

Gospel of John: The Coming Counsellor

Now, what comes to your mind when I say the Holy Spirit? That’s what we’re going to talk a bit about today as we continue in our series through those parts of the gospel of John, the fourth and last biographical account of the life of Jesus in the New Testament.

The Holy Spirit is a person, not a vague force. It is possible to lie to the Holy Spirit ³ **Then Peter said, “Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? ⁴ Didn’t it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn’t the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God.” Acts 5: 3-4.**

Paul speaks of grieving the Holy Spirit, ³⁰ **And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Ephesians 4:30.** He also speaks of quenching the Holy Spirit, ¹⁹ **Do not quench the Spirit. 1 Thessalonians 5:19.** Stephen accuses his adversaries of always resisting the Holy Spirit, ⁵¹ **“You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit! Acts 7:51.** While it is possible to resist a mere force one cannot lie to or grieve something that is impersonal.

In addition, the Holy Spirit engages in moral actions and ministries that can only be performed by a person. Among these are, teaching, regenerating, searching, speaking, interceding, commanding, testifying, illuminating and revealing. ²⁶ **In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. Romans 8:26.** This all leads us to conclude that the Holy Spirit is someone with whom we can have a personal relationship, someone to whom we can and should pray.

Now many of us were raised with the King James Version of the Bible, which called him the Holy Ghost, which is why Casper might really have come to mind. That’s from the 1600’s and while I have nothing against the King James Version of the Bible, in this case, it’s a terrible translation of the original Greek. Unfortunately, you have lots of people thinking of the Holy Spirit as an impersonal "it" or “energy” or “force.”

However, that’s not at all what the Bible teaches. Jesus always referred to the Holy Spirit in personal terms. Not as an "it" but as a "he", a person! He is fully personal. Finally, the Holy Spirit is in you if you are a follower of Christ. The Bible teaches that when you cross the line of faith – when you come to Christ, the Holy Spirit enters your life. He takes up residence. He moves in and sets up house. Inviting Christ into your life is inviting the presence and work of the Holy Spirit. Theologians call this miraculous transformation of the individual, regeneration.

It is life in the spirit that God intends for every Christian. This new life in the spirit should produce what Paul calls the fruit of the spirit, ²² **But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, self-control, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against**

such things there is no law. Galatians 5: 22-23. You may be able to replicate some of this fruit but it is the supernatural work of the spirit that allows you to grow in all of these areas.

Foremost on Jesus’ mind is the promise of the Holy Spirit, which he promises five times in chapters fourteen to sixteen. The spirit will not only bring gifts to the church but will supply the ongoing presence of Jesus in the church. Here is the first promise.

¹⁵ “If you love me, keep my commands. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— ¹⁷ the Spirit of truth. 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. ¹⁸ I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. John 14: 15-18.

Now as Jesus anticipates his departure, he describes the spirit that is coming. The spirit’s gift in these verses is set up in verse fifteen, ¹⁵ “If you love me, keep my commands”. The gift, then, is an outgrowth of the loving relationship between Jesus and his disciples.

The NIV translation from the Greek is the word advocate. This word is unique to John in the New Testament. Its root meaning is to ‘come alongside’, it is also translated as ‘counsellor’. We don’t really have an English equivalent for it, so picking one word in English is tough, because it carries a lot of different angles. Yes, it means counsellor, but it also carries the idea of Helper or Comforter or Advocate or Strengtheners.

It’s also important to note the phrase, “another advocate” in verse sixteen. This means that the ongoing work of the spirit will be a continuation of the work of Jesus in the world. The Holy Spirit will pick up where Jesus leaves off. The one that takes his place in their life after He’s gone. The one who will carry on His work, His ministry, and the one who will take His presence into the world and into their lives.

To experience the Spirit is to experience Jesus. It’s no surprise then that we read in verse seventeen, that he is called the ‘spirit of truth’. He will continue to communicate the truth about God. The experience of the spirit promised by Jesus also points to spiritual life that is truly astounding. Believers will sustain the miraculous works of Jesus, ¹² **Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. John 14:12.**

Then we have the second promise of the Holy Spirit in John’s Gospel. ²⁵ **“All this I have spoken while still with you. ²⁶ But the Advocate, 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. John 14: 25-26.**

In the second promise of the spirit, he is described specifically as the Holy Spirit. Here Jesus is emphasising the teaching roles of the spirit. For the first disciples, understanding everything that Jesus did and said was difficult at times. Now, Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit will recall all things he has done and said and fix them in the minds of his followers.

On earth, Jesus could not enter into their personality and change them from within. Now, through the Holy Spirit, Christ dwells in our hearts and does his transforming work there.

The Holy Spirit is Christ’s continuing, ongoing presence, working in and through our lives, and in and through the church. Everything that Jesus stood for, taught, worked for, and modelled, it’s all still going forward. Everything Jesus unleashed on this planet is still moving forward. It’s through the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Then the Third promise of the Holy Spirit. ²⁶ **“When the Advocate 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. ²⁷ And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning. John 15: 26-27.**

The third thing Jesus tells us about the Holy Spirit is that he is a missional Spirit. Also, the followers of Jesus should not worry about what to say since the Spirit will speak through them.¹⁹ **But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time, you will be given what to say, ²⁰ for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. Matthew 10: 19-20. ¹² for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say.” Luke 12:12.**

The Holy Spirit in people’s lives was making Christ known – for people to engage and respond to. In fact, at the very beginning of Acts, we read these words from Jesus: **“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” (Acts 1:8, NIV).** The Holy Spirit has no interest in being quiet about Jesus and neither should we.

The fourth promise of the Holy Spirit. ⁵ **but now I am going to him who sent me. None of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ ⁶ Rather, you are filled with grief because I have said these things. ⁷ But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. ⁸ When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹ about sin, because people do not believe in me; ¹⁰ about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; ¹¹ and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned. John 16: 5-11.**

The world is now put on notice. Its guilt will be exposed by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit will bring to light the true meaning of sin and righteousness and judgement and expose the world’s fatal errors. All this will come to light because of what God has done in Jesus. The work of the spirit here is an operation of the conscience of the world. The world is on trial.

However, since the world cannot receive the spirit, this operation will be affected through the work of the church which has the spirit and which provides a bold testimony to the truth. The message of the church is also prophetic. It incriminates the moral and spiritual bankruptcy of the world around us. The world lives under the judgement of the God. As believers and as the church we are not called to abandon this world but seek to offer redemption through the mighty power of conversion to Jesus and a way back to the father.

Now the fifth and final promise of the Holy Spirit. ¹² **“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. ¹³ When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own but will speak whatever he hears, and he will**

declare to you the things that are to come. ¹⁴ He will glorify me because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. ¹⁵ All that the Father has is mine. For this reason, I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you John 16: 12-15.

This final promise about the Holy Spirit suggest that the Spirit will provide supplementary revelations that the disciples have not yet heard. A new time and a different experience is coming. Jesus speaks of a future time when new things will be disclosed. This is about recalling and preserving the historic works of Jesus. Jesus and his ministry stand alongside the ongoing living Jesus-in-spirit which is continuously experienced in the church.

The spirit is dependent on Jesus for everything he says. The revelation of Jesus will continue in the church and the Spirit will be the authoritative channel through which it is heard. Jesus as recorded in Scripture must be the measure by which all new revelations are tested. Revelations that fail to glorify Jesus and fail to recognise his glory dishonour the father since it is he who is the source of everything Jesus is. The father is at work in the son, the son is at work in the spirit, any revelation that disrupts the glory of these is not from God.

This ongoing illumination is firstly tied to the development of Scripture and its use. However, the Spirit’s work goes beyond the production of the Scriptures. We have a genuine prophetic gift from the Holy Spirit that provides ongoing revelation. We must always test and discern such revelation in the life of the church.

The best evidence for the view that John’s followers understood the spirit to have ongoing revelatory power can be seen in the abuses John had to deal with in his first letter. Since many false prophets were springing up, John’s followers needed to test these spirits to see if they belonged to God. He doesn’t automatically disregard these prophets but calls for their gifts to be tested. He was on the outlook for those who used their gifts to exploit others. Here John gives strict guidelines;

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. ² By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, ³ and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. And this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world. ⁴ Little children, you are from God and have conquered them, for the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. ⁵ They are from the world; therefore, what they say is from the world, and the world listens to them. ⁶ We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us, and whoever is not from God does not listen to us. From this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error 1 John 4: 1-6.

I love how Gary Burge puts this in his Commentary on the Gospel of John. **“Therefore, as we look at the work of the Spirit today, we see that not only does the Spirit recall, authenticate and enliven the teaching of Jesus for each generation but also the Spirit works creatively in the church bringing a new Prophetic word”.**¹

¹ Gary M Burge, NIV Application Commentary: John, 452.