

The Spirit Is God: What That Actually Means

The Spirit of Christ

A man named Ananias sold a piece of land. He and his wife Sapphira agreed together to keep back part of the money for themselves, while telling the church they were giving the whole price. It should have been a small, private deception. Instead, it became one of the most important verses in the whole Bible for answering a question we are going to sit with today.

Peter confronted him.

“Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.”

ACTS 5:3-4

Read that again slowly. Peter says Ananias lied to the Holy Spirit. Then, in the very next breath, without any sense that he is changing subjects, Peter says Ananias lied to God. Same lie. Same act. Two names for the one he sinned against. The Holy Spirit and God are not two different beings here. They are the same being, addressed two different ways in the space of a single sentence.

That is where we start today. Last time we asked who the Spirit is, and we said he is a person, not a force. Today we go further and further than most people are comfortable going. The Holy Spirit is not merely a person. He is God.

I want to be careful here, because this is the kind of claim that gets nodded along to and never actually believed. Most of us would say, if asked directly, “sure, the Spirit is God.” But then we go on to treat him like a kind of divine influence, an atmosphere, an assistance package that God sends down while God himself stays elsewhere. That is not what the Bible describes. The Bible describes a Spirit who is addressed as God, who does what only God does, and who is placed by Jesus himself on exactly the same footing as the Father and the Son.

Take Paul’s words in second Corinthians. Writing about the old covenant and the new, he says:

“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”

2 CORINTHIANS 3:17-18

“The Lord is the Spirit.” Paul is not confusing his terms. Throughout this letter, “the Lord” is his standard way of referring to the covenant God of Israel, the God of Exodus, the God whose glory once shone on Moses’ face until Moses had to veil it. And Paul says that God, the Lord, is the Spirit. The very glory that transforms us, degree by degree, into Christ’s likeness, is described as coming from the Spirit precisely because the Spirit is that Lord.

Then there is the moment Jesus himself settles the matter, right at the end of Matthew’s Gospel, giving his followers their marching orders for every generation to come.

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,
baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the
Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

MATTHEW 28:19

Notice the grammar. Not three names. One name, singular, and then three persons who share it: the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. If the Spirit were some lesser being, an angel, an emissary, a created force sent to help out, this sentence could not exist. You cannot baptize someone into the name of God, the Son of God, and an errand-runner, as though all three belonged in the same breath. Jesus puts the Spirit exactly where he puts himself and his Father. Undivided. Equal. One name shared by three.

This is what the church has always meant by the word Trinity, even though the word itself never appears in Scripture. Not three gods. Not one God wearing three different masks depending on the occasion, sometimes Father, sometimes Son, sometimes Spirit, as if he cycles through moods. Both of those get it wrong, and both were rejected early and firmly by Christians who had no interest in speculation, only in being faithful to what they had read and received. What the Bible actually presents is one God, eternally three persons, distinct from one another and yet never divided from one another. The Father is not the Son. The Son is not the Spirit. And yet Father, Son, and Spirit are, together, the one God, acting as one, willing as one, loved and loving as one.

Here is a picture that might help, and it comes from watching Jesus himself. At his baptism, the Father speaks his love over the Son, and the Spirit descends and rests on him. Three persons, one moment, each doing what only they do, and none of them any less God for it. The Father is not more God than the Son because he speaks first. The Spirit is not less God because he descends rather than being spoken of. What you are watching is the eternal

shape of God's own life, spilling out into a single moment in history so that we could see it. The Father has always loved the Son, and has always done so in and through the Spirit. That love did not begin at the Jordan river. It has simply always been who God is.

So let me put the shape of it plainly, because this is worth being able to say clearly, not just feel vaguely. Three convictions, held together. One: there is one God, one being, not three. Two: within that one being there are three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, genuinely distinct from one another, not the same person wearing three different masks depending on the occasion. Three: each of those persons is fully and equally God, sharing the one divine being completely, none of them a lesser, later, or borrowed deity trailing behind the others. Lose the first and you end up with three gods. Lose the second and you end up with a solitary God performing three acts. Lose the third and you end up with a Father attended by two junior deities, which is exactly the error the church spent its first few centuries refusing to accept. Orthodox Christian faith holds all three together, not because it is tidy, but because that is what the text will not let us surrender. And it is precisely because the Spirit is fully and equally God that the ancient creeds insist he is worshiped and glorified together with the Father and the Son, and not one step behind them.

So why does this matter enough to spend a whole session on it? Because who the Spirit is changes everything about what it means to have him.

If the Spirit were a created force, however powerful, then having him would be like having a tool. Something you use, manage, and hope you are using correctly. You would relate to him the way you relate to electricity: useful, necessary even, but not someone you know, not someone you owe worship to, not someone whose presence in you is itself the point.

But if the Spirit is God, everything changes. His presence in you is not the King's assistant showing up on the King's behalf. It is the King himself, present and reigning. This is the Kingdom breaking in, not by proxy, but in person. When the Spirit indwells a believer, the sovereign rule of Christ is not represented from a distance. It has taken up residence. That is a claim about authority as much as it is a claim about intimacy. You do not manage a King. You submit to one, you listen to one, you obey one, and you find, if you know him at all, that you come to love one.

Which brings me to where this session has to end, because knowing this changes how we listen. Are you treating the Holy Spirit within you as an influence to be tapped when convenient, or as God himself, present and reigning, worthy of the same reverence, the same obedience, the same worship you would give if Christ himself walked into the room? Because according to Peter, standing over the body of a man who thought he could manage the Spirit rather than answer to him, there is no third option. You have not lied to, ignored, or sidelined some lesser presence. You have not lied to men but to God. And this same Spirit, who takes deception that seriously, is the Spirit who is with you now, this moment, inviting you to stop pretending and deal honestly, while there is still time, with the God who already lives there.

Group Discussion Questions

- 1 Before this session, how would you have answered someone who asked, "Is the Holy Spirit really God, or just a way of talking about God's presence?"

- 2 What's the difference between saying "the Spirit is a helper sent by God" and "the Spirit is God, present and reigning"? Why does that distinction actually matter for how we treat him?
- 3 Which mistake is easier to slip into, treating God as three separate gods, or treating him as one God wearing three different masks? Where have you seen each one show up in ordinary Christian language, even in church?

Personal Reflection Questions

- 1 In practice, do you relate to the Holy Spirit as a tool you use or as God you worship? What would actually change today if you treated him the second way?
- 2 Ananias tried to manage the appearance of what he was giving rather than being honest about it. Where are you managing appearances right now, rather than dealing honestly with a Spirit who already knows?
- 3 If the Spirit's presence in you is the King himself reigning, not a representative acting on his behalf, what part of your life have you been quietly keeping outside his authority?

REFERENCES

Reeves, M. (2012). *Delighting in the Trinity: An introduction to the Christian faith*. IVP Academic.