

Jesus and the Spirit

Sometime I would like to do a series on John 13-17, Jesus' final interactions with His disciples before He was arrested, tried and crucified. This time through, we're going to look at two of the many themes from these chapters. Today I'll look at the teaching Jesus gave in these chapters on the Holy Spirit, and on May 5, Ruth will take us through a passage in chapter 15 about the world hating the true followers of Jesus.

We get a lot of our understanding of the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts and their role in the life of the church from the writing of Luke, mainly the book of Acts, and from the letters of Paul. But John has carefully preserved for us a significant and profound collection of teachings that are found in chapters 14 and 16 of his gospel.

Let's start with chapter 14 where Jesus promises to ask the Father for the Spirit:

If you love Me, obey My commandments. And I will ask the Father and He will give you another Counsellor, who will never leave you. He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth. The world at large cannot receive Him because it isn't looking for Him and doesn't recognize Him. But you do, because He lives with you now and later will be in you.

No, I will not abandon you as orphans - I will come to you. In just a little while the world will not see Me again, but you will. For I will live again, and you will, too. When I am raised to life again, you will know that I am in My Father, and you are in Me, and I am in you. Those who obey My commandments are the ones who love Me. And because they love Me, My Father will love them, and I will love them. And I will reveal Myself to each one of them. (14:15-21)

What do we learn about the ministry of the Holy Spirit in this passage?

1. He is the gift of the Father. We know that every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. Therefore, we know that the gift of the Spirit is wonderful, a blessing for our lives.
2. The second thing we learn is that the Father will give His followers another Counsellor. Who is the first Counsellor? Why does Jesus say that the Spirit is *another* Counsellor? It would be very creative and dishonest to think that these 11 men had any prior Counsellor other than their Teacher and Lord. So the Spirit who is coming to them is *like Jesus!* He is somehow the same as, fulfilling the same function that Jesus fulfilled in leading His disciples. The second part of this is the word "counsellor". The word translated counsellor is *parakletos*, which literally means "someone called along side", or someone who is called in to help. It is sometimes translated with the English word "advocate", but that suggests someone like a lawyer who pleads your case in court, which is a rare use of the word. More common uses for the word, outside the New Testament, are "mediator", "intercessor", "one who appears in another's behalf" and the simple "helper". All of which is to say that the "Counsellor" that Jesus will ask the Father for is the One who intervenes on our behalf, who supports us and helps us walk as we should, loving Jesus and obeying His commandments.

3. The third thing we learn about the Spirit is that the Father's gift is permanent. The NIV reads that the Spirit will be with us "forever" and the New Living says that He "will never leave you." This was a new thing, an unexpected blessing, because the Spirit during Old Testament times came on just a few people, from time to time, to accomplish a task - and then He was gone. So Jesus' promise here is radically new and exciting. This 'other Mediator' like Jesus, will come to act for us, interceding, coming alongside to help, and will never leave us, never abandon us.
4. That was all in verse 16. Now, in verse 17, we find the identity of this gift of the Father, that He is the Holy Spirit and then we read this important phrase, "who leads into all truth". This is another key function of the Spirit who is present with us forever - He guides us into all truth. This tells us a couple of important things about ourselves and our world: one is that there is truth out there to be found and the other is that we need a guide to find it. At some point in life, most of us come to the realization that we can be pretty gullible at times and that we've been taken advantage of more than we'd like to admit. We also tend to form fairly strong opinions around very limited sources of information - in other words, what the media we're reading or listening to wants us to believe. We need a guide into truth and that is what the Holy Spirit does for us.
5. The next thing we learn about the Holy Spirit is that the world "out there" doesn't know Him, isn't able to receive Him and we're told two reasons for this. The first reason they can't receive Him is that they're not looking for Him. People may be looking for health and happiness and success, but they aren't looking for the Spirit of God. The second reason is that they can't recognize the Holy Spirit, even when they are confronted by His Presence. Like the Pharisees in the Gospels, they can see a miracle and call it coincidence - or even evil - and they can have their hearts exposed and not be moved by it. So Jesus tells His disciples that the world, that system of thinking and acting and speaking that deliberately excludes God from their existence, has no capacity for recognizing the Spirit.
6. But, says Jesus, the disciples do know Him because they have already experienced His presence with them and will soon experience His presence IN them. Their experience with Jesus, their submission to Him, their devotion to Him, has opened their hearts to the real presence of the Holy Spirit. And in the next verse, Jesus makes it clear why this is ...
7. The seventh thing we learn about the Spirit is that this is the Spirit of Jesus Himself. After teaching them these first six things about Him, Jesus then tells them, "No, I will not abandon you as orphans — I will come to you." "I will come to you" is like Jesus' later promise that He would be with them always, to the end of the age. He will be gone from them physically, but He will be present with them BY the Holy Spirit.
8. The final point that I want to draw out of this section comes in verse 20. After telling His men that the time would soon come when the world would not see Him again, but that they would, He explains, "When I am raised to life again. you will know that I am in My Father, and you are in Me, and I am in you." Again, this emphasis that the very Presence of Jesus continues on with those who love Him, with those who truly follow Him.

This whole passage on the ongoing presence of Jesus with His disciples is bracketed, at the beginning and the end by a call to love Him and to obey His commandments. What were His commandments? Stated on one occasion, Jesus said that the whole law and the prophets were summarized by the command to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and then to love our neighbour as ourself. In the passage we looked at last week, as part of the celebration of Passover with His disciples, Jesus said, "I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other just as I have loved you." So, all of this should be read in context: the Spirit is given to those who love Jesus and show that love by obeying His call to love others as well. The Spirit Himself is Jesus' presence with us, a gift from the Father who will never leave us, One who comes alongside to help us where we are weak, who leads us into truth, who is unrecognizable to the world around us because they don't love Him or even want to know Him, but who is known by those who have opened their hearts in love and loyalty to Jesus.

Before we move on to chapter 16, there is one short passage near the end of 14 that's important to mention. It's verse 26:

When the Father sends the Counsellor as My representative - and by the Counsellor I mean the Holy Spirit - He will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I Myself have told you.

That is an important part of the Spirit's ministry that is often overlooked. When the disciples went on to write for themselves, or to tell others what to write, the Holy Spirit reminded them of everything, of all that Jesus had said and done. Those stories told and written down became our gospels and the Spirit is the inspiration, the breath, behind each one of them. He did His job, just as Jesus had promised. We aren't just relying on human memory, but on the Spirit's guidance and inspiration.

The second block of teaching on the Holy Spirit comes in John 16 and I'll start reading from v. 5:

But now I am going away to the One who sent Me, and none of you has asked Me where I am going. Instead, you are very sad. But it is actually best for you that I go away, because if I don't, the Counsellor won't come. If I do go away, He will come because I will send Him to you. And when He comes, He will convince the world of its sin, and of God's righteousness, and of the coming judgment. The world's sin is unbelief in Me. Righteousness is available because I go to the Father, and you will see Me no more. Judgment will come because the prince of this world has already been judged.

Oh, there is so much more I want to tell you, but you can't bear it now. When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all truth. He will not be presenting His own ideas; He will be telling you what He has heard. He will tell you about the future. He will bring Me glory by revealing to you whatever He receives from Me. All that the Father has is mine; this is what I mean when I say that the Spirit will reveal to you whatever He receives from Me. (16:5-15)

In this chapter we see the work of the Spirit as illuminating truth to the whole world, to everyone.

1. In the first place, the Spirit is able to convince or convict the world of sin - specifically the sin of not believing in Jesus. What has John been all about throughout the gospel - belief! He has quoted Jesus and added his own commentary calling on people to believe in Jesus and has described the great blessing that comes from such belief. It's the drumbeat of the Gospel; it sets the rhythm of all that Jesus and John are saying in its pages: believe into Jesus and you will be saved into zoe, into eternal life.
2. The second thing the Spirit will do is convince the world of God's righteousness and I think it's more than saying that God has been right all along and that all human rebellion against Him has been wrong. I think it's saying that because Jesus has returned to the Father, having completed the mission for which He was sent to earth, that the gift of righteousness will now be made available to those who believe in Jesus.
3. The third thing the Spirit will do is convince the world that judgment is coming, the judgment of the prince of darkness, the evil ruler of this age. From that judgment, the powers of darkness will know that their time of rule in the hearts and minds of humans is limited, and that the ultimate destruction of evil is certain.

To summarize, when the Spirit comes, He will address the spiritual powers of this world, bringing conviction of the power and victory of God. Those who stand with the powers of darkness will be convinced that Jesus is worthy of belief, that the righteousness of God has come through Him and that the evil powers have been judged and will be overcome. That's a lot that the Spirit will do.

In the second part of this section, Jesus explains that there is a lot more that He'd like to tell them, but that they can't bear any more. And then He tells them, again, that when the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide them into all truth. And Jesus makes it clear that this truth is from Him and the Father; the Spirit represents them perfectly. Another beautiful picture of how the Trinity works: Father, Son and Holy Spirit functioning as a unity of purpose and power and love.

Now, when we read Paul's teaching on the Holy Spirit or read the book of Acts and witness the dynamic power of the Spirit, our focus is limited to the more spectacular aspects of the Spirit's ministry. Here in John, we are given a whole different aspect of what the coming of the Spirit would mean for the church. Here is the inspiration and provision for the writing of the Gospels and the development of the doctrines, or core beliefs, of the early church. Here we have the One who convinces the world of Jesus' trustworthiness, His authority, His origin and His victory.

And in John we see the Spirit as a very personal gift from the Father - His presence called alongside the believer, His presence to advocate for us in our need, His presence to intercede for us, to comfort us, to remind us continually that we are never alone.

And in John I think we see more clearly than in other places that the Spirit provides us with the essentials necessary for us to continue in our faith. The world is constantly at

odds with the Spirit, always trying to discredit His ministry, trying to cause us to stumble in doubt and darkness - like they do. But John tells us that the Spirit of Truth acts to reveal Jesus to us, to lead us into truth, to remind us of the things Jesus has taught us, to expose the lies of that world system that opposes Jesus and to lead us in the light of what's real and eternal and filled with love.

So, as I turn to finding applications for this passage, I want to begin there. Why do we need the Spirit of Truth and how does He lead us?

1. The short and simple answer is that the world out there is built on lies. The art of politics in our day is not to tell the truth but to tell a lie in a way that makes people either believe it, or at least want it. For example, when I was a child, it was economically very possible for a couple to raise their family on one income. Now it has become very difficult, but this is sold to us as a good thing, as a sign of progress, because now the role of raising children can be passed on to the professionals who are trained and hired by the state. In coming generations, very few children will grow up without the state having the most important role in their upbringing. Again, this is sold to us as a benefit, as a positive, in which children grow up with shared values, a shared view of what's important in their world, a shared commitment to whatever political agenda is being driven at the moment. But where is the evidence that this has been good for society? Why do we believe that the state raising our children is better than having us raise them? There are numerous lies which have come to be widely accepted in the social structures of our culture: if something is legal, it's right - whether abortion or euthanasia or any one of dozens of other social issues. And in every case, the far-left media ignores objective, factual research and continues to promote the misinformation and biased views of a particular ideology. A world that is driven by ideologies is not a world that is open to truth, so we need to be led by the Holy Spirit. We need to know the voice of authority, the voice that always speaks truth, the voice that can reorient our thinking around things the way God has made them and the way He intends for them to be acted upon. We think we understand, we think we know how to act with wisdom and with compassion, but the Spirit shows us those aspects of our thinking that we've overlooked, that we've misunderstood, that we're maybe blind to. Jesus said, and we've seen it in recent weeks, that He is the light of the world and that those who reject Him stumble in the darkness - as our Western world tries to push Jesus out to the margins of society, we see the darkness growing and our need to hear and to know the truth becoming a desperate need.
2. The other really central application from these texts on the coming of the Spirit is the focus on relationship. The Spirit isn't a book of rules or a course on spirituality. He is a person, He is the presence of the living God, He is the Counsellor, the Comforter, the One called alongside, so we can't relate to Him as we relate to a book or a sign post or a great talk. We have to learn to relate to Him as a person. He is here with us, there are ways He can help us, things we can and should learn from Him, guidance and inspiration that only He can give. To grow in our faith, to mature as followers of Jesus, will require a deepening relationship with the Holy Spirit, so let's work on developing that. How do we learn to relate to a person we

can't see, rarely if ever hear from (at least audibly) and find so easy to ignore? Let me end with a couple of thoughts and then ask for yours . . .

- a. The Presence of God was with the Israelites in the Wilderness of Sinai. They couldn't see Him and very rarely heard Him (and when they did they thought it was thunder), but they developed an awareness of His presence through certain disciplines, practices, that reminded them that He was there. One was worship, another was learning to be grateful, another was the challenge to be obedient, another was being reminded by Moses that God was there. We don't have Moses - but we do have his writings and all the rest of Scripture. And we have everything else that they had. In our approach to God, we need to add in, wherever possible, an awareness of the Spirit's presence, just by responding to Him, in our daily devotions, our habits of the heart.
- b. Secondly, I want to suggest one particular kind of spiritual discipline to help grow in awareness of the Spirit's presence with you. Try journalling, writing out some prayers, some conversations with God about big issues you're facing or nagging questions that you can never find satisfactory answers for. Keep the conversation going ... keep writing ... and then check back once in awhile and see if the Spirit hasn't been speaking to you about those concerns. What you're doing in that process is building your own awareness of the Spirit's presence - because He is very real and very present - and you're learning how to relate to someone you can't see and may never hear audibly. The rewards will be wonderful - and they'll be eternal.