

CGH 1/4: Holy Spirit Study

The Spirit of God

The Lutheran Difference begins this section with the following: “*Trinity*. Christians hear this word so often they may sometimes fail to appreciate its true meaning. *Coequal, coeternal*—Christians use these words so little that they may not even know what they mean! The Holy Trinity is, to be sure, a great mystery. What’s more, the 3rd Person of the Trinity the Holy Spirit may be the most mysterious.” In this section we look at the Holy spirit in relation to the other persons of the trinity.

1. What comes to mind when we hear the term spirit?
2. Is the Holy Spirit the same as the Holy Ghost?
3. How can we reconcile referring to a spirit using the term “person?”

Psa 139:7-10 Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? (8) If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! (9) If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, (10) even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.

1Co 2:10-11 these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. (11) For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.

Act 13:2 While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”

Isa 63:10 But they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit; therefore he turned to be their enemy, and himself fought against them.

Rom 15:30 I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf,

1. What do these passages tell us about the “nature” of the Holy Spirit?
2. Are there any commonalities in these passages?
3. How are these depictions consistent with what we understand God to be?

Many of our credal/confessional writings refer to the Holy Spirit in person form:

Augsburg Confession Article I: [2] It is to be believed without any doubt. God is one divine essence who is eternal, without a body, without parts, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness. He is the maker and preserver of all things, visible and invisible [Nehemiah 9:6]. [3] Yet there are three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit [Matthew 28:19]. These three persons are of the same essence and power. [4] Our churches use the term person as the Fathers have used it. We use it to signify, not a part or quality in another, but that which subsists of itself.

Athanasian Creed: And the catholic faith is this, that we worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in unity, neither confusing the persons nor dividing the substance. For the Father is one person, the Son is another, and the Holy Spirit is another.

Nicene Creed: And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets.

1. What does it mean to “proceed” from the Father and the Son?
2. How do you see the relationship of the Father, Son, and Holy spirit in the trinity?
3. Does the Holy Spirit have “equal standing” with the other members of the Trinity?

TLD says: “It is common, and certainly not incorrect, to classify the work of the Father as creation, that of the Son as redemption, and that of the Holy Spirit as sanctification.”

1. Do you agree with this assessment?
2. Do you think these are the only functions of the trinity?
3. Do the three persons of the Trinity work together or separately?

Scripture, along with our confessional writings, shed some light on this issue:

Joh 16:13-15 When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. (14) He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. (15) All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

Joh 4:24 God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

1. What does this say to us about how the Holy Spirit works as part of the Trinity?
2. What do the verses from John 16 tell us about God’s love for us?
3. According to John 4 what do you think it means to worship in spirit and truth?
4. How would we answer a non-believer’s question about the Holy Spirit in relation to God the Father and God the Son?
5. After this discussion, do you see the Holy spirit as more of a “person” or more of a “Spirit?”
6. TLD says we often begin and end our prayers in the name of the Father or in the name of Jesus. Why do you think we don’t include the name of the Holy Spirit?

Other thoughts?

COMPARISONS:

Proceeds from the Father and the Son: Christians of the Western tradition teach that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son (filioque in Latin). They tend to emphasize the coequal divinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Proceeds from the Father: Eastern Orthodox churches have never accepted the filioque statement added by Western churches to the Nicene Creed. They contend that the Spirit proceeds from the Father *through* the Son, emphasizing more of a hierarchy among the persons of the Trinity.

Pseudo-Christian beliefs: A variety of groups reject the divinity of the Holy Spirit and the doctrine of the Trinity. For example, the Jehovah's Witnesses regard the Holy Spirit as an impersonal force. The United Pentecostal Church teaches that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all manifestations of the same person ("Jesus only"). Mormons hold that the Holy Spirit is a spiritual god alongside the Father and the Son, who are gods with physical bodies.