

The Holy Spirit in the Upper Room Discourse

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Overview

We are examining Eph 3:16-17, “That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; 17 That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith ... in love,” particularly the first clause referring to “strengthened ... by his Spirit.” Our method has been to examine antecedent scripture on the subject, on the grounds that the biblical writers regularly draw on revelation already given.

- Last week, we saw from an overview of the OT and NT together that the Spirit of God is commonly associated with power.
- Today, we look at the preeminent passage in the gospels on the Holy Spirit, the Upper Room Discourse in John’s gospel, to gain a better idea of the ministry of the HS.
- Next week, Lord willing, consider Rom. 8, the major passage on the subject in Paul’s writings.

The Upper Room Discourse (John 14-16) is the Lord Jesus’ last block of teaching to his disciples before he was executed. They had gathered for the Passover meal. The synoptic gospels record the meal itself, and in particular the elements of it that the Lord singled out as enduring symbols of his coming sacrifice. John, written later, sees no need to repeat this material, but preserves in more detail than the synoptics the Lord’s teaching to the disciples during that last evening together. There are six main themes woven together throughout the discourse, more like a tapestry or a symphony than a strict outline.

- Theme 1: The overall objective of the discourse is preparing them for his impending departure.
- Theme 2: He warns them of rejection by the world, so that they will not be taken by surprise.
- He gives them four tools to help them in his absence:
 - Theme 3: The *command* to love one another; they are to uphold and care for each other while he is gone.
 - Three resources, one corresponding to each member of the trinity:
 - Theme 4: The *promise* of his own return to deliver them from the world.
 - Theme 5: The *power* that they have of praying directly to the Father,
 - Theme 6: The *gift* of the Holy Spirit to be their helper during his absence.

Everything in these chapters can be related to one of these four topics.

Our approach:

- Overview the discourse paragraph by paragraph, relating it to these ideas.
- Linger longer over the paragraphs dealing with the Holy Spirit.

Paragraph Summaries

Consider enough of the other themes to see how they are reflected.

13:1 Setting: Theme 1

Here is the theme of the entire discourse. Jesus knows that he is to leave the disciples, but in love to them wants to prepare them for that separation.

13:2-17, Washing the Disciples' Feet: Theme 3

This introduces the “love one another” theme. Washing the feet of household guests was a requirement of hospitality, but at the same time the work of a servant. He has taken the place of a servant among them; they are to follow his example and serve one another (12-17).

13:18-30, Dismissal of Judas: Theme 2

Here is the first instance of “warning.” 18-19 emphasize that there is opposition, but also the notion of advance warning to avoid surprise and encourage the believers that “I am” (another instance where Jesus take to himself the ineffable name of Jehovah).

13:31-35, The New Commandment: Theme 3

Love one another. Note two themes:

- The standard: “as I have loved you.” Sacrificially; he is about to give his life to redeem them.
- The company: his true followers, with the traitor absent. This is *not* a vague command “love everybody.” While the Lord was a servant toward Judas as well as toward the others, he does not give this command until Judas has left. He is speaking here of a special love within the body of believers for one another.

Now the questions start to fly. The disciples are really confused.

13:36-14:4, Peter's Questions: Theme 4.

He is finally getting the picture that the Lord is leaving. The Lord repeats this teaching, but introduces the promise of his return.

14:5-14, Thomas and Philip: Access to the Father: Theme 5

The point of these verses is their access to the Father. Jesus is the only way (v.6), but those who know him can come directly to the Father in prayer (13-14).

14:15-17, Promise of the Spirit: Theme 6

Now we come to the first of the passages concerning the Holy Spirit.

16, His name: “Comforter,” as we discussed last week, is less than ideal. “Helper” would be better. The term actually refers to someone summoned to help in court, an “advocate.”

16, His character: “another helper.” Another next to whom? Answer: next to the Lord Jesus. He is leaving, so he will provide them with someone in his stead, and that is the HS. This is

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emphasized by the word he chooses for “another.” Greek has two words that we translate in this way: *ετερος* (another that contrasts with the first one) and *αλλος* (another of the same kind as the first one), and the Lord here chooses *αλλος*. He is to be a surrogate for the Lord. In fact, recall the parallel phrases in Eph 3, “to be strengthened by his Spirit in the inner man, Christ to dwell in your hearts....” How does Christ dwell in our hearts? By his Spirit in us.

17, His selectivity: He is beyond the experience of the unbeliever. This is *not* the “force” of Star Wars, accessible to either good or evil. It is the very presence of God. Those separated from God by sin cannot know him or enjoy his presence. By bearing his people’s sin, the Lord Jesus has made it possible for them to have this intimate fellowship with the Spirit of God. There is another spirit in the world, the “spirit of error” (for the contrast, see 1 John 4:6), but the Spirit of Truth is accessible only to believers.

16, 17, His presence: Two details here to note: the change in his relation to them (“he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you,” and the permanent character of his future presence (“that he may abide with you forever”). Both are diagnostic of the New Covenant. As the other gospels make clear, the Lord has already celebrated the Passover with them, using the matzah as a picture of his body to be broken on the cross, and the cup after supper as a picture of his shed blood. He told them that the cup represented “my blood of the new covenant,” the covenant promised by God to Israel. Compare Jer 31:31-34, which emphasizes that this covenant is eternal, and Ezekiel 36:21-28, which emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit in it.

14:18-24, Fellowship with the Son and the Father, Theme 6 (extended)

I believe this is a continuation of the work of the Spirit, in whom “Christ dwells in our hearts,” as we shall see later.

14:25-26, The Spirit as Teacher, Theme 6

As we suggested last week, there are two main activities of the Spirit. The first is teaching. He enables us to understand the Scriptures; without his help we cannot discern them. More immediately in this context, he enabled the disciples to recall the earthly words of the Lord Jesus and so record them accurately for us. Skeptics sometimes protest that the authors of the NT could hardly have remembered accurately what the Lord Jesus taught, and must have added a lot in the light of later thought, but our Lord’s promise here is the basis on which we can rely on the accuracy of the NT record.

This is another pointer to the New Covenant. Jer 31:33,34.

14:27-31, His coming departure, Theme 1

15:1-8, Answered Prayer through abiding, Theme 5

15:9-17, Love one another, Theme 3

15:18-25, Opposition from the World, Theme 2

15:26-27, Witness of the Spirit in believers, Theme 6

Although the world does not recognize him, the Spirit is the means of bearing a witness to them, through the believers. So he does not instruct us simply for our own edification, but for our impact on those around us.

16:1-4a, Opposition from the World, Theme 2

16:4b-6, The Lord's Departure, Theme 1

16:7-15, the Work of the Spirit, Theme 6

This is the last major section on the Spirit in the URD. So far we have seen two major activities of the Spirit:

- instructing the believers (14:25-26)
- enabling their witness to unbelievers (15:26-27).

This paragraph picks up and amplifies both of these.

16:7-11, Witness to Unbelievers

He is to reprove the world of three things as he works through us to bear witness to Christ. This is the message he will equip us to convey. Not “God loves you,” but a warning about sin, righteousness, and judgment.

Sin: failure to believe on the Lord Jesus. This is the great offense against God; to reject his beloved son. All the things we think of as sins pale in comparison, for they can all be forgiven by receiving the Lord Jesus. But there is no remedy for unbelief.

Righteousness: Because the preeminent example of righteousness is removed from the world. Even unbelievers recognize in Jesus a “great moral teacher.” Even if they consider him only in this light, they will realize how far short they themselves fall.

Judgment: By his death on the cross, the Lord Jesus broke Satan's power. The work of the Spirit through believers will show the world that siding with Satan is a losing proposition.

16:12-15, Instructing Believers

Note that his role is to glorify Christ, not himself. Excesses attributed through history to emphasis on the HS have invariably been reflected in a focus on the Spirit rather than the Son.

Summary

How are we “strengthened with might by his spirit in the inner man”? Two major ministries of the Spirit under the New Covenant:

- He strengthens us to know God's word, writing it in our hearts, bringing it to our remembrance.
- He witnesses through us to a hostile world, and makes that witness effective.