

Paraclete & Spiritual Gifts

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PARACLETE

The Holy Spirit Ministers to Believers

*When he, the Spirit of truth, comes,
he will guide you into all truth.
He will not speak on his own;
he will speak only what he hears,
and he will tell you what is yet to come.*

*He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine
and making it known to you.*

JOHN 16:13-14

Before Jesus' passion, he promised that the Father and he would send his disciples "another Counselor" (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). The Counselor or Paraclete, from the Greek word *parakletos* (meaning one who gives support), is a helper, adviser, strengthener, encourager, ally, and advocate. *Another* points to the fact that Jesus was the first Paraclete and is promising a replacement who, after he is gone, will carry on the teaching and testimony that he started (John 16:6-7).

Paraclete ministry, by its very nature, is personal, relational ministry, implying the full personhood of the one who fulfills it. Though the Old Testament said much about the Spirit's activity in Creation (e.g., Gen. 1:2; Ps. 33:6), revelation (e.g., Isa. 61:1-6; Mic. 3:8), enabling for service (e.g., Exod. 31:2-6; Judg. 6:34; 15:14-15; Isa. 11:2), and inward renewal (e.g., Ps. 51:10-12; Ezek. 36:25-27), it did not make clear that the Spirit is a distinct divine Person. In the New Testament, however, it becomes clear that the Spirit is as truly a Person distinct from the Father as the Son is. This is apparent not only from Jesus' promise of "another Counselor," but also from the fact that the Spirit, among other things, speaks (Acts 1:16; 8:29; 10:19; 11:12; 13:2; 28:25), teaches (John 14:26), witnesses (John 15:26), searches (1 Cor. 2:11), determines (1 Cor. 12:11), intercedes

(Rom. 8:26-27), is lied to (Acts 5:3), and can be grieved (Eph. 4:30). Only of a personal being can such things be said.

The divinity of the Spirit appears from the declaration that lying to the Spirit is lying to God (Acts 5:3-4), and from the linking of the Spirit with the Father and the Son in benedictions (2 Cor. 13:14; Rev. 1:4-6) and in the formula of baptism (Matt. 28:19). The Spirit is called "the seven spirits" in Revelation 1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6 partly, it seems, because seven is a number signifying divine perfection and partly because the Spirit ministers in his fullness.

The Spirit, then, is "he," not "it," and he must be obeyed, loved, and adored along with the Father and the Son.

Witnessing to Jesus Christ, glorifying him by showing his disciples who and what he is (John 16:7-15), and making them aware of what they are in him (Rom. 8:15-17; Gal. 4:6) is the Paraclete's central ministry. The Spirit enlightens us (Eph. 1:17-18), regenerates us (John 3:5-8), leads us into holiness (Rom. 8:14; Gal. 5:16-18), transforms us (2 Cor. 3:18; Gal. 5:22-23), gives us assurance (Rom. 8:16), and gifts us for ministry (1 Cor. 12:4-11). All God's work in us, touching our hearts, our characters, and our conduct, is done by the Spirit, though aspects of it are sometimes ascribed to the Father and the Son, whose executive the Spirit is.

The Spirit's full Paraclete ministry began on Pentecost morning, following Jesus' ascension (Acts 2:1-4). John the Baptist had foretold that Jesus would baptize in the Spirit (Mark 1:8; John 1:33), according to the Old Testament promise of an outpouring of God's Spirit in the last days (Joel 2:28-32; cf. Jer. 31:31-34), and Jesus had repeated the promise (Acts 1:4-5). The significance of Pentecost morning was twofold: it marked the opening of the final era of world history before Christ's return, and, as compared with the Old Testament era, it marked a tremendous enhancing of the Spirit's ministry and of the experience of being alive to God.

Jesus' disciples were evidently Spirit-born believers prior to Pentecost, so their Spirit-baptism, which brought power to their life and ministry (Acts 1:8), was not the start of their spiritual experience. For all who have come

to faith since Pentecost morning, however, beginning with the Pentecost converts themselves, the receiving of the Spirit in full new-covenant blessing has been one aspect of their conversion and new birth (Acts 2:37; Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 12:13). All capacities for service that subsequently appear in a Christian's life should be seen as flowing from this initial Spirit-baptism, which vitally unites the sinner to the risen Christ.

SPIRITUAL GIFTS

The Holy Spirit Equips the Church

*But to each one of us grace has been given
as Christ apportioned it.... He ... gave
some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some
to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and
teachers, to prepare God's people for works of
service, so that the body of Christ
may be built up.*

EPHESIANS 4:7, 11-12

The New Testament depicts local churches in which some Christians hold formal and official ministerial offices (elder-overseers and deacons, Phil. 1:1), while all fulfill informal serving roles. Every-member ministry in the body of Christ is the New Testament ideal. It is clear that officers who oversee should not restrict the informal ministries but rather should facilitate them (Eph. 4:11-13), just as it is clear that those who minister informally should not be defiant or disruptive but should allow the overseers to direct their ministries in ways that are orderly and edifying (i.e., strengthening and upbuilding, 1 Cor. 14:3-5, 12, 26, 40; Heb. 13:17). The body of Christ grows to maturity in faith and love "as each part does its work" (Eph. 4:16) and fulfills its grace-given form of service (Eph. 4:7, 12).

The word *gift* (literally "donation") appears in connection with spiritual service only in Ephesians 4:7-8. Paul explains the phrase *he ... gave gifts to men* as referring to the ascended Christ giving his church persons called to and equipped for the ministries of apostle, prophet, evangelist, and pastor-teacher. Also, through the enabling ministry of these functionaries, Christ is bestowing a ministry role of one sort or another on every Christian. Elsewhere (Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12-14) Paul calls these divinely given powers to serve *charismata* (gifts which are specific manifestations of *charis* or grace, God's active and creative love, 1 Cor. 12:4), and also *pneumatika* (spiritual gifts as specific demonstrations of the energy of the Holy Spirit, God's *pneuma*, 1 Cor. 12:1).

Amid many obscurities and debated questions regarding New Testament *charismata*, three certainties stand out. First, a spiritual gift is an ability in some way to express, celebrate, display, and so communicate Christ. We are told that gifts, rightly used, build up Christians and churches. But only knowledge of God in Christ builds up, so each *charisma* must be an ability from Christ to show and share Christ in an upbuilding way.

Second, gifts are of two types. There are gifts of speech and of loving, practical helpfulness. In Romans 12:6-8, Paul's list of gifts alternates between the categories: items one, three, and four (prophecy, teaching, and exhorting) are gifts of speech; items two, five, six, and seven (serving, giving, leading, and showing mercy) are gifts of helpfulness. The alternation implies that no thought of superiority of one gift over another may enter in. However much gifts differ as forms of human activity, all are of equal dignity, and the only question is whether one properly uses the gift one has (1 Pet. 4:10-11).

Third, no Christian is giftless (1 Cor. 12:7; Eph. 4:7), and it is everyone's responsibility to find, develop, and fully use whatever capacities for service God has given.



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