

John 14:15-24: The Spirit, the Trinity, & Us

Intro:

- My name is John Seago, I serve as an elder here at City Life Church and it's a joy to bring you God's word for us this morning.
- Before we start I want to give you glimpse into my daily life, a realm that that many of you happily avoid: State politics. Yes, I heard that audible grumble, but stick with me. I work with the Texas Legislature and there is a reality that anyone working in the capitol building has to acknowledge and work under: there are three main figures of authority relevant to the Legislative Process. "The Big Three" as we affectionately refer to them. The Speaker of the House, runs the House of Representatives, the Lt Governor, runs the Senate and the Governor, who among other things signs or vetoes legislation passed by both chambers. It is necessary for these offices to work together to get substantial policy changes, the problem is that these three have a tenuous relationship. By nature they don't trust each other. In fact towards the end of the session there are Press Release fights where this leader is blaming that leader for some failure and a response PR is sent saying well if you would have done this earlier on... so on and so forth.¹
- Part of the tension is that these political figures have different agendas, so plenty of media and social media space is filled with analysis of comparing what the Lt Gov's priority bills are and whether the Governor supports all of those and which ones he does not care about, etc.
- Three offices of power, different agendas, tenuous relationship.
- Today in our passage we see a different trio, we see three persons who have absolute authority, impassable power, yet they work and exist in sublime unity.
 - John 14-17 pulls back the heavenly curtain and allows us to peak into the reality of the Trinity and our relationship to it.
- Just like in the capitol how the "Big Three" get along affects my daily life, the legislation I'm working on, the oneness of the Father, Son, and Spirit affects our daily lives as saints in community and on mission.
- Let's pray.
- This morning we're going to look at three aspects of the Spirit: The Spirit as a member of the Trinity, the Spirit as our Helper, and the Spirit's role in our

¹ The distrust is so constant that they have shaped the architecture around this, the Lt Gov on one end of the capitol can see all the way through the Senate through the rotunda into the House chamber to the dias where the speaker stands if the chamber doors are open and they use this periodically when passing contentious legislation to make sure the other isn't trying to pull a fast one on the other after they make a deal.

love and obedience.

I. Spirit is a member of the Trinity - the divine Big Three²

- a. John 14 is a beautiful display of the Trinitarian God we serve.
- b. During this farewell address of Jesus, we see the dynamic and complex relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Spirit also called the Helper.
- c. We start here, all three persons of the Godhead have a presence and relationship with us, the faithful:
 - Spirit (15-17) – Our Helper who dwells in us forever
 - Son (18-21) – Our Savior who reconciles us to the love of the Father
 - Father (22-24) – Who sent the son love us because of Christ’s work
- d. At City Life Church we hold the Trinity as a central doctrine. There are some views we hold more lightly and believe but they are of less importance than this core belief for us.³
 - The first sentence of a good statement of faith reads, “We believe in one God, eternally existing in three equally divine Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, who know, love, and glorify one another.”
- e. Now, the Trinity is a rich topic, and if you’re here and have questions about the history of this doctrine, some of the misunderstanding out there, please engage our leaders on this. We’re not going to outline all the technicalities of this theology, but it is a deep dive, which is worth the time and effort.⁴
- f. Some of you may already be checking out. This theology stuff is not your jam.
 - But hold on. What we think about God, especially his triune nature, affects how we live in community and go on mission.
 - So this is practical, but besides that, the truth about God is essential.
 - The third person of the trinity is called the ‘Spirit of Truth’ in our passage, verse 17. One of his roles is to teach us, illuminate these life-changing truths to us.
- g. You may be thinking, theology sounds great for when I have the time to study this stuff, but for now, I’m just a Jesus person. Just give me Jesus. That's all

² One specific misunderstanding I want to warn against, the trinity is not three modes or masks of one person taking on three different forms. This is the error called Modalism. Like when I’m driving home from work and I’m on a work call I’m functioning as a Lobbyist, then I come in the front door and I hug my kids putting on the mask of a Father, then I walk over and kiss my wife, functioning in the mode of a Husband. That's not what God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are. There are not three roles or even mask the same person puts on. These are three distinct entities, but they absolutely unified in one substance.

³ “There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body, parts, or passions; of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; the Maker, and Preserver of all things both visible and invisible. And in unity of this Godhead there be three Persons, of one substance, power, and eternity; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.” Thirty-Nine Article of the Anglican Church, I.

⁴ “There is no subject where error is more dangerous, research more laborious, and discovery more fruitful than the oneness of the Trinity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” Augustine, *On the Trinity*, 1.3.5.

that matters right?

- h. Kevin Vanhoozer writes, “The gospel requires a triune God.”⁵
- i. The very gospel requires unity of the three persons of God.
- The Trinity exists in an intricate oneness like an Orchestra. You sit there listening to the melody of a grand symphony and then you focus on one instrument and try to pick out what part that member is playing and notice her role is in time with the others, distinct noise from her instrument but it compliments the others, it works with the others in such a way that when the whole orchestra is unified it produces a harmonious piece of music that no one instrument could come close to producing on its own or in discord.
 - This is like the Trinity, each has its role but working in accord.
 - Now I know there is a big sports event today, so you might have expected a football reference...but, sorry. I guess you could say the Father is like the Quarterback, and...eh. I’m not the right guys for this, so that will have to be your homework for this afternoon.
- j. There are three ways the Trinity is unified.
- k. First, They are unified in Redemptive History.
- There would not be a gospel without the Father and Spirit.
 - You may want to be a Jesus guy, not needing complicated theology, but you’ll lose the very gospel.
 - Jesus is the way into unity and reconciliation with the Trinity. To focus on Jesus without the Father and Spirit would be to deny and ignore the purpose of his work. It also neglects that Jesus was sent by the Father to save us. Scripture tells us Redemptive history was planned by the entire godhead.⁶
 - Look at verse 16, “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth.”
 - The Spirit does not come to the world on his own will, but he is sent by the Father, after the the Son asked him.

⁵The quote starts by claiming the “integrity of the gospel is fatally compromised if either the Son or the Spirit is not fully God. If the Son were not God, he could neither reveal the Father nor atone for our sin. If the Spirit were not God, he could unite us neither to the Father and Son nor one another.” Kevin Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 43. Vanhoozer also wrote: “The very logic of the gospel – the declaration that God enables believers to relate to God the Father in Jesus Christ through the Spirit – implies the divinity of the Son and Spirit as well.” Kevin Vanhoozer, “The Triune God of the Gospel,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology* (ed. T. Larsen and D.J. Treier; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 17.

⁶ The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit work together to effectuate the gospel. Their unity in power, plan, and passion is essential for the gospel to deliver on its promises of redemption and reconciliation with God. The Trinity is a corollary of our gospel experience, not an afterthought.

- Its actually more complicated than that, the trinity is not a team that tags in and out. The Spirit has already been at work, but the Son asked the Father to send him in a distinct way once Christ leaves. And we see that fulfilled in Acts 2 at Pentecost.⁷
 - All three members of the Trinity work together to accomplish the gospel, they are all agents of the story of scripture that God made a perfect world that was marred by sin when the first humans disobeyed God, yet God promised to restore his creation and humanity through sending a savior Christ Jesus who was sinless yet he suffered the punishment for our disobedience, yet through the power of the Spirit he rose from the dead, defeating sin, death, and evil, he ascended into heaven and sits at right hand of the Father continually advocating for us, and the Spirit was sent so that we may have union with God until Christ returns and all things are made new. That is the good news.
 - Spirit helps us in our role of that story.
 - Galatians 4:4-6 expresses this well. Paul writes, “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’”
 - Maybe you don’t know where you fit in that story. If this is new to you, no matter how familiar you are with church or Christianity, if you have not really reflected on that story of what God is doing in history and how that affects you, I invite you this morning to ask that question. It is good news and it only gets better with every additional question. As we learn aspects of the faith we’ve put off as unimportant like the Trinity we see the glorious nature of this truth (Bible) even brighter.
1. Secondly, The Trinity has Unity in Affection
- The three persons of God share love for the same people and things.
 - Look at verse 18, “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. 19 Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. 20 In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. 21 Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.”

⁷ At that moment, something does change, the spirit comes to be *in* the followers of Christ, which Jesus predicts here in John 14.

- Although Christ was going to die on the cross soon, he was not abandoning his disciplines and even after his ascension, the end of his earthly ministry he has not abandoned us.
- Christ is still our teacher, our caring shepherd, not leaving us as orphans.
- He cares for us by the ministry of the Spirit.
 - **The Spirit accomplishes union with Christ**
- And not just Christ, look at verse 21, “Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.”
 - Whew. Like a Gordian knot of divine affection.⁸
- Simplifying this passage and the principles of Jesus’ teaching show there is a formula of unions here:
 - First, union between the Father and Son (Jesus Christ)
 - Then the union of us and Christ (through the Spirit)
 - Which means, we have love for and receive love from the Father.
- This set up in Verse 21 points to the fact that love for one divine person is not to the detriment or opposition of the others like in a polytheistic religion. Or how some religions have family gods out of many.
 - Greek and Roman Mythology is filled with feuds of men, cities, tribes on earth which is fueled and escalated because the gods in the pantheon had their own favorite mortals they wanted to be happy, successful, and victorious over the other humans.
 - The gospel is better than Homer, than any myth. We are loved by and sought after by the entirety of the Trinity.
- m. Lastly, in this passage we see the Trinity has unity in Word/command
 - Look at verse 15, “If you love me, you will keep my commands”
 - Then in v24, Jesus makes it clear that he and the Father are speaking one message, one word, he says, “Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father’s who sent me.”
 - Next week in verse 26, we see Jesus claim one of the jobs of the Spirit is to remind his followers of Jesus’ words.
- n. The Biblical teaching of the Trinity is immensely practical.
 - 1. We were created in God’s image and God exists in a holy community of the Trinity. This means that although messy and hard in a fallen world, we need to pursue fellowship and faith-centered community. We need to clear our schedule for hosting others and make time to pour into others.

⁸ Let’s try to get this straight: So, Jesus’ love for us will be manifest in the Spirit, and the Spirit moves us to keep Jesus’ commands, which is how we show we love Jesus, and when we keep those commands the Father will love us.

- 2. Submitting to authority is not degrading. We've seen God the Son and the Spirit submitting to God the Father and the Spirit also submitting to the Son. This does not devalue them, or demean them in any way. God has structured some relationships to be complementarian within an authority structure. So when Scripture instructs us to submit to our government, church leaders, to your husband, or to your parents, that is not an attack on your worth, dignity, or status. We can freely submit to proper authority without compromising our value. There are obviously caveats to biblical submission, but it itself is not a bad thing.
- 3. We have a role in Redemptive History like the Trinity, we also have been sent to renew and restore the world and help other finds reconciliation to God in Christ. Christ is content with spending his whole life and death to glorify the Father, we should look forward to how we make much of him and bring attention to his story.
- 4. The biggest practical response today for you **may** be to study scripture, to stop underestimating the value of deep truths. The gospel becomes more beautiful when you start seeing the individual brush strokes in the details of doctrines like the Trinity. If you can spend hours researching and then explaining to your friends the timeline of all the Star Wars movies, including the spinoffs yet to come, and all the plot lines, you can pick up a theology book and grapple with these core aspects of our faith. That's why we have tools like City Seminary and the book table.

II. Second, in this section of John 14 we see the Spirit is a helper.

- Now, in the Trinity, the Holy Spirit is like the neglected middle child.
 - You can see this in our prayers, we'll start to pray with "Our Father," addressing our Heavenly Father and close in "Jesus' name," but where's the Spirit? In us!
 - Remember the Galatians 4, "God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'"
 - Paul writes in Romans 8, "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God."
 - The Spirit assists us in our weakness, even in how to pray.
- Paul got this language and notion of "helper" from Jesus himself, look back at our passage in verse 16: Spirit here is described as "another helper."

- That word, “paraclete,” means advocate, helper, comforter.⁹
- Interesting, Jesus sees himself as a paraclete, and another one is coming.
- We’ll dive more into this next week, but the Spirit is a better helper. Look at what Jesus says, *16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.*”
- **So, lets look at four attributes of the Spirit here in our passage:**
- **1. So, Spirit is the Paraclete who stays with us**
 - Jesus was with believers, but limited in a space and time. Spirit will be with us forever.
 - Constantly with us. I think of the Nike App I used when I went running. It's an app you go and you tell it to record you, then you turn it off and a year goes by before your last recorded run. Well, then I found out that my phone actually has a built in health app that is always on and can show me data from any day the last week of how far I walked/ran, how many flights of stairs I climbed. That app was always with me.
 - Whether we remember or not, the Spirit is always with us.
- **2. The Spirit Dwells in us**
 - Not only was his time limited, but he was not as intimate with his followers as the Spirit. Jesus took on flesh, and adopted the confines of the human form (Phil 2:7). Yet the Spirit works in us, renews our minds, shifts our affections, and empowers our wills to glorify God.
 - Those that love God and keep his word will have the Spirit come and dwell with them.
 - *22 Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, “Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not the world?” Jesus answered him, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.”*
 - Judas’ question shows they were expecting a different type of manifestation. Remember some Jews wanted a Messiah to come in the world to show political power and military dominance. That is not how God planned to revolutionize the world. – He planned to change the course of history by working in the lives of the faithful.
 - Christ will show himself to us, manifest himself to us by **dwelling**
 - “make our home with him” - This is the same term used in 14:2

⁹ Παράκλητον. Also includes connotations of a legal advocate or lawyer.

- when Jesus said he goes to prepare a ‘dwelling place’ for us.
- Same idea in 1:14, when we see the word became flesh and “dwelt” among us.
 - There is a huge theology of dwelling in John’s writings.¹⁰
- So what does this mean?
- 1. We have complete access to God. City Life Church, do you take advantage of that? Have you grown cold in your relationship? He’s always there and you ignore him? You have the power and grace of God in you. He is always there: in the best days and worst days.
 - This is not in a legalistic Elf on the Shelf way. But, always available, to pray to, to praise, to plead and commune with. He knows you.
 - 2. You are valued. You have been made the dwelling place of God. Paul says in 2 Cor 6, “For we are the temple of the living God.”¹¹
- **3. He is the Spirit of truth in verse 17**
- He is the power and authority behind Scripture itself.
 - 2 Tim 3:16 – “All scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.”
 - This title of “Spirit of Truth” is interesting. Notice there is no dichotomy between spirit and truth, no spirit people vs. truth people.
 - The eggheads who like to study and debate things like the trinity and the free-spirits who raise their hands, stop to pray when they hear someone sneeze.
 - False dichotomy that we created: The third person of the trinity that inspired every word of the original manuscripts of scripture is the same spirit that rushed through believers at Pentecost empowering them to preach the gospels in foreign languages they didn’t know.
- **4. He is the Spirit of Christ:**¹²
- He does not have a separate agenda of the Father or Jesus. The Divine ‘Big Three’ have the same goals and purpose.
 - Interesting, Judas asks how CHRIST will be known to his followers but Jesus said in 21 that he will manifest himself through the Spirit.
 - This presence of the Spirit and the grace of Christ in us, is something

¹⁰ This term and related imagery appear all over John with both *concrete* (1:37-40; 10:40; 14:2) and *spiritual* (14:10, 17, 23) references.

¹¹ 2 Corinthians 6:16b; 7:1.

¹² Spirit is always orbiting like a moon orbits a planet, gravitationally connected. But when Jesus leaves, they switch places. The Spirit indwells us and Jesus orbits around the Spirit.

only followers in Christ will recognize.

- He says, the spirit is not of the world, they do not receive him, they do not see him, they do not know or recognize him.
- We are the ones that know or recognize Christ.
- Are you good at recognizing the Spirit? Do you take those opportunities when God is calling you to pray for someone, or engage in a gospel conversation when you see the need?
- You might be underestimating the Spirit. Do we recognize his work or simply attribute it to our own intellect, reason, or character? I shouldn't sin right now, or I should serve by church, and then blow off realizing the Spirit's work in us because we mistake the Spirit's prompting for our own reasoning or virtue.
- This should drive us to humility, that the love, service, and grace we show others is a product of God's work in us.

III. The Spirit Helps us love and obey

- a. Our passage ends in verse 24 with another repeated note about keeping God's commands and loving him. We've come across this multiple times now.
- b. So, the Spirit is a helper, but what does he help us do?
 - Spirit of Truth helps us understand Scripture and deep realities like the Trinity.
 - We saw he helps us pray, cry out to our heavenly Father.
 - But also the Spirit is helping us love and obey the Lord.
- c. Our passage also opened up in verse 15 with this phrase "If you love me, keep my commands."
 - This instruction reflects old testament imperatives like in Deuteronomy.¹³
 - This means that Jesus is equating his commands with God's commands in Old Testament.
- d. We see this principle throughout Scripture: there is a connection between love and obedience. "True love manifests itself in willing obedience."
- e. This is central to John, we see in 1 John 5:3 he puts it this way,
 - "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome."¹⁴

¹³ The Lord told Israel in Deut 10:12-13, "And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the Lord, which I am commanding you today for your good?"

¹⁴ Again in 2 John 6, "And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments; this is the command, just as you have heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it."

- f. We often pit love against obedience, grace against truth, but Jesus does no such thing.
- i. The love people downplay the truth, soften commands (don't worry about holiness) and the truth people ramp up judgment, often insensitive to other's struggles to believe and walk in the truth (you're wrong and no excuse).
 - ii. But Jesus affirms both. He shows that love results in obedience, and obedience leads us deeper into love
 1. Verse 15 if you love me, obey me
 2. Verse 21 he who obeys me, loves me
- g. Good works are called "Fruit of the **Spirit**" in Galatians. Although we see works, character, holiness over here and then our faith, grace, and communion with Holy Spirit on the opposition side.
- "For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up." (Galatians 6:7-9)
 - Obeying God's commands here are called reaping in the Spirit.

Church, we can respond in love and obedience today because we have the Helper that unites us to God. Christ is the way to reconciliation to the Father and the Spirit empowers us to walk in faith.
