The Coming of the Comforter
John 14:15-26
P020

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, we are told repeatedly in Scripture how we are to live, act, think, and speak. We are enjoined to be this or to commit ourselves to that. We are informed about what we are to do, at what point we are to commit ourselves, and for what tasks we are to separate ourselves. All of that is essential to our Christian faith.

But on the other hand, much of the New Testament emphasizes what Christ has already done for us. We are told 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 are the recipients of an inheritance that cannot be measured in human terms.

Most of Jesus' final discourse to His disciples consists not of commandments they were responsible to obey, but rather of promises of what He would do on their behalf. John 14:15-26 is the heart of His message of comfort. Here, Jesus gives to His disciples the promise 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 behold 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 makes 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. Verse 15 says, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." Implied in that statement is the corollary that the promises that follow apply to all those who love Jesus Christ. Thus they apply to all believers in Christ, those whose love is marked out by their obedience.

We cannot miss Jesus' clear statement here that the proof of genuine love for Him is obedience to His commandments. The New Testament repeats this truth a number of times. Verse 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."

Love for Christ is not sentimentalism or a sickly, pseudo-spiritual depression, and it does not result in mere lip service. Real love for Him is demonstrated by an active, eager, joyful, responsive obedience to His commandments. What you say about your love for Him is relatively unimportant—what counts is that you demonstrate your love for Him by how you live your life. Discipleship is not singing songs and saying nice things. True discipleship is obedience.

To those who are obedient, the Lord extends a number of promises. These promises are for all disciples from all ages. They constitute that which has been accomplished on our behalf without effort on our part.

All of them 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 those who love Him.

The Indwelling Spirit

The promise of the Holy Spirit is the culmination of all that Jesus has to say to comfort these eleven troubled men. In that hour of turmoil, they feared being left alone. Jesus assured them that they would not be left to fend for themselves, but they would have a supernatural Helper. The Greek word for "Helper" is parakletos, which literally means "one who is called (kaleo) alongside (para)." We sometimes use the transliterated term paraclete in English. The King James Version translates it "Comforter," which is one of the meanings of the word. Jesus is saying, "I am going to send a Helper, a Comforter—One to stand alongside you."

The Greek word translated "another" is crucial to an understanding of Jesus' meaning. The Greek language, with all its complexities, is much more precise than English. The Greeks had two words that meant "another." One was heteros, which means "another kind," as in, "This wrench doesn't fit; bring me another one." Allos also means "another," but it means "another of the same kind," as in "I enjoyed that sandwich; I think I'll have another."

Allos is the word Jesus used to describe the Holy Spirit: "another [allos] Helper." He is, in effect,

saying, "I am sending you One of exactly the same essence as Myself." The disciples would have known His meaning immediately. He was not sending back just any old helper, but One exactly like Himself, with the same compassion, the same attributes of deity, and the same love for them.

Jesus had been their Paraclete 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 as much as Jesus is a person. He is not a floating fog or some kind of ghostlike emanation. It is unfortunate that the King James translators used the term "Ghost" instead of "Spirit." For generations, people have had the idea that the Holy Spirit is something like Casper, the "friendly" ghost of cartoon fame. He is not a ghost, but a person.

All believers have two paracletes—the Spirit of God within us, and Christ at the right hand of the Father in heaven. First John 2:1 says, "My little children, I am writing these things to you that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." The word translated "Advocate" in that verse is parakletos.

You can imagine that the disciples must have been greatly encouraged and comforted to hear Jesus say that He would send another Helper like Him to minister to them in His place when He left. As One who is the exact essence of Him, the Holy Spirit would be a perfect substitute for the familiar presence of Jesus.

But Jesus' promise extended beyond that. His next words beautifully culminate the message of comfort: "that He may be with you forever" (v. 16). Not only would the Holy Spirit come to dwell with them—He would never leave. Once the Spirit of God resides within a person, He is there forever.

In Luke 11:13, Jesus told His disciples that the Father would give them the Holy Spirit if they asked. Yet here, before they can even ask, He asks on their behalf. That is a good picture of how our prayer operates. The Lord knows what we have need of before we even ask. I'm sure that often, before we get our prayers organized, Jesus Christ has already asked on our behalf for what we need. That is part of His ministry of advocacy and intercession.

Spiritual Perception

Notice the Spirit is called "the Spirit of truth." He is both the essence of truth, because He's God, and the One who guides us into truth. In fact, unsaved men do not recognize the Spirit or His work, and that is as Jesus said it would be: "The world cannot receive [the Spirit of Truth], because it does not see Him or know Him" (v. 17). If the people of the world didn't recognize the first Comforter, Jesus, you cannot expect them to recognize the second One, who is exactly like the first.

Unsaved people have no facility for perception. They have no way to see the working of the power of the Holy Spirit. When the academic minds of Jesus' day came to their conclusion about who He was, their very astute, reasoned, theological pronouncement was that He was from the devil (Matthew 12:24)—and that came after years of studying His ministry. That shows graphically the spiritual capacity of unregenerate humanity. Given all the facts, they will invariably conclude the wrong thing.

In 1 Corinthians 2:12-14, the apostle Paul writes,

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

In other words, the only way a man can understand the things of God is to have the Spirit of God. The natural man cannot understand the Holy Spirit's work.

In fact, in John 8:44-45, 47, Jesus indicted the Jewish leaders:

You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me.... He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear them, because you are not of God.

As unsaved men, they had no capacity to comprehend the truth of God.

So Jesus told His disciples that when the Holy Spirit came, the world would not get the message, anymore than it believed Him when He came. And He was right. In Acts 2, when the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost, the unbelievers who witnessed the 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 would not respond to the Holy Spirit. Then it dawned on me that with all the promises Jesus was giving them, they might have succumbed to overconfidence, He had told them they would do greater things than even He had done (v.12), and promised to answer every prayer they asked (v.14). They might have been totally deflated. So Jesus was trying to temper their enthusiasm.

The Eternal Union with God

At the end of verse 17, our Lord reveals a classic dispensational truth: "But you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you." They knew of the ministry of God's Spirit from the Old Testament. In the Old Testament economy, the Spirit of God sometimes came upon people for a certain service, and after it was accomplished, He departed. The Spirit of God came on Saul, Azariah, and Isaiah, for example. At Jesus' baptism the Spirit had descended on Him like a dove. So the disciples were not ignorant of the ministry of the Spirit.

But notice Jesus' words to them at the end of verse 17: "He abides with you, and will be in you" (emphasis added). From now on the Holy Spirit would not just be present with them; He would indwell them, and the verb tense in the Greek indicates that it would be a permanent, uninterrupted residence. That never happened in the Old Testament age.

Scripture had prophesied this in Ezekiel 37:14: "I will put my Spirit within you, and you will come to life." That promise actually has reference to the nation Israel in the Kingdom age, but it is prefigured in the church age.

What a privilege it is in the grace of God that He would plant His very essence in us. We have a supernatural Helper, not just with, but in every one of us. Every moment of our existence throughout all eternity, we have the presence of the Holy Spirit within.

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." This is the picture of a dying father. He would literally die before another day had passed, and He wanted to reassure them that they could nevertheless count on His presence after that.

There are at least two elements involved in this promise. For one thing, He was guaranteeing them that He would rise from the dead. His dying on the cross would not be the end of existence. But beyond that, He promises, "I will come to you." Some say that this is a promise of the rapture. But if this verse referred to the rapture, it would say, "I will come for you." Others say it is only a promise that they would see Him after the resurrection. I don't think that's the best interpretation either, because He was only on earth for forty days after He rose. That seems like a small commodity of comfort.

What He seems rather to be speaking of is His spiritual presence in every believer through the agency of the Holy Spirit. He is saying, "When the Spirit of God comes to reside in your life, I will be there as well." In Matthew 28:20, He promised, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

This 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). This presence is the source of eternal life. Jesus goes on to say, "Because I live, you will live also" (v. 19).

How is it that a man can sense the presence of God within him? How can he know the Spirit is there? How is it that he knows that Christ is there? He must be spiritually alive to have spiritual perception. The spiritually dead man understands nothing about God. He cannot respond to God.

But the person who is spiritually alive lives in another dimension. He is alive to the spiritual world. And the basis of his life is the resurrection of Jesus Christ: "Because I live, you will live also." Eternal life isn't the quantity of life, it's the kind of life that makes you eternally sensitive to what God is doing. Here is the essence of spiritual life: to be alive spiritually, walking with God, sensing the Holy Spirit, communing with Christ, and moving and participating in the spiritual realm. The world cannot know anything about that.

Full Understanding

Those who love Christ are not only indwelt by the Holy Spirit, Christ, and the Father, but the believer enjoys a supernatural union with them as well. Jesus illustrates this 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" (v. 20). We are one with God and Christ. That's why sin is so out of place in the believer's life.

It is confusing to try to understand how we can be in Christ and He in us. How can both things be true at once? It doesn't seem logical, but it is not supposed to be. We are so closely united spiritually with Christ that the distinctions are difficult to sort out.

At this point, the disciples still did not understand the mystery of the relationship of the Son to the Father. Union with deity was such a foreign concept to them that their minds could not conceive of it. So Jesus said, "In that day you will know." It seems clear that He was referring to the day of Pentecost, in which the Holy Spirit came. Before He came to dwell within them and teach them the truth, they had no way of understanding the relationship of God with Christ and how it corresponded to their relationship with Him.

But as suddenly as they received the Holy Spirit in Acts 2, they began to understand. Peter is probably the best evidence of that. Bumbling, denying Peter, who rarely seemed to understand anything, stood up on the very day that the Spirit of God came to dwell within him and preached a powerful sermon, clearly delineating exactly who Jesus Christ is, who the Father is, why He rose, and what it all meant in reference to Israel.

Peter had not secretly acquired a seminary education, or suddenly read all the good theology books—those things weren't even available. The Spirit of God had supernaturally untangled Peter's understanding, and everything had fallen into place for him. He finally understood that day. It may not have made any more sense logically than it did before, but in a spiritual sense, he understood.

The Manifestation of the Father

In a beautiful summary, crushing the full bloom of redemption into one little wisp of fragrance, Jesus reviews how a person comes into that supernatural union with Him: "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." He has come full circle to the point where He began in verse 15.

The Father wants to glorify the Son, and He continually does so. Anybody who loves the Son is thus loved of the Father. That is not difficult to understand from a human perspective. I find I like people who like my children and grand-children. How much more must God, whose love is perfect, love those who love His Son?

Not only that, but Jesus also promises to love them, and to disclose Himself and the Father to them. That supernatural union comes with loving Jesus Christ, a personal love relationship between the believer and Christ—not religion, cranking out the motions, going to church and going through some kind of a ritual—but an honest, deep, heartfelt, committed kind of love that obeys. To that kind of love comes the manifestation of God in all His fullness and the spiritual union that results.

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—speaks out: "Lord, what then has happened that You are going to disclose Yourself to us and not to the world?" (v. 22). He thought Jesus meant

that He would physically manifest Himself and the Father. Yet he reasoned that if they could see Jesus, everyone else should be able to as well. Furthermore, Christ was to be the Savior of the world, how could He not manifest Himself 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" (vv. 23-24). Thaddaeus might not have been very 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 He made to Thaddaeus is that He was talking about manifesting Himself in a spiritual sense—revealing Himself and the Father in one's heart, to his spiritual senses. An unsaved person doesn't have spiritual perception, so the only one who can comprehend the manifestation Christ is talking about is one who loves Him and shows his love by obedience.

It is not a question of perfection—if we say we are without sin, we call God a liar (cf.1 John 1:10). Nor is the issue one of earning salvation with obedience. Salvation is a gift that comes by faith. It cannot be earned or deserved. But faith that does not produce obedience is not saving faith (see James 2:17). The issue is not perfection, but the direction of the redeemed life. The Lord has fellowship only with those whose hearts welcome Him and love Him and whose love is clearly indicated by their obedience. They are the ones who are truly redeemed. The world will never discern Jesus Christ because the world will not love Him. The world will never discern the Father because the Father reveals Himself only to those who love the Son.

Jesus continues: "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" (v. 24). 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. The reason people of the world don't receive the manifestation of God is that they don't want Him. And He won't manifest Himself to an unbelieving, unwanting, unloving world.

Note that Jesus claimed His words were the Father's. It was the highest claim to authority He could make. He was in essence saying, "If you reject My words, you have rejected God." His words were the Father's truth. Christ had subjugated His own thoughts, words, ideas, and attitudes, to the will of the Father, so that while they were always in perfect harmony, nevertheless, the Son was totally yielded to the Father's will.

A Supernatural Teacher

Jesus had spoken only the Father's words, but the disciples had always had trouble understanding. For example, in John 2:22 we read, "So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had

spoken." 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 said, "I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now." They had failed to understand so much of what He had already said, that He had to call a halt to it.

Now He was turning over the continuing teaching 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" (vv. 25-26). All these three years He had been telling them the Father's truth. But they never really understood much. Now He would send them a resident Teacher to dwell within.

The Holy Spirit comes in the name of Christ. That means, of course, that He comes in Christ's stead. Christ had come in the name of the Father. Neither carries on His own ministry independently. The Holy Spirit's ministry is to stand in this world in the place of Christ. He desires what Christ desires, loves what Christ loves, does what Christ would do, and thus brings glory to Christ, not to Himself.

So God gave His truth to Christ, who gave it to the Holy Spirit, who reveals it to us. The Spirit receives nothing of Himself, seeks no glory of His own, and desires only to manifest the glory of Jesus Christ.

His role is that of a Teacher: "He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you" (v. 26). That does not mean, of course, that the Holy Spirit imparts to us some kind of omniscience. "All things" is used here in a relative sense. It means "all things pertaining to spiritual maturity."

A secondary application of this promise is that the Holy Spirit would enable these disciple to recall the words Jesus had spoken to them so that when they recorded them as Scripture, they would be perfect and error free. It is a promise of divine inspiration.

Can you imagine their trying, with no supernatural help, to put together a record of Jesus' words? They had to have a supernatural Teacher to record accurately Jesus' words as Scripture. In addition, the Spirit would reveal new truth. Those whom God chose wrote it down, resulting in the Word of God as we have it today. To question the accuracy or the integrity of it is to deny this crucial aspect of the Spirit's role.

Faith in the inerrancy of biblical inspiration is fundamental to sound doctrine. Those who give up the inspiration of the Bible have given up the basis of Christianity. History has repeatedly borne that out. Churches, seminaries, and denominations that have yielded ground on the issue of inspiration have opened the floodgates to rationalism, compromise, and ultimately, total apostasy.

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 is of sin, affirming the truth in our heart, and opening our understanding to the depth of truth God has revealed. He often brings to mind appropriate verses and truths from Scripture at just the right time.

Matthew 10:19 is a promise to the apostles as Christ sent them on a mission to preach among the cities, but it shows how the Spirit of God works, even today: "But when they hand you over [to be tried for your faith], do not worry about how or what you are to say; for it will be given you in that hour what you are to say."

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), infinitely richer than all the billionaires of the world put together, because what we possess is not a passing thing—ours is an eternal inheritance.

Paul, quoting 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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