

Chapter 29: The Paraclete of Jesus

John 14:15–31

Toward the end of the previous section, Jesus offered an eyebrow-raising comment: “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do, and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father” (John 14:12). We talked about what this will mean in general—the conversion of sinners toward faith in Jesus for salvation—but that still leaves a lot of questions. Why must Jesus actually go through the cross, die, be resurrected, and return to his Father for these “greater works” to happen? What role will Jesus’ disciples play in these greater works? How long will this continuation of Jesus’ earthly ministry continue? The deeper we go into these issues—and the further that Jesus speaks about them—the more we realize that Jesus’ earthly ministry is only the first part of a larger work. While Jesus’ virgin birth, baptism, public ministry, teaching, preaching, and miracle-working has been remarkable, there is yet more to do. Even after Jesus dies, rises from the dead, and ascends to the Father—even up to today—*Jesus is still completing his mission.*

New Agents (John 14:15–17)

First, Jesus explains that he will continue completing his mission *through new agents*. Earlier in this conversation with his disciples, Jesus gave them his new commandment: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another” (John 13:34). Now, Jesus frames the significance of obeying his commandments: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15). As these discourses progress, Jesus will repeat the same idea in John 14:21a: “Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me.” Jesus is not manipulating his disciples with these statements, as though he were trying to play on their emotions to get them to do something they did not want to do. Instead, Jesus simply states a general condition: if it is true that his disciples love him (Jesus’ language neither assumes that they do, nor that they do not), then they will consequently keep his commandments.¹ Jesus excludes the possibility of truly loving him without keeping his commandments. Whatever that kind of affection or admiration for Jesus might be, Jesus tells us that it does not qualify as love.

Out of context, such a commandment might sound like a heavy burden for us to bear. Why should Jesus demand so much from us? Of course, this commandment that we love Jesus does not stand in isolation, but flows from the rich descriptions of *Jesus’* love for us that we find throughout this passage. By this point, Jesus has “loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end” (John 13:1), and Jesus has demonstrated that love by washing their feet (John 13:3–11). Furthermore, Jesus will add promises that those who love him will abide in his love for them: “And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him” (John 14:21b). Then again, Jesus says, “If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I

have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love" (John 15:10). A full study of these chapters in the Gospel of John demonstrate that God's love for us both *precedes* and *follows* our own love for him.² Jesus surrounds us in his love, overwhelming us with love on all sides. In fact, Jesus' statement in John 14:15 is the very first statement in this Gospel about the disciples' love for Jesus—up until now, Jesus has spoken exclusively of his love for them (e.g., John 3:16; 11:5; 13:1).³

From this broader look at Jesus' love for us, is it really surprising that Jesus should insist upon the necessity that we should love him by keeping his commandments? This is not a "formula" or a *quid pro quo* arrangement where Jesus promises to scratch our back if we scratch his, but the requirement of mutuality is at the center of any developing, loving relationship.⁴ In marriage, both spouses vow to love one another, especially through faithfulness to one another. A husband cannot claim to love his wife while also insisting on retaining freedom to pursue other women. If he loves her, then he will obey his vows to her. In the same way, if we love Jesus, we will obey his commands—not only that we should love him, but that we should love one another as he has loved us.

Instead, Jesus is explaining to his disciples that *they* will be the agents to carry his mission to completion. Remember, the *great* commandment Jesus gives to his disciples is not only that they should love God with all their heart, soul mind, and strength, and love their neighbor as themselves (Matt. 22:34–40), but that they should make *other* disciples who will learn to do everything that Jesus has commanded as well (Matt. 28:18–20). It is not that the disciples must finish what Jesus started, but that Jesus is sending them into the world to bear witness to all that *Jesus* will have said and done. By proclaiming that message of Jesus to the world, they will demonstrate their love for Jesus.

"And I will ask the Father"

The disciples will not be the only agents whom Jesus sends, however. Jesus continues by promising to send another Helper to dwell in them:

"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you." (John 14:16–17)

Jesus' promise to send another "Helper" does not require our love as a prerequisite. Instead, Jesus seems to make this promise in recognition of his disciples *inability* to fulfill this condition of love after Jesus' departure from the world. John Calvin writes this:

This was given as a remedy for soothing the grief which they might feel on account of Christ's absence; but at the same time, Christ promises that he will give them strength to keep his commandments; For otherwise the exhortation would have had little effect. He therefore loses no time in informing them that, though he be absent from them in body, yet he will never allow them to remain destitute of assistance; for he will be present with them by his Spirit.⁵

What Jesus begins to teach here about the Holy Spirit—the other "Helper"—begins to answer the question of how Jesus' departure could possibly be better for the disciples. If we had been in the place

of the disciples, we should not have wanted to leave the presence of Jesus any more than they; however, Jesus promises that he is not abandoning them entirely, but that he will petition the Father to send Someone in his stead. We should make several important observations from these two verses.

First, Jesus says that the Spirit will come as one given by the Father, according to the request of Jesus (John 14:16). Later on, Jesus will describe his own role in the coming of the Spirit a bit differently: “Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, *I will send him to you*” (John 16:7). On the Day of Pentecost after the initial outpouring of the Holy Spirit, Peter preaches to the crowd of Jews that Jesus, “Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing” (Acts 2:33). Both the Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit into the world, although apparently in different ways. The Son asks the Father to send the Spirit on the basis of his completed work in the world; the Father fulfills his promise by giving the Spirit to the Son, and the Son, after receiving the Spirit, pours the Spirit out on his people.

This arrangement naturally raises the question of why God chooses to work in this complicated way. Why should the Son petition the Father to give the Spirit, especially since we are talking about the operations of three Persons who exist as one God? R. C. H. Lenski helpfully teases out the various aspects of this question:

The curious question might be asked why, when all three Persons of the Godhead have the same mind and the same will, the same love and the same grace for men, the Son should yet request the Father to send the Spirit; or the Father should send the Son. Why would not the Son come of his own accord, the Spirit likewise; or the Father send the Spirit without request as he sent the Son; or the Son himself send the Spirit as the Father sent him?... This is nothing less than the mystery of the Trinity itself, in which we do not see three Fathers but only one; not three Sons but only one; not three Spirits but only one. One in essence, the three are yet diverse. They work to one end, yet, as in this case, One requests, One gives, One comes. We know certain divine facts, which can do but one thing: abide by the facts and their blessedness and rest content.⁶

If all this seems confusing, consider the question from the opposite perspective: If the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit did *not* operate jointly, yet distinctly, in accomplishing the work of salvation, how would we have come to know that our God exists as three Persons? How would we see and know the Father unless the Son came into this world to reveal him to us (John 14:9)? How would we who live today know the Son (and, consequently, the Father) apart from the Spirit who dwells in us (John 14:17) and teaches us about Jesus now that Jesus is bodily absent from the world (John 14:26)? Through this great drama where the Father sends the Son, and then the Father and the Son send the Spirit, God accomplishes our redemption, applies that redemption to us, and reveals the glory of his Tri-unity to us in the process.

Another Paraclete

Second, Jesus calls the Holy Spirit “another Helper” (John 14:16). The word that the ESV translates as “Helper” is notoriously difficult to capture in English. The Greek word *paraklētos*,

commonly rendered in English as “Paraclete,” carries a largely legal meaning: “In secular Greek it was used especially of one called to help another *in court*, but it never became a technical term (unlike the Latin *advocatus*, meaning a professional legal adviser and representative).” So, various Bible translations have used the word “Counsellor” (not in the sense of a therapist, but “legal counsellor”; NIV 1984, CSB), “Advocate” (cf. 1 John 2:1; NIV 2011, NET), “Comforter” (not in the sense of consolation, but in the Elizabethan English sense of strengthening; KJV), or “Helper” (ESV, NKJV, NASB).⁸ The word describes an ally, an advocate, an exhorter, a guard, a protector, a strategist, a strengthener, and so much more, both for the battle of the courtroom and for the battle of life. Importantly, Jesus says that the Holy Spirit is “another *Paraclete*,” meaning that Jesus also is a *Paraclete* and that our definitions must be wide enough to encompass the Son as well as the Holy Spirit.⁹ Because English has no direct translation to bring out the richness of this word, it may be preferable simply to use the transliteration *Paraclete*, as we will do here.

The Spirit of Truth

Third, Jesus says that the Holy Spirit is “the spirit of truth.” *Truth* commands central importance in the Gospel of John, most recently in Jesus’ assertion about himself (“I am the way, *and the truth*, and the life”; John 14:6), but even from the beginning of the Gospel: “For the law was given through Moses; grace *and truth* came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17). Andreas Köstenberger traces five main aspects of truth in the Gospel John to the person and work of the Holy spirit: “he accurately represents the truth regarding Jesus; he is the eschatological gift of God; he imparts true knowledge of God; he is operative in both worship and sanctification; and he points people to the person of Jesus.”¹⁰ We will discover more about the Spirit’s relationship to truth through the rest of the Farewell Discourses, but we must simply observe that Jesus here characterizes the Spirit not with the word “Holy” (which would also have been accurate), but with the word “Truth” instead.

Receiving the Spirit

Finally, Jesus insists that the world can neither receive, nor see, nor know the Spirit, but that the disciples know him, since he dwells with them and will be in them (John 14:17). Jesus has much more to say about the Holy Spirit over the next few chapters, but one of the most challenging interpretation questions has to do with how much God’s people actually do know the Holy Spirit before the Day of Pentecost. On the day of Jesus’ resurrection, he will breathe on his disciples and tell them, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:22), but here he already says that they know the Spirit, and the Spirit dwells in them. To begin, let us consider three principles.

First, the outpourings of the Holy Spirit that we typically see in Old Testament are associated with the anointed offices of the old covenant: prophets, priests, and kings (e.g., 1 Sam. 10:10, 16:13). As such, the anointing of the Holy Spirit was only given to a limited number of people, and the Spirit could depart from those who did not follow the Lord (1 Sam. 16:14; 2 Chron. 18:23; Ps. 51:11). Second, the entire Old Testament anticipates the full coming of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the one who will circumcise the hearts of God’s people (Deut. 30:6), and the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit is the most significant feature of the prophesied new covenant (Eze. 36:27). Under the new covenant, *all* people will know God through the Holy Spirit, “from the least of them to the greatest” (Jer. 31:34)—that is, not only the “great” prophets, priests and kings. Furthermore, the giving of the Holy Spirit under the new covenant will be permanent in a way that

was not the case under the old covenant. Third, the Holy Spirit was nevertheless at work to some degree with *all* God’s people, throughout salvation history. The old covenant was an administration of God’s overarching covenant of grace, pointing forward to the coming of Jesus, and old covenant believers were saved by looking forward to the coming of Jesus, just as much as new covenant believers are saved by looking backward to Jesus’ first coming *and* by looking forward to his second coming. As such, true, saving faith has only ever come about—even during the days of the Old Testament—only through the “operation of the Spirit.”¹¹

We must say much more about the coming of the Holy Spirit as another Paraclete after Jesus; however, it is enough for the moment simply to observe that there is both continuity and discontinuity between the Holy Spirit’s work from the Old Testament to the New Testament. The world has never received, seen, or known the Spirit at any time, but all true believers under the old covenant knew the Spirit in some sense. Beyond that general knowledge of the Holy Spirit, the disciples alone have known the Spirit in a new sense through their interaction with Jesus, upon whom the Holy Spirit descended and remained (John 1:32). Eventually, all disciples of Jesus will know the Spirit in a still newer sense from the Day of Pentecost forward.¹² And through this new involvement of the Holy Spirit, Jesus will empower his disciples to carry out his mission to make disciples of all nations to the ends of the earth.

New Activities (John 14:18–24)

In this next section, Jesus explains that he will continue his mission *by new activities*. Specifically, these new activities will provide for his ongoing presence with his disciples, despite the fact that he must depart from this world soon. Jesus begins, saying, “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live” (John 14:18–19). Most likely, when Jesus speaks about coming to his disciples, he is referring to his reappearance to them on Easter, when they will “with eyes of faith quickened into new perception.”¹³ By sending to them the new Paraclete, Jesus will not abandon them as fatherless “orphans.” With the word “orphans,” Jesus could simply be referring to a general sense of abandonment at the loss from someone dear to his disciples, or perhaps to the fact that great teachers were called “fathers,” so that his departure would leave them “fatherless.” Alternately, Jesus may be playing on the idea of a Paraclete as an advocate for orphans, since orphans (along with widows) were the most vulnerable to oppression and abuse.¹⁴

Seeing Jesus After the Ascension

But what about after Easter, and after the forty days (Acts 1:3) until Jesus ascended back to his Father? Does Jesus *then* abandon his disciples as orphans? Interestingly, Jesus does not argue that the disciples will avoid becoming orphans because the other Paraclete will be with them. Instead, he argues that his disciples will not be orphans because “I will come to you” (John 14:18) and “you will see me” (John 14:19). The sense is not that Jesus expects the new Paraclete to replace him, but to connect him to his disciples in his absence. We do not see Jesus’ bodily presence, which is absent from us and at the right hand of the Father now. Nevertheless, we *do* see Jesus through the eyes of faith. John Calvin writes this:

That we may enjoy this secret beholding of Christ, we must not judge of his presence or his absence according to carnal perception, but we must earnestly employ the eyes of faith for contemplating his power. Thus believers always have Christ present by his Spirit, and behold him, though they be distant from him in body.¹⁵

Far from replacing Jesus, the Holy Spirit reveals Christ to us in his glory through the word, sacraments, and prayer. In these means of grace, the Spirit makes Jesus known to us in a way that the world cannot apprehend. This gift of the Spirit's revelation of Jesus to us is as much for the disciples after the first forty days of Jesus' resurrection as it is for us living today. This new vision of Jesus that gives new life through the power of the Spirit is what Jesus describes as the kingdom of God.¹⁶

The Manifestation of the Father and the Son

Jesus gives further explanation to what believers will experience through the sight given them by the Paraclete: "In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him" (John 14:20–21). Here, Jesus identifies two aspects of this experience: believers will *know*, and believers will *love*. The new knowledge Jesus imparts has to do with the mutual indwelling of the Father and the Son, but more than that, with the indwelling presence of us in Jesus, and Jesus in us: "you in me, and I in you." Jesus has said before that the Father is in him, and he is in the Father (John 10:38; 14:10–11), and he has stated that the new Paraclete will dwell in us (John 14:17). Now, Jesus combines these ideas by explaining what it means for the new Paraclete to dwell in us: by the new Paraclete's indwelling presence in us, Jesus himself will dwell in us.

This knowledge is not theoretical, but practical and experiential. We do not simply know *about* the fact that Jesus is in the Father, and that we are in him, and he in us; we *know* these realities by experience. Furthermore, this experience will bear the fruit of love. First, Jesus states that we will love him: "Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me." Again, this is a restatement of John 14:15, but now we know why the conditional statement is true—Jesus will indwell his people through the new Paraclete, and Jesus' indwelling presence by his Spirit will cause his people to keep his commandments by loving one another (John 13:34), which is how we demonstrate that we love him (John 14:21). Then, through that love, we will experience the love of the Father: "And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him."

You are not mistaken if this language feels endlessly circular to you, swirling from person to person and between love, knowledge, and experience. The inter-personal relationships in the Trinity are *infinitely* circular, with mutually indwelling love that the Father, Son, and Spirit have enjoyed from all eternity past, and our Triune God is catching *us* up into that eternal relationship of love. And only when we find ourselves washed over with wave after wave of love in the endless ocean of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are we actually able to understand the greatness and glory of the Son, whom the Spirit opens our eyes to see, so that we may see the image of the Father in Christ. There in the middle of God's endless love, Jesus manifests himself to us (John 14:21).

The Word of the Father and the Son

Still, this is not a vague, mystical experience that we only *feel*. The experience of God's love has objective content behind it. Jesus does not let us wait passively for the love of God to wash over us, but that we seek out the love of God in his word. When Judas (not Iscariot) asks, "Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?" (John 14:22), Jesus responds that he will manifest himself through his word: "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me" (John 14:23–24). The kingdom of Jesus in the world is simultaneously open and secret; open in the sense that God's word is published for all the world to hear, but secret in that Jesus will reveal himself only to those who keep his word.¹⁷ Lenski summarizes this idea well: "The test is always obvious and simple: a true disciple, one who really loves Jesus, always does more than make protestations or pretenses, he cherishes and guards every precept of Jesus which he has by holding to it in his heart and his life against all opposition."¹⁸

If we love Jesus, we will keep his word, and whoever does not love Jesus will not keep his words. The reason that the church of Jesus Christ must not only root itself in the word of God, but that we must also return to it again and again, is quite simple: Jesus' words are the means by which we come to know and experience the love of the Father: "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him" (John 14:23). Only here in the Bible do we find the idea that the Father and the Son will *both* indwell believers.¹⁹ Along with Jesus' statement in John 14:17, Jesus declares in these verses that the Father, Son, *and* the Holy Spirit will indwell believers. This is significant, since the entire Old Testament tells the story of God's mission to dwell in the midst of his people, culminating in the triumphal cry at the very end of the Bible: "Behold the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God" (Rev. 21:3).²⁰ The Triune God comes to dwell in us forever through the *word* that Jesus speaks to us.

Do not miss the stunning transformation here in comparison with the beginning of the Gospel of John. In John 1:14, we read, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth." The Word who became flesh only dwelt *among* us for a short time, but yet Jesus insists that we will continue to *see* his glory. The Word does not dwell among us any longer, but the word now dwells *in* us by the Holy Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit's indwelling presence—through whom the Father and the Son indwell us as well (John 14:23)—we continue to see the glory of Jesus. Jesus will continue his mission through these new activities of dwelling among us by his word and by his Spirit.

New Accomplishments (John 14:25–31)

Finally, Jesus continues to complete his mission *from his new accomplishments*. This is a critical point that keeps us from thinking that Jesus' work on earth omitted something important that we and the Holy Spirit must finish up for him. On the contrary—the work of Jesus during his earthly ministry is complete and final, so that nothing can detract from it, and nothing more can be added. Instead, Jesus completes his mission by *applying* to his people (and through his Spirit) everything that

he *accomplished* during his earthly ministry.

Reminding and Remembering

For starters, Jesus will not send a new word to his people after his departure, but he will send his Holy Spirit to remind us of what he spoke *before* his departure: “These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” (John 14:25–26). During Jesus’ earthly ministry, he has spoken to them in their presence. After he departs, Jesus will continue to teach his disciples, but not by giving them new revelations or new words. Rather, the Father will send the Paraclete—the Holy Spirit—in Jesus’ name to *remind* the disciples of all that Jesus said to them.

This word for “remind” (*hupominnēskō*) only appears here in the Gospel of John, but the related word *remember* (*mimnēskō*) appears in two other places: when the disciples “remembered” what Jesus had said about raising up the destroyed temple in three days (John 2:17, 22), and when the disciples “remembered” his triumphal entry on a donkey into Jerusalem (John 12:16).²¹ In the former case, the disciples remembered his words about the temple “when...he was raised from the dead”; in the latter, they remembered the triumphal entry “when Jesus was glorified.” While John has already told us *when* the disciples remembered these things, Jesus now tells us *how* they will remember them—through the work of the Holy Spirit to *remind* them of what Jesus said and did. The disciples did not receive a new word from Jesus, but, after Jesus’ resurrection, the Holy Spirit helped them to remember and understand what Jesus had said during his earthly ministry. Whether the disciples forgot about Jesus’ teaching or simply misunderstood it, “the Holy Spirit will supply their lack.”²² Therefore, the Holy Spirit does not come to do away with or to supplant the work of Jesus; rather, the Holy Spirit comes in the name of Jesus in order to *continue* the work of Jesus after Jesus’ departure.²³

Of course, this idea has great significance as we think about our own relationship to Jesus today. First, Jesus personally tells us that we do not need new words from him, but only to *remember* his words. The Holy Spirit does not give new prophetic inspiration, but he offers new illumination into the word of God. So, there will be times that we are confused and perplexed about how to follow God in a given situation. Rather than needing new information from God, what we really need is for the Holy Spirit to shed light on the same old passages in new ways for us. The meaning of well-worn verses does not change, but our context, situation, challenges, and relationships do change. The Scriptures of the Old and New Testament remain the word of Jesus, and the Holy Spirit continues to wield those same sixty-six canonical books like a sword that continues to cut deeper into our lives—not to harm us, but to heal us.

Second, this insight reminds us that even the Bible alone, apart from the work of the Holy Spirit, cannot change hearts and minds. The world who directly heard the word of Jesus ultimately rejected him, and even Jesus’ own disciples who loved him and heard him speak at length failed to understand him. While the word of Jesus is the means by which God comes to dwell in his people (John 14:23–24), that word cannot take up residence in our hearts apart from the work of the Holy Spirit. John Calvin writes,

When Christ testifies that it is the peculiar office of the Holy Spirit to teach the apostles what they had already learned from his mouth, it follows that the outward preaching will be vain and useless, if it be not accompanied by the teaching of the Spirit. God has therefore two ways of teaching; for, first, he sounds in our ears by the mouth of men; and, secondly, he addresses us inwardly by his Spirit; and he does this either at the same moment, or at different times, as he thinks fit.²⁴

We must not only listen to and study God’s word, but also pray that God will use his word to transform our hearts and minds by his Holy Spirit.

The Person of the Holy Spirit

Although Jesus primarily speaks of the Holy Spirit’s *work* in this passage, the way Jesus speaks about the Holy Spirit gives us a couple of important pieces of information about the Spirit’s *person*. Specifically, Jesus speaks of the Holy Spirit as “he”: “...the Holy Spirit...*he* will teach you all things...” (John 14:26). Unlike in English, every Greek noun has a gender, being either masculine, feminine, or neuter. Even though these gender distinctions are important in the Greek language, the gender of a word can sometimes be misleading. For example, the word “spirit” in Greek (*pneuma*) is neuter, but we cannot call the Holy Spirit “it” or imagine that he is an impersonal energy like the Force in *Star Wars*. Jesus does use the neuter word “spirit,” but then he uses the masculine personal pronoun “he” (*ekeinos*) to speak of him. Additionally, William Hendriksen points out that “this Spirit teaches, reminds, testifies, comes, convinces, guides, speaks, hears, predicts, etc. All these activities are personal.”²⁵ We must guard against the tendency to depersonalize the Holy Spirit, for he is fully a person of the Trinity just as much as the Father and the Son. As such, the Spirit is worthy of our love, adoration, and prayer.

We should also notice that, in distinction from the other persons of the Trinity, only the Spirit is called “Holy.” While God is called the “Holy One” (e.g., Rev. 16:5) or the “Holy One of Israel” (e.g., Isa. 30:12) and while Jesus is sometimes called the “Holy One” (e.g., Mark 1:24; John 6:69; Rev. 3:7), only the Spirit is consistently called the “*Holy Spirit*.”²⁶ The Holy Spirit fully shares the attribute of holiness with the Father and the Spirit, so we cannot differentiate the Spirit’s *personal* holiness from the Father or the Son. More likely, the reason for calling him the *Holy Spirit* has to do with his role in the plan of redemption: “because it is *he* who takes the leading part in the work of making others holy (sanctification).”²⁷ Just as Jesus is called the “Christ” because of the unique role he took in *accomplishing* out salvation as the anointed one of God for our salvation, so also the Spirit is called “Holy” because of the unique role he takes in *applying* the finished work of Jesus Christ to make sinners like you and me holy.

Peace

Next, Jesus says that he will not ask his disciples to complete his mission by *making* peace, for he will leave them with his peace: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid” (John 14:27) Here, Jesus repeats his earlier admonition that his disciples should stop letting their hearts be troubled from John 14:1: “Let not your hearts be troubled.” Just as in John 14:1, the force of the imperative here in John 14:27 is that Jesus’ disciples should *stop* doing something that is already happening, rather than

to *prevent* something from happening at all. But Jesus here also describes the remedy for their troubled hearts: his peace.

Although we usually think of peace as the absence of conflict, the idea of peace (*shalom*) in Hebrew meant something far greater—the rich blessings and flourishing that come through living in harmonious peace with God.²⁸ Certainly, this peace calms and soothes the turmoil of our souls in the midst of anxious personal troubles and strife, but the biblical idea of *peace* “is one of the fundamental characteristics of the messianic kingdom anticipated in the Old Testament (Nu. 6:26; Ps. 29:11; Is. 9:6–7; 52:7; 54:13; 57:19; Ezk. 37:26; Hg. 2:9) and fulfilled in the New (Acts 10:36; Rom. 1:7; 5:1; 14:17).”²⁹ While the world may offer this peace, the world cannot give it. Only King Jesus can give real peace, for only King Jesus will conquer the enemies of God’s people once and for all at the cross. The Holy Spirit then brings this peace to us in the proclamation of the gospel.

“The Father is greater than I”

Jesus continues, addressing why he wants to go away to his Father:

“You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I will come to you.’ If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place you may believe.” (John 14:28–29)

Once again, Jesus stresses that he is not absolutely leaving his disciples, but he will also come to them. This coming to them will happen ultimately when Jesus Christ returns, but Jesus will also come to us through his indwelling Spirit (John 14:17) and his indwelling word (John 14:23–24).³⁰ Jesus absolutely will not leave them abandoned as orphans (John 14:18).

Still, this estate of humiliation and lowliness can only be temporary. As Jesus here speaks, he is limited by the frailty of his humanity and beset with fears and sorrows (John 12:27; 13:21) over what he must accomplish shortly at the cross. He has come to accomplish a mission that requires him to take the form of a servant and humble himself and suffer increasingly to the point of death on a cross (Phil. 2:7–8), but after he accomplishes it, he will enter into the heavenly glory that awaits his victorious return. Lenski writes, “Here Jesus is in his humiliation, limited to a narrow range in exercising his divine attributes; but now he goes to the Father, to him who has assumed no limitations of any kind, where, when Jesus arrives there, all limitations will cease also for him.”³¹ Jesus’ disciples ought to rejoice over the glory awaiting their Master—and yet, which of us would not wish to cling to Jesus in the here and now? Carson writes, “To this point the disciples have responded emotionally entirely according to their perception of *their own* gain or loss. If they had loved Jesus, they would have perceived that his departure to his own ‘home’ was *his* gain and rejoiced with him at the prospect. As it is, their grief is an index of their self-centredness.”³²

This context helps us to sort out Jesus’ statement that “the Father is greater than I” (John 14:28). This does not mean that the Father is greater than the Son in the Son’s *divine* nature as God. Not at all, for orthodox Christian theology affirms the absolute equality of each of the three persons of the Trinity. The Athanasian Creed puts it this way: “And in this Trinity none is afore or after another; none is greater or less than another. But the whole three persons are coeternal, and coequal.”³³ Furthermore, Jesus is not simply saying that the Father is greater than his human nature. Rather,

Jesus is speaking of the mission that he has come to accomplish. In order to redeem us, the Son has made himself lesser than the Father by taking the form of a servant. John Calvin is worth quoting at length on this critical passage:

Christ does not now speak either of his human nature, or of his eternal Divinity, but, accommodating himself to our weakness, places himself between God and us; and, indeed, as it has not been granted to us to reach the height of God, Christ descended to us, that he might raise us to it. You ought to have rejoiced, he says, because I return to the Father; for this is the ultimate object at which you ought to aim. By these words he does not show in what respect he differs in himself from the Father, but why he descended to us; and that was that he might unite us to God; for until we have reached that point, we are, as it were, in the middle of the course. We too imagine to ourselves but a half-Christ, and a mutilated Christ, if he do not lead us to God.

There is a similar passage in the writings of Paul, where he says that *Christ will deliver up the Kingdom to God his Father, that God may be all in all*, (1 Corinthians 15:24.) Christ certainly reigns, not only in human nature, but as he is God manifested in the flesh. In what manner, therefore, will he lay aside the kingdom? It is, because the Divinity which is now beheld in Christ's face alone, will then be openly visible in him. The only point of difference is, that Paul there describes the highest perfection of the Divine brightness, the rays of which began to shine from the time when Christ ascended to heaven. To make the matter more clear, we must use still greater plainness of speech. Christ does not here make a comparison between the Divinity of the Father and his own, nor between his own human nature and the Divine essence of the Father, but rather between his present state and the heavenly glory, to which he would soon afterwards be received; as if he had said, "You wish to detain me in the world, but it is better that I should ascend to heaven." Let us therefore learn to behold Christ humbled in the flesh, so that he may conduct us to the fountain of a blessed immortality; for he was not appointed to be our guide, merely to raise us to the sphere of the moon or of the sun, but to make us one with God the Father.³⁴

God the Son willingly humbled himself to become not only human, but low, despised, and humiliated for the sake of reuniting us to the Father. Now that his mission is almost over, he longs to return to the greater glory that awaits him with his Father.

The Ruler of this World

Jesus indicates that the climax of the mission is drawing exceedingly near: "I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me, but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us go from here" (John 14:30–31). When Jesus says that he will "no longer talk much" with his disciples, and then encourages them to "Rise, let us go from here," his words carry both an immediate meaning and a longer-term meaning. In the immediate sense, Jesus is wrapping up both the Passover feast and the conversation that he is having with his disciples before heading out to the garden to meet his betrayer.³⁵ Jesus could speak all of the contents of John 15–17 within a period of only ten minutes, so the time for his betrayal is extremely close.³⁶ In the longer-term sense, these words echo what Jesus

said earlier about the Holy Spirit's work of bringing to remembrance everything he has said to them while he is with them (John 14:25–26). The hour during which the true light will shine in the world is drawing to a close (cf. John 1:9; 12:35). He will continue to shine, but by the illumination of the Holy Spirit, and not by his own bodily presence.

Jesus, then, goes out to do battle with “the ruler of this world” (John 14:3). It is not as though Satan actually rules the world by right, or because he has won some kind of true victory over God. Instead, Satan rules over this world “by God's permission” because of our sin.³⁷ Nevertheless, while Satan possesses a dominion over *almost* all of the human race, Jesus insists that Satan “has no claim” on him (John 14:30). Jesus only submits himself to the powers of darkness because he does “as the Father has commanded” him (John 14:31). Contrary to all appearances, Satan is not in control of Jesus' crucifixion; God alone is. Therefore, when Jesus willingly sacrifices himself in obedience to his Father, he will not demonstrate some kind of power that Satan holds over him, but he will do so “that the world may know that I love the Father” (John 14:31). In the process, Jesus will shatter Satan's tyranny over the world forever.

And so, the hour draws even closer: “Rise, let us go from here” (John 14:31).

Discussion Questions

1. What did Jesus accomplish during his earthly ministry? If Jesus finished everything he came to do (cf. John 19:30), then what more is there to accomplish in this world? What implications does that have for us individually as Jesus' disciples, and for the church as a whole?
2. What is the relationship between Jesus and the Holy Spirit? Why does Jesus call the Holy Spirit “another Helper”? Does the Holy Spirit replace Jesus? Is the Holy Spirit necessary? What implications are there for us as we consider the total unity of mission between Jesus and the Holy Spirit? How do we fit into that mission?
3. Why does Jesus promise to indwell us? What is the significance of Jesus' word in the way that Jesus and the Father will come to dwell in us by the Spirit? What comfort can we take from the promise that Jesus will not leave us as orphans (John 14:18)?
4. Do we need new words beyond the Bible? Why or why not? How can we know God's will for our lives without having something more than the Bible? Why is it so important for us to remember the things Jesus spoke while he was still with us?

Notes

1. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 498.
2. Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 281.
3. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 498.
4. Keener, *The Gospel of John*, vol. 2, 972.
5. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 92. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/>>

ccel/calvin/calcom35.iv.iii.html>

6. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John's Gospel*, 996–97.

7. Beasley–Murray, *John*, 256.

8. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 499.

9. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 92. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom35.iv.iii.html>>

10. Köstenberger, *John*, 438.

11. Westminster Confession of Faith 7.5. See also WCF 11.6: “The justification of believers under the Old Testament was, in all these respects, one and the same with the justification of believers under the New Testament.” In context, “all these respects” includes the work of the Holy Spirit in applying Christ’s work (WCF 11.4).

12. “No saving faith was ever wrought even in the Old Testament without the Spirit. Jesus himself had planted the Spirit in the hearts of his disciples; their experience of the Spirit had begun. And yet all their contact with the Spirit had been only through Jesus and through him as being visibly present. This is where the great change would come in the departure of Jesus and in the coming of the Spirit. One Paraclete would take the place of the other. And this not silently and secretly but openly, miraculously, on Pentecost.” (Lenski, *The Interpretation of John's Gospel*, 1001.)

13. Beasley–Murray, *John*, 258.

14. For several options on the idea of “orphans” (including the ones listed here), see Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 973.

15. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 94. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom35.iv.iv.html>>

16. Beasley–Murray, *John*, 258.

17. Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 975.

18. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John's Gospel*, 1007.

19. Köstenberger, *John*, 441.

20. For more on this theme, see G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A biblical theology of the dwelling place of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004).

21. Beasley–Murray, *John*, 261.

22. Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 583.

23. Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John*, 510.

24. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 100–01. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom35.iv.vi.html>>

25. Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 286, footnote 171. Here, Hendriksen also points out the masculine “he” word used in John 14:26.

26. Gerber, *That You May Know*, 48–49.

27. Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 286.

28. Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 584.

29. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 505–06.

30. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John's Gospel*, 1018–19.

31. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John's Gospel*, 1020.

32. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 507–08.

33. Athanasian Creed, 25–26. Available online: <<https://www.ccel.org/creeds/athanasian.creed.html>>

34. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 102–03. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom35.iv.vi.html>>

35. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John's Gospel*, 1023–24.

36. Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 290.

37. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 104–05. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom35.iv.vii.html>>