



# He Who Gives Life: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit

*Graham A. Cole*

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## **He Who Gives Life: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit** Graham A. Cole

Often the most misunderstood, and therefore ignored, member of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit deserves our attention and understanding. God the Father and God the Son rightfully garner much explanation and exploration, and God the Holy Spirit ought to be given the same studiousness, curiosity, and scholarship. In this addition to Crossway's Foundations of Evangelical Theology series, Dr. Graham Cole has written a work that offers a comprehensive theology of the Holy Spirit.

This book shows the ultimate selflessness of the Holy Spirit as the member of the Trinity who always works for the glory of God the Father and God the Son and the good of the saints.

Ideal for pastors, teachers, and students of theology, this book is a superb theology of the Holy Spirit.

Part of the Foundations of Evangelical Theology series.

## **He Who Gives Life: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit Details**

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# From Reader Review **He Who Gives Life: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit** for online ebook

## **L. R. Bouligny** says

The church of Jesus Christ has historically produced voluminous works concerning all matters of doctrine and theology. As Solomon wisely observed, “Of making many books there is no end” (Ecc 12:12). However, when it comes to doctrine on the Person and work of the Holy Spirit, there is a comparative neglect with other subjects. This may be due in part to a lack of understanding. Not only is there less explicit revelation concerning Him in the Scriptures in contrast to the Father and the Son, but there is no systematic discussion pertaining to Him in the Scripture anywhere, leaving much room for confusion. Arthur Pink observed this and warned, “[I:]gnorance of the Third Person of the Godhead is most dishonoring to Him, and highly injurious to ourselves.” To be faithful students of the Word, we must neglect nothing.

With this in mind, I was excited to pick up Graham Cole’s book entitled, *He Who Gives Life*, with the hope of discovering some of the great truths concerning the Spirit’s role and function, and how He relates to the church. This review will evaluate Cole’s work from a biblical (and academic) perspective—highlighting the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly.

### The Good

Cole appears to be a thorough researcher and scholar, and covers his topics in the book with abundant research. He has evidently given considerable thought to these issues, and leaves no stone unturned. He covers everything from how the Spirit has been understood historically—which is always important for a sober perspective—to what role the Spirit had in creation. Some of the categories he chose for discussion were especially thought-provoking, and I was glad to see someone asking practical questions about the believer’s relationship to the Holy Spirit and what that looks like.

I was challenged on several points, as he brought forth ideas contrary to some of my own long-held assumptions, causing me to question whether or not their foundation was based on Scripture alone. For instance, on page 247, in a discussion about “grieving the Spirit,” he cites several writers, including Calvin, who hold the traditional view that this is anthropomorphic language. Certainly God cannot be grieved as a man grieves. He then interrogates those ideas by asking, “Why read only Scriptures that ostensibly speak of divine grief in this [anthropomorphic:] way? Why not read those that speak of divine love and wrath similarly?” It is this type of inquiry that causes me to examine myself and what I believe. His point is very valid, and it is the kind of question that makes theology books like this of great interest and value.

Another example of practical wisdom is found on page 251, where the author deals with the controversial use of the gift of tongues. He points out the inconsistent claims of those who have a special affinity in the church today with this practice. Many use Paul’s statement, “I wish you all spoke with tongues” (1 Cor 14:5), to imply that it is mandatory for all Christians to evidence this gift. However, Cole’s point is well made when he states, “But he also wished that all the Corinthians were unmarried (7:7). An apostolic wish is not an apostolic command.” This type of clear reasoning is of great help in encouraging Christians to think through the issues.

One final example deals with some of the OT uses of the Hebrew word *ruach*, and why it is translated with its alternate meanings of “breath,” and “wind” in some places, not in others and why it matters (100-102). I found these types of discussions in the book to be most helpful in forming a consistent view of God from the

Scriptures. The greatest benefit this book has to offer, in my opinion, is to raise discussion about some of the more difficult and controversial passages dealing with the work of the Spirit, with an attempt to bring them into the light for closer examination. (maybe mention the open-but-cautious view in the book?)

### The Bad

Several glaring problems come to mind when I think about what I did not like about the book. To begin with, while Cole does do well to bring up a variety of important and interesting discussion points, rarely is anything ever conclusive—only a few of the problems he raises does he also solve. He will cite many people in the church who believe, or have historically believed, certain variations concerning the same doctrinal position, but nothing is ever concrete—where the reader can walk away from the book with the sense of landing on solid ground. While I understand that many of these subjects have been debated throughout the history of the church, the point of writing on a particular subject is normally to bring understanding through the use of the Scriptures, and not just to point out that there are problems.

This habit of not being decisive on anything can be seen concerning most of the items brought up for discussion. He may raise questions, which in some cases I was thankful for, but he often left me with more questions than answers. For example, on pages 188-190, he discussed the difficult text from John 20:19-22, where Jesus breathed on the disciples and said “Receive the Holy Spirit.” After listing several views from scholars, the discussion just ended, with nothing helpful but to highlight that this is a difficult verse in the Bible. If this were the only occurrence, it might not be worth mentioning, but it is abundant throughout. Even Cole himself confesses this, when the subject of gifts in the church arises. He pokes fun at his own inability to land on a position. He comments that on certain days of the week he believes one position, and other days he holds to another. And normally in concert with this uncertainty and abrupt ending is an immediate shift to another subject, leaving the reader confused as to what just happened.

Another persistent tendency of the author is to repeatedly cite questionable sources. From feminists to Popes, from liberal scholars to modern heretics, this book includes them all. I kept asking myself throughout, Why give so much space to these aberrant views? I can understand informing the church about the diversity of beliefs on a particular subject, but repeatedly quoting men (and women!) who do not uphold the doctrines of the historic Christian faith seemed excessive and most of the time, unnecessary. The author would have better served the Body of Christ by spending more time on exegesis, and less on people’s opinions.

### The Ugly

While this portion may seem hyper-critical, I included it for the sake of disclosing my frustration with this book, and many comparable that are published in Christendom today. This does not reflect an attitude toward the author solely, but a desire in general to elevate the overall quality of Christian literature.

First of all, Cole, and many others at his level of scholarship, often cite terms in Latin, and yet rarely explain them. I understand that the more one engages this type of material, the more these terms will become common-place, but I often wonder who the target audience is, and for what purpose are Latin phrases included? For the edification of the Body? To raise the church’s level of comprehension? Or is it perhaps to flaunt a particular level of knowledge? I do not want to judge motives, but sometimes these things can take away from a work that is intended for Christian edification and growth. While I do commend the author for occasionally defining terms in parenthesis next to the Latin, or in the glossary toward the back of the book, there are many left undefined, interrupting the flow of argumentation and sending the reader off into another room to find a dictionary. Ironically, the ones that are somewhat easy to interpret (*Imago Dei*) are given an English equivalent, while others (such as *conditio sine qua non*, or *mutatis mutandis*) are given no

explanation, with the exception of a footnote, directing the reader to a Latin dictionary.

Another troubling aspect of the book was obsessive need to reference other materials. I absolutely support the thoroughness of modern scholarship, and how they supplement their thoughts with appropriate citations. However, this book contains an average of 6-8 footnotes per page, and oftentimes more! I could only find one page in the entire book that did not have a citation, and that was in the introduction! This is part of the overall frustration with this work, that many ideas are presented, but few are established. The author seems to fancy the many different perspectives of others, but rarely distinguishes his own convictions. He regularly cites men such as Karl Barth and Friedrich Schleiermacher, sharing their philosophies about the Scriptures, instead of using the Scriptures to examine their philosophies.

## Conclusion

I have great respect for men such as John Feinberg, who produced this work. I did find many things of value within these pages, and several things that caused me to consider my own position and evaluate my hermeneutic. However, that being said, there was more that was lacking than profitable. I believe the purpose of producing a work, such as on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, is to bring things into the light and make concrete conclusions based on the biblical text. I found too much speculation and uncertainty than should be found in a theological treatment. If I had to assign a grade to the book, I would give He Who Gives Life a C. Profitable for raising questions, but lacking in supplying answers.

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## **Matthew Mitchell says**

Able, even-handed survey of the Bible's teaching on the Holy Spirit.

Graham Cole has done the Church a service by succinctly sketching out the main lines of the complex data in the Bible about the Third Person of the Trinity and ably assembling them into a coherent picture of His person and ministry.

Cole's work is a textbook example of theological method. I learned not only from what he wrote but how he wrote it. It's careful, learned, and cheerful. He does an excellent job of providing balancing perspectives on the many controversial questions about the Holy Spirit. At times, I wished he was more decisive and less tentative about his exegetical and theological decisions, but that just shows how difficult some of the judgment calls are to make in this arena. Wherever a strong conclusion was required by the either the importance of the question or the preponderance of the biblical evidence, Cole did not hesitate to reach it or state it. If I could write a book on this level, I would want to do it on this model.

I especially appreciated how Cole started with the mystery and elusiveness of the Spirit (He is the uncontrollable wind!) and ended with His divine self-effacement. The Spirit of God is perfectly worthy to be made known but is best known as He makes known the Son of God. "The magnificence of the Spirit lies in this self-effacement or divine selflessness. For this reason believers are rightly called 'Christians' not 'Pneumians'" (pg. 284). Highly recommended.

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## **Steve says**

The book has good elements, including the review of the mystery of the Holy Spirit and the review of the Old Testament testimony concerning the Holy Spirit.

However, in much of the book Cole makes very bold statements without providing any supporting evidence or even discussion on which to base such claims. For instance Cole simply makes the statement that baptism in the Spirit is associated with “Christian conversion-initiation” (197) without referring to any biblical evidence or discussion on the subject.

Additionally, Cole asserts that the accounts of baptism in the Spirit in Acts are “arguably extensions of Pentecost rather than a paradigm for today” (p205), without providing any discussion to support this claim. Moreover, this opinion is not derived from scripture itself, but is predicated on the lack of such tangible experiences in many denominations of the modern church.

A third example is the assertion, in agreement with Ramm and Fergusson (page 206), that pneumatology should not be determined from narrative scriptures, but rather from didactic scriptures. This is simply superficial theology which dismisses important aspects of biblical testimony regarding the Holy Spirit. It is interesting that no theologian makes similar assertions regarding the use of narrative scripture to formulate Christology.

In another example, Cole states that the differences in the Acts accounts of baptism in the Spirit makes it “too difficult” to draw conclusions on normative experience (p204). For many, there is little difficulty at all. Whilst there are variations on the timing of the baptism, there are strong agreements on the nature of the experience; in all cases Baptism in the Holy Spirit was a tangible experience for both the recipient and those observing.

In a very bold statement Cole states that there is no exegetical evidence that baptism in the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost resulted in empowerment to witness, preferring to assert that this was a “filling with the Spirit” (p194). Here Cole simply ignores the fact that in Acts 10:15-16 Peter compares this event with that of the House of Cornelius, and refers to the experience as a “baptism with the Holy Spirit and with fire”. Cole then seems to contradict this position (p197), asserting that baptism in Spirit is about confessing Jesus as Lord; confession and witness are intimately related as confession really means public confession, and again on p207 where he acknowledges this event to be a baptism in the Holy Spirit.

On page 219 and 244, Cole asserts that Ephesians 5:18-21 is not concerned with the empowerment of the Spirit to sanctify or empower individuals, but is concerned with Pauline ecclesiology. This is poor exegesis as Ephesians is a letter which defines God’s purpose as bringing individuals together under one head, even Christ (Eph. 1:10), and then goes on to explain the calling and behaviour of individuals within the body corporate. Harmony amongst the corporate body is only possible because each individual is under the One Head.

Finally, on page 254 Cole asserts that the reference to “when the perfect comes” in 1 Cor. 13:10 refers to the full canon of scripture rather than eternity. This is another example of weak exegesis as the the passage states that when the perfect comes we will see face to face, and know fully, even as we are fully known; the formation of the canon has not resulted in us being able to see Jesus “face to face” or to know Him fully, as we are “fully known”.

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## **Brian Watson says**

This book is a well-written pneumatology--a theology of the Holy Spirit. On the plus side, Cole writes well, and he pays attention to biblical theology. Also, his theology is solid. He is a careful thinker. However, often his discussions of particular issues are brief. This book could easily have been 50-100 pages longer and would have been better for it.

I think this book is best supplemented by James Hamilton's *God's Indwelling Spirit*. He pays more attention to the way the Spirit works in the OT and the NT. His discussion of the Spirit in John's Gospel as well as in Acts is very helpful.

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## **Nate H says**

If reading contemporary pneumatology is your thing, I'm sure you'll enjoy this. You've got a thorough survey of the field & cerebral scholastic erudition, but what you have very little of is a coherent whole. The book is more concerned with a survey of the scholarly consensus than making a decisive conclusion based on the texts in question. That's not to say that Cole doesn't make conclusions and that he doesn't analyze texts, but it seems like a scholastic endeavor rather than spirituality. The scholarship is impressive, but is this what doing theology ought to be? Cole makes a great point at the beginning of the book that the mysteries of God and the Holy Spirit should be treated as such, but everything else seems like science rather than a fearful treatment of the mystery of the Spirit. Perhaps that's what 'theology' means in academia, but it's not so good for God's people to aid their awe of the Holy Spirit. I must commend Cole on his scholarship since that's his aim. I must commend other works though for a good study of the Spirit.

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## **Andrew says**

Took me more than a year, but totally worth it! Another great book in the Foundations of Evangelical Theology. Read it!

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## **Peter Johnson says**

A great read. Clear with a critical approach to most issues and a determination to make conclusions only on the basis of firm exegetical support. Cole deals with a host of issues very helpfully if briefly (occasionally frustratingly briefly).

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## **Oswaldo says**

Very informative and readable survey on the doctrine concerning the Holy Spirit. I was at times frustrated with the author when he did not consistently provide his own perspective on an issue when critiquing another theologian's perspective on the issue or when presenting the various views of a controversy.

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### **Bradley Davis says**

Fairly brief for a work like this. Mostly clear. Points where I felt I read more about what he'd be saying than what he actually said. Some parts could be eliminated, others expanded, and still more topics should be treated. Overall, a good theology on the person and work of the Holy Spirit.

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### **Annie Rose says**

A professor of mine from Trinity wrote this book, which is a very helpful theology of the Holy Spirit. A good primer on the often-neglected third Person of the Trinity!

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### **Todd Miles says**

Cole's work is easy to read and expansive. It is also brief, considering all that it attempts to do. He does a good job with the Holy Spirit in the OT. He also addresses the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of Christ, but does not highlight the Christocentric role during Christ's lifetime, preferring to speak of the Son submitting to the Spirit (which is true insofar as it goes). There are many times where he looks at multiple options, but does not argue for one position over another—which is frustrating. This chapters on the role of the Spirit in the church are very good.

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### **Tim says**

Awesome from a biblical perspective lacking from practical value--typical work coming from a first rate Christian scholar.

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