

## The Comforter is on Duty

Our guiding text today is from John Chapter 14, primarily verses 16-18, but as usual it is good to have context when considering a particular passage of scripture, so we will consider the first 21 verses of that chapter --

**1** Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.

**2** In my Father's house are many mansions: if *it were* not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

**3** And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, *there* ye may be also.

**4** And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.

**5** Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?

**6** Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

**7** If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him.

**8** Philip saith unto him, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us.

**9** Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou *then*, Shew us the Father?

**10** Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.

**11** Believe me that I *am* in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake.

**12** Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater *works* than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.

**13** And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

**14** If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do *it*.

**15** If ye love me, keep my commandments.

**16** And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever;

**17** *Even* the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.

**18** I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.

**19** Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also.

**20** At that day ye shall know that I *am* in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.

**21** He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.

These words were spoken in a time of great tumult and change, both within this group of the Lord's disciples and in the surrounding society of that time. (Is this not a fair description of our lives?) Calvary's cross was on the horizon.

Against that backdrop, Christ was sitting in the midst of his faithful disciples, addressing himself to comfort their sorrowful hearts. This great Shepherd had been with his close followers for a long spell, helping them through their various distresses, shielding them from enemies, revealing great things concerning His grace and truth and manifesting His glory to them. Now he was on the cusp of departing. Consoling their sad hearts, Jesus lays before them this grand truth that it was expedient for them that He should go away; for if He went not away, they could not have the promised Comforter, who was to abide with them forever.

With that said, please consider these points:

#### **A. Why is he called the "Comforter" and the "Spirit of Truth?"**

The Comforter is the Holy Spirit, part of the 3-part Godhead. As such, He is just as much a party to the everlasting covenant as the Father and the Son. Indeed, the Comforter is a part of the ***everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure*** (2 Samuel 23:5) and stands upon that solid foundation.

It should also be noted that the Comforter is a gift to His people, resulting from the direct prayer of the Son to the Father. The text tells us that Christ promises he will pray to the Father, who shall then **give you another Comforter**. (John 14:16). We see in this passage the very courts of heaven and an interceding High Priest at the right hand of God. This vital prayer is part of that intercession spoken of in Hebrews 7:25: ***Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.***

While Christ was here on earth and with his disciples, he was the Comforter of His people. While He was with them, they needed no other; but when He left them they required one to supply His place. They needed one who could be to them what Jesus had been. So, plainly, we see from this the Deity and distinct personality of the Holy Spirit. When Jesus was present, it was His Person that comforted and shielded them. To take his place, then, was not a comparable Person or entity needed? Thus, this replacement for Jesus is called the “Comforter”, or more specifically, ***another Comforter***. (John 14:16).

But He has another name or title: The ***Spirit of truth***. (John 14:17). We are surrounded with error; the carnal heart is full of it. Wherever truth is not, there error must be. A veil of ignorance is by nature spread thickly over our minds, through which not one ray of divine light penetrates. Men love error, and God’s own testimony is that they love ***darkness rather than light***. (John 3:19). Each person listening to me today, by his or her very nature, loves to be deceived and wallow in spiritual delusion. We see it everywhere. So while encompassed with the mists and clouds of error, how find you the truth? Just there this Comforter comes on the scene: It is His sacred office to take away this veil of unbelief and ignorance that spread over the human heart. He is, after all, the “Spirit of truth!”

In a nearby passage, we are told of the Comforter: ***Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.*** (John 16:13). Guides, including safari, field or nature guides, as the name suggests, guide guests through nature, whether by vehicle, canoe, horseback or on foot. It is a guide's job to explain some of the remarkable secrets hidden within the natural environment, and to act as a link between the guests and nature.

Similarly, this Spirit of truth guides the Lord's people through the many hazards and pitfalls of a waste, howling wilderness into all necessary truth, including a showing of things to come. The father of lies, in whom is no truth found (John 8:44), is thereby soundly defeated.

Remember, it is the Lord himself that affixed this sacred title to this third member of the Triune God. It is His prerogative to unfold truth to the soul, to engraft truth into the heart, and to make the saints of God vitally and experimentally acquainted with it. We may have bare letter knowledge of the Bible, but this Spirit of truth is essential in setting up the kingdom of God with power in the heart of the believer.

For a fact, ***the carnal mind is enmity against God.*** (Romans 8:7). The natural mind hates God and His Word. But through rich and unspeakable mercy there are times and seasons when a spiritual light seems to shine upon the sacred page. Often are the times when we read the scriptures and the truth of God shines from it into our understanding as brightly and as clearly as the sun in the noonday sky. We wonder how anyone can doubt or deny the truth of God. And why is that? Because the "Spirit of truth" is opening it up to our understanding and applying it with power to our hearts.

To close this point on good offices of the Comforter/Spirit of truth, consider these words from the prophet Ezekiel: ***Then said he unto me, Prophecy unto the wind, prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord God; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army.*** (Ezekiel 37:9, 10).

**B. The world cannot receive this Comforter because it sees Him not, neither knows Him.**

Christ says the world cannot receive the Spirit of truth, first, because it cannot see him. Men destitute of the life and power of God must have something that they can see. Things must be either presented to their natural eye, or be such as their rational understanding can grasp, or they cannot and will not receive them. Accordingly, a “religion” that presents itself with beauty and grandeur to the natural eye – such as the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C. or the Westminster Abbey in the U.K. -- is readily accepted by the world. The world easily receives a “religion” that consists of forms, rites and ceremonies, because these are things seen. Beautiful buildings, painted windows, pealing organs, melodious choirs, the pomp of an earthly priesthood and the like carry with them something that the natural eye can see and admire.

But the Spirit of truth is invisible to the natural eye, he simply cannot be seen, so we read: ***As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit.*** (Ecclesiastes 11:5). And for that very reason Christ tells us the world cannot receive him.

Barnes nails it: *The men of the world are under the influence of the senses. They walk by sight, and not by faith. Hence, what they cannot perceive by their senses, what does not gratify their sight, or taste, or feeling, makes no impression on them.*

Christ says the world cannot receive the Spirit of truth, second, because the world knows him not. The world knows nothing of divine consolation. Just watch the earthlings thrashing around in the wake of destruction and disaster. They necessarily turn to lying lips and know nothing of an inward Comforter. Their “religion”, such as it is, has never cost them a moment’s uneasiness or brought their hearts down with trouble and distress. If, according to Paul’s rule, ***as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ*** (2 Corinthians 1:5), where there is no suffering for Christ and his Word, there can be no consolation.

Paul helpfully elaborates on this very point in his first letter to the church at Corinth: ***But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*** (1 Corinthians 2:14).

**C. In contrast, the saint of God does know this Comforter due to a personal work upon his heart.**

Christ simply tells his disciples: ***ye know him.*** (John 14:17). Short and sweet; the Lord's people know the Comforter, and only the Lord's people do so. All the rest of mankind ***do always resist the Holy Ghost[.]*** (Acts 7:51).

***Ye know him*** is a statement of fact. It applies to those who ***believeth on me*** (John 14:12) as that is who Christ was talking to at this time. And this is language of exclusivity. Those specific people who believe on Jesus – and only those people – know this Comforter. ***But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit.*** (1 Corinthians 6:17).

When the King of the Universe, who created all things, tells us that we will know the Comforter, you can count on it. It's a done deal. Matthew Poole best captures this thought: *but ye know him believingly, experimentally, affectionately, savingly; for he dwelleth in you by a mystical union, and he shall abide with you, by his dwelling in you, and influences upon you.*

Here are some evidences identifying those people who know the Comforter (not a complete listing by any stretch of the imagination) -

- They are convinced of sin; guilt is laid upon their consciences. They know the Spirit of truth in His killing and in His raising up.

- They have a spirit of supplication. ***Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.*** (Romans 8:26).
- They receive encouraging words dropped into their hearts; call it an internal testimony. We read of such in Luke 24:32 - ***And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?***
- They have a right perspective of mind which results in lifting up their affections to things above; they feel the earth has no place for them. They understand down deep inside this passage: ***Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets.*** (Luke 6:22-23). I say a direct result of true knowledge of the Comforter is that they set their ***affection on things above, not on things on the earth.*** (Colossians 3:2).
- They love the people of God; they love the image of Christ they see in His people. In a word, they love those who love Jesus.

To sum this segment up, the beautiful consequence of knowing the Comforter is receiving a full testimony of God the Father and God the Son. To that end, I refer you to John 15:26: ***But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me[.]***



**D. It is a sweet promise that this Comforter dwells with God's people.**

Harkening back to our text, we learn two things: (1) This Comforter dwells in and with God's people; **for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.** (John 14:17). (2) This dwelling is not temporary or sporadic, but permanent and eternal; **that he may abide with you forever.** (John 14:16).

Remember the context; Jesus in the body was going to soon leave them. Consider Gill's observations on the ever-dwelling Comforter: *[N]ot a few years only, as I (Jesus) have done, but as long as you live; and with all those that shall succeed you in the work of the ministry, and with the church, and all true believers unto the end of the world: this is a proof of the saints' final perseverance.*

Once this Spirit of truth takes up His dwelling, there He forever dwells. Where once the holy Dove lights, there that Dove abides. He does not visit the elect soul and then leave it to perish under the wrath of God, or allow His work to wither, droop or die. Indeed, the Comforter takes up His dwelling in their heart, and there He lives, moves, works and sanctifies.

True, there are seasons when the carnal mind, which is **enmity against God** (Romans 8:7), causes a particular sheep to feel cold and lifeless towards God. And it's a fact that **the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh and these are contrary the one to the other[.]** (Galatians 5:17). But in those sad seasons, we are to believe the Lord's Word, which cannot lie, and not the reasonings and workings of our own wicked hearts. For it is a certain truth that He forever abides with that soul which He has once visited, and there is great comfort in that fact! He shall never leave nor forsake that blessed human soul. He has begun that work and will finish it. The soul that was once so blessed will be always blessed.

And so it is that the apostle Paul commences his second letter to the Corinthians with this theme:

***1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints which are in all Achaia:***

***2 Grace be to you and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.***

***3 Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort;***

***4 Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.***

***5 For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.***

***6 And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation.***

***7 And our hope of you is stedfast, knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation.*** (2 Corinthians 1:1-7).

Shame on me if I didn't conclude this presentation with a segment of that hymn we sometimes sing, *The Comforter has Come*:

The Comforter has come, the Comforter has come!  
The Holy Ghost from Heav'n, the Father's promise giv'n;  
Oh, spread the tidings 'round, wherever man is found—  
The Comforter has come!

Amen and my love to all the saints.