

John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

26 ‘When the Advocate 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. 27 And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.

16 ‘All this I have told you so that you will not fall away. 2 They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they are offering a service to God. 3 They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me. 4 I have told you this, so that when their time comes you will remember that I warned you about them. I did not tell you this from the beginning because I was with you, 5 but now I am going to him who sent me. None of you asks me, “Where are you going?” 6 Rather, you are filled with grief because I have said these things. 7 But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. 8 When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: 9 about sin, because people do not believe in me; 10 about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; 11 and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

12 ‘I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. 13 But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the 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. 14 He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. 15 All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you.’

The Spirit of truth

John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

Pentecost was the birth of the church, and the reason that was the case was that even though Jesus had returned to the Father, the Holy Spirit had not been sent until that moment. There would be no church without the Holy Spirit. There would be no Christians without the Holy Spirit. Those who seek to play down the role of the Holy Spirit are in effect working against the Kingdom, and I’ve been in churches in the past where the Holy Spirit is only permitted a minor role in things. I certainly lived under the impression for a number of years that the Holy Spirit was some sort of impersonal cosmic force, and largely a voluntary part of the faith who mostly turned people a bit weird. Firstly, the Holy Spirit is a person in the same way the Father and Son are. Secondly you cannot be a Christian without the presence in you of the Holy Spirit. If you are a Christian, the Holy Spirit lives within you.

And so the point at which Jesus introduces the Holy Spirit, or as he calls Him the Advocate, is of vital importance. (Tom Wright) As we know, an advocate is someone who intercedes on behalf of another, particularly in a legal setting. The Jewish mindset in the first century was that their God was a God of justice, and so in their imagination, their enemies (Babylon, Syria, Rome) were, in effect, on trial.

They had no right to oppress Jews, who had done nothing wrong! The trouble was of course that Jewish prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah and Daniel pointed out that the Jews had repeatedly rebelled against God. Those same prophets then went on to say time and again that He was a forgiving God if they recognised their fault. They almost certainly would have had things to say about the current situation in Israel.

You have to be aware of this Jewish mindset to understand this passage, because it's difficult. Jesus is getting on board with the legal symbolism when He calls the Spirit our Advocate, because we have also rebelled against God, although we also will often say we haven't. And so He warns that the reality for Christians will be persecution and opposition, Verse 3: *the time will come when anyone who kills you will think they are offering a service to God.* Or in our own case now, apathy and disinterest. Not (yet) dangerous but more difficult to formulate a response.

The Spirit, the Advocate, the Counsellor, the Helper, is in effect our defence barrister.

Jesus here is giving us the proof...

8 When the Spirit comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgement:

ONE 9 *about sin, because people do not believe in me;*

Wrong about sin, because the world has not believed in Jesus. He was without sin, yet they called him a liar, and crucified Him. Either He was without sin or He was a liar. He couldn't be both.

TWO 10 *he will prove the world to be in the wrong about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer.*

Wrong about what is right. The Father has judged Jesus as good, and the world at fault, because Jesus spoke truth and they unjustly killed an innocent man. So the Father raised him from death.

THREE 11 *he will prove the world to be in the wrong about judgement, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.*

Wrong about judgment. Satan was judged, condemned and defeated at the cross. Death itself, the weapon of tyrants, was destroyed. All who believe in Jesus will be raised to eternal life. The Holy Spirit has many names, and now the Advocate is also the Comforter, because in Him, despite our struggles, we have hope and reassurance.

Perhaps the most important though is that He is the Spirit of Truth. In a world where truth has now become massively devalued, and we have leaders who lie openly and with impunity, it is more crucial than ever that we follow Isaiah and Jeremiah and witness to the truth. Pilate's question to Jesus of course was what is truth? We really haven't moved on from that, we're living in what is described by some as a post-truth world.

God's very nature is to bring light into darkness, love into an atmosphere of fear and distrust, and you can see this in the life of Jesus, for instance meeting the woman at the well. Jesus has a laser like vision and confronts her with his knowledge of her 5 husbands and complicated love life.

And yet far from feeling shamed and embarrassed she is exultant and wants to tell the story to anyone who will listen, because she has been set free. Jesus used this phrase, the truth shall set you free, in relation to sin and the way we're enslaved by having to keep hidden the things we've done wrong. It's heavily ironic that 'the truth shall set you free' is the motto of the C.I.A., the world's most prominent secret service organisation. You could not make it up. Of course there's nothing we can hide from God in any case, and confession of sin is a powerful and freeing thing to do. Try it! It's a pity it's become so formalised, because it's often more productive when done informally, person to person. As James teaches in his letter (5:16), *confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. Set free.*

So confession leads to healing. This is the value of a ministry team, which we will hopefully be able to restart soon.

The Holy Spirit has been described as the empowering presence of God. We need to consider what that means.

In my very first sermon which was in 1996 I spoke about the Holy Spirit because it was a new openness to the Spirit at that point in my life which led me to consider the very idea of preaching, something I could never have seen myself doing. The passage used was in 1 Corinthians 2 which says this *10 The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. 11 For who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.*

12 What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us....

we have the mind of Christ

as Jesus says here v 13 *when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth.*

And I think we're too often guilty of not realising this astonishing fact and acting on it. The Holy Spirit is the empowering presence of God within each of us, who brings us to the point at which we can say we have the mind of Christ, and gives us the gifts necessary to do what he has called us to do. We must listen and do what he says.

If we are open to this there is really no limit to what God can do through his people, because God has given us the means and the authority, as Jesus said himself, to do greater things than even He has done. It's a spiritual wisdom which does not come from intellect or education or knowledge. I've seen relatively uneducated people who nevertheless possess a deep understanding of the things of God which some theological experts, despite their knowledge of scripture, do not. Jesus founded the church with a group of fishermen and a tax collector. We simply have to open our ears and hearts and minds to the work of the Spirit and we can all contribute to the growing His Kingdom in this place. Amen.