

# Comforter, Helper, Counselor

## *The Greatest of Gifts*

*Many are the gifts of God, but none is greater than the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is a Comforter, Helper, and Counselor for the committed follower of Jesus Christ.*

Before His death, Jesus promised His disciples that He would not leave them as orphans. "And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever" (John 14:16). This "Comforter," Jesus said, would guide the disciples into "all truth" (16:13). The Greek word *parakletos* is rendered "Comforter" in the King James Version, "Helper" and "Counselor" in modern English versions. The term denotes the Helper or Counselor who is always there to give special care in times of need.

But the Holy Spirit is more than a Comforter, Helper, and Counselor. The Spirit is also an Advocate and an Encourager. From this we can clearly see and understand that the Holy Spirit is the representative of the Son Jesus Christ, even as the Son was the representative of God the Father.

The expression "another Counselor" means "another counselor of the same kind as the first." This signifies that Jesus was the first Counselor (see 1 John 2:1), and that the Spirit would be the same kind of Counselor. Therefore, even though Jesus is not here in the flesh, the Holy Spirit is here and is our constant companion to guide, help, and empower every convert of Christ for the tasks ahead. Jesus identified this wonderful Counselor as the source that leads into all truth, for it is the Spirit that reveals the truth about God.

At first blush, we might muse over how it would be if Jesus could be with us on earth today as He was over 2,000 years ago. If we lived near Him and saw Him frequently, wouldn't that make our life a lot simpler? We could ask Him about all those difficult decisions we have to make, such as job changes, house buying, Bible questions, or perhaps just ask Him to cheer us up or heal us from the flu bug. Sounds great, doesn't it? A Savior we could see and touch, as well as hear and talk to. I am sure we have all had thoughts of that nature. But it isn't that way now, is it?

Jesus, of course, has left the earth. "I leave the world and go to the Father," He announced at the close of His earthly ministry (John 16:28). "I go away to Him who sent Me," He stated (John 16:5).

On the other hand, He might not solve our problems exactly the way we would like. He might remind us that we chose our own vocation, advising us to be patient and work it out. Remember, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest" (Ecclesiastes 9:10). Why did you buy that new car when you have such a high mortgage

payment to come up with each month? If you would eat your veggies and get to bed at a reasonable time you wouldn't get sick. Don't be downcast! God won't put anything on you that you can't handle; besides, its character building. Well, maybe He wouldn't be that tough on us, would He? Anyway, He is gone now. We now worship and serve a God who is not visible to us.

When we pray to Him, we do not see Him or hear Him; there is only silence. We may possibly have to wait for an answer to our prayers perhaps even wait for a long time. We may be tempted to doubt whether our prayers have been heard, whether God cares, whether he still intervenes today, whether this, whether that,

All this tests our faith in a way it could not be tested if Jesus were bodily here among us. All this is for a divine purpose being worked out here below for our good.

In the first chapter of Acts, we find the account of Jesus' ascension into heaven, leaving His disciples—His church—behind. He had told them, "I go to My Father and you see Me no more" (John 16:10).

Oh woe for us? To the contrary; we are better off! Jesus Himself said so! Read it in John 16:7. Jesus told His disciples, "It is to your advantage that I go away." How can this be to our advantage? What did He mean by that? How could it be to our advantage that He left? Read on: "For if I do not go away, the *Comforter* will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send him to you." What is this "Comforting Helper," and why is it to our advantage that Jesus went away to send it to us?

### **What is the Comforter?**

When Jesus said these things, these events had not yet transpired. The Comforter had not yet come. Although Jesus was Himself the great Comforter while He was on earth, the task of being the Comforter eternally was the role of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus was a Comforter to the woman who had bled for twelve years. He said, "Daughter, be of good comfort for thy faith hath made thee whole and the woman was made whole from that hour" (Matthew 9:22). She said within herself, "If I may but touch His garment, I shall be whole" (verse 21). But Jesus explained that it was not His clothing that had healed her; rather, her faith in reaching out to the one Person who could heal her had allowed that healing to take place. Not only did she have faith, but she had also placed her faith in the right Person. At that moment, she was delivered from her bleeding and her pain.

On another occasion, blind Bartimaeus was told, "Be of good comfort, rise; He calleth thee" (Mark 10:49). Blindness was considered a curse from God for sin (John 9:2), but

Jesus refuted this idea when He told the people to call the man to Him. Bartimaeus threw aside his coat, jumped up, and came to Jesus. Obviously, Jesus already knew what Bartimaeus wanted, but Jesus wanted Bartimaeus to state His need and, in the process, declare His faith. "And Jesus said unto Him, Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole. And immediately he received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way" (Mark 10:51-52).

Jesus fulfilled prophecy when He comforted the people, for His mission was, in part, "to comfort all that mourn" (Isaiah 61:2). But Jesus' fulfillment of this prophecy was only partial; it was temporary while He was on earth. His teachings and His work pointed to a future fulfillment: the coming of the Comforter!

In Nazareth, Jesus went to a synagogue on the Sabbath where He was given the book (scroll) of Isaiah to read aloud: "When He had opened the book [scroll], He found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; He hath sent me to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:17-19). The Lord indeed preached the gospel to the poor, and He did heal many people; thus, He fulfilled a portion of the prophetic word of Isaiah 61.

How do we know that? Luke 4:20-21 says, "And He closed the book [scroll], and He gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all of them that were in the synagogue were fastened on Him. And He began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears."

Remember that Isaiah didn't stop after the words "to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, "but he continued in one breath, "and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all them that mourn" (verse 2). The ultimate comfort for the remnant of Israel will be fulfilled after the Great Tribulation.

"Opening" the scroll meant to find the correct passage to read. Scrolls did not have chapter headings and numbered verses as our Bibles do. After the synagogue attendant gave the Isaiah scroll to Jesus, Jesus had to unroll it. To be able to open and unroll the scroll to the passage Jesus wanted to read was no small feat, considering that there were no chapter headings and that the book of Isaiah is relatively lengthy, taking up sixty-six chapters in our Bibles.

Clearly, Jesus was claiming to be the Messiah who could bring the Kingdom of God that had been promised for so long, but His First Advent was not His time for judgment. The people were amazed at His teaching.

When Jesus was here on earth, He was a limitless Source of strength, inspiration, and instruction to those who were with Him and those who would accept Him. He was in every sense of the word a true Helper. But He dwelt with them only a short while, after which He stated, "I go to My Father." He added, however, "And I will pray the Father,

and He will give you another Comforter [or "Helper"], that He may abide with you forever" (John 14:12,16).

Of course, this other Comforter, which remains forever with the converted, is the Holy Spirit—the "Spirit of truth" (verse 17). It is the method God has chosen by which He is able to be in one place and exercise His power, influence, and omniscience anywhere else, no matter what the distance from Him.

When Jesus was with His disciples prior to His ascension, He told His disciples "that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father" (Acts 1:4). This points back to Luke 24:49. He had spoken about this before. "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth" (John 14:16-17, New International Version).

The momentous occasion when the Holy Spirit was sent was the Day of Pentecost. For the first time, the Holy Spirit was made available to more than a few individuals.

Accompanied by miraculous signs, its arrival inaugurated the New Testament Church age (Acts 2). Peter explained, while addressing the assembled crowd witnessing this marvel, that Jesus, "being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured out this which you now see and hear" (verse 33, New King James Version).

### **How is God With Us?**

Jesus in no way deserted His followers or forsook them. He told them, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20, NKJV). "I will not leave you orphans," He promised; "I will come to you. A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me" (John 14:18-19, NKJV). Also, Christ stated that if a person truly loves and obeys Him, "I will love Him and manifest Myself to him" (verse 21), and both Jesus and the Father "will come to Him and make [Their] home with him" (verse 23).

Jesus, in this same discourse, explained that He was leaving and that His disciples would see Him no longer (John 16:10). Jesus also explained in John 14:25-26, "These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things."

That is the answer! It is *through the Holy Spirit*, the other Helper, that God is now with us. We see Him not with our physical eyesight, but with the eye of faith. The apostle Paul referred to this truth when he wrote that being "absent from the Lord," as we are now, "we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:6-7).

It is by praying to God on a daily basis that we strengthen our faith. We must also spend time drinking in of His Word so we will be able to withstand and resist Satan, defeat doubt, and overcome our own carnal nature. To do this we must remain focused on Jesus Christ and God's Kingdom to come.

The Christian life is a struggle, especially in today's world, Knowing this we can see how blessed we are and why we should express our love and appreciation to God for this great gift of the Spirit of Truth!

### **A New Mind**

Over the course of many years, most of us have been ruled by our natural minds. The human mind, which the Bible sometimes refers to as the "heart," is subject to selfish desires and passions. It is in these minds of ours that we make decisions and determine courses of action. The mind refers to our mindset, our goals.

Choosing to let the sinful nature be in control will result in death, both spiritual and physical. "For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace" (Romans 8:6). Choosing to let the Holy Spirit work freely in our minds, unobstructed by the works of the flesh, will bring us full life on earth, eternal life, and peace with God.

In other scriptures, we find the characteristics of a mind under the Spirit's influence. It will be a mind directed toward truth, aware of the Spirit's presence (John 14:17). It will be a mind seeking to please God the Father and Jesus Christ (Galatians 6:8).

God is not interested in eternally saving our mortal bodies. Salvation centers on and is concerned with the mind, the human spirit. Once that is in order, God can supply an immortal, spirit-composed body in a resurrection.

The ability of the human mind to make decisions and judgments is called free moral agency, It is a God-given ability that every person has. The critical question is, By whose guidelines and standards do we make our decisions: our own or God's? On what do we base our decisions? Feelings, prejudices, lusts, or peer pressure? Or are we wise enough to follow God's Word?

This is the vital reason to have the Holy Spirit in our mind. Our natural mind must give way to a spiritual mind. We must be transformed—"converted"—by the renewing of our minds. "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable and perfect, will of God" (Romans 12:2).

When we offer our entire self to God, a change will happen in our relationship to the world. We have been called by God to a different lifestyle than what the world offers

with its behaviors and customs, which are usually selfish and often corrupting. "Who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father" (Galatians 1:4).

A converted person actually has two minds: the natural, fleshly mind and the spiritual mind. These two are in constant conflict with each other.

Paul, warning the Christians of Galatia to refrain from the corrupting works of the flesh, described this internal battle this way: "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law [that is, you are not under the *power of the law* to condemn you as a sinner, or law-breaker]" (Galatians 5:17-18).

In our walk with Jesus Christ, we are to be stamping out—putting to death—the carnal mind. "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry" (Colossians 3:5). By following God's Word, our spiritual mind will grow and develop.

As believers we must adopt the same attitude or frame of mind that was found in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Many people feel they can't control their moods or attitudes. But Paul doesn't accept the fact that Spirit-filled Christians are slaves to their attitudes. Christ Jesus had a particular attitude. We must allow the Holy Spirit to develop the same attitude of Christ in our mind, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus," Paul urged (Philippians 2:5).

We can't accomplish this on our own. We need the constant supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. "For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and *the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ*" (Philippians 1:19).

Believe it or not, God and the believers live in one another. The presence of the Spirit in each believer's life makes this possible. The Christian lives in the Spirit and the Spirit lives in the Christian. An analogy makes this clear. People must live in the air so that the air can come into them (1 John 1:24).

### **Christ Within Us**

When Jesus was here on earth, He could only directly influence those immediately around Him. And even His disciples, with whom He had continual contact for three and one-half years, were still without real understanding at the end of those years. Why? He was right in their midst. True. But He was not *in* them! And that fact is what makes the difference. For us to receive salvation, Christ must be formed *in* us. "My little children of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you" (Galatians 4:19).

The indwelling Christ gives believers assurance that they will share in His glory in His eternal Kingdom. Believers are in Christ; Christ is in them; therefore, believers can look forward to sharing Christ's glory. "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27).

The Holy Spirit is not separate from God. It is part of God. "Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Corinthians 3:17).

Christ's death bought freedom for anyone who believes. He frees us from sin and condemnation. Jesus frees us from the evil powers of the age. Christ frees us from the same mental veil that covered many of the Jews to whom Paul was preaching. "But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which veil is done away in Christ" (2 Corinthians 3:14).

These scriptures makes clear how Jesus, while still in heaven, "absent" from us, can come and dwell in humans anywhere on earth, through the Holy Spirit, changing them, converting them. If you have the Holy Spirit, God is working in you.

Paul wrote to the Ephesians that God wanted them "to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith...that you may be filled with all the fullness of God" (Ephesians 3:16-19).

To be filled with all the fullness of God should be the goal of every converted person. It doesn't happen all at once. It is a process. We should be striving to reach "the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13). If we are yielding to Jesus Christ, allowing Him to direct our decision-making processes, allowing His mind to replace our own natural mind, then we "are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Corinthians 3:18).

What a wonderful work Christ will have accomplished in us. At the end of our physical life, we have the assurance that in the resurrection we will be given a spiritual body and become a member of the God family. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2).

We are already in this life God's children. Yet God's people have a future, as John further explained, that we are unable to even imagine what we will be like when Christ returns. We do not know all the specifics, but we do know that when Jesus comes, we will be like Him. This gives us a hint at what this future glory will be like. Christ will be revealed and His people will be like Him, for they will see Him as He really is. The Greek word for "see" involves more than merely seeing reflections of light with the physical eyes; it means "perceiving," "recognizing," even "appreciating."

If we are to know one another, we must share similar experiences. Therefore, in order to see Jesus as He really is, believers must experience the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings.

## **Partakers of the Divine Nature**

Warnings about the perilous last days were common among the leaders of the early church. Paul's reference to the "last days" was filled with a sense of urgency, probably prompted by the harsh difficult times he himself was experiencing. His warning deserves our full attention.

The "last days" began after Jesus' resurrection, when the Holy Spirit came upon the believers at Pentecost. The last days will continue until Christ's Second Coming. Both Jesus and Paul warned of the state of depravity that would be in the world at the close of the age. "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come, For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away" (2 Timothy 3:1-3).

The "works of the flesh," listed in Galatians, make up the carnal mind that all humans have to one degree or another. Paul contrasted the desires of the sinful nature and the works of the Spirit-filled life. "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:19-21). "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law" (Galatians 5:22-23). No part of the carnal will can be carried over into eternity. Only that part of us that reflects the fruit of the Spirit is going to live forever.

Therefore, it is to our advantage to be filled with the fruit of the Spirit as much as we can during our brief lifetime upon this earth. Remember, Jesus has not left us alone, for the divine power He shares with His Father is the power that raised Jesus from the dead. Christ's power manifests itself in the lives of Christians, for that power gives believers everything needed for living a godly life.

The power to grow spiritually in grace and knowledge doesn't come from within us, but from God. "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18). Because we don't have the resources to live as He requires, God gives us everything we need for godly living, to keep us from sin, and to help us live for Him. "According as His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might



be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (2 Peter 1:3-4).

### **God's Great Gift**

Consider the characteristics of the divine nature mentioned in 2 Peter 1:5-7: faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. We must ask ourselves to what degree these characteristics dwell in us.

Because of God's great gift, the Holy Spirit, and our promised destiny, we are duty bound to make every effort to apply these benefits and promises to our lives by working toward a standard of high moral living. While Christ gives the power and the divine nature, believers must make use of that power by making every effort to set aside their sinful desires and actively seek the qualities Peter describes.

Faith is mentioned first because without it Christians are no different from others who are in the world. The faith Peter referred too is faith in Christ, the faith that brings them into the family of God.

But we are not to stop at faith alone. Peter knew, like James, that faith without works is dead. Their faith was to produce a life of moral excellence.

That life of moral excellence should lead to knowing God better. "Knowledge," as used here, refers not to the knowledge of God that leads to salvation; rather, here *gnosis* is that knowledge that leads to wisdom and discernment that enables us to live godly lives (Ephesians 5:17; Philippians 1:9; Hebrews 5:14).

Knowing God leads to self-control, a word used only here and in Acts 24:25 and Galatians 5:23 (as one of the fruits of the Spirit). Self-control refers to mastery over sinful human desires in every aspect of life. We know from Romans 8:13 and Galatians 5:22-23 that Christians have the Holy Spirit's help to gain self-control.

Self-control will lead us to patient endurance, the ability to remain steadfast even in the face of suffering or evil without giving up one's faith.

Such endurance leads to godliness. Godliness was the primary word for "religion" and referred to a person's correct attitudes toward God and people, usually referring to performing obligatory duties such as, "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world" (James 1:27). Here in 2 Peter 1:3, the word describes an awareness of God in all of life, a lifestyle that exemplifies Christ and is empowered by Him. "According as His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and *godliness*, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue."

If godliness includes right attitudes toward others, then godliness should lead to love for other Christians. It is an especially intense love that considers others as brothers and sisters. "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently" (1 Peter 1:22).

Showing love for our brothers and sisters should translate into genuine love for others. While Christians must exhibit love for other believers, their love must also go deeper than mere affection. That affection should grow into the kind of love that always puts others first, seeking their highest good. The Greek word *agape* refers to self-sacrificial love.

While these eight qualities should be a part of our life, they are not static. We don't just possess these eight qualities; instead, we must *grow* in them by practicing them in this life.

The Spirit is a once-and-for-all identification that gives us continued assurance that we are God's children, entitled to His riches and goodness, now as well as in eternity.

The Holy Spirit had been promised in the Old Testament. "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions" (Joel 2:28). It was also promised by Jesus to His disciples: "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" (John 14:26).

After Christ returned to His Father, He would be spiritually present everywhere through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit came upon all who believed in Jesus. Believers received the Holy Spirit when they accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Savior.

The word "guarantee" was once used to describe a down payment, promising that the buyer would complete the transaction and pay the full amount. The Holy Spirit is God's guarantee that He will give us everything He promised. He is the first payment of all the treasures that will be ours because He has purchased us to be His own people. The presence of the Holy Spirit in us demonstrates the genuineness of our faith, proves we are God's children, and, at the same time, secures for us eternal life. "[A]fter that ye believed [in Christ], ye were *sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise*, Which is the *earnest* [down payment] of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of His glory" (Ephesians 1:13-14).

Yes, it is true, we do not see and hear Jesus with our physical senses. We do not have Him dwelling bodily with us. We are now absent from Him. We in this church age have a unique opportunity to build faith. What is important now is, whether present or absent, we are well pleasing to Him. "Wherefore we labour, that whether present or absent, we may be accepted of Him" (2 Corinthians 5:9).

We must be in a continual state of thankfulness for our calling in Jesus Christ, and for the Comforter, Helper, and Counselor, that is our guarantee that we will be in God's Eternal Kingdom. It is the Greatest of Gifts!

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