

# **Jehovah's Witness teaching on the Holy Spirit**

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## **Introduction**

The most important fact about the Holy Spirit is that He works in people's lives to bring us to God, to bless us and to use us to bless others.

So the main thing about the Holy Spirit is ***not*** doctrine or teaching about the Holy Spirit. It is not facts or "knowledge".

If we focus on trying to understand the Holy Spirit, we will not have understood the most important aspect of the Holy Spirit.  
We will have missed the whole point.

The point is letting God work in our lives (by the Holy Spirit) and experiencing the power of God, which is a work undertaken by the Holy Spirit.

God makes His power available to us, for His glory, through the Holy Spirit. If we can be sidelined into studying, discussing and arguing about the Holy Spirit, we will have gone up a blind alley.

## **1. Why is it important to the Jehovah's Witness leadership that we should not believe in the Holy Spirit?**

The Jehovah's Witness leadership doesn't want people to believe in the Holy Spirit, because Jesus said that it is the Spirit who will lead us into all truth (John 16:13).

The first letter of John chapter 2 says that believers have an "anointing from the Holy One" (v 20)<sup>1</sup>. This is generally understood to be a commentary on Jesus' promise in John 16:13, and thus a reference to the Holy Spirit. The passage goes on to state, "the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit, ... remain in him." (v 27) Jehovah's Witnesses to whom I have shown these verses have said, "No we don't have the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not for us; we need the Governing Body of the Jehovah's Witnesses to teach us and tell us what the Bible means."

This is the ultimate success of the JW leadership brainwashing technique: to persuade people that they can't think for themselves, that they can't even find the truth by reading the Bible, and that there is no Holy Spirit to help them; it is necessary for members of the sect to believe that the only one with "the Truth" is the so-called "Faithful Servant" in Brooklyn, New York (where the "Governing Body" of the Jehovah's Witness Watchtower organisation has its headquarters).

It is not surprising that the leaders of this sect don't want their followers to believe in the Holy Spirit, whose presence and action would threaten and undermine their total control of what their adherents think, believe and do. So they have to persuade people that Jesus' promise in John 16:13 doesn't apply to them, and that the commentary on it in 1 John 2 is not for them, either.

If individual Jehovah's Witnesses were to believe that they could – without the help of the organisation – understand the Bible, or that God's Holy Spirit could lead them into truth without them needing to have the organisation teach them and tell them what to believe and think, there would be a danger that the organisation would lose control of its members.

It is paradoxical that precisely *the* organisation – the Watchtower Society of Brooklyn, New York – that claims to be the *only* religious body in the whole of the world that has "the Truth" is the very same organisation that denies the existence of the Holy Spirit, whom Christ said was the one Who would lead His followers into all truth. Given this fact, it is difficult to see that the Jehovah's Witnesses could possibly be the ones with "the Truth", since in that case they would be indicating that the words of Christ Himself were false.

We note that Jesus absolutely did not say, "the Governing Body of the Jehovah's Witnesses will lead you into all truth."

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, quotations are from the New International Version of the Bible, © 1984 by the International Bible Society

## **2. Consequences of rejecting the reality of the Holy Spirit**

Significantly, Jesus said that the only sin that could not be forgiven was speaking “against the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 12:32, Mark 3:29, Luke 12:10). Many people believe that this is because those who reject the Holy Spirit prevent themselves from receiving God’s truth, God’s forgiveness and God’s power. This seems to be precisely what the Watchtower organisation is doing and persuading its followers to do.

Are <u>you</u> refusing to let the Holy Spirit work in your life?
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### **3. The limitations of the human mind**

It is not surprising that we can't *understand* the Holy Spirit, since the human mind is incapable of *understanding* God. In fact, the whole JW argument against the deity of Christ (which is clearly taught throughout the New Testament and by Christ Himself) is based on the human argument that it is not possible to understand how God could at the same time both be in heaven and be on earth in Christ. This is to say, "My human mind can't grasp this, so it can't be true."

It's as though you were to expect a two-year-old child to understand the physics, chemistry, engineering and electronics that make a car engine work, before allowing them to travel in a car.
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In relation to God, we are and in this life always will be *less* than that two-year-old child. We cannot rationally explain God or understand God, but we can believe Him, trust Him and experience the power of His Holy Spirit in our lives.

#### **4. The personality of the Holy Spirit**

The Bible constantly refers to the Holy Spirit as alive and having the characteristics of a thinking and active being (what the early church fathers called a “person”). In contrast, the Jehovah's Witnesses described the Holy Spirit as being an impersonal “thing”, “like electricity”. This comparison now sounds extremely dated, about a century after it was thought up by them, at a time when few of their followers had much understanding or experience of what could be done with electric power. They also describe the Holy Spirit as being an impersonal “force” or “influence”.

The following are merely *representative examples* of how the Holy Spirit is described in the New Testament, without any intention of being a comprehensive study or a complete listing. They may serve as a *starting point* for a study of what the Bible says about the Holy Spirit, and readers are encouraged to look up these verses, read them in their context and follow up any cross-references in any Bible with references. Reading what the Bible itself actually says is much more important than reading footnotes, even if printed in a Bible, or than reading articles *about* the Holy Spirit, which is why this article consists mostly of Bible verses and brief reflections, many of them being questions that are simply designed to help the reader to *think for him/herself* about what the words in the Bible actually mean.

1. Peter said that Ananias had “*lied to the Holy Spirit*” (Acts 5:3). It is not possible to *lie* to an “impersonal thing” like electricity, or to a stone, or to a piece of wood, or to any other inanimate object. It is also not possible to “lie” to any “force” or “influence”, such as magnetism, gravity, heat or cold – or electricity.
2. The Bible says that we can “*cause the Holy Spirit sorrow*” by the way we live (Ephesians 4:30). Is it possible to make electricity (or any other impersonal thing) *sad*?
3. 1 Thessalonians 4:8 speaks of those who “reject ... God, who gives you his Holy Spirit”. It would seem reasonable to conclude that those who consciously and deliberately reject the Holy Spirit (which, by their own definition, includes the Jehovah's Witnesses) are in fact rejecting God.
4. We are told that the Holy Spirit *speaks* (Acts 13:2: “the Holy Spirit said ...”, Acts 21:11: “The Holy Spirit says ...”). Can an “impersonal force” or “influence” *speak*? Many other Bible verses tell us of the Holy Spirit speaking, for instance, Acts 1:16, 4:25-28, 13:2, 21:11, 28:25, Hebrews 3:7-8, etc – this is far from a complete list.
5. In Acts 20:23 the Apostle Paul is recorded as saying, “the Holy Spirit *warns* me”. In some cases, (e.g., Acts 21:10-11) this warning was through *words that were spoken*. Can a “thing” speak?
6. In Acts 11:28 it is stated that a prophet “*predicted* ... through the Spirit”. Again, this was in the form of words that were spoken, not some sort of “feeling” or “impersonal sensation”.
7. The church in Jerusalem wrote, “It *seemed good to the Holy Spirit* and to us ...” (Acts 15:28) In other words, the Holy Spirit *thinks*. Is it possible for something to “seem good” to electricity (or to any other *im*personal thing)? Can electricity “*think*”?
8. As quoted above, Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would *lead* us into all truth (John 16:13). Only a living being can *lead* anyone.
9. Jesus said that the Holy Spirit “will *teach* you what you should say” (Luke 12:12). Can “a *thing*” *teach* anyone anything?
10. Jesus also said that the Holy Spirit would *teach* us all things (John 14:26),

11. and that the Spirit would remind us of the things that he had said (John 14:26). Can an inanimate object teach or remind anyone anything?
12. Romans 8:14 says that only those who are "led by the Spirit of God" are children of God. So, without the Holy Spirit we can't be children of God! This is a very serious consequence of rejecting the work of the Holy Spirit and refusing to let Him work in our lives.
13. Romans 8:16 states that "The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children." The Greek word that is here translated "testifies" could also be translated "bears witness" (as in the NRSV). Today's English Version also correctly renders this as "God's Spirit joins himself to our spirits to declare that we are God's children." An "impersonal force" cannot testify, give a witness statement or declare anything.
14. Romans 8:26 says that "the Spirit helps us in our weakness". Could a "thing" help anyone?
15. Romans 8:26-27 states that "the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. ... the Spirit intercedes for the saints". To intercede means to request, to appeal. In this context, it means to pray. Can an impersonal force pray, intercede, make an appeal or request anything?
16. Jesus told the first believers that the Holy Spirit would baptise them with power (Acts 1:5, 8). This is talking about being immersed in God's power, just as believers were immersed in water when they were baptised in water. No-one can baptise themselves; they need to be baptised by someone else. The Holy Spirit is that "Someone Else" Who baptises people in the power of God.
17. The Bible speaks of the gifts of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:1-11). Can an "impersonal force" give anything to anyone?
18. In 1 Thessalonians 1:6 we read that it is the Holy Spirit Who gives joy. Is it possible that the high level of stress felt by many Jehovah's Witnesses, constantly pressurised by the sect's leadership to meet targets in terms of hours spent going door to door, indicates precisely a lack of that joy which the Holy Spirit gives?
19. The Bible says that the Holy Spirit gives these gifts, "just as He determines". (1 Corinthians 12:11) "Determines" means "decides". Is it possible for an "impersonal thing" to "determine" or "decide" anything? To "determine" or "decide" requires intelligence and an ability to think.
20. In Hebrews 2:4 we read of the "gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will". Does any inanimate object have a will?
21. Acts 13:4 tells us that Barnabas and Saul were "sent on their way by the Holy Spirit." Could an impersonal force send people out as missionaries?
22. In Acts 16:6 we read that Paul and his companions were prevented or "kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia."
23. Jesus describes the Holy Spirit as being a Comforter (John 14:16, 14:26, 15:26, 16:7). This word can also be translated "Counsellor". A counsellor is someone who advises and informs us. Can an "impersonal force" comfort, advise or inform us?
24. Romans 8:9 tells us that we should be controlled by the Spirit of God. Could an inanimate object (something like a stone, for instance) control anyone?
25. Paul said to the elders of the church in Ephesus, "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers." (Acts 20:28) Could an inanimate "influence" give people a ministry and a responsibility, making them overseers in the church?
26. The Bible says that God lives in us "by His Spirit" (Ephesians 2:22) Does God live in us through "an impersonal force that is rather like electricity"?



27. In an almost-parallel passage, the Bible also says that “God’s Spirit *lives* in us” (1 Corinthians 3:16). An “impersonal force” or an “inanimate object” *is not alive*.
28. Hebrews 10:29 speaks of people who “*insult* the Spirit”. Is it possible to *insult* or *outrage* a *thing*? Have you ever “*insulted*” your desk or a chair, for instance? The NRSV translates this as to “*outrage* the Spirit”. *To outrage* is defined as “to arouse fierce anger, shock or indignation”<sup>2</sup>. Is it possible to “arouse fierce anger, shock or indignation” in a *thing*, electricity, for instance, to quote the explanation of the Spirit given by the Jehovah’s Witnesses? However, by speaking “against the Holy Spirit” (as referred to above – see Matthew 12:32, Mark 3:29, Luke 12:10), perhaps *this* is precisely what the Jehovah’s Witnesses do: they *insult and outrage the Spirit*.
29. 1 Peter 1:2 tells us that the Holy Spirit “*sanctifies*” believers<sup>3</sup>. This means, “makes them holy” or “sets them apart for God’s special use”. Could an inanimate “thing” *sanctify* people?
30. 1 Peter 1: 11 states that the Spirit “*predicted* [to the prophets] the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.” Could an “impersonal force” without a mind *predict* anything?
31. 1 Timothy 4:1 informs us that “The Spirit *clearly says* that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.” Can “a *thing*” *say* anything, whether clearly or otherwise?
32. In 2 Timothy 1:14 we read that the Holy Spirit *helps* us.
33. Hebrews 10:15 states that the Holy Spirit *testifies* or *witnesses* to us. When John the Baptist was described as testifying (for instance, in John 1:15), this was defined as “speaking” or “crying out” – not something that an “impersonal force” is capable of doing.
34. In *eight* different places, the book of Revelation says that the Spirit *speaks* (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 14:13). It is not possible to dismiss these numerous examples as “metaphorical” or not meaning what they clearly say.

These – and many other verses – speak of the *personality* of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is thus clearly shown not to be a “thing”; He is described in the Bible as having many of the characteristics of a living being: He can be lied to<sup>4</sup>, and made sad. He can be insulted and rejected. He leads, teaches, reminds, comforts, advises, thinks, speaks, decides, warns, testifies, helps, prays, predicts, gives gifts and much, much more. He can live in people and give us spiritual power when we let Him.

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<sup>2</sup> “Definition of outrage” on google.co.uk, accessed on 5.8.14.

<sup>3</sup> See also Romans 15:16 and other verses in the New Testament.

<sup>4</sup> Although God always knows the truth about each one of us!

## 5. Is the Holy Spirit God?

It is thus clear that the Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit has intelligence and performs actions. Both of these things are qualities of a living being that is or has a personality. The things that He does clearly make Him some sort of supernatural being, but do they make Him divine?

The Bible describes the Holy Spirit as God. Thus, in Acts 5 Peter said to Ananias, "You have lied to the Holy Spirit" (v 3), and a few seconds later he explains what this means, saying, "You have not lied to men but to God" (v 4).

Also, when we look at the things that the Holy Spirit is described as doing, we discover that they are neither more nor less than the type of things that God does. The Bible even describes Jesus as being "full of joy *through the Holy Spirit*" (Luke 10:21).

1. Jesus told His followers to baptise believers "in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). Would he really have told them (and us!) to baptise in a name of something (or even "someone") who was less than God? On the contrary, He put all three on the same platform in the same sentence and for the same activity.
2. A common blessing in New Testament times was "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." (2 Corinthians 13:14)<sup>5</sup> Is it possible to "have fellowship" with a *thing*? Have you ever "had fellowship" with a piece of wood, or even with a magnetic field (to name another "impersonal force", one of the terms used by the Jehovah's Witnesses to describe the Holy Spirit)?
3. The Bible tells us that it is God Who gives us His Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19).
4. Jesus says that the Father will send us the Holy Spirit (John 14:26), and also that He Himself (Jesus) will send us the Holy Spirit "from the Father" (John 15:26, 16:7) – also an indication of the oneness of the Father and the Son (John 10:30, 17:11, 17:22).
5. 1 Corinthians 12:13 says that we were "baptised *by the Holy Spirit* into the body of Christ", clearly a divine action. Or should we conclude that a non-divine, impersonal "thing" makes us believers and members of the body of Christ? That is the implication of JW teaching on the Holy Spirit.
6. Ephesians 2:18 shows the unity of God in three persons, saying that "through *Jesus* we have access by the *Spirit* to the *Father*". Is it conceivable that we could have access to God the Father by some sort of inferior being that was not divine?

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<sup>5</sup> Barnes says, "There is a distinction in the divine nature; or there is the existence of what is usually termed three persons in the Godhead. If not. why are they mentioned in this manner? If the Lord Jesus is not divine and equal with the Father, why is he mentioned in this connection? How strange it would be for Paul, an inspired man, to pray in the same breath, "the grace of a man or an angel" and "the love of God" be with you! And if the "Holy Spirit" be merely an influence of God or an attribute of God, how strange to pray that the "love of God" and the participation or fellowship of an "influence of God," or an "attribute of God" might be with them!

... "The passage, therefore, furnishes a proof of the doctrine of the Trinity that has not yet been answered... . On the supposition that there are three persons in the ... Trinity, united in essence and yet distinct in some respects, all is plain and clear. But on the supposition that, the Lord Jesus is a mere man, an angel, or an archangel, and that the Holy Spirit is an attribute, or an influence from God, how unintelligible, confused, strange does all become! That Paul, in the solemn close of the Epistle, should at the same time invoke blessings from a mere creature, and from God, and from an attribute, surpasses belief. But that he should invoke blessings from him who was the equal with the Father, and from the Father himself, and from the Sacred Spirit sustaining the same rank, and in like manner imparting important blessings, is in accordance with all that we should expect ...." (from Barnes' Notes, Electronic Database Copyright © 1997, 2003, 2005, 2006 by BibleSoft, Inc. All rights reserved.)

7. Hebrews 9:14 speaks similarly of “Christ, who *through the eternal Spirit* offered himself unblemished to God”, thus describing the Holy Spirit as *eternal* – a characteristic that is unique to God.
8. 1 Corinthians 2:11 says that “only God’s Spirit knows all about God” (TEV<sup>6</sup>). The Greek means “the things concerning God”. “All” is a justifiable translation of this. Can an “impersonal force” *know* anything? What is more, a Spirit that uniquely knows everything about God cannot be less than divine.
9. The preceding verse says that “The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.” (1 Corinthians 2:10). The technical term for such *unlimited knowledge* is “*omniscience*”, another characteristic that is unique to God.
10. 1 Corinthians 12:4-6 speaks of “the same Spirit, ... the same Lord [Jesus], ... the same God”, putting all three on an equal, divine footing.
11. In Ephesians 3:2-5 the Apostle Paul describes how he became a believer, invoking the work of God [the Father], Christ and the Spirit, who he said had “*revealed* the mystery of Christ” to him.
12. The Apostle Peter referred to the work of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, when he wrote to believers, saying, “To God's elect, strangers in the world, ..., who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of *God the Father*, through the sanctifying work of *the Spirit*, for obedience to *Jesus Christ*.” (1 Peter 1:1-2). This clearly shows that the Christians in New Testament times believed in God as active through Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
13. Actions in the Old Testament that are ascribed to God are quoted in the New Testament and ascribed to the Holy Spirit. For instance, in Isaiah 6:8-10 we read, “Then I heard *the voice of the Lord* saying, ... "Go and tell this people: ..." ”.<sup>7</sup> When this passage is quoted in the New Testament, we read, “Paul ... made this final statement: "The *Holy Spirit* spoke the truth to your forefathers when he said through Isaiah the prophet: ..." ” (Acts 28:25-26) Thus this action by God in the Old Testament is further defined in the New Testament as being an action by the Holy Spirit. Thus the Holy Spirit is God.

To accept the Jehovah’s Witness argument that the Holy Spirit is not God, we would have to conclude that the New Testament is contradicting the Old Testament.

14. Comparing Ephesians 2:22, which tells us that God lives in us, and 1 Corinthians 3:16, which tells us that “God’s Spirit lives in us”, we also see that the Bible states that “God’s Spirit” does the same supernatural thing that “God” does, with the obvious implication that the Spirit is God.
15. Most interpreters and translators, both Jewish and Christian, see the first mention of the Holy Spirit or “the Spirit of God” in the first paragraph of the Bible, before the creation of humanity or animal and plant life: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.” (Genesis 1:1-2). Thus, “the Spirit of God” is linked back to the word “God” in the preceding sentence and appears to be a further clarification concerning God.
16. Further on in the same chapter, there is a hint at what we might call the “plurality” of the nature of God: “Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness".” (Genesis 1:26) To whom do the “us” and the “our” refer? This cannot be a reference

<sup>6</sup> Today’s English Version

<sup>7</sup> The New World Translation even renders this, “I began to hear the voice of *Jehovah* saying ...”.

to angels, since only God has the power to create. The following verse shows that "our image" refers to "the image of God" (Genesis 1:27). The immediate context of this verse is the reference to the Holy Spirit at the beginning of the chapter (while Christians see a further understanding of this usage in the light of New Testament passages that talk about Christ's role in creation, e.g., John 1:1-3, 1 Corinthians 8:6, Colossians 1:16, Hebrews 1:2). The implications concerning the divine nature of the "Spirit of God" (and of Christ) are thus unavoidable.

All of these passages, and others, show that the Holy Spirit is not only a "person" and supernatural, but also divine, a manifestation of God.

In the Old Testament there are also other indications of the plurality of the manifestation of the one God.

17. We note that the Hebrew word employed for "God" in the first verse of the Bible is "Elohim", which is plural, even though the verb that follows it ("created") is in the singular.
18. A further, similar, hint can be found in Genesis 11:6-7, describing God's reaction to the building of the tower of Babel: "the Lord said, "... Come, let us go down and let us confuse their language" " (NIV, modified to show the actual, plural form of the verb "confuse" in the Hebrew.)
19. We see another example in Isaiah 6:8: "I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?"'" (NIV) (This is far from being a complete list of such verses.)

## **6. "The Trinity"**

The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are repeatedly mentioned together in the New Testament. A supreme example is the baptism of Jesus. The importance of this event is underlined by the fact that it is reported in all four gospels. In Luke 3:21-22 we read, "When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." "

So God manifests Himself and works as "the Father", "the Son (Jesus)" and "the Holy Spirit". It really doesn't matter whether or not we use the word "Trinity", but it is a convenient word, invented by theologians, to describe God. But it is only *the word* that they invented, *not the reality*.

Jesus introduced the phrase "God the Father" (John 6:27), a term that clearly shows a desire to define the word "God" more precisely, and implies the concept of "God-the-someone-else". This phrase is repeated throughout the New Testament a further 17 times<sup>8</sup>, usually in a phrase such as "God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" or "God the Father and Christ Jesus our Saviour".

By instructing His followers to baptise converts "in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19), Jesus clearly inferred that both the Holy Spirit and He Himself are manifestations of God.

As indicated above, a common blessing used by the early church was "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 Corinthians 13:14). This shows a clear understanding by believers in New Testament times that God manifested Himself and interacted with humanity as "God the Father", "the Lord Jesus Christ" and "the Holy Spirit".

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<sup>8</sup> 1 Corinthians 8:6, 1 Corinthians 15:24, Galatians 1:1, Ephesians 5:20, Ephesians 6:23, Philippians 2:11, Colossians 1:3, Colossians 3:17, 1 Thessalonians 1:1, 2 Thessalonians 1:2, 1 Timothy 1:2, 2 Timothy 1:2, Titus 1:4, 1 Peter 1:2, 2 Peter 1:17, 2 John 3, Jude 1

## 7. One great "inclusio"

The word *inclusio* is a term that is used by classical and Biblical scholars to describe a literary technique in which an incident, an event or an account is surrounded by what we might call two "brackets" or "bookends": the key theme is mentioned *before* the incident, event or account, and this same theme is repeated *again* after it. The purpose of using this technique is to show that the whole of the event or account between the two references to the theme is characterised by that theme.

In Matthew, the description of Jesus' baptism is given in Matthew 3:13-16. Again, it involves the presence of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. When we remember that the last words of Jesus that are recorded in Matthew's gospel (28:19-20) concern the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, we realise that the whole of Matthew's account of Jesus' ministry is marked an *inclusio*: the whole of Jesus's ministry is framed by references at the beginning and the end to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The purpose of the *inclusio* is that we should understand everything that comes between the first reference to the theme and the last reference to it in the light of that theme. So we are intended to understand the whole of Jesus' ministry as involving the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

In fact, if we look back to the coming of Christ into the world, we find that the incarnation of the Son involves God the Father and the Holy Spirit. Thus, in the very first chapter of Matthew we read:

"an angel of the Lord [i.e., God the Father] appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfil what the Lord [God the Father] had said through the prophet: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"-which means, "God with us."<sup>9</sup>" (Matthew 1:20-23)

Concerning the resurrection, the New Testament repeatedly says that "God raised Jesus from the dead" (e.g., Acts 2:32, 4:10, 10:40), thus referring to the Father and the Son, while 1 Peter 3:18 says, "He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit,"<sup>10</sup> thus referring to the power of the Holy Spirit in the resurrection of Jesus, as well as mentioning once more the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in one and the same sentence. Wallace states<sup>11</sup>, "The NT thus speaks of the entire Trinity as participants in Christ's resurrection (cf. Eph 1:20; 1 Pet 3:18)."

So we see that in fact the whole of Jesus' life is framed by an *inclusio* of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit from conception to resurrection.

Thus we see that the "doctrine of the Trinity" is a human summary that endeavours to explain the clear teachings of Jesus and the Bible about God, Who manifests Himself in

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<sup>9</sup> In passing, we note also this reference to the deity of Christ.

<sup>10</sup> The Greek word translated here as "by the Spirit" is πνεύματι ("pneumati"), which is in the dative case. This case is used, among other things, to indicate the *means by which* something happened, as will be confirmed by any reference book on Koiné Greek grammar. See, for instance, Wallace, Daniel B, "Greek Grammar beyond the Basics", Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1996, pp 162-3.

<sup>11</sup> op. cit., p. 98

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three ways, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It helps us to see and organise in our minds the teaching about God. However, ultimately, we accept it by faith, because we believe in God and we trust the reliability of Jesus' teaching and the reliability of what the Bible says about the Holy Spirit. To think that we can "explain" or "understand" God is patently misguided.

But accepting the reality of the Holy Spirit is a step that opens us up to be willing to experience the power of God in our lives. If someone can persuade us that the Holy Spirit does not exist, or is not God, then we can end up forever blocking God's work in our lives – or at least, a major part of God's work, and the best blessings of God for ourselves and for others.

## **8. Jehovah's Witness objections to the Person of the Holy Spirit**

### i) Appeal to an analogy with "wisdom" in the Old Testament

Jehovah's Witnesses claim that the personalisation of wisdom in an Old Testament passage shows that the Holy Spirit is not a person. However, such an appeal to an unrelated passage of poetical literature (that is in any case not talking about the Holy Spirit) is totally irrelevant to an understanding of the clear teaching of the Bible about the Holy Spirit. Dr Bruce Metzger states:

"By ... joining together portions of Scripture which were never intended to go together it is possible, of course, to prove anything from the Bible."<sup>12</sup>

### ii) Appeal to the gender of the Greek noun for "Spirit"

Jason BeDuhn, who is an apologist for the Jehovah's Witnesses, has claimed that as the Greek noun for "spirit", πνεῦμα ("pneuma") is of grammatically neuter gender, this proves that the Holy Spirit "is an 'it,' not a 'he.'" <sup>13</sup>

However, such a claim is based on a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of language in general and specifically a misunderstanding of the function of grammatical gender in Greek. See the response by the present author on this website, in the review of BeDuhn's book<sup>14</sup>, especially pp 10, 34 of the review. In reality, in Greek numerous nouns for *people* are of neuter gender, as detailed in that review. Thus, this claim by BeDuhn is contradicted by the Greek language itself. In any event, the gender of a noun in a (human!) language is irrelevant to an understanding of the nature of God.

### iii) References to the Holy Spirit in the Jehovah's Witness version of the Bible

The Jehovah's Witness version of the Bible changes phrases such as "the Holy Spirit" to "the holy spirit", "holy spirit" or "a holy spirit". The differences in capitalisation are designed to reduce the status of the Holy Spirit. However, the difference is much greater than that. For Christians since the first century, "the Holy Spirit" has been essentially the "name" or the "title" of the Spirit of God. By not using capital letters and by changing the definite article "the" to the indefinite article "a", the Jehovah's Witnesses imply that references to "the Holy Spirit" are in fact merely references to a spirit (lower case and not divine) that happens to be holy, with the implication that there may also be other spirits that are holy. So, they claim, there is no unique, divine "Holy Spirit". The phrase "holy spirit" (without "the" and with or without "a") implies that the reference is to some substance, such as in phrases like "warm water".

Two comments are necessary:

#### 1. The use or non-use of capital letters

The New Testament was originally entirely written in capital letters. Therefore, any decisions on capitalisation or otherwise in a translation reflect

- a. the requirements of the target language in question. For instance, in German, all nouns have to be written with an initial capital letter.
- b. the preferences of the translators.

However, the earliest extant manuscripts of the New Testament show that the writers did have a special way of writing words that were considered sacred or divine, and that

<sup>12</sup> Metzger, Bruce M, "The Jehovah's Witnesses and Jesus Christ: A Biblical and Theological Appraisal" in "Theology Today", Vol 10, No. 1, 1953, p. 69

<sup>13</sup> BeDuhn, Jason, "Truth in Translation", Lanham: University Press of America, 2003, p. 140

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.livingwater-spain.com/beduhn.pdf>



the Holy Spirit is usually written in accordance with this convention. The term generally used for this phenomenon is “nomina sacra”. I explain in more detail how this applies to the references to the Holy Spirit in my review of Jason BeDuhn’s book “Truth in Translation”.<sup>15</sup>

2. The translation of phrases for the Holy Spirit

Some of the relevant inconsistencies of the JW translation are summarised in a separate article that we hope to publish on this website soon. Simply put, their translation does not accurately reflect the meaning of the Greek.

iv) Is the Jehovah’s Witness version of the Bible reliable?

From the establishment of the Jehovah’s Witnesses in the 1870s until 1950, the organisation used as its principal Bible translation the English-language Authorised Version of 1611 (known as the King James Version in the USA). This translation (along with *all* other translations then and now in existence) presents enormous difficulties for the organisation, since it and all other translations consistently disprove numerous fundamental doctrines of the sect, so the leadership decided to produce a “translation” that would eliminate these problems. In 1950 the Jehovah’s Witness translation of the New Testament was produced<sup>16</sup>. The Old Testament was completed in 1960, after which the whole of the Bible was published as “The New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures”<sup>17</sup>. In this “translation”, the wording of problem passages – including those referring to the Holy Spirit – has been changed to align it with JW doctrine.

The following brief comments are made here concerning the “New World Translation”:

1. The Watchtower organisation has always refused to publish the names of the “translators”, although a list of names has been published by a former leading member of the Governing Body of the Jehovah’s Witnesses<sup>18</sup>. This shows that none of the translators had a degree-level qualification in any of the languages in which the Bible was written, and most of them had no formal studies or qualifications in these languages, even at the most elementary level.
2. Studies have shown that this translation is the result of *fundamental doctrinal bias*. See the review of Jason BeDuhn’s book on this website<sup>19</sup> and “Bias in New Testament Translations?” by Thomas A Howe, a Professor of Bible and Biblical languages.<sup>20</sup>
3. In fact, the Watchtower “translation” appears to be no more than a re-working of the English Authorised Version, merely modernising slightly the language and changing the wording of anything that contradicts JW doctrine. A study of the NWT text shows that the “translators” paid little if any attention to the Hebrew, Aramaic or Greek text.<sup>21</sup>
4. In over 60 years since the New Testament section was published, no independent publisher worldwide has published the “New World Translation”, whose only publisher is the Jehovah’s Witness organisation.
5. No other Christian denomination has accepted or adopted the “New World Translation”.

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<sup>15</sup> See <http://www.livingwater-spain.com/beduhn.pdf> , pages 62-63

<sup>16</sup> “The New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures”, Brooklyn, New York: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc.

<sup>17</sup> Brooklyn, New York: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1961

<sup>18</sup> Raymond Franz, in “Crisis of Conscience”, 4th edition, 2002, Atlanta: Commentary Press, p. 56 fn 16

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.livingwater-spain.com/beduhn.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> Charlotte, NC: Solomon’s Razor Publishing, 2010

<sup>21</sup> See page 69 of the review of BeDuhn’s book on this website.

6. Worldwide, no independently-recognised academic institution has adopted the “New World Translation” as its standard text of the Bible.<sup>22</sup>
7. Jehovah's Witness translations “of the Bible” into other languages are in fact all translations from the *English* text of *their own* “New World Translation”. There is thus no additional or independent input from experts in the original languages in which the Bible was written.
8. The Jehovah's Witnesses claim that they also use other translations of the Bible. However, studies (including their own book by Jason BeDuhn) show that they pick and choose isolated phrases from other translations, only accepting those phrases that seem to support their own version, and rejecting all those (the overwhelming majority!) that disagree with it.
9. The Jehovah's Witness translation of references to the Holy Spirit in the Greek original breaks the translation principles that they enunciate and is skewed to support their doctrines.

The “New World Translation” has thus been demonstrated to have no sound basis in actual understanding of the original biblical languages. It is a re-working of the real text of the Bible, driven by a sectarian agenda. It therefore does not form a reliable basis on which to base an understanding of the Bible's teaching on the Holy Spirit or on any other topic.

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<sup>22</sup> It is reported that Jason BeDuhn has distributed copies of the New World Translation to some of his students. However, as he is a spokesperson for the Watchtower organisation, this does not constitute the action of an *independent* academic.

## **9. Conclusion – and the next step**

In conclusion, it is important to state that an “intellectual” understanding of the Bible’s teaching concerning the Holy Spirit is no more than a precursor to experiencing the work and power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We must not stop at mere “academic” knowledge, which itself can only be imperfect (1 Corinthians 13:12), but, having accepted the existence of the Holy Spirit, we then need to be open to allow Him to work in our lives, to free us from fear and from bondage to false teaching and wrong attitudes, and to enable us to experience something of the power of God in our lives.

That step is far more important than any “knowledge” *about* the Holy Spirit that we may have. Hebrews 11:6 says that “without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him *must believe that he exists* and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.” This equally applies to the work of the Holy Spirit.