

We can't see Jesus. He has died on the cross, risen from the dead, and ascended to his Father. He is far away from our sight, and our eyes cannot grasp him. But Jesus says that this is to our advantage. It is good for us that we can't see him. How can this be? When you are troubled over your sins, when you are mourning a death of a loved one, when you are surrounded by a world that denies and even mocks your faith, how is good that Jesus has gone away from your sight? Our Lord tells us. He says, "If I don't go away, then the Comforter will not come to you. But if I go, then I'll send him to you."

Jesus calls the Holy Spirit the Comforter. Another word for this is Advocate. This is the same title St. John uses to describe Jesus. He says, "I write to you so that you do not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous One" (1 John 2:1). The Holy Spirit is our Advocate. Jesus is our Advocate. They are the same God, giving us the same comfort and assurance from the Father.

This is why it is so good for us that Jesus has gone away. Let's consider what this means. First, it means that he has gone to the cross. He was betrayed, handed over, condemned, and crucified. There he died for our sins and bore God's righteous wrath against us. There he reconciled us to the Father. But second, it means that he has gone to the Father. He has risen from the dead, ascended into heaven, and he sits at the right hand of the Father forever. He therefore serves as our Advocate with the Father. In other words, he pleads for us. He intercedes for us. He sets before the Father everything he has done for us and for our salvation. And it is enough. The Father is pleased with what his Son has done and continues to do, and his Son does it all for you. Jesus says that he shares everything with the Father. "Everything the Father has is mine," he says. This means that you can be certain that the Father hears and accepts every plea his Son makes on your behalf. As surely as he raised Jesus from the dead, you can be certain that the Father listens to everything his Son says.

Finally, this means that we know Jesus by faith. We don't know him by sight. If this were the case, then we would lose hope. Because no matter how hard we look, we can't see him with our eyes. His tomb is empty. We won't find him among the dead. But again, that only confirms our faith all the more! We can be certain that our faith is not in vain.

After all, Jesus hasn't left our faith up to us. Instead, he has given us his Holy Spirit who calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies us in this one sure faith. Jesus calls the Holy Spirit the Comforter, or Advocate, because he delivers to us everything Christ has accomplished for us. Everything the Son presents before the Father on our behalf the Holy Spirit presents to us so that we would hold onto it by faith. This is why Jesus calls him the Spirit of Truth. His words are the truth. He is inseparable from the words Jesus has given us. That's why Jesus says, "My words, which I spoke to you, are Spirit and Life." So if you have the words of

Christ in the Scriptures, then you have his Holy Spirit who speaks through the prophets and apostles.

Jesus is our Comforter and Advocate before the Father. The Holy Spirit is our Comforter and Advocate in this world. Jesus is our righteousness before the Father. The Holy Spirit bestows this very righteousness on you. And you can be sure that everything the Father has, everything the Son shares with him, everything necessary for your salvation and eternal life the Holy Spirit delivers to you in the ministry of his Word.

The world is filled with all sorts of strange spirits and notions about what is right, good, and spiritual. People are pushed this way and that way by every wind of doctrine. And sadly, a lot of Christians become deceived into thinking that the Holy Spirit is speaking to them when they are in fact just following their own desires and the popular teachings of the world. They find some kind of fleeting comfort in this or that earthly thing, and they assume that it is the comfort of the Holy Spirit. This, sadly, only leaves them without any lasting comfort. They depend on their own thoughts and senses, and they end up losing hope and giving into the despair of this dying world.

Now, let's consider some examples of these false teachings that confuse the people of this world. First, the world doesn't know what sin is. The false spirits of this age lead people to see sin as anything that happens to make you feel bad. Or they think sin is breaking a few rules. People then make their own rules. They excuse their own bad behavior, because it makes them feel good, and they condemn others for not meeting up to the standards they have set for themselves. But even they can't live up to their own standards. Eventually, they despair altogether, and when they are at the face of death, where can they go?

The world also doesn't know what righteousness is. The false spirits of the age lead people to believe that righteousness is supporting whatever cause seems popular. Make sure everyone knows that you aren't on the wrong side. The false spirits can teach this phony righteousness to all different kinds of people. To those who aren't religious, the false spirits teach that righteousness is found in some kind of political or social cause. To those who are religious, they teach that righteousness is found in the power and activity of our own will and our own spiritual exercises. In either case, they point people to their own merits, their own virtues, or their own abilities to do the right thing. They might even learn to do some good things, to advocate for the oppressed, and to comfort those who feeling sad. But this righteousness is uncertain and flimsy, and it ultimately leaves people trusting in themselves. They again end up hopeless and without any lasting comfort.

The world also doesn't know what judgment is. At best, people know that justice is to punish those who do wrong and reward those who do good. At worst, people think that it is

attempting to create a society with no oppression, inequalities, or conflicts. Of course, this only ends in more robbing and killing. The spirits of the age teach people to judge based on their own desires. They do this until the people are incapable of making any sound judgments at all. They judge people to be good just because they are friendly. They judge people to be bad just because they are controversial. But the worst kind of judgment taught by these wicked spirits is when they get people to speculate, based on their own notions and ideas, about whether God is on their side. All of this not only leads to chaos, but it also leads to the same despair and hopelessness taught by the filthy spirits of the age.

But the Spirit of Truth remains our Comforter. He doesn't leave us to be tossed to and fro by every wind and spirit of false teaching. No, as our Advocate, he teaches us. He convicts the world of its false understanding of sin, righteousness, and judgment. And he sets the record straight.

The Holy Spirit teaches us that sin is much deeper than breaking rules. It more serious than just a bad feeling. No, sin is that poisonous power passed down to all people from Adam, which calls God a liar. It is the inability to believe in God's Son whom he has sent. It is refusing to believe the words our Lord speaks. It is therefore to love the darkness rather than the light, to wallow in your own slavery rather than to rest in the truth of Christ, which sets you free.

The Holy Spirit also teaches us that righteousness is much greater than any works done by man. No, righteousness is found only in Jesus. He is our righteousness. He satisfied the law of God. He loved God with his whole heart and his neighbor as himself. He advocated for every sinner, took upon himself the condemnation of every guilty man, woman and child, and he bore it all on the cross. With this righteousness, which he won for all people, the Son of God has gone to his Father where he lives and reigns as the Advocate and Righteous one for all the unrighteous. And we don't see this righteousness of Jesus, because he has gone to the Father, far away from this world's observations and speculations. Instead, we know it only by faith in his Word.

Finally, the Holy Spirit teaches us that judgment is much greater than this world's ability to right wrongs and punish crimes. No matter how many bad guys are brought to justice in this life, the blood of Abel still cries out for vengeance. The devil, who rules the hearts and minds of this dying world, still prowls around like a roaring lion deceiving and devouring souls. But the devil has been judged. He has been defeated and cast down. Though he tries to attack you, lead you into temptation, and condemn you, the Father has shut his ears to Satan's accusations. Instead, the Father only listens to the Son whose blood

speaks a much better word than the blood of Abel. There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

When we try to make good judgments and act fairly toward our neighbors, we often find it overwhelming. Our attempts at comforting and advocating fall short. We often see that we can't make most things right. But we can be certain that the Lord Jesus has. He has already brought the devil into judgment, and he will come and judge the world with equity and righteousness. He knows all things, and he will sort all things out.

In the meantime, the Holy Spirit teaches us and leads us with the truth. And the truth is that of ourselves we cannot believe. We are poor, miserable sinners. The truth is that our righteousness can't avail before God. The truth is that our best judgments and most merciful actions cannot satisfy God's perfect standard of love and goodness. The Holy Spirit teaches us this so that we would not rely on some false faith, righteousness, or judgment. He teaches us to look to the coming of our Lord who will come again to judge the living and the dead. He guides us to love those whom God has given us to love. When we fall short, he leads us to rest in our Lord's blood and righteousness, which covers up all of our sins. He remains our Comforter and Advocate in this world.

And if the Holy Spirit is your Comforter – if you have the Word of God – then you can be certain that Jesus, though he has gone to the Father, is truly with you. As Jesus himself says, "He will take of what is mine and declare it to you." You can therefore be certain that your Lord Jesus truly does cover you in your baptism. He truly does feed you with his body and blood, absolve you with his words of grace, and endure with you under every cross you bear. He remains your Advocate before the Father, and his Holy Spirit gives you every assurance of this.

Therefore, sing to the Lord a new song! For he has done marvelous things! And though you don't see him, this is only for a little while. He remains your righteousness and your salvation, and his mercy endures forever. So comfort one another with this truth. God's Word is truth. Amen.