

## 01–18–2021 John 14.15–31 Bible Study #50

At Tabernacles John stated clearly that the Spirit had not yet been given because Jesus had not yet been glorified (7:37–39). Now, as Jesus anticipates his departure, he describes the Spirit that is coming (15–17). The Spirit’s gift in these verses is controlled by 15a, “if you love me.” The gift is an outgrowth of the loving relationship between Jesus and his disciples (not an entitlement earned by the disciple).

The Greek *paraklêtos* (16), often transliterated “Paraclete,” is a term that is unique to John in the New Testament. Four of the five Spirit promises in the discourse include this title (14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7; only 16:12–14 leaves it out). A fifth (and final) use occurs in 1 John 2:1 where Jesus is called a Paraclete.

Extensive scholarly debate as well as every commentary on John tries to probe the meaning of the term. The word comes from a verbal root that describes someone “called alongside” and it occurs in secular Greek literature for an advocate in a court of law who comes “alongside” a person, speaking in his/her defense and providing counsel.

The Greek term became popular in the first century and was even a loan-word in Hebrew and Aramaic for a similar judicial setting (P. Aboth, 4:11). It seems that the best translation is “Advocate” (NRS), pointing to the Spirit’s judicial or legal service (see on 15:18–27; 16:7–11). Many scholars prefer to leave the word untranslated (though no modern translations have done so).

Jesus describes the Spirit as *another* Paraclete. This should not be taken to mean that the Father will send “another, namely, a Paraclete.” First John 2:1 makes clear that John views Jesus also as a Paraclete (“But if any one does sin, we have an *advocate* with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”) Jesus is thus a Paraclete who is now sending a second Paraclete.

The ongoing work of the Spirit will be a continuation of the work of Jesus enjoyed during the disciples’ lifetime. This serves John’s “judicial” framework for the gospel (see on John 5): Jesus has been on trial and like an advocate he has produced evidence and witnesses for the truth about God. The Paraclete then will pick up where Jesus leaves off.

It is no surprise that he is also called “the Spirit of Truth” (17; also 15:26, 16:13). He communicates the truth about God which is the essence of God’s work in Christ (1:17; 4:24; 5:33; 8:32, 40). Moreover we know that Jesus is “the truth” (14:6) and inasmuch as the Spirit duplicates and sustains Jesus’ work, he will continue to defend the truth of Jesus.

The world (17b, Gk: *kosmos*), which in John’s gospel denotes the human environment that is in rebellion against God (1:10; 3:16, 19; 7:7; 8:23; 12:31; 14:30) and in need of salvation (4:42; 6:14, 33, 51; 8:12), cannot understand the mystery of the Holy Spirit. But the disciples can know the Spirit of Truth because he (that is, Jesus) has been with them all along—and will be in them (that is, in the Spirit) in the future.

Despite what Jesus has told the disciples about his return to them and the coming of the Holy Spirit, the present crisis still weighs heavily on them. In the near term, what comfort will Jesus give in light of his imminent death? It is fine for Jesus to promise the Spirit, but it is Jesus that they will miss. “I will come to you” means that Jesus will not leave them desolate (18).

Subtle clues suggest that this promise refers to the coming of the resurrection on Easter. The time frame is specific (a “little while”) and the disciples are to look for “that day” (20). Now it is not just a matter of the world failing to see him, but the disciples having a private visual experience (19).

This promise should be compared with 16:16–24 which employs similar language and makes the Easter promise specific. Jesus is saying that while from the world’s perspective he will disappear from view (in his death), still, in his resurrection he will return to them alone and validate that the power of the Father has been with him all along (20).

But Jesus' Easter coming will signify much more than a return to life. *It will be the bridge which will inaugurate the spiritual union Jesus wants with his disciples.* The oneness he enjoys with the Father (20a) parallels the oneness the disciples will enjoy with him (20b).

The call to obedience (21), similar to that given in v. 15, is a clue that Jesus is speaking of a union that will include the coming of the Spirit. This is precisely what happens when on Easter Jesus appears to them and they receive his Spirit (20:22).

Jesus will "reveal" (21) himself to his beloved disciples, resulting in a profound spiritual union which the world cannot understand. The question of Judas (who is not Judas Iscariot) presses Jesus on the nature of his appearance to the disciples (22) that will exclude the world.

Surely, the disciples were thinking, the revelation of Jesus must happen *before the world* so that Jesus' testimony and indeed, their testimonies will be validated publicly. For the third time Jesus talks about obedience as a key to what is planned (23): those who love Jesus show it by their fidelity to his word—and out of love, the Father and Jesus will come to them and make their home with them (23).

The reverse is also the case (24). Those who fail to invest faith in Jesus are not connected either to Jesus or the Father (who is behind and within Jesus' words and mission) and so cannot share in this divine union.

The role of the Spirit becomes more explicit in the second promise of the Paraclete (25–26), as now he is described specifically as the "Holy Spirit." The rudimentary Trinitarian implications of 14:25–26 are inescapable: The Father will send the Spirit in the name of Jesus. Therefore this spiritual revelation promised by Jesus is in fact the effort of God himself (in every dimension) working for our benefit.

Jesus now emphasizes the conserving and teaching roles of the Spirit. The concept of "remembering" occurs multiple times in the gospel (2:17, 22; 12:16; 14:26; 15:20; 16:4, 21) and is linked to the "misunderstanding" of the disciples in the gospel. During the earthly ministry of Jesus, understanding was difficult.

But now Jesus promises, the Spirit-Paraclete will recall the things he has done and said and fix them in the minds of his followers. We can see this at work in John's own gospel. After Jesus cleansed the temple (2:13–23) John adds the editorial comment, "After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said.

Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken" (2:22). It was the resurrection—and its gift of the Spirit—that now provided the meaning of Jesus' deed. This inspiration therefore does not bring forward new revelations about Jesus, but simply gives correct applications and meanings for what he did in history.

Just as Jesus' primary work was revealing the Father (1:18), so now the work of the Spirit-Paraclete is revealing the Jesus "of history" to his followers.

The final words of encouragement in chapter 14 recall those offered at the beginning. "Peace" refers to the Hebrew greeting "shalom," which was the aim of the Messiah's work on earth: to restore the equilibrium and richness of humanity's relationship with God (Rom. 5:1). Jesus' shalom brings an end to the brokenness caused by sin and will be the fruit of the Spirit given when he departs.

As in 14:1, Jesus again comments on the troubled emotional state of his disciples (27). Thus far his encouragement has described the benefits that his departure will bring them: a new intimacy with God (and himself) wrought through the eschatological gift of the Spirit.

Now Jesus points to himself. Their love for him should lead to celebration because he is returning to the Father who sent him, who gave him his words, and whose love for the world initiated Jesus' mission and the planned indwelling of the Spirit. To receive the Father's gifts is blessed—to return to live with the Giver is beyond comprehension.

There is much debate over 14:28b, “I am going to the Father, for the Father is *greater* than I.” Controversy centers on the many places in the gospel where the equality and oneness of Jesus and the Father (1:1–18; 5:16–18; 10:30; 20:28; etc.) are juxtaposed to affirmations describing the dependence of the Son on the Father (4:34; 5:19–30; 8:29; 12:48–49).

Some interpreters have sought to make this “lesser” status refer to Jesus’ humanity limited in the incarnation (Augustine, Ambrose). Others have pointed to eternal distinctions between the Father and Son which do not compromise the Son’s divinity. To use the language of another century, the Son is subordinate in Person but not in essence (Tertullian, Athanasius). This view owe more to later Trinitarian debates than to the gospel itself.

The image Jesus often uses to explain his role is the agent sent on a mission (17:4–5) fulfilling the assignments of his Sender (4:34; 5:30; 6:38f; 9:4; 10:32, 37; 17:4). Within this agent/sender relationship, the originator of the mission has greater authority. In 13:16, Jesus cites the proverbial saying, “I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.”

Later he repeats it for his disciples, who will be *his* agents in the world (15:20). As courier of God’s message—as the agent devoted to divine service—Jesus is acknowledging the relationship, the source, that has brought that message to life (14:24b, 31a).

Not only should the disciples be encouraged because Jesus is returning to where he came from (and sending gifts), but they should understand what will happen to him in Jerusalem is not under Satan’s control (30). In fact, Jesus’ specific description of these matters (29) should prove to encourage their faith because they will see his predictions fulfilled (cf. Mark 14:41–42).

Moreover, Jesus’ obedience to God’s plan (31a) within these events should be seen as an example of his love for the Father (a love, hopefully, every disciple will imitate, 21).

Following the discourse Jesus says, “Rise; let us leave” (31b). This verse presents a notorious problem since Jesus teaches for three more chapters. In fact, one could easily read 18:1 directly after 14:31 and build a coherent picture, “When he had finished praying, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley.” Without the intervening chapters (15–17) the scene makes perfect sense: the discourse is found in chapter 14 and then the group leaves for the Kidron Valley.

Scholars have suggested many rearrangements of portions of chapters 13–17 as the original order to try to solve the literary problem. But it also makes sense to take the text as it is: Jesus does leave the room at 14:31 and the words spoken in 15–17 take place en route to the Kidron Valley.

Some believe Jesus enters the temple and the golden vines on the temple gates inspire his discourse in chapter 15 (“I am the vine ...”). A convincing case can be made that the words of chapters 15–17 find their very best setting in the temple (where in chapter 17 Jesus gives a priestly prayer). If Jesus is in the temple following 14:31, the departure of 18:1 refers to his departing the temple as he climbs east into the Kidron Valley.

**PERSONAL REACTION NOTE:** I don’t even like to mention many of the disputes between Bible scholars. I see their attempts at revising the order of certain parts like we have here in John as if they are saying, “If I were writing this, I would do it this way.” They weren’t present during any of the events and they don’t have the promise of the guidance of the Holy Spirit as the Bible authors do. When there is little or no textual evidence of rearrangement, why worry about idle speculation? Let the text speak for itself.