

The Holy Spirit Is Not an 'It'

We charismatics celebrate the Holy Spirit, yet our theology of the Spirit is often off balance.

Two popular charismatic speakers stood on a stage two years ago and decided they should demonstrate the power of the Holy Spirit. One guy pretended to throw an imaginary "fireball" at his friend, who promptly fell over as if he had been zapped by the divine power. Then, feeling equally playful, the guy on the floor stood to his feet and threw the "fireball" back at his friend—who fell after the "blob" of God hit him.

Everybody laughed and had a hilarious time at this outrageous party. There was just one problem. The Holy Spirit is not a blob, a fireball or any other form of divine energy that can be thrown, manipulated, maneuvered or controlled.

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This scenario happened in a charismatic church—a place where the ministry of the Holy Spirit is presumably honored and understood. It's incredibly sad that many of us who wear the charismatic label have forgotten what the Scriptures teach about the third person of the Trinity. At the risk of sounding way too elementary, I'd like to offer this basic layman's guide to pneumatology—the study of the Holy Spirit and how He works:

1. He is the Spirit of the Lord. He is not a force (as in *Star Wars*), a magical power or an "it." The Holy Spirit is God, and we should revere Him as God. The concept of the Trinity doesn't make sense to the human mind. Yet Scripture reveals God as a triune being. As theologian Norman Geisler writes: "God is one *what* (nature) with three *whos* (persons). This is a mystery but not a contradiction."

2. He is our Regenerator. Jesus told Nicodemus that we are born again by the Holy Spirit (John 3:5). True conversion is the most supernatural thing we will ever experience! When a person puts his faith in Christ for salvation, it is the Spirit who opens the heart and quickens divine life. He then indwells us. While this is an invisible process, it is no less miraculous. When we are converted our hearts cry out, "*Abba!* Father" because the Holy Spirit is "the Spirit of adoption" (Romans 8:15); He gives us confidence that we are now

children of God.

3. He is our Empowerer. When we are baptized in the Holy Spirit we are “clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49, NASB). The Spirit who already indwells us fills us to the point of overflowing. Jesus said the Holy Spirit’s power would flow out of us like “rivers of living water” from our innermost being (John 7:38). This overflow releases supernatural boldness (Acts 4:31) as well as the anointing for various gifts of the Spirit including prophecy, speaking in tongues and healing.

4. He is the Spirit of Truth. The Spirit has access to all the wisdom and knowledge of God. When we abide in Him, He leads us continually into truth—causing us to grow and mature spiritually. He wants to fill us with the treasures of heavenly revelation. We can fully trust Him because He never does anything to violate the Word of God. As our teacher (1 John 2:27), He knows the difference between truth and error, and those who depend on Him will walk in discernment and avoid deception, pride and carnality.

5. He is our Counselor. This word is also translated “Advocate,” “Comforter” or “Helper.” The Greek word, *parakletos*, means “one called alongside to help.” It implies that the Spirit comes to our legal defense when we are accused or troubled; it also means He is a close friend who offers encouragement,

consolation and direction when we face any difficulty. He is truly a friend who “sticks closer than a brother” (Prov. 18:24).

6. He is our Intercessor. This is probably one of the greatest miracles of grace. The Spirit who lives inside of us “intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words” (Rom. 8:26). Even when we don’t know how to pray, the Spirit prays the perfect will of God. No matter what kind of dark difficulty we face, the Spirit travails for us until we emerge on the other side.

7. He is our Unifier. Like the master conductor of an orchestra, the Holy Spirit pulls together each individual Christian—with all of our diverse gifts—and causes us to flow in synchronization as one body. The Spirit distributes His gifts to individuals (1 Cor. 12:11) and He brings about the “fellowship of the Spirit” (2 Cor. 13:14)—a supernatural, loving harmony among believers that overcomes jealousy, envy, strife and bitterness.

8. He is our Refiner. The Spirit took the form of a dove at Christ’s baptism, but He is often portrayed in Scripture as a fire. He is the “refiner’s fire” (Mal. 3:2-3) who purifies us of selfishness, pride and wrong motives. The Holy Spirit is indeed the fire of blazing holiness, and He can be both grieved (Eph. 4:30) and quenched (1 Thess. 5:19) when we disobey His promptings.

As we prepare to celebrate the day of Pentecost in less than a month (it’s on May 23), let’s meditate on all aspects of the

Spirit's work in
our lives—and invite Him to fill us in a fresh way.

J. Lee Grady served as editor of *Charisma* for 11 years and is now contributing editor. You can find him on Twitter at leegrady. His newest book is *The Holy Spirit Is Not for Sale*.