

The Personhood and Full Deity of the Holy Spirit

Matthew 3:16,17

And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

Evidence of the tri-unity of the Godhead arises out of the presence of the Three at the baptism of Jesus. As Jesus formally begins His public ministry of redemption, all three members of the Heavenly Trio are present. This scene powerfully portrays the oneness of purpose held by the Godhead. Furthermore, it clearly evidences the distinctiveness of each divine being.

Matthew 12:31,32

Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.

Blasphemy is defined as evil speaking against God. In these verses it is clear that the Holy Spirit can be blasphemed, thus it is easy to conclude that the Spirit is a personal God, and not an abstraction or impersonal force. All Bible-believing Christians recognize that if blasphemy is directed either at the Father or the Son it has as its target a divine person. If the Holy Spirit can also be blasphemed, then it stands to reason that the Holy Spirit is also a divine person.

Matthew 28:19

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

The famous gospel commission declares the three members of the Godhead to have a "name" (singular), strongly suggesting that they are one in personal character and nature. The concept of "name" in the Bible includes character or nature. "Name" is never used in Scripture in connection with abstract things or qualities, but always with persons. Thus, the members of the triune Godhead are distinct individual persons, and yet one in divine nature, character, and purpose.

Further, the union of these three names indicates that the Son and the Holy Spirit are equal with the Father. It would be rather strange, even blasphemous, to unite the name of the eternal God with a created being and a force or power in this baptismal formula. When the Holy Spirit is put in the same expression and on the same level as the two other persons, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the Holy Spirit is also viewed as a person and of equal standing with the Father and the Son.

John 14-16

John 14:16-18 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. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.

In this passage we see a trinity of persons in the Godhead. The Father is prayed to, the Son in human nature is praying, and the Holy Spirit the Comforter is prayed for. Christ calls the Holy Spirit "another Comforter", which shows that He is a distinct person from Jesus. The Greek word translated "another" is the word *allos* which means another of the same kind.

Further, while the word "Spirit" (Greek *pneuma*) is the neuter gender in Greek, the personal pronoun "he" (*ekeinos*) is in the masculine gender. In fact, in John 14-16 there are at least 20 instances of masculine personal pronouns applied to the Holy Spirit, strongly indicating the personhood of the Spirit.

"Comforter" (Greek *paraklētos*, also translated as "Helper" or "Counselor") is a term commonly used to speak of a person who helps or gives counsel to another person or persons, but is used of the Holy Spirit in John's gospel (14:16,26; 15:26; 16:7).

Scripture ascribes other activities to the Spirit that are highly personal, such as teaching (John 14:26), bearing witness (John 15:26), convicting of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8); guiding into truth, speaking, hearing, and telling (John 16:13); glorifying God, receiving, and showing (John 16:14).

The evidence from these passages in John's gospel strongly suggest the personal and interactive nature of a divine person who is distinct from the Father and Son.

(For more texts that portray personally interactive actions by the Spirit, see Acts 8:29; 10:19; 11:12; 13:2-4; 15:28; 16:6,7; 20:23; 28:25; Romans 8:26; 1 Corinthians 12:11; Ephesians 2:18; 1 Timothy 4:1)

Acts 5:3,4

But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.

In this passage the personality and deity of the Spirit are asserted in an incidental way. In verse 3 the sin of Ananias and Sapphira was "Lying unto the Holy Ghost". In verse 4 Peter varies the charge of lying to the Spirit to lying to God.

The word "God" here is evidently used in its plain and obvious sense as denoting the "supreme divinity," and the use of the word here shows that the Holy Spirit is "divine." The whole passage demonstrates, therefore, one of the important doctrines of the Christian religion, that the Holy Spirit is distinct from the Father and the Son, and yet is divine.

Peter clearly believed that the Holy Spirit was a Person, because one can only lie to a person. He also believed the Holy Spirit is God ("You have not lied to men but to God").

Romans 8:14-16,26

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.

Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

The Holy Spirit is depicted as leading and bearing witness, both of which are actions with intensely personal overtones.

One of the most powerful evidences of the personality of the Spirit is that He makes intercession for us. Intercession implies willing, active intervention between two personal beings. There is also an emotional element in the intercession of the Spirit that is typical of personal beings ("groanings" that cannot be "uttered").

1 Corinthians 2:10,11

But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.

The Holy Spirit has an intimate and profound knowledge of the hidden counsels and purposes of God. This strongly suggests an intimate, personal communication between the Spirit and God the Father. This must also mean that the Spirit is distinct from the Father, because one divine Being is said to have a thorough knowledge of the deep purposes of another divine Being. To "search" implies action, thought, personality, thus the Holy Spirit is an intelligent and personal Being. The Holy Spirit knows the mind of God because He is a personal and divine Being capable of communicating to us God's mind.

Commenting on 1 Corinthians 2:11, Ellen White made the following statement:

"The Holy Spirit has a personality, else He could not bear witness to our spirits and with our spirits that we are the children of God. He must also be a divine person, else He could not search out the secrets which lie hidden in the mind of God. [1 Corinthians 2:11 quoted]" - Evangelism 617.1

1 Corinthians 12:3-11

Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost. Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the

word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.

Mark the allusion in this passage to the Heavenly Trio: the same Spirit (verse 4), the same Lord (verse 5), the same God (verse 6).

In verse 3 Paul states that no one can acknowledge Jesus as Lord, but by the Holy Spirit. Jesus made this plain as well, saying that when the Holy Spirit would come, He will testify of Me (John 15:26), and He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you (John 16:14). The ministry of the Holy Spirit is not to promote Himself or any man, but to glorify and represent Jesus.

We have as necessary a dependence on the Spirit's operation and influence for our sanctification as on the mediation of Christ for our reconciliation and acceptance with God: and no man could confirm this truth but by the Holy Ghost.

One of the striking aspects of this passage describing the workings of the Holy Spirit is the way that it portrays the Spirit as having a "will," or the ability to make choices (verse 11). The spiritual gifts are the ministering talents that the Holy Spirit distributes to each person in the body of Christ. And the Spirit does so through the exercise of a self-aware will - as He chooses! The ability to will is a profound trait of a personal being.

2 Corinthians 13:14

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen.

This passage furnishes proof of the doctrine of the triune Godhead that are united in nature and yet distinct individual Beings. There is a distinction made between the three persons in the Godhead, yet all are equally divine. As God the Father and Jesus Christ are distinct persons, the Holy Spirit is also a person, having a distinct personality. He is not an attribute of God, nor a mere divine influence.

Since the Father and the Son are personal divine beings, the fact that the Holy Spirit is mentioned along with the other two members of the Godhead strongly suggests that He is also a personal divine being. The "love of God" obviously suggests the personality of the Father, since love is the essence of any interpersonal experience and expresses caring and concern. The "grace" that comes from Jesus Christ can only come from a personal origin. The word "communion" means fellowship, partnership, association, the sharing of intimate thoughts and feelings. This word, directly descriptive of the workings of the Spirit, strongly suggests interpersonal communications between relational beings - whether they be human, angelic, or divine. Thus, the Holy Spirit must be a personal Being with whom we share an intimate fellowship on a spiritual level.

Ephesians 4:4-6

There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

As with other passages where the Holy Spirit is put into a coordinate relationship with the Father and the Son (see Matthew 28:19; 1 Corinthians 12:4-6; 2 Corinthians 13:14; 1 Peter 1:2), these verses present strong evidence that the Spirit is a distinct person of the Godhead. When the Holy Spirit is put in the same expression and on the same level as the other two persons, the Holy Spirit must also be viewed as a person and of equal standing with the Father and the Son.

Ephesians 4:30

And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.

From this passage we learn that the Holy Spirit can be grieved. The word used here means to afflict with sadness or sorrow. Can we grieve an "it" or a "thing"? Grief is something that only a person experiences. Inanimate or impersonal things or abstractions do not have the ability to be grieved. This is proof of the personality of the Holy Spirit.

If the Holy Spirit can be grieved, this strongly suggests the idea of the love which the Holy Spirit bears towards humans in general, and to the followers of Christ in particular. As a personal Being, the Holy Spirit cares deeply for the salvation of the human race. "He is grieved with us mainly for our own sakes, for he knows what misery sin will cost us; he reads our sorrows in our sins... He grieves over us because he sees how much chastisement we incur, and how much communion we lose." (Spurgeon)

1 Peter 1:2

Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.

In this passage, as with others in which all three members of the Godhead are mentioned together, the profound unity or oneness inherent in the triune Godhead is shown. Here are three divine beings working together with singleness of purpose, though in different offices, for the salvation of men. The Father is the Author of the plan of salvation and has given them His Son to redeem and save. The Holy Spirit works on our hearts to renew us in the divine image. The atoning blood of Jesus provides the means to cleansing from sin.

This passage, along with others that speak of a strong coordinate relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, not only suggest the personality of the Spirit, but also the deity of the Spirit. These verses show that the Holy Spirit is classified on an equal level with the Father and the Son as a divine person. To suggest that the Holy Spirit is an impersonal force or merely an abstraction is entirely inappropriate when Scripture repeatedly places the Holy Spirit in an equally coordinate position with the Father and the Son.