

Who is the Holy Spirit?

A Study Outline



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The primary work of the Holy Spirit is to manifest the active presence of God in the world, and especially in the church.¹ However, there are many misconceptions about the identity of the Holy Spirit. Some view the Holy Spirit as a mystical force. Others understand the Holy Spirit as the impersonal power God makes available to followers of Christ. What does the Bible say about the identity of the Holy Spirit?

I. WHO IS THE HOLY SPIRIT?

A. The Holy Spirit is often misunderstood.

1. Lack of imagery compared to the Father and the Son.²
2. References to the Holy Spirit as the Holy Ghost (KJV) give some people the view that the Holy Spirit is something inside a white sheet.
3. The Holy Spirit's role to declare and glorify the Son (John 16:13-14).
4. Unlike other doctrines there are no systematic discussions in the Bible—many books like Acts describe the Holy Spirit, but the most concentrated is found in John 14—16.
5. A misconception that the Holy Spirit is lower in essence than the Father and the Son.³
6. Millard Erickson⁴ states that in the last half of the twentieth century there has been considerable controversy concerning the Holy Spirit. Pentecostals make so much of the Holy Spirit, certain non-Pentecostals, anxious that they not be misunderstood for Pentecostals because of their emotional, ecstatic worship practices, avoid speaking of the Holy Spirit altogether.

B. The Holy Spirit is a person, not a mystical force.

1. He is designated as "he/him," not "it"⁵ (John 16:13; Acts 11:15; Eph. 1:13-14).
2. He has the attributes of a person.
 - a) He has intelligence like a person.
 - (1) He knows and searches the things of God (1 Cor. 2:10-11).
 - (2) He possesses a mind (Rom. 8:27).
 - (3) He is able to teach people (1 Cor. 2:13).
 - b) He has emotions like a person (Eph. 4:30).
 - c) He has volition and makes decisions like a person.
 - (1) He determines which spiritual gifts a believer is given (1 Cor. 12:11).
 - (2) He directs the activities of believers (Acts 16:6-11).
 - d) He is to be obeyed (Acts 10:19-21).
 - e) He can be lied to (Acts 5:3).
 - f) He can be resisted (Acts 7:51).
 - g) He can be blasphemed (Matt. 12:31).

- h) He can be insulted (Heb. 10:29).
- 3. He exhibits the actions of a person.
 - a) He guides believers into truth (John 16:13).
 - b) He convicts the world of sin (John 16:8).
 - c) He performs miracles (Acts 8:39).
 - d) He intercedes for us (Rom. 8:26).
 - e) He empowers believers (1 Cor. 2:4).
- 4. He relates to others as a person.
 - a) To the apostles (Acts 15:28).
 - b) To Jesus (John 16:14).
 - c) To other Trinity members (Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14).

C. The Holy Spirit is part of the Godhead.

1. He is designated as God (compare Acts 28:25-27 to Isa. 6:8-10, and Heb. 10:15-17 to Jer. 31:31-34).
2. He was active and present at creation, hovering over the unordered conditions (Gen. 1:2).
3. He is omnipresent (Psa. 139:7).
4. He miraculously caused the virgin birth (Luke 1:35).
5. He is related to the Father and the Son (Matt. 28:19; John 16:14; Acts 15:28).
6. He was the agent in giving the inspired scriptures (2 Pet. 1:21).

D. The Holy Spirit is likened to “wind,” or “breath.”

1. Old Testament → Heb. רוּחַ ruach → “breath” as a sign of life.⁶
2. New Testament.
 - a) Grk: πνεῦμα *pneuma*. Same meaning as ruach.
 - b) Grk: παράκλητος *parakletos*.
 - (1) One who is called alongside to help.
 - (2) Counselor, advocate, helper (John 15:26).
 - (3) One sent to assist another, one who pleads the cause of another.
3. Other names of the Holy Spirit.⁷
 - a) Spirit of Grace (Heb. 10:29).
 - b) Spirit of Truth (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13).
 - c) Spirit of Wisdom and Knowledge (Isa. 11:2; cf. Eph. 1:17).
 - d) Spirit of Glory (1 Pet. 4:14).

II. THE HOLY SPIRIT IN OLD TESTAMENT TIMES

There are about 100 references to the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament which disclose his activities during that period. Ryrie reminds us that these references are not always definitive indications of the third person of the Trinity as disclosed more clearly in the New Testament.⁸

A. The Holy Spirit worked in creation.

1. He was involved with the planning of the universe (Isa. 40:12-14).⁹
2. He was also active in relation to the creation of the stars of heaven (Psa. 33:6).¹⁰
3. He participated in the creation of the earth (Gen. 1:2).¹¹
4. He worked in creating the animals (Psa. 104:25-30).
5. He worked in creating man (Job 33:4).

B. The Holy Spirit worked in revelation and inspiration.

1. The Holy Spirit guided¹² the writing of the Scriptures (2 Pet. 1:20-21).
2. Old Testament prophets spoke by means of the Holy Spirit (2 Sam. 23:2; Micah 3:8).
3. When Jesus quoted from Psalm 110, he acknowledged that it was written by David but given by the Holy Spirit (Matt. 22:43-44).
4. Peter quoted from Psalm 41 in connection with the replacement for Judas and said that the Holy Spirit foretold this concerning Judas by the mouth of David (Acts 1:16-17).
5. Peter stated that Psalm 2 was given by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of David (Acts 4:25).
6. Paul also quoted from the Old Testament (Isa. 6:9-10) and assigned the authorship to the Holy Spirit (Acts 28:25-27).
7. The writer to the Hebrews did the same in two places (Heb. 3:7-11 quoting from Psalm 95:7-11; and Heb. 10:15-16 quoting from Jer. 31:33).

C. The Holy Spirit worked in relation to Old Testament people.

1. The nature of his work.
 - a) The Holy Spirit's ministry to people in Old Testament times was not the same as it was after the Day of Pentecost.
 - b) He was in certain ones.
 - (1) Pharaoh recognized that the Spirit was in Joseph (Gen.41:38). Pharaoh may not have understood this was the Holy Spirit, but later revelation seems to make this clear.
 - (2) The Spirit was in Joshua, which is why God chose him (Num. 27:18).
 - (3) The Spirit was in Daniel (Dan. 4:8; 5:11-14; 6:3).
 - c) He was upon certain ones.

- (1) Judges (Judg. 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 14:6, 19; 15:14). Later, the Spirit left Samson (Jud. 16:20).
 - (2) Saul (1 Sam. 11:6; 16:14, 23). Later, it left him (1 Sam. 16:14)
 - (3) Balaam (Num. 24:2).
 - (4) Azariah (2 Chron. 15:1).
2. The Holy Spirit was source of supernatural abilities (Gen. 41:38).
 3. The Holy Spirit was the giver of artistic skill (Exod. 31:2-5).
 4. The Holy Spirit was the source of power and strength (Judg. 3:9, 10).
 5. The Holy Spirit was the inspiration of prophecy (1 Sam. 19:20, 23).
 6. The Holy Spirit was the equipper of God's messenger (Mic. 3:8).
 7. The extent of his work.
 - a) His work was limited before the Day of Pentecost.
 - (1) The Holy Spirit ministered to the entire nation of Israel by being present and guiding the people (Neh. 9:20; Isa. 63:10-11, 14).
 - (2) But there were others, like Moses, with which he had a closer relationship (Num. 11:29).
 - b) His ministry was limited before the Day of Pentecost.
 - (1) J. I Packer writes, "For it was then (Pentecost) that the new covenant ministry of the divine Holy Spirit was initiated, and that ministry—maybe I should say, the Church in the power of that ministry—has done more to change the world than any other force since history began."¹³
 - (2) The general conviction, indwelling, and empowering of the Holy Spirit was limited until after Pentecost (John 7:37-39), no sealing, and certainly no baptizing since it is still future in Acts 1:5.
 - (3) Regeneration of the Holy Spirit, such as found in Titus 3:5-6 did not seem to happen in Old Testament days.

D. How is the ministry of the Holy Spirit different in the Old Testament from what we find in the New Testament?

There are at least four major differences in the work of the Holy Spirit between the OT and the NT.¹⁴

1. Not every believer in God experienced the work of the Holy Spirit in the OT.
2. The Holy Spirit came "upon" certain people in the OT, and also left them. He does not do this in the NT.
3. In the OT, the Holy Spirit work did not include the permanent indwelling of believers, as it does in the NT (John 14:16-17).
4. OT believers were not baptized by the Holy Spirit. In Acts 1:5 Jesus made it clear that the baptism of the Holy Spirit had not yet occurred and would not until a few days from that point, on Pentecost.

Aspect	Old Testament	New Testament
Term "Holy Spirit"	3 times	250 times
Indwelling of the HS	Some	All
Primary work	Equipping	Saving, empowering, glorifying
Presence of the HS	Temporary	Permanent
Sealing of the HS	Absent	Present
Baptism of the HS	Absent	Present

III. THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

A. The Holy Spirit worked in the life of Jesus Christ

1. The Holy Spirit worked in the birth of Christ.
 - a) The Holy Spirit was involved with the conception of Christ in the womb of the virgin Mary.
 - b) The result was Jesus Christ's incarnation (Luke 1:35).
2. The Holy Spirit worked in the post-birth life of Christ.
 - a) Christ was filled with the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:1).
 - b) Christ was anointed by the Holy Spirit signifying that Jesus was the Messiah, the Anointed One (Luke 4:18; Acts 4:27; 10:38; Heb. 1:9).
 - c) Christ was full of joy through the Holy Spirit (Luke 10:21).
 - d) Christ was empowered by the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:18; Matt. 12:28).

B. 18 Ways the Holy Spirit works in the believer's life.

1. He convicts us (John 16:8).
2. He gives life to those who believe (2 Corinthians 3:6)
3. He renews us (Titus 3:5).
4. He lives within us (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19; John 14:16-17).
5. He sanctifies us (1 Cor. 6:11).
6. He helps us in our weakness (Romans 8:26)
7. He produces "fruit"¹⁵ in us (Gal. 5:22-23)
8. He teaches us (John 16:15; 1 Cor. 2:13).
9. He guides us (John 16:13; Rom. 8:14; Acts 13:2; Gal. 5:18).

10. He gives us assurance (Rom. 8:16).
11. He strengthens believers (Ephesians 3:16)
12. He cries out from within our hearts (Galatians 4:6)
13. He intercedes on our behalf (Romans 8:26, 27).
14. He gives us special abilities (gifts) for building up believers (1 Cor. 12:11).
15. He empowers our message when we share Christ with others (1 Cor. 2:4).
16. He baptizes us (1 Cor. 12:13).
17. He fills us (Eph. 5:18; Acts 2:4; Acts 4:31).
18. He seals us (Eph. 4:30; 2 Cor. 1:22).

C. The Holy Spirit seals, baptizes, and fills believers

1. The baptism of the Holy Spirit.
 - a) The Greek word for baptize (*baptizo*) means to immerse (1 Cor. 12:13).
 - b) The main point? All believers share the reality of being baptized by the Spirit, not just some believers.
 - c) What does it do? We become immersed into union with Christ, and the body of Christ, the Church.
 - d) When does it happen? Since every believer is baptized in the Spirit, it happens at the moment a person accepts Christ and becomes born-again.
 - e) How often does it happen? It happens only once, at the point of accepting Christ.
 - f) There is only one kind of baptism of the Holy Spirit; not a baptism *in* the Spirit and a separate baptism *by* the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:5).¹⁶
2. The filling of the Holy Spirit.
 - a) To be filled¹⁷ with the Holy Spirit is to be led by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:14; Gal. 5:18).
 - b) All believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, but filling depends on the believer's willingness to give control to the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:16, 25; Eph. 5:18).

"To be filled with the Holy Spirit is to be under his total domination and control. To be filled with the Spirit involves confession of sin, surrender of will, intellect, body, time, talent, possessions, and desires. It requires the death of selfishness and the slaying of self-will. To be filled with God's Spirit is to be filled with his Word. And as we are filled with God's Word, it controls our thinking and action." -John MacArthur¹⁸

- c) The Holy Spirit lives in all sinning Christians (1 Cor. 6:19)¹⁹. However, the Holy Spirit can be grieved or quenched when a believer resists the work of the Spirit in and through him (Eph. 4:30; 1 Thess. 5:19).
- d) In what ways is the baptism of the Holy Spirit different from the filling of the Spirit?
 - (1) All believers are baptized by the Holy Spirit and permanently joined into the body of Christ, the church. (John 7:37-39; Eph. 1:13; 4:30; Gal. 3:2; 2 Cor. 1:22)
 - (2) The filling of the Holy Spirit is related to yieldedness—giving control of one’s life to the Holy Spirit.
 - (3) All believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, but filling depends on the believer’s willingness to give control to the Holy Spirit. As one matures, this yieldedness grows, and as one grows the Holy Spirit reveals new areas that need to be yielded to him.²⁰
 - (4) Charles Ryrie presents an excellent comparison between the baptism and filling of the Holy Spirit.²¹

Baptism of the Holy Spirit	Filling of the Holy Spirit
Occurs only once in each believer’s life	Is a repeated experience
Did not happen before the day of Pentecost	Occurred in the Old Testament
True of all believers	Not necessarily experienced by all
Cannot be undone	Can be lost
Results in a position	Results in power
Occurs when we believe in Christ	Occurs throughout the Christian life
No prerequisite (except faith in Christ)	Depends on yieldedness

3. The sealing of the Holy Spirit.

- a) To be sealed by the Holy Spirit means to authenticate God’s ownership (2 Cor. 1:21-22; Eph. 1:13-14; Eph. 4:30).
- b) Sealing takes place at the time of our conversion (2 Cor. 1:22).
- c) The very presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives is an authentication (seal) that we belong to God, that we are owned by him, and therefore, we belong to his family, we receive his provisions, and we receive his protection.
- d) The Holy Spirit’s presence is a deposit or guarantee of our future inheritance.
- e) Sealing is to the day of redemption (Eph. 4:30).
 - (1) This means that at some future day when our redemption is fully accomplished, including the resurrection of our bodies (Rom. 8:23; Phil. 3:20-21).
 - (2) Thus the sealing guarantees the complete fulfillment of God’s promises to us.

IV. HISTORY OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

A. Early Church Period (A.D. 100-500): Relatively little was said about the Holy Spirit.

1. The Holy Spirit was viewed as simply a guiding force that produced the Bible.
2. By the late second century there was a growing emphasis on the deity of the Holy Spirit.
3. False views that existed in the early centuries:
 - a) Sabellianism (215): The Holy Spirit was simply another mode of expression of the one God (Modalism).
 - b) Arianism (325): The Holy Spirit was created by the Son.
 - c) Macedonianism (342-386): The Holy Spirit was subordinate to Jesus, and a servant of the Son and the Father.
4. Reactions to early false views.
 - a) Council of Nicaea (325): Countered Arianism by affirming that the Holy Spirit, like the Son, was of the same essence as the Father.
 - b) Council of Constantinople (381): Countered Macedonianism by giving equal status of the Holy Spirit to the Son and the Father. The Holy Spirit is part of the Godhead.
 - c) Council of Chalcedon (451): Confirmed the deity of the Holy Spirit.

B. Medieval Period (A.D. 500-1500): Little emphasis on the Holy Spirit.

1. Filioque dispute: Eastern churches objected to adding the filioque phrase (Latin: "and the Son") clause to the Greek version of the Nicene Creed (A.D. 325). It was in the Latin version.
2. The Eastern churches felt that Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father but not the Son. The filioque clause was probably devised in response to Arianism, which denied the full divinity of the Son.
3. The dispute was one of the reasons why the Eastern Church split from the Western Church in A.D. 1054.

C. Reformation Period (A.D.1500-1600): The work of the Holy Spirit was emphasized.

1. Reformers brought a renewed emphasis on the regenerating of man by the Holy Spirit, and his function in bringing illumination to the Scriptures.
2. Martin Luther concept stressed the role of the Holy Spirit in the Christian's struggle against the old sinful nature.
3. John Calvin took exception to the Roman Catholic view that only the RC Church could enlighten the Scriptures. Calvin saw the work of the Holy Spirit in helping the believer understand the Scriptures. This was in opposition to the Roman Catholic Church which taught that only the priest could interpret the Word of God.

4. Socinians and Arminians: Taught that salvation is the work of man, not the Holy Spirit. This view was condemned by the Synod (Council) of Dort (1618-19). Nevertheless, Arminian theology flourishes today, especially in the Methodist Churches.

D. Post Reformation Period (A.D. 1600-1900): The work of the Holy Spirit was downplayed.

1. Protestant Scholasticism: A movement which regarded the Holy Spirit and his work as superfluous, unnecessary and needless.
2. Enlightenment Period: The existence of the Holy Spirit cannot be proved. God came to be viewed as very far away from human life—deism.
3. John Wesley (1703-1791), founder of Methodism, emphasized the Holy Spirit's ongoing process of sanctifying the believer. Wesley is known for his doctrine of entire sanctification and the second blessing.²²
4. Romanticism Movement: Interest in the Holy Spirit was stifled as men like Friedrich Schleiermacher, (Protestant theologian, 1768-1834) taught that intuition and feeling are the basis for religion.
5. Non-biblical views of the Holy Spirit.²³
 - a) Jehovah's Witnesses: The Holy Spirit is not God, but rather an invisible, active force from Jehovah.
 - b) Mormonism: The Holy Spirit is not God, but is an influence or electricity-like emanation from God.
 - c) Christian Science: The Holy Spirit is the teaching of Christian Science.
 - d) New Age: The Holy Spirit is sometimes a psychic force.
 - e) Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism: The Holy Spirit is not part of these beliefs.

E. 1900s—Today: Divergent views of the work of the Holy Spirit in the church emerge.

1. The primary difference in the views of the Holy Spirit today center primarily on the use and purpose of speaking in tongues, prophecy, and healing.
2. At the two extremes are Pentecostalism²⁴ and Cessationism. Both are often viewed as "Movements" and are often transdenominational.
3. In Christian theology, Cessationism is the view that the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit, such as tongues, prophecy and healing, ceased being practiced early on in Church history.
4. The opposite of Cessationism is Continuationism²⁵.
5. Cessationists generally believe that the miraculous gifts were given only for the foundation of the Church, during the time between the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, ca. A.D. 33 (see Acts 2) and the fulfillment of God's purposes in history, usually identified as either the completion of the last book of the New Testament or the death of the last Apostle, i.e. John the Apostle. Most Conservative Baptist and Reformed Churches hold this view.

6. Its counterpart is Continuationism which believes that the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit have been available for use by the church ever since Pentecost. Most Pentecostals and Charismatics hold this view.
7. Differences in modern views should not be cause for a break in fellowships between believers. God blesses those who hold either view.
8. H. Wayne House offers a comparison between these views in the following table.²⁶

Aspect	Traditional View	Pentecostal View	Charismatic View
Use of Tongues	Not normative today.	Necessary today. It is a second work of grace that takes place after salvation.	An indicator of Spirit fullness. It takes place at the time of salvation.
Duration of Tongues	They ceased after the completion of the N.T. and are not needed today.	They continue today, especially when there is a greater desire for spirituality.	Same as Pentecostal view.
Spiritual Gifts	Today they include all but tongues, interpretation of tongues, prophecy, and healing.	All spiritual gifts are to be practiced today.	Same as Pentecostal view.

V. WHERE TO GET MORE INFORMATION

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ENDNOTES

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- ¹ Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1994, 2000) 634.
- ² Millard J. Erickson, Christian Theology, Second Edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998) 863-4
- ³ See Erickson diagram, 864.
- ⁴ Erickson, 864.
- ⁵ John 16:13. The Greek word *ekeinos* (that one) is in the nominative, singular masculine form.
- ⁶ The word *ruackh* in the OT occurs 378 times, about 140 times it actually means "wind,
- ⁷ H. Wayne House, Charts of Christian Theology & Doctrine (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992) 66.
- ⁸ Charles Ryrie, Basic Theology: A Popular Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986, 1999) 399.
- ⁹ Some Bible versions may translate the word רֹּחַ *ruach* as "mind" or "breath" a figurative representation of the Holy Spirit.
- ¹⁰ See Endnote 3.
- ¹¹ The word "hovering" (NIV) or "moved" (KJV) means the Holy Spirit hovered over and cared for the yet unfashioned and uninhabited earth (Ryrie.) Hovering may also be viewed as manifesting God's immediate presence in creation (Grudem).
- ¹² 2 Pet. 1:21. Grk: φέρω *pherō* meaning to be guided, carried along, or moved by the Holy Spirit. The will of man was not the carrier but rather the Holy Spirit was. The men who wrote acted as agents, but their wills did not control or interfere with what God wished to communicate; the Holy Spirit was the one who carried them along.
- ¹³ M. James Sawyer and Daniel B. Wallace, eds., Who's Afraid of the Holy Spirit? An Investigation into the Ministry of the Holy Spirit Today (Dallas: Biblical Studies Press, 2005) 97.
- ¹⁴ David Hocking, He Will Be in You: The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit Today (La Mirada: Calvary Communications, 1988) 27-28.
- ¹⁵ Fruit (Grk. καρπός *karpos*) a metaphor representing nine desirable Christ-like characteristics that are intended to grow as the believer takes nourishment from a loving relationship with Jesus Christ. Notice it is singular "fruit," not fruits.
- ¹⁶ For more on this the reader is invited to examine Basic Theology by Charles C. Ryrie, Chapter 64, "Spirit Baptizing."
- ¹⁷ Filled (Grk. πληροῦσθε, *plērousthe*) verb imperative present passive 2nd person plural. Notice the word is in the passive voice meaning believers are to receive the action (filled), not to generate the action.
- ¹⁸ John MacArthur, Fundamentals of the Faith (Chicago: Moody Press, 2009) 56.
- ¹⁹ 1 Cor. 6:19. The Greek word "you" (ὑμῖν) is 2nd person plural (you-all). The church at Corinth was filled with many believers, a spiritually mixed group, some strong believers and some who were carnal and worldly; yet Paul said all were indwelt by the Holy Spirit.
- ²⁰ Charles Ryrie, 437.
- ²¹ Ryrie, 438.
- ²² Wesley emphasized the significance of a post-conversion crisis experience (a second work of grace) whereby the heart is cleansed from significant sin—that is becomes no longer possible for the believer to sin consciously. The event

is an instantaneous, one-time experience. Wesley was foundation for subsequent Holiness and Pentecostal teachings. Wesleyans tend to be Arminian as opposed to embracing Calvinism (M. James Sawyer, [The Survivor's Guide to Theology](#) (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006) 364.

²³ [Christianity, Cults & Religions](#) (Torrence: Rose Publishing, 2008).

²⁴ "Pentecostal" is often used interchangeably, though erroneously, with "Charismatic". The Pentecostal movement began with the revivalist fervor in Los Angeles, California in the early 1900s. Alienated by the religious formalism of mainline and traditional churches, Pentecostals emphasized informal worship services characterized by emotional and ecstatic experiences.

²⁵ An account of the dispute between Cessationists and Continuationists is presented in the article [Cessationism versus Continuationism](#) < http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cessationism_versus_Continuationism>. Accessed August 24, 2011.

²⁶ House, 74.