

Sermon Series Four: Believe and Live
(The Gospel of John: *The Preparation and Passion of the Messiah*
Birthing the New Testament Church - John 13-21)
John 14:15-17
Prescriptions for Troubled Hearts (Part Three)
The Other Comforter

¹⁵ “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, ¹⁷ even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.

Dogs are the connoisseurs of comfort. When you are not feeling up to par there is nothing like a dog at your side. Man’s best friend is ever present to offer unconditional love, to stand guard against an intruder, and looks forward to every possible moment of being with you - of sharing in your life. This comfort reminds us of *the Comforter* who is far greater and can have a far more amazing impact on our lives.

Well as we come to our text, Jesus is preparing his disciples for his departure from this world. And as he does, he has just promised that he will answer their petitions if they are prayed in Jesus’s name - with a passionate desire to do His will. Such obedience is not only a condition for answered prayer, but is proof of one’s love for God. “*If you love me, you will keep my commandments,*” Jesus says. Indeed, this love for God will be the controlling idea in verses 15 through 21. The greatness of our love, says Jesus, is easy to test. It corresponds exactly to our conformity to all that God has revealed in his Word. The quality of your obedience is a good indicator of the quality of your love for God.

Now praying properly in Jesus name and keeping his commandments is an absolute impossibility for any believer to do on their own. Consequently, this demands that someone else be called alongside to help. Understanding our plight, Jesus promises that he will petition the Father to provide another “helping presence” like himself. The word he uses for “another” means another comforter exactly like himself. Further, this giving of the Holy Spirit constitutes another major

advantage of Christ going to the Father. For the giving of the Holy Spirit was possible only subsequent to Jesus's glorification (see John 7:39).

Further, the text teaches us four things about this promised comforter, the Holy Spirit:

I. He is God (“another”).

There are a number of reasons for believing that the Holy Spirit is God.

1. One that is found in this text is the term “another,” as we have already said, which means someone *exactly* like Christ. The Greek language has two different words which can be translated “another.” In one case, it means *another of a different kind* and in the other case, it means *another of the same kind*. The Spirit is “another of the same kind.” Therefore since Christ is God the Holy Spirit is God.

2. The fact that he will *forever be with us* eludes to the fact that he is the Eternal Spirit. His relationship with us is a permanent one. This eternity is expressly stated in Hebrews 9:14. Only God is, was, and will forever be. So this phrase certainly implies the eternal existence of the Holy Spirit which is a characteristic of God.

II. He is our Helper (“another helper”).

1. The Greek term here for helper is a very difficult term to translate. None of the expressions chosen in English translations seem fully adequate.

Parakletos could refer to the Spirit as a *counselor*, but this smacks of contemporary notions of counseling such as a marriage counselor, camp counselor, focusing primarily on emotional or psychological aspects. Instead, the word counselor here is a word that can be used in a legal sense of a friend of the accused, such as an advocate or counsel for the defense. *Parakletos* can be translated as a *helper*, but this conveys an inferior status which is certainly not true of the Holy Spirit who is equal to the other persons of the Trinity. Also, in the Greek copy of the Old Testament, it is used with regard to the consoling or comforting expected to occur during the Messiah's reign – the *Comforter*. Certainly he is all these things, but it is probably best to refer to the Holy Spirit as another *helping presence* called alongside to encourage, strengthen, and counsel.

2. It is important that we understand why Jesus promises this Helper. This would certainly relieve a primary concern for Jesus's first followers. It would insure that when Jesus departed he would not leave them as orphans. Just as God was wonderfully and powerfully present with them through Jesus, so he will continue to be present with them through his Holy Spirit. You are not alone. You will never be alone!

What does this mean to all to us today? It means that at all times and in all places we have the presence, the helping presence of the Holy Spirit. He is there to comfort us in times of bereavement, failure, persecution or depression. He is our counsel giving guidance and he empowers or strengthens us for holy living, in the use of our gifts, and in our obligations as parents, church leaders, and at our everyday jobs. In the words of an old song, "You'll never walk alone."

III. He is the Spirit of truth.

1. *The Spirit of truth uses the Word of truth to guide us into the will and work of God.* This means that the Holy Spirit is marked or characterized by truthfulness and is the communicator of truth regarding the person of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit enlightens us or illuminates to us the truth of God's Word. This is the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit. All of us have had the experience of a passage of Scripture which puzzled us or confounded us. And then one day suddenly, or over a period of time, the Holy Spirit revealed to us either through a pastor or theologian or simply through our own personal dedication and study the clear meaning of that passage. That is the Spirit of truth at work. Further, he not only guides us to the truth, but works through us to convict unbelievers of three certain truths – of their sin, unrighteousness, and their coming judgment. He reveals through us the truth of the gospel and enables us to lead a person to Christ.

2. But, for the 12 disciples, this promise had special meaning. First, the unbelieving world around them could not receive the Holy Spirit because they did not understand him. Unbelievers do not have, in and of themselves, any knowledge of spiritual things. They have no clear perception of who the Spirit is and what he is doing. The disciples, on the other hand, had seen the power of the Holy Spirit working miracles through Christ and empowering Christ as he preached. The Holy Spirit

had enabled them to understand who Christ was, their Messiah, and to some degree what he was doing. Later this Spirit of truth would come upon them powerfully and visibly at Pentecost and he would enable them to write the Gospels and the other New Testament Scriptures so that they could truthfully give testimony to Jesus. They would be carried along, filled and controlled by the Spirit so that every word of the New Testament was inspired by God.

But before we go on, just another word about the Spirit of truth and your Bible study. There are some common unhelpful ways to read and study God's Word. Yes, they can be helpful in some ways, but they cannot be your only approach to the Scriptures: 1) You can use the *Xanax approach*. This treats the Bible as if it exists primarily to make us feel better. Bible study is about finding comfort for my issues. The problem this approach poses is that I ask how the Bible can serve me, rather than how I can serve the God it proclaims. 2) You can also use the *pinball approach*. Lacking any guidance on what to read, I read whatever Scripture verse I happen to turn to next, ricocheting from one passage to the next. But this approach gives no thought to the continuity, culture, history, authorship, or original intent of the passage. 3) Then there is the *magic eight ball approach*. Remember the magic eight ball which you just shake until it provides a clear answer to your most difficult questions. The Bible is not magical. Its primary function is to transform us rather than to answer our most pressing questions. Yes, it is there for our questions. God does want to hear your questions, but the Bible is primarily there to sanctify us and grow us. 4) Of course you could use the *personal shopper approach*. In this case you don't actually study the Bible, rather you shop around for the Bible teachers or preachers who suit your tastes. This isn't all bad, but it can prevent us from taking ownership of Scripture. It also limits your perspective in that it eliminates any other viewpoint on the meaning of Scripture than the ones you like. It is very important that we read and listen to evangelical (and even some scholarly non-evangelical theologians) Bible teachers and scholars who, come to theology and biblical studies from different viewpoints. Otherwise, much like the pinball approach, we ricochet from teacher to teacher and topic to topic without getting the

tools to study God's word for ourselves. Further we miss the blessing of the Holy Spirit speaking directly to us in our own private time alone with him. Finally, we could use the *Jack Spratt approach*. In the English nursery rhyme, the character Jack Spratt could eat no fat. We take this approach when we are picky eaters and refuse to digest certain parts of the Bible. "Too much work for us," we say. But all Scripture is God breathed and profitable. We need a balanced diet to grow to maturity in Christ. We will say more about an exciting balanced way to study the Bible later.

IV. He indwells us.

It is not that the Holy Spirit was not already present with his disciples before the cross. As John MacArthur states, "No one in any era of redemptive history could be saved, sanctified, and empowered for service and witness, or guided in understanding Scripture and praying in the will of God apart from the spirit's internal soul work. That he was already present with the disciples before the cross is clear from the present tense of the verb "abides (or dwells)." The Old Testament saints had to be regenerated by the Holy Spirit to experience their spiritual blessings. This regeneration was evidenced by their heart-felt participation in the sacrificial system plus a life of obedience to the Law. Some ministry of the Holy Spirit had to be constantly applied to the old covenant believer. But in the New Testament, the Holy Spirit will come upon believers in an unprecedented way. It will mean greater empowerment and presence for ministry and evangelism unlike any generation before. He would come in a new fullness that became normative for all believers.

Jesus, while here on earth, had been a teacher and leader, but his influence was that of external word and example. The Holy Spirit is able to affect one more intensely because, dwelling within (living inside us), he can get to the very center of one's thinking and emotions. The Holy Spirit knows you inside and out and can literally feel your emotions and understand your every thought and every motive. This makes him, and God the Father and God the Son, the only ones who can truly help you.

Chuck Swindoll writes in his book, *Flying Closer to the Flame: A Passion for the Holy Spirit*, "By the time I graduated from seminary, I

had many convictions and few questions, especially regarding the Holy Spirit... But during a lifetime of ministry that has taken me around the United States and to many countries abroad, I have found that the work of the Holy Spirit continually keeps me off balance. I'm not alone in that. Those in church leadership seem afraid the Spirit is going to do something we can't explain. I've found that disturbs many folks... But it energizes me. I've come to realize there are dimensions of the Holy Spirit I've never tapped and places in this study about which I know very little. I'm on a strong learning curve. I have witnessed a dynamic power in his presence that I long to know more of firsthand. I now have questions and a strong interest in many of the things of the Spirit I once felt were settled. To say it plainly, I am hungry for more of him. I long to know God more deeply and more intimately.

I wonder if we realize what a privilege it is to have the Holy Spirit indwelling us. Derek Thomas writes: One recent summer, in a large urn that sits outside the front door of my house, a blue Swift made a nest in which she laid six eggs. This beautiful, shy creature had made her home in my house. I felt privileged that I had been honored by her presence, even if my cat viewed it entirely differently. Now if I felt privileged with her nesting by my door, how much more privileged should I feel knowing that the Holy Spirit has taken up residence in me? Our hearts should well up with gratitude at the mere thought of it. It is staggering. Some of us take photographs when distinguished guests visit in our homes. I like to glance through the "visitor's book" to see who has stayed in our home. On occasion I see the name of a well-known person or a dear friend. But none of this compares to having the Holy Spirit permanently dwelling in our hearts."

Conclusion

In many fictional tales, characters die after suffering a devastating loss. The Bible often refers to the anguish of the brokenhearted. But has anyone really died or suffered physical harm from a broken heart? Surprisingly, medical researchers at Johns Hopkins University have now identified a medical condition called stress cardiomyopathy, also called "broken heart syndrome." This new research shows that tragic or shocking life events – including loss of a loved one, a car accident,

armed robbery, a fierce argument – can cause a sudden surge in adrenaline that weakens heart muscles. According to the lead author of the Johns Hopkins study: “It looked like a heart attack in the sense that the EKGs were abnormal, the blood work was abnormal, but when you went to the lab the arteries had no blockages.” The patients had very few or none of the typical risk factors for heart , but the emotional pain they experienced worked on their heart, making it feel like they were having classic heart attack symptoms, including chest pain, fluid in the lungs, and shortness of breath. In some cases, broken heart syndrome can be as dangerous as a real heart attack. In all cases broken heart syndrome hurts just as much as a real heart attack. Research has also shown that the same regions of the brain that signal physical pain are also activated when we feel emotion such as grief.

Perhaps today your heart is breaking in some way. Indeed all of our hearts are breaking in some way over some circumstance or some relationship. May the truth of this passage comfort your heart! Think of it, Christ has placed within you the Holy Spirit. He is very God and therefore has all of the power, all of the wisdom, to be your ever helping presence. He is there to comfort, to encourage, to sustain, and to lead you into all truth. Just one more comfort for your anxious heart.