

Introduction To The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit

Any study of God or doctrine would be incomplete without a study of the Holy Spirit. Certainly there is a great deal of controversy over this doctrine during our lifetime. It has been said over the course of church history that no doctrine has been so neglected as the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. That is until the 20th century. At the turn of the 20th century this essential and important doctrine was no longer neglected, but it became and continues to be misunderstood and even abused.

Some of this confusion is due to the rise of unbiblical thinking and teaching:

First, the teaching of **materialism** has developed. Materialism is a philosophical outlook that contends that physical matter is the only reality or category of existence, so that everything that exists is a manifestation of the material (rather than a manifestation of the mind). In a more popular parlance, the term refers to pursuit of money and possessions as a central goal of human existence. [Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms, p. 76] This over emphasis on the physical or material aspect of life results in a complete denial of the. Many people live their lives in the realm of the physical (in the flesh), and therefore do not concern themselves with the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Certainly this is a widespread mindset in today's world, especially in America.

Second, in addition to the development of materialism, there has been a focus on the teaching of **rationalism**. Rationalism is a system that assigns reason, not sensory experience as the primary means of gaining knowledge. In other words all truth is discoverable through human reason. [Robert Thomas & David Farnell, The Jesus Crisis, p. 89] As a philosophy it rejects that which is spiritual and is at odds with much Biblical truth. This is the mindset of those from the academic world who hold to a more liberal theology, and elevate the human mind over Biblical truth.

Third, in an extreme reaction to materialism and rationalism many have embraced the idea of **experientialism**. This is the belief that knowledge is gained through personal experience. This usually focuses on the spiritual rather than the rational or material aspects, but is often carried to an unhealthy extreme and thus elevates personal experience over Biblical truth. This has certainly infiltrated many churches in our day through the Charismatic Movement.

With the development and rise of materialism, rationalism, and experientialism, the true Biblical teaching regarding the Holy Spirit is often ignored, misunderstood, and abused. Therefore it is extremely important to carefully study God's Word to see what it says about the Holy Spirit.

The systematic study of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is called **pneumatology** coming from the Greek words: "pneuma" meaning *spirit* and "logos" meaning *word*. Thus **pneumatology** is the word on the spirit or the study of the Holy Spirit.

The doctrine of the Holy Spirit is important because it concerns the personality and ministry of one of the members of our Triune God. However, it is also important because of the Spirit's role in our sanctification (our Christian growth and walk). It is necessary for us to have an accurate and Biblical understanding of the person and work of the Holy Spirit so that we might more effectively walk by the Spirit (Galatians 5:16).

Valley Bible Church Theology Studies

Over the course of the next few weeks we will examine the following areas of study, which fall under the doctrine of the Holy Spirit:

- The personality of the Holy Spirit
- The deity of the Holy Spirit
- The representations of the Holy Spirit
- The ministry of the Holy Spirit in Society
- The Old Testament ministry of the Holy Spirit
- The ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of Christ
- The New Testament ministry of the Holy Spirit including (The Baptism of the Spirit; The Indwelling of the Spirit; the Spirit's sealing, filling, teaching and guiding ministries; and the Spirit's role in prayer)
- The ministry of the Holy Spirit in the giving of Spiritual Gifts (including speaking gifts, service gifts and sign gifts)