

Journey to Pentecost

WITHOUT A HOPE IN THE WORLD

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Jesus was preparing His disciples for the worst. He told them what was coming. He described how He would be mistreated and killed. He told them He would rise from the dead. And He told them that whenever He was away from them, He would not leave them alone; He would send a substitute—another Advocate.

Our Advocate

The original word for Advocate, in Greek, was *paracletos*—the Paraclete—literally, “one called alongside.” It was a term used for a defense lawyer, who represents his client’s interests in a court of law. It was used for a nurse, who attends to her patient’s care and comfort. Other translations render the word as Helper, Comforter, Counselor, Intercessor, Strengtheners, Guide, and Standby.

Such an Advocate is a mighty source of hope—in sickness, in desperation, in loneliness, in weakness, in travel, in prayer, and in legal proceedings.

Do you know Him, this Advocate? Jesus called Him “the Holy Spirit.” He and God the Father have sent Him to us. In Jesus’ physical absence, the Holy Spirit is our Comforter and Advocate, and the perfect representative of Christ, for He and the Savior are one.

John 14

¹⁵ “If you love me, obey my commandments. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, who will never leave you. ¹⁷ He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth. The world cannot receive him, because it isn’t looking for him and doesn’t recognize him. But you know him, because he lives with you now and later will be in you.

John 14

²⁶ But when the Father sends the Advocate as my representative—that is, the Holy Spirit—he will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you.

John 15

²⁶ “But I will send you the Advocate—the Spirit of truth. He will come to you from the Father and will testify all about me.

John 16

⁷ But in fact, it is best for you that I go away, because if I don't, the Advocate won't come. If I do go away, then I will send him to you.

The work of the Holy Spirit supplements the work of Jesus Christ. Christ was the first Paraclete, who came to strengthen us by His atoning death. Now, the Holy Spirit empowers us to live out this life that Christ has given us.

1 John 2

¹ My dear children, I am writing this to you so that you will not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an Advocate who pleads our case before the Father. He is Jesus Christ, the one who is truly righteous. ² He himself is the sacrifice that atones for our sins—and not only our sins but the sins of all the world.

Technically, the *parakletos* was the family attorney who was on a permanent retainer. Any time a problem arose in the family, the *parakletos* was on call, and he would come immediately to assist in resolving the issue.

He Is With You

Jesus said, *“You know [the Holy Spirit], because he lives WITH you now and later will be in you.”* (John 14:17)

Right now, look up toward Heaven and tell yourself, out loud, “The Holy Spirit is with me now.”

To those who have been neglected by self-absorbed parents, I say, “The Holy Spirit is with you right now, and He will never neglect you!”

To those who have been abandoned at birth or in adolescence by father or mother, I say, “The Holy Spirit is with you now, and He will never abandon you!”

To those who have been rejected by peers or loved ones, I say, “The Holy Spirit is with you now, and He will never reject you!”

To those who have been ignored, or overlooked, or minimized, or marginalized, I say, “The Holy Spirit is with you now, and He will never forsake you!”

No matter who you are, or where you have come from, or what you have come through—no matter what you have done, or left undone—the Holy Spirit is with you now, and that is Good News!

The Holy Spirit is with you to guide you. Not just to decide which color shirt to wear, or where to eat dinner—the Holy Spirit is with you to guide you, as Jesus said, “*into all truth.*” (John 14:17)

If there is one thing that every human being needs to know, it is the truth. Not simply “what is true,” but what is the TRUTH about the world in which we live—what is real and reliable, what holds it all together, how does it all work, what does it all mean.

Sadly, some have given up on discovering such truth for life, but the Holy Spirit is with you for that very purpose. However, it does not come in a single blinding flash of white light. Instead, it grows, like ever-widening ripples in a pond, as the Holy Spirit guides our way and illuminates our understanding of His Word, the Bible.

No Superstition

People, especially in Marin, like to think of themselves as sophisticated and technological, but remain filled with superstitions, like astrology and horoscopes. Christians are not immune to this. We, too, can succumb to the new-age desire for the power to manipulate our environment. We may not go as far as accepting the foolish idea that the courses of the stars determine our destinies, our prosperity, our relationships, our achievements, and our successes. However, it is equally superstitious to equate our feelings and inclinations with the leading of the Holy Spirit.

It can seem so much more exciting to live with a freewheeling openness to impulses and imaginations—what we may prefer to call the “leading of the Holy Spirit”—rather than to practice the laborious discipline of truly understanding and applying the Scriptures. However, this is exceedingly dangerous ground. If you want to do the will of the Father, you need to study the Word of the Father—and leave the magic to the astrologers.

Through the Word

The Spirit works in the Word, with the Word, and through the Word. He is the Author of the Scriptures, having directly inspired each of their 40 writers. The Bible is His primary tool of communication. In it He has revealed what could not be seen or known or understood apart from it.

But He doesn’t use the Word by “cut and paste”—taking a word from here, and a phrase from there—to create a maxim that has no context, and no history.

The Bible is not a riddle to be figured out, and you do not need a special code to unlock its truth. The Bible is a compilation of books and letters and poems welded into the history of the Hebrew people and the Early Church, to whom God revealed Himself and His purpose. If you will take the time to discover the broad sweep of the history it

records, and recognize the cultures from which it has been taken, and keep it all together, rather than picking it apart—in other words, abide by its context—God the Holy Spirit will illuminate your world and your life with its precepts and principles.

Illumination is not revelation. Revelation is an appealing new-age term, because it suggests secret insight—knowledge that others do not yet have—and immediately boosts its possessor into an elite position. This is the age-old challenge of Gnosticism, and it is very much alive and still threatening the church today.

The Bible is God's self-revealing message to humankind. But we regard the Bible as His *complete* revelation. There is nothing more needed, nothing more to add. There is no additional source of divine revelation to be found. We don't add Mary Baker Eddy's "Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures." We don't add Joseph Smith's "Book of Mormon." We don't add the Urantia Book, or the Aquarian Gospel, or the Gospel of Thomas, or any other text that purports to present another history of the life of Jesus. Nor do we add any experience—vision or dream—that embellishes or alters the truth given in the Scriptures.

All of the texts I have mentioned do not simply add information to what the Bible tells us; they *alter* the information found in the Bible. Thus, they *contradict* the Bible and they *change* the message that God has given us. They present a *different* Jesus. And they minimize or eliminate the cross and its centrality in the saving work of Christ. In the end, they leave you with a salvation you must accomplish for yourself—whether by special knowledge or endless deeds—and that is not salvation at all, but a life of slavery.

Revelation or Illumination?

God's Word, the Bible reveals who God is, what God has done, and what God expects of us—that is revelation. God has pulled back the veil that separates Heaven from Earth. In fact, He tore the veil in two, from top to bottom, so it could never again be raised to separate us from Him.

That is the effect that Paul described in Romans 8:

³⁵ *Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death?* ³⁷ *No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us.*

³⁸ *And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love.* ³⁹ *No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Revelation is fixed and embedded in the Holy Scriptures.

When the Holy Spirit highlights a passage of Scripture, to give us understanding or direction, that is illumination. It is not new information from God, but fresh application of His Word to our lives. That is the work of the Holy Spirit today. He is not crafting new Scriptures, but illuminating the ones we already have, in order to bring us to Jesus and to guide us to do the Father's will. He helps us to partner with God in His work—for time and eternity—by illuminating the Scriptures.

It is this way in which the Holy Spirit is with *every person* on the planet, using the Scriptures to reveal Jesus and lead everyone to salvation and newness of life. There is no other way. *“There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved”* (Acts 4:12). And God has given no other Book by which we may find Jesus.

Perhaps you have heard of the wonderful way in which God has been giving dreams at night to Muslim people in regions closed to Christian missionaries. Sometimes, to multiple people in a village on the same night, Jesus has been appearing to spiritually hungry Muslims. Yet, in those dreams, He directs them to someone who already knows Him, someone who can share the Scriptures with them, someone who can tell them accurately who He is and what He has done to save them.

Hope for the World

No new revelation here. Only direction to the Scriptures, so He can illuminate the truth, and they can be saved. Paul captured the situation for the church at Ephesus, as he described the plight of non-Jewish people everywhere, and their deliverance:

Ephesians 2

¹¹ Don't forget that you Gentiles used to be outsiders. You were called “uncircumcised heathens” by the Jews, who were proud of their circumcision, even though it affected only their bodies and not their hearts. ¹² In those days you were living apart from Christ. You were excluded from citizenship among the people of Israel, and you did not know the covenant promises God had made to them. You lived in this world without God and without hope. ¹³ But now you have been united with Christ Jesus. Once you were far away from God, but now you have been brought near to him through the blood of Christ.

Apart from the Holy Spirit, there is no lasting hope in this world. There is too much danger, too much turmoil, too much uncertainty. It is the Holy Spirit who authored our peace in the Scriptures and now applies them to our lives to make that peace our secure experience through Jesus Christ.

For those who already have those Scriptures, the Holy Spirit sheds light on them as often as you seek it from Him. He is your Helper, your Teacher, your Guide, and Comforter.

If you lack assurance, ask the Holy Spirit to comfort your heart and mind through the Scriptures.

If you lack understanding, ask the Holy Spirit to illuminate the Scriptures for you.

If you lack direction, ask the Holy Spirit to make plain the way He wants you to go, guiding you with the principles of God's Word.

If you lack courage to move forward, ask the Holy Spirit to illuminate portions of the Bible that will encourage you and point you in the right way.

If you lack strength to overcome temptations or obstacles, ask the Holy Spirit to illuminate passages in the Scriptures that will give you strength to overcome and continue.

What is it you need? *"All Scripture is inspired by God (the Holy Spirit) and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God (the Holy Spirit) uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work"* (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Without a hope in the world? Not now! And not ever again, because the Holy Spirit has come!