

We are beginning a series that will last most of the summer, on the Holy Spirit. I am excited about this series because I believe that understanding and opening ourselves up to the ministry of the Spirit is key to living an abundant Christian life.

Over the summer, will be looking at many aspects of the Spirit, such as who is the Spirit, how are we filled with the Spirit, what are the gifts of the Spirit, what does it mean to be sealed with the Spirit.

Before Jesus died, he explained the importance of the Spirit's coming to his disciples. In John 14:16 – 18, he speaks to them:

“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.”

The Spirit is central to our relationship with God and to experiencing the presence of Christ in our lives.

We live in a unique, climactic period of redemptive history, the new age, the age of the Spirit.

We are spending 11 weeks looking at the Holy Spirit because the Spirit is so central to our spiritual lives.

This morning we are going to look at 4 important things we need to understand about the Spirit as we start.

Who is the Holy Spirit?

What is the Spirit like?

How important is the Spirit for our spiritual lives?

How important is the Spirit for the church?

The Spirit is God.

The Bible mentions the Holy Spirit over 320 times, 260 of those are in the New Testament. The Apostle Paul in particular focuses on the Spirit in his letters (Epistles) in the bible and mentions the Spirit about 140 times. He calls the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, or the Spirit of Christ.

The Holy Spirit is part of the Trinity, Father, Son and Spirit, and is of the same essence of the Father and Son.

The New Testament reveals to us this three-part nature of God, in what are called Doxologies (worship creeds of praise to God.)

*“May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the **Holy Spirit** be with you all.”* 2 Cor. 13:14

And in the Baptismal Formula, *“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...”*. Matt. 28:19

The doctrine of the Trinity was taught by very early church theologians in successive statements called “creeds”. These creeds were based on what was revealed about God in the bible. This morning we read the Nicene Creed which was developed around 325 AD, *“I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life who with the Father and son together is worship and glorified”*. (Nicene Creed)”

The Holy Spirit – is like Jesus who is like the Father

The Bible teaches the Holy Spirit is God not a creation of God. As far back into eternity, God, the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit have existed. Throughout the Scriptures the titles of “Holy Spirit” and “God” are used interchangeably. Not only does the Bible refer to the Spirit as God himself, it describes the Spirit using the same attributes as the Father. The is described as:

- a. Omniscient - all-knowing (1 Cor. 2:10-11),
- b. Omnipresent (Psalm 139:7-8)
- c. Eternal (Hebrews 9:14).

The Doctrine of the Trinity was more fully clarified in the Athanasian Creed – used by churches since the 6th century

Athanasius Creed: “For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Spirit. But the godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, is all one, the glory equal, the majesty co-eternal.

Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Spirit. The Father uncreated, the Son uncreated, and the Holy Spirit uncreated. The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Spirit incomprehensible.

The Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Spirit eternal. And yet they are not three eternals, but one Eternal.”

The Spirit was present and active as creation came into existence, the Spirit empowered Jesus as he demonstrated the Kingdom of God, the Spirit was poured out into the church to enable the church to live a missional life and the Spirit enables the Trinity to function as an ever welcoming community of persons.

When the Holy Spirit comes into our lives, he comes not merely as the Spirit of the Son, nor merely as the Spirit of the Father, but as the Spirit of infinite love between the Father and the Son, so that we may love the Father with the very love of the Son, and love the Son with the very love of the Father. ¹

The second thing it is important for us to know is what the Spirit is like.

Is the Spirit a mysterious force at work in the world, like the wind or fire? Or is the Spirit a person? This is important because how we seek to connect with a person is different than

¹ (John Piper <http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-holy-spirit-he-is-god>)

how we seek to connect with an impersonal force. So if you think of the spirit being like fire, you stick your torch in and it and it lights up, or the wind, you hoist a sail and you take off. This is how eastern religions think of the divine – but in the Christian faith – the divine is personal and we connect with the personal divine in ways that we connect with other persons. If the Spirit is a person, you need to converse and to understand Him to connect. The New Testament uses a Personal pronoun when referring to the Spirit – he and not “it”. For instance, in John 16:13 – 15 the pronoun, “he” is used 6 times.

John 16:13 *“But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.”*

Sometimes you will hear people refer to the Spirit as ‘it’, but this does not clearly communicate the nature of the Spirit.

Although The Spirit is a person, he does not have a physical shape or body. The Spirit is a different mode of being from matter. Humans are composed of matter; matter has weight, size, and form. The Holy Spirit is not material and has no weight or size and does not take up space. We see the Spirit’s effects but cannot see the Spirit. The Spirit Has all the qualities of a person. He has substance, individuality, will, and intelligence. The Spirit can feel, has knowledge, the ability to speak, to grieve and to rejoice. The Spirit can love you and communicate with you. (Tozer)

The Spirit relates to us in the way he indicates he is a person –

- He has knowledge (Acts 15 “It seemed good to us and the Holy Spirit”, 1 Cor. 2:11)
- He has a will, (apportions gifts as he wills 1 Cor. 12: 11)
- He has a mind (Rom 8:27 refers to “the Mind of spirit”)
- He intercedes for us (Rom 8:26)
- He teaches and he guides us. (John 14:26 *“But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”*)
- He convicts us. (John 16:8)
- The spirit can forbid us to do something, (In Acts 16:6, he forbids Paul and his companions to speak the word in the province of Asia).
- The Spirit loves us, (Romans 5:5 *“And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.”*)

1. The Spirit can be affected by the way people treat him. He can be lied to (Acts 3), blasphemed, insulted, and quenched.

He can be grieved when we ignore, resist, doubt, or refuse to obey him.

His grief reminds us, there must be love present before there can be grief. We can please him by obeying. (Gal 6:8)

We need to know about the Holy Spirit because it it through the Spirit we are given access to the Triune God. We need to understand who the Spirit is, because the Spirit is personal and to connect with the Spirit, we need to understand Him. We also need to know about the Spirit because the Spirit is Vital to our Spiritual lives.

In John 16:7 Jesus says **to his friends**,

“Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.”

It is to their, and our advantage, for Jesus to go away so we can experience the Spirit.

Jesus explains to His disciples that the Spirit will be like him another counselor, another helper, another teacher. The disciples did not understand how it could be possibly better to have the Spirit than to have Jesus.

I think for us today; we might feel the same way as those original disciples. It would be better to have Jesus here than it is to have the Spirit.

I think in some ways this points to, how well we know Jesus and how little we know the Holy Spirit. There is a sense of distance, anonymity and abstraction when it comes Holy Spirit.

But the idea Jesus is communicating it is possible to know the Spirit the way we know the Son and The Father.

Even though the Spirit lives in us, we may not know him well at all but it is possible to know the Spirit better.

We hope through this series, it will give you a better sense of who the Spirit is and the role of the Spirit in your life.

Here are some reasons that the Spirit’s presence is necessary for us in order to live a life that pleases God:

- Gives us new birth (Jn. 3:5)

It is the Spirit’s presence in us that gives us the new heart, this new Spirit. The Spirit plays a key role in enabling us to repent. The spirit is the one who enables us to be born again, who cleanses us. It is the presence of the Spirit that makes us a new creation. The Spirit is both pre-requisite to salvation and the requirement for salvation. There is no such thing as a Christian conversion that does not have the coming of the Spirit into the believer’s life as the critical ingredient.²

- Seals us (Eph. 1:13) The Spirit is a seals upon us, like a stamp that says, ‘this is God’s child’.
- Teaches us (Jn. 14:26). The Spirit Teaches us and illuminates Scripture for us so we can understand the things of God
- Enables us to know the Father and Son (Jn. 15:26, 1 Jn. 3:24). It is the Spirit who opens the way for us to encounter the Father and The Son.
The Disciple John emphasizes this in John 17 – the son is in the father and the father in the son, when the spirit comes he is opening up the privilege of knowing the intimacy of the father and the son, ushered into the fellowship of the Trinity.
- Fills us (Eph. 5:18)

² Fee, *Paul the Spirit and the People of God*, p. 95.

- Mediates for us (John 14:26)
The Holy Spirit dwells in us and seeks to minister to us the real presence of our loving God. The spirit it's called the spirit of truth and the spirit of adoption. The Spirit is the go-between between us and God – he is the mediator on earth as Jesus is our mediator in Heaven.
- The Holy Spirit is the presence of the real power of God (*Matt. 3:11; Acts 1:8*), which enables us to live out the Christian life. As Paul in Ephesians prayed, *“the Father would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in your inner being.”* (Eph. 3:16)
- *The Holy Spirit gives us power to conquer sin (Rom.8: 12-14)*
- The spirit transforms our character – fruit (Galatians 5).
- The Holy Spirit distributes Spiritual Gifts in order to build up the church.
- The Spirit empowers us for witness (Acts 1:8).

We need to know about the Spirit because the Spirit is Vital to our Spiritual lives. But, the spirit is not just vital to our individual spiritual lives, but the spirit is vital to us as a community.

It is important for us to know that as we gather here together – we are the people of God, and we have become the people of God, not because we are good or kind or loving, but because the Spirit is present in our midst.

The Holy Spirit's presence is what makes us the People of God. The Spirit is what makes us the church, the body of Christ.

As we look around our gathered church community, it is important to recognize that the Holy Spirit is in our midst. We cannot bring him here, he is already with us and is in us. This Spirit the mark of what it means to be the church of Jesus. For us as a church, if we had wealth, power, or the listening ear of our community but we did not have the Spirit, all would be lost. As the prophet Zechariah spoke, *“Not by might nor by power but by my spirit says the Lord.”* (Zech. 4:6)

The Spirit presence is necessary to be the church of Jesus. Back in the Old Testament, Moses recognized how necessary the presence of the Spirit was. In Exodus 33: 15 -17 on Mt Sinai, Moses says to God, *“If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?”*

Moses' prayer at Mount Sinai lies at the heart of the New Testament understanding of the Spirit, the Spirit's presence is what distinguishes us as the people of God. (Gordon Fee) And although the presence of the Spirit is here with us, we can ignore the Spirit, we can grieve the Spirit and we can quench the Spirit.

Let us be a people who gather together and welcome the presence and power of the Spirit in our midst. Let Moses prayer for God's presence, through the Holy Spirit, be our prayer. It's God's plan that the life of the Spirit be revealed when the people of God gather together, the church is the place where God's heavenly invasion takes place. Despite this, the church

often lives between two extremes. Many churches ignore the Spirit, perhaps they are afraid of the Spirit, because the Spirit cannot be controlled or tamed. On the other hand, many churches over emphasize the Spirit, remember the Spirit is present to reveal the Father and the Son, to reveal God's Kingdom is breaking in.

My former professor, Gordon Fee calls one of those two extremes, "Heavenly overdrive". He sees this overdrive characterized by the church at Corinth. They were all about the Spirit and yet their relationships demonstrated conflict and immorality; they wanted the excitement of heaven without being willing to live out the reality of the challenge of living holy lives in this time in between.

The opposite extreme, often seen in more often, is not a lot of heaven, no sense of the spirit or the supernatural and everything that is done could be done if God was there or not. The coming of the Spirit is God's promise fulfilled: his presence returned to his people. In the Old Testament, which I'll talk more about next week, God's presence is holy and sacred. When God is present, people hide their face, think of Moses, Elijah. Worshipers should come into God's sanctuary--to borrow from spiritual writer Annie Dillard--with "crash helmets" donned in preparation to meet with the living God. In worship, Gordon Fee says, "you should have this incredible sense of unworthiness--'I don't really belong here'--coupled with the opposing sense of total joy--'It is all of grace, so I do belong here.' In some churches, we see the joy without reverence, without awe." And in other churches we see neither "reverence nor joy."

As we gather, let us look with expectation for the presence of the Holy Spirit. Remember the Spirit's presence is a sign that the Kingdom of God is near, that heaven is invading earth.

As we gather on Sunday – we are called to celebrate and welcome the Spirit and to recognize we are the dwelling place for God's very presence.

The Spirit is the one who's presence makes the church the People of God (Eph. 2:22); empowers the church (Acts 4:31) and brings unity to the church (Eph. 4:3-5, 1 Cor. 12:13).

The Spirit's presence in the church is a sign that God is actively seeking to build a people for "God's Name". Although we rejoice with each individual who experiences salvation, God's ultimate purposes, which we can see throughout the whole of the Old and New Testament are to build a people who gather together to reflect God's Name.

Now many of us know all this information I have shared today. The Spirit is God, the Spirit is personal, the Spirit is necessary for our individual spirituality and for our spiritual lives together and that is good but knowing this, having the right theology does not make a difference in our lives.

We need to open ourselves up to the power, the presence and the work of the Spirit in our lives.