

The Indwelling Comforter

by Dougan Clark

The Holy Spirit is the indwelling Comforter who teaches, guides, and reminds believers of God's will and promises.

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Spiritual Guidance"

Description

Dougan Clark preaches about the promise of the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, who would abide with the disciples forever after Jesus' departure. The Comforter purified and empowered the disciples on the day of Pentecost, enabling them to speak with tongues, magnify God, and preach the Word with great power. The Holy Spirit serves as a Teacher, Remembrancer, and Guide in the hearts of believers, imparting wisdom and bringing to remembrance the words of Jesus. Believers are encouraged to seek guidance through the Holy Spirit, primarily through the Scriptures, the ministry of the Gospel, and God's providences, while discerning His will and rejecting any impressions contrary to Scripture.

Transcript

Then Jesus was about to be taken away from his sorrowing disciples, He promised that after His departure, the Father would send them, in His name, another Comforter, who should abide with them for ever. He expressly told them that this Comforter should be the Holy Ghost, or the Spirit of truth, who was even then dwelling with them, and should be in them.

And we cannot doubt that the Comforter of whom He spake, did come into their hearts on the day of Pentecost--purifying and enduing them; nor that He did abide in them the remainder of their lives. His incoming was accompanied by certain miraculous phenomena, manifest to the observation of all present, and to the wondering multitude; but the essential and important thing was the incoming itself.

It was because they were possessed and filled by the Holy Ghost that they spake with tongues and magnified God and preached the Word with such power that thousands were convicted and converted. The purifying of their hearts by faith was accomplished then, and afterwards they experienced a continuous cleansing. The enduement of power was "conferred" upon them then, and was a permanent enduement.

But what does Jesus tell them about the offices of the Comforter, as He was to dwell in their purified and energized hearts during their earthly pilgrimage? In other words, what does the Holy Spirit do in the heart of the believer with whom He abides for ever?

In answering this question, I remark, in the first place, that Jesus does not here make mention of any remarkable or miraculous gifts which the Spirit was to confer upon the disciples.

I have spoken in another place of the miracle-working power imparted in Apostolic times to one individual in one particular, to another in another, and withheld altogether, in all probability, from a very large majority: but the Spirit dwelling in the heart of a Christian cannot, and will not, be inoperative: and there are certain offices which, as an indwelling Comforter, He will discharge with greater or less power and distinctness in all.

And the first office that the Saviour designates as belonging to the abiding Holy Ghost is that of Teacher and Remembrancer. "He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance whatsoever I have said unto you." Nothing is more clearly stated in Old Testament Scripture than that in the gospel days the Lord shall teach His children Himself. "And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of thy children." And the Apostle John speaks of the "anointing which abideth and teacheth," doubtless designating by that term the Holy Spirit dwelling in the heart of the sanctified believer and teaching him.

For we must not fail to remember that it is "the children of the Lord," those who have been adopted into the family through faith in Christ, who are to be taught of the Lord. It is the sheep who hear the voice of the Good Shepherd, and know Him, and follow Him.

Of the very indwelling Comforter in regard to whom we are now inquiring, Jesus Himself said that the world--the unconverted world--"seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him." And we are told expressly that "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

In reference to heathen nations and all those who have no outward knowledge of the Gospel, I have no doubt that God will deal with them both in strict justice and great mercy, and so many of them as are saved will be found to owe their salvation, as do others, to the Lord Jesus Christ. And, as I am not writing for the heathen, I leave them there, commending them with myself and all to the merciful disposal of an all-wise and all-gracious Heavenly Father.

The indwelling Spirit, then, is a Teacher; and, like Jesus Himself, He teaches as never man taught. He may, and often does, teach directly, by an impression communicated either supernaturally or through the ordinary operations of the intellect to the understanding; but in a larger number of instances, perhaps, His teaching is by instrumental means, and these we must neither ignore nor undervalue.

And here again the most important instrumentality which the Holy Spirit employs for the teaching of God's people is the Bible. The Scriptures "are profitable," with other things, "for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

How often does a text of Scripture which we may have read scores of times without receiving any marked impression, become a rich feast to the soul as the light of the Holy Spirit shines like a sunbeam upon it. How often does the whole Bible become a new book when we read it again and again under the illumination of that blessed Spirit who gave it forth. It is as if the author of a book were sitting by your side, when you peruse it, ready to explain all your difficulties and solve all your doubts.

Let no one, therefore, fail to search the Scriptures. It is a dangerous error to neglect, or reject, or ignore the teachings of the Holy Bible, on the pretext, however plausible, that the inward teachings of the Spirit are more valuable than the outward letter. It will always be found that those who love God most, love His Bible most. He who is taught by Scripture is taught of the Lord: and it is never by the Holy Spirit that anyone is induced to desert the outward revelation written by holy men whom He inspired.

Another agency of very great importance which the Holy Spirit employs for teaching God's people is the ministry of the Gospel. In every age of the Church the Lord has given to it men and women whose calling and qualification were to speak unto their fellow-believers for "exhortation, edification, and comfort."

There have not only been evangelists who might preach the glad tidings of the Gospel to sinners, and invite them to come to Christ, but pastors and teachers who should labor for the perfecting of the saints and the edifying of the body of Christ. The apostles and prophets being dead yet speak in the Scriptures, of which they were the inspired authors: and the Spirit still teaches the Church by conferring the gift of teaching upon some of its members and strengthening them to exercise it.

Not that the same degree of inspiration is given to any now as was conferred upon the authors of the Scriptures. Not that anyone is authorized now to proclaim new doctrines, i.e., such as are not found in the Scriptures, or clearly deducible therefrom. But the ministry is still a gift, and when exercised in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power, it will always be in accordance with the Scriptures, and reaching the witness in the hearts of believers, it becomes, through grace, a very valuable means of instructing them in the right way of the Lord.

And we should receive with thankfulness and childlike docility the teaching of even the humblest instrument whom the Spirit condescends to employ. How wondrous is the privilege of enjoying His instructions--of being taught by Him, whether mediately or immediately, directly or instrumentally!

Another thing that the Saviour promised the Comforter should do, was to guide the disciples into all truth. Guidance, is one form of teaching. It is teaching us the right course to pursue. It is showing us what our duty is.

Divine guidance is distinctly promised both in the Old Testament and the New, and has been the experience of the saints in all ages. The following quotations are a sufficient proof: "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go, I will guide thee with mine eye." "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and he delighteth in His way." "The meek will He guide in judgment, and the meek will He teach His way." "He calleth His own sheep by name, and leadeth them out." "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." "These are they that follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth."

And yet, it must be confessed that it is often one of the greatest difficulties which beset the Christian's path, to ascertain, to his own entire satisfaction, what God's will is concerning him, in the particular circumstances by which he is surrounded. A few observations may possibly throw some light, both on the cause of this difficulty and the remedy.

In order to secure the Divine guidance in our daily life--both secular and religious--our minds must be brought into a proper condition for receiving it. And, in the first place, we must sincerely desire to be guided aright. God is always willing to supply all our real need in Christ Jesus; but it is the longing soul that He satisfies, it is the hungry soul that He fills with His goodness.

And, as we need guidance continually--moment by moment, and day by day--so the desire for it needs to be permanent and intense; and David's prayer will frequently be adopted by the humble disciple, "For Thy name's sake, O Lord, lead me, and guide me;" or, "Lead me in a plain path, because of mine enemies;" whether these be outward enemies, such as David had, or the enemies of our souls, within.

In the next place, we must believe that, since God has so distinctly promised us His guidance, therefore, when we utter such prayers as the above, we are asking according to His will, and that He heareth us, and that we have the petitions that we desired of Him. We must honour Him by believing in His veracity, and His faithfulness to His own promises. Without faith it is impossible to please God.

And, it is by faith that we must receive our answer to the prayer for guidance, as well as the answer to prayers for other things. Let me explain. It often happens that, after praying earnestly, to be guided aright in a difficult case, we do not feel at all differently, nor see our way any more clearly than before, and yet, the time comes when we must decide what to do. We hear, it may be, no voice saying, "This is the way, walk ye in it;" and, so far as any sensations that we may have are concerned, we may seem to be left as much in the dark as if we had not prayed at all.

Under these circumstances, our only resource is in faith. We have come to God with a sincere desire and purpose, to be directed aright, and to be guided by His will. We have asked Him to lead us as He has promised; and now, deciding upon the matter before us, with the best judgment we have, we are bound to believe that we have the petitions that we desire; that God does guide us; and that our decision is according to His will; and therefore, in child-like confidence, we should leave our ease in the hands of our Father. We are to believe that He has decided our course; though He may not have communicated His decision to our sight, but only to our faith.

The proper exercise of faith in seeking Divine guidance, implies the restraining and subordinating of all undue eagerness and activity of our own. I do not mean that we are not to act, nor that we are not to use, to the best of our ability, our own perceptions and judgments in determining the question, whatever it may be; but, having come to God, asking and seeking His guidance, we are not still to cherish a determination to guide ourselves: nor to give way to restless anxiety, which indicates an unsubdued will and a want of faith in God. We have committed our way unto Him, and now we must trust in Him, that He will bring to pass that which He knows to be best for us. To sincerely desire His guidance, is to desire that we may adopt His plans; and not that He may adopt our plans.

Our Heavenly Father communicates His will to us, (1) by the Scriptures, (2) by His Holy Spirit, (3) by His providences. By carefully interpreting the intimations received through these channels--singly, or in connection with each other, the Christian will, to say the least, very generally--and perhaps I might venture to say, always--be preserved from serious error in reference to his conduct and pursuits.

In the first place, anyone who is sincerely desirous to know God's will as to his general course of life must not neglect to obey the Saviour's injunction, "Search the Scriptures." And we must not only diligently search them, but we must be willing to bow to their authority. Wherever the will of God is clearly revealed in the Bible in reference to any subject, our duty in regard to that subject is determined. And we are not to expect an inward revelation in addition to the outward one" to show us what to do.

If Jesus says "Do not kill, do not steal, do not bear false witness, defraud not, honour thy father and mother," we do not need any other revelation to instruct us as to our duty in these particulars.

And the Scriptures do go into more detailed directions than we should imagine, until we acquaint ourselves thoroughly with them. If the Christian lady wishes to know how she may dress so as to please God, she finds that women are "to adorn themselves in modest apparel:" and, although the standard of modest apparel might be different in different localities and with varying circumstances, yet, with God's providence and the Holy Spirit to assist the sincere inquirer in determining, I think few would be left long in doubt.

If we want to know what kind of talk is acceptable to God, we read (1) that we are to let no corrupt communication proceed out of our mouth, nor any foolish talking, and (2) that our talk ought to be "good to the use of edifying."

If we are in doubt how to treat our enemies and those who have injured us, we are told explicitly, "Love your enemies," "Pray for them that despitefully use you," "Avenge not yourselves." And if our civil or personal rights are invaded, we are asked, "Why do ye not rather suffer wrong than to go to law?" and told that charity, which is perfect love, "seeketh not her own." And the universal duty of Christians when praying is, "Forgive, if ye have aught against any man."

If we want to understand our obligation to the civil magistrates and rulers, we are told to honour them, to obey them in all things not in conflict with our duty to the King of kings, to pray for them, and to pay tribute to them.

If we are at a loss as to how far we may join in the pleasures and customs of the world, we are enjoined not to be conformed to the world, and assured that "if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

It is to the written revelation of God's will, then, that we are first to look for the knowledge of our Christian duties, as well as the knowledge of the way of salvation.

But there are still many questions arising in our daily life--questions of propriety and duty about which we find no directions in Scripture, and the deciding of which often causes us no little perplexity. It is in reference to these matters that we are to seek and to expect the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit. He either makes extraordinary impressions upon the mind with more or less distinctness, or He influences the understanding and the will by an unconscious and imperceptible operation so as to bring about the right decision.

The instances are by no means few, in which God's children have been induced, by feelings and impulses wholly inexplicable to themselves at the time, to adopt measures which resulted in their deliverance from danger, the prevention of disasters to themselves, their families, or their business, and the successful accomplishment of formidable undertakings. And a blessed thing it is, indeed, to know the voice of the Spirit, to listen obediently to His gentlest intimations, and to make the Lord our Counselor in things temporal as well as in things spiritual.

But not all the impulses and intimations that come into our minds are from the Holy Spirit. Satan also can originate impressions, and is transformed into an angel of light. Thus, as we are to interpret the Bible in the light of the Holy Spirit, so we are to interpret inward impressions upon the mind by comparing them with Scripture truth, with sound reason, and with the outward providences of God.

As the Scriptures were given by inspiration, and dictated by the Holy Spirit, any impression claiming to be revelation from God, which is contrary to the Scriptures, must be rejected as a delusion. The Holy Ghost will not contradict Himself. As sound reason, also, or a sanctified judgment, is the gift of God, nothing that is really from His Spirit will be contrary to such judgment, although it may be quite beyond it.

In the daily events of our lives we are to look for and to see the providences of God. Everything that takes place, with the sole exception of sin, is either permissively or causatively His will and sin itself is permissively providential. In other words there would be no sin if God did not permit it, although He is never the author of sin. In everything that happens to us, then, God is present. And our daily lives are made up of what we are bound to regard as providential events; and we are to meet God where He meets us, and allow Him to guide us by His providence as well as by His Spirit and His Bible.

As there is an exact and mutual correspondence between the power of vision and the phenomena of light and color, between the power of hearing and the phenomena of sound, between the sense of touch and the material forms which are presented to it for recognition, so there is a precise adaptation of the providences of God without, and the intimations of His Spirit within. Both are expressions of His will, and each will be found to illustrate and interpret the other. And so we often hear Christians say, in effect, that "way opens" to do certain things, which they regard as right to be done, the meaning being that inward impressions of duty, made on the mind by the Holy Spirit, are confirmed by outward providences so shaping events as to facilitate the performance of the duty.

The earnest desire to be guided aright implies a willingness on our part to obey the intimations of God's will; however received. While there must be no eager impetuosity, which always indicates that self-will is still alive, there must be a constant seeking to know the mind of Christ, and a prompt and diligent obedience to His will, which are the reverse of slothfulness or carelessness. We must wait upon the Lord in the true spirit of a servant watching to receive His commands, and ever ready to execute them, and then to say, "What next wilt Thou have me to do?" Every moment meets us with a duty to be done, or a suffering to be borne, some active service, or some silent waiting; and let us have a spirit earnest while quiet, an eye watchful but restful, an ear attentive but patient, and move or be still as "the love of Christ constraineth us."

Another office of the indwelling Comforter is to bring to remembrance the words of the Saviour, which He may do when we are engaged in silent contemplation or about our needful avocations, or He may, as already stated, impress them with new life and power upon our hearts as we read them. "He shall bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." "He shall glorify Me, for He shall receive of Mine, and shall show it unto you." "He shall testify of Me." "He shall not speak of Himself, but whatsoever He shall hear that shall He speak."

The power of the Spirit has been treated of in a previous chapter; and He, dwelling in the heart of the believer as a constant strengthener, supports him in every time of weakness, and guides him for every required service. Paul prays for the Ephesians, that they "may be strengthened with might, by His Spirit, in the inner man;" and it was doubtless through Him that he expected his other petitions to be realized, i.e., that their comprehension might be so enlarged, that they might comprehend the solid contents of God's love; and their knowledge so increased, that they might know the love of Christ which passeth (human) knowledge, and be filled with all the fulness of God.

Finally; the designation, Comforter, applied by the Saviour Himself to the indwelling Spirit, expresses one of the most precious of His offices. He dwells in the heart of the sanctified believer; and with Him, the Father and the Son. Thus He keeps the soul in communion and fellowship with the "God of all comfort." "Truly," says the Apostle, "our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son, Jesus Christ."

He comforts those in whom He abides, in all their tribulation. He causes consolation to abound by Christ. He gives them to eat of the Hidden Manna. He brings to pass, that, out of their deepest sorrow, shall well up their richest, and fullest, and most permanent consolations. "Ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy." The sorrow shall be transitory, even if it continues a life-time; the joy shall be everlasting. From God, in Christ, by the Holy Spirit, we have "everlasting consolation, and good hope through grace."

Remarks

1. The offices of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the sanctified believer, are totally different from His work in convicting and converting the sinner, by leading him to repent and believe in Jesus.
2. These offices are distinct, also, from His work in the justified believer, showing him his heart-sin, and leading him to seek a clean heart, by entire consecration and faith in Christ.
3. The Spirit witnesseth: In the justified, to his adoption: in the sanctified, to his cleansing; in all, to Christ.
4. When the Holy Ghost has taken possession of the heart, and dwells there as an abiding guest, He operates as a Teacher, a Guide, a Remembrancer, a Glorifier of, and Testifier to, Christ; a Strengtheners, and a Comforter.
5. The indwelling Comforter teaches and guides the believer; either directly, by impressions, made perceptibly or imperceptibly upon the understanding and the will; or, instrumentally, by the Holy Scriptures, the preaching of the Gospel, and the outward providences of God.
6. If our Heavenly Father has clearly revealed His will by the written word, in reference to any point, we are not to expect another revelation from His Spirit to teach us our duty in that regard.
7. When God's will has not been thus revealed, we are authorized and enjoined to seek His guidance, and to claim His promise that we shall have it.
8. Impressions of truth and duty, are not to be regarded as coming from the Holy Spirit, if they are contrary to Scripture, to a sanctified judgment, or to the outward providences of God.
9. It is by faith that Christ, or the Holy Spirit, dwells in the heart. And we should seek for that form of faith that sees God's hand in everything, permitting or causing all that happens to us. "I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Comforter." John 14:17.

Our blest Redeemer, ere He breathed

His tender, last farewell,

A Guide, a Comforter, bequeathed

With us to dwell.

He comes, the mystic heavenly Dove,
With sheltering wings outspread,
The holy balm of peace and love,
On earth to shed.
He comes, sweet influence to impart,
A gracious, willing Guest,
Where He can find one humble heart
Wherein to rest.
And His that gentle voice we hear,
Soft as the breath of heaven,
That checks each fault, that calms each fear,
And speaks of heaven.
And every virtue we possess,
And every victory won,
And every thought of holiness,
Are His alone.
Spirit of purity and grace,
Our weakness, pitying see.
Oh, make our hearts Thy dwelling-place,
And meet for Thee!
(Harriett Auber, 1809.)

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