

PNEUMATOLOGY – THE DOCTRINE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Although this century has seen a major rise and emphasis on the subject of the Holy Spirit, the tragic reality is that even though Christianity has acknowledged the existence of the Holy Spirit for nearly 2000 years, it has failed to give serious, systematic consideration to Him.

Undoubtedly, much confusion on the subject of the Holy Spirit does exist because of a failure to systematically study this doctrine. The specific importance of the Holy Spirit to this age is profound. According to Scripture, all N.T. spirituality and a N.T. spiritual life are produced by the Holy Spirit. As believers, we cannot realistically expect our spirituality to be deep if we neglect a serious analysis of the ministry and work of the Holy Spirit, who makes spirituality possible. As Dr. Charles Ryrie wrote: “An understanding of the ministry of the Holy Spirit is basic to Christian Living” (Charles Ryrie, *The Holy Spirit*, p. 7).

It is the intent of this doctrinal study to systematize as much information as possible regarding the third member of the Trinity–The Holy Spirit. It is our desire to grasp as much of the Word of God as we possibly can so that our doctrine may be precise and accurate and our lives may be spiritually powerful.

As in all of our studies in Systematic Theology, we will approach this doctrine in a question / answer form:

QUESTION #1 – What does the word or term “pneuma” mean?

The word “pneuma” is used in at least six ways in the N.T.:

- 1) It is used to refer to moving air (“wind” John 3:8);
- 2) It is used to refer to the human spirit (Luke 8:55; John 19:30);
- 3) It is used to refer to one’s frame of mind or attitude of thinking (I Cor. 4:21; Gal. 6:1; II Tim. 1:7; I John 4:6);
- 4) It is used to refer to spiritual influence, which leads to some type of action (Rom. 8:15; Eph. 2:2)
- 5) It is used to refer to a spirit - being :
A. Of God Himself (John 4:24); B. Of disembodied humans (Heb. 12:23; I Pet. 3:19);
C. Of God’s angels (Heb. 1:14); D. Of Satan’s angels, known as demons (Matt. 8:16);
- 6) It is used to refer to the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:18).

Generally speaking and grammatically speaking, when a N.T. writer wants to stress the person and work of the Holy Spirit, he typically uses an article with the term “Holy Spirit.” When he desires to emphasize the work of the Holy Spirit, he does not use the article. For example, the following references in Matthew do have an article: Matt. 3:16; 4:1; 12:31-32. The following references in Matthew do not have an article: Matt. 1:18; 3:11.

It is the sixth use of the word “pneuma” which is the subject of this doctrinal study. The spirit side of the human was studied under the heading of Anthropology. God, as a Spirit, was studied under the heading of Theology Proper.

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Angelic spirit beings, both God's and Satan's, were studied under the heading of Angelology with a special category called Satanology and Demonology. The Holy Spirit is the single subject of our study of Pneumatology.

QUESTION #2 – What is “Pneumatology?”

Pneumatology is the systematic, doctrinal study of the person and work of the Holy Spirit, who is the third person of the Trinity! Pneumatology is not the study of God the Father, it is not the study of God the Son; it is the study of God the Spirit.

QUESTION #3 – Why has there been such a neglect of study in Pneumatology?

William Bierderwolf, who was director of the Winona Lake School of Theology at the turn of the last century, observed, “The ‘Bibliotheca’ for 46 years from the date of its first publication, 1844, contains not one article on the Holy Spirit; for more than 40 years, from 1839, the *Methodist Quarterly* contained but one article; the *Princeton Review*, in 56 years, from 1838, only one, and the same thing is true of all other theological magazines. Dr. Charles Hodge gave us three ponderous volumes of *Systematic Theology*, containing 2,300 pages, and of this number only 12 pages were devoted to the subject of the Holy Spirit; and here, as well as in all other such literature, the question, as a matter of course, has been treated wholly as a theological dogma, with but little meaning for the life and experience of the believer” (William E. Bierderwolf, *Study of the Holy Spirit*, pp. 11-12).

The sad reality is most believers have never even been taught Pneumatology. The only concept of the Holy Spirit which most have is one based on a verse of Scripture here and there. Rarely does serious systematic study of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit enter the believer's world. When it comes to actual sound doctrine concerning the Holy Spirit, most believers are very close to being able to say with John's disciples, “We have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit” (Acts 19:2).

Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer begins his study of Pneumatology, which is Volume 6–298 pages of this doctrine—by addressing the matter of why Christians are generally so little informed about this doctrine (pp. 4-6). We begin with the same question here.

Reason #1 - Because of a neglect of systematic study.

Let us begin by stating that there is a great deal of information in the Bible concerning the Holy Spirit. This information is inspired and abundant and clear. Ignorance of “Pneumatology” is not due to lack of biblical data, it is due to a lack of systematic analysis of the data.

The primary individual who is responsible to see to it that God's doctrines are taught to God's flock is the pastor/teacher. The primary group of men who are responsible to see to it that the pastor/teacher is doing this are the elders.

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In most instances, both have neglected their responsibilities and Hosea's statement "like people, like priest" (Hosea 4:6-8) is certainly a reality when it comes to neglect of doctrinal understanding concerning the Holy Spirit. A neglect of systematic study will always produce ignorance. Ignorance exists on the subject of the Holy Spirit because systematic study of His doctrine has been neglected by those who are not fulfilling their responsibilities.

Reason #2 - Because of error of and in instruction .

As a sub-point to the previous point, it stands to reason that if serious systematic study of doctrine is neglected, then one's perspective of the doctrine will be surface level, simplistic and filled with errors. For example, it is nothing for a teacher to stand before students and give his idea of "the baptism of the Holy Spirit." It is quite another matter for a teacher to stand before students and give a systematic biblical analysis of the same subject. The sad reality is most believers think they know truth about doctrine when the doctrine has not even been carefully studied. For the most part, the student holds on to some idea given to him by some "teacher," without ever being carefully taught. Dr. Chafer observed that it was only in rare instances when a pupil, who had been handed error by his teacher, would be willing to get out of the mold of theological error and reach out for a true understanding of God's revelation (Vol. 6, p. 4).

Once error in doctrine or ignorance of doctrine has been cemented in the mind of a student, it is the rare student who breaks free from the mold. The Holy Spirit is a misunderstood doctrine because much ignorance and error have been passed down and accepted as dogma without ever searching the Scriptures to really come to terms with theological truth.

Dr. Chafer wrote: "Almost every error or disproportionate emphasis upon some aspect of doctrine on the part of a few is caused by the neglect of that truth on the part of the many. The Pentecostal errors with their misuse of biblical terms and their assumptions would never have developed to any extent had the full and right doctrine of the Holy Spirit been taught generally in its right proportions. Similarly, those cults which live solely by an emphasis upon healing of the body would not have arisen had the church recognized and defended that which is true in that field of doctrine" (Vol. 6, p. 4).

Reason #3 - Because of ignorance of salvation .

When most instruction of salvation is set forth, there is a great emphasis on God the Son , there is a great emphasis on God the Father , and there is usually a great emphasis on human choice . However, there is almost a total disregard of God the Spirit . In fact, the truth is in most teaching on the subject of salvation, the Holy Spirit, who is so critical to the saving process, is not, for the most part, even considered to be part of the process of salvation and basically becomes nothing more than an after-thought, even though Jesus Christ made Him the key factor (i.e. John 3:6-8; 6:44; 16:7-11).

As we shall clearly see in future studies, the biblical record is straightforward and clear that the Holy Spirit is the critical factor to true salvation, and without the Holy Spirit there is no salvation.

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It is no wonder that there is so much ignorance and confusion pertaining to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit for in one of His most important works, the saving of a soul, He is almost completely left out of the picture. If one is ignorant of the Holy Spirit's work in the matter of salvation, it is logically expected ignorance will prevail in every other pneumatological matter.

Reason #4 - Because of certain connections between God the Father and God the Son .

There are times in the N.T. when the Father and the Son are mentioned without mentioning the Holy Spirit (i.e. John 14:10-13). It may be observed, however, that even in a context like this, the Holy Spirit is also present (i.e. John 14:16-20).

One reason why this happens is because the New Testament centers on the reality that God the Son physically came to this world. There are times when the unique relationship between God the Father and God the Son are being discussed. However, this in no way minimizes New Testament information concerning God the Spirit, and to neglect to focus on doctrine pertaining to the Holy Spirit for this reason is to choose a path of spiritual stupidity and bankruptcy.

Reason #5 - Because of an ignorance of the Godhead .

The Holy Spirit, as a key doctrine, has been neglected, in part, because of a neglect to understand and systematize information pertaining to the Godhead. This failure and neglect has undoubtedly been one main reason why the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is neglected and misunderstood. After all, it is the Holy Spirit's job to direct God's people into truth pertaining to God (John 16:13), and if there has not been careful instruction concerning the Godhead, there will certainly be ignorance of the Holy Spirit.

Reason #6 - Because of an ignorance of dispensations .

There is a tremendous amount of ignorance and confusion on the subject of the Holy Spirit because many do not "rightly divide" dispensations. Many do not understand the differences between the work of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament and the work of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament. As a result, misguided people think that it is all the same work, when in fact it is totally different. For example, in the Old Testament we read that the Holy Spirit came and went to and from a particular individual. Therefore, some make a faulty assumption that this is the way the Holy Spirit operates in the New Testament. Instead of carefully studying this doctrine, there is a faulty belief that the doctrine is understood even though it is not accurate or true. This confused perspective is then passed on to others who stay in ignorant confusion concerning the real truth (Ps. 51:11; I Sam. 16:13-14).

Reason #7 - Because of the work of Satan .

Undoubtedly, the root cause of a lack of precision in the understanding of this critical doctrine is Satan. The last thing Satan would want is a believer who understands the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

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Satan realizes that the Holy Spirit is “the” spiritual power source for spiritual development. Satan is very much interested in keeping believers as ignorant as possible because he realizes a believer can become very strong and powerful as he develops according to the Holy Spirit. We may be absolutely certain that Satan has done his best to conceal any and all systematic instruction concerning the Holy Spirit.

It is very evident that systematic teaching is needed concerning the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Dr. Chafer said, “Pastors and teachers would do well to measure the amount of emphasis that should be given to this theme in accord with the extent to which it appears in the New Testament text...” (Vol. 6, p. 5).

QUESTION #4 – Does the Bible teach that the Holy Spirit is God?

Does the Bible actually and factually teach that the Holy Spirit is Deity? If we carefully study Scripture, will we conclude that the Holy Spirit is as much God as the Father and the Son?

In our study of Theology Proper, we discovered that there were certain biblically revealed attributes and facts which caused us to form certain theological beliefs and concepts about God. In our study of Christology, we discovered that Jesus Christ had those same attributes and met the same standards, thus biblically establishing that He was God.

As we come to this study, we are out to discover whether or not biblical data will cause us to conclude that the Holy Spirit is God because He meets the same criteria. As we journey through this, we shall answer the question with an emphatic yes, the Holy Spirit is God !

There are at least four biblical evidences that prove the Holy Spirit is God: 1) The evidence of His divine names ; 2) The evidence of His divine attributes ; 3) The evidence of His divine work ; 4) The evidence of His divine associations .

Evidence #1 - The evidence of the Holy Spirit’s divine names .

It needs to be remembered when studying names that pertain to God, that God , Himself, is the one who revealed and invented these names. Names of God are not an invention from the imagination of humans . God gave certain titles to Himself in order to reveal certain things about Himself to His created beings. Therefore, names tell us much about the divine person.

Under this category, we may offer at least six proofs:

Proof #1 - He is specifically identified as holy . Matthew 1:18

This is not just an isolated reference to a positive part of His character, this is His character—He is holy! Only God has the complete character of being holy; therefore, by giving this name to the Spirit, He is God.