



*the holy spirit*

Scott Petty

• Little Black Books •  
*books that get to the point*

# *the holy spirit*

We know that God is our heavenly Father, and we can wrap our minds around who Jesus is because he was a man who walked the earth. But what about the Holy Spirit? What is a ‘spirit’ anyway? And if the Bible says that the Holy Spirit lives within us as Christians, what does that feel like?

In this Little Black Book, Scott Petty clears away the confusion many people have about the role of the Spirit in the Christian life. He writes: “My hope is that by the end of this Little Black Book you won’t just be a believer in the Holy Spirit, but you will also understand who he is, what he does, and how fortunate and blessed we are to have him.”



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*Little Black Books: The Holy Spirit*

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# *Contents*

CHAPTER 1: Meet the Holy Spirit.....	5
CHAPTER 2: The Holy Spirit and Jesus.....	21
CHAPTER 3: The Holy Spirit and mission.....	35
CHAPTER 4: The Spirit in our Christian lives.....	49
CHAPTER 5: The Holy Spirit and gifts.....	67
Conclusion .....	83
APPENDIX: Tongues, prophecy and healing.....	85

## CHAPTER I

# *Meet the Holy Spirit*

Do you believe in ghosts? I don't—not just because I've never seen one, but also because I find it very difficult to believe the people who claim to have seen one. On the internet, people who have spotted ghosts can share their stories and photos with other believers right across the world. One day when I happened upon a ghost story website, I kept reading because I was interested to see if I could be convinced. There were a whole bunch of stories called things like 'The Lone Wolf' and 'The Banshee's Curse' and 'Walter in the Basement' and other odd names, and the tales they told seemed pretty silly to me.

I kept looking, though, because I was intrigued to see what the photos page would reveal, with all its 'clear examples' of paranormal activity. There was one photo entitled 'Freddy Jackson', where behind the top row in a group photo you could see the shadowy

face of another man. There was another photo called ‘The Ghost of Boothill Cemetery’. Some dude in America was taking photos of his friend, who was dressed up in old Western gear, standing among the gravestones. Which is ok I guess if you’re into that sort of thing. Anyway, in the background of the photo, just to the right of his costumed friend, is an image of what appears to be a thin man in a dark hat. This apparently convinced the photographer that ghosts were real. But as I looked at these photos, I realized I’d seen this sort of thing in other places. I’d seen it in magazines, where people ‘photo bomb’ celebrity photos, popping into the paparazzo’s photo at just the right time.

Given the reality of photo-bombers and of photo-editing software, websites like this are never going to convince me that ghosts are real. I remain sceptical about the existence of ghosts.

And yet the Scriptures teach me to believe in the Holy Spirit, who is also sometimes referred to as the Holy Ghost. What are you and I supposed to think about the Holy Spirit if we find it so difficult to believe in ghosts? We understand God the Father because we get what fathers are supposed to be like, even if our own fathers aren’t great. We can visualize Jesus, God the Son, because he became a man and walked among us. But what about

God the Holy Spirit? It's pretty confusing. And it's even more confusing because in some churches you barely hear any mention of the Holy Spirit, while in others the Holy Spirit seems to be all you hear about.

So I think it would do us all good to examine the Holy Spirit from the words of the Bible, which the Holy Spirit co-wrote as he spoke through the human authors like the prophets and apostles (2 Pet 1:20-21). My hope is that by the end of this Little Black Book you won't just be a believer in the Holy Spirit, but you will also understand who he is, what he does, and how fortunate and blessed we are to have him.

Well then, the first thing we need to do is meet the Holy Spirit.

## **The Holy Spirit is God**

If we are to truly meet the Holy Spirit we need to know that he is God. He is part of that unique thing in Christianity called the Trinity, in which there are three persons—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—within the one being of God. Let me say straight up that if you don't understand how there can be three persons who are each fully God and yet together are just one God, join the club. Nobody understands it properly and nobody can explain it with absolute



clarity. I reckon that's a clue that it's not made up—because who would make up a story with three persons who form just one God? But even if we cannot fully understand the Trinity, it's impossible not to notice the idea in the Bible. God the Father is God, God the Son (Jesus) is God, and God the Holy Spirit is also God. They are all equally and fully God, but there are not three Gods, just the one. You notice this in what Jesus said to his disciples at the very end of Matthew's Gospel:

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you...” (Matt 28:19-20)

So according to Jesus there is only one name—he doesn't tell his disciples to baptize new disciples into three names. There is one name because there's one God. But there are three persons: Father, Son and Spirit. This can become confusing as you try to get your head around it. You may have heard analogies or illustrations that try to help explain it. Like if you think of God as if he were an egg, there is only one egg but the yellow yolk, the egg white and the shell are three different parts of that one egg. The problem

with this illustration is that you'd never describe the eggshell as the complete egg, or the yolk or the white alone as 'fully the egg'. But the Scriptures teach us that God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are each fully God. So the egg illustration is only useful up to a point.

Or you might have heard people say that God is like water. With water there is only one substance: H<sub>2</sub>O. But H<sub>2</sub>O can appear distinctly as ice, or liquid water, or steam. It's all water, but there are distinctive features depending on whether it's solid, liquid or gas. Again, this sort of helps, but not completely, because you can never find water, ice and steam in the same place under the same conditions. And yet you do find God the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit in the same place at the same time. This happens, for example, at the baptism of Jesus, which we read about in Matthew 3:

As 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. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased". (Matt 3:16-17)

Here you have in one place God the Son being baptized, God the

Holy Spirit descending upon Jesus, and God the Father speaking from heaven. Each one is fully God at the same time. So again, the water illustration is helpful up to a point, but not completely accurate.

At the end of the day, no human illustration is going to be absolutely clear because God is beyond the human mind. And although it is worth thinking through how God can be three persons yet just one God, it's not worth getting too hung up about it. It shows us that God is far more complex than our weenie little brains can comprehend.

But for now, it really is worth noting that without doubt the Holy Spirit is God. In fact, he always has been God. If you turn to the very first lines of the Bible you see the Holy Spirit involved in the creation of the world. Take a look at Genesis 1:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. (Gen 1:1-2)

At creation—way back in the beginning—the Holy Spirit was there, hovering over the watery chaos like a rescue helicopter, ready to put the commands of God into action. The Holy Spirit is God;

he always has been, and he was active from the very beginning.

Not only that, but the Holy Spirit is also a person and he's personal. Just as God the Father is personal, so the Holy Spirit is personal. He's not some strange impersonal power like 'the Force' in the *Star Wars* movies. I'm not saying he has a body like a person—he is called the Holy *Spirit*, after all. But he has personal qualities like intelligence and emotions. The New Testament tells us he can be resisted, grieved or saddened, and he can be lied to. He also does personal things like teach, comfort and guide us. It is interesting to see how Jesus describes the Holy Spirit to the disciples:

“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever—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.” (John 14:16-17)

Notice that Jesus calls the Holy Spirit a “Counsellor”, which is a personal kind of word. And he keeps calling the Holy Spirit “him”, not “it”, even though you would normally say “it” in the Greek language that the New Testament is written in. Jesus is making the point that the Holy Spirit is a person, not an impersonal force. The Holy Spirit is a “he”, not an “it”.