

“Jesus Gives the Holy Spirit; the Written Word Is the Authority and Source of Speaking in the Church”

John 15:26-27; 1 Peter 4:10-11

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Jesus speaks to us again today in John’s Gospel about the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the great gift given to us Christians by God the Father and Jesus. Jesus says, “[W]hen the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning” (John 15:26-27 ESV).

My specific area of concern this morning is what Jesus’ words mean for us as church together. In this connection, we will also interact with what the Holy Spirit moved the Apostle Peter to write in the epistle reading for today from 1 Peter chapter 4.

Jesus spoke about the giving of the Holy Spirit in a particular context and for a particular purpose. Jesus provided the context in the verses that immediately come before in John chapter 15. The context here is our relation to the ways of the world. Jesus says, “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it has hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you” (John 15:18-19 ESV). It is in this context that Jesus promises the Holy Spirit, because we need the Holy Spirit’s help to stay faithful to God and Jesus in the midst of the pressure the world puts on us to conform to its way of thinking and believing and what it does.

Jesus teaches here a basic assumption about our relation as Christians to the world. He teaches that being Christian and the world are at odds. He does not teach harmony and continuity between the Christian faith and being Christian, one the one hand, and the world, on the other. He does not teach continuity between the Spirit of truth, the Holy Spirit, and the spirit of the world.

And so Jesus teaches us that as people called by the Name of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as people named Christian after our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, our identity and our source of authority is not as the world would see things. Our identity is not provided by the way the world gives identity. Our source of authority is not the world and how the world would direct us. For Jesus says to His followers: “I chose you out of the world” (John 15:19 ESV).

Should we expect the world to love us for this reason? Should we expect the world to leave us in peace? Jesus says, “I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you” (John 15:19 ESV). He goes on to say, “Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you” (John 15:20 ESV).

But it is a serious temptation to want to be at peace with the world. We want to be liked. We want to fit in. The fact that the world and the spirit of the world won’t like us when we are true to Jesus and His word, however, should not persuade us not to be true and faithful to God, as we know God in Jesus and in His word, the law and the Gospel.

The purpose for God and Jesus giving the Holy Spirit has to do with bearing witness. We sorely need the Holy Spirit’s help here. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth. The Holy Spirit testifies or bears witness. And so we testify to God’s truth and bear witness, with words and with our lives.

In verse 27, Jesus talks about bearing witness. Actually, the immediate reference of verse 27

is the Apostles themselves, when Jesus says: “And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning” (John 15:27 ESV). The phrase “because you have been with me from the beginning” defines who Jesus means by “you” when He says “and *you* also will bear witness.” We were not with Jesus from the beginning, but the Apostles were. So the “you” there is the Apostles. In other words, the immediate reference of the “you” there is not you and me.

This is vitally important because the Apostles had the special mission in God’s kingdom of being eye-witnesses to Jesus Himself: who he is; what He said; what He did. They also had the special calling of proclaiming what they saw and heard to anyone who would hear. Then they also had the special calling of being the source of the written testimony to Jesus and what He said and did. The written testimony is vitally important because it is the only way the church—you and I—can have the voice and testimony of the apostles down through the ages.

This written testimony is the voice and testimony of eye-witnesses—it is eye-witness testimony. But not only were they eye-witnesses. They were also the instruments of the Holy Spirit’s inspiration so that they could write their testimony for us. Apart from the Spirit of the truth, they could not have born witness and testified to Jesus and the truth in Him, that Jesus is truth (John 14:6). But the Spirit was given to them and so they testified. They testified in speech. They testified in writing, which writing we have today. They did these things inspired by the Spirit.

This is all to say that the church is apostolic. This means that we speak and teach and live according to the preaching, teaching, and writing of the Apostles. We also add the prophets here since the Apostle Peter says that “it was the Spirit of Christ in the prophets that talked beforehand about the sufferings of Christ and His resurrection and ascension (1 Peter 1:11). We add the prophets because they give us absolutely necessary teaching and understanding of God that provides the framework for understanding human nature and the world, as well as the Gospel. And so the Spirit is given so that you have the testimony, so that “though you have not seen [Jesus], you love him;” So that, though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls” (1 Peter 1:8-9).

But we can also say that Jesus’ words about bearing witness refer in a secondary way to us, for we too bear witness according to the strength and attitude of the soul that the Spirit works in us. This attitude of the soul is repentance, faith, humility, and being shaped by God’s word in what we believe and think. This leads us to what the Apostle Peter said with respect to service in the church. Being moved by the Spirit of truth, he said this: “If anyone speaks, [let him or her speak] as the oracles of God” (1 Peter 4:11).

Peter uses the word “logion” here in Greek, which is translated by the ESV as “oracles.” It can also just be simply translated as the word of God, and this is really what it means: If anyone speaks, let that person speak according to the word of God. This is as it says in Psalm 138:2, a Psalm written by King David, where the word “logion” is used: “I will bow down toward Your holy temple,” David says, “and give thanks to Your name for Your lovingkindness and Your truth; For You have magnified Your *word* according to all Your name” (Psalm 138:2 ESV).

Peter’s point is that the standard, source, and inspiration of speaking in the church is the word of God, so that, when speaking is done in the church, it is inspired by, determined by, judged by, and consistent with the word of God; so when speaking is done in the church it is strengthened, inspired, and given by the Helper, the Spirit of truth. There is no authority in the church to speak otherwise than according to the word of God. This is how the Spirit would have

it because the word of God is given by the Spirit through the Apostles and prophets, as Jesus said” You will bear witness.”

Like Jesus, the Apostle Peter was moved by the Spirit to write these words in contrast to the ways of the world, though he speaks in terms of human passions, or we could say in terms of what comes naturally to human beings as corrupted by sin. He spoke about this in the verses that came immediately before the text we read: “Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking . . . so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God” (1 Peter 4:1-2 ESV). Here human passions are put in contrast to the will of God. The Apostle urges us this way because, as he says, “The end of all things is at hand” or near (1 Peter 4:7 ESV).

The Apostle bears witness by the Holy Spirit that humans cannot just do what they please without accountability, for he refers to the one who is ready to judge the living and the dead” (1 Peter 4:5). This one is Jesus Christ our Lord. The Apostles exhorts us therefore to “be self-controlled and sober-minded” (1 Peter 4:7 ESV). He exhorts us not to live according to what the natural human way of thinking and uncontrolled human passions would have us do.

Do human passions want to do the will of God? No they don’t. Do human passions want to be self-controlled and sober-minded? No they don’t. They want us to be wild and to be governed by whatever feeling moves us. They want us to be governed by the crowd and moved by the mob. They want us to find the truth within ourselves. They do this because passions only want their own fulfillment, so they want to be their own authority. The Spirit of truth directs us otherwise, and so the Spirit directs us in ways that are good, and true, and right, and healthy according to God’s word, and according to God’s love portrayed for us in the Gospel of Christ.

So in the church the battle cry is: Let anyone who speaks speak according to the word of God. And speaking then leads to how we live as speech trains the heart and the mind and directs the will.

And so Christ and the Father give the Holy Spirit to us. And so our authority is the word of God given to us now as the written word of God, given by the Spirit of truth through the apostles and the prophets. Jesus Christ Himself is the source, the center, the Lord, and the ultimate subject who acts for us in the name of the Lord for our salvation, because God is faithful to His own character and promises (Ezekiel 36:22).

We want this and live in it because this written word shows us Jesus and delivers to us forgiveness and our reconciliation with God that was won by the self-giving of our Savior and the faithfulness of God the Father who raised Him from the dead. As Jesus is portrayed for us as self-giving for our redemption, so He inspires us not to live for our own self glory, but according to the will of God. As God has redeemed us in Jesus, He also inspires us by the Holy Spirit to live to His glory, according to His word now and forever, for the word of God remains forever (Matthew 24:35; 1 Peter 1:25).

May God inspire us in this way by the Spirit through the written word He has given us through the Apostles and prophets Amen.