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The Holy Spirit & Neuter Pronouns

Insight on the Scriptures, Vol. 2 states:

Jesus personalized the holy spirit when speaking of that spirit as a "helper" (which in Greek is the masculine substantive *pa·ra'kle·tos*). Properly, therefore, John presents Jesus' words as referring to that "helper" aspect of the spirit with masculine personal pronouns. On the other hand, in the same context, when the Greek *pneu'ma* is used, John employs a neuter pronoun to refer to the holy spirit, *pneu'ma* itself being neuter. Hence, we have in John's use of the masculine personal pronoun in association with *pa·ra'kle·tos* an example of conformity to grammatical rules, not an expression of doctrine. – Joh 14:16, 17; 16:7, 8.¹

In Greek, nouns can be masculine, feminine or neuter and pronouns referring to these nouns are masculine, feminine or neuter as well. The Greek word for demon, *daimonion*, is neuter,² as is the Greek word for child, *paidion*.³ According to the WTBS, demons and children are personal beings. Yet, the Greek text uses neuter personal pronouns to refer to them. Why? Proper grammar in the Greek demands that pronouns agree in gender with the noun the pronouns refer to. Jesus is referred to with a neuter pronoun in Matthew 2:8, 11, 13, 14, 20, and 21 because in those verses, Jesus is identified as a "young child" (KJV) and in Greek, child is a neuter noun. That does not, however, demand that Jesus is an impersonal being, nor does the use of neuter pronouns referencing the Holy Spirit demand he is an impersonal being.

As the WTBS indicated, the noun *pneuma* is neuter. As such, the pronouns referring to *pneuma* are also neuter. Point of fact, *pneuma* is referred to with *autos*, a neuter pronoun, in John 4:24:

God is a Spirit: and they that worship him [autos] must worship him in spirit and in truth. (KJV)

"God is spirit, and those who worship Him [autos] must worship in spirit and truth." (NASB)

"God is spirit, and his [autos] worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth." (NIV)

"God is a Spirit, and those worshipping him [autos] must worship with spirit and truth." (NWT)⁴

One certainly wouldn't argue that Yahweh God isn't a person simply because, following proper grammar, the pronoun referring to him is neuter.

The use of neuter pronouns referring to *pneuma*, which is a neuter noun, does not demand that the Holy Spirit is an impersonal being.

[1] Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc. "Entry for "SPIRIT."" Insight on the Scriptures, Volume 2, 1989. P. 1019.

[2] Strong, James. "Entry for G1140 daimonion." Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, 1890.

[3] Strong, James. "Entry for G3813 paidion." Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, 1890.

[4] Please note in John 4:24, where Yahweh God is referred to with a neuter pronoun, the WTBS has no difficulty ascribing a masculine pronoun to him in the NWT.

As noted by the WTBTS above, the Greek refers to the Holy Spirit with masculine pronouns in the book of John, chapters 14 and 16. The WTBTS asserts that the masculine pronouns in John refer to Comforter (*paraklētos*), which is also masculine, not *pneuma*, which is neuter.

A.T. Robertson, in his commentary of John 14:26 and again in his commentary on 16:8, states that the personal pronoun he, *ekeinos*, is an emphatic demonstrative masculine pronoun.⁵ The WTBTS asserts that this emphatic demonstrative pronoun refers back to *paraklētos* so we should seek to understand all that we can about *paraklētos*. Strong's defines it as:

G3875

παράκλητος

paraklētos

par-ak'-lay-tos

An *intercessor, consoler*: - advocate, comforter.⁶

And Thayer's:

G3875

παράκλητος

paraklētos

Thayer Definition:

- 1) summoned, called to one's side, especially called to one's aid
 - 1a) one who pleads another's cause before a judge, a pleader, counsel for defense, legal assistant, an advocate
 - 1b) one who pleads another's cause with one, an intercessor
 - 1b1) of Christ in his exaltation at God's right hand, pleading with God the Father for the pardon of our sins
 - 1c) in the widest sense, a helper, succourer, aider, assistant
 - 1c1) of the Holy Spirit destined to take the place of Christ with the apostles (after his ascension to the Father), to lead them to a deeper knowledge of the gospel truth, and give them divine strength needed to enable them to undergo trials and persecutions on behalf of the divine kingdom

Part of Speech: noun masculine⁷

Paraklētos is used only 5 times in the New Testament: of the Holy Spirit in the verses noted above by the WTBTS and in 1 John 2:1 (emphasized in **bold**):

*My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an **advocate** with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:* (KJV)

*My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an **Advocate** with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous;* (NASB)

[5] Robertson, A.T. "Commentary on John 14:26," "Commentary on John 16:8." Robertson's Word Pictures in the New Testament, 1932.

[6] Strong, James. "Entry for G3875 paraklētos" Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, 1890.

[7] Thayer, Joseph H. "Entry for 'parakletos.'" Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, 1896.

*My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have **one who speaks** to the Father **in our defense** - Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. (NIV)*

*My little children, I am writing YOU these things that YOU may not commit a sin. And yet, if anyone does commit a sin, we have a **helper** with the Father, Jesus Christ, a righteous one. (NWT)*

The only other time the Bible uses *paraklētos* when not speaking of the Holy Spirit, the text is referring to a person, Jesus Christ. John Gill stated, "One of the names of the Messiah, with the Jews, is מְנַחֵם, 'a Comforter'; such an one Jesus had been to his disciples..."⁸ Matthew Henry confirmed Gill's position, stating, "One of the names of the Messiah among the Jews was *Menahem - the Comforter*."⁹

More significantly, John 14:16 tells us that the Holy Spirit is **another** Comforter:

*And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you **another Comforter**, that he may abide with you forever; (KJV)*

*"I will ask the Father, and He will give you **another Helper**, that He may be with you forever; (NASB)*

*And I will ask the Father, and he will give you **another Counselor** to be with you forever - (NIV)*

*and I will request the Father and he will give YOU **another helper** to be with YOU forever, (NWT)*

A.T. Robertson described "another comforter" as:

Another of like kind (*allon*, not *heteron*), besides Jesus who becomes our Paraclete, Helper, Advocate, with the Father...¹⁰

Vincent's Word Studies also states:

Note also that the word *another* is ἄλλον, and not ἕτερον, which means *different*. The advocate who is to be sent is not *different* from Christ, but *another* similar to Himself.¹¹

The word "another", *allon*, means one of like kind. Jesus is called the *paraklētos* and indicates he will pray to the Father to send one of like kind. Jesus is a person. To be of like kind, the Holy Spirit must also be a person.

Jesus is called the Comforter in the New Testament and refers to the Holy Spirit as another Comforter. The Greek word for another means one of like kind. Jesus is a person. To be of like kind as Jesus, the Holy Spirit must also be a person.

[8] Gill, John. "Commentary on John 14:16." John Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible, 1690-1771.

[9] Henry, Matthew. "Complete Commentary on John 14". Matthew Henry Complete Commentary on the Whole Bible. 1706.

[10] Robertson, A.T. "Commentary on John 14:16." Robertson's Word Pictures in the New Testament, 1932.

[11] Vincent. "Commentary on John 14:16." Vincent's Word Studies, 1886.

Also, Jesus did not just use masculine pronouns in referring to the Holy Spirit as a Comforter of like kind as himself. He used the **emphatic** demonstrative pronoun as indicated by A.T. Robertson above. Jesus was making a point. What point? That the one who is another Comforter of like kind as himself is very much a person.

Therefore, Jesus' use of the emphatic demonstrative personal pronoun emphasizes that the one he referred to as another Comforter is of like kind as himself and is a person.

Furthermore, the WTBTS cites John 14:16, 17 and John 16:7, 8 while discussing personal pronouns in Insights on the Scriptures, Vol. 2. above. The book, however, fails to mention or discuss the personal pronouns used in John 16:13, 14:¹²

[13] *Howbeit when **he** [ekeinos], the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. [14] **He** [ekeinos] shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you. (KJV)*

[13] *"But when **He** [ekeinos], 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. [14] "**He** [ekeinos] will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you. (NASB)*

[13] *But when **he** [ekeinos], the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. [14] **He** [ekeinos] will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. (NIV)*

[13] *However, when **that one** [ekeinos] arrives, the spirit of the truth, he will guide YOU into all the truth, for he will not speak of his own impulse, but what things he hears he will speak, and he will declare to YOU the things coming. [14] **That one** [ekeinos] will glorify me, because he will receive from what is mine and will declare it to YOU. (NWT)*

The personal pronoun "he" (*ekeinos*, emphasized in **bold** above) is a masculine pronoun. Commenting on John 16:13, A.T. Robertson stated:

Note *ekeinos* (masculine demonstrative pronoun, though followed by neuter *pneuma* in apposition.¹³

The pronoun "he" should agree with Spirit of truth, the neuter *pneuma* in John 16:13. But this is not the case. Contrary to proper Greek grammar, John uses the masculine pronoun *ekeinos* instead of the neuter *autos*, with nary a masculine noun such as *parakletos*/Comforter to refer back to in sight (see John 16:7 for the last reference to *parakletos*/Comforter prior to John 16:13).

Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words comments on masculine pronouns applied to the Holy Spirit in John:

The personality of the Spirit is emphasized at the expense of strict grammatical procedure in John 14:26; 15:26; 16:8, 13, 14, where the emphatic pronoun *ekeinos*,

[12] The WTBTS does cite John 6:13 in the book, Reasoning from the Scriptures, in its "Entry for 'Trinity,'" P. 407, though personal pronouns used are not mentioned or discussed. This simple citation is quoted here under the section "Personification."

[13] Robertson, A.T. "Commentary on John 16:13" Robertson's Word Pictures in the New Testament, 1932.

"He," is used of Him in the masculine, whereas the noun *pneuma* is neuter in Greek...¹⁴

John uses the masculine personal pronoun *ekeinōs* of the Holy Spirit in John 16:13, 14 without referring to the masculine noun, *paraklētos*/Comforter. As such, John identifies the Holy Spirit as a personal being.

Charles Hodge sums it up nicely:

He [the Holy Spirit] is introduced as a person so often, not merely in poetic and excited discourse, but in simple narrative, and in didactic instructions; and his personality is sustained by so many collateral proofs, that to explain the use of the personal pronouns in relation to Him on the principle of personification, is to do violence to all the rules of interpretation."¹⁵

I agree.

[14] Vine, W.E. "Entry for 'Spirit', '*pneuma*'". Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words, 1966.

[15] Hodges, Charles. Systematic Theology, Volume 1 – Theology Proper, Chapter VIII The Holy Spirit, 1871.