

The Holy Spirit – John 14
Pentecost 2010

INTRODUCTION:

Sometimes following the Lord is very difficult. It can often feel so insubstantial and ethereal. And we have impossible tasks.

- We are to be holy as God is holy,
- Love the Lord with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength;
- Love our neighbors as ourselves, esteeming each other more highly than ourselves;
- And we're supposed to do all this with love, joy, peace, patience, and all the rest of those impossible character traits!
- Oh yes, I almost forgot, we have to do this in a world that hates God and under attack from Satan who hates God too.

And that's while we're changing diapers, paying bills, trying to make our marriages work, dealing with loneliness or sickness, going to school, and all the other responsibilities and burdens of existence. Let's face it: in the midst of real life, Jesus and heaven can feel just plain unreal.

Well, this is exactly the situation in which Jesus' disciples find themselves in John 13 and ff. Jesus is well aware of what the next 72 hours will bring and especially what it's going to cost him personally. Nevertheless, he fully gives himself to preparing his disciples for what is to come. And in doing so, he shows them how utterly, completely, fully dependent they are on the Father's gift of the Holy Spirit.

WE CANNOT:

13.31 presents a kind of switch in tone and Jesus' sermon to the disciples begins in earnest. Jesus starts by saying: I'm going to be glorified and you are going to serve me. But John 14 makes it explicitly clear that they are not yet competent for what lies ahead of them.

Many of us struggle with self-confidence and self-esteem. Some of us have far too much of those things and think that they CAN do anything. And there are those who have far too little and know that they can't do much of anything right. And then, of course, there's the whole spectrum in between.

It might interest you to know that both perspectives are completely wrong! Jesus wants it to be clear that self-dependence, whether well developed or poorly developed is utterly useless. Dependence on God's work in us by His Spirit is the only competence that really matters.

Peter's Example:

Look, for example, at Jesus' response to Peter. Jesus has just finished speaking about loving each other: *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another* (13.34). Peter responds to that statement by saying: *Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you* (13.37). "I hear you about love, Lord! I've got it! I'm all over it! I'll follow you anywhere, no matter what happens, even to the death!"

You can imagine Jesus glancing over at Peter as he says: *Will you indeed lay down your life for Me? Do you really think you love me that much?*" Remember, this is exactly the question that Jesus will put to Peter later: "Do you love me!"

Do you love Him? Are you ready to follow him to death? How about are you willing to follow him at school? At work? Are you willing to follow him right here among your brothers and sisters? Are you willing to follow him with your closest friends and acquaintances?

Peter thought he was competent to follow Jesus anywhere, but by the end of that evening, his competence wasn't looking all the good, was it?

Examples of Thomas and Philip:

Consider the examples of Thomas and Philip. Jesus challenges them by asking: "Do you really know me?" With Thomas: *If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also* (14.7). And Jesus is even sharper with Philip: *Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip* (14.9)?

How competent are you in the area of knowing the Lord Jesus? You might respond by saying: "Well, I know the books of the Bible, and I've read Packer's Knowing God, and I go to church most Sundays, and, umm, let's see, I think I can see the Nicene Creed from memory! I must know God pretty well!"

Thomas, Philip, Peter, and the other apostles lived daily with the Lord. They experienced miracles, and sermons, and private conversations, and moments of real joy together with real sorrow. On top of that, they knew far more about the Scriptures than most of us do. And yet Jesus' response to Philip really applies to all of us: *Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me?*

One of the most basic facts of the faith – that Jesus and the Father are one and that therefore everyone who knows the Son knows the Father as well – still they hadn't grasped that truth. And the most basic method of knowing God – following the way, the truth, and the life; that should have been intuitive to them by now. But it wasn't.

Summary:

As that evening unfolds, we see that the disciples weren't really paying very good attention. Peter brings a sword, in order to show how much he loves Jesus and to demonstrate his readiness to die for Him. In the end, it's the questioning of a servant girl that frightens him

and Peter betrays Christ. The other disciples either run away or follow the proceedings at a distance.

And they may have been asking themselves: “How will we ever measure up? I thought I loved you, Jesus. I thought I knew you. I thought I believed in you! But this is too much for us!”

That really is the problem, isn't it? We would like to think and hope that we can measure up. We would like to believe that we could be worthy of the name “Christian”. But every time we turn around, we're just like Peter, and Thomas, and Philip, and Thaddeus. We forget to obey. Fear overcomes trust. Anger washes away love. Desire overcomes contentment.

They were not competent to follow Jesus and we aren't either, not on our own.

THE HOLY SPIRIT CAN:

As I said at the opening, what we have before us as believers is an impossible task. But Jesus promises us a really big solution to these big problems: the Holy Spirit. And with the Holy Spirit come at least 3 necessary things:

Help / Counsel:

In vs 16 Jesus calls the Holy Spirit our helper or counselor. Jesus, the disciples' helper and friend is going away. However, He's not taking the disciples' help with him. The word “helper” or “counselor” literally means “one who is called alongside.” So the Holy Spirit continues alongside them.

The Proverbs say that *without consultation, plans are frustrated, but with many counselors they succeed.*¹ In the Holy Spirit, we have the Counselor of all counselors. And as with an earthly helper and counselor, when we stumble, He strengthens us. When we are uncertain of our way, He directs us.

Presence of Christ:

Secondly, the Holy Spirit gives us His presence. Jesus says *I will not leave you as orphans* (14.18). One cannot be an absentee comfort or friend and so presence is extremely important to the Lord Jesus.

- *I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also* (3-4). He has not forgotten us or forsaken us.
- *I'm here for you: If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it* (14). He provides for us.

¹ Pro 15.22

- The Holy Spirit *abides with you and will be in you* (17). So what do we lack then?²

I could go on, but you get the point. The Holy Spirit is the on-going presence of Christ Jesus with us, giving us assurance and comfort.

Truth / Remembrance:

Finally, the Holy Spirit gives us truth, resulting in knowledge and boldness. In vs 16, Jesus calls the Holy Spirit by a second title. *I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth.* Instead of the Holy Spirit, He's the Truthful Spirit.

Later on Jesus says of the Holy Spirit: *the Father will send Him in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you* (26). Ignorance is not bliss. Sincerity is not the same as truth. And it does matter what you know and believe. Part of the Spirit's work is therefore to bring to mind the truth.

The Scriptures tell us again and again that the Spirit of God brings us wisdom, as He gave wisdom to Moses and Joshua, to Daniel and Stephen, and to Paul. Later on, Jesus will tell his disciples: *When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth.*³

And truth brings boldness. True faith, true actions, true purpose and direction; these are the things we want! Not tentative, not halting faith, but bold faith in the Lord!

APPLICATION:

So how do we make the Holy Spirit ours? How do we appropriate these things and make them real? Well, I confess to you that we have a little problem at this point. No matter what I tell you about how to "get" the Holy Spirit – I've already asserted that you and I are incompetent to do it.

Additionally, the question "how can we make the Holy Spirit ours?" implies that He isn't already. And that's simply not true. And this is the most important fact of all. If you are in Christ Jesus, all that He has promised you regarding the Holy Spirit is already true.

- Jesus doesn't say: "I'll not leave some of you as orphans, but for the rest of you, tough luck." We have his word that he has not and will not leave us as orphans.
- Paul doesn't tell the Ephesians *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who could bless us in Christ with every spiritual blessing,*⁴ but rather than God *has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing.*

Jesus, Paul, and the rest of Scriptures assume that if you are a Christian, that in itself is the greatest work of God's Spirit and therefore you are already endowed with Him.

² See also 18-19, and 23.

³ Joh 16.13

⁴ Eph 1.3

And so this phrase comes to mind: “Let go of the steering wheel.” I’m not saying “let go and let God,” a kind of passive floating through life. But I am saying that we need to stop usurping the place of the Holy Spirit with other things.

Do you want strength for holiness? Seek God. Do you want peace? Christ dwelling in us by his Spirit does that job. Do you want a bold faith? Then God will teach you the truth by the Spirit. The gifts of the Spirit are given, not grasped, taken, nor demanded. The fruit of the Spirit is worked by the Spirit, not by our cleverness nor diligence.

In short, assume the truth of what Jesus has proclaimed. That’s what Paul is trying to communicate when he writes:

The Lord ... said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.⁵

Sometimes, like little children, we want to do it ourselves. We want a magic bullet for our faith. We want a prayer, a Bible verse, a study, a book, the right mentor, or pastor, or congregation, or counselor. Then all will be well, we think. Instead, we get in the way, hinder the process, and make a mess of things. You already have the right man on your side, the man of God’s own choosing. If he were not and if he had not kept his promise to send the Helper, the Holy Spirit – your striving would be losing!

HS God’s multitool?

John 13.31-14.31, “We Cannot, He Can”: On The Holy Spirit

1. Background Structural Notes

1.1. Pre-sermon

1.1.1. John 13.1-20: Example of servanthood

1.1.2. 13.21-30: Jesus “commissions” Judas Iscariot to betray him

1.2. Sermon (13.31-17.26)

1.2.1. Seated? (13.31-14.31)

1.2.1.1. The Thesis: Christ’s glory, our commandment (13.31-36)

1.2.1.2. Peter’s section: 13.36-14.4

1.2.1.3. Thomas’ section: 14.5-7

1.2.1.4. Philip’s section: 14.8-21

1.2.1.5. Judas’ (aka Thaddeus’) section: 14.22-31

1.2.2. Walking? (chapters 15-16)

1.2.3. Praying: (chapter 17)

2. We Cannot

2.1. Hard questions from Jesus: Do you know me? Do you love me? Do you believe in me? See 13.37-38, 14.1, 7, 9, and 23.

⁵ 2Co 12.5-10

- 2.2. Look at the example of Peter, who makes big promises, but doesn't keep them.
- 2.3. Think of Thomas and Philip, who think that they know Christ, and yet *Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me?*
- 2.4. We will never measure up and never be worthy of the name Christian on our own.
3. The Holy Spirit Can
 - 3.1. As Helper / Counselor: One "called alongside," a defender or advocate, much like a lawyer. See 14.16. His counsel gives us strength for holiness.
 - 3.2. As the Presence of Christ: *I will not leave you as orphans*. Presence gives comfort and confidence. See 14.3-4, 14, 17, 18-19, and 23.
 - 3.3. As Reminder of Truth: See 14.16, 26. See also 16.13. We then can be bold.
4. Application
 - 4.1. How do we make the Holy Spirit ours? He already is. See Ephesians 1.3.
 - 4.2. Assume the truth of Jesus' words – *I will not leave you as orphans*.
 - 4.3. Learn the meaning of Paul's words: *I will boast ... of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me* (see 2 Corinthians 12.5-10).
 - 4.4. The Holy Spirit is God's "multi-tool" or "Swiss Army Knife," but we may not know how to use all the implements!