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A HOLY SPIRIT ENCOUNTER WITH A JEHOVAH'S WITNESS

by Bobby Conway

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It was a night I'll never forget. Heather and I had just finished dinner, on our little romantic getaway to Gatlinburg, Tennessee, nestled in the Smoky Mountains. Shortly before reaching our hotel, we met a kindhearted lady named Candy Jo, who was selling time shares.

After a short exchange of words, somehow the conversation turned spiritual, and that's when we learned that Candy Jo was a Jehovah's Witness. Now, I've had several conversations with Jehovah's Witnesses through the years, but this one was different. While I don't remember all the specifics of the conversation, I do remember discussing the major distinctions between our belief systems. Topics such as the doctrine of the Trinity, the controlling nature of the Watchtower Society, the deity of Christ, and their impersonal view of the Holy Spirit were certainly among the highlights of our discussion.

What made the conversation all the more exciting was that Candy Jo appeared unusually intrigued. The Holy Spirit was at work. As we neared the end of our conversation, I asked her if she would be willing to read some resources if I mailed them her way. To my delighted surprise, she agreed (a big no-no for Jehovah's Witnesses). After returning from our trip, that's exactly what I did. I sent Candy Jo a reading package. For months, all was silent. But we will come back to this story later.

The Holy Spirit. For now, let's winnow down the topics we discussed to one: the Holy Spirit. When dialoguing with a Jehovah's Witness, if we're going to be evangelistically effective, we must be prepared to distinguish their view of the Holy Spirit from ours.

While both the Christian and Jehovah's Witness believe in the Holy Spirit, their beliefs couldn't be more diametrically opposed. This is where defining our *terms* matters. Unfortunately, many Christians are not only ignorant of how a Jehovah Witness understands the Holy Spirit but also are equally oblivious to what Christians believe about the Holy Spirit.

Who Is the Holy Spirit? A Jehovah's Witness will tell you the Holy Spirit is an impersonal force. In *Awake*, a Watchtower publication, we read, "In the Bible, God's Holy Spirit is identified as God's power *in action*. Hence, an accurate translation of the Bible's Hebrew text refers to God's spirit as God's active force."¹ But is this the case? And if the Holy Spirit is not a force and not an "it," then who is He?

The Holy Spirit Is a Person. When we think of a person, we often think of a human, right? But God is also described as a Person, though obviously not human like us. In Genesis 1:27, we learn that God made us in His image. But what exactly does that mean? At the very least, a person is someone who possesses mind, will, and emotion. Like God, we have intellect with which to think and reason. We have wills, enabling us to make choices. And we certainly have emotions, allowing us to feel, a capacity that, to some respect, mirrors the revelation of God in Scripture (e.g., Mic. 7:18–20; although finite and fallen man can only imperfectly reflect God's emotions). Furthermore, we are created as moral beings designed to reflect the ultimate Moral Being – God. Much more could be said, but with this in mind, how can we know that the Holy Spirit *is* a person?

Language is important in understanding things about God. And when describing the Holy Spirit, the Bible uses personal pronouns. Personal pronouns reveal personality. This should be made clear when talking to a Jehovah's Witness. For example, look up John 16:7–15, and note the repetitive use of pronouns in reference to the Holy Spirit. These personal pronouns point to His personhood, crushing the idea that the Holy Spirit is purely a force or some impersonal energy, as Jehovah Witnesses contend. Further, the Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit is our personal comforter (John 14:16), He speaks to us (Rev. 2:7), prays on our behalf (Rom. 8:26), leads us (Rom. 8:14), teaches us truth (John 16:13), raises up leaders in the church (Acts 20:28), can be lied to like a person (Acts 5:3–4), and can be emotionally grieved and disappointed (Eph. 4:30).

All of this shouts *personality*. A mere force cannot speak, pray, teach, lead, or be grieved. These are all things associated with *personhood*. So we see something much deeper than a force here. We see the person of the Holy Spirit. But there is another important aspect to the Spirit. And this must not be missed.

The Holy Spirit Is God. The Holy Spirit is not just a person. He is the third person of the Godhead. That means He is God. As strict monotheists, this is something a Jehovah's Witness will certainly contest. Yet here is a simple sampling of the scriptural data that, when taken as a whole, serves to build a powerful cumulative case for the Spirit's deity. Lying to the Holy Spirit is equated with lying to God (Acts 5:3–4, 9). The Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin, as only God could (John 16:8–11). The Spirit of God gives new birth and spiritual life to those who trust in Jesus (John 3:8). Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is considered the most damning of all sins against God (Matt. 12:31). And adding to all of this, He is called the "*Holy Spirit*" (2 Cor. 13:14). Quite telling in and of itself.

Christians believe in the Trinity, a teaching the Jehovah's Witnesses reject. This is a word (though not found in the Bible) that was coined to describe the three-fold personhood of God: Father, Son, and Spirit. This Tri-unity means that that Father, Son, and Spirit are one in essence yet three distinct persons. For example, the Trinity was present at Christ's baptism.

Jesus' command to "make disciples" is followed by instructions to baptize them "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Notice there is but *one* name (God or essence) and yet three distinct persons.

The Holy Spirit is described as being on the same level as the Father and Son. He is fully God, possessing all the same attributes associated with God the Father and God the Son. He is omnipotent (Mark 10:27), omnipresent (Ps. 139:7–8), omniscient (1 Cor. 2:10–11), holy (2 Cor. 13:14), and the Creator God (Gen. 1:2).

The Holy Spirit Has a Unique Role. To further color our understanding of the Holy Spirit, it's helpful to remember that, while the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are coequal, they each assume different roles in relation to creation and redemption. The Father sent the Son into the world, the Son died for the world, and the Spirit confirms this truth in people's hearts. The Holy Spirit is a vital part of our Christian experience (Tit. 3:5). He grants us assurance of salvation (Rom. 8:16). He gives us spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:11). He baptizes us into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). He produces spiritual fruit in our lives (Gal. 5:22–23). He fills us (Eph. 5:18). He radically empowers us for the work of evangelism (Acts 1:8).

The Personal God Is Still at Work. As promised, let's now return to Candy Jo. It was just this type of evangelistic empowerment that Heather and I experienced in the Smoky Mountains. The Spirit was clearly at work through us in the life of Candy Jo—not as some mere impersonal force but rather as the third person of the Trinity. Here's

what later took place. I was sitting on the couch one evening, several months after sending Candy Jo the books, when my wife brought me the phone. I could tell she was moved by emotion. Someone had left a message: “Hi, Bobby and Heather. I’m not sure if you remember me. It’s Candy Jo. You stopped and talked to me for a while about your faith when you were in Gatlinburg together. Then you sent me some reading materials. I felt I needed to follow up with you and tell you what happened. I know it’s been a long time, but I figured you would be glad to know that I ended up giving my life to Jesus Christ, and on top of that, I just celebrated my first Easter as a Christian. It was amazing. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Goodbye.”

I wept. As I’ve further reflected on what God did in Candy Jo’s life, I’m continuously reminded of the importance of staying in step with the Spirit (Gal. 5:25). Opportunities for everlasting impact abound around us, and they often happen suddenly. So keep your eyes open. And stay in touch with the Holy Spirit.²

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NOTES

- 1 *Awake!* “Is The Holy Spirit A Person?” 2006, pp. 14–15, <http://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lpe/102006245>.
- 2 Adapted from Bobby Conway’s *The Fifth Gospel* (Harvest House, 2014). Used by permission.