

## **The Gift of the Spirit (John 14:15-31)**

### **Matthew Williams**

Have you ever received a gift and didn't see it coming? I think back to Christmas mornings growing up when I didn't know an adjustable basketball hoop was waiting in the shed, or a new ping-pong table was under a sheet in the garage. The gift had been purchased. The gift had been assembled. It was ready and waiting, so to speak. But I didn't realize it. It came as a total surprise.

Switching scenarios a bit, have you ever received a gift and then months or even years later grasped in a deeper way just how precious it really is? Aliza and I have been married for over 15 years. And I found myself thinking yesterday afternoon, I had no idea, absolutely no idea, when I popped the question in 2005 and she said "yes" what an incredible gift I had just received.

Both sorts of experiences apply to a gift Jesus announces to his followers in the second half of Jn 14. It's a gift they have yet to receive and don't see coming. It's also a gift many of us have already received and easily fail to appreciate. It's called the gift of the Holy Spirit. He is one of the most precious gifts God has ever given to us.

Depending on your background, a wide range of thoughts may come to mind when you hear those two words. Some of you may be new to church and think, "I have no clue what you're talking about." Some of you may be thinking, "Uh oh. I sure hope the pastor isn't going to get into all that charismatic craziness. I came to KingsWay to get away from all that." Some of you may be thinking, "Bring it on! It's about time we talked about the stuff of Christianity that really matters."

Lest we foist our personal histories onto the passage, let's take a moment to understand the biblical context. Jesus' closest followers are troubled. He told them at the end of Jn 13 that he's about to leave and some of them are going to struggle spiritually, starting with his main man Peter. When pressed for details, Jesus responds in Jn 14:1, "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me."

Don't respond to the challenges coming your way now or in the future by ignoring trouble or trying to make it go away as fast as possible. Lean the weight of your life on me. Why? Because faith in me enables you to be with God, to know God, and to

participate in the works of God – even in your trouble! Jn 14:12, “Whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do...”

The primary work God calls us to embrace through faith in Jesus is the work of prayer. Jn 14:14, “If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.” It’s where every good work God sets before us begins – with a spirit of humble, confident dependence on the Lord. But we don’t stop with prayer. The work Christians do necessarily includes obeying everything God has said to us in his Word, the Bible. Jesus makes that crystal clear in v. 15, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” V. 21, “Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me.” V. 23, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word.” V. 24, “Whoever does not love me does not keep my words.” And he concludes by pointing to his own example in v. 31: “I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father.”

In fact, you could argue this passage isn’t first and foremost about the Holy Spirit. It’s about the relationship between loving God and obeying God. Jesus never says we earn God’s love by obeying him. Nor does he say God only loves those who perfectly obey him. He says five times that you cannot separate affections and actions, what you love in your heart and the choices you make in your life.

Loving God and obeying God are not two separate things as if we could have one but not the other. “Oh yeah, I love God. I’m just not into doing everything he says.” No. Love for God consists of obedience to God. Real and true love for Jesus expresses itself, by definition, in obedience to his commands.

Sometimes I hear people say, “Pastor, it’s just too hard. I know what I’m supposed to do. I know what God tells me to do. But I can’t. It’s impossible.” To which I say, “You’re right. Looking to God for your identity instead of your own sexual desires or feelings is hard. Spending significant emotional energy showing God’s love to a spouse who struggles with depression is hard. Trusting Jesus in the middle of recurring trouble is hard. In fact, it’s impossible apart from the precious gift Jesus promises to give us in v. 16. “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever.”

**Loving Jesus means obeying Jesus *by the power of the Spirit*.** So who is this Holy Spirit whose help we need in order to love God by obeying his commands? Jesus

answers that question in at least 7 ways in vv. 16-27. We're going to consider 3 of them this Sunday and 4 of them next Sunday.

## **1) THE SPIRIT IS GIVEN BY GOD**

The "Helper" Jesus speaks of in v. 16 could also be translated as "Intercessor" "Advocate" or "Counselor," though not in the strictly legal sense in which we often use the terms. In passive form, it means "one who is called to someone's aid." The active sense employed here captures the idea of a friend who fully supplies what another needs. From v. 16 onward, it's clear Jesus isn't speaking of a mere force or power in the spiritual realm. He's talking about a person.

And notice he identifies him not as "a Helper," which could imply one among many, but as "another Helper," indicating he will help the disciples during Jesus' physical absence in the same way Jesus did when he was physically present. Though he is a distinct person, his work is in the same category as Jesus' work.

Jesus' description in v. 17 clarifies the Helper's nature even further. He says he is "the Spirit of truth." We know from Jn 14:6 that Jesus is the ultimate standard of truth because he is the definitive self-revelation of the only True God. So who is this "Spirit of truth?" He's the One who bears witness to Jesus by communicating the truth about Jesus in all he does and says.

The Helper does the work of God and communicates the truth about God. Why? Because he is one with God and is God. 1 Cor 2:11, "For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God." In v. 26, Jesus explicitly identifies him as "the Holy Spirit," the third person of the Trinity.

The Holy Spirit isn't the "crazy" part of God, the awkward uncle of whom respectable Christians do not speak. He's not the "spirit of God" as if he's nothing more than a force field or power emanating out of the Father or the Son. No. He's a distinct person who subsists in the divine essence no less than the Father or the Son. As our Statement of Faith declares, "The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity, who proceeds eternally from the Father and the Son. He is equal in deity, attributes, and nature with the Father and the Son, and with them is to be worshiped and glorified."

So why does Jesus say God the Father “will give” him in v. 16, “will send” him in v. 26, and will do it all in Jesus’ name? Why the future tenses? Here’s where a little Old Testament background is critical. In Joel 2:28-29, the Lord promised his people:

“And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit.” Regardless of social status, every member of the people of God would be filled with the Spirit.

That’s exactly what happened in Acts 2 on the Day of Pentecost. After dying on the cross and rising from the grave, after doing all that was necessary to reconcile sinners like us to a holy God, Jesus ascended into heaven and from there poured out the gift of the Holy Spirit in new covenant measure to continue his work of redemption. Acts 2:1-4, “When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit...”

## **2) THE SPIRIT INDWELLS THE PEOPLE OF GOD**

Prior to Pentecost, the Holy Spirit wasn’t missing in action or chilling in a heavenly lounge. As our Statement of Faith also says, “The eternal Spirit was present at the beginning of God’s creation, carrying out the creative word of God and giving life to all things. In God’s work under the old covenant, the Spirit was present with God’s people to consecrate, deliver, guide, and grant saving faith in the promises of God. He empowered prophets to reveal God’s Word, appointed elders to render judgment, raised up judges to bring deliverance, anointed priests and kings as his representatives, and inspired the record of old covenant revelation.”

That’s quite the resume! And in that sense, the Spirit was “with” Jesus’ disciples as he says in v. 17, even prior to Pentecost. So what changed in Acts 2? The Spirit went from dwelling “with” God’s people to taking up residence “in” God’s people. It’s why the “will be in you” in v. 17 and the “will come to him and make our home with him” in v. 23 are both in the future tense.



It is one thing to enjoy proximity to the presence of God. The saints of old experienced as much through the physical tent of the tabernacle and the physical building of the temple. It's where God made his presence known to them. They could scarcely have dreamed of having the free access to God we enjoy as his people today through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus.

But God didn't stop with giving us access to the temple of his presence. Through the indwelling presence of the Spirit, he makes us temples of his presence. If you are a Christian, if you love Jesus as your Savior and are obeying him accordingly, then God, through the Spirit, is never far from you because he has taken up residence within you. And not periodically or occasionally as if you're simply his primary residence. No, he indwells his people permanently. V. 16, "he will...be with you forever."

The Lord commands us in Eph 5:8 to "be filled" with the Spirit in the sense of coming more fully under his influence in every area of life. But that doesn't change the fact that every genuine believer is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. The moment you place your trust in Jesus to give you spiritual life as a gift and stop trying to earn it for yourself by keeping all the rules or breaking all the rules, God moves in on his own initiative and comes to stay. The Spirit mediates the presence of God to the people of God by making his home with us. What a precious gift, my friends!

Consider the dignity the Spirit's indwelling gives to your physical existence in this world. No matter how broken, no matter how decrepit, no matter how sick or dysfunctional your body is or becomes, you remain the dwelling place of God. The world may look at you and say, "What a loser." The world may size you up and say, "You're too short, or too tall, or too skinny, or too fat, or too whatever." The Lord says, "You are my dwelling place. My Spirit is in you because you are mine."

Consider the comfort of the Spirit's indwelling supplies in the loneliest hours of your life. No matter where you are, no matter what you're feeling, Almighty God is with you. The Lord's promises in Ps 139:7-10 are immeasurably truer for us on this side of Pentecost than they ever were for King David. "Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! If I take the wings of the morning and well in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me." Why? It's not simply because God is everywhere present. It's because he is continually with you.

Finally, consider the incentive to holiness the Spirit's indwelling provides. In 1 Cor 6:18-19, Paul forbids against any form of sexual activity outside of marriage, declaring, "Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God?" He makes the exact same argument in 2 Cor 6:14-16, warning Christian against closely aligning themselves with unbelievers, whether through intimate friendship or marriage.

"Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, 'I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.'"

To the degree we take the Holy Spirit for granted, we are forgetting the distinctive blessing of the new kind of relationship with God Jesus has made possible. God himself dwells within us.

### **3) THE SPIRIT IMPARTS THE LIFE OF GOD**

Have you ever wondered what the Spirit does once he indwells a Christian? Is he busy? Is he active? Is he just along for the ride like whatever you have dangling from the rearview mirror of your car? Jesus helps us understand the massive significance of the Spirit's ministry by returning in vv. 18-20 to the story of his own ministry.

He knew the hour of his crucifixion was fast approaching. Before too long (v. 19), "the world will see me no more." Whether his disciples understood the significance of his words or not, Jesus knew what was about to happen. He was going to die. You will feel like I'm abandoning you. You will feel like I'm forsaking you, as a parent leaving their child.

Rest assured, the cross is not the end of the line. Death will not be able to hold me. "I will not leave you as orphans," he assures them. I'm not going to leave you without a spiritual Father or family. "You will see me" (v. 19) because "I will come to you" (v. 18). I will rise from the grave, and you will behold me face to face.

And then in v. 18 he connects the story of his life to the story of their life with one of the most encouraging promises in the entire gospel of John. "Because I live, you also will live." Sometimes we think of Jesus' resurrection as something that merely confirms the merit of his death. It says the infinite worth of his life exceeded the immeasurable debt of our sin. That is gloriously true, brothers and sisters.

But let us never reduce the resurrection of Christ to a notary stamp on a bill of divine pardon. His life does far more than validate his sacrificial death. It is the very life that secures and defines our own both now and for all eternity! Look at what Jesus says in v. 20. "In that day," when the new age of resurrection life begins, you will know not only that "I am in the Father" (that I am one with God because I am God), but also that you are "in me" and I am "in you."

So how do we come to be "in" Christ and he "in" us? What enables us to experience the same intimacy of spiritual fellowship with the Son that the Son enjoys with the Father? It's the work of the Spirit! Remember Father, Son, and Spirit are one because they have the same divine nature. Where one member of the Trinity is present, the other two are present, which means the Spirit dwelling "with" us in v. 17, the Son being "in" us in v. 19, and the Father and Son making their home "with" us in v. 23, are not three separate activities. The first one, the Spirit coming to dwell in us, brings the others to pass. He mediates the presence of the Triune God, Father and Son included, after Jesus physically ascended to heaven.

Right now, he is with the Father in heaven in a physical sense, interceding on our behalf. At the same time, however, he is with us in a spiritual sense, continuing the redeeming work he began during his life on earth through the person of the Spirit. It's why many see a double meaning in Jesus' words in v. 18. He didn't leave the disciples as orphans, first and foremost, because he rose from the grave. But even after he ascended to heaven, he still didn't leave them as orphans because he remained with them (and remains with us) through the indwelling presence of the Spirit!

Jesus is with us because the Spirit is with us. And our present experience of the Spirit guarantees our present interest in the saving work of the Son because he is the bond, the spiritual fabric, of our union with Christ as members of his body. 1 Cor 12:12-13, "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one



Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.”

When we place our faith in Jesus, the Spirit unites us to Jesus such that we become one with Jesus. And when that happens, his life becomes our life. It’s why Paul says to Christians in Col 3, “your life is hidden with Christ in God” and anticipates the day “when Christ who is your life appears.”

What is true of his life becomes true of our life. Because he lives, we also live. The blessings he deserves become the blessings we receive. The victory over sin and death he achieved becomes the victory over sin and death we enjoy. The joy and peace he knows becomes the joy and peace we know. None of that is legal fiction. All of it is the work of the Spirit. We cannot be saved apart from him for he imparts the life of God to the people of God by uniting us to the Son of God.

Are you weary in the battle for godliness, friend? Are you losing heart in the fight to follow Jesus? Do you feel like spiritual life is slipping through your fingers? Take heart in this. Because Jesus lives, you too will live. You can no more perish than the Son of God can perish. Don’t gauge your future based on what you see in your own life. Gauge your future based on what you see in Jesus. Fix your gaze on his life for his holiness, his love, his humility, his generosity, his faithfulness, his wisdom, his power is precisely what God the Father has made available to you and is forming in you by the Spirit.

When you want to know what God is doing in you, look to Jesus. When you want to know what God will accomplish in you, look to Jesus. When you want to know all that awaits you, look to Jesus. His life is your life, Christian, and all the benefits of his saving work are applied to us through the person and work of the Spirit.

## **CONCLUSION**

Keeping Jesus’ commandments isn’t easy. It’s hard! Jesus promises to give us the help we need. And it comes to us not through a nebulous infusion of spiritual “strength” but through the gift of a person – the Holy Spirit. Loving Jesus means obeying Jesus by the power of the Spirit. He is given by God. He indwells the people of God. And he imparts the life of God, including all the grace we need to follow Jesus in every area of life.





He is the best gift we could ever receive because he applies and brings to fruition all the benefits of the salvation Jesus won for us. And so Jesus urges us, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:9-13) Let's ask him right now.