

## Why is the Holy Spirit Hard to Understand? – By Thailer Jimerson

Recently, this question has absorbed much of my meditation. A lot of it is due to the Holy Spirit's place as our primary focus for 2017's second quarter, but some of it has come from the furrowed brows that approach me after the sermons. Of course, this has been a meaty topic even for myself as I'm allowed the time each week to dive deeply into various books on the Holy Spirit, trying to make sense out of the few Bible passages that do teach about him.

But though the Holy Spirit can be difficult to understand, that's not to say it's impossible. The Holy Spirit should be grasped – most of all by those who claim to have him. Not only that, but I think the title of Francis Chan's 2009 book *Forgotten God* accurately summarizes the problem: the Holy Spirit, though seemingly forgotten and treated with irreverent amnesia, is God. The Holy Spirit deserves to be understood because he is Creator, existing eternally with the Father and Son, without beginning nor end.

Here's a few reasons I want to share that may account for the difficulty:

1. **The Holy Spirit naturally takes a back seat.** By this I don't mean that he lacks appearances in our New Testaments or that he's not at the forefront of mission, especially seen in the book of Acts – or even at the forefront of the church seen everywhere in the letters of Paul. Instead, I mean that Jesus expressly states that his goal is to mainly glorify Christ. “He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.” (John 16.14) He is there to magnify Christ, not himself.
2. **The Holy Spirit has been avoided because of the abuses in Charismatic movements.** Many charismatic churches have put an unbiblical premium on the work of the Holy Spirit, simply because they've forgotten the preceding point. Often in reaction to the abominable Spirit-less churches of dead religion, others can swing to the complete opposite error. And I think that when we see clear abuses of the Holy Spirit we take the natural road of avoiding the subject altogether, or maybe even suppressing the teaching.
3. **Teaching on the Holy Spirit can be taken out of context.** Whether there are passages that we abuse as proof-texts to support preconceived notions of how he works, or whether we isolate a statement made about the Spirit from one sermon rather than taking in the whole series, we hinder our understanding. No one sermon can be the final say on the work of the Holy Spirit, and even in our current series each lesson is meant to be one building block upon another, to be taken together until a full picture blossoms. If you've missed a lesson, it might be good to go back and listen (starting with the first *Life in the Spirit*) as all the sermons are made available in digital or CD format.
4. **It's difficult to discern the extent of the Holy Spirit's work today.** What makes the Spirit exceedingly difficult is trying to discern the continuity and discontinuity evident in the scriptures concerning the extent of what the Spirit is doing today. It's clear that there are exceptional examples in the book of Acts of the miraculous, and there are spiritual gifts that seem to have ceased today – but does this mean the Spirit is inactive?
5. **Not asking questions about the Holy Spirit.** My mother always taught me that if I wanted to understand something in class, I needed to raise my hand. And that was a big deal for my awkward, introverted self. But getting over my self-consciousness was key to start asking questions and thus to start finding answers. Please reach out to me about your questions.
6. **You can't understand what's not being taught.** In my own (admittedly limited) church experience, we've been content to relegate the Holy Spirit to the word of God and leave him be. But the Holy Spirit is not the word of God. He is God. Yes, author of the Scriptures and working most profoundly through them today – but nonetheless God himself. And we must understand him, and teach him. A warning we should heed is the story from Acts 19.1-7. After you read it,

you'll see that God just may keep the Holy Spirit from those who are ill-taught. And we must not handicap ourselves by failing to grow in our understanding of truth.

7. **The wind blows where it wills.** I'm naturally an analytical thinker, always noticing patterns and always trying to formulate and organize scripture systematically. That's how God made me. But as I've spent most of my time studying the Holy Spirit, more and more I realize that he totally resists bending to my formulaic expressions and totally delights to shatter my understanding of how he should work. For me, the best expression of his essence is the simple analogy Jesus used in John 3.8, "The wind [the same Greek word for "Spirit"] blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." He is like the wind. And the wind blows where it wills.