

**Sermon preached by Dr. Neil Smith at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, March 1, 2015**

**THE ESSENTIALS OF OUR FAITH (7):
WE BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT**

Matthew 16:7-15

I wasn't here last Sunday. Then again, neither were you, as a result of the winter storm that prompted us to cancel our scheduled Sunday activities. I want you to know, though, that Mary Sue and I *did* go to church last Sunday. We didn't let the snow and freezing rain and ice prevent us. We worshiped at Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in sunny Fort Lauderdale, FL, where we attended a conference on the finished work of Christ and its liberating implications in our lives as followers of Christ. I brought back a church bulletin from last Sunday's service at Coral Ridge as evidence!

Today, as we resume our examination of the *Essentials of Our Faith*, we turn our attention to the person and work of the Holy Spirit. I invite you to turn with me to John 16:7-15, where Jesus speaks to His disciples about the Holy Spirit. May we give our full and reverent attention to the reading of God's holy Word.

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Do you know who discovered oxygen? There actually is some dispute about it. A Swedish chemist named Carl Scheele discovered it in 1772. He doesn't usually get the credit, though. The credit is usually given to English scientist and clergyman Joseph Priestley, who in 1774 was the first to make his findings public. Priestley did not call his discovery "oxygen." He originally referred to it as "dephlogisticated air." Aren't you glad that name didn't stick? Now Scheele, the Swedish chemist, named it "fire air," which is definitely an improvement over Priestly's suggestion.

The term "oxygen" didn't come into use till 1775, when a French chemist named Antoine Lavoisier "discovered" it and gave it the name "oxygen." It was Lavoisier who first recognized oxygen as a chemical element.

Today, the idea of someone "discovering" oxygen seems about as strange as a fish discovering water. Oxygen is simply something we take for granted unless we happen to have trouble breathing, in which case we become very much aware of how much we need it. Though we can't see it, oxygen surrounds us at every moment. And even if we choose to call it "dephlogisticated air," we really can't live without it.

(Source: Clark Cothorn, www.preachingtoday.com.)

The same is true of the Holy Spirit, except that the Holy Spirit is not an "it." The Holy Spirit is not an element in the atmosphere. The Holy Spirit is not some kind of impersonal power or force as in *Star Wars* in its invocation *May the Force be with You*.

Like God the Father and God the Son, the Holy Spirit is a living, personal Being. Like the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit is God. The Holy Spirit is the third Person of the Trinity, eternally existing and co-equal with the Father and the Son in deity, dignity and honor.

What I'm about to say is not true of everyone, but it is true nonetheless: Many Christians and churches, even denominations, can fall into one of two camps regarding the person and work of the Holy Spirit. Some Christians are obsessed with the Holy Spirit, while others ignore the Holy Spirit – that is, they either make everything in life about the Holy Spirit and attribute every thought that passes through their minds as the Holy Spirit or, at the other end of the spectrum, they say they believe in the Holy Spirit but they go through their days without any awareness of the presence and ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

Francis Chan, best known for his book *Crazy Love*, has written another book entitled *Forgotten God: Reversing Our Tragic Neglect of the Holy Spirit*, which begs the question: Have we forgotten about the person and work of the Holy Spirit? Are we guilty of neglecting or ignoring the Spirit? Have we misunderstood who He is, what He does and how He does it? Do we focus too little attention on the Holy Spirit or too much? Are we obsessed with the Spirit, with certain kinds of experiences or evidences of the Holy Spirit's presence or power in our lives? Or do we live as if the Holy Spirit really has nothing to do with our lives?

How is it in your life? In our life as a church? Is it possible that some of us fall into one of these two camps?

WHAT JESUS SAYS ABOUT THE HOLY SPIRIT

If you want to gain a right understanding and a proper perspective on the Holy Spirit, the place to go, of course, is the Bible. And the best place in the Bible to start is with the words of Jesus. In the passage we read from John 16, in verse 7, Jesus uses a particular word, the Greek word *parakletos*, or "Paraclete" in referring to the Holy Spirit. The word "Paraclete" occurs only five times in the New Testament. Jesus uses the word four times in this farewell discourse He's giving the disciples – a discourse that begins near the end of John 13 and continues through John chapter 16. The primary meaning of "Paraclete" is "one who is called alongside to help or to provide comfort or encouragement or to give strength." It's variously translated in different Bible translations as Helper (ESV), Counselor (NIV), Comforter (KJV), or Friend (MSG). It carries the meaning of all these words along with others such as Advisor, Advocate, Ally, and Champion.

ANOTHER PARACLETE

The first time Jesus uses the word "Paraclete" is in John chapter 14:16-17, where He says: "I will ask the Father and He will give you another Paraclete, to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. But you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you."

Listen to this: The fact that Jesus speaks of the Holy Spirit as "another Paraclete," indicates that His disciples already had a Paraclete – Jesus, God the Son, was the original Paraclete –

the original Helper, Counselor, Comforter, Advocate, Ally and Friend, who came alongside His disciples to give them guidance, counsel, insight, comfort, courage, strength and power to face any situation in life. Jesus was the original Paraclete. And the disciples didn't want Him to go away. They didn't want Jesus to leave them. They wanted to keep Him around forever. But Jesus said to them, as we read in John 16:7: "I tell you the truth: It is for your good - it is to your advantage that I go away. Unless I go away, the Paraclete will not come to you. But if I go, I will send Him to you."

This verse, from John 16, is actually the fourth and final time Jesus speaks of the Paraclete. So we've mentioned the first and the fourth and we'll get to the second and third shortly. But understand that in His incarnate state, during the 33 years of His life here on earth, Jesus, just like you and me, could be physically present in only one place at a time. The promised Paraclete, however – the Holy Spirit – would *universalize* the presence of the Lord Jesus with His people at all places at all times. Everywhere and always. The Holy Spirit is not hemmed in by the limitations of a physical body. In addition, the Holy Spirit *internalizes* the presence of God in our lives. Not only is God the Holy Spirit *with* us, He's come to take up residence *in* us, just as Jesus promised He would in John 14:17. (John Stott uses the words "universalizes" and "internalizes" to describe the role of the Holy Spirit in *Christian Basics*, 78.)

Paul expresses it this way in Ephesians 3:16-17 in his prayer for the church in Ephesus: "I pray that out of His glorious riches He [that is God the Father] may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith." The Holy Spirit is now our Immanuel – God with us – and God in us. Through the Spirit, the Lord Jesus Christ resides and abides in our hearts by faith.

The two other places where Jesus speaks of the Holy Spirit as the Paraclete are John 14:26 and John 15:26. Listen to what He says:

John 14:26 Jesus says, "The Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name will teach you all things and will bring to your remembrance everything I have said to you." There we get a pretty clear picture of at least part of the Holy Spirit's ministry or mission in our midst. "He will teach you all things and will bring to your remembrance or help you remember the things I've taught you and the things I've said to you."

John 15:26: "When the Paraclete comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify [or bear witness] about Me."

The Paraclete Jesus promised has come. The Holy Spirit came upon the followers of Jesus in power with wind and fire on the Day of Pentecost - 50 days after the resurrection of Christ, ten days after His ascension into heaven. The Holy Spirit is *with* us today, with His people all around the world. Through the Holy Spirit, the Lord Jesus resides *in* us, in our hearts and in the hearts of people everywhere who know Him and love Him and trust in Him as Savior and Lord.

As usual, there is much, much more to glean from God's Word about the person and work of the Holy Spirit and, God willing, we will talk more about it next Sunday. For today, though, I want to leave you with this: The Holy Spirit, the Paraclete promised by Jesus, the third Person of the Trinity, is the birthright of every true believer in Christ. He's your birthright! If you belong to Jesus Christ by faith, if your hope of salvation is in Him and in Him alone, then the Holy Spirit has been given to you. The Holy Spirit has come to take up residence in your life. The Paraclete Jesus promised has come not just to be *with* you or to walk beside you, as if that weren't amazing enough in itself, but actually to live *in* you and to change you by His power, bit by bit, from the inside out, so that you become more and more like Jesus.

If you trust in Jesus alone and His finished work on the cross for your salvation, you don't ever need to wonder if you have the Holy Spirit. You do! In his book, *Keeping in Step with the Spirit*, J. I. Packer says that the question is not: "Do you have the Spirit?" The question really is "Does the Spirit have you?" Does the Holy Spirit have *all* of you or just some parts of you? Is there some part of your life you're holding back from the Holy Spirit? Some area of your life in which you don't want the Holy Spirit to interfere? (Packer, *Keeping in Step with the Spirit*, 92-93)

Since the Holy Spirit is your birthright as a believer, since you have Him in your life, why not let Him have all your life? Let Him have all of you. Not that by giving Him all of you will you somehow prove yourself worthy of His love and favor. No, that will never happen. None of us will ever be worthy. Let Him have all of you as a way of showing your thanks, as a way of expressing your gratitude and love. Because Jesus gave His all for you and did everything necessary for your salvation and mine. There is nothing left for us to do but to believe it, to believe Him, to trust Him, and to follow Him wherever He leads.

Hallelujah, what a Savior. All praise to God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Lord, let it be so. Amen