

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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The Person and work of the Spirit: The Holy Spirit in the Christian

“Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,” which is translated, ‘God with us’”, Matthew 1:23.

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” John 1:14

I’m sure you will agree with me that the subject of the incarnation is far too wonderful to only think about at one time of the year:

*“Our God contracted to a span,
Incomprehensibly made man”*

as Charles Wesley has put it. I find it absolutely incredible that God should want to live with and share His life with ordinary, sinful mankind. However, this morning we come to something even more wonderful, if that were possible. You see, *“God with us”* (Matthew 1:23) was limited to time and space. Those in Nazareth enjoyed His childhood years but He remained unknown to those in Damascus, for example. Whilst those in Bethany enjoyed His presence in His last week, those in Capernaum did not see Him again. And how many generations, before and since, have come and gone and never seen Him? I guess that is why so many want to make a trip to Israel to visit the supposed sites where Jesus walked upon this earth.

This morning we are going to continue our studies concerning the Holy Spirit, by considering His living in, or indwelling, the individual Christian. No longer *“God with us”* - but incredibly, God in us!

Let us begin, then, by reading together from John 14, that great chapter that begins with those wonderful words *“Let not your heart be troubled...”*, John 14:1. We shall start from John 14:15: *“If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever - the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.”*

And then in John 14:26: *“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 things that I said to you.”*

Three things need to be said to help us to understand what the Lord Jesus was saying to His disciples.

Firstly, it is **another** Helper, but of the same sort. If I buy a box of liquorice allsorts, I would not expect to find chocolate raisins in there. Much as I like them, they are of a different sort. Jesus is saying that the Holy Spirit of God is of the same sort as God the Son and God the Father, of whom He had been speaking.

Secondly, again, it is **another** Helper. Back to our box of liquorice allsorts. If I opened the said box and found only one sweet in the box, I would be pretty disappointed. Here, Jesus was not saying that the Holy Spirit would take over Jesus’ work, but more wonderfully, that He would supplement it. We now have two Helpers - one seated at the right hand of the Father, the Other living inside each and every Christian. We can never be separated from the presence of God!

Thirdly, the Holy Spirit would be another **Helper**. Some translations use the word ‘Comforter’ others ‘Advocate’. The word used in the Greek original is *‘paraklētos’*, literally ‘One called alongside to help’. In its ordinary usage, it would describe the work of a solicitor or barrister, someone who would explain the law to us and speak up on our behalf. Therefore, in heaven today, we have the Lord Jesus speaking up for us before the Father’s throne. Within us, we have the Holy Spirit speaking up for the interests of God within our lives.

The Devil will always accuse us before God when we sin and he will look for condemnation. How reassuring to know that Jesus is there, the marks in His hands and feet still visible, to remind the heavenly courtroom that we have been

forgiven all our sins. But sometimes our consciences will condemn us when we sin. The Holy Spirit may well stir our conscience to bring about contrition and restore communion. But the Holy Spirit will delight in bringing to our remembrance the work of Christ on the cross, so that we realise that *"there is, therefore, now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus"* Romans 8:1.

There are three characteristic features outlined in John 14:15-17 and John 14:26, that we need to take notice of:

Firstly, the Lord always referred to the Holy Spirit as a Person: an equal, indivisible member of the Godhead - Father, Son and Holy Spirit, forming the One God. In my house there are two great forces for good - my wife and electricity. Both however are totally different in character although their purpose is the same. With the latter I flick a switch and the room is lit up, the heating comes on, the food is cooked and a host of other benefits. All I have to do is pay the bill and the supply just keeps on coming. With the former, my wife also ensures that the house is kept warm, I am fed, the house is light and clean etc. but she wants me, not my money. Too often, we think of the Holy Spirit as a power and forget He is a Person. Perhaps we demand that He will give us the strength to serve God faithfully, rather than ask Him to lead us to do what God really wants us to do. Perhaps we think that a little secret wrong behaviour is not so bad, as nobody else knows about it, forgetting that He is in us, knowing our thoughts, evaluating our motives, observing our actions every moment of every day. I still remember the time when my elder brother and I had had a bit of a disagreement. Because he was older, he usually won these disagreements, but on this one occasion I was winning. I was explaining to him what was about to happen, when I noticed my mother had quietly entered the room and had heard. Argh! She didn't say a word - she didn't need to. But we both knew the argument was over. Her presence had made the difference! How very different my life would be if I really understood that one Person of the Godhead was with me every moment of every day. How different my communal church life would be if I realised that the One who had told me how to behave within the church was there with me every time I met together with my fellow believers.

Secondly, He is the **Holy** Spirit. I guess if I had a career criminal lodging in my house, he would not be too concerned if I was a few days late in lodging my tax returns. But the fact that I have the Holy Spirit of God living in me ought to have real consequences in my life. This is highlighted in 1 Peter 1:14-16: *"As obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, 'Be holy, for I am holy.'"* Now we often confuse holiness with righteousness, and think that holiness is doing no wrong. However, there is more to it than that. Of course, if I am holy I will not be engaged in wrong behaviour, because God is a righteous God, who hates sin.

My mum used to have a pair of scissors that she kept in her sewing box. They were just for cutting material. They were really sharp and the edge they cut was always very fine. Being so sharp, they would have also been excellent for cutting the plastic parts from the sprue in my model kits, but I knew that I would be in so much trouble if I was caught using them for that purpose! Those scissors were set apart, or holy, for my mum to use in the way she saw fit. So we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, who is here to represent God's interests in our lives, and through us, in this world. So my life should be lived wholly for God's use. He wants me to serve Him exclusively. That is not to say I have to go off to some remote corner of the earth as a missionary. He has called me to show my neighbours what the difference is between a Christian and a non-Christian homeowner, and husband and father and lab worker. The Holy Spirit, working in me, should show that only God's interests are at work in all these spheres of my life. Too often I want my interests to be taken note of in my home, or where I work, and when I do I am compromising the work of the Holy Spirit. As soon as I take note of my own interests or of the interests of this world then I lose my holiness, and I need to repent, and allow the Holy Spirit to speak up for God in my life.

Thirdly, it is the Lord who sends His Spirit to live in us. We do not need to pray to be indwelt by the Holy Spirit. At the very moment that we accept Christ as Saviour, He sends the Holy Spirit to live in us so that we are not left as orphans. That Spirit remains with us forever (John 14:16). We need never fear losing the Holy Spirit, as that can never happen. It is God's work. Upon salvation, we are sealed by the Holy Spirit as God marks us out as belonging to Him. This permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit is totally dependent on the completed work of the Lord Jesus upon the cross. Because we are now reckoned as right before God, He can make His home within us- it is a defining characteristic of Christianity. It is really important to understand that the reception and indwelling of the Holy Spirit is something that God does for us - we have no part in it, other than to enjoy the blessing of it.

However, we do have a part to play, and that is to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Now there is never any shortfall on the part of God. But there may well be on our part. If we use the picture of a house to which a guest comes to stay, I may invite him into the lounge, and show him the kitchen, and perhaps the spare bedroom. However, if I have put a lock on the master bedroom door, and the dining room door, then it is not the fault of the guest if they do not enjoy those rooms. What is required is for those locks to be removed so that the guest can enjoy the whole house. To be filled with the Holy Spirit, I need to allow every area of my life to be under His control. Am I happy for God's interests to come first so far as my wallet is concerned? If I have a hobby that takes up an excessive amount of my time, then I need to remove the lock from that door, and allow God to have His say first on how my leisure time is used. Perhaps I

have a quick temper, or a proud spirit, or a mean attitude of heart. These kinds of things need to be judged and got rid of ruthlessly if I am to know what it is to be filled with the Holy Spirit. For I can be sure that as I allow every area of my life to come under His control, He will gladly fill that space and bring it under the authority of God. So the next time we feel a lack of spiritual power in our lives, let us not try to blame God by wishing we were filled with the Spirit more. Let us rather take a careful look at our lives and identify those areas that have not been surrendered to His control.

Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God

Before we finish this morning, I want to look at two more aspects of the work of the Holy Spirit within each and every believer. The first of these we read about in Ephesians 4:30-32: *"And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you."* Paul makes it really plain that we are capable of grieving the Holy Spirit, and so it is worth just considering how this is done. We have said already this morning that the Spirit lives within us to represent the interests of God. And His principal interest is to make much of the Lord Jesus, before whom every knee will bow.

My youngest son got married last summer. We have got the photos saved on our laptop. Now let us imagine that you were to visit my house and over a cup of tea his wedding came up in conversation. I may well get out the photos and want to show you them. If in the course of this I noticed that after the first couple your eyes had glazed over, and you were clearly not interested, then that would upset me. You were not really interested in my son. So it is with the Holy Spirit. He wants to show us the beauty of the Lord Jesus. We see this most strikingly in the first chapter of the book of Revelation. We read in Revelation 1:10, that John was *"in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet."* He then goes on to have the most glorious vision of the Lord Jesus in all His glory. Had John not been in the Spirit, he would not have seen the glory of the person of the Lord Jesus.

I need to take a very careful look at my life to see if there are times when, frankly, I am not interested in the person of my Saviour. I become so preoccupied with something or someone else that He is relegated to just a few spare moments of my thoughts. But how can I know if I am not as interested in the Lord Jesus as I should be? We most clearly display our real interest in the way we behave. Bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, evil speaking and malice were never a part of His life and they ought not to be characteristics in my life. If I notice them, then I can be pretty sure that I have lost interest in being like Him. But there are positive qualities, too, that featured so clearly in the life of the Lord Jesus: kindness, tender heartedness, forgiveness. If I find it hard to display these beautiful attributes then it may be because I have no real interest in being Christlike. When I am like this, then I can be sure that I will be grieving the Holy Spirit of God. It is one thing to make a fellow human being cry. It is altogether another, to upset God, not in some mystical way, but by the very ordinary behaviour that is displayed in my life. Perhaps I find my attention wandering as I come to remember the Lord Jesus in His death. I can be sure that this will grieve the Holy Spirit. However, as with John, though perhaps in a little less dramatic fashion, I can also be confident that if I have a real desire to know and appreciate more of the wonderful person of the Lord Jesus, then I will have the full power of the Holy Spirit to facilitate this. It may be through a fresh understanding of a verse I have read many times before. It may be through experiences that He takes me through, perhaps even difficult ones, that I learn something more about the Lord Jesus. But I can be sure that if I am a willing learner, the indwelling Holy Spirit is a more than willing Tutor.

Do not quench the Spirit

The second aspect we need to consider carefully is found in 1 Thessalonians 5:19: *"Do not quench the Spirit."*

As we consider this instruction, I am reminded of the great fire of London, or a forest fire. The way that these kinds of fires are put out, or quenched, is not just to fight the flames themselves. Instead little fires are set in a controlled manner ahead of the path of the fire. These little fires can then be put out, so that when the main fire comes there is nothing combustible left and so the fire dies out. Water is then poured on everything around to take the heat out of the embers to prevent it from reigniting. Perhaps James had a similar picture in his head as he wrote in James 4:4-7: *"Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, 'The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously'? But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: 'God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.' Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you."*

The Holy Spirit wants to fan the flames of spirituality in us until they are white hot. He desires to draw us into the most wonderful appreciation and relationship with God. But there is a danger and it comes from within. By our behaviour and in our attitudes we may put out that Spirit led fire. As we look at the verses immediately around 1 Thessalonians 5:19 we see some of the things that Paul had in mind when he implored the Thessalonians not to quench the Spirit. When we stop rejoicing, when we do not pray, when we are not thankful, when we do not respect His word and when we do not actively keep ourselves from wrong behaviour then we put out the Spirit's fire. It is like

us setting little fires that take away the power of the Spirit to act in our lives. When we “*render evil for evil*” (see 1 Thessalonians 5:15) and when we despise His word, then we are pouring cold water on the work of the Holy Spirit.

Did you notice that these kinds of things are so common and in a sense seemingly small things. We need to be really careful not to allow wrong attitudes into our lives. We also need to be really diligent in encouraging right attitudes in our lives, so that the Holy Spirit can take these and fan them into a great fire for God. In Psalm 66:18 we read, “*If I regard iniquity in my heart, the LORD will not hear.*” It is so easy to drift away spiritually from a close relationship with God. We can never lose our salvation, but we may lose the enjoyment of it. Just a day without prayer. Just a missed daily reading of His word. By grumbling and moaning instead of being thankful, and before we even realise it, we have become as cold as ice spiritually. The devil is more than happy for us to be like this. Most of us may never sin spectacularly, like King David did with Bathsheba (see 2 Samuel 11:1-27), but many of us may end up in just the same state spiritually by carelessly quenching the Spirit.

As we have considered this morning, the indwelling Holy Spirit in every believer is the most wonderful privilege. We have no part in receiving the Holy Spirit. That is God’s work and happens the moment we are saved. The indwelling Holy Spirit marks us out as belonging to God. However, with great privilege comes great responsibility. We are to live our lives just for His benefit. We must always have a real interest in being more like the Lord Jesus, and we must not hinder the work of the Holy Spirit within us by wrong behaviour. Just imagine a world where every Christian was wholly under the control of the Holy Spirit - what endless possibilities for good! As has been pointed out: “Real Christianity has not been tried and found wanting, it has just not been tried!” (GK Chesterton).

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