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**The Holy Spirit in Ephesians**

## The Holy Spirit in Ephesians

This paper is an inductive study of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament (NT) book of Ephesians. (A list of the pertinent verses can be found at the end of this paper.) There are a number of different ways to organize the pertinent verses. This paper will seek to answer the question, “What can be learned about the Holy Spirit?” by looking at these verses from two main perspectives: 1) What Paul says about the *Person* of the Holy Spirit, and 2) What Paul says about the *works* of the Holy Spirit. The first perspective, for convenience, can be further divided into a) What Paul says about the *personality* of the Holy Spirit, and b) What Paul says about the *deity* of the Holy Spirit. While all of the relevant verses will appear in at least one of the two main categories some verses because of their content will appear in both main categories.

Against those individuals and groups in the past and the present who have thought of the Holy Spirit as an impersonal force (e.g. Jehovah’s Witnesses) Paul gives us indications in Ephesians that the Holy Spirit is a Person in that He has a personality. The first thing that can be said relates to *οτι* which is neuter. Therefore, according to the rules of Greek grammar one would expect that any pronouns used by Paul to refer to the Holy Spirit would agree in gender and also be neuter. This is usually what is found. However, in Ephesians 1:13-14 there is significant textual evidence that Paul may have used *οτις* (the masculine relative pronoun) to refer to the Holy Spirit. He would have been “going against the grain” of conventional grammatical rules by using *οτις* instead of *οτι* (the neuter relative pronoun). If the use of the masculine relative pronoun would be the case then Paul would have been emphasizing the fact that he understood the Holy Spirit to be a Person and not an “it”. But since this occurrence is a textual variant that is not in the main body of the most recent critical texts it must be held here as tentative at best. (However, there are examples of this “substitution” occurring elsewhere in the NT without the “problem” of ambiguous textual variants. See John 15:26, 16:7-8, and 16:13-14.)

Paul also gives us an indication that the Holy Spirit is a Person in that the Holy Spirit is described as possessing an attribute that can only be identified with an emotion of a being who has a personality. Ephesians 4:30 says, “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God...”. That Paul warns his readers to not grieve the Holy Spirit implies that it is possible. It would be inappropriate to describe something that is not a person (such as a “force”) as being able to

grieve. Therefore, Paul must have understood the Holy Spirit to have a personality and so be a Person.

Along the same lines, Paul gives us indications of the Holy Spirit's deity. Though in verse 1:17 is not unanimously understood as "the Holy Spirit", it does seem to be almost unanimous that wisdom and revelation are at least the effects of the Holy Spirit. What Paul seems to be saying here is that "acquaintance with God Himself" would be impossible without *divine* revelation.<sup>1</sup> (I Cor. 2:10-11) Indeed, we could not know anything about God if He did not reveal it to us first. Closely related to this verse is 3:4-5 which says that "the mystery of Christ...has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets." These two verses attribute to the Holy Spirit the revelation of things (i.e. intimate knowledge of God, and the "brotherhood and fellow-citizenship of the Gentiles with Israel!"<sup>2</sup>) that could only be known by God. (II Peter 1:20-21) Verse 6:17 is also related to divine revelation: "the sword of the Spirit is the word of God". Bruce writes, "The 'word' ( ) is the utterance of God appropriate to the occasion which the Spirit, so to speak, puts into the believer's hand to be wielded as a sword which will put his spiritual assailants to flight...This is the one weapon of attack in the panoply of God; against it there is no defense".<sup>3</sup>

Verse 2:22 also contributes to our understanding of the deity of the Holy Spirit as revealed in Ephesians. The Spirit is referred to as "his Spirit" (i.e. God's Spirit). The relationship is not one of possession, however. Abbott says, "The Spirit is not the means or instrument only, but the medium by virtue which God dwells in the Church. He [God] by or in His Spirit dwells in this temple."<sup>4</sup> Paul seems to be saying that where the Spirit is, there God is. Indeed, II Cor. 6:16 says, "we are the temple of the living God." There is a very close connection between God and the Spirit here. In fact, there seems to be a degree of interchangeability between God and the Spirit with respect to the indwelling of the Church. I Cor. 3:16 says that it is the Spirit who dwells

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<sup>1</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1961) p. 39.

<sup>2</sup> Markus Barth, *The Broken Wall, A Study of the Epistle to the Ephesians* (Chicago, IL: The Judson Press, 1959) p. 124.

<sup>3</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1961) p. 131.

<sup>4</sup> T. K. Abbott, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians* (Edinburgh, England: T. & T. Clark, 1897) p. 76.

within the believer. This further strengthens the case of the deity of the Holy Spirit as understood in Ephesians.

Having dealt with the verses that relate to the Person of the Holy Spirit it is time to examine the second category of verses. The majority of the verses that refer to the Holy Spirit in Ephesians are those that pertain to the work or ministry of the Holy Spirit. These ministries vary greatly but at least two things can be generally said about all of them: 1) Mankind is His object, and 2) He ministers for the glory of God (1:14). The first ministry of the Holy Spirit is encountered in verses 1:13-14. Verse 13 tells us that the Holy Spirit who was promised (Luke 24:49) marks all believers with a seal. About this “seal” Barclay informs us that, “In the ancient world - it is a custom still followed - when a sack, or crate, or a package was dispatched, it was sealed with a seal, in order to indicate from where it had come and to whom it belonged. The possession of the Holy Spirit is the seal which shows that a man belongs to God. [I Cor. 1:22, 4:5] The Holy Spirit both shows us God’s will and enables us to do it.”<sup>5</sup> In TDNT Barth tells us that besides the legal protection and guarantee there was also a religious usage, namely that the power of the deity protects the bearer of the seal and is available to him. Verse 1:14 continues with the fact that the Holy Spirit is a “deposit guaranteeing ( ) our inheritance until the redemption...” He is the “earnest” in that He is the first installment, an actual portion of the whole which is later to be paid in full.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the Holy Spirit is a promise of full payment to made by God. His presence and ministry is a sign (foretaste) of our redemption still to come; the eschatological promise to believers of an “inheritance” of which we presently have the first payment. Packer writes of the “earnest” of our inheritance: “that by enabling us to see the glory of Christ glorified, and to live in fellowship with him as our Mediator and with his Father as our Father, the Spirit introduces us to the inmost essence of the life of heaven... what must always be at the heart of our thoughts about heaven, is the actual relationship with the Father and the Son that is perfected there. It is of this that the Spirit’s present ministry to us is the first installment... And by means of the ministry to us of the indwelling Spirit heaven begins for us here and now,

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<sup>5</sup> William Barclay *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians* (DSB) (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1976) p. 87.

<sup>6</sup> J. A. Robinson *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians* (London, England: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1903) p. 36.

as through Christ and in Christ we are made sharers with Christ in his resurrection life.”<sup>7</sup> Heaven can and must start here. 4:30b contains a combination of both ideas. The Holy Spirit has “sealed” all believers until Christ’s second coming.

A second ministry of the Holy Spirit is found in 2:18. Both Jews and Gentiles now have free and unrestricted access to the Father through Christ and “in one Spirit”. The Holy Spirit is the unifying factor in whom all believers have equal access to the Father. This thought is related to 4:3-4 where unity is the theme. Bruce writes, “The Spirit who came down in power on Jewish believers at Pentecost is the same as fell on Gentile believers in the house of Cornelius [Acts 10:44-46].”<sup>8</sup> The Holy Spirit is the producer and maintainer of Christian unity.

A third idea relating to the work of the Spirit is found in 2:22. As was said early with regard to this verse, the Holy Spirit is the medium by which God dwells in the Church. Again, the same idea is also found in I Cor. 3:16 and II Cor. 6:16.

A fourth ministry of the Holy Spirit is found in 3:16: that believers might be strengthened with power. The Holy Spirit is the “instrument or means” by which the Father strengthens believers. The following verses detail the purpose involved. Verse 3:19 seems to sum it up, “that you may be filled to the measure of the fullness of God.” Here is the “secret” for living the Christian life: being strengthened by the Spirit for righteous living for God’s glory.

A fifth and very important ministry of the Holy Spirit is found in 5:18. To be filled with the Holy Spirit is a command that is played against being drunk with wine. However, it is not “to be inferred that the Spirit is a substance with which man’s personality can be filled just as his body can be filled with wine.” The phrase is literally “Be filled in Spirit” and means “let your fullness be that which the Holy Spirit produces.”<sup>9</sup> Rogers’ article about the possible Dionysian background of this command is convincing. Apparently, during the pagan worship of Dionysus or Bacchus (the god of wine) there was much drinking of wine accompanied by frenzied dancing and the eating of raw animal flesh. “The purpose of the intoxication by wine and also the chewing of ivy, as well as the eating of raw animal flesh, was to have Dionysus enter the body of

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<sup>7</sup> J. I. Packer *Keep in Step with the Spirit* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1984) p. 79.

<sup>8</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1961) p. 77.

<sup>9</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1961) p. 110.

the worshiper and fill him with 'enthusiasm' or the spirit of the god."<sup>10</sup> It might have been with this as background that Paul gave the command to be filled with the Spirit. If so then the obvious contrast would be that God by His Spirit is to fill the believer and thereby control him/her. Indeed, "Spiritual strength, wisdom, and divine help to live a godly life are obtained by being controlled by the Spirit of God, not by any other means."<sup>11</sup>

The sixth and final ministry of the Holy Spirit found in Ephesians is found in 6:18. This is an interesting phrase and may be related to Romans 8:15. Packer seems helpful here: "Prayer in the Spirit is prayer from the heart, springing from awareness of God, of self, of others, of needs, and of Christ. Whether it comes forth verbalized, as in the prayers and praises recorded in Scripture, or un verbalized, as when the contemplative gazes Godward in love or the charismatic slips into glossolalia, is immaterial. He (or she) whose heart seeks God through Christ prays in the Spirit."<sup>12</sup>

Ephesians gives us much information about the Person and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. He has a personality; He is God; He is a Person in the Triune Godhead. His works are varied and vital to the life of the individual believer and to the Church.

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<sup>10</sup> C. L. Rogers *The Dionysian Background of Eph. 5:18* (Bibliotheca-Sacra) 136 (534, 1979) p. 254.

<sup>11</sup> C. L. Rogers *The Dionysian Background of Eph. 5:18* (Bibliotheca-Sacra) 136 (534, 1979) p. 257.

<sup>12</sup> J. I. Packer *Keep in Step with the Spirit* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1984) p. 79-80.

## List of verses referring to the Holy Spirit in Ephesians

### Verse(s)

- 1:13-14 “a seal, the promised H.S., who is a deposit”
- 1:17 “Spirit of wisdom and revelation”
- 2:18 “access to the Father by one Spirit.”
- 2:22 “in which God lives by his Spirit.”
- 3:5 “revealed by the Spirit”
- 3:16 “strengthen you with power through his Spirit”
- 3:19 “the fullness of God.”
- 4:3-5 “unity of the Spirit...one Spirit”
- 4:30 “do not grieve the H.S...with whom you were sealed”
- 5:18-20 “be filled with the Spirit.”
- 6:17-18 “the sword of the Spirit...pray in the Spirit”