

Worship services are being cancelled until further notice because of Covid-19. However, we will have worship services through the Internet Zoom platform every Sunday at 10:30 AM. The Zoom link for this service will be sent to you by email. The phone number for Zoom always remains the same but the Meeting ID and password number changes every week. If you need more information, please contact Mr. Vautour. See the bottom of the bulletin the contact information.

If you have friends or acquaintances who want to join in the worship service, please do not hesitate to share with them the Zoom links to join with us in the worship our great God.

For more information about special activities happening in GCI, please see the international website at [www.gci.org](http://www.gci.org). On the left-hand upper side of the screen, you will see 3 short lines. You simply need to click on it. A drop-down menu will appear. Click on "PARTICIPATE".

Please note that audio sermons are available and a PDF copy of sermons are available at [www.worshipim.ca](http://www.worshipim.ca) and video sermons are now available on YouTube – GRACE COMMUNION INTERNATIONAL-MONCTON (see link below)

If you have a prayer requests, other events you would like to announce and/or praise to our great God you would like to share, please try to contact Mr. Vautour by email, text or telephone no later than Saturday, in the morning.

For local prayer requests, please see <http://www.worshipim.ca/> and click on **Members Only**. It is password protected for confidentiality reason. If you do not have the password, please contact Mr. Vautour.

**Voice of the Martyrs** (<https://www.vomcanada.com/ng-2020-06-04b.htm>). Christians continue to be persecuted in many parts of the world. They need our prayers. You can receive a free publication through your email. If you are interested, please visit their website to subscribe.

Next Bible Study (through ZOOM) is tentatively scheduled for Thursday July 23 at 7:30 p.m. We will be continuing in 1 John 3.

**Offerings:** you can send your offering directly to the following address: **Grace Communion International- Canada, Suite 203A, 2121 Airport Dr., Saskatoon, SK 7SL 6W5**. If you prefer, you can also call **1-306-653-2705**. Thank you for your continued generous giving to God by giving to this part of God's church, his body.

**From Mr. Bill Hall – GCI Canadian Director** "We will continue to process the donations we receive in Saskatoon. Members are urged to mail them directly to our office for the time-being. They can also donate via phone using a credit card, or via Canada Helps using the donate button on our website [www.gcicanada.ca](http://www.gcicanada.ca) We are waving the provision that all donations given via Canada Helps go toward national expenses for the time being. We will credit all donations received via Canada Helps to a member's local congregation, if we can identify where they attend."

### **Embracing our new identity in Christ**

<https://update.gci.org/2016/02/embracing-our-new-identity-in-christ/>

In his letter this week, Dr. Tkach begins a three-part series on the topic of God's grace (for the other two letters in the series, click on the above link).

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

[Martin Luther](#) famously referred to Christians as "simultaneously saints and sinners." His slogan was originally written in Latin: *simul justus et peccator* (where *simul* is the root of our English word *simultaneously*; *justus* means *just* or *righteous*; *et* means *and*; and *peccator* means *sinner*). If taken literally to mean that we live simultaneously in states of both sinlessness and sinfulness, Luther's slogan would be a contradiction. But he was speaking metaphorically, addressing the *paradox* that on this side of the fullness of the kingdom of God we are never completely free of sin's influence. Though reconciled to God (saints), we do not live perfect, Christ-like lives (sinners).

In constructing his slogan, Luther picked up on some of the apostle Paul's language to make the point that at the heart of the gospel is a "double imputation" where our sin is "imputed" to Jesus, and his righteousness is "imputed" to us. This legal terminology of imputation

provided a way to express what is legally true (and thus actual), but what may not be clearly visible in the life of the one to whom it applies. Luther also was saying that, apart from Christ, Christ's righteousness never becomes our own possession (under our control)—it is a *gift* that is ours only as we receive it from him. We receive that gift by being united to the gift's Giver, for in the end, the Giver is the Gift. *Jesus is our righteousness!*



Martin Luther  
(public domain  
via Wikimedia  
Commons)

Luther, of course, had much more to say about the Christian life than this one slogan, and though we agree with much of the slogan's intended meaning, there are aspects with which we disagree. Note, for example, J. de Waal Dryden's critique in the following quote from his article in *The Journal of the Study of Paul and His Letters* (I thank my good friend John Kossey for sending the quote to me):

*[Luther's] slogan helpfully summarizes the principle that the justified sinner is declared righteous by the "alien" righteousness of Christ, not according to the individual's own inherent righteousness. Where this slogan proves unhelpful is when it is adopted, whether consciously or not, as a foundation for sanctification [the Christian life]. The problem lies in the continued identification of the Christian as "sinner." The noun peccator signals more than simply a deformed moral will or a propensity toward illicit acts; it defines the ontology of the Christian. The Christian is not only "sinful" (in actions) but a "sinner" (in being and identity).*

*In psychological terms, [Luther's slogan] mollifies moral guilt but perpetuates (and even promotes) shame. The self-interpretive image of the "justified sinner," while it proclaims forgiveness, undermines the same forgiveness by reinforcing an understanding of the self as sinful to the core, precisely because it categorically excludes a transformative element that would lift the sinner to a higher station. The Christian is left with a pathological self-understanding, reinforced by common practices that habituate this perspective as a Christian virtue. In this way, shame and self-contempt become virtues to be fostered, instead of vices to be censured. ("Revisiting Romans 7: Law, Self, Spirit," JSPL (2015), 148-149)*

### Embracing our new identity in Christ

As Dryden notes, God does "lift the sinner to a higher station." In union and communion with God, in Christ and by the Spirit, we are "a new creation" ([2 Corinthians 5:17 ESV](#)), being transformed to "participate" in God's "divine nature" ([2 Peter 1:4](#)). No longer are we totally wretched humans yearning to be free from our sinful nature. Rather, we are God's adopted, beloved, forgiven children being transformed into the likeness of Jesus. Our thinking about Jesus and about ourselves radically changes as we embrace the reality of this new identity. We do so realizing that it is ours not because of who we are, but because of Christ. It is not ours due to *our* faith (which always is imperfect) but because of *Jesus'* faith. Note how Paul addresses this in his letter to Christians in Galatia: ***I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.*** ([Galatians 2:20, KJV](#), *emphasis added*)

Paul understood Jesus to be both the *subject* and the *object* of saving faith. As *subject*, he is the active agent who authors faith. As *object*, he responds as one of us with perfect faith, doing so in our place and on our behalf. It is *his* faith and faithfulness, not ours, that gives us our new identity and makes us righteous in him. [1]

As I noted in my *Weekly Update* letter a couple of weeks ago, in saving us, God does not merely wipe our slate clean and leave us to our own efforts in following Christ. Rather, by grace, God enables us to joyfully participate in what he has done and is now doing in and through us. Grace, you see, is more than a gleam in our heavenly Father's eye. It originates in our electing Father who gives us gifts and promises of complete salvation in Christ, including justification, sanctification and glorification ([1 Corinthians 1:30](#)). We live out each of these aspects of our salvation by grace, in union with Jesus, by the Spirit who is sent into our very beings as the adopted, beloved children of God that we are.

Thinking about God's grace in this way changes our perspective on just about everything. For example, as I go about my daily routine, I might wonder what I'm dragging Jesus into. But as I think about my life from the perspective of my identity in Christ, my thinking is transformed to understand that it's not what I'm dragging Jesus into, but what he's doing that I'm being called to share in. This transformation in our thinking is what growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus is all about. As we grow closer to him, we share more fully in what he is doing. This is the concept of "abiding" in Christ that our Lord spoke about in John 15. Paul referred to it as being "hidden" in Christ ([Colossians 3:3](#)). There can be no better hiding place, because "in Christ" is where there is nothing but goodness.

Paul understood that the purpose of life is to be *in Christ*. Abiding in Jesus instills within us an assured dignity and the destiny that our Creator intended for us from the beginning. This identity sets us free to live in the freedom of God's forgiveness rather than in debilitating guilt and shame. It also sets us free to live with the sure knowledge that God, by the Spirit, is transforming us from the inside out. That is the reality of who we, by grace, truly are in Christ.

### Misconstruing the nature of God's grace

Sadly, some people badly misconstrue the nature of God's grace, seeing it as license to sin (the error of [antinomianism](#)). Paradoxically, that error most frequently occurs when people try to fit grace and a grace-based relationship with God into a legal framework (the error of [legalism](#)). Within that legal framework, grace is misread as God making exceptions to legal rules. Grace then becomes a legal excuse for inconsistent obedience. When that is how grace is understood, the biblical concept of God as Father, disciplining his beloved children, goes right out the window.

Trying to force-fit grace into a legal framework is a terrible, life-robbing mistake. Lawful works do not maintain righteousness, and grace is not about making exceptions to legal rules. This misunderstanding of grace leads, typically, to libertine, unstructured lifestyles that are contrary to the grace-based, gospel-shaped life that Jesus shares with us by the Spirit.

### Transformed by grace

While this unfortunate misunderstanding of grace (with its wrong approach to the Christian life) can seem to reduce guilt, it unwittingly misses the grace of transformation—the love of God coming into our hearts by the Spirit to truly change us from the inside out. Missing this truth leads ultimately to shame that typically is grounded in fear. Speaking from my own experience, I can say that being motivated by shame and fear is a poor substitute for being motivated by grace—motivated by the transforming love of God who justifies and sanctifies us through our union with Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. Note Paul's words to Titus: **For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age.** ([Titus 2:11-12 ESV](#))

God has not saved us only to abandon us to shame, immaturity and sinful, destructive lifestyles. By grace he saves us so we can live, by grace, in his righteousness. Grace means that God never gives up on us. He continues to give us the gift of a share in his Son's union and communion with the Father, and the gift of the Spirit who is committed to transforming us into Christ's likeness. *Grace is what our whole relationship with God is about!*

In Christ, we are and always will be the beloved children of our heavenly Father. All he asks is that we grow in grace and in our knowledge of him. We grow in grace as we learn to trust him to be our all in all, and we grow in our knowledge of him as we follow him and spend time with him. God not only forgives us by grace, as we walk and talk with him in a life of obedience, he transforms us by grace.

Our relationship with God, in Christ, by the Spirit is not something that grows to some point where we have less need for God and his grace. Rather, our lives are *contingent* upon him at all points. He makes us new, cleansing us from the inside out. As we learn to rest in his grace, we come to know him better and love him and his ways more completely. And the more we know and love him, the more we will sense the freedom to rest in his grace, free of guilt, fear and shame. Paul sums it up this way:

**For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.** ([Ephesians 2:8-10 ESV](#))

Let us not forget that it is Jesus' faith—his faithfulness—that saves and transforms us. [1] As the author of Hebrews reminds us, Jesus is "the author [*founder*-ESV] and finisher [*perfecter*-ESV] of our faith" ([Hebrews 12:2 KJV](#)).

Joyfully embracing my identity in Christ, Joseph Tkach

P.S. To learn more on this topic, I recommend Dr. Gary Deddo's essay, "The Christian Life and Our Participation in Christ's Continuing Ministry." You'll find it online at [www.gci.org/christian-life](http://www.gci.org/christian-life).

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### The Spirit's Importance (Doctrine of the Spirit, part 4)

By [Ted Johnston - July 08, 2020](#)

*This post continues a series presenting "The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit" by Dr. Gary Deddo, President of [Grace Communion Seminary](#). For other posts in the series, click a number: (<http://thesurprisinggodblog.gci.org/2020/05/holy-spirit-part-1.html>)*

Why is it important to say anything about the Holy Spirit beyond simply acknowledging the Spirit? First, because a disconnection between the divine Persons can develop in our understandings of the triune God. In some churches this happens with an almost exclusive emphasis on the Father. Others restrict their focus to the Son, and still others put the spotlight on the Holy Spirit. Though these approaches to God are fragmented, God is not.

#### What a theological understanding of the Spirit offers

Theological work aims to fix things on our side, not fix things on God's side. So, we can grow in understanding even if the reality is not changed by our better grasp. And if we have misunderstandings, it will be good to clear them up. As the Spirit is working it is far better to be aware of that work compared to being unaware.

But our better understanding does not make something real or change the nature of the Spirit's working. God does not all of a sudden become the Holy Spirit when we recognize the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not tied up, unable to do anything until we figure the Holy Spirit out. That would be like saying the wind is tied up until we can figure out the wind.

No, the Spirit still works, but we may not recognize it. And by recognizing it we may more fully participate, we become more involved, become more in tune with the truth and reality of who God is. So, we're trying to make sure our understanding matches the truth about who God is such as the Spirit has been revealed to us.

So we need to remember that our understanding may be fragmented but God is not fragmented. Our understanding of the working in the ministry of the Spirit may be fragmented but that doesn't mean the actual working of the Spirit is fragmented. We're not controlling God by our understanding. If that were the case then God would be dependent upon us. But we want to sort this all out and let our understanding be as full and faithful as can be.

#### How do we fix a lack of awareness and understanding of the Spirit?

How do we then bring our understanding of the ministry of the Spirit up to speed in a way that recognizes the Spirit is one of the three Divine Persons of the Trinity? Some are concerned about the need to speak proportionately about the Holy Spirit. We might say, giving the Holy Spirit equal time or equal emphasis. What's behind that concern?

There are situations where our faith and understanding of the Spirit is indeed lacking and so lags behind the Father and Son. It might be that this is often the case, the rule, rather than the exception. Wherever we find this situation it ought to be rectified. We should become familiar with all that's been revealed to us about the Spirit and then pass that on to others. So in those cases additional teaching and focus on the Spirit is called for. (Although this should never be the exclusive focus.) In that way our faith and knowledge of the Spirit will become better aligned with the other divine Persons.

### **Objections to pursuing the Spirit**

In pursuing this kind of correction we may run into some obstacles that contributed to the unbalanced situation in the first place. For, example, some persons might not be interested in the Spirit and so have neglected the topic. Hopefully those in this condition who worship the Triune God will come around and see that the Holy Spirit is no less important than the Father and Son.

Others may not want to know or have much to do with the Holy Spirit because the Spirit seems kind of, well, spooky. We usually don't want to be around ghosts, especially one you can't control or that you can't identify or you can't nail down, can't make a part of your program and who's, well, like the wind, (or maybe even a typhoon!). Who wants that? So, some people, may be avoiding the Spirit because they have certain worries. That's not the best reason not to have an interest in the Holy Spirit. Their fears may be based in part (or perhaps in whole) on ignorance or misinformation about the nature of the power and working of the Holy Spirit. Those who have misgivings may not have a good grasp on who the Holy Spirit is. The Spirit isn't like a ghost or something to be fearful of in the sense that it might do us harm. So helping people know that the Spirit is Holy, is good, is crucial.

The best way to do this is to emphasize regularly that the Spirit and has the exact same character and purpose as Jesus. There is no slippage in mind, attitude, or aim between the two. The best way to identify the working of the Spirit is to compare it directly to what we know about Jesus. It is his Spirit. If it doesn't, feel, sound, taste, and work like Jesus, then it is not his Spirit. Knowing Jesus is how we best discern the spirits, that is, which is the Holy Spirit.

Some could think the Spirit is now irrelevant to our current situation or no long available to us, at least as in the days of the early church. That was back in those days, some may think. That would be another poor reason, however, to have little or no interest in the Spirit. While it's perfectly acceptable to raise questions about the working of the Spirit today, there is no biblical teaching designed to inform us that the Spirit cannot or will not continue to work as in the days of the early church. Of course this does not mean that the Spirit cannot adjust the mode of his ministry as, in his wisdom, he sees fit from time to time and place to place. He can in his sovereign grace make adjustments.

However, there is no absolute reason that the Spirit could not continue to work today as in the days of the New Testament. But that is up to the Spirit. Those who have dogmatically concluded that the Spirit does not work and cannot work in the same manner have argued from their own experience and on that basis selected and interpreted Scripture to explain their lack of experiencing the working of the Spirit. But such arguments do not have binding authority in the church—and especially upon the Spirit! It might simply be that the Spirit at some times and places chooses to work behind the scenes, mostly undetected even perhaps by Christians—and that's why the church's experience of the Spirit is not evenly distributed all the time.

Especially thinking that the ministry and manifestation of the Spirit depends upon us, what we do, what condition we're in, what we want, or on our level of understanding, is to put the cart way before the horse. If the Spirit is dependent upon us in these ways, then the Spirit does not (cannot?) minister by grace. The ministry of the Spirit then is being regarded as a reward for works. Whatever the Spirit does and however he works, it is all of grace. We do not condition the Spirit to act. The Spirit is faithful whether or not we are.

Now some are concerned about abuses and misrepresentations of the Spirit. Indeed, there are legitimate reason for folks to be cautious or concerned. There have been, since the days of the New Testament, abuses, misuses and misleading teaching about the Spirit. There are many cases where an emphasis on the Holy Spirit has contributed to conflict and even church splits. There have been deceitful things said and done in the name of the Holy Spirit. And some things have occurred in connection with an emphasis on the Spirit that are bizarre and in some cases even abusive. But are these good reasons to entirely neglect the Spirit? No. Any good thing can be misused. As an ancient maxim states: abuse does not rule out proper use. So if these things can guarded against, all the while coming to understand and welcome the ministry of the Spirit, I think the way can be clear to address any imbalance. But checks and balances, spiritual discipline and discernment need to be in place provided by wise pastors and elders ministering under the authority of the whole teaching of Scripture. That is a legitimate requirement to guard against spiritual pride and abuse, disunity and division. There are real dangers.

### **Equal proportions?**

Given all that, however, setting up a goal of equality of emphasis or parity of focus on the three divine Persons is really not the best way to go about making a healthy correction if there is an imbalance or ignorance about the Spirit. There are valid reasons why there necessarily always will be a certain kind of faithful disproportion or inequality of emphasis or focus on the Spirit compared to the other two Persons of the Trinity. The reason has to do with the nature and character of the Spirit itself!

There is a good reason why the church down through the ages has had less to say and did not give equal concentration or time to the Spirit. Here are some good reasons why the Spirit will not get equal time or focus, in terms of our level of explanation or concentration of attention.

First of all, there is simply less biblical information about the Holy Spirit. In the Gospels there are plenty of references to the Spirit, but there is a lot more told about Jesus and his relationship with the Father in them than on the Spirit. Jesus definitely speaks of the Spirit and

not just as side comments. The Spirit is an essential element to his message and life and is not less important. But he talks and tells much more in detail about the Father and his relationship with him.

Now, the same goes for Paul and the epistles. There is plenty of important teaching about the Spirit with more detail than we even have in the Gospels about our living in relationship with the Spirit. But we find there as well significantly more discussion and detail given on the Person and Work of the Son and his connection to the Father. The disproportionate detailed treatment does not signal an inequality of importance since it is clear that faith in the Holy Spirit and his ministry is not only important, but vitally connected to the ministry of Jesus.

Turning to the Old Testament, we find significant teaching and reference to the Spirit. Just consider the landmark prophesies about the Spirit in **Joel (2:28)** and **Ezekiel (11:19; 26:36)**. But throughout the OT there is far more consideration given simply to God the creator, covenant maker and deliverer of Israel. But again this disproportion does not indicate that the Spirit is less important. Not at all. Rather we simply are given less detailed information about this very important subject.

So for example there is no description of the nature of the Spirit's relationship to the Father. The biblical authors don't directly tell us it. We find them named together. We are given a few words that indicate the basics of the relationship: the Spirit is said to "proceed" from the Father and is "sent" from the Father in the Son's name. We find their actions described in a way that indicates they are coordinated with each other. When Jesus acts he does so in or by the Spirit. Even his sacrifice on the Cross involves offering himself up in the Spirit ([Heb. 9:14](#)).. But we have nothing comparable to a detailed description of the Spirit's interaction with the Father like we find, for instance, in Jesus' prayer, in **John 17**. Here we have an amazing window in the nature and character of Jesus' relationship with the Father. But we don't have any equal to that regarding the Spirit.

Given the whole of biblical revelation, we do not have near as much written about the Spirit as we do about God the Father and the Son. The information given us is unequal, disproportional. Now that is no excuse not to pay very careful attention to what insight we are given about the Spirit. And that, indeed, may be a problem that needs rectifying. In fact, perhaps we should give even more care to what has been made available to us. But if our speech and understanding is going to remain dependent upon biblical revelation, then we shouldn't be surprised that our considerations will follow the same unequal pattern. So having less to say does not necessarily demonstrate neglect or fear or disinterest in the Spirit.

### **Misguided attempts at correction**

The Scripture revelation is disproportional in that way. Now, of course, we could artificially try to give the Spirit "equal time" by extending what we say through the fabrication of long logical chains of argumentation leading to various inferred conclusions. But such speculations about the Spirit, even if they start with a bit of Scripture, can offer nothing secure since simple logical inferences even from some true starting point are never necessarily true.

In fact, that's where a lot of heresy and bad teaching about the Spirit comes from. Some preachers and teachers have taken a few biblical verses and then attempted to make strings of logical arguments from them, oftentimes not paying attention to other biblical teaching regarding the Spirit. But the conclusions reached are speculative. And in reaching them a lot had to be added in, such as making someone's experience (and their understanding of it!) normative for all Christians, in order to establish a purportedly doctrinal statement. But all that additional information and the logical chains developed from them do not amount to reliable Christian doctrine.

So giving the Spirit more attention by generating more information than we actually have been given is not a recommended or reliable procedure. But sometimes a desire to re-balance things and give greater emphasis to the Spirit has resulted in such practices. We should not follow suit.

### **Why is less revealed about the Spirit?**

Is there some reason why there is unequal information about the Holy Spirit in Scripture? It seems to me the disproportion ought to be expected because of what we do find out about the Spirit. Given the very nature of the Spirit and the nature of his work, it makes sense that there is less to say concretely and authoritatively about the Spirit than the Father or the Son.

First, the Spirit is not incarnate. We don't have an embodied revelation of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit remains undetectable itself, but is identified indirectly by the effects of his working (like the wind). The Holy Spirit doesn't show up on the incarnate stage of history like Jesus does. The Son is the only triune Person who becomes incarnate. So there's no incarnate description of the Spirit available to us.

And that's the main reason why we have a lot more to say about the Son. The purpose of his coming in human form was to be the self-revelation of God. He is the Word of God to us. The Spirit doesn't have his own incarnation. The Spirit, as a matter of fact, doesn't have his own independent word. Jesus is the Logos, the intelligibility, the communication, the living interpretation of God to us. In fact, without the incarnate life and teaching of Jesus we would know far less about the Spirit, for the Son reveals not only himself, but the Father and the Spirit to us. The Incarnate Son takes us to the Father and sends us the Spirit. So we approach the Spirit through the mediation of the Son.

Even when the Spirit is present and active within creation, he doesn't establish his own revelation and doesn't convey his own self-explanation. The Spirit remains the Spirit. That is, remains unincarnate while present to and within creation.

The Spirit's remaining unincarnate actually serves a positive purpose. It prevents us from reducing God simply to a creature or thinking that we can understand God entirely in terms of creaturely realities. It preserves the transcendence, the spirituality of God. God is not a creature and so we cannot explain God as if God were a creature subject to its ways and limitations. We cannot simply read back onto God the creaturely nature of Jesus.

Now, some people mistakenly think that when the Son of God took on human form, the Father (or God) turned into a man, a creature. Two mistakes here. First, it was the Son of God who became incarnate, not the Father (nor the Spirit).

Second, the Son of God did not cease being the eternal, divine, Son of God when he took on human being. He remained what he was but also added to himself a fully human nature and lived a human life. He didn't stop being something he was and turn in into something else, a man. Early church teachers put it this way: The eternal Son of God, remaining what he was, assumed also a human nature to himself. You can recognize this kind of confusion when, considering the possibility of the incarnation, people ask, "Then, who is running the universe?"

Now how the eternal Son of God can be incarnate in human form is indeed a mystery. We can't imagine how such a change of that order could be true for human beings. But, remember God is not a creature. Admittedly, it is easier to think of Jesus' incarnation as his turning into what he was not and ceasing to be what he was. If A becomes B, then it ceases to be A. It's now B. That's easy to think because that's how most if not all creaturely things work. However, such thinking just doesn't apply to the truth about who the Son of God is. He remains what he was, the eternal Son of God, assuming a human nature as well.

The Spirit then never did take on a human nature himself. If you ask, "How was Jesus conceived in the womb of Mary?" What's the answer? By the Spirit. The agency of the Spirit is the answer to the "how" question. But this answer doesn't tell us the mechanisms involved. No mention of DNA. Or what happened with the chromosomes. We don't get that type of explanation. Rather we get an explanation of who, the agent involved who knows how! I suppose if we asked the Spirit and he thought it was important for us to know, the Spirit could explain it to us if we were educated and intelligent enough to grasp it. But apparently, it's far more important to know by whom it occurred rather than how.

But we definitely learn something about the Spirit in this event. The Spirit can interact in time and space, with flesh and blood without being incarnate himself. The Spirit is able to be present and active at the deepest levels of creaturely existence, down to the DNA and chromosomes if need be. The Spirit is not absent but able to be very present to creation. That's one way God can work directly within creation—by the Spirit. Recognizing that God is the Spirit and the Spirit is God and he remains the Holy Spirit prevents us from thinking of God as merely being a creature but that the Spirit doesn't have to be incarnate to have a direct ministry to us. As Jesus said, he is sending another Comforter who was with us, but will be in us ([John 14: 17](#)).

There is another reason we find that makes sense as to why there is a disproportion in the amount of information we have about the Spirit in the biblical portrayal. Again this distinction is not one of importance but of the extent of the revelation. And if what we say and teach about the Spirit depends upon that revelation, then this will make a difference in how much we can say and how much we can understand about the Spirit.

This second reason has to do with the very character of the Spirit and of his ministry. It seems that the whole purpose and character of the ministry of the Holy Spirit is actually to always direct attention away from, not bring it to himself. The ministry of the Spirit, Jesus tells us, is to direct us to Jesus ([John 15: 26](#)) So he doesn't come with his own independent message but bears witness to the truth he has heard spoken by the Son. The Spirit does not glorify himself but Jesus by taking his words and declaring them to us ([John 16:13, 14](#)). And that is the glory of the Spirit!

So, the Holy Spirit isn't saying, "Hey, Jesus, you've had the microphone now for plenty of time. Now, it's my turn to tell people about myself." No. When the Holy Spirit "gets the microphone," what does he announce? He helps us recall all that Jesus taught, the truth that He taught. He, perhaps annoyingly, passes up his opportunity to shed light on himself.

The Holy Spirit doesn't really draw attention to himself. Rather he points away from himself. Why? Because that's his ministry, so that we see who Jesus is, who reveals to us the Father. The early church put it this way. The Holy Spirit is like light and the light shines. And the Holy Spirit shines light on the face of Jesus who has an actual, flesh and blood human face. And when the Holy Spirit's light shines on the face of Jesus, what do we see mirrored in the face of Jesus? The invisible face of the Father. Isn't that a beautiful thing?

So, the Holy Spirit doesn't say, "Hey, look at me. Look at me. I'm the light. I'm shining. I'm shining, can't you see how bright I am?" Not at all. The whole reason for the Spirit's shining is so that when we look at the face of Jesus, we see the face of the Father. That's the whole point of the light. The light doesn't draw attention to itself.

That doesn't mean the Spirit's not important, but the contrary! If the light didn't shine, what would result? We wouldn't see the face of the Father in the face of the Son. In fact, there wouldn't even be a face of the Son incarnate if the Spirit hadn't been involved in the conception of the Son in the womb of Mary. The Spirit has a coordinated but different mission and ministry than the Son. But that ministry would be somewhat compromised and not demonstrate the true nature and character of the Spirit if it drew attention to itself.

One theologian has said, if you add the Biblical picture up, the Spirit is the "shy one" of the Trinity or the "retiring one." We could also even say the Holy Spirit displays the humility of God because he serves the Father and the Son. Theologian Thomas Torrance brings out this same point regarding the character of the Spirit. Relatively speaking he stays in the background.

Now, should we come to clearly grasp that that the Holy Spirit serves the Father and Son rather than himself? Absolutely. We'd be somewhat impoverished if we didn't know that. We are learning something about the Spirit when we see that he doesn't draw attention to himself! But whenever we find revelation concerning the Spirit what we discover are more references to the Father and the Son. The Spirit actually promotes the disproportion of detailed understanding about the Triune Persons, because that's the ministry of the Spirit. The Spirit says, "Yes, excellent. You saw the face of the Father and the face of the Son. Wonderful. That's what I do. That's why I'm here."

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**GCI principle website and Moncton Websites**—a) [www.gci.org](http://www.gci.org) , b) [www.worshipim.ca](http://www.worshipim.ca) , c)

<https://www.facebook.com/GCIMoncton> ; d) *Grace Communion International-Moncton*

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCgKazyWhmKMDZy69vJcFfPg>

*For a wealth of helpful articles about God, grace and his plan for salvation, who we are, etc., please see the GCI.org website.*

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