

“Understanding the Holy Spirit” (part 1)

John 14:16-18, 26; 15:26-27; 16:7-15

Turn with me in your Bible this morning to John 14, where we will read in just a minute from verse 16. Last week, we began a series on the person and work of the Holy Spirit. I sort of feel like the man who grew up in the mountains, had been there all of his life, and finally got to see the ocean for the very first time. Needless to say, he was impressed and found himself in awe of its vastness. He brought with him a little jar with which he scooped up a little bit of ocean water. Someone asked him what he was doing, and he said, “Well none of my people back home have ever seen the ocean, so I’m going to bring this back with me so they might know what it is like!” Obviously, a jar of ocean water could never in a million years help people understand the vastness of the ocean. And yet I sort of feel like that man as I attempt to take up a subject so vast and immeasurable as the Holy Spirit. I might as well be taking up the ocean in a thimble!

I don’t know what comes into your mind whenever you hear that expression. For some, the mere mention of ‘the Holy Spirit’ brings to mind the idea of the supernatural, or certain miraculous signs and wonders brought about in the book of Acts. Some may give lip service to the Holy Spirit, but they are unsure of His activity in their own lives. Then there are others who perhaps see Him as sort of an inner ‘GPS’ with which they are guided throughout life. He’s there to guide and direct, but our relationship with Him is impersonal and mechanical. Maybe more like the voice of Google maps or something. You’re appreciate of the direction, but there is no closeness or relationship.

Do you think of the Holy Spirit more in those terms, like a force, or have you come to understand that He is indeed a person with whom you have a relationship? It is essential that we know and understand the unique role of the Holy Spirit in our lives as believers. And so look at what Jesus says about the Helper from these verses, beginning with verse 16 in the fourteenth chapter. (Read)

So very much of what we know about the ministry of the Holy Spirit comes from the words of Jesus in these three chapters. On the night of His betrayal and arrest, Jesus

is preparing His disciples for His departure. He tells them He is leaving, but they will not be left alone as orphans. He is going to send them ‘another Helper’ who will be with them in the same way that He had, though not physically. Jesus had been with them physically. He had been right there beside the disciples. However, Jesus says that it would actually be to their advantage for Him to go away. Maybe we wonder how this could be so? When He was here on earth physically, Jesus was with them at one place at one time. We read in the gospel accounts about His miracles and preaching to the crowds, but He says to the disciples in verse 13 that they would do ‘greater works’ than these because He is going to the Father. The works would not be greater in kind, but in extent. He’s going away so that He can send the Holy Spirit who would come to live within believers and will empower them to take the gospel around the world. Jesus says it is better and to their advantage.

He would not simply be there beside them, but would come to reside within them. And this has been the Father’s plan all along. So from these verses, I want to show what Jesus has to say about ‘the Helper’ in terms of His person, His purpose, and His presence.

1—The PERSON of the Holy Spirit (14:16-18)

“And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, 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. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.”

The first thing that we need to understand about the Holy Spirit is that He is indeed a very real person. Jesus gives the disciples the assurance that even though He is leaving, they will not be left alone. There would be another divine Person who would take His place in their midst. He would be with them just as Jesus had been with them physically for truth, for comfort, and for strength. Jesus had been beside them, but the Spirit would live inside them. Jesus never once intended for us to live the Christian life in our own strength. Instead, He promised to give us ‘the Helper.’ In fact, this descriptive term is used four times in these chapters in reference to the Holy Spirit. It’s

interesting that when Jesus chose to introduce the person of the Holy Spirit, of all the names that He could have chosen, He chose to refer to Him as ‘the Helper.’ Or, your translation may use another term such as ‘Comforter’ (KJV) or ‘Advocate’ (NIV) or ‘Counselor’ (CSB) or ‘Friend’ (MSG). Both the ESV and NASB use the word ‘Helper’ to translate the Greek noun ‘parakletos.’ But what exactly does that mean? Well, the word ‘parakletos’ refers to someone who is called alongside of another. It was a word that served as a legal term designating one’s defender in a public court of law, someone who pleads another’s case in court. What’s interesting is that this same word is used in 1 John 2:1 to describe the way Jesus is our ‘advocate’ before God the Father in heaven.

1 John 2:1 — “If anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”

In Christ, I have an Advocate before the throne of God the Father who is pleading my case. And in the Holy Spirit, I have an Advocate in my heart who is pleading the Father’s cause. As the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit has come to be a resident Helper and Defender, my Counselor, Comforter, and Guide, the One who energizes my Christian life, who illuminates my spiritual understanding, who reproduces the character of Christ in me, and the One who gifts me and fits me for service. That is who He is in the life of believers, those who have placed their faith and trust in Jesus. That doesn’t mean He has nothing to do with nonbelievers, for we will see later on that He does. But His presence within a person depends upon whether or not that person knows Jesus Christ as Savior. The Holy Spirit is our Helper, One whom the world cannot receive. Which means:

He is a distinct person

Jesus wanted the disciples to know that He was going to send them Somebody, not something. He is not an ‘it’ or a force. Just a few years ago, there was a survey by Lifeway Research that demonstrated that showed how 56 percent of respondents believe the Holy Spirit is a force rather than a person. In fact, I’ve even heard preachers use language from the pulpit, or lyrics of the songs we sing, which seem to indicate that the Holy Spirit is some mystical energy we summon rather than the indwelling person of

the Trinity to whom we are to submit. What we need is a recovery of an accurate understanding of the person of the Holy Spirit.

How do we know that the Holy Spirit is a person and not an impersonal force, or an 'it'? Well, the reason we know this is that in Scripture, He is described as having the attributes of personality—intellect, emotion, and will. He is spoken of in personal terms. The Spirit's intellect is demonstrated by the fact that there are things He knows with His infinite and omniscient mind. For example:

Romans 8:26-27—“Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groaning too deep for words. And He who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.”

1 Corinthians 2:9-11—“But, as it is written, What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love Him—these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.”

The Holy Spirit has an infinite intellect. And then He also is described in Scripture as having emotions. An impersonal force can't be grieved, but the Spirit can (Eph. 4:30). His will is seen in the fact that He acts with intentionality or with purpose. Referring to various spiritual gifts He gives:

1 Corinthians 12:11—“All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as He wills.”

In multiple places, the Bible uses personal pronouns when referring to the Holy Spirit. Jesus referred to Him as “He.” In Acts 13:2, the Spirit refers to Himself in the first person and speaks His thoughts intelligibly to others, something that only a person can do. Intellect, emotion, and will!

In terms of His intellect...

- He counsels (Isaiah 11:2)
- He imparts wisdom (Isaiah 11:2)
- He inspired Scripture (Acts 1:16; 2 Peter 1:21)
- He intercedes (Romans 8:26)
- He knows (Isaiah 11:2)
- He possesses a mind (Romans 8:27)
- He reminds (John 14:26)
- He provides truth (John 14:17)
- He speaks (Acts 8:29)
- He teaches (Luke 12:12; John 14:26)
- He testifies (John 15:26; 1 John 5:7-8)

In terms of His emotion...

- He experiences joy (1 Thess. 1:6)
- He can be insulted (Heb. 10:29)
- He grieves over sin (Is. 63:10; Eph. 4:30)
- He loves (Rom. 5:5; 15:30)

In terms of His will...

- He contends with sinners (Gen. 6:3; Acts 7:51)
- He directs (Acts 16:6-7)
- He distributes spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:11; Heb. 2:4)
- He regenerates (John 3:7-8; Titus 3:5)

And so the point to keep in mind is that the Holy Spirit is a distinct person. But then something else to consider:

He is a divine person

We worship one God who has eternally existed in three persons. The Holy Spirit is God, the third member of the Trinity. The point I want to make here is that the Holy Spirit is just as much God as the Father and Son. Jesus refers to Him as ‘another’ Helper, and that is an important word. There are two Greek words that can be translated as another and they have different shades of meaning. First, there is the word ‘heteros’ which means another of a different kind. You may say, “I’m going to trade cars. I’m trading in my Ford for a Chevrolet.” You are trading for another truck of a different kind. This is the same word used in 2 Corinthians 11:4 where Paul warns us about those who were preaching ‘another’ Jesus and ‘another’ gospel. It wasn’t the true gospel, not the same one he preached. The word ‘heteros’ is not what is used in verse 16. Instead, it is a second Greek word that is translated as ‘another’ and is the word ‘allos.’ It means another of the same kind. So that when Jesus says He is going to give them another Helper, He means, “I’m going to give you another of the same kind who is just like Me.” Which is to say He is just as much God as is both the Father and the Son. In other words, the Holy Spirit is fully divine, a truth that is found in abundant evidence throughout Scripture. He possesses all the attributes of Deity. For instance, the Bible says the Holy Spirit is:

- omniscient and all-knowing

Isaiah 40:13-14—“Who has measured the Spirit of the Lord, or what man shows Him his counsel? Whom did He consult, and who made Him understand? Who has taught Him the path of justice or taught Him knowledge and showed Him the way of understanding?”

- omnipresent or in all places at once

Psalms 139:7—“Where shall I go from Your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from Your presence?”

- omnipotent and all-powerful

Job 33:4—“The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life.”

Psalm 104:30—“When You send forth Your Spirit, they are created, and You renew the face of the ground.”

The Spirit does what only God can do, superintending the virgin birth of Jesus, inspiring Scripture, and creating the world. His unique role is seen throughout Scripture as He is present at creation, hovering over the watery depths to bring order out of chaos. It is the Spirit who oversees the virgin birth as Luke 1 says that Mary is ‘overshadowed’ by the Spirit who brings about the miracle of conception in her womb. The Child who would be conceived in her womb would be the Son of God. The incarnation of the Son was by the power of the Spirit, and the inspiration of Scripture means the Holy Spirit is its author, for Peter writes:

2 Peter 1:20-21 —“Knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

To lie to the Holy Spirit is the same as lying to God, for this was the sin that Ananias and Sapphira committed in Acts 5:3-4. Peter told them that they had not lied to men but to God. Matthew 28:19 says that we are to baptize those who believe in the ‘name’ of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And so the point to remember is that the Holy Spirit is God! If you’ve come to faith in Christ, God Himself has come to live and make His home within your heart. And we may be so familiar with this truth that its weight is lost.

John Phillips —“At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit began not only a baptizing work in relation to those who believed, which puts believers in Christ and makes them members of Christ’s body, but He began an indwelling work, by which He puts Christ in the believers. The Holy Spirit comes to take up permanent residence in a believer’s heart and life. Thus the body of the believer becomes the temple of the Holy Spirit, a truth of

immense importance. It is only our familiarity with it that prevents us from appreciating its immensity. To think that a member of the triune Godhead has condescended to take up residence in our hearts!"

And we have Jesus' word on the matter in verse 17. The Helper is both a distinct person and a divine person. One more thing to consider is that:

He is a dynamic person

To whom does Jesus make these promises? The answer is seen there in verse 15, "Those who love Me and keep My commandments." This is the way that the Apostle John defines a Christian, and you find this in all of his writings in the New Testament. For instance in verse 21, "Whoever has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me." Verse 23, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word." Verse 24, "Whoever does not love Me does not keep My words." John uses this same language in his letters:

1 John 2:3-4—"And by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. Whoever says 'I know Him' but does not keep His commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him."

Friend, it is the Holy Spirit who is the dynamic behind our obedience. Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as 'the Spirit of truth' in John 14:17. In verse 26, Jesus called Him 'the Holy Spirit.' He is holy because God is holy, separate from all that is unlike who and what God is. It focuses attention on the Spirit's primary work in the life of believers, which is to progressively conform us to the image of Christ. This is the process we refer to as 'sanctification.' Evidence of His work in your life will be an increasing likeness to Jesus. He works to reproduce the character of Christ in your life, and brings Jesus to us experientially. ("I am with you always!")

The Holy Spirit is intangible and invisible. Both the Hebrew and Greek word for 'spirit' mean wind or breath ('ruach' or 'pneuma'). You can't see the wind, but you sure can see its effects, can't you? In the same way, you can't see the Holy Spirit, but you can be a recipient and an eyewitness of His influence in your life. Where there is life, there

will also be fruit. The Holy Spirit is a gift from God to every believer at salvation. No matter your age or background, or no matter your educational level, no matter your former way of living before you came to know Jesus. He is given to you.

Romans 5:5—“God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”

2 Corinthians 1:22—“He has given us His Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.”

Ephesians 1:13-14—“In Him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in Him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of His glory.”

1 Thessalonians 4:7-8—“For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. Therefore whoever disregard this, disregards not man but God, who gives His Holy Spirit to you.”

The Holy Spirit is the very breath or wind of God. And like the wind, He has great power even though He is invisible. Trying to explain an invisible reality is a difficult thing, but Jesus makes it abundantly clear in that the Holy Spirit is knowable. He says in verse 17, “The world doesn’t know Him but you know Him.” Why doesn’t the world know the Holy Spirit? For the same reason you cannot pick up radio stations if you don’t have a radio. It has nothing to do with whether or not radio waves are going through the air. It has everything to do with not having anything with which to receive the signals. The world does not have a spiritual receiver. Through faith in Jesus Christ, God has implanted a divine receiver within those who know Him, and it picks up heaven’s signals so the believer can be ‘in tune’ with the heavenlies, and enjoy fellowship with God. So in the midst of discouragement, fear, loneliness, insecurity, or even our ongoing battle with temptation and sin—a believer can be in tune with the Holy Spirit. Which means I’m not left to my own reserves or resources.

Acts 1:8—“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come...”

It is same word we get 'dynamite' or 'dynamic' from. There is empowerment and enablement in the person of the Holy Spirit. And we need His dynamic power in our lives every single day. There is not a day that passes where I am not in need of His strength, where I can coast in my own ability.

Several years ago, someone gave me a copy of a book by Francis Chan entitled "Forgotten God." It is basically about our futile attempt to live the Christian life in our own efforts rather than by relying on the power of the Spirit. I want to close this morning by sharing something with you that he wrote in the introduction to that little book. He says:

"From my perspective, the Holy Spirit is tragically neglected and, for all practical purposes, forgotten. While no evangelical would deny His existence, I'm willing to bet there are millions of churchgoers across America who cannot confidently say they have experienced His presence or action in their lives over the past year. And many of them do not believe they can. The benchmark of success in church services has become more about attendance than the movement of the Holy Spirit. The 'entertainment' model of church was largely adopted in the 1980s and 90s, and while it alleviated some of our boredom for a couple of hours a week, it filled our churches with self-focused consumers rather than self-sacrificing servants attuned to the Holy Spirit. Perhaps we're too familiar and comfortable with the current state of the church to feel the weight of the problem. But what if you grew up on a deserted island with nothing but the Bible to read? Imagine being rescued after twenty years and then attending a typical evangelical church. Chances are you'd be shocked (for a whole lot of reasons, but that is another story). Having read the Scriptures outside the context of contemporary church culture, you would be convinced that the Holy Spirit is as essential to a believer's existence as air is to staying alive. You would know that the Spirit led the first Christians to do unexplainable things, to live lives that didn't make sense to the culture around them, and ultimately to spread the story of God's grace around the world. There is a big gap between what we read in Scripture about the Holy Spirit and how most believers and churches operate today. In many modern churches, you would be stunned by the apparent absence of the Spirit in any manifest way. And this, I believe, is the crux of the

problem. If I were Satan and my ultimate goal was to thwart God's kingdom and purposes, one of my main strategies would be to get churchgoers to ignore the Holy Spirit. The degree to which this has happened (and I would argue that it is a prolific disease in the body of Christ) is directly connected to the dissatisfaction most of us feel with and in the church. We understand something very important is missing. The feeling is so strong that some have run away from the church and God's Word completely. I believe that this missing something is actually a missing Someone—namely, the Holy Spirit. Without Him, people operate in their own strength and only accomplish human-size results. The world is not moved by love or actions that are of human creation. And the church is not empowered to live differently from any other gathering of people without the Holy Spirit. But when believers live in the power of the Spirit, the evidence in their lives is supernatural. The church cannot help but be different, and the world cannot help but notice.”

Acts 4:13—“Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.”

Friend, the Holy Spirit is absolutely vital to our situation at Hopewell today. For without Him, we'd be without comfort, strength, and impact. If He doesn't move in our lives and in our church, there will be no lasting fruit. And so let's learn to treasure and worship Him as the divine Person He truly is, and only then will we experience more of His manifested power in our lives. And here are just a few of the ways that a true knowledge of His person will result in profound changes in your life as a believer:

- Knowing that He is a **distinct** Person will deliver you from fear and loneliness.

As your Helper, He is there to comfort you and bring confidence to your life. The same promise that Jesus gave to His disciples is the same promise He gives to you now—He will not leave you as an orphan, but will come to you. As God, He is there when you need Him most! He's there in the pain and disappointments of life. He's with you when doubt seems to be getting the best of you, communicating the truth of who you are in Christ.

- Knowing that He is a **divine** Person will awaken you to the fact that He is Someone, not something.

And that keeps you from mechanical religion. You have a personal relationship with God the Holy Spirit. To know Jesus means that God's Spirit has come to make His home in your heart. The One who created the sun, moon and stars. The One who knows all things. The One who is everywhere at the same time. He comes to make your heart His home. And He can be grieved by our sin, quenched by our pride, and frustrated by our persistent disobedience. So we must be sensitive to His leadership in our lives.

- Knowing that He is a **dynamic** Person will keep you from relying on your own strength and effort.

Jesus didn't come to simply give His for you, but He also came to give His life to you. As the Helper, the Holy Spirit is the life of Christ in you. He is your strength whenever you're facing the heat of struggle. He is your Friend who is not only beside you, and all around you, but He lives on the inside of you and constantly communicates to your heart the love of both the Father and the Son. And so be thankful and grateful for the wonderful Person of the Holy Spirit!

2—The PURPOSE of the Holy Spirit (14:26; 15:26-27)

"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things and brings to your remembrance all that I have said to you...But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness about Me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning."

He exalts the Son of God

He empowers the people of God

3—The PRESENCE of the Holy Spirit (16:7-15)

“Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send Him to you. And when He comes, He will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see Me no longer; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth, for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak, and He will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take what is Mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is Mine; therefore I said that He will take what is Mine and declare it to you.”

His presence to remind

His presence to reprove

His presence to reveal