

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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The Person of the Holy Spirit

His Person

The Holy Spirit is a Person in the Godhead and His activity and energy are seen throughout the Bible beginning with creation, "...And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters" (Genesis 1:2). The Spirit of God was in operation in the Old Testament in building the tabernacle (Exodus 31:3), in writing the Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:16), in the lives of the prophets (1 Peter 1:10-12; 2 Peter 1:21) and kings, like David who speaks of the Holy Spirit's Omnipresence in Psalm 139:7 when he asks, "...where can I go from Your Spirit?..."

Whenever God acts we see His Spirit. This is especially so in the life of Christ. Of the Incarnation we read, "...The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you: therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35).

When Jesus begins His ministry the Holy Spirit is active, "...the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him..." (Luke 3:22). When Jesus reads from Isaiah in Nazareth, He begins with the words, "...The Spirit of the LORD is upon me..." (Luke 4:18).

The Holy Spirit's presence and power were not only evident throughout the life of Christ but He was also active in the sacrifice of Christ, "...Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God..." (Hebrews 9:14).

The Holy Spirit is mentioned by the resurrected Christ as part of the Trinity in Matthew 28:19. Jesus at the end of Mark's Gospel mentions the powerful signs of the Holy Spirit. In Luke 24:49, Jesus promises to send the Holy Spirit. And, in John 20:22, the resurrected Jesus breathed on the disciples and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

Finally, the Holy Spirit is mentioned in relation to the ascension of Jesus, "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water." But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified" (John 7:38-39).

His Work

The work of the Spirit of God continues in our salvation. Jesus explains we are born again through the Spirit of God, "...most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God" (John 3:5). The Holy Spirit indwells us at conversion and does not leave us. "In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise" (Ephesians 1:13).

The Spirit of God was also active and vital to the birth of Christ's Church at Pentecost, "...you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit not many days from now" (Acts 1:5). And it is through the Holy Spirit's gifts and ministry in the hearts and lives of Christ's disciples that the Church grows, "...but the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all" (1 Corinthians 12:7).

The ministry of the Holy Spirit continues until Christ returns and the One, who is there in the first chapter of the Bible, is there in its last chapter, "...the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" (Revelation 22:17).

It is God the Father who introduces Jesus, as God the Son, at His baptism, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased". And, it is Jesus, God the Son, who introduces us to God the Holy Spirit in the Gospel of John, "I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever - the Spirit of truth" (John 14:16-17a).

In John 14:15, the Lord Jesus speaks about love and obedience, "If you love Me, keep My commandments". It is vital to realise that the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives is directly linked to our personal love for the Lord which is proved by our obedience to His word. We should not forget that unless this love for the Lord exists and we are obedient to His word, we cannot expect the Holy Spirit to work in power through us. It is possible for us both to "grieve the Holy

Spirit of God" (Ephesians 4:30) and to "quench the Spirit" (1 Thessalonians 5:19). The Holy Spirit is a Person in the Godhead. We grieve Him by allowing things in our lives which hinder His working through us. We quench the Spirit by belittling or preventing His work in our lives and that of our fellow believers. He is the Holy Spirit and for Him to work through us we have to behave in a way which is consistent with His holiness.

On the positive side we are born of the Spirit, He dwells in us and He can fill us.

In promising the Holy Spirit, the Lord Jesus involves the whole of the Trinity. It is the God the Son who asks God the Father to send God the Spirit in John 14:16. This verse demonstrates the care that the Lord has for His people. He had been a constant help and comfort to the disciples in their lives but He was about to go back to heaven. But He was to leave them another Comforter. This name of 'Comforter' or 'Consoler' is the Hebrew name given to the Messiah and shows the closeness of the work of the Son of God and the Spirit of God.

The Lord speaks of "another Comforter (or Helper)". This can be taken in two ways. It could mean something that is something different or something which is the same. I might have a Ford car and decide, "I am going to buy another car" and go off and buy a Vauxhall. So, I would have another car but of a different type. But I might like the Ford car and go off and buy the same model again. That is another car but the same type. This was the sense of what the Lord was saying. The Father would send another Comforter who would be with them in the future, just like the Lord had been with them when He was on earth. More than this, the relationship which was to be established between the people of God and the Spirit of God was an eternal relationship, "He will abide with you forever". Once we are born of the Spirit, we are linked with Him forever.

Jesus then gives the Holy Spirit another name, "the Spirit of truth". At the beginning of chapter 14, Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life". Jesus is the way, and it is the Spirit who leads us to Christ. Jesus is the truth, and the Spirit is the Spirit of truth. Jesus is the life, and we are born of the Spirit. The work of the Spirit is entirely consistent with the work of Christ. However, the Spirit is only received and known by those who are Christ's. Of course, the Spirit has a powerful effect upon the world as we shall see, but here the Lord is explaining the relationship the people of God have with the Spirit of God. It is a twofold relationship. First, the Spirit of truth dwells with the whole of Christ's people - rather like the cloud and fire of God's presence in the Old Testament which was with Israel as they travelled through the wilderness. But for the Christian there is something else. The Spirit of truth also dwells in each one of us individually. This was what Jesus spoke of in John 7:38-39, "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified." This relationship between the Spirit of God and Christians was entirely new. It happened at Pentecost when the promised Spirit was sent in fulfilment of Christ's words in John 14:17.

In John 14:18, you can feel the love of Christ when He says, "I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you". Orphans are very dear to God's heart. In both the Old and New Testaments, God made provision for the special care of widows and orphans. Orphans suggest those who, for whatever reason, were abandoned. It is particularly touching to know that Jesus, who was about to be abandoned at the Cross when He sacrificed Himself for our sins, promises never to abandon us. "I will come to you," He says. By this He meant that through the indwelling Spirit of God, Christ would always be with us.

I am looking at my hands as I write this message. My brain is telling my hands what to type. But my hands would never know the thoughts of my brain unless they were connected to it by my nervous system. So it is with the Christian. We know the presence and power of Christ through the indwelling Spirit of God who links us to Him.

In John 14:25-26, we have the work of the Spirit of God described further. Once more the Lord Jesus emphasises the Trinity in explaining the work of the Holy Spirit. It was the Father who would send the Spirit in the name of Christ. "In My name" suggests authority and power. The Father could only send the Spirit because Christ's work was finished and He was glorified in heaven. From that place of authority the Spirit is sent.

The Lord Jesus also compares His present ministry with the ministry of the Spirit. Jesus had taught the disciples whilst He was with them. They did not always take notice or remember or understand His teaching. Here the Lord explains that the Holy Spirit would "bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you." From this verse, we understand the ministry of the Spirit in relation to what is past. The Spirit would recall to the apostles' memory all Christ's words and through this means the Scriptures were completed.

But the Spirit would also teach them "all things". What was not always understood and obeyed when Christ was on earth would be able to be understood and obeyed through the indwelling Spirit of God. He is our great Teacher now as Christ had been to His disciples on earth. We also can take this to our own hearts and know the indwelling Spirit of God who enables us to understand the word of God and to fulfil God's will in our lives.

John 15 is about fruit bearing. Jesus describes Himself as the true vine and we are described as branches through which His life is seen in the fruit we bear. In verse 2, Jesus speaks about bearing fruit, then bearing more fruit. In verse 8, He says, "By this My father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples." The expectation of the Lord Jesus is that, through the indwelling Spirit of God, our lives will be lived in such a way that we constantly and increasingly display the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. It is one of the proofs that we are His disciples and is also the way in which we bring glory to the Father. The fruit of the Spirit is described in Galatians 5:22-26. We should remember that it is the fruit of Spirit, not the fruits. There is one fruit which has many characteristics, such as love, joy and peace. It is also interesting to compare this with Psalm 1:2-3.

In the last two verses of chapter 15, the Lord Jesus speaks specifically about the promised Spirit of God. Again He is called the Comforter (or Helper) and the Spirit of truth. Christ was full of grace and truth and so the Spirit is characterised by grace (the comfort He is to us) and truth, because He is the Spirit of truth. In chapter 14 the Lord Jesus described the ministry of the Holy Spirit in relation to the past. In 15:26-27, Jesus explains the Spirit's ministry in terms of the present: "He will testify of Me". This is an important verse because it shows us that the present work of the Spirit is Christ centred. The Spirit is a witness to both the Person and work of Christ. In John 15:27, Jesus links the Spirit's witness and that of the apostles who had been with Jesus throughout His earthly ministry. It demonstrates to us that witnessing to Christ is done only in the power of the Holy Spirit through our personal experience of Christ. By abiding in Christ through day-by-day communion and obedience, the Spirit of God empowers us to be effective witnesses to Christ in this world. This was the apostles' experience. They only became powerful witnesses to Christ after the Spirit of God came down at Pentecost. The fearful Peter who denied his Lord became the fearless evangelist who drew 3,000 people to Christ!

The disciples were sad because Jesus had spoken about leaving them. But the Lord Jesus explains that His leaving was to their advantage because, unless He returned to heaven, the Holy Spirit would not come to them. In chapter 15 we saw that Jesus described the ministry of the Spirit in relation to the present. This description of the Spirit in relation to the present continues but then goes on to the future. The promise of the Spirit, in John 16, is in two parts. In verses 8-11, the Spirit's work in the world is outlined; then in verses 12-15 the Spirit's work amongst Christians is explained.

The work of Spirit in the world has to do with the conviction of sin, the presentation of righteousness and the certainty of judgement. This powerful work was first seen at Pentecost in Acts 2. The Spirit of God through Peter's preaching convicted the crowd of the sin of not believing in Christ and of crucifying Him. The Spirit of God then presented the righteousness of God in raising Christ from the dead and exalting Him in heaven. Finally, the Spirit of God warns of judgement and the need to be saved. These themes of sin, righteousness and judgement are used by the Spirit of God to convince people of their need of Christ. And, just as 3,000 people turned to Christ at Pentecost to form the Church of God on earth, so, ever since, He has worked to bring the message of salvation to this world through the evangelistic efforts of Christians. The Holy Spirit's work is based entirely on Christ's finished work on the cross, His resurrection and glorification, and His defeat of Satan, "the ruler of this world is judged" (verse 11).

In chapter 14 the Lord Jesus had spoken of the Holy Spirit bringing His words to their remembrance. In 16:12, He explains that He still had many things to tell His disciples but they were not ready to receive this further teaching. But, in the future, the Spirit of truth would guide them "into all truth". Here we have a further insight into the Spirit's work. He is our Teacher and our Guide.

A few years ago I was in Zermatt in Switzerland. This beautiful Alpine town lies beneath the majestic Matterhorn, one of the most distinctive mountains in the world. In the town lives an old guide in his nineties who had spent all his life leading visitors up to the summit of the Matterhorn. He had made the ascent more times than anyone else and never tired of the journey. This remarkable old man reminds me of the Holy Spirit, who, just like the Saviour, came down to earth in order to guide us into the truth of God on that upward journey into heaven. He never tires of the journey but, just as Jesus was sent by the Father into the world as the Saviour, so now the Spirit, sent by the Father and Son, fulfils His ministry as the One who guides us into all truth.

I visited the Emmaus road in Israel some years ago. It brought home to me the occasion when Jesus spoke to His two disciples and "beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." The Spirit of God continues this work of teaching us from all the Scriptures. He does it in our personal communion and through the gift of teaching.

In the Old Testament, we have two wonderful pictures of the work of the Son and the Spirit. In Genesis 22, Abraham is prepared to sacrifice his only son, Isaac. Hebrews 11:17-19 explains that, in being prepared to offer up his only begotten son, Abraham believed God would raise Isaac from the dead. Through this Old Testament story, at the very beginning of the Bible, God showed how in the future He would give His only Son Jesus as the sacrifice for our sin and raise Him from the dead.

Then in Genesis 24 we read the story of how Abraham sent his servant to find a bride for Isaac. By the direction of God, the servant finds, Rebekah and leads her back to Isaac's home where she becomes his wife. The servant is a good picture of the Spirit's work of leading us home to the Saviour and the Father's house. Everything the servant said to Rebekah and the gifts he gave her witnessed to her future husband and home. So the Spirit's present ministry is to present Christ to our hearts and to empower us in His worship and service. As the Lord Jesus explains in John 16:14, "He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you".

However, at the end of verse 13, Jesus mentions another aspect of the work of the Spirit, "He will tell you things to come." We have seen how the Spirit of God's ministry has a connection to the past, "He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you". It also has a connection to the present, "He will testify of Me" and "He will guide you into all truth". Now we see, at the end of verse 13, the Spirit's ministry also has a connection to the future, "He will tell you things to come." The New Testament is the great witness to this ministry as we find within its pages the things which Jesus said and did, the way Christ was preached and the Church built up, and finally the completion of the prophetic word in regard to future events. "All Scripture", Paul reminds Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:16 is "God breathed," that is, of the Spirit. Peter confirms this in 2 Peter 1:21: "prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."

I was reminded recently in re-reading Luke 15 of the involvement of the whole of the Trinity in our salvation. First the Lord Jesus as Shepherd finds the lost sheep. Then the woman searches in all the dark corners of the house to find the lost coin - just like the Spirit searches tirelessly through this world for lost souls. Finally the father receives his once lost son back into his house. It occurred to me that when the father received his son back again that we have some remarkable illustrations of the ministry of the Spirit.

The son was convicted of his sin and led to repentance. The Spirit's work of conviction leads us to Christ. The father received the son with love. The Spirit leads us to knowledge of the Father. "You [have] received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God" (Romans 8:15-16). The son had the best robe put on him. The Spirit brings us to the knowledge of having Christ's righteousness. "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour" (Titus 3:5-6). The son was also given a ring, the symbol of authority and power - the Spirit's indwelling power: "Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4). The son was given shoes for his feet. "Walk in the Spirit" (Galatians 5:16 and 25). Finally, the fatted calf was killed and a great family meal was enjoyed - a time of family fellowship and joy: the "fellowship of the Spirit" (Philippians 2:1).

God is the greatest Giver. He has given us His Son for our salvation and He has given us His Spirit to become worshippers and witnesses. May we ensure that we do not grieve or quench this Holy Person but now, as temples of the Holy Spirit, allow His work to be fulfilled in our lives!

In 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, we are reminded that our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit, "Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you are bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit which are God's." When Jesus visited the temple at Jerusalem it had become a den of thieves and robbers. As He cleared the temple in John 2, He said, "Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise" (verse 16). I sometimes think my heart is a little like the temple at Jerusalem which Jesus visited - indwelt by the Spirit of God but cluttered by many things which should not be there and which hinder His power. My prayer this morning is for the grace to clear out the rubbish and allow the Holy Spirit to take complete control.

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