

"Holy Spirit," "holy Spirit" or "holy spirit"

Which is Biblically Accurate?

By Richie Temple

Bible translators and scholars are not of one mind when it comes to how to write in English the Greek words *pneuma hagion*. Most write "Holy Spirit" but an ever increasing number are writing "holy Spirit" and some even "holy spirit." This comes from a growing awareness that the Greek words *pneuma hagion* are not used in the Bible to speak of a separate "person" of the Godhead as in the post-biblical Trinitarian sense - but rather as the power and presence of God himself. NT scholar Joseph Fitzmeyer explains:

In speaking of *to pneuma*, "the Spirit," Paul tends to treat it as it appears in the OT. There it is a mode of expressing God's outgoing activity and presence to the world and his people in a creative, prophetic, quickening, or renovating way ... This is also the basic meaning Paul attributes to *to (hagion) pneuma* [the holy Spirit] which is not understood yet as a personal being, distinct from the Father and the Son, as it was to become in later Christian trinitarian theology of the patristic period ... He may, indeed, personify the Spirit, that is to say, personify the activity and presence of the OT sense, but it is not yet conceived of as a person in his theology. It is for Paul a way of expressing the dynamic influence of God's presence to justified Christians, the manifestation of his love for them, and the powerful source of their new life in Christ (*The Anchor Bible Series, Romans*, p. 480).

Paul, of course, did not have the problem of capitalization since early Greek manuscripts were all written in letters of the same size. But the use of a capital "H" or "S" in English does not necessarily suggest that the Holy Spirit is a person any more than does the term Holy Scriptures. It can simply be a way of revering that which is "of God" or distinguishing the Spirit of God from the spirit of man.

Though some verses with the definite article may appear to speak of the Spirit as a person, or even to be a name for God himself, this is unlikely. Instead, the Spirit can be personified, just as the Word or Wisdom of God, and portrayed as God's agent in relating to his creation. As Raymond Brown states, the addition of the definite article,

should not lead the Christian reader to assume that either Matthew or Luke has developed a theology of the Spirit as a person, much less the Third Person of the Trinity (*The Birth of the Messiah*, p.125).

It is meaning that matters - not capitalization - so this need not be a dogmatic issue. Let each use their own preference. Brown wisely concludes:

As for capitalization I follow recent Bible custom, without implying that a passage conveys either personality or a Trinitarian concept of divinity. Early English Protestant Bibles capitalized neither "holy" nor "spirit"; the Rheims Catholic edition capitalized both; the Authorized (King James) Version capitalized only "Spirit" until the eighteenth century (*ibid.*).

**