

## **Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time***

### **The Ministry of the Holy Spirit**

Scripture: John 14:15-26

Code: P15

You cannot study the New Testament long without seeing that there is a dichotomy between what we are responsible to do as Christians and what has already been done on our behalf. To understand the distinction is to get a grip on the basics of our faith.

On the one hand, Scripture makes clear how we are to live, act, think, and speak. We are enjoined to be this or to commit ourselves to do that.

But on the other hand, much of the New Testament emphasizes what Christ has already done for us. It says that we are called, justified, sanctified, and kept in the faith through no effort of our own. We learn that Christ and the Holy Spirit are continually interceding on our behalf. And we discover that we have an inheritance that cannot be measured in human terms.

### **The Coming of the Comforter**

Most of Jesus' final discourse to His disciples consists not of commandments they were responsible to obey, but of promises He would fulfill on their behalf. John 14:15-26 is the heart of His message of comfort--that after His departure, the Holy Spirit would come in His place:

"If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. After a little while the world will no longer see Me, but you will see Me; because I live, you will live also. In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him." Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, "Lord, what then has happened that You are going to disclose Yourself to us and not to the world?" Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not

Mine, but the Father's who sent Me. These things I have spoken to you while abiding with 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.

The promises Jesus made in that brief passage are staggering. To whom are they made? In context, Jesus is speaking to His eleven disciples, but the scope of His promises is broader than that. In verse 15 He says, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." That implies the promises that follow apply to all who love Jesus Christ. Thus they apply to all believers in Christ, whose love for Christ is characterized by their obedience.

We cannot miss Jesus' clear statement here that the proof of genuine love for Him is obedience to His commands (a subject I explain in great depth in my book *The Gospel According to Jesus* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988, 1994]). The New Testament repeats that truth a number of times. John 14:21 says, "He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him." Verses 23-24 repeat the same truth: "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word...He who does not love Me does not keep My words."

To those who are obedient, the Lord extends a number of promises. They fall into the category of things that have been accomplished on our behalf without effort on our part. They all are tied to the coming of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, Teacher, and Helper who would minister to the disciples when Jesus left. Together these promises constitute a legacy left by our Lord to all who love Him.

## **The Indwelling Spirit**

The promise of the Holy Spirit is the culmination of all that Jesus said to comfort those eleven troubled men. In that hour of turmoil, they feared being left alone. However Jesus assured them that they would not be left to fend for themselves; they would have a supernatural Helper. The Greek word translated "Helper" (*parakletos*) literally means "one who is called alongside." The King James Version translates it "Comforter," which is one of its meanings.

The Greek word translated "another" may provide a helpful clue in understanding Jesus' meaning in John 14. There are two Greek words frequently translated "another": *heteros* and *allos*. Sometimes the biblical authors used those words interchangeably, but sometimes they used *heteros* to speak of another of a different kind and *allos* to speak of another of the same kind (e.g. the "different" [*heteros*] gospel vs. "another" [*allos*] gospel in Galatians 1:6-7).

*Allos* is the word Jesus used to describe the Holy Spirit: "another [*allos*] Helper." That could be His way of saying, "I am sending you One of exactly the same essence as Me." He wasn't sending just

any helper, but One exactly like Himself with the same compassion, the same attributes of deity, and the same love for them.

Jesus had been the disciples' helper for three years. He had helped them, comforted them, and walked alongside them. Now they would have another Helper--One exactly like Jesus--to minister to them as He had.

The Holy Spirit is not a mystical power; He is a person just as Jesus is a person. He is not a floating fog or some kind of ghostlike emanation. It is unfortunate that the translators of the King James Version used the term *Ghost* instead of *Spirit*. For generations people have had the idea that the Holy Spirit is an apparition, something like Casper the Friendly Ghost, the 1950s and 60s comic book and cartoon character! But He's not a ghost; He's a person.

All believers have two paracletes: the Spirit of God within us and the Son of God in heaven. First John 2:1 says, "If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." The Greek word translated "Advocate" is *parakletos*.

The disciples must have been greatly encouraged and comforted to hear Jesus say that He would send another Helper to minister to them when He left. But Jesus' promise extended beyond that. His next words beautifully culminate the message of comfort: "that He may be with you forever" (John 14:16). Not only would the Holy Spirit come to dwell with them, but also He would never leave.

The apostle Paul said that Christ in us is the hope of glory (Colossians 1:27), and Christ promised His Spirit would reside in us (John 14:17). And He will reside in us permanently. Jesus didn't tell the disciples He would come back and leave again. Nor did He say He would leave and be back in two thousand years. He said He would leave, then come back and be with us as long as we live, and throughout eternity. In Matthew 28:20 Christ says, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." He will never leave or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5).

The fulfillment of Christ's promise came on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:4). The Spirit came and dwelt within the disciples, teaching them all about Christ, as John 14:26 says He would.

Christ was saying, "I'm going away to My Father, yet I'll come to you in the form of My Spirit to dwell within you." That's a wonderful promise every believer has. There's no such thing as a Christian who doesn't possess the indwelling Christ (Romans 8:9). Some people think they have to search for the Holy Spirit, but He dwells in every believer. Paul said to the Corinthians, "Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (1 Corinthians 3:16).

## Spiritual Perception

Notice that the Spirit is called "the Spirit of truth" in John 14:17. Apart from Him, men cannot know or understand truth. Jesus said, "The world cannot receive [the Spirit of truth], because it does not see Him or know Him" (v. 17). When the academic minds of Jesus' day came to their conclusion about who He was, their pronouncement was that He was from the devil (Matthew 12:24). They totally ignored the hundreds of prophecies from their own Scriptures that Jesus fulfilled. Since the world didn't recognize the first Comforter, Jesus, for who He was, you can't expect it to recognize the second One, who is exactly like the first.

So Jesus told His disciples that when the Holy Spirit came, the world would not accept the message any more than it did from Him. And He was right. In Acts 2, when the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost, the unbelievers who witnessed the miraculous manifestation thought the disciples were drunk. The Holy Spirit was just as foreign to the stubborn, rejecting world as Jesus had been.

When I first studied John 14, I was puzzled about why in this context Jesus told the disciples that the world in general would not respond to the Holy Spirit. Then I realized that with all the promises Jesus was giving them, they might have succumbed to overconfidence. He told them they would do greater things than even He had done (v. 12), and He promised to answer every prayer they asked (v. 14). They might have been feeling invincible. If they proclaimed the gospel without knowing that the world would not understand, they might have been crushed. So Jesus was tempering their enthusiasm.

## An Eternal Union with God

In verse 17 Jesus says to His disciples, "But you know Him." They knew of the ministry of God's Spirit from the Old Testament. In Old Testament times, we see the Holy Spirit coming upon certain people for a specific service, and then departing after it was accomplished (cf. 1 Samuel 16:13-14; Ps. 51:11). At Jesus' baptism, the Spirit had descended on Him like a dove. So the disciples were not ignorant of the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

At the end of verse 17 Jesus says, "He abides with you *and* will be *in you*" (emphases added). From now on the Holy Spirit would not just assist them but be in them. The Greek text suggests a permanent, uninterrupted residence--something that never happened in Old Testament times. What the Lord promised in Ezekiel 37:14 would come to pass: "I will put My Spirit within you and you will come to life."

What a privilege it is that God in His grace plants His very essence in us! We have a supernatural Helper, not just with but *in* every one of us who believes.

## **The Presence of Christ**

Our Lord expands the promise in verses 18-19: "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. After a little while the world will no longer see Me, but you will see Me." Jesus would die the next day, so He wanted to reassure His disciples that they could nevertheless count on His presence after that.

He was guaranteeing that He would rise from the dead. His dying on the cross would not be the end of His existence. But beyond that, He promised, "I will come to you." Indeed He sought out His disciples after the resurrection, but the context implies He was speaking of something more: His spiritual presence in every believer through the agency of the Holy Spirit.

That is the mystery of the Trinity: the Holy Spirit abides in us (v. 17), Christ indwells us (Colossians 1:27), and God is in us (1 John 4:12). That abiding presence is the source of eternal life. Jesus added, "Because I live, you will live also" (v. 19).

Eternal life refers not just to quantity--to life that goes on forever--but more to quality. It's the kind of life that makes you sensitive to what God is doing. The essence of spiritual life is walking with God, sensing the Holy Spirit in your life, communing with Christ, and participating in the spiritual realm.

The Holy Spirit's ministry is to show us Christ. He assures us that Christ really exists. In John 16:15 Jesus says, "All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said that He takes of Mine and will disclose it to you." When Jesus told the disciples to believe in Him just as they believed in the invisible God, He said He would send the Holy Spirit, who would remind them of His presence. Any ministry that centers on the Holy Spirit is dangerous because the Spirit's ministry is to point to Christ.

## **Full Understanding**

Those who love Christ are not only indwelt by the Holy Spirit, Christ, and the Father, but also enjoy a supernatural union with them. Jesus illustrated that union by comparing it with His relationship to the Father: "In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you" (John 14:20). We are one with God and Christ. That's why sin is so out of place in the believer's life.

At this point, the disciples still didn't understand the mystery of the relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit--let alone how they would be able to relate to all three. That's why Jesus said, "In that day you will know," a reference to the day of Pentecost.

As soon as the disciples received the Holy Spirit in Acts 2, they began to understand. On the very day that the Spirit of God came to dwell within him, Peter preached a powerful sermon clearly delineating

who Jesus Christ is, who the Father is, how they are related, why Jesus came, why He died, why He rose, and what it all meant in reference to Israel.

## **The Manifestation of the Father**

In John 14:21 Jesus says, "He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him." The Father loves anyone who loves His Son. That's not difficult to understand: I find I like people who like my children. How much more must God, whose love is perfect, love those who love His Son?

Jesus also promises to love us and to disclose Himself and the Father to us. I am sure all the disciples were dumbfounded at that point. Judas--not Judas Iscariot, but the disciple who is also called Lebbaeus and Thaddaeus--spoke out: "Lord, what then has happened that You are going to disclose Yourself to us and not to the world?" (v. 22). Apparently he thought Jesus would physically manifest Himself and the Father. He reasoned that if he and the other disciples could see Jesus, everyone else should be able to as well. Furthermore, since Christ was to be the Savior of the world, why would He not manifest Himself to the world?

Jesus answered, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him" (v. 23). Thaddaeus might not have been satisfied with that answer; it sounds exactly like verse 21, which sounds exactly like verse 15. They all say the same thing: "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments, and I will manifest Myself to you." We begin to get the idea that this is an important concept.

The point Jesus was making to Thaddaeus is that He would manifest Himself in a spiritual sense. An unsaved person doesn't have spiritual perception (1 Corinthians 2:12-14), so only those who love and obey Christ can comprehend the manifestation He was talking about.

In verse 24 Jesus says, "He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me." How can He manifest Himself to someone who is disobedient? People in the world don't want Christ. They don't want to obey His words. They don't love Him. And since the words Jesus spoke came from the Father, the world doesn't want Him either. He manifests Himself only to those who want Him. There's not a soul in the world who wants Jesus Christ to the point of loving obedience who doesn't receive Him (cf. John 1:12-13).

## **A Supernatural Teacher**

Jesus had spoken only the Father's words, but the disciples always had trouble understanding Him during His earthly ministry. For example, John 12:16 says, "These things His disciples did not understand at the first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written of Him, and that they had done these things to Him." In John 16:12 Jesus says, "I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now."

Now He was turning over His teaching of the disciples to the Holy Spirit, who would dwell in them: "These things I have spoken to you while abiding with 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" (John 14:25-26). For three years Jesus had been teaching them the Father's truth, but they never understood much. Now He would send a Teacher that would dwell within them.

Because of that wonderful promise, the disciples were later able to recall the precise words Jesus had spoken to them. Once they recorded them as Scripture, those words would be perfect and error free. In addition, the Spirit revealed new truth to them. Those whom God chose wrote it all down, resulting in the Word of God as we have it today. To deny the accuracy or the integrity of the Bible is to deny this crucial aspect of the Spirit's ministry.

The Holy Spirit's main role to us is that of teacher. Verse 26 says that the Spirit teaches "all things." That does not mean He imparts to us some kind of omniscience. "All things" is used here in a relative sense. It speaks of "all things that pertain to life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3, New King James Version).

How does the promise that the Holy Spirit will instruct us and bring all things to our memory apply today? The Spirit guides us in our pursuit of truth through the Word of God. He teaches us by convicting us of sin, affirming truth in our hearts, and opening our understanding to the depth of God's revealed truth. As you've probably experienced many times, He often brings to mind appropriate verses and truths from Scripture at just the right moment.

First John 2:27 says, "The anointing which you have received from Him [Christ] abides in you...as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him." Why does a Christian continue in Christ and not follow after cults and false doctrine? Because of the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit. God has so endowed the Christian with discernment that he ultimately will not be deceived by lies. He may become confused at times, but he will always abide in Christ.

Verse 27 speaks of the anointing that the believer "received"--past tense. You received the Spirit when you were saved, and He continues to abide in you. The Spirit never leaves any Christian; the true believer will never depart from the faith. If one ever did, the Holy Spirit would have failed in His

teaching ministry.

## **The Power of the Spirit in You**

Prior to receiving the Holy Spirit, the apostles were powerless to carry out Christ's unfinished work. So in Acts 1:8 Jesus promised, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you." The Greek word translated "power" (*dunamis*) is the source of the English word *dynamite*. Every Christian is packed with power--the Holy Spirit.

Some Christians feel they are lacking in power. If you feel that way, it's not God's fault. The power is within you--all you need to do is turn on the ignition switch!

Ephesians 5:18 says to "be filled with the Spirit." To live a Spirit-filled life means to yield yourself to the control of the Spirit. The way to do that is to "let the word of Christ richly dwell within you" (Colossians 3:16). Being filled with the Spirit and letting the Word dwell in you are synonymous because they produce the same results: a song in your heart, a thankful attitude, and loving relationships at home and at work (Ephesians 5:19--6:9; Colossians 3:16--4:1).

To let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly is to be preoccupied with the presence of Christ. The more you saturate your mind with what you learn about Him from the Bible, the more He controls your thoughts. By yielding yourself totally to the Word of God and letting it permeate your life, you'll be controlled by the Spirit's desires.

God can do great things through you. Ephesians 3:20 says He "is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us." The power is in you; it just needs to be released. That happens when you yield every aspect of your life to the Spirit's control.

## **Conclusion**

Nothing can take the place of the Holy Spirit's work in the life of the believer. Through Him we are "heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ" (Romans 8:17). We are infinitely richer than all the billionaires of the world put together because what we possess is an eternal inheritance.

Paul, quoting the prophet Isaiah, wrote, "Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him" (1 Corinthians 2:9). Christians are rich beyond imagination. And the greatest resource of all--the Holy Spirit--dwells in us and is with us forever.



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