

The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit

Jonathan K. Dodson | November 5, 2017 | True Doctrine

In the Netflix series, *Stranger Things*, a group of elementary kids take on an evil infecting their town, Hawkins, IN. We get glimpses of this evil from a realm called the upside-down. Although invisible to most, some can see the intra-dimensional world. Their eyes just have to be opened to it. In reverse, there is an actual dimension to *our world* that is *good*. It too can be felt and seen. It is the realm of the right-side up, where the goodness, beauty and truth of the triune God break-in to order all things. But to see, feel, and live in the right-side up, *our eyes must be opened and our lives guided by the Holy Spirit*. Who is the Holy Spirit? What is he doing in this world? And where is he going with it?

Who is the Holy Spirit?

In the Star Wars spin-off film, *Rogue One*, Donnie Yen plays a blind warrior named Chirrut. Whenever Chirrut encounters a crisis he repeats a mantra, “I am one with the Force. The Force is with me. I am one with the Force. The Force is with me.” Then, “filled with the Force” empowers him to kick some Empire tail. This isn’t far from how many people view the Holy Spirit, a force that empowers Christians. Almost 60% of self-identifying evangelicals claim the Holy Spirit is a force. Some sort of spiritual power. But a closer reading of the Scriptures reveal something much more. The Spirit is first, a person. He is not a person in the sense of having hands, a mouth, and eyes but in the sense of *possessing a personality and acting as a person*. Let’s take a look. When Jesus promised the Spirit he said, “**But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things**” (Jn 14:26). The Spirit teaches. He also speaks and prompts us, “**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.”**” (Ac 13:2). He can also be lied to and grieved like a person, **But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit”** (Ac 5:3); **“And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God”** (Eph 4:30). The Spirit of God speaks, teaches, can be lied to and grieved, *like a person*. If it acts like a person, speaks like a person; it is *a person*. Well, not it—he! In fact, Romans says he’s the “*love of God poured out into our hearts*” (Rom 5:5). If this is true, how should it affect us? We should *know* the Spirit like you would *know* a person. He listens and you can talk to him. We are repeatedly told to pray *in* the Spirit. For years I neglected the third person of the Trinity, acting as if he wasn’t there. But then one day I was in a cold, breezy garage

apartment in Manchester-by-the-Sea reading about the Spirit, and I was cut to the core. I realized I had ignored him my entire life. That day I began a relationship with the Spirit. Are you listening to his voice, joining him in prayer, seeking his instruction, depending on his help? Begin by simply asking him to teach, help, guide you when you read the Bible, need direction, or lack wisdom. Say Spirit help me; he is a helper, that's one of his names. And we need his help. There are real forces at work to seduce us, but the Spirit is eager to lead us into upright living. And he's not just a person; he's divine. He does the things God does: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth...and the Spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters" (Gen 1:2). He creates. The Spirit is bigger and smaller than we might think. He is as big as creating the cosmos and as small as relating to you and me. Paul puts him on par with God when he says, "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom...For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit" (2 Cor 3.). Twice he emphasizes the deity of the Spirit as the Lord. He is a *divine* person. In fact he gives the Spirit the holy name, Lord, inscribing him into the Godhead. How should affect us? We should respect (not ignore) and *worship* Spirit. As the official prayer of the Blessed Order of the Trinity states, "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever. Amen."

What Does He Do?

As a *divine person*, the Spirit is more than a force but not less. He does *empower*. Experience tells us all we need a power outside of ourselves. When we're tempted to cheat, lust, judge, gossip, or flat out exhausted we are lured by an upside-down power. Even if you can't see it, you can *feel* it—the temptation to snap, despair. The Spirit is the power of resistance; he enables us to walk right-side up, "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh" (Gal 5:16). Walking in the Spirit puts in step with holiness. Holiness isn't about seeing how far we can get away from sin but how close we can get to Christ, in step with Jesus. But we cannot be like Christ apart from the "Spirit of holiness" (Rom 1:4). The problem is that we often rely an alternative power supplies: reason, experience, emotion. All good things but not powerful enough to alter us to into the image of Jesus, to resist evil. One alternate power supply is **reason**. Western Christians are particularly susceptible to switching out the Spirit for reason. This often happens when we are faced with temptation. Say an attractive person walks by, or pops up on your screen. You have a decision to make. You can appreciate their beauty and move on or linger in *envious comparison* or

degrading lust. I wish I had her looks or I wish I had her. How do you escape? You know the Bible tells you “love does not envy” (1 Cor 13:4) and to flee youthful lusts (1 Tim 2:22), but you go ahead and envy or lust anyway. You enter into self-counsel and still *remain powerless to do what’s good and right*. In that moment, we enter an inner dialogue with our reason and dismiss the presence and power of the Spirit. We think “I’ve got this” when we don’t at all; He Does! He loves to make us holy; he loves to get us close to Christ. Try this next time you’re tempted. When I’m tempted to lust or envy, and I include the Spirit and ask him to help me; it snaps the power of evil and helps me choose what is right. If we don’t, no Spirit, no holiness, no intimacy with Jesus. Its reduced to a moral transaction. But what would happen if, in the moment, we chose to recognize our thoughts as the Spirit’s prompts? And entered into dialog with him, not reason? And we said, Spirit thank you for alerting me to this half-truth; grant me the power to not settle for lust or envy and the power to choose Christ. Temptation would transform into a moment of communion! Another alt power supply is **experience**. Maybe you’ve heard the millennial mantra, “*Spend your money on experiences not on things.*” Although it sounds like a push-back on materialism, it can be just as consumeristic. In an experience economy, we always want the next best experience. Have you been to that restaurant on the eastside, that new brewery in Dripping, seen that band at SX? But it’s not just the food, the beer, and the music we want; we want an *experience*. A restaurant with killer interior design, great service, and live music. A brewery that serves great beer, has outdoor activities, and food trucks. Not just a great band, but a whole freaking festival of bands. Experience. We no longer work for the weekend; we work for *an experience* on the weekend. And if we don’t get one, we might feel glum. So we line up more. Powered by experience, we are happy when we have something to look forward to and ho-hum when we don’t. The power of experience replaces the power and presence of the Spirit. *Think about the implications this has for suffering or service*. Your spouse wants to get away for the weekend, and for you to take the kids, and you don’t want to serve. You want a great experience. And see your kids as an inconvenience. Instead of an opportunity to identify with Christ, blessing others, suffering and service become “a bad experience,” an inconvenience, something we give a one-star rating. But it is in suffering and service that the character of Christ is forged most. The experience economy/upside-down is meant to rewire the motivation of your heart, to lure you away from the Spirit who produces likeness of Jesus. This might seem like overstatement, but consider what the authors of *The Experience Economy* say, “*the best way to a customer’s heart is the idea of staging experiences.*” They

want to capture your heart through increased levels of experience. The wallet will follow. Are you riding the roller-coaster of experience or walking in step with the Spirit? Suffering and service weren't above Jesus, "**For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many**" (Mk 10:45). Thank God Jesus didn't opt for the best experience. His heart was pierced for our transgressions. Only the power of the Spirit produces the image of Christ.

Where is the Spirit Going?

Who is the Spirit? A divine person to know and worship, rely on and revere. What does he do? Empowers you to look like Jesus, to be holy. And now, *where is the Spirit going?* The Spirit is leading all things toward their zenith, a new creation inscribed by the city of God. John records, "**And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God**" (Rev 21:10). This is how we are introduced to the vision of a new heavens and earth. The Spirit transports John and will transport us into all things new. At the end of the Bible we are told **the Spirit and the Bride say come.** The saints who have gone on before us, who are with the Father and the Spirit and the Son, together with the Spirit himself, beckon us to persevere, to pursue holiness, to draw near to Jesus in this world, and his mission of making all things new. The Spirit is intent in finishing what he started. He moves everything closer to perfection, getting us closer to the right-side up, to kingdom come, to a renewed heavens and earth. If this is true, how should it affect us now? 1) If the Spirit made this world and is intent on guiding it to comprehensive renewal, what we do with the world in the present matters. The kind of culture you make, the work you do, how we treat others, the way we treat the environment—those things matter to God. His creation is moving toward perfection, and our parenting, writing, coding, designing, and relating should show it. We should be previews of the world to come. 2) This promised future also reminds us how central Jesus is to the creation project. Apart from Spirit-enabled faith in Jesus, no one enters the new creation. The Spirit points us to a new creation *with Jesus on the throne*, "**And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.**" It turns out the new cosmos is also a new temple, a place of never-ending worship in all we do. Those who worship him now will worship him then. *So let's join the Spirit in making all things new, even us.*