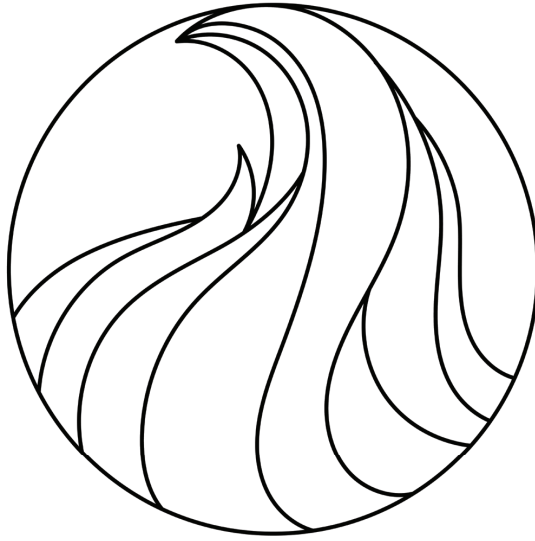


**THE  
HOLY SPIRIT**  
*An Introduction*

MATT AYARS



# THE HOLY SPIRIT

*An Introduction*

MATT AYARS

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Printed in the United States of America

*Cover design and layout by Strange Last Name*

*Page design and layout by PerfectType, Nashville, Tennessee*

## **Ayars, Matthew I.**

The Holy Spirit : an introduction / Matt Ayars. – Franklin, Tennessee : Seedbed Publishing, ©2023.

pages ; cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN: 9781628249989 (paperback)

ISBN: 9781628249996 (mobi)

ISBN: 9798888000007 (epub)

ISBN: 9798888000014 (pdf)

OCLC: 1376008092

1. Holy Spirit. I. Title.

BT121.3 A92 2023

231.3

2023936163

SEEDBED PUBLISHING  
Franklin, Tennessee  
[Seedbed.com](http://Seedbed.com)

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## INTRODUCTION

# Holiness, the Holy Spirit, and the Glory of God

In the early verses of Exodus 3, Moses is keeping his father-in-law's sheep at the foot of Mount Sinai when he sees something strange. He sees a bush engulfed in flames, but the fire is not consuming it. As Moses approaches to get a better look at the peculiar sight, God speaks to him out of the flames in the heart of the bush. God tells Moses that if he comes any closer, he must remove his sandals because the ground on which he is standing is holy (Ex. 3:5). In other words, this ground is no ordinary ground. This ground is *different* because God's personal presence is there in the heart of the bush.

This story contains the seed of a central theme that is unpacked in high-resolution detail through the rest of the Bible: God's holiness. The holiness of God is at the center of who God reveals himself to be in Scripture. God's holiness is the most important thing about him. Yes, God is all-powerful,

faithful, and incorruptibly good, but even before all of that, he is *holy*. The top priority of the holiness of God in Scripture is why holiness is the most appropriate starting point for a study of the Holy Spirit. Just like Moses, if we want to take a step closer to knowing God—and in this case, God the Holy Spirit—we must first come to grips with his holiness.

### **Holiness: A Definition**

So, what does it mean that God is holy? The word *holy*, in the most basic sense, means “different.” First Samuel 2:2 captures this well. It says: “There is none holy like the LORD: for there is none besides you; there is no rock like our God.” So, when we say that God is holy, we mean that God is *different*.

### **I Am: The Transcendence of God**

How is God different? A few verses after God tells Moses to remove his sandals, he tells Moses that his name is “I AM” (Ex. 3:14). What does this mean? For starters, God is saying that unlike created beings, he is entirely *independent* and *unlimited*. In a word, God is *transcendent*. Like all created beings, human beings are utterly dependent on creation for their existence. We are also bound by time and space. We cannot be in more than one place at once. God can. People cannot be in the past, present, and future all at once. God can. Every created being has a beginning. God doesn’t. Humans are a part of

creation, and creation is a part of them. We are continuous with the creation. God is not. God is not dependent on the creation and not limited by time or space because God is not a created being, unlike everything else. God simply *is*. God's unique existence in the category of "uncreated being" makes him *different* from everything else in the creation.

### No Idolatry: It's Too Small

The transcendence and eternity of God are the reasons behind the Bible's strong prohibitions against making idols.

God is so wholly other than the creation that nothing within it can contain him. Trying to fit God into a statue would be like trying to fit the Pacific Ocean in a teacup. The teacup cannot even come close to containing all the water of the ocean. Likewise, no created thing can come remotely close to containing God or representing him adequately. God is always more than anything shaped by human hands because he has no limits. All created things and beings fall infinitely short of fully describing him. Trying to fit God into something that is created would diminish him and thereby be a false representation of who he is. Idolatry,

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### Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. What is the meaning of “holy”?
2. What are the two ways in which God is set apart, or different, from created beings?
3. God is incomprehensible, yet we can know about him and have a personal relationship with him. How is that possible?
4. What is the difference between general revelation and special revelation?
5. How does the Holy Spirit glorify Jesus?

## CHAPTER 1

# The Bible as the Primary Source

**W**e said in the introduction that the Bible is the primary source for our study of the Holy Spirit. This means that the Bible is our source for understanding how we can know about the Holy Spirit and know the Holy Spirit personally. Before jumping right into what the Bible says about the Holy Spirit, I will lay out my assumptions and convictions about the Bible. In this chapter, we will cover the classical Christian doctrine of bibliology, which is the Christian teaching and understanding of the Bible as the Word of God. This is particularly important for a study on the Holy Spirit because—as we will see in later chapters—the Holy Spirit has a key role in the writing and interpretation of the Bible. This section, then, will not only explore classical Christian bibliology, but particularly the relationship between the view of Scripture and the Holy Spirit’s revealing work. In the sections that follow we will consider the following aspects of the Scriptures as they relate to the study of the Holy Spirit:

- the uniqueness of the Christian Bible as divine revelation
- the inspiration and authority of Scripture
- the infallibility of Scripture
- the sufficiency of Scripture
- the clarity of Scripture
- the unity of Scripture

### **The Bible as the Community Witness of God’s Revelation**

Standing in the broader currents of the great Christian tradition, the cornerstone principle of my view of the Scriptures is that the Bible is what it claims to be. In other words, I believe that the Bible’s claims about itself are valid. Thus, when 2 Timothy 3:16–17 says that “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work,” I take it at face value.

Jesus, who was declared to be the Son of God in his resurrection, endorses the Old Testament.

But why do I take the Bible’s claim about itself at face value? The Qur’an also claims that it is the word of God, but we don’t take that claim at face value. What makes the Bible unique in that sense?

The short answer is the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus, who was declared to be the

Son of God in his resurrection, endorses the Old Testament. That Jesus alone was raised from the dead to a glorified body means that he is in a category of his own regarding authoritative and reliable teaching. Jesus's other miracles also validate this claim. The Spirit-led conviction of the church has always been to follow the man who healed people, calmed storms, walked on water, cast out demons, brought people back to life, and was resurrected after being dead for three days. There has never been anyone like that in history. Jesus, being in a category of his own, affirmed the Old Testament as Scripture (Matt. 5:12; 21:42; 22:29; 26:54; Luke 24:27; John 10:35). If he says it is Scripture, then it must be.

But what about the New Testament? The New Testament is the account of firsthand witnesses to Jesus. Church history attests to several criteria for determining which writings made it into the New Testament as Christian scripture. First, scripture (writings inspired by the Holy Spirit for the whole church) is always evidenced in its ability to transform readers. In other words, there is a particular self-authenticating quality to Holy Spirit-inspired writing that sets it apart from ordinary writings. A second criterion for determining canonicity was used in Christian worship. Certain books were commonly used by the earliest Christ-followers, and those books—the church decided—should be a part of the Christian Scriptures. The third and most essential factor in determining a book's inclusion into the New Testament is apostolicity; that is, a direct connection to someone who knew Jesus firsthand. For a text to be considered as divinely

inspired, its author had to have proximity to either Jesus himself or one degree of separation from Jesus via an apostle. If there was any doubt over an author's direct connection to an apostle, the early church did not accept that author's text as divinely inspired. There has been consensus that the New Testament contained twenty-seven books beginning at the end of the apostolic era. In other words, even though the criteria for New Testament canonicity was not firmly declared until the fourth century AD, the recognition of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament as we have it today originated immediately following Jesus.

When the Bible says that it is the Word of God, then we believe it because it has the backing of historical witnesses.

The second thing that makes the Bible unique is that it is the Word of God according to the witness of a community. One man in a cave wrote the Qur'an.<sup>1</sup> Multiple individuals wrote the Bible over time, and its claims were affirmed and verified by a community of firsthand witnesses. When God revealed himself in real time and space in word and deed, it was in the presence of a community of individuals who uphold the witness of the truthfulness

of the Bible's claims. The witness of the community is what makes the Bible unique and trustworthy. This communal

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1. The authorship of the Qur'an is more complicated than this, but the common view is that Muhammed alone is the originator of the written text.

witness is true for both the Old and New Testaments. Thus, when the Bible says that it is the Word of God, then we believe it because it has the backing of historical witnesses.

How does the uniqueness of Scripture relate to the Holy Spirit? First, Jesus, the risen one, had a lot to say about the Holy Spirit. The risen one is a reliable source. What Jesus tells us about the Holy Spirit we know to be reliable because he was vindicated as the divine Son of God in his resurrection. Related to this same dynamic, we know that the Old Testament's teaching on the Holy Spirit is trustworthy and reliable because Jesus endorsed the divine inspiration of the Old Testament. Second, what the Bible says about the Holy Spirit is what God revealed to a community of witnesses in real time and space. There were individuals and groups who stood by the claims of Scripture and what they said about the Holy Spirit. In other words, what the Scriptures say regarding the person and work of the Holy Spirit is affirmed by firsthand witnesses as trustworthy.

What Jesus tells us about the Holy Spirit we know to be reliable because he was vindicated as the divine Son of God in his resurrection.

## **The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture**

The most important claim that the Bible makes about itself is that God inspired it. Once again, 2 Timothy 3:16–17 says: “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable

for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”<sup>2</sup> This means that the Bible is God-breathed, a metaphor that the Bible is *from* God; God is the source or origin of his self-revelation in the Scriptures. The Bible is not merely a human accounting of the witness of God’s redemptive work in history. Rather, the Bible is God’s inspiration of human authors to write the story the way he wanted it written (2 Peter 1:20–21).

That God is the source and originator of the Bible implies its authority. It carries the very authority of God in itself. As the holy, infinite Creator, God has the power and is entitled to give orders, and the Bible carries that same power and entitlement. Isaiah 45:9–12 says:

“Woe to him who strives with him who formed him,  
a pot among earthen pots!  
Does the clay say to him who forms it, ‘What are  
you making?’  
or ‘Your work has no handles?’  
Woe to him who says to a father, ‘What are you  
begetting?’  
or to a woman, ‘With what are you in labor?’”

---

2. See also Nehemiah 9:30; Matthew 22:43–44; 1 Corinthians 2:13; 2 Peter 1:20–21; Hebrews 1:1–2.

Thus says the LORD,

the Holy One of Israel, and the one who  
formed him:

“Ask me of things to come;

will you command me concerning my children  
and the work of my hands?

I made the earth

and created man on it;

it was my hands that stretched out the heavens,

and I commanded all their host.”

Because God is the source of all things (including human life), he alone has the right and privilege to give commands; because God is the source of the Holy Scriptures, the Bible itself has authority. Disobeying the Bible is the same as disobeying God himself.

The doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture is also why Christians believe that the Bible is a living document. Hebrews 4:12–13 says: “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is

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and intentions  
of the heart.”



hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”

The Word of God is alive because God breathes life into the Word, as well as into believers who read the Word to love and obey God. As we will explore in detail in later

The Word of God is alive because God breathes life into the Word, as well as into believers who read the Word to love and obey God.

chapters, the Holy Spirit is always associated with the life-giving activity of God. When we say that God breathes life into something (e.g., the Word) or someone, it is God the Holy Spirit who gives life. With this, we can say that God inspires the writing of the Word, and that God inspires the interpretation of the Word.

What does the inspiration and authority of Scripture have to do with the Holy Spirit? First, it means that what the Bible reveals about the Holy Spirit comes from the Holy Spirit himself, since the Spirit played an integral role in the writing of the Word of God. Second, what the Bible says about the Holy Spirit is authoritative, meaning that challenging what the Bible says about the Holy Spirit is the same as challenging God himself on the matter. Those whose teachings on the Holy Spirit deviate from the Scriptures are dangerous because they contradict what God himself says on the subject. Third, the inspiration of the Scriptures means

that since the Holy Spirit was instrumental in the writing of the Word, then he is also instrumental in the interpretation of the Word. As we will explore in more detail in the sections on the clarity of Scripture and the role of Christian tradition, the Holy Spirit helps us interpret the deeper theological meaning of the Bible when we read it seeking to love and obey God.

## The Infallibility of Scripture

The doctrine of the infallibility of Scripture is in some ways very straightforward, and in other ways rather complicated. The doctrine simply stated is that *the Bible is entirely trustworthy in its teaching*. In other words, the Bible does not contain any falsehoods or lead readers astray. It is entirely reliable as God's self-revelation. Alan Cairns offers a more robust definition of infallibility:

That quality of the Bible, the inspired word of God, by which it is free from error, authentic in its writings, reliable in its revelation, and authoritative in all its communications. In other words, infallibility means that the Scripture, whether considered in its totality or in any of its

The doctrine of infallibility simply stated is that *the Bible is entirely trustworthy in its teaching*.

parts cannot fall short of being true, whatever the subject under consideration may be.<sup>3</sup>

This doctrine is the natural result of the doctrine of inspiration. It affirms that when God reveals himself in Scripture, he does so without fault or error. If the Bible is inspired by God (meaning that God is the source of the Bible)

Infallability is the natural result of the doctrine of inspiration. It affirms that when God reveals himself in Scripture, he does so without fault or error.

and God (1) knows all things (Ps. 147:5; 1 John 3:20) and (2) does not lie (Tit. 1:2), then a falsehood in Scripture means that God is either lying or limited in his knowledge, both of which the Scriptures refute. Let's unpack this a bit more.

First, the Bible clearly says that God knows all things (i.e., God is omniscient). Scripture tells us that God's understanding is beyond measure (Ps. 147:5), that he knows everything (1 John 3:20), that the hairs of every human head and the stars are numbered (Matt. 10:30; Ps. 147:4), and that no creature is hidden from God's sight and that all things are laid bare to God's eyes (Heb. 4:13). In short, God is omniscient, meaning

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3. Alan Cairns, *Dictionary of Theological Terms: A Ready Reference of Over 800 Theological and Doctrinal Terms* (Greenville, SC: Ambassador Emerald International, 2002), 232.

“all-knowing.” There is nothing that God does not know or understand.

Second, the Bible also definitively declares that God does not lie (Num. 23:19; Titus 1:2). Hebrews 6:18 says: “so that by two unchangeable things, *in which it is impossible for God to lie*, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us” (italics added). God is honest, true, and reliable.

What do God’s omniscience and honesty have to do with the Bible being trustworthy? If the Bible contains falsehoods, then God either (1) doesn’t know any better or (2) is giving misinformation (i.e., lying). Put another way, if God knows everything, then to declare a falsehood would be a lie or misleading. Likewise, if God does not lie yet states a falsehood, he is not all-knowing. To suggest that the Bible affirms things that are not true implies that God is either limited in knowledge or not trustworthy, both of which the Bible refutes.

One of the significant dangers of rejecting the infallibility of Scripture is that to do so makes the Bible an inferior standard for measuring truth. It diminishes the reliability of Scripture.

To make the Bible inferior to anything else such as science or human reason as a standard for measuring truth is to

It is precisely because the Holy Spirit played an active role in creating the Bible that it is trustworthy and reliable.

The doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture says that the Bible contains everything necessary for people to live a life that is wholly pleasing to God.

undermine God's supremacy, sovereignty, authority, and truthfulness—all of which directly contradicts the very commands of Scripture. To reject the infallibility of Scripture is to reject God as he has revealed himself in the Bible, or to reject inspiration.

What does the doctrine of the infallibility of Scripture have to do with the Holy Spirit? First, *it is precisely because the Holy Spirit played an active role in creating the Bible that it is trustworthy and reliable*. Because the Holy Spirit is God, we can fully and without hesitation or reserve trust what he inspired the human authors of Scripture to write. Second, what the Bible says about the Holy Spirit is trustworthy and reliable. The Bible does not mislead readers about who the Holy Spirit is or what he does in the world.

## The Sufficiency of Scripture

The doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture says that the Bible contains everything necessary for people to live a life that is wholly pleasing to God (Pss. 1, 19, and 119). Nothing is missing from Scripture and nothing needs to be added to Scripture to live in complete obedience to God. The curses against those who take away from or add to the Scriptures are the foundations for the doctrine. Revelation 22:18–19

says: “I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.” This strong warning is because, on the one hand, taking away from the Scriptures means preventing people from living a life that is fully pleasing to God. On the other hand, adding to the Scriptures requires more of people than what God himself requires for righteousness.

The sufficiency of Scripture as special revelation is in contrast with the insufficiency of general revelation. While we can know about God through nature and our internal moral compass, nature and the moral conscience cannot bring us to a *personal relationship* with God. The Bible, however, is sufficient for a personal relationship with God.

The impact of the sufficiency of Scripture on the study of the Holy Spirit is that the Scriptures contain everything that we need to know about the Holy Spirit to be saved. There is not something about the Holy Spirit missing from the Scriptures that we need human teaching or experience to supplement. Everything that God has ordained for people to know about the Holy Spirit can be found in the Bible.

The doctrine of the clarity of Scripture states that the Holy Spirit clarifies the text’s message to those who read it with a desire to love and obey God.

## The Clarity of Scripture

Psalm 19:7 says: “The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.” This means that even the simple can understand the Bible. Furthermore, the Bible commands believers to teach their children the Scriptures (Deut. 6:7). If the Bible can make wise the simple and even children can understand

it, then the text’s message must be clear and comprehensible. More precisely, the doctrine of the clarity of Scripture states that the Holy Spirit clarifies the text’s message to those who read it with a desire to love and obey God.

While there is a sense of divine mystery to the Holy Spirit, the Bible tells readers what they need to know about him and how to know about him and to know him personally.

The first thing to highlight here is the role of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit inspired both the writing of the text and the reading of the text. The Holy Spirit interprets the meaning of the Word to our hearts and helps us accept the Word as good and true. As we will explore in later chapters, faith is a gift of the Holy Spirit, meaning that the Holy Spirit helps

readers understand, believe, and obey the Word.

The clarity of Scripture tells us that what the Bible says about the Holy Spirit is understandable and accessible. The

Bible reveals that the Holy Spirit is not hidden nor incomprehensible. While there is a sense of divine mystery to the Holy Spirit, the Bible tells readers what they need to know about him and how to know about him and to know him personally. What the Bible says about the Holy Spirit is plain and clear.

## The Unity of Scripture

If God is the source of the Bible, then the Bible must reflect God's single, comprehensive, unified mind (Deut. 6:4). The Bible does not contradict itself because God does not contradict himself. The Bible, like its source, is consistent and has an internal coherence. Additionally, since the Bible is trustworthy, reliable, and infallible it must also be unified in its message. The unity of the Bible is why we use Scripture to interpret Scripture. The meaning of specific parts of the text is derived from the whole and the whole by the parts.

Because the Bible is unified in its message, what the Bible reveals about the Holy Spirit will not be contradictory. For example, it will not say in the Old Testament that the Holy Spirit is not God, yet in the New Testament, say that he is God, since the entire Bible comes from God who is one.

The Bible, like its divine source, is consistent and has an internal coherence.



## Conclusion

The Bible is the primary source for this study of the Holy Spirit. What the Bible says about the Holy Spirit is revealed by God himself and, therefore, authoritative. Furthermore, what we learn about the Holy Spirit in Scripture is trustworthy, understandable, coherent, and sufficient for a saving relationship with God.

## Why It Matters

Why does it matter that we clearly understand what we believe about the Scriptures? It's important because the Bible says that the Deceiver is like a roaring lion who roams about, seeking to devour us (1 Peter 5:8). He is a liar who wants to lead us astray through deception. The

If the message of Scripture is not clear, adequate, or trustworthy, then we would lack what we need to know about the Holy Spirit and to know him personally.

proper defense against the enemy is a clear understanding of the truth, which the Bible gives us. If the Bible contains falsehoods, we are vulnerable to being led astray. It matters that the message of the Bible is clear and sufficient for understanding salvation—and particularly for this book—the Holy Spirit. If the message of Scripture is not clear, adequate, or trustworthy, then we would lack what we need to know about the Holy Spirit and to know him personally. The clarity and

sufficiency of Scripture means that we can know everything we need to know about the Holy Spirit right from the Scriptures, and this is required for living fully into the life that Jesus is offering us.

### Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What role does the Holy Spirit play in the shaping of Scripture?
2. What is the doctrine of the infallibility of Scripture?
3. What does it mean that the Scriptures are “God-breathed”?
4. What are some of the dangers of believing that the Scriptures contain falsehoods?
5. Considering the doctrine of the clarity and simplicity of Scripture, what can we conclude if people disagree on the message and meaning of the text?

## CHAPTER 2

# Church Tradition and Doctrine

In the previous chapter, we said that the Bible is the foundational and authoritative source for learning about the person and work of the Holy Spirit. In this chapter, we will look at the consensual tradition of the church represented in the ancient councils and the recognized orthodox theological interpreters of the faith across the centuries as a secondary source for learning about the person and work of the Holy Spirit. We will further explore an idea from chapter 1: the Holy Spirit not only inspired the writing of the Bible, but *he also inspires the reading and interpretation of the Bible*, which is the basis for church tradition, which is better called the “Great Tradition” that is the shared lineage of all Christians.

## The Need for Tradition: Interpreting the Bible

Many Christians are uneasy about the idea of church tradition as an authoritative source for an accurate understanding of God and worship. If the Bible is the inspired Word of God and sufficient for salvation, why do we need church tradition and creeds? Does following church tradition not violate the Bible's commands to not add to the Scriptures (Deut. 4:2 and Rev. 18–19)?

The answer to the objection to tradition is relatively simple: we need church tradition because the Bible—as a text—*requires interpretation*. Take, for example, the command to remember the Sabbath to keep it holy (Ex. 20:8–11). Can we wash dishes on the Sabbath? Go for a walk? Can we get out of bed? Go to the grocery store? Watch sports? Play with the kids? The point is that the command to rest on the Sabbath needs to be interpreted. Even further, it is only based on the church's theological tradition that we understand why Sunday, rather than the Sabbath, became the Christian holy day. As one theologian once said, the Bible sometimes gives us all the ingredients but doesn't always tell us how to bake the cake.

Tradition results  
from moving  
beyond what a text  
says and arriving  
at what it *means*.

Tradition results from moving beyond what a text *says* and arriving at what it *means*. Tradition is founded on the conviction that the Holy Spirit inspires both the *writing* and the *reading* of Scripture (Heb. 4:12; 2 Tim. 3:16). The Holy Spirit not only gives God's people the Word of God but also helps us to understand what it means and apply it in our times. When the worshipping community arrives at an interpretation by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, that interpretation becomes tradition. *The role of tradition, then, is not to invent teaching or add to the Scriptures, but to preserve the integrity of the original meaning of Scripture with the help of the Holy Spirit.* We are significantly aided in our efforts to understand the Holy Spirit by recognizing the Great Tradition of the church and entering into dialogue with those who came before us in the effort to live faithfully.

When we rely on tradition for clarity on the Holy Spirit, we must keep in mind that we are assuming that the Holy Spirit was faithful in guiding the formulation of doctrine. When we look to tradition for teaching on the Holy Spirit, we assume that the faithful community of Christians were under the guidance of the Holy Spirit in arriving at their

The role of tradition is not to invent teaching or add to the Scriptures, but to preserve the integrity of the original meaning of Scripture with the help of the Holy Spirit.

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**We're all invited to know the personal presence  
of God in the Holy Spirit for the glory of God.**

This book is an accessible, introductory-level, systematic treatment of the Holy Spirit that is rooted in Scripture and the historic Christian faith. Its treatment of topics includes the identity of the Holy Spirit as the third person of the Trinity as well as the work of the Holy Spirit in applying the redemptive work of Christ in the life of the collective church and in the individual believer.

Readers will come away with the sound biblical and historic Christian basis for the divine personhood of the Holy Spirit and the optimism of living a Christian life that is free from the power of sin. This results from the graceful reality of the indwelling Spirit, who unites our lives with Christ. This book—*The Holy Spirit: An Introduction*—drives home our high privilege of having the Holy Spirit restore the image of God in individuals by uniting us to Jesus. It will serve as an indispensable resource for leaders, students, and anyone desiring to deepen their understanding of the Holy Spirit.

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ISBN 978-1-62824-998-9



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