

The Personality of the Holy Spirit
by
R. A. Torrey
(1856-1928)

Before one can correctly understand the work of the Holy Spirit, he must first of all know the Spirit himself. A frequent source of error and fanaticism about the work of the Holy Spirit is the attempt to study and understand His work without, first of all, coming to know Him as a person.

It is of the highest importance from the standpoint of worship that we decide whether the Holy Spirit is a Divine Person, worthy to receive our adoration, our faith, our love, and our entire surrender to Himself, or whether it is simply an influence emanating from God or a power or an illumination that God imparts to us. If the Holy Spirit is a person, and a Divine Person, and we do not know Him as such, then we are robbing a Divine Being of the worship and the faith and the love and the surrender to Himself which are His due.

It is also of the highest importance from the practical standpoint that we decide whether the Holy Spirit is merely some mysterious and wonderful power that we in our weakness and ignorance are, somehow, to get hold of and use, or whether the Holy Spirit is a real Person, infinitely holy, infinitely wise, infinitely mighty and infinitely tender, who is to get hold of and use us. The former conception is utterly heathenish, not essentially different from the thought of the African fetish worshiper who has his god whom he uses. The latter conception is sublime and Christian.

If we think of the Holy Spirit, as so many do, as merely a power of influence, our constant thought will be, "How can I get more of the Holy Spirit?" But if we think of Him in the Biblical way as a Divine Person, our thought will rather be, "How can the Holy Spirit have more of me?" The conception of the Holy Spirit as a Divine influence or power that somehow, we are to get hold of and use, leads to self-exaltation and self-sufficiency. One who so thinks of the Holy Spirit and who at the same time imagines that he has received the Holy Spirit will almost inevitably be full of spiritual pride and strut about as if he belonged to some superior order of Christians. One frequently hears such persons say, "I am a Holy Spirit man," or "I am a Holy Spirit woman." But if we once grasp the thought that the Holy Spirit is a Divine Person of infinite majesty, glory and holiness and power, who in marvelous condescension has come into our hearts to make His abode there and take possession of our lives and make use of them, it will put us in the dust and keep us in the dust. I can think of no thought more humbling or more overwhelming than the thought that a person of Divine majesty and glory dwells in my heart and is ready to use even me

It is of the highest importance from the standpoint of experience that we know the Holy Spirit as a person. Thousands and tens of thousands of men and women can testify to the blessing that has come into their own lives as they have come to know the Holy Spirit, not merely as a gracious influence(emanating, it is true, from God), but as a real Person, just as real as Jesus Christ Himself, an ever-present, loving Friend and mighty Helper, who is not only always by their side but dwells in their heart every day and every hour, and who is ready to undertake for them in every emergency of life. Thousands of ministers, Christian workers and Christians in the humblest spheres of life have spoken to me, or written to me, of the complete

transformation of their Christian experience that came to them when they grasped the thought (not merely in a theological, but in an experimental way) that the Holy Spirit was a Person, and consequently came to know Him.

There are at least four distinct lines of proof in the Bible that the Holy Spirit is a person.

1. All the distinctive characteristics of personality are ascribed to the Holy Spirit in the Bible.

What are the distinctive characteristics, or marks, of personality? Knowledge, feeling, or emotion, and will. Any entity that thinks and feels and wills is a person. When we say that the Holy Spirit is a person, there are those who understand us to mean that the Holy Spirit has hands and feet and eyes and ears and mouth, and so on, but these are not the characteristics of personality but of bodily existence. All of these characteristics or marks of personality are repeatedly ascribed to the Holy Spirit in the Old and New Testaments. We read in 1 Corinthians 2:10, 11, "But God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God." Here knowledge is ascribed to the Holy Spirit. We are clearly taught that the Holy Spirit is not merely an influence that illuminates our minds to comprehend the truth but a Being who Himself knows the truth.

In 1 Corinthians 12:11, we read, "All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines." Here will is ascribed to the Spirit and we are taught that the Holy Spirit is not a power that we get hold of and use according to our will but a Person of sovereign majesty, who uses us according to His will. This distinction is of fundamental importance in getting into right relations with the Holy Spirit. It is at this very point that many honest seekers after power and efficiency in service go astray. They are reaching out after, and struggling to get, possession of some mysterious and mighty power that they can make use of in their work according to their own will. They will never get possession of the power they seek until they come to recognize that there is not some Divine power for them to get hold of and use in their blindness and ignorance, but that there is a Person, infinitely wise, as well as infinitely mighty, who is willing to take possession of them and use them according to His own perfect will.

When we stop to think of it, we must rejoice that there is no Divine power that beings so ignorant as we are, so liable to err, can get hold of and use. How appalling might be the results if there were. But what a holy joy must come into our hearts when we grasp the thought that there is a Divine Person, One who never errs, who is willing to take possession of us and impart to us such gifts as He sees best and to use us according to His wise and loving will.

We read in Romans 8:27, "He who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will." In this passage mind is ascribed to the Holy Spirit. The Greek word translated "mind" is a comprehensive word, including the ideas of thought, feeling, and purpose. It is the same that is used in Romans 8:7, where we read that "the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so." So, then, in this passage we have all the distinctive marks of personality ascribed to the Holy Spirit.

We find the personality of the Holy Spirit brought out in a most touching and suggestive way in Romans 15:30, "I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me." Here we have "love" ascribed to the Holy Spirit. The reader would do well to stop and ponder those five words, "the love of the Spirit." We dwell often on the love of God the Father. It is the subject of our daily and constant thought.

We dwell often on the love of Jesus Christ the Son. Who would think of calling himself a Christian who passed a day without meditating on the love of his Savior, but how often have we meditated on "the love of the Spirit"? Each day of our lives, if we are living as Christians ought, we kneel down in the presence of God the Father and look up into His face and say, "I thank You, Father, for Your great love that led You to give Your only Son to die on the cross of Calvary for me." Each day of our lives we also look up into the face of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and say, "Oh, glorious Lord and Savior, Jesus, Son of God, I thank You for Your great love that led You not to count it a thing to be grasped to be equal with God but to empty Yourself and, forsaking all the glory of heaven, come down to earth with all its shame and to take my sins upon Yourself and die in my place on the cross of Calvary."

But how often do we kneel and say to the Holy Spirit, "Oh, eternal and infinite Spirit of God, I thank You for Your great love that led You to come into this world of sin and darkness and to seek me out and to follow me so patiently until You brought me to see my utter ruin and need of a Savior and to reveal to me my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, as just the Savior whom I need"? Yet we owe our salvation just as truly to the love of the Spirit as to the love of the Father and the love of the Son. If it had not been for the love of God the Father looking down on me in my utter ruin and providing a perfect atonement for me in the death of His own Son on the cross of Calvary, I would have been in hell today.

If it had not been for the love of Jesus Christ, the eternal Word of God, looking on me in my utter ruin and in obedience to the Father, putting aside all the glory of heaven for all the shame of earth and taking my place, the place of the curse on the cross of Calvary and pouring out His life utterly for me, I would have been in hell today. If it had not been for the love of the Holy Spirit, sent by the Father in answer to the prayer of the Son (John 14:16), leading Him to seek me out in my utter blindness and ruin and to follow me day after day, week after week, and year after year, when I persistently turned a deaf ear to His pleadings, following me through paths of sin where it must have been agony for that Holy One to go, until at last I listened and He opened my eyes to see my utter ruin and then revealed Jesus to me as just the Savior that would meet my every need and then enabled me to receive this Jesus as my own Savior; if it had not been for this patient, long-suffering, never-tiring, infinitely tender love of the Holy Spirit, I would have been in hell today. Oh, the Holy Spirit is not merely an influence or a power or an illumination, but is a Person just as real as God the Father or Jesus Christ His Son.

The personality of the Holy Spirit comes out in the Old Testament as truly as in the New, for we read in Nehemiah 9:20, "You gave your good Spirit to instruct them. You did not withhold your manna from their mouths, and you gave them water for their thirst." Here both intelligence and goodness are ascribed to the Holy Spirit. There are some who tell us that while it is true the personality of the Holy Spirit is found in the New Testament, it is not found in the Old. But it is certainly found in this passage. As a matter of course, the doctrine of the personality of the

Holy Spirit is not so fully developed in the Old Testament as in the New. But the doctrine is there.

There is perhaps no passage in the entire Bible in which the personality of the Holy Spirit comes out more tenderly and touchingly than in Ephesians 4:30, "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." Here grief is ascribed to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not a blind, impersonal influence or power that comes into our lives to illuminate, sanctify, and empower them. No, He is immeasurably more than that, He is a holy Person, who comes to dwell in our hearts, One who sees clearly every act we perform? every word we speak, every thought we entertain, even the most fleeting fancy that is allowed to pass through our minds; and if there is anything in act, or word or deed that is impure, unholy, unkind, selfish, mean, petty or untrue, this infinitely holy One is deeply grieved by it. I know of no thought that will help one more than this to lead a holy life and to walk softly in the presence of the holy One.

How often a young man is kept back from yielding to the temptations that surround young manhood by the thought that if he should yield to the temptation that now assails him, his holy mother might hear of it and would be grieved by it beyond expression. How often some young man has had his hand on the door of some place of sin that he is about to enter and the thought has come to him, "If I should enter there, my mother might hear of it and it would nearly kill her," and he has turned his back on that door and gone away to lead a pure life, that he might not grieve his mother. But there is One who is holier than any mother, One who is more sensitive against sin than the purest woman who ever walked this earth, and who loves us as even no mother ever loved. This One dwells in our hearts, if we are really Christians, and He sees every act we do by day or under cover of the night; He hears every word we utter in public or in private; He sees every thought we entertain, He beholds every fancy and imagination that is permitted even a momentary thoughts in our mind, and if there is anything unholy, impure, selfish, mean, petty, unkind, harsh, unjust, or any evil act or word or thought or fancy, He is grieved by it.

If we will allow those words, "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God," to sink into our hearts and become the motto of our lives they will keep us from many a sin. How often some thought or fancy has knocked for an entrance into my own mind and was about to find entertainment when the thought has come, "The Holy Spirit sees that thought and will be grieved by it," and that thought has gone.

2. Many acts that only a Person can perform are ascribed to the Holy Spirit.

If we deny the personality of the Holy Spirit, many passages of Scripture become meaningless and absurd. For example, we read in 1 Corinthians 2:10, "But God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God." This passage sets before us the Holy Spirit, not merely as an illumination whereby we are enabled to grasp the deep things of God, but a Person who Himself searches the deep things of God and then reveals to us the precious discoveries which He has made.

We read in Revelation 2:7, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise

of God." Here the Holy Spirit is set before us, not merely as an impersonal enlightenment that comes to our mind but as a Person who speaks and out of the depths of His own wisdom whispers into the ear of His listening servant the precious truth of God.

In Galatians 4:6, we read, "Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father.'" Here the Holy Spirit is represented as crying out in the heart of the individual believer. Not merely a Divine influence producing in our own hearts the assurance of our sonship, but one who cries out in our hearts, who bears witness together with our spirit that we are sons of God. (See also Romans 8:16)

The Holy Spirit is also represented in the Scripture as one who prays. We read in Romans 8:26, "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express." It is plain from this passage that the Holy Spirit is not merely an influence that moves us to pray, not merely an illumination that teaches us how to pray, but a Person who Himself prays in and through us. There is wondrous comfort in the thought that every true believer has two Divine Persons praying for him, Jesus Christ, the Son who was once on this earth, who knows all about our temptations, who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities and who is now ascended to the right hand of the Father and in that place of authority and power ever lives to make intercession for us (Hebrews 7:25; 1 John 2:1); and another Person, just as Divine as the Son, who walks by our side each day, yes, who dwells in the innermost depths of our being and knows our needs, even as we do not know them ourselves, and from these depths makes intercession to the Father for us. The position of the believer is indeed one of perfect security with these two Divine Persons praying for him.

We read again in John 15:26, "When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me." Here the Holy Spirit is set before us as a Person who gives His testimony to Jesus Christ, not merely as an illumination that enables the believer to testify of Christ, but as a Person who Himself testifies; and a clear distinction is drawn in this and the following verse between the testimony of the Holy Spirit and the testimony of the believer to whom He has borne His witness, for we read in the next verse, "And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning." So there are two witnesses, the Holy Spirit bearing witness to the believer, and the believer bearing witness to the world.

The Holy Spirit is also spoken of as a teacher. We read in John 14:26, "But the Counselor, 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." And in a similar way, we read in John 16:12-14, "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all 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. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you." And in the Old Testament, Nehemiah 9:20, "You gave your good Spirit to instruct them." In all these passages it is perfectly clear that the Holy Spirit is not a mere illumination that enables us to apprehend the truth, but a Person who comes to us to teach us day by day the truth of God. It is the privilege of the humblest believer in Jesus Christ, not merely to have his mind illumined to comprehend the truth of God, but to have a Divine Teacher to teach him daily the truth he needs to know (cf. 1 John 2:20, 27).

The Holy Spirit is also represented as the Leader and Guide of the children of God. We read in Romans 8:14, "Because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God." He is not merely an influence that enables us to see the way that God would have us go, nor merely a power that gives us strength to go that way, but a Person who takes us by the hand and gently leads us on in the paths in which God would have us walk.

The Holy Spirit is also represented as a Person who has authority to command men in their service of Jesus Christ. We read of the Apostle Paul and his companions in Acts 16:6, 7, "Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to." Here it is a Person who takes the direction of the conduct of Paul and his companions and a Person whose authority they recognize and to whom they instantly submit.

Further still than this, the Holy Spirit is represented as the One who is the supreme authority in the church, who calls men to work and appoints them to office. We read in Acts 13:2, "While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.'" And in Acts 20:28, "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood." There can be no doubt to a candid seeker after truth that it is a Person, and a person of Divine majesty and sovereignty, who is here set before us.

From all the passages here quoted, it is evident that many acts that only a person can perform are ascribed to the Holy Spirit.

3. An office is predicated of the Holy Spirit that can be predicated only of a person.

Our Savior says in John 14:16, 17, "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to 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." Our Lord had announced to the disciples that He was about to leave them. An awful sense of desolation took possession of them. Sorrow filled their hearts (John 16:6) at the contemplation of their loneliness and absolute helplessness when Jesus should thus leave them alone. To comfort them the Lord tells them that they shall not be left alone, that in leaving them He was going to the Father and that He would pray the Father, who would give them another Comforter to take the place of Himself during His absence. Is it possible that Jesus Christ could have used such language if the other Comforter who was coming to take His place was only an impersonal influence or power? Still more, is it possible that Jesus could have said as He did in John 16:7, "But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you," if this Comforter whom He was to send was simply an impersonal influence or power? No, one Divine Person was going, another Person just as Divine was coming to take His place, and it was expedient for the disciples that the One go to represent them before the Father, for another just as Divine and sufficient was coming to take His place. This promise of our Lord and Savior of the coming of the other Comforter and of His abiding with us is the greatest and best of all for the present

dispensation. This is the promise of the Father (Acts 1:4), the promise of promises. We shall take it up again when we come to study the names of the Holy Spirit.

4. A treatment is predicated of the Holy Spirit that could be predicated only of a Person.

We read in Isaiah 63:10, "Yet they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit. So he turned and became their enemy and he himself fought against them." Here we are told that the Holy Spirit is rebelled against and grieved (cf. Ephesians 4:30). Only a person can be rebelled against and only a person of authority. Only a person can be grieved. You cannot grieve a mere influence or power. In Hebrews 10:29, we read, "How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?" Here we are told that the Holy Spirit is "insulted." There is but one kind of entity in the universe that can be insulted and that is a person. It is absurd to think of insulting an influence or a power or any kind of being except a person. We read again in Acts 5:3, "Then Peter said, 'Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land?'" Here we have the Holy Spirit represented as one who can be lied to. One cannot lie to anything but a person.

In Matthew 12:31, 32, we read, "And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come." Here we are told that the Holy Spirit is blasphemed against. It is impossible to blaspheme anything but a person. If the Holy Spirit is not a person, it certainly cannot be a more serious and decisive sin to blaspheme Him than it is to blaspheme the Son of man, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ Himself.

Here, then, we have four distinctive and decisive lines of proof that the Holy Spirit is a Person. Theoretically most of us believe this, but do we, in our real thoughts of Him and in our practical attitude toward Him, treat Him as if He were indeed a Person? At the close of an address on the Personality of the Holy Spirit at a Bible conference some years ago, one who had been a church member many years, a member of one of the most orthodox of our modern denominations, said to me, "I never thought of It before as a Person." Doubtless this Christian woman had often sung:

Praise God from whom all blessings flow,
Praise Him all creatures here below,
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host,
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

Doubtless she had often sung:

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost,
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be,
World without end, Amen.

But it is one thing to sing words; it is quite another thing to realize the meaning of what we sing. If this Christian woman had been questioned in regard to her doctrine, she would doubtless have said that she believed that there were three Persons in the Godhead--Father,

Son, and Holy Spirit--but a theological confession is one thing, a practical realization of the truth we confess is quite another. So the question is altogether necessary, no matter how orthodox you may be in your creedal statements, Do you regard the Holy Spirit as indeed as real a Person as Jesus Christ, as loving and wise and strong, as worthy of your confidence and love and surrender as Jesus Christ Himself?

The Holy Spirit came into this world to be to the disciples of our Lord after His departure, and to us, what Jesus Christ had been to them during the days of His personal companionship with them (John 14:16, 17). Is He that to you? Do you know Him? Every week in your life you hear the apostolic benediction, "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 Corinthians 13:14), and while you hear it, do you take in the significance of it? Do you know the communion of the Holy Ghost? The fellowship of the Holy Ghost? The partnership of the Holy Ghost? The comradeship of the Holy Ghost? The intimate personal friendship of the Holy Ghost? Herein lies the whole secret of a real Christian life, a life of liberty and joy and power and fullness. To have as one's ever-present Friend, and to be conscious that one has as his ever-present Friend, the Holy Spirit, and to surrender one's life in all its departments entirely to His control, this is true Christian living. The doctrine of the Personality of the Holy Spirit is as distinctive of the religion that Jesus taught as the doctrines of the Deity and the atonement of Jesus Christ Himself. But it is not enough to believe the doctrine--one must know the Holy Spirit Himself. The whole purpose of this chapter (God help me to say it reverently) is to introduce you to my Friend, the Holy Spirit.

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Reuben Archer Torrey (1856-1928) was both an evangelist and a Bible scholar. Long associated with D. L. Moody, he became most prominent during world preaching tours in 1902 and 1921. His preaching in Wales in 1902 has been noted as one cause for the Welsh revivals of the early 1900s. He was the first superintendent of the Moody Bible Institute and wrote numerous devotional and theological books.

Spiritual awakening followed R. A. Torrey throughout his career as an evangelist. In revivals with the popular gospel singer Charles W. Alexander, Dr. Torrey filled meeting halls with his magnetic presence, passion, and earnestness.

To help the reading of this classic work, the original Scripture references have been replaced by the language of our time--the NIV. Also, obviously archaic terminology and passages obscured by expressions not totally familiar in our day have been revised. However, neither Torrey's meaning nor intent have been tampered with.

All Scripture references are taken from the HOLY BIBLE: NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION (C) 1978 by the New York Bible Society, used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers.

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