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Bridgeway Church

John 13-17 / #10

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Sermon Summary #10

The Joy and Power of Friendship with the Holy Spirit

John 14:15-24

Gordon Fee is one of the more prominent NT scholars of our day. In one of his books he refers to the struggle one student had with understanding how the Holy Spirit could be a person. "God the Father makes perfectly good sense to me," said the student, "and God the Son I can quite understand; but the Holy Spirit is a gray, oblong blur" (5-6).

I can sympathize with this student's struggles. After all, the words "Father" and "Son" are used every day in our world to describe close, intimate relationships with actual persons we know. But the word "Spirit" doesn't immediately suggest a personal being with whom we might enter into a relationship. So let me ask you a question: ***How many of you today can honestly say that you have a personal relationship with the Holy Spirit?***

Often times when we are sharing our faith with non-Christians we say to them: "Wouldn't you like to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ?" That's easy to understand. After all, Jesus was a human being. Yes, he was and is and always will be God, but he is God ***in human flesh***. You could touch him and hug him and hear him speak and look into his eyes. But the Holy Spirit is, well, a spirit! How do you hug a spirit? You can't see a spirit. You can't eat dinner with a spirit. So how are we supposed to have a personal relationship with the Holy Spirit? Perhaps we ought to ask the question: *Should* we expect to have a personal relationship with the Spirit?

Yes, we should. So let me take a few minutes here at the start to help you understand ***why the Holy Spirit is not a "gray, oblong blur" but is in fact a genuine, thinking, feeling, willing, person with whom we are to enter into a close intimate relationship.***

Before I do that, I need to say something about people who actually think it is unbiblical to think or talk much of the Spirit. They aren't being blasphemous in this regard, but are simply trying to honor what they believe is the point of what Jesus said in John 16:13-15.

“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”

The point they derive from this statement is that the Spirit will *never* draw attention to himself. His divinely appointed task in the economy of redemption is to shine a light on Jesus. “He will glorify me,” said Jesus. Therefore, anything that tends to glorify the Spirit himself is not of God. The Spirit is supremely *Christocentric*. Any ministry today, any teaching, vision, mission, or otherwise that elevates the Spirit above the Son, is decidedly unbiblical.

This is a healthy reminder for many who have severed the person and work of the Spirit from the person and work of the Son. Those who make experiencing the Spirit an end in itself have failed to grasp the goal for which the Spirit has come. However, we must be careful to avoid the error of *reductionism*, as if the whole of the Spirit’s ministry can be reduced to Christology, as if the Spirit does *nothing but* glorify Christ. It’s the mistake of arguing that the *primary* purpose of the Spirit’s coming is the *sole* purpose of his coming. ***The principal aim of the Spirit in what he does is to awaken us to the glory, splendor, and centrality of the work of Christ Jesus. But this does not mean that it is less than the Spirit at work when what he does awakens us also to his own glory and power and abiding presence.***

We should remember that the Holy Spirit inspired hundreds of biblical passages that speak about himself and his work! The Holy Spirit makes himself known through a variety of spiritual and physical manifestations. People often could see the presence of the Spirit (cf. Acts 8 and 10). Consider his descent on Jesus in the form of a dove at his baptism, or his appearance with rushing wind and tongues of fire at Pentecost.

In Acts 13:1-2, it is the Holy Spirit who gives direction in response to fasting and worship. Acts 15:28 suggests that the apostles and elders of the Jerusalem church sought the Spirit in their decisions to find out what “seemed good to the Holy Spirit.” The Spirit also bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God (Rom. 8:16), and cries, “Abba, Father” (Gal. 4:6). He provides a guarantee or a down payment of our future fellowship with him in heaven (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5), and reveals his desires to us so that we can be led by those desires and follow them (Rom. 8:4-16; Gal. 5:16-25). He gives gifts that manifest his presence (1 Cor. 12:7-11). And from time to time he works miraculous signs and wonders and miracles that strongly attest to the presence of God in the preaching of the gospel (Heb 2:4; compare 1 Cor. 2:4; Rom. 15:19).

The Holy Spirit is a Person

Let me begin by saying something about the words used in the Bible to describe the Holy Spirit. In the OT the Hebrew word most often translated “spirit” is *ruach* (94x). In the NT the Greek word most often translated “spirit” is *pneuma*. There is nothing of significance in the fact that *ruach* is feminine, any more than there is significance in the fact that *pneuma* is neuter. Let’s not forget that the Greek word for child (*teknon*) is also neuter!

Sadly, there are times when the precious Spirit of God is treated as if he were no more than an ethereal energy, the divine equivalent to an electric current: stick your finger of faith into the socket of his “anointing presence” and you’ll experience a spiritual shock of biblical proportions! The mechanical manipulation and virtual de-personalizing of the Spirit has frightened many evangelicals and made them understandably skeptical of any claims to miraculous activity. In view of such patterns of “ministry,” any talk of *experiencing the Spirit* is summarily

dismissed as dishonoring to his exalted status as God and a failure to embrace his sovereignty over us rather than ours over him.

Here is why we believe the Holy Spirit is not just a power or a principle but a genuine person. When you read about the Spirit in the Bible you quickly discover that ***all the attributes that we typically associate with a person are found in the Spirit***. For example, the Holy Spirit has a *mind*. He thinks, reasons, understands, deliberates, and reflects. We read this in Isaiah 11:2 – “the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord”). Here in John 14:26 the Spirit is described as teaching us all things. In Romans 8:27 we read that “he who searches the hearts knows what is ***the mind of the Spirit***”. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2:10-11 that “no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.”

The Holy Spirit also has *feelings*. He experiences emotions. In Romans 8:26 we are told that the Spirit “groans” and in Romans 15:30 that he feels “love.” Paul warns us in Ephesians 4:30 not to “grieve” the Holy Spirit. In other words, our unrepentant sin causes pain to the Spirit. It is distressing and disturbing to him. When the early church had to make a decision on whether or not to accept Gentiles into the body of Christ on the same terms as Jews, we read in Acts 15:28 that “it seemed good to the Holy Spirit” to do so.

The Holy Spirit has a *will*. He deliberates between options and makes choices. We read in Acts 16:7 that “the Spirit of Jesus did not allow” Paul and his companions to enter into Bithynia but instead led them into Macedonia. And in 1 Corinthians 12:11 Paul says clearly that when it comes to who gets what spiritual gifts that the Spirit “apportions [gifts] to each one individually ***as he wills***.”

The Holy Spirit performs all the *functions* of a personal being.

- He talks (Mark 13:11; Acts 1:16; 8:29; 10:19; 11:12; 13:2; 21:11; 1 Tim. 4:1; Heb. 3:7; Rev. 2:7 [“what the Spirit says to the churches”; see also 2:11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22])
- He testifies (John 15:26; 16:23)
- He can be sinned against (Matt. 12:31)
- He can be lied to (Acts 5:3)
- He can be tested/tempted (Acts 5:9)
- He can be insulted (Heb. 10:29)
- He enters into relationship with other persons (2 Cor. 13:14)
- He encourages (Acts 9:31)
- He strengthens (Eph. 3:16)
- He teaches (Luke 12:12; John 14:26; 1 Cor. 2:13)

Here in our passage we see clear and undisputed evidence that the Holy Spirit is a person. In John 14:16 Jesus says that the Father will give to us “another Helper” or “another Comforter” or “Counselor.” Someone who helps and comforts and counsels is by definition a person, not merely a power or impersonal force. But notice also that Jesus refers to the Spirit as “***another***” Helper. In other words, Jesus is saying that the Helper the Father is sending you is “just like me.” He’s “another” Helper. He will help and comfort and counsel you just like I have while I’ve been with you physically on the earth.

The Holy Spirit is a Divine Person

The Holy Spirit is more than a person. He is a divine person. That is to say, the Holy Spirit is God. We all affirm that the Father is God and that the Son is God but so too and no less so is the Holy Spirit God. Several things in the Bible affirm this to be true.

1. What is said of God is said of the Spirit (Acts 5:3-4).

“But Peter said, ‘Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to *the Holy Spirit* . . . ? You have not lied to man but to **God**’ (Acts 5:3-4).

2. The Holy Spirit is identified with Yahweh (Acts 7:51 / Ps. 78:17, 21; Heb. 10:15-17 / Jer. 31:33-34).

3. The activity of God = the activity of the Holy Spirit (e.g., in creation, conversion, etc.).

4. “God said” = “the Spirit said” (Isa. 6:9 / Acts 28:25).

5. We are the “temple of God because the Holy Spirit dwells in us” (Eph. 2:22; 1 Cor. 6:19). If the Holy Spirit is not God, how could we properly be called the temple of God simply because the Spirit indwells us?

6. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is the only unforgiveable sin (Mt. 12:31; Mk. 3:28).

7. Attributes/Actions of God are ascribed to the Spirit.

(a) *Omniscience* (Isa. 40:13-14; 1 Cor. 2:10-11); (b) *Omnipresence* (Ps. 139:7-8); (c) *Omnipotence* (as seen in the Spirit’s role in creation [Gen. 1], providence [Ps. 104:30], regeneration, etc.; see especially Zech. 4:6); (d) *Eternality* (Heb. 9:14); € *Holiness* (used of the Spirit only twice in OT: Ps. 51:11 and Isa. 63:10).

8. The names of the Spirit suggest (require?) his deity.

(a) Spirit of glory (1 Pt. 4:14); (b) Spirit of grace (Heb. 10:29); (c) Spirit of life (Rom. 8:2); (d) Spirit of truth (John 14:16; 15:26; 16:13); (e) Spirit of wisdom and revelation (Eph. 1:17).

9. The linking of the Spirit with the Father and Son (Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14; 1 Cor. 12:4)

Take special note of several texts in Paul’s letters where the work of saving sinners is formulated in *Trinitarian* terms: Rom. 5:1-8; 2 Cor. 3:1-4:6; Gal. 4:4-6; Eph. 1:3-14. See also 1 Thess. 1:4-5; 2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Cor. 1:4-7; 2:4-5; 2:12; 6:11; 6:19-20; 2 Cor. 1:21-22; Gal. 3:1-5; Rom. 8:3-4; 8:15-17; Col. 3:16; Eph. 1:17; 2:18; 2:20-22; Phil. 3:3.

Consider what Paul says in Romans 8:9 – “You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.”

Here the Holy Spirit is referred to in three ways: (1) as the Spirit; (2) as the Spirit of God (the Father); and (3) as the Spirit of Christ. There are not, however, three Spirits, but one Spirit who simultaneously sustains the same relationship to both Father and Son. Note also: the presence of the Holy Spirit is the *key* criterion in determining if someone is a Christian. To have the Holy Spirit is to be a Christian. To be devoid of the Spirit is to be devoid of Christ.

When Paul says that the Spirit is “of God” or “of Christ” he does not mean the Spirit was created by God the Father or by God the Son. Rather he is “of God” because he shares God’s nature. He is one with God in terms of the divine essence.

The Spirit is a Divine Person with a Purpose

But I also want you to see that the divine person of the Holy Spirit has a clear and distinct purpose in your life. I hardly need to remind you, but I will anyway, that everything we know of God the Father and of Jesus does not come naturally. ***Rather, we owe everything to the ministry of the Spirit.*** Everything we understand in God’s Word, whatever degree of insight we gain into the measureless truths it embodies, we must attribute to the ministry of the Spirit. Whatever positive moral change we’ve experienced in life, whatever conformity to Christ we’ve seen develop in our spiritual walk, the Holy Spirit did it. Whatever strength we receive when our weakness threatens to overwhelm, whatever encouragement we feel at times of despair and doubt, whatever sanctifying influence we sense in our souls, we owe to the third person of the Godhead.

Let me unpack the Spirit’s purpose with six “P’s”.

First, the Holy Spirit dwells or lives in you to provide you with ***power*** to do what you could never do in your own strength. He provides the power or the God-given ability to do what God wants us to do and what, apart from the Spirit, we otherwise could not do.

- Power for hope (Rom. 15:13)
- Power for miracles (Lk. 24:49; Acts 1:8; Rom. 15:18-19)
- Power for prayer (Eph. 6:18-19; Rom. 8:26-27)
- Power for praise (Eph. 5:18-19; Phil. 3:3)
- Power for preaching (Acts 4:33)

Second, the Holy Spirit has been given to us for ***practice***. By the word “practice” I have in mind what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:7 where we are told that the Spirit imparts spiritual gifts to us and energizes us to practice them for the building up of the body of Christ.

Third, the Spirit is in us for the purpose of ***purity***. That is to say, the Spirit sanctifies our motives and actions and delivers us from the power and pollution of sin. The Spirit lives within us to cultivate and to develop his fruit in our lives (Gal. 5:22-23).

Fourth, the Spirit is here with us and in us for the purpose of ***presentation***. That is to say, he presents to us the truth of God’s Word. He reveals, he illumines, and he awakens us to the meaning of who God is and what his will is for our life (Eph. 1:17; 1 John 2:20,27).

Fifth, the word *presence* points to the Spirit's role as the one who makes known to us and mediates for us the person of Jesus. His role is to shine a floodlight, as it were, on the person of Jesus. As Jesus later says in John 15:26, "when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me." And again in John 16:14 Jesus says that when the Holy Spirit comes "he will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you."

Sixth, and finally, the Holy Spirit is in us for the purpose of *prevention*. That is to say, he restrains our sin. He not only positively enables us to live in obedience to Christ's commands, but he also exerts a restraining or preventative influence in keeping our sinful impulses in check.

The Promise of the Spirit's Presence in Us

There are two things that I want you to see about our Lord's promise of the Holy Spirit. Never forget that the disciples in the upper room with Jesus were facing the most excruciating crisis of their lives. Jesus is about to leave them. He's going to be crucified. He's told them repeatedly that he will soon depart. Needless to say, they are crestfallen. They are crushed and worried and probably terrified of what the future might hold once Jesus is gone.

The second thing you should note is something we'll talk more about next week. But in v. 15 Jesus says this: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." I suspect that the disciples in the first century were just as overwhelmed by that statement as you and I are today. "Yes, I love you Lord. But Lord, I'm so weak. I'm so prone to serve my own interests and not yours. I'm selfish and arrogant and prideful and greedy. How can I ever hope to keep your commandments, especially once you are no longer here with us?"

Jesus knew this would run through their minds. On the one hand, they are discouraged and frightened by the prospect of Jesus' departure. On the other hand, they are terrified by the call to obey his commands. So what does Jesus do? He tells them: "Don't worry. Don't be afraid. Don't be discouraged. Don't be overwhelmed. I know my departure is of great concern to you. And I know that you feel utterly incompetent and ill-equipped to obey my commands. That is precisely why I'm going to ask the Father to send the Holy Spirit to you. He will help you. He will encourage you. He will strengthen you. He will guide you when you start to wander off the path. He will teach you. He will remind you of what I've said. He will comfort you when you are frustrated and depressed. He will counsel you when you are confused."

I want you to see several critically important truths about what Jesus says concerning the coming of the Spirit. By the way, the Spirit is sent to us in fulfillment of this promise on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2).

First, there is considerable debate over how we should translate the word in v. 16 that is rendered by the ESV as "*Helper*". I'm inclined to say that all of the suggestions carry a measure of truth. Yes, the Holy Spirit comes and indwells us to help us in every conceivable way. Others render this word as "*Counselor*" or "*Advocate*." The point is that the Spirit is like someone who stands alongside and defends your case in court. Thus the idea would be of a legal assistant. The word is used in this sense of Jesus in 1 John 2:2. Some render it "*Comforter*", inasmuch as the Spirit comforts us in trials and struggles and pain.

Regardless of the word we choose, the point is that *the Spirit is one who is to be experienced*. Remember that Jesus is trying to reassure them in their discouragement and fear by saying that another Helper or Counselor or Advocate will come. Their sense of abandonment will be overcome by the Spirit, pointing to some sort of experiential ministry on his part to encourage and uplift.

Second, when he comes he comes *forever!* He will be “with” us, says Jesus, “forever” (v. 16b). He will never leave us. He permanently indwells us. This is surely one of the most encouraging promises found anywhere in Scripture. Jesus does not say the Spirit will be with us “only as long as we behave ourselves” or “only as long as we don’t commit a sin” or “only as long as we live up to expectations.” Can we *grieve* the Spirit by our sin? Yes (Eph. 4:24). Can we *quench* the Spirit by treating prophetic words with contempt? Yes (1 Thess. 5:19-20).

But the Spirit will never abandon the children of God. He will never leave us or forsake us. It is in light of this that a brief word needs to be said about what David prayed in Psalm 51. Remember that this is his psalm or prayer of confession following his adultery with Bathsheba and his complicity in the murder of her husband, Uriah the Hittite.

David can’t bear the thought of the loss of intimacy of fellowship and its attendant joys, and thus prays: “*Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me*” (v. 11). What does David mean when he prays that God would not take his Spirit from him? Does he envision the possible loss of his salvation? Does he envision the withdrawal of divine grace? No.

Aside from the saving activity of the Holy Spirit in the OT and the empowering ministry by which believers are sanctified and enabled to live holy lives, *the Holy Spirit was poured out on select individuals to equip them to perform important tasks in the covenant community of Israel*. For example:

- (1) Craftsmen who worked on the tabernacle/temple (Exod. 31:1-6);
- (2) Civil administrators (such as Moses and the 70 elders in Num. 11:16-17,25-26);
- (3) Military commanders (such as Joshua; Num. 27:18);
- (4) Judges (appointed and empowered to rule over Israel as in Judges 3:10; 6:34);
- (5) Samson (Judges 14:5-6,19; 15:14; 16:20);
- (6) Prophets (1 Chron. 12:18; Micah 3:8);
- (7) Kings over Israel (Saul in 1 Sam. 10:1,6,10; 16:14; and David in 1 Sam. 16:12-13).

Thus there was a ministry of the Holy Spirit in the OT, *unrelated to personal salvation or character, designed solely to empower, enable and equip someone for a task to which God had appointed him/her*. Such, I believe, is what David has in mind in Psalm 51:11. *His prayer is that God would not withdraw the enabling anointing of the Spirit that empowers and equips him to lead Israel as King*. Indeed, he may well have had in mind that disturbing scene where “the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul” (1 Sam. 16:14) and prays that such would never befall him.

Third, the Holy Spirit is not given to the world at large but only to believers in particular. “The world cannot receive” him, says Jesus in v. 17. The world has no knowledge of the Spirit, no experience of the Spirit. Why? Because the world doesn’t know me. Only those who know and love and believe in me will receive this presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus says much the same thing later in v. 19. “Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me.” And in v. 22, Judas (not Iscariot) asked him, “Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?” What these texts indicate is that this special relationship of intimacy and love and the abiding presence of the risen Christ in us through his Spirit in us is something that the world cannot understand or see or know and will never experience until such time as someone repents and turns to Christ in faith.

Fourth, the Holy Spirit won't just be *"with"* us, as if a companion walking alongside. He will be *"in"* us. *He lives inside, not just alongside.* He doesn't come to you as I do on Sunday mornings, standing in your presence, speaking to you from outside who you are. He comes into us. He lives in us. He makes his dwelling and his home in our hearts, minds, affections, and in our bodies. We are his temple (Eph. 2:21-22). The apostle Paul asks this question: "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?" (1 Cor. 3:16). Again, later in 1 Corinthians 6:19 he again asks: "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God?"

Clearly Jesus is saying that *the Day of Pentecost marks a massively significant shift in the way God's people relate to the Holy Spirit.* We know that people in the OT were regenerated by the Holy Spirit. We know that the Holy Spirit would come "upon" certain people to empower and equip them to do specified tasks. The Spirit is described as coming "on" those who constructed the tabernacle, and as coming "on" the kings of Israel to equip them and aid them in leading God's people. The Spirit would come "on" prophets and military commanders and others to do what God had commanded them. But in no case did the Spirit come "into" them and remain there forever. The permanent, abiding presence of the Spirit "in" the believer is something that first came to pass on the Day of Pentecost.

Fifth, the presence of the Holy Spirit in us is nothing less than the presence of Jesus himself in us. Look again at John 14:18 – "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you." Some think this "coming" of Jesus refers to his appearance to the disciples after the resurrection (see John 20:19-23). Others argue that this "coming" of Jesus is the second coming that will occur at the end of history. But I'm inclined to believe that when the Spirit comes to them to indwell them forever it is Jesus who comes to indwell them forever. That's not because the Spirit and Jesus are the same person, but because they are the same God!

Sixth, the coming and abiding presence of the Holy Spirit in us is equivalent to an orphan being adopted and taken into the home of loving parents who devote themselves to doing everything that a child needs done. "I will not leave you as orphans," says Jesus in v. 18. Yes, Jesus will "leave" them physically. He is about to be crucified and raised from the dead and will ascend to the right hand of the Father in heaven. But when the Spirit comes it is the Spirit "of Christ" who comes. And whatever bereavement or loss or loneliness that his disciples might otherwise have felt will be overcome by the presence of the Holy Spirit in them.

A Concluding Prayer

"Precious Holy Spirit of Christ our Savior. We rejoice in your permanent abiding reality in our lives. We pray that you yourself would work in our hearts to make our hearts a fit dwelling place for your presence. Show us Christ! Reveal his glory! Deepen our love for him! Fill us with your power! Comfort us in our distress! Encourage us in our conflict! Defend us against the enemy! Impart your spiritual gifts! Energize us for ministry! Amen."