

THAT OTHER HELPER

by Ray C. Stedman

One of the social phenomena of our times is the seminars in human achievement that are being offered every weekend. In many parts of the country this very weekend select groups of people are meeting, hoping to find some secret power that will develop all their hidden abilities, and bring them to a new level of life and experience. Here is an advertisement which appeared recently,

Start the major love affair of your life by spending a weekend with yourself. Take two days out of your life to spend just with you. To explore and discover yourself in ways you cannot do by yourself. Discover the most fascinating, wondrous, magnificent person you will ever know -- yourself -- in an experience you'll never forget.

Costing \$250, this seminar was called *The Advocate Experience*.

What a remarkably apt title for the Upper Room discourse. In some sense, this is an account of a first century weekend retreat, a special seminar with a most remarkable curriculum, which Jesus is conducting with his disciples. He has already spoken of the secret of true greatness, demonstrating it in the washing of the disciples' feet; and of a radical, exciting: loving community that will soon come into being. This group, he promised, will do "greater works" than he himself ever did in his days on earth.

In Chapter 14, beginning with Verse 15, Jesus reveals God's plan to send another Person, whom he calls the "Paraclete" (or, as First John 2 translates it, the "Advocate"; also called "Comforter," "Strengthener" or "Helper") who will make all this possible. Perhaps there is no area today more in need of clarification than truth about the Spirit of God. Much confusion abounds in Christian circles on the Person and work of the Holy Spirit. Many are being misled by inappropriate texts, and by twisted and distorted interpretations of passages. We need to hear what our Lord himself taught about the coming of the Spirit. Let us join this retreat with Jesus and his disciples, and hear his exact words:

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; you know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you." {John 14:15-17 RSV}

Packed into that paragraph are six remarkable facts centering about the person of this other Counselor:

First, we learn that he will be a gift from the Father to true believers. I put it that way because our Lord identifies loving obedience as the mark of a true believer. A true believer is one who has been drawn to Christ by love and is ready to obey what he says. To those genuine believers, who are not merely using Christianity as a front for their own activities or advancement, Jesus promises to give the Spirit.

He has already spoken of this in the seventh chapter of this gospel, in the account of the Feast of Tabernacles: "On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and proclaimed, 'If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink. ... out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water,'" {cf, John 7:37-38 RSV}. John immediately adds: "This he said about the Spirit, which those who believe in him would receive," {cf, John 7:39a RSV}. Here our Lord confirms again that those who believe in Jesus receive the Spirit. We do not need to expect another giving of the Spirit after we have come to Christ, for he comes to us when we believe.

The second thing Jesus says is that this Spirit will be "another," a separate but similar Person to himself. "I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counselor," Jesus promises, thereby, clearly indicating it will not be himself but someone else. He uses a word for "another" which in Greek means "another of the same kind." Here again is a clear reference to the mystery of the Trinity; three persons in one, Father, Son and

Spirit, all distinct, separate one from another, yet forming only one God. The Spirit will take over the work that Jesus had been doing with the disciples. The reason they had held firm in their faith for three and a half years was because they were with Jesus. The minute they lost sight of who he was, even when he was physically present, they began to come apart. He upheld them; he strengthened them; he counseled them; he ministered to them. But now he promises another is coming who will do this same work.

The third fact Jesus announces is that the Spirit will be a continually abiding presence: He will be "with you forever." That means that the Spirit only comes once into our lives. He does not come again and again. He comes to abide, to dwell with us. The writer of Hebrews puts it this way: "Be content with what you have, for he has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you,'" {cf, Heb 13:5 KJV}. There is the strongest negative in the Greek language: "I will never, under any circumstances, ever leave you nor forsake you."

Certain groups today teach that when your spiritual vision grows dim what you need is "more of the Spirit." But you can not have "more of the Spirit." He is a Person, and persons do not come in chunks, or bits and pieces. He comes as a whole person and he "abides forever," according to Jesus. The epistles of Paul and Peter, and other Scriptures, confirm this fact that the Spirit comes once for all.

The fourth fact is that the Spirit will be a revealer of truth. What a marvelous word that is! He is "the Spirit of Truth." What he does and says can be absolutely relied upon to be fundamental reality -- no confusion, no deceit, no disillusionment is possible. I do not know any aspect of the Spirit's work that is more important than this. The Spirit gives us the Word, and that Word, understood and interpreted by the Spirit, is absolutely dependable. Truth is also what the Spirit wants from us in our relationship with him. He will not accept anything but truth from us. If you want to maintain a good relationship with him, then be honest. Do not deceive yourself or try to deceive him. Just tell him where you are. That is all he wants.

The fifth thing, Jesus says, is that this remarkable new resource is unavailable to the world. "The world cannot receive him because it neither sees him or knows him." A conspiracy seems to exist in secular institutions -- public schools, governmental institutions, etc., -- to keep God out of his own world. No mention is made of him, no credit is given him because the world blinds its eyes to the existence of the great God who holds everything in his hands and guides and directs the destinies of men and nations. As a result, Jesus says the world cannot receive this remarkable resource which is available to those who believe.

The Spirit is truly a remarkable resource. He is a source of knowledge not to be found in any university in the land. Marvelous as Stanford University is, with its vast collections of human learning and knowledge, it cannot function in the realm that is the purview of the Spirit of God alone. There is fundamental knowledge about life, absolutely necessary to properly function as a human being, that will never be found in any secular university, but is made available to us only by the Spirit. This resource is a fountain of strength, an ability to revive, to encourage, to put new vim into life. The Spirit can grant a cleansing of the conscience and heart that human psychology knows nothing about.

The sixth fact Jesus discloses is that this will be a resource that is available from within. "You know him," he says to these disciples, "for he dwells with you, and will be in you." It's very important to see that those words apply only to these eleven men. We know from other Scriptures that since Pentecost when we come to Jesus we receive the Spirit. There is never a moment in a Christian's life when it can be said, "The Spirit is with you but he shall be in you." These words apply only to these men because they were in a transition period, before Pentecost, when the Spirit had not yet come as he came on the day of Pentecost.

Nor is there any justification to extend these words backward to cover the whole of the Old Testament period. I was taught in seminary that the Old Testament saints had the Spirit dwelling "with" them but not "in" them. But that is not correct. The Apostle Peter describes the prophets who predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow as speaking "by the Spirit of Christ which was in them," {cf, 1 Pet 1:11}. Thus, there seems to be an indwelling of the Spirit all through the Old Testament days. But when the Spirit came on Pentecost he did something different than he did in the days of the Old Testament. At Pentecost he began to form the community of believers called "the Church" -- people who belong to one another as well as to the Lord. We do not find that relationship in the Old Testament.

This remarkable revelation concerning the Spirit is confirmed to us by 2,000 years of human history. He did come on the Day of Pentecost; he did impart strength and boldness to these men so that they lost all fear and began to witness boldly in Jerusalem; he has come to every believer since that time. We have seen the fulfillment of these words of Jesus across two millennia of human testimony. Thus we can fully believe that Jesus knew what he was talking about in this revelation of the Person and work of the Spirit.

Our Lord now turns his attention to how the Spirit will relate to him. The hearts of these disciples were filled with anxious foreboding because Jesus had said, "I am going away. You will see me no more." It was little comfort to them that another Person, whom they knew very little about, was coming. How much comfort would it be for you if a departing loved one told you he would send his Uncle Joe whom you had never met? Here Jesus deals with that concern.

I will not leave you desolate; I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world will see me no more, but you will see me; because I live, you will live also. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me; and he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him. {John 14:18-21 RSV}

The good news for these men is that they would not lose Jesus when the Spirit came. He would be back by means of the Spirit, and he would stay with them. When it reads "I will not leave you desolate," the actual word used is "orphans." "I will not leave you orphans." That was surely how they felt -- like orphans. The One whom they had learned to love and trust was leaving them. But Jesus promises, "when the Spirit comes, I will come with him." Here he puts his finger on what is probably the most wonderful truth about the coming of the Spirit: His primary work is to make Jesus real to his disciples. The mark of the Spirit-filled life is not signs, or wonders, or tongues, but an ever-deepening consciousness of the reality of Jesus Christ. That is the Spirit at work.

Jesus continues, "Yet a little while, and the world will see me no more, but you will see me." Here he is referring to his appearances following the resurrection. The disciples were assured that he had risen from the dead by his several appearances over the course of 40 days. But, even more than that, he means, "You will continue to see me by means of the Spirit. You will know me more richly, more deeply, more truly after the Day of Pentecost than before." Matthew wrote at the close of his Gospel that Jesus said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and lo, I am with you even to the end of the age," {cf, Matt 28:19-20}. The great truth is that the Spirit makes Jesus real.

More than that, Jesus continues. "Because I live, you will live also." There is a new vitality coming by means of the Spirit. How often we have seen this happen. People whose lives were dull and meaningless suddenly lit up with a sense of vitality and joy as the Spirit began to release to them the life of Jesus. This is the promise of the Spirit.

And it is still not all. That new life would be, says Jesus, expressed in two remarkable ways, two phases, of the Christian life: "In that day [i.e., the Day of Pentecost and following] you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you." I never get over the wonder of that phrase.

Here Jesus expresses in the simplest words the most profound truth that can ever engage the mind of man -- "You in me." This is our first experience when we come to Christ. We know we belong to another family; we realize that we now are children of God. We are no longer children of the devil, following after a false philosophy. We have been transferred out of the powers of darkness into the kingdom of the Son of his love. "You in me."

But soon we begin to learn another great truth -- that he is "in us." We learn that we are not required to demonstrate how much we can do for God, but **what he can do through us!** Many Christians take a long time to reach that level. This explains those Christians who are filled with a holy zeal that gets very little done until they begin to learn that there is a new provision made: Jesus will be at work in them. We are going to

learn much more about this in the Upper Room discourse. This is the outstanding truth that Jesus wants understood.

Finally, Jesus says, loving obedience is the key to progressive intimacy with him. If you have Jesus in your heart the one thing you want more than anything else is to know him better. Paul could say, "Oh, that I may know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his suffering, being made conformable unto his death," {Phil 3:10 RSV}. That is what is promised to us: "He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me." Obedience is not difficult to those filled with love. The clue to Christian behavior is not law, not demand, but love. Teach people to love Jesus. Show them how much he has already loved them, and obedience becomes easier and easier. "And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him" -- keep on revealing myself to him. That is intimacy. That is the longing of every Christian heart -- to know him better, to go deeper and deeper into the love of Jesus which passes knowledge.

At this point one of the disciples interrupts. His name is Judas, not Judas Iscariot, the traitor, who has been sent out, but another disciple whose name was Judas.

Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, "Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?" Jesus answered him, "If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me does not keep my words; and the word which you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me." {John 14:22-24 RSV}

Here again is a reference to that formula for intimacy -- loving obedience.

Trust and obey, for there's no other way,
To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.

Loving obedience brings a deepening knowledge of Jesus that enhances the beautiful attributes of Christian character. My dear friend, Howie Hendricks, puts it this way. "The opposite of ignorance is not knowledge, but obedience." It is obeying truth, not merely filling your head with facts, that brings the refreshing knowledge that cancels out ignorance. Our Lord points out that, because the world does not know him, and does not obey him, it is impossible for non-Christians to understand this deepening quality of intimate fellowship. As long as anyone remains in and of the world, he will never know these remarkable secrets.

Jesus has shown us who the Spirit is, and how he relates to him. Now he has a further word on what the spirit will do when he comes:

These things I have spoken to you, while I am still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. {John 14:25-27 RSV}

Here are three further revelations of the work of the Spirit:

First, Jesus reminds us again that the Spirit is coming "in his name" as his replacement, at his request, and thus his work is to make Jesus known to us.

Secondly, he will teach and remind these men of everything Jesus has ever said. Here is another wonderfully encouraging revelation. Some have argued that it is impossible to trust the gospels because they were written long after the events had taken place. The disciples did not write down Jesus' words while he was speaking. At the earliest, they did not write of these things until ten years after the events. In the case of John, it was 40 to 50 years later before he got around to writing these things down. "You know how human memory is," the skeptics say. "We cannot trust anyone to remember in sharp detail events that happened that long ago. Therefore, these gospels are full of error. We cannot trust them."

But that is to ignore what Jesus says here. The Holy Spirit has the power to bring back to human recollection "everything I have said," he declares. This is our reassurance that when these men began to write they wrote exactly what Jesus had said. To use the modern language of Silicon Valley, the Spirit of God has power to trigger the "data retrieval system" in the minds of these apostles and bring back everything they had heard. Under hypnosis, a skilled hypnotist can take an individual back to a certain event and bring out long forgotten details. If that is possible to a human being with his limited knowledge, how much more is it certain that the Spirit of God can do that with this remarkable computer we call the brain, that wonderful organ that has hidden away in its folds everything we ever said or did, everything that ever happened to us. So we have great assurance here that the words of Scripture are the words of Jesus just as he uttered them.

Further, Jesus said the Spirit would "teach" them, i.e., he would unfold the meaning and the implication of his words. This is what the epistles are -- the unfolding of the meaning of these events. In the writings of Paul, Peter, James, John, and others are set out the meaning of the things that Jesus said. These men were taught of the Spirit what they meant. Thus we can trust the Scriptures in this regard.

Further, Jesus said, the work of the Spirit is to impart the peace which he alone can give: "My peace I give unto you." The most striking thing through all the events of this last week is the serenity with which Jesus moves through them. He is always in charge. Even when he stands as a prisoner before Pilate and Herod and the chief priests it soon becomes evident, even to them, that they are the prisoners and he is the judge.

This peace which Jesus gives is what we can well describe as "the ability to cope." I learned long ago that when people seek counseling they almost invariably come with two problems. First, they have the problem that has troubled them, for which they want a solution. But their second problem is the upset attitude they have toward their problem, the torn and pressured feeling they have about it that blocks their reasoning power and reduces them to narrow, rigid views of an event. I have learned there is no use trying to answer the problem they have until you first solve the problem they are, and teach them how to have peace. When they approach the problem with a sense of peace their dilemma unravels itself.

I cannot over stress the importance of this. This is the bequest of Jesus, the inheritance of Christians: "My peace I leave with you." We can have that peace under any circumstance, because, as he says, it is not given as the world gives. If you are all upset over something that keeps eating away at you, and you ask a doctor for help, he will give you a tranquilizer -- chemical peace! But as soon as it has worn off you are right back where you were before. You will have to take more tranquilizers until your mind is dulled and you are half-sedated. That is how the world gives peace. Or it resorts to escapism -- take a trip to Hawaii, go off to the mountains, lose yourself in some activity. When you return, the trouble is still there, of course. But here Jesus speaks of what Paul calls "peace that passes understanding," {Phil 4:7 RSV}. Events do not affect it. It is internal, not subject to external pressure. Circumstances may not have changed, but there has been imparted to you a consciousness that the One who indwells you is able to handle your problem and you are at peace because of that. That is why Jesus adds, "Let not your hearts be troubled." You do not have to be all upset and bothered. You have a sufficient basis for confidence if you will act on it. "Neither be afraid." Peace has been supplied to you.

In the final paragraph our Lord answers the question that must have been uppermost in the minds of these disciples, "When will the Spirit come?"

You heard me say to you, I'll go away, and I will come to you." If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I go to the Father; for the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place, you may believe. I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me; but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us go hence. {John 14:28-31 RSV}

This seems to close the discourse in the Upper Room. At this point Jesus and the disciples leave and go out to Gethsemane's darkness. But before they go, Jesus indicates there will be an intervening period of time before the Spirit comes.

Two things must happen:

First, he must go to the Father. "That should make you rejoice," he says. "If you really loved me you would rejoice, because what I am going back to is deliverance from the agony, hurt, weakness and shame of this existence." It always strikes me as strange that we grieve so much for those who have died and gone to glory. We forget that they have entered into joy and release, into marvelous experience. We are only feeling sorry for ourselves; we need not for them. That is what Jesus says, "If you loved me you would be glad that I am going back."

Furthermore, he says, "You would understand that I am going to my Father, and all the limitations I have experienced in this earthly life will have come to an end." It is only as a man that he says, "My Father is greater than I," for God is always greater than man. When Jesus took upon himself our humanity he entered into limitation that made him less than the Father in greatness. But now that is ending. He is going back to the Father to resume the glory, the equality he had with him at the beginning. "You ought to rejoice in that because the limitations will be over," he tells them. "Now I can do what I have always wanted to do. When the Spirit comes, I will be able to do what I never could do in the days of my flesh." That return to the Father must occur before the Spirit comes.

Secondly, he will come after the devil is conquered. Jesus announces, "I have told you before it takes place, so when it does take place you may believe. I will no longer talk much with you for the ruler of this world is coming." He sees looming on the immediate horizon the most terrible power clash in all history, the awful "death grapple in the darkness" when he must confront the enemy of humanity head-on and deal with the shame, humiliation and weakness of sin. I wonder if he is not at this point thinking of those remarkable words from Isaiah 53, "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was laid upon him," {Isa 53:5a KJV}. That chastisement which would eventuate in peace with God, was laid on him, not on us. Because of this, he can give us peace, his peace, because he himself has entered into the terrible struggle that resulted in the conquering of the ruler of this world.

And victory is certain, he says. "He has no power over me." There is no foothold of sin in his life that the devil can lay hold of. Victory is absolutely certain. Why, then, did he do this? "I go as the Father has commanded me," is his reply. Here is an example of the loving obedience which he wants us to follow. He went into hurt, danger, heartache and agony of mind and body only because he loved the Father, and the Father had determined that this was the only way that what both of them wanted could ever be achieved. He went with complete faithfulness to do what the Father had commanded him. When that battle had been accomplished, the promised Spirit would come. He would make real to us The presence of Jesus, explain to us the words of Jesus, and grant to us the peace of Jesus.

No distant Lord have I, loving afar to be;
Made flesh for me He cannot rest until He rests in me.
I need not journey far this dearest friend to see;
Companionship is always mine,
He makes His home with me.

I envy not the twelve, nearer to me is He;
The life He once lived here on earth He lives again in me.
Ascended now to God my witness there to be,
His witness here am I because His Spirit dwells in me.

O glorious Son of God, Incarnate Deity,
I shall forever be with Thee because Thou art with me.

Prayer:

Now may the grace of our Lord Jesus reflected so abundantly in this provision from the throne of God be your portion. May the fellowship and companionship of the Holy Spirit and the love of God, our Father, be our experience, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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