

The Spirit (Breath) of God

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One of the primary ways that the deception of the Roman Catholic “Trinity” has been cloaked in Protestant Bibles is by the use of the English word “Spirit” for the Greek πνευμα (pneuma). The Greek word, like its Hebrew counterpart רוח (ruach), literally means “wind” or “breath,” implying an active but unseen force.¹

However, there are three metaphorical uses besides the literal meaning.

1. Angels and demons are metaphorically called πνευμα because they share the same qualities as wind or breath – being unseen, but powerful.
2. There are metaphorical uses with abstract nouns such as a “wind of fear,”² “wind of error,”³ and “wind of this world.”⁴ Again, the metaphor stems from the unseen power yet visible effect.
3. There are also metaphorical uses for a person’s innermost thoughts or feelings like “anguish of breath.”⁵ Again, it is the invisible yet powerful quality of πνευμα that lends itself to this kind of metaphor.

As long as the Bible was read in Greek, the literal and metaphorical usage was not difficult to discern in each context provided one had a firm grasp of the Old Testament understanding of the “Breath of God.” However, because there is no exact equivalent term in English (which can convey both the literal meaning as well as the three metaphorical usages) translators are forced to use different English terms depending on which of these meanings seem to be correct in any given passage. The English words that appear in our Bibles as a translation of this Greek word are: wind, breath, and spirit. The problem arises when the wrong English word is chosen to translate this Greek word in a given context. Translator bias has been the single deciding factor in a great many cases. Since only Trinitarian translators are allowed on the vast majority of translation committees (Catholic and Protestant), it is no surprise that when the Greek word πνευμα is used in connection with God, the Trinitarian bias and presuppositions automatically lead them to translate it metaphorically as “Spirit” instead of literally as “Breath” when it refers to God. As with sound Biblical interpretation, the literal understanding of terms should always be the default meaning unless there is considerable reason in the context to assume a metaphorical meaning. In addition, the term πνευμα is itself a neuter term, and by default is not personal. Yet, for most translators, their own Trinitarian theological bias overrides both the default literal hermeneutic as well as the natural gender of the noun. Thus, they

¹ John 3:8; Acts 17:25

² 2 Tim. 1:7

³ 1 John 4:6

⁴ 1 Cor. 2:12

⁵ Job 7:11 LXX

The Spirit of God

not only render πνευμα metaphorphically as “Spirit” when referring to God, but they also incorrectly translate the neuter pronouns as “He/Him/His” instead of “It/Its” as the Greek pronouns are in the neuter gender. In the remainder of this paper, the literal translation “Breath” is used instead of the theologically loaded term “Spirit.”

The following twelve arguments from Scripture show that the holy Spirit/Breath is a limited manifestation of the person of the Father or preincarnate Son, not a third divine person.

I. Progressive Revelation:

There is no hint in the entire Old Testament that the Spirit/Breath of God is a distinct person apart from the Father (or Son), from the first mention of the “*Breath of God*” vibrating over the surface of the waters on day one when God said “*let there be light*”⁶ to the last mention of God’s Breath in the Old Testament, which is that Adam and Eve together possessed a “*remnant of the Breath.*”⁷ All Jewish sects have consistently understood the holy Spirit/Breath to be a limited manifestation of the one God. Faced with this fact, Trinitarians claim that the third person of the Trinity was a mystery reserved for revelation in the New Testament. Yet, we have Paul’s clear statement on the full understanding and knowledge of the mystery of the Godhead which conspicuously excludes a third Person: “... *that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*”⁸ How can the holy Spirit/Breath be omitted from “*the full assurance of understanding to the knowledge of the mystery of God*” if He/It is a co-equal and co-eternal third person of a Trinity? In every one of Paul’s letters (except Hebrews) his opening greeting is: “*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,*” always omitting the alleged third as the source of grace and peace.

II. New Testament Initial Precedent:

At the very beginning of the Gospel we learn about the transformation of the Son of God to Son of Man. Both Trinitarians and Unitarians suppose that the “*fathering*” of Jesus by God occurred at this time, although both actually deny what “*begotten of the Father*” would require (that the Son of God be fully divinity since the Father is full divinity; that kind begets like kind). Yet we are told that the “*holy Spirit/Breath*” would come upon Mary causing her to conceive. Gabriel said to her: “*the holy Breath will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is begotten will be*

⁶ Gen. 1:1-2

⁷ Mal. 2:15

⁸ Col. 2:1-3

called the Son of God.”⁹ This statement equates the “holy Breath” with the “power of the Highest.” Its coming upon Mary to conceive the child was the reason Jesus would be called by men the “Son of God.” When Joseph discovered the pregnancy, Gabriel appeared to him and said: “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the holy Breath.”¹⁰ If the holy Breath of God is a distinct divine Person, the third Person of the Trinity, then He would be the “Father” of Jesus rather than the One Jesus always addressed as His Father.

III. Terminology for the Holy Breath:

Since the “breath of man” does not refer to a separate human person, why should the “Breath of God” refer to a separate divine Person? The “breath of man” bears the same relationship to a man as the “Breath of God” bears to God – an aspect of his nature, but not Him in His entirety.¹¹ The common term “Breath of God” itself uses the possessive (genitive noun “of God”) showing that the Breath is a possession of God (God’s Breath), not another person. A third person would not be spoken of as a *possession* of the first person, unless he was a slave. Also, the holy Breath is referred to by a host of possessives that are abstract nouns: *Breath of wisdom, Breath of understanding, Breath of counsel, Breath of might, Breath of knowledge, Breath of the fear of the Lord, Breath of peace, Breath of truth, Breath of grace, Breath of holiness, Breath of life, Breath of glory, Breath of prophecy*. Since both “Breath” and all of these abstract nouns are impersonal things, it is extremely difficult to attribute all of these abstract terms to a person. Rather, these all suggest qualities of God which are conveyed to man through the Breath of God. Scripture also equates the “Breath of God” with other nouns that refer to a part or aspect of God rather than to distinct person – the “hand of God,” the “finger of God,” and the “breath of God.”¹² These all define various limited extensions of God’s power and presence, not distinct divine persons.

IV. Terminology of Familial Relationships:

God has revealed Himself to us using human relational terminology for a reason – so that we can understand the Godhead by comparison to our human familial relationships. The terms “Father” and “Son” are human terms meant to define relationships between people. The Son was “begotten” out of the Father’s own substance,¹³ thus becoming a distinct person. These are all terms God used because we can relate to them and draw parallels to God the Father’s relationship to His only-begotten Son. A human man is not a “father” until he begets a human “son” (or daughter). Likewise God was not a Father until He

⁹ Luke 1:35

¹⁰ Matt. 1:20

¹¹ 1 Cor. 2:11

¹² Job 4:9; Job 26:13; Job 27:3; Psalm 8:3; Psalm 33:6; Ezek. 3:14; Matt. 12:28; Luke 11:20

¹³ Psalm 2:7; John 1:18; John 8:42; Col. 1:15

begat a Son *“in the beginning.”*¹⁴ However, the term *“Breath of God”* and all other terms associated with the holy Breath never refer to distinct personal and familial relationships with the Father, but to impersonal aspects of God. If a third person of a Trinity was intended, He would have been spoken of in terms that also define His personal familial relationship to the Father. No such familial term is ever used of the holy Breath of God.

V. The Presence of God in and among His People:

The holy Breath in us is not a distinct personal presence, but is defined as the presence of the Father (and/or the Son) in and among men *through* the Breath as a conduit. Thus, a third person is not present, as the following points prove: The Father was in Jesus doing the miraculous works,¹⁵ yet the miraculous works were all done through the holy Breath.¹⁶ When preparing the disciples for His ascension to heaven, Jesus said that the holy Breath which was present with them only within Christ Himself would soon be in and among them. He defined this as Himself dwelling among them¹⁷ and the Father dwelling among them.¹⁸ Jesus previously said that He would be present among believers whenever two or three gather *“in My name,”*¹⁹ and would be with His missionaries *“always, even to the end of the age.”*²⁰ This seems to imply that the Breath of God acts as conduit, since Jesus remains physically in heaven at the right hand of the Father until the Kingdom comes.²¹ Later we find that the *“Breath of God,”* *“Breath of Christ,”* and *“Christ in you”* are all interchangeable terms in the very same passage.²² Matthew wrote that the *“Breath of your Father”* would give you the words to speak,²³ yet Mark wrote that it would be the *“holy Breath,”*²⁴ and Luke wrote that it would be Jesus Himself.²⁵ Is this a contradiction? Or are all three saying the same thing in different ways, so that a limited manifestation of the Father’s divine essence brings to them a message from Jesus Himself? When speaking of the inspiration of the Scriptures, Paul wrote that all Scripture is *“God breathed,”*²⁶ thus God Himself spoke through the prophets.²⁷ Yet Peter wrote that it was the *“holy Breath”* that guided the prophets.²⁸ When the prophets foretold of Christ’s sufferings and ultimate glory, it was the

¹⁴ John 1:1; Rev. 3:14

¹⁵ John 3:2; John 10:38; John 14:10-11

¹⁶ Acts 10:38

¹⁷ John 14:17-20; 1 John 3:24; Eph. 3:16-17

¹⁸ John 14:23; 1 John 4:12

¹⁹ Matt. 18:20

²⁰ Matt. 28:20

²¹ Psalm 110:1; Acts 3:21; Heb. 10:13

²² Rom. 8:9-11

²³ Matt. 10:20

²⁴ Mark 13:11

²⁵ Luke 21:15

²⁶ 2 Tim. 3:16

²⁷ Heb. 1:1-2

²⁸ 2 Pet. 1:20-21

“Breath of Christ” in the prophets.²⁹ Finally, lying to the *“holy Breath”* is lying to *“God,”* not to a third person.³⁰ Viewing the Breath of God as a third Person creates a paradox in these and many other passages.

VI. The Creeds of the Old and New Testaments:

The Hebrew Shema states: *“Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one.”*³¹ Jesus repeated the Shema, acknowledging that God is one.³² In His prayer, Jesus referred to His Father as *“the only true God.”*³³ Paul affirmed the Shema also: *“there is no other God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live.”*³⁴ Paul also wrote that the Father alone possesses immortality.³⁵ If the holy Spirit/Breath is a third Person, He is necessarily excluded from all of these statements.

VII. Parallel Contrasting Terms:

The Comforter/Helper is the *“Breath of Truth,”*³⁶ yet John contrasted the *“Breath of Truth”* with the *“breath of error.”*³⁷ If the *“breath of error”* is not a person, it would be expected that neither is the *“Breath of Truth.”* Paul contrasted the *“Breath which is out of (εκ) God”* with the *“breath of the world.”*³⁸ If the *“breath of the world”* is not a person, neither is the *“Breath which is out of God.”* According to John, there are multiple *“Breaths”* out of (εκ) God.³⁹ Are there multiple persons of the third person?⁴⁰

VIII. Personal Knowledge Possessed only by the Father and the Son:

Jesus said: *“... no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son ...”*⁴¹ If the *“holy Breath”* is a third person, then He has no personal knowledge of either the Father or the Son according to Jesus.

²⁹ 1 Pet. 1:11

³⁰ Acts 5:3-4

³¹ Deut. 6:4

³² Mark 12:29-32

³³ John 17:3

³⁴ 1 Cor. 8:4-6

³⁵ 1 Tim. 6:13-16

³⁶ John 14:17

³⁷ 1 John 4:6

³⁸ 1 Cor. 2:12

³⁹ 1 John 4:1-2

⁴⁰ cf. Isaiah 11:1-2

⁴¹ Matt. 11:27

IX. Identification of the Spirit/Breath with both the Father and the Son:

The holy Breath is directly identified by Paul as the “Lord” Jesus,⁴² and identified by Jesus as “God.”⁴³ This is because both are present among God’s people through the holy Breath.

X. Fellowship with the Father and Son excludes a third Person:

Our fellowship is exclusively with the Father, with the Son, with the Apostles, and with one another.⁴⁴ Why is the alleged third Person omitted? It is because we have fellowship with all these *through* the holy Breath.⁴⁵

XI. The Comforter/Helper is not a distinct Person:

The Apostle John recorded Jesus’ extensive dialogue with His disciples concerning the promised Comforter/Helper.⁴⁶ Since the term “paraclete” (helper, assistant) is a masculine term, Trinitarians claim that it proves that the “helper” is a person. Yet, it should also be noted that at least two of the “*three witnesses*” (which is a masculine term) in 1 John 5:8 are impersonal things – water, and blood. They are called “witnesses” (masculine) in a figurative sense. Also, as stated above in V, the coming of the Comforter/Helper was immediately defined by Jesus as the coming presence of the Father and the Son.⁴⁷ That is, the “helper” was God’s providing His assistance in a new way in which they had not yet seen. At the end of that dialogue Jesus said: “*These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; but the time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but I will tell you plainly about the Father.*”⁴⁸ That the coming of a “helper” was intended to be figurative language is proven by John’s later coining a new term for the holy Breath which by its very nature is impersonal – the “*Anointing*” which you have received from Him.⁴⁹ The context concerned remaining in the Father and in the Son and their remaining in us (just as in John 14-16). Yet, instead of referring to a third person (by using a personal term), John coined the term “*anointing*” instead, which is neuter: “*But you have an anointing from the Holy One*” (vs. 20); and “*the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you*” (vs. 27a); and “*the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true*” (vs. 27b). Compare the “*anointing*” which is “*true*” with Jesus’ statement that the “helper” is the “*Breath of truth*.”⁵⁰ This passage is a commentary on Jesus’ dialogue in John 14-16 and shows that John understood the “helper” to be figurative language, referring to an impersonal

⁴² 2 Cor. 3:17

⁴³ John 4:24

⁴⁴ 1 John 1:3,7

⁴⁵ Eph. 4:1; Phil. 2:1

⁴⁶ John 14:16 – 16:33

⁴⁷ John 14:18,20,23

⁴⁸ John 16:25

⁴⁹ 1 John 2:20-28

⁵⁰ John 14:16-17; John 15:26; John 16:13

“anointing.” Yet that anointing conveys the Father and Son in and among us and us in them.

XII. The Distribution of Spiritual Gifts:

Spiritual gifts were not distributed by the will and choice of the holy Breath, but by the Father’s personal choices for each believer delivered through the holy Breath. *“[H]ow shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the holy Breath, according to His own will.”*⁵¹ Paul affirmed this also in 1 Corinthians 12 when writing about the distribution of spiritual gifts: *“but it is the same God who works all in all.”*⁵² The gifts were given to each person *through* (διὰ) the Breath.⁵³ The preposition “διὰ” indicates the channel of an act – an instrument through which someone does something. In this case it is the Father who gave the gifts to individual believers through the Breath as His instrument. This is followed by: *“But the one and the same Breath is operating all these, in each [one] his own [manifestation], according as He [God] wills.”*⁵⁴ The third person verb (He wills) has as its antecedent *“the same God who works all in all”* in verse 6. It does not refer to the Breath. Then Paul writes: *“But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.”*⁵⁵ And again: *“But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it.”*⁵⁶ It is clearly not a third person of the Trinity that is doing these things independently according to his own will, but it is the Father who is doing all of these things *through* (διὰ) extending a portion of His holy Breath to individual believers.

The bottom line is that the Jews, to whom the oracles of God were delivered in their Hebrew language, never imagined that the “Spirit/Breath” of God was a distinct Person. The Apostles who wrote the New Testament were not taught in their upbringing that the Spirit/Breath of God was a distinct Person. If the New Testament teaches a third person as new revelation, we would expect Jesus to have clearly explained this, especially since He is the one who told them to wait in Jerusalem until the power came upon them. Finally, the earliest Christian writers after the Apostles did not distinguish a third Person until late in the second century. Tertullian was the first.

⁵¹ Heb. 2:3-4

⁵² vs. 6

⁵³ vs. 8

⁵⁴ vs. 11

⁵⁵ vss. 17-18

⁵⁶ vs. 24