

THE SPIRIT AND THE CHURCH

The Spirit Brings Illumination

Questions for Personal Study

Re-read John 14-16 this week, and mark the sayings about the Spirit. Specifically look at John 14.25-31. Who does Jesus say the Spirit is? What 2 roles does Jesus say the Spirit will fulfill in this section? Have you experienced the Holy Spirit in these ways? How might the Spirit be doing these things without your awareness?

Questions for Study in Community

What does Jesus say the Spirit will do in John 14.25-31? What might that look like in your Missional Community? Does that make you anxious or nervous in any way? Why or why not? How can you as a MC cultivate room for the Spirit to teach & remind you? What changes do you need to make to live this out?

Questions for Staying on Mission

How does the Spirit as Illuminator equip us for making disciples? What fears or hesitations keep you from proclaiming the gospel? How does knowing you have everything in the Spirit undermine your fears? What steps can you take to make disciples in dependence on the Spirit?

Practical Thoughts on Welcoming the Spirit

Theologian and pastor J.I. Packer writes: The work of the Spirit in imparting this knowledge is called “illumination,” or enlightening. It is not a giving of new revelation, but a work within us that enables us to grasp and to love the revelation that is there before us in the biblical text as heard and read, and as explained by teachers and writers. Sin in our mental and moral system clouds our minds and wills so that we miss and resist the force of Scripture. God seems to us remote to the point of unreality, and in the face of God’s truth we are dull and apathetic. The Spirit, however, opens and unveils our minds and attunes our hearts so that we understand (Eph. 1:17-18; 3:18-19; 2 Cor. 3:14-16; 4:6). As by inspiration he provided Scripture truth for us, so now by illumination he interprets it to us. Illumination is thus the applying of God’s revealed truth to our hearts, so that we grasp as reality for ourselves what the sacred text sets forth.

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The Spirit: God’s Empowering Presence

Last week we looked at the context of Jesus’ teachings about the Spirit in John 14-16. Jesus is preparing his disciples for his coming death and resurrection, followed by his return to his Father. Jesus will no longer physically be present with his disciples, and in his absence, they will be responsible to continue his work. In particular, their job is to see to it that Jesus’ people continue to love one another radically and sacrificially, and that they continue to do the work Jesus began when he was with them.

Into this context, Jesus begins to promise the disciples that he will send another Helper, the Holy Spirit, who will more than compensate the disciples for the loss of Jesus’ physical presence. The Spirit is God’s Empowering Presence: This is who he is (God!), how we experience him (God’s Presence!), and his purpose in our lives (Empowering!). The Spirit of God has come to take up residence in the Church, making the presence of God a living reality among us as His Family, and empowering us to be disciple-making Missionaries in our city. The coming of the Spirit into Jesus’ disciples is what makes it possible for them to love one another and carry on his work.

Our study in John 14-16 must take place in this context! Jesus is not teaching about the role of the Spirit so that we can have better theology. He is not interested in you and I have a solid theoretical understanding of the role the Spirit is to play in our lives as a church! Jesus is telling his disciples - and us - exactly what we ought to expect the Spirit to do once Jesus is no longer physically present. This study is not about information, but about anticipation; this study is about us as a church being unreservedly open to the person and work of the Spirit among us.

What Do You Want?

So before we continue, take a moment to evaluate your own heart on this. Do you really *want* the Holy Spirit to come in and take control of your life? Do you want to submit to Jesus, be filled with the Spirit, and give your life to building Jesus’ Kingdom? Or are you content and comfortable being an individualis-

tic American consumer, wanting the Spirit's work in your life only to the degree that he blesses your pursuit of personal success? These are key questions, because Jesus promises his Spirit only to those who truly love Him, not to those who are basically using him for their own purposes.

In John 14.28, Jesus says, "You heard me say, '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, and the Father is greater than I." It is a tricky statement, but basically Jesus is pointing out that most disciples of Jesus want him for what he can do for them, not because they truly love him. If you really love Jesus, you are glad that he is not here, because his going away means the Spirit shows up to empower the church to glorify Jesus in the world! If Jesus were still here, we'd be off the hook; because Jesus is gone, each and every Christian has been given everything he or she needs to fully obey Jesus by loving one another and making disciples.

But what do we need? What are we lacking in this great responsibility, and how does the arrival of the Helper assist us? How does the Spirit empower the church to love Jesus more fully and obey him for consistently?

The Spirit Brings Illumination

In John 14.26, Jesus says that the Spirit will teach us all things and cause us to remember all that Jesus has said. Both roles are essential for us in loving Jesus, serving one another, and continuing the work of Jesus. This is the Spirit's role as "illuminator."

First of all, Jesus says the Spirit will "teach you all things." The word translated "teach" means that the Spirit will be our instructor, mentor, or guide. Jesus is saying that we have in the Spirit a perfect teacher. In 1 Corinthians 2.11-12, "No one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God." The Spirit of God gives to each believer, and to the church community, the ability to understand the deep things of God. This is particularly true of Scripture, but extends beyond the words of Scripture to actual knowledge of God himself. The Spirit teaches us about who God is, what he is like, and what he wants from us as his people. The Spirit is constantly wanting to disciple us.

Secondly, Jesus specifically says that the Spirit's role is to "bring to remembrance" all that Jesus has said. There were many things that the disciples did

not understand in what Jesus was teaching them. In particular, they did not understand his teachings about the crucifixion and resurrection. Once the Spirit came, everything became clear. The Spirit will remind the disciples of all that Jesus said his death and resurrection would mean, and this is what they proclaimed as the gospel!

You Already Have What You Need

If this is true, that God has sent his Spirit to teach, mentor, disciple, and remind us of all that Jesus has done, what difference does it make? How would believing this change the way we live, particularly as we love one another and work together to make disciples?

If we are going to love one another well, we need to remember. We need the Spirit to remind us, again and again, of the cost that Jesus paid to save us. We need to be disciplined by the Spirit in how to love one another well. We need to listen and learn from the Spirit so that he can teach us when and how to love one another. In dependence on the Spirit, you can love the unlovely, and you can love in ways that are costly and messy. The Spirit wants to teach you how to love in ways that you don't even now think are possible!

If we are going to make disciples, we are utterly dependent on the Spirit. We can't make this happen on our own! And we are unfortunately so dependent on humans that we've forgotten the power of the Spirit to work through us. We need to realize that we have everything we need in the Spirit, and stop making excuses for why we can't teach, lead, or admonish others. Jesus has already equipped you to make disciples, and he is urging you to step out and trust that his Spirit will do the work through you! You already have everything you need, so you have no excuse! Every disciple of Jesus is fully equipped to be a disciple maker, regardless of how long you have known Jesus or how much Bible you understand! Do you believe that?

And in the end, to know that Jesus loves us so much that he not only lived the life we could never live and died the death we deserved to die, but that he also then sent his Spirit so that we'd never be alone and so that we'd have access to all the teaching and learning we can handle, is reason to worship and praise and love him all the more. He is a glorious Savior who richly provides for our needs. Let's lean on the Spirit together, and faithfully respond to his leadership in our church.