

# By the Wind of the Spirit 1...

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My Grandmother was a wonderful godly woman. She'd married reasonably late being a woman caught, as many were at the time, by the first world war and the death of so many men of her age. In the end she found an Englishman who'd emigrated here when he was still in his teens to fall in love with. They were an interesting couple. She was the daughter of a manse. He was a refugee from the English country class system which he rightly guessed would never let him rise above mediocrity. So he left, as so many did, to find freedom if not fortune in the Pacific Isles. She was very serious about Church. He was, I suspect, somewhat guarded since what he'd left in England had been implicated in the official church. She was a genetic Presbyterian if you know what I mean. He had come from Anglican stock and held more lightly to faith though he went to church occasionally to be with her.

Grandma got sick in her late 70s eventually suffering a bad stroke which amongst other things robbed her of her speech though not of her mind. She would struggle to express herself but was limited to one of about 3 phrases one of which was 'the old yost yawn' and the other something about the 'Holy yost.' It didn't really surprise me that the only thing left after the damage of a stroke was something very religious sounding. As I said, she was almost a genetic Presbyterian. But this reference to the Holy Ghost was a kind of symbol of her deep and abiding faith and it is fascinating to reflect from this distance that it was not the 'Father' or, indeed, 'the Son' which remained in speech but the third person of the Trinity 'the Holy Ghost.' I say this because of each of the three the Holy Spirit, as we refer more commonly to Him, is the one who gets so much less press. As much as we might like to say that the three persons of the Trinity are equal the Father and the Son are usually the two we relate to much more easily. It is so much harder, we think, to relate to the Spirit and yet references to the Spirit are manifold in the Old and well as the New Testaments. There are 92 mentions of the 'Holy Spirit' in the New Testament but 316 references to spirit. Now some of those do refer to the human spirit or to evil spirits but not many. Most of those references are to

the Holy Spirit. This compares to 312 references to Father and 323 references to the Son.

The Spirit is the third person of the Trinity and over the next few weeks I want to paint a picture of what we might know of the Spirit and of who the Spirit is. This is important not only to balance our picture of God but to understand why the Spirit plays such a big part in a Christian understanding of God and, of course, in the NT. I'm going to divide this three ways. First today we look at the Spirit in Creation. Then we are going to look at the Spirit in the World and then, finally we will look at the Spirit in the Church. I'm dividing this way because I think this is the way we learn about it in the Bible.

In the Bible was first meet the Spirit in the great Creative act of God. Right at the beginning, the Spirit is there before God begins the great creative act.

**<sup>1</sup>In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. <sup>2</sup>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. (Gen 1)**

Now a question arises immediately as to the involvement of the Spirit since it is not entirely clear here but we can quickly answer that by turning to a passage such as this one in Psalm 104...

**<sup>27</sup> These all look to you to give them their food in due season;  
<sup>28</sup> when you give to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.  
<sup>29</sup> When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust.  
<sup>30</sup> When you send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground.( Ps 104)**

It is, perhaps, no surprise that the Spirit is involved in God's creative work. Perhaps that was something we had always thought but the scope of this activity

is much greater than simply being there at the beginning. Rather what seems to be the case is that it is the Spirit's very Presence which is the creative principle. In other words, where the Spirit is – creation happens.

In Job we discover that if God should remove His Spirit, life would cease.

**<sup>14</sup> If he should take back his spirit to himself,  
and gather to himself his breath,  
<sup>15</sup> all flesh would perish together,  
and all mortals return to dust.(Job 34)**

In Psalm 139 we discover that God's Spirit is everywhere.

**<sup>7</sup> Where can I go from your spirit?  
Or where can I flee from your presence?  
<sup>8</sup> If I ascend to heaven, you are there;  
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.  
<sup>9</sup> If I take the wings of the morning  
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,  
<sup>10</sup> even there your hand shall lead me,  
and your right hand shall hold me fast.  
<sup>11</sup> If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,  
and the light around me become night,"  
<sup>12</sup> even the darkness is not dark to you;  
the night is as bright as the day,  
for darkness is as light to you. (Ps 139)**

In Isaiah 42 it is clearly God's Spirit which brings life...

**<sup>5</sup> Thus says God, the LORD,  
who created the heavens and stretched them out,  
who spread out the earth and what comes from it,  
who gives breath to the people upon it  
and spirit to those who walk in it (Is 42)**

And in Exodus 37 it is by the pouring out of God's Spirit that life returns...

**Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. <sup>5</sup>Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live.  
(Ezekiel 37)**

So we can come to a couple of fairly straight forward conclusions here about the Spirit. The first is that where the Spirit is there is life and where that Spirit is withdrawn life ceases. The second is that God's creative work is broader than just making things. God's creative work also **restores** things and makes them whole again. The Spirit makes things **and** restores things. But wait, there's more!

The concept of creation is stretched even further in the OT to refer to all kinds of creativity. Listen to this...

**<sup>30</sup>Then Moses said to the Israelites: See, the LORD has called by name Bezalel son of Uri son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah; <sup>31</sup>he has filled him with divine spirit, with skill, intelligence, and knowledge in every kind of craft, <sup>32</sup>to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, <sup>33</sup>in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, in every kind of craft. (Ex 45)**

So we have this man Bezalel filled with the spirit to do what? To be skilful, to be intelligent, to have knowledge of every kind of craft, to be an artist and to work in many materials. This man when filled with the Spirit becomes a virtual creative genius and he applies that creativity to the making of the ark of the covenant and to the Tent of the Presence of God. And it is God's Spirit which brings this amazing ability.

Furthermore we discover that the Spirit is also implicated in another type of creation, one that is more intellectual and moral in function.

**<sup>1</sup>A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,  
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.  
<sup>2</sup>The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him,  
The spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
the spirit of counsel and might,**

**the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. (Isaiah 11)**

Wisdom and understanding, counsel and might, knowledge and the fear of the LORD. These are **creative** gifts of God and they come by the Spirit of God. And in case we have some doubts about that listen to this...

**<sup>5</sup> who by understanding made the heavens,  
for his steadfast love endures forever; (Psalm 136)**

**<sup>19</sup> The LORD by wisdom founded the earth;  
by understanding he established the heavens;  
<sup>20</sup> by his knowledge the deeps broke open,  
and the clouds drop down the dew. (Proverbs 3)**

**<sup>3</sup> By wisdom a house is built,  
And by understanding it is established; (Proverbs 24)**

The creativity of the Spirit extends, so it seems, even to our thinking, to our understanding, to our knowledge. And, as we said, it's not just about making stuff. God's creativity extends also to **restoring things**. What things?

Well, things that have been damaged or which have become unfruitful...

**'and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field, and the fruitful field is deemed a forest.' (Is 32)**

The wilderness is a metaphor for that which is barren and empty. It is not productive – it is wasted. However, when the spirit is poured out it is changed, restored, made fruitful again. God's creativity is in the business of bringing things back to life again. In this case a field or a piece of land. But in Ezekiel we see it extending to people – people who have died and whose are bare skeletons. There God breathes on them and the skin and flesh is formed again and He breathes again and they come alive.

**<sup>4</sup>Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. <sup>5</sup>Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. <sup>6</sup>I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the LORD." (Ez 37)**

But wait, there is more! Let's move now into the NT and have a brief look at the Spirit's work there and as soon as we do so we discover that the Spirit's creativity is even more varied than we could imagine. It extends, for example, to the creating of wine out of water in the blink of an eye at a wedding in Cana. And this is significant not just because of the content of the miracle but because of where it is placed in John's Gospel. It is the **first of Jesus' miraculous works** as John is at pains to point out. Now when we make something first we generally mean that it is highly significant. What I believe John is saying here is that this miracle reveal something of the essence of all Jesus' miracles – that they are all 'creative' at heart; they are all productive in character.

Further examples are plentiful. Jesus feeds 5000 and 4000 out of very small bits of food. He helps experienced and highly skilful fishermen catch huge catches after they've fished all night for nothing. He produces the Temple Tax from a fish caught by Peter. These are obviously creative miracles but there is a case for saying that all the miracles are, in some sense, creative. The healing miracles can easily be seen in terms of the restoration of health and as we've seen the Spirit's creative work includes restoration. Even the battle with demonic forces can be seen in much the same way as the flowering of the desert - as the redeeming of territory which has been made barren. Indeed, the NT uses the wilderness as something of a metaphor for the demonic. What are we to make of this?

God's Spirit is essentially creative. Where the Spirit is things are being created. In one sense we can say, then that all Creation is an act of the Spirit's Presence and work. Even the sustaining of Creation is a result of the Spirit's work. We need the Spirit because God intends that our lives should be creative as well and something of this has been stolen because of sin. There is also a hint that when we do recover this we will solve some of our ecological problems. Without wanting to

inspire a hope of unfettered consumerism Jesus solves 'lack' by simply creating 'more' and He does this without harming the environment. More than this, however, let us be clear about a couple of things. Firstly, God didn't create and then leave all that we see. Without the Spirit's sustaining creative work everything would dissolve. Secondly, the key to redeeming Creation lies with our redemption. As we join the Spirit's creative work we will allow the Spirit to work through us. We are in partnership with God and that partnership allows us to restrict the Spirit or the give the Spirit room to move both within us and within Creation.