

“Spirit” or “spirit”? Is there a problem?

A sister writes: “OK, guys, I need your help.

1 John 5:8 And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.

What goes where the ? is and why? The answer is not as easy as it seems.
Deb

Hi Deb. No, the answer is not as easy as it seems. The word “spirit” can have several meanings or a different emphasis depending on both the context of a phrase or verse and whether or not it is capitalized.

The King James Bible uses both a capitalized Spirit and a small spirit. Some printings of the KJB have a small “s” in spirit in this verse, but most have a capital S and read Spirit.

Older Bible versions used a small “s” in this particular verse.

Wycliffe 1395 - “And thre ben, that yyuen witnessing in erthe, the spirit, water, and blood; and these thre ben oon.”

Tyndale 1525 - “For there are thre which beare recorde in erth: the sprete and water and bloud: and these thre are one.”

Coverdale 1535 - “And there are thre which beare recorde in earth: the sprete, water and bloude, and these thre are one.”

The Great Bible (Cranmer) 1540 - “And ther are thre which beare recorde the sprete & water, and bloud: & these thre are one.”

Matthew’s Bible 1549 - “For there are thre, whiche beare recorde in earth the spyrite and water, and bloude, and these thre are one.”

Bishops’ Bible 1568 - “And there are three which beare recorde in earth, the spirite, and water, and blood, and these three agree in one.”

The Geneva Bible 1587 - “And there are three, which beare record in the earth, the spirit, and the water and the blood: and these three agree in one.”

The Douay-Rheims 1610 - “And there are three that give testimony on earth: the

spirit and the water and the blood. And these three are one.”

Actually , it was the King James Bible that was the first English Bible to capitalize the “s” in this verse. The original 1611 printing read:

King James Bible 1611 - “And there are three that beare wnesse in earth, the Spirit, and the Water, and the Blood, and these three agree in one.”

I have hard copies the Cambridge KJB, the World Publishing Company, Zondervan and the Oxford University Press King James Bible, The Scofield Reference Bible 1945, and all four of them have a capital S here in 1 John 5:8 and read: "And there are three that bear witness in earth, **the Spirit**, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one."

Also having a capital S for Spirit here are Darby 1890, Young's 1898, the Revised Version 1881, the ASV 1901, RSV, NRSV 1989, ESV 2001-2011, NIV, NASB, Holman Standard and the NKJV 1982. I have hard copies of them all.

A few Bibles still used a small “s” in this verse even after the KJB came out. For example:

Mace New Testament 1729 - “so that there are three witnesses, the spirit, the water, and the blood: and these three testify the same thing.

Whitson't Primitive N.T. 1745 - “The spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.”

Most modern Versions use a capitalized “S” in this verse and now read “Spirit”. Among these are the RV, ASV 1901, Weymouth 1902, Williams N.T. 1937, Goodspeed 1943, J.B. Phillips N.T. 1962, the RSV, NRSV, ESV, NASB, NKJV, NIV, NET, Holman Standard, Darby, Youngs, ISV (International Standard Version), The Voice 2012, the Orthodox Jewish Bible 2011 - "the Ruach Hakodesh and the mayim and the dahm", the Lexham English Bible 2011, KJV 21st Century Version 1994, Common English Bible 2011 and the Jubilee Bible 2000-2010 to name but a few.

Keep in mind that the Greek language does not use special upper or lower case letters when referring to God the Father, God the Son or the spirit or the Spirit. And in the case of “Spirit” versus “spirit” - when referring to either the Person or the influence of the Deity - the lines can become so close as to be virtually identical.

Sometimes in Scripture the capitalized “Spirit” can refer to the Third Person of the Holy Trinity. But the word “spirit” with a small “s” often refers not so much to the Person of Deity, as it does to the “working, activity, influence, animating principle, essential quality, disposition, energy or the driving force” behind something.

The Old Testament Scriptures speak of “the spirit of wisdom” (Exodus 28:3; Deut. 34:9), the “spirit of jealousy” (Num. 5:14,30), the “spirit of my understanding” (Job 20:3), the “a contrite spirit” (Ps. 34:18), “a right spirit” (Ps. 51:10), “thy holy spirit” and “thy free spirit” (Ps. 51:11,12), “a broken spirit” (Ps. 51:17, Pro. 17:22), “a faithful spirit” (Pro. 11:13), “an haughty spirit” (Pro. 16:18), “an humble spirit” (Pro. 16:19), “an excellent spirit” (Pro. 17:27) “the proud in spirit” (Ecc. 7:8), “the spirit of judgment” and “the spirit of burning” (Isaiah 4:4), the “spirit of counsel” an “the spirit of knowledge” (Isaiah 11:2), “the spirit of Egypt” (Isa. 19:3), “a perverse spirit” (Isa. 19:14), “a spirit of judgment” (Isa. 28:6), “the spirit of deep sleep” (Isa. 29:10), “the spirit of heaviness” (Isa. 61:3), “an excellent spirit” (Dan. 5:12), “spirit of whoredoms” (Hosea 4:12; 5:4), “the spirit of grace and supplications” (Zech. 12:10).

In the New Testament, the Bible refers to such things as “ye know not what MANNER OF SPIRIT ye are of” (Luke 9:55), “the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake” (Acts 6:10), “the spirit of holiness” (Romans 1:4), “newness of spirit” (Rom.7:6), “the spirit of bondage” (Romans 8:15), “the spirit of slumber” (Rom. 11:8), “the spirit of the world” (1 Cor. 2:12), “the spirit of meekness” (1 Cor. 4:21), “spirit of faith” (2 Cor. 4:13), “the spirit of wisdom and revelation” (Eph. 1:17), “the spirit of your mind” (Eph. 4:23), “the spirit of his mouth” (2 Thes. 2:8), “the spirit of fear” (2 Tim. 1:7), “a meek and quiet spirit” (1 Peter 3:4), “the spirit of glory” (1 Peter 4:14), “spirit of antichrist” (1 John 4:3), “the spirit of truth” (1 John 4:6), “the spirit of error” (1 John 4:6) and finally “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” (Revelation 19:10)

So, what we sometimes see in Scripture is that God will speak of His Spirit and also of His “spirit”, and “the spirit of the Lord” and “the Spirit of the Lord” or “the spirit of God” and also “the Spirit of God” and “My spirit” as well.

See examples of the small “s” in the word “spirit” in the King James Bible in Genesis 6:3; Exodus 31:3; 35:31; Numbers 24:2, Isaiah 11:2; 40:7; 42:1; 44:3 and 59:21.

These are not errors at all, but are verses that describe the “working, activity, influence, animating principle, essential quality, disposition, energy or the driving force” of God behind various actions He carries out rather than to the Third

Person of the Blessed Trinity, the Holy Ghost.

As for the original question about 1 John 5:8, I believe the first printing of the King James Bible in 1611 got it right as do most Publishing companies today who print the King James Bible. "And there are three that bear witness in the earth, the Spirit, and the water and the blood; and these three agree in one."

However other Bibles that have a small "s" here and say "three that bear witness in the earth, the spirit, and the water and the blood" may be focusing more on the idea of the working or the energizing power of "the spirit of truth" (1 John 4:6) than of the direct action of the Holy Ghost.

Foreign language Bibles that also have a capital "S" in the word Spirit in 1 John 5:8 are the following: The French Martin 1744, Louis Segond 1910 and French Ostervald 1996 - "l'Esprit, l'eau, et le sang", the Italian Diodati 1649, 1991 and La Nuova Riveduta 2006 - "lo Spirito, e l'acqua, e il sangue", the Spanish Sagradas Escrituras 1569, the Cipriano de Valera of 1602 and the Reina Valeras from 1909 to 1995 - "el Espíritu, y el agua, y la sangre", Luther's German Bible 1545 and German Schlachter 2000 - "der Geist und das Wasser und das Blut", the Portuguese Almeida 1681 and the modern Portuguese Bibles - "o Espírito, e a água, e o sangue", the Dutch Staten Vertaling - "de Geest, en het water, en het bloed", the Tagalog Ang Dating Biblia 1905 and the Tagalog Ang Salita ng Diyos of 1998 - "ang Espiritu, ang tubig, at ang dugo", the Romanian Cornilescu - "Duhul, apa și sîngele", the Hungarian Károli bible - "a Lélek, a víz és a vér" and even Scrivener's 1894 Greek text (Trinitarian Bible Society) as well as the Greek Orthodox text of 1904 have a capital letter for "Spirit" - τὸ Πνεῦμα, καὶ τὸ ὕδωρ, καὶ τὸ αἷμα.

Of much greater concern should be the fact that most of today's new Vatican Versions like the ESV, NIV, NASB completely omit some 23 words and the strongest teaching in the Bible about the Trinity from 1 John 5:7-8.

See Why 1 John 5:7-8 "the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one" is inspired Scripture -

<http://brandplucked.webs.com/1john57.htm>

I hope this has been of some help to you, sister Deb. May God increase our faith and understanding and our love for His precious words.

Will Kinney