What is the Holy Spirit?

Apologetics · https://thebiblicalroots.org/answers/what-is-the-holy-spirit/

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity—fully God, eternal, personal, and actively involved in God's work of creation, redemption, and sanctification. The Holy Spirit is not merely a force, energy, influence, or impersonal power. Scripture presents Him as a divine person who teaches, speaks, guides, comforts, convicts, and empowers God's people (John 14:26; 16:13; Acts 13:2).

The Holy Spirit is God Himself at work in the world and in the lives of believers. Along with the Father and the Son, He shares the one divine nature while remaining a distinct person (Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14).

The Bible introduces the Holy Spirit from its opening pages. In Genesis 1:2, the Spirit of God is present and active at creation. Throughout the Old Testament, the Spirit empowers prophets, kings, judges, and craftsmen for God's purposes (Judg. 6:34; 1 Sam. 16:13; Isa. 61:1). Yet the prophets also looked forward to a day when God would pour out His Spirit more broadly upon His people (Joel 2:28–29; Ezek. 36:26–27).

That promise began to be fulfilled through the ministry of Jesus Christ. At His baptism, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him (Matt. 3:16). Jesus taught extensively about the Spirit and promised that after His ascension the Spirit would come to dwell within believers (John 14:16–17; 16:7–15).

The fulfillment of that promise occurred at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the Church (Acts 2:1–4). Since then, every Christian has received the Holy Spirit as part of God's saving work (Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 12:13).

Is the Holy Spirit a person or a force?

One common misunderstanding is that the Holy Spirit is merely God's power or influence.

Scripture teaches otherwise.

The Holy Spirit speaks (Acts 13:2), teaches (John 14:26), guides (John 16:13), intercedes (Rom. 8:26–27), can be grieved (Eph. 4:30), and distributes spiritual gifts according to His own will (1 Cor. 12:11). These are the actions of a person, not an impersonal force.

The Holy Spirit is also explicitly identified as God. In Acts 5:3–4, Peter tells Ananias that lying to the Holy Spirit is equivalent to lying to God. Likewise, Paul teaches that believers are God's temple because the Holy Spirit dwells within them (1 Cor. 3:16).

What does the Holy Spirit do?

The Holy Spirit carries out many ministries in the life of believers.

First, He brings people to faith in Christ. Jesus taught that the Spirit convicts the world concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8–11). No one comes to saving faith apart from the Spirit's work (1 Cor. 12:3).

Second, the Holy Spirit gives spiritual life. Jesus described this as being "born of the Spirit" (John 3:5–8). The Spirit regenerates sinners and makes them new creations in Christ (Titus 3:5).

Third, the Holy Spirit dwells within believers. Under the New Covenant, God's people become temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19–20). His presence is not temporary or occasional but permanent (Eph. 1:13–14).

Fourth, the Spirit sanctifies believers. The word *sanctification* refers to God's ongoing work of making Christians more like Christ. The Spirit produces spiritual fruit such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22–23).

Fifth, the Holy Spirit equips believers for service. He distributes spiritual gifts to build up the Church and advance God's mission (1 Cor. 12:4–11; Eph. 4:11–13).

Most importantly, the Holy Spirit always points people to Jesus. Jesus said that the Spirit "will glorify me" (John 16:14). The Spirit's role is never to draw attention to Himself but to reveal Christ and strengthen faith in Him.

What about spiritual gifts?

Christians generally agree that the Holy Spirit gives spiritual gifts to believers. These include gifts such as teaching, serving, encouraging, giving, leadership, mercy, evangelism, and many others (Rom. 12:6–8; 1 Cor. 12:4–11).

Some Christian traditions teach that miraculous gifts such as tongues, prophecy, and healing continue in the same way today. Others believe certain apostolic-era gifts served a unique purpose in the foundation of the early Church. Faithful Christians differ on these questions.

What all mainstream Christian traditions agree on is that spiritual gifts are given to serve others and glorify Christ—not to elevate ourselves (1 Cor. 12:7; 14:12).

Key Scriptures to Study

- Genesis 1:2 — The Spirit of God is active in creation.
- Joel 2:28–29 — God promises to pour out His Spirit.
- Matthew 3:16–17 — The Spirit appears at Jesus' baptism.
- John 3:5–8 — Jesus teaches about being born of the Spirit.
- John 14:16–17, 26 — The Spirit is the Helper and Teacher.
- Acts 2:1–4 — The Holy Spirit is poured out at Pentecost.
- Acts 5:3–4 — The Holy Spirit is identified as God.
- Romans 8:9–17 — The Spirit dwells within believers.
- Galatians 5:22–23 — The fruit of the Spirit.

Objections & Misconceptions

Common Objection: "Is the Holy Spirit just God's power?"

Response: No. God's power is one of His attributes, but the Holy Spirit is a divine person who speaks, teaches, wills, guides, and intercedes (John 14:26; 1 Cor. 12:11; Rom. 8:26–27).

Common Objection: "Do Christians receive the Holy Spirit later in life after conversion?"

Response: The New Testament generally presents receiving the Holy Spirit as part of becoming a Christian (Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 12:13). While Christians may experience varying levels of spiritual maturity and growth, every believer belongs to Christ because the Spirit dwells within them.

Common Objection: "What does it mean to be filled with the Holy Spirit?"

Response: Being filled with the Spirit refers to the Spirit's ongoing influence and control in a believer's life (Eph. 5:18). It is not about receiving more of the Spirit, but about living under His guidance and empowerment.

Common Objection: "Can I grieve the Holy Spirit?"

Response: Yes. Ephesians 4:30 warns believers not to grieve the Holy Spirit through persistent sin and disobedience. This is further evidence that the Spirit is a person rather than an impersonal

force.

Why This Matters

The Holy Spirit is not an optional part of the Christian life. Without the Spirit there is no regeneration, no faith, no sanctification, and no assurance of salvation.

The Spirit opens our eyes to the Gospel, unites us to Christ, empowers us for holy living, and comforts us in times of suffering. He is God's presence dwelling within His people.

Understanding the Holy Spirit also helps us avoid two common errors. One is treating the Spirit as an impersonal force. The other is becoming so focused on experiences that we lose sight of Christ. The Spirit's ministry is always Christ-centered. His purpose is to glorify Jesus and strengthen believers in their faith.

As Christians grow in their relationship with God, they learn to depend increasingly on the Holy Spirit, who continually points them to the Savior and assures them that they belong to the Father through the Son.

Recommended Resources

- *The Holy Spirit* — Sinclair B. Ferguson
- *Forgotten God* — Francis Chan
- *The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit* — R. A. Torrey
- *Keep in Step with the Spirit* — J. I. Packer
- *The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life* — John Stott