



A SPIRIT FOR THE REST OF US

WHY BOTHER WITH THE SPIRIT?

John 14: 28-31

You heard me say, 'I am going away and I am coming back to you.' If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe. I will not speak with you much longer, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold on me, but the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me.

Sermon Summary:

When Jesus told the Twelve that he was going away, the shock must have been devastating. At such times, we shouldn't expect the apostles to be on their best behavior. They are wounded and reeling and confused.

Look into their hearts on this final evening and you will find some very raw emotions. They feel abandoned by Jesus, left behind while he goes back to the Father. They feel overwhelmed by the mission he has left in their hands—they know they are unequal to the task. They are about to watch the hatred of the world vented on their Master, but already they have seen enough of that to be afraid of what the world does to truth-tellers. They recognize that, for the Kingdom to come, hearts have to change ... people must confront their own sin and failure ... and they are uncomfortably aware of their own inability to make that happen. And, in light of the news that Jesus is leaving, they feel too small to contain the gospel and the God it proclaims.

Do you ever feel such things? If you do, you are in good company. In fact, these feelings are not the exception but the rule for those who dare to follow Jesus. We miss our Master and long to be with him. We are stunned by the scope of the mission he has given us to accomplish. We are fearful of a hostile world and powerless to effect the heart-change the world needs. We are unable to get our arms around a too-big-God and a too-big-gospel.

The solution Jesus offered the Twelve on this night (and the solution he offers us) is the Holy Spirit. In five powerful "Paraclete Passages," Jesus promises that a Spirit is coming who will keep them company forever, equip them for the work they must do, keep up their courage as they testify to the world, convict the world of its need for a Savior, and expand/deepen/mature disciples so they can contain the glory of God.

Those same promises are for us. That same solution is ours.

Reflection Questions:

1. "I often feel lonely, overwhelmed, fearful, underpowered, and small in my walk of faith." Do you agree or disagree with this statement? How strongly do you feel about it? Why?
2. "I'm looking for a *trustable* approach to the Spirit. I am not willing to abandon Scripture, the Gospel, and what I know of Jesus in exchange for mere signs and wonders. But I also need more than just words in the Bible." Agree? Why or why not?



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Study Questions:

If we *don't* bother with the Spirit, that leaves us with a Spiritless faith. It leaves us stuck in a no man's land between our commitment to Christ on the one hand and a dearth of spiritual power on the other. Paul describes exactly this kind of existence in **Romans 7**. Read that chapter carefully and then think through the following:

1. Paul talks a great deal in this passage about the *sinful nature*. He's not referring to our love of sin or our eagerness to sin but to the *power* of sin. We can't *not* sin. Sin controls us no matter how much we want to live differently. Read through these verses again and notice how Paul sees sin as a "power." (See vs 5, 8, 11, 13-14, 17, 23.)
2. Notice too that, "under the law," we are *caught* in this condition. Doesn't matter what we want to do. Doesn't matter what we hate doing. So long as we are under the power of the *sinful nature*, we will sin. Period. Once more, go through these verses and write out the phrases Paul uses to underscore this point. (See vs 5, 15-23).
3. This is not a happy way to live. Paul sees it as misery—for the person who really wants to please God but cannot find the power to do so. What words does Paul select through this passage to describe just how miserable this kind of powerless, impotent living is? (Words like "death," "deceived," etc.) Write them out and reflect on them.
4. How familiar is Paul's description? Could these words describe your own spiritual life? Do you ever feel "unspiritual" (vs 14), "a slave to sin," not understanding why you keep doing the things you hate (vs 15)? Do you ever feel sin is "living" in you, that you are trapped by its power. Do you ever feel like Paul's "wretched man" (vs 24)?
5. This is not how Christians were meant to live. This is not the necessary condition of believers as long as they live in this world. Paul will say so emphatically in Romans 8. But he gives us a hint here. Notice vs 4, 6, 24, 25. Write out your understanding of these verses. What does Paul mean by "died to the law" and "belong to another" (vs 4)? What does he mean by "dying to what once bound us" and "we have been released from the law" (vs 6)? And, especially, how does Christ "rescue me from this body of death" (vs 24-25)?

Conclusions:

In this chapter, we meet a man who wants to do good, who hates evil, who longs to obey God's law. But he is caught, trapped, imprisoned by the power of sin. Paul insists that something more is needed than good motives and good effort to live the life of God. Something is required to break the power of sin and replace our *sinful nature*. What is that "something"? Peek into Romans 8 and hear Paul offer an alternative: to be controlled by the Spirit.