

THE HOLY SPIRIT (2) THE TEACHER OF TRUTH

John 14:15-18, 25-26; 15:26; 16:7-11, 12-16

In John's Gospel chapters 13 to 16 we find the final teaching Jesus gave his disciples just hours before his arrest and trial. Part of that teaching includes five short passages about the Holy Spirit.

1. The Spirit is a gift.

John 14:15, 16. 'If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever.' At the request of the Son the Father gives the Spirit. The Spirit is given to those who love Jesus and prove that love by obeying his commands. Do you love Jesus? Are you obeying his commands? On the day of Pentecost Peter said, 'Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit' (Acts 2:38). You don't have to earn it. You can never deserve it. The presence and power of the Holy Spirit are a gift, a gift to be received.

2. The Spirit is another Counsellor.

Four times in these short passages Jesus refers to the Spirit as the Counsellor, 14:16, 26; 15:26, 16:7. The older versions of the Bible translated this 'Comforter'. The original word belongs to a group of words which includes the verb 'to comfort'. 'Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.' However, if the word 'comforter' conjures up images of a baby's dummy or Linus's blanket then you've got the wrong picture.

In other contexts the verb means to encourage. The Spirit is the Encourager. There is a particular meaning which was common in the ancient world in legal contexts. It means a counsellor in the sense of an advocate, what we would call a barrister, someone who will defend you in a court of law. Comforter, encourager, counsel for the defence: all these are possible nuances. If Satan is the accuser of Christian brothers, the Spirit puts up a defence.

In chapter 16 Jesus portrays the Spirit as counsel for the prosecution. Verse 8. 'When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment.'

But there's a wider meaning than that, which the Good News Bible sums up simply in the word 'helper'. The Spirit is never anything other than a positive influence in our lives.

Jesus goes on to say, 'he [the Father] will give you *another* Counsellor'. Greek had two words for 'another', another of the same kind and another of a different kind. We find them side by side in the same verse in Galatians 1:6, 7. The King James Version gives us a very literal translation. 'I marvel that ye are so soon removed ... unto another gospel: which is not another.' You've turned to a gospel that is another of a different kind, not another of the same kind.

When Jesus talks about 'another' Counsellor in John 14 verse 16 it indicates another of the same kind. The same kind as what? The same kind as Jesus. Jesus had upset the disciples by telling them that he was going. 'My children, I will be with you only a little longer' (13:33). They would not have his physical presence with them. And yet at the same time he could say, 'I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you' (14:18). How can these two things be reconciled? Jesus linked the ascension and Pentecost. He was to be with them only a little longer before ascending into heaven, but then he would come to them through the presence of the Spirit.

'I will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever.' In his physical body Jesus could only be with one set of people in one place at one time. By the Spirit's presence he could be with all his people in every place at all times.

Jesus is in heaven, exalted to the right hand of God the Father. And yet Jesus is with us. 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am, right there with them.' How is that possible? Through the presence of the Spirit.

Look again at chapter 14 verse 17. 'The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.' Do you see the distinction between the experience of the disciples when Jesus was with them and their experience later? The Spirit lives with you. Jesus was filled with the Spirit and Jesus was with them. After the ascension Jesus would return to heaven. The Spirit would no longer be living *with* them, but after Pentecost the Spirit would be *in* them.

If we just had the words of Jesus about the Spirit as streams of living water quenching our thirst and making us fruitful we might think of the Spirit as an impersonal force. But Jesus makes it clear that the Spirit is the third person of the Godhead, as personal as the Father and Jesus himself. You – know – him.

3. He is the Spirit of truth.

Jesus uses this title in three verses, 14:17; 15:26; 16:13.

He is the Spirit of truth because he is the Spirit of Jesus. Jesus said, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me' (John 14:6). In verses 25 and 26 of this same chapter Jesus says, 'All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.'

The Spirit is given to be our teacher. When Jesus said, 'He will teach you all things,' he didn't mean that we would become omniscient. He meant that the Spirit would teach us everything we need to know, namely everything that Jesus wants us to know. There are two aspects to this.

Firstly, the Spirit will teach us things that lead to holiness. He is given the title 'the Holy Spirit' here. A lot of intellectuals today despise Christianity. They mock the values that once dominated our culture: modesty, self-control, celibacy outside marriage and fidelity within marriage, honesty, courtesy, respect. Today that's called repression and the club culture of Ibiza is held up as the new freedom. Which is the truth and which is the lie? The Spirit of Jesus teaches us that holiness is truth. Look around you and see the consequences of abandoning holiness. Addiction, selfishness, violence, delinquency, broken relationships, broken homes, broken hearts.

The Spirit of truth teaches things that lead to holiness, and secondly, the Spirit of truth reminds us of everything that Jesus said. Truth is not an ever-expanding universe. Truth is grounded in the revelation that came to us in Jesus Christ. The Spirit doesn't reveal truth to us by leading us into some magical mystery tour of our own mystical experience. He reveals truth to us by grounding us in the given words of Jesus, as we have them in the Bible. He *teaches* us, and that means hard work, studying and learning.

In chapter 15 verse 26. Jesus said, 'When the Counsellor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me.'

Chapter 16 verses 14 and 15. 'He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said

the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you.'

A sure test of a work that claims to be inspired by the Holy Spirit is the place it gives to Jesus. If it glorifies the Spirit, if it makes the Spirit the centre of attention, then it's probably suspect. If it glorifies you and makes you the centre of attention, then it's definitely suspect. Jesus said, 'He will bring glory to me.'

Verse 13 says, 'But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.' An important aspect of the truth is the truth about the future, what is yet to come. It's not that we have a detailed blue-print of end time events. Rather the future is secure, the immediate future and the ultimate future.

After the resurrection the disciples asked Jesus, 'Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?' (Acts 1:6). His reply is very enlightening. 'It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth' (verses 7, 8).

He will tell you what is yet to come. Read through the book of Acts and you will see how the Spirit guides in relation to the immediate future. We can expect to be guided individually and together as a church by the Spirit. Read through the book of Revelation and you will see how the Spirit reveals the ultimate future, the overthrow of evil and the establishing of the kingdom of God.

The evil we see around us and the evil we fight within us will not prevail. There will be new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness will dwell, where the Lamb of God will be on the throne and he will reign for ever.