

PAUL'S THEOLOGY

Lesson 41

Paul's Anthropological Terms – Spirit

Recently, we had a discussion about how cartoons have changed over the years. Some changes have been, in my humble opinion, for the worse. With all due respect, neither “Rolie Polie Olie” nor “Dora the Explorer” hold a candle to the original Bugs Bunny or Yosemite Sam cartoons. Some changes, however, have been for the better. “Phineas and Ferb,” while not the greatest cartoon ever, is excellent, and it certainly beats some of the early cartoons of my generation.

One particularly bad early cartoon was called, “Casper the Friendly Ghost.” Ugh. It was a cartoon about a friendly ghost who consistently scared people, even though he was always trying to be friendly, with not a bad bone in his body (joke intended.)

In 1995, a feature film was made named *Casper* that built off the legacy of the cartoon. The film explained that a boy named Casper had stayed out in the snow too long sledding and died of pneumonia. After death, Casper became the ghost on whom the movie (and by extension, the television cartoon) was based.

Casper, and other similar ideas of “ghosts” give us a bit of a distorted meaning of a word that has an interesting history. “Ghost” comes from the Germanic aspect of the English language. In Old English (Anglo Saxon), the word used was *gast* just slightly removed from the cousin language of Old German which had *geist*. (The German word is still in use and residually found in English words like “poltergeist.”)

In the Old English, the word *gast* (ghost) carried the meaning of “breath” as well as the soul or spirit of a person that was the source of life. Hence, one Old English reference to dying was to “give up the ghost.” The idea was that once one died, it was most easily apparent by the deceased no longer breathing. The breath/*geist*/ghost was gone whenever one died. This idea of ghost was carried into our Biblical language when the Bible was translated into English.

One might recall from our Church History series¹ that one of the arguments offered against translating the Bible into English was the premise that the English language was too primitive to allow an accurate translation of the Bible. Those people translating the Bible into English had the task of trying to find the best

¹ These lessons are feely available for download in written and audio forms from our website www.biblical-literacy.com.

English words that fit the Latin scriptures in use for a thousand years in the Western Church.

We should pause here and note that in England during the 13th and 14th centuries there were three main languages spoken. The priests did their work in Latin, the language of Scripture for the Western Church since Justin's translation in the 5th century. The aristocracy spoke in a French dialect now called "Anglo-Norman." The peasants spoke in what was becoming "Middle English" which was closer in many ways to Old English than to Modern English.

Had the translation efforts of Wycliffe (1320's–1384), Tyndale (c. 1494–1536) and others rendered the Latin Scriptures into French, the ruckus would at most have been slight, and likely there would have been no concern. But, it was Wycliffe and other translators' efforts to put Scripture into the vulgar language of the peasants that created the uproar. Several centuries had to pass before King James finally authorized a version of Scripture in English. This "Authorized Version," understandably called The King James Version, took the Bible and put it into the common English of 1611, which some linguists call "Early Modern English."

It is here that we confront the verses of Scripture many of us still remember today. In the King James, for example, we read verses that speak of the "Holy Ghost." Following the unauthorized translations of Tyndale and Wycliffe, the King James took the Biblical word for "spirit" and put it into the Germanic-based word "ghost" ("gost" for Tyndale!). This was done, however, only for the passages where the Bible text spoke of the "Holy Spirit." These verses, like Matthew 3:11 read:

he shal baptise you in the Hooli Goost and fier (Wycliffe 1395 version).

He shall baptize you with the holy gost and with fyre (Tyndale 1534).

hee shall baptize you with the holy Ghost, and with fire (King James 1611).

Interestingly, while the translators chose the Germanic descent "ghost" as the common word when translating the "Holy Spirit," when the same word was found in other places of Scripture (but without the modifier "Holy"), the translators used a word of French/Anglo-Norman descent. Hence, we read Romans 8:2 in these versions:

For the lawe of the spirit of lijf in Crist Jhesu hath delyuerid me fro the lawe of synne, and of deth (Wycliffe 1395 version).

For the lawe of the sprete that bringeth life thorowe Jesus Christ,
hath delivered me from the lawe of synne and deeth (Tyndale 1534).

For the law of the spirit of life, in Christ Jesus, hath made me free
from the law of sinne and death (King James 1611).

Unless the Bible referred specifically to the Holy Spirit, the word used in early English translations was “spirit.” The English words descended from the Old French *esperit*. The French word was just a step away from the Latin *spiritus*. *Spiritus* (meaning “breathing”) and its Latin root *spirare* (meaning “breathe”) both carry the same sense as the English words used in their stead, at least in the original meaning of the English words.

As we know, Paul wrote in neither English, Old or otherwise, French, nor Latin. Paul wrote in Greek. So, we need to go behind the English words and their roots to find the word Paul actually used. In so doing, we will note some of the problems the translators have had. Hopefully, we will be able to cast off some of the 21st century overtones of the words in an effort to better understand some of the import of what Paul was trying to communicate as he wrote of what we now call “spirit” (whether with a capital S referring to God or a lower case referring to something other than God).

SPIRIT

Every time the translators used the English word “ghost” or “spirit,” the translators were facing the New Testament Greek word *pneuma* (πνεῦμα). This word was used for “breath” much like the Latin word *spiritus*. If we go back to the times of Tyndale, Wycliffe and King James, the English word “spirit” was also in use meaning “breath.”

We have vestiges of the Greek word in our word “pneumonia.” (As mentioned earlier, according to the movie *Casper*, the boy who died and became the ghost, died of pneumonia – likely a tribute to the roots of the words.)

That the early English translators chose to use a different word for those references to the “Holy Spirit” than to other uses of “spirit” showed a keen awareness of the multiple uses certain Greek words had. We discussed this in the lesson on “body” – single word, multiple uses!

We will see that Paul makes multiple uses of the Greek *pneuma*. As we look at the verses, I urge us to do so thinking primarily of what might be associated in Paul’s mind with the idea of “breath.” While Paul does not generally mean the human breath coming from the lungs, it gives a better idea of meaning than much of what we think of in the 21st century by “spirit.” It certainly is more on target than thinking of some disembodied ghost like Casper!

When Paul wrote of *pneuma*, Paul was using a term that had great history in his Jewish walk as well as the personal experiences he held from his Christian walk. Paul's often-used Greek version of the Old Testament (the Septuagint) had repeatedly used the word *pneuma*. 264 times *pneuma* was used translating the Hebrew word for breath/spirit.² The Hebrew was used also frequently for the wind, the "breath of air." If we were to do a Hebrew word study, we would see a very consistent usage between Paul and the Old Testament on the idea of Spirit, both as it pertains to man and to God. Rather than spend our time on that word study, we will proceed straight to Paul, simply noting that the Pauline usage is entirely consistent with that of the Old Testament.

PAUL ON "SPIRIT" (*PNEUMA*)

While any attempt to classify Paul's many uses of *pneuma* into categories is difficult, if not frustrating, certain laudable efforts have been made. David Stacey, for example, finds at least six categories of usage for Paul. We will use Stacey's categories here (although in a different order).³

1. The Holy Spirit. Paul uses *pneuma* over and over when writing of the "Spirit of God," the "Holy Spirit," and the "Spirit of Christ." Consider here passages like Romans 8:14 where Paul writes:

For all who are led by the **Spirit** [*pneuma*] of God are sons of God.

Similarly, in 1 Corinthians 2:11 Paul writes that:

No one comprehends the thoughts of God except the **Spirit** [*pneuma*] of God.

Over and over in Romans we read of Paul referencing the Holy Spirit:

God's love has been poured into our hearts through the **Holy Spirit** [*pneuma*] who has been given to us (Rom. 5:5).

I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the **Holy Spirit** [*pneuma*] — (Rom. 9:1).

or the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the **Holy Spirit** [*pneuma*] (Rom. 14:17)

² The Hebrew was *ruach* (רוח)

³ Stacey, W. David, *The Pauline View of Man* (St. Martin's Press 1956) at 128ff.

We see Paul combining some of these terms showing their interchangeable nature when used of God in Romans 8:9:

You, however, are not in the flesh but in the **Spirit** [*pneuma*], if in fact the **Spirit** [*pneuma*] of **God** dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the **Spirit** [*pneuma*] of **Christ** does not belong to him.⁴

In writing of the Spirit of God, in any of the permutations Paul used, Paul is following a strand of thought maintained throughout the Old Testament. God's Spirit moved on the face of the deep (Gen. 1:2). God's Spirit was one of wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, and knowledge (Isa. 11:2). God's Spirit was beyond man's comprehension or full understanding ("Who has measured the Spirit of the LORD, or what man shows him his counsel?" Isa. 40:13).

The Spirit was God's breath, God's wind, the unseen evidence of his working among men. It proceeded forth from God and was God's energy or force.

Understanding God's Spirit in this sense leads naturally into the next category of Stacy.

2. A Divine Influence in the Believer. A second group of scriptures set out by Stacey concerns Paul's usage of *pneuma* as "a divine influence in the life of believers, creating in them 'spiritual gifts', talents which they had not previously known."⁵

Stacey cites 116 examples of Paul using *pneuma* for a supernatural influence in believers.⁶ These passages will be given more attention in our class on spiritual gifts, but we should consider several verses here to illustrate the point that Paul makes repeatedly: God has divinely come into and upon believers to work his purposes with his power through his church. Consider in this sense 1 Corinthians chapter 12:4-11 where Paul writes of "spiritual gifts":

There are varieties of gifts, but the same **Spirit** [*pneuma*] ... it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the **Spirit** [*pneuma*] for the common good. For to one is given through the **Spirit** [*pneuma*] the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same **Spirit** [*pneuma*], to another faith by the same **Spirit** [*pneuma*], to another gifts of healing by the one **Spirit** [*pneuma*], to another the

⁴ For "Spirit of Christ" see also Gal. 4:6 and Phil. 1:19.

⁵ Stacey at 128.

⁶ *Ibid.* at 129.

working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between **spirits** [*pneuma*], to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are empowered by one and the same **Spirit** [*pneuma*], who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

Such supernatural things were not new for God's Spirit. In the Old Testament, the Spirit moved similarly. For example, God's Spirit placed unusual intelligence and skill in certain Jews to accomplish God's tasks (Ex. 28:3; 31:3; 35:31, etc.). The Spirit of God descended on elders in Israel causing them to prophesy (Num. 11:25). God's Spirit led judges to battle and victory (Jud. 3:10; 6:34). The Spirit gave Samson his supernatural strength (Jud. 14:19).

Paul saw the Spirit of God working in the sphere of man. In the Old Testament the Spirit worked at selected times in selected people, but Paul saw the Spirit working in each believer. The way the Spirit worked might vary, but it was the same Spirit at work for the good of the kingdom.

3. **Created in a Christian when Born Again.** Another way Paul uses *pneuma* is when describing something that is "created in a believer when he enters the Christian inheritance."⁷ This is another logical progression from Paul's uses of *pneuma* given above. Here we see Paul writing, not of a particular supernatural manifestation as is given one believer or another, like in category 2 above, but rather a *pneuma* that is part of a person's make up changing the way a person lives.

Rudolph Bultmann speaks of this aspect of the *pneuma* discussing the way God's *pneuma* projects God's will into action. In the same sense, man has a will and is conscious of himself or herself. Once a believer, a pure "right" will is placed into man, which works in tandem and is influenced by God's divine will. It is the "breath" of God influencing the breath of man. Bultmann speaks of the interaction between God's Spirit and the spirit of man in this sense:

Paul does not conceive the divine Spirit as an explosively working power [a conclusion with which I disagree; I would say does not "in this sense *always* conceive of the divine Spirit as an explosively working power⁸] but conceives of it as guided by a definite

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ There are times where Paul considers the Spirit working in explosive ways, but not in the sense of this third category of work. Consider, however, when Paul writes, "our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction" (1 Thes. 1:5). Similarly, God's Spirit in power also raised Jesus from the dead: "his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 1:3-4).

tendency, a will, so that he can speak of its ‘endeavor’ or even its ‘desires.’⁹

Stacey notes this “divine invasion” writing,

When this divine will acts upon the human will, as Spirit upon spirit, the divine will is transmitted to the human.¹⁰

In this sense we see Paul writing of the *pneuma* as one of adoption:

For you did not receive the **spirit** [*pneuma*] of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the **Spirit** [*pneuma*] of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" (Rom. 8:15)

In 2 Corinthians 4:13, Paul writes of this as working faith in the believer:

Since we have the same **spirit** [*pneuma*] of faith according to what has been written, "I believed, and so I spoke," we also believe, and so we also speak.

This is a divine work that is one of wisdom and revelation in the believer:

I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a **spirit** [*pneuma*] of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him (Eph. 1:16-17).

It is also a work of gentleness:

What do you wish? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love in a **spirit** [*pneuma*] of gentleness? (1 Cor. 4:21).

In this sense, not only gentleness, but also a number of Christian virtues are set out as influences of God’s *pneuma* working within the believer’s *pneuma* to influence the believer’s life:

But I say, walk by the **Spirit** [*pneuma*], and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh...the fruit of the **Spirit** [*pneuma*] is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law (Gal. 5:16, 22-23).

⁹ Bultmann, Rudolph, *Theology of the New Testament* (Baylor University Press ed. 2007), Vol. I at 207.

¹⁰ Stacey at 131-132.

In Romans 8:1-14, Paul adds a number of ways this *pneuma* of man is working with the *pneuma* of God. A notable example is Romans 8:5:

Those who live according to the **Spirit** [*pneuma*] set their minds on the things of the **Spirit** [*pneuma*].

We must carefully note in these instances that Paul is drawing a clear distinction between the breath/Spirit of God and the divinely placed breath/spirit in the believer. The two should not be confused! This is why Paul can write in 1 Corinthians 2:11-16 about how God's *pneuma* works with the believer's *pneuma*:

For who knows a person's thoughts except the **spirit** [*pneuma*] of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the **Spirit** [*pneuma*] of God. Now we have received not the **spirit** [*pneuma*] of the world, but the **Spirit** [*pneuma*] who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the **Spirit** [*pneuma*], interpreting **spiritual** [*pneuma*] truths to those who are **spiritual** [*pneuma*¹¹]. The natural person does not accept the things of the **Spirit** [*pneuma*] of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are **spiritually** [*pneuma*] discerned. The **spiritual** [*pneuma*] person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. "For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

We see the distinction clearly also in Romans 8:16 where Paul writes:

The **Spirit** [*pneuma*] himself bears witness with our **spirit** [*pneuma*] that we are children of God.

This is the Spirit that works even where our spirit fails:

Likewise the **Spirit** [*pneuma*] helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the **Spirit** [*pneuma*] himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words (Rom. 8:26).

So there is at work in the believer the Spirit of God, influencing the pure spirit of man that is present in the believer who is in God's kingdom and family. This

¹¹ We should add that the word translated "spiritual" is a form of *pneuma*: *pneumatikos*. This becomes important in word studies especially as used by Paul in 1 Corinthians because some scholars believe that Paul was combating an early Gnostic heresy and was using *pneumatikos* in a special sense that had significant meaning in that early heresy. See, e.g., Birger Pearson's *The Pneumatikos-Psychikos Terminology* (SBL1973)

interaction of the two spirits (Spirit and spirit) leads and works God's purposes into man, influencing the mind and will of man. Beyond this, there is still another sense where Paul writes of *pneuma*.

4. **The Personal and Natural *pneuma* of Everyone.** While we can see the Spirit of God (category 1), which works supernaturally for the good of the church (category 2), and also the pure spirit placed in the believer (category 3), we need to see that Paul also writes of the spirit that exists in everyone, saved or unsaved.

We saw this above in the passage from Paul to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 2). In verse 11, Paul noted that only one's *pneuma* knows one's thoughts. There is thus a *pneuma* of the world that is contrasted to the divinely placed *pneuma* of the believer that communicates to the Divine *pneuma*. As a source and part of man's will and awareness, a *pneuma* is there in all men. As we shall see next lesson, this is either the divine spirit in line with the Spirit of God or it is a natural *pneuma*, which is a part of the "flesh" which is in opposition to God's *pneuma*. It is in this sense that Paul writes of the need to, "cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body [lit. "flesh" – *sarx*] and spirit [*pneuma*]" (2 Cor. 7:1).

5. **Spirit and the Kingdom of Evil.** Paul wrote of *pneuma* beyond that proceeding from God. Paul saw a *pneuma* at work in the world proceeding from Satan and his diabolical kingdom. Consider these words of Paul:

- "And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the **spirit** [*pneuma*] that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind" (Eph. 2:1-3).
- "We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the **spiritual** [*pneuma*] forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12).
- "But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different **spirit** [*pneuma*] from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough" (2 Cor. 11:3-4).

We see an extension of this evil *pneuma* in the way it can affect man:

6. **Characteristics of Evil Spirits Influencing Man.** Just as God’s Spirit has an influence upon man, so can the spirits of evil. Evil carries this influence in works of bondage and slavery:

For you did not receive the **spirit** [*pneuma*] of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the **Spirit** [*pneuma*] of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” (Rom. 8:15).

Paul also writes of a spirit of stupor where God lets the evil spirits work among men in Romans 11:8. In 2 Timothy 1:7, Paul contrasts the spirit we have from God with the spirit of fear which comes from the world.

CONCLUSION

While Stacey’s categories can serve a use in helping us see and consider Paul’s diverse usage of *pneuma*, they can also do a disservice. First, they are not fully thorough. There are some usages by Paul that do not seem to fit into any of the six categories. For example, in 2 Thessalonians Paul used *pneuma* when he wrote:

And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the **breath** [*pneuma*] of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming.

A second difficulty of using Stacey’s categories is that a number of the examples and usages by Paul seem to bleed into one or more categories. Can we certainly say, for example, what are “supernatural works” of the Spirit versus what are “natural” works? Is the impartation of faith by the Spirit any less miraculous than the gift of prophecy?

A third difficulty arises naturally when we assign categories in a way that Paul never did. If Paul had given us the six (or more) categories, then we should be satisfied. But when it is a scholar’s creation, we need to use it as a tool and not see it as an absolute.

With those warnings and shortcomings noted, the categories do help us more fully understand the workings of the *pneuma* in the vocabulary of Paul. Further, we are given some clear points for home!

POINTS FOR HOME

1. “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the **Holy Spirit** [*pneuma*] who has been given to us” (Rom. 5:5)

There is something special that happens when a human comes into restored fellowship with God. God pours his love into us through his Holy Spirit. We are not the same. We are different. With God’s Spirit, we have a new

focus, and new motivation, a new understanding. It is a divine influence that we are sensitive to and can choose to follow. Let us make that choice!

2. *“The fruit of the **Spirit** [pneuma] is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.”* (Gal. 5:22).

A question we frequently ask, but reiterate here is, what is your compass? What gives you direction in the choices of life? What do you find to be the source of your actions and reactions? Do you let the guidance and work of the Spirit within your spirit direct you? Do you follow God’s leading or that of the Tempter? These are choices we make. We need to be conscious and aware that we make them. If we are defaulting into what seems natural or right, then it is not always going to be the will or Spirit of God we follow. There are times to swallow pride, admit mistakes, and do right. We can make those choices, and we need to.

3. *“For you did not receive the **spirit** [pneuma] of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the **Spirit** [pneuma] of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!””* (Rom. 8:15).

This brings the first two Points for Home full circle. God has worked in us through his Spirit. We have guidance and fruit from his Spirit working within our born-again spirit. The spirit we have is not one of bondage to sin, bondage to evil, or bondage to wrong thinking and doing. It is a Spirit (God’s) and spirit (the believer’s) that set us into God’s family as sons. It is a spirit that cries to God for help and, importantly, is empowered to respond to God’s answers. Let us choose to cry out to God, let us listen and seek his answers, and then let us walk in those answers. Let us be fully content to be his, but let us be content with nothing less!