

The Holy Spirit

Week 1: A Divine Person, Not a Force -- Acts 5:1–11; John 16:7–15

Picture the young church in Jerusalem in its first bright days. Believers are selling fields and laying the money at the apostles' feet, not because anyone demanded it, but because love had loosened their grip on everything they owned. Into that warmth walk a husband and wife named Ananias and Sapphira, carrying part of the price of a field and a carefully rehearsed lie. They want the reputation of generosity without the cost of it. And Peter, looking at Ananias, asks a question that should stop every reader in mid-sentence: "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?" Then he adds the line that anchors this entire study: "You have not lied to man but to God."

Notice what Peter did not say. He did not say Ananias had misused a power or abused an energy. You cannot lie to electricity. You cannot deceive a wind or insult an influence. Lying requires a someone, a person with a mind that can know the truth and be told a falsehood. In one breath Peter tells us that the Holy Spirit is a person who can be lied to, and that this person is God Himself. The first lesson the church ever learned about taking the Spirit lightly was a funeral. Two funerals, actually, three hours apart.

Jesus had already prepared His apostles for this truth. On the night before the cross, He promised them "another Helper," the Spirit of truth, and He spoke of Him the way you speak of a person you know and love: He will teach you, He will guide you, He will speak, He will hear, He will glorify Me. Jesus did not describe a force field. He described a Friend who would take His place at their side, so really and personally present that Jesus could say it was to their advantage that He go away.

Much of the religious world has lost this. Some have reduced the Spirit to an impersonal "active force," a kind of divine electricity God plugs in when He needs work done. Others speak of Him so casually that He becomes a feeling, a mood in a worship service, a tingle down the spine. This week we begin where the Bible begins, with the Spirit as He actually is: a divine person, fully God, who speaks and teaches and wills, who can be lied to, grieved, and resisted, and who deserves the same reverence we give the Father and the Son. Before we study what the Spirit does, we must meet who the Spirit is.

Group Discussion: When you hear people talk about the Holy Spirit, what words and images do they tend to use? Why do you think so many people, even sincere believers, find it easier to think of the Spirit as a power or an influence than as a divine person?

Personal Reflection: Be honest about your own heart for a moment. When you pray, when you worship, when you read your Bible, do you think of the Holy Spirit as a someone or a something? What might change in your reverence and your daily walk if you truly believed a divine person was involved in your life?

Read Acts 5:1–11; John 16:7–15

Study Questions

1. In Acts 5:3–4, Peter says Ananias lied “to the Holy Spirit” and then says, “You have not lied to man but to God.” What do these two statements, side by side, teach us about the Holy Spirit? Why is it impossible to lie to an impersonal force?
2. Ananias and Sapphira wanted to look more generous than they really were, and they assumed the Spirit either would not notice or did not matter. Where are you most tempted to manage your reputation before people while forgetting that the Spirit of God sees the real ledger? What would change if His presence felt as real to you as Peter’s gaze felt to Ananias?
3. In John 16:7–15, Jesus says the Helper will convict, guide, speak, hear, declare, and glorify. List the personal actions Jesus attributes to the Spirit in this passage and in John 14:26. What kind of being do these verbs require? Could they honestly be said of a force or a power?
4. Jesus told the apostles it was to their advantage that He go away so the Helper would come (John 16:7). The apostles had walked beside Jesus for three years, yet Jesus says they would not be left worse off. When have you felt that God was distant or that you were on your own? How does the coming of the Helper speak to that fear?
5. Jesus calls the Spirit “another Helper” (John 14:16) and consistently uses personal pronouns of Him, “He will guide you,” “He will glorify me.” What does the word “another” suggest about the relationship between the Spirit and Jesus, and why does it matter that Jesus speaks of the Spirit as “He” and not “it”?
6. Scripture says the Spirit can be grieved (Ephesians 4:30) and resisted (Acts 7:51). Only a person who loves can be grieved. What does it do to your view of sin to realize that your

choices do not merely break a rule but grieve a divine person who dwells with God's people? Name one specific habit or attitude in your life that this truth puts in a new light.

7. Looking across the New Testament, the Spirit speaks (Acts 13:2), teaches (John 14:26), wills (1 Corinthians 12:11), and intercedes (Romans 8:26–27), and He is joined with the Father and the Son in one name (Matthew 28:19). How do these passages together establish both the personhood and the full deity of the Holy Spirit?
8. The judgment on Ananias and Sapphira brought “great fear” on the whole church (Acts 5:11). Reverence for the Spirit has grown rare; He is often treated as a topic to debate or an experience to chase. What would healthy, biblical reverence for the Holy Spirit look like in your speech, your worship, and your treatment of His word this week?
9. Some sincere religious people, including Jehovah's Witnesses, teach that the Holy Spirit is not a person at all but simply “God's active force.” Using what you have seen in Acts 5 and John 14–16, how would you lovingly and clearly answer that claim? Which single passage would you turn to first, and why?
10. Look back across both passages for this week. You have met a Spirit who can be lied to and who is called God, a Helper who teaches, guides, and glorifies Christ. Name one specific way Jesus is forming you through this truth. What is one concrete step you will take this week to treat the Holy Spirit as the divine person He is?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Acts 13:2, the Spirit speaks and calls workers by name; 1 Corinthians 12:11, the Spirit wills and apportions as He chooses; Ephesians 4:30, the command not to grieve the Holy Spirit of God; Acts 7:51, Stephen's charge that stiff-necked people always resist the Holy Spirit; Matthew 28:19, the Spirit joined with the Father and the Son in the one name