

THE OTHER HELPER

John 14:16-17

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“I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth” (Jn. 14:16-17).

It is not hard to see how the disciples became so devoted to Jesus and dependent on his personal presence. During the three or so years of his ministry on earth, he had guided them, taught them, rescued them, and revealed God’s power to them. According to Jesus, however, one of the most important things he would ever do for his disciples was leave them. Jesus explained why his departure to heaven was for the benefit of his followers: “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth” (Jn. 14:16-17). In heaven, Jesus would be seated in power at the right hand of the Father for their sakes, and in his place on earth he would send the Holy Spirit, who would not merely “dwell with you,” but would even “be in you” (Jn. 14:17).

MEET THE HOLY SPIRIT

Most Christians today are well informed about the person and work of Jesus Christ, at least knowing that he is the Son of God who died on the cross for our sins. But, writes J. I. Packer, “the average Christian is in a complete fog as to what work the Holy Spirit does.”¹ Errors abound among Christians when it comes to the Spirit and, perhaps just as concerning, many are like the impoverished believers Paul met when he first arrived in Ephesus, who stated, “We have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit” (Acts 19:2).

¹ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1973), 60.

The first thing for us to know about the Holy Spirit is that he is a divine person. This can be seen throughout the New Testament, in which the Spirit is said to decide (1 Cor. 12:11), act (Rom. 8:26), speak (1 Tim. 4:1), and feel (Eph. 4:30), just as any other person does. Thus Jesus says that he will send “another Helper,” meaning not a different kind of helper but the same kind of helper as himself. The Holy Spirit is a divine person who takes the place of the divine person who leaves.

The importance of the Spirit’s personhood cannot be overstated, since the alternative is to think of the Spirit as an impersonal force. Thinking this way, many Christians desire to get more of the Spirit in the same way that one gets power from an electrical outlet. They speak of “plugging into” the Spirit and emphasize spiritual techniques or experiences that will “tap into” the Spirit’s power. The Holy Spirit is not a mere power, however, but the third person of the divine Godhead, co-equal with God the Father and God the Son. James Boice comments: “If we think of the Holy Spirit as a mysterious power, our thought will continually be, ‘How can I get more of the Holy Spirit?’ If we think of the Holy Spirit as a person, our thought will be, ‘How can the Holy Spirit have more of me?’ The first thought is entirely pagan. The second is New Testament Christianity.”²

In Acts 8:9-24, we read of Simon the mage, a spiritual figure who professed faith in Christ and then sought to purchase the Holy Spirit. Peter rebuked Simon, saying, “May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!” (Acts 8:20). Acts later tells of the calling of Paul and Barnabas to be the first missionaries. While the believers in Antioch were worshiping, “the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them’” (Acts 13:2). Simon was one who wanted to gain and use God’s Spirit as a magical force, but instead it is the Spirit who gains us and uses us for Christ’s work.

² James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of John*, 5 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 4:1112.

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In addressing his forlorn disciples, Jesus made a second statement about the Holy Spirit. He said that the Holy Spirit is sent by the Father and the Son together as a result of Jesus' finished work on earth. "I will ask the Father," Jesus said, "and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever" (Jn. 14:16). Jesus had just told the disciples that they would do "greater works" than he had done (referring to the spread of the gospel), that they would pray effectual prayers, and that out of love for him they would obey his commands (Jn. 14:12-15). The promise of the Holy Spirit continues that teaching. The sending of the Holy Spirit is not a reward for good behavior, but rather is Jesus' part of this relationship of mutual devotion. He would send the Holy Spirit to empower the disciples' life of gospel witness, prayer, and good works. Together in a joined counsel of grace for our salvation, the Father would give the Spirit and the Son would send the Spirit, to carry forward Christ's saving work in the gospel after his resurrection and ascension into heaven.

This teaching highlights the importance of the word "another." Herman Ridderbos states, "This [Helper] will take Jesus' place after Jesus' departure and in his activity as [Helper] will do nothing other than what Jesus has been doing, except that in doing it he will continue and advance Jesus' work."³ In terms of the work of our salvation, the Holy Spirit comes as another Jesus. It is because of the Spirit's on-going ministry on Christ's behalf that Christians are not impoverished by Jesus' departure but in fact are greatly helped.

What exactly, then, does the Spirit do to provide for Christ's disciples and their work for Jesus? The answer is found in a word that Jesus will mention four times in his farewell discourse, but which is not easily translated from the original Greek into English. The King James Version describes the Spirit as "another Comforter." The New International Version calls him "another Counselor." The English Standard Version renders this description as "another Helper." All of these offer a valid perspective, so long as they are rightly understood. In the Elizabethan English of the King James Version, a "Comforter" was not a sympathetic listener but a legal advocate who supported a

³ Herman Ridderbos, *John: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 500.

person in his affairs at court. To call the Spirit a “Counselor” is in accord with his mission of conveying Christ’s truth, and the word “Helper” perhaps best conveys the meaning by being most general, speaking of the whole help the Spirit brings.

In order to understand Jesus’ meaning, we must consider the Greek word itself. Jesus describes the Holy Spirit as a *paraklete* (Greek, *parakleton*), a word that combines the prefix *para* (meaning “alongside of”) with the verb *kaleo* (meaning to “call out”). The form of the word is a passive participle, so we might literally describe the Holy Spirit as the one “who is called alongside.” It is also valid to translate *paraklete* in terms of the Spirit’s action, in which case he would be one “who calls from alongside.” If we take these two ideas and combine them we have the basic meaning of Jesus’ designation of the Spirit as a *paraklete*. The Spirit is the divine person who is called to our side to continue the ministry that Jesus began. There at our side, the Spirit calls out to us, in the words of the Puritan John Owen “to support, cherish, relieve, and comfort the church.”⁴

I thought of the idea of a *paraklete* recently as one of our younger daughters began to ride her bicycle without the training wheels. She was only able to take this important step in life with a good deal of help. The “helper” was her mother, who acted out both senses of the word *paraklete*. First, she raced to our daughter’s side as one called to answer the need. Once there, she guided the handlebars, balanced the bike as it got going, and called out the encouragement our daughter needed to ride on her own without the training wheels. With the help of her mother as a *paraklete*, our daughter was able to accomplish what she otherwise lacked the ability to do on her own. In a like manner, the Holy Spirit provides the enabling help for Christians to achieve their potential as born again followers of Jesus.

THE SPIRIT’S INWARD MINISTRY

The primary difference in the manner of Christ’s ministry and the Spirit’s ministry as our Helper is seen in verse 17. “You know him,” Jesus said of the Spirit, and he “dwells with you,” referring to the Spirit’s presence in Christ himself. Jesus was born by the

⁴ John Owen, *The Spirit and the Church*, abr. R.J.K. Law (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2002), 147.

miraculous conception of the Holy Spirit (Mt. 1:20) and though himself fully divine, Jesus received the equipping of the Holy Spirit at his baptism (Mt. 3:16). Jesus was himself the beginning of a new humanity in the Holy Spirit, which is why Paul refers to him as “the last Adam” who “became a life-giving spirit” (1 Cor. 15:45). In the person of Christ, the Spirit had been present all along, so by knowing Jesus the disciples knew the Spirit. Now, after Jesus departed, his continued ministry of grace would be by means of the *indwelling* Spirit. Jesus here refers to the future when the Holy Spirit would come upon the church at Pentecost, saying that the Spirit then “will be in you” (Jn. 14:17). This is why Jesus said it was better for his disciples that he depart, for then the “other Helper” whom he sends will indwell believers with saving power.

The Spirit carries on Jesus’ work as the Christ, meaning the Messiah, or Anointed One, a title that gathers together the three anointed offices of the Old Testament. It is in terms of these offices that the Spirit carries on *within us* the work that Jesus accomplished *for us*.

First, the Spirit takes up Christ’s office as the great and true Prophet of God’s people. John began his Gospel by designating Jesus as “the Word” (Jn. 1:1), and Jesus told his disciples that “whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (Jn. 14:9). His revealing work carries on in the Church by means of the Holy Scriptures which Jesus appointed his apostles to write. It was the role of the Spirit to come alongside the apostles in this calling, divinely inspiring them so that their words would be the very words of God. Benjamin Palmer commented that Christ carried on his work of revelation as the Spirit’s “mysterious power [was] exerted upon the minds of prophets and apostles, in order that they may safely conceive in thought and accurately represent in language all that the Revealer [made] known.”⁵ Peter likewise stated that in writing the Scriptures, “men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter. 1:21).

Christ’s work of revelation did not conclude with the Spirit’s inspiration of the Bible, but he continues to reveal God and his salvation today through the Spirit’s illuminating work. It is only as the Spirit shines on the heart that anyone comprehends and believes

⁵ B. M. Palmer, *Sermons*, 2 vols (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle, 1875, reprint 2002), I:208.

God's Word today and is saved. Palmer explained that the Spirit "does this by lighting up the Scriptures to us with the glory which beams from the Savior's person and throne above."⁶ As the Paraklete that we need, the Holy Spirit comes alongside and works on Christ's behalf within us so that, as Paul put it, the Word shines "in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6).

Christ is also the great High Priest who brings his people cleansed before God's holy throne. The New Testament teaches that it was "through the eternal Spirit" that Jesus gave himself as a spiritual sacrifice for our sins (Heb. 9:14), offering his own blood to pay our debt to God's justice and secure our forgiveness. This great and pivotal work was about to take place, as Jesus' arrest lay mere hours beyond this last teaching to his disciples. For us as the true High Priest, Jesus made the sacrifice for our sin and after his ascension he offered that sacrifice once for all in heaven. It is in this context that the New Testament uses the term *paraklete* to describe Jesus himself: "if anyone does sin, we have an advocate (Greek, *parakleton*) with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 Jn. 2:1).

Since Jesus' sacrifice was offered once-for-all, what is the further priestly role of the Spirit? The answer is seen in the inward application of Christ's priestly blessings to the individual believer's spirit. Palmer explains:

Christ procures for His people all spiritual blessings by His death. He then, by His intercession, sues them out before the throne of the Father. The decree is granted in their favor under this pleading; and then it is handed over to the eternal Spirit, whose function it is to work it into the actual experience of the believer.⁷

Jesus ministers as our High Priest today by his effectual intercession at the right hand of the Father. Paul asks, "Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died – more than that, who was raised – who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us" (Rom. 8:34). While Jesus, now in heaven, intercedes for us at the throne of grace, reaching out to the Father with the hands that were

⁶ Ibid., 1:209.

⁷ Ibid., 1:210.

pierced for us, the other Helper, the Holy Spirit, performs this same work within us, bringing peace to our consciences as he presents the wounds of Christ to our minds. The pardon of sins was achieved for us by Christ our *paraklete*, and the application of this pardon within our hearts is carried out by the other *paraklete*, the Spirit whom Christ has sent from the Father.

Christ's third office is that of the great King over all God's people. According to the Westminster Shorter Catechism, Christ executes his kingly office "in subduing us to himself, in ruling and defending us, and in restraining and conquering all his and our enemies."⁸ Jesus reigns in us today by means of the Holy Spirit within us. Jesus said, "Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (Jn. 3:3). Thus he subdues the elect from their unbelief by sending the Holy Spirit to regenerate their souls. "Being born of the Spirit, we become the living subjects of Jesus the King,"⁹ who rejoices along with the host of heaven as his sheep are called into the fold of salvation.

This kingly ministry is necessary for our strength under trials and temptations. Palmer comments, "The strength by which we are sustained, and through which we conquer at the last, is purchased for us by Christ our Lord, and is communicated through the agency of the Holy Spirit."¹⁰ This principle pertains to the whole of our sanctification. Jesus said that the Holy Spirit whom he sends will be "with you forever" (Jn. 14:16), because he is able to preserve us in faith by working into us all the graces of Christian character that we need for our pilgrimage to heaven. It is by the Spirit that believers are set free from their bondage to sin. It is by the Spirit that we receive assurance of our sonship to the Father and our inheritance with Christ in glory. Paul thus calls him the "Spirit of adoption," by whom we cry out "Abba, Father!" (Rom. 8:15). And it is by the Spirit within us that Christ conveys his peace to our hearts, calling, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Mt. 11:28).

⁸ Answer 26.

⁹ Palmer, I:213.

¹⁰ Ibid., I:212.

THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH

One thing that all these ministries have in common is that they are revealed to us by Christ through his Spirit by means of the Word.

This reality explains the emphasis that Jesus gives in describing the Paraklete as “the Spirit of truth” (Jn. 14:17). As we continue in Jesus’ farewell discourse, the role of the Spirit in revealing Christ’s truth will be explained in detail. It was by the Spirit that these disciples were able to write the New Testament: “The Helper, the Holy Spirit..., will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” (Jn. 14:26). It is by the same Spirit that the glory of Christ is revealed to believers in the Word: “He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you” (Jn. 16:14).

Without delving into Jesus’ later teaching, for now we should observe the close connection between the Spirit of God and the Word of God. Christianity is not a religion of mystical insight, intuition, or ritual technique, but of revealed truth through the Word of God. It is largely because of erroneous views regarding the Holy Spirit that so many Christians today are suspicious of believers who are devoted to knowing Christ’s truth and who revere the Bible as the very Word of God, given by the Spirit to lead us into a true knowledge of divine revelation. For many, being spiritual means being non-dogmatic and imprecise. But according to Jesus, to be spiritual is to be biblical, for the Spirit is the “Spirit of truth” who through the Scriptures “will guide you into all truth” (Jn. 16:13). To be sure, this revelation will give us more than head-knowledge! But it will not give us less. Thus Paul says that the way for us to progress spiritually is to be “be transformed by the renewal of your mind,” so that we may “discern what is the will of God” through the truth of God’s Word (Rom. 12:2).

Indeed, according to Jesus, it is by means of the truth that the great division within mankind is revealed. He says of the Spirit: “whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him” (Jn 14:17). John Calvin commented: “the Holy Spirit is only a dream to earthly men, because they rely on their own reason and despise

heavenly illumination.”¹¹ Without the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, man in sin is spiritually dead, so that he not only *will not* but *cannot* accept the things of God’s Spirit. Paul elaborates: “The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:14). This gives believers all the more reason to prize the truth given us by Christ through the Spirit, relying not on worldly wisdom but on God’s revealed Word.

EMPOWERED TO SERVE

Given Jesus’ statement about the Spirit and the world, the first application of this passage should be made to unbelievers. Why is it that you, if you do not believe on Jesus Christ, know nothing of the reality and power of God’s Holy Spirit? The answer, according to the Bible, is that through sin you are alienated from God. This alienation is within you, so that your heart is hostile to God, the way a reckless driver resents a trailing police car. According to the Bible, this alienation is even more severe on God’s part, for our sins have offended him personally, and transgressed his holy law, and as sinners we now lie under the awful wrath of the holy God who says, “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23).

What hope is there for you if you cannot know the Holy Spirit or even understand God’s Word? The answer is the very work of Christ which we have considered in this study. Christ is the prophet, and he sets himself before you as the perfect revelation of the glory and grace of God. Moreover, through the Spirit-inspired Scriptures he declares to you his priestly work to gain the pardon of sins through his own blood. As king of heaven, he calls you to salvation through simple faith in his Word. As prophet, priest and king today, Jesus invites you to receive all of his work for you which he will then continue in you by his Spirit, if you will receive him in humble, repentant faith. “Behold, now is the favorable time,” he says; “behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor. 6:2)

What is the application for believers? Jesus’ teaching was designed to comfort his disciples with the knowledge of his continuing work in

¹¹ John Calvin, *New Testament Commentaries*, trans. T.H.L. Parker, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 5:83.

them by the Holy Spirit. We should thus be greatly encouraged by the power of Christ available to us through the Spirit, who comes alongside us and calls within us so that we can achieve our potential as born again citizens of the kingdom of Christ.

So far in this chapter, Christ has told his disciples of three things they will do after he departs, and it turns out that these correspond to his own three-fold office. Jesus said that whoever believes “will also do the works that I do,” even “greater works than these” (Jn. 14:12), referring mainly to the spread of the gospel through the world. But how are we to take up Christ’s prophetic office, telling people today about his gospel of salvation? The answer is the mighty help of the Holy Spirit, who gives us words to say (Mt 10:19-20). Jesus added that we would pray in his name and receive what we ask. But can we really be mighty in the priestly ministry of prayer? The answer is the indwelling help of the Holy Spirit. Not that we always know what we should pray, but, Paul writes, “the Spirit helps us in our weakness” and intercedes for us even in our own prayers (Rom. 8:26-27). Lastly, Jesus said, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (Jn 14:15). Can we reign with Christ, obeying the commands of God’s Word, especially Christ’s new commandment that we should love one another? The answer must surely be no if we were left to our own strength. But Jesus said, “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth” (Jn. 14:16-17). With the Spirit of our King subduing our sin and granting us power from the armories of heaven, we have what we need through faith to do his royal will on earth as it is in heaven.

So how do we receive the Spirit? Remember that he is a Person, not an impersonal force that we tap. According to the Bible, we receive the Spirit by trusting in Jesus Christ. Paul asked the Galatians, “Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?” (Gal. 3:2). The answer was by faith alone. We then experience the Spirit’s power through the Word that he inspired, which “is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Lastly, we receive the Spirit’s work in our lives by asking. In his great parable on prayer, Jesus commented that even earthly fathers give good gifts to

their children. “How much more,” he concluded, “will the heavenly Father give the Spirit to those who ask him!” (Lk. 11:13).