THEOLOGY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT 101

For more information on the material in this session, read chapter 3 of the book *Forgotten God.*

Theology always pushes us in a particular direction. The knowledge of God is not neutral—it demands something of us. Every thought and belief in our minds leads us to some sort of action.

Unfortunately, we don't always grasp the significance of what we claim to believe. If we stop short of applying a truth to our lives, then we do not actually grasp that truth. Until our lives (and not just our beliefs) are changed, we are not doing theology.

Chapter 3 of *Forgotten God* says it like this:

> What you do and how you live are absolutely vital. Without action and fruit, all the theology in the world has little meaning. But theology is still important—what you believe absolutely determines how you act. So while good theology at its best can lead us to live godly lives, bad theology will

> always point us in the wrong direction. When we study the Holy Spirit, bad theology can lead to ineffective lives or, worse yet, lives spent striving after what the Spirit of God opposes. (64)

More important than what we know is how we act. Being a Christian isn't about knowing a set of propositions—it's about knowing Christ and acting on His behalf in the world. But our beliefs shape our actions. As we study the Holy Spirit, it's vitally important that our understanding of who He is and what He does is accurate. If our understanding is misguided, we could spend our whole lives on pursuits that grieve the Spirit. But once our theology is in the right place (or at least headed in the right direction), we need to act on it.

1. Write down a few of the things that you've learned about the Holy Spirit in the last two sessions.

2. How should those truths start shaping the way you act?

Have you seen this happen yet? Place a check mark beside any of the actions you just listed that you've begun to see in your life.

If you have the *Forgotten God DVD Study Resource,* watch the video for session 3, particularly if you are meeting with a group. After the video, come back and work through the rest of this section.

Think about the football-huddle analogy for a minute. Too often the church is like a football team that huddles, calls a play, and then sits on the bench—never to run the play that they got so excited about. Perhaps we've forgotten the Holy Spirit because we don't need Him. We don't need the Spirit for the huddle; we need Him when we step out of the huddle and run the play.

3. Think about your gathering of believers in light of the huddle analogy. Have you been running from the huddle to the bench? If so, in what ways?

4. God gave us the Spirit so that we might change the world through His power. How do you think the church would look if we all began "running the plays"?

5. How do you think the world would respond?

We're all capable of studying biblical truth in a way that makes us "smarter" but doesn't affect anything in our lives. On the other hand, we also have the ability to study in such a way that our lives are never the same because of what we've learned. The end result of this study could be that you walk away knowing more about the Holy Spirit. Or it could be that you walk away *knowing the Holy Spirit,* showing the people around you a Spirit-filled life. Only a life lived in the power of the Spirit can offer the world something better than what they have.

Who the Spirit Is

The rest of this session is going to look a little different. Rather than focusing on a single passage, we're going to study some of the attributes of the Holy Spirit. The goal is to get you better acquainted with the Spirit. If you've never heard these truths before, then consider looking up the accompanying Scripture references. Allow these truths to form your understanding of the Spirit.

For many of us who grew up in the church, these attributes of the Spirit are very familiar—maybe you've even lost your sense of wonder. If that's you, I challenge you to approach these truths as if you've never heard them before. Ponder the Spirit until you find yourself in awe of Him. The most amazing part of this whole thing is that the very Spirit you are studying is actually *living inside of you!*

6. Read the following statements about the Holy Spirit. Take your time. Think about the practical implications of that particular attribute of the Spirit. If you want to spend more time on each point, look up the accompanying Scripture references. Under each statement, record your thoughts about how understanding that truth about the Spirit should affect our lives.

a. The Holy Spirit is a Person. He is not an impersonal force or thing. Many people refer to the Spirit as an "it," but the Bible consistently describes the Spirit as a Person (for example, see Matthew 28:19 where the Spirit is an equal member of the personal Godhead or Ephesians 4:30 where He is said to have emotions). Rather than using the Spirit as an energy boost or tapping into Him like an electric current, we actually talk to Him, relate to Him, cooperate with Him, and make ourselves available to Him. Give an example of how this difference between Person and thing should affect the way we live.

b. *The Holy Spirit is God.* He is not less than the Father or the Son; He is consistently presented as equal (Matt. 28:19). Just like the other members of the

Godhead, the Spirit is sometimes referred to simply as "God" (Acts 5:3–4). How do you think this ought to change the way we relate to Him?

c. *The Holy Spirit has His own mind and will.* He thinks and acts according to His own will and the will of God the Father (Rom. 8:27; 1 Cor. 12:11). The Spirit strategically enables and empowers us to fulfill our mission here on earth. How should the thought that the Holy Spirit has His own mind and will affect the way you think and plan?

d. *The Holy Spirit has emotions.* Paul tells us not to grieve the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:30). When there is disunity and lack of love, whether with other people or with God Himself, we cause the Spirit to grieve. We rarely think about the effect our sin has on God, but He is clearly saddened when we fail to honor Him as we ought. How should understanding that the Spirit can be grieved affect our attitudes toward sin?

e. *The Holy Spirit is all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-present.* In Zechariah 4:6 God calls His people to rely on the power of the Spirit. In 1 Corinthians 2:10, Paul not only says that the Holy Spirit knows everything, but that He reveals truth to us. And in Psalm 139:7–8, David tells us that the Spirit is everywhere, and we cannot escape His presence. How do these three truths affect the way we look to the Spirit?

As you study the Holy Spirit, keep in mind that you shouldn't be trying to fully comprehend Him—you can't! "The point is not to completely understand God but to worship Him" (*Forgotten God,* 65). What you learn about the Holy Spirit should lead you to value Him more and desire His active presence in your life. How is He doing that thus far?

What the Holy Spirit Does In and Through Us

When Jesus left earth to go back to the Father, He left us, His followers, with an impossible task: "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). But before sending His disciples out to accomplish that task, He told them to wait: "He ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, 'you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now'" (Acts 1:4–5). And as Jesus sent them out, He was clear that they would need the power of the Spirit: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses" (Acts 1:8).

Don't forget that God gave the Holy Spirit to us. It sometimes feels so difficult to be a Christian. How do we live lives that are radically different from the world around us? How do we continue the mission that Jesus began and entrusted to us? The answer is: through the power of the Holy Spirit.

7. God's Spirit works in and through us in a variety of ways to glorify Himself. Below is a list of ways that He does this.[1] For each item, ask yourself, "How is the Spirit working in this way in my everyday life? Or how might He do so?" Jot down a brief answer to this question under each point.

a. The Spirit helps us when we are in precarious situations and need to bear witness (Mark 13:11; Luke 12:12).

b. The Counselor teaches and reminds us of what we need to know and remember. He is our comforter, our advisor, our encourager, and our strength. He guides us in the way we should go (Ps. 143:10; John 14—16; Acts 9:31; 13:2; 15:28; 1 Cor. 2:9–10; 1 John 5:6–8).

1 This list is taken from *Forgotten God,* pages 74–76.

c. From the Spirit we receive power to be God's witnesses to the ends of the earth. It is the Spirit who draws people to the gospel, the Spirit who equips us with the strength we need to accomplish God's purposes. The Holy Spirit not only initially draws people to God the Father, but He also draws believers closer to Jesus (Acts 1:8; Rom. 8:26; Eph. 3:16–19).

d. By the power of the Spirit we put to death the misdeeds of the body. The Spirit sets us free from sin, which we cannot get rid of on our own. This is a lifelong process we entered into, in partnership with the Spirit, when we first believed (Rom. 8:2).

e. Through the Spirit we have received adoption as children, which leads us into intimacy with the Father, instead of a relationship based on fear and slavery. The Spirit bears witness to us that we are God's children (Rom. 8:15–16).

f. The Holy Spirit convicts people of sin. He does this both before we initially enter into right relationship with God and as we journey through this life as believers (John 16:7–11; 1 Thess. 1:5).

g. The Spirit brings us life and freedom. Where the Spirit is, there is freedom, not bondage or slavery. In our world that is plagued with death, this is a profound truth that points to real hope (Rom. 8:10–11; 2 Cor. 3:17).

h. By the power of the Holy Spirit we abound with hope because our God is a God of hope, who fills His children with all joy and peace (Rom. 15:13).

i. As members of God's kingdom community, each of us is given a manifestation of the Spirit in our lives for the purpose of the common good. We all have something to offer because of what the Spirit gives to us (1 Cor. 12:7).

j. The fruit of being led by the Spirit of God includes love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. These attitudes and actions will characterize our lives as we allow ourselves to be grown and molded by the Spirit. The Spirit is our sanctifier (Gal. 5:22–23; 2 Cor. 3:18).

k. The Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. When we don't know what to pray for or what to do, He actually intercedes on our behalf. He gives us strength in the midst of uncertainty and asks the Father to work according to His will (Rom. 8:26–27).

Note: What if I don't see these things in my life?

The Holy Spirit does incredible things in the lives of His children. But what if you're not seeing His action and power in your life? Don't be discouraged. Remember that it's impossible for you to do these things on your own. That's actually the point—it's impossible for you, and that's why God sent us the Spirit.

Sometimes we expect Him to change every aspect of our lives all at once. But that's rarely the way He works. Most often, He works slowly, teaching us to trust Him and increasingly molding us and using us in greater and greater ways. If you want to see the Spirit working in your life, God tells us to ask Him and He will give us the Spirit (Luke 11:13).

Now that you know more (or have been reminded) about what the Holy Spirit does, there's one very important question that you need to ask: What does the Holy Spirit want *me* to do *right now?* How does He want me to cooperate with Him in His work?

Resist the temptation to stop at learning more facts. And don't let yourself believe in what the Spirit can do *hypothetically* rather than what He can do *in your life.* Now that the power available to you in the Holy Spirit is fresh in your mind, consider what God might want to do *through you.* Where might He want you to go? Who might He want you to talk to or serve? All the power in the world is irrelevant until it's put to use.

8. Take a minute to ponder the amazing power of the Spirit of God. Looking at the situations God has placed you in, what do you think He might be calling you to do through the power of the Spirit?

9. Spend some time in prayer. After looking through these Scriptures about who the Holy Spirit is and what He does, there are bound to be a number of things that you need to begin applying to your life. Ask God to fill you with His Spirit so that the world around you will see His power.