Introduction to the Holy Spirit, Part Two

The Helper, the Spirit of Truth, and the New Temple

JOHN 14:15-31

Where We Are

We are nine months into our study of John's Gospel, and four weeks into the Upper Room Discourse, that dense and intimate stretch of five chapters where Jesus prepares His disciples for what is coming. Chapters 13 through 17. We have been moving slowly and deliberately through this material because it deserves it.

If you missed last week, here is where we are. The night before the crucifixion, Jesus and His disciples are sharing the Passover meal. We call it the Last Supper. And Jesus looks at the people who know Him best in the world and tells them something painful. He is leaving, and they cannot follow Him yet to where He is going. We spent considerable time sitting in what that would have felt like. Their best friend, mentor, pastor, teacher, guide, and God was saying He had to go. That had imagined a very different outcome. This wasn't going to be a Moses-and-ten-plagues moment. There would be no overthrow of Rome. Jesus was going to surrender to His enemies and be put to death, and they were going to be left alone.

He comforts them. He is going to prepare a place for them and will come back for them. Thomas presses Him. "Lord, we don't know the way." Jesus answers with perhaps the most famous of His I AM statements: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." That is where we left things last week, and it is where we pick back up today.

An Unusual Ask

Before we read the text, I want to make what may be the hardest ask I've made in this series. I need you to set aside everything you think you know about the Holy Spirit.

Many of us come from backgrounds where the Holy Spirit was either heavily emphasized or quietly set aside, and depending on that tradition, we've likely picked up some conclusions about Him that are inaccurate. Some of you, I'm asking to take fifty years of theology and lived experience and lay it down for a moment. Not walk away from it. Just become like a child again, and hear this as if for the first time.

Jesus is about to give His first clear, extended teaching on the person and work of the Holy Spirit. Up until this point in John's Gospel, the Spirit has been referenced. But here in chapter 14, He is revealed. The Spirit hasn't been absent from the story. He hasn't been explained.

Here is what I need you to hear before we read a word of this passage. Many of us come from charismatic or Pentecostal backgrounds, a tradition that rightly prizes to love for the Holy Spirit. That love is often expressed through a particular kind of freedom: "We don't put the Holy Spirit in a box." I've said it myself. I said it to think the difference between Pentecostals and everyone else was that we loved the Holy Spirit and made room for His works.

But I want to offer a different way of seeing this. In our effort to take Him out of the box, I wonder if we've inadvertently placed Him in a cage, much like an animal at the zoo. We don't shut Him down, but we put Him on display for our own experience. He has become an attraction to encounter rather than an authority to submit to. We thought "no box" meant making room for tongues, healing, and prophecy. But if those are the only things we make room for, we've quietly put Him in a different kind of box. And some of us may need to repent of the arrogance that says we are the only ones who love the Holy Spirit. The Spirit who doesn't speak in tongues is not your enemy.

Today we need to reacquaintance ourselves with Him as He is revealed in Scripture. And I want to tell you something about this first extended teaching Jesus gives on the Holy Spirit. It spans two chapters, and there is not a single reference to signs and wonders. I'm not saying those don't happen. Jesus will absolutely mention them after the resurrection. But when Jesus gives us here is the foundation. He is talking to us about our first impression of the Holy Spirit should be, and we need to pay very close attention.

> JOHN 14:15-18
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> "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you."
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> "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him." [Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, "Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?" Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me."
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> "These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I will come to you.' If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place you may believe. I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me, but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us go from here."

What They Already Knew

The disciples didn't come to this conversation as blank slates. They had a framework for the Spirit of God, and understanding that framework is essential to hearing what Jesus is about to entertain.

In the Old Testament, the Spirit was referred to as the Spirit of God or the Spirit of the Lord. He wasn't clearly understood as a distinct Person within the Godhead, but was more closely associated with the presence and power of God moving in particular moments. And crucially, He operated on a very specific pattern. He would come upon a select few, equip them for a task, and often depart when the task was done or when the person was no longer worthy of Him.

> *"The Spirit of the Lord rushed upon him..."*
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> JUDGES 14:6 · JUDGES 15:14 · 1 SAMUEL 10:10
>
> *"The Spirit of God rushed upon him..."*
>
> 1 SAMUEL 10:10 · 19:23
>
> *"The Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul..."*
>
> 1 SAMUEL 16:14

The prophets occupied a different category. They were described not as having the Spirit rush upon them momentarily, but as being filled or inhabited by Him in a more sustained way.

> *"The Spirit entered into me and spoke to me."*
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> EZEKIEL 2:2
>
> *"I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the Lord."*
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> MICAH 3:8

And then there were the great prophetic promises. Joel's declaration that God would pour out His Spirit on all flesh, not just the select few and the New Covenant language of Ezekiel 36 and Jeremiah 31, where God promised to put His Spirit within His people. These were staggering promises. But to the Jewish mind, they were entirely eschatological. They belonged to the age of the Messiah, the end of things, not the present moment. There was no framework for a first coming that would bring about these promises.

So here is the Old Testament picture of the Spirit, the picture the disciples held walking into this conversation: God's power and presence, given temporarily, given selectively, rank-oriented, not clearly revealed as a distinct Person, and not indwelling the whole people of God.

Another Helper

Jesus introduces the Spirit with a title: *Helper*. And the word He uses for "another" is significant. In Greek, it means another of the same kind. He is not sending a lesser substitute or a different sort of aid. He is sending One who is like Him. The Spirit is the same kind of Helper that Jesus Himself has been to the disciples.

Remember, Jesus is leaving. The pain of that departure is still raw in the room. And His answer to their grief is this. I won't leave you as orphans. I'm sending someone like me. Worth noting: the title "Helper" in its Hebrew resonance is used in one other significant context in Scripture, that of a wife or helpmate. It is not a diminutive word. It is a word for an assistant. It is a word for one whose very orientation and purpose is to come alongside and strengthen.

The Helper's goal is to help. The question is *help with what?* And the context Jesus gives us is the answer.

Look at the phrase that opens this passage: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." Jesus uses this idea five times across chapters 14 and 15. It isn't about the Ten Commandments or the 613 laws of the Old Testament. It certainly isn't the law of Moses and don't from the New Testament, which hadn't even been written yet. When you follow the thread of these five uses, *they all converge on one place: the New Commandment*, that you love one another as He has loved you.

> *"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."*
>
> JOHN 15:12

The Helper is introduced in the context of love for the brothers and sisters. That is the first and primary thing He is here to help you do. And we covered why in an earlier sermon; to love the Christian is to love Christ. He is the Head, we are the Body. You cannot love the Groom and despise the Bride. Our contempt for the Bride would vindicate our claim to love the Groom. The Spirit's first purpose, as Jesus would have it, is not to give you an extraordinary experience. It is to help you do the hardest and most ordinary thing, love the person sitting next to you.

The Spirit of Truth

Jesus gives the Spirit a second title: *the Spirit of truth*. And the order matters. He is the Helper first in context, and now He is the Spirit of truth. Jesus does not call Him the Spirit of power, though He could have. That title is not wrong. He will speak to power and signs later, upon His resurrection. But here, laying the foundation, Jesus chooses *truth*.

John speaks of truth throughout this Gospel not as an abstract concept but as a Person. Jesus is the Truth. And so the Spirit of truth is not primarily a philosophical claim; it is a relational one. The Spirit is bound to the Son who is Truth, and He carries that binding into every place He goes.

> *Jesus doesn't call Him the Spirit of power. He calls Him the Spirit of truth. The foundation is not experience. The foundation is reality.*

If you miss this, the consequences are serious. When power becomes the primary lens through which you understand the Holy Spirit, and truth is the thing you get to around the edges, you will inevitably end up in one of three places.

I. Abusing the Power of the Spirit

Power without truth has no governing principle. What feels powerful becomes what feels right, and the Spirit becomes a name attached to whatever the moment demands. This is how manipulation enters, dressed in the language of anointing.

II. Mismanaging the Power of the Spirit

Without truth as the governing reality, even sincere people apply spiritual power to the wrong places, at the wrong times, for the wrong reasons. Not maliciously, simply because there is no anchor keeping them to what is real.

III. Misleading Others Through the Power of the Spirit

The most dangerous outcome. When you are untethered from truth and speaking with authority, the people who trust you follow you. And you lead them somewhere the Spirit of truth never intended them to go.

> A MOMENT OF EXAMINATION
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> ### Do You Know How to Spot It?
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> Here is how you can tell if you're slipped into placing power above truth as your governing framework for the Holy Spirit. It is one question, and it is uncomfortable.
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> Do you operate in the gifts, but struggle to be honest?
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> Not honest in the abstract. Honest with yourself. Honest with the people around you. Honest about what is actually happening in your life, your marriage, your church. The Spirit of truth anchors you in reality. He keeps you from self-deception. He keeps you from drifting into the comfortable lull of spiritual performance. If you can move in spiritual gifts on Sunday but live in avoidance, flattery, and half-truths the rest of the week, something is out of order.
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> Think about the context Jesus is speaking into. His disciples are about to face confusion, persecution, conquering voices, sharp doubts, and layered grief. They will be hit with lies about who Jesus was and what happened at the cross. And Jesus's answer to all of it is not, "I'll give you power to push through." His answer is "I'll send you the Spirit of truth, and He will keep you in reality."
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> *Truth is not the ceiling of the Spirit's work. It is the floor. Everything else stands on it.*

He Will Be in You

Then Jesus says something that, for the disciples, would have been almost too large to receive: "He dwells with you and will be in you."

Hear this clearly: the Holy Spirit dwells in every believer. He is just as present in the Baptist as in the Presbyterian as in the Pentecostal. He indwells everyone who is born again. No tradition has the market on Him. And if we are all filled with the same Spirit, there are implications we simply cannot ignore about how we treat one another across these traditions.

But for the disciples standing in that room, this statement would have landed differently than it lands on us. Their entire framework for the Spirit's dwelling place was the temple. Specifically, the Holy of Holies, that innermost chamber where the presence of God resided, separated from the people by a thick veil. The Spirit dwelt in the most sacred, set-apart space in Israel's life. You didn't go in. The High Priest went in, once a year, with great preparation and great fear.

And now Jesus is saying the Spirit will no longer dwell in the temple. He will dwell in them.

That is not a small revision. That is a complete reorientation of what it means to be the people of God. They are hearing that they will become the new temple. The new dwelling place of God. Not a building of stone with a roof and a curtain and an inner chamber. Living people, in whom the Spirit of God takes up residence.

This language runs all the way through the New Testament. Paul will say your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. Peter will describe believers as living stones being built into a spiritual house. The imagery cascades because the reality is that large. The Spirit was not lost when the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in AD 70. He had already moved. He moved into the people of God the moment Jesus went Him.

> *You are the new temple. The Spirit doesn't dwell behind a veil anymore. He dwells in you.*

The Foundation

Jesus closes this portion of His teaching with a peace that is unlike anything the world can offer, and a sounding word: "Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." He has spoken the evening monitoring everything they thought they knew about what is coming, about where God will be, about how they will survive without Him beside them. And He does not end with power. He ends with peace, and with a Spirit who is truth.

That is the foundation. Helper. Spirit of Truth. Dwelling within every believer, permanently, not for a rank and not for a season. This is where Jesus begins when He teaches about the Holy Spirit, and it is where we must begin as well. Everything else we understand about Him must stand on this floor, or it won't stand at all.