

**JOHN 15:26–27.** (EHV)

**“When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father—he will testify about me. And you also are going to testify, because you have been with me from the beginning.”**

“Why am I a Christian? Why am I a Lutheran? Why am I getting confirmed at Trinity Lutheran Church? Why am I a member of a church at all? Why do I attend church regularly? Is there a good reason I drag myself out of bed on Sunday morning while countless people are enjoying extra rest or recreation? Is it necessary? Is it worth it?”

The festival of Pentecost serves wonderfully to answer those questions. As we hear Jesus telling his disciples how he is going to send the Holy Spirit to found the Christian Church of the New Testament, we also hear how the Holy Spirit’s religion is going to be unique, different from all other religions on earth, yes, infinitely superior to all other religions on earth.

### **1. Unique God**

First of all, throughout these two verses, Jesus speaks of the unique God that the Holy Spirit is going to teach people about when he founds the Christian Church of the New Testament. Now this is really the entire focus of next Sunday, Holy Trinity Sunday. But we do well to briefly mention it here.

Jesus says he is going to send the Holy Spirit “from the Father.”

Jesus says *he* is going to send the Holy Spirit from the Father. By calling God “the Father,” he is identifying himself as God the Son.

And he says that he is going to send “the Counselor” or “the Spirit of truth” from the Father—we know him more commonly as the God the Holy Spirit. Jesus says here that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father. But he also says that he himself will send the Holy Spirit, indicating that the Holy Spirit also proceeds from the Son.

And yet Jesus also makes it clear elsewhere, in his own words and in the words of his prophets and apostles, that there are not three gods, but only one God. One God in three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

All other religions on earth either teach only one God without the divine persons, which means that they are failing to teach people the truth about the Savior, Jesus Christ, or they teach multiple gods, which is to rob the one true God of the glory that is due his name. Only the Christian religion uniquely and correctly teaches and confesses the one true, triune God. And it’s actually precisely his incomprehensibility—his one-plus-one-plus-one-equals-one-ness—that assures us that humans didn’t come up with him, but that he is the true God who came up with us and has revealed himself to us.

### **2. Unique Focus**

The reason the doctrine of the unique God is so important is because the religion of the unique God provides a unique focus that no other religion has. Jesus tells his disciples that when he sends the Holy Spirit, the Spirit is going to focus on him. “When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father—he will testify *about me*.”

Think of the focus of every other religion. What are the so-called five pillars of Islam? The creed that there is no god but Allah and Muhammad is his prophet; ritual prayer five times each day; almsgiving of two and a half percent; fasting from sunrise to sunset during the month of Ramadan, which actually concluded last month; and pilgrimage to the city of Mecca. Where is all the focus? You could argue that one of those pillars is focused on God, but even for that one, the emphasis is on you saying that you believe there is no god but Allah and Muhammad is his prophet, not on what Allah has actually done. So the focus for all five pillars is actually on the Muslim worshipper. They are all focused on the human person and his own works.

What are the so-called four noble truths of Buddhism? The fact that humans suffer; the cause of human suffering, namely having desirous attachment to anything; the supposed truth that suffering can completely end; and the eightfold, do-it-yourself path to get to that end. Where is all the focus? It's all on humans and their own works.

What is the focus of pagan religions? People's sacrifices and superstitions.

Think of the cults. What is the focus, for example, of the Jehovah's Witnesses with their frenzied missionary activity and their false doctrine about repentance? Think even of the focus of false teachings within visible Christianity. Where is the focus in things like Hail Marys, prayers to departed saints, pilgrimages to venerate the relics of saints, and purgatory? What is the focus of the community churches and mega churches when they emphasize making your decision for Christ? The focus is on humans and their own works.

There is obviously a place for focusing on us and our works. But if the primary focus is on us and our works, like in all other religions, it will always be a fallible religion, because it will only lead either to self-righteousness and self-centeredness or to despair. And if that focus is no different than any other religion, how do you know it's true? And if you don't know it's true, what's the point of joining?

But the Holy Spirit's religion is unique, because he does not primarily focus on humans and their works. "He will testify about me," Jesus says. And in saying this, Jesus is saying that the Holy Spirit's religion, even though it will have a new angle with Jesus's mission being accomplished, is really nothing but the same ancient religion of the Old Testament, whose focus was also on Jesus. Jesus himself once told the Jewish leaders that the Old Testament Scriptures testified about him (John 5:39). All the Bible testifies about Jesus.

The focus of the Christian religion is on Jesus and on his works for us, not on us and our works. That focus does not create self-righteousness, but leads people to find their righteousness in Christ. That focus does not create self-centeredness, but leads us to glorify Christ by serving others and putting self always in second place. That focus does not leave us in doubt, but fills us with certainty and the sure hope of heaven.

We so often take this for granted, but let us renew our gratitude to God, that from "In the name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit" to "Glory to God in the highest and peace to his people on earth" to "O Christ, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world" to "The Lord look on you with favor and give you peace," the focus of our worship is placed squarely on Jesus, where the Holy Spirit wants it.

### 3. Unique Comfort

That unique focus leads directly to the next unique trait of the Holy Spirit's religion. The Christian religion, by focusing on Jesus, provides unique comfort.

That unique comfort is reflected in the two names that Jesus gives the Holy Spirit—"the Counselor" or "the Comforter" or "the Defense Attorney" on the one hand and "the Spirit of truth" on the other. These names are the exact opposites of the two chief names of our worst enemy and God's worst enemy. He is called Satan; *Satan* means *accuser* or *prosecuting attorney*. And he is called the devil; *devil* means *liar* or *slanderer* or *someone who gives false testimony*.

Think about how Satan works. He starts off by trying to be a counselor and comforter himself by passing off lies. He "comforts" us by telling us, for example, that what the Bible says is sin isn't really sin, or that, if it is sin, it really isn't that big a deal. He tells us that we're basically good people. If the thought of hell is bothering us, he tries to convince us that the punishment of hell isn't as bad as some people make it out to be, that hell is reserved for people who are much worse than we are, or that hell does not exist at all. In short, he "comforts" us by trying to convince us that God's word is lying about sin and its punishment to one degree or another. This is also the only "comfort" that any non-Christian or falsely-Christian religion can offer.

But once he successfully leads us into temptation and sin, his comfort evaporates like steam. Using our conscience as his helper, he shakes his finger at us and accuses and terrifies us, saying, "Look at what you've done! What a horrible sinner you are!" He tells us we must give up any hope of being loved by God and being saved.

The Holy Spirit operates the exact opposite way. He also terrifies us, by using God's law to make us aware of just how wretched our natural condition is, of just how many sins we commit every day, and of just how serious they all are. But he does this only so that he can give us the best and surest comfort. And he gives us this comfort precisely by focusing our attention on the truth—namely, Christ and his life, death, and resurrection for us. The apostle Paul once preached: "Through this Jesus forgiveness of sins is being proclaimed to you" (Acts 13:38). Elsewhere Paul wrote, "God made him who had no experience with sin to be sin for us, so that we in turn might become the righteousness of God in him" (2 Cor. 5:21). Even Jesus's enemies unknowingly declared this rich comfort when they observed, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them" (Luke 15:2).

In other words, whether the devil is tempting you beforehand, or accusing you after you have fallen into sin and you realize it and are sorry for it, the Spirit of truth tells you that you should say to him, "Isn't your name the devil? Doesn't devil mean liar? Then why are you talking?"

This comfort—that our sinful condition and all our actual sins have been forgiven and that we are righteous and holy before God through the blood of Christ—this is the most unique and precious gem of our religion that we will not find anywhere else.

We could use this passage to talk about other unique aspects of our religion, like its unique reliability, which I already talked about at length on Easter. But in what we've talked about already, you can already see from just these two verses that this religion, the Holy Spirit's religion, *your* religion, communicates a unique God, has a unique focus on Jesus Christ, and

offers unique comfort. That's why you're getting confirmed in this Christian church. That's why you attend church regularly, and why you should attend even more regularly, if you can. That's why you are members here, and why being a member of the Christian Church, the most unique church on earth, is the most valuable and wonderful aspect of your life. Glory be to the Father and to the Son and, especially on this day, to the Holy Spirit for this unique religion. Amen.