

## The Gender of the Holy Spirit (No. 155)

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One of the most controversial topics of Christianity is the Holy Spirit. All agree he/it exists but there are many ideas of what he/it is. Some use Greek Scriptures which they claim refer to the Holy Spirit as "he" and conclude that the Holy Spirit must be a person. In this paper, these Scriptures are analysed and conclusions on the gender of the Holy Spirit are drawn.

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### The Gender of the Holy Spirit

Recently a letter was received by the Church which addressed the question of the gender of the Holy Spirit. That letter was important because it was based on a false premise which seems to have currency in the English speaking world, and is actively encouraged by Trinitarians because it supports their error. The letter is reproduced in part to assist others in identifying the problem.

I have been told that your church teaches that the Holy Spirit is not a person in the Godhead, but is merely the power of God working in true Christians. I believed this for many years, but a few weeks ago I discovered that the Holy Spirit mentioned as the Spirit of Truth in John 16:13 is referred to as *he*.

I realise that there are many places in the New Testament where the Holy Spirit is referred to as *he*, but in all instances except three the Greek word for *he* is not actually in the Greek. Commonly Greek leaves out the subject pronoun and, in these references to the Holy Spirit, implies by the verbal ending that the subject is *he, she, or it*. All of the translations that I have seen use *he. She or it* could have been used instead.

In Greek, as in Latin, Slavic, and most Germanic languages, every noun is given a gender by virtue of its ending. This is called grammatical gender and cannot be changed. This may not correspond to its natural gender. The word for man is grammatically masculine which is good because a man is masculine, but the word for sun is also masculine and this is in contrast with its neuter meaning. Greek grammar demands that when a word is referred back to by a pronoun, the pronoun must have the same grammatical gender as the noun it refers to. An exception is made by a writer only when he is emphasising natural gender. Spirit is grammatically neuter, so *he* refers to the Spirit because the Spirit is a living being.

In three verses ie. John 14:26, 15:26 & 16:13, the Greek word for *he* (ie [*ekeinos*]) is actually used. In these first two instances, if the grammar is greatly and absurdly stretched, one perhaps could say that [*ekeinos*] refers to the comforter (*ho parakletos*) or father (*patros*) both of which are masculine and therefore demand *he* and not *it*. However, in John 16:13 there is not any other word in the sentence that *he* (*ekeinos*) could refer to except the word Spirit (*pneuma*) in the phrase the Spirit of Truth.

The Greek word for Spirit [*pneuma*] is grammatically neuter and demands the pronoun *it* [*ekeino*], but John has purposely chosen to use *he* [*ekeinos*], therefore the Holy Spirit must be a person in the Godhead. Furthermore, The Greek word for comforter [*parakletos*] is a verbal adjective used as a noun. This word is essentially an adjective which can be used in common (ie. masculine or feminine) gender (*parakletos*) or in neuter gender [*parakleton*]. Comforter is used in the New Testament in the common gender, ie, [*parakletos*].

If the Holy Spirit is only the power of God how can you account for these two points?

The answer to the problem lies in the most basic of false assumptions, in this case, that *ekeinos* means *he*. It does not mean, nor has it been translated as, *he*. This seems to have been stated by someone as if to demonstrate a point and then remained unchallenged. The word *he* in John 16:13 is deduced from the grammar and inserted in the English, as it has been elsewhere.

In English the problem of sex and gender is complicated because, in this language, gender implies sex. In many languages, gender is inherent in the grammar. It is not directly linked to sex as it is in English. The mistake is trying to make deductions from foreign languages by using an English thought process. It might be pointed out that it is dangerous, indeed, to construct a theology from the presence or absence of the Greek letter *sigma* in John 16:13 (translated *That one*; see also 16:14), given the acknowledged forgeries in 1Timothy 3:16, in Codex Aleph, involving also the letter *sigma* and *theta* constructing *Theos* where none existed. This resulted in the false text in the KJV. Also 1John 5:7 was a forgery inserted in the Receptus, again affecting the KJV. Be that as it may, we will

accept *ekeinos* as accurate because it is not critical to the point.

*Ekeinos* is rendered *That one* and not *He* on each occasion it is used in relation to the Holy Spirit in these texts. The *New Thayer's Greek English Lexicon* (p. 194) shows that *ekeinos* does not mean *he*. It is derived from the proposition *the one there*. It is a pronoun meaning *That man, women or thing*. It is used for stress. Hence, it is given the suffix *os* to reflect the grammatical structure in which it occurs. The endings can also denote case, *os* denoting the nominative case, *n* or *on* denoting the accusative (hence *theos* (our *theos* or *elohim*) and *ton theon* (the God) in Jn. 1:1). The word *he* in John 16:13 is rendered from words which do not convey that meaning except abstractly from their construction. Marshall's Interlinear shows that The Spirit receives literally *the of me* and announces or conveys it to the brethren. This Spirit is of the Father, because Christ says in the next verse that *All things which has the Father, mine is (are)* (see Marshall's Jn. 16:13-15). The Interlinear text supports the concept that the Spirit is the power of God. The grammatical structure is used because it speaks of the Father and His attributes or powers.

Marshall's Interlinear shows how the problem is asserted from the translation. The Greek is Romanised for ease of reading.

*otan de elthe ekeinos, to pneuma tes aletheias*

but when comes that one the Spirit of truth,

*odegesei umas eis ten aletheian pasan*

he will guide you into the truth all;

*ou gar laleseis aph eautou, all osa*

for not will he speak from himself but what things

*akouei laleseis, kai ta erchomena*

he hears he will speak and the coming things

*anaggelei umin*

he will announce to you.

Note that the word *he* is attributed from the word structure. The word *he* can also be attributed in the following circumstance as Marshall notes in the Introduction.

The definite article must sometimes be rendered by a pronoun or a possessive adjective. This is particularly so where parts of the body are indicated; e.g., Matthew *ch.* 8, v. 3. Sometimes it is used 'pronominally' - that is, it must be rendered 'he' (or otherwise according to the gender) or 'they'; see Mark *ch.* 10, v. 4.

Marshall goes on to deal with the question of gender on page xi.

In Greek, gender belongs to the word and not necessarily to what is indicated by the word; whereas of course in English we keep the ideas of masculine, feminine, and neuter to men, women, and inanimate things respectively. (English, by the way, is the only great modern language to do so.) Allowance must be made for this in translating: sometimes it is possible to transfer the idea from one language to another, but not always. The note to Revelation *ch.* 13, v. 1, may be consulted.

The note to Revelation 13:1 is useful because it also deals with the notion of gender from grammar and bears on John 16:13 and the translation of the word rendered *himself*.

[autou], of course may be neuter or masculine - "of it" or "of him". [*drakon*] being masculine (= Satan), we have kept to the masculine. But [*therion*] is neuter. Yet if it stands for a person, as [*arnion*] certainly does, it too should be treated, as to the pronoun, as a masculine.

Thus *himself* is a rendering of a word which can either be neuter or masculine. The rendering of *himself* is in accord with the association with the attributes of God. The translations are compounded by the fact that it is convenient to render the texts in such manner.

Marshall also makes note of the use of a participle with the definite article (Intro., p. xiv).

A participle may be used, with the definite article, with, say, "one" understood, where we should use a noun or a relative phrase; e.g., frequently, [*ho pisteuon*] = the [one] believing = the believer *or* he who believes. Here the participle is continuous; in Luke *ch.* 1, v. 45, it is momentary (and, naturally, feminine in gender as referring to Mary's one act of faith at the Annunciation). If two participles are used but with one definite article, as in John *ch.* 5, v. 24, the meaning is that one person is doubly described, not two persons doing two things. This feature has been preserved in our translation.

John was a Hebrew using Aramaic as his native language relating Aramaic and Hebrew concepts and Hebrew theology. There is even some doubt as to whether the gospels were written originally in Greek. To examine the aspects of the Holy Spirit we should go back to the context in which the Holy Spirit is revealed and prophesied. That is the Old Testament.

There should be harmony between the Old and New Testaments. The Bible does not contradict itself on spiritual matters. The Holy Spirit is referred to in the Old Testament on many occasions. The Spirit is linked with God as the Spirit of the Lord. The word is *Ruach* (see SHD 7307). It is a spirit but only of a rational being (see Strong's). The term does not possess the same problems because the grammatical structure of Hebrew is not value laden in the same way as it is in Greek. English merely compounds this linguistic problem.

The Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius *Hebrew English Lexicon* on pages 924-925 shows the spirit in man to be the gift and creation of God (referring to Zech. 12:1; Job. 27:3 cf. Isa. 42:6). God preserves it (Job 10:12; cf. 12:10; Num. 16:22; 27:16; Prov. 16:2). The Lexicon concludes that it is therefore God's Spirit (Gen. 6:3) departing at death (Isa. 38:16; Job 17:1; 34:14; Isa. 57:16; Eccl. 8:8).

The Lexicon then deals with the Spirit of God in the various references in the neuter. It is referred to as the inspiration of prophecy and the force that impels the prophets to utter instruction or warning. This was so of ancient prophets (Zech. 7:12; Neh. 9:30).

Zechariah 7:12 <sup>12</sup> Yea, they made their hearts *as* an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the LORD of hosts hath sent in his spirit by the former prophets: therefore came a great wrath from the LORD of hosts. (KJV)

Nehemiah 9:30 <sup>30</sup> Yet many years didst thou forbear them, and testifiedst against them by thy spirit in thy prophets: yet would they not give ear: therefore gavest thou them into the hand of the people of the lands. (KJV)

These verses make it quite clear that the Holy Spirit is the possession of the God of Hosts who sends His Spirit to the prophets. Isaiah 11:2 shows that this Spirit rests on Messiah.

The Spirit of God was held to impart warlike energy and executive and administrative power to ancient Israel (Judg. 3:10; 11:29; cf. 6:34; 13:25; 14:6,19; 15:14; 1Sam. 11:6; 16:13,14 and also Isa. 32:15). It was seen as resting upon the Messianic king (Isa. 11:2). It was seen as endowing men with various gifts, e.g. technical skill (Ex. 31:3; 35:31), understanding (Job 32:8), as poured out by divine wisdom (Prov. 1:23). It was seen as the energy of life (Gen. 1:2), and as a vital power (Isa. 31:3) (and in a cherubic chariot from Ezek. 1:12 cf. vv. 20-21).

The Lexicon groups the Spirit in the last category as being the ancient Angel of the Presence and later Shekina (Isa. 63:10-11; cf. also the concepts in Neh. 9:20). Thus the Spirit was made manifest to Israel first in the Angel of the Presence, who later became Messiah. Messiah thus is embodied with the Spirit as the power of God. Later it became evident as the Shekina. The Lexicon holds that the prophecies of restoration conceive of the divine Spirit as standing in the midst of Israel and about to fulfil all divine promises (Hag. 2:5; Zech. 4:6). This concept culminates in the divine presence and as such [God is] omnipresent (see p. 926).

The Spirit is thus the Power of God. It is not *merely* or *only* the Power of God. No concept of the Holy Spirit as the third person of a closed Trinity could grasp the omnipresent all embracing extension of the nature and personality of God that will ensue from this process of God becoming all in all (1Cor. 12:6; 15:28 KJV; Eph. 4:6). The power of the elect will thus be as the power of God in the Holy Spirit and they will be as Elohim (Zech. 12:8) as the Angel of Jehovah at their head, who is Messiah. They will be Israel and they shall rule as God.

Historically, it is useful to understand the development of the doctrine of the Trinity. It was not suggested that the Holy Spirit was a person nor was it considered as such until the Council of Constantinople in 381 AD.

The Holy Spirit was not fixed in the doctrine at all in the Council of Nicea (325). It failed to gain formulation at Constantinople (381). Only at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 was the doctrine formulated. There is no evidence that the apostles or the early apologists saw Christ as other than created and the Spirit as other than the power of God until the end of the third century, except with the Modalists and the Gnostics. It was these groups that finally emerged as the Trinitarian faction under Theodosius in 381 and by force of arms introduced their heresy.

The Trinity must reduce the activities of the Holy Spirit in order to deny the destiny of Israel and the elect. Greek ethics and philosophy are totally reliant on this epistemology in order to remove the logical requirements of biblical law as given at Sinai. The assertion of *He* and masculine gender is but part of the process in the assertion of personality to an attribute of God by which the elect are empowered.

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