

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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The Holy Spirit: The Promise of the Comforter

This morning we begin a new series of talks on the Holy Spirit. Our subject today is, The Promise of the Comforter. John, in chapters 13-17 of his Gospel, gives us an amazing insight into the heart of the Lord Jesus as He faced the cross. Instead of being occupied with the sufferings which lay before Him, the Saviour spends the evening addressing the needs of His disciples and preparing them for future service when He had returned to heaven. It is during these talks that He teaches them about Holy Spirit. This teaching begins in chapter 14 verses 15-18 and 25-26.

The chapter has a wonderful sequence of promises.

In verse 1, the Saviour promises Himself as the Person who is the object of our faith; "believe in Me".

In verse 2, He promises a place for us in heaven, "I go to prepare a place for you".

In verse 3, He promises His personal return, "I will come again".

In the same verse He promises His presence forever, "where I am (in heaven) there you may be also."

In verse 13, He promises the power of His name, "ask in My name".

Then in verse 16, which is a key verse for us this morning, He promises the Parakletos, that is the Holy Spirit. "I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever."

Finally, in verse 27, He promises peace, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you."

At the beginning of this first passage in verse 15, the Lord Jesus speaks about love and obedience, "If you love Me, keep My commandments". It is vital to realise that the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives is directly linked to our personal love for the Lord which is proved by our obedience to His word. We should not forget that unless this love for the Lord exists and we are obedient to His word we cannot expect the Holy Spirit to work in power through us. It is possible for us both to "grieve the Spirit of God" (Ephesians 4:30) and to "quench the Spirit" (1 Thessalonians 5:19). The Holy Spirit is a Person in the Godhead. We grieve Him by allowing things in our lives which hinder His working through us. We quench the Spirit by belittling or preventing His work in our lives and that of our fellow believers. He is the Holy Spirit and for Him to work through us we have to behave in a way which is consistent with His holiness.

On the positive side we are born of the Spirit, He dwells in us and we can be filled by Him.

In promising the Holy Spirit the Lord Jesus involves the whole of the Trinity. It is the God the Son who asks God the Father to send God the Spirit in verse 16. This verse demonstrates the care that the Lord has for His people. He had been a constant help and comfort to the disciples in their lives but He was about to go back to heaven. But He was to leave them another Comforter. This name of 'Comforter' or 'Consoler' is the Hebrew name given to the Messiah and shows the closeness of the work of the Son of God and the Spirit of God.

The Lord speaks of "another Comforter" and this can be taken in two ways. It could mean something that is something different or something which is the same. I might have a Ford car and decide "I am going to buy another car" and go off and buy a Vauxhall. So I would have another car but of a different type. But I might like the Ford car and go off and buy the same model again. Another car but the same type. This was the sense of what the Lord was saying. The Father would send another Comforter who would be with them in the future, just like the Lord had been with them when He was on earth. More than this, the relationship which was to be established between the people of God and the Spirit of God was an eternal relationship, "He will abide with you forever". Once we are born of the Spirit, we are linked with Him forever.

Jesus then gives the Holy Spirit another name, "the Spirit of truth". At the beginning of chapter 14 Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life". Jesus is the way, and it is the Spirit who leads us to Christ. Jesus is the truth, and the Spirit is the Spirit of truth. Jesus is the life, and we are born of the Spirit. The work of the Spirit is entirely consistent with the work of Christ. However, the Spirit is only received and known by those who are Christ's. Of course, the Spirit has a powerful effect upon the world as we shall see, but here the Lord is explaining the relationship the people of God have with the Spirit of God.

It is a twofold relationship. First, the Spirit of truth dwells with the whole of Christ's people. Rather like the cloud and fire of God's presence in the Old Testament which was with Israel as they travelled through the wilderness. But for

the Christian there is something else. The Spirit of truth also dwells in each one of us individually. This was what Jesus spoke of in John 7:38-39, "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living waters. But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified." This relationship between the Spirit of God and Christians was entirely new. It happened at Pentecost when the promised Spirit was sent in fulfilment of Christ's words in verse 17.

In verse 18 you can feel the love of Christ when He says, "I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you". Orphans are very dear to God's heart. In both the Old and New Testaments God made provision for the special care of widows and orphans. Orphans suggests those who, for whatever reason, were abandoned. It is particularly touching to know that Jesus, who was about to be abandoned at the Cross when He sacrificed Himself for our sins, promises never to abandon us. "I will come to you," He says. By this He meant that through the indwelling Spirit of God Christ would always be with us.

I am looking at my hands as I write this message. My brain is telling my hands what to type. But my hands would never know the thoughts of my brain unless they were connected to it by my nervous system. So it is with the Christian. We know the presence and power of Christ through the indwelling Spirit of God who links us to Him.

In verses 25 and 26, we have the work of the Spirit of God described further. Once more the Lord Jesus emphasises the Trinity in explaining the work of the Holy Spirit. It was the Father who would send the Spirit in the name of Christ. "In My name", suggests authority and power. The Father could only send the Spirit because Christ's work was finished and He was glorified in heaven. From that place of authority the Spirit is sent.

The Lord Jesus also compares His present ministry with the ministry of the Spirit. Jesus had taught the disciples whilst He was with them. They did not always take notice or remember or understand His teaching. Here the Lord explains that the Holy Spirit would "bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you." From this verse we understand the ministry of the Spirit in relation to what is past. The Spirit would recall to the apostles' memory all Christ's words and through this means the Scriptures were completed.

But the Spirit would also teach them "all things". What was not always understood and obeyed when Christ was on earth would be able to be understood and obeyed through the indwelling Spirit of God. He is our great teacher now as Christ had been to His disciples on earth. We also can take this to our own hearts and know the indwelling Spirit of God who enables us to understand the word of God and to fulfil God's will in our lives.

Now we turn to John chapter 15 verses 26-27. Chapter 15 is about fruit bearing. Jesus describes Himself as the true vine and we are described as branches through which His life is seen in the fruit we bear. In verse 2 Jesus speaks about bearing fruit, then bearing more fruit. In verse 8 He says, "By this My father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples." The expectation of the Lord Jesus is that, through the indwelling Spirit of God, our lives will be lived in such a way that we constantly and increasingly display the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. It is one of the proofs that we are His disciples and also the way in which we bring glory to the Father. The fruit of the Spirit is described in Galatians 5:22-26. We should remember that it is the fruit of Spirit, not the fruits. There is one fruit which has many characteristics, such as love, joy and peace. It is also interesting to compare this with Psalm 1:2-3.

In the last two verses of chapter 15 the Lord Jesus speaks specifically about the promised Spirit of God. Again He is called the Comforter and the Spirit of truth. Christ was full of grace and truth and so the Spirit is characterised by grace (the comfort He is to us) and truth, because He is the Spirit of truth. In chapter 14 the Lord Jesus described the ministry of the Holy Spirit in relation to the past. In these two short verses Jesus explains the Spirit's ministry in terms of the present: "He will testify of Me".

This is an important verse because it shows us that the present work of the Spirit is Christ centred. The Spirit witnesses to the Person and work of Christ. In verse 27, Jesus links the Spirit's witness and that of the apostles who had been with Jesus throughout His earthly ministry. It demonstrates to us that witnessing to Christ is done only in the power of the Holy Spirit through our personal experience of Christ. By abiding in Christ through day by day communion and obedience, the Spirit of God empowers us to be effective witnesses to Christ in this world. This was the apostles' experience. They only became powerful witnesses to Christ after the Spirit of God came down at Pentecost. The fearful Peter who denied his Lord became the fearless evangelist who drew 3,000 people to Christ.

Now we turn to John chapter 16 verses 5-15. The disciples were sad because Jesus had spoken about leaving them. But the Lord Jesus explains that His leaving was to their advantage because unless He returned to heaven the Holy Spirit would not come to them. In chapter 15 we saw that Jesus described the ministry of the Spirit in relation to the present. This description of the Spirit in relation to the present continues but then goes on to the future. The promise of the Spirit, in chapter 16, is in two parts. In verses 8-11 the Spirit's work in the world is outlined; then in verses 12-15 the Spirit's work amongst Christians is explained.

The work of Spirit in the world has to do with the conviction of sin, the presentation of righteousness and the certainty of judgement. This powerful work was first seen at Pentecost in Acts 2. The Spirit of God through Peter's preaching convicted the crowd of the sin of not believing in Christ and of crucifying Him. The Spirit of God then presented the righteousness of God in raising Christ from the dead and exalting Him in heaven. Finally, the Spirit of God warns of judgement and need to be saved. These themes of sin, righteousness and judgement are used by the Spirit of God to convince people of their need of Christ. And, just as 3,000 people turned to Christ at Pentecost to form the Church of God on earth, so, ever since, He has worked to bring the message of salvation to this world through the evangelistic efforts of Christians. The Holy Spirit's work is based entirely on Christ's finished work on the cross, His resurrection and glorification, and His defeat of Satan, "the ruler of this world is judged" (verse 11).

In chapter 14 the Lord Jesus had spoken of the Holy Spirit bringing His words to their remembrance. In verse 12 of chapter 16, He explains that He still had many things to tell His disciples but they were not ready to receive this further teaching. But, in the future, the Spirit of truth would guide them "into all truth". Here we have a further insight into the Spirit's work. He is our Teacher and our Guide.

A few years ago I was in Zermatt in Switzerland. This beautiful Alpine town lies beneath the majestic Matterhorn, one of the most distinctive mountains in the world. In the town lives an old guide in his nineties who had spent all his life leading visitors up to the summit of the Matterhorn. He had made the ascent more times than anyone else and never tired of the journey. This remarkable old man reminds me of the Holy Spirit, who, just like the Saviour, came down to earth in order to guide us into the truth of God on that upward journey into heaven. He never tires of the journey but, just as Jesus was sent by the Father into the world as the Saviour, so now the Spirit, sent by the Father and Son, fulfils His ministry as the One who guides us into all truth.

Last year I remember visiting the Emmaus road in Israel. It brings home to you the occasion when Jesus spoke to His two disciples and "beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." The Spirit of God continues this work of teaching us from all the Scriptures. He does it in our personal communion and through the gift of teaching.

In the Old Testament, we have two wonderful pictures of the work of the Son and the Spirit. In Genesis 22, Abraham is prepared to sacrifice his only son, Isaac. Hebrews 11 verses 17-19 explains that in being prepared to offer up his only begotten son, Abraham believed God would raise Isaac from the dead. Through this Old Testament story, at the very beginning of the Bible, God showed how in the future He would give His only Son Jesus as the sacrifice for our sin and raise Him from the dead.

Then in chapter 24 of Genesis we read the story of how Abraham sent his servant to find a bride for Isaac. By the direction of God, the servant finds, Rebekah and leads her back to Isaac's home where she becomes his wife. The servant is a good picture of the Spirit's work of leading us home to the Saviour and the Father's house. Everything the servant said to Rebekah and the gifts he gave her witnessed to her future husband and home. So the Spirit's present ministry is to present Christ to our hearts and to empower us in His worship and service. As the Lord Jesus explains in verse 14, "He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you".

However, at the end of verse 13, Jesus mentions another aspect of the work of the Spirit, "He will tell you things to come." We have seen how the Spirit of God's ministry has a connection to the past, "He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you".

It also has a connection to the present, "He will testify of me" and "He will guide you into all truth". Now we see, at the end of verse 13, the Spirit's ministry also has a connection to the future, "He will tell you things to come." The New Testament is the great witness to this ministry as we find within its pages the things which Jesus said and did, the way Christ was preached and the Church built up, and finally the completion of the prophetic word in regard to future events.

"All Scripture", Paul reminds Timothy in 2 Timothy 3 verse 16 is "God breathed," that is, of the Spirit. Peter confirms this in 2 Peter 1:21: "prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."

I was reminded recently in re-reading Luke 15 of the involvement of the whole of the Trinity in our salvation. First the Lord Jesus as Shepherd finds the lost sheep. Then the woman searches in all the dark corners of the house to find the lost coin - just like the Spirit searches tirelessly through this world for lost souls. Finally the Father receives His once lost son back into His house. It occurred to me that when the Father received His son back again that we have some remarkable illustrations of the ministry of the Spirit.

The son was convicted of his sin and led to repentance. The Spirit's work of conviction leads us to Christ. The son was received with love by the father. The Spirit leads us a knowledge of the Father. "You [have] received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God." (Romans 8:15-16). The son had the best robe put on him.

The Spirit brings us to the knowledge of the having Christ's righteousness. "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour" (Titus 3:5-6). The son was also given a ring, the symbol of authority and power. The Spirit's indwelling power: "Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4). The son was given shoes for his feet. "Walk in the Spirit" (Galatians 5:16, 25). Finally, the fatted calf was killed and a great family meal was enjoyed - a time of family fellowship and joy. The "fellowship of the Spirit" (Philippians 2:1).

God is the greatest Giver. He has given us His Son for our salvation and He has given us His Spirit to become worshippers and witnesses. May we ensure that we do not grieve or quench this Holy Person but now, as temples of the Holy Spirit, allow His work to be fulfilled in our lives.

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