

“The Holy Spirit”

A sermon by Rev. Michael Gladish
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Jesus said, “If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever— the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you” (John 14:15-18).

This is the third sermon in our series on the Divine Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It has been inspired, at least to some extent, by the realization that although we have a strong and clear set of teachings about the Holy Spirit in this church we don’t actually talk very much about it, and when we do it is almost always in rather abstract, impersonal terms. Yet the Gospels refer to the Holy Spirit as the *Helper* or the *Comforter* and not just some abstract Spirit of Truth that nobody can see or feel. Indeed, people in most Christian churches think of this Spirit as a Person – the third Person in the Trinity – for several reasons that we’ll consider momentarily. And yet it is not a person *separate or different* from the Lord Himself, as He made perfectly clear, saying that He, as that Spirit, would dwell with His disciples *and be in them*, indeed that *He* would not leave them orphans, but that *He* would come to them.

So what are we to believe about this very powerful presence that the Lord promised at the end of His natural life in this world? And how can we learn to appreciate its influence in our lives?

Well, as usual, it’s important first of all to get the meaning of certain key words in the Gospels. For example, the word translated Helper, and sometimes Comforter, is from the Greek, *Paraclete*, from a verb that means *to call alongside*. Curiously, it is the very same word used in Luke (3:18) to describe the preaching of John the Baptist (and several other places), where it is translated “exhortation.” So it suggests a kind of urging or encouragement, as of one walking with you, appealing to you. It is also translated “consolation,” when for example it refers to Simeon, who at the Lord’s birth was found “waiting for the *Consolation* of Israel” (Luke 2:25). Finally, John in his first Epistle also used the word, which is then translated “advocate” in the saying, “If anyone sins, we have an *Advocate* with the Father, (namely,) Jesus Christ the righteous” (2:1).

Since all these names suggest a Personal presence, and since the Lord sometimes speaks as if the Comforter were a Person separate from Himself, it is understandable that many have come to this conclusion about the Holy Spirit. But wait. Speaking of Jesus in His earthly life, John said, “*He* will baptize you *with* the Holy Spirit and with fire” (Luke 3:16). What does *that* mean? And again, speaking of the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father would send, Jesus said it was He Himself who would come to them (John 14:28). Not only that, but translation issues further complicate the matter, as the personal pronoun, *he*, is often assigned to the Holy Spirit when in fact the impersonal, *it*, is just as valid, if not more so. We’ll see why this is important shortly.

First, though, let’s be aware that the term, spirit, like the term, father, and son, is not always used to refer to a person. “The wish is father to the thought,” we say, and we often speak of having a “brain child.” The point is that these terms represent the principles of cause and effect. In the same vein the word, spirit, can refer to an attitude, a disposition or an understanding, as in the

expression, “not just the letter but *the spirit of the law*.” In fact the word in the original languages in the vast majority of cases in the New Testament actually means *breath* or *wind*, as in “the wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8). Wind and Spirit in this verse are *the same Greek word*. Remember in the book of Acts, chapter 2, where the people in Jerusalem “were all filled with the Holy Spirit” on the Day of Pentecost? What this means, of course, is that they were *inspired*. And yes, they were inspired by the Lord, but the inspiration was a function of their *thought and perception* so that even though they came from many different countries they understood one another as if they were all speaking the same language. The Lord was therefore working *in* them through the Spirit of Truth, not outside of them as if by means of another separate person.

Turning back to John’s Gospel, then, especially chapter 16, where the Holy Spirit is mentioned more than any other place in the Word, we find the statement, “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth...” (vv 12-13). In the Greek language of the Gospels this word, *He*, is *not* necessarily masculine. It could just as easily be the neuter, *It*: so “When *this*, the Spirit of Truth, has come, *IT* will guide you into all truth.” The main reason it has been translated as masculine is that in the Elizabethan English of 1611, like modern French, all nouns were considered either masculine or feminine, so “It” was not an option. But today *It* is what we mean, and *It* is only *personified* in a symbolic or representative sense. Just think of how we use expressions like “the spirit of adventure,” “the spirit generosity,” or “a kindly spirit:” sure, these are attributes a person may HAVE, but they are not the person.

Of course, the translation goes on to say, “...for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.” But note here, the word, authority, is not in the original text. And really, what the verse means is simply that the Spirit of Truth does not proceed from itself but from the Love that inspires it.

So, further, we have the teaching, “It (the Spirit of Truth) will glorify Me, for It will take of what is Mine and declare it to you” (v. 14). “What is Mine” here of course refers to the Lord’s love and wisdom, and this surely is glorified when it is informed by the Spirit, that is, the true understanding and appreciation of it.

Note, all this is written in the context these earlier verses:

“...Because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. 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 depart, I will send Him to you” (John 16:6-7).

Again, we sincerely believe the *He* and *Him* in these verses should be *It*, for the Helper Jesus refers to here is not another person but the Help itself, the Comfort, the Consolation, and yes, even the Advocacy that comes with a knowledge and understanding of His Word.

The whole idea here has to be seen in the light of what the Lord was actually doing in the world, and what changes were taking place in His own life as He fought against the corruption of the hells. The process is what we call glorification and it is similar to our own regeneration, that is,

being born again from natural life into spiritual life. Simply put, the Lord when He came into the world adopted a natural human heredity so that He could confront the hells *in Himself* rather than imposing on the freedom of others. Then, during His life, He addressed all the evils, all the selfishness, all the loves of dominating over others, and all the falsities that confirm these attitudes by rejecting them, correcting them, and demonstrating the power of what we now call Christian love and wisdom. In this way, as we say, He *subjugated* the hells, restored order in the whole spiritual world, and established a new church on the earth.

But it was a church built among very simple, innocent people and so its members at first had very little depth of understanding. They heard the teachings and they saw the miracles, but they didn't really see the implications except in outward life. And this is why the Lord so plainly said, “I still have many things to say to you, however you cannot bear them now.” This is why Christians even today continue to struggle to understand the Bible, especially Bible prophecy, and almost everything to do with the Trinity, the atonement and salvation.

But, He said, “When the Spirit of Truth has come, it will guide you into all truth,” and specifically, “It is expedient for you that I go away, for if I do not go away, help will not come to you, but if I depart, I will send it to you.” The point is that the Lord had to complete the work He was doing to, as He said, “overcome the world” (John 16:33) and fully glorify His Humanity. This He accomplished through the death of His material body and the resurrection of His spiritual body so that He could, in fact, be present in His love and wisdom *everywhere and for all time*, not just among the people of one small nation in one tiny part of the world, for one generation of followers.

So the spirit and power of His teaching, the Spirit of Truth that did in fact bring great spiritual help and comfort was effective for thousands of people all around the Mediterranean right from that first Day of Pentecost. But still, the Lord had many things to say, many things to explain especially as people began to grow in knowledge and understanding of the world around them and began to question the teachings of the Word that seemed to contradict the evidence of their senses. You all know the story, but you may not appreciate the ramifications it had for the church in the 18th and 19th centuries. The intellectual and industrial revolution of those years so challenged the simple faith of “Bible believers” that they found themselves virtually backed into a corner: the new scientific knowledge was contradicting what they thought the Bible teaches, so in order to bolster their faith they retreated more and more into the literal sense and took their stand in opposition to science. Unfortunately this alienated many who were not prepared to deny the evidence of their senses, and so a sort of culture war began to develop over religion.

It was in this context that Emanuel Swedenborg was born, educated and began to write. And what he wrote, from around 1749 until 1770, literally codified a whole new approach to the understanding of the Scriptures AND science. In fact we now say that his many volumes are an embodiment of the Spirit of Truth that the Lord Himself promised, and that they reveal the deeper meaning and implications of all that He taught in a way that actually constitutes His Second Coming – not indeed in a body of flesh (since what He did once most perfectly He did not need to do again), but in a *body of teaching* that provides all the new help, comfort and consolation that the world needs to see how natural life can serve the spiritual and minister to it.

Volume after volume was written, 25 big books in Latin (35 now in English), providentially just as the printing press was taking off, making publication relatively cheap and accessible around

the world. And all sorts of very profound concepts were explained so that even today many of our modern branches of psychology are grafted on the roots of what was revealed through this man. Here we have a detailed exposition of the true nature of God, the symbolism of the whole Bible, the cause and means of creation, the laws of providence, the interaction of the soul and body, the real nature of heaven and hell, the spiritual principles and eternal purpose of marriage and *much more* all plainly set forth in a rigorously logical manner for all to see – if only we have eyes to see.

So in Revelation (1:7) we read, “Behold He is coming with clouds, *and every eye will see Him*, and they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him.” The clouds here represent the truths of the literal sense of the Word *within which, and through which* the deeper truths of the spiritual sense shine forth like beautiful rays of glorious sunshine despite the dark, foreboding character of so much that is written in the Word. “Every eye [that] will see Him” is the understanding of everyone who looks and reads, or otherwise appreciates the truth of what has been written. “They who pierced Him” are those who reject Him, but still they can see, *and they will reject what they see if they don’t like it*. And finally, “the tribes of the earth that will mourn” are the members of the Christian Church generally who have so embraced the fallacies of a literal or dysfunctional interpretation of the Word that they honestly feel sorry for us and grieve that we can be so misled by these new teachings.

But now, what are we who see the Spirit of Truth in this new revelation actually to do with it? How are we to use it so that we can get the full benefit of it?

Well, here’s the thing. Just having the books doesn’t do us any good. But neither does just reading or discussing them. The Spirit of Truth is not a set of books, but a spirit of true understanding, something we can only get from the Lord Himself in a state of enlightenment, which in turn is only possible when we put what He teaches us to work *internally*. It’s not enough to use it as a guide for outward activity, to inform our civic and social lives, or even to evaluate what we see around us, though all those are useful things to do.

Our third lesson today outlined 2 general functions of the Holy Spirit in our lives, *reformation and regeneration*, followed by 7 specific functions including renewal, vivification, sanctification, justification, purification from evils, forgiveness of sins, and at last salvation. Many of these are big, fancy words, but what they mean is pretty straightforward. Vivification, for example, simply means giving life: the Lord through the Spirit of His Truth gives us a spiritual quality of life that we couldn’t have without it. Sanctification means to make holy, not that anyone is ever really holy, but holiness can be attributed to us *as if it were our own* to the extent that we receive Divine Truth in faith and life. And justification is not at all what it sounds like (least of all by a vicarious atonement); what it really means is the process of making just, which in everyday terms could be said to mean fair and good. And the thing is, we can’t be genuinely fair or good unless we understand the truth. So the Lord through His Holy Spirit inspires true justice in us by informing us and directing our thoughts as we reflect on His Word.

In short, all the functions of the Holy Spirit have to do with clarifying and improving the quality of our inner lives and perspectives, giving us spiritual health and wellbeing, peace, comfort and stability, in other words, a real taste of *salvation*, however fleeting it may be in this life. And we should know that the operation of the Holy Spirit upon us is constant, never wavering in its strength or purpose; it is only up to us to receive it and act upon it.

Finally, then, we feel the influence of the Holy Spirit when we are fully committed to the Word, when we see it coming to life through a working knowledge of its contents and the revelation of its spiritual sense, and when we let its powerful truths affect the way we think and talk and act, whether on our own or with others. So the Lord’s prophecy of His own indwelling Spirit will be realized, and His final message in the Gospel of Matthew will be fulfilled where He said,

“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Amen.

Lessons: *John* 14:15-18 and 25-26
Children’s Talk about the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Truth

John 16:1-15 (in the Kempton translation?)
True Christian Religion #139:1 and 138:2-6

“The Holy Spirit is the Divine Truth and also the Divine Energy and Operation proceeding from the one God in whom is the Divine Trinity, that is, from the Lord God the Savior.

“The Holy Spirit signifies strictly the Divine truth, thus also the Word; and in this sense the Lord Himself is the Holy Spirit. But since in the church at this day the Divine operation, which is actually justification, is what is meant by the Holy Spirit, this is here taken to be the Holy Spirit, and is what is chiefly treated of. This is done for the further reason that the Divine operation is effected by means of the Divine truth which goes forth from the Lord; and that which goes forth is of one and the same essence with Him from whom it goes forth, as the three things, soul, body, and what goes forth from them, together constitute one essence, which in man is purely human, but in the Lord is Divine and Human at the same time; and these after glorification are united as what is prior is with its posterior, or as essence is with its form. Thus the three essentials, called Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, are one in the Lord” (TRC 139:1).

(2) “The Divine Energy and Operation, which are meant by the Holy Spirit, are, in general, reformation and regeneration; and in accordance with these, renovation, vivification, sanctification, and justification; and in accordance with these latter, purification from evils and forgiveness of sins, and finally salvation.

(3) “The Divine Energy and Operation which are meant by the "sending of the Holy Spirit," are, with the clergy especially, enlightenment and instruction.

(4) “The Lord makes these energies operative in those who believe in Him.

(5) “The Lord operates of Himself from the Father, and not the reverse.

(6) “The spirit of man is his mind and whatever proceeds from it” (TCR 138).
