

# The Holy Spirit, our Comforter

John 14:15-31

Rocco Ferrario, *Associate Pastor*

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How awesome that the faithful can all join together, sign on to a website, stay safe, get all cozy and comfy, and worship together from every corner of the globe.

How about you? How are you watching this message? Maybe curled up in bed with your laptop? I've heard from some that they'll even shower and dress just like they were going to church...while others are still in their jammies for a third straight day. Just think of all the water you're saving! ...Whatever makes you comfortable.

I'm holding an Afghan comforter that my Nani crocheted for me over forty years ago and I can still remember, being off at college during one of my frequent spells of homesickness, that having Nani's Afghan was very comforting. Of course I still love it.

How about you? We live in crazy times. We have so many reasons to be a bit apprehensive. Did you sign on today looking for some comfort? With each disturbing headline wouldn't it be nice to have that blessed assurance that the Lord God Almighty has called himself to be at your side? He's there! He's there!

In 1 John 4:4 we're promised that "*... You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.*"

As I sense a growing need in my heart, mind, and spirit, I desire help...everyone needs someone to comfort them and stand beside them. So now that we've acknowledged how great our need is, let focus on our spiritual advocate, our comforter, the Holy Spirit.

*Our Father, will you speak words of comfort to us this morning as you teach us about your Holy Spirit. Will you guide us into all truth as we hear Jesus speak. In his name we pray. Amen*

There is perhaps no area where there is more confusion today than the person and work of the Holy Spirit. Back in November 1979, just a week before my baptism, my youth pastor had asked me who I thought the Holy Spirit was and I remember excitedly sharing that... "The Holy Spirit must be like some kind of 'beam' that fills a room and shines into our lives. That it must be all glowing and glittery!" My pastor sat me down and said, "Boy, do you have a lot to learn!"

And even in reading different translations of the Bible you may hear the Holy Spirit referred to as the "comforter", the "helper", or an "advocate," but regardless of how it's translated every term comes from the original Greek term, *parakletos*, and it means 'someone called to be at one's side.' 1 John 2:1 confirms this for us, "*...My dear children, I write this to you so that you*

*will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.”*

We need to hear what our Lord Jesus Himself taught about the Holy Spirit. In our passage today He teaches us three things about the Holy Spirit: the Holy Spirit’s personal and divine identity, the delightful blessings of the Holy Spirit, and the designated recipients of the Holy Spirit.

### **1. The Divine Identity of the Comforter**

The Holy Spirit is not an impersonal force or influence but a living person. This can be seen quite clearly in verse 26 of our text, *‘... 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.’*

An impersonal force or influence cannot accomplish the functions mentioned here of teaching and helping us to remember spiritual truths. Only a person can do them.

Furthermore, in this verse the Holy Spirit is mentioned together with 2 other persons - the Father and the Son. Jesus who was speaking these words clearly means that the Holy Spirit must be a person as well.

This verse also shows us the Trinity at work, and the Holy Spirit is the third person in the Holy Trinity, after God the Father and God the Son. From the rest of the Bible we know that there is one God in 3 persons, and that all 3 persons in the Godhead have always been working to accomplish the will of God. All 3 persons - the Father, Son and Holy Spirit - are equal in nature and substance, and to be equally honored and worshipped as God. Amen

Now, knowing the divine identity of our comforter, the Holy Spirit, helps us to appreciate this second point.

### **2. The Delightful Blessings of Having the Comforter**

In v.26 Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would be sent *'in His name'*. This means that The Spirit would be acting on behalf of Jesus to take over His work on earth. He is the same kind of Comforter as Jesus because He would be everything that Jesus was to the disciples.

That was the best comfort they could have at that moment. Jesus had been abiding with them for 3.5 years, teaching them, helping them, praying for them, and sending them. He had been their Comforter. But now He was giving His 'farewell' message to them.

The disciples were naturally fearful that their Comforter was leaving them. From the words of v.27 we know that their hearts were troubled and afraid. In a few moments Jesus would say, *“Come now; let us leave.”* (v.30) They would then leave that upper room to go out into the darkness of the night and arrive at the Garden of Gethsemane. There Jesus, their beloved Comforter, would be arrested by the Jews, bound and led away to be tried and crucified.

But then what becomes of His disciples after that? Who will take care of them? Are they going to be left 'comfortless'? Will they become like poor orphans grieving the loss of their parents? No. Jesus will not leave them alone. He tells them that another Comforter who is like Him will come to abide with them forever.

But this Comforter will go one extra step further than what the Lord Jesus had done for them. Jesus had been dwelling WITH the disciples. But according to v.17 the Holy Spirit will dwell IN them. This means that they would always have the Comforter with them everywhere they went. Even when the disciples were scattered far away from each other to distant corners of the earth later on in fulfilling the "Great Commission", each of them would not be left comfortless, but they would have all the comfort and help they needed through the Holy Spirit abiding in their hearts at all times. This is true now of every Christian. We have the Holy Spirit dwelling in us forever (v.16). He never leaves us at any time.

And in making that point as clear as possible, look at what Jesus says v17-20. Jesus says

*"you know him (that is, the Holy Spirit), for he lives with you and will be in you. 18 I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. 19 Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but **you** will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that **I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.**"*

As my pastor friend Jermain Keller would illustrate with 4 plastic tubs, the Holy Spirit is in us. We are in Jesus. And Jesus is in the Father...

In addition to that, the Holy Spirit would do a special work in these original disciples of Christ: He would enable them to remember everything that Jesus had taught them throughout the 3.5 years He had spent with them. We see this in vv.25-26

*"...All this I have spoken while still with you. 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."*

This then became the basis for what was written in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John later on. Sometimes we wonder how these 4 gospels could capture all the exact words that Jesus spoke at each occasion. Our human brain is a marvelous organ of the central nervous system. It is capable of storing up everything we have heard, seen and experienced in our lifetime (like some people who have 'photographic memory').

As I pick up my Bible and wonder at its authority, I get comfort from the fact that the Holy Spirit was actively working in the hearts, minds, and penmanship of the disciples as they transcribed the scriptures of today.

Teaching the disciples all things, and bringing all things to their remembrance – Both of these things show us that the Holy Spirit was the One behind the writing of the Scriptures. The Bible that we hold in our hands is therefore not a man-made book. Everything that is recorded in the Scriptures is entirely accurate, reliable and true because its real author is the Spirit of Truth.

Therefore, in all knowledge and truth, Christ is made real to us through the Holy Spirit. And not only Christ, but the Father as well, because Jesus said in v.23

*"...Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and **we** will come to them and make **our** home with them."*

Therefore all 3 persons of the Trinity are abiding in us through the Spirit. Isn't it exciting to know that the Triune God, the God whom we worship, dwells within the heart of every believer? The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit have made you their home - what a glorious privilege this is! It is certainly one that we should not treat lightly. Now we go on to...

### **3. The Designated Recipients of the Comforter**

There are two contrasting groups of people in the whole passage with regards to the Holy Spirit.

The first is the unbelieving world. It cannot see Him know Him or receive Him. The things of the Spirit are totally unintelligible to the world. That is why the Bible makes no sense to many people when they read it. To them, it is only a collection of sayings and stories. Some people ridicule our faith saying that it is only a crutch for emotionally weak people and that they don't need it. That's how they'll see it without the Holy Spirit.

From v.27 we learn another thing about the world: It can never give us the peace that Jesus gives. The world does offer its own kind of peace but we should not be fooled by it as it will turn out to be a false and short-lived peace, maybe you can try emptying your mind in meditation, or by getting yourself high on drugs or alcohol to seek relief from stress and distress. Many who search for inner peace are taken in by the things of the world and their lives are destroyed. And this is because the world is under the evil influence of its prince who is mentioned in v.30. Satan is the prince of this world who opposes Christ.

Remember back in school as the two "captains" for some sport were picking the members of their team and you were so scared that you were going to get picked last...or not at all? How wonderful that in reality, we're already on the winning team! We cry out, "Put me in Coach!" And He does!

But he doesn't stay back on the sideline, our God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit never leaves our side, He's stays right alongside us...winning! I've never played rugby, but I understand from some very close friends that it's a fantastic sport. Apparently, if you're stopped by your opponents while moving that weird big ball forward, but you're still standing, your mates can form a group around you and continue pushing forward ... this is called a 'maul.'

Can we all just for a moment stop and appreciate "the maul" we have on our side? With every day, with every headline, the prince of this world would love to tackle you; to grind you into the ground. Though he tried his utmost best to oppose Christ there was no way that he could overcome Him. Christ has won the victory! We've stopped being of the world and under its

prince. We've changed our allegiance. We've come to Jesus right now by believing in Him alone for our salvation. We no longer belong to the world, but to the other group mentioned in the text: the Disciples of Christ.

Are you a Disciple of Christ? But how can we tell if we have truly believed in Jesus? The answer is: If we love Him. This is mentioned 3 times in the passage (vv.15,21,23). These same verses also show us how we can tell if we really love Jesus: If we keep (obey) His commandments.

Verse 15 *'If you love me, keep my commands.'*

Verse 21 *'Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me.'*

Verse 23 *'Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching.'*

When Jesus says the same thing three times like this, we better pay attention! The main point here is that a true disciple of Christ will love Him and obey Him. Christianity is a personal relationship with Christ. We should be growing in our love for Him and obedience to Him every day.

Can you recognize the chain of events here? We love and then obey. Please remember that you can't "do" anything to make God love you more. Just as you can't "do" anything to make God love you less. 1 John 4:19 clearly reminds us that *"...We love because he first loved us."*

Think back on the Valentine tokens of love that you may have exchanged last February. When you're doing something for someone you love, you're doing it because you get to, not because you've got to. Christ wants us to be on fire for Him and committed to godliness.

Thus we have seen that all true disciples of Christ will receive the Holy Spirit to dwell in them forever right from the moment they believe in Christ. We have also seen that to believe in Christ is to love Him.

Now that you have seen all this, the question you need to answer is: Are you a true disciple of Christ? If you are, then you have the Holy Spirit dwelling in you, and with that, you have the blessings that He brings into your life including His comfort, His power to do God's work, and the privilege of fellowship with the Triune God. What a joy it is for us to have the Comforter living within us! May we always be thankful for the Holy Spirit's work in our life.

And besides that, there is one more thing that all true disciples of Christ will receive from Him. And I would like to end the sermon with this thought. Let us look at verse 27 where Jesus said,

*"...Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you: I do not give to you as the world gives, Let not your heart be troubled, and do not be afraid."*

This Peace of Christ is the peace that Jesus Himself had as He prepared to go to the cross of Calvary to make atonement for our sins (v.27). Despite knowing that the prince of this world was coming soon to rally the unbelieving world against Him, and despite knowing all the agony

He was going to suffer, our Lord Jesus was able to go through this crisis with this wonderful divine peace. And now to us His disciples, this peace, His peace, He gives to us. Let not our hearts be troubled, neither let us be afraid.

Perhaps there is someone listening to me that needs this peace right now. Perhaps you signed on with a very troubled heart from the pandemic, some difficult trial you are going through, or because of some unexpected developments in your life that have shaken your faith to its very core. This peace of Christ is available to you now through the divine Comforter who dwells in you. We may feel isolated from each other, but we're never isolated from God. Commit all your cares and trials to Him now, and let that peace keep your heart and mind in Christ Jesus.

Amen!

### **Prayers:**

Father, we thank you for your word to us today. We thank you for the promise of the Holy Spirit, for your presence with us always, and for your peace which transcends all understanding. Help us to walk in step with the Holy Spirit as you change us day by day to be more like Jesus. Help us not to grieve the Holy Spirit, and to follow your leading as we seek you in the Scriptures. We thank you for every spiritual blessing that we have in Christ, and ask that you would keep us in him, until the day he returns or calls us home.

We pray for Rocco Ferrario, our Associate Pastor in Pastoral Care. We ask that you would give Rocco love, joy, wisdom and perseverance as he provides pastoral and discipleship care to our church family. Guard his heart in Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen

We pray for our local government and non-profit agencies that seek to provide care and assistance to those who are vulnerable in our county. Thank you, Lord, for them and pray that you would keep their workers safe, healthy and that people would, as they are able, to give financially to those programs. We ask that you would use their efforts to reduce the impact of this health crisis, and protect the lives of the most vulnerable.

Father, we pray for our efforts in starting a Christianity Explored course online. We pray that people's hearts and minds would be open to hearing the good news of the gospel, and that you would use this time for us to reach beyond the normal boundaries of our church. We pray that our church family would be bold in asking friends, family, neighbors and workmates along to this course.

We ask all these in the name of our saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen