

Who Is the Holy Spirit?

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R. C. SPROUL

Who Is the Holy Spirit?

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Preface

When I became a Christian in September of 1957, I found myself in a serious quandary. I was engaged to be married, but when I told my fiancée about my conversion, she thought I had lost my mind. That was upsetting enough, but I was also learning that I should not marry a nonbeliever, and so I began to wonder whether I would be able to marry the woman I loved. Several months passed with no resolution of this dilemma.

Finally, spring break approached. My fiancée was planning to go home to Pittsburgh from the college where she was studying, and I persuaded her to stop at my college,

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attend a campus Bible study with me, and then spend the night in the girls' dorm. I cannot remember anything for which I spent more time praying. I spent virtually the whole day before she arrived on my knees, praying that God would work in her life. I came to the conclusion that if she did not soon become a Christian, I would have to break the engagement, as much as I did not want to do so.

We went to the Bible study that night and she sat through the whole thing without saying a word. Afterward, I took her to the girls' dorm, and she was still very quiet. However, the next morning, when I went to meet her, she came out as if she were walking on air. She told me that she had had a hard time sleeping because something had happened to her the night before. She kept waking up in the night, pinching herself, and asking, "Do I still have it?" Each time she told herself, "Yes, I still have it," and went back to sleep. She had been converted to Christ through the study of the Scriptures the night before.

One of my clearest memories of that wonderful morning is of the moment when we were getting into my car. As she was telling me about her experience, she looked at me with great excitement and said, "Now I know who

the Holy Spirit is.” Of course, she had attended church for years. She had heard the Holy Spirit mentioned. She had heard the benediction pronounced in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. But now, for the first time, she had a sense of who the Spirit really is.

That statement of my fiancée, who is now my wife, was very significant. Notice that she said, “Now I know *who* the Holy Spirit is,” not, “Now I know *what* the Holy Spirit is.” In her conversion, she made a transition from understanding Christianity in an abstract sense to understanding it as a personal relationship with God. And one of the first truths she grasped was that the Holy Spirit is a person, not a thing.

It is exceedingly important that Christians know who the Holy Spirit is and understand something of the vital role He plays in their lives. That is why I have written this booklet. Of course, the biblical teaching on the Holy Spirit is far too extensive to be covered adequately in a volume of this size. My purpose in this booklet is to simply provide the most basic of answers to the question of who the Spirit is and then to touch briefly on some of the important roles He plays in the lives of believers. For

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a fuller treatment, I encourage you to see my book *The Mystery of the Holy Spirit*.

I pray this short treatise on the Spirit will draw you into a deeper relationship with the God you love and serve, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Chapter One

The Third Person

As Christians, we embrace a historic formula about God's being. We say, "God is One in essence and three in person." In other words, God is triune; He is a Trinity. This means there are three persons within the Godhead. These persons are understood in theology as distinct characters. The differences among the three, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, are real differences but not essential differences. In other words, there is only one essence to the Godhead, not three. In our experience as

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human beings, each person we meet is a separate being. One person means one being, and vice versa. But in the Godhead, there is one being with three persons. We must maintain this distinction lest we slip into a form of polytheism, seeing the three persons of the Godhead as three beings who are three separate gods.

None of us can plumb the depths of the Trinity comprehensively, but we can take some small steps to understand it better. The words *existence* and *subsistence* can help us here.

Existence and Subsistence

One of the games I used to play with my seminary students was to ask them, “Does God exist?” They would say, “Of course God exists.” I would then say, “No, God does not exist,” and it was always fun to see the looks of horror that would appear on their faces as they began to wonder whether their professor had abandoned Christianity and given up his faith. But I quickly had mercy on them and explained that I was playing a little philosophy game by asserting that God does not exist.

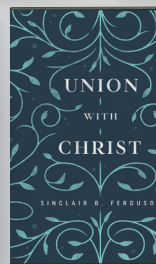
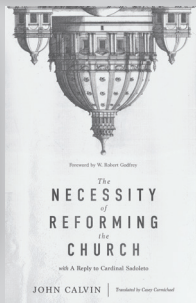
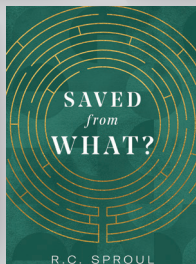
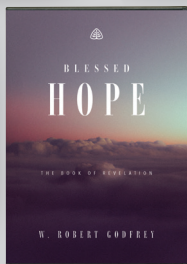
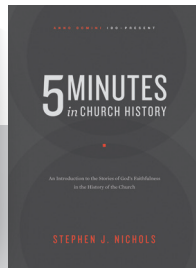
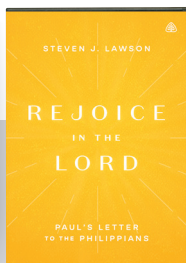
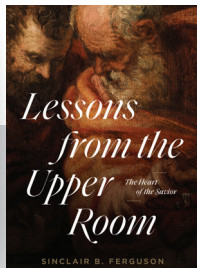
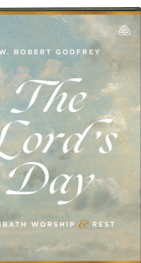
The word *exist* comes from the Latin *existare*, which

means “to stand out of.” So the word *exist* literally means “to stand out.” That does not necessarily mean that if you exist you are outstanding at what you do. The obvious question is, of what does an existing being stand out?

The idea of existence has its roots in ancient philosophy, when the philosophers were very concerned with the question of being. We also are concerned with this question; in fact, when we make a distinction between God and ourselves, we identify Him as the Supreme Being and ourselves as human beings. However, that distinction is a bit misleading. Both descriptions use the word *being*, so we look to the adjectival qualifiers to find the difference between God and ourselves: He is supreme and we are human. In reality, the big difference between God and man is being itself. God is pure being, a being who has His life in and of Himself eternally. A human being is a creature, a being whose very existence from moment to moment depends on the power of the Supreme Being. God’s being is not dependent on anything or derived from anything. He has the power to be in and of Himself.

When the old philosophers talked about existence, using the Latin word meaning “to stand out of,” they were saying that to exist means to stand out of being. What does

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