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Before Pentecost

Through the Scriptures we receive knowledge we could receive in no other way. One of the supremely important revelations of the Bible is the nature of God. The Bible unfolds a mystery that we could know through no other source. The mystery is that God is both one and yet more than one; three persons, yet one God. The three persons revealed in Scripture are the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This book will deal with the Holy Spirit.

One of the most profound and distinctive revelations of the whole Bible is that of the person and the work of the Holy Spirit. The first thing we must understand is that the Holy Spirit is Himself a person, just as much as the Father and the Son. Because of human parallels, it is comparatively easy for us to realize that God the Father is a person and God the Son is a person, but it is not as easy to realize that God the Holy Spirit is a person.

Through the Holy Spirit, God knows everything, there is nothing hidden from God; and through the Holy Spirit, God is present everywhere at the same time. These two characteristics are represented by the theological terms omniscient and omnipresent, respectively. This is unfolded in various passages of Scripture. For instance, in Jeremiah 23:23–24, the Lord says:

²³“Am I only a God nearby,”

declares the LORD,

“and not a God far away?

²⁴“Can anyone hide in secret places

so that I cannot see him?”

declares the LORD.

“Do not I fill heaven and earth?”
declares the LORD.
(NIV)

God fills heaven and earth. There is no place where God is not. There is no place where things happen that God does not know about them. This is very beautifully unfolded in the opening verses of Psalm 139:

¹O Lord, you have searched me
and you know me.
²You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.
³You discern my going out and my lying down;
you are familiar with all my ways.
⁴Before a word is on my tongue
you know it completely, O LORD.
⁵You hem me in, behind and before;
you have laid your hand upon me.
⁶Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too lofty for me to attain.
⁷Where can I go from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?
⁸If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.
⁹If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,
¹⁰even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast.
¹¹If I say, “Surely the darkness will hide me
and the light become night around me,”

¹²even the darkness will not be dark to you;
the night will shine like the day,
for darkness is as light to you.

(NIV)

What beautiful language! What a wonderful unfolding of the greatness of the wisdom of God. God's presence permeates the entire universe. There is nowhere that you can go to be hidden from God. No distance can separate you from Him. No darkness can hide you from Him. God is everywhere, throughout the entire universe. He knows all that is happening in every place.

The key that unfolds the secret is in the seventh verse, where the psalmist says: "*Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?*" This is a typical example of Hebrew poetry, where the two halves of the verse say essentially the same thing. God's presence throughout the universe is His Holy Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit, God is present everywhere; and through the Holy Spirit, God knows all that is going on in the universe at any time.

The Holy Spirit has been active in the universe from creation onwards. The psalmist tells us about the actual process of creation:

⁶By the word of the LORD the heavens were made,
And by the breath of His mouth all their host.

(Psalm 33:6 NAS)

Where the English translation says "breath," the Hebrew says, literally, "spirit." That would change the reading to: "*By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the 'spirit' of His mouth all their host.*" In other words, the two great agents of creation which brought the whole universe into being were the word of the Lord and the Spirit of the Lord, or the Holy Spirit. If we turn back to the verses at the beginning of the Bible which describe creation, we see this unfolded in greater detail.

Genesis 1:2–3 reads:

²Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

³And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.

(NIV)

The presence of the Spirit of God was there in the formless darkness, in the void, in the waste. The word “*hovering*” suggests a bird. Many times in Scripture, the Holy Spirit is identified as being the heavenly dove. Here we have heaven’s dove, the Holy Spirit, hovering over the dark, formless waste of waters.

Verse three says: “*And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.*” Here again are the two agents of creation: the Spirit of God and the word of God. When they are united, creation takes place. When the Spirit of God and the word of God are there, then a new thing—in this case light—is created. Light comes into being, formed by the Spirit and by the word of God. You can see that the Holy Spirit has been at work in the universe from creation onwards and has always been present everywhere in the universe. In a sense, the Holy Spirit is the active, effective agent of the Godhead.

The Holy Spirit inspired and empowered all the men of God in the Old Testament. The list is too long to give all the names, but we will consider several examples.

The first one is Bezalel, the man who designed and created the ark and all the furniture for the tabernacle of Moses. The Lord is speaking in Exodus 31:2–3:

²“See, I have chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah,

³and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts. . . .”

(NIV)

It was the Spirit of God filling Bezalel that gave him the ability to produce such outstanding creative workmanship. It always impresses me that he is the first man in Scripture of whom it was said that he was filled with the Spirit of God. The result, in his case, was craftsmanship. That gives a very high value to craftsmanship.

In Deuteronomy 34:9, we read about Joshua:

⁹Now Joshua son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom [that's another way of saying the Spirit of God] because Moses had laid his hands on him. So the Israelites listened to [Joshua] and did what the LORD had commanded Moses.

(NIV)

Joshua was the great military leader who conquered the Promised Land, and he did it because he was filled with the Spirit of God.

In Judges 6:34, we read about Gideon:

³⁴Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet, summoning the Abiezrites to follow him.

(NIV)

The Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon and made him the mighty leader that he was. Before that, he was a timid young man, cowering at the winepress, unable to do anything effective. But he was changed by the Spirit of God coming upon him.

Then we read about David, the great king and psalmist, in 2 Samuel 23:1–2. This

is what David says:

¹Now these are the last words of David. David the son of Jesse declares, And the man who was raised on high declares, The anointed of the God of Jacob, And the sweet psalmist of Israel,
²“The Spirit of the LORD spoke by me, And His word was on my tongue.”

(NAS)

David gave us those beautiful psalms because “*The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me . . . His word was on my tongue.*” Notice again, it is the Spirit of God and the word of God.

In 2 Peter 1:21, Peter sums up the ministry of all the Old Testament prophets when he says:

²¹For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

(NIV)

Every prophet who brought a true message from God never spoke out of his own initiative or from his own thinking, reasoning or understanding; but he was inspired (prompted or carried along) by the Holy Spirit. That made his message more than human; it became a message from God Himself.

As we look at the examples of these and many other men, we come to the conclusion that all the Old Testament men who served God acceptably and effectively did so solely through the power and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Surely, this is a lesson for us. If they were unable to effectively serve God without the Holy Spirit, neither can we.