

**First Christian Church (Lawrence, KS)**

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### **The Voice of the Spirit**

John 14:16-26 (NIV)

*16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— 17 the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. 18 I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. 19 Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. 20 On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. 21 Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.”*

*22 Then Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, “But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?”*

*23 Jesus replied, “Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. 24 Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.*

*25 “All this I have spoken while still with you. 26 But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”*

John 16:1-15 (NIV)

*16 “All this I have told you so that you will not fall away. 2 They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they are offering a service to God. 3 They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me. 4 I have told you this, so that when their time comes you will remember that I warned you about them. I did not tell you this from the beginning because I was with you, 5 but now I am going to him who sent me. None of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ 6 Rather, you are filled with grief because I have said these things. 7 But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. 8 When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: 9 about sin, because people do not believe in me; 10 about righteousness, because I am going to the*

*Father, where you can see me no longer; 11 and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned. 12 “I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. 13 But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the 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. 14 He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. 15 All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you.”*

Luke 12:8-12 (NIV)

*8 “I tell you, whoever publicly acknowledges me before others, the Son of Man will also acknowledge before the angels of God. 9 But whoever disowns me before others will be disowned before the angels of God. 10 And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.*

*11 “When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, 12 for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say.”*

**[Slide 1]**    *Opening*

Good morning church! Let me encourage you again to consider joining the new class starting after the service on the “Foundation of our Faith”—where we’ll review fundamental doctrines of Christian faith and some basic, essential elements of the Christian life as a follower of Jesus Christ. We’ll meet in the room right behind the sanctuary, starting about 11:10. It should be both encouraging and helpful, no matter whether you’re a new believer or a seasoned veteran in faith.

**[Slide 2]**    *Introduction*

We’re continuing our series, “Follow the Leader: Learning God’s Voice.” Jesus promised his disciples that they would hear and know his voice and thus be enabled to follow him. As the “Good Shepherd” of God’s people, Jesus is the only one who can absolutely and authoritatively speak for God. Those who want to hear from God, who are seeking for God’s guidance, must come to him, must listen to his voice. They must recognize and submit to his authority, and they must follow him—they must live according to what he says.

Last week we focused on letting God’s word be the thing that shapes our lives, gives structure and strength to us, and provides a window through which to understand the world around us and our place in it. Understanding what God has

already said to us through his word is the most important foundation therefore for understanding what he may be saying to us in any particular situation in which we find ourselves needing guidance today.

[Slide 3]

But here is where we have to ask an exceedingly important question. Actually, we have several questions, at least three crucial ones.

The first question is this: *Since Israel, God's covenant people, already had the word of God in the form of the Law and the Prophets, what we would refer to as the Old Testament, why was something more needed? Why do we have a New Testament?*

The second is like unto the first: *If we have the New Testament as the word of God, from the lips of the Living Word himself, Jesus, then why did he say that there was something else needed besides his word?*

And the third question follows right along the same lines: *If we have the Word of God and the Spirit of God, isn't that enough?* I'll address this third question in a sermon later in this series. But I want to point it out as we start today, for it will help tie together some important concepts for us to remember.

[Slide 4]

We've already touched on the answer to the first question. The short version of the answer is this: Israel had the Law and the Prophets, but didn't listen to the Prophets or obey the Law. Having the word of God simply pointed out their sinfulness; it didn't help them overcome their sinfulness. And as Jesus pointed out repeatedly, they didn't understand the word that God had sent them. So they needed a Savior, who could reveal the true intent and meaning of the Scripture and could deliver them from sin. He alone could provide salvation and the proper interpretation of God's word.

[Slide 5]

But the second question takes us to the heart of the revelation in the New Testament. Because Jesus didn't come to simply give us a new interpretation of the Law or to give us a new Law in the form of his word. Yes, his word is the foundation, the bedrock for our faith. It is essential, crucial, the standard by which all of our ideas and doctrines must be measured. Jesus himself said earlier in John's gospel that the way to prove that you were his disciple was to keep his commandments, to abide in his word, his teaching.

*31 To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. 32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (John 8:31-32)*

But when we come to chapters 14-16 of John's gospel, Jesus begins teaching his disciples about the "something else" that was needed in addition to the word of God that he had spoken to them, the "something else" that made the difference between the Old Testament people of God and the New Testament people of God, the "something else" that was actually a "someone else"—the person of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity.

[Slide 6] *The setting of John 14-16*

Our two main texts this morning come from a section of John's gospel (chapters 14-16) that occurs during Jesus' last meal with his disciples. It is the night of the Passover just before Jesus' arrest, trial, and crucifixion. In this moment, knowing what is about to transpire, Jesus wants to prepare his disciples for what they are not expecting and cannot imagine. He knows that they are about to experience the lowest of lows—when they will see him die on the cross. He also knows that he will be raised from the dead—which they do not yet understand. But even after that miracle will transform their sorrow into joy, Jesus knows that he is going to leave them. He will return to the Father's side and will no longer be physically with them. And when he does so, they would need more than the memory of him and his teachings if they are going to fulfill the mission to take the gospel message of salvation to the world. They would need the same power and presence of God that was evident when Jesus performed miracles, healed the sick, and raised the dead to life; the same power and presence of God that drew multitudes to hear his words, to experience the love of God that flowed from Jesus, and to throw everything away in order to enter the kingdom of God.

[Slide 7] *The promised helper*

So Jesus promises his disciples that he is going to send them the Holy Spirit, who would only come after Jesus was resurrected and glorified. But when he came, he would be "*another Helper*" (or "advocate," as NIV, or "counselor," "comforter"). And the term here, "*another*," means "*another of the same sort*."

Notice John 14:18—Jesus has told his disciples that he is going to leave them, to return to the Father. But he promises that he is going to return to them. That promise will be fulfilled in double measure. (1) First, Jesus will return to them after he is resurrected. He will appear to them periodically over a period of about six weeks, demonstrating the reality of his resurrection and continuing to explain to them what the Old Testament scriptures meant and how they pointed to himself. (2) But he will also return to them in the person of the Holy Spirit, who would be the replacement, as it were, for Jesus' physical presence. The Holy Spirit, who is "*another of the same sort*," will come to be with the disciples—no,

actually more than just “with” them. Jesus tells them in 14:17 that he will be “in them.” He has been “with them” already, and they have experienced his anointing for ministry when Jesus sent them out to perform miracles. But now the Holy Spirit would indwell them; they would be the new place of the habitation of the living God; the new temple in whom God himself lived.

[Slide 8]

Verses 19-23 make it clear that when Jesus says he is going to come again to them, he is referring to the presence of the Spirit in them.

- Jesus promises to come to them and to reveal himself to them.
- In response to Judas’ question, he lets them know that both he and the Father will come and make their dwelling in them.
- And this is all given as further explanation of his statement that he would ask the Father to send the Spirit in his name (that is, on his authority and as his representative).

[Slide 9]

The presence of the Holy Spirit, the Helper or Advocate, is not just a feeling or a metaphor—verse 23 shows us that the Trinity, Father, Son, and Spirit, comes to live in those who love Jesus and keep his teachings. We are indwelt by God, God in all of his fulness. We don’t get a part of God or a piece of God, or a little bit of God—the entirety of God, all that he is in all of his greatness and goodness comes into you and me when we turn from our sin and confess Jesus as Lord. For the persons of the Trinity are inseparable: we can speak about each of them as persons who can be distinguished. But they cannot be separated. Jesus said, “*The Father is in me and I am in the Father.*” They are eternally, completely, mutually indwelling one another. To see one is to see the other. To know one is to know the other. And the same is true of the Spirit, who is also fully God and fully indwells the Father and the Son and is indwelt by each of them. Basil the Great, the fourth-century bishop regarded as one of the great fathers of the church, emphasized this truth in his defense of the deity of the Holy Spirit. He likened the Trinity to a chain—pull on any part of the chain and the whole chain comes along. The persons of the Godhead are inseparable—when one comes, they all come along.

A full study of the Holy Spirit would take us months, if not years, to cover adequately. And there is a lot just in this section of John’s gospel that is crucial for understanding what the Bible teaches about the Spirit. But let’s focus on a few points that are highlighted in John 14 and 16 that are germane to our present questions about learning to hear God’s voice.

[Slide 10]

First, let's note how Jesus introduces the person of the Holy Spirit. He refers to him as "the Spirit of truth"—that is, the Spirit who is characterized by truth. What is really striking about this phrase used to describe the Holy Spirit is that it corresponds to so many other things that John has to say about truth in his gospel. In chapter one, he tells us that Jesus was full of grace and truth, that grace and truth were made manifest in Jesus. Those who would worship God rightly must worship in the truth (chapter 4). Jesus says of himself, that he only speaks the truth, in contrast to Satan who is a liar (chapter eight), and that he is truth incarnate (chapter 14). He refers to the Scriptures (the word of God) as the truth in his prayer (chapter 17). There are other places where the importance of truthfulness and understanding the truth are emphasized by John.

And here—he speaks of the Holy Spirit as the "Spirit of truth." It makes sense, of course. If God is the perfection of truth, then his Spirit must be characterized by truth. And if the Spirit is characterized by truth, then that which he inspires, God's word, is also true. It cannot be otherwise. What he speaks to us is perfectly true. (And let's not forget the salient point about Satan being a liar, a deceiver, in whom there is no truth.)

It stands to reason, therefore, that if we're asking God for guidance, if we're seeking to hear his voice, then that voice must correspond to the truth. If it doesn't, then it's not God's voice. And if it is God's voice, then what he says to me will be truthful. So one of the tests we can use to discern if we're hearing from God or from some other source is whether or not it lines up with the truth. (More about that in just a bit.)

[Slide 11]

The second point we want to see in these chapters is that the Holy Spirit testifies on behalf of Jesus. That is, he brings to our awareness the truth about Jesus and the truth that Jesus both personified and spoke. He glorifies Jesus by exposing the truth about him—who Jesus is and what he has done—and by taking the truth that Jesus lived out and taught his disciples and displaying that before us so that we can understand it. He illuminates our minds so that we rightly perceive Jesus and the Father and ourselves and the world around us.

Jesus said that the Spirit would lead us into all the truth. What does that mean? It means that he guides those who are following Christ so that we are increasingly *able to grasp the truth*. He leads us and changes us as we walk with Jesus so that our lives are increasingly *characterized by truth*; we are conformed more and more to be like the one in whom grace and truth were fully manifest. He

opens our minds to understand what the word of God means, how it applies to our situation, and how we need to respond to it.

So again, one of the tests we can use to determine if we're hearing from God or not is whether what we're hearing lines up with who Jesus is and what he said. If something is coming from the Holy Spirit, then it will be consistent with what Jesus taught and it will reflect his ways—it will fit with the person of Jesus Christ as he is revealed to us in the gospels.

[Slide 12]

The third major point we want to see is that Jesus told the disciples that the Holy Spirit would bring to their remembrance all that he had taught them. So, if you remember last week's sermon, the part about hearing that voice of your teacher in your head, "*Remember what I taught you,*" the voice that God uses to speak in our heads is the voice of the Holy Spirit.

Now, for the Twelve (and others among that first generation of believers who heard Jesus personally while he was on earth), the Spirit quite literally reminded them of what they had heard Jesus say. The Spirit helped them all to recall his teachings, his parables, his sayings, his explanations, so that they could re-present it to the church. And notice that this promise is made to them as a group. There were multiple witnesses here—each of the Twelve, Jesus' original inner core of disciples, was able to recall what Jesus said. Consequently, when they began preaching and teaching after the resurrection, there was a group of believers who were able to verify with one another what Jesus had taught. That multiple attestation among the original apostles aided them when they began to write down his teachings so that what was written (the New Testament writings) could be checked against what the apostles commonly taught. There was a way to verify what was said to be from Jesus.

This corresponds to what Paul later refers to as the inspiration of the Scriptures: the Spirit of God filled the minds of the authors of the books of the Bible so that what they wrote in their own words and their own style was precisely what God wanted them to write in order to say what he wanted to say.

For those of us who weren't present in that first generation right after the resurrection, the Holy Spirit promises to bring to our remembrance what we've heard from the word of God. He speaks for Jesus by rehearsing for us and reminding us of what Jesus taught, what the apostles wrote, what the prophets of the Old Testament wrote—all that is contained in the written word of God comes from the Spirit, who finds the pieces we need to hear and presents them to us.

And he can do this for anyone! We have heard lots of stories, especially recently, from converts who came to Jesus because someone in a dream told them something that they later learned was a quote from the Bible. The Holy Spirit spoke to them through a dream (or through a testimony, or through a gospel tract, or a podcast) by using the words of Scripture, the words he himself inspired. To be fair, though, if we want the Spirit to remind us of what Jesus said, it would certainly be easier if we were regularly presenting to our minds the words of Scripture by reading the Bible and thinking about what it says. At the very least, it would give him more fuel with which to light a fire.

[Slide 13]

Let's circle back now to our questions, especially the second one: *If we have the New Testament as the word of God, from the lips of the Living Word himself, Jesus, then why did he say that there was something else needed besides his word? Or, to put it another way, When it comes to hearing from God, what's the reason for giving us the Holy Spirit? Why do we need the Spirit if we're trying to hear and understand what God is saying? Or, yet another way, I already have a Bible. I can read it for myself. Why do I need the Spirit?*

[Slide 14]

There are a lot of ways to answer this, a lot of important points for constructing a good answer, a theologically and biblically sound answer, a complete answer. But I just want to give you what I think are the two most important parts of the answer, at least as it relates to this issue of hearing from God and seeking God's guidance. Before I do, however, let me share why this is such a crucial question, such a vital thing we must recognize.

There are some streams in the church where the role of the Spirit in the life of the church is acknowledged, but mostly as a kind of divine stamp upon what happens through the proper use of the intellect. So he is acknowledged as the one who inspired the Scriptures, which we may analyze according to a particular set of rules for interpretation of literature (called "hermeneutics"). We follow our interpretive rules, derive correct theology from our analysis, and thank God for what we have learned. The focus is almost entirely on the production of a set of doctrinal teachings as the goal of our Christian faith.

Now I happen to believe pretty strongly in the importance of using our minds to analyze what is written in the Scriptures. I am a strong advocate for developing healthy theology that is based on a careful analysis of the biblical teaching according to a sound hermeneutical method, so that our theology can be demonstrated to accurately reflect what the Bible teaches. I agree whole-heartedly



with those who insist that this effort is of primary importance for the life and health of the church. And I paid a lot of money and spent a lot of years learning how to do just that.

But . . . but that isn't the point of being a Christian, or of being the church. Jesus did not say that our goal was to develop a comprehensive theology, or that the thing that ought to characterize his church was being able to demonstrate the logical consistency of its theology and the rational means by which it could be proven to be correct. In fact, the apostle Paul said in his letter to Timothy that "*the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart, and a clean conscience, and a sincere faith.*" If the point of our faith was just to have a correct doctrinal statement that everyone could sign and say, "*Yes, this is what the Bible teaches,*" then we'd have to really wonder what the point of sending the Spirit was.

The fact that Jesus himself implies that there is something more needed than simply having his word is exceedingly important. Combined with what he says about *why* he is sending the Spirit screams something that we must absolutely understand. And that brings us to the first critical thing to remember when we want to understand why God sent the Holy Spirit.

[Slide 15]

God sent the Spirit to live in us, because the point of it all wasn't the production of correct theology—as absolutely vital as that is to the life and health of the church!!—but to create a people in whom and with whom he could live. The Spirit lives inside of us because God has always intended to have a people who live in his love and love him in return. Jesus didn't come to give us a better set of doctrines (though we do have a better set of doctrines now that he has explained how to better understand God's word!). Jesus came to give us new life, life in relationship with God. He tore down the barrier that kept us apart, making us fit to be restored to God, able to live in his presence. That's the point; that's the goal.

And if that's the goal, then there is an inescapable and essential element of Christian faith that is not reducible to logic and intellectual comprehension of principles. Christian faith, by definition, depends upon a personal encounter with God, a relational connection between the person of God as he is revealed in the New Testament, a Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). You can never eliminate the personal, experiential aspect of Christianity in any way—including *when you are developing your theology*. Christianity—Christian faith and life—is never reducible to merely intellectual propositions, doctrine. And a purely rational theology that does not take into consideration the relational and personal

experience of God is not a genuinely Christian theology. That is a ditch on one side of the road, one that we really need to avoid.

[Slide 16]

But there's a ditch on the other side of the road as well, one that we also want to avoid, and that leads us to the second really important part of the answer.

Even though Jesus said he was sending the Spirit to live in us, not just leaving us to remember and analyze his teachings, *the Spirit and the Word will never contradict one another*. If you have rightly understood the word of God, then it will align with what the Holy Spirit is saying to the church (or to you). If you have rightly understood what the Spirit is saying to the church (or to you), then it will align with what the Scriptures say and teach. Both will agree, for God cannot contradict himself. He is neither schizophrenic nor confused. His word, through the written word, or through the Spirit, will always agree. If it seems otherwise, we are misunderstanding one or the other—or both.

So this is another test we can use. And the starting place for using this test is to begin with our assumptions, especially the most common assumption we have, which is one that is most often erroneous. We must start with this as a fundamental truth: *Our personal, subjective impressions of the meaning of Scripture or of the meaning of something we believe we've heard from God are not infallible. It is quite possible that I'm wrong.*

Now please hear me! I'm not saying that we're *always* wrong about what we believe that God is saying to us or what we believe the Bible teaches. We're not always wrong. We're not usually wrong. It's just that occasionally we are wrong—all of us, at some point, to some degree, miss the mark when it comes to knowing what God has said to us. We're not infallible. (So come back over the next couple of weeks to hear more about what to do about this problem.)

And the fact that we all miss the mark to some degree does *not* mean that we can never be certain of anything that God has said. That's a logical fallacy itself. It just means that I need to test my conclusions, my interpretations of Scripture and my sense of what God is saying. I need to test them by something other than my own subjective impressions. I need a better frame of reference, a better measuring tool than just saying, "*Well, that's what I think.*"

So we avoid the first ditch of ignoring the personal aspect of relating to God and focusing solely on a supposed objective truth that I can obtain through rational analysis of the Bible. And we avoid the second ditch of ignoring the danger of trusting solely in our own subjective or even idiosyncratic thoughts and impressions. Instead, we hold fast to this fundamental truth of Christian faith—that

God has revealed himself to us in the person of Jesus Christ, who has given us these two guard rails to keep us on the path: his word to instruct us, and his Spirit to indwell us, and those two will never contradict one another. Wherever they agree, the Word and the Spirit, I know that I'm hearing from God.

[Slide 17]

And next week, we'll see why we still need something more, and what God has given us that will help us discern what he is saying to us.

*Transition to communion*

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