

The Personality of the Holy Spirit

We begin the study of the Holy Spirit by asking the question, “*Who is He?*” “*Who is the Holy Spirit?*” So, who is the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit is a Person!

Theologian John Walvoord says in his book, The Holy Spirit, “It is a fundamental revelation of Scripture that the Holy Spirit is a person in the same sense that God the Father is a person and the Lord Jesus Christ is a person.” [John Walvoord, The Holy Spirit, p. 5]

This idea of personhood in relation to the Holy Spirit has been subject to denial and neglect throughout church history and is seldom understood by modern day Christians. Most modern day Christians view the Holy Spirit as an impersonal force rather than a real person.

IF, the Holy Spirit can be shown to be directly linked with terms descriptive of personality,
AND, the Holy Spirit can be shown to act as a person would act,
AND, the Holy Spirit can be shown to be a separate identifiable person in relation to other persons,
THEN, the Holy Spirit can clearly be identified as a person rather than an impersonal force.

So, what evidence from Scripture do we have that the Holy Spirit is a person?

First, the Scripture reveals that the Holy Spirit possesses the characteristics/attributes of personhood.

The Scripture clearly ascribes all the distinctive characteristics of personality to the Holy Spirit. What are the distinctive characteristics of personality? Personhood/personality may simply be defined as possessing the characteristics of *intellect*, *emotion* and *will*. By demonstrating that the Holy Spirit possesses intellect, emotion and will, it will be shown that the Holy Spirit is indeed a person not just an impersonal force.

There are passages that describe the Holy Spirit as possessing an intellect:

- **Romans 8:26-27** tells us that the Holy Spirit has a *mind*.

*“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.”*

The Greek word *mind* includes the ideas of thought, feeling and purpose and therefore proves the Holy Spirit possesses all the attributes of personhood.

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- In **1 Corinthians 2:10-11** *knowledge* is ascribed to the Holy Spirit.

*“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.**”*

Clearly the Holy Spirit is more than an influence that illuminates our minds to comprehend the truth, but is a person who searches and knows the truth.

- **1 Corinthians 2:12-13** tells us that the Holy Spirit is able to teach.

*“Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those **taught by the Spirit**, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.”*

The ability to teach requires a mind as well as the knowledge necessary to teach and thereby proves the possession of an intellect by the Holy Spirit.

- In **Isaiah 11:1-2** the Holy Spirit is referred to as the Spirit of wisdom, understanding, counsel and knowledge.

*“Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, And a branch from his roots will bear fruit. **The Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, The Spirit of counsel and strength, The Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.**”*

The Holy Spirit is first referenced as the Spirit of the LORD and then further defined as the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, counsel and knowledge... This certainly would be descriptive of one who possesses an intellect.

- **Isaiah 40:13-14** further emphasizes the wisdom, knowledge and understanding of the Spirit.

*“Who has directed **the Spirit of the LORD**, Or as His counselor has informed Him? With whom did He consult and who gave Him understanding? And who taught Him in the path of justice and taught Him knowledge, And informed Him of the way of understanding?”*

This of course is a rhetorical question with the implied answer of “NO ONE!” This passage emphasizes the absolute wisdom, knowledge and understanding possessed by the Holy Spirit. Thus it emphasizes the possession of an intellect and thereby proves the Holy Spirit's personhood. This passage is somewhat controversial and is not often used to prove the Holy Spirit's personhood. The Hebrew term RUACH is normally translated “Spirit,” but the Greek Septuagint followed by the NIV version translate it “mind.” This certainly would place more emphasis on the Second Person of the Trinity rather than the Third. In addition the Apostle Paul quotes the Greek Septuagint in Romans 11:34 and thereby Romans 11:34 states “mind.”

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There are passages that describe the Holy Spirit as possessing emotion:

- In **Romans 15:30** love is ascribed to the Holy Spirit.

*“Now I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and **by the love of the Spirit**, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me.”*

Very clearly from this passage the Holy Spirit possesses the emotion of love. All too often we fail to recognize the Holy Spirit as a person who has real emotions. We have a tendency to see the Holy Spirit as an impersonal force. We quite often recognize the love of the Father or the love of Christ, but fail to see that the Holy Spirit demonstrates the attribute of love. R.A. Torrey clarifies this in his book, The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit.

“If it had not been for the love of God the Father looking down upon me in my utter ruin and providing a perfect atonement for me in the death of His own Son on the cross of Calvary, I would have been in hell today. If it had not been for the love of Jesus Christ, the eternal Word of God, looking upon me in my utter ruin and in obedience for all the shame of earth and taking my place, the pouring out of His life utterly for me, I would have been in hell today. But if it had not been for the love of the Holy Spirit, sent by the Father in answer to the prayer of the Son (John 15:16), leading Him to seek me out in my utter blindness and ruin, I would have been in hell today... He opened my eyes to see my utter ruin and then revealed Jesus to me... and then enabled me to receive this Jesus as my own Savior. If it had not been for this patient, long-suffering, never-tiring, infinitely-tender love of the Holy Spirit, I would have been in hell today.” [R.A. Torrey, The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit, p. 13]

- According to **Ephesians 4:30**, the Holy Spirit can be grieved.

*“Do not **grieve the Holy Spirit of God**, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”*

The context emphasizes that the Holy Spirit is grieved when a believer sins by lying (v. 25), by stealing or being lazy (v. 28), by speaking unkind words (v. 29) and by being angry, bitter and slanderous (v. 27, 31). The term grieve is the noun form of the same word used in describing the Corinthians sorrow after Paul wrote them a stern letter (cf. 2 Corinthians 2:2, 5). Certainly an impersonal force cannot be grieved or become sorrowful.

“The Holy Spirit is not a blind, impersonal influence or power that comes into our lives to illuminate, sanctify, and empower us. No, He is immeasurably more than that. He is a holy person who comes to dwell in us, One who sees clearly every act we perform, every word we speak, every thought we entertain, even the most fleeting fancy that is allowed to pass through our minds. If there is anything in act or word or deed that is impure, unholy, unkind, selfish, mean, petty, or untrue, this infinitely Holy One is deeply grieved by it.” [Torrey, p. 14-15]

Certainly the expression of love and grief demonstrates the presence of emotion and thus supports the personality of the Holy Spirit.

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There are passages that describe the Holy Spirit as possessing a will/volition:

The possession of a will or volition would indicate that the Holy Spirit has the power of choice or decision and certainly in His case as we study further this is the power of sovereign choice and decision.

- According to **1 Corinthians 12:11**, the Holy Spirit distributes gifts just as He wills.

*“But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually **just as He wills.**”*

The term “wills” [BOULETAI] refers to the decision of the will after previous deliberation. It also carries forth the idea of sovereign choice or determination and is the same term used in James 1:18 regarding the will of the Father.

- In **Acts 13:2**, the Holy Spirit exercised His will in the selection of Saul and Barnabas to be set apart for a specific ministry.

*“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.**”*

The term *called* [PROSKEKLEIMAI] emphasizes the personal and sovereign choice/decision that was made by the Holy Spirit.

- In **Acts 16:6ff**, the Holy Spirit exercised His will in forbidding Paul to preach in Asia and redirecting his ministry in Europe. *“They passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, having been **forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia...**”*

Clearly the Holy Spirit possesses a will as demonstrated in His selection of individuals for ministry, distribution of spiritual gifts for individual believers and the redirection of ministry activities.

Second, the Scripture reveals that the Holy Spirit performs the actions associated with personhood.

Not only does the Holy Spirit possess the characteristics of personality, but He also performs actions that can only be ascribed to a person. The following are activities that can only be done by a person, not by an impersonal force, a mere influence, a personification or an emanation.

There are passages, which reveal that the Holy Spirit Speaks:

- **Matthew 10:20** *“For it is not you who speak, but it is **the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.**”*

Jesus is here instructing His disciples and informing them that they will face times of persecution. When they are delivered up to the governing authorities the Holy Spirit will give them the words to say and it is not them that are speaking, but the Holy Spirit who speaks in/through them.

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- **John 16:13** “*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 what ever He hears, **He will speak**; and He will disclose to you what is to come.*”

Just as Jesus did nothing on His own initiative, so also the Spirit does nothing on His own initiative. The Holy Spirit will guide in truth, but will not speak on His own initiative, but rather speaks only what He hears from Christ who speaks what He hears from the Father. There is reliable consistency in what the Triune God communicates to us.

- **Acts 8:29** “*Then **the Spirit said** to Philip, “Go up and join this chariot.”*”

- **Acts 10:19** “*While Peter was reflecting on the vision, **the Spirit said to him**, “Behold, three men are looking for you.”*”

- **Acts 13:2** “*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.”*”

In each of the three preceding verses the Holy Spirit gave direct commands to Philip, Peter, Barnabas and Saul (Paul). Certainly, during the formation stages of the church, prior to the completion of God's Special Revelation (the Bible), we see specific and direct audible commands given by the Holy Spirit.

- **1 Timothy 4:1** “*But **the Spirit explicitly says** that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons.”*”

Paul had been given explicit information about the end times from the Holy Spirit.

- **Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22** “*He who has an ear, let him hear what **the Spirit says** to the churches.”*”

Clearly the Holy Spirit was involved in the speaking forth of information that the Apostle John needed to communicate to the seven churches in Asia Minor during the writing of Revelation.

The ability to speak is not something you would expect from an impersonal force, but it is a clear indication of personhood. As will be emphasized later, the Scripture may emphasize the Spirit's ability to speak, but that does not mean that He speaks in an audible voice today. Certainly, now that all of God's Word is complete, this revelatory activity of the Holy Spirit has ceased. The Holy Spirit only speaks to us today through the completed Word of God.

There are passages, which reveal that the Holy Spirit Teaches:

Before Jesus departed from the disciples He encouraged them by telling them that He would send them “another helper” (John 14:16). The Greek term [ALLOS] “*another*” stresses that the Holy Spirit would be a helper of the same kind as Christ. Just as Jesus had taught the disciples (Matthew 5:2; John 8:2), so the Holy Spirit would teach them. The Holy Spirit would perform and carry on the same kind of teaching ministry as Christ did. The Holy Spirit would cause them to remember

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the things Christ had previously taught them. So the Holy Spirit would be confirming Christ's teaching. [cf. Paul Enns, The Moody Handbook of Theology, p. 246-247]

- **Nehemiah 9:20** “*You gave Your good **Spirit to instruct them...***”

This passage is remembering the years of wilderness wandering recorded for us in Numbers 9-19. Obviously the Holy Spirit was involved in instructing the Israelites during this time period.

- **Luke 12:12** “*for **the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.***”

This is a similar passage to that above in Matthew 10:20. Clearly the Holy Spirit would be very instrumental in teaching the disciples.

- **John 14:26** “*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.*”

It was in light of His anticipated departure that Jesus provided this instruction on the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit would be sent to teach the disciples all things and reminding them of everything that Jesus taught them. “The Holy Spirit energized the hearts and minds of the apostles in their ministry, helping them to produce the New Testament Scripture.” [The MacArthur Study Bible, p. 1614]

- **John 16:13** “*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 what ever He hears, He will speak; and **He will disclose to you what is to come.***”

“Anticipating the Spirit's work at Pentecost (Acts 2), Jesus announces that the “Spirit of Truth” will “guide you into all truth.” The word “guide” [HODEGEO] is actually made up of two words, “to lead” [HEGEOMAI] and “way” [HODOS]. The word indicates that the Holy Spirit, who is a source of truth, will lead the way into the truth as a guide.” [J. Carl Laney, Moody Gospel Commentary on John, p. 290-291]

- **Romans 8:14** “*For all who are being **led by the Spirit of God**, these are sons of God.*”

The Holy Spirit illuminates the Word of God to those who are true children of His. Through the teaching of the Scripture the Holy Spirit is able to lead and give instruction to believers.

- **1 Corinthians 2:12-13** “*Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those **taught by the Spirit**, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.*”

Very Clearly in this passage the Apostle Paul is making the point that the Apostles have received God's revelation through the teaching of the Holy Spirit. It is not their own human wisdom being passed on, but the teaching of the Holy Spirit.

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An impersonal force does not give instruction, or guide into all truth. Very clearly the Scriptures reveal the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit and thus confirm the personhood of the Spirit.

There are passages, which reveal that the Holy Spirit Prays/Intercedes:

- **Romans 8:26** “*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.*****”

Paul makes it clear that we have an inability to pray as we should. “Because of our imperfect perspectives, finite minds, human frailties, and spiritual limitations, we are not able to pray in absolute consistency with God's will. Many times we are not even aware that spiritual needs exist...” [The MacArthur New Testament Commentary on Romans 1-8, p. 466]

It is clear from this passage that the Holy Spirit is not merely an influence that moves us to pray, not merely an illumination that teaches us how to pray, but a person who Himself prays in and through us. [Torrey, p. 17]

The Holy Spirit's intercession is described as “*groanings too deep for words.*” These groans are not audible; they are not utterances; they are inexpressible in words. They are infinitely beyond our understanding as the Holy Spirit intercedes on our behalf.

In the time of a believer's weakness, the Holy Spirit intercedes on our behalf. It is interesting that the word used for intercedes here is the same word used of Christ's intercessory work in Romans 8:34 and Hebrews 7:25.

It is comforting to know that not only do we have our advocate, Jesus Christ who has ascended to the right hand of the Father interceding on our behalf, but we also have the Holy Spirit who intercedes for us.

There are passages, which reveal that the Holy Spirit Convicts:

- **John 16:8** “*And He, when **He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.***”

In John 16:8-11 we are given information about the Holy Spirit's ministry to the unbelieving world. The term “*convict*” [ELEGCHO] can be translated “convict,” “reprove,” or “rebuke.” It means to “convince someone of something or to point something out to someone.” It implies a rebuke that brings conviction.

The Holy Spirit acts as a divine prosecutor in convincing the world concerning sin righteousness and judgment; concerning sin because they do not believe in Christ (v. 9); concerning righteousness because Christ will be with the Father (v. 10); concerning judgment because the ruler of this world has been judged (v. 11).

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There are passages which reveal that the Holy Spirit Testifies:

- **John 16:14** “*He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose to you.*”

The term, “*glorify*” [DOXAZO] means to magnify or extol the reputation of another. The Holy Spirit will magnify Christ's reputation as He makes the truth of Christ's Person and work known. He will make known the glory of Christ.

- **John 15:26** “*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.***”

The term “*Helper*” [PARAKLATOS] is a reference to the Holy Spirit. Notice that the Holy Spirit is sent by Christ from the Father and therefore is a Person of highest authority. Also notice that the Holy Spirit is referred to as the Spirit of Truth and thus indicates that He is characterized by and communicates truth.

The term “*testify*” [MARTUREO] simply means to testify or speak about someone or something. It is the term from which we get our English term *martyr*. Very, clearly one of the roles of the Holy Spirit is to testify the truth concerning Christ.

- **Acts 5:32** “*And we are **witnesses** of these things; and **so is the Holy Spirit**, whom God has given to those who obey Him.*”

Once again an emphasis is made on the *witness* of the Holy Spirit. He is said to be a “*witness*” [MARTURES] of Christ. Here we have the use of the noun form of the verb “*testify*” used in John 15:26. Not only are believers to be witnesses of Christ, but the Holy Spirit already is a witness of Christ.

- **Romans 8:16** “*The **Spirit Himself** testifies with our spirit that we are children of God.*”

In a Roman adoption there were witnesses, which had the responsibility or testifying to the validity of the adoption. Here the Holy Spirit Himself is constantly present to provide inner testimony to our divine adoption as children of God. [cf. The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Romans 1-8, p. 438]

- **Hebrews 10:15** “*And the **Holy Spirit** also testifies to us...*”

Here in this passage the Holy Spirit is involved in testifying to us in regards to the New Covenant (cf. Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Hebrews 8:8-12).

It seems unlikely that some sort of impersonal force can bear witness, or testify of Christ. This certainly is an action that clearly demonstrates personhood.

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There are passages, which reveal the Holy Spirit Directs Ministry:

We have already seen in some of the passages already mentioned that the Holy Spirit had an active role in the direction of early church ministry.

- **Acts 8:29** “Then *the Spirit said* to Philip, “Go up and join this chariot.”
- **Acts 10:19** “While Peter was reflecting on the vision, *the Spirit said to him*, “Behold, three men are looking for you.”
- **Acts 13:2** “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.”
- **Acts 16:6** “They passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, having been *forbidden by the Holy Spirit* to speak the word in Asia...”
- **1 Corinthians 12:11** “But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually *just as He wills*.”

In these passages the Holy Spirit played an active role in directing the ministry of Philip, Peter, Barnabas and Paul. In addition He was involved in specifically gifting individuals for ministry. This is not descriptive activity of an impersonal force.

“The most tangible and conclusive evidence for the personality of the Holy Spirit is found in His works. The very character of His works makes it impossible to interpret the Scripture properly without assuming His personality.” [Walvoord, p. 6]

Third, the Scripture reveals that the Holy Spirit is described as a person would.

Certain acts are performed toward the Holy Spirit, which would be inconsistent of one not possessing true personality.

The Holy Spirit can be grieved:

- **Ephesians 4:30** “*Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God*, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”

The sin of a believer grieves the Holy Spirit. There is also an illustration of the Holy Spirit being grieved in the case of Israel's sin and rebellion against God recorded in Isaiah 63:10.

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The Holy Spirit can be lied to:

- **Acts 5:3** “*But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land?”*”

When Peter confronted Ananias and Sapphira concerning their deceit, he accused them of having lied to the Holy Spirit and both were judged with death for this sin.

The Holy Spirit can be resisted:

- **Acts 7:51** “*You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit...*”

In his speech against unbelieving Jews who ultimately stoned him to death, Stephen accused them of resisting the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit can be insulted:

- **Hebrews 10:29** “*How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has **insulted the Spirit of grace.***”

The Spirit of grace is a reference to the Holy Spirit. Rejecting Christ insults the Holy Spirit who worked through Him (Matthew 12:31-32) and testifies of Him (John 15:26).

The Holy Spirit can be blasphemed:

- **Matthew 12:31** “*Therefore I say to you, any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven people, but **blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven.***”

The blasphemy against the Holy Spirit consisted of attributing the works of Christ to Satan when the Holy Spirit had testified to Christ's work as being from the Father.

These examples give evidence of the personality of the Holy Spirit. To think of acting or reacting to an influence in these ways is incongruous. Certainly the fact that the Holy Spirit can be grieved, resisted, lied to, insulted and blasphemed give evidence to His personality.

Fourth, the Scripture reveals that the Holy Spirit relates as a Person to other persons.

In certain passages, the Holy Spirit relates to other persons as a person and not as an impersonal force. Certainly texts such as these provide some of the strongest evidence of the Holy Spirit's personhood as He is identified as a separate and identifiable person.

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The Holy Spirit relates to the Apostles:

- **Acts 15:28** *“For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials...”*

Here he related to the Apostles in a manner that shows His own distinct personality. He is a person who is distinct and identifiable.

The Holy Spirit relates to Christ:

- **John 16:13-14** *“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. He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you.”*

He relates to the Lord Jesus in such a way that if the Lord has personality one must conclude that the Spirit does also. Yet according to verse 14, He is clearly distinct from Christ. Additional passages can be noted in which the Holy Spirit operates as a separate identifiable person from the Father and the Son (Matthew 28:19; Romans 8:26-27; Mark 1:10-11; 2 Corinthians 13:14).

Fifth, the Scripture reveals that the Holy Spirit is represented in the New Testament with personal pronouns.

Several times the writers of the New Testament use a masculine pronoun to refer to the Spirit (which is a neuter term in the Greek). The clearest example of this exception to normal grammatical usage occurs in John 16:13-14, where the masculine demonstrative pronoun is used twice to refer to the Spirit mentioned in verse 13.

- **John 16:13-14** *“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. **He** will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you.”*

The only rationale for such wording is the belief that the Holy Spirit is indeed a personal being. There are other texts in which the same case could be made, but they are not quite as clear.

CONCLUSION

Certainly the Holy Spirit's possession of personal attributes; performance of personal actions; reception of personal ascriptions; involvement in personal relations; and representation with personal pronouns provide very clear Scriptural evidence that leads to the conclusion that the Holy Spirit, even though a spiritual being, is as real a person as the Father; or the Son, or as we are and is by no means an impersonal force.

APPLICATION QUESTION

How do you view the Holy Spirit? Do you see Him as some vague, impersonal force? Or do you recognize Him as a clear and distinct person, whom you can have a personal relationship with, someone to whom you can and should pray?