

The Holy Spirit of God

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In an earlier lesson we introduced the holiness of God using the concept of holiness developed by Rudolf Otto in his book, *The Idea of the Holy*. Otto describes God's holiness as that which attracts or draws man to God and fills him with wonder and, at the same time, fills him with fear and trembling at his presence. Moses was drawn to God's presence in the burning bush yet was filled with trembling at standing on holy ground. Belief, having this Holy God as its object, can produce similar effects. We are drawn to "he who is Holy" by the very mystery of his being and, at the same time, we are overwhelmed with awe at the very contemplation of such a being. All of this has to do with the wonder of belief in "the Holy."

It is important to keep this concept before us as we enter into this third discussion relating to the three faces of God. In this lesson we are concerned with God as Spirit, the Spirit of the Holy, or the Holy Spirit.

Understanding God as Spirit

In John 4:24 Jesus informs an inquirer that, "God is spirit." The Hebrew term for spirit is *ruach*, the Greek term is *pneuma*. Both may be defined as, "wind/breath, or the invisible life force." In the religious literature of the ancient Mediterranean world, the most common concept of spirit was that it was an intelligent life force that animated that in which it dwelt. The magnification of this concept (i.e., a life force filled with intellect and power) reflects the ancient Mediterranean concept of deity - the divine *ruach*. To the ancient Hebrews there was but one deity and they would not name him for fear of violation of the third commandment. Rather they would refer to God as *Ha Shem* (the name), *Adonai* (Lord), or *Ha Ruach Elohim* (the

breath of God). When the breath of God (*Ruach Elohim*), moved in the realm of the natural, the supernatural often occurred (i.e., that which transcends the confines of natural law). This concept of the divine *ruach* is also carried over into the New Testament; in fact, it is a dominant concept found throughout the whole of both the Old and New Testaments.

The Spirit of God Moved

In the opening lines of Genesis we are told: "In the beginning **God created** the heavens and the earth. And the earth was waste and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep: and **the Spirit (breath) of God moved upon** the face of the waters." (Gen 1:1-2.) The concept of "God creating" and "the Spirit of God moving to effect creation" are synonymous in this text. This usage occurs throughout the Old Testament. In Job 33:4, Job says, "The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty has given me life." Further, in Psalms 104:30, we read, "When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth." In Psalms 139:7, the Spirit of God and the presence of God are spoken of as one and the same, "Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?"

The Spirit of the Holy One

In that the God of Israel is "the Holy One," his Spirit is called "the Holy Spirit" (i.e., the presence of the Holy One in their midst), "Do not cast me from your presence," says the psalmist, "or take **your Holy Spirit** from me" (Psa 51:11).. This kind of language is all the more common due to the Jews reluctance to refer to God by name. He was *Yahweh*, the *Elohim* of Israel. The scribes wrote the name of God with the consonants YHWH and inserted the vowels of *Adonai* (Lord) between the consonants. When they read the Scriptures they would verbally read *Adonai* rather than *Yahweh*. In a similar way they would substitute God's attributes for the name: "He who is Holy," or "the Holy One," or "He who is Good," or they would say, "Blessed be the NAME." When referring to the spirit of God, they would say, "the Spirit of he who is Holy or the Holy One," hence, "the Holy Spirit." In

must be remembered that they were speaking of "God" when they spoke of "the Holy Spirit," as may be seen in the following.

*Yet they rebelled and grieved **his Holy Spirit**. So he turned and became their enemy and he himself fought against them. Then his people recalled the days of old, the days of Moses and his people - where is he who brought them through the sea, with the shepherd of his flock? Where is he who set **his Holy Spirit** among them . . . (Isaiah 63:10-11).*

Numerous expressions are used throughout the Old Testament to speak of God's Spirit. We find the Spirit of God, My (God's) Spirit, your (God's) Spirit, the Spirit, the Spirit of *Yahweh*, the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit of *Yahweh*.

In the New Testament we see a similar array of expressions for the Spirit of God: My Spirit, the Spirit of your Father, the Spirit of the Lord, the Spirit of God (14 Occur), the Spirit (110 Occur), the Spirit Holy (50 Occur), the Spirit the Holy (14 Occur), the Holy Spirit (12 Occur), the Spirit of holiness, the eternal Spirit, the Spirit of life and the live giving Spirit. We also find the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of Jesus Christ, the Spirit of Jesus, and the Spirit of his Son.

There can be no question but that the Spirit of God is God as much as the Spirit of Maurice is Maurice. In both the Old and New Testament Scriptures the Spirit of God is God. The earliest Christians could have believed nothing less than what Jesus himself believed on this matter. In John 4:24, when instructing the woman at the well in Samaria, he says "God is Spirit." This can only mean that God, in his very nature, is spirit and that the Spirit of God is God himself.

The Presence And Power Of God

The Spirit as the Presence of God

The movement of "the Holy" in our world is effected, essentially, by means of the divine *ruach/pneuma* (the Spirit of God or Holy

Spirit). In the Scriptures, the Spirit of God is consistently portrayed as the presence and power of God moving within creation. To the ancient Hebrews, as well as the early Christians, the Spirit of God was the dynamic presence of God at work in the world. To the people of Scripture their God was a God who moved in their midst, and this presence was believed to be none other than the very Spirit of God moving among them. Within much of the traditional writings of Judaism, the expression, "*Ha Ruach Elohim*," is translated as, "the breath of God." This very literal rendering of this Hebrew expression can help the reader grasp something of the essential meaning of the concept of the Spirit of God - that the Hebrew expression "Spirit of God" is literally, "the breath of God," which is a manifestation of the presence of God.

The Spirit as the Power of God

This presence is often associated with manifestations of power. In numerous references in the Hebrew Scriptures we read of the Spirit of *Yahweh* coming upon individuals in power: Jud 14:6, 19; 15:14; 1 Sam 10:6, 10; 11:6; 16:13; Isaiah 11:2; Micah 3:8. In the New Testament this same concept is present. In Luke 1:35, the virgin Mary was told by an angel of God, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God." After the Messianic anointing of the Holy Spirit (Isaiah 61:1) at the baptism of John (Matt 3:13-17) we see Jesus coming forth from that time in the power of the Spirit (Luke 4:1 and 14; see also v 36).

There can be no question that the one we are seeing in all of these references to the Holy Spirit or the Spirit of God is none other than God himself. In the creation it is God who creates yet the creative activity is spoken of as God's Spirit moving (Gen 1:1-2; Job 26:13; 33:4; Psalms 104:30). The presence and power of the Spirit may be seen in the many miraculous manifestations of God found in the Hebrew Scriptures. This may be seen in the miracles and mighty wonders of the ancient men of God: Moses, the judges, and the prophets (Exod 31:3; 35:31; Num 11:17, 25-29; 24:2; Judges 6:34; 11:29; 13:25; 14:6, 19; 15:14; 2 Sam 23:2; Neh 9:30; Isaiah 48:16; 59:21; Ezek

11:5, 24; Joel 2:28-29; Micah 3:8; Zech 7:12). That the writers were speaking by the power of the Spirit of God is a clear record of Scripture. In Exodus alone, out of 44 chapters, the expression, "God spoke these words," is found 161 times. In 2 Peter 1:21, we are told that, "no prophecy ever came by the will of man; but men spoke from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit." The word for "moved" in the Greek text literally means, "to be borne along as the wind in the sails of a ship."

This same expression of the presence and power of God is found in the New Testament. In the incarnation of Christ, the Spirit of God is the presence and power of God at work in the miraculous conception (cf. Matt 1:18-20; Luke 1:31-35; John 1:1, 14). The Spirit's presence and power can be seen in the many miraculous manifestations in the life of Jesus (Matt 4:23-24; 12:18, 28; Luke 4:1, 14), as well as the apostles of Christ (Acts 1:5-8), and other first century personalities (1 Cor 12:4-11, 28-31). His presence and power may be seen in all inspiration of Scripture (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21; John 14:26; 16:13; 1 Cor 2:10-13; 14:37; 1 Thess 1:5; 2:13; 1 Tim 4:1). These all, "spoke from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21).

The God Who Is "Here" and "There," Again!

In previous lessons we raised the question of how we can think of God as a being who transcends his creation yet moves within that creation. How can God be both immanent and transcendent, present and beyond, here and there at one and the same time? In Gen 1:1 we are told that "God created the heavens and the earth," so he is was before the existence of heaven and earth and, thus, transcends them. This was effected by means of "the Spirit of God moving upon the face of the deep," thus, he moved within that which he created to effect the creation of it. He transcends this world of space, time, matter, and energy, yet he enters into it and moves to effect that which he wills within in. It is not the case that two different beings are present here in this Gen 1:1 text, both are terms used to identify God. He is the Creator, but the activity of God in the creation of our space-time world, as well as his activity within that world, is

expressed as the movement of the Spirit of God, or the Spirit of the Holy One.

Just as the Son of God was a manifestation of God's presence and power expressed by means of human existence, the Holy Spirit is the movement of the presence and power of God expressed by means of his spiritual presence in our world. In every instance of God entering into our world, he has done so by means of a special revelation of himself. Such does not demand the existence of another "self," he is a God who has, through the ages, expressed his existence in different ways, by different means, in different contexts, and in different modes of expression. In all of this he is the one God who is the only God and there are not other gods other than him.

God "Off Stage" and "On Stage"

The roles God plays in his relationships with us are not the roles of three different gods. Rather, each role is a different expression of his existence. While he was one with the baby Jesus in the manger, he was also the Creator sustaining the world within which that manger rested. When Jesus prayed to the Father, he was in communion with God. "Was he talking to himself?" a Jewish doctor friend once asked me. The Son was addressing himself to the Father, and this communication of Son to Father was real and genuine. How can this be? It can only be if it is the case that God is "here" and "there" at one and the same time, with both manifestations of his existence being true expressions and activities of God. He is both "off stage" as the director of the drama taking place on earth and he is "on stage" a player in the drama.

To a finite being limited in terms of time and space, this would be impossible, to an infinite being, not so limited, such is not only conceivable, but a reality. The existence of God during the incarnation of Christ was not limited to the time and space of first century Palestine. We have a difficulty understanding this, and the reason for this difficulty is our limitation in terms of finite existence. We would not know how to relate to infinite or unlimited existence if God explained it to us, but we can know that infinity (which we do

not know) is beyond finiteness (which we do know). From this we can reason, with a good bit of creative imagination, to such possibilities as infinite or unlimited existence. We do not understand the intricacies of "divine causation," but we can understand that since we could not have created ourselves, something beyond ourselves must have caused the effect we know as our existence. The validity of this reasoning is confirmed to us by the one who did cause our existence. God has revealed to us that he is our Creator. He has told us that he is our Father, he has told us that he is "*ruach kodesh*" (a Holy Spirit) and he enters our world as a spiritual being. He has also told us that he has entered our world in person - in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. All of these are expressions of his existence, all exist within his existence, and all are expressions of his existence within our finite realm of existence.

Conclusion

We are talking about belief in the God who has revealed himself to us as our Creator or Father, who, as a Holy Spirit, enters into our world to effect his will, who has been here, not only in Spirit but by means of human existence, in order that he may redeem us and show himself to us in the life and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth.

Such a concept as this should fill us with wonder, just as such a being as this should fill us with wonder. As Rudolf Otto suggested, the very concept of "the Holy" confronts us with wonder; wonder *in the sense of awe* in that it takes our breath away, and wonder *in the sense of mystery* in that it fills us with fascination and a longing to see more. Within all this there is a certain amount of hiddenness, in that we are talking about things we have come to know through revelation. There is a fascination with revelation in that the *mysterium* is always there. No matter how deep into the revelation we go, there is always a fascination with and a desire to know more about that which we have not yet seen. The more we see the more we want to see, and the more there is to see. The more questions to which we find answers, the more questions are created by these very answers. This is why the quest of faith is so wonderful to so many people, it is through this quest that we come to insights that fill us

with wonder and this wonder fills us with the desire for more insights and the journey goes on. It is the journey that gives the joy, as is the case with most journeys, but the joy is even greater with this journey because of what we believe is there to be discovered at the journey's end.

MWLIII

Questions for Discussion

1. What do you understand by the word "spirit?" What do you understand by the expression "the Spirit of God?" What do you understand by the expression "the Holy Spirit?" Why are there more than one term to express this aspect of God's existence?
2. How would you respond to the statement that, "the expression Spirit of God is a poetic metaphor for the presence or power of God?"
3. What argument would you give to prove that the Spirit of God is actually God rather than another way of talking about God's activity? Is the Holy Spirit ever called God in the Bible?
4. Is the Holy Spirit a "he" (a personality) or should the Holy Spirit be referred to as an "it" (a concept)?"
5. Discuss the biblical references (given above) of the how the Holy Spirit is always associated with manifestations of the presence and power of God in our world?
6. How can God be both "beyond" and "within" the world at one and the same time? Relate this to the discussion concerning the God who is "here" and "there."
7. Can a finite being understand anything about the existence of something that is infinite? To what extent can we think about that which is infinite? If we cannot know anything about infinity, why do we have revelation from God which implies such a concept?

8. How do you understand the Holy Spirit's descending on Jesus at his baptism? What was happening here, and why was it happening?
9. Why do you think the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles on Pentecost with the visual and audible phenomena of flaming light and a roaring wind ?
10. How do you relate to the comment about the quest of faith and the journey of faith in the conclusion of this lesson.