

Th123 A Study of the Holy Spirit

Th123-1 Introducing the Holy Spirit

In most cultures, people in need or crisis go to some person whom they believe has power to help them. The person may be called a shaman, witchdoctor, or sorcerer. The New Testament Book of Acts tells the story of a man named Simon. This man was a powerful sorcerer living in the city of Samaria. He would often astonish the people with his supernatural powers. Many followed him declaring, “This man is the Great Power of God!” Then one day Simon heard Philip the evangelist preaching about the kingdom of God and telling the people about Jesus. He believed Philip’s message and began to follow him.

Soon after this, the apostles Peter and John came down from Jerusalem to Samaria. Simon watched them as they laid their hands on the new Samaritan Christians. To Simon’s amazement, the Holy Spirit came powerfully on each believer, one by one. They were all filled with the Spirit—just like the 120 disciples had been on the Day of Pentecost.

Simon recalled how, in the past, he had profited from peddling his magical wares. He thought, “*If I had this power, I could use it to make money.*” So, he made an offer to the apostles. “Sell me this power” he said, “so that, when I lay my hands on people, they too will receive the Holy Spirit.”

When Peter heard this, he became angry. “May your money perish with you!” he said. “Do you really think you can buy and sell the power of the Holy Spirit?” Then, looking Simon straight in the eye, Peter ordered him, “Repent of your wickedness and ask God to forgive you.” Simon was so shaken that he cried out in fear, “Peter, please pray for me that no awful thing will happen to me!” (Acts 8:9-24).

Because Simon did not understand who the Holy Spirit was, and how He works, he made a grave mistake. Sadly, many today are making similar mistakes, and for similar reasons.

In the lessons that follow we will be examining the person and work of the Holy Spirit. We will learn who He is, what He does, and how we should respond to Him. Our primary source of information about the Holy Spirit is the Bible—the very book that He himself inspired. However, we will do more than study about Him; we will get to know Him. While it is important that we *know about* the Holy Spirit, it is equally important that we *know Him* personally and receive His power. By the time you finish this study, our goal is that:

- You will understand who the Holy Spirit is, including His nature and work.
- You will personally experience the Spirit’s power and presence in your own life.
- You will develop an intimate relationship with the Holy Spirit.
- You will be able to share the Spirit’s blessings with others.

Who, or what, then is the Holy Spirit? Like Simon the sorcerer in Acts, many people misunderstand this subject. We will therefore begin our inquiry by removing some false ideas about the Spirit. One wrong idea says that the Holy Spirit is some sort of ghost or a spirit-being

with no body. This idea could be reinforced by some older English translations of the Bible, such as the old King James Version (KJV), which refer to the Holy Spirit as the “Holy Ghost.” This was a perfectly good term when the KJV was published some 400 years ago. The word *ghost*, however, has a different meaning to people today than it did back then. Then it simply meant “spirit.” Today the word *ghost* speaks of the soul of a dead person who wanders among the living. This understanding of the Holy Spirit is far from what the Scriptures teach about the Holy Spirit.

Others think of the Holy Spirit as divine energy or an impersonal spiritual force coming from God. As such, the Spirit could be manipulated. This means that someone can thus use Him for their own purposes—much as a sorcerer or wizard would use his magical powers. This seems to be the way Simon viewed the Holy Spirit. However, like the first idea about the Spirit of God, this idea is also false. Both ideas can lead to unhealthy, and even sinful, practices in the church.

How then does the Bible present the Holy Spirit?

From Scripture we learn that *the Holy Spirit is in fact God*. Sometimes Bible scholars refer to Him as the “Third Person of the Godhead.” This terminology can be a bit confusing. However, it need not be. When Bible scholars speak of the *Godhead*, they are talking about the very essence or nature of God. The Scriptures reveal God as a Trinity of being. In other words, He is “one God in three divine persons.” He is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Paul spoke of the Trinity when he wrote, “May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (2Cor 13:14). Jesus taught that we are to baptize new believers “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt 28:19). The point is that the Holy Spirit is in truth God.

As God, the Holy Spirit has all of the characteristics of God. For instance, the Spirit too is eternal, all-powerful, all-knowing, and everywhere-present. He is holy, loving, faithful, and just. And, as God, He is sovereign. This means that He can never be controlled or manipulated. No person can ever command the Holy Spirit or use Him for their own purposes. As God, the Holy Spirit has supreme authority over all and the power and right to do as He pleases.

Not only is the Holy Spirit God, *He is also a person*. When we say that he is a person, we do not mean that He is a human being, either male or female. We mean that, as a divine person, the Spirit thinks, feels, and wills. He has a mind. Paul wrote, “The Spirit searches all things ... no one knows the mind of God except the Spirit of God” (1Cor 2:10-11). He has feelings. The Bible warns us against grieving the Holy Spirit: “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption” (Eph 4:30). And the Spirit has a will. Paul told them, “All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportioned to each one individually as he wills” (1Cor 12:11, ESV).

It is therefore wrong to refer to the Holy Spirit as “it.” We should always refer to the Holy Spirit as “He” or “Him,” just as we refer to God. And because He is a divine, loving person, we can live in loving fellowship with Him. We will talk more about these things later. As we move through this study we will learn many wonderful truths about the Holy Spirit. For now, you should remember that He is God, and He wants to empower and help you.

This lesson is **important** because it teaches who the Holy Spirit is. We have learned that He is God and that He is a divine person.

The **main truth** we learn from this lesson is that we should never try to use the Holy Spirit. His power cannot be bought or sold. Instead, we should submit ourselves to Him and seek to live in loving relationship with Him.

Let's **review** some important truths from this lesson.

1. Simon the Sorcerer thought he could buy the power of the Holy Spirit. What was Peter's response to him? [PAUSE]
 - A. If you answered, "When Simon asked to purchase the power of the Holy Spirit, Peter became angry and rebuked him for his foolishness," you answered correctly.
2. In this lesson we learned that the Holy Spirit is God, the "Third Person of the Trinity." How is the Trinity revealed in the way Jesus taught us to baptize new believers? [PAUSE]
 - A. If you answered that Jesus taught us to baptize "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," you are right.
3. As God, what are some of the characteristics of the Holy Spirit? [PAUSE]
 - A. If you answered that the Holy Spirit is eternal, all-powerful, all-knowing, and everywhere-present, and that He is holy, loving, faithful, and just, you answered correctly.
4. The Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit is a divine person. Why is it important that we understand this truth? [PAUSE]
 - A. If you answered, that this truth is important because it lets us know that we can live in loving relationship with the Holy Spirit, you are correct.

Your **assignment** is to listen to this lesson several times until you can teach it to others. Gather a few friends and ask them to share about who they go to in times of crisis or need. Then tell them about your friend, the Holy Spirit.