

Following with the Holy Spirit

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Date: 13 February 2021

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning, everyone. If you've just joined us for the first time here at St. Paul's, this is our third week into launching our strategic plan for the next five years, Follow 25. We're particularly concerned in this series of what it means to be a follower of Jesus, what it means to follow Jesus in all of life and for all of life. And I should let you know. You've probably received it in the notifications throughout the email through the course this week. We lost one of our dear sisters this week, Betty Shearman, who hasn't been amongst us the last couple of years because of age issues and needing special care, passed away on Wednesday. She was 99. Someone who followed Jesus, much loved amongst us, someone who trusted in Jesus and particularly was committed to a very committed devotional life that saw her express the living relationship with Jesus right to the end and in such a way that had an impact upon several generations. So at some point in the near future, all details are yet to be finalised. We will have a Thanksgiving service for Betty here in the next, probably in the next couple of weeks, but keep your eye out and we'll bring that to you. As we launched in this series, the first thing we discovered was that being a Christian means that you are in fact a follower of Jesus Christ, the Lord and Saviour of all. A Christian is a disciple.

They're a follower of Jesus who learns from him, who submits to his teaching and becomes like him in all of life. And we saw last week that the foundation, sorry, before that, a couple weeks ago. The foundation of this relationship is the gospel. It is the good news that Jesus himself has absorbed God's punishment for our sin in us choosing to walk a different path in life, determining our own journey, rejecting God, our creator. And Jesus went to the cross.

He died our death. He paid our debt. He turned God's anger away from us and has set us free to live a new life, the life that we were created for in the beginning. And that is in fact to live in obedience to our God who loves us infinitely and created us. So Christian discipleship is a lifelong journey of following Jesus and impacts every aspect of your life. It's not just something that you leave for Sundays. It changes your entire worldview of all things.

So if we're going to follow well, and if we're going to keep following until this journey's end, God has given us resources for that. We need to take up those resources. And then last week we looked at the Bible and prayer. Today we're focusing on the gift of the Holy Spirit.

And I've got two things really to say, and that is, first of all, who is the Holy Spirit? And secondly, what does it mean to live with the Holy Spirit? So if you've got the St. Paul's app open, that'd be great. If not, create your own app with paper and pen, and you can take some notes as we go through. So first of all, who is the Holy Spirit? We've touched on this on at least two occasions already in this series. We're going to do it again today. There's one aspect of the Bible's teaching. I mean, in fact, there's many aspects of Bible teaching which are difficult. It shouldn't surprise us because God is so huge and magnificent, bigger and greater than any of our minds could fully comprehend. So he has to be bigger than us. Otherwise, he's no more than us, and that makes him a pretty weak God. One of the difficult things, one of the challenging areas is the doctrine of the Trinity. We sang about it this morning. The Trinity calls us to believe that there is one and only one God. To know the one true God is, however, to know him as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Father, Son, and

[4 : 1 1] Holy Spirit, each is fully God, always and forever. So the Trinity functions kind of like an orchestra, where you have a multitude of different instruments and coming together at the right time in a rich harmony that any individual instrument wouldn't be able to do by itself. That is, the diversity of an orchestra is more beautiful sound than if the whole orchestra was just made up of cymbals.

It's just a clanging noise. Each person of the Trinity does its own distinctive work. They work in harmony with each other as each person fulfills the work, the overall work that is right and good for that member of the Trinity to do. And yet all three persons of the Trinity are committed to the one

work of God. They contribute to the one work of God. And so the Holy Spirit is equally God, that is equally God, same as God the Father and God the Son is God. That's the first point. The Holy Spirit is not some lesser thing than God. For example, in Acts chapter 5, Peter rebukes Ananias for lying to the Holy Spirit about the land that he had sold. And then Peter says, you have not lied to men, but to God. So when he lied to the Holy Spirit, he is lying to God. We also note the Holy Spirit are certain qualities that are only true of God in the Bible, such as living forever and eternally, according to Hebrews 9, and being everywhere, according to Psalm 139, and having all knowledge in 1 Corinthians 2.10. He's also declared to be equal with the Father and the Son in Matthew 28 and 2 Corinthians 13. So that's the first thing. I want to be clear. The Holy Spirit is equally God, as the Father and Son is equally God. But secondly, the Holy Spirit is a person, not a force. The Holy Spirit is a divine person, as the Father and Son are divine persons. So in John 14, just read out to us, verse 16, Jesus calls him another counselor. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another counselor, another advocate to be with you forever, the Spirit of truth. So when Jesus calls him another advocate or comforter or counselor, he treats him as a person, not as a force. When he calls him another, he means another like me. The Holy Spirit is an advocate. Like Jesus is. He is a person. We also know the Holy Spirit is a person because he shows the qualities of true personhood, a genuine personhood. For example, Holy Spirit can be lied to, as we just read in Acts 5, insulted according to Hebrews 10. And there are two things you cannot do to the electricity that's making your refrigerator work. You can't insult electricity, a force.

[7 : 40] The Holy Spirit also has personal qualities, like a mind, according to 1 Corinthians 2, emotions, according to Ephesians 4, and a will, according to 1 Corinthians 12.

But possibly the most important aspect, the most important aspect of the personhood of the Holy Spirit is that 94 times in the New Testament, he is called holy. He has the character of holiness, which along with having emotions and will can only ever be true of someone with personhood. And so the Holy Spirit is person and divine, divine person. And so when you add the second truth about the Holy Spirit, the first bit becomes even more precious. It will make an enormous difference in your life.

If you believe that you are being led, changed, transformed by a person who is in their very essence, the personal God of love and not an impersonal force. It makes a world of difference as you live the Christian life day by day.

The person who leads and purifies is no one less than God, the Holy Spirit. This is a personal relationship of love. This is not a force connecting you to God.

[9 : 16] So there's a lot more that can be said about the Holy Spirit and masses of books have been written on this. But I want to jump to what does it mean for us to live with the Holy Spirit.

Now for too many Christians, the Holy Spirit has either faded into the background somewhere to be almost non-existent in their life, or he's been brought to the forefront in such a way that he dominates the Trinity and all things about God.

Either ends of the spectrum are deficient. For too many of us, the Holy Spirit doesn't factor enough in our discipleship. So therefore, what does it mean to live with the Holy Spirit?

In the John reading, we see something very significant about our relationship with the Holy Spirit. John chapters 14 to 17 are known as the farewell discourse.

As Jesus is here farewelling his disciples, he's about to depart back to the Father via the cross. And he's going to die and he's going to leave his disciples.

[10 : 30] And they are distraught by this news. They are confused. It was uncertain times. Their world is falling apart. We thought that Jesus was the one who would ascend the throne in Jerusalem and make all things right that are wrong and beat up the Romans and all that kind of stuff.

And so Jesus comforts his disciples by telling them, Yes, I am departing. And I am departing to prepare an eternal place for them in the Father's house.

It is fantastic news. Fantastic news. That some rooms are getting ready, but it would feel so distant and unknown for them.

What about now? What about now? Are we going to be left abandoned in the meantime? And that's when Jesus says, I will send a permanent resident.

Chapter 14, verse 16. Jesus tells him, I will ask the Father and he will give you another advocate to be with you forever. One who will never depart.

[11:47] The spirit of truth. So Jesus says to his grieving disciples, I am going to the Father and I will send you another advocate. Another, meaning one of the same kind.

Another, in verse 16, is going to be with them forever and he will not depart as Jesus must depart. Now this is exactly what the grieving disciples need in this moment.

When they're feeling abandoned. Or is it? Is it really? Is this really a comfort to these disciples? Now, not that we actually can at the moment, but imagine if Nat and I were about to go on a long trip. And we didn't know, it was a one-way ticket, we didn't know exactly when we'd be coming back. And we sat down our three girls and said to them, we're going away on a trip, not sure when we're going to come back, but it's okay. We've organised for an uncle who you've never met, ever, to come and look after you in the meantime.

[12:56] Oh, that's the comfort we needed. We haven't gotten over the first bit. But I think verse 23 reveals the staggering implications of verse 16.

If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching, my father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.

Now, let me just unpack this a little bit and get a bit technical for you. This is very, very important. Notice the word home in verse 23. It is a very rare word in the original language in the New Testament.

In fact, it is used in only one other place in the entire New Testament. One other place. And it's in chapter 14, verse 2, where it is translated rooms.

In verse 2, Jesus says that by going to the cross, he is preparing a room, a dwelling place, an eternal dwelling place in the perfection of relationship with the Father, with God forever.

[14:19] But in verse 23, Jesus says that by going to the cross, I'm not just preparing a room with the Father in the future, but I'm going to prepare in us.

He is going to prepare in us a home, a dwelling place, a room for his Father to dwell with us. The departure of Jesus to his Father via the cross is going to prepare two things, a room for us with the Father and the Son and the Spirit in heaven forever, and a room for the Father and Jesus with the Spirit with us now on earth.

What a promise. Not just a place for us we've got at some point in the future. That is, the promises of the Christian faith is not just pie in the sky when you die, but it's now.

For God's presence with us now. The coming of the Spirit doesn't replace the presence of Jesus. It guarantees the presence of Jesus with us now.

The Holy Spirit unites us with Christ and the Father. Jesus is not distant. He has not abandoned his disciples. I think Jesus is actually saying to his bewildered disciples in this moment, guys, you've got to understand it will be better for you when I depart.

[15:53] My presence will be stronger. Jesus promised not just to leave us as orphans to do our best to survive, to pull up our socks and work really hard on this journey of discipleship just to, he has not left us to our own devices.

The promise to his first disciples extends to us. He added eternal words of comfort in saying that the Spirit will come not just dwelling with us, not just walking beside us, but dwelling in the disciples of Jesus.

The intimacy of the disciple of Jesus and the Holy Spirit is captured in the word abiding. Abiding. The Holy Spirit, the third member of the Trinity, abides in you and me in his church in all who belong to Jesus Christ by faith.

The Holy Spirit, his abiding restores all hope and secures us on the sure foundation of faith in uncertain times as we trust in the promises of God in Jesus.

So the Holy Spirit explains how the church survives and how the gospel continues to spread to the ends of the earth even when all else is collapsing around.

[17:28] The Holy Spirit abiding in us explains how the disciple of the Lord Jesus can hear the words of the Bible, can hear the gospel not as the words of merely a human philosopher, not just the opinions of other human beings, but as the word of God revealing truth and reality.

The Holy Spirit is the difference from darkness to light. The Holy Spirit is the difference between you reading this as being black ink on white paper and it being the very word of God.

The creator of the universe speaking to you. The Holy Spirit abiding in us is the reason why the disciples of Jesus have life in the face of death.

The Spirit does not flee when we are struggling with sin. His presence does not hinge upon our obedience and our effort. His abiding in the Christian rests upon the infinite grace and the love of God out for us.

So then, how do we get the experience, how do we get to experience this presence of the Holy Spirit right now?

[18 : 52] especially when we at times may not feel like it? And crucial to this, last week we talked about absolutely essential for the Christian life is word and prayer.

How does the word and prayer, devotional life, not just become about a regulation, a rule, a duty that must be performed, a dry activity that makes no difference in my life?

What's the difference? difference between the legalist who's doing more than four and not really moving forward? What makes the difference?

The Holy Spirit is the difference. In John chapter, that is, it's crucial to listen to the Holy Spirit.

John chapter 16 verse 13, we get a key part of the Spirit's work. book, but when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth.

[19 : 57] He will not speak on his own. He will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.

So in chapter 14, Jesus promised that the Spirit of truth will remind the disciples of everything that Jesus taught them. Now, he promises something a little bit more than that.

The 11 disciples will be led into truth, into a true understanding of all the saving events which are about to take place about the death and the resurrection of Jesus, and they'll be given glimpses of the future, of this final work being played out.

The final climax, if you like, of world history will partially be unveiled to them so that they'll be able to get a glimpse of the sweep of God's enormous plan of salvation and the central part that Jesus plays in that with his death and his resurrection.

But in leading them into truth, the Holy Spirit will not speak on his own, Jesus insists. He will speak only what he hears.

[21 : 16] In John 16, 13 to 15, but when he, the spirit 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 here to come.

He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine, that is why I said the spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you. So the general subject matter of the Holy Spirit, it's saying there in John 16, is restricted. It's a glorious restriction.

salvation. The spirit will take that which is Jesus' and make it known to the disciples of Jesus. The focus is entirely on Jesus.

The role of the Holy Spirit is to bring glory to Jesus. It was necessary for Jesus to be glorified by returning to the Father via the cross, but when he leaves, he receives more glory through the ministry of the Spirit to his disciples.

[22 : 35] As Jesus took that which belonged to the Father and made it known to them, to his disciples, so the Spirit takes that which belongs to Jesus and makes it known to us.

Nothing brings more glory to our Lord Jesus than for his followers to become steeped in all truth concerning him.

Jesus prays for his disciples one chapter later, that they would be led into that truth, and then he prays for the disciples who come to the truth because of his original disciples being led into the truth.

What does that mean for us? The acquisition of this truth of God is intellectual, but it's not merely intellectual.

As this truth is truly absorbed by the followers of the Lord Jesus, it transforms them, it enables them to reflect the glory of the Lord Jesus, and thereby being praised to his name.

[23 : 58] That is, his priorities become our priorities, his character our character. Glory comes to Jesus when the truths that the original disciples recorded become truths for us.

glory comes to Jesus when the truths of the gospel, the word of God, are established in our lives.

Up until this point, the disciples have been quite confused, have been characterized by misunderstanding as the person of Jesus. All of this is going to change with the arrival of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

The Spirit would ensure that these original disciples would not forget Jesus, would not forget what he said to them.

He would ensure that they accurately remembered everything, his life, his commandments, his teachings, everything.

[25 : 22] So how does that happen for us then? I think that one main answer comes from Ephesians chapter 5 verse 18 which may come up on the screen in a moment.

This is where Paul teaches believers to be filled with the Spirit so that their thoughts, their attitudes, their words, their actions would be directed by the Spirit.

That is, Paul's command is to be filled with the Spirit in Ephesians 5 18 is not a one-off event when someone first comes to faith in the Lord Jesus.

It is also not what some might claim a reference to some sort of second blessing reserved for serious disciples of Jesus, often referred to as a baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 5 18 is what scholars call an imperative in the present tense which means the command here in 5 18 is to constantly be filled with the Holy Spirit, a continuing experience and to be filled implies something total, completely filled, that is the Spirit has full control over all aspects of your life, no area of life is off limits to the work of the Spirit in your life.

[26 : 59] Andreas Kostenberg in his book, What Does It Mean To Be Filled With the Spirit says that it is something that God does. So while it's a command in Ephesians 5 18, it is a passive command, be filled.

We are to respond to the command, but it is something that primarily that God does in us. Paul also wrote a parallel passage to Ephesians 5 and it's Colossians 3 16 and 17 and they are almost interchangeable, different language but almost interchangeable.

The structure is exactly the same. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonish one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your heart to God.

And whatever you do in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God the Father through him. In both passages, Ephesians 5, Colossians 3, the results are the same.

Words and deeds that honour Christ, bring glory to Christ. But what brings about the results are stated differently in both passages.

[28 : 18] In Ephesians 5, Paul says, be filled with the Spirit. In Colossians 3, he says, let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.

What this means is that the Spirit has greater influence, provides us with more direction in life, more comfort as his disciples, more enabling as his disciples, provided that God's word dwells more and more within us.

That is, it is impossible, both in Old Testament and New Testament, to separate the word from the Spirit. Our reading of the word, our time spent memorizing and meditating on Scripture is the main tool that the Spirit of God uses to help us to think, feel, speak, and act in ways that are more and more glorifying to the Lord Jesus, which is why you were saved.

You see, the goal of all biblical learning is knowing God. the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential to this process. The Holy Spirit enables us not just to see the facts of the Lord Jesus Christ and the gospel and the word of God, he helps us to see the glory and the beauty and the worth and the magnificence of all of that truth.

He convicts us of the necessary submission and transformation and repentance of sin and obedience to Christ that follows. And so listening to the Spirit in the word is so, so crucial for the Christian.

[30 : 16] But so is speaking. So is speaking. See, I would further suggest that we pray for God to fill us with his Spirit as we engage with him in his word.

That is, our engagement with God in his word, prayerfully, is encountering God's presence. And if you want to know more about that, Tim Keller's written a great book on prayer and there's a great section on what it means to encounter God in his word and prayer.

Paul doesn't explicitly command anywhere that we pray for the filling of the Holy Spirit, but he himself does it that God would in fact give us the spirit of revelation and wisdom in Ephesians 1.

Also, that we would be strengthened in our inner being by the Spirit in Ephesians 3. Pray that God's Spirit will fill you day by day as you are filled with his word.

The Holy Spirit working through the word of God, the Bible, is how the word of God, Jesus Christ, is present and active in our daily life and works in his world right now.

[31 : 31] That's how it happens. The Holy Spirit is essential for that work. The late theologian Jim Packer puts the importance of the Spirit of God for the Christian disciple like this.

If you neglect the Spirit, you lose your focus on the fellowship with Christ that he creates. The renewal of character that he affects.

The assurance and the joy that he evokes and the enabling of service that he bestows. Packer then goes on to the effects of the person who ignores the work of the Spirit in their life.

And this may be a rebuke, so please hear these words from Packer. You slip back into orthodoxism and formalism, getting stuck in a religion of aspiration and perspiration without either inspiration or transformation.

The religion of low expectations, deep ruts and grooves that become in the end graves.

[33 : 02] Our key objective for the next five years is to see 65% of St. Paul's identifying much growth in the faith. As I said last week, a devotional life of more than four a week is absolutely essential to that growth.

That is, without that, how on earth is God going to mediate his presence in your life. He has given you a resource that he might dwell with you day by day in all the complexity of life.

But these objectives are not about you pulling up your socks and sweating a lot harder, a bit more perspiration, a bit more effort. They are about bringing you to a point and us as a point as a church to say, we cannot do this by ourselves.

It should force us back into every moment of every day of total reliance upon the Holy Spirit. Spirit. And so what a resource that we have as disciples of Jesus.

He has not left us. He's not just giving us a promise that one day when you die, there will be some great future for you. He gives you a promise now, the future's now. He gives you his presence now.

[34 : 20] So look to the Spirit as your enabler to move out of, as Packer says, a Christian life of low expectations, of religious effort, formalism, ruts, grooves, so that in the end, it might not be for your grave.

Thank you. Thank you.