

Hy 36:1,2
Ps 139:13
Ps 25:2,4
Ps 119:49,50
Ps 85:3; Hy 37:1,2
John 16:5-16
I Corinthians 2:1-13
John 16:13a

Yarrow, May 23, 2010

Beloved Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ!

Ten days ago was Ascension Day, an event we remembered in the proclamation of the gospel last Sunday. Ten days after the Lord's departure from earth to heaven, He poured out His Holy Spirit – Pentecost. On the church's calendar that's today.

So here's the question for today: of what advantage was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on that Pentecost Day so long ago? We made confession on an aspect of this question last week with Lord's Day 20. It will be good, though, to put ourselves in the shoes of the disciples when they heard Jesus speak about the coming of the Spirit. What did it mean to them that the Holy Spirit would guide them into all the truth?? And how does that reality help us??¹

I summarise the sermon with this theme:

THE HOLY SPIRIT GUIDES THE DISCIPLES INTO ALL GOD'S TRUTH.

1. The limitations of the disciples
2. The work of the Holy Spirit
3. The consequence for the Church

1. The Limitations of the Disciples

The words of our text, brothers and sisters, form part of Jesus' so-called 'farewell address' to His disciples. This address was spoken "on the run"; already Judas had departed from the circle of the disciples to organize Jesus' arrest. Time was running out.

What Jesus talks about in the moments before His arrest? A key aspect of this address is that His departure should not leave the disciples heart-broken. For, Jesus assures them, He would send a replacement, the Holy Spirit; indeed, He could not send this Spirit unless He first departed (vs 7). In fact, it would be to the disciples' advantage that this Holy Spirit comes (vs 7).

Why, brothers and sisters, would it be advantageous for the disciples that the Holy Spirit comes? In the passage we read together, Jesus mentions two advantages. The first is recorded in vs 8: "when He comes, He will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment." It will be His work, then, to make the unbelieving world know that it is guilty before God, condemned. The second advantage is recorded in our text; the Spirit "will guide you into all the truth." It's this second advantage for the Spirit's coming that we involve ourselves with today.

This second advantage of the Spirit's coming involves the *disciples*. Jesus speaks to the disciples, and says to *them*: "He will guide *you* into all truth." The implication of that statement is that

¹ Grateful use was made of HW Ophoff, *De Reformatie*, Vol 46, #35; C vanderWal, *Wat Staat er Eigenlijk*, pg 86ff; TDNT; Brown, *John*; also vanderWal on *John*.

the disciples did not yet know “all truth”. It’s something we can understand. I do not know how old the disciples were, but it would seem reasonable that they were not old and bent when Jesus sent them out to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them into the name of Triune God. Men of 30 or 40 years of age may know much, and men of 60 or 70 may know even more, but we realize well that no one knows “all truth”. Then it’s true that these disciples had the advantage no one else ever had or will have, and that is that for a period of some three years they had been following Jesus around the land of Israel, listening to His instruction, learning much about God’s revelation in the Old Testament, about the will of God in Jesus Christ, about how sinners are reconciled to God, and so on; they were schooled in the ultimate truths of life in a way that makes so many others very jealous. But, Jesus implies, despite their progress in the school of life, plus what they’ve learned at Jesus’ feet these last three years, the disciples did not yet know “all truth”. That’ll make their God-given task of making disciples of all nations, and so of proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ to people everywhere, so very much more difficult. O to have answers to all questions!! But Jesus realized they did not yet know “all truth”....

And it’s not just that their lack of knowledge and understanding involved some of the practical applications of the gospel in daily life – like what you should do on a Sunday and what you shouldn’t, or what a God-pleasing approach to your spouse actually looks like. When Jesus spoke the words of our text, the disciples didn’t even understand the basics of why Jesus had to die! How else do you explain Peter’s offer to “lay down [his] life” for the Lord (13:37)?! The whole idea that Jesus had to die for sin, that Peter couldn’t die for sin because the wrath of God would swallow him up, that Jesus was in fact true God, went right past him. Peter and the others ready to be preachers of the gospel? Obviously not....

One could say: that means that Jesus should teach them some more. But there’s the problem; vs 12: “you cannot bear [more teaching] now.” Jesus recognised that the disciples lacked yet so much, and that’s why He says to the disciples: “I have yet many things to say to you.” But: the disciples were not now in a position to handle, to comprehend, more information, more understanding, of the meaning and purpose of the Saviour’s coming sacrifice. Why can’t they handle it, can’t they bear it? It’s because God’s ways are too wonderful, too high for a mortal man to understand (Is 55:8f). As Paul writes to Corinthians:

“...what person knows a man’s thoughts except the spirit of the man which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God” (I Corinthians 2:11).

And *here*, beloved, is now *one of the reasons why the Holy Spirit would be sent to the disciples*: “He will guide you into all truth.” The disciples can’t get their minds around the whole truth of God yet, can’t comprehend why Jesus must die. That’s true not just in an intellectual sense, but perhaps even more so in the spiritual sense; they don’t begin to grasp their own bankruptcy before God, their own deadness in sin, don’t begin to grasp that they need a heavenly Saviour to deliver them from the righteous judgment of God.

So Jesus promises that the Spirit of God will replace the Son of God as teacher of the disciples. The Spirit will carry on the instruction of the Son so that the disciples come to understand the fullness of God’s redeeming work for sinners. That brings us to our second point:

2. The work of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit, then, would be sent to lead the disciples –with their current limited understanding and ability– into all truth. Just what, however, does this mean, beloved: guide the disciples into all truth? I mentioned already the disciples’ ignorance about why their Master had to die. Coming to understand the reason for Jesus’ death is part of this “truth” into which the Holy Spirit will guide them. But there is, brothers and sisters, more involved.

The word 'truth' appears twice in our text. Not only will the Holy Spirit "guide the disciples into all truth"; the Holy Spirit is Himself also called "the Spirit of truth".

We understand the word 'truth' to mean *the facts*, that which is real, tangible, correct. In the Bible, however, the word 'truth' has a far richer meaning. 'Truth' in Scripture refers to *faithfulness*. In the Scriptures the word is rooted in the God who does not lie, who does not disappoint, mislead. When Jesus says of Himself, for example, that He is the "true vine" (John 15:1), then His point is not so much that He is real, tangible; His point is rather that He is a reliable vine, a vine that *shall* bring forth the expected fruit. As the 'true vine' He does not deceive, does not raise expectations of a good yield only to disappoint.

Jesus calls the Holy Spirit the "Spirit of truth". That means that this Spirit will always reflect faithfulness, always demonstrate that divine characteristic of God-doing-what-God-has-said-He-would-do, of God being reliable. As 'Spirit of truth', then, the Holy Spirit will pop no surprises on the disciples, will only teach them *in a line consistent with what God had already said in the past*. In the Old Testament God had revealed this and that, and Jesus Christ had built squarely and solidly on top of that Old Testament foundation of God's revelation. By calling the Holy Spirit the "Spirit of truth", Jesus Christ assured the disciples that this Spirit would in turn build firmly and consistently on the foundation of the Old Testament and on Jesus' explanation of the Old Testament. Never would the Spirit guide them into a gospel that differed in any way from what God had earlier revealed. For He's the Spirit of truth, is reliable in unfolding the will of God perfectly.

What was it God had revealed in the past? Through all those sacrifices and ceremonies of the law, congregation, through all those visions and oracles given to the prophets, the Lord God had unfolded for Israel the gospel of redemption in the seed of the woman. In the last three years God had had this Old Testament revelation worked out for the disciples through His chief Prophet and Teacher, Jesus of Nazareth. What the Holy Spirit would do is open up that Old Testament revelation for the disciples, open it up as it was fulfilled in Jesus Christ. As the cloud in the desert had "guided" Israel on its way through the wilderness, so the Holy Spirit would now "guide" the disciples through God's Old Testament revelation so that they could comprehend the depths and the heights of God's saving work as fulfilled in the Saviour. This Spirit would add nothing new to what God had already revealed; what the Spirit would instead do is open it up, explain it, lay it all before the disciples, cause them to see and understand. In a word, He would give the disciples *inspired insight* into the Scriptures the disciples had, so that they in turn might be able to be the preachers of the gospel Christ wished them to be.

It may be helpful to give an illustration of the point. We've all heard of the two men who travelled from Jerusalem to Emmaus on the day of Jesus' resurrection (Lu 24:13ff). Those two men –the one was named Cleopas and the other we don't know– are described in Scriptures as disciples of the Lord (cf vs 10 & 13). When a third man joined the two on the walk, the two –both followers of Jesus who had spent much time with the Lord– openly admitted that they were at a loss as to why Jesus had to die, at a loss too about what to make of the impossible story of a resurrection as reported by the women. What that means? These two, though they were disciples of Jesus, understood neither God's Old Testament revelation about a triumph over death, nor Jesus' teachings in the course of those three years about how it was necessary –according to Old Testament Scripture– that He rise from the dead. Though they knew so much of the Old Testament, knew so much of what Jesus had said, they did not *understand* a word of it. It is as the stranger who accompanied them said:

"O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary (for it's written in God's Old Testament Scriptures) that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into His glory?" (vs 25f).

Then He –and that stranger turns out to be the risen Christ Himself– then He “beginning with Moses and all the prophets, interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself” (vs 27). In a word: the resurrected Christ “guided” these two disciples “into all truth”.

And now consider what the disciple Philip was able to say to the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8. That eunuch, though He had the Scriptures on His lap, did not understand what he was reading (vs 30). It’s what he says to Philip: I can’t understand it “unless some one guides me” (vs 31). So what does Philip do? This disciple, we read, “opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture (that’s the one the eunuch was reading from Isaiah 53) he told him the good news of Jesus” (vs 35).

“He told him the good news of Jesus.” How that was possible?? On the day of Christ’s resurrection, Philip was as ignorant in His understanding of why Jesus had to die and rise again as were those two disciples who walked the road to Emmaus, blind to the wealth of God’s Old Testament revelation. But now Philip himself can guide the Ethiopian eunuch into all truth, can lead him through the Old Testament so that the eunuch understands Jesus Christ to be the fulfilment of God’s glorious promises. How we’re to explain the change? It’s because *the Spirit of truth was poured out* some time *between* the day the disciples went to Emmaus and the day the eunuch returned to Ethiopia. Jesus Christ was true to His Word, and in accordance with God’s promises in the Old Testament had poured out His Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. And that Spirit had *done* what He was instructed to do; He had led the disciples into all truth so that now the disciples understood the glorious heights and depths of God’s saving work as revealed in the Old Testament. They understood, saw that God’s promises were fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and that’s why they were able on their missionary journeys to proclaim God’s Word of redemption to thousands of Jews who until then had not understand the riches of the Old Testament, were able to proclaim that Word of redemption to countless Gentiles too. They were “guided into all truth” by the outpoured Holy Spirit, and therefore were they able –despite all their natural limitations and weaknesses– to understand something of the depths of God and impart that understanding to their hearers. That’s what Paul says in the passage we read from I Corinthians 2: though “I was with you in weakness and in much fear and trembling..., my speech and my message were ... in demonstration of the Spirit and of power...” (vs 4f).

“Demonstration of the Spirit”, for Paul –himself by nature blinded in understanding by the limitations imposed by sin so that all his Old Testament studies at the feet of Gamaliel helped only to stir up more hatred of the church– had been guided by the Spirit of truth so that he understood the deep things of God as revealed in the Old Testament. Vs 10: “God has revealed to us through the Spirit” that which otherwise is too wonderful for people even to imagine. So Paul is able to “understand the gifts [of salvation in Christ] bestowed on us by God” (vs 12). He can understand it, and therefore is Paul able to preach the gospel, to open up for the people of Corinth that which God had revealed in the Old Testament Scriptures.

And what Paul says here about why he is able to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ is true not only of his preaching; it’s true also of what he *puts on paper*. He is guided into all truth, and therefore is he moved by the Spirit also in what he writes to the Corinthians; this letter is *inspired* so that it is fully in line with God’s Old Testament revelation, fully in line with what Jesus said during His earthly ministry. And this is true not just of Paul, but also of what the other apostles wrote; each in turn were “moved by the Holy Spirit” so that they spoke and wrote “from God” (2 Peter 1:21); each was guided by the Spirit of truth so that they put black on white all that was “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). The fact that the apostles were moved by the Spirit to preach the gospel and to write the words of the New Testament is the fulfilment of Jesus’ promise made on the night of His betrayal. It is because the Spirit of truth guided the disciples into all truth that we may today have the New Testament. That New Testament contains “all the truth”, contains nothing essentially new, nothing different from the Old Testament. Rather, that New

Testament *opens up* the Old Testament, draws out what was hidden in the Old Testament so that all with an eye of faith are able to understand it.

What this work of the Holy Spirit is then? In relation to our text it comes down to two things. The one is that the Holy Spirit works a living faith in hearts that by nature do not appreciate the gospel of redemption. It is He who causes normal, sinful people to marvel and delight in the glorious redemptive work of Jesus Christ. The other is that this same Holy Spirit has moved the disciples to write the letters of the New Testament Scriptures so that the Bible might be complete, that the church of all ages might in turn have the complete revelation of God, everything we need to know to live our daily lives in a fashion that glorifies the Lord our Maker. Both of those things are promised in Jesus' words about the Holy Spirit poured out in Pentecost, and both of these things this Spirit has done.

That brings us to today, and so to our third point:

3. The consequence for the Church

What do you think, now, congregation about what all this might mean for you? So the Holy Spirit of Pentecost gave the disciples the insight-into-Scripture and the understanding-of-God's-redemptive-plan they needed in order to explain God's will for sinners in their preaching and in their writing. Does that have consequences for us today??

The answer, of course, is Yes. For it is *by the Spirit of Pentecost* that we have God's will and revelation! We have it, both because the Spirit guided the disciples into all truth in the sense of making them understand and believe God's good news in Jesus Christ *and* because the Spirit guided the disciples in preaching this truth and writing it down. More, this same Spirit of truth preserved that written Word throughout twenty centuries of church history in unaltered form; today's Bible still very much contains God's good news. Satan may hate it, some people may despise it, to people's minds truth and reality may change according to changing circumstances, but despite such hurdles the Spirit of Pentecost has ensured that the church of Jesus Christ is guided still into all truth! That you have the Bible, the Word of God that "fully contains the will of God" and teaches "all that man must believe in order to be saved" and indeed describes "the whole manner of worship which God requires of us" in every part of life – this, brothers and sisters, is the gracious and blessed fruit of the Holy Spirit's outpouring on Pentecost. Our world searches for the way forward in the face of the oil spill in the Gulf and the economic uncertainties that follow from massive national and personal debts, searches for the way forward when the number of aged and frail people gets disproportionately big and allegiance in marriage and family evaporates. Our world searches for meaning, for where we come from and why there is such a thing as life and existence, what it's all for and where we're going. In abundant grace the God-who-is-real has given the answers! That is: on this earth, in this life, He poured out His Holy Spirit from heaven to guide us into all truth – both in the sense that He gives us today in the Bible the complete Word of God *and* in the sense that He opens up sinful hearts to comprehend and believe God's written Word. See in this, congregation, the wonderful care and mercy of your Creator! And delight in what Pentecost implies!

But if that's all so, another consequence follows in turn. And that's this: *it is for us to esteem the written word of God most highly*. Behind the word is the Spirit of truth, and that is why David could already say in Ps 119 that "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path" (vs 105), and in Ps 19 that "The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple" (vs 7). You need answers, good answers, to the business questions of life, good answers in how to disciple and train your children, good answers in how to celebrate your graduation? The answers are in the Bible! But you will not know those answers, nor will you benefit from those heavenly answers, if your Bible stays closed.

Here I need to say something about some habits we have in the congregation. The Bible study society has come to its end, and so it's reasonable to think back on the year we've had. Was it a good one? Yes, in the sense that the societies could continue to operate. But elders and others report that attendance has not been so sterling this past year. Men's Society, Young People's, even Women's Society have all seen better attendance in earlier years than the past. A bigger problem, though, is the amount of personal Bible study done in preparation for discussion at society. The reports coming to me indicate that time and again prep study was lacking so that much of the talk that happened was a talk off the top of one's head. I say nothing new when I remind you that no one finds such talk stimulating or edifying. And that lack of study, of course, has discouraged others from attending....

But here's another thought. If prep study for society faltered this past year, what does that in reality say for family Bible study and personal Bible study? If the prep study doesn't happen when others will see it, is it reasonable to assume that personal Bible study happens when others won't see it? Given what human nature is, honesty points us to an unhappy answer.

Yet our God in mercy has given us His answers to all life's questions! Pentecost: He sent us His Holy Spirit to guide us into all truth! So we have the word, *and we have the ability to understand it!* What's left? What's left is that we work with the *responsibility* with which God created us in the beginning, the responsibility to make decisions in daily life from a position of knowledge. And the knowledge we need is not just of economics and market movements, but is knowledge of the God behind the markets and the economy and the social developments of our time.

The Spirit of Pentecost guides God's people into all truth. You belong to God's people, you have the privilege of knowing His wisdom. Consequence?? Treasure the Word! Spend time with it, personally and in your family, morning and evening, and meditate on it prayerfully as you go through your day's program. And then trust that the Spirit *will* guide you in life's questions.