

PNEUMATOLOGY: DOCTRINE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Introduction

On the one hand, the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit may be one of the least understood and most ignored doctrines in the Scriptures. But on the other hand, the doctrine may be the most abused doctrine in the Scriptures. There is a major debate among evangelicals concerning the doctrine of cessation, that is, that certain spiritual gifts operative in the early church have ceased to be active gifts in the remainder of this dispensation as the church grows and matures. Pentecostals and Charismatics vigorously challenge the doctrine of cessationism and claim that the entire gamut of spiritual gifts identified in the book of Acts are still operative in the church today.

When I told a friend I was teaching a class on the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit, this friend remarked that too many people acted as though the Holy Spirit didn't exist. That may be true but I think an even more egregious error is to seriously abuse the Holy Spirit by ascribing unbiblical, mystical events, miracles, and spoken words to Him that are clearly outside the bounds of the written Word. It is completely unbiblical for anyone to assert that they have heard a spoken Word from the Lord. He has spoken and we have His words recorded in the Scriptures. We are not to search for the voice of the Lord apart from the Word.

Is it true that those of us who believe the Holy Spirit has ceased to function through certain spiritual gifts in this age believe that His ministry is therefore completely finished in this age? Do cessationists, as I am, totally neglect the Holy Spirit and His role in the life of the believer? Of course not, but that is the accusation. I would expect that charge to be levelled against me from Charismatics, but there are dispensationalists who also accuse cessationists of this lack of respect for the Holy Spirit. Later, we will examine the ways we interact with the Holy Spirit today. We will also examine in depth this issue of cessation.

THE TRINITY AND RELATED HERESIES CONCERNING THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit is, of course, the third member of the Triune Godhead. He is fully God; He is not subordinate to the Father and the Son; He is coequal with them. The fact that He operates in a role that may seem to us in our finite understanding of God to be subordinate is simply the manner in which He conducts the business of being the Holy Spirit in this dispensation. It is not the role of the Spirit to promote Himself. His ministry points people to Christ Jesus and glorifies the Son and not Himself. That is a major reason why so much Charismatic worship is misguided and unbiblical; it elevates and celebrates the Holy Spirit over and above the Father and the Son. In many cases, that

which is claimed to be the work of the Spirit is so off base that it becomes blasphemous. For example, a faith healer who claims to have cured a person that is actually not healed is discrediting the Holy Spirit and abusing His holy name. Claiming to have healed a person in the power of the Spirit and that person is not actually healed, is an abuse of the Spirit and is therefore blasphemous. The name and the ministry of the Spirit are being abused in such cases.

Some years back there was a faith healer—I can't recall his name—who was proven to be a fake. As people entered the building where he was conducting his service, his wife would interview people to find out some personal information about them and their health problem. Once the service began, the wife would relay that information to her husband via a radio system which had the microphone in his ear. That made it look like he was directly hearing from the Lord and identifying people and their specific ailments and then healing people of those ailments. This is completely blasphemous; yet, people still want to believe these MEN can heal them. But they cannot.

Theologians who have investigated some of the faith healing ministries have found no credible example of a true healing. Most of the reported healings are related to psychosomatic illnesses that are not visible to the naked eye or to real illnesses that the person believes have been cured but return in a short time. I am not discounting true healing miracles wrought by God.

The antics of people at the Toronto Blessing and the Brownsville Pensacola revival are also blasphemous in their portrayal of the Holy Spirit. People laugh or shake uncontrollably and/or sound like animals by barking like dogs, mooing like cows, oinking like pigs, or roaring like lions. They fall to the floor and can't get up and claim they are glued to the floor by Holy Spirit glue. Some people slither around like snakes.

In the past, some people have tried to claim that the Holy Spirit is simply eternal energy exerted by God. A man named Arius was one such person. He taught "that the Holy Spirit was only the exerted energy of God: Since God the Father is a person, His personality may manifest itself, and that manifestations of the personality of the Father is the exercised energy that goes forth from the Father. Arius therefore denied the true personality of the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit" [J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Divine Comforter: The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit*, p. 12]. The Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. condemned this heresy but it continued to be taught and we will see that it continues to this day.

After the Reformation, a man named Socinus adopted the doctrine propagated by Arius. He denied that the Holy Spirit could possibly be a person but he also claimed "the Spirit is the *eternally* proceeding energy of God: Since God is eternal, and God as a

Person was always manifesting power, that eternal manifestation of the power of God was the Spirit of God" [Pentecost, p. 12].

This thinking also led to what today is universalism; it is the theology of the Unitarian Universalist Church. As noted, this heresy cropped up early in the history of the church and the Niceno-Constantinopolitan ecumenical creed also dealt with this heresy in 381 A.D. The part of the creed dealing with the Holy Spirit reads, "And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father [*and the Son*]. Who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified."

A fairly large denomination that denies the individual personhood of the Holy Spirit today is the United Pentecostal Church. They call themselves "Oneness" Pentecostals. They deny the Trinity and replace it with a doctrine called Modalism. In this heresy, God is one Person who expresses Himself in the three modes of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as circumstances dictate. They would liken this doctrine to the concept that a man can be a son, a brother, and a father all at the same time. One reason they believe this is that, in their opinion, the orthodox concept of the Triune God opens the door to polytheism but it specifically leads to Tritheism. Tritheism claims the Godhead consists of three distinct Gods who are not one in essence. They are independent Gods one from the other.

Modalism is a heresy with a long history. Sebellianism, a third century heresy, taught that God operating as the Father is the creator and the lawgiver. As the Son, God is incarnate and He is the Redeemer. As the Holy Spirit, He completes the work of regeneration and sanctification. In this system of theology, God is not three persons. A prominent adherent of Modalism but who keeps it very quiet is T. D. Jakes.

So you can understand the thinking of a Modalist or Oneness theologian I'm going to quote some things from documents of the United Pentecostal Church. These are secondary sources because they are contained in the book *Cults, Sects, & Religious Movements* by H. Wayne House, pp. 239-252 but I trust they are true and accurate quotations from the original sources.

"God is absolutely and indivisibly one....His eternal nature contains no essential distinctions or divisions....Any plurality associated with God is only a plurality of attributes, titles, roles, manifestations, modes of activity, or relationships to man" (*Essential Doctrines of the Bible*, p. 7).

"In contrast to trinitarianism, Oneness asserts that (1) God is indivisibly one in number with no distinction of persons..." (*Meet the United Pentecostal Church International*, p. 66).

“The Bible certainly speaks of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, but not as three distinct persons....the titles of Father, Son, and Spirit describe God’s multiple roles and works.... The terms can also be understood in God’s revelation to humanity: *Father* refers to God in family relationship to humanity; *Son* refers to God in flesh; and *Spirit* refers to God in activity. For example, one man can have three significant relationships or functions—such as administrator, teacher, and counsellor—and yet be one person in every sense of the word” (*Meet the United Pentecostal Church International*, pp. 60-61).

“It has been stated by some that LORD, or Jehovah in the Old Testament, is inclusive of three personalities (Father, Son, Holy Ghost). This concept should be avoided for two reasons. First, because Scripture plainly declares ‘to us there is one Lord...Jesus Christ’ (I Cor. 8:6)...Secondly...when scripture speaks of ‘one Lord,’ it so obviously means a mathematical one” (*The P.A.S.T.O. R.S. Course: Theology, Book Two of Five*, p. 99).

“Despite the protests of Trinitarians, their doctrine inevitably leads to a practical form of Tritheism” (*The Oneness of God: Series in Pentecostal Theology*, vol. 1, p. 288).

“Neither testament uses the word *trinity* or associates the word *three* or the word *persons* with God in any significant way” (*Meet the United Pentecostal Church International*, p. 58).

It is very common for these theologians to deny the doctrine of the Trinity based on the fact that the word “Trinity” never appears in the Bible. Interestingly, the word “Bible” as it refers to the Word of God never appears in that Word of God either, but people don’t discount that name for the book we call the Bible. Βίβλος simply means book and we have transliterated it into “bible” and given that name to the book that is the Word of God. In the Greek, however, it simply refers to any book and not specifically to the Word of God. It is noteworthy that the UPC has no problem referring to a Bible when speaking of the Word of God without the qualification they assign to the word “Trinity.” However, there is no denying that the concept of a Triune God is clearly revealed in the Scriptures; that fact neuters the argument that the absence of the word itself invalidates the doctrine.

Part of this problem may involve the Greek grammar. The word translated “spirit” is πνεῦμα and it is a neuter word; it is not masculine as Father and Son are masculine. The word means breath, breeze or wind, or air. Because the word is neuter, it is sometimes viewed as more of an “it” than as a “He.” The only way it is proper to relate the Spirit to the masculine gender is to arrive at a biblical understanding of the Triune nature of God. Perhaps the larger part of the problem is simply faulty humanistic reasoning. People reason that a monotheistic understanding of God cannot be expressed in terms of three persons; therefore, they reason themselves into a denial of the Trinity. They set

aside the analogy of Scripture that relates one part of the Bible to another and ignore the clear texts that relate the three Persons of the Godhead one to the other in order to support their reasoning.