

The Comforter

Ellet J. Waggoner

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Before Jesus went back from earth to heaven He promised to send the Comforter—the Holy Spirit—to abide with His people for ever, as His representative. Since it was by the anointing of the Spirit that He accomplished all His work here on earth (See Isa. 61:1-3), *it is evident that the presence of the Spirit is the same as the presence of the Lord.* The Spirit continues the same instruction, counsel, and works of love that came from Christ.

In promising the Comforter, Jesus said, “And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (John 16:8). “By law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom. 3:20). But “the law is spiritual” (Rom. 7:14). It is the nature of the Spirit, for the righteousness of the law is the fruit of the Spirit. Therefore there is no conviction of sin in any soul on earth that is not the working of the Spirit of God.

But while the Spirit convicts of sin it is always a Comforter. *It is as a Comforter that it convicts.* Few people stop to think of that. Remember that nowhere is it said that the Spirit condemns for sin. There is a difference between conviction and condemnation. Conviction is the revealing of sin. But *it depends on the person’s course after he has been convinced of sin, whether or not he will be condemned.* For “this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19). *The mere pointing out to a person that he is a sinner is not condemnation; the condemnation comes from holding to the sin after it is made known.*

Let the mind grasp the thought that the same Spirit that convinces of sin also convinces of righteousness. It is always a Comforter. The Spirit does not lay aside one office while it performs another. It does not leave aside the revealing of righteousness while convicting of sin, nor does it cease to be a convincer of sin when it reveals righteousness. It does both at the same time, and herein is the comfort to all those who will take it. It convinces of sin because it convinces of righteousness. But let us consider this matter a little, and then meditate upon it.

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God—the Spirit of the Father and of the Son. Therefore the righteousness revealed by it is the righteousness of God. *Now it is only by looking at righteousness that we can know sin and its sinfulness.* The law, by which is the knowledge of sin, is not sin, but is the expression of God’s righteousness. A man may look at sin, and if he has never seen anything else he will think it is all right. Even one who knows the right, may lose the knowledge of it by looking at sin, so great is the deceitfulness of sin. So the Spirit must reveal the righteousness of God in His law, before the sinner can know sin as sin. The apostle says, “I would not have known sin except through the law” (Rom. 7:7). So it is as the revealer of the perfect righteousness of God that the Spirit convinces of sin. [So, by revealing to us the perfect righteousness of God, the Spirit convinces of sin.]

It is evident; therefore, that the closer one comes to God, thus getting a more perfect view of Him, the greater will be his sense of his own imperfections. He gets this knowledge of sin, not by studying himself, but by beholding God. As an illustration, take man in relation to the works of God. When does one ever feel his insignificance so much as when in mid-ocean, or by its side? Its vastness makes him feel his littleness. So when one stands amid the lofty mountains. On such an occasion one does not have to look at himself to realize how small he is. It is while looking up, —beholding the mighty works of God, —that he realizes that in comparison he is nothing. The psalmist says, “When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, what is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him (Ps. 8:3, 4)?”

If this is a result of contact with and beholding the works of God, what must be the result when considering the character of God Himself? “The Lord God is a sun” (Ps. 84:11). He is greater than all the heavens. “Your righteousness is like the great mountains; Your judgments are a great deep” (Ps. 36:6). As while beholding the visible works of God’s hands one feels his own physical insignificance, so in contemplating the righteousness of God, one is made conscious of his own spiritual lack. Now the message of comfort, which God sends to His people, especially for the days immediately preceding His coming, is this, “Behold your God!” (Isa. 40:9). That means that as a necessary preparation for His coming, He wants us to know our own lack of righteousness by beholding His righteousness.

Thus far we have been speaking of the knowledge of sin by the righteousness of God. Now mark the comfort that there is in that same conviction of sin. Remember that the sensibility of a lack of righteousness is caused by the revelation of God’s righteousness. Also remember that the Spirit that convinces of both sin and righteousness is given to men. Christ said, “I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever-- the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you” (John 14:16, 17).

What necessarily follows from this? Just this, that whoever accepts the Spirit, which, by its revelation of the righteousness of God, convicts the soul of sin, and allows it to abide with him, thereby gets the righteousness, which it brings. The sense of need is in itself the promise of supply. *It is God who produces a sense of a lack of righteousness, which is conviction for sin. But He does not do this in order to taunt the sinner, and cause him to despair. He does it for the purpose of letting the sinner know that He has that, which will abundantly supply all that he lacks. In fact, it is by the very bringing of the supply of righteousness, that the soul knows itself to be simple. Therefore, whoever will take God exactly at His word need not be under condemnation for a single minute, although always, and ever anew, conscious of his own imperfections. As every new defect is pointed out, he may cry, “O Lord, I thank You that You have this new thing to give me, and I take it as freely as You give it.” This is true rejoicing in the Lord.*

This is the truth that God was trying to teach ancient Israel, when He spoke His law from Sinai, and is what He has been anxious for us to learn all these years. The law

was ordained in “the hand of a Mediator” (Gal. 3:19). That is, in the hands of Christ, for He is the “one Mediator between God and man” (1 Tim. 2:5). He is Mediator because He reconciles us to God. Since the enmity consists in the fact that we are not subject to the law of God, the reconciliation consists in the putting of that law in the heart and mind. *So Christ is Mediator because He is the medium through which the righteousness of God is conveyed to us.*

This was most forcibly illustrated at the giving of the law from Sinai. Some time before the people had been perishing with thirst, and God said to Moses, “Go on before the people, and take with you some of the elders of Israel. Also take in you hand your rod with which you struck the river, and go. *Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock in Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink*” (Ex. 17:5, 6). This was done, and the people drank and were revived. But Christ miraculously gave the water, which they drank. In fact it came directly from Him. The apostle Paul says, “they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ” (1 Cor. 10:4). The Rock which the people saw, and which Moses smote, was a symbol of Christ.

But Horeb is another name for Sinai. So that the law of God was spoken from the very same mountain from which God had caused the water to flow, which was even then quenching their thirst. *When God came down upon the mount, it was the very personification of Him and His law. No man could touch it without dying. Yet from it at that same time the water, which gave life, was flowing. This water, which, as we have seen, came from Christ, is a symbol of the Spirit, which is given to all who believe.* (See John 4:10, 13, 14; 7:37-39). In that event God has given us a great object lesson. Although the law gives the knowledge of sin, and sin is death, the law comes to us in the hands of a Mediator, ministered to us by the Spirit; and “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death” (Rom. 8:2). *It is thus that the commandment of God is life everlasting.*

Is there not the very essence of comfort in this? At the same moment that the knowledge of sin comes to us, righteousness to cover and take away all the sin is revealed. “Where sin abounded, grace abounded much more” (Rom. 5:20). The law, which convicts is spiritual, and the Spirit is the water of life, which is given freely to all who will take it. Could anything surpass the wonderful provisions of the grace of “the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort” (2 Cor. 1:3)? Who will not drink and drink again, and thus continually be filled.

“I heard the voice of Jesus say,
Behold, I freely give
The living water; thirsty one
Stoop down, and drink, and live.
I came to Jesus, and I drank
Of that life-giving stream;
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived,
And now I live in Him.”