

PAPER #9

Understanding the Spirit of God

Making the Spirit of God the third person of the Trinity was something of an afterthought in the development of that doctrine. Trinitarian doctrine was first and foremost an attempt to make sense of the incarnation. How can this man Jesus also be God? And if Jesus is God and God is one, how can we make sense out of God being two distinct beings and at the same time one God?

The fundamental “logic” of the Trinity was hammered out in the context of those questions. Once the logic of one-God-yet-two-persons was initially worked out with respect to God and his Son, that then became a concept that was available to apply to the biblical references to the Spirit of God. Perhaps the Spirit of God was a distinct person as well. After all, doesn’t the Spirit pray to the Father—just like the Son prays to the Father? Accordingly, the Spirit must be a distinct person of the one God just as the Son is a distinct person of that one God.

It is highly doubtful, however, that a concept of the divine Binity (God the Father and God the Spirit, two distinct persons of one divine being) would have developed if God had never incarnated as Jesus. (In that regard it is interesting that the Jews have never, to my knowledge, been tempted to believe in a Binity.)

Indeed, even with a knowledge of the incarnation, it is somewhat surprising that the Holy Spirit was nominated to be the third person of the godhead. Not because it is difficult to see how the Spirit is divine enough; but rather it is difficult to see why we should think he is a distinct person.

Our ordinary linguistic sensibilities would not lead us to see a distinction between God and the Spirit of God. They strongly suggest that the Spirit of God is just what it says—THE SPIRIT of God. Let me explain.

The phrase “the spirit of God” suggests one of two possible meanings: (1) the spirit of God is a part of God [where the “of God” is what grammarians would call a partitive genitive], or (2) the spirit of God just is God being described by the fact that he is spirit [where the “of God” is what grammarians would call a genitive of apposition].

Consider some examples of a partitive genitive. If we were to speak of the “head of John the Baptist” we are dealing with a partitive genitive. “Head” describes a part of the body of John the Baptist. If we were to speak of the “mind of Paul” we are dealing again with a partitive genitive. “Mind” describes a part or element of the being of Paul. If we were to speak of the “heart of a believer,” is the “heart” not being described as a part or

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element of the being of some person who believes? What then if we were to speak of the "finger of God"? Are we dealing with another person of the godhead? Or, is it more likely that "finger" is being described as, in some sense, a part of the being of God?

Now consider some examples of a genitive of apposition. If we were to speak of the "sign of circumcision" we are dealing with a genitive of apposition. "Sign" describes what exactly circumcision is. Circumcision is a sign of the Covenant. So, we can speak of it as the "sign of circumcision," meaning, the sign that is circumcision. In John 2:21 John describes Jesus as speaking of the "temple of his body." Clearly, by that, John means the temple *which is his body*. He doesn't mean a *part of his body* that we call the temple. If we were to speak, against any normal idiom, of the "apostle of Paul" we would once again be dealing with a genitive of apposition. What would that phrase mean? "Apostle" would describe what it is that Paul is. Paul is an apostle. So, we could meaningfully say the "apostle of Paul," meaning, the apostle that is named Paul, or the apostle who is identical with Paul. What then if we were to speak of the "god of Yahweh"? Would that not mean the god who is Yahweh? Now, then, what if we were to speak of the "Supreme Being of God"? Would we be speaking of another person of the godhead—God, the Supreme Being? Or, is it more likely that "Supreme Being" just is a way of describing who God is? We would be speaking of the Supreme Being who we call "God." Or, alternatively, we would be speaking of God who just is the Supreme Being.

Either of the above two options are strong possibilities for what the phrase "Spirit of God" means. The "spirit of God" could be describing a part or element of the being of God—much like "the mind of Paul." Or, it could be simply describing what God is—the spirit who is God. In all of the places where the phrase "Spirit of God" occurs, it seems highly likely that it is being used in one of these two ways. Probably it is used in different ways in different contexts; but that is not a study I have done.

(Trinitarianism takes it as a partitive genitive. The Spirit is a part [one person] of the godhead. However, taking it as a partitive genitive does not require the conclusion that the Spirit is a person of the godhead. It could be a "part" in a different sense. When we speak of the "spirit of a man" we simply mean that part of his being that we describe as his spirit. The same could certainly be true of "spirit of God." We could mean that part of God's single, non-triune being that we describe as his spirit; much like we could refer to the "mind of God" without implying that the "mind" is a distinct person of a godhead.)

The sense that most likely captures the more prominent occurrences of "Spirit of God" is the genitive of apposition. If that is right, if "spirit of God" means the spirit who is God, that explains why "the Spirit of God" is used interchangeably with "the Spirit" or the "Holy Spirit." One way of referring to the transcendent creator is by denominating him "the Spirit." This is not unlike how at other times he is denominated "the Almighty," or "the Power," or "the Blessed One," or "the Most High," or by other such titles. To call God "the Spirit" calls special attention to his invisible nature, just as calling him "the Almighty" draws attention to his supreme power. But while these denote him with words

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having different connotations, the denotation is the same. "The Almighty" denotes the same person as "the Spirit" which denotes the same person as the transcendent creator himself. Both denote God.

That is how we should understand the title "Father" as well. The Father is not a particular person of the Trinity. The "Father" is a way of describing the one and only transcendent creator. Why "Father"? It draws attention to the fact that he is the source and origin of all that is. Everything has its being because of God, who is the Father of all.

(When Jesus describes God as "Father" however, he is using "Father" in a different sense. His use of the title hearkens back to the Davidic Covenant. God is Jesus' "Father" because Jesus is God's "Son." The promise was, "I will be a father to him and he will be a son to me.")

Arguments for the Trinity

When it comes to the Holy Spirit, most arguments to prove that he is the third person of the Trinity run like this: (1) the Spirit is God; (2) the Spirit is a person; therefore, (conclusion) he is the third divine person, the third person of the Trinity. [See *Afterward* below.] This argument, of course, proves no such thing. If "the Spirit" is nothing more than a name for God, wouldn't the two premises of the argument be true? The Spirit is God because...well, the Spirit *IS* God. And the Spirit is a person because God is a person, and the Spirit is God. So those two observations alone do not prove the Trinity. They only prove the obvious; that "the Spirit" is a title that describes a personal God. In order to prove the Trinity, one more crucial premise is needed: (3) the Spirit is a distinct person, with a distinct personal identity from God, the Father. The less hurried arguments for the Trinity include this step.

Step (3) is the crux of the issue between Trinitarianism and Transcendent Monotheism. If it is true, then Trinitarianism, or something like it, must be true. If it is not true, then there is absolutely no reason to think that the Spirit of God is the third person of a Trinity. I am aware of one and only one passage that could reasonably be construed to prove step (3). (It is curious fact that out of four books written to defend the doctrine of the Trinity that I consulted, only one even addressed the issue of step (3); and it did not cite biblical evidence that it was true.) I will examine that one key passage in the remainder of this paper.

Romans 8:26–27 and the Trinity

Romans 8:26–27 is a key passage to look at. It has the potential to prove what the Trinitarian needs to prove, if he is to vindicate his inclusion of the Spirit as a third person in his Trinity. In the NASV it reads:

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In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. (Rom 8:26-27)

This passage is potentially a key, because it has the potential for making it clear that Paul considers the Spirit to be a separate and distinct person from God. It describes the Spirit as interceding for us. With whom is he interceding then? Is it not God? So if the Spirit is interceding between us and God, he must be a distinct person from God.

Furthermore, does Paul's statement not make a distinction between "He who searches the hearts" and "the mind of the Spirit" which "He who searches the hearts" thereby knows? If "He who searches the hearts" is God, then he, God, is the one who knows "the mind of the Spirit." Hence, the Spirit must be a separate and distinct person from God.

This is all well and good, but a cursory reading of the two verses makes it clear that these are difficult verses. It is not easy to know what is being said. Accordingly, it is overly hasty to draw conclusions about the important subject of the Trinity from superficial observations about a statement that I know I don't understand. If we are to draw any conclusions from these two verses, we need to know that we understand what they are asserting. And to understand them, we need to understand them in context.

The Argument of Romans 8:15–27

In Romans 8 Paul is drawing to the end of the first major section of the second part of his letter. In part two he has been responding to the first of two major objections that he knows Jews will have with the gospel.

Their objection, in brief, is that if the gospel is true—if it is true that God just mercifully grants eternal Life to people who believe in Jesus, even though they don't deserve it—then the effect that will have in people's lives is to promote sin and unrighteousness. It won't frighten them with dire consequences and make them toe the moral line. Paul's gospel removes every reason a person has to obey God.

Paul's answer to their objection is to clarify a few things. God's mercy is not extended to all; it is only extended to those who believe in and have chosen to follow Jesus. But Jesus teaches his disciples to love and obey God. So, someone who is not striving to obey God is not a disciple of Jesus and will not receive eternal Life.

Furthermore, Paul says, there is another important way to describe the person who is a disciple of Jesus and will inherit eternal life. The one who makes a commitment to follow Jesus is one who is being "led by the Spirit." Paul introduces the very important

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fact that no human being believes and follows Jesus unless he has been transformed in his heart and mind. It is the Spirit of God who works in the heart of a person to bring about that transformation. Left to himself, no natural-born sinner would ever love God, seek to know God, want to serve God, be drawn to Jesus as his teacher, believe the truth about Jesus and God, nor desire to obey God. It is only because God (the Spirit) has worked in a man's heart that he could ever begin to be the person described by these traits.

That is why Paul writes, "...for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will *live*. For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God." (8:13–14, NASV) He is clear: it is those who are *led by the Spirit of God* who are sons of God; and a son (or child) of God, as he will go on to say, is an heir of God. The heir of God is one who will inherit "the glory that is to be revealed to us." And the "glory that is to be revealed to us" is what he describes elsewhere as "Life," or "eternal Life." (Cf., 8:2,6,13-14; being justified in order to attain eternal Life is the issue throughout the whole of 6:1–8:39)

One can see how effectively Paul's point here addresses the Jewish objection. Is there any incentive to be obedient to God? Well, Paul argues, only those who, because of the activity of the Spirit within them, are striving to "put to death" their sinful deeds are authentic children of God who will receive the blessing of God's promised inheritance. Does that count as incentive? If one is not seeking to obey God, he will not receive eternal Life. The believer in the gospel has just as much "incentive" to obey as any Jew under the Law does.

Then, in Romans 8:15 Paul begins the section that we are concerned with. In this section he wants to explain two important differences between the believer in the gospel and the Jew under the Law. Verse 15 explains the first difference (from now on I will be citing my own translation):

Now we have not received once again the mindset of slavery, leading to fear; rather we have received the mindset of being adopted as sons, out of which we cry out, "Abba"—"Father."

[8:15]

The first difference between the Christian disciple and the Pharisaical Jew is that the Pharisee must live in constant fear that he will not prove good enough and will, thereby, lose the favor of God. The disciple of Jesus does not. Knowing and depending upon the mercy of God, he knows that his standing is secure. God has adopted him as his child; he has promised to give an inheritance to him. He did not deserve it; he was not worthy of it. It was strictly a matter of God's sovereign merciful choice. So, not being good enough could never make him unfit to receive it. He never has been, never will be, and never could be deserving of it. So he has nothing to prove. He does not have to walk on eggshells around God. It is the Pharisee who thinks that he does.

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Verse 16–18 explains the second difference:

The Spirit itself bears witness along with our spirit that we are children of God—and if children, in fact heirs, heirs of God and fellow-heirs with Christ—if we long to be glorified with him. (2•Now I count it that the longings of this current time are not worthy [ἄξια] in face of the glory to be revealed to us.)

[8:16–18]

Once Paul has clarified matters, it is clear that the Pharisee and the disciple of Jesus can agree on this much: it is the one who strives to be righteous who is a *bona fide* child of God, that is, one who will inherit the eternal Life. But here is where Paul and Pharisaism part company. What is the nature of that striving that marks one as a true child of God? The Pharisee would see the evidence in one’s outward behaviors; Paul sees it in one’s inward yearnings. So far as Pharisaism is concerned, it is one’s explicit, outward obedience that marks one as an authentic child of God. So far as Paul is concerned, it is one’s inward, subjective desires (one’s “longing to be glorified with him”) that mark him as an authentic child of God.

Paul then proceeds to develop and elaborate on each of the two points he has just made, beginning with the last point first. So, in the next several paragraphs, 8:19–27, Paul develops further the following point: the *bona fide* child of God is the one whose status as a child of God is confirmed by the fact that his inner longings, inner desires, and inner yearnings are focused on the glory of moral perfection. The child of God is he who, from the inner depths of his being, anxiously yearns for God to make him gloriously good and anxiously awaits the day when that hope will be realized.

Paul’s elaboration of this point occurs in three parts. In the first part he describes the fact that the yearning of the true child of God is a yearning shared with the entire created order. All of God’s creation yearns to be re-created into a new and more glorious version of itself. The child of God is the one whose inner longings are in harmony with this universal yearning of the whole creation:

The anxious yearning of the creation eagerly awaits the unveiling of the sons of God. 2•For the creation was made subject to futility—not voluntarily, but because of Him who put it in subjection—with the confident expectation that the creation itself would in fact be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. 3•Now we know that the entire created order groans together and is in labor together until now.

[8:19–22]

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In the second part of Paul’s elaboration, he goes on to fill out what the mindset of an authentic child of God is: it is a mindset of yearning and eager expectation for our “adoption as sons”—that is, for the final realization of God’s promised inheritance.

Not only this, but also we ourselves—because we have the first fruits of the Spirit—even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly awaiting our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body; for it is in confident anticipation that we have been saved. 2•Now an anticipation that is already being seen is not an “anticipation”—for why would one “anticipate” what he already sees? 3•But if we anticipate something that we do not already see, then with perseverance we eagerly await it.

[8:23–25]

Paul ends the second part of his elaboration by emphasizing that what the child of God anticipates and eagerly awaits is a future blessing (in that it will be realized in the new age to come), not something that will ever be realized in this present state of the world.

Romans 8:26–27

Finally, we come to the third part of Paul’s elaboration. This is the passage that concerns us with respect to the doctrine of the Trinity. We must try to thoroughly understand it.

First let me review: Romans 8:19–27 is an elaboration of the point that Paul made in 8:16–18. Therefore, the point being elaborated upon in 8:19–27 is that the mark of a *bona fide* child of God is the presence of a deep, inner longing for the glory that God has predestined for his children. In the larger context it is clear that the most valuable and important element of that glory is the glory of moral perfection, the glory of real goodness. Hence, 8:19-27 is an elaboration of the point that *the mark and evidence that one is a true child of God—that is, the mark of one who will receive mercy and not wrath—is that he yearns, from the depth of his inner being, to be truly good.*

In elaborating this point through 8:25, Paul has made two important points:

(1) The yearning for goodness by the child of God is part of a larger purpose that God had in mind from before the beginning—to create a cosmos subject to corruption with the prior intent to one day set it free from its slavery to corruption and make it gloriously free from that corruption. Accordingly, the yearning for goodness that marks the child of God is part of a larger yearning for glory on the part of the entire creation.

(2) The quality and character of the child of God’s yearning is one of confident, eager expectation for a “redemption” that he will never see and never realize in

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the present age. It is a hope for the age to come, not a future hope for this lifetime.
So this yearning is a yearning for what one does not and cannot see.

Now, in our target passage, Paul comes to the third and final point of his elaboration. He now touches on what his elaboration has failed, so far, to explain—the relationship between the child of God’s yearning and God’s granting him mercy.

Before we look at it sentence-by-sentence, let me summarize the point of this brief paragraph:

As Paul has discussed throughout Romans, we are hopelessly unworthy and undeserving. The end we deserve is wrath and destruction. How then can any human being make an appeal to God for mercy? What kind of appeal can one make that will be heard and heeded by God? We do not have a strong basis for any such appeal. Any appeal that we might make is deficient? How can we possibly do anything that would move God to compassion?

It is at precisely this point of “weakness” and inadequacy that the Spirit of God steps in and helps us. The Spirit creates within us just the sort of appeal for mercy that God will hear. Namely, he creates within our inner beings a groaning—under the weight of our sin and unrighteousness—that corresponds to a Spirit-created longing for the glory of moral perfection. God, he who will ultimately determine whether to grant mercy to us, will consider the groanings and longing created in our inner depths by the Spirit to be that which satisfies the pre-requisite for mercy. God will grant us mercy, because the groanings in our inner beings make us suitable recipients of such mercy.

Let us consider now, in detail, how this paragraph says this. I will comment on it phrase-by phrase:

In just this way [by creating in our spirit this yearning for glory], the Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness. 2•We do not know how we could possibly present our appeal in accord with what is necessary. 3•But the Spirit himself presents our appeal for us by means of our wordless groaning. 4•And he who searches hearts knows what the intent of the Spirit is—namely, that he makes an appeal for mercy on behalf of the sanctified in accord with what God requires.

[8:26–27]

In just this way > In just the way that Paul has been describing for the last two paragraphs. Namely, by creating within the *bona fide* child of God an inner yearning for the glory of moral perfection.

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the Spirit > This is either the second person of the Trinity or it is just a word that describes the transcendent creator himself. I think it is the latter. We will discuss that below.

the Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness > The weakness in view is exactly the same weakness Paul refers to in Romans 8:3 and is a foundational assumption throughout the whole of the letter—namely, it is the weakness of our standing with God. We are depraved sinners who are utterly unworthy of anything good from God. We deserve wrath and destruction. We do not deserve blessing. We do not deserve mercy. Paul will go on to explain the nature of this help or aid that God gives us in the midst of this hopeless situation. In other words, Paul is going to describe how the Spirit helps us get mercy from God even though we don’t deserve it.

We do not know how we could possibly present our appeal in accord with what is necessary > The text literally reads: “We do not know the what that we might pray that is in accord with what is necessary.” By this he means: “We do not know what we could possibly say that would satisfy what he (God) requires.” Or, more fully still: “We do not know what we could possibly say to God—in order to appeal to him for mercy—that would satisfy what he wants in such a way that he would grant us the mercy we want.”

But the Spirit himself presents our appeal for us > What we are utterly helpless to do ourselves—namely, to make a successful appeal to God for mercy—the Spirit himself does for us.

by means of our wordless groanings > This describes *how* the successful appeal for mercy is made. The Spirit transforms our inner being—turning us into people who groan under the weight of our sinfulness and evil as we long to be set free from evil and transformed into perfectly righteous people. That transformation of our inner being is, in its own way, an appeal to God to be merciful to us, whose inwardness is marked by such groaning. These groanings are “wordless” groanings. When God grants mercy to the child of God, it is not on the basis of what he has found to **say** to persuade God to grant him mercy, it is on the basis of what that person has become in his heart. It is what and who he is, not what he says, that gets a response from God.

And he who searches hearts > This is most certainly God, the transcendent Creator. He is the one who can search the very inward core (the heart) of any and every human being in order to know their true desires and true yearnings.

knows what the intent of the Spirit is > God knows how to interpret the transformed inwardness of the child of God—he knows what the Spirit of God has intended by bringing it about in him. The following clause spells out what God knows, what the intent of the Spirit was.

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he makes an appeal for mercy > The Spirit transformed the person's heart and spirit in order to serve as an appeal to God for mercy. It is as if the work of the Spirit in the life of the child of God was meant to say, "Look upon my heart and inner yearning and accept it as an appeal for mercy."

on behalf of the sanctified > This appeal to God for mercy—produced in them by the Spirit—is an appeal to God on behalf of those who are being sanctified by the Spirit of God. Those whom God has chosen to belong to him are those in whose hearts the Spirit has been active to transform them. These are the "holy ones" who are being sanctified. It is within and for them that the Spirit is creating an appeal to God for mercy.

in accord with what God requires > God's mercy is not universally granted. It is conditional. What condition must be met in order for God to decide to grant mercy rather than wrath? The Spirit is meeting that condition by creating the groaning and yearning in the believer's inner being. Literally, this translates: "according to God." The Spirit is making an appeal for mercy to God on behalf of the sanctified that is "according to God." I have interpreted that to mean: that is "in accord with what God wants or requires."

God and the Spirit in Romans 8:26–27

Hopefully the above discussion has made it clear what Romans 8:26–27 means in the context of the discussion of 8: 15–27. We are now in a position to analyze this paragraph with respect to its implications for the Trinity.

Let me recapitulate where the alleged evidence for the Trinity lies in these verses:

(1) It describes the Spirit as interceding for us to God, thereby making him a distinct person from God.

(2) It makes a distinction between God as "he who searches the hearts" and the Spirit, because it describes God as "knowing the mind of the Spirit." This clearly implies that God and the Spirit are different persons.

I will respond to each of these alleged evidences in turn:

(1) The NASV translates the two relevant statements,

(a) "...but the Spirit himself intercedes [*huperentunchano*] for us with groanings too deep for words..." I translated this same statement above as "But the Spirit himself presents our appeal for us by means of our wordless groaning."

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(b) “...because He [the Spirit] intercedes [*entunchano*] for the saints according to the will of God.” I translated this same statement above as “...namely, that he [the Spirit] makes an appeal for mercy on behalf of the sanctified in accord with what God requires.”

Notice that, rightly understood, both assertions are metaphorical. The “intercession” (NASV) or the “appeal to God for mercy” (my translation) does not come in the form of the Spirit speaking words to God. The Spirit does not ask God to grant the “saints” mercy in language. Rather, Paul’s whole point hinges on the appeal for mercy (the “intercession”) being “wordless.” [There is no justification for the NASV’s translation “too deep for words.”] It is decidedly *not* words that sway the heart of God. God is not “talked into” granting mercy to the saints—not by the saints, and not by the Spirit. God is swayed by the condition of the saint’s heart, not by some fast-talking on the part of anyone.

This being the case, there is no literal intercession going on anywhere in this paragraph. The Spirit quietly and secretly transforms the hearts of the saints. By doing so, he is creating in them a condition to which God will respond favorably—granting them mercy rather than wrath. Paul describes it, metaphorically, as the Spirit “interceding” for them—that is, appealing to God for mercy for them. But that is clearly and explicitly declared to be a metaphor. For Paul explicitly tells us what the real substance of the appeal (the intercession) is: it is the **wordless** groanings of the saints.

Consequently, there is no evidence here for a distinction in persons between God and the Spirit. Paul never intends to suggest that the Spirit actually utters an intercessory prayer to God. Without that, this verse provides no evidence that Paul thinks the Spirit is a different person who can carry on a conversation with God.

(2) The NASV translates the relevant statement,

“...and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind [*phronema*] of the Spirit is, because he intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.” I translated this same statement above as “And he who searches hearts knows what the intent [*phronema*] of the Spirit is—namely, that he makes an appeal for mercy on behalf of the sanctified in accord with what God requires.”

How we understand this in relation to the doctrine of the Trinity hinges on how we take the word *phronema*. The word seems to be used in two ways: (1) it can mean something like “mindset” or “attitude” or “mental orientation”; or (2) it can denote the content of the mind—that is, a thought, thinking, etc.

If I am right in my interpretation of this paragraph, Paul means it in the latter sense. Paul is trying to explain why it is significant that God (“He who searches hearts”) will find hearts that groan under the weight of their own sin. It is significant, Paul says, because God knows what the Spirit was *thinking* when he created such a condition in

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their hearts. God knows what the Spirit’s [*phronema*] is in his transforming their hearts. His *phronema*, his thinking, is that he intends God to grant the saints mercy as a result.

So, by *phronema* Paul does not mean the right sort of thing to prove that the Spirit is a distinct person from God. If *phronema* meant mind in the sense that it described the intellectual faculty of a person, then arguably, we would have evidence that the Spirit is a distinct person from God. God uses his intellectual faculty to have knowledge of the intellectual faculty of the Spirit. How could that be without their being two distinct intellectual faculties and two distinct persons. But *phronema* does not mean “mind” in that sense. It is not being said that God knows the intellectual faculty of the Spirit; it is being said that he knows the thinking, the purpose, the intent of the Spirit—his intent behind his sanctifying work in the hearts of believers. So this verse does not provide the Trinitarian with any clear and direct evidence that the Spirit is a distinct person from the Father.

We could still ask why Paul makes a distinction between “the Spirit” who sanctifies and “God” who judges and shows mercy. My contention is that the distinction is precisely that: it is between God insofar as he is active in sanctifying the believer, and God insofar as he is the transcendent Creator, sovereign King, and righteous judge over all creation.

The Distinction Between God and the Spirit of God

I have not done the complete and exhaustive research necessary to finally confirm this, but there seems to me to be a very decided pattern throughout the Bible—Old and New Testament. The Bible speaks of God as God; and yet the Bible sometimes speaks of God (the very same person) as the Spirit (Holy Spirit, Spirit of Holiness, Spirit of God, etc.). Why?

When the Bible refers to God as God, it is viewing God from the perspective of who he is in his sovereign transcendence. When the Bible refers to God as the Spirit, it is viewing God from the perspective of who he is in his mysterious, invisible presence in the midst of his creation—especially, who he is in his mysterious, invisible working to transform the hearts of his elect. “God” describes God in his role as transcendent ruler; “Spirit” describes God in his role as sanctifier. But it is the same God, the same person who is being described. “God” describes God in his majesty and sovereignty over creation; “Spirit” describes God in his intimate, immanent contact with his creation, invisibly at work to accomplish something in his creation. But, again, it is the same God, the same person who is being described.

It is “God” who created the heavens and the earth; but it is the “Spirit of God” who hovered over the face of the deep in anticipation. God created from the distance of his

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transcendence; but God also “hovered” from the nearness of his intimate care and involvement.

It is “God” who decrees who will and will not know him; but it is the “Spirit of God” who works in our hearts to make them receptive to the truth about God. God wills and decrees and chooses from the distance of his transcendence; but God sanctifies from the nearness of his intimate care and involvement.

It is “God” who will determine who it is that will receive mercy; but it is the “Spirit of God” who works in the hearts of those whom he has chosen and renders them suitably contrite. God elects from the distance of his transcendence; but God saves from the nearness of his intimate care and involvement.

God is transcendent. But God is not removed, detached, distant, aloof, or uncaring. When the Bible wants to designate God from the perspective of his power, majesty, and sovereignty it simply used the generic term God. But when it wants to emphasize his closeness to—his intimate care and involvement with—some aspect of his creation, it more typically calls him the Spirit.

Accordingly, for the Bible to talk about God “sending his Spirit” does not mean that the Spirit is a separate and distinct person. It is a metaphorical way of describing God’s purposing to “get close” to his creation and do something.

Conclusion

There is no good reason to take the Spirit of God to be a distinct person of the godhead. Nothing in the Bible requires nor even suggests such a reading, except a superficial reading of Romans 8:26–27. We have seen that an adequate understanding of Romans 8:26–27 eliminates it from functioning as any reasonable evidence that Paul sees the Spirit of God as a distinct person from God himself. The Bible does not use the title “Spirit of God” because it views him as a separate and distinct person. It uses the term only because, at times, it wants to emphasize God’s close involvement with his creatures. When it speaks of God sending his Spirit or pouring out his Spirit, it is a metaphorical way of emphasizing God’s close involvement with his creation.

AFTERWARD

The nature of the arguments that Trinitarians often advance for including the Spirit as a separate and distinct person of the triune godhead are specious. The same kind of argument that is often advanced to prove the Spirit is a person of the godhead could equally well prove that other “persons” of the godhead exist. I have listed some of those other possible “persons” along with some evidence below:

PAPER #9: Understanding the Spirit of God

God, the Angel:

The phrase "Angel of God" is used repeatedly throughout the Bible. The "angel of God" clearly has divine attributes; and the "angel of God" clearly is a person. By the same line of argument that establishes the Spirit as a distinct person of the godhead, we must also accept a fourth person, **God, the Angel**, into the godhead.

God, the Wisdom:

Luke 11:49 > "For this reason also the **wisdom of God** said, 'I will send to them prophets and apostles, and *some* of them they will kill and *some* they will persecute...'"

The phrase "Wisdom of God" is clearly a person. It speaks. It clearly has a divine attribute—the authority to send prophets and apostles. By the same line of argument that establishes the Spirit as a distinct person of the godhead, we must also accept a fifth person, **God, the Wisdom**, into the godhead.

God, the Power:

Luke 22:69 > "But from now on **THE SON OF MAN WILL BE SEATED AT THE RIGHT HAND of the power OF GOD.**"

The phrase "Power of God" is clearly a person. It has a right hand. It clearly has a divine attribute—the status and authority to have the Messiah sit at his right hand. By the same line of argument that establishes the Spirit as a distinct person of the godhead, we must also accept a sixth person, **God, the Power**, into the godhead.