The Personality & Deity of the Holy Spirit
By: Keith Keyser

The Personality of the Holy Spirit

The personality of the Holy Spirit is clearly taught in our Lord’s upper room promise to His disciples: “And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you” (Jn. 14:16-17). There are two commonly used words for “another” in the Greek language. Heteros means “another of a different kind”; its counterpart, allos, signifies “another of the same kind.” In verse 16, the Lord uses the second of these words to describe the coming Spirit of Truth; thereby indicating that the new Comforter would be of the same kind as the old. That is to say, like the Lord Jesus, the Spirit is a divine person of the Trinity, who would diligently attend to all of the spiritual needs of the apostles. The Spirit's personality is further seen in the Lord’s employment of the personal pronoun in reference to “Him.” The passage also promises that the Spirit will teach them – which is clearly the function of an active intelligence. Elsewhere in the upper room discourse, Christ refers to the Spirit testifying (15:26), reproving (16:8), as well as guiding, hearing, speaking, receiving, showing and glorifying (16:13-15). All of these are activities of a person.

The New Testament shows the Holy Spirit doing many other personal activities, such as empowering the early Church (Acts 1:8). Peter clearly believed in His personality, saying: “…the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David concerning Judas…” (1:16). He also affirmed that the Spirit could be tested (5:9). Acts further shows the Spirit speaking to Philip the evangelist (8:29), Peter (10:19), Paul and Silas (16:7). In Romans 8:2 He frees the believer from the “law of sin and of death.” In addition, He enables the Christians to mortify the flesh (8:13) and leads them (v.14; cf. Lk. 4:1 & Gal. 5:18). The Spirit also confirms a believer’s possession of eternal life (v.16) and intercedes for them in prayer (v. 26-27). Verse 27 speaks of the Spirit’s mind, which is another clear indication of personality. Hebrews 10:29 speaks of Him being insulted. One cannot insult an impersonal force or mere energy. In other Scriptures, He searches (1 Cor. 2:10),
imparts spiritual gifts (12:11, JND), indicates (1 Pet. 1:11, NKJV), quickens (3:18), is grieved (Eph. 4:30), is known (1 Jn. 4:2), and bears witness (5:6). In Revelation, He speaks to the Churches (2:7,11, 17, etc.). Lastly, the Spirit joins the Lord Jesus and the Bride in offering the last Gospel appeal of the New Testament (Rev. 22:17). All of these activities show that the Holy Spirit is a distinct person of the triune Godhead.

The Deity of the Holy Spirit

The deity of the Holy Spirit is clearly seen by the way in which He is grouped in Scripture with the Father and the Son. In certain salutations of the epistles He is listed as an equal with the other two members of the Trinity. For example, 2 Corinthians 13:14 offers this parting trinitarian benediction: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen.” 2 Thes. 2:13-14, Titus 3:4-6, 1 Pet. 1:2, and Rev. 1:4-6 also show the close connection of the persons of the Trinity.

The divine Spirit also acts in concert with the Father and the Son on notable occasions like the creation (Gen. 1:2), the incarnation (Lk. 1:35), the baptism of Christ (Mat. 3:16), and the sacrificial death at Calvary (Heb. 9:14). He does only things that God can do, including regeneration (Jn. 3:6), inspiration (2 Pet. 1:21), and sanctification (2 Thes. 2:13). He is also directly called God in Acts 5:3-4. Furthermore, He is equated with the Jehovah of the Old Testament in certain New Testament passages (compare Isaiah 6:8–9 & Acts 28:25; also Jer. 31:31-34 & Heb. 10:15-17). The Spirit also possesses attributes of God such as omniscience (1 Cor. 2:10-16), eternality (Heb. 9:14), omnipresence (Psa. 139:7-12), power (Rom. 1:4; 15:19), truth (Jn. 14:17), and holiness (hence His normal name in the Bible “the Holy Spirit”). Thus we see that there is ample evidence to prove the deity of the Spirit.

The early eighteenth century theologian Thomas Sherlock sums up the case for the deity of the Holy Spirit in an eloquent tribute to His variegated role in the salvation of man: “…can a creature be the universal spring and fountain of Divine grace and life? Can a finite creature be a kind of universal soul to the whole Christian Church, and to every sincere member of it? Can a creature make such close application to our minds, know our thoughts, set bounds to our passions, inspire us with new affections and desires, and be more intimate to us than we are to ourselves? If a creature be the only instrument and principle of grace, we shall soon be tempted either to deny the grace of God, or to make it only an external thing, and entertain very mean conceits of it. All those miraculous gifts which were bestowed upon the apostles and primitive Christians, for the edification of the Church; all the graces of the Christian life, are the fruits [sic] of the Spirit. The Divine Spirit is the principle of immortality in us, which first gave life to our souls, and will, at the last day, raise our dead bodies out of the dust; works which sufficiently proclaim him to be God, and which we cannot heartily believe, in the Gospel notion, if he be not.” In other words, if the Spirit is not God, then how can He do all of the ministries that He does for the believer?
The Holy Spirit is both personal and divine. This should humble the Christian, for such a great personage indwells (Jn. 14:17), seals (Eph. 1:13), empowers (Acts 1:8; Gal. 5:16), guides (Rom. 8:14), and teaches him (1 Cor. 2:13). Thus, all of the resources of God are concentrated on the goal of making the believer like Christ and one day presenting him to Christ without spot or blemish or any such thing (Rom. 8:18-39). The Father and Son have made their abode in believers by the Spirit (Jn. 14:23; 1 Cor. 6:19). Christians should thank God for the gift of the Holy Spirit, who unites them to God and mediates the blessings of the Gospel to them.

1 John Walvoord points out that in these verses “The identification is not of Person but of Essence. Jehovah is used of all three Persons of the Trinity severally as well as of the Trinity corporately.” “The Person of the Holy Spirit, Part 1”, Bibliotheca Sacra, Vol. 97, Apr. 1940, p. 171.