

John 14:15-21

¹⁵ 'If you love me, you will keep* my commandments.¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate,* to be with you for ever.¹⁷ This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in* you.

¹⁸ 'I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you.¹⁹ In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live.²⁰ On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.²¹ They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.'

That's the Spirit!

There is a theology that some still hold that God is an angry God who is pretty much disgusted with the human race and ready to "throw in the towel" so to speak, to condemn us all to hell for being such a sinful and ornery people. This theology sees Jesus as our intercessor, the one who died on our behalf in order to appease the Father and thus gain for us admittance into the hereafter. The problem that I have with this theology is in Jesus' own words, "I and the Father are one," and if the Father is angry and Jesus is the one who pays the price for us, well, we get the impression that God is schizophrenic; he's got his good side (Jesus) and his bad side (the mean father). When we think about the parable of the prodigal son, which is more about the father than the son, Jesus is giving us a picture of God's loving, forgiving, accepting character that will hopefully endear us to him. Jesus' life and ministry was intended to give us a clear picture of who the God really is, what he's like, and how far he's willing to go to save us from a life that is bound to sin and death and despair and hatred and everything else that spoils life. And the resurrection shows us that life in Christ is eternal as God always intended it to be.

The reason I bring up these points is that, just as we misunderstand the relationship between Jesus and the Father, so too do we misunderstand the relationship of the Holy Spirit to both Jesus and the Father. The word that is used in today's text is *parakletos*, which may be translated *comforter*, *advocate*, or *counselor*. The idea is that the *parakletos* is someone (not something) who is called to one's side, to plead a cause, or to advocate for another. The *parakletos* is a helper, an assistant. But in what way does the *parakletos* assist you and me? Is he (or she) advocating for us to the Father...or is he (or she) advocating for the Father to us?

Jesus says in verse 16: “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate,* to be with you forever.” Notice Jesus says, “*another* Advocate,” which indicates that Jesus is also an advocate. So if we bring the whole trinity into the picture, we can look at it two ways: First, we can understand that Jesus and the Holy Spirit serve as our defense attorneys, both saying to the Father, “Father, forgive them. They have placed their faith in Jesus, so don’t punish them.” And assuming that we are admitted into heaven, we may feel a need to tiptoe past the temperamental, angry Father since the only reason he allowed us into his presence was that his son died on our behalf. Or you can look at it another way; You can see this as Jesus and the Holy Spirit both advocating the Father, being the spokesmen of the Father, to us. More specifically, you and I were so far gone, so lost and so hopeless, that the Father sent Jesus to reveal the love of the Father to us, and after Jesus has left us, has ascended into heaven, the Father sends the Holy Spirit, the *parakletos*, to advocate for Christ, to speak to our hearts and reveal that, yes, Jesus is the Son of God, a God who loves us enough to become just like us, to show us his wondrous love, to be humiliated and beaten and killed for us, and through the resurrection to bring us hope and belief that, yes, we do have eternal life in Christ. I like the second option. It makes infinitely more sense than the first. The Spirit gives us our faith.

Think about it: Our Christian faith sounds absurd to the world. A crucified God? A faith in a man who died almost two thousand years ago and, according to a few witnesses, was brought back to life, only to disappear once again? There are a lot more people at home watching T.V. or at restaurants having brunch right now than there are sitting in church pews. Why are you here, unless someone or something is within you that is telling you that Jesus Christ is our Lord, *advocating* that this man is indeed the Son of God who rose from the dead, is alive now and eternally, and has promised *you* a place where he is? Praise God! He has given you the Holy Spirit!

Do you remember high school, and your school basketball team? There were the star players, the starting lineup, and some other good players. But if you went to every basketball game, you may have noticed that person who was always in uniform, and never on the court...or maybe put into the game for a play or two, and everyone breathes a sigh of relief when someone else is placed into the game and he’s benched once again. He’d be there to get water or Gatorade for players as they came out of the game, get them clean towels, and encourage them on the sideline. And you may notice that sometimes it’s that person who is the biggest cheerleader, the one who always tells the star players, “good job” or “that’s ok. You’re doing fine.” “Way to hustle!” And when the season is over and all the trophies are being presented, you know that last trophy that didn’t go to any of the star players, but went to that person who was at every game, in uniform, cheering on his teammates. That was the trophy for “Best Team Spirit.” What a great trophy! To the person who was never in the spotlight, but encouraged those who were. He may have never scored a point, but his enthusiasm may have led others to score hundreds of points. That’s the Spirit.

The Spirit is hard to conceptualize because the Spirit is not drawing attention to himself; he’s drawing attention to Christ who draws attention to the Father.

Now verse 17 says that the world cannot receive the Spirit because the world neither sees him nor knows him. Some think that that means there are some people who damned to remain blind, but I don't believe that's what Jesus means. The world, according to John, is simply everything that does not know or embrace Christ. Once someone knows Christ, and we all progress from a state of NOT knowing Christ to a state of knowing him, and once someone knows him, that person is no longer of the world. Once upon a time, we were all "of the world" and none of us, I believe, had a direct physical encounter with the resurrected Christ. But the Spirit convinced us, and here we are, no longer of the world, but of the kingdom of God. Everyone has the potential to be part of God's kingdom. How?

Well that's where you and I fit into things. The Spirit works within us the way that it works in that fellow or young lady sitting on the sideline...only the team that he or she is cheering on is EVERYBODY...the entire human race. That's our team! Christ died for each and every person in this world. He told us to love our enemies, because he died for them too. God's grace extends to all people. So you and I, as SPIRITED disciples of Jesus Christ, we're not seeking our own glory, but Christ's. We're getting Gatorade for the thirsty, we're bringing clean towels to the tired and exhausted, offering encouragement all the time, AND PEOPLE WILL TAKE NOTICE. And it's the Holy Spirit in you that helps you lead others to Christ: When people ask you, "Why are you always so positive? How can you be so kind to those people? What makes you so joyful?" The Spirit does what it always does: it points to Christ. You don't say, "Well I believe it's essential for my own health to keep my chin up," or "My doctor tells me that I need to be more patient." No. The Holy Spirit takes charge of your tongue and you say, "I believe in Jesus Christ." Our persistent and bold witnessing of the Father's love, manifest in Jesus Christ, and driven by the Holy Spirit will change hearts and minds and bring many into God's kingdom.