



This article, the second in a series of three dealing with the eternal Godhead, was published in ALMA Torch in August 2008. The final article in the series will be posted here when it is published.

THE ETERNAL GODHEAD – II

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Introduction

This series of articles upholds the doctrine of the eternal Godhead, composed of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and seeks to explain the significance of contemporary challenges to this doctrine. In the first article it was demonstrated that rejection of the eternal Godhead, intellectually at least, stems from failure to apply sound Scriptural methodology. That article closed with a case study in relation to methodology and the eternity of the Son of God. This article begins with a similar case study in relation to the Third Member of the eternal Godhead, the Holy Spirit.

The Eternal Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit's membership of the absolute and eternal Godhead was established beyond reasonable question in the first article by clear, plain, unambiguous statements from Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy. However, as in the previous treatment of the eternity of the Son of God, it will be instructive to focus on methodological issues in relation to the Holy Spirit in Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy. When sound methodology is not applied, even the compelling clarity of the evidence can lose its force upon the human mind.

It is extremely important that we have a Biblical understanding of the Holy Spirit for Scripture tells us in 1 Corinthians 12:3 that it is by the Holy Spirit that we are able to confess Jesus as

Lord: “Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.” Additionally, Scripture warns in Matthew 12:31, 32 against speaking against the Holy Ghost: “Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.” One of the barriers against speaking against the Holy Ghost is a correct understanding of who He is and the nature of His role.

Verses 31 and 32 of Matthew 12 are a good starting point for our discussion for there we find a clear distinction between the Son of man and the Holy Ghost. It is not just that they are clearly distinguished as separate individuals but that the consequences of speaking against them are distinguished. If the Holy Spirit is actually Jesus or part of him the consequences of speaking against them should rightly or justly be the same. That the consequences are not the same is a clear indication that we are dealing with two quite distinct beings.

Scripture not only distinguishes Jesus and the Holy Spirit but it separates them spatially in many places. Here are some examples: “But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost” Matthew 1:20; “I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire” (Matthew 3:11); “And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:16, 17); “And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased” (Luke 3:22); “Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil” (Matthew 4:1); “And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness” (Luke 4:1); and “But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God” (Acts 7:55, 56).

What we are doing is testing the conclusion that the Holy Spirit is Jesus or a part of Him and that conclusion is clearly disconfirmed by the passages of Scripture cited above. Yet, there are more tests that can be applied. For instance, let us look at Christ’s own testimony about the Holy Spirit. If the Holy Spirit is a separate person within the Godhead, He is entitled to the personal pronoun.

Note the problem that arises if we insist that the personal pronoun is actually referring to Christ (Italics supplied): “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, *he* shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (John 14:26); “Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send *him* unto you” (John 16:7); “Howbeit when *he*, the Spirit of truth, is come, *he* will guide you into all truth: for *he* shall not speak of *himself*; but whatsoever *he* shall hear, that shall *he* speak: and *he*

will show you things to come” (John 16:13); and “*He* shall glorify me: for *he* shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you” (John 16:14).

In these passages, Christ is speaking and He applies the personal pronoun to the Holy Spirit. That is sufficient to sustain the point that Christ is recognizing the Holy Spirit as a distinct person, separate from Himself. Yet, there is more. Notice John 16:13: “for *he* shall not speak of *himself*.” If “*he*” actually refers to Christ, rather than the Holy Spirit, it makes the statement contradictory. For example, if “*he*” refers to Christ, then it is saying that Christ (“*he*”) will not speak of Christ (“*himself/myself*”), but the rest of the verse says that the Holy Spirit communicates what “*He*” hears and, in verse 14, glorifies Christ. If Christ is really the Holy Spirit, how can Christ not speak of Himself but still glorify Himself? Thus, the construction of John 16:13 and 14 demands a distinction between Christ and the Holy Spirit, something which is there for all to see in Christ’s use of the personal pronoun for the Holy Spirit.

When Jesus refers to Himself in the third person as “he” or “him,” this does not require us to see Christ’s use of “he” or “him” or “himself,” when referring to the Holy Spirit, as applying to Himself (Christ). These are quite different uses and there is no necessary connection between Christ referring to Himself and Christ referring to another, in this case the Holy Spirit, with these pronouns. Let’s see this clearly in two examples of substitutions made in accordance with the assertion that the Holy Spirit is actually Christ: “But when the Comforter (Christ) is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he (I) shall testify of me” John 15:26. In paraphrase, these substitutions might look something like this: “But when I am come as the Comforter, when I send myself unto you from the Father, even as myself, the Spirit of truth, as I proceed from the Father, I shall testify of me.” Insistence that the personal pronoun used for the Holy Spirit in this text is referring to Christ makes the text farcical.

Here is the second example, in which the substitutions are applied to John 16:7: “Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter (Christ) will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him (myself) unto you. Here is a reasonable paraphrase of the substitutions: “Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, I will not be able to come to you as the Comforter; but if I depart, I will send myself unto you.” Clearly, these substitutions don’t work and that is another reason to reject the assertion that the Holy Spirit is really Jesus Himself or a part of Jesus.

The problems for viewing the Comforter or the Holy Spirit as Christ or a part of Him are heightened by John 14:16. There we read: “And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever.” If the Holy Spirit is “another Comforter,” the Holy Spirit could not be Jesus for Jesus uses the personal pronoun “he” when referring to Him. It makes no sense to call the Holy Spirit “another Comforter” and to use the personal pronoun when referring to Him if there is no distinction between Christ and the Holy Spirit.

The use of “another Comforter” in John 14:16 is also a barrier to a line of thinking that sees a name for the Holy Spirit which embodies one of His characteristics as an indication that we are not dealing with a real person. Here is John 14:16, 17: “And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.” As we have noted, Jesus settles the issue of the personhood of the Holy Spirit in John 14:16, so the name applied to the Holy Spirit in John 14:17, “Spirit of truth,” is clearly not intended to conflict with the conclusion that the Holy Spirit is a real person. By noting the context in which “Spirit of truth” appears, we are preserved from drawing incorrect conclusions about this name and setting up irresolvable contradictions in Scripture.

It is clear from these tests that the Holy Spirit is distinct from Jesus. From the nature of these tests we can determine the methodological failures that have led to the erroneous conclusions that the Holy Spirit is Jesus or a part of Him. Concepts have been imposed upon texts and passages of Scripture that cannot be derived from them by proper attention to what they are saying in context. An example is the misapprehension of “another Comforter” in John 14:16. Other examples are the misapprehension of Christ’s use of the personal pronoun when referring to the Holy Spirit and the failure to account for the spatial separation between the Holy Spirit and Christ that is evident in Scripture.

When we deal faithfully with what the text is saying in its context, compare relevant passages and bring them into harmony and test conclusions against the clearest and most relevant passages of Scripture, we have properly implemented the basic methodology for understanding Scripture. Where tests reveal that conclusions are not supported, it is obvious that the self-interpreting principles of the Scripture have either not been used or not fully implemented. It is not safe to accept conclusions that cannot pass simple Scriptural tests, so prudence dictates that the misidentification of the Holy Spirit as Christ must be rejected on Scriptural grounds.

God knew that the last days would bring severe trials to His people, so he provided another source of testimony that would help protect them from doctrinal error (Early Writings, p. 78). The testimonies are to be understood by the same self-interpreting principles that unlock the Scriptures (Selected Messages, Vol. 1, p. 42), so we turn to the Spirit of Prophecy again to see how these principles confirm the Scriptural view that the Holy Spirit is a member of the eternal and absolute Godhead.

The Testimony of the Spirit of Prophecy

In addition to those cited in Part One, let us note some statements that attest to the eternal personhood of the Holy Spirit: “The eternal heavenly dignitaries—God, and Christ, and the Holy Spirit—arming them [the disciples] with more than mortal energy, . . . would advance with them to the work and convince the world of sin.--Manuscript 145, 1901. (Evangelism, p. 616); “We

need to realize that the Holy Spirit, who is as much a person as God is a person, is walking through these grounds.—Manuscript 66, 1899. (From a talk to the students at the Avondale School.) (Evangelism, p. 616); “The Holy Spirit is a person, for He beareth witness with our spirits that we are the children of God. When this witness is borne, it carries with it its own evidence. At such times we believe and are sure that we are the children of God. . . .The Holy Spirit has a personality, else He could not bear witness to our spirits and with our spirits that we are the children of God. He must also be a divine person, else He could not search out the secrets which lie hidden in the mind of God. "For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God."—Manuscript 20, 1906. (Evangelism, p. 617); and “The prince of the power of evil can only be held in check by the power of God in the third person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit.—Special Testimonies, Series A, No. 10, p. 37. (1897) (Evangelism, p. 617).

These statements are unequivocal and, when taken together, they confirm that the Holy Spirit is a divine person and a member of the eternal Godhead. The clarity and force of these passages is a barrier against drawing conclusions that are in conflict with them. Despite this, there are those who replace the authority of these benchmark passages with less relevant or less clear passages. The Biblical principle of not imposing less clear passages over clearer passages but using the clearer passages as a key to the less clear and to facilitate overall harmony (2 Peter 3:16; 2 Timothy 3:16) also applies to the Spirit of Prophecy (Selected Messages, Vol. 1, p. 42). So it will be helpful to do a case study of what happens when the Spirit of Prophecy is not permitted to be self-interpreting in relation to the Holy Spirit. The passage we will examine is considered by some to overturn the force of the Spirit of Prophecy statements on the Holy Spirit cited so far in this series, especially those that affirm that the Son and the Holy Spirit are distinct persons.

Here is a passage from 14 Manuscript Release, p. 23: “Cumbered with humanity, Christ could not be in every place personally; therefore it was altogether for their advantage that He should leave them, go to His father, and send the Holy Spirit to be His successor on earth. The Holy Spirit is Himself divested of the personality of humanity and independent thereof. He would represent Himself as present in all places by His Holy Spirit, as the Omnipresent.” Despite the fact that the antecedent of “Himself” in the third sentence and at the end of the second sentence is the Holy Spirit, “Himself” is applied by some to Christ, making the Holy Spirit Christ divested of the personality of humanity. Reasoning that “Himself” could not refer to the Holy Spirit because He never had the personality of humanity and could not therefore be “divested” of it, clear passages are overturned in favour of the belief that the Holy Spirit is really Christ or a part of Him.

Letting the Spirit of Prophecy interpret itself, we find six other paragraphs in which “divested of the personality of humanity” appears, all in the same form but distinct from the above passage.ⁱ Here is Desire of Ages, p. 669: “The Holy Spirit is Christ's representative, but divested of the personality of humanity, and independent thereof. Cumbered with humanity, Christ could not be in every place personally. Therefore it was for their interest that He should go to the Father, and

send the Spirit to be His successor on earth. No one could then have any advantage because of his location or his personal contact with Christ. By the Spirit the Saviour would be accessible to all. In this sense He would be nearer to them than if He had not ascended on high.” Note that the syntax or structure of the first sentence requires “divested of the personality of humanity” to apply to the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is Christ’s representative and, standing in Christ’s place, must therefore be a separate being; in this case a divine being.ⁱⁱ While the Holy Spirit is Christ’s representative, He is “divested of the personality of humanity, and independent thereof.” He does not manifest the aspects of human personality that Christ does. Thus, while a representative of Christ, the Holy Spirit stands in contrast with Christ in that he is not limited by Christ’s identification with the human race. “Divested” does not mean that the Holy Spirit once had human personality; it is used by way of contrast with Christ.

The key to understanding the use of “divested” in relation to the Holy Spirit is “representative.” Ellen White could have said: “The Holy Spirit is Christ, but divested of the personality of humanity and independent thereof.” On the contrary, she indicates that the Holy Spirit is “divested of the personality of humanity, and independent thereof” as “Christ’s representative,” not as Christ. Take away the personality of humanity and you have Christ as He is represented by the Holy Spirit.

In Review and Herald, November 19, 1908, we find unequivocal evidence that Ellen White did not intend “divested of the personality of humanity and independent thereof” to refer to Christ but to Christ’s representative, the Holy Spirit. The same paragraph that we reviewed in Desire of Ages, page 669, also appears as paragraph 3 of the Review and Herald article cited above. In paragraph 5 of this article, which is entitled, “Christ’s Most Essential Gift to His Church,” we read: “In describing to his disciples the office work of the Holy Spirit, Jesus sought to inspire them with the joy and hope that inspired his own heart...Sin could be resisted and overcome only through the mighty agency of the third person of the Godhead, who would come with no modified energy, but in the fulness of divine power...Christ has given his Spirit as a divine power to overcome all hereditary and cultivated tendencies to evil, and to impress his own character on his church.”

Here, the Holy Spirit has “office work” or a specific role to play in the plan of salvation and is also identified as the “Third Person of the Godhead,” clearly distinguishing Christ from the Holy Spirit. If the Holy Spirit is the Third Person of the Godhead, then Jesus must be the Second Person. If Jesus is the Second Person, He cannot also be the Third Person. The distinction between Christ and the Holy Spirit is also affirmed in the identification of the “Third Person of the Godhead” as Christ’s Spirit. So when the claim that the Holy Spirit is really Christ divested of the personality of humanity is tested against relevant evidence, it collapses.

It is cause for reflection that such serious misapprehension of the evidence can take place among those who claim to be preparing for Christ's soon return. In the next and final article in this series, I will attempt an explanation for this phenomenon but not before looking at several case studies in the Spirit of Prophecy relating to the eternity of the Son of God. These case studies will highlight yet again the importance of consistent application of the self-interpreting principles of the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy when establishing sound doctrine.

ⁱ CS 255; DA 669; FLB 56, AG 191. LHU 179; and RH, Nov. 19, 1908, para.3.

ⁱⁱ We noted that the Holy Spirit is identified as one of the three eternal, heavenly dignitaries in *Evangelism*, p. 616.