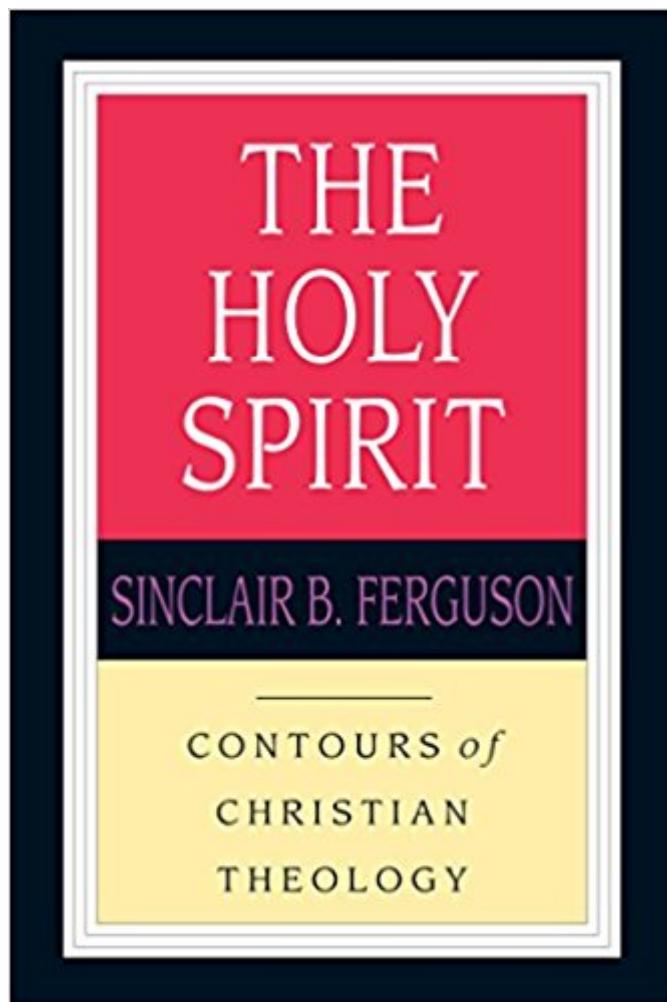


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# The Holy Spirit (Contours Of Christian Theology)



## Synopsis

The Holy Spirit, once forgotten, has been "rediscovered" in the twentieth century--or has he? Sinclair Ferguson believes we should rephrase this common assertion: "While his work has been recognized, the Spirit himself remains to many Christians an anonymous, faceless aspect of the divine being." In order to redress this balance, Ferguson seeks to recover the who of the Spirit fully as much as the what and how. Ferguson's study is rooted and driven by the scriptural story of the Spirit in creation and redemption. Throughout he shows himself fully at home in the church's historical theology of the Spirit and conversant with the wide variety of contemporary Christians who have explored the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Foundational issues are surveyed and clarified. Hard questions are explored and answered. Clarity and insight radiate from every page. Here is the mature reflection of a Reformed theologian who will summon respect and charity from those who disagree.

## Book Information

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"This excellent volume takes its place in the Contours of Christian Theology series between The Work of Christ and The Church. It is a very able exposition of the orthodox Reformed understanding of the person and work of the Holy Spirit. The style is attractive without losing accuracy; thus the book is more readable than many theological volumes that tend to be skeletal. The wholehearted commitment to Scripture is manifest through abundant references and crisp exegesis of some difficult passages. One can see here the valuable combination of a mind permeated with revealed

truth with a sense of the profound unity in diversity of the various administrations of the covenant of grace. We might note the insights concerning the correlation of the three Persons of the Trinity, the relationship between the Old and New Testament in the unity of the redemptive purpose of God, the connections between the various elements of soteriology, the modern discussions about cessation or continuation of supernatural gifts, not to mention many other topics. [Ferguson] is well informed, lucid in the presentation of his views and in the discussion of alternative positions. More than many other theologians he is serene in his conscious obedience to the teaching of Scripture and therefore generous toward those with whom he differs." (ROGER NICOLE, Reformed Theological Seminary--Orlando)"In characteristic fashion Sinclair Ferguson has once again provided thoughtful readers with a wise, comprehensive, balanced and thoroughly biblical treatment of an important area of theology--the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. All the major questions and texts are treated, and the chapter on 'The Cosmic Spirit,' which deals with universalism, is itself worth the book's price." (JAMES M. BOICE, Tenth Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia)"This series has been around for over a decade now and has established itself as providing learned yet accessible treatments of key topics in systematic theology. The authors are not only fine theological thinkers, they are also passionate churchmen with a love for God's people and a desire to see the church grow in her knowledge of grace. Each volume blends exegesis, theological synthesis and judicious dialogue with the history of theology to provide an excellent treatment of the chosen topic. Highly recommended for thoughtful Christians who want to deepen their knowledge of Christian theology." (Carl R. Trueman, Paul Woolley Professor of Church History, Westminster Theological Seminary)"Read everything in the IVP Contours of Theology series. Pure gold." (Kevin DeYoung, senior pastor at University Reformed Church in East Lansing, Michigan)"This excellent volume takes its place in the Contours of Christian Theology series between The Work of Christ and The Church. It is a very able exposition of the orthodox Reformed understanding of the person and work of the Holy Spirit. The style is attractive without losing accuracy; thus the book is more readable than many theological volumes that tend to be skeletal. The wholehearted commitment to Scripture is manifest through abundant references and crisp exegesis of some difficult passages. One can see here the valuable combination of a mind permeated with revealed truth with a sense of the profound unity in diversity of the various administrations of the covenant of grace. We might note the insights concerning the correlation of the three Persons of the Trinity, the relationship between the Old and New Testament in the unity of the redemptive purpose of God, the connections between the various elements of soteriology, the modern discussions about cessation or continuation of supernatural gifts, not to mention many other topics. The author is well informed, lucid in the

presentation of his views and in the discussion of alternative positions. More than many other theologians he is serene in his conscious obedience to the teaching of Scripture and therefore generous toward those with whom he differs." (Roger Nicole, Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando, Florida)"Sinclair Ferguson has done an extraordinary piece of work. This is the most comprehensive treatment of the person and work of the Holy Spirit from a Reformed perspective since Abraham Kuyper." (R. C. Sproul, Ligonier Ministries)"In characteristic fashion Sinclair Ferguson has once again provided thoughtful readers with a wise, comprehensive, balanced and thoroughly biblical treatment of an important area of theology--the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. All the major questions and texts are treated, and the chapter on 'The Cosmic Spirit,' which deals with universalism, is itself worth the book's price." (James M. Boice, Tenth Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania)"Because this book is thorough and reliable, fresh and full of insight, and its tone is pastoral and constructive, it is among the best treatments of this subject." (David Wells, Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary)

Ferguson's study is rooted and driven by the scriptural story of the Spirit in creation and redemption. Throughout he shows himself fully at home in the church's historical theology of the Spirit and conversant with the wide variety of contemporary Christians who have explored the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

There are certain realities and truths in Scripture that are often ignored in both the pulpit and private studies among Christians. These realities and truths are usually controversial and mysterious. In fact, the reason these difficult doctrines are controversial or include controversial elements is because of the mystery that so often clouds understanding. Doctrines in this category include, predestination, divine sovereignty and human responsibility, and the person of the Holy Spirit.I have heard the Nicene Creed paraphrased in these terms: "We believe in God the Father and we believe in Jesus Christ His Son, but we are not so sure about the Holy Spirit." Sinclair Ferguson set out to buffer this tendency in the lives of so many Christians and churches in his theology of the Holy Spirit. While the Holy Spirit finds much attention in Pentecostal or Charismatic theologies, the person and work of the Holy Spirit is often ignored, glossed over, and neglected in Reformed theology. However, Ferguson provides a masterful work that resounds in harmonious sound in response to the deafening silence typically given to the third Person of the Trinity.Ferguson does not just crowd our bookshelves with more white noise on a topic that even to this day continues to rise in popularity. His work provides understanding to a

doctrine that is so often misunderstood. Ferguson, a noted scholar, provides a unique resource in The Holy Spirit. He provides us with a scholarly work that is both readable and full of thoughtful exegesis written from a distinctively thorough Reformed position. Summary Sinclair Ferguson succinctly and ambitiously states his purpose in writing a theology of the Holy Spirit. He states his purpose as follows: “the focus is to trace the revelation of the Spirit’s identity and work in a biblio-theological and redemptive-historical manner” (12). Ferguson sets out to provide us with a theology of the Holy Spirit and to increase understanding into His person and work by working doing biblical theology from a redemptive-historical frame. Ferguson’s superb exegetical abilities are on full display as a result. Rather than tracing the theology of the Holy Spirit historically, although he references many Reformed thinkers throughout this work as he forewarns his “indebtedness to [them]” (12), Ferguson relies primarily on the inerrant canon of the Old and New Testaments, taking them at “face value” and as the “only reliable foundation on which to build a theology of the Holy Spirit” (13). From the outset of this book, it is made clear by the author that in the chapters to follow, there will be heavy reliance on the Word of God to develop a correct and edifying theology of the Holy Spirit. In a manner of confident humility, Sinclair Ferguson exposes and explains in detailed terms both the Spirit’s identity and work. In chapters 1-4, Ferguson outlines and describes the identity of the Spirit in the Old Testament (chapter 1), the life of Christ (chapter 2), and in the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost (chapters 3 and 4). The work of the Spirit in the outworking of redemption is discussed in chapters 5-8. In this section of the book, the author unfolds themes such as the Spirit’s work in uniting believers to Christ (chapter 5), regeneration (chapter 6), sanctification (chapter 7), and communion with Christ (chapter 8). Chapters 9 and 10 describe the corporate aspect of the Spirit’s work by outlining baptism and the Lord’s Supper (chapter 9), as well as giving attention to spiritual gifts (chapter 10). Ferguson closes his theology of the Holy Spirit by defining His work in the world at large and finishing up with an appropriate eschatological focus on the Spirit’s role in final resurrection and the new creation (chapter 11). Evaluation Ferguson gives attention to points that are vital to a theology of the Holy Spirit. He argues for the deity of the Spirit by highlighting his work in creation and “re-creation” (redemption). He points out the Spirit’s role in creation and the connection found in paradigmatic events like the Exodus (19). While his argument for the “distinct divine hypostasis” (19) is

of the Spirit is rooted in Genesis 1:2, he also finds the redemptive-historical significance of the Spirit’s unique and godly role in creation as being paradigmatic of further biblical actions of the Spirit (21). Therefore, faithful to his goal, Ferguson traces not only along the lines of biblical theology, but also within the framework of a redemptive-historical paradigm to argue for the deity of the Spirit in Trinitarian light. The heart of this book, especially in its first half, is the relationship between Christ and the Spirit. Ferguson argues that the Spirit is most fully revealed in the incarnation, life, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. In fact, Ferguson makes the case that the doctrine of union with Christ is a work of the Spirit accomplished through regeneration and all who have the Spirit living in them have the Spirit of Christ living in them. His section on pp. 103ff concerning an exposition of union with Christ is remarkable. He grounds the salvation of the Christian in the “salvation” of Christ. The benefits of justification, adoption, sanctification, and glorification belong to the Christian as a work of the Spirit in uniting the Christian to Christ who was delivered and redeemed from death by the power of the Holy Spirit (104). This highly Christological fervor is present throughout the book, which greatly accompanies and accents the redemptive-historical and biblical-theological flow of the book. Instead of understanding the Spirit in charismatic actions and

“outpourings,” the Spirit is being presented Christologically. In order to understand the Spirit, Christ must be understood. Thus, the application of the work of Christ is beautifully expository in chapters 5-7, particularly in chapter 5, with a concentration on *ordo salutis*. Here again, Ferguson is faithful to the oneness and plurality of the Trinity. Ferguson also spends time in chapter 10 interacting with Wayne Grudem’s position concerning prophecy. In light of a cessationist position, Ferguson respectfully and convincingly disagrees with Grudem’s position of lower and higher levels of prophecy. In chapter 10, he expresses his concern that Grudem’s position is lacking much biblical foundation hence his opposition to his position. The heavily Reformed nature of Ferguson’s personal theology is felt throughout and if it does cloud his vision at all, it does not affect the reliability of the work as a whole. This is not a comprehensive historical theology of the Holy Spirit (as stated in the Preface, p. 12) and therefore must be treated for what it is; a tracing of biblical-theological and redemptive-historical evidence of the person and work of the Spirit from a distinctively Reformed position. With this in mind, Ferguson’s Reformed position does not hinder this particular work, but greatly enables it and in fact gives it tremendous reliability for all wanting to study Reformed thinking on the Holy Spirit. One Downfall The only downfall that I experienced in this work on the Holy Spirit was its seemingly brief handling of

the gifts of the Spirit. While handling the more pressing issues of baptism, the Lord’s Supper, prophecy, and tongues, Ferguson seems to give little attention to the other corporate dimensions of the Spirit’s work, namely in other spiritual gifts. I was so engaged in his arguments on the other gifts that he left me wanting more. However, this slight “blemish” does nothing to the overall worth of the book.

**Conclusion**

In closing, *The Holy Spirit*, is a dramatically relevant book rich in faithful exegesis and rooted in biblical theology, which is set upon a redemptive-historical rock bed foundation. This is a God-glorifying book that gives an accurate and compelling picture of the Holy Spirit from a heavily Reformed and biblical perspective.

Ferguson’s volume is especially helpful for the new Christian, layperson, or seasoned pastor. He wades through the current issues dominating the discussion of the Holy Spirit with a deft hand and Scriptural support. Instead of muddying the waters further, he clarifies the arguments with charity and still comes down with definitive stances. The Strengths of this volume are:

- 1) **Biblical Theology** - He writes with biblical trajectories and themes in mind, always showing how the Old and New Testament are working together to support the work of God in the Cross of Christ. He portrays a robust Biblical Theology of the Holy Spirit from beginning to end.
- 2) **Pastorally Sensitive** - Ferguson writes with a pastor’s heart. There were many times when I was moved to prayer when reading this book because of the devotional and pastoral tone in which he writes.
- 3) **Contemporary Significance** - Ferguson addresses some of the most pressing issues (i.e. speaking in tongues, miracles, etc.) with charitable respect while showing how Scripture speaks to these issues today.

Though this volume isn’t perfect, there is little to dislike about it. There were a few places where he spent too much time making his point, but other than that I found it to be a great read -- one I’ll go back to time and time again.

Sinclair Ferguson’s biblical-theological treatment on the Holy Spirit is a rich and sumptuous theological feast for any serious-minded believer who wants to know more about the so-called “shy member of the Trinity.” In eleven meaty chapters, Ferguson gives a comprehensive, if not exhaustive, biblical overview of the person and work of the Holy Spirit, all along the way drawing on historical theology and charitably interacting with perspectives different from his own. Chapter one, “The Spirit and His Story” surveys the Old Testament’s more shadowy teaching on the Holy Spirit with a careful biblical-theological approach. “The Spirit of Christ” (chapter two) is an exceptionally rich chapter on the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of Jesus. Christ is seen as the quintessential

"Man of the Spirit." Because his entire life was lived in the Spirit's power (Ferguson starts with his conception and moves through the various aspects of Jesus' life all the way to exaltation), Jesus is now the "Lord of the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18) - the One who sends the Spirit to his church to reproduce the "human holiness" of which he (Jesus) is the pattern. This moves into the next two chapters, which focus on "The Gift of the Spirit" and "Pentecost Today?", exploring the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost and its significance in redemptive history and for believers today. "The Spirit of Order" (chapter five) discusses the *ordo salutis* (order of salvation) and how the Spirit applies the redemptive work of Christ to the individual believer. This is an excellent chapter which focuses on union with Christ as the central motif for understanding how the Spirit applies salvation in our lives. Throughout both this chapter and the entire book, Ferguson writes with a solid understanding of the inaugurated eschatology of the New Testament, allowing the "already/not yet" tension to inform his treatment of the various aspects of the *ordo salutis* (i.e. justification, regeneration, adoption, sanctification, glorification). "Spiritus Recreator" (chapter six) discusses the Spirit's role in the new creation, while the next chapter, "The Spirit of Holiness," explores his role in sanctification. These were two of the most helpful chapters in the book for me personally. Ferguson maintains the Christ-centeredness with which he began the book as he shows how the Spirit reproduces the image of Christ in believers through his definitive act and progressive work of sanctification. Also very edifying is chapter eight, "The Communion of the Spirit," which deals with the personal ministry of the Spirit in the life of the believer as seal, firstfruits, and earnest/guarantee. Chapters nine and ten talk about "The Spirit and the Body" and "The Gifts of the Spirit," the former discussing the role of the sacraments under the Spirit in the life of the church and the latter addressing the issue of spiritual gifts - with Ferguson taking a firm, though gentle, cessationist position. His critiques of Wayne Grudem deserve careful reflection from all who hold a continuationist perspective. The final chapter, "The Cosmic Spirit" discusses the Spirit's work in what we might call common grace and points us forward to the eschatological fulfillment of the Spirit's work in the world. I thoroughly enjoyed this book and learned much from it. Ferguson's articulation of a Reformed view of the Holy Spirit is intelligent and persuasive. Theologians, biblical scholars, pastors, and serious layreaders would all benefit from this book.

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