

The Person and Work of God the Holy Spirit

A Study

Part I - The Person of God the Holy Spirit

Lesson 3 - The Advocate

In the nineteenth century, two philosophers in Europe made an enormous impact on their culture and on subsequent history. Both of them were very concerned about the corruption of Western civilization. Both of them described nineteenth-century Europe as decadent. But the two of them saw very different reasons for that decadence and proposed very different solutions.

One of these men was Søren Kierkegaard (1813–55), a Danish philosopher. He complained that the reason for the decadence of civilization in his age was a failure to apply Christianity in a vital way to daily life. He believed that Christianity had largely become a “dead orthodoxy” that was dispassionate and removed from day-to-day matters. As he put it, his age was “paltry.” Therefore, he cried out for the return of passion to the Christian life.

When he became discouraged about this, he liked to turn to the pages of the Old Testament, for there he found people who seemed more real. They were saints and sinners, and there was nothing phony, fake, or artificial about them. God really worked in their lives, and they, in turn, had a passion for Him.

Somebody once asked, “How do you assess the strength of the Church today?” I replied that it was becoming increasingly clear to me that many people in the Church have a vibrant faith, believe the cardinal doctrines of Scripture, and so forth, but few of them see the Christian faith as a mission and as a profound concern in their lives. That was what Kierkegaard longed to see.

The other man who cried out against the death of civilization was the German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900). However, Nietzsche believed the biggest problem with Western civilization was the terrible influence that Christianity had on it. He was convinced that the ethic of Christianity- with its virtues of meekness and kindness- had emasculated the human race. He felt that Christianity denied and undercut the most basic human passion of all- the will to have and to use power.

To Nietzsche, all of life was a power struggle. He believed and taught that all of us are engaged in a competitive enterprise, seeking dominance over others. So, Nietzsche called for a “new civilization” that would be brought in by a new kind of human being, a new kind of existential hero, which he called the “übermensch”, the “superman.” He described the superman as one who would build his home on the slopes of the volcano Mount Vesuvius.

Thus, he would build his home in a place where it might be destroyed at any moment, should the volcano erupt. Likewise, he would sail his ship into uncharted seas. He might encounter sea monsters or tempests that would capsize his ship and kill him, but that would be no hindrance to the superman.

According to Nietzsche's concept, the superman is chiefly a conqueror and his chief virtue is courage because Nietzsche believed that courage was the main thing lacking in his nineteenth-century culture.

What is interesting though, is that when Nietzsche spoke about courage he gave it a strange spin. He called for something he called, a "dialectical courage." Now in philosophy, the word "dialectical" has to do with a state of contradiction wherein something stands as an antithesis to something else. These things can never be resolved. So, what is "dialectical courage"?

Nietzsche came to the conclusion that life ultimately is nihilistic or meaningless. He believed God was dead, and since there is no God there is no such thing as absolute goodness or truth. There is no objective significance to human existence, and so life's meaning is only what we make it to be ourselves. Therefore, we have to manifest courage in a world that is not so much hostile as it is indifferent, and this is what his "superman" would do. So, his dialectical courage was courage in the face of the universe's indifference. Nietzsche was saying, in essence,

"Life is meaningless; therefore, have courage. Your courage is meaningless, but have it anyway."

Another Helper

But what do Kierkegaard and Nietzsche have to do with the person of God the Holy Spirit? In the upper room on the night before His crucifixion, Jesus gave His disciples some important promises regarding the Spirit. He told them that He was about to depart and that they could not go with Him. But then Jesus promised,

John 14:16

I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever.

Some translations use the word "comforter" instead of "helper." The Greek word that is translated as either "helper" or "comforter" is the word *parakletos* which is the source for the English word *paraclete*. This word includes a prefix "para" that means "alongside" and a root that is a form of the verb "kletos" which means "to call". So, a *parakletos* was someone who was called to stand alongside another.

This word was originally used to refer to an attorney, but not just *any* attorney. Technically, the *parakletos* was the close, trusted *family* attorney who was on a permanent retainer. So, any time a problem arose in that family, the *parakletos* was on call, and he would come immediately to assist in the struggle.

That is the way it is in our relationship with God the Holy Spirit. We are part of the family of God through our adoption and the close trusted family attorney (advocate) is the Holy Spirit Himself. He is always present to come alongside us and help in times of troubles.

Most New Testament translations in English do a very poor job of translating *parakletos*—particularly those that render the word as "comforter." That translation misses the point entirely and has given rise to many aberrant teachings about the Holy Spirit which are based on that poor translation.

When Jesus said that He would ask the Father to send the disciples "**another Paraclete**" He was *not* talking about someone who would come and heal their wounds when they were

bruised and broken (the most common meaning of “comforter”). Of course, one of the vital works of the Holy Spirit is to bring consolation to broken hearts. He is a “**balm in Gilead**” when we are in the midst of grief and mourning. But we must remember the correct *context* in which Jesus promised to send the Spirit.

Jesus was telling His disciples that He was about to leave them. They were going to be without Him in the midst of a hostile world where they would be hated as He had been hated. Every moment of their lives would be filled with pressure, hostility, and persecution from the world. No one wants to enter that kind of scenario without divine help.

The translators of the King James Version chose to render *parakletos* with the English word “*comforter*” because at that time the English language was more closely connected to its historical roots in Latin. Today, we understand the word “comfort” to mean ease and solace in the midst of trouble. But its original meaning was much different. The Middle English word, “comforter” is derived from the Latin word *comfortis* which consisted of a prefix “*com*” meaning “*with*” and a root “*fortis*” meaning “*strong*”. So, originally, back in 1611, when the KJV was translated, the word “Comforter” meant “*with strength*”.

So in reality, the King James Version translators were telling us that the Holy Spirit comes to the people of Christ, *not* to heal their wounds *after* a battle, but rather to strengthen them both *before* and *during* a struggle. The idea is that the Church operates not so much as a hospital but as an army, and God the Holy Spirit comes to empower and strengthen Christians to ensure victory or conquest.

More than Conquerors

So while Nietzsche said, “*Life is meaningless, but have courage anyway.*” Jesus called His people to be courageous in the face of difficulty, adversity, and hostility. But Jesus did not call anyone to a meaningless courage. As we know, Jesus told His disciples,

John 16:33

...Take heart...

... or, as some translations have put it,

“Be of good cheer.”

However, Jesus did *not* simply tell us to take heart for the sake of taking heart. Our Lord gave us a reason why we ought to have a sense of confidence and assurance for the Christian life. He said,

“Take heart; I have overcome the world.”

Nietzsche wanted a superman and a conqueror. He should have looked to Christ because Jesus overcame the entire world, and He did it in the power of the same Spirit that He sends to His people. So, the Holy Spirit, as our Advocate, comes to give strength and power to the people of God. As a result, the Scripture says,

Romans 8:37

We are more than conquerors through him who loved us

That is infinitely better than anything Nietzsche taught. So, the work of God the Holy Spirit supplements or compliments the Work of Christ. God the Son was the first Paraclete who came to strengthen us by His atoning death. Now, God the Holy Spirit comes to bring us the empowerment to live the life that Christ has called us to live by and through His life, death, and resurrection.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.