

NEW TESTAMENT BIBLICAL LITERACY

Lesson 18

John – Part Eight The Holy Spirit

I. INTRODUCTION

In John 14, 15, and 16, we have Jesus giving his last speech to his apostles. Judas left the gathering in John 13:30, leaving Jesus alone with his faithful eleven. At this time, Jesus gives some going away encouragement, explanations, and assurances. Among those are multiple statements about the Holy Spirit that are instructive to our understanding of him. The teaching of Jesus is well worth our focus because it is the one place in scripture where we have God clearly setting out the purpose and work of the Holy Spirit. We will examine each passage and then put the passages into context with the Bible as a whole.

II. PROMISE 1: The Indwelling Holy Spirit and Spiritual Insight (14:16-20)

John 14:16-20 begins with Jesus explaining to his apostles that, “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth.” This starts the first passage of Jesus promising the Holy Spirit. We pause to focus here for two reasons.

First, we see that the Holy Spirit is something Jesus is promising for the FUTURE. Jesus says, “I will” – the future tense – “ask the Father.” Similarly Jesus notes “and he [the Father] will give you” – by again using the future tense. This coming Holy Spirit is something different than the apostles had experienced to that point.

Second, Jesus terms the coming Holy Spirit “another Counselor.” Instead of Counselor, some translations use the word “Advocate,” “Helper,” or “Comforter.” The Greek word used is παρακλητος, literally meaning “called to the side of.” The idea is fuller than any one English word we could use to translate the Greek. It is useful, therefore, to talk a bit about the word and its various translations. The Greek word is used in historic Greek to reference someone who aids in the defense of an individual at court. This does not mean a defense lawyer per se (in fact the word is rarely used in Greek to reference an actual defense attorney), but would include any number of roles of people who assist an accused at a court.

This gives rise to the translation “Advocate” and emphasizes a role as one pleading our case before the judge.

The Greek usage went beyond a courtroom setting. It was much bigger than that; hence, the translation “Helper.” This word is meant to convey one who is called along to assist or aid the individual. Similarly, “Counselor” is used as an effective translation because it can denote a lawyer or courtroom advocate as well as someone who assists in day-to-day life struggles.

Some older translations have used the word “Comforter.” This word is traceable back to the Wycliffe translation, so it has long historical underpinnings. The word is not as useful, however, because since its use by Wycliffe, its core meaning in English has shifted in such a way as to make it a misleading translation. In its old usage, “Comforter” was a combination of two Latin words, “*con*” meaning “with” and “*fortis*” meaning “strength.” Thus, the English word “Comforter” was originally a “Strengtheners” or “Helper.” Time, however, has turned the word into meaning more of a “Consoler” or one offering consolation. This meaning is not an accurate understanding of the word John used.

So, as we look back at John 14:16-20, we see Jesus promising another Counselor who will “be with you forever.” Jesus specifies this Counselor as “the Spirit of truth.” There is insight in the role of the Holy Spirit, but there is also insight into the relationship change coming between the Holy Spirit and the Apostles. Jesus says that the apostles “know” (PRESENT TENSE) the Spirit because the Spirit “lives” (again PRESENT TENSE) with the apostles. But Jesus then adds that the Spirit “will be” (FUTURE TENSE) “in” the apostles.

What do we make of these verb tenses? We do well to remember that the Holy Spirit was never generally indwelling followers throughout the Old Testament and gospel time periods. God would selectively send his Spirit for working in and through select individuals, but one of the promises of the Old Testament through the prophet Joel was the eventual outpouring of the Spirit on all God’s children. This is Jesus’ point. The apostles knew the Holy Spirit (whether they realized it or not) because the Holy Spirit dwelt WITH them. This occurred by virtue of the fact that Jesus was full of the Spirit and Jesus dwelt with the apostles. Jesus, however, draws a distinction. Jesus says that while the Spirit currently dwelt with them (through Jesus dwelling with them) that a time would come when Jesus would send this other Counselor to actually dwell IN them.

On the day the Spirit would be sent to indwell the apostles, the apostles would then “realize that I [Jesus] am in the father and you are in me and I am in you” (Verse 20). As Jesus spoke these words, the context of the passage, and indeed of the whole gospels, tells us that the apostles truly had no idea what Jesus was talking about. At that point in time, the Apostles were unclear on whether Jesus would establish an earthly kingdom. They did not understand Jesus’ crucifixion, nor did they anticipate Jesus’ resurrection. Jesus’ promise was that such understanding would come from the Holy Spirit on the day of indwelling.

We see this occur clearly in the first two chapters of Acts. In Acts 2, the Holy Spirit comes as promised and sweeps on the believers like a rushing wind. The apostles turn from a group of praying men who are throwing dice to decide who should take the place of Judas as one of the twelve, into men who stand up boldly proclaiming the risen Jesus as the Son of God who alone brings man into a forgiven relationship with the Father. The Apostles for the first time had clear understanding that Jesus was in the Father and that they were in Jesus and that Jesus was in them. The promise of Jesus set out in John 14:16-20 unequivocally finds its fulfillment.

III. PROMISE 2: A Teacher / Reminder (John 14:25-26)

This second promise Jesus gives of the Holy Spirit falls in the flow of Jesus explaining, “All this I have spoken while still with you” (25). Now, the Apostles were not there with video cameras on, nor did they have tape recorders running. In fact, they weren’t even taking notes. Jesus assures them, however, that this was no cause for alarm. For “the Counselor, 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” (26).

This assurance to the apostles is equally important to us today. It is a promise from Jesus that the apostles would be in a position to not only remember the events of Jesus’ ministry (which they would then record for our benefit in the gospels) but would also understand those events and teachings. This promise we see fulfilled in every page of John’s gospel. John is replete with statements that convey the events but add the explanations – explanations that the apostles did not understand until the Holy Spirit came on Pentecost. For example, in John 8:25 and 26 Jesus explains his deity and mission from God. John then adds the note of verse 27, “They did not understand that he was telling them about his Father.”

IV. PROMISE 3: Testify About Jesus (John 15:26-27)

John 15:26-27 sets out the third promise of the Holy Spirit. Jesus says, “When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me. And you also must testify....”

The Spirit will come, will indwell the apostles, will remind the apostles of Jesus’ teachings, will guide and instruct the apostles in understanding that teaching and will testify, or bear witness, to Jesus. This testimony is not done solely by the Spirit. It is done in conjunction with Jesus’ followers.

V. PROMISE 4: The Work of the Spirit (John 16:7-15)

In this section, Jesus bluntly sets out the work of the Spirit. In doing so, Jesus first notes that the disciples are grieving because Jesus has said that Jesus must go away. Jesus lets the disciples know that it is good that Jesus leaves because “unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you” (7). This statement in itself gives a hint as to the work of the Spirit. The work is something that is in conjunction or in some way required by Jesus’ departure. This relationship is then plainly set out:

When he [the Holy Spirit] comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned. (8-11)

This is a threefold explanation of the work of the Spirit. The Spirit is to convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. Man does not gain conviction of his sin without the involvement of the Holy Spirit. Man does not gain conviction of righteousness in the eternal sense of Jesus before the Father without the work of the Holy Spirit. Man certainly does not gain conviction of the judgment of Satan and sin without the direct work of the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit that brings such understanding and conviction to us. That is the Spirit’s effect.

Jesus further elucidates and explains this work in verses 13-15. Jesus notes that the Spirit “will guide you into all truth. He will not only 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 what is mine and making it known to you.*”

The work of the Spirit is thus summed up as bringing glory to Christ. The Spirit is about Jesus glorified. The issue of sin, righteousness and judgment has become centered in the glory of Christ. The spiritual insight of the apostles is a reflection of the glory of Christ. The memories the apostles secured for us reflect the glory of Christ. The testimony of the cross, the work of Christ is in itself the glory of Jesus. Jesus restored in the Father, with us in Christ and Christ in us is the glory of Jesus.

The work of the Holy Spirit is not to praise any man. It is not to lift up any man. It is not to glorify any man. The work of the Holy Spirit is to glorify Christ. Similarly, the work of the Spirit is not to lift up the Spirit. The Spirit does not work to bring the Spirit praise and honor. The Spirit comes and works to glorify Jesus.

This is in fact what we see when we look at scripture. Even briefly looking at the Spirit at work revealed throughout the Old and New Testament illustrates this point. The creation has the spirit of God moving over the face of the deep. This is the creation that rings in the sacrifice of Jesus. As Paul will explain later in Ephesians, this is the creation before which God had already set out his salvation plan (Eph. 1:3-10). We can see this when John the Baptist “leaps in Elizabeth’s womb” as Elizabeth was “filled with the Holy Spirit” bringing glory to the yet unborn Jesus as the expectant Mary’s voice is heard (Luke 1:39-45).

We certainly see the glory of Jesus and the convicting of the sin, righteousness, and judgment in Acts 2 as the people are convicted of their sins in crucifying Jesus and yet see the resurrection as the power of God’s salvation. The Holy Spirit works exactly as Jesus promised.

An interesting note should be attached here. In all Jesus’ statements about the promised Holy Spirit, Jesus never says HOW the Holy Spirit will go about his work. Jesus tells us WHAT the Holy Spirit will do rather than HOW. Unfortunately, we often emphasize rules and restrictions on how the Holy Spirit works when the emphasis of scripture is what the Holy Spirit is about, not how. Similarly, we are often led into seeing the Holy Spirit as bringing glory to the Spirit itself....that is very much against what Jesus sets out. The Holy Spirit is about glorifying our crucified and resurrected savior, not the Holy Spirit. Self-aggrandizement is not the Spirit’s *modus operandi*.

VI. POINTS FOR HOME

1. Have confidence in the scriptures.
2. Pray for the work of the Spirit.
3. Walk in conviction of sin, righteousness, and judgment,
4. Align with the Spirit and live to glorify Jesus.