JOHN'S VIEW OF THE HOLY SPIRIT
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Introduction

The Gospel of John is profound in a myriad of ways. However, John's overall reason, as stated in John 20:31, for writing the book states his intent so well: “But these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.”[1] John writes a Gospel for the believers of his day and for today. While John may have known of previous Scripture writings of his day, he writes as a true eyewitness and records a book according to a Holy Spirit inspired plan. Seventy years may have passed since John heard and saw the ideas that he writes, but they are all still fresh in the mind of John. Much has taken place within the church during this time. John writes a Gospel that addresses the eyewitness testimony as well as the current issues of the day.

Depending on a scholar’s perspective of this book, it may be studied from the viewpoint of its simple Greek, its picture of the humanity of Jesus, or the various signs. Additionally, John rounds out one’s understanding of such topics as the divinity of Christ, His offices, and, most importantly, the nature, person, and operations of the Holy Spirit. John gives the greatest and fullest teaching of the Holy Spirit among the Gospel writers. He weaves this understanding of the Holy Spirit throughout the themes and chapters of this Gospel. The purpose of this paper then is to examine and illustrate John's major teachings on the Holy Spirit.

Holy Spirit in John

Baptism of Jesus – John 1:32-33; 3:32; 3:34

John first mentions the Spirit during his account of the baptism of Jesus. Carson and Moo note that the baptism of Jesus is one of the “parallel incidents”[2] in the synoptic gospels. Each of the gospels records this occurrence. This event is a watershed incident in the life of Jesus, which signals the beginning of his earthly ministry.

The symbol used for the Holy Spirit in 1:32 is a dove. Over the course of history, the dove has always signified peace, gentleness, purity, and innocence. Here in the Gospel of John, the dove “identifies the Coming One”[3] to John the Baptist. John the Baptist saw a literal dove descending upon Jesus; identifying Jesus as the one “who would himself baptize with the Spirit.”[4] The Holy Spirit revealed Himself in a visible manner.

God’s sign to identify the Messiah to John the Baptist in 1:33 was the one on whom “you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.” Additionally, in 1:33 and in 3:32 the Holy Spirit is described as resting permanently on Jesus. This is much different from many Old Testament references where the Holy Spirit was given for a season or for the completion of a task.

Later on John will describe the Holy Spirit as resting permanently on and within the believer. He or she can take great comfort in knowing that the Holy Spirit is a permanent part of his/her life. The Holy Spirit does not operate in a part-time fashion. The believer can depend upon the Holy Spirit to be continuously present throughout all of the experiences of life.

The connection between the baptism of Jesus and the opening scenes of his earthly ministry are significant. Jesus first entered into
human history with his birth and again in a different way through his ministry. God will now be shown and explained to humanity through the means of the Holy Spirit. The coming of the Holy Spirit is demonstrated so well through Acts 2 within the context of Pentecost. At Pentecost, the Church and the believers were filled with the power of God’s Spirit. The Holy Spirit was sent to work and live within the heart of man.

The church on the day of Pentecost needed a visible imputation of the Holy Spirit to confirm the promise of Jesus. The visible and audible components of the event removed their uncertainty and fear about what to do next. The disciples were able to connect the coming of the Holy Spirit with the commission to which Jesus had charged them. The active indwelling of the Holy Spirit would now empower them in the way that Jesus desired.

A contrast is shown between John the Baptist baptizing with water and Jesus baptizing with the Holy Spirit. While John the Baptist’s ministry might be described as an unpretentious ministry, the ministry of Jesus was God’s ultimate mission to the world. John the Baptist’s last testimony concerning Jesus and the Spirit is reflected in the words of John 3:34.

This verse also states that the Holy Spirit was given to Jesus “without measure.” The prophets of the Old Testament had the Holy Spirit, but only in the measure needed for the task. In Luke 4:18-19, Jesus shares the reason for the Holy Spirit being given to him “without measure.” While John is talking about Jesus here, believers can also gain a lesson from this verse. The Apostle Paul and others refer to the believer as being called within many contexts. Since this is the case, the believer can rest assured that when God calls, he will endow whom he calls with his Spirit.

**Regeneration – John 3:5-8**

John’s treatment of the Holy Spirit moves next to the important aspect of the new birth. John makes the point that the new birth cannot occur through the flesh, but can only be achieved through the Holy Spirit. Whereas water can cleanse outwardly, a “spiritual renewal of this kind is bound to affect every part of a man’s life.”[5] Guthrie makes a good point with this statement. An individual’s common experience as a Christian points out the great change that comes over one when he/she repents of sins and asks Jesus Christ into his/her life. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit affects every aspect of one’s life.

Jesus is very clear throughout the Nicodemus discourse that humanity cannot affect, by its own efforts, the new birth. This transformation requires the work of the Holy Spirit. Too often, this is misunderstood as being a reformation, which is very different and usually effected by self. Man cannot regenerate himself “using his latent capacities.”[6] The post-modern man and woman believes that there exists within themselves all that is needed to meet the requirements of any reasonable God. Believers need to be reminded often of what God has done and is continuing to do as a transforming work within their lives. Too often followers of Christ can fall into the trap of thinking that God started the work, but they must come alongside to help the process. Conversely, the believer exists within the context of progressive sanctification. God in Christ Jesus saves us and the Holy Spirit sanctifies.

In 3:8, John uses the analogy of the wind to describe the mysterious nature and process of regeneration. The point Jesus is making to Nicodemus is that the wind is a real entity, but one does not always know its origin or its goal. Nevertheless, just like the working of the Holy Spirit, its effects are evident.


When Jesus converses with the Samaritan woman, he indicates that true worship is only accomplished when it is done in the Spirit. This type of worship is only “made possible by the gift of the Holy Spirit.”[7] Carson goes on to explain that unless people are born of the spirit as Jesus indicated to Nicodemus, they cannot worship as indicated. While the Holy Spirit is not directly noted here, this verse only makes sense if the Holy Spirit is the animating force. These verses need to be interpreted within the context of John’s treatment of the Holy Spirit within the entire Fourth Gospel.

An important distinction can be made here between worshipping in the Spirit and worshipping the Spirit. Believers must be cautious of any fellowship that has turned its focus away from the finished work of Christ.

**Gives Life – John 6:63**

John’s question in this passage is “How can a dead sinner gain eternal life?” Jesus had just related the Bread of Life discourse to his followers and disciples. There was confusion and misunderstanding on their part with his comments of eating his flesh and drinking his blood. The response of Jesus invokes the Holy Spirit’s work in regeneration. Without the Spirit, the flesh will never be alive. This is true even in the physical sense as illustrated in Genesis 2:7. Carson clarifies this with his statement of “It is not as if the flesh is of no significance: after all, the Word became flesh.”[8] Christ was the embodiment of God. Jesus does not deny that His own flesh was of no value. Only through the risen Christ, can the Holy Spirit enter one’s soul and give spiritual life.

People have been essentially the same down throughout the ages. They adhere to the strength and wisdom that exists within them as being adequate for all things. The term “in the flesh” has often meant by the “strong arm of man.” Though flesh starts out young and vibrant, it eventually deteriorates and dies. While it may have been adequate for this life, it dies with this existence. Jesus contradicts very clearly the thought that the flesh is of ultimate profit.

**Outpouring of Spirit through Waiting on God – John 7:37-39**
Jesus makes several different claims in these verses in chapter 7. He can satisfy the real thirst of a man, give abundant life, and is the source of the Holy Spirit. As in the Samaritan woman account in John 4, Jesus speaks of the living water as being the gift of the Holy Spirit to a person.

John adds 7:39 to clarify the time of the Holy Spirit’s coming. When the Son’s work is completed and he is glorified, the Holy Spirit will come upon the believer in the “Christian sense of the term.” Once the death, resurrection, and glorification occurred, the believers would then be ready to function as Jesus intended. The giving of the Holy Spirit would be the operating agent of this new life. John 7:39 both promises the coming of the Holy Spirit and, at the same time, indicates that it will be a delayed blessing. The unbeliever today who comes to faith does not have to wait for the blessing of the Holy Spirit. Once an individual is convicted of sin, and acknowledges and confesses it to God and asks Jesus Christ into his/her life, the Holy Spirit takes up residence immediately in their life.

**Conviction of Sin – John 16:8-11**

A primary function of the Holy Spirit is to convict individuals of sin by awakening their hearts. Question 202 of Luther’s Small Catechism states: “The Holy Spirit calls us by awakening in our hearts a deep sense of sin and by inviting us to receive the grace of God in Christ.” This statement leads back to the thought of the Holy Spirit effecting transformation and not reformation. The Holy Spirit convicts of sin “because the world does not believe in Christ.” This statement by Aloisi has rung true throughout all of the ages. Humanity, since the Fall, has always exhibited a disbelief in God. The only way that humanity will ever change its mind is for an outside force to shine light upon their sin.

Carson describes this convicting work of the Holy Spirit as “designed to bring men and women of the world to recognize their need, and so turn to Jesus, and thus stop being ‘the world.’” Erickson states that the convicting work as the “working of the Spirit is necessary because the depravity characteristic of all humans prevents them from grasping God’s revealed truth.” Carson and Erickson complement one another with their descriptions of the convicting work of the Holy Spirit. Carson’s description focuses more on the process of the work. Since the unbeliever is blinded by sin, he/she first needs to be first prompted to recognize their need. Whereas the believer is not to be a part of the world, the unbeliever is fully immersed. Erickson focuses on the issue addressed by the Holy Spirit. The depravity of man blinds the unbeliever, thereby relegating him/her to darkness without the intervention of the Holy Spirit.


Within these passages, John uses a term that has proved “particularly difficult” to translate. The Greek word parakletos is used in five different verses in John. It is found in John 14:16; 14:26; 15:26; 16:7-8, and 16:13. Kostenberger argues that none of the current English renderings of the word does justice to this Greek word. In fact, the passage of time has obscured the meaning of many such terms. The historical records do not indicate a clear enough context so that current biblical scholars can ascertain its use and meaning at the time.

The various Bible translations render this word as Counselor, Helper, Comforter, Encourager, and Advocate. Kostenberger advocates for the meaning of “helping Presence.” This definition does seem to come closer to the essence of the root meaning of the word, which is “one called alongside to help.”

Prior to the passages under consideration here, Jesus notes that only those who love him receive the Holy Spirit. This clearly means that the receiving of the Holy Spirit is conditional upon an individual’s unconditional love for him. Just as the Holy Spirit rested permanently upon Jesus, believers will have the Holy Spirit abiding with them forever. Jesus tells his disciples in 14:16 and within the other four applicable verses that another “Helper (NASB)” will be sent to them. Kostenberger describes this well in saying the Spirit will be a “substitute presence” for Jesus. While he is with his disciples, Jesus is the driving and stabilizing force in their lives. However, when he departs, the void will be great and must be filled. It is important to note that “unless Jesus departs, the Spirit-Paraclete will not come.” Jesus knew that it would be impossible for believers to operate in this world without reinforcement from above. Believers are not strong enough to resist the worldly influence of the unbelieving world without the supernatural help of the Holy Spirit.

The description of the Holy Spirit as another “helper” is very applicable to the believer. In many ways, all of the functions of the Holy Spirit can fall under this heading. The Holy Spirit gives life and power, purifies, reveals, and assures us of our salvation. Each of these categories falls within the thought of “helper.”

John continues in 14:17 by describing the Holy Spirit with such terms and thoughts as the “Spirit of Truth”, “Indwelling Presence”, and teacher. Scripture always uses the concept of truth as the foundational aspect of all things. John uses truth as a “recurring theme in the Gospel of John.” John’s use of the phrase “Spirit of Truth” to describe the Holy Spirit is contextually the same truth that Jesus has embodied to the disciples. Many of the things that Jesus shared with his disciples, they were unable to understand or bear at the time. The Holy Spirit would later explain these to the disciples and bring illumination to them. Jesus, who is the current personification of truth is going away and being replaced by an identical substitute, the Holy Spirit.

Erickson makes a comment regarding “the Spirit of Truth” and Jesus himself with “The world cannot know him, because it neither sees him nor knows him.” This comment illuminates John 14:17 very clearly. What was true at the time of John’s writing of the book is true today. The world exists only within the context of its eyes and ears. There is a conscious effort on the part of individuals to distance themselves from any being higher than they. The unbelieving world does not know Jesus and, therefore, by default, does not know of the Holy Spirit. However, the believer does know Him as John states in verse 17, “but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you.” The believer possesses all of the blessings of the Holy Spirit.

The second thought in 14:17, concerning the Holy Spirit here, is his “Indwelling Presence.” John is very clear on the fact that believers...
The presence of the Lord is given to believers to provide the strength to live in a hostile world. The Holy Spirit, according to Jesus’ words in 14:18, is the personal presence of Christ. Some texts use the term “manifest” presence to describe how the Holy Spirit works in our lives.

In 14:25-26, 15:26, 16:8-11, and 16:13, John shares the important aspects of the Holy Spirit’s teaching and remembrance. Jesus taught many things to his disciples while he was here on earth, including the teachings on the Holy Spirit. One of Spirit’s functions is to teach people about Jesus through the Word, along with the way to live out that teaching. The Holy Spirit also functions as the prompter or reminder of Biblical truth when the trials of life come upon believers.

One of the great blessings for the believer is the teaching aspect of the Holy Spirit. When the Word of God is studied, the believer is not left to his or her own devices. The Holy Spirit illuminates, explains, and opens the meaning to the heart and mind. Since the Holy Spirit is also the reminder of biblical truth, the believer must be faithful in studying the Word so that there is a body of God’s Word exists within the mind and heart that can be prompted for recall.

**Holy Spirit’s Function of Glorifying God – John 16:14**

The major function of the Holy Spirit is to glorify Jesus. John 16:14 uses this verse to illustrate the principle that the Holy Spirit will come and proclaim whom Jesus is and what he did. The Holy Spirit would come and remind the disciples or, in essence, bear witness to the life, character, and work of Jesus Christ. This function still exists today as the Holy Spirit bears witness to believers of this same Jesus.

**Imparting of Holy Spirit – John 20:22**

At the end of his earthly ministry, Jesus commissions the disciples for the next phase of salvific history. Kostenberger states that “the coming of the Spirit will actually constitute an advance in God’s operations with and through the disciples.” While there is dispute on what this breathing on the disciples means, it does constitute, at the very least, a “pointing forward to the full enduement still to come.” It was very likely a symbolic representation of the Spirit’s presence and power that was to both indwell the believers and the Church after Christ’s ascension. Bennema posits that believers, during Jesus’ earthly ministry, had glimpses of “the life-giving Spirit, but authentic Christian faith became a reality only after the cross, the resurrection and the gift of the Spirit.” An application for the believer today is that he/she is now given a glimpse of the life to come through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. This shows a real “care” factor on the part of Jesus to provide a continuous thread of his “help” until he returns.

**Conclusion**

As indicated in the beginning, the Gospel of John is indeed a profound work. Once read, an individual has an extraordinary view and appreciation of God’s intentional love for humanity. When an unbeliever is seeking to understand who Jesus Christ is and what Christianity is all about, the Gospel of John addresses both the intellectual and heart needs of the individual. This includes understanding the humanity and deity of Christ, his ministry, and his provision for believers once he left this earth. The ongoing presence of the Holy Spirit also forms the foundation for one’s daily walk with the Lord. In this book, John provides the most complete picture of the nature, person, character, and operations of the Holy Spirit.

How does one understand the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit today? As believers, we understand that when an individual accepts Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, he/she is given the “Helper, Advocate, Counselor, etc.” The indwelt “one who comes along side to help” illuminates Scripture, encourages good works, convicts of sin, and preserves the believer.

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[5] Ibid., 527.

[6] Ibid.


[8] Ibid., 300.

[9] Ibid., 329.


[16] Ibid.


[22] Ibid., 157.


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By the end of the 20th century, the theological importance of the Holy Spirit in Johannine literature had been accepted by New Testament scholars, overshadowing the early 20th-century views that minimized its role in the writings of John. Three separate terms, namely Holy Spirit, Spirit of Truth and Paraclete are used in Johannine literature. The "Spirit of Truth" is used in John 14:17, 15:26 and 16:13. The First Epistle of John then contrasts this with the "spirit of error" in 1 John 4:6. 1 John 4:1 JOHN'S VIEW OF THE HOLY SPIRIT Introduction The Gospel of John is profound in a myriad of ways. However, John's overall reason, as stated in John 20:31, for John first mentions the Spirit during his account of the baptism of Jesus. Carson and Moo note that the baptism of Jesus is one of the "parallel incidents"[2] in the synoptic gospels. Each of the gospels records this occurrence.