

John 14:16,17
The Holy Spirit

Introduction

We come to another leading theme of these Upper Room discourses – the promised gift of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God was present in the Old Testament times, but now there was going to be a richer and fuller manifestation of His power. This promise was fulfilled at Pentecost.

The Holy Spirit used to be called the forgotten member of the Trinity. We are most clear and emphatic about the Son, not quite so clear about the Father, but rarely clear about the Holy Spirit. This imbalance has been partly redressed because of the charismatic movement. There is much talk about the gifts of the Spirit at present. Yet in some places there is still neglect of this matter. Therefore there is vagueness about His being a divine person and His work.

To ignore or neglect this subject is bound to influence our lives and the quality of our lives. No religion is really scriptural if the work of the Holy Spirit is not prominent.

Who is the Holy Spirit?

Jesus was about to leave. Imagine the frame of mind of the disciples – depressed and despondent. Going to be left on their own, they felt so weak and helpless. **I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Comforter to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth** (John 14:16), promises Jesus. The Greek word for Comforter, παρακλητος, literally means “one who comes alongside to help”. The RSV translation, “helper”, is probably more helpful than “comforter”, which has come to mean a consoler or sympathiser. Years ago a “comforter” had a different meaning, it meant a strengthener (Latin “fortis” c.f. fortress, fortify), so “comforter” was good a translation years ago, because it had a much wider meaning then than now.

He specifies “another” – meaning another of the same kind as Jesus was, to take His place. All that Jesus was, the next comforter would be to them. Jesus was their companion, helper, encourager, strengthener, adviser, and guide. Although He would be away in heaven, He would still be back with them in the work of the Holy Spirit. He describes the Spirit as the “Spirit of Truth”, just as He had spoken of Himself – **I am the truth** (John 14:6). The Spirit would witness the truth to them, guide them into the truth, use the truth as His instrument. Jesus also describes Him as the *Holy Spirit* (John 14:26), sensitive to sin and easily grieved by it. They were not going to be alone, then; they would have the presence of another helper.

Theologically, the Holy Spirit is a person and He is divine. With the Father and the Son, He is part of the Godhead, the third person of the Trinity. Not a vague cloud or hazy idea, but a divine person. So with the believer today. We not only have the gift of forgiveness, but the gift of the Holy Spirit, a divine person to help us. He is able to be to us all that Jesus was to His disciples. He enables us to cope and makes us adequate. Jesus gave those disciples, and us, a hard task – but with the command is a

promise of someone to help and enable. He furnishes whatever help is necessary. “Guide and counsellor and friend”. The divine person we can call in to help.

Recently heard a convention speaker who was stationed in Palestine during the war. Going outside the camp early one morning, he was confronted by a pack of half wild dogs, very close, baring their fangs. He was relieved when they disappeared, and shortly two figures approached – a father with a bicycle and his 3-year-old son on the saddle, holding onto the handlebars. The father had one strong hand on the handlebars, guiding the bicycle, and his other arm around the boy. The child was quite unperturbed by the savage dogs, because he was safe with his father. The convention speaker said this image suddenly helped him realise the meaning of the Holy Spirit. One called alongside to help is what the Holy Spirit should be to us. For those with a sense of helplessness, the Holy Spirit wants to put His mighty hand around us to help us onward, and His other hand on the handlebars to guide us and steer the way. What a defence from our enemies when He is our shield.

Where is the Holy Spirit?

He is a gift solely for believers. Not everyone enjoys this gift. **The world cannot accept Him, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him** (John 14:17). By “world” He speaks of the part of mankind which lives as if there is no God, who organize their lives leaving God out of account because He is quite irrelevant to them. They have no interest in the gift of the Holy Spirit and His operations, for **They are foolishness to him** (1 Corinthians 2:14). They just cannot understand.

But the believers who first experienced the Holy Spirit at Pentecost could really testify and fully experience Him being in the midst, by their side, and within. And this is the experience of Christians ever since. He prepares them for service. Jesus’ disciples enjoyed Jesus’ presence, but the Son was limited to being in one place at a time. The Holy Spirit lives in us as a spirit, and is with each one of us all the time, wherever we go. He controls believers from within, revealing His fruit and His power.

The Christian is aware of the Spirit within, for he is a new man, with a new outlook and new power. The Holy Spirit has made him different from what he used to be. He supplies spiritual needs, and will abide with the church till Christ returns. He will never leave us. Trying to live a Christian life without the help of the Holy Spirit, as some do, is like stirring the cup of tea expecting it to get sweeter – when we have forgotten to add the sugar.

The Holy Spirit gives tremendous potential to our lives and the lives of churches. If His power is not manifested, the fault must be with us – our faith or obedience must be wanting. If our self-sufficiency and pride is not quenched, we are not truly open to His influences. The distinguishing mark of the Christian – the presence of the Holy Spirit within. The measure of His fullness may vary in individual lives, but His presence is essential to true Christian experience. We ought never to rest till we know and feel that He dwells in us.

What is the Holy Spirit’s work?

The Holy Spirit will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you (John 14:26). These promises are applied to all Christians sometimes. This is true in secondary reference to us as well. But the primary reference was to the apostles in the Upper Room. The Holy Spirit was being given to them to remind them of the teaching they had heard from the lips of the Son, and to teach them in all things. **He will guide you into all truth, and he will tell you what is yet to come** (John 16:13). They were given the authority and right to teach and guide the early church. The fulfilment of this promise is found in the Gospels, the Epistles, and Revelation. The church was built on the teaching of the apostles and on their writings.

But it is also true in a secondary sense that the Holy Spirit leads us all to understanding of the teaching which was given to the apostles, as we read their testimony. Anyone can learn facts and doctrines, but the inner meaning, application to our selves, the force and power of the truths, their spiritual profit involves the work of the Holy Spirit. Some truths are only taught when in special circumstances. Some truths He can never teach us till we are in the sickbed, are bereaved, or going through adversity. His work is to burn the truth into our souls, engrave it on our hearts, and make our minds sure of it, help us recall it when we need it. He makes the truth real and powerful to the conscience and heart in a way that the human voice cannot. He also enables us to witness to it in power. Christians before tribunals in times of Reformation non-plussed their enemies, not with human wisdom, but because they spoke simple words with the authority of the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion

The abiding presence of the Helper is to be acknowledged by us. Therefore we must treat the Holy Spirit as we would have treated Christ if He had been among us. The disciples told Him their troubles when they were confronted by their adversaries or needed guidance. They sought His aid in understanding His teaching, and sought His strength in their weakness. We must treat the Holy Spirit with the love and tender respect we give to Christ.

He will teach us in our learning, sustain us in our suffering, give us the right words in our teaching, wisdom in our witness-bearing, help in our service. Reckon on His presence, take His power into your calculations, and do not grieve Him by ignoring Him or treating Him as unimportant.

To the unsaved – the Holy Spirit is essential to you. No life apart from Him. Ask Him to show you the things of Christ.