

The Holy Spirit and Translation Bias

A Smoking Gun of Trinity Mischief (2)

by Sean Finnegan

In the first part of this investigation into the holy spirit and translation bias, I limited my focus to relative pronouns used to refer to the holy spirit. In what follows I will broaden my inquiry to include several other key texts and important concepts related to God's spirit. First I will discuss in detail the primary texts used to prove the personhood of the spirit on grammatical grounds, before I make the case that the biblical concept of God's spirit resists categorization.

Key Texts Used to Establish Personhood¹

Before jumping in to exegete each of the primary texts commonly used to affirm the personality of the spirit, I will begin by citing Millard Erickson's words to show how the argument typically works:

The first evidence of the Spirit's personality is the use of the masculine pronoun in representing him. Since the word πνεῦμα is neuter, and since pronouns are to agree with their antecedents in person, number, and gender, we would expect the neuter pronoun to be used to represent the Holy Spirit. Yet in John 16:13-14 we find an unusual phenomenon. As Jesus describes the Holy Spirit's ministry, he uses a masculine pronoun ἐκεῖνος where we would expect a neuter pronoun. The **only possible antecedent** in the immediate context is "Spirit of Truth" (v. 13)...[John] deliberately chose to use the masculine to convey to us the fact that Jesus is referring to a person, not a thing. A similar reference is Ephesians 1:14, where, in a relative clause modifying "Holy Spirit," the preferred textual reading is ὃς [who].²

It is important to note that Erickson does not base his argument here on the theology expressed in these texts, but on grammatical grounds. We will broach the subject of theology, especially with reference to the Upper Room Discourse, once we have made our way through the grammatical issue. One more source that aptly articulates the same grammatical argument comes from George Ladd:

[W]here pronouns that have *pneuma* for their immediate antecedent are found in the masculine, we can only conclude that the personality of the Spirit is meant to be suggested...The language is even more vivid in 16:13: 'When the Spirit of truth comes, he (*ekeinos*) will guide you into all truth.' Here the neuter *pneuma* stands in direct connection with the pronoun, but the masculine form rather than the 'normal' neuter is employed. From this evidence we must conclude that the Spirit is viewed as a personality.³

¹ For much of this exegesis I am indebted to Daniel Wallace's "Greek Grammar and the Personality of the Holy Spirit," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 13.1 (2003) 97-125, Institute for Biblical Research, 2003.

² Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), pp. 859-860 (emphasis added in bold). Other scholars who employ this same argument include Dabney, Smeaton, Kim, Conner, Berkhof, Chafer, Thiessen, Pache, Pentecost, Ryrie, Green, Williams, Packer, Sproul, Grudem, Ferguson, Reymond, Congar, John, Lange, Godet, Mortimer, Westcott, Bernard, Lenski, Hendricksen, Barrett, Behler, Sanders, Brown, Morris, Lindars, Newman, Nida, Carson, and Beasley-Murray. For references see Wallace's list in "Greek Grammar and Personality of the Holy Spirit" pp. 102-103.

³ George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), p. 295.

As I mentioned in part one, the New Testament does sometimes break the rules of grammar by employing masculine pronouns to refer to neuter nouns when it is clear that the referent is a person or group of individuals. Thus, if Erickson and Ladd are right, they would be on solid grounds to affirm a personal view of the spirit (or Spirit) on this grammatical basis. Of course, this would not prove that the Spirit is a *distinct* person *of* God; that would require considerably more work. I will return to the theological implications later, for now let us work through each of the five major texts typically used to make the grammatical case for the personality of the holy spirit (John 14.26; 15.26; 16.13; Ephesians 1.14; 1 John 5.7).

John 14.26 [NA27]	John 14.26 [Literal]	John 14.26 [NASB]
ὁ δὲ παράκλητος, τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον, ὃ πέμψει ὁ πατήρ ἐν τῷ ὀνόματί μου, ἐκεῖνος ὑμᾶς διδάξει πάντα καὶ ὑπομνήσει ὑμᾶς πάντα ἃ εἶπον ὑμῖν [ἐγώ].	but the advocate, ⁴ the holy spirit, which the father will send in my name, that one will teach you everything and remind you (of) everything which I said to you.	"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.

Once again the text uses the word ὃ (which) to refer to the holy spirit and the NASB and most other versions alter the text by translating it “whom.” We have already discussed this translator’s hucksterism in part one, so we can jump ahead to the next interesting word—ἐκεῖνος (that one). This is the masculine form of the demonstrative pronoun and it simply points back to its antecedent. This pronoun, like the ones we examined earlier, contains grammatical gender, but this does not necessarily correlate to personhood unless the referent is itself an individual. Some say that ἐκεῖνος (that one) refers to τὸ πνεῦμα (the spirit) since it is the nearest noun and on that basis argue for the personality of the holy spirit. However, this way of looking at it ignores the sentence structure. The phrase “the holy spirit which the father will send in my name” is an appositive or an aside employed to provide further detail about παράκλητος (the advocate). Appositives interrupt the flow of a sentence momentarily to add more information, but then the sentence returns to what it was saying before. Thus, “that one” refers back to “the advocate,” and it is masculine because its antecedent is masculine. So, in this verse we do not have grammatical grounds to argue that the spirit is a person.

John 15.26 [NA27]	John 15.26 [Literal]	John 15.26 [NASB]
Ὅταν ἔλθῃ ὁ παράκλητος ὃν ἐγὼ πέμψω ὑμῖν παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς, τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας ὃ παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκπορεύεται, ἐκεῖνος μαρτυρήσει περὶ ἐμοῦ·	when the advocate may come whom/which I will send to you from the father, the spirit of truth which proceeds from the father, that one will testify concerning me	"When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, <i>that is</i> the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me,

Once again the Spirit personality defenders argue that ἐκεῖνος refers to “the spirit of truth,” effectively bestowing personhood on the spirit. But, as before, the phrase “the spirit of truth which proceeds from

⁴ The word παράκλητος *parakletos* or *paraklete* looms large in what follows so a definition may be in order. F. F. Bruce explains: “The work *parakletos* is...one who is called alongside as a helper or defender, a friend at court. ...[T]he word is there aptly rendered ‘Advocate’, from the Latin *advocatus*, which is the exact equivalent of Greek *parakletos*.” [F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), pp. 301-302.]

the father” is in apposition to ὁ παράκλητος (the advocate). Like John 14.26, we cannot make a grammatical argument that the spirit is a person here.

John 16.7, 13 [NA27]	John 16.7, 13 [Literal]	John 16.7, 13 [NASB]
ἀλλ’ ἐγὼ τὴν ἀλήθειαν λέγω ὑμῖν, συμφέρει ὑμῖν ἵνα ἐγὼ ἀπέλθω. ἐὰν γὰρ μὴ ἀπέλθω, ὁ παράκλητος οὐκ ἐλεύσεται πρὸς ὑμᾶς· ἐὰν δὲ πορευθῶ, πέμψω αὐτὸν πρὸς ὑμᾶς...ὅταν δὲ ἔλθῃ ἐκεῖνος , τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας, ὀδηγήσει ὑμᾶς ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ πάση...	But I tell you the truth, it benefits you that I depart. For if I do not depart, the advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him/it to you...but when that one comes, the spirit of truth, he/it will guide you into all truth...	"But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. But when He , the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth...

Here a third time ἐκεῖνος (that one) appears in close proximity to “the spirit of truth.” Scholars like Erickson and Ladd argue on this basis that John is applying the masculine pronoun “that one” to a neuter noun “spirit” in order to affirm the personhood of the spirit. However, as with the last two instances “the spirit of truth” is really just in apposition to “that one” and the referent, though it goes all the way back to verse 7, is actually ὁ παράκλητος (the advocate). Curt Mayes helpfully explains the flow of thought in this passage:

It is necessary to begin back in verse seven. There the Spirit is introduced as the παράκλητος [advocate] and becomes the subject of an extended discussion. Αὐτόν [him] in verse seven refers back to παράκλητος, as does ἐκεῖνος [that one] in verse eight. Then verses nine through eleven explain the work of the παράκλητος (with respect to the world) which (work) was introduced in verse eight. Notice the dependency of verses nine through eleven on verse eight, as attested by the incomplete sentences in the former. Verse twelve sets the stage for another statement about the work of the παράκλητος—this time with respect to believers. Ἐκεῖνος is used in both verses thirteen and fourteen, probably with the same reference. On the basis of this sequence, then, it is this writer's contention that ὁ παράκλητος is introduced in 16:7 as the subject of the passage and remains the subject through 16:15. Ἐκεῖνος would then refer to παράκλητος in each instance (vv. 8, 13, 14)—simple agreement, the general rule.⁵

Further strengthening this case is the fact, as Daniel Wallace points out, that verses 8-11 are actually only one Greek sentence, the subject of which is ἐκεῖνος. He goes on to say:

Yet, as soon as v. 12 disrupts the flow of thought...the Paraclete is immediately brought back into view by the resumptive ἐκεῖνος, *followed* by his identification as τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας [the spirit of truth]. Thus, in spite of the distance between παράκλητος in v. 7 and ἐκεῖνος in v. 13, since the παράκλητος never fully fades from view throughout the discourse, the masculine gender of ἐκεῖνος can easily be accounted for on grounds other than the Spirit's personality...Although one might argue that the Spirit's personality is in view in the Upper Room Discourse, the view must be based on the nature of a παράκλητος and the things said about the Counselor, not on any alleged grammatical subtleties. The fact is that, in all of John's Gospel, the only time a masculine pronoun is used concerning the πνεῦμα is in relation to ὁ

⁵ Curt Steven Mayes, *Pronominal Referents and the Personality of the Holy Spirit* (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1980), p. 35.

παράκλητος. This suggests that the philological argument in John 14-16 may be a case of *petition principii*.⁶

So, there are no *syntactical* grounds—at least not in John—for arguing the spirit is a person, but before moving on to look at the last two texts, we should pause and consider the *theological* meaning of the texts we have just cited. There is no doubt that the many actions attributed to the advocate in this Upper Room Discourse indicate personhood. Here is a brief list of such statements made about the advocate:

John 14.17	abides with you
John 14.26	teach you all things
John 14.26	bring to your remembrance
John 15.26	testify about me [Jesus]
John 16.8	convict the world
John 16.13	guide you into all the truth
John 16.13	will not speak on his own initiative
John 16.13	hears...speaks...discloses
John 16.14	will glorify me
John 16.14	take of mine...and disclose to you

Who can teach, remind, testify, convict, guide, etc., other than a sentient being? What is more, the very word, παράκλητος (advocate), normally refers to individuals not things. Patrick Navas, however, does not think a woodenly literal reading is appropriate here:

The fact that the Spirit is sometimes depicted as “teaching,” “speaking,” “interceding,” “guiding,” and “helping” in the Scriptures has influenced many theologians to conclude that the Spirit must be a distinct “person” like God the Father and Jesus Christ. But because the holy Spirit does not have a personal/proper name like the Father and Son, is never shown to be an object of worship or recipient of prayer, and never depicted or identified as a member of a “triune” God in Scripture, other Bible students believe that these are simply a few of numerous examples where the Bible uses the common linguistic device of *personification*—that is, the practice of ascribing personal attributes or qualities to subjects that are not actually or literally persons⁷

Navas’ theory gains traction once we come to grips with two facts. First of all, Jesus explicitly states that his words are not to be taken literally, “These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; an hour

⁶ Wallace, 110-111. *Petition principii* is, according to Merriam Webster, “a logical fallacy in which a premise is assumed to be true without warrant or in which what is to be proved is implicitly taken for granted” (i.e. begging the question).

⁷ Patrick Navas, *Divine Truth or Human Tradition: A Reconsideration of the Roman Catholic-Protestant Doctrine of the Trinity in Light of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures* (Bloomington: AuthorHouse, 2007), p. 477.

is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but will tell you plainly of the Father” (John 16.25). The second point to keep in mind is how often Scripture employs personification. Here is a table of several such instances:

Examples of Personification

Genesis 1.10	voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground
Isaiah 3.26	gates will lament and mourn, Jerusalem will sit on the ground
Isaiah 35.1-2	the desert will be glad, rejoice, shout for joy
Isaiah 49.13	heavens shout for joy, earth rejoices, mountains break forth into joyful shouting
Psalms 98.8	the rivers clap their hands, the mountains sing together for joy
Proverbs 8	wisdom calls, understanding up her voice, she [wisdom] cries out at the entrance to the city, wisdom speaks noble things and opens her lips, wisdom dwells with prudence, wisdom walks in the way of righteousness, wisdom was a master workman with God, etc.
Luke 7.35	wisdom is vindicated by all her children
John 3.8	the wind blows where it wishes
Romans 10.6	righteousness based on faith speaks
1 Corinthians 13	love is patient, kind, not jealous, does not brag, is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly, does not seek its own, etc.
1 John 2.27	the anointing abides in you and teaches you
1 John 5.7	spirit, water, and blood testify

Another option, put forward tentatively by Wallace, is that the advocate actually refers to “the concept of the ascended Christ as Spirit.” He goes on to speculate, “If this were the case...the author would tend toward the masculine, not because of a view of the Spirit’s personality, but because of a view that the Spirit was identified some who with the ascended, exalted Christ (who would naturally be thought of as masculine).”⁸ We will return to wrestle some more with pneumatology, but, for now, suffice it to say we have two interpretive options for these Johannine texts: (1) Jesus here employs personification to talk about the advocate as if it were a person or (2) the advocate really is (or is to be) a person. Even if we accept the latter idea, it does not necessarily imply a third person; it is much more likely that Christ is really talking about himself in his future role as heavenly mediator. We will return to this in the next section, but for now we must work through the last two texts marshaled to support a personalized spirit.

⁸ Wallace, p. 100.

Ephesians 1.13-14 [NA27]	Ephesians 1.13-14 [Literal]	Ephesians 1.13-14 [NASB]
Ἐν ᾧ καὶ ὑμεῖς ἀκούσαντες τὸν λόγον τῆς ἀληθείας, τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς σωτηρίας ὑμῶν, ἐν ᾧ καὶ πιστεύσαντες ἐσφραγίσθητε τῷ πνεύματι τῆς ἐπαγγελίας τῷ ἁγίῳ, ὃ/ὅς ἐστὶν ἀρραβὼν τῆς κληρονομίας ἡμῶν, εἰς ἀπολύτρωσιν τῆς περιποιήσεως, εἰς ἔπαινον τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ.	In which also you having heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation, in whom also you having believed were sealed with the holy spirit of promise, which/who is a down payment of our inheritance, for redemption of the , to the praise of his glory.	In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation-- having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of <i>God's own</i> possession, to the praise of His glory.

The issue here in Ephesians 1.14 is quite different than what we have seen before. In this case, the Greek manuscripts differ on whether the neuter ὃ (which) or the masculine ὅς (who) belongs here. According to Bruce Metzger and the committee behind the critical Greek text, the more likely reading is ὃ, to which they give a {B} rating, meaning “the text is almost certain.”⁹ Here is their explanation for their decision:

It is difficult to decide whether copyists altered ὅς to ὃ in order to make it agree with the gender of πνεῦμα, or whether ὃ became ὅς by attraction to the gender of the following ἀρραβὼν [down payment], according to a usual idiom. On the basis of what was taken to be superior external attestation, a majority of the Committee preferred the reading ὃ.¹⁰

This manuscript discrepancy is possibly another smoking gun, an incident of scribal mischief or sloppiness. Naturally, it is very difficult to decide which the case is. Sadly, even recent translations that take into account Metzger’s work continue to translate the ὃ as “who” in defiance to what Scripture actually says. I was surprised to discover that the NET Bible, with its 60,000 translators’ notes, fails to alert the reader to the existence of the manuscript difference and audaciously translates the neuter pronoun as masculine. Ironically, Wallace, who was intimately involved with the NET, completely agrees with Metzger’s assessment on this point. What is more, even if the text had said ὅς, this still would not be a slam dunk for the spirit’s personality. This is because of the grammatical phenomenon known as attraction. Wallace writes, “The attraction-to-predicate idiom is thus common enough that, even if the verse were textually stable, Eph 1:14 should still be removed from the proof-text bin for the Spirit’s personality.”¹¹ So, either way, this verse does not bear on the question we are investigating. Now we turn to analyze our last proof text, 1 John 5.7-8.

1 John 5.7-8 [NA27]	1 John 5.7-8 [Literal]	1 John 5.7-8 [NASB]
ὅτι τρεῖς εἰσιν οἱ μαρτυροῦντες, τὸ πνεῦμα καὶ τὸ ὕδωρ καὶ τὸ αἷμα, καὶ οἱ τρεῖς εἰς τὸ ἓν εἰσιν.	because there are three who testify , the spirit and the water and the blood, and the three are in agreement	For there are three that testify : the Spirit and the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement.

⁹ Bruce Metzger, *Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd edition (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft 2002), p. 14.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, 533.

¹¹ Wallace, 117.

Here we have an unambiguous masculine participle employed in reference to the spirit. Interestingly, all three nouns in the collection (the spirit, water, and blood) are neuter, and therefore one might expect to see a neuter form—τὰ μαρτυροῦντα (which testify). Ironically, the NASB here gets cold feet and avoids tweaking the translation to lean the reader towards a personalized spirit. This is probably because it would prove too much, for if they woodenly translated the phrase as I did (“those who testify”) it would leave the impression that not only is the spirit but also are the water and the blood conscious beings! Now that we have completed our survey of grammatical proof texts, I would like to return to the big questions of what exactly the holy spirit is.

Is the Spirit a Thing, a Person, or Neither?

Up until now we have focused a lot more on what the spirit is not rather than what it, in fact, is. This is because the focus for these papers has been on the issue of translation bias not on building a biblical pneumatology.¹² Before attempting a synthesis, I want to first present the evidence for four distinct ways that Scripture talks about the holy spirit. The first of these is when spirit is used interchangeable with God as if the spirit (or Spirit) just is God.

The Spirit as Interchangeable with God

Psalm 51.11	your presence = your holy spirit
Psalm 139.7	your spirit = God's presence
Psalm 143.10	teach me = let your good spirit lead me
Isaiah 30.1	mine = of my spirit
Isaiah 40.13	spirit of Yahweh = him
Isaiah 63.10	his holy spirit = himself
Mt 12.28; Lk 11.20	spirit of God = finger of God
Luke 1.35	the holy spirit = power of the most high
Acts 5.3-4	lie to the holy spirit = lied...to God
1 Cor 12.11; Heb 2.4	as the Spirit wills = according to God's will

Navas sums up this perspective with the following words:

Perhaps the matter is best put in terms like these: the Spirit is God’s active approach to us. Where the Spirit operates, there God himself is at work. The Spirit is not a ‘thing,’ over against God, but a way of expressing God in his relation to us...Where the Spirit is given a personal quality such as teaching, revealing, witnessing, interceding, creating, and so on, it is not as an

¹² The interested reader may obtain my essay entitled, “What Is the Holy Spirit?” from christianmonotheism.com. That paper was originally presented at the 2006 One God Seminar in Atlanta, GA.

entity distinct from God, but as God himself doing these things and yet not compromising his transcendence.¹³

This may help make sense of a whole other collection of texts wherein the spirit (or Spirit) appears to be autonomous. Here is the data:

The Spirit as Autonomous

Mark 1.12	Immediately the Spirit impelled Him <i>to go</i> out into the wilderness.
Acts 1.16	Brethren, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit foretold by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus.
Romans 8.26-27	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 <i>us</i> 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 <i>the will of God</i> .
1 Corinthians 2.11	For who among men knows the <i>thoughts</i> of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the <i>thoughts</i> of God no one knows except the Spirit of God.
1 Corinthians 12.11	But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.
Hebrews 3.7	Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, "TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE,

With the exception of Romans 8.26-27, in these texts the spirit really is the Spirit—God himself. Thus, when the Spirit drives Jesus into the wilderness, it is really God who impels him. When the Spirit speaks to the prophets, it is really God who speaks. Just like our spirit knows what we are thinking and yet is not a distinct person, so God’s Spirit knows what he is thinking. We’ll return to Romans 8 shortly, but for now, we need to consider the many Scriptures where the spirit is spoken of as a thing or a gift.

The Spirit as a Thing/Gift

Exodus 31.1; 35.31; Deuteronomy 34.9; Micah 3.8; Luke 1.15, 41, 67; Acts 2.4; 4.8, 31; 5.3; 9.17; 13.9; 13.52; Eph 5.18	filled with the spirit (like a liquid)
Proverbs 1.23; Isaiah 29.10; 32.15; 44.3; Ezekiel 39.29; Joel 2.28-29; Zechariah 12.10; Acts 2.17-18, 33; 10.45	spirit poured upon someone (like a liquid)
Matthew 3.11; Mark 1.8; Luke 3.16; John 1.33; Acts 1.5; 11.16; 1 Corinthians 12.13	baptize/immerse in spirit (like a liquid)

¹³ Navas, pp. 483-484.

Acts 2.38; 5.32; 8.19; 10.47; 15.8; Romans 5.5; 1 Corinthians 2.12; 2 Corinthians 5.5; Galatians 3.2; Ephesians 1.17; 1 Thessalonians 4.8; 1 John 3.24; 4.13	something given/received (a gift, pledge, down payment)
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These many texts are nearly always swept under the rug by those advocated a myopic personal view of the holy spirit in line with traditional orthodoxy. The Bible often speaks of the spirit as a liquid that God (or Christ) pours out resulting in someone being filled with or baptized with it. It is a gift which God gives to those who obey him and a pledge of our ultimate inheritance. Still, there is one more significant grouping of texts to consider before attempting any kind of synthesis. In this last table I present some of the Scriptures that show, as Anthony Buzzard put it, “The Spirit is Christ himself extending his influence to the believers.”¹⁴

The Spirit Interchangeable with Christ

Mark 13.11	Luke 21.14-15
When they arrest you and hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but it is the Holy Spirit .	So make up your minds not to prepare beforehand to defend yourselves; for I [Jesus] will give you utterance and wisdom which none of your opponents will be able to resist or refute.
Romans 8.26	Romans 8.34
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;	who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.
Romans 8.9	Romans 8.10
However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you . But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.	If Christ is in you , though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness.

We find the word παράκλητος only five times in the NT, four of which occur in the Gospel of John in reference to the spirit. However, the last, and most interesting, usage shows up in 1 John 2.1 where we read, “My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate [παράκλητος] with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” Furthermore, throughout the Upper Room Discourse, Jesus switches between speaking of his own coming and the spirit’s coming without clarifying much of a difference. Here are some examples:

¹⁴ Anthony F. Buzzard and Charles F. Hunting, *The Doctrine of the Trinity: Christianity’s Self-Inflicted Wound* (Lanham: International Scholars Publications, 1998), p. 233.

The Advocate Will Come

He will give you another helper, that he may be with you forever	14.16
the helper, the holy spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you	14.26
when the helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father...	15.26
if I do not go away the helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you	16.7
when he, the spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth	16.13

Jesus Will Come

I will come again and receive you to myself	14.3
I will come to you	14.18
you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you	14.17
he who loves me...I will love him and will disclose myself to him	14.21
if anyone loves me, he will keep my word...and we will come to him and make our abode with him	14.23
I go away, and I will come to you	14.28
'a little while, and you will see me;' and, 'because I go to the Father'	16.17

What is interesting about this coming of Christ is that it has nothing to do with the ultimate return when the resurrection occurs and the kingdom arrives. This is a coming that will happen in a little while. Note how freely Jesus switches between the spirit's coming and his own coming in this text:

John 16.13-19

"But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose *it* to you. All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said that He takes of Mine and will disclose *it* to you. A little while, and you will no longer see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me."

Some of His disciples then said to one another, "What is this thing He is telling us, 'A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me'; and, 'because I go to the Father '?" So they were saying, "What is this that He says, 'A little while '? We do not know what He is talking about."

Jesus knew that they wished to question Him, and He said to them, "Are you deliberating together about this, that I said, 'A little while, and you will not see Me, and again a little while, and you will see Me'?"

In this last grouping the spirit appears to be just another way of referring to Christ's on going work in his heavenly ministry—a role he was preparing his disciples to understand in his last meeting with them before his death.

So, pulling together the various threads of the Biblical data regarding the spirit, we have the following picture. The spirit (or Spirit) is sometimes used interchangeably with God, sometimes employed to refer to Christ, and as such appears autonomous. However, other times the spirit sounds much more like a thing or a force or a gift. I do not claim to have some brand new category of thought that would adequately hold together these disparate notions, but I can say it is not at all helpful to box ourselves into one, and only one, category of thinking about the spirit. We should allow it to be what it is. The Anchor Bible Dictionary offers the following polysemous definition:

The Spirit appears in some texts as the autonomous agent of prophecy (Acts 1:16; Heb 3:7); the vehicle of sanctification (Rom 8:4; Gal 5:16-25), and intercession (Rom 8:27); the sign of God's acceptance (Acts 15:8; Gal 3:2); and a guarantee of future salvation (Rom 5:3-5; 2 Cor 5:5). It is also, however, clearly designated as the Spirit of God (1 Cor 2:11-12; Rom 8:9-17), the Spirit sent by God that represents in some sense God's active and indwelling presence.¹⁵

Likewise Navas, offers the following explanation:

Although it does not seem necessary (scripturally speaking) to view the Spirit as a "person" per se, it also does not seem necessary to think of the Spirit as merely an "impersonal force," for it is undoubtedly the Spirit of a *personal* being; the outwardly extending through invisible expression and influence of the inward, personal reality and heart of God.¹⁶

So, which is it, a person or a thing? Is it both or neither? Perhaps the whole purpose of a concept like "spirit" is to defy the pinning down of a single definition. I agree with the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* when they write, "The New Testament treatment of the Spirit is difficult, ambiguous, and sometimes even oblique to the interests of later trinitarianism."¹⁷ Defining the spirit as another distinct personality within the Godhead not only fails to account for all of the data, but it also exerts tremendous pressure on translation committees to shoehorn the original text into a Trinitarian mold, even when doing so requires them to violate their own principles of translation and violate the very Scripture they revere so much.

Conclusion

Our foray into pneumatological translation bias began with looking at the many texts where translators' rendered neuter relative pronouns as masculine in order to make the Bible appear to personalize the holy spirit. We saw that in every single case, the text grammatically supported a non-personality position. Next we turned to investigate the five texts that allegedly employ personal pronouns to refer to the spirit. Upon closer examination, every one of these Scriptures failed to demonstrate the personality of the spirit on grammatical grounds. Then we turned our attention to the much more difficult theological question of interpreting the many texts, especially in the Upper Room Discourse, that attribute personal actions and qualities to the spirit or advocate. I put forward two possible

¹⁵ *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 2, p. 1055.

¹⁶ Navas, 499.

¹⁷ *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 4, p. 916.

explanations (personification or personhood) before collecting together several other groupings of Scripture that bear on this question. We saw that sometimes the spirit (or Spirit) is used to refer to God and/or Christ and as such is properly given personal qualities. This is not to say that the Spirit is a distinct person from the Father and Son, but that it is the distinct person of the Father or the Son. In other instances we observed that the Scriptures speak of the spirit as a thing, often portrayed metaphorically as a liquid. I conclude that the spirit is hard to define and it steadfastly defines categorization.

In this instance the unitarian may feel like Socrates whereas the Trinitarian, the wise men of Athens. The old guard is confident in their superior wisdom, yet upon examination are found wanting. Socrates, who knows he is not the wisest man in Athens, comes to realize that precisely because he is least deceived, he is actually the wisest. We may not be able to offer a fully organized and neatly defined view of the spirit, but at least we know that we do not know what the spirit exactly is. Even so, the advantage of being truth seekers is that we can change our beliefs based on the evidence and follow the truth wherever it leads. Sadly, most groups are so encumbered by fixed creeds, confessions, and statements of belief that they cannot change, even if they wanted to. I am not suggesting that we jettison any kind of statement of faith or evaporate away into some post-modernist fog, but I am arguing that we must retain a modicum of doctrinal humility. Whatever ends up being true at the end of the day is what we should want to believe, even when it conflicts with our own long held traditions.

We must strive to always keep the correct order when pursuing biblical truth: the text is first, then translation, interpretation, and, last of all, doctrine. If we begin with our doctrinal commitments, we run the risk of reading our beliefs into the Bible, tampering with the translation to suit our fancy, or worst of all, changing the text of Scripture itself (see 1 John 5.7-8 in the KJV). Last of all, we must be content sometimes to say we are not sure how to best understand something or someone.