

THE ROLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN EDUCATION

The Great Commission is instrumental in helping believers understand the role of the Holy Spirit in education. Three important truths can be seen in Matthew 28:18-20 as Jesus commands,

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

First, Jesus makes clear that the Holy Spirit is God by listing Him with the Father and Son. Therefore, the Spirit is the aim of education in that people need to know Him in order to praise Him. Second, the Holy Spirit is the power that enables transformational education which leads to obedience. Jesus calls believers to teach disciples, and it is the Holy Spirit makes that teaching effective. Finally, the Holy Spirit is the way in which Jesus remains with his people “to the very end of the age.” Though Jesus ascended, God continued attending to his people by his Spirit.

The Aim of Education

The Holy Spirit is God, and He must never be relegated to being thought of as a mere means rather than an end.¹ In the words of Michael Barrett, “As the third Person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit is the proper object of worship. It is the Holy Spirit who applies all the benefits of grace, moving believers to worship in the first place.”² While worship of the Holy Spirit is

¹In class discussion, and in the literature, there seems to be a missing emphasis on the Holy Spirit as God Himself—worthy of praise. There is much content on what He *does*, but, in the field of education, there is less on who He *is*. Sometimes He seems to be discussed as the One who *works* more than the One who is *worthy*.

²Michael P. V. Barrett, *The Beauty of Holiness: A Guide to Biblical Worship* (Greenville, South

discussed less than the worship of Father and Son within the body of Scripture, He is nonetheless fully God. Richard Ross aptly explains, “Even at the end of time, the mission of the Son will be to secure before the whole universe the glory *of* the Godhead *for* the Godhead.”³ The Spirit is to be glorified.

Education, the work of knowledge and understanding, is meant to bring people to a right view of who God is. Before considering the ways in which the Holy Spirit enables education, it must be noted that He is the end of education. Paul says in Ephesians 1:13-14 that, upon believing, Christians are sealed with the Holy Spirit as God’s possession “to the praise of his glory.” Humankind exists for the glory of God. Martin Lloyd-Jones makes the point that Acts 5:3-4 shows us that the Apostles understood that “the Holy Spirit is God—God, the Holy Spirit.”⁴ Therefore, it should be grasped that, since the Spirit is God, Christian education is meant to herald the truth of the worthiness of this God.

If the Holy Spirit is reduced to a means to assist those who try to accomplish the education commanded in Great Commission, He is misunderstood. Warren Wiersbe declares, “When the messenger becomes more important than the message, you have the beginnings of a cult; and that is always dangerous.”⁵ Though God loves to serve his people, He is ultimately the One to be served. Though God loves to illumine and enlighten his people, He does not do this at the expense of his rightful place as the Lord of all. Jesus pointed out in Acts 1:8 that the power of the Spirit was for the purpose of witnessing for Him.⁶ Christian education exists for the advancement of worship.

Carolina; Belfast, Northern Ireland: Ambassador International, 2006), 56.

³Richard Ross, *Student Ministry and the Supremacy of Christ*, (Bloomington, IN: Cross Books, 2009), 16.

⁴David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *God the Holy Spirit* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1997), 15.

⁵Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be What You Are: 12 Intriguing Pictures of the Christian from the New Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1988), 142–143.

⁶Jim Wilhoit, and Linda Rozema, "Anointed teaching," *Christian Education Journal* 2, no. 2

The Power of Education

While the Spirit is the One worthy of worship, He also enables us to worship.⁷ He works to show us who He is. He educates for awing all who will see and learn. In a very real sense, the Holy Spirit is the Teacher.⁸ He is the One who makes education effective. Citing Acts 2:47, James Emery White points out that it was Lord who added to numbers of new believers daily.⁹ Yes, the church taught, shared, and loved, but it was God who did the work.

The Spirit is still the One who does the work. This truth has powerful implications. Frank Rogers explains, “If it is true that the Holy Spirit is the True Teacher, the effective Agent which sustains this life, then Christian education should attend to, take its own coordinates from, and seek to cooperate with this Spirit's work.”¹⁰ Knowing that the Spirit empowers education should cause teachers to always look to Him.

Throughout the history of the church, leaders like Augustine have made clear that there can be no Christian faith without the work of the Spirit.¹¹ Roy Zuck helpfully unpacks the Spirit's role in teaching saying, “Because the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, comprehends the depths of God's nature, He is competent to reveal the things of God to humans.”¹²

(September 2005): 247.

⁷R. T. Kendall, *Understanding Theology, Volume Three* (Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus, 2001), 219.

⁸Roy B. Zuck, *Spirit-Filled Teaching: The Power of the Holy Spirit in Your Ministry*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003), 160.

⁹James Emery White, *What They Didn't Teach You in Seminary: 25 Lessons for Successful Ministry in Your Church*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 107.

¹⁰Frank Rogers Jr, "Dancing with grace: Toward a spirit-centered education," *Religious Education* 89, no. 3 (Summer94 1994): 387.

¹¹Norman L. Geisler, "Holy Spirit, Role in Apologetics," *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 331.

¹²Zuck, *Spirit-Filled Teaching*, 29.

The Trinity powerfully works in the salvific act. The Father sent the son. The Son performed all the work of obedience and sacrifice. According to R.C. Sproul, “The role of the Holy Spirit chiefly and principally in the New Testament is to apply the work of Christ to believers.”¹³ How does He do this? R.A. Torrey lists a few ways, showing that the Spirit:

- a. Reveals the things of God. 1 Co 2:10, 13.
- b. Reveals the things of Christ. Joh 16:14.
- c. Reveals the future. Lu 2:26; Ac 21:11.
- d. Brings the words of Christ to remembrance. Joh 14:26.
- e. Directs in the way of godliness. Isa 30:21; Eze 36:27.
- f. Teaches saints to answer persecutors. Mr 13:11; Lu 12:12.
- g. Enables ministers to teach. 1 Co 12:8.
- h. Guides into all truth. Joh 14:26; 16:13.
- i. Directs the decisions of the Church. Ac 15:28.¹⁴

Christian education is not word without power because the Spirit is the power. He uses his people to do the work of education. As the church ministers, they are doing so through the active involvement of this God.

The Presence in Education

When Christian educators teach, they are not alone. They operate with and in the Spirit. In Romans 14:17, Paul says, “the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” While some might naturally equate the physical with the real, this is an illusion. The spiritual is the foundational reality on which the physical is built because all creation is built on a spiritual God. Further, spiritual identity is the more consequential than physical or temporal, and the believer’s identity is in Christ. This citizenship in the kingdom means that the church does not only work to live out the

¹³R. C. Sproul, *Who Is the Holy Spirit?*, vol. 13, The Crucial Questions Series (Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust, 2012), 12–13.

¹⁴R.A. Torrey, *The New Topical Text Book: A Scriptural Text Book for the Use of Ministers, Teachers, and All Christian Workers* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2001).

Great Commission *for* God, but also *with* God. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* explains, “The whole of Christian life is ‘in Christ’, or ‘in the Spirit’, ‘being led by the Spirit’. Possessing the Spirit unites believers with the Lord (1 Cor. 6:17) and has moral implications (1 Cor. 3:16 and Gal. 5).”¹⁵

Grasping the powerful presence of the Spirit is key to success in education. Popular speaker Francis Chan elaborates, “Instead of mustering up more willpower, let’s focus our energies and time on asking for help from the One who has the power to change us.”¹⁶ Rather than employees giving effort, Christian teachers must be sons and daughter receiving help. This is especially true for proclaimers of Scripture. The Word of God is made up of the words of the Spirit. He spoke them to the writers of the Bible, but He also works so that people today may hear them. In the words of Donald Bloesch,

It is by the inner work of the Spirit that we perceive the mysteries of Christ. Church proclamation is ineffectual if it consists only in plausible words of wisdom: it must occur “with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (1 Cor 2:4 NRSV). The Word is animated by the Spirit, and the Spirit always directs us to the Word... The Holy Spirit reminds us of all that Christ says to us in Scripture (Jn 14:25–26) and confirms the witness of Christ that we are indeed children of God (Rom 8:16–17).¹⁷

Christian education is not just the teaching about God, it is the teaching work in and of God. Human teachers proclaim, but their words are made alive by the Spirit. Human learners work to apply, but their acts are inspired and empowered by the Spirit. Human missionaries go and make disciples, but they are never without the witness of the Spirit.

¹⁵F. L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 788.

¹⁶Francis Chan, *Forgotten God: Reversing Our Tragic Neglect of the Holy Spirit*, (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook Publishing, 2009), 148.

¹⁷Donald G. Bloesch, *The Holy Spirit: Works & Gifts* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 274–275.

Conclusion

In the Great Commission, Jesus gave the command to make disciples. This means that Christian education is imperative. Obedience to the call is necessary. However, the work teachers do is all from the Holy Spirit. That God is the aim of education, the power in the work, and the presence with his people.

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