

The Holy Spirit is a Person • John 16:12

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John 16, and then skip down to verse 12. John 16:12 – we’re going to read 2 verses. It says:

“I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. ¹³ But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.” (ESV)

Just 2 short verses, but pray with me.

Heavenly Father, open our hearts to the ministry of Your Word today, and speak as You are so capable of doing. Our hearts long to be open to hear Your voice. Use this time, we pray, in Jesus’ name, amen.

As I thought about and prayed about – and even studied out some of the things that I wanted to share with you about the Holy Spirit, I think that there can be little doubt that the Holy Spirit, as far as the members of the Godhead, is probably the least understood, the most misunderstood of the persons of the Godhead.

And one of the issues that people have, I find the biggest problem with, is when we refer to the Holy Spirit as a person. People get all tweaked about that, and they really struggle with it. People genuinely struggle with the idea that the Holy Spirit is a separate person. Some groups such as the Jehovah's Witnesses and others just come out and make a blanket statement rejecting any idea of the personhood of the Holy Spirit.

To them, and to other groups, the Spirit of God is more of an impersonal force, if you will, similar to gravity or wind, but a little more under the direction of God's power, and so forth. Or like in Star Wars – The Force – sort of an impersonal thing that just does things, but is impersonal from the standpoint of not being a person. And I suppose that is a reasonable deduction, at least until you've read the Bible.

But at least, when you're just looking at the word, spirit— okay, by the way, can I, can we do a little bit of English review here this morning? I know you came to church, and you thought the last thing I wanted to do is deal with grammar, but actually this is important to understanding this. I'll put some things on the screen for you.

Spirit

Greek: pneuma

Meaning: breath or wind

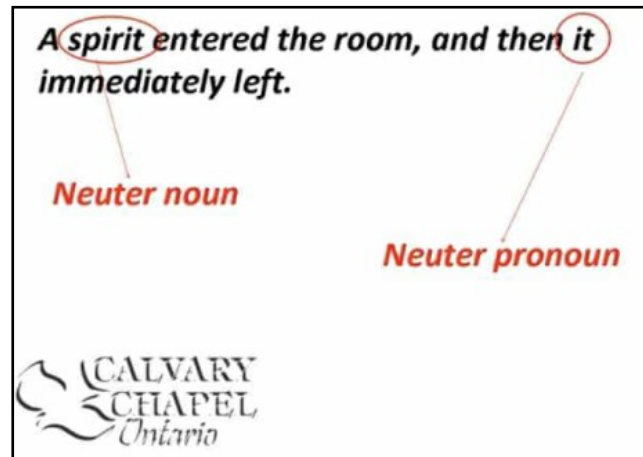
First of all, I just want to put up the word, Spirit. Interestingly enough, this is the Greek word, pneuma (πνεῦμα). It's interesting about Greek; there's no silent letters like there are in English, so it's actually easier to pronounce Greek words than it is English words. It means— it has a basic meaning of breath or wind.

All right. Obviously, it also is translated spirit but it can mean breath or wind, and it's where we get many of our common words, such as pneumonia. Now, we don't pronounce the P. We don't say pneumonia.

It's a little funny. If you do—some of you guys, I envy you; you have those tools that you hook up to a compressor. Remember what they're called? They're called pneumatic, right? Or pneumatic because they use air to cause them to function. Well, those words come from the Greek word pneuma.

Interestingly enough, about this word in Greek—and it's the same in English—it is what we call genderless. Or in grammar, it's referred to as neuter. It does not contain gender. And so, what that means is if I were to use the word spirit in a sentence, I would be obliged—if I used a pronoun with that word, I would be obliged to use also a neuter or genderless pronoun.

All right, let me give you an example—in fact, I'll put it up on the screen for you, because it would require the word it. Here's a sentence that I'm just going to make up for you.



The sentence is: A spirit—or you can even say: The spirit entered the room, and then it immediately left.

Now, I want you to notice, just for a minute here, what the construction of that sentence is. First of all, you've got the word, spirit, which is a neuter or genderless noun. And then, because I used also a pronoun in that sentence, which is the word, it, it has to be a neuter pronoun.

All right—you'll notice that I didn't use a personal pronoun there like he or her or something like that. That would be inappropriate. That would be improper grammar to do because there's rules to grammar. You know that, don't you? When we talk, when we write, there are things we're supposed to follow in terms of rules.

Here's the one that we're dealing with today.

Proper grammatical structure demands that when a neuter noun is used in a sentence (like: *spirit*), any pronouns used in context *must agree* in gender.

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All right? That is a rule that everybody understands. It's a rule in English and it's a rule in Greek.

Now, why am I telling you all this stuff? Why are we going back to school? Because this is very important about the passage that we read here just a moment ago.

I want to go ahead and we'll put it up on the screen here for you, because this is the one we read from John chapter 16 where Jesus said to His disciples:

John 16:12-13 (NIV)

“I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.”

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I want you to notice something about that passage. First of all, you've got a noun there, and that is, Spirit, or the Spirit of truth. Okay, now remember in Greek, the word Spirit is neuter. It's genderless. So, by using the rules of grammar, you are obliged to use a genderless pronoun.

Let me highlight for you what John did; he's just recording basically what Jesus said— because Jesus is speaking here.

John 16:12-13 (NIV)

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No less than seven times in this passage John writes what Jesus said, and he uses here what we call the emphatic masculine pronoun: he, 6 times, and then the masculine pronoun, him, is used once.

Well, what's the conclusion to this? John broke the rules of grammar, for one. By the way, if anybody ever says that to you, the Bible breaks the rules of proper grammatical structure, you're supposed to tell them: Yes, it does. True, because it does. The Bible breaks the rules. You know why? Because the Spirit is a person. John broke the rules purposely.

I believe Jesus broke the rules when He was even speaking it because you look at that sentence or you look at that passage again and Jesus says:

John 16:12-13 (NIV)

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Here's the deal. You cannot read through the New Testament with sincerity and honesty without concluding that the Holy Spirit is a person. It is impossible, unless you go into reading the Bible with your mind already made up. That's the only way you're going to come away thinking that the Holy Spirit is an impersonal force. It's because somebody told you ahead of time, you believed it, and now everything you read in the Bible doesn't really matter because you've already made up your mind.

But if you— let me tell you something. We're just looking at 2 verses. There are a ton of verses in the Bible that offer us biblical evidence of the personhood of the Holy Spirit. I want to share just a few others with you— and this is by no means all of them.

There is a passage that we read in the Book of Acts where Peter confronts Ananias, and he says:

Acts 5:3 (NIV)

Then Peter said, “Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land?”

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Now that's interesting. Peter, very clearly, is confronting Ananias with lying to the Holy Spirit. In other words, the Holy Spirit is capable of being lied to.

Let me ask you something. If you're going to put another impersonal force in that place, like gravity or wind, we have to ask this question: Can you lie to gravity? Can you lie to the wind? Wouldn't it be nonsensical and somewhat

ridiculous if someone said to you: Stop lying to gravity? You go, what? You can't lie to gravity. It's an impersonal force.

Well, here's the question: Can you lie to the Holy Spirit? Yes, according to the Bible. According to what Peter said, Ananias lied to the Holy Spirit.

Here's another one, Ephesians chapter 4:30. It says:

Ephesians 4:30 (NIV)

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

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Let me just remind you that to grieve means to suffer grief or to sadden, to make sad. Okay? So, Paul is writing to the church in Ephesus and saying: Do not sadden the Holy Spirit with whom you've been sealed for the day of redemption. Now, again, can you make gravity sad? Can you make wind sad?

They're forces, but they're impersonal, so you can't, can you? You can't grieve the wind. You can't grieve gravity. But Paul says you can actually grieve the Holy Spirit. All right? This is very important.

And then, look at Acts 15:28—and it says there:

Acts 15:28 (NIV)

It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements...

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This was written, by the way, when many of the Judaizers were making their way into the churches around Asia Minor, and they were telling those people that they had to be circumcised and keep Jewish religious laws in order to be saved. And Paul and Barnabas came into such sharp debate with these guys that they decided to go back to Jerusalem to bring it before the council of apostles, and so forth, and to get a determination on this thing.

James finally spoke up. He settled the issue, and they wrote a letter that Paul was to take back to the believers in these other areas. Part of what they said to them was the passage you just saw on the screen where it said: *“It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you beyond the following requirements...”*

Did you catch that? It, the Holy Spirit, is credited with the decision in that passage. Now that sounds a whole heck of a lot like a person to me.

Now that we've established a biblical understanding—and please understand, too, people, that this is just the tip of the iceberg. I could go on and on and talk about biblical passages related to the personhood of the Holy Spirit, but as long as we've just established here, I think, hopefully to everyone's satisfaction of what we're dealing with, I want to look again at these 2 verses that we started our study time with in your Bible.

If you still have it on your lap, open to that passage, John 16:12-13. I want to look at the beginning of this again, and see what Jesus is saying. He says: *“I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear.”*

And with these words, Jesus is presenting to His disciples a problem. He's telling the guys: Listen, there's a problem. I want to tell you more stuff. I really do, but the problem is you can't bear it right now. You're just not in a place to receive everything that I want to say to you, and so, that's going to be a problem.

He goes on to tell them that he's outlined a solution for this issue. It goes on to say: *“...when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you (or lead you) into all the truth.”*

Now, obviously, Jesus is referring here to the ministry of the Holy Spirit, which would take place after the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, and when He would be given to the disciples to live in their hearts. We call this the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. We call this the indwelling presence of God's Holy Spirit.

Jesus made this distinction about this time when the Spirit would come in to live in their hearts in a particular passage from John chapter 14 that I want to show on the screen to you—and it goes like this:

John 14:17 (NIV)

*... the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives **with** you and will be **in** you.*

(Jesus says—He refers to) ...*the Spirit of truth* (and He says:) *The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives **with** you and will be **in** you.*

Now, obviously, in this passage, there are two key words: **with** and **in**. Jesus said to His disciples: Right now, the Holy Spirit is with you. But in the future, He will be in you. He's not yet, but He will be.

Okay now—by the way, just in case you want to really go back to grammar school, remember, those are prepositions **with** and **in**. Now, we need to advance a couple questions along with what Jesus has just said, and I'll put them on the screen. Number 1.

Question 1:

Why was the Holy Spirit only “with” the disciples at that time?

Answer:

Because Jesus had not yet died for man’s sins—thus opening the way for the spirit to indwell believers.

Why was the Holy Spirit only “with” the disciples at that time? In other words, why wasn't the Spirit in them yet? And the answer to the question is because Jesus had not yet died for man’s sins— thus opening the way for the Spirit to indwell believers.

Did you ever stop to think about that? In the Old Testament, nobody had the Spirit living in their hearts. Nobody had the indwelling presence of God's Spirit. And the reason is, Jesus had not died to pay the price for man's sin, thus cleansing the vessel so that the Spirit could come in and reside.

Because you see, light cannot be where darkness is. And our lives before Christ and before we were forgiven of all of our sin was full of darkness. But He came, and cleansed us by His Spirit, enabling the Spirit now to come into our lives, to indwell us, and so forth. So that is why it couldn't take place.

But that question and answer frankly leads to another question.

Question 2:

When did the Holy Spirit first come to indwell (or live inside) believers?

Answer:

On the evening of Christ’s resurrection day.

Question number 2 is: When did the Holy Spirit first come to indwell (or live inside) believers?

Does the Bible give us any insights into this? Well, the fact of the matter – it does. First of all, the answer is: The Spirit came to indwell believers for the first time on the evening of the day that Christ was raised from the dead, and it's actually recorded for us on the screen.

John chapter 20 – here's what it says:

John 20:19-22 (NIV)

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit.

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw (Him). (And then it goes on to say:) Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." (And then look at this:) And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit.

He breathed on them. And by the way, don't miss the connection to what Jesus is doing here to what took place when man first became a man, a human being. In the Book of Genesis, when God created man, it says that He made him out of the earth, but he was lifeless. And so, the Bible says, God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and he became a human being, right?

But something happened to that human being. Sin came into the equation. And although man was made a living being – body, soul, and spirit – that which was connected to God, that spiritual part of his life died when sin came into the equation.

And now man was cut off from God, which is why Jesus told Nicodemus in John chapter 3—He said: Nick, it's not just enough for you to be born. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but that's not enough. You must be born again. You must be given new birth or rebirth. And Jesus officiated at that rebirth, that first moving of the Spirit, when He breathed on them and said *"Receive the Holy Spirit."*

This is the time when men became regenerated. This is when they became born-again.

Look with me again at the passage in your Bible – John 16:12-13. He says again: *“I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. (And then here's the part I want to emphasize right now, he says:) ¹³ But when he (remember, a person), the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you (this is the important part) into all truth.*

And I think this is one of the most important aspects of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives. It is He, the Spirit of God, who leads us into all truth. He is the one who teaches us. He is the one who gives us understanding. He is the one who opens our heart to understand the things of God.

We call this the illuminating work of God's Holy Spirit – and that's a good word because a light bulb illuminates a dark room so that you can see what you're doing. The Spirit of God illuminates God's Word so that we can understand it. But before we've come to Christ, before we've received the Spirit, we're just in the dark and we can't figure things out.

If I gave you an opportunity, I bet some of you could probably share a testimony of when you— before you met the Lord, before you really gave your heart to the Lord, and you were reading your Bible or reading a Bible. Maybe you found one somewhere, and you just couldn't make sense of it. It was like, yeah, I read the Bible, and it was like it didn't make any sense to you, and you put it down in frustration, and so forth.

And then later on you got saved, you came to Christ, you opened your heart to Him, you invited Him in, you confessed your sin. You said: Come into my heart, come into my life. And He did; and when He did, He illuminated your heart, and you started reading your Bible and going, wow, this is crazy.

And you started getting it, and now you're able to connect the dots of understanding of God's Word, and there's just a vivaciousness and excitement about diving into God's Word. It's a wonderful thing to see a brand-new Christian just have the light come on.

But people, it's not an intellectual light. It's not a light of higher learning. It's the light of the Spirit. It's the move of the Spirit to turn the light on and make us to understand the things that God has given us.

And what He tells us in this passage in John chapter 16 is that the Spirit of God will lead us into all truth.

All right, here's how Paul says it to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians. There's a passage here where he writes to them and says:

1 Corinthians 2:12, 14 (NIV)

We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.

We have not received the spirit of the world (praise God) but the Spirit who is from God, (why?) that we may understand what God has freely given us. In fact, let me emphasize that part of the verse right there – underlined it for you: that we may understand. Why is the Spirit given us? That we may understand, that we might have the light come on, and comprehend the things of God.

Now, Paul goes on to say that: *The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and (in fact, he says) he cannot understand them, (he does not possess the capability of understanding) because they are (spiritual truths that are) spiritually discerned.*

He does not possess the Spirit, and therefore, he cannot understand the things of the Spirit. But you can, and that's pretty exciting. If you're in Christ today, you can understand the things of the Spirit. God can do that work in your heart that allows you to come into an understanding of all things.

And what that means is you don't need to know Hebrew and Greek. Once in a while I throw out a little Hebrew and Greek, not because I'm a Hebrew and Greek scholar. I am nothing even close to that. I studied a little bit of Greek when I was in college and that's it. But you know what— and I'm not saying anything against it. Some of you have studied and learned some of those ancient languages and there's nothing wrong with that.

But the work of the Spirit is not a work of higher education, higher learning. The work of the Spirit is a supernatural understanding that we gain from Him to be able to discern, comprehend, and lay hold of God's Word in our lives. A child can understand God's Word through the ministry of the Spirit.

So don't— if you've never studied a Bible College and you don't know Greek, and you don't know Hebrew, and all that stuff, that's okay. You can still know the Word of God, and you can still know God through His Word. It's a wonderful thing. So, believers are given the Spirit to enlighten us.

And I want to add— by way of closing with this, I want to share just a little warning, if I may, about everything that I've said so far. Just because Christians are given the Holy Spirit to live in our hearts, to illuminate us, to teach us, and to bring us, as Jesus says, into all truth, does not mean that we are independent of the Word.

The reason that I share that is because sometimes Christians will believe that the Holy Spirit is leading them, believe that the Spirit is speaking to them about something when, in fact, what they believe that they're hearing is actually contrary to the Word of God. This is something that we need to be well-aware of people.

I remember a number of years ago, it was a long time ago, when I was an assistant pastor up in Montana, about 25, 6— no it was more than that— about 27 years ago. There was a woman who came— a young woman who came into my office, and she looked at me, and with absolute determination said that she believed that God's Holy Spirit had spoken to her, telling her to divorce her husband.

Now you and I hope— we both know that you know the Bible does outline what we would refer to as biblical grounds for divorce. People usually ignore them for the most part, but there are actually—Jesus said there were biblical grounds for divorce, and that was marital unfaithfulness. It doesn't demand that you have to divorce, but it gives you biblical grounds for it.

This woman didn't have that. She had nothing of the kind. Her husband had not been unfaithful to her yet she believed the Holy Spirit told her to divorce him. And I was able to come back to her and say: I'm sorry, but I don't think so.

Well— and she was just incensed at the idea that I would possibly contradict what she believed was the leading of the Holy Spirit. I came back and said: I just don't believe that the Holy Spirit is going to tell you to do something that is contrary to His Word, because it is the Spirit of God who has breathed the Word in the first place, and I don't think He's going to say one thing and then say another thing later on that is completely contradictory to that. I just don't believe that.

That is what I mean, people, when I say that you and I have been given the Spirit. We have been given the ability to know and understand and be directed by His Spirit, but we are not independent of the Word. If we were, Paul's statement to the Thessalonian church would be nonsensical. And here's what Paul said to the church in Thessalonica. I'll put this on the screen here for you. He said to them:

1 Thessalonians 5:21 (NIV)

Test everything. Hold on to the good.

Test everything. Hold on to the good.

Listen, for somebody to say to someone else, test something without giving them a standard by which to test it, it doesn't make any sense. You see, if you didn't know any form of measurement and I asked you to, for example, measure this room from one end to the other, but I didn't give you any means of measuring it, and you didn't really understand in your mind whole measurement sort of stuff, how would you measure it?

I mean, what number would you come up with? Maybe you would just guess. Maybe you'd say, well, I think this building is so many feet long. Well, how can I test that to see if it's accurate? Right? How do I test it? Well, I got to get out a tape measure, don't I? I can even start with a ruler, or maybe I can even pace it off knowing that essentially one step is right around three feet or so.

But to know that is to understand what a standard measurement is, and to come up with a conclusion based on that, to be able to say: No, actually this room is a hundred feet long, and we know that because we measured it, and the reason we measured is because we had systems or units of measure that we could use to determine how long it was.

Well, what is the system of measurement that is given for you and I to determine truth? One of them is the Word of God. We look in the Word of God; we test. We're like the Bereans from the Book of Acts.

Remember the Bereans? Paul came to the people in Berea, and he shared the Word of God with them, and the people said: That's interesting. Well, we're going to check you out, pal. We're going to look into the Word of God and see if what you're saying is true or not.

The apostle Paul didn't say to them: Now listen here; I am the Apostle Paul. Who in the world are you to check me out? No, I think Paul was thrilled

because Luke writes in there that the people of Berea were of more noble character, and the disciples were thrilled that these people wanted to check it out to see if it was true. And that is something that you and I have the responsibility to do.

The Spirit is moving. The Spirit is speaking. The Spirit is directing. But we need to test everything. We need to test it. And if it's something that can't be tested specifically by a chapter or verse in the Bible, there are other means of testing. We'll talk more about those later, but one of the most popular questions people ask me as a pastor probably is: How do I know I'm hearing from God?

Well, number 1., it's the Word of God. That is the measure by which we test the revelation and the things that we believe God is putting in our heart. Beyond that, there's the test of peace. Let the peace of Christ rule in your heart, or referee, as that word, rule actually means. There's the test of the counsel of godly believers that we come to, and we say: What do you think about this decision, and so forth. There are many ways that we can test things, but remember that the standard of God's Word is powerful, and something that—

We need to know what the Word of God has to say on things, so that when somebody comes along and makes some statement, and say, well, the Spirit of God told me—whatever it is, you and I need to be able to know what the Word of God has to say, enough to say yeah or no. We need to know.

The reason I share this with you is because ever since the establishment of the Christian church to this very day, there have been what we call winds of doctrine that have blown in and out of the church – and many of them have nothing to do with the revelation of God's Word. They have nothing whatsoever to do with what God has revealed to us in the Bible and yet they take hold in some sectors of the body of Christ. Why? Because people have let go of the test to which they might understand: Is this God or not?

Remember this, people. God will never contradict Himself. God will never go beyond what He has already declared. So, you and I can have that peace of knowing that He is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

God wants to speak. God wants to direct your life. God wants you to hear His voice. God will lead you through His Spirit into all truth, and it will be confirmed right here.

Let's stand together.