

Life in the Spirit: God in Person

Text: John 16:5-15

5.7.17



Reflection questions... [please consider the teaching notes, first, as a basis of your reflections]

“Who, or what, comes to mind when I say the word, “God”, as a Christian?”

I propose that it should be a very specific image/understanding which is inextricably linked to the Hebrew Story of the of the One, True, Creator-God, who offers himself to us personally and communally as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

“Why do you think that it is easier to think of the Holy Spirit in non-personal terms? How does that change the way that we would think about interacting with him?”

“What would you say that you know of God that was decidedly more revelational than informational? What do you know of God that didn’t come off the pages of your “Busy Christians” devotional?”

“I know about _____. I know _____. How can you say you truly ‘know’ something? Would you say that there is a confidence and ease of movement about your life when you are operating out of what you know?”

Teaching Notes...

We spend a great deal of time attempting to explain the Holy Spirit without actually experiencing/encountering him. The early followers of Jesus developed in their understanding by their encounter of him.

Let me be clear that I do not function under the assumption that what we need is some return to the “glory days” of the church in the first century. What I desire is not something that is simply “time-honored”, but a “time-honored practice”.

What I desire is that we somehow allow the Holy Spirit to leap off of the pages of our creeds and into the experiential life of the believing community.

When it comes to the Holy Spirit, it’s not that we are, most often, dismissive or ignorant, it’s that we are simply inexperienced.

Experience is that interaction with knowledge that allows you to say that you “know” it. Knowledge, in the biblical sense, is a term on intimacy. It signals a relationship between the one knowing and the one being known.

I continue to purport this idea of encounter, because the Bible is full of stories of people who did not simply “study” God in ways that were cold and calculated, but people who desired to “know”

God. To know, not just his *“works, but his ways”* (Psalm 103:7). These experiences were dynamic and personal because a faith that is impersonal and non-experiential violates our creative design.

The people in the OT did not have a fully-formed, Trinitarian theology, but they did have a decided awareness of the ***Spirit of God***. This was shaped by their Hebrew word, *“ruach”* (spirit) which was connected to the idea of “wind” (Genesis 8:1) and “breath” (Ezekiel 37:1-10).

Although unadvanced in their understanding of biological systems, they connected *“breath”* and *“life”*. No breath... no life. This idea led them to use the term **“spirit”** to refer to the life-principle in all living creatures (Genesis 6:17; 7:15).

But, they also believed that God was the source of all life. So, they used the word, “spirit”, to refer to the power that God exudes by which everything existed and was sustained. It was God’s own Spirit.

A person’s ***“ruach”*** (spirit) was mysterious. It was unseen. The ancients didn’t think in biological terms, but in spiritual terms which is challenging for us who function in a culture that has made an art-form out of de-constructing everything down to its smallest component. In the end, we are left with a pile of parts on the floor and no idea how they fit together or what their functionality.

FF to Jesus...

“Don’t let your hearts be troubled...” John 14

“Troubled”, in this sense, is a word used to describe someone who is *“shuddering as a result of being thrown into confusion”*. For (3) years, they have been travelling-companions with Jesus. Their lives had become so bound to his that they were identified as those who had been with him. Although they weren’t always sure what he was up to, they not only trusted him, they trusted themselves with him.

“This is for your own good that I go away...” John 16:7 (How many times have we heard that?)

Absence doesn’t make the heart grow fonder. In this case, it throws the heart into confusion and panic.

There are places to which we simply cannot go. There are times when we simply cannot be present. Our physicality entails certain limitations; limitations which Jesus accepted in his humanity.

None of us who live and function on this side of the resurrection have ever had the experience of bearded, footprints in the sand, touch-my-side, Jesus. We know Jesus--- we relate to Jesus--- through the expression and work of the Holy Spirit.

But... *“if I go away...”* **parakletos**

Difficult to translate this word, singularly, into the English language. **“Comforter”** (a being with; help others discern presence), **“counselor”**, **“advocate”** (voice for the voiceless), **“helper”**, **“one called alongside”**.

Jesus didn’t say, *“I am going away, but I am leaving you with written instructions and a way to reach me, if necessary”*. Jesus can say, *“You know the Spirit”*, because they know Jesus. The Spirit is the very life, essence, and personality of Jesus. The remainder of the NT will speak of them in the same breath (pardon the pun). To have the Spirit is to be indwelled by Jesus himself.

Personally, is the only way that God can come to us. It's the only way that we can know God.

As someone developing within the incubator of the church, hearing this person of the Trinity referred to as the **“Holy Ghost”**, didn't do me any favors. The ancient's use of non-personal terminology [wind, fire, water, oil], at times, to describe the Holy Spirit's activity among us, becomes challenging for us to understand him in **personal** ways.

“I AM, THAT I AM”... Exodus 3:14. Although it sounds like an odd way to introduce yourself, but if we are to conclude anything from it, we would, at the very least, recognize the use of a personal pronoun and a **“being”** verb.

Even though the Spirit's work (outcome of his interactions) is powerful and effective, he is never spoken of in non-personal terms. He is not simply an energy or force.

Christianity would say, *“Yes, everything has the finger-prints of God on it, but not everything is divine. We declare that there is an ‘energy’ that is animating and influencing everything we encounter around us, but the biblical conviction is that the “energy” is emanating from (proceeding from) someone personal: a relatable, intimate, involved, loving Creator-God.*

It is to our advantage, as humanity, to relegate the idea of this “presence” (which explains everything: *‘logos’*, Gr) to some impersonal energy or force because it allows us to “tap into it”, to “direct it”, to channel it”, but never surrender to it. It remains within our ability to control, and manage, and coerce. We remain autonomous and independent!

The Holy Spirit is the point at which God becomes personal and personally involved with us.

teaches (John 14 and 1 Corinthians 2:13)

leads (Galatians 5:18; Romans 8:14)

speaks (Luke 1:16; 2 Peter 1:21)

prays for us and with us (Romans 8)

can be resisted (Luke 7:51)

thinks (Luke 15:28)

can be grieved (Ephesians 4:30)

You don't know the really important things in life by information, but by revelation.

1 Corinthians 2:10 *“deep things of God...”*

information--- facts we gather on our own which we interpret subjectively and typically to support our own position or will. Information can be gained impersonally.

revelation--- personal knowledge offered only at another's (God) discretion, meant to offer another vision/will to which we might surrender. It can only be offered personally.

“Flesh and blood have not revealed that...” (Matthew 16:17)

No one knows God but God!

1 Corinthians 2:11 *“... no one can know God's thoughts except God's own Spirit”*. **There's “knowing”, then there's, “knowing”, right?**

The primary work of the Holy Spirit is to take all that is true about Jesus (and us, because of Jesus), remind us, teach us and lead us into it, until we ARE what we know.

When revelation (what the Holy Spirit offers you of Jesus and, necessarily, of yourself) becomes your experience, you know it and what you know gets settled because it has been transformative. It defies argument and you relate it without becoming argumentative. It changed you. It's what is truly memorable.

I have found no direct correlation between the plethora of God-facts that I have accumulated and its ability to ensure the life well-lived.

"Might I dare say that you could actually possess less information about God and receive some revelation which, if acted upon as truth, could radically alter your circumstance and posture?"

Most of the people that Jesus encountered, in some life-giving way, had little information about him, but some life-altering revelation about who God was through him.

Because the Holy Spirit is one with the Father and the Son, his role is to confirm and affirm our place with him and allow us to experience the same love they have for one another.

Jesus wants you to have the same experience of love from his Father that identified him and emboldened all of his actions.

Romans 5:5 "... God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit..."

Perhaps we are less likely to experience the Spirit as *helper*, when we assume that we have life under control? Maybe we don't experience the Spirit as *advocate* when we are always making our own case and trying to defend ourselves? How can the Holy Spirit *remind* us of what we have failed to learn? Perhaps the Spirit can't *lead* if we are determined to chart our own course for life? Are we the kind of people with whom the Spirit feels free to speak? How has your perpetual connectivity effected communion?