Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Holy Spirit

The Personality and Deity of the Holy Spirit

There seem to be among many professing Christians — some of them leaders and teachers, past and present, — those who fail to recognize and acknowledge the personality and deity of the Holy Spirit. Among these was Charles Taze Russell, the founder of the Jehovah’s Witnesses.

Obviously, this is a very important subject. The Holy Spirit is either a person and one of the “Godhead,” or he is not. The doctrine of the personality of the Holy Spirit is of the highest importance from the practical standpoint. If we think of the Holy Spirit only as an impersonal power or influence, then our thought will constantly be, ‘How can I get hold of and use the Holy Spirit’; but if we think of him in the biblical way, as a divine Person, infinitely wise, infinitely holy, infinitely tender, then our thought will constantly be, ‘How can the Holy Spirit get hold of and use me?’

Before taking up the various lines of truth in proof of the personality and deity of the Holy Spirit, we shall cite a few clear quotations from Millennial Dawnism (1) showing its denial of this fundamental Bible truth.

After quoting some scripture texts containing the words “Holy Spirit” or “Spirit,” Russell says:

“It is impossible to harmonize these various statements with the ordinary idea of a third God; but it is entirely consistent with everyone of them to understand these various expressions as descriptive of the spirit, disposition and power of one God, our Father.” —Studies in the Scriptures, Series V, p. 168.

Commenting upon Jesus’ promise of the “comforter,” the “Spirit of truth,” the “Holy Ghost,” as recorded in John 14: 16, 17, 26, Elder Russell says:

“The passage has no reference whatever to a person, but to the influence of the truth,
and the effect of the same upon the Lord's people.” — p. 170.

"There is absolutely no ground whatever for thinking of or speaking of the Holy Spirit as another God, distinct in personality from the Father and the Son." — p. 169.

“So, then, let us not overlook the fact that the use of the personal pronouns does not prove the holy Spirit of God to be another person from the Father and the Son — another God. The holy Spirit or influence is the Father's spirit or influence, and the Son's also.” — p. 172. The promise of being “filled with the Spirit” or mind of God.” — p. 205.

He also speaks of acquiring “more and more of the holy Spirit” (page 185), and says that “we must eat the Word of God, if we would derive his Spirit from it.” — p. 225. “Now we have received the Spirit [mind, disposition or will] of God.” — p. 202.

This above citations should be sufficient to see Russell’s position clearly. To him there is no personal Holy Spirit. It is only “mind,” “will,” “disposition,” “influence.” The disciples had received and eaten the word of God, had followed right along with Christ during his ministry on earth, and yet he must “go away” before this “holy mind” or “influence” could affect them. Imagine God curbing or “cornering” this “mind,” or “influence,” some place, and preventing it from emanating as a natural consequence of Christ’s presence and of his mighty works! The idea of a mere blind, impersonal influence’s being “sent forth” at a definite time, under specific conditions, and into particular persons, instantaneously, is ridiculous.

There are four lines of proof in the Bible that the Holy Spirit is a person.

The Characteristics of the Holy Spirit

1. All the distinctive characteristics of personality are ascribed to the Holy Spirit in the Bible.

These are knowledge, feeling, will, mind, love, intelligence, goodness, grief. Any being who knows and feels and wills is a person. When we speak of the personality of the Holy Spirit some people think we mean that the Spirit has hands, feet, eyes, nose, and so on; but these are the marks, not of personality, but of corporeity. When we speak of the Holy Spirit as a person, we mean that he is not a mere influence or power that God sends into our lives, but that he is a Being who knows and feels and wills. These characteristics are ascribed to the Holy Spirit over and over again in the Bible.

Knowledge. — Does the Holy Spirit have knowledge? Yes. In I Cor. 2: 10-11, we read, “God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For what person knows a man’s thoughts except the spirit of the man which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.”

The Holy Spirit is not merely an illumination that comes into our minds, but he is a Being who comes into our hearts, and reveals to us the deep things of God. “But the Counselor, 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 14:26).

Will. — “All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills” (1 Cor. 12:11). Here “will” is ascribed to the Holy Spirit. We receive gifts according to the will of the Spirit; that is, as we consecrate ourselves to work for God the Holy Spirit imparts to us gifts according to His will. No, we can never get and use the Holy Spirit according to our own foolish wills; we must make a complete surrender of ourselves to the Father, and let him send the Comforter into our hearts, who will work in and through us according to his good pleasure.

Mind. — The Holy Spirit has a mind. “And he who searches the hearts of men knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God” (Rom. 8:27). Russell applies the word “mind” here to the man — the spirit of the man. Well, if the spirit of man has a mind, then it is certain that the Spirit of God also has a mind. But we beg to differ from the Russell’s interpretation. It is God who “searches the hearts”; hence He knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because He (i.e., the Spirit) “makes intercession for the saints.” This can not be said of the spirit of man. The spirit of man can not “make intercession for the saints according to the will of God,” for man does not know the will of God concerning the saints, but the Holy Spirit does know, and he knows God’s will in a universal sense. An impersonal influence has no intelligence, and hence can have no “mind.”

Intelligence and Goodness. — “Thou gavest thy good Spirit to instruct them, and didst not withhold thy manna from their mouth, and gavest them water for their thirst” (Neh. 9:20). Here intelligence and goodness are ascribed to the Holy Spirit. This does not add any new thought to what has been said, but I bring it forth as additional testimony, and to show that the idea of this personality was established in the minds of the Old Testament writers. True, it was not so fully developed then as in New Testament times; but this weighs nothing on the negative side, for there are many revealed New Testament truths which were more or less obscure in Old Testament times.

Grief. — “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in whom you were sealed for the day of redemption” (Eph. 4:30). The Holy Spirit is a person who comes to dwell in our hearts; He knows every thought, word, and action, and can be grieved at any unholy conduct. A blind influence has no knowledge, and therefore can feel no sense of grief. The Holy Spirit is a distinct personality; for this reason He is frequently referred to in the Bible. “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God (1 Cor. 6:19). These words strongly imply personality. Stephen, as he was being stoned, looked into heaven and saw Jesus standing on the right hand of God. But it is said of Stephen that he was full of the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:5). We should be careful how we live before God, for His Spirit dwells in us and we are commanded to “grieve” Him not.

The Acts of the Spirit

2. Many acts that only a person can perform are ascribed to the Holy Spirit.

Speaking and Praying. — “It is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you” (Matt.10:20). Here speech is ascribed to the Holy Spirit. The disciples were told that when they should be brought before magistrates, they should not try to rehearse their answers; for, said Jesus, the Spirit will speak through you. Again, “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do