

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

PNEUMATOLOGY

The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit

UNIT 2: THE PERSON OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Lesson 3

The Spirit Is a Person

Not a Force, Not an Influence

The Personhood of the Third Person of the Trinity

Key Texts: John 16:13–14; 1 Corinthians 2:10–11; 12:11; Ephesians 4:30; Acts 5:3–4; Romans 8:26–27

“He Will Guide You into All the Truth”

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Series Verse

*“But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes,
He will guide you into all the truth;
for He will not speak on His own initiative,
but whatever He hears, He will speak;
and He will disclose to you what is to come.”*

John 16:13, NASB 1995

Introduction

With Lesson 3 we cross a significant threshold. The first two lessons of this series were prolegomenal, they established why the doctrine of the Holy Spirit demands our most serious and sustained theological attention, and how the church has, across sixteen centuries, labored to understand Him. Beginning with this lesson, we move from the preparatory work to the substance itself: we begin Unit 2, the study of the Person of the Holy Spirit.

The first and most foundational question in any pneumatological inquiry is not what the Spirit does but who the Spirit is. Function must be grounded in being; activity must be understood in light of identity. Before we can rightly understand the Spirit's work in regeneration, sanctification, intercession, or the distribution of gifts, we must first understand His nature as a divine Person, distinct from the Father and the Son, but equally God, equally personal, equally worthy of honor, trust, and obedience.

The specific question that occupies this lesson is among the most practically consequential in all of Pneumatology: Is the Holy Spirit a Person or a power? Is He a "He" or an "it"? Is He a divine Agent with intellect, will, and affections who acts, decides, speaks, loves, and grieves, or is He an impersonal divine energy, a spiritual force, a divine atmosphere that pervades creation and animates religious experience without possessing the properties of personal being?

The question is not merely theological in the academic sense. It is profoundly pastoral and devotional. A person can be known; a force can only be used. A person can be honored or grieved; a force can only be harnessed or directed. A person speaks, commands, intercedes, and fellowships; a force simply flows. The moment the Spirit is depersonalized, however subtly, however unconsciously, however orthodoxly, the entire character of the believer's relationship to Him changes. He is no longer someone to be walked with, listened to, honored, and feared; He becomes something to be sought, channeled, claimed, or maximized. The grammar shifts from communion to consumption, from obedience to technique. And this shift, so quiet it can happen without a single false doctrine being formally confessed, is one of the most spiritually corrosive mistakes a Christian can make.

This lesson lays the exegetical and theological foundation for all that follows by demonstrating, from the Scriptures themselves, that the Holy Spirit possesses every attribute of personhood: a mind that knows, a will that decides, and affections that can be moved. He speaks, leads, testifies, teaches, intercedes, convicts, and grieves. He is not an "it" but a "He", and the difference, lived out in the daily texture of the Christian life, is everything.

I. Defining the Question: What Is a Person?

The Philosophical and Theological Meaning of Personal Being

A. The Classical Definition of Personhood

The word “person” carries in contemporary usage a cluster of meanings that are partly psychological, partly legal, and partly philosophical. For the purposes of systematic theology, the most useful definition is the one that has governed the church’s Trinitarian reflection since Boethius in the early sixth century: a person is an individual substance of a rational nature (*persona est rationalis naturae individua substantia*). Personhood, on this definition, involves individuality (this person and not another), rationality (the capacity for thought, knowledge, and deliberation), and substance (a real, not merely apparent, mode of being).

In the Trinitarian grammar established at Nicaea and Constantinople, personhood (Greek: *hypostasis*; Latin: *persona*) designates what is three in the one God: the Father is a Person, the Son is a Person, the Spirit is a Person, three distinct centers of personal being, related to one another in the eternal relations of generation and procession, sharing the one indivisible divine essence (*ousia* / *substantia*). The three Persons are not three parts of God, not three manifestations of one God (which would be modalism), and not three separate Gods (which would be tritheism). They are three personal subsistences of the one divine nature, eternally and irreducibly distinct.

Applied to the Spirit, this means that the personhood of the Spirit is not a metaphor or a personification. He does not “personify” the divine power at work in creation and redemption in the way that Wisdom is personified in Proverbs 8. He is not the church’s way of speaking about divine influence in human-friendly language. He is a real Person, the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, who possesses intellect, will, and affections as genuine, subsistent properties of His personal being. To depersonalize the Spirit is not merely a philosophical error; it is a departure from the theological grammar that the catholic church has confessed from the earliest centuries of its existence.

B. The Three Errors That Depersonalize the Spirit

Three specific theological errors, ancient and modern, depersonalize the Holy Spirit and must be identified and refuted before proceeding to the positive scriptural case for His personhood.

The first is the Arian error in its pneumatological form, the position of the Pneumatomachians (Lesson 2). On this view, the Spirit is a divine being but not a divine Person in the full Trinitarian sense: He is a minister or instrument of the Father and the Son, possessed of a kind of personal character but not sharing the one divine essence and therefore not fully personal in the Trinitarian sense. This error was condemned at Constantinople (381 AD), but its influence lingers wherever the Spirit is treated as subordinate in kind, not merely in role, to the Father and the Son.

The second is the Sabellian or modalist error, which collapses the three Persons into one Person manifesting Himself in three successive modes: the Father in the Old Testament, the Son in the Incarnation, the Spirit in the church age. On this view, the Spirit is not a distinct Person but a mode of the one God, which means there is no genuine Trinitarian fellowship, no real sending

of the Spirit by the Father and the Son, and no distinct pneumatological work that is properly His. Modalism appears frequently in popular evangelical piety that speaks of “God wearing three hats” or appearing in three forms, and it effectively destroys the Spirit’s personal distinctness.

The third is the depersonalization characteristic of modern liberal theology and of much popular continuationist and New Age spirituality: the Spirit as an impersonal divine force, energy, power, or influence. In liberal theology, from Schleiermacher onward, the Spirit tends to be reduced to the divine immanence in general or to the collective religious consciousness of the church. In popular charismatic piety, He can subtly become a spiritual power to be accessed, a divine electricity to be channeled, or a heavenly resource to be claimed, categories that are more compatible with an impersonal force than with a divine Person. And in New Age spirituality, the “universal spirit” is explicitly impersonal: the ground of being, the cosmic life-force, the energy that underlies all reality. Each of these errors, in its own way, denies what the Scripture teaches: the Holy Spirit is a divine Person who knows, wills, loves, speaks, and acts.

II. The Spirit Has a Mind: The Intellect of the Third Person

He Searches, He Knows, He Teaches

A. The Spirit Searches the Depths of God

The most explicit biblical text on the Spirit’s intellect is 1 Corinthians 2:10–11, where Paul writes: “For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God” (NASB 1995).

Paul’s argument is structured as an analogy from human psychology to divine epistemology. Just as a human being’s thoughts are accessible only to that human being’s own spirit, the interior, personal dimension of self-knowledge, so the thoughts of God are accessible only to the Spirit of God. The Spirit is to the divine inner life what the human spirit is to human inner life: the one who knows, from within, what God thinks, wills, and purposes. The verb “searches” (Greek: *ereunaō*) denotes active, thorough, exhaustive investigation, not the searching of one who does not know and is looking for information, but the searching of one who knows comprehensively and explores the full depth of what is known.

The pneumatological implication is decisive: a force or power cannot search. An impersonal energy does not know. The verb “searches” presupposes a subject with intellect, a mind that actively engages with its object, that knows rather than merely exists. The Spirit’s searching of “the depths of God” (*tā bathē tou Theou*) reveals a knowing that is personal, intimate, and co-extensive with the divine life itself. He knows the Father’s deepest purposes not as a bystander or a messenger but as a co-equal Person sharing the one divine mind, dwelling in the intimacy of the Trinitarian inner life.

B. The Spirit Teaches and Reminds

The Spirit's intellect is further demonstrated by His teaching ministry. In John 14:26, Jesus promises: "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 said to you" (NASB 1995). Teaching is an irreducibly intellectual act: it requires the teacher to possess knowledge, to understand the knowledge that the learner lacks, to select what is appropriate to communicate, to communicate it in ways the learner can receive, and to attend to whether the learner has in fact understood. A force cannot teach. An influence cannot bring something to remembrance. Only a Person with a mind, a Person who knows, discerns, selects, and communicates, can perform the acts of teaching and reminding that Jesus here ascribes to the Spirit.

This teaching ministry of the Spirit is not merely the mechanical dictation of information; it is the active, discerning, pedagogically intelligent application of divine truth to the minds and hearts of those whom the Spirit indwells. John 16:13 adds that the Spirit of truth "will guide you into all the truth", again, a guidance that presupposes intelligence, purpose, and discernment. He does not push; He guides. He does not compel mechanically; He leads personally, in a way that corresponds to and respects the personal nature of those He is leading. The language is irreducibly relational, and relational language presupposes personal agents on both sides of the relationship.

"He searches all things, even the depths of God" | "He will teach you all things" | "He will guide you into all the truth"
1 Corinthians 2:10; John 14:26; John 16:13, NASB 1995

III. The Spirit Has a Will: The Volition of the Third Person

He Decides, He Distributes, He Acts Sovereignly

A. He Distributes Gifts as He Wills

The most explicit biblical text on the Spirit's will is 1 Corinthians 12:11: "But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills" (NASB 1995). The Greek verb *boulōmai*, here translated "wills," denotes the deliberate exercise of the will, not impulse, not mechanism, not random variation, but the purposive, sovereign, personally determined decision of an agent who distributes what He determines to distribute, to whom He determines to distribute it, for the reasons and purposes that are His own.

The context of 1 Corinthians 12 is Paul's corrective teaching on spiritual gifts to a congregation that had badly misunderstood and abused them. Paul's pneumatological point is precisely that the distribution of gifts is not subject to human desire, human decision, human seeking, or human achievement. It is subject to the Spirit's sovereign will. He distributes "to each one individually", the distribution is personal, particular, and purposive. The Spirit knows each

believer, knows the body as a whole, knows what each member needs and what the whole body needs, and He distributes accordingly. This is the action of a Person with a mind and a will, not the behavior of an impersonal force that flows wherever it is permitted or invited.

B. He Acts, Leads, and Sends with Sovereign Initiative

The Spirit's will is further displayed in His sovereign initiative throughout the book of Acts, where He is the primary agent of the church's missionary expansion. Acts 13:2 records: "While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.'" Notice the details: the Spirit speaks ("said", *eipōn*), He calls ("called", *proskēklēmai*), and the work to which He calls them is His own ("for Me", *eis ho proskēklēmai autous*). This is the language of personal sovereignty, not of impersonal mechanism. He has a purpose, He has made a choice, He communicates that choice, and He claims the mission as His own.

Acts 16:6–7 presents the Spirit actively prohibiting Paul's missionary plans: "They passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia; and after they came to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them." A force does not forbid; a power does not permit or restrict. These are acts of a sovereign Person who has His own strategic purposes for the mission of the church, who overrides human planning with divine wisdom, and who directs the movement of the gospel according to His own will and purpose. The Holy Spirit of the book of Acts is not a divine electricity that flows where human wires conduct it; He is the sovereign Lord of the mission who directs, restrains, sends, and calls according to His own counsel.

IV. The Spirit Has Affections: The Emotional Life of the Third Person

He Loves, He Grieves, and He Can Be Resisted

A. The Spirit Can Be Grieved

The most pastorally significant text on the Spirit's affections is Ephesians 4:30: "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption" (NASB 1995). The verb "grieve" (Greek: *lypeō*) is the same word used of human grief, sorrow, and distress. It is not a technical theological term for a cognitive state or a legal category; it is the language of emotional response, the response of a Person who cares, who loves, whose love can be wounded by the behavior of the beloved.

The pastoral and theological implications of this verse are enormous. If the Spirit can be grieved, then our sin is not merely a violation of a divine code or a disruption of a divine mechanism; it is a wound inflicted on a divine Person. The Spirit who dwells within us is not an impersonal spiritual force that continues to function regardless of our conduct; He is a loving Person whose love for us makes Him capable of grief when we act in ways that contradict His holy character and His sanctifying purposes. The Spirit's grief is, in a sense, the grief of a divine love that is being spurned. And the proper response to the realization that we have grieved Him

is not merely moral resolution but personal repentance, the acknowledgment that we have wounded a Person, not merely transgressed a principle.

The immediate context of Ephesians 4:30 is instructive: Paul surrounds this command with specifics about the sins that grieve the Spirit, falsehood (v. 25), unrighteous anger (v. 26–27), theft (v. 28), unwholesome speech (v. 29), bitterness, wrath, clamor, slander, and malice (v. 31). These are not esoteric spiritual transgressions; they are the ordinary sins of ordinary communal life. The Spirit is grieved by the gossip exchanged between believers, by the bitterness nursed in the heart, by the harsh word spoken in anger, by the lie told to protect reputation. His grief is not distant or detached; it is the immediate response of a Person who dwells within the community of faith and who cares with divine intensity about the character of those He inhabits.

B. The Spirit Can Be Lied To, Quenched, and Resisted

Acts 5:3–4 records Peter’s confrontation of Ananias: “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit...? You have not lied to men but to God.” The equation of lying to the Holy Spirit with lying to God is itself a proof of the Spirit’s deity, but the pneumatological point here is equally significant: one can only lie to a Person. A lie is a communicative act addressed to a rational, knowing agent, an attempt to deceive someone who has the capacity to know the truth and to respond to the deception with moral judgment. An impersonal force cannot be lied to; only a Person with a mind, with the capacity for moral evaluation, and with the relational standing to be either honored or deceived, can be the proper object of a lie.

Acts 7:51 records Stephen’s charge against his accusers: “You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing as your fathers did.” Resistance, like grief and lying, is a relational category: one resists a person, an authority, a will. The Spirit comes to the unregenerate with convicting power, the conviction of sin, righteousness, and judgment described in John 16:8, and human beings in their rebellion push back against Him, refuse His testimony, harden their hearts against His conviction. This is not resistance of a force; it is defiance of a Person, and it is, as the history of Israel demonstrates, one of the most spiritually catastrophic postures a human being can adopt.

The instruction of 1 Thessalonians 5:19, “Do not quench the Spirit”, adds yet another relational and personal image. One quenches a flame; but the metaphor here is applied to a Person, and the command implies that believers have the capacity to suppress, stifle, or hinder the Spirit’s work in the community of faith. The Spirit can be grieved; He can be lied to; He can be resisted; He can be quenched. Every one of these categories presupposes a Person, a divine Agent who acts in genuine relation to human beings, whose purposes and whose presence can be responded to in ways that honor or wound Him.

V. Personal Actions Attributed to the Spirit

He Speaks, Testifies, Intercedes, and Convicts

A. He Speaks, Testifies, and Intercedes

The range of personal actions attributed to the Holy Spirit in the New Testament constitutes one of the most compelling cumulative arguments for His personhood. John 15:26 records Jesus' promise: "When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me." Testimony is a personal act: it requires a witness who knows what he testifies to, who has the capacity to communicate his testimony, and whose testimony can be evaluated as true or false. The Spirit's testimony about Christ is not the automatic testimony of a mechanism; it is the intentional, knowing witness of a divine Person who has intimate knowledge of the Son and who communicates that knowledge to those whom He indwells.

Romans 8:26–27 presents the Spirit's most intimate and most personally urgent action: intercessory prayer. "In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God" (NASB 1995). The language here is saturated with personal categories: the Spirit "helps" (*sunantilambanetai*, He takes hold of our burden alongside us); He "feel" our weakness (*astheneia*); He "intercedes" (*huperentugchanō*, He pleads on our behalf before the Father); He has a "mind" (*phōnema*) whose contents are known to the Father; and He aligns His intercession with "the will of God."

These categories, helping, feeling, interceding, having a mind, willing, are not the vocabulary of force or mechanism. They are the vocabulary of a Person who knows, who loves, who acts in response to the needs of those He indwells, and who does so with the wisdom and the authority of God Himself. The Spirit's intercession is not secondary to or dependent upon human prayer; it is the prior, enabling, co-ordinating action of a divine Person who, knowing our weakness and knowing the will of God, takes our inarticulate groaning and presents it before the Father as a perfectly formed petition.

B. The Significance of the Masculine Pronoun *Ekeinos*

One of the most grammatically striking evidences of the Spirit's personhood appears in John 16:13–14. In Greek, the word for spirit (*pneuma*) is grammatically neuter, it takes neuter pronouns in ordinary usage. Yet throughout the Farewell Discourse (John 14–16), Jesus consistently refers to the Spirit with the masculine pronoun *ekeinos* ("that one," "He"). John 16:13 reads: "When He, the Spirit of truth, comes... He will guide you... He will disclose to you", *ekeinos* in each instance.

This grammatical anomaly, a masculine pronoun referring to a grammatically neuter noun, is not accidental and is not a normal feature of Greek prose. It represents a deliberate departure from grammatical convention in order to make a theological point: the Spirit is not an "it" but a "He." The masculine pronoun asserts personal identity in the face of a grammatical convention that might otherwise depersonalize the Spirit. John, under the inspiration of the very Spirit he is

describing, records Jesus' words with this grammatical precision because the precision matters: the Spirit is a Person, and no convention of human language, not even the grammatical gender of the Greek word for spirit, should be allowed to obscure that truth.

The pastoral implication flows naturally from the grammatical observation: when a believer prays, he is not operating a divine mechanism or accessing a spiritual resource. He is communing with a Person, the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, who knows him, loves him, dwells within him, intercedes for him, and is grieved by his sin and delighted by his faithfulness. The grammar of pronoun usage, in the Spirit's own inspired self-description, corrects the instinctive depersonalization that afflicts even the sincerest pneumatology.

VI. Against the Depersonalizers: Jehovah's Witnesses, Unitarians, and Popular Distortions

A Pastoral and Apologetic Defense of the Spirit's Personhood

A. The Jehovah's Witness Position and Its Refutation

The Jehovah's Witnesses teach that the Holy Spirit is not a Person but an impersonal active force, specifically, the invisible operating force or power that Jehovah uses to accomplish His purpose. Their translation, the New World Translation, consistently renders the Spirit with neuter pronouns ("it" rather than "He") and strips from the biblical text the personal-pronoun language that the Greek original preserves. This is not merely a translation choice; it is a theological program: the systematic elimination of the Spirit's personhood from the biblical text in order to bring it into conformity with their non-Trinitarian theology.

The refutation is straightforward and scripturally devastating. First, the masculine pronoun *ekeinos* in John 16:13–14 cannot be explained by grammatical gender, since *pneuma* is neuter and the grammatical convention would require a neuter pronoun. The masculine pronoun is a theological assertion, not a grammatical accident. Second, an active force does not lie (Acts 5:3), does not distribute gifts as it wills (1 Corinthians 12:11), does not grieve (Ephesians 4:30), does not intercede with groanings too deep for words (Romans 8:26–27), does not speak and say "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul" (Acts 13:2). The cumulative weight of these personal predicates, lying, willing, grieving, interceding, speaking in the first person, is simply incompatible with the category of an impersonal force, however powerful. Third, if the Spirit is merely God's active force rather than a divine Person, then the baptismal formula of Matthew 28:19, "baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit", is grammatically and theologically bizarre: one is not baptized in the name of a power but in the name of a Person.

B. The Popular Evangelical Distortions and Their Correction

The Jehovah's Witnesses' formal denial of the Spirit's personhood is easy to identify and refute. The more insidious distortions are those that formally confess the Spirit's personhood while practically treating Him as an impersonal resource. Three patterns in popular evangelical piety are worth naming.

First, the “getting more of the Spirit” language that pervades much popular pneumatology. Believers are urged to “get more of the Spirit,” to “unlock His power,” to “activate His gifts.” The metaphors are hydraulic and mechanical, as if the Spirit were a fluid whose quantity and pressure could be increased by the right spiritual techniques. But if the Spirit is a Person, then the relevant question is not how much of Him one has but how fully one is yielded to Him, how attentively one listens to His Word, how promptly one obeys His convictions, and how seriously one takes the offense of grieving Him. The relationship is covenantal and personal, not hydraulic.

Second, the treatment of the Spirit as a spiritual commodity to be sought and obtained. Much revivalist and charismatic spirituality speaks of “receiving the Spirit” as a dramatic experience to be sought, as if the Spirit were a prize to be claimed by sufficiently urgent spiritual effort. But the New Testament language of “receiving the Spirit” consistently refers to the Spirit’s sovereign gift given at conversion and sealed at baptism (Acts 2:38; Romans 8:9; Ephesians 1:13–14), not to a subsequent dramatic experience conditioned on human spiritual achievement. The Spirit is not a commodity; He is a sovereign Person who gives Himself to whom He will.

Third, the confusion of the Spirit with subjective religious experience. When “the Spirit” becomes synonymous with “what I feel in worship,” the Spirit has been effectively depersonalized: He has been identified with human religious psychology rather than with a divine Person who is distinct from and sovereign over the believer’s feelings. Genuine encounter with the Spirit will certainly have experiential dimensions, assurance, joy, conviction, love, the sense of God’s presence, but these experiences are effects of the Spirit’s personal ministry, not the Spirit Himself. To confuse the Person with the experience is to confuse the physician with the medicine, the Shepherd with the green pastures.

“Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God” | “He distributes just as He wills” | “The Spirit Himself intercedes for us”

Ephesians 4:30; 1 Corinthians 12:11; Romans 8:26, NASB 1995

VII. The Pastoral Significance: Knowing a Person, Not Operating a Power

The Difference the Spirit’s Personhood Makes for the Christian Life

The personhood of the Holy Spirit is not a doctrinal footnote that settles a philosophical dispute about Trinitarian metaphysics and then retires from practical relevance. It is the foundation of the entire Christian life as the New Testament describes it. Consider the following pastoral implications, each drawn directly from the scriptural evidence surveyed in this lesson.

First, the Spirit’s personhood transforms the meaning of sin. If the Spirit is a Person who can be grieved (Ephesians 4:30), then sin is not primarily a performance failure or a legal violation, it is a relational wound. The believer who nurses bitterness, tells a half-truth, or entertains impurity

is not merely violating a divine standard; he is grieving the divine Person who dwells within him. This recognition, properly felt and not merely formally acknowledged, produces a quality of repentance that formal moralism cannot generate. It is the difference between apologizing to a rule book and apologizing to a person who loves you.

Second, the Spirit's personhood transforms prayer. Romans 8:26–27 teaches that the Spirit intercedes within the believer, not as a theological mechanism that processes the believer's requests, but as a divine Person who knows the believer's deepest needs, knows the Father's perfect will, and brings the two into alignment through His own intercession. This means that the believer never prays alone: he prays in the Spirit (Ephesians 6:18), with the Spirit (Romans 8:26–27), and toward the Father (Ephesians 2:18). Prayer, rightly understood, is a Trinitarian act facilitated by the personal mediation of the Spirit.

Third, the Spirit's personhood transforms the understanding of spiritual gifts. If the Spirit is a sovereign Person who distributes gifts "just as He wills" (1 Corinthians 12:11), then spiritual gifts are not human achievements or divine rewards for spiritual attainment. They are the Spirit's personal gifts to the members of Christ's body, distributed according to His wisdom and for the body's edification. The believer who covets another's gift or despises his own is effectively quarreling with the Spirit's sovereign decision, and this is a far more serious matter than merely being discontent with one's place in the congregation.

Fourth, and most fundamentally, the Spirit's personhood means that the Christian life is, at its core, a relationship. It is fellowship (koinōnia) with the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 13:14). It is walking with and by and in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16–25). It is being led by the Spirit (Romans 8:14), being filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18), and keeping in step with the Spirit (Galatians 5:25). Every one of these images presupposes a Person, someone to walk with, to be filled by, to be led by, to keep in step with. The Christian life is not the performance of religious duties empowered by a divine force; it is the daily, intimate, dependent, responsive, worshipful relationship with the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, who has chosen, by the sovereign grace of God and in fulfillment of the promises of Christ, to make His home within mortal human flesh.

*"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with all of you."*

2 Corinthians 13:14, NASB 1995

Theological Terms and Definitions

Term	Definition
Personhood	In classical theological usage, personhood refers to an individual subsistence of a rational nature, a being that possesses intellect (the capacity for knowledge and reasoning), will (the capacity for purposive choice), and affections (the capacity for relational response). In Trinitarian theology, the three divine Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, are three distinct hypostases (Greek) or personae (Latin) who share the one divine ousia (essence or substance). The personhood of the Spirit means He is not an impersonal force, energy, or influence but a genuine divine Agent with mind, will, and affections.
Hypostasis	Greek: literally, “that which stands under” or “subsistence.” The technical theological term used at the Council of Constantinople (381 AD) and thereafter for what is three in the one God: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three hypostaseis (plural), three distinct personal subsistences of the one divine ousia. The use of hypostasis in Trinitarian theology was established largely through the work of the Cappadocian Fathers, who distinguished hypostasis (person) from ousia (essence) in a way that allowed the church to confess three Persons and one God without confusion or separation.
Modalism	Also known as Sabellianism (after Sabellius, a third-century teacher), modalism is the heretical teaching that the one God exists not as three co-eternal Persons but as one Person who manifests Himself in three successive modes or roles: as Father in creation and the Old Covenant, as Son in the incarnation, and as Spirit in the church age. Modalism destroys the genuine personal distinctions within the Trinity, makes the sending of the Spirit by the Father and the Son impossible, and was condemned by the early church as incompatible with biblical Trinitarian teaching.
Ekeinos	Greek masculine demonstrative pronoun: “that one,” “He.” Significant in pneumatological discussion because the Greek word for spirit (pneuma) is grammatically neuter, which would normally require a neuter pronoun. In the Farewell Discourse of John 14–16, Jesus consistently refers to the Spirit with the masculine pronoun ekeinos, a deliberate grammatical anomaly that asserts the Spirit’s personal identity. The masculine pronoun is a theological statement embedded in grammatical form: the Spirit is not an “it” but a “He,” not an impersonal force but a divine Person.
Grieving the Spirit	The action described in Ephesians 4:30: “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” The verb lypeō denotes sorrow, distress, or pain, language appropriate to a Person capable of relational response. That the Spirit can be grieved demonstrates both His

Term	Definition
	personhood (only a Person with affections can grieve) and His presence within the believer (His grief is the response of One who dwells within the community and who cares with divine intensity about the character of those He inhabits). Grieving the Spirit occurs through the sins catalogued in Ephesians 4:25–32.
Koinōnia	Greek: “fellowship, participation, communion, partnership.” Used in 2 Corinthians 13:14 (“the fellowship of the Holy Spirit”) to describe the Spirit’s relational gift to believers. Koinōnia can mean either the fellowship that the Spirit produces among believers or the believer’s personal fellowship with the Spirit Himself, most likely both. It is a relational term that implies shared life, mutual participation, and genuine personal communion. The fact that the Spirit is the object of koinōnia presupposes His personhood: one has koinōnia with a person, not a force.
Intercession of the Spirit	The Spirit’s personal, inward intercessory work described in Romans 8:26–27. The Spirit takes the believer’s inarticulate groanings, the prayers that the believer cannot properly form in words, and presents them before the Father as perfectly formed intercessions aligned with God’s will. The Greek verb <i>huperentugchanō</i> (to intercede) and the reference to the Spirit’s “groanings too deep for words” and His “mind” (<i>phōnema</i>) all presuppose a divine Person with affections, knowledge, and the capacity for purposive communication with the Father on behalf of the saints.
Quenching the Spirit	The action forbidden in 1 Thessalonians 5:19: “Do not quench the Spirit.” The metaphor of quenching (<i>sbennuō</i> , to extinguish a fire) is applied to the Spirit’s personal ministry, implying that believers have the capacity to suppress, hinder, or stifle the Spirit’s work in the community of faith. The immediate context suggests that quenching the Spirit involves despising prophetic utterances (v. 20) and refusing to test them (v. 21), a corporate failure to attend to the Spirit’s Word-centered ministry. Quenching is a relational response to a personal Agent, not a mechanical disruption of an impersonal force.
Resisting the Spirit	The action charged against Israel and against the accusers of Stephen in Acts 7:51: “You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing as your fathers did.” Resistance (<i>antiptō</i> , to fall against, to oppose) implies that the Spirit comes with authority, conviction, and purpose, and that human beings in their sinful rebellion push back against that authority and refuse His testimony. Resisting the Spirit is a pattern of spiritual history: the prophets who spoke by the Spirit were rejected, and the rejection of their word was a rejection of the Spirit Himself.
Active Force	The Jehovah’s Witness designation for the Holy Spirit: “God’s invisible operative force.” On this view, the Spirit is not a Person but a divine power that Jehovah uses to accomplish His purposes, analogous to electricity or

Term	Definition
	wind. This position is exegetically untenable: it cannot account for the Spirit being lied to (Acts 5:3), grieved (Ephesians 4:30), or distributing gifts 'as He wills' (1 Corinthians 12:11); it requires the systematic suppression of personal-pronoun language in the biblical text; and it destroys the Trinitarian grammar of Matthew 28:19. The Jehovah's Witnesses' rejection of the Spirit's personhood is an integral part of their broader rejection of classical Trinitarian theology.

Practical Application

A. For the Mind: *What Must We Believe?*

We must believe, not merely formally confess, but genuinely believe, that the Holy Spirit is a Person: a divine Agent with intellect, will, and affections who acts, decides, speaks, loves, teaches, and grieves. This belief must be held with sufficient concreteness and theological clarity that it actually shapes how we think about the Spirit in the daily texture of our lives. The test is this: when you think about the Spirit, do you instinctively think “He” or “it”? Do you think of someone to be known and honored, or something to be sought and utilized? Do you think of a Person whose grief over your sin should move you to repentance, or a power whose effectiveness might be diminished by your sin? The answers to these questions reveal far more about your actual pneumatology than your formal theological commitments do.

We must also believe that the cumulative scriptural evidence for the Spirit’s personhood, His mind (1 Corinthians 2:10–11), His will (1 Corinthians 12:11), His affections (Ephesians 4:30), His personal actions (Romans 8:26–27; Acts 13:2; John 15:26), is not a collection of isolated proof-texts that can be dismissed by alternative explanations, but a coherent, mutually reinforcing biblical portrait of a divine Person who is irreducibly personal in His being and His ministry. The person who accepts one or two of these texts while depersonalizing the Spirit in their practical theology has not yet reckoned with the full weight of the biblical evidence.

B. For the Heart: *What Must We Feel and Desire?*

The great pastoral implication of the Spirit’s personhood is this: the Third Person of the Holy Trinity has chosen to make His dwelling place within you (1 Corinthians 6:19). Not near you, not around you, not available to you, within you. He dwells within your mortal body as the Lord and Life-giver who was promised by Christ and poured out at Pentecost. Let this truth produce, first, a deep and sustained sense of the extraordinary privilege of being a believer. The living God, not a divine influence, not a spiritual atmosphere, not an anonymous divine energy, but the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, has made your body His temple. No Old Testament saint possessed this. The ark of the covenant dwelt in a tent; the Spirit of God dwells in you.

Desire, above all, the kind of relationship with the Spirit that His personhood makes possible and demands. Desire to know Him, not to know about Him but to know Him, in the way that the New Testament’s language of *koinōnia* implies: shared life, mutual participation, genuine personal communion. Desire to grieve Him as little as possible and to honor Him as fully as possible. Desire to listen attentively when He speaks through the Word, to obey promptly when He convicts through the conscience, to follow willingly when He leads through providence, and to rest in the confidence that He intercedes for you before the Father even when you cannot pray as you should.

C. For the Hands: *What Must We Do?*

- Audit your pneumatological grammar. For one week, pay attention to the pronouns you use when you speak or think about the Holy Spirit. Do you say “He” or “it”? Do you speak of “feeling the Spirit” or of “walking with the Spirit”? Do you speak of “getting more of the Spirit” or of “honoring the Spirit who already dwells within you”? The grammar of your pneumatology reveals the actual theology of your pneumatology, and correcting the grammar is often the most practical first step toward correcting the theology.
- Read Ephesians 4:25–32 slowly and prayerfully, attending to each specific sin that Paul identifies as grieving the Holy Spirit. Make a personal inventory: in which of these areas, falsehood, unrighteous anger, theft, unwholesome speech, bitterness, wrath, clamor, slander, malice, have you most recently grieved the Spirit who dwells within you? Bring those specific sins to repentance, not merely as violations of a divine standard but as wounds inflicted on a divine Person. The quality of your repentance will be deepened by the recognition that you have grieved a Person who loves you with a love that cannot be measured.
- Begin each day with an explicit, personal acknowledgment of the Spirit’s presence and Person. Not a formula, but a genuine address: “Holy Spirit, You are God. You dwell within me. I am not my own. I need Your teaching, Your leading, Your intercession, and Your restraint today. Guard me from grieving You. Help me to walk in step with You.” This practice, simple, non-spectacular, utterly unlike the dramatic Spirit-seeking of popular charismatic spirituality, is one of the most profound expressions of the conviction that the Spirit is a Person to be known and honored.
- Prepare yourself for the apologetic challenge. The personhood of the Spirit is directly denied by Jehovah’s Witnesses in every door-to-door conversation and in every piece of Watch Tower literature. Memorize three or four key texts, Acts 5:3–4 (the Spirit is lied to; lying to the Spirit is lying to God); 1 Corinthians 12:11 (He distributes just as He wills); Ephesians 4:30 (do not grieve the Holy Spirit); Romans 8:26–27 (He intercedes with groanings too deep for words), and be prepared to explain why these texts are incompatible with the category of an impersonal active force. The argument is not complex, but it must be known to be deployed.
- Memorize 2 Corinthians 13:14 as a Trinitarian and pneumatological confession: “May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with all of you.” Note that *koinōnia*, fellowship, communion, personal participation, is the word Paul uses for the Spirit’s gift. Let the memorization of this verse be accompanied by the resolution that your relationship to the Spirit will be, increasingly, what that word implies: genuine personal communion with the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, who has chosen to make His dwelling place within you.

Study and Discussion Questions

Opening Question

1. Before studying this lesson, if someone had asked you to describe the Holy Spirit in one sentence, would your description have been primarily personal (attributes of a Person, He knows, He loves, He wills) or primarily functional (what He does, He empowers, He convicts, He gifts)? What does the balance between these two framings reveal about your working pneumatology?

Observation Questions (What Do the Texts Say?)

2. Read 1 Corinthians 2:10–11 carefully. Paul draws an analogy between the human spirit's knowledge of human thoughts and the Spirit's knowledge of God's thoughts. What are the exact terms of this analogy? What does the verb "searches" (ereunaō) imply about the Spirit's epistemological relationship to the divine inner life? Why does Paul introduce this argument in the context of explaining how believers receive and understand the things of God? What would be lost in Paul's argument if the Spirit were an impersonal force rather than a knowing Person?
3. Read 1 Corinthians 12:4–11 as a whole. Note the threefold Trinitarian structure Paul employs (varieties of gifts, the same Spirit; varieties of ministries, the same Lord; varieties of effects, the same God). What does the parallelism between the Spirit, the Lord (Christ), and God (the Father) imply about the Spirit's status? How does the phrase "distributing to each one individually just as He wills" in verse 11 function within the passage's argument? What is Paul's purpose in emphasizing the Spirit's sovereign will at this point in his discussion of gifts?
4. Read Ephesians 4:25–32 in its entirety. List every specific sin Paul mentions in this passage. Then identify the command "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God" (v. 30) in its context. What does the placement of this command, between the lists of sins in verses 25–29 and 31–32, indicate about which specific sins grieve the Spirit? What does it mean theologically that these relatively ordinary community-life sins are described as grieving a divine Person?
5. Read Romans 8:26–27 slowly. List every personal attribute or action attributed to the Spirit in these two verses. How many of these attributes could be predicated of an impersonal force? What is the significance of the Father being described as knowing "the mind of the Spirit" (v. 27)? What does it mean for the Spirit to intercede "according to the will of God", how does this phrase relate to the Spirit's role within the Trinitarian relationships?

6. Read John 16:13–14 in the original context of the Farewell Discourse. Count how many times a personal pronoun referring to the Spirit appears in these two verses. Note the grammatical anomaly: *pneuma* is grammatically neuter but Jesus uses *ekeinos* (masculine, “He”). What is the theological significance of this grammatical choice? What would be obscured or lost if a translator rendered the pronouns with “it” rather than “He”?

Interpretation Questions (What Does It Mean?)

7. The lesson identifies three errors that depersonalize the Spirit: the Pneumatomachian error, modalism, and the reduction of the Spirit to an impersonal force. Which of these three do you consider the most significant threat in the contemporary evangelical church, and why? How does each of these errors affect the practical spiritual life of a congregation that holds it?
8. The lesson argues that the Spirit’s capacity to be grieved (Ephesians 4:30) transforms the meaning of sin: “Sin is not primarily a performance failure or a legal violation, it is a relational wound.” Do you agree with this reframing? Is there a danger that emphasizing the relational dimension of sin could minimize its legal and judicial dimensions (the violation of God’s holy law, the incurring of guilt)? How do the relational and the forensic dimensions of sin relate to one another?
9. The lesson critiques three forms of popular evangelical pneumatology: the “getting more of the Spirit” language, the treatment of the Spirit as a commodity to be sought and obtained, and the confusion of the Spirit with subjective religious experience. For each of these, (a) explain why it constitutes a subtle depersonalization of the Spirit, and (b) propose a corrected form of pneumatological speech or practice that preserves the Spirit’s personhood.
10. The lesson states that “genuine encounter with the Spirit will certainly have experiential dimensions, assurance, joy, conviction, love, the sense of God’s presence, but these experiences are effects of the Spirit’s personal ministry, not the Spirit Himself.” How does this distinction between the Spirit and His effects safeguard the believer’s pneumatology? What happens practically when a believer confuses the two?
11. The lesson argues that the Spirit’s personhood transforms prayer, spiritual gifts, and the understanding of sin. Which of these three transformations do you find most practically significant for your own life and ministry? Where do you most need the conviction that you are dealing with a divine Person rather than a divine power?

Application Questions (What Does It Demand of Us?)

12. The lesson suggests auditing your pneumatological grammar: paying attention for one week to the pronouns and categories you use when thinking and speaking about the

Spirit. What do you anticipate that audit will reveal? In which specific contexts, private prayer, pastoral counseling, preaching, casual conversation, do you think you are most likely to slip into impersonal language about the Spirit?

13. The lesson proposes beginning each day with an explicit, personal address to the Holy Spirit, not a formula but a genuine acknowledgment of His presence and Person. What would need to change in your devotional routine to incorporate this practice? What theological convictions would this practice reinforce over time if it were maintained consistently?
14. Ephesians 4:30 commands us not to grieve the Spirit. Reflecting honestly on the sins Paul lists in Ephesians 4:25–32, falsehood, unrighteous anger, theft, unwholesome speech, bitterness, wrath, clamor, slander, malice, identify the two or three areas in which you are most prone to grieve Him. What specific, concrete, Spirit-dependent practices would help you address each of these areas? How does the recognition that you are grieving a Person (rather than violating a rule) change your approach to repentance in these areas?
15. The lesson identifies the Jehovah's Witnesses' denial of the Spirit's personhood as a direct apologetic challenge. Have you had conversations with Jehovah's Witnesses or others who depersonalize the Spirit? How prepared do you feel to make the scriptural case for the Spirit's personhood? Which of the biblical texts covered in this lesson do you think is most difficult for the Jehovah's Witness position to explain, and why?

Prayer Focus

Open this lesson with a period of corporate silence, followed by a simple, deliberate, corporate address to the Holy Spirit. Not a formula, not a liturgical recitation, but a genuine, personal acknowledgment of His presence and Person. Something in the character of: “Holy Spirit, You are here. You are God. You are a Person who knows us, loves us, and dwells within us. We acknowledge You, not as a power to be accessed or a force to be channeled, but as the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, to whom we owe the same honor, trust, and obedience that we owe to the Father and the Son. We ask You to teach us, in this lesson, who You truly are.” Let the silence and the address set the relational and devotional tone for the lesson that follows.

Pray through each of the Spirit’s personal attributes as this lesson has presented them. Thank the Father for giving us a Helper, not a power source, not a divine tool, but a Helper: a Person who comes alongside, who knows our weakness, who supplies what we lack. Thank the Son for sending the Spirit in His own name (John 14:26), so that the Spirit’s presence among us is the continuing presence of Christ’s ministry in and through us. And address the Spirit directly: thank Him for His teaching, for His intercession, for His grief over our sin that reveals His love for our holiness, for His sovereign distribution of gifts to the body.

Spend time in corporate confession, guided by Ephesians 4:25–32. Read the passage slowly and let each specific sin provide a specific occasion for repentance. Confess not merely the acts but the Person who has been grieved by them. The form of confessional address that this lesson’s doctrine enables is different from impersonal moral self-assessment: “Holy Spirit, I have grieved You by...” is a different kind of repentance than “I have violated Your standard by...”. Both are necessary; but the first, grounded in the Spirit’s personhood, has a depth and an intimacy that purely forensic repentance cannot reach.

Close with the Trinitarian benediction of 2 Corinthians 13:14, prayed slowly and with attention to each phrase. Linger on the word *koinōnia*, fellowship, communion, personal participation. Ask the Spirit to deepen in each member of this study the *koinōnia* that is His gift: not the dramatic experience of a divine force, but the quiet, deepening, transforming communion of a divine Person who has chosen to make His home in mortal flesh, to walk with mortal pilgrims toward the heavenly city, and to intercede for them at every step of the way.

*“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with all of you.”*

2 Corinthians 13:14, NASB 1995

Key Texts: John 16:13–14; 1 Corinthians 2:10–11; 12:11; Ephesians 4:30; Acts 5:3–4; Acts 7:51; Acts 13:2; Romans 8:26–27; John 14:26; John 15:26; 2 Corinthians 13:14

Soli Deo Gloria

To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

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