

The Holy Spirit (Part 1) – John 16:7-15

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John 16:7-15.

If you were to do some random on-the-street interviews, asking people who the Holy Spirit is, I'm pretty sure you'd get everything from, "I have no idea," to "Some sort of spiritual *force*." Like Star Wars. Obi-Wan Kenobi. Even in churches that's what many people think.

But it's nowhere close to the truth. It sounds good. It works in science fiction. But it's massive understatement. Like calling God a good idea.

The truth, as we've seen in previous passages from chapters 14 and 15, is that the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Three persons, one God. Each fully God, in and of themselves, yet one divine essence. Different in role, yet equal in every way. The Holy Spirit is part of the Trinity.

And the things he does – he, not it; because that's how the Bible refers to him, as a person – the things he does are nothing short of amazing. Remember these?

He gives us life.

He seals us. Unto salvation.

He guarantees our inheritance. In heaven.

He empowers us.

He sanctifies us.

He testifies for us. That we are children of God.

He gives us spiritual gifts. To do the work of ministry.

He guides us.

He convicts us.

He assures us.

He teaches us.

Amazing aspects of his ministry. And vital. And real.

But that's not even it. Jesus isn't done. For the third time in this long discourse he gives us more about the Spirit. Starting in v7.

[7] *Nevertheless* [Jesus says; as in despite your self-absorption and self-pity], *I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away* [that's what he's been telling them], *for if I do not go away, the Helper* [the Holy Spirit] *will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.* (ESV)

We talked about the first part of that verse two weeks ago, and a little bit about the last part. *If I go, I will send him to you.* (7b)

What we haven't talked about, is how that fits with the other "sending" verses we've seen. Like **John 15:26** – "*When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.*"

And before that, **John 14:26** – *The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.*

And before *that*, **John 14:16** – *I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper [send him], to be with you forever.*

Three verses about the Holy Spirit being sent. And a fourth here in v7 – *I will send him to you.*

The question is, how do they mesh? Because there's an issue. Do you see it?

Here in v7 Jesus says – *I will send the Holy Spirit.* But in chapter 14 he says that the *Father* will send him. And in 15:26 it's a combination – *I will send the Spirit, Jesus said, from the Father.* The one who proceeds from the Father.

So which is it? Does God the Father send the Holy Spirit, or God the Son?

Both. Obviously.

The Spirit was sent by both the Father and the Son (John 16:7b; 15:26)

Is that a contradiction? Did we just find the Bible's first error? Not at all. Because they're one. Not just united, but of the same essence. One God comprised of three persons. And what the Father does, the Son does. We saw that back in chapter 5. *Whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.* (19b)

So it's not a contradiction to say that the Spirit was sent by both the Father and the Son because the decisions of one are the decisions of the other. That's the first way to reconcile this "issue."

The second, is to say that the Holy Spirit was sent by Jesus on the Father's behalf. That too would be accurate. He's sent by the Son on behalf of the Father from whom he proceeds.

It would be like a mom and a dad who send their 1st grader to school. *They* do. Even though the Dad isn't home most of the time having already left for work.

Is that a contradiction? A false statement? To say that *both* of them send their child to school?

Not at all. They're one. The mom and dad are of one mind and one heart. So that what the mom does in getting little Johnny out the door, the dad does too. She acts on his behalf. And the child proceeds from their home just like the Spirit proceeds from the Father.

Crisis averted. Issue resolved. The Spirit was sent by both the Father and the Son.

But *most* important about this truth, are the implications. Like the *deity* of the Holy Spirit.

• **It implies that the Holy Spirit is not only from God but fully God**

Or, even more precise, he's from the Father, and fully *God* like the Father. Just because he's sent by the Father.

Look at John 15:26 again. People may hate and reject me, Jesus said – [26] "*But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.*"

The word “proceeds” doesn’t mean he “originated” from the Father, like the Holy Spirit had a beginning or something; but that he’s *of* the Father. Of the same essence. Which means he’s fully God like the Father. Just like the Son is fully God. Because he too came from the Father. He too was sent.

So the implication of the Spirit being sent by both the Father and the Son, is that he’s from God and fully God like the Father and the Son.

And if that feels like a stretch, consider the fact that Peter even *called* the Holy Spirit God. When he spoke to Ananias in Acts 5:4 about *lying* to the Holy Spirit. “*You have not lied to man [he said] but to God.*”

So the implication remains. The fact of the Spirit’s *procession* – that’s the theological word for all this; his procession from the Father and the Son – that fact, implies that he’s fully God.

Which of course is confirmed by what the Spirit *does*. The list I showed you. Things that only God can do. At least from the inside out. He’s fully and equally God.

The problem is . . .

-We often forget about him

He’s from God and fully God, equal in every respect to the Father and Son, but we live and talk like he doesn’t even exist. He’s out of sight out of mind and largely excluded from our thinking. Even disregarded. Persona non grata.

I’ll never forget the prayer of one of our girls early on. She was 3 or 4 years old, and we were kneeling beside her bed at bedtime one night, when she started to pray. And mind you, she couldn’t say her “S’s” yet. They came out as “T’s.”

So she folded her hands and started in, “Dear God, dear Jetut,” and then a long pause. So long that I opened my eyes and looked sideways at her, only to find that she had opened hers to look at me. And when our eyes met, she said, “Who de utter guy?” Dear God, dear Jetut . . . who the utter guy?”

I don’t know if I burst out laughing like I do every time I remember that, but somehow I said, “The Holy Spirit?” And she went right back to praying without missing a beat. “Dear God, dear Jetut, dear Holy Pirit.”

A. Bless her for her trinitarian mindset at such a young age. Biblical through and through, and vital not only for our knowledge of God, but our salvation. No Trinity, no salvation. No Jesus to die in our place, and no Spirit to apply it to our hearts. Bless her.

B. Bless her for so innocently illustrating our *adult* amnesia when it comes to the Holy Spirit. In *our* prayers. *Our* lives. Our mind. Our heart.

Don’t forget him. Make the often, seldom. And never. He’s fully God.

What’s worse . . .

-Sometimes we diminish him

We often forget the Holy Spirit, and even when we don’t, sometimes we diminish him.

Not intentionally but inadvertently. We do. We tend to think a little bit less of the Holy Spirit. Maybe not consciously, but subconsciously.

“*He* didn’t die on the cross, Jesus did. *He* didn’t forgive my sins, the Father did. We don’t pray to *him*, we pray to the Father.” *Our Father who art in heaven*. We don’t lift the *Spirit* high in worship, we worship Jesus. We don’t glorify him, we glorify God. So we end up diminishing the Spirit by default.

Who knows? You might even do so consciously. Thinking that the Spirit is actually *inferior* to the Father. Less than and secondary. Tertiary. Third. Isn’t that how we say it? God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit? He *must* be lesser.

After all, he didn’t send the Father, the Father sent him. He didn’t send the Son, the Son sent him. He *must* be lower on the totem pole.

And yet, nothing could be further from the truth.

Does the Holy Spirit submit to the Father? Yes. Does he follow his plan? Yes. But that doesn’t diminish the Spirit’s standing. That doesn’t reduce his deity. Or decrease his importance. Just like the submission of a wife to her husband doesn’t diminish *her* standing, or *her* equality, or *her* worth.

And yet sometimes we think that way. About both.

But the word *proceeds* doesn’t allow it. Back to John 15:26. The word *proceeds* doesn’t *allow* us to assign a secondary status to the Holy Spirit, because it implies that in being sent, he went of his own volition. His own desire.

It doesn’t say that he came “kicking and screaming” from the Father, but *proceeded* from the Father. Implying that he *wanted* to come. He *wanted* to be sent.

And went accordingly. According to the one will of God, of which he is fully a part. Yes, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit express that will *differently* at times, but it’s still one will. The will of God.

It would be like parents, once again, sending their teenager to the best summer camp in the world. The very thing he *wants* to do. The very place he *wants* to go. Or our church sending a missionary to an unreached people group. The very thing *they* want to do.

Are they technically submitting? Yes. But is it a push? No. Because everybody’s on the same page. There’s one desire to do the same thing. One mind, one heart, one will.

So too with the Spirit. Technically submitting, but of the same mind and same heart as the Father and Son who sent him.

So whatever you do, don’t diminish him. Don’t forget about him, and don’t diminish him.

Now, returning to the main point, that the Spirit was sent by both the Father and the Son, it seems pretty straightforward. Certainly not worthy of dispute or debate. But 1500 years ago those last three words, “and the Son,” created a firestorm.

It's called the "**filioque**" clause. Latin for "**and the Son.**" Latin, because that was the common language when this word was made famous. Or infamous. "Filio" meaning "son," and Q-U-E meaning "and." And the Son. Filioque.

The point being, when that word was used in this context, to say that the Holy Spirit was sent by both the Father *and the Son*, it split the church.

- **It's a doctrine that split the church**

It started in 589AD when a regional church council met in Spain, and made a change to the Nicene Creed. A famous and often used confession of faith over the centuries. Even in our day. And to the extent that such creeds are biblical, they serve a good purpose.

And to *ensure* that they were biblical, church councils edited them from time to time. Changed them. Like the council that changed this particular phrase:

"I believe in the Holy Ghost, The Lord and giver of life, Who proceedeth from the Father *and the Son*, Who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, Who spake by the Prophets."
And the Son.

The original version of the creed, from Nicaea in 325AD, modern day Turkey, didn't have those words. Because *that* council was fighting to uphold the deity of *Christ*. They weren't thinking so much about the Spirit. He was a little bit forgotten.

And the council in Constantinople, 381AD, didn't include it either. Because *they* were trying to protect the primacy of the Father. And worried that saying the Son did something the Father did, like sending the Spirit, would undermine it.

But 250 years later, in Spain, the battle was different. They were not only fighting for the biblical truth that *Jesus* is fully and eternally God, but the Holy Spirit as well. So they added "filioque" to shore it up. Thinking it was an improvement, and that they were of the same mind as the rest of the church.

But the church in the East wasn't having it. They not only thought the word "filioque" undermined the primacy of the *Father*, but that the Spanish church didn't have the right to change the creed in the first place. And they certainly couldn't change the original language from Greek to Latin.

So those three words, "and the Son," *one* word in Latin, created a divide that eventually split the church in 1054AD. And it remains split to this day. Eastern Orthodox on one side, Catholic and Protestant on the other.

And . . .

- **It's a reminder to think biblically**

The fact that the church split over something explicitly biblical is a travesty, and a great big reminder to think biblically first, and theologically second. A great big reminder to let the Bible dictate your theology, not your theology the Bible. Because nobody would disagree with the statement that the Spirit was sent by both the Father and the Son. That's what the text says.

The trouble is what the words in a man-made, non-inspired creed mean. And what the *implications* are theologically. And whether you take your stand on them or on the Bible.

Theologically, the phrase, "proceeds from the Father and the Son," took on a *massive* amount of meaning. Speaking to the eternal nature of the Trinity in times past. And to the relationship between the Son and Holy Spirit in the godhead. Not merely in their roles, but in their nature and being.

All of which is true. The "procession" of the Holy Spirit from the Father speaks to the nature of the Trinity. And the fact that he's sent by Jesus speaks to *that* relationship.

But neither of those things are spoken of explicitly in the Bible. Neither of them are crystal clear. Both of them are theological implications.

So if you take your stand on things like *that* – on theological inferences instead of biblical sentences, on something implied instead of explicit, something questionable instead of clear – you're going to end up majoring on the minors, arguing over words, and separating over speculation. (2 Timothy 2:23)

Think biblically. First and foremost. Stick to the Word. And if the Bible doesn't speak to the issue, or speak clearly to it, hold loosely and show grace.

Summary

That's the first thought I want you to see regarding the Holy Spirit. He was sent by both the Father *and the Son*. Implying that he's not only *from* God but fully God. So don't forget him, and definitely don't diminish him. Think biblically, and stick together.

Prayer – Father, thank you for sending the Spirit to light the flame. The flame of the church and the light of our life. Holy Spirit fall fresh on us and have thine own way. Fill us and move us. Mold us and fuse us. And remind us to think first and foremost according to the Word you inspired. We pray in Jesus' name, amen.

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