

**Sermon preached by Dr. Neil Smith at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,  
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, May 27, 2012  
Pentecost Sunday**

**WHAT JESUS WANTS YOU TO KNOW  
ABOUT THE HOLY SPIRIT**

**John 14:15-21, 25-27**

**PENTECOST**

For a period of forty days following His resurrection, Jesus appeared to His followers on a number of occasions. On one of those occasions, He gave His disciples the Great Commission recorded in Matthew 28, the charge to “go and make disciples of all nations” (28:19-20). Jesus also instructed the disciples to stay in Jerusalem and to wait for the gift promised by the Father (Acts 1:4), the gift of the Holy Spirit with whom the followers of Jesus would soon be baptized (1:5), and whose power they would receive to be witnesses to the whole world (1:8) of His saving power and love. Then, right before their eyes, Jesus was taken up into heaven (1:9). As the disciples were standing there, staring up into the sky, two angels dressed in white suddenly stood before them and said: “Why do you just stand here looking up at the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen Him go into heaven” (1:10-11). You can bet your life on it.

So, do you know what the disciples of Jesus did? They did what Jesus had told them to do. They stayed in Jerusalem. And waited. Francis Chan says the disciples obeyed “because that’s what people do when someone rises from the dead and gives instructions” (*Forgotten God*, p. 30). They didn’t really know what to expect. They didn’t know when it would happen or what it would be like. But they did what Jesus told them to do. They stayed in Jerusalem. They waited. And while they waited, they prayed.

As it turns out, they didn’t have to wait long. Ten days after the ascension of Jesus into heaven, fifty days after His resurrection, during the Jewish festival of Pentecost that began fifty days after Passover, the promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit was fulfilled. The Holy Spirit came upon the believers in Jerusalem, and the power of the Spirit was unleashed in a dramatic way like no one had ever seen or experienced before. It is this coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, described in Acts 2, that we observe and celebrate along with Christians around the world today. For Christians, the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost marks the beginning of the church as the Holy Spirit-filled, Holy Spirit-powered, and Holy Spirit-led body of Christ in the world.

So, today let’s shine the spotlight on the Holy Spirit. Let’s consider what Jesus has to say – what Jesus wants us to know – about the Holy Spirit by looking at His teaching on the Holy Spirit in the upper room on the night before His death on the cross. This teaching on the Holy Spirit is found in portions of John 14, 15, and 16. Let’s look together at a slice of it in John 14:15-21, 25-27. Let’s all give our full and reverent attention to the reading of God’s holy Word.

Pastor, author, and Bible teacher Chuck Swindoll recently made this confession about the Holy Spirit: “By the time I graduated from [seminary], I had many convictions and few questions, especially regarding the Holy Spirit... But during a lifetime of ministry that has taken me around the United States and to many countries abroad, I have found that the work of the Holy Spirit continually keeps me off balance. I’m not alone in that. Those in church leadership seem afraid the Spirit is going to do something we can’t explain. I’ve found that disturbs many folks ... but I’ll admit it energizes me.

“I’ve come to realize there are dimensions of the Spirit’s ministry I have never tapped and [aspects] about which I know very little. I’m on a strong learning curve. I have witnessed a dynamic power in His presence that I long to know more of firsthand. I now have questions and a strong interest in many of the things of the Spirit I once felt were settled. To say it plainly, I am *hungry* for more of Him. I long to know God more deeply and more intimately.” (*Embraced by the Spirit*, pp. 25-26).

Can you identify with any of that? Does it disturb you to think that the Holy Spirit may do something we can’t explain? Something with which we may not be comfortable? Are you hungry for more of the Holy Spirit? I am. Do you desire to know God in the fullness of the Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – more deeply and more intimately? I do.

If you want to know and understand the person and work of the Holy Spirit better, the place to begin is the Bible – in particular, the teaching of Jesus on the Holy Spirit in the upper room recounted in John’s Gospel. It is remarkable how much teaching Jesus packed into the last night before His death.

### **THE HOLY SPIRIT IS GOD**

The first and most essential thing Jesus wants you to know about the Holy Spirit is that He (the Spirit) is God. He is the third person of the Trinity, equal in deity and dignity with God the Father and God the Son. As Francis Chan says, “He is not a lesser or different kind of Being than God the Father or God the Son” (*Forgotten God*, p. 70). Like the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit is fully God – which means that the Holy Spirit is eternally existing and perfectly holy. All the attributes of God apply to the Holy Spirit, because the Spirit is God.

The teaching of Jesus and, in fact, the witness of the Bible as a whole also confirm the truth that the Holy Spirit is not an impersonal force or power, not a commodity you can buy or sell, but a person. The Spirit is a “who,” not a “what;” a “he,” not an “it.” The Holy Spirit is a person who enjoys loving fellowship in the Godhead with the Father and the Son. The Spirit carries out His work in our lives in a personal way, and personally takes up residence in the life of every Christian.

John Stott has written that the Holy Spirit both *universalizes* and *internalizes* the presence of Jesus. You can see this from what Jesus says in verses 16 and 17. In His incarnate state, the presence of Jesus was limited to one place at one time. But the Holy Spirit, Jesus said, would be with His followers everywhere and always – forever (14:16). Not just for a season. Not just for a limited time. Not just on certain occasions. Not just when you’re at church or when

you're doing something spiritual. Always. Everywhere. Forever. Further, Jesus said, the Holy Spirit would not only be *with* His followers, He would actually live *in* us, dwelling in our hearts by faith (14:17). During the years of His life on earth, Jesus was Immanuel, God with us. Now, the Holy Spirit is God with us and God at work in us.

### **THE PARACLETE**

Perhaps the most distinctive thing about what Jesus says about the Holy Spirit in these chapters is the word He uses to describe the Spirit and His work. It is the word *Paraclete*, which Jesus uses four times to refer to the Holy Spirit (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; and 16:7). It is translated "Comforter" in the King James Bible. In the NIV, it is "Counselor;" in the ESV, "Helper;" in *The Message*, "Friend." The basic meaning of the word *paraclete* is "a person summoned to one's aid" or "one who is called to come alongside as a helper or defender." It can refer to a counselor or advisor, a mediator or intercessor, a defense attorney or advocate in court. The apostle John uses the word in this last way in 1 John 2:1, where he says: "I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate (a *paraclete*) who speaks to the Father on our behalf – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One." In this instance, it is Jesus Himself who is our *Paraclete*. He is the One who comes to our aid and serves as our advocate.

Jesus,, however, focuses on the Holy Spirit as the *Paraclete*. Gordon Dalbey points out that *paraclete* was a term used by soldiers in ancient Greece. "Soldiers went into battle in pairs," he says, "so when the enemy attacked, they could draw together back-to-back, covering each other's blind side. Each one was the other's *paraclete*" (*Healing the Masculine Soul*).

Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to us as "another *Paraclete*" to take His place, a *Paraclete* to be with us permanently, and not only with us but alive and at work in us as our Counselor and Advocate and Helper.

Here is a story that I hope will help to put some "skin" on this idea of a *paraclete*. You probably already know at least parts of this story. On the advice of Dr. Alexander Graham Bell (does his name ring a bell?), the parents of Helen Keller sent for a teacher from the Perkins Institution for the Blind in Boston. A 19-year-old young woman named Anne Sullivan was chosen for the task of instructing six-year-old Helen. It was the beginning of a close and lifelong friendship between them. (Not that it was all rosy, for it wasn't.). By means of a manual alphabet, Anne "spelled" into Helen's hand words such as *doll* or *puppy*. Two years later, Helen was reading and writing Braille fluently. At the age of ten, Helen learned different sounds by placing her fingers on her teacher's larynx and "hearing" the vibrations. Later Helen went to Radcliffe College, where Anne spelled the lectures into Helen's hand. After graduating with honors, Helen decided to devote her life to helping the blind and deaf. She wrote many books and articles, and traveled around the world giving talks. Since not everyone could understand her speech, Anne often translated her talks for her.

When Anne died in 1936, it marked the end of a relationship lasting nearly fifty years. About her lifelong teacher and friend, Helen wrote: "My teacher is so near to me that I scarcely

think of myself apart from her. I feel that her being is inseparable from my own, and that the footsteps of my life are in hers. All the best of me belongs to her – there is not a talent or an inspiration or a joy in me that has not been awakened by her loving touch.”

It is an imperfect analogy, of course, but as one writer suggests, in many ways, what Anne Sullivan was to Helen Keller, the Holy Spirit is to the Christian believer (Van Morris, [www.preachingtoday.com](http://www.preachingtoday.com)). Unlike Anne Sullivan, though, our *Paraclete* will be with us always. Forever. You can count on this: Our *Paraclete*, the Holy Spirit, will never die.

### **THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH**

Jesus also refers to the Holy Spirit several times as “the Spirit of truth” – first in John 14:17, a second time in 15:26, and again in 16:13. As “the Spirit of truth,” the Holy Spirit is our teacher. The Spirit gives us insight into the truth to help us “connect the dots” of our spiritual understanding, and reminds us of what Jesus did and said. In this role as “the Spirit of truth,” the Holy Spirit was behind the writing of the New Testament, superintending the process of its writing, equipping and enabling the human instruments chosen by God to write as they were inspired and directed by the Holy Spirit, just as the same Spirit sovereignly guided the process of writing and compiling the Scriptures of the Old Testament over a period of a thousand years.

It is the Spirit’s role to make known God’s truth, to remind us of God’s truth, to bear witness to the truth of the gospel, and to guide us into a fuller understanding of the truth. The mission of the Spirit, as F. F. Bruce put it, is to make the message of Jesus explicit, so that the truth of the gospel is known.

### **TO ILLUMINE THE GLORY OF JESUS CHRIST**

But the primary mission of the Holy Spirit is to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus said: “He (the Spirit) will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you” (John 16:14). The Holy Spirit is not out to draw attention to Himself. He is out to make Jesus known in the fullness of His glory and grace. In this, J. I. Packer says, the Holy Spirit functions like a floodlight. The purpose of a floodlight is not to get itself noticed. Its purpose is not to draw attention to itself, but to focus attention on the building or object on which it is trained. Which, in the case of the Holy Spirit, is Jesus Christ, the second Person of the Trinity, the eternal Son of God, the one and only Savior of sinners, at whose name every knee will one day bow and every tongue will confess that He is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:10-11).

### **THE HOLY SPIRIT AS PROSECUTING ATTORNEY**

There is at least one more thing Jesus wants us to know about the Holy Spirit. In John 16:8-11, Jesus speaks of another role of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit, He says, acts as a prosecuting attorney who presents overwhelming and irrefutable evidence of the unbelieving world’s guilt and errors with regard to sin, righteousness, and judgment. Listen to what Jesus says in these verses: “When He (the *Paraclete*) comes, He will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin

and righteousness and judgment; in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world (Satan) now stands condemned.”

The Holy Spirit has come from the Father and the Son to convict the world of its sin and to call it to repentance. Not just “the world” but each one of us. Do you remember what happened after David committed adultery with Bathsheba and then tried to cover up his sin by arranging to have Bathsheba’s husband, Uriah, killed in battle? The Lord sent Nathan the prophet to confront David with his sin. (How would you like to have that job?) Like a prosecuting attorney, Nathan laid out the case before David and then said to him: “You are the man! You are the one who has done this!” And David was overwhelmed with a sense of his sin and guilt. (See 2 Samuel 11-12)

At its root, the world’s basic sin is its refusal to believe in Jesus as the true Son of God and the only Savior of sinners, and to live under God’s rule. That is the basic sin of everyone who refuses to trust in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. One essential part of the Holy Spirit’s work is to convict us of our sin, to show us our need for a Savior, and to point us to Jesus as the only One who can save us.

It is the work of the Holy Spirit as the divine prosecutor to expose our unrighteousness and to show where true righteousness is found – again, by pointing us to Jesus. And it is the work of the Holy Spirit to convict the world with regard to judgment, by showing that Satan, our archenemy, was judged and condemned at the cross.

Yes, the Holy Spirit has come to expose our sin and to show us our desperate need for a Savior. Mercifully, though, this is not all that the Spirit does. The Spirit draws us to the Lord Jesus Christ in repentance and faith. The Spirit regenerates our hearts and makes us spiritually alive. The Spirit takes up residence in our hearts and lives *in* us. The Spirit gives us the assurance of our salvation, our new relationship with God, and our future inheritance in God’s eternal kingdom. The Holy Spirit has come not only to bring us to salvation but to sanctify us as well. The work of the Holy Spirit involves making us holy, by changing us on the inside so that Christ is formed in us – to the glory of His name. The Spirit also gives us gifts – *charismata* – for service, to be used for the common good and for the glory of Christ.

### **WITH US AND IN US**

In John 16:7, Jesus tells His disciples that His imminent departure is really in their best interest (and ours). “Unless I go away,” He says, “the Counselor (*Paraclete*) will not come to you. But if I go, I will send Him to you.” The coming of the Holy Spirit was contingent on the return of Jesus to the Father in heaven. Though Jesus is no longer physically present with us, He is spiritually present in the fullness of His grace and glory in the person and work of the Holy Spirit, whose coming to the church at Pentecost, and whose indwelling presence and power in our lives right now, we celebrate today.

The Holy Spirit – the *Paraclete*, the Comforter, the Counselor, the Spirit of truth, the Prosecutor from heaven – has come. He is here right now. He is with us. He is with you.

And, if you are in Christ, if you have put your faith in Christ, the Holy Spirit is *in* you. Let Him have all of you. Let Him use you in any way He desires – even if it does shake you up a bit at first. And praise God for the gift of the Holy Spirit – the gift of Himself – to us.

Lord, let it be so, to the glory of Your name. Amen.