

The Abiding Comforter

by J.C. Ryle

The Comforter, the Holy Spirit, is the gift of the Lord Jesus Christ and is sent to abide with believers forever, speaking peace to their hearts and relieving their troubles and sorrows.

Scripture: John 14:16

Topics: "The Holy Spirit", "Comfort in Trials"

Description

J.C. Ryle preaches on 'The Abiding Comforter,' emphasizing the promise of the Holy Spirit as the Comforter who dwells with believers forever. He reflects on the sorrow of the disciples at Jesus' impending departure and reassures them that the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, will provide the comfort and guidance they need. Ryle explains that the world cannot receive this Comforter because it does not see or know Him, while true believers experience His presence and work in their hearts. The sermon highlights the necessity of the Holy Spirit for spiritual life, conviction of sin, and the assurance of God's promises, ultimately leading to eternal comfort and joy in Christ.

Transcript

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on November 14th, 1858, by J. C. Philpot

"And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever; even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it sees Him not, neither knows Him. But you know Him, for He dwells with you, and shall be in you." John 14:16, 17

What an evening was that which preceded the memorable night in which the Lord of life and glory sweat great drops of blood in the garden of Gethsemane; that gloomy night which ushered in a still more gloomy day on which the Son of God was nailed to the accursed tree at Calvary! Could we roll back the tide of more than eighteen hundred years, and be transported in spirit to Jerusalem, what scenes that evening would there meet our astonished eye! We would see the streets of the city crowded with multitudes, not only of its own citizens, but of sojourners also from all parts of the neighboring countries who had come up to keep the Passover; and we would view this vast assemblage surging and heaving like the troubled sea, as expecting some mighty event to take place. Some of them would be half believing that Jesus of Nazareth was the promised Messiah; but the greater part would be filled with enmity and prejudice against Him because He had not come as they expected, in all the power and pomp of kingly majesty, to put the abhorred Roman eagles to ignominious flight!

We would see Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, sitting at his feast, amid the cups of flowing wine, little dreaming of the important part that he was to play in the great event of the morrow. We would view the chief priests, Scribes and Pharisees, all assembled in secret conclave, plotting the death of the innocent Lamb of God, and among them we might observe a dark form flitting to and fro, one doomed by the just sentence of God to eternal perdition, and condemned by the universal concurrence of men to everlasting infamy--the traitor Judas, holding out his itching palm for the offered reward of blood.

But turning our eyes from these, and fixing them on a solitary spot, in an upper chamber, we would see the blessed Lord sitting in the midst of His eleven faithful disciples, addressing Himself to comfort their sorrowful hearts, and speaking in their ears those gracious words which have been preserved by the Holy Spirit through the pen of John, and which we have now before us for our instruction and consolation. It is true that we cannot transport ourselves there in spirit; that we cannot see the Lord's face, or hear the Lord's voice; but we can, with God's help, listen with holy reverence and solemn attention to the words which fell from His lips on that memorable evening. And if the Lord the Spirit be pleased to touch my lips this morning with His unction and grace, and to anoint your ear and heart with the same divine power, I may speak and you may hear words that may profit, instruct, edify and comfort your souls.

The Lord Jesus Christ, from whose omniscience nothing was concealed, saw that His disciples' hearts were filled with sorrow. He had told them that He was about to leave them, and it broke their hearts to think of His departure. His presence with them had been so full of blessing; He had so comforted them in their various distresses, had been such a shield against all their enemies, had so revealed to them His grace and truth, and had so manifested His glory, that the very thought of His departure filled their hearts with grief, for in losing Him they felt that they would lose their all. They little thought how that departure would take place, and what a scene would present itself before their eyes on the coming day; for the deep mystery of the Cross was at that time hidden from them, and they saw in it for their Master nothing but agony and shame, and for themselves the total wreck of all their hopes. Addressing Himself then to console their sorrowing hearts, Jesus lays before them this grand truth, that it was expedient for them that He should go away; for that if He went not away, they could not have the promised Comforter, who was to abide with them forever. As this is the chief point that presents itself in the words of our text, I now proceed, with God's blessing, to open it up. And in so doing, I shall direct your attention--

I. First, to the Blessed Spirit of promise, and I shall endeavor to show why He is called "the Comforter" and "the Spirit of truth."

II. Secondly, that the world cannot receive this Comforter, this Spirit of truth; and the reason, "because it sees Him not, neither knows Him."

III. Thirdly, that the saint of God does know Him, and that by a personal work upon his heart and conscience.

IV. And fourthly, the sweet promise, that He dwells with them, and shall be in them.

I. The Blessed Spirit of promise. The Lord Jesus Christ speaks here of the gift of the Spirit as being the first fruit of His intercession at the right hand of God: "And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter." Observe the word "give" and the almost similar expression "send." "But the Comforter, who is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My Name." I do not hold that the blessed Spirit, or any one of His gifts and graces, was purchased by the atoning blood of the Lamb--an expression we frequently meet with--but that they were the fruits of His intercession. The gift of the Holy Spirit and His

divine mission were as much a part of the covenant of grace as the gift and mission of the Son of God. Regeneration and sanctification are as indispensable to the soul's entering the courts of heaven as redemption and justification; and had these been left out of the eternal covenant, redemption would have been of no avail, for "without holiness no man can see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14). Is not, then, the Holy Spirit, as a Person in the Godhead, as much a party to the everlasting covenant as the Father and the Son? and would it be consistent with the dignity of His Person that He, with His gifts and graces, should have been purchased by the atoning blood of the Son? The gifts and graces of God the Holy Spirit were as much a part of the "everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure," as the electing love of God the Father and the redeeming blood of God the Son, and therefore stand upon the same foundation.

But let me not be misunderstood. The sufferings and death of the Lord Jesus Christ were the appointed channel through which the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit were to come. But for His death they could not have been given, for in the order of things redemption must precede sanctification. Sin must be put away before mercy can be revealed; the sacrifice must be offered before its merits and benefits can be applied; but that by no means implies that the one purchased the other, or that because the one precedes and is the foundation of the other, that it should be said to have bought it. The blood-shedding and sacrifice of the Son of God opened a way whereby God, consistently with all His perfections, could bestow upon His people the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit.

But I do not believe that there was any bargain, so to speak, between the Father and the Son, whereby these gifts and graces were bought and purchased by atoning blood. Most certainly they are spoken of in our text as a gift; and a gift excludes purchase. I view, therefore, the gift of the Comforter, and of everything implied by that expression, as the first fruits of the intercession of Jesus. "I will pray the Father."

But if enabled to look upwards, what a glorious view these words open before our eyes, introducing us, as it were, into the very courts of heaven, there to see an interceding High Priest at the right hand of God! This intercession was beautifully prefigured by what took place on the great day of atonement under the Levitical law. On that solemn day the high priest entered the most holy place with incense beaten small, which as he went in he scattered upon live coals taken from off the bronze altar. As then he entered the most holy place with the blood of the bullock and the goat, the fragrant steam of the incense filled the sanctuary as with a cloud; the coals typifying the wrath of God, and the incense beaten small the bruised humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus the incense of Christ's work upon earth, of His blood and sufferings and obedience here below, fills the courts of heaven as if with an ever-rising, ever-enduring cloud, as the prophet in vision saw "the house of the Lord filled with smoke" (Isa. 6:4).

When, then, the blessed Lord said, "I will pray the Father," we need not necessarily attach such a meaning to the words as if they implied that He uses vocal prayer. His presence in heaven is prayer. "He ever lives to make intercession for us." And this intercession was typified by the act of Aaron, when he took the censer and put fire therein from off the altar and put on incense, and thus stood between the dead and the living (Num. 16:46-48). In this sense Jesus "prays the Father," and the first fruit of His intercession is the gift of the Comforter, as was first strikingly seen on the day of Pentecost, and is from time to time realized by every saint of God who receives the Spirit and is blessed by His presence and grace.

A. The Comforter. But let us, with God's blessing, examine a little more closely the words that the blessed Lord spoke, and whereby He brings before our eyes more distinctly who and what this promised Comforter is. The Lord Himself when here below was the Comforter of His people. While He was with them, they needed no other; but when He left them they required one to supply His place. They needed one who

could be to them what Jesus had been. How plainly we gather from this the Deity and distinct personality of the Holy Spirit! When Jesus was present with them, it was His Person that comforted and shielded them. To supply His place was not therefore a Person needed? How short of this would fall a mere influence, an emanation, a virtue, or any other such inferior consolation! Any person, too, that was not Divine and equal with Jesus could not fill His place, or be to them what Jesus had been. Let us, therefore, hold fast by the Deity and personality of the Holy Spirit. Those who deny them have neither part nor lot in His teachings or consolations, in His regeneration or His sanctification.

1. But what the disciples needed, all other true disciples of Jesus equally need--a Comforter who can speak peace to their hearts, who can relieve the various troubles and sorrows through which they are called upon to pass, and that by administering an inward consolation which shall be an effectual remedy. Here lies the vast difference between the comfort that the world bestows and that which is communicated by the Holy Spirit. The world has to a certain extent its comforts to give; in fact, we are surrounded on every side by a vast number of earthly comforts; but these can speak no peace or pardon to a troubled conscience; these can take no load of guilt off a burdened soul; these can give no sweet anticipations of eternal joy when life comes to a close; these cannot smooth a dying pillow, rob death of its sting, or spoil the grave of its victory. Here everything falls short but the consolations of the blessed Spirit.

2. But besides this the saints of God are called upon for the most part to pass through many trials and afflictions in this valley of tears. Their very character, as determined by the mouth of God, is to be "an afflicted and poor people," as much as "to trust in the name of the Lord" (Zeph. 3:12). It is "through much tribulation that they are to enter the kingdom" (Acts 14:22). And as these afflictions and tribulations are chiefly internal, they need an internal Comforter to relieve and comfort them under their weight and pressure. Many of the Lord's family are pressed down exceedingly with guilt and distress of mind on account of their sins against a holy God. Can earthly comforts relieve these distressing pangs? Can they remove this heavy burden of guilt? Can they pour oil and wine into this bleeding conscience? No; they need a deliverance, a remedy, a consolation that can reach their case; and as this is beyond all human help, none but the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, can whisper it into their souls. Spiritual maladies lie too deep for any other remedy. The same hand which shot the arrow can alone extract it. A woe is pronounced against those who "heal the hurt of God's people slightly" (Jer. 6:14). Only He, then, who brings health and cure can reveal to the soul "the abundance of peace and truth" (Jer. 33:6).

3. But besides the affliction of a troubled mind and a guilty conscience that every saint of God is called upon to pass through at one time or other of his earthly pilgrimage, which above all other troubles makes a Comforter so needful, and when He comes so valued, there are few of the living family who have not many trials and sorrows spread in their path. Circumstances arise in Providence as connected with their daily business or occupation which often deeply and acutely try their mind. Nor is it always with them as regards their families as they would have it to be. They may have, with David, to lament that their "house is not so with God," that is so favored and blessed as he himself was (2 Sam. 23:5). They would gladly see their children walking in the strait and narrow path that leads to eternal life, but rarely find a favor so great. As David had to mourn over the vile lust of Amnon and the rebellion of Absalom, so some of the saints of God have even to mourn over profligate or rebellious children, whom no discipline can control or kindness alter. Under these trials they need special support to reconcile their minds in submission to God's sovereignty. As Aaron held his peace when he saw his two sons consumed by fire from heaven at the very altar (Lev. 10:1, 2); as David had a blessed persuasion that the Lord had made with him an everlasting covenant, though his house was not with God as he could wish; so many of the most highly

avored saints have had to put their mouth into the dust before God in solemn silence, and to submit to His holy will. But can they do this without special grace? Do not they almost above all others need the Comforter to support them under such heart-rending trials? Who else can silence the murmurs of their rebellious heart, and bend and bow it into submission to these heavy strokes?

4. Many, too, of the choicest of God's people have to drink the bitter cup of poverty, to labor hard for the bread that perishes. But that bread is scanty, and their minds are often filled with anxiety as to the coming morrow, whence a fresh supply is to come. These also need an inward Comforter to stay their murmurings and fretfulness, and to set before their eyes how their Master "had not where to lay His head"; how He was "a Man of sorrows," and passed through this world as a poor, despised carpenter's son. Poverty is one of the greatest of earthly trials, and has a peculiar tendency to stir up unbelief, as well as fretfulness and envy against those who seem to be more favorably dealt with. But the blessed Spirit, the Comforter, can subdue every murmuring thought, and can so bless the soul with inward consolation, that poverty and need lose their keen edge, and a crust with the Lord's blessing may become sweeter food than all the delicacies under which the tables of the wealthy groan.

5. Many, too, of the Lord's people are suffering under bodily disease. Their body is racked with pain, or their constitution is shattered with ailments of long standing, or their nerves are weak and trembling, or their general health broken by multiplied afflictions. This often causes inward murmuring, fretfulness, and rebellion, for few trials are heavier than continued ill health. Hence the need of a Comforter to support them under the pain and languor of an afflicted body; and while they are thus reminded that their time is but short and that life itself is held by a slender thread, so to manifest the power of His grace that as "the outward man perishes, so the inward man may be renewed day by day."

6. But time will not suffice to enumerate a tenth of the numerous trials and afflictions that the Lord's people have to pass through. They have temptations also which in some respects are harder to bear and need more special help. Their own treacherous, unstable, and wicked heart is continually presenting snares in which their unwary feet are too readily caught, and they have to prove again and again, to their sorrow and shame, the truth of the word:

"Seldom do we see the snares

Before we feel the smart."

Satan, too, is continually tempting them to despair, or infidelity, it may be, even to suicide, and distressing their mind with many suggestions which, though groundless, appear at the time to have some solid foundation. Under these temptations they need that special relief and consolation which nothing short of the Spirit of God can communicate. For when severely pressed down by the weight of temptation, they deeply feel that His inward comforts alone can relieve their distress or speak a solid peace to their souls.

B. The Spirit of truth. But the Lord speaks of this blessed Comforter under another title: He calls Him the "Spirit of truth." We are surrounded with error, the carnal heart is full of it; for wherever truth is not, there error must be. A veil of ignorance is by nature spread thickly over the mind, through which not one ray of divine light penetrates. Men love error--I mean religious error--for God's own testimony is that they "love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil" (John 3:19). They love to be deceived; they hate the hand which would rend the delusion asunder. While then they are encompassed with the mists of error, how can they find the way to truth? The Lord the Spirit alone can dissipate these clouds, disperse these mists, and take away this veil of unbelief and ignorance spread over the heart; and this it is His

sacred office to perform, for He is the "Spirit of truth."

1. But why we may ask, does He bear from the Lord's own lips this sacred title: "the Spirit of truth"? Because it is His prerogative to unfold truth to the soul, to engraft it into the heart, and to make the saints of God vitally and experimentally acquainted with it. I say vitally and experimentally, because we may know truth in the letter without the teaching of the Spirit. We may have a sound creed, a form of words perfectly consistent with the outward revelation of truth in the Scriptures; but this will neither sanctify nor save. Truth in the bare letter brings no deliverance from the guilt, filth, love, power, and practice of sin; brings not the soul near unto God, repels not Satan, sets not up the kingdom of God with power in the heart.

We need a better teaching than this. We need "the Spirit of truth," whose especial office is to take the truth of God, and to open up, reveal, make known, apply, and seal it with His own gracious operation, divine influence, and holy power upon the heart and conscience. Do not you who fear His great name find at times darkness pervading your souls--an Egyptian darkness, a darkness that may be felt--so that there seems not a ray of divine light in your breast? Whence comes this dreary feeling, this sinking down of your whole soul under the power of darkness, as the earth sinks under the power of the shades of night? Because the Spirit of truth has come into your heart to convince you of the darkness in which you were born, and to show you that it still hovers as deeply as ever over your carnal mind.

Remember this, that as the carnal mind is ever "enmity against God," darkness wholly possesses it; for as love is light, enmity is darkness, and the light of life has no more penetrated the carnal mind than the love of God. It is light in your spiritual mind that makes you see this darkness; it is the teaching of God's Spirit in your soul that makes you groan and sigh beneath it. Now as you mourn and sigh under this darkness you feel the indispensable necessity of the Spirit of truth to open up, apply, reveal, and make known the truth of God to your soul, for you can no more give yourself light than give yourself faith or love.

But, through rich and unspeakable mercy, there are times and seasons when a spiritual light seems to shine upon the sacred page. You read the Bible with enlightened eyes. Power and sweetness seem to stream, as it were, in rich unction through the Word of truth, and as you read it with softened heart and tearful eyes, the truth of God shines from it into your understanding as brightly and as clearly as the sun in the noonday sky. You wonder how anyone can doubt or deny the truth of God; it is so clear to you that you think he who runs may read.

And why? Because the Spirit of truth is opening it up to your understanding and applying it with power to your heart. You wonder how any man who reads the Bible can deny the Deity of Christ, His eternal Sonship, the atoning blood, the justifying righteousness, the dying love of the Lord the Lamb. You wonder how any man can read the Bible and deny the covenant of grace, the electing love of God, the full salvation wrought out by His dear Son, and the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. Why is the matter so clear to you? Because the Spirit of truth is illuminating your mind, radiating light from the Scriptures into your soul, and opening up the truth of God with divine power to your heart. This He does as the Spirit of truth, for as the Spirit of truth He makes the Word of God to be spirit and life to the soul.

2. But not only at times do you see the truth of God plainly and clearly, but you believe as well as see. There is a divine movement in your soul, whereby your heart is brought under the holy influence and sacred impression of God's truth. As the wax to the seal, as the clay to the potter's hand, so your heart is softened and melted within you, and you receive God's truth stamped upon your heart with a heavenly

hand. Does not this show that the Spirit of truth is not only enlightening your understanding, but quickening your conscience, renewing your heart, and spreading a divine influence through your soul? Truth by itself can only stand at the portal, or look in at the window; it cannot come within to regenerate or renew; but the Spirit of truth enters with truth in His mouth, and breathes it into the heart as a living breath, as the prophet saw in "the valley of vision," for until "the breath" came into the slain they did not live (Ezek. 37:10).

3. Under this sacred and spiritual influence there are times and seasons when your conscience seems in an especial manner wrought upon. The evil of sin is set before you as perhaps you have never seen it before. Your conscience bleeds with the guilt and weight of it. You see what a dreadful and an evil thing sin is, how loathsome, how detestable! You could almost weep tears of blood that you have been such a sinner. Your backslidings rise up to view as so many mountains of iniquity. The wickedness of your heart is laid bare, and you feel that there cannot be such another wretch on earth. Your corrupt nature is opened up in all its filth and gore; you wonder how the long suffering of God could have borne with you so many years in the wilderness. And not only so, but tears flow down your cheek; sobs of contrition heave from your breast; you could almost weep your life away, because you have sinned so deeply against such love and against such blood. Why is this? The Spirit of truth is breathing upon your conscience, and the feeling of sin there is His work.

4. Then, again, there are times and seasons when your heart seems in a special manner lifted up to heavenly things. It is as if a live coal from off the altar touched your inmost affections. You see Jesus by the eye of faith at the right hand of the Father; your heart goes out after Him in love and affection; you feel that, be you what you may, you do love Him with every faculty of your soul, and your desire is to live to His praise, and die in the sweet enjoyment of His love shed abroad in your heart. And yet you feel that you never can upon earth love Him as He is to be loved. You must have an immortal tongue to sing His praise, and a glorified soul to hold all that His love can bestow. Why is this? Because the Spirit of truth is love in your affections.

In this way, then, we have the Spirit of truth as light in the understanding, life in the heart, feeling in the conscience, and love in the affections; and by these four things He is made vitally and experimentally known to the saints of God as the Spirit of truth. Can the letter of truth, however clear or sound, do all this? Can a sound creed or a mere form of words effect a work in the least degree approaching to it? I feel sure they cannot, for words as words cannot reach beyond the surface; they cannot sink or penetrate into the very core of the heart's deepest feeling. It is therefore indispensably necessary that the Spirit of truth should put, as it were, a soul into the body of truth, or to speak more correctly, should Himself regenerate, renew and sanctify the saint of God that he may have a living union and communion with the Lord of life and glory; for "he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit," and he becomes this when he is baptized by the Holy Spirit into that spiritual baptism which makes him a living member of the body of Christ.

II. The world cannot receive this Comforter, this Spirit of truth. But I pass on to show how the world thinks, speaks and acts with respect to this promised "Comforter," this "Spirit of truth." The Lord says, "Whom the world cannot receive." Aye, it stands as good now as it stood good then. The world cannot now receive the Comforter, the Spirit of truth, one whit more than it could receive Him then. And why cannot the world receive Him? It is too full of sin and self. If you have a pitcher filled with dirty water, is there room in it for clean water? If a vessel is filled with clay up to the very brim, is there room in it for gold and silver and precious stones? The world is full--full of pride, ignorance, prejudice, self-righteousness, unbelief and selfishness. Then what room is there for the Comforter, the Spirit of truth? "My Word," said the Lord to the Pharisees, "has no place in you." They could not receive it, for their hearts were barred against it.

1. But the Lord Himself gives two reasons why the world cannot receive the Spirit of truth. The first is, "It sees Him not;" the second is, "It knows Him not." The world--that is, the world dead in sin, and the world dead in profession, men generally destitute of the life and power of God--must have something that it can see. It cannot receive that which it sees not. Nature, sense, reason can never go beyond earthly things; thus, while men have no divine faith, they are under the entire influence of their natural minds; and, as heavenly things can only be seen by heavenly eyes, they cannot receive the things which are invisible. Things must be either presented to their natural eye, or be such as their rational understanding can grasp, or they cannot and will not receive them. Now this explains why a religion that presents itself with a degree of beauty and grandeur to the natural eye will always be received by the world, while a spiritual, internal, heartfelt and experimental religion will always be rejected. The world can receive a religion that consists of forms, rites, and ceremonies. These are things seen. Beautiful buildings, painted windows, pealing organs, melodious choirs, the pomp and parade of an earthly priesthood, and a whole apparatus of religious ceremony, carry with them something that the natural eye can see and admire. The world receives all this external worship because suitable to the natural mind and intelligible to the reasoning faculties. But the quiet, inward, experimental, divine religion, which presents no attractions to the outward eye, but is wrought in the heart by a divine operation, the world cannot receive this, because it presents nothing that the natural eye can rest upon with pleasure, or is adapted to gratify the general idea of what religion is or should be.

2. "Neither knows Him." The world knows nothing of divine consolation, because it knows nothing of spiritual grief and sorrow. Hardened in sin, careless in self-righteousness, or steeped up to the lips in an empty profession, what do men care to know about an inward Comforter? Their religion, such as it is, has never cost them an hour's uneasiness or brought their heart down with trouble and distress. If, according to Paul's rule, "as the sufferings of Christ abound, so consolation abounds also by Christ" (2 Cor. 1:5), where there is no suffering, there can be no consolation. Not knowing, then, for themselves anything of the inward consolations of the Spirit, they cannot believe there is such a thing known to the saint of God.

"Fanaticism, enthusiasm, stuff, madness, ridiculous nonsense, bigotry, a bad spirit," any term that can be used, any which comes the easiest to hand, will be launched with many an angry invective against that religion which mainly consists in the love and power of the Holy Spirit. And why? For this reason, because they do not themselves know the consolations bestowed upon the saints of God, nor are they acquainted with the work and witness of the Spirit of truth in their own heart and conscience. Marvel not, then, that worldly professors despise a religion wrought in the soul by the power of God. Be not surprised if even own relatives think you are almost insane when you speak of the consolations of the Spirit or of the teachings of God in your soul. They cannot receive these things, for they have no experience of them, and being such as are altogether opposed to the carnal mind, they reject them with enmity and scorn.

It is surprising that men with the Bible in their hands, and read as it is so much in public and private, should set themselves so desperately against what is so plainly declared therein. Our Lord's own words, if they were not His, would be called by thousands "fanaticism" and "enthusiasm"; for the moment that they are opened up and brought forward as present realities, they arouse a very storm of indignation. Men can read them or bear to hear them read as long as they are 'merely in the Bible'. The 'sword in the sheath' is not dreaded, for it inflicts no wounds; but the naked sword cuts too deeply not to arouse enmity against its keen strokes. It was so when the Lord spoke the words; it is so now when His words in the mouth of His servants have point and edge.

But if the Lord has given to any of you eyes to see and hearts to receive this divine Comforter, praise, bless, and adore your God and Father, and most merciful Benefactor, for His distinguishing grace in giving you to know Him as your Comforter; and if He has ever dropped into your soul any of His sweet teachings, bless Him that you have received Him also as the Spirit of truth into your conscience. What but sovereign grace--rich, free and super-abounding grace--has made the difference between you and them? But for His divine operations upon your soul, you would still be of the world, hardening your heart against everything good and godlike, walking on in the pride and ignorance of unbelief and self-righteousness, until you sank down into the chambers of death.

O, it is a mercy if but one drop of heavenly consolation has ever been distilled into your soul; if ever you have felt or found any relief in your sorrows and distresses from the work and witness of the Holy Spirit; if you have ever gathered any solid comfort from any promise applied with power, from any text dropped into your heart with a sealing testimony, from any manifestation of the love and blood of Christ, or from any communication of liberty, joy, or peace, such as are produced by the operation and influence of the Spirit of God. It may have been but little, nor did it last long, but it has given you a taste of its blessedness, and made you long for another sip, another crumb, another visit.

But look to it well, and examine carefully whether it be real, and whether, weighed in the balance of the sanctuary, you have good ground for believing that what you received with such comfort to your soul was distilled into your heart by the Comforter, and that the truth which you have felt and believed, as well as professed, has been opened up to your conscience by the Spirit of truth. And this leads me to our third point, which is-

III. The difference that the Lord draws between His disciples, and by implication all the saints of God, and the world--"But you know Him." The disciples of the Lord Jesus were very weak and ignorant. They closed their ears to the very last to the Lord's declarations as to His dying the death of the cross. And even when He died before their very eyes, they were as slow to believe in His promised resurrection. Considering the opportunities which they had of daily communion with Him and of instruction from His lips, we are tempted to wonder at their unbelief; and yet, with all their weakness and ignorance, they knew something vitally and experimentally of the Spirit's work upon their hearts.

It may be so with some of you. You may be very weak, very doubting, very fearing, very unbelieving. The natural, deep-seated unbelief of your heart may at times seem to have great power over you, and you may often have reason to say, "I would believe, but cannot." Still you may know, as the disciples knew, something, if not much, of the work of the Comforter, and something, if not much, of the teaching of the Spirit of truth. The Lord assured His disciples that there was a wide and fundamental difference between them and the world. "But you know Him." May I say the same to you: "You know Him"? But if so, may I not further ask: What has that Comforter done for you as a Comforter? What has that Spirit of truth revealed and made manifest to you as the Spirit of truth? Let us examine for a few moments how He is made known to the family of God, and what He does by His power and grace in their heart and conscience.

1. First, He convinces of sin; that is His special office. He, opens up the law, discovers the curse attached to it, makes the soul feel its spirituality, its breadth, and length, and condemning authority. Do you know this Spirit as a Spirit of conviction in having convinced you of sin? Has He ever laid guilt upon your conscience by opening up the law, and condemning you as a transgressor against it, so that you have put your mouth in the dust and confessed you were guilty before God? If you have felt conviction of sin by the Holy Spirit, you know Him; if not as a Comforter, yet as preparing the way for comfort. You know Him in

His killing, if not in His reviving; in His bringing down, if not in His raising up; in His discovering sin, if not in revealing salvation.

2. But He is known also as a Spirit of grace and of supplication. When the Lord is pleased to awaken the soul by His Spirit and grace, He gives Him as 'an internal intercessor' to intercede "with groanings that cannot be uttered." Was that ever given to you, so that upon your bended knees you besought the Lord with that earnestness, that sincerity, that pouring out of the heart before Him, with all that simplicity and brokenness, with those tears and sighs, which mark and manifest His internal intercession, and distinguish it from mere formal prayer? If so, you have received Him as a Spirit of grace and of supplications; you "know Him."

3. But has He ever dropped an encouraging word into your heart? As you have sat to hear me or any other minister opening up the work of grace upon the soul, exalting the Lord the Lamb, speaking of His blood and righteousness, tracing out the sacred work of God upon the conscience, have you felt an internal testimony that these things you know for yourself in the depths of your own heart? Then you know Him, for it is He who has given you this encouraging testimony; it is He who blessed the Word with a witnessing power to your conscience.

4. Or have you ever had a revelation of Christ to your soul? Did you ever see Him by the eye of faith at the right hand of God? This can only be by the testimony of the Spirit, for it is His covenant office to take of the things of Christ and to reveal them to the soul. He glorifies Christ by manifesting Him. If you have seen Christ by the eye of faith, if you have had a manifestation of the Son of God and a revelation of Him with power to your soul, "you know Him," because it is He who gave you that most blessed manifestation, such as eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man.

5. Has Jesus ever been made precious to your heart? Did you ever hold Him, as it were, in the arms of faith, as a mother clasps her babe to her bosom, and love Him with a pure heart fervently? Who kindled that love? Who touched your heart with that sacred flame? The Comforter, the Spirit of truth. Then you know Him; for "the love of God is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit."

6. Have you ever experienced any of that spirituality of mind which is life and peace, any lifting up of your affections to things above, where Jesus sits at God's right hand, so that you felt that earth was no place for you; the things of time and sense you could tread under your feet; and your heart was so taken up with the blessed things of eternity, that they became the very element in which your soul could bathe, the only happiness you knew below? Then "you know Him," because it was He, and He alone, who lifted up your heart and affections to these heavenly things.

7. Do you love the people of God? Can you say, with all your darkness, and doubt, and fear, that you do love the image of Christ which you see in His people? that taking away all other evidences, this seems still to you so plain that you cannot deny it, and Satan cannot beat you out of it, that you do love those who love Jesus? Whence comes this love? From the Spirit of truth and love, who alone can enable us to love the saints as we love the Savior, to love the members as we love the Head. Then "you know Him."

8. Has any deliverance ever come to you from the power of temptation? Have you had any manifestation of the sufferings of the Lord of life and glory; any solemn, heart-melting views of the garden of Gethsemane; any standing at the cross of Calvary; any view by the eye of faith of the blood that fell from the Redeemer's sacred brow as filled with sorrow in the garden, or crowned with thorns upon the cross; any sympathy, any union, any fellow-feeling with the Man of Sorrows? Whence came this? By the Spirit of

Truth, the Comforter. Then "you know Him."

9. Has your heart ever felt true repentance for sin, any godly sorrow, any forsaking of your bosom lusts, any breaking to pieces of your fondest idols, any loosening of earthly ties, any willingness to crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts? The Spirit of truth alone can accomplish this. Then "you know Him."

10. Has the fear of death ever been removed? Did you ever look that gaunt 'king of terrors' in the face? Did you ever look beyond the narrow isthmus of time and the dark and dreary river which flows between you and eternity, and believe that when death came it would be a messenger from the Lord to take your soul into His bosom? Has the Lord ever been made so dear, near, and precious that you have felt as if you could gladly drop the body and mount on eagle's wings from earth to heaven? Then "you know Him"; for who but He could deliver you from the fear of death, and make you, instead of shrinking from him with terror, even welcome the last enemy as your best friend? To have felt this, is it not to have known the Spirit as the Comforter?

And oh what a blessing it is also to have received the same gracious and heavenly Teacher as the Spirit of truth! If this is your happy case, you know the truth for yourself, and the truth is dear to your soul; it has been ingrafted by a divine witness in your heart, and inlaid by the power of God in your conscience. The truth as it is in Jesus is very, very precious to you. You cannot part with it; it is your very life. Sooner than part with God's truth and your interest therein, you would be willing in favored moments to lay down your life itself.

But what makes you love God's truth? What has given you a heart to embrace and delight in it; and when you have come to the house of prayer, it may be with a fainting body and a troubled mind, has yet supported your weary steps and brought you in; or when you have gone home from hearing the Word, has cheered your heart in the dark and gloomy night as you have lain upon your bed, and drawn your affections up to the Lord Jesus Christ? The Comforter, the Spirit of truth. He, and He alone, could give it so firm and enduring a place in your heart, conscience, and affections.

Then live that truth, as well as love it, and proclaim its power and efficacy in your life and conversation. If the Spirit has written His truth upon your heart, He will bring forth that truth in your lips and in your life. He will make it manifest that you are "children that cannot lie." You will show forth the power of truth, in the sincerity of your speech, in the uprightness of your movements, in your family, in the church, in your business, in your general character and deportment, and in everything which stamps the reality of religion and the power of vital godliness.

IV. I now pass on to our last point, which is the reason why His people know Him, and the promise the Lord gives: "He dwells with you, and shall be in you."

That holy Comforter and most gracious Spirit does not take up a 'temporary' abode in the heart of the Lord's people. Where He once takes up His dwelling, there He forever dwells and lives. "He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever." Oh the blessing! Where once that holy Dove has lighted, there that Dove abides. He does not visit the soul with His grace, and then leave it to perish under the wrath of God, or allow His work to wither, droop and die. But where He has once come into the soul with power, there He fixes His continual habitation, for He makes the bodies of the saints His temple. He consecrates them to the service of God. He takes up His dwelling in their heart; there He lives, there He moves, there He works, and sanctifies body and soul to the honor and glory of the Lord God Almighty.

But I think I can almost hear you say, "I believe it to be true; but how can He be in my heart when I am often so cold and lifeless; when I seem to be at times so exposed to the working of every sin, and subject to every vanity and temptation? How can this Comforter, the Spirit of truth, dwell with me, and I be what I am?" He may still be in you, and you may not be able, at all times and under all circumstances, to recognize His presence. He dwells in your heart, and yet sometimes He dwells out of sight and almost out of life.

Do not forget that you still have a carnal mind, which is "enmity against God." Remember that "the flesh still lusts against the Spirit as well as the Spirit against the flesh, and that these two are contrary the one to the other." Believe the Lord's Word, which cannot lie, and not the reasonings and workings of your own unbelieving heart. Take this, then, as a most certain truth, that He forever abides with that soul which He has once visited. For oh, what would be the consequences of His deserting it? Satan would enter in to fill it with his horrid blasphemies and wickedness, and the last state of that man would be worse than the first. No; the indwelling of the Spirit is needful to keep out the incoming of Satan; the indwelling of life to keep out death; the indwelling of holiness to keep out sin; the indwelling of the work and witness of the Holy Spirit to keep back the waves that would deluge the soul and the billows that would sweep it into a never-ending hell.

Therefore, blessed be the word that the Lord has spoken: "He dwells with you, and shall be in you." Yes, He shall be in you; He will never leave you nor forsake you. If He has begun His work, He will carry it on and bring it to completion. If He has once blessed you, He will bless you again. He will never leave the soul to which He has ever made known the glory of God, but He will bring you, who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, to those glorious and blissful mansions "where tears are wiped off all faces," and where you will see the Son of God as He is, be conformed to His image, and enjoy His ravishing presence to all eternity.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/jc-ryle/the-abiding-comforter/>

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