

MINISTRIES OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

In our study of the Holy Spirit, we previously gave an admittedly oversimplified description of the ministries of the Three Persons of the Godhead. We said —

- God the father wrote the plan.
- God the Son executes the plan
- God the Holy Spirit reveals the plan

The idea was to make it easier to differentiate the ministries of the Three persons. This description really speaks to the overarching theme of our understanding of the Godhead. That being the plan of God to redeem all that was lost as a result the rebellion of Satan with the fallen angels and Adam and Eve in the Garden. That will conclude with the final punishment of Satan and his fallen angelic beings being exiled forever in the Lake of Fire. Within this master theme, each person of the Godhead has more detailed responsibilities. We will now look at some of those details in regard to the Holy Spirit.

But we should first note something about the relationships of the Three Persons of the Godhead, specifically pertaining to the Holy Spirit.

John 16:13 When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for **he will not speak on his own authority**, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.

Our Lord says, “He shall not speak of his own authority”. He is given what to speak, and we are told it is to glorify Christ. The Spirit does not glorify Himself; He glorifies the Son.

John 16:14 He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you

The Spirit is subordinate to the Father and to the Son, “he will not speak on his own authority”. As we will note in the next passage, Jesus is also subordinate to the Father.

John 14:10 Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you **I do not speak on my own authority**, but the Father who dwells in me does his works

We have a division of the work. The Son says that He has come to glorify the Father, and the Spirit's work is to glorify the Son. Each one reflects the glory of the other.

A good test as to whether we have received the Spirit is to ask ourselves, what do we think of, and what do we know about the Son. Is the Son real to you? If you answer yes, then that is the work of the Spirit. He is always pointing us to the Son.

The Scripture teaches there is this division of labor between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Father is all the fulness of the Godhead invisible, without form, "whom no man has seen, or can see".

1 Tim. 6:16 who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see.

The Son is all the fulness of the Godhead manifested visibly.

Col. 2:9 For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily

And the Spirit is all the fulness of the Godhead acting upon the believer that by His power makes manifest the Father in the image of the Son.

We have a relationship in the Trinity in which all three are coequal and share the same essence, but within that relationship we have some members playing subordinate roles to other members.

About the Ministries of the Holy Spirit

We Christians in this dispensation tend to look back 2,000 years to that Pentecost after the Cross, when the Holy Spirit descended on believers, and we identify that as the beginning of the Church Age and the ministries of the Holy Spirit on earth. Only half of that is true, the beginning of the Church Age part, as we shortly shall see.

Acts 2:1 When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. ²And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. ⁴And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Many believe that the ministry of the Holy Spirit will end at the Rapture when the Church is to be taken up prior to the Tribulation as based on a passage in 2 Thessalonians. That is also only partially true.

2 Thess 2:1 Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, ²not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. ³Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, ⁴who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. ⁵Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? ⁶And you know **what is restraining him** now so that he may be revealed in his time. ⁷For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only **he who now restrains** it will do so **until he is out of the way**. ⁸And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming

In this passage we see references to someone or something that restrains. Many expositors identify this as the Holy Spirit being removed from Earth and His ministry is not functioning during the Tribulation. The removal of this “restraint” allows evil to run rampant for those seven years.

What you are about to find out, among other things, is Pentecost was not the beginning of the ministries of the Holy Spirit, nor will His ministries be completely eliminated during the seven years of the Tribulation.

I have long felt that in our studies the Holy Spirit has taken a “back seat” to the other two persons of the Trinity. We hear so much about God the

Father and Jesus Christ but the Holy Spirit is just sort of there somewhere and lurking in the background. Turns out there is a reason for that. His ministry is not visible in the same sense as that of Jesus. The main ministries of the Holy Spirit are to convict, edify, and glorify Christ. One might look at these three missions and say they could be captured in one word, teach.

John 16:5 But now I am going to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ ⁶ But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. ⁷ Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the **Helper** will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. ⁸ And when he comes, **he will convict the world** concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹ concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; ¹⁰ concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; ¹¹ concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. ¹² “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. ¹³ When the **Spirit of truth** comes, **he will guide you into all the truth**, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. ¹⁴ **He will glorify me**, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you

John 14:26 But 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.

John 15:26 “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.

Clearly, the ministry of the Holy Spirit is focused on teaching or illumination particularly relating to Jesus Christ, but it isn’t limited to that.

Gen 1:1 In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. ² The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the **Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.**

That word translated “hovering” is *rachaph* /raw·**khaf**/ and carries the meaning of like an eagle incubating its eggs in the nest as seen in this Deuteronomy passage from the Song of Moses translated “flutters” in the ESV.

Deut 12:11 Like an eagle that stirs up its nest, that flutters over its young, spreading out its wings, catching them, bearing them on its pinions,

The Holy Spirit shows up in the second verse in the Bible! He was present and operating at creation. God the Father made everything, through the Son, by the Holy Spirit. This is just one and the earliest examples. There are many more, as we shall see.

Common Grace

Common grace is the doctrine of providence, demanding that the power of God be effective in the world of the spiritually dead. While the unbeliever is spiritually dead from birth, the Holy Spirit has several ministries to the world of unbelievers:

- Restraint of sin, human good, and evil for the preservation of human history.
- The ministry of common grace regarding salvation.

Let’s elaborate on that. Common grace is the term applied to those general blessings, which God imparts to all men and women as He pleases, not only to those who are His own, but to all men and women, according to His own will. We might also say that common grace means those general operations of the Holy Spirit in which He exercises a moral influence on the unsaved whereby sin is restrained, order is maintained in social life, and civil righteousness is promoted. We are saying that the Holy Spirit has been operative in this world from the very beginning and He not only influences believers but also has influenced men and women who were never saved and have gone on to perdition. While they were in this life they came under these general, non-saving operations of the Holy Spirit. That is what we call common grace.

John 1:9 The true light, which gives **light to everyone**, was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him

We are mainly interested in the phrase “the true light, which gives light to everyone”. This is a kind of natural light we might call “natural understanding,” that is the light of conscience in every person born into this world. It is one of the operations of the Holy Spirit in common grace. The light comes from Christ, because He is the Head of the human race, but it is the Holy Spirit who puts that light into everyone who is born. This same light also manifests itself in governments, laws, and in “powers that be” as Paul calls them.

Rom 13:1 Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. ²Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. ³For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, ⁴for he is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer. ⁵Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God’s wrath but also for the sake of conscience.

Man did not create governments. God did! And He did it to put restraints on man’s sin natures. Without laws and governments to enforce these restraints the human race would likely have self-destructed long ago. But God restrains bad behavior. Yes, of course, these institutions are often also evil themselves and in the worst imaginable ways, but God has restraints on even that. Example: When Israel failed miserably and slipped into apostasy and idolatry, they were destroyed as a nation by an even more evil nation, which itself was later destroyed. God is perfectly capable of using evil to promote righteousness. Look at verse 4 in the Romans passage above “For he (rulers) is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer”. Even those who are unsaved are under this influence of the Holy Spirit. It is not, however, a saving influence, but it is a part of God’s plan.

Another form of common grace is what we might call public opinion, that is, in this context, a general consensus of opinion related to moral issues.

People who are not Christian at all believe that certain things are wrong and should be prohibited, that other things are right and should be encouraged. All cultures have some sense of right and wrong, and that is a manifestation of common grace.

Part of culture is the arts and sciences, the things of the mind, science, literature, architecture, art, music, etc. While we say the arts are good, they are not redemptive, but they improve people. They encourage them to live better lives. How do you explain people like Shakespeare or Michelangelo? These people were given gifts and were able to exercise them as the result of this general influence of the Holy Spirit we call the operation of common grace.

People tend to glory in great writers, artists, or musicians as if they were responsible for their own abilities, but they are not. These artists had only what they had received. All these gifts that man and women have come from God. What is wrong with culture is not the thing itself, it is rather that people give their worship, their praise and adoration to those men and women who have produced the works rather than to the God who enabled them to do it. God dispenses these gifts on humanity as a whole.

Matt 5:45 ... For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

The God who sends rain and sunshine also gives bountiful harvests to the evil farmer as well as to the Christian farmer. He dispenses artistic and scientific gifts in exactly the same way, indiscriminately, to both the bad and the good, the saved and the unsaved, as He so determines. That is a work of the Holy Spirit in common grace.

Isa 45:7 I form light and create darkness; I make well-being and create calamity; I am the Lord, who does all these things.

This doesn't mean that God is the author of sin, nor that He is the author of evil, but that He is the author of the evil consequences that follow certain actions. He controls everything. It is the Holy Spirit who sees to it that certain actions lead to certain painful and evil consequences. What the righteousness of God approves, the justice of God blesses. What the righteousness of God condemns, the justice of God disciplines. Those, then, are some of the ways in which common grace manifests itself.

But how can the world go on living in sin? The answer is it is the Spirit who prolongs human life. “The goodness of God,” says Paul in Romans 2:4, “leadeth thee to repentance.” Peter says the same thing in his second epistle: “The Lord ... is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). God is patient, and He keeps the world going by the Holy Spirit instead of pronouncing final judgment.

Gen 6:1 When man began to multiply on the face of the land and daughters were born to them, ² the sons of God saw that the daughters of man were attractive. And they took as their wives any they chose. ³ Then the Lord said, “My Spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he is flesh: his days shall be 120 years.”

This passage is the warning that preceded the Flood in the time of Noah. Some Bibles translate “abide in man forever” as “stride with man”. It means a time was coming when instead of keeping men and women alive, in spite of their sin, God would stop and the flood would come and they would all be destroyed. The Hebrew word is *duwn* /deen/ and means to judge, contend, or plead a case. The abiding/striding/pleading means “keeping in existence” or “keeping going”. It also means that God was pleading through His Spirit, trying to get men and women to see the enormity of their sins and of their actions before it was too late. You find the same idea in Stephen’s sermon recorded in the seventh chapter of Acts. He says, ‘Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost’ (Acts 7:51). The Holy Spirit is there with this general work of conviction, but people resist it instead of yielding to it. God was saying, “I have been patient with man and his sins, but I will not be patient forever.”

Rom 1:26 For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; ²⁷ and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. ²⁸ And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. ²⁹ They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, ³⁰ slanderers, haters of God, insolent,

haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, ³¹ foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. ³² Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

Verse 1 "God gave them up to dishonorable passions". Up to a point, God, by the Holy Spirit, restrains men and women from these "dishonorable passions," and that is why the world is not always as bad as it could be. God, through the Holy Spirit, restrains the foulest manifestations of sin, but there are times when He gives people up to them. Compare the twenty-first century with the nineteenth. It is obvious that the morality of today is much lower than 200 years ago. Not everybody was a Christian in the Victorian era, but it does mean that even people who were not Christians were generally better men and women than people are now. Why? It was because of the general influence of the Holy Spirit. And we must ask ourselves is God today giving us over to our "dishonorable passions"?

We must conclude that through the common grace operation of the Holy Spirit that God does restrain men and women including the unsaved. God has appointed governments, authorities, magistrates and powers to keep sin within bounds. Though God knows that there are certain people in the world who will never be saved, He does not allow them to live just as they please and give a much fuller manifestation to sin; He restrains it in them.

We would say there is a general sense of morality and right even in the religions of the world. We all know many people who are religious but who are not Christian in our sense of the term, but you have got to grant that they are "religious". That is nothing but common grace in action. It is one of God's ways of restraining sin. Every sense of morality and rightness and religion, the belief in goodness, beauty and truth, such as you have in the Greek philosophers, is all the result of the operation of the Holy Spirit. Paul puts it clearly in Romans 2:14.

Rom 2:14 For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. ¹⁵ They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them.

2 Thess 2:3 ... the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, ⁴ who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. ⁵ Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? ⁶ And you know what is **restraining** him now so that he may be revealed in his time. ⁷ For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only **he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way.** ⁸ And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming.

If we understand the ministry of the Holy Spirit in common grace, this passage becomes a lot clearer. Many say it means the Holy Spirit is removed with the Rapture of the Church. Others argue it refers to the Church itself that is the restrainer that is removed. True, the Church with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and its influence will be absent during the Tribulation. But imagine, for a moment, what this world will be like with governments broken and at war all with fallen man having been completely “given over to dishonorable passions” by God and allowed to run completely unrestrained. It will not be pretty. In view of the utter horrors of the Tribulation, which is said to be as never before witnessed on Earth, I would suggest the restraint that is lifted is the general restraining of sin part of the common grace of the Holy Spirit along with the lost impact of the true Church.

More Common Grace – Efficacious Grace

Man is born spiritually dead and remains so forever unless he is born again. Thus, we are spiritually dead when we hear the Gospel. The total helplessness of the spiritually dead person is divided into two categories:

- The inability to understand what is heard in the Gospel
- And the ineffectuality of faith in Christ.

Spiritual death means total inability to do anything by which we can enter into an eternal relationship with God. Being spiritually dead, we cannot even understand what we hear as unbelievers. Therefore, without the ministry of God the Holy Spirit in common and efficacious grace, none of us would have eternal salvation.

But God the Holy Spirit, in His matchless grace, comes to our rescue. First, He makes the Gospel clear to us. This is common grace. Then He makes our faith in Christ effectual, giving life to our faith. This is efficacious grace. Efficacious grace is the enabling power of the Holy Spirit to the believer in Christ in the work of the Holy Spirit enabling the believer to have an effective faith in Christ as Savior.

1 Cor 2:14 The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

The “natural man” is, of course, one who is unsaved and born dichotomous without a human spirit (or as some believe a spiritually dead human spirit). Such a person cannot understand spiritual matters, because they are spiritually discerned. They seem to be “folly” to him. That word folly is *moria* /*mo·ree·ah*/, which means foolishness. I am sure most of us have indeed encountered responses from some, with whom we attempted to share the Gospel, that indicate they think we are just some kind of “religious nutcase”. Maybe they don’t say it, but you know they are thinking it. The Gospel is foolishness to them. They may academically grasp what you are saying, but the real meaning and implications are not truly understood, much less appreciated and accepted. The reason they don’t get it is because they lack a human spirit, and it is the human spirit that communicates with the Holy Spirit. The lost person is not able to acquire understanding, because the Gospel is investigated spiritually.

In the function of common grace, God the Holy Spirit acts as a human spirit to enable the spiritually dead unbeliever to comprehend the Gospel. The unbeliever may hear the Gospel, but he must be willing to *listen* to the Gospel for common grace to function. He must have an open mind to the Gospel message rather than a completely negative mindset that regards you as a “religious nut” and what you are telling him is foolishness. The positive volition of the unbeliever provides the non-meritorious willingness to listen, while God the Holy Spirit provides understanding of the details of the message.

These two enabling ministries of the Holy Spirit in evangelism are compared to breathing.

- The **inhale**: the unbeliever listens to the Gospel, while the Holy Spirit makes it perspicuous.
- The **exhale**: the unbeliever believes in Christ, and the Holy Spirit under efficacious grace, makes faith effectual.

At the point of faith in Christ, the unbeliever makes a non-meritorious decision to believe in Christ. But because this faith comes from one who is spiritually dead, God the Holy Spirit must make the faith effectual; this is the doctrine of efficacious grace. Without this ministry of the Holy Spirit, there is no validity in the faith of an unbeliever. There is nothing valid in what an unbeliever does or thinks as far as relationship with God is concerned. But the Holy Spirit makes this faith effectual in every case!

From the human viewpoint, we simply believe in Christ for salvation. From the divine viewpoint, the very second we believe, God the Holy Spirit makes that faith effectual; He carries us into salvation.

Back to that Genesis 6 passage ...

Gen 6:1 When man began to multiply on the face of the land and daughters were born to them, ² the sons of God saw that the daughters of man were attractive. And they took as their wives any they chose. ³ Then the Lord said, "My Spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he is flesh: his days shall be 120 years."

We have previously looked at this passage and seen that some Bibles translate "abide in man forever" as "stride with man". The Hebrew word means to judge, contend, plead a case. It also means that God was pleading through His Spirit, trying to get men and women to see the enormity of their sins and of their actions before it was too late. Stephen, in Acts, says, "Ye do always resist the Holy Spirit" (Acts 7:51). The Holy Spirit is there with this general work of conviction, but people resist it instead of yielding to it.

The idea here is the Spirit is not "striving," (as per the King James Version), but making lucid and clarifying Gospel information. Note the 120 years in the Genesis passage: God has His limits. As long as you're alive, the Spirit will "abide/strive" with you. In other words, you have the chance to believe in Christ as long as you're alive. If you die without doing so, you will go to hell.

John 16:5 But now I am going to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' ⁶ But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. ⁷ Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the **Helper** will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. ⁸ And when he comes, **he will convict the world** concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹ concerning **sin, because they do not believe in me;** ¹⁰ concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; ¹¹ concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. ¹² "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. ¹³ When the **Spirit of truth** comes, **he will guide you into all the truth**, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. ¹⁴ **He will glorify me**, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you

Revisiting this passage once again, let's look at Verse 8-9, "And when he comes, **he will convict the world** concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹ concerning **sin, because they do not believe in me.**"

Verse 9 explains the meaning of "sin" in verse 8; don't divorce the two. Personal sin is not the issue in the Gospel. It is only an issue in total depravity. There is only one sin for which Christ could not die: disbelief in His person and work on the Cross. The idea of "repenting of sin" has nothing to do with the Gospel presentation. Unbelievers repent of their sins and are sometimes reformed, but they are still not saved. Before you were saved, did you not have moments of regret and disgust with yourself concerning your sinful behavior, and have such long before you came to believing the message of the Gospel? I did decades before I understood salvation and trusted that Christ had solved the problem for me, but I wasn't saved at any of those moments of repentance in my past.

This will freak some of you out, but **repentance is not an issue in salvation**, at least not in the sense that some believe it is. Yes, there are passages that call for repentance associated with salvation. Here are just a few for illustration:

Mark 1:15 ...repent and believe in the gospel."

Luke 13:3 No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish

Acts 2:38 And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Repent simply means to have a change of mind about something. But the repentance called for here is a change of mind, not about your sins, but about how you feel about the work of Christ on the Cross. You don't believe in what He did on the Cross was sufficient to save you? Then repent (**change your mind**) and believe it can save you.

You are more than welcome to feel bad about our sins and hate them, most of us do and there is nothing wrong with that, but it is **not** a condition for salvation. “Changing your mind” about Christ most certainly is. The issue is faith or lack of faith in what Christ did on the Cross.

John 3:18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

There is no mention of repentance here. Go back and read the passage. John doesn't say you must repent to be saved. And yet he says ...

John 20:31 ...but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Read the whole Gospel of John and you won't find repentance mentioned.

Sins are not even the issue at the Last Judgment, but the human good which the unbeliever tries to substitute for faith in Christ (Book of Works) is. Only something that was not judged at the Cross could be used as the basis for condemnation at the last judgment. That something is not the unbeliever's personal sins, since they were judged on the Cross, but it is his human good some will claim in the absence of faith in Christ. Plus+R cannot ever accept Minus-R.