

Ghost

Who is the Spirit?

by Senior Pastor: Bill Couch
Copyright © 2011, Bill Couch. All rights reserved worldwide.
This material may be printed or copied for personal use only.

This morning we begin a series of messages entitled “Ghost”. What comes to your mind when you hear the word “ghost”? The word “ghost” conjures up all kinds of spooky images in our minds. The King James Version of the Bible refers to the Holy Spirit as the Holy Ghost. I think the term “Holy Ghost” made people reluctant to have anything to do with him. The term “Holy Spirit” is not quite as scary, but it is still hard for us to grasp. What is a Spirit—much less a Holy Spirit? It is easy for us to picture Jesus—as God in the flesh--a man who walked on this earth. How do you picture God, the Father? Does he have the face of a kind grandfather? Is he such majestic light that he hurts your eyes? Most of have some image of God, the Father, although those images will be vastly different. But when it comes to the Holy Spirit, do you have a picture that comes to your mind?

Because the Holy Spirit is more difficult for us to grasp, there are some churches that neglect the Holy Spirit—only talk about Jesus and God, the Father. There are other churches that fear the Holy Spirit—they know he exists, but they are afraid that he will interrupt their nicely choreographed worship services with supernatural surprises! There are other churches that are pre-occupied with the Holy Spirit almost to the neglect of Jesus and God the Father. These churches focus on miracles, speaking in tongues and other gifts of the Spirit.

In the scripture we find a balanced approach to the Trinity. There is one God in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Because there is so much confusion about the Holy Spirit, I want to focus on him for the next few weeks.

Jesus gives us a wonderful description of the Holy Spirit and his work in our scripture passage for today.

¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever--
¹⁷ 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.

¹⁸ I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.

¹⁹ Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live.

²⁰ On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.

²¹ Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him."

²² Then Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, "But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?"

²³ Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.

²⁴ He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.

²⁵ "All this I have spoken while still with you.

²⁶ But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you

all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.
John 14:16-26

Who is the Holy Spirit? What does he do? How can I know he is in my life?

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God living in you and working in the world. While the Holy Spirit has important work in the world, this passage primarily talks about the work of the Holy Spirit in us. Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as “he.” The Holy Spirit is not an “it”—not an impersonal energy force. He is a person. Paul tells us in Ephesians 4:30 that we can grieve the Holy Spirit. Hebrews 10:29 tells us that we can insult the Holy Spirit. Romans 15:30 speaks of the love of the Spirit. Those are feeling words. Only a person can grieve, love and be insulted. An impersonal force is not capable of feeling. The Holy Spirit is a person.

The Holy Spirit is God. Jesus said: “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor.” (John 14:16) The Greek word for “another” in this passage means “one just like the former.” Jesus is equating the Holy Spirit with himself. Jesus makes some amazing claims about himself. He says, “I and the Father are one.” “He who has seen me has seen the Father.” Then he says, the Holy Spirit is another person like me. Just as Jesus is fully God, so the Holy Spirit is fully God. The Holy Spirit is a person and he is God.

One God, three persons. Not one God in three forms—wearing three different hats. But One God in three persons. Perplexing, illogical. I appreciate the mystery and wonder the Trinity brings to our experience of God. We cannot put God in a tidy little logical box. He is the infinite, Creator God who is beyond our comprehension. Thank goodness he is bigger than our finite minds could ever dream up.

The Holy Spirit is God in the middle of your life. If you have asked Jesus Christ into your heart, then the Holy Spirit is living in you right now. Many people are not aware of that. If you ask them where Jesus is, they will say: “He lives in my heart.” But if you ask them

where the Holy Spirit is, they will say: "I don't know." Or "He is the Spirit of God that hovers around the universe." Jesus said to his disciples:

"Whoever believes in me...streams of living water will flow from within him."

By this he meant the Spirit...John 7:38-39

When you believe in Jesus Christ, trust in him as your Lord and Savior, the Holy Spirit comes to live inside of you. He is already there. The question is: How do we experience his power and fullness in our lives? How do we let him work in us, on us, and through us? In the following messages we will talk about how to be filled with the Spirit. For today I want you to know that the Holy Spirit lives in you!

Do you have a consciousness of God in your life? Think of someone you would really enjoy coming to visit in your home for three days—perhaps a relative or good friend. You enjoy this person. You look forward to spending time with them. When they are staying with you, you are conscious of their presence all the time. They affect the decisions you make about what you are going to do. Do you include this person and take them along? Do you do activities they would enjoy? Do you avoid things you know they would not enjoy? To be filled with the Holy Spirit is to have him as a permanent resident in our hearts. We have a consciousness that God is always with us and in us. It affects the decisions about where we go and what we do. Would this be something God would enjoy doing with me? Would this be something that would be against God's purposes? To have the Holy Spirit in our lives gives us a God conscious that affects everything we do every day. The Holy Spirit is God. He is a person. And he lives in us.

What does the Holy Spirit do? The Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of Truth. The Holy Spirit is the author of the Bible. Peter tells us that prophets only spoke as they were "carried along by the Holy Spirit." (II Peter 1:21) Paul tells us that all scripture is God-breathed—

breath is another term for the Spirit of God. (II Timothy 3:16) The Holy Spirit reveals the truth about God through his Word. He inspired it. He is available to help us interpret, understand and apply it. Since he lives in us, we can ask him to help us understand the Bible and what we need to know at this time in our lives. We never exhaust the depths of God's Word. The Holy Spirit will reveal to us deeper and deeper truths of God's word as we grow in maturity. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the meaning of his word to you. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth.

Another term that describes the Holy Spirit is the Greek word "paraclete". It is interesting to read different translations and see the different words that are used for the "paraclete." The NIV translation says that the Holy Spirit is a Counselor. The King James version calls him a Comforter. No single English word can capture the fullness of this term. It has two root words: "para" which means "stand along side". And "clete" which means "to argue." The Holy Spirit is literally a legal advocate. He stands in your place representing you. He is totally loyal to you. He is for you in the strongest sense. He makes your case. He defends you against your accusers and enemies. The Holy Spirit has both a hard side and a soft side. He supports you and he does battle for you.

Why would Jesus say that the Holy Spirit is our legal advocate? The Holy Spirit's job is to defend you against the enemy. The enemies outside of you that threaten your life. But especially against the toughest enemies that are inside your own heart.

Paul says in Romans 8:15: ¹⁵ For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." Sometimes our hearts get gripped with fear. Fear can paralyze us and make us unable to deal with life. The Holy Spirit comes and defends us against the spirit of fear. He says to

our hearts remember that God loves you. You are his child. His perfect love can cast out all fear.

Hebrews chapter 12 describes how our hearts can become overwhelmed with suffering and trouble. When we are suffering, it is easy to doubt that God is with us. Or we doubt that he cares for us or this would not be happening in our lives. In those times the Holy Spirit defends us against the spirit of doubt and tells us to “fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.” (Hebrews 12:2) The Holy Spirit gives us power to overcome our doubts.

John tells us there are times when our hearts condemn us. (I John 3:20) Have you ever heard the accuser’s voice in your heart? “God can never accept you. You are not good enough. Who do you think you are? You’ve got to try harder to earn God’s approval. You are so bad, how could God ever forgive you?”

Our hearts do not like grace. We want to earn everything because it puts us in control. If we do the right thing, then we deserve a reward. If we do the wrong thing we deserve punishment. When bad things happen, it is because God is punishing me for something I did wrong. I can control things and change things by doing the right thing and then nothing bad will happen to me. When I operate under the illusion that I can earn God’s approval, eventually I get discouraged. I know deep down that I will never be good enough. My heart condemns me. I’m full of guilt and shame.

The Holy Spirit comes and enlightens our hearts with Truth. Our acceptance from God is by grace alone. He loves us as we are. There is nothing we can do that will cause him to love us more. There is nothing we can do that will cause him to love us less. God’s love cannot be earned or deserved. It is a gift. When our hearts condemn us, we are

seeking God's approval on the basis of what we do. The Holy Spirit reminds us to receive God's approval and love as a gift.

The Holy Spirit also defends us against evil. James 4 says: "Friendship toward the world is hatred toward God." The Spirit of God in you longs for your love. The Holy Spirit watches as you give your heart to the world—to money, or success, or sex, or power. The Holy Spirit knows that if you make those things the source of your worth and meaning in life, they will destroy you. The Holy Spirit confronts you with the truth about these things. He confronts us because he loves us. He confronts the evil in our lives. The Holy Spirit loves us enough to use "tough love" if that is what we need. Often we resist the Spirit. We deny that we have a problem: "I'm not obsessed with work; I'm just very committed to my job." "I can quit gambling or smoking or drinking or over-eating or cussing any time I want to." "I'm not addicted to pornography; I only look at it occasionally." "I'm not materialistic; I just enjoy nice things." We have an Advocate—someone who is on our side. Someone who loves us too much to let us destroy ourselves with self-deception. Someone who battles the evil in our heart. The Holy Spirit is our best friend who will not quit confronting us with the truth until we let go of those things that will destroy us. He is relentless—thank God! He delivers us from evil and bondage to sin.

Who is the Holy Spirit? He is not an "it". He is a Person. He is God. He is the third person of the Trinity—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He is the Spirit of Truth who is available to help you understand God's Word. He is your Comforter, Your Counselor, Your advocate who can deliver you from evil. Do you know that he lives in you? If you have invited Jesus into your heart, the Holy Spirit is inside you right now. Next week we will talk about how we can be filled with the Spirit and appropriate his power for living each day.

Please join me in the "Prayer to the Holy Spirit" from the Emmaus Walk:

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created. And you shall renew the face of the earth. O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy your consolations. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.