

The Holy Helper

My camera was packed away for the return home from our vacation out west, but I had to get a picture of a sign that caught my eye as I traveled eastward on U.S. Highway 18 in western Wyoming. The camera in my cell phone would have to do. The sign said: Lost Springs, Population: 1. Aside from a building or two some distance off the road, there was nothing but open highway to the east and west for as far as my eyes could see. I knew that Wyoming would be sparsely populated. Still, that sign took me a bit by surprise.

Can you imagine that degree of isolation? Perhaps, you have felt at some time in your life as though you were living in a community of one even though you were physically in close proximity to others. From the dawn of creation, God decreed that it was never good for us to be alone. Still, the stuff of life happens. Sickness, sin, depression, the loss of a loved one – these things can cause us to feel isolated. Eventually, Jesus ushers His broken people back into community and into paths of normalcy. But, how does He sustain us in the interim? How does He remind us that there is light when all around us, there seems to be only darkness?

There was a brief moment in time when the disciples of Jesus believed that they would never taste His fellowship again. He would die and be taken from them. For three dark days, it would seem as though their lives were shattered. But, on the night before His death, even as He was dealing with all that lay before Him, Jesus seemed most interested in letting His closest friends know how He would provide for them in His physical absence:

¹⁵“If you love me, you will obey what I command. ¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever - ¹⁷the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. ¹⁸I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you . . .” – 1 John 14:15-18

The night before Jesus faced the cross, He promised to send Someone just like Himself to His frightened disciples. He promised to send a *parakleton*. John is the only Bible author to use this unique Greek word and he only uses it five times - four times in his gospel as Jesus speaks of the ministry of the Holy Spirit and once in 1 *John 2:1*, where Jesus Himself is referred to as our representative before the Father whenever we stumble into sin:

“My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense - Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.” - 1 John 2:1

The *New International Version* translates *parakleton*, “Counselor” in the gospel of *John* and “one who speaks in our defense” in *1 John*. The *King James Version* renders the word, “Comforter” in the gospel and “Advocate” in the epistle. The *New American Standard Version* also translates it “Advocate” in *1 John*, but renders it “Helper” in the gospel. Actually, it is quite impossible to adequately translate the word with any single English equivalent.

I judge the *NASV* rendering of “Helper” to be the most useful precisely because it commits to the least specificity. *Parakleton* is a noun from a compound verb meaning to call alongside. A *parakleton* is simply “one called alongside of another.” Old scholars came up with the word, “Paraclete,” which tells us nothing more than *parakleton*. It is simply an English way to pronounce a Greek word. If one does not know what a Greek *parakleton* is, Paraclete cannot inform him much further. In *1 John 2:1*, the role of Jesus as Paraclete is quite clear. He intercedes for us before the Father when we are confessing our sins. However, in John's gospel, Jesus addresses a number of roles for the *parakleton*, and no one English word quite fills the bill. William Barclay makes this interesting comment about the term:

“... it is the reason *why* the person is called in which gives the word its distinctive associations.”

In other words, the Holy Spirit is a Counselor when counsel is needed, a Comforter when comfort is needed, an Advocate when advocacy is needed, an Encourager when encouragement is needed, a Revealer of truth when direction is needed, a “Reminder-er” when a disciple needs the words of Scripture brought to his or her remembrance. The Holy Spirit is the perfect Helper because He provides the kind of help that we need when we need it.

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