

**“WHO OR WHAT IS THE HOLY SPIRIT?
Genesis 1:1-2**

Imagine yourself present at creation. Absolute darkness. Chaos. Floating in an endless ocean. Cold. Fear. Then you sense someone there – not someone or something dangerous, like a thief in your home in the dark or a shark hidden beneath the water. Someone who is there to help. You feel a sense of Hope. Like being lost at sea in the blackest night and the rescue helicopter is hovering overhead. You are still in the water, but the fear goes away. You are about to be rescued. The Spirit of God is present in Creation, hovering over the waters, to bring order out of the chaos.

Well, what is the *Spirit* of God? Is it the same as God; is it different from God? Of course the answer to that is, “Yes!” First, know that the Spirit is not an impersonal force or energy. The Holy Spirit is never referred in the Bible as a “What,” a “Thing,” a “Feeling,” a “Power,” an “Energy,” or a “Force.” The Holy Spirit is a “Who,” a “Person,” a “Personality.” Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit with personal pronouns, like “He,” but never “It.” He is known by many names: the Holy Spirit, the Holy Ghost, the Spirit, Spirit of Life, Spirit of God, Spirit of Christ.

Second, He is the Third Person of the Trinity, the Triune God – the three in One. We believe in One God in three persons – not 3 gods, not 3 personalities of God, not 3 moods of God – 3 distinct, unique persons, each with different functions, (diagram) but all three of the same substance – all 3 are God, the 3 in One. Is this hard to wrap your mind around? Of course! Would you expect anything less from the God of the Universe?

Since we can’t see the Holy Spirit, and we know He is different from the Father and the Son, the Bible has other comparative metaphors to help us understand the Holy Spirit – like the wind, like water, like fire. The Hebrew word often associated with the Spirit is *ruach* or *breath* – some say this metaphor comes from the breath of God moving the curtains of the Holy of Holies back and forth in the Temple. In John 20:22, the Risen Lord Jesus is with His disciples and it says: “And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” Breathe on me breath of God.

One of the dominant symbols of the Holy Spirit is a dove; This comes mainly from the Gospel accounts of when John the Baptist baptized Jesus.

“¹⁶As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. ¹⁷And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.” (Matthew 3:16-18)

You will see the Holy Spirit dove image on many pieces of art. *The Message* paraphrases Genesis 1:1-2 like this:

¹⁻²First this: God created the Heavens and Earth—all you see, all you don't see. Earth was a soup of nothingness, a bottomless emptiness, an inky blackness. God's Spirit brooded like a bird above the watery abyss.

Jesus described the Holy Spirit with the Greek word, *paraclete* – which literally translated means, *One Who Walks Alongside* (sounds Native American) – *Paraclete* translates as Helper, Counselor, Advocate, Teacher. But the Holy Spirit does more than walk alongside of us. He dwells within us. Not like being possessed– you invite Him in, and He only does what you allow Him to do.

What does the Holy Spirit do? John 16:7-14 Jesus explains some of what the *Paraclete* would do:

“⁷ But I tell you the truth, it is better for you that I go away. When I go away, I will send the Helper to you. If I do not go away, the Helper will not come.⁸ When the Helper comes, he will prove to the people of the world the truth about sin, about being right with God, and about judgment.⁹ He will prove to them that sin is not believing in me.¹⁰ He will prove to them that being right with God comes from my going to the Father and not being seen anymore. ¹¹ And the Helper will prove to them that judgment happened when the ruler of this world was judged. ¹² "I have many more things to say to you, but they are too much for you now. ¹³ But when the Spirit of truth comes, he will lead you into all truth. He will not speak his own words, but he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is to come.¹⁴ The Spirit of truth will bring glory to me, because he will take what I have to say and tell it to you.”

The first reference in the Bible to the Holy Spirit, is at Creation, bringing order to chaos. The Spirit seems to have a real hands-on approach to the world we live in. He is action oriented. He makes things happen. He carries out the will of the Father and the Son. He is the communicator, our real-life connection with God. In the Old Testament, you hear of the Holy Spirit associated with God’s prophets. In Numbers 11; God tells Moses to get some help taking care of all of these people in the wilderness. So Moses selects 70 elders to help share the decision making and the Holy Spirit comes upon these people:

“¹⁶ The LORD said to Moses: "Bring me seventy of Israel's elders who are known to you as leaders and officials among the people. Have them come to the Tent of Meeting, that they may stand there with you. ¹⁷ I will come down and speak with you there, and I will take of the Spirit that is on you and put the Spirit on them. They will help you carry the burden of the people so that you will not have to carry it alone.”

Joshua gets a little upset, but Moses’ reply is a bit of prophecy: “I wish that all the LORD's people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!”

In those days the Holy Spirit would come UPON people, so that they felt and experienced God’s power and presence. But He didn’t always stay with them. He would be there to help them accomplish some task God had for that person. In the book of Judges, after the Israelites had been in the Promised Land for a while, they sinned, God would allow enemies to oppress them, they would pray, and God would send His Spirit to come upon judges, certain men or women chosen to deliver God’s people (Judges 6:34). Again and again you will read how the Spirit of the Lord came UPON Gideon, came UPON Jephthah, came UPON Samson.

God would send His Holy Spirit to come UPON certain people to anoint, inspire and strengthen, those He chose as kings of Israel– first King Saul (1 Samuel 10:6) and then King David. But there was always a fear that the Holy Spirit would leave them, like in Psalm 51 when David asks that the Lord would create in him a clean heart and not to take the Holy Spirit away from him.

In the Gospels, the Holy Spirit made Himself known through Jesus. In the Gospels, the Spirit of God was WITH us, through Jesus. You remember what happened when John the Baptist baptized Jesus – the Spirit of God descended like a dove upon Jesus and lighted on Him. The Holy Spirit was WITH Jesus. The disciples were frightened at the Last Supper when Jesus started talking about dying. He told them in John 14 – “I will not leave you as orphans. I will send the Counselor.” After Jesus’ rose from the dead and appeared to the disciples for 40 days, right before He ascended into heaven, Jesus told them – “Wait for the Holy Spirit, who will come.” They waited 10 days – and on the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit made a big entrance in the Upper Room with the sound of a mighty wind, and tongues of flame settling on each of them, and enabling them to proclaim the Gospel in unknown tongues.

Pentecost was in fulfillment of the prophecy in Joel 2 where God said He would pour out His Spirit on all flesh – so that God would not just come UPON us, or be WITH us, but live WITHIN us. In Acts and beyond, the Spirit of God would live WITHIN believers. (Acts 2:38) By faith, all who believed in Jesus Christ, would receive His Holy Spirit to live WITHIN them – not coming and going – but there to stay. The Presence of God living within us.

Paul reminds us that our bodies are dwelling places of the Holy Spirit. We are reminded of this in 1 Corinthians 3:16: “¹⁶Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?” and again in 1 Corinthians 6:19 – “¹⁹Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own;” Then again Romans 8:9 makes it very plain, “⁹You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.” Romans 8:16 gives us an assurance of our relationship with the Spirit of God, “¹⁶The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.”

So what does all of this mean for us? It means that when you came to faith in Jesus Christ, you invited the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, to live within you. He is no longer far away. He is as close as your next breath. He is not your conscience – He is the Presence of God. He guides, teaches, and empowers you to do what God wills for you. He gives spiritual gifts; and He produces quality character traits called fruit – the Fruit of the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit likes a clean house, so if you allow Him, He will help you clean up your life. Remember, He is the Power of God at work in you. The Spirit will help bring order out of the chaos of your life.

So if someone asks you: Who or What is the Holy Spirit, you can respond:

The Holy Spirit IS God, the third Person of the Trinity. He is not a feeling or an impersonal power – those might be evidences of His Presence.

The Holy Spirit lives within believers. He is the Presence of God in your heart. He is the still small voice; He teaches, guides, directs – never forcing, but always influencing. He is God with us – living in our hearts.

The Holy Spirit gives spiritual gifts to believers and produces fruit in believers.

Know Who the Holy Spirit is, and you will know God who lives within you, guides you and gives to you. Be open to the Holy Spirit in your life.