

The Holy Spirit



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URBAN VILLAGE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Latechurch & Village Church
Growth Group studies
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The Holy Spirit. If there was a controversial topic in Christian circles today, it would be the person of the Holy Spirit. Followers of Jesus have always confessed the existence and the deity of the Holy Spirit since the time of the NT,¹ but so much has been claimed about what He does among Christians today that leaves people inside and outside the church bewildered, befuddled and bemused (the alliteration is just getting us used to thinking in threes!)

In these two studies, we will look at what the Bible says about who the Spirit is and what He does. Studying the third person of the Trinity will help us better understand God (who is 'spirit' – John 4:24) and assess what people claim about the Holy Spirit and what He's doing in regards to claims of healing and prophecy. We hope you enjoy the studies and gain encouragement from the God who has given Himself to us through the presence of His Spirit in us.

Weber & Derek

A bit from the Nicene Creed (381 AD)

We believe in one God, the Father...

We believe in One Lord, Jesus Christ...

*We believe in the **Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,**
who proceeds from the Father [and the Son.]*

With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified.

He has spoken through the Prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.

We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

*We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.*

¹ See text box at the bottom of the page for what all Christians have agreed about the Trinity and specifically the Holy Spirit. The bolded phrases are what the following studies will focus on – the Holy Spirit as the Revealer of truth (Week 1) and the Giver of life (Week 2).

Method to the Madness

When we come to an issue like the Holy Spirit, we are not doing what we usually do in asking 'what does this passage say?' Rather, we're looking across the entire bible to see what it says about a certain topic.

However, we don't randomly pluck verses from here and there about the Spirit, and even taking every verse that says something about the Spirit is not enough. Instead we need to filter these verses through the big picture story of the Bible – something called Biblical Theology. In other words, the major landmarks in God's story –

- Creation/Fall,
- Promises to Abraham and the gathering of his OT people Israel,
- the failure and exile of Israel,
- the coming of Jesus the true Israelite,
- The gathering in of the new Israel in Christ,
- the return of Jesus that brings it all to an end –

these all need to be taken into account as to how we read these individual verses about the Spirit.

Ultimately, we need to see how the Holy Spirit plays a part in the big picture of what God is doing in our world.

Words that matter: Spirit

To begin with, there is an interesting fact to know about the Greek and Hebrew word translated 'Spirit' in English. The words 'ruach' in OT Hebrew, and 'pneuma' in NT Greek can mean spirit, or wind or breath! (we find the Greek meanings in words like pneumatic tyres – tyres with air in them) So we have to be aware that our English translations of the Bible can often 'disguise' these key words when they are (appropriately) translated as wind or breath. Psalm 33:6 is a good example – God's breath/wind/spirit created the stars.

Study 1 : Holy Spirit - the Revealer of truth

Christians have always believed in a God who speaks as well as act in the world.² But how God speaks isn't always something people agree on. Some people have claimed that God speaks, not just in the Bible, but in new ways, through prophecies and 'words of knowledge' given by His Holy Spirit... What does the Bible make of this? Should we expect to hear new revelations from God? Is it more spiritual to have these experiences?

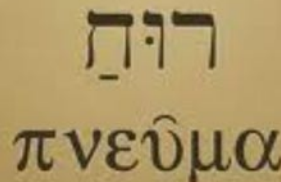
Getting Started: Share your experiences or observations of 'new words' from God.

Brainstorming in the Bible

(Make sure you read the side bar on this page before you go on)

What does the Bible have to say about the Spirit? Take 20-30 minutes to brainstorm (individually or in pairs) some ideas and look up verses to fill out the table on the over the page. Make sure you ask how the spirit is related to the thing that God does most – Speaking.

After you've spent time scouring through the Bible, answer the two summary questions on the next page before feeding back to the group.



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² See the Nicene creed on p.3.

	Bible references	What does it tell us about God's Spirit?	How does it relate to God's word/God speaking?
creation	e.g. Gen 1:2, Psa 33:6		
fall			
Abraham to Israel		e.g. God raised Judges who are empowered by his Spirit to save Israel	
Fall of Israel and prophetic expectations			e.g. (Eze 36:27) God's spirit will move his people to follow His decree and laws (i.e God's words).
Jesus			
The church			

Bible references	What does it tell us about God's Spirit?	How does it relate to God's word/God speaking?
fall		

The Spirit and the Trinity

As you worked through the Bible's description of the Spirit, you might have noticed that the Spirit is personal, a 'He'. He is someone who **speaks** (Heb 3:7, 10:15; Acts 13: 2, 21:11), someone who can be **grieved** (Eph 4:30), someone who can be **lied to** (Act 5:3) and even someone who can be **blasphemed** against (Lk 12:10). All this is evidence that the Holy Spirit isn't some impersonal force a la Star Wars, but rather **someone** with divine authority to speak as God.

Put together with the fact that Jesus is God (a study for another time!), who calls God his Father, we have God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Since the Bible is clear that there are not **three** Gods but **one** (Deu 6:4, Rom 3:30, 1Tim 2:5; Jam 2:19), the early Christians develop the term Trinity to say 'One God, three persons'. This became popularised in Creeds (like the Nicene Creed on p.3) that helpfully inoculate Christians against heresies that deny Jesus' **divinity** (e.g. Arians and modern day Jehovah's Witnesses) or the Spirit's **personhood** (again, Jehovah's Witnesses).

Where the rubber hits the road for us is the fact that the Spirit's presence with us is God's own presence. It is not God acting from a distance, but it is God acting supremely from **within us** to change our mind towards Jesus His Word as well as (see next week) change our living accordingly. If we walk according to the Spirit, there is no force that can separate us from God's love (Rom 8). Similarly, if the Spirit were not divine, then we'd have no guarantee of knowing God's mind and will as He has promised (1 Cor 2:10), and the Bible inspired by that Spirit would not be God's authoritative word.

Far from being trivial and an embarrassment, the doctrine of the Trinity is fundamental for Christians to have assurance when it comes to knowing God and living a life pleasing to God.

In the Bible, the appearance of the Spirit almost always accompanies God's words, in the form of promises of salvation, pronouncements of judgment etc. An ancient theologian called the Word and the Spirit God's two hands with which he 'handled' the world, whether it's creation, salvation or judgment. The relationship is as close as that between the words spoken and the breath that vocalises those words! So we shouldn't be surprised that when the Word from God becomes incarnate (John 1:1-18) in the person of Jesus, the Holy Spirit is right there with Jesus from go to woe. But what about after Jesus' death and resurrection? What can Christians expect from God's Spirit?

Jesus Himself describes the ministry of the Spirit in relation to Himself in John 14-16, A final farewell to his Disciples just before he goes to the cross.

Read John 14:15-26 & 15:26-16:16

- According to 14:15-21, what will Jesus do when He's no longer with the Disciples?
- What does 14:26 point to as the function of the Counsellor?
- How will the Counsellor help the disciples in their task of testifying to Jesus? (15:26-27, 16:12-15)

Like a divine spotlight, the Spirit keeps reminding and pointing people to Jesus the Word of God, through the words that the Disciples wrote down (that we have as the New Testament). But not only does the Spirit superintend the process of God's word turning into Scripture, He is also in control of the process of how the gospel is proclaimed and received.

Read 1Thes 1:4-6

- How did the gospel come to the Thessalonians? How did they receive it?
- Would you describe the Thessalonian's experience of receiving the gospel a spiritual experience? How?

(If you have time, skim through Acts 2:1-41. What was the purpose of the Spirit-given display of people speaking languages they don't know?)

We've seen how God's Spirit and Word works closely together in God's dealings with the world. The Spirit does not generate new words or new revelations of God's truth that hasn't already come in Jesus. Instead, He points to Jesus and prepares the hearts and ears of people to receive the gospel about Jesus as God's words. We will look at other aspects of the Spirit's activity in the next study, but it's worthwhile being reminded that the Spirit's core business is to point to Jesus, hence receiving and being reminded of the gospel is the most authentic Spiritual experience possible!

Application

- If the main job of the 'Spirit of Truth' is to point us to Jesus, then how do we discern what is truly spiritual and what isn't?

- Do you appreciate God's word and hearing it as a Spiritual experience? Why or why not?

Prayer points:

Study 2 : Holy Spirit - the Giver of life

Many Christians find the person of the Holy Spirit somewhat mysterious, even a little spooky. It may come as a surprise, then, that Christians have always believed in the presence and the power of the Spirit. In fact most Christians want to 'live by the Spirit' (Gal 5:16 & 25), even if they can't agree exactly what that means. Some believe in miraculous healings and extraordinary signs like speaking in tongues of angels, while others practically deny that the Spirit does anything anymore. So what does the Bible say about Spiritual living?

Getting started: What have you heard from Christians about who the Holy Spirit is and what 'living by/walking in the Spirit' means?

What does the Bible have to say?

We saw last week that references to God's Spirit is scattered everywhere in the Bible. To help us get to grips with it again, Go back to the table you filled out in Study 1 (or if you haven't filled it out, try and fill it out before the study) and instead of 'how does the Spirit relate to God's word', ask 'How does the Spirit give life/save life?' and fill in the following table at the top of the next page. Take 15 minutes or so and then answer the following summary question:

- How is the Holy Spirit the 'Giver of life'?
- What does that mean for Christians?

Life from Death

The Bible uses 'life' a metaphor ultimately of reconciliation with God – since in the fall, we lost our relationship with God who gives us life which lead to our physical and spiritual death. So for example, the miraculous healings and raising from the dead that Jesus does by the Spirit are a foretaste of new life with God, when death will have been destroyed. Take care not to turn everything into something about life, but just be aware of the big picture story of the Bible.

How does the Holy Spirit give life/Save life? (see text box on facing page)	
Creation	
fall	
Abraham to Israel	
Fall of Israel and prophetic expectations	
Jesus	
The church	

Just as we saw last week that the Spirit goes along with God's word, the Spirit and the Word both go out to achieve God's plan and purposes. Ultimately, that is all about bringing humanity out of death into new life, ultimately as we go from the old fallen creation to the new creation ushered in by Jesus!³ The entry into the new life by faith in Jesus is through the Spirit breathed words about Jesus in the gospels. But this also means that the Spirit and the Word of God will already have an ongoing effect on Christians, as they live lives transformed by the Spirit while awaiting the return of Jesus.

Read Eph 2:11-22 & Tit 3:4-7

- What has Jesus and the Spirit accomplished for Christians?

The extraordinary work of rescuing sinners is something the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all a part of. But it is the Holy Spirit who has a unique role in the ongoing work of dwelling in people as His Temple to continue the transformative work that will only be finished on the day Jesus returns. This means that we have a role in working in with the Spirit.

Read Gal 5:16-26

- What does living by the Spirit mean?

- Does living by the Spirit sound 'spiritual' or extraordinary?

- Look up 2 Tim 1:7, how does God enable us to live the way He wants us to?

In the end, the same Spirit that reveals the truth of God's words in the gospel of Jesus is also transforming and making holy our lives. In the same way that the Spirit empowered Jesus to finish His mission on earth, the Spirit of Jesus will finish the good work he started in us.

A contentious issue that is around the claims by some that 'signs and wonders' are done by the Holy Spirit in their churches. Whether those signs and wonders are authentic or not, there is a purpose with which signs and wonders occurred in the Bible. Paul wrote to the Corinthians on just this matter, specifically, the issue of speaking angelic languages or tongues.

Read 1Cor 12:4-11, 13:1, 14:1-19

³ So all the miracles that accompanied the Apostles (e.g. in Acts, Paul mentions it in Romans 15:19) were not an end in themselves, but rather are signs that accompany the gospel wherever it goes from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth.

- What is speaking in Tongues about?
- A related but contrasting gift is 'prophecy'. How is that different to 'speaking in Tongues'?⁴
- What, according to Paul argument, is the purpose of these gifts of the Holy Spirit? (12:7, 13:1, 14:4-5, 17-19)
- What restrictions then, does Paul place on the speaking of tongue?

We see that even the exercise of extraordinary spiritual gifts like 'speaking in tongues' are just like other activities of the Spirit – meant to point to Jesus (Acts 2 is a good example). So gifts of the Spirit must be governed by the rule of love, for building up (edifying) others in their trust in Jesus, not confusing the message of the gospel by being unintelligible. This core business of the Holy Spirit – pointing to Jesus – simply reminds us of our core business in living by the Spirit, to point to Jesus with the integrity and godliness of our lives and the distinctiveness and gospel content of our words.

Application

- How would you respond to someone who thinks that you should pursue 'spiritual gifts' like speaking in tongues?
- What does the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives do for your assurance of salvation?
- What responsibilities comes with the fact that we are now the Holy Temple of God the Holy Spirit?

Prayer points:

⁴ The description of prophecy seems to be what we'd call 'preaching', i.e. the edifying of God's people by speaking God's mind from his revealed word to us in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Leader's Guide

The table (p.4) is quite open ended. It is designed to allow the group members to inductively range across the bible and use their knowledge of Biblical theology. However, feel free to provide the following suggestions for passages to look up (under the following sections).

	Bible references	What does it tell us about God's Spirit?	How does it relate to God's word?
creation	e.g. Gen 1:2, Psa 33:6, 104:29-30; Job 33:4		
fall			
Abraham to Israel	Gen 41:38; Ex 31:3, 31; Num 11:17, 25; Deu 34:9, Judg 3:10, 6:34, 11:29, 14:6, 19, 15:14; 1Sam 10:6, 10; 16:13-14; 2Sam 23:2; 1Ch 12:18, 28:12; 2Ch 24:20.	e.g. God raised Judges who are empowered by his Spirit to save Israel	
Fall of Israel and prophetic hope	Neh 9:20,30; Isa 11:2, 42:1, 44:3, 48:16, 59:21, 61:1, 63:10-14; Eze 11:5, 13:3, 36:26-27, Eze 37:1-14, 39:29; Joel 2:28-29; Micah 3:8; Zec 7:12		e.g. (Eze 36:27) God's spirit will move his people to follow His decree and laws (i.e God's words).
Jesus (Impt. for Study 2)	Mat 1:18-20, Lk 1:15, 35, 67f, 3:16, 22, 4:1, 18, 12:10, 23:46; John 14:15-16:16. Rom 1:4 Heb 9:14		
The church	Acts 2, 4:31, 10:44-47; Rom 5:5, 7:6, ch.8; 1Cor 2:6-16, 12:4-11, 14:1-5; Gal 5:16-26; 1Th 1:4-6; 1Pe 1:12; 2Pe 1:20-21		

Notes: