

1

The Person

Some people think of the Holy Spirit as no more than a power or force – a kind of divine electricity.

There's a good – but sad – example of this in the Bible (in Acts 8:9-25). A man called Simon, a magician, was impressed by the miracles he saw Philip doing in the name of Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit. Later, when the apostles Peter and John arrived in the same place, he was impressed by their ability to give the Holy Spirit to the new Christians.

He wanted the same power for himself because he was a man impressed by power. In fact, the people had given him a nickname: 'the Great Power'. But what he saw Peter doing was so much more impressive than anything he could do himself. He therefore asked Peter for the ability to give the Holy Spirit

to others and he was prepared to pay for it.

But Peter was not impressed with Simon and this was his response: 'Your heart is not right before God. Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin' (Acts 8:21-23).

Simon's heart was not right with God nor was his mind clear about the Holy Spirit. The power of the Holy Spirit cannot be bought, and the Holy Spirit is more than mere power.

It is, of course, true that the Holy Spirit is powerful. In fact he is all-powerful ('almighty') because he is God.

It is also true that the Holy Spirit is often associated in the Bible with the power of God – for example, in the book of Judges in the Old Testament or in the book of Acts in the New Testament.

And again, it is the Holy Spirit who gives people the power of God in their lives – as Jesus promised his disciples: 'You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you' (Acts 1:8). (In this respect, chapter 8 of this book looks at the Holy Spirit as our Power Source.)

But the Holy Spirit is not mere Power. He is first and foremost a Person.

The Bible shows this clearly...

Jesus himself always referred to the Holy Spirit as 'he' not 'it' – for example in John 16:14, 'He [the Holy Spirit] will bring glory to me [Jesus]', and throughout John chapters 14-16.

THE PERSON

He also called the Holy Spirit the ‘counsellor’ – or ‘comforter’, or ‘helper’. These words translate a very rich word in the language in which the New Testament was originally written (Greek): ‘The Counsellor or Paraclete, from the Greek word “parakletos” (meaning one who gives support), is a helper, adviser, strengthener, encourager, ally, and advocate’ (Packer, CT, p.143).

In fact, Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would be ‘another Counsellor’ (John 14:16) – to replace himself when he had returned to the Father in heaven. How could ‘another Counsellor’ be anything other than personal, another person? Even more significantly, this word translated ‘another’ means ‘another of the same kind’ (as Jesus) not ‘another of a different kind’ – which resolves the matter even more certainly. The Holy Spirit is Jesus’ replacement helper. We might even say he is Jesus’ ‘alter ego’, his ‘other self’. In fact, the Bible can refer to the Holy Spirit as ‘the Spirit of Jesus’ (Acts 16:7, Phil. 1:19). This is because the Holy Spirit comes from Jesus (his gift to believers) and represents all that Jesus is to us now. It is in fact better for us to have the Holy Spirit here and now than it was for the first disciples to have Jesus in the flesh back then – according to Jesus in John 16:7. If this was a replacement of personal with impersonal, this would make no sense.

It is even better to have the personal Holy Spirit with us and in us than to have the personal Jesus walking and talking alongside us – though, as we have said, what the Holy Spirit does is to bring Jesus closer to us and thus make the relationship more personal.

The Bible also shows us the personal nature of the Holy Spirit in other ways.

Perhaps the most striking example of this appears in Ephesians 4:30 where it is written, 'Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God.' It is therefore possible to 'grieve' the Holy Spirit – by the way we live and speak. You can make the Holy Spirit sad, you can hurt his feelings. This is not something you can do to a power or a thing. No matter how much you might curse or even kick your computer when it lets you down, you will not hurt its feelings. It has no feelings, unlike the Holy Spirit who is a person.

In addition, there are many other indications in the Bible that the Holy Spirit is a thinking, speaking, choosing, feeling – and therefore, *personal* – being.

Without question the Bible in general, and Jesus Christ in particular, present the Holy Spirit as a person.

Action points

- When you talk about the Holy Spirit, talk about him in personal terms – 'he', not 'it'. Otherwise you surely dishonour him, as you would dishonour any person by speaking of them impersonally. (It is not that unusual for Christians to fall into the tendency of speaking and thinking of the Holy Spirit as more of a power than a person – in essence, to forget that Christianity is a relationship, not merely a source of strength.)
- Relate to the Holy Spirit as a person, not as a power. When we 'relate' to a television, for example, we obviously relate to a power – which we can control, switch on and off, change channel etc. It is quite acceptable (even necessary) to control a power, but we should not try to

THE PERSON

control a person, especially a divine person. In fact, if we are wise we will want the Holy Spirit to 'control' or 'fill' us, because 'the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace' (Rom. 8:6) and 'where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom' (2 Cor. 3:17). This is to say, if we are wise, we will want the Holy Spirit to be the major influence in our lives and on our minds, for this will mean for us spiritual life, peace and freedom.

- Remember that you can grieve the personal Holy Spirit by the way you live, speak and think (Eph. 4:30 and surrounding verses). 'Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger...' (Eph. 4:31). Alternatively and positively, you can choose to please the Holy Spirit, to make him glad. It's a personal relationship. 'Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other...' (Eph. 4:32). This is good for all your relationships – with other people and with the Holy Spirit. As you can see, the Holy Spirit should directly affect our relationships with other people.

- 'Be very careful, then, how you live' (Eph. 5:15). The word translated 'live' here can also be translated 'walk', as in our daily walk of life. You may remember, as a child, playing 'don't step on the cracks of the pavement' as you walked down the street. You had to be very careful where you stepped or how you walked. The Bible tells us to live with the same kind of care and attention, particularly as we face the challenges and temptations of life. Otherwise, we run the risk of grieving the Holy Spirit and quenching his power within us.