

86 - The Spirit of Truth

John 15:18-27; 16:13-15

There's a great difference between being informed and conformed. Being informed means to receive knowledge. Our minds learn something we didn't know. But to be conformed involves being changed from one thing into another. It's what happens to a lump of clay when it's pushed into a mold. It takes on an entirely different appearance; one that was determined by someone else. First the clay has to be moistened with water. Then it's kneaded until it becomes soft and pliable, and finally it's pressed into a mold and allowed to harden until it retains the image even after the mold is removed. God's plan for each of us is not only to inform us, but to conform us until we become like Jesus. Listen, "For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined [to become] conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the first-born among many brethren..." (Ro 8:29).

That means, before God made the world He knew those who would become righteous by faith. That means He knew your name and mine long before we were born, and decided way back then what kind of person we would become. His desire was to form a great family made up of people whose character, and even glory, was like that of His only begotten Son. That means He predestined us to become morally pure, selfless, faithful, bold, and full of the Holy Spirit. Like that lump of clay, He intends to press each one of us into the mold of His Son. And you'll notice that He doesn't ask our opinion or seek our permission, though it's true we can resist the process until it becomes very painful and takes a long time. But we can't change the outcome; not if we're His children, and frankly, who would want to? He won't change the unique way He has designed us. He loves variety, and places it in everything He creates. But when it comes to our character and the direction of our lives there is only one mold: His beloved Son.

At that moment, somewhere in Jerusalem on Passover night, as Jesus was speaking to His disciples, that group of men did not look like a fearless band of missionaries about to carry the gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth. Not one of them was bold enough to stir up all the persecution Jesus was warning them about. They looked like eleven frightened people wondering what was going to happen to them if Jesus really left them as He said He would. But Jesus was able to look beyond that moment. He saw the change that would take place in them after they were baptized with the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. So He confidently assured them, "When the Helper (Paraklete) comes, whom I will send to you from beside the Father, the Spirit of Truth, who comes from beside the Father, that One will bear witness about Me..." (literal).

And then He added this, "... and you will also bear witness that you [have been] with Me from the beginning" (literal). He was so sure that they would boldly go out and tell the world about Him, that He knew that they would bring upon themselves the persecution He had been describing. Why could He be so sure? He knew the plan. The Father had predestined them to be conformed into His image. That's why He would send "the Spirit of Truth."

Preparing for persecution

- DBS (Sun-Weds)

The Spirit of Truth

Jesus called the Holy Spirit, "the Spirit of Truth." In a biblical context, the word truth is not a philosophical word, it's practical. It describes those who faithfully keep the promises that were made in a covenant. God is true because He keeps His covenant promises and always acts in harmony with His revealed character. People are true when they keep the promises they make to God and one another, and when their character aligns with God's character. So Jesus called the Holy Spirit "the Spirit of Truth" because the Spirit's assignment is to indwell Jesus' disciples and to enable us to "do truth" (Jn 3:21). That means to obey God's commands, to keep our promises, and to have our character molded into Jesus' godly character. And Jesus says the Spirit will do this by "testifying" (bearing witness) to us about Him. When the Holy Spirit is at work, He will teach us and remind us of what Jesus did and said, He will testify to the truth about Jesus, and He will guide us back onto the path of becoming like Him if we go astray.

The Spirit's assignment

Jesus said He would ask the Father to send the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:16, 17) to be our Helper (Paraklete). On that final evening He mentioned four different ways the Spirit conforms us into the image of Jesus. Let's try to understand each one.

1. He will teach you (Jn 14:26)

Jesus said, "He will teach you all things." In other words, God has sent the Holy Spirit to us with the specific assignment of helping us understand the truths God revealed to us through His Word and His Son. The Spirit has not been given to us to satisfy our curiosities about things that don't matter. But when it comes to important truths, He very much wants to explain them to us at deeper and deeper levels. When you and I read the Word we can be absolutely sure God wants us to understand what we're reading. There are very few things He will hide from us. We have become His children, and therefore it is His will that we learn to think like Him and understand spiritual matters (1Co 12:1). Paul described the process this way, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds..." (Ro 12:2). And the main way our minds are renewed is by having the Spirit explain to us what Jesus taught. In Jesus we have the highest revelation of the nature and purpose of God. When He speaks we hear God speak. When He acts we watch God act. That's why the Holy Spirit will always return our thoughts back to Jesus. He's the mold.



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2. He will remind you (Jn 14:26)
Jesus told His disciples, the Holy Spirit will “bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.” Years later, John wrote a letter in which he warned believers about false teachers. Listen to what he said:
“As for you, the anointing which you received abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but His anointing teaches you about all things” (1Jn 2:27).
He wasn’t saying the church has no need of godly teachers to help explain the Word, but he was warning people to never give another human the final control over what you believe. He told them, God has placed His Spirit of Truth within you, and He will confirm to you that which is true. When you hear the truth you will recognize it, not necessarily because it makes logical sense to your brain, but because it aligns with something Jesus said.
3. He will testify to you (Jn 15:26, 27)
The Holy Spirit will not only explain and remind, Jesus said He will also “testify about Me,” meaning He will actively confirm the truth about Jesus with signs following and/or the awareness of His presence. When humans obey Jesus’ commands there will be a divine response. When humans faithfully proclaim Jesus there will come divine presence and activity to prove that what was said is accurate. This confirmation can take many forms, but it means that if what we are doing or saying is true, one way or another, God will show up to indicate His approval.
4. He will guide you (Jn 16:13)
Here’s a wonderful promise that captures this idea of the Spirit guiding us “into all truth.” Through the prophet Isaiah, the Lord described how He would care for His people when the Messiah comes. He said,
“...your Teacher will no longer hide Himself, but your eyes will behold your Teacher. Your ears will hear a word behind you, ‘This is the way, walk in it,’ whenever you turn to the right or to the left” (Isa 30:20, 21).
By turning right or left, He means turning aside from the straight path of God’s ways (Dt 5:31, 32). There are many tools the Spirit can use to guide us. There are gifts of the Spirit such as the word of knowledge, the word of wisdom, prophecy or discernment (1Co 12:8-10). The gift of discernment helps us to identify what is true or false; it alerts us to a lie, or shows us the spiritual source behind a situation or a teaching. The Spirit can produce in us an inner grieving of the conscience when we do or are about to do what’s wrong. Or He may encourage to do what’s right if we are wavering. At times He will point out a verse of Scripture and show us how it applies to us. And sometimes He uses what you might call “living parables.” He suddenly speaks to us, in the moment, through something we see or hear, and that often stirs an immediate conversation with the Lord. And the memory of it may linger in us for many years.

However He guides us, we are promised that He will always be working from within us to lead us into all truth. We will never be alone. The Spirit of Truth will be within us to correct us, encourage us, confirm truth or expose a lie, speak to us through His supernatural gifts, or whisper to us in a still, small voice. He will always be pressing us, like clay, into the image of Jesus Christ.

How do I receive the Spirit of Truth?

When Jesus spoke of the Spirit of Truth he always promised His disciples that they would receive a powerful indwelling that would change them. That promise arrived on the Day of Pentecost. Jesus called it a “baptism with the Holy Spirit” (Ac 1:4, 5). And after it happened to him, Peter stood up and invited everyone who believed in Jesus to receive the same blessing. He said,
“Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself” (Ac 2:38, 39).

It wasn’t only those eleven frightened men who needed the “Spirit of Truth.” We all need Him, not as a vague theological truth, but as a powerful active presence dwelling within us. God wants every one of His children to have this gift. He clearly promised that He will give this baptism with the Holy Spirit to every person, young or old, who comes to Him through faith in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins. But there is also a human side to this process. God will give the Spirit, but we must receive Him. He won’t force Himself upon us. We must invite Him to take up residence within us. And when He does, He sets right to work, conforming us into the image of God’s beloved Son, Jesus.

Questions

- 1) Think of a time when the Holy Spirit cautioned you before you did something wrong. What did that feel like? Did you actually stop, or did you press past His warning and do it anyway?
- 2) Think of a truth the Holy Spirit has revealed to you. Something you didn’t understand, and then through one way or another, He explained it. How did it happen?
- 3) Think of a time when the Holy Spirit alerted you that something you were hearing or reading was not true. How did you know? What did you do?