

PARACLETE THE HOLY SPIRIT MINISTERS TO BELIEVERS

When he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. JOHN 16:13-14

Before Jesus' passion, he promised that the Father and he would send his disciples "another Counselor" (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). The Counselor or Paraclete, from the Greek word *parakletos* (meaning one who gives support), is a helper, adviser, strengthener, encourager, ally, and advocate. Another points to the fact that Jesus was the first Paraclete and is promising a replacement who, after he is gone, will carry on the teaching and testimony that he started (John 16:6-7). Paraclete ministry, by its very nature, is personal, relational ministry, implying the full personhood of the one who fulfills it. Though the Old Testament said much about the Spirit's activity in Creation (e.g., Gen. 1:2; Ps. 33:6), revelation (e.g., Isa. 61:1-6; Mic. 3:8), enabling for service (e.g., Exod. 31:2-6; Judg. 6:34; 15:14-15; Isa. 11:2), and inward renewal (e.g., Ps. 51:10-12; Ezek. 36:25-27), it did not make clear that the Spirit is a distinct divine Person. In the New Testament, however, it becomes clear that the Spirit is as truly a Person distinct from the Father as the Son is. This is apparent not only from Jesus' promise of "another Counselor," but also from the fact that the Spirit, among other things, speaks (Acts 1:16; 8:29; 10:19; 11:12; 13:2; 28:25), teaches (John 14:26), witnesses (John 15:26), searches (1 Cor. 2:11), determines (1 Cor. 12:11), intercedes (Rom. 8:26-27), is lied to (Acts 5:3), and can be grieved (Eph. 4:30). Only of a personal being can such things be said.

The divinity of the Spirit appears from the declaration that lying to the Spirit is lying to God (Acts 5:3-4), and from the linking of the Spirit with the Father and the Son in benedictions (2 Cor. 13:14; Rev. 1:4-6) and in the formula of baptism (Matt. 28:19). The Spirit is called "the seven spirits" in Revelation 1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6 partly, it seems, because seven is a number signifying divine perfection and partly because the Spirit ministers in his fullness.

The Spirit, then, is "he," not "it," and he must be obeyed, loved, and adored along with the Father and the Son.

Witnessing to Jesus Christ, glorifying him by showing his disciples who and what he is (John 16:7-15), and making them aware of what they are in him (Rom. 8:15-17; Gal. 4:6) is the Paraclete's central ministry. The Spirit enlightens us (Eph. 1:17-18), regenerates us (John 3:5-8), leads us into holiness (Rom. 8:14; Gal. 5:16-18), transforms us (2 Cor. 3:18; Gal. 5:22-23), gives us assurance (Rom. 8:16), and gifts us for ministry (1 Cor. 12:4-11). All God's work in us, touching our hearts, our characters, and our conduct, is done by the Spirit, though aspects of it are sometimes ascribed to the Father and the Son, whose executive the Spirit is.

The Spirit's full Paraclete ministry began on Pentecost morning, following Jesus' ascension (Acts 2:1-4). John the Baptist had foretold that Jesus would baptize in the Spirit

(Mark 1:8; John 1:33), according to the Old Testament promise of an outpouring of God's Spirit in the last days (Joel 2:28-32; cf. Jer. 31:31-34), and Jesus had repeated the promise (Acts 1:4-5). The significance of Pentecost morning was twofold: it marked the opening of the final era of world history before Christ's return, and, as compared with the Old Testament era, it marked a tremendous enhancing of the Spirit's ministry and of the experience of being alive to God.

Jesus' disciples were evidently Spirit-born believers prior to Pentecost, so their Spirit-baptism, which brought power to their life and ministry (Acts 1:8), was not the start of their spiritual experience. For all who have come to faith since Pentecost morning, however, beginning with the Pentecost converts themselves, the receiving of the Spirit in full new-covenant blessing has been one aspect of their conversion and new birth (Acts 2:37; Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 12:13). All capacities for service that subsequently appear in a Christian's life should be seen as flowing from this initial Spirit-baptism, which vitally unites the sinner to the risen Christ.

The knowledge of divine things to which Christians are called is more than a formal acquaintance with biblical words and Christian ideas. It is a realizing of the reality and relevance of those activities of the triune God to which Scripture testifies. Such awareness is natural to none, familiar with Christian ideas though they may be (like "the man without the Spirit" in 1 Cor. 2:14 who cannot receive what Christians tell him, or the blind leaders of the blind of whom Jesus speaks so caustically in Matt. 15:14, or like Paul himself before Christ met him on the Damascus road). Only the Holy Spirit, searcher of the deep things of God (1 Cor. 2:10), can bring about this realization in our sin-darkened minds and hearts. That is why it is called "spiritual understanding" (spiritual means "Spirit-given," Col. 1:9; cf. Luke 24:25; 1 John 5:20). Those who, along with sound verbal instruction, "have an anointing from the Holy One... know the truth" (1 John 2:20).

The work of the Spirit in imparting this knowledge is called "illumination," or enlightening. It is not a giving of new revelation, but a work within us that enables us to grasp and to love the revelation that is there before us in the biblical text as heard and read, and as explained by teachers and writers. Sin in our mental and moral system clouds our minds and wills so that we miss and resist the force of Scripture. God seems to us remote to the point of unreality, and in the face of God's truth we are dull and apathetic. The Spirit, however, opens and unveils our minds and attunes our hearts so that we understand (Eph. 1:17-18; 3:18-19; 2 Cor. 3:14-16; 4:6). As by inspiration he provided Scripture truth for us, so now by illumination he interprets it to us. Illumination is thus the applying of God's revealed truth to our hearts, so that we grasp as reality for ourselves what the sacred text sets forth.

Illumination, which is a lifelong ministry of the Holy Spirit to Christians, starts before conversion with a growing grasp of the truth about Jesus and a growing sense of being measured and exposed by it. Jesus said that the Spirit would "convict the world" of the sin of not believing in him, of the fact that he was in the right with God the Father (as his welcome back to heaven proved), and of the reality of judgment both here and hereafter (John 16:8-11). This threefold conviction is still God's means of making sin repulsive

and Christ adorable in the eyes of persons who previously loved sin and cared nothing for the divine Savior.

The way to benefit fully from the Spirit's ministry of illumination is by serious Bible study, serious prayer, and serious response in obedience to whatever truths one has been shown already. This corresponds to Luther's dictum that three things make a theologian: oratio (prayer), meditatio (thinking in God's presence about the text), and tentatio (trial, the struggle for biblical fidelity in the face of pressure to disregard what Scripture says).