

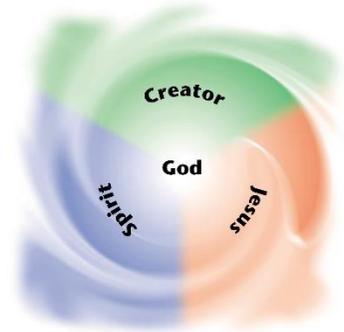
“The Forgotten God”

John 14:15-27 ¹

You and I are experienced differently by persons who know us in different settings, or who have known us in differing seasons of our lives. To use myself as an example, most of you know me in the role of your pastor. The members of our extraordinary staff experience me as their supervisor. Nathan and Anna experience me as their father. Jill experiences me as her husband. My parents experienced me as their child. I hope each of you experiences me as your friend.

To the extent that you know me in only one of these roles, you see different dimensions of who I am. The better you know me, though, the more you see how each of these dimensions is a facet of one integrated and consistent whole—at least, I hope I’m integrated and consistent! The farther out you are, the more you see pieces. The closer in you are, the more you see the inner reality that fuels each piece.

Our experience of God is sort of like that. As you look at this diagram, in the Center is a bright-white circle that represents God’s integrated and consistent personal Being. The closer we are to the Center, in the passionate relationship of love that God desires with us, the more we experience God as One. The farther out we move from the Center, the more we experience the dimensions of God’s Being as Father, Son, and Spirit; what we call “The Holy Trinity.”



I expect that most of you know that the word “Trinity” does not appear in the Bible. While Jesus described what we have come to call “the Trinity” a number of times, He didn’t give much explicit teaching about those relationships, and a great deal of our understanding of the Trinity has to be inferred.

Those first Christians did not begin with a theological doctrine of “the Trinity.” Rather, they simply paid attention to the various ways in which they experienced personal relationship with God, and then they tried to describe that experience.

Those first believers had long known God as Creator and as the “God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” Then Jesus erupted into their lives, convincing them by many signs and wonders that He had divine power, and telling them, “*Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father* (John 14:9). *The Father and I are one*” (John 10:30). Finally, on an electric Sunday morning in Jerusalem, the Spirit was poured out in power, fulfilling Joel’s prophecy (Joel 2:29) , even as Jesus had promised.

We’re approaching that “electric Sunday morning” once again, because Pentecost Sunday is just two weeks away. And as we make our way through the books of the Bible and now come to the Gospel of John, it is the Holy Spirit who is our subject this morning.

Before we focus more closely on God’s Spirit, let’s look once more at our text for this morning, which helps us with the idea of the Trinity. In this morning’s text, Jesus mentioned all three Members of the Trinity,² and He mentioned all three Persons of the Trinity again in John

¹ A sermon by Dr. David C. Stancil, delivered at the Columbia Baptist Fellowship in Columbia, MD on 5.17.20, during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The title for the sermon comes from Francis Chan, *Forgotten God: Reversing Our Tragic Neglect of the Holy Spirit* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2009).

² John 14:16-17

14:26, in 15:26, and in 16:15.³ In 14:26 Jesus told His disciples that the Father would send the Spirit; and in 15:26 He said that He himself would send the Spirit (also 16:7). Both of these statements remind us that Jesus had just told them that “**Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father**” (John 14:9), and of His earlier affirmation that “**I and the Father are one**” (John 10:30).

Please take your Bibles and open them again to John 14:15-18 so that we can look at these verses more closely: “*If you love me, keep my commands. And **I** will ask the **Father**, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—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. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.*”

There are at least six important things to notice in these five sentences, the **first** of which is that Jesus defined our love for Him as chiefly characterized by obedience to His commands. **Second**, Jesus referred here to all three Members of what we have come to call the Trinity or the Godhead—Father, Son, and Spirit. **Third**, Jesus referred to the Spirit as “He,” as a person, not as an impersonal force of some sort.

Fourth, Jesus characterized this Spirit as “*the Spirit of truth*” and as our “*advocate*” who will be with us forever.⁴ **Fifth**, Jesus pointed out that the Spirit is unknown and unavailable to those who do not know Him. And **sixth**, Jesus identified Himself with this Spirit, saying “*I will come to you.*” That’s a lot of important information in just a few sentences. Let’s drill down on what Jesus told us about the Spirit.

A little later that evening, in what we know as John 16:7, Jesus told His disciples that “*Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.*” Jesus then went on to tell them, “*I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth*” (John 16:12-13a).

Three times in these few verses, Jesus emphasized that God’s Spirit is our Guide to Truth. He has already told the disciples that He himself IS Truth (John 14:6), and He is about to tell them that God’s Word is Truth (John 17:17).

And John has already told us that these affirmations amount to the same thing, because Jesus IS the Word of God: *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth* (John 1:14).

For many Christians, God’s Spirit is the least understood Member of the Trinity, and “Forgotten God” isn’t far from the mark. At the risk of overdoing this, let me say again that the concept of the Trinity is a deduction from the evidence of personal experience, which developed something like this in the first century, and it develops in similar ways in our own lives: In New Testament times, people already knew about God in a vague sort of way. Then along came a man who claimed to be God. He was not the sort of man you could dismiss as a lunatic, and He convinced many of the people who heard Him that He was indeed God.

Those early believers met Jesus again after they had watched Him die an awful death; and then, after they had watched Him ascend into the sky and had formed themselves into a little

³ See also Matthew 28:19 and 2 Corinthians 13:14, among many other New Testament examples.

⁴ Some versions translate the Greek “Paraclete” (παρακλητος) as “Comforter,” “Counselor,” or “Helper.”

society, they discovered that He was somehow *inside* them as well, directing them and making them able to do things they could never have done before. And when they worked it all out, they found that they had arrived at the idea of a Three-Personal God.

They discovered a God who is Three Persons while remaining One Being, somewhat as a cube is a three-dimensional box whose surface is six two-dimensional squares. Of course, we can't really conceive a Being like that, just as, if we were so made that we perceived only two dimensions in space, we could not properly imagine a cube. But we can get sort of a faint notion about it. And the important thing is not that we fully understand this Three-Personal God, **but that we be drawn into personal relationship with Him.**

As we focus this morning on God's Spirit, it's important to remember that the Holy Spirit did not come into existence on Pentecost Sunday. The Spirit of God is mentioned in the very first verse of Genesis and in the last chapter of Revelation. And, as the Spirit *of God*, the Holy Spirit exists from everlasting to everlasting. With the Father and the Son, the Spirit is beyond time.

What happened on Pentecost morning was that the Spirit was given to every believer, rather than being given only to particular persons at particular times, as had always been the case before. Today, the Spirit continues to take up residence in the heart and life of every person who commits her or his life to Jesus.

Pentecost morning was noteworthy because the Spirit was given to every believer; but equally remarkable was the awareness these Christians had of a new and amazing sense of **power**. Those first believers received the power to live, not just "somehow," but triumphantly. They received the **courage** to meet dangerous and deadly situations bravely and boldly.

They received an unlearned **eloquence** when the time came to give testimony about their faith. And they received an unstoppable **joy** that was independent of their circumstances.⁵ I want to concentrate our thought this morning on the *power* that is available to us right now—*today!*—through the work of God's Spirit in our lives.

I'm sure you're familiar with the "fruit of the Spirit" in Galatians 5: *the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law* (Galatians 5:22-23). You may even have the list memorized.

But here's the question: Consider this list and ask yourself whether you possess each of these characteristics to a supernatural degree. Do you exhibit more kindness and faithfulness than the non-Christians you know? Do you have more self-control? Do you have more peace? Do you have more joy? *If GOD truly lives in you*, shouldn't you expect to be *different* as a result?⁶

To say this another way, I like to describe fully-devoted followers of Jesus as persons whose lives are prayer-filled, Bible-centered, virtuous, compassionate, congruent, and spiritually powerful. Would people who know you well say that your life is **prayer-filled**? Would they say that your life is **Bible-centered**? Would they say that your life is **virtuous** and holy, no matter where you are or who you're with? Would they say that you demonstrate genuine **compassion** for the poor and downtrodden?

⁵ These developments should really have been no surprise. After all, Jesus had told them, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

⁶ Chan, p. 146.

Would your friends say that your life is **congruent**, that what and who you are on Sunday morning is the same way you present yourself at any other time in the week? And taking all this together, would people who know you well say that your life is filled with spiritual **power**? These are hard questions, are they not? And yet it is to such character that we are called, if we dare to say that we follow Jesus.

So how do we receive the power to live in such a way? Even in asking the question, I must warn you that the desire for power can be—and frequently is—a very dangerous thing. In Acts 19, the sons of Sceva were trying to cast out evil spirits using Jesus’ Name, but without His authority. The evil spirit responded, “*Jesus I know, and Paul I know about, but who are you?!”* (v.15). What happened next was not any fun for the impostors, I can tell you!

My friends, God clearly intends for us to live in the Spirit’s power, but the power of God’s Spirit in our lives can’t be had on our own authority, and that power cannot be bought.⁷ Here’s how God’s Power works⁸

At the moment when we first commit our lives to follow Jesus—at that very moment—we receive the Gift of God’s Spirit and become citizens of heaven, with “all the rights and privileges appertaining thereunto.” **But there is another experience with the Spirit, and it is this**

⁷ See Acts 8:18-20.

⁸ At this point, I need to clarify several terms. Serious misunderstandings arise in various parts of the Church around the terms “the **gift** (not “gifts”) of the Holy Spirit,” “the **baptism** of the Holy Spirit,” “the **filling** of the Holy Spirit,” and “**speaking in tongues**.”

The easiest one of these four to clarify is “speaking in tongues,” also known as “glossolalia.” Speaking in tongues is one of the many “gifts of the Spirit,” but it is not THE GIFT of the Spirit, as we’ll see in a moment. Speaking in tongues is a God-given ability to pray in the language(s) of heaven, and it is a precious gift for those who receive it. But precious though it is, speaking in tongues is not a gift that is given to all believers. This is a persistent point of confusion.

Nor was what happened at Pentecost “speaking in tongues.” The gift of speaking in tongues is not a matter of human language; and on Pentecost, the miracle was that the Disciples were suddenly able to speak eloquently in known languages that they themselves did not know. The purpose of this miracle was to give testimony of Jesus’ Resurrection to the Jews from all over the Roman Empire who had come to Jerusalem for Passover.

Distinct from the gift of speaking in tongues, the “gift of the Holy Spirit” and the “baptism of the Holy Spirit” are synonymous. They refer to the same experience, which takes place when we are “*born again*” (John 3:3).

The gift or “baptism” of the Holy Spirit is not some “second blessing,” as some groups mistakenly describe it. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is God’s gift of Himself to us at the moment of our conversion (Romans 8:9).

When we put our faith in Jesus as the Source of our Salvation, God’s Spirit—which, through the mystery of the Trinity, is Jesus Himself—takes up residence in our lives *at that very moment*. We are *immediately* adopted into God’s family and granted citizenship in God’s Eternal Kingdom. And we have access *right then* to all of the power and resources of heaven, although it will take most of our earthly lives to learn how to allow that power to flow through us into the world. That flow of power has to do with “being filled with the Spirit,” as the remainder of the sermon explains.

The baptism of the Spirit occurs only once with each believer. It is not repeatable, and it always takes place at the moment of conversion. The Bible very clearly says that if you don’t have the Holy Spirit in your life, then you don’t belong to Christ (Romans 8:9). **If you have Christ, then you have the Holy Spirit. It’s that simple** (see also John 7:39).

At the moment of our first faith in Jesus, we receive the Gift of God’s Spirit and become citizens of heaven, with “all the rights and privileges appertaining thereunto.” **But there is indeed another experience with the Spirit, and it is this experience that is the key to spiritual power.** The Bible calls this experience “being filled with” the Spirit.

experience that is the key to spiritual power. The Bible calls this experience “being filled with” the Spirit.

The key to living supernaturally powerful lives is found in what the New Testament calls “being filled with the Spirit.” Being filled with God’s Spirit has to do with placing our lives at the Spirit’s disposal and under the Spirit’s full control.

To be filled with the Holy Spirit is to live in constant dependence on and in complete surrender to God. This filling is the result of an act of the will that has to be repeated often, somewhat like physical breathing. Unlike physical birth, breathing is not a once-for-all event, but something that is experienced repeatedly during every minute of our lives. Without breath, there is no life.

Being “filled with God’s Spirit” is also an experience that is repeated throughout the remainder of our lives. Experiencing this filling requires focused attention in the beginning, rather like learning to ride a bicycle, but little by little, we learn to live “filled” without having to give it much thought.

It’s important to realize that learning to “live filled” is not a question of whether or not we’re “saved.” **Being filled with God’s Spirit is not a matter of salvation, but it is the key to living in the Spirit’s power.**

When Paul wrote, “*Don’t be drunk with wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, let the Holy Spirit fill and control you*” (Ephesians 5:18), his point was that the person who is filled with the Spirit will be controlled by the Spirit even as it’s possible to be filled with and controlled by alcohol or other drugs. And the context of this verse makes it clear that this filling, this control, is an experience needed by every Christian, not some special blessing for the spiritually elite. **Being filled with and controlled by God’s Spirit is absolutely essential for a normal Christian life. Anything less is sub-normal.**⁹

My friends, one of the greatest challenges in our spiritual lives is that we tend to become more and more interested in our own comfort than we are in serving a holy God who is rebuilding creation and creating an eternal Kingdom right under Satan’s nose. Perhaps our lives have become too routine, too safe, too predictable, too domesticated to be of much use to God’s Kingdom.

As you sit in your home this morning, try to be honest with yourself about the degree to which your life is or is not prayer-filled, Bible-centered, virtuous, compassionate, congruent, and spiritually powerful. You and I need to identify things that we’re allowing to continue in our lives that fall short of God’s virtue and holiness. We need to identify ways in which we’re being disobedient to what we know God intends for us to do, because it **is disobedience, more than anything else, that puts out the Spirit’s fire.**

My friend, if your fire has gone down to the pilot light, here are five steps toward allowing God’s Spirit to fill and to control your life. Each of these steps is achieved through clear and focused commitment that changes our minds, our hearts, our attitudes, and our actions:

1. **ADMIT** that you need God’s Spirit to fill and to control your life.
2. **ASK** God to do this—to fill and to control your life. Ask God to guide you through Scripture, spiritual promptings, circumstances, and fellow believers.

⁹ See Watchman Nee, *The Normal Christian Life* (Bombay, India: Gospel Literature Service, 1957).

3. **ABANDON** any sin that you consciously tolerate in your life, asking God to reveal any sin of which you're not aware (Psalm 139:23-24).
4. **APPROPRIATE** God's powerful promises and life principles, found throughout the Bible.
5. **ABIDE** in Christ by continuing this process through all the days of your life, bearing eternal fruit through the Spirit's work in you (John 14-15).

If we do these things, and if we *continue* to do them, Paul told us that our roots will grow down deep into the soil of God's marvelous love. We will have the power to understand how wide, how long, how high and how deep God's love really is, and we will be filled with the incredible **power** that comes from God (Ephesians 3:17-19).

But as wonderful as this is, there's one more thing we need to remember. God doesn't redeem us, fill us, and empower us so we'll be happy and comfortable. God fills us and transforms us so we will be useful on the front lines of God's taking back this planet from the forces of evil.

My friend, what is God calling you to do that you've been reluctant to do? What bold decision rumbles around at the edges of your consciousness, beckoning you to go deeper with God's purposes for your life? What might God accomplish through your life if you released the Spirit's power? So here's the challenge:

- Fill out the application.
- Make the call.
- Pack the U-Haul.
- Write the check.
- Set up the appointment.
- Have the conversation.
- Make the move.¹⁰

Let's roll.

¹⁰ Mark Batterson, *Wild Goose Chase: Reclaim the Adventure of Pursuing God* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2008), p. 27.