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LAST WORDS FOR CLOSEST FRIENDS:
JOHN 14-17

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WHAT KIND OF UNITY?

At the conclusion of Jesus' final discourse, He prayed for his immediate and later disciples and a central issue was that "they may be one as we are one." But what does that mean? Various agendas have arisen around what kind of unity he prayed for. Entire ecumenical movements have been fueled by a particular interpretation of the unity that was in the heart of Jesus as he petitioned the Father for his people, always running into the complexity of defining the boundaries of doctrine and practice involved. In the following discussion we will seek to define that unity in the context of the entire discourse.

The text:

> *I pray not only for these, but also for those who believe in me through their word. May they all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us, so that the world may believe you sent me. I have given them the glory you have given to me, so that they may be one as we are one. I am in them and you are in me, so that they may be made completely one, that the world may know you have sent me and have loved them as you have loved me.*
>
> *Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, so that they will see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the world's foundation. Righteous Father, the world has not known you. However, I have known you, and they have known that you sent me. I made your name known to them and will continue to make it known so that the love you have loved me with may be in them and I may be in them." (John 17:20-26)*

Jesus has made quite a deal of the fruit of the life he has given to the disciples being the privilege and power of prayer. He demonstrated that as he closes the last great discourse with his magnificent prayer for his followers to really get the full package of grace that is theirs in sharing his life. It seems that Paul took his clue in that after making great statements of doctrinal truth, he prays that his readers will get it. (Ephesians 1:15-23; 3:14-21) May be take the clue today and focus on the prayer for our hearers as much as the lessons we teach them. In Jesus' prayer we find the summary of what he has taught them during their time together on earth and especially in this last discourse. The core of what he wants them to get is the grasp on eternal life.

> *"Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you gave him authority over all people, so that he may give eternal life to everyone you have*

> *given him. This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God and the one you have sent – Jesus Christ. (John 17:1-3)*

Interestingly he points out that the purpose of the Father's granting him authority over all people is so that he can give eternal life to those the Father has given him. His authority is related to giving the life he shares with the Father and the Spirit to those whom the Father has chosen to give him. What a far cry that concept is from the contemporary view of eternal life as the legal right to go to heaven when we die! We seem more interested in going to heaven than seeing the glory of God displayed on earth. The glory we have envisioned is more akin to the American dream of comfort, convenience, and eternal bliss, than the glory of the cross, resurrection, and rule of Christ on earth. Heaven has become more important than knowing the Father through Jesus. We talk more about the venue than knowing personally the fullness of the God who created us and redeemed us by giving his life to us. Is heaven better than knowing the Father through the Son? Actually the whole of the New Testament is more about the heavenlies coming to earth than our going to heaven. In fact when Jesus earlier told his immediate disciples that he was going away, it was to the Father in whom there are many rooms.

Whatever the full meaning of unity is, it is about sharing the life of Jesus, and the Father through the Spirit. But what does it look like? In John 13, we see a **preview** of the shared life being demonstrated by Jesus.

> *Jesus knew that the Father had given everything into his hands, that he had come from God, and that he was going back to God. So he got up from supper, laid aside his outer clothing, took a towel, and tied it around himself. Next he poured water into a basin and began to wash is disciples' feet and to dry them with the towel tied around him. (John 13:3-5)*

So confident was he that he was fully in the will of the Father, and that nothing outside of God himself could determine his destiny he was free to serve without concern for reputation or status. It didn't matter that he was filling the role of the lowliest servant in the house. The disciples were appalled that he, the teacher, would stoop to such a role. It was way beneath his dignity, but that is the point. The life he is giving them is one of full confidence in God's faithfulness to keep them, and utilize them to carry out his mission on earth; a mission that cost him his life. His life was free from the need of public affirmation. He didn't serve to be noticed as a servant. He was not a slave to their notice or their appreciation. He did what he did as the natural expression of his intimacy with the Father who is well pleased with him. The disciples didn't fully understand this yet. They were about to receive a life from him that would do the same kind service to each other and the world. They were still wondering who would sit on the right and left hand of Messiah. It would be a shock, but as they would embrace it, they would be lights in a dark world and salt in a rotting society, and they would do it with the same joy they saw in him.

Next we see the **promise** of a shared place. In chapter 14, Jesus recognizing their trepidation about what was about to happen, promises them that there is glorious purpose in his departure. He is going to prepare a place so that where he is they may be also. They will like it.

> *I will not leave you as orphans; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me. Because I live, you will live too. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, you are in me, and I am in you. (John 14:18-20)*

Among other things, one of the characteristics of this shared life is the ability to see a meaning in the events that the world cannot see. His life's source is not the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but the tree of life depicted in Eden. New eyes! New ears! Eternal life. The observable circumstances will be horrible. Injustice, hatred, deception, violence, death, shame, blasphemy…but he sees it as glory. His hour has come. The big event is here. He came for this purpose. All things are getting ready for the greatest climax of history. Those without eternal life will totally misinterpret what they see, but with new eyes, they will see. After his death, resurrection, ascension, and Pentecost they will see that they are in the Father and the Son. They will be radicalized by the privilege and purposes of God in choosing them to be the stewards of the heavenly vision. They will be overcome by the realization that the Father loves them as much as he loves the Son. This kind of love will compel them to obey and embrace their role as witnesses in the world. And this eternal life issues forth in a kind of peace that the world has not known, at least since Eden. It is the peace of Jesus who is one with the Father and is the recipient of authority to rule over all that redemption purchased. No angst, no anxiety about status, significance or security. The peace of knowing that nothing can separate you from the love of God; a kind of love that defeats death and rules over all the pseudo gods of the universe. It is not a path to peace that he gives. It is his peace. It is part of his life that is being shared with them.

In chapter 15 we see a **picture** of the shared life. The metaphor of the vineyard has been a major means of defining the people of God in the Old Testament. The familiar passage of Isaiah 5:1-2 depicts the relationship God desired with Israel, the old covenant people. The people under this covenant were unable and unwilling to share the purpose of God as his vineyard, from which he would give drink to a thirsty world.

> *I will sing about the one I love, a song about my loved one's vineyard: The one I love had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. He broke up the soil, cleared it of stones, and planted it with the finest vines. He built a tower in the middle of it and even dug out a winepress there. He expected it to yield good grapes, but it yielded worthless grapes.*

A strange twist reveals the hero of the story of Israel. The Seed that was promised to Abraham that began the Israel story finally came to earth after many types and shadows that promised it. It wasn't the physical nation of Israel that was the hero after all. Jesus was born of a woman and under the Law, (Galatians 4:4) qualifying for the role of Israel's representative. He is the only Israelite who kept the Law perfectly. He fulfilled the stipulations of the covenant that God made through Moses, thus gaining the inheritance of the blessings promised in Deut. 28-29. He also was qualified as the perfect Lamb to be the sacrifice taking the curses of disobedience to the covenant. Jesus as Israel, fulfilled the covenant and established a new covenant that did everything the old covenant promised and more. Those who saw him as the Messiah and received him as the Lord became the partners of the new covenant. The blessings are summed up in sharing the very life of Jesus. He is the inheritance. He has all the blessings of obedience

and grants the righteousness of his obedience to those whom the Father gives to him.

So when Jesus declares "I am the vine," He is claiming that he has fulfilled Israel's role and completed the Israel story related to God's purpose in redemption. The metaphor reveals that the same life that is in the vine is flowing through the branches, who are his disciples now as well as then. They have been cleaned and prepared to produce the fruit of love. The same life flowing through Jesus is now shared by those who believe in him as Messiah and Lord. Their response and responsibility is to remain in him. Trying to gain favor and blessings outside of trusting him completely will accomplish nothing. He is the source, the guide, the power and the authority. They are empowered by being sent by him into the world. They have access to this life by total dependence on the one who sent them. As they began to fulfill their assignment, they find that it is their prayers (that he longs to answer) that connect his life with theirs. They ask…the Father answers and the Father is glorified on earth. Shared life; shared mission; shared glory. Such love poured out on disciples is beyond human imagination. Being loved in such a way is truly transforming and compelling. No one on earth has ever before seen such a quality of love as revealed in the Father sending the Son with the Holy Spirit regenerating and illuminating the recipients. It produces the same joy that characterized Jesus whole life. Since Jesus knew the delight of the Father towards him, he delighted in those the Father gave him and the same delight became theirs. No circumstances need depress them. They were as secure as Jesus himself in the love of the Father.

A helpful clue about abiding in him is captured from Jesus' teaching about the kingdom in his parables. He features the role of the word of Jesus being a seed. It is the seed that has life in it. It is obviously the object of the enemy's attack against the kingdom of God on earth. By the time of Jesus's declaration that his word is the key issue how a stable life is built, (Matthew 7:24-27) it is obvious that his word equals the gospel he preached. He had continued to pound on the reality that he was and is the completion of the Israel-story and that the kingdom had arrived with him. The only right thing to do with his word is to believe it and let it transform the thinking, analyzing, planning, and behavior of the true hearer. But the seed offers some understanding of how it works. It takes time. Unlike those who prefer the cataclyptic nature of transformation, Jesus expected his word to begin small, work in a hidden fashion and finally to produce the fruit of his life. It could not be observed by those who did not receive his word as final. They would be tripped up by natural and physical manifestations of change. They would resort to regulations, rituals, and right behavior to be the fruit of their labor. The disciples then and now who know the nature of the kingdom and its seed can believe and persevere knowing that the seed has the very life of Jesus in it and when received, it will produce fruit. Rushing ahead to produce fruitfulness or maturity is not necessary. Regular sowing, receiving, waiting, and nurturing, marks their embrace of his present kingdom.

For those seeking to follow Jesus in discipleship who believe the kingdom has been postponed until after the second coming, there is a huge problem. If the kingdom has been postponed, then Jesus is not the ruling king. We would have to wait for has final appearance before we could enjoy the inheritance of his present life. We could have no assurance that the cross dealt the death blow to the powers that rule over the world. We could not align with his crucifixion, resurrection and ascension. How could we set our minds on things above where our life is hidden with him in God? (Colossians 3:2-3) Oh it is true that the culmination of the kingdom's rule on earth has yet more fruit to be tasted, the definitive death of Jesus won the battle forever.

He is king now. As king he rules over the all, including the mechanisms of the devil. We are not to be confused. The devil has no authority over what Jesus rules. He is busy seeking to dimmish, distract, and disrupt the sowing and growing seed of the kingdom, but his role under the king is to offer the circumstances to test our faith in the finished work of Christ. He often points out how evil things look as if God had done nothing to change it. He suggests how silly it is for us to believe there is a good kingdom in charge when so much bad stuff happens. Those who like the virgin Mary, after hearing the preposterous declaration of her pregnancy by the Holy Spirit, proclaim: "Be it unto me according to thy word," find the kingdom to be real and growing. It still required 9 months for the fruit to come. Delay, according to our schedules is not denial on his calendar. Everything we believe is based on the assurance of the completion of Calvary. We wait with patience the full harvest of the seed.

The picture of the vine and the branches reveal that we are not expected to create a peace of our own, but to simply share his peace. Neither are we to work in order to be joyous. We have his joy planted deep in our inner man. We draw on his life when we face obstacles that tend to rob peace and diminish joy. There is nothing that this world with its secular explanations can do to prevent Jesus from ruling daily. There is nothing that we can do to make the Father stop delighting in us as his own. As we remember that this is the Father's vineyard and he is the vinedresser, our confidence rises.

We are also confident because, though we have been commissioned by the king to be his witnesses to who he is and what he has done, we are not alone in our witness. The Holy Spirit is working as a witness too.

> *When the Counselor comes, the one I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father—he will testify about me. You also will testify, because you have been with me from the beginning. (John 15:26-27)*

Our mission in not in jeopardy. Failure has been denied by the permanent work of Jesus. The glory of God will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea—because it is based on his faithfulness. We sow…the Holy Spirit convicts. We are beyond privileged to be called his sons and given the role of extending his kingdom to every sphere that his blood has redeemed. Sure, our shared mission will include persecution. Just as he as the incarnate One suffered the hatred of the wicked, we too will share in it. According to another of his parables, the wheat and the tares grow in the same field, but he knows the difference and will make the harvest plain.

> *I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. You will have suffering in this world. Be courageous! I have conquered the world. (John 16:33)*

Unlike the shallow promises of the so called prosperity message, Jesus does not offer to prevent suffering, nor does he blame our lack of faith for the pain we experience. He gives a deeper love and a greater grace so that as the suffering world watches, it can see a glory they cannot explain. After all, we are not commissioned to be heroes that have no needs. Nor are we here to simple endure until we can go to heaven. In our common needs with those around us we have a life

that is greater than sorrow, grief, and pain. We are not just putting on a positive face. We have a deep-seeded faith that is tried by fire and precious beyond measure. The more his life within us is exposed by the circumstances that pressure us, the more his glory is revealed through us.

Yet, there is the further dimension of this unity that Jesus provided and prayed for. It is the shared life of the shared body. It is not just about individually being aware of our special union with Christ. We are a multimembered body that has a spiritual unity, created by the common life we share. It is a unity far beyond human efforts of ecumenism. Tons of energy has been expended by those trying to produce a structural or doctrinal unity based on statements of belief and practice. We tend to treasure most those truths or practices that have meant much to us in our season of enlightenment. Whole denominations have grown up around an old truth rediscovered, or a new way of stating what prior generations have settled . The challenge for us is to fully, yet simply identify what the markers of our common life are.

I contend that we should focus on what we commonly *know* by the Spirit. After all, this whole section is about a quality life that is called "eternal." It is not just long lasting, but different from any lifeform ever known on earth. The description is: "that they may know you, the only true God, and the one you have sent—Jesus Christ." This kind of knowledge goes beyond mental understanding or creedal documentation. It is a faculty of the regenerated saint. Paul calls it the unity of the Spirit and assumes that we already have it, but we must guard it and nurture it.

> *Therefore I, the prisoner in the Lord, urge you to walk worthy of the calling you have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope at your calling—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is above all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:1-6)*

Historically, Christians have tended to argue over the meaning of these simple statements of common life. Splits have occurred over which body, Roman Catholic?, Orthodox?, Protestant?, or other. Mode of baptism is a subject that has divided. And what does our calling have to do with unity. It seems that spiritual immaturity demands a fight. For instance, I heard recently a definition of the millennium as "the thousand years of peace that Christians fight over." In an effort to accurately define our common life with each Christian, I think we can safely say that is knowing the person of God the Father through the knowledge of the Son, by the revelation of the Spirit. But, let's look at this "calling" issue. We are called by the sound of the gospel. It is nothing less than the declaration that Jesus fulfills the Israel story and inaugurates the kingdom of heaven on earth. Without this gospel there is no unity. Jesus is clearly delineated as the one historical Jesus of history and climax of the Old Testament story. There is only one of that Jesus. By his very nature and identity, he reveals the Father and we know the Father only through him. By virtue of his covenant obedience, he is the Israelite who receives all the blessings of that obedience and by grace grants them to those who are his. In his victorious death, he defeats all the authorities and powers that have ruled the kingdoms of the world and he himself is raised to the right hand of God as King. As Israel's Messiah, and the world's Lord he rules over everything that stands as an enemy of God and his people. That rule is awaiting those people of God who believe and receive it.

To try to guard a unity that doesn't have as its center the gospel that Jesus preached and achieved is futile. The sound of the gospel rings the bell of familiarity in the spirit of every true believer. When it is heard by ears of faith, it alerts, empowers, and guides the hearers into common fellowship with God and each other. It produces a gospel community that is like that of the early church after Pentecost. Generosity, prayerfulness, apostles' doctrine, and fellowship are common markers. A true gospel community should expect the same kind of hellish attack as individual Christians. The seed of the word (gospel) of God is under attack. When the gospel is not central, unity is not possible.

As we conclude, we are grateful that we are not expected to live up to standards of righteousness defined by the law, the pharisee, or the denomination. We have received eternal life and by it we know God and the Son he sent. We enjoy intimacy as the same level as the Son. We expect to show the fruit of the gospel seed sown in our hearts. We enjoy triumphant prayer since we are his witnesses in this world. And we find our hearts being warmed by his love and stimulated to joyful obedience to his word. We never forget that we only love because he first loved us, and that love from him continues.

Questions for thought:

Though we visited the concept of union life with God in a previous roundtable, why is this truth often ignored or diminished?

What is the difference in "my joy" and "his joy?"

How do you see the gospel that Jesus preached in light of the unity he prayed for?

In much contemporary expository preaching, the focus is on the principles found in scripture that if followed make life better. Is that the gospel? Where do principles of divine order fit in the gospel community?

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THE FOUR "BLANK CHECKS" OF PRAYER IN JESUS' FAREWELL CONVERSATION

When someone is loved greatly, that person's final words become something to be treasured. So, what of our beloved Lord Jesus' final words? Of course, every recorded word Jesus spoke in His brief three-year ministry is of great value to us. We rightly study them. We parse and mine them for meaning. In them we seek truth for our lives and comfort for our souls—and never fail to find both.

John, chapters fourteen through sixteen, delivers to us Jesus' final words before going to the cross. Words spoken to His closest followers. His protégés. His legacy. His friends. And the seventeenth chapter brings us, in glorious detail, His prayer for them. And for us.

PRAYER VS. "ASKING"

The mission of this paper is to explore Jesus' words about prayer in this intimate, and oh, so very consequential conversation. The odd thing about this assignment is that the words *pray* or *prayer* don't appear a single time in this discourse in most of our English translations. Not once.

However, the word *ask* makes fourteen appearances. And in nearly every one of those, Jesus is talking about making requests of the Father (thus, prayer).

On the whole, this tends to reinforce the widespread misconception among believers that *prayer* defined is, functionally: "Bringing one's list of needs and desires to God in the hope He will grant some of them." Of course, this is but one facet of what prayer can be. Indeed, *should* be.

In the full light of New Covenant revelation, prayer is life-giving communion with the heavenly Father who moved heaven and earth for the very purpose of restoring us to connection with Himself. Full-bodied prayer involves worship. It involves listening as well as talking. It involves allowing the Spirit to infuse and inform and instruct the interaction. And it extends the privilege of partnering with God by giving prophetic voice to the carrying out of His plans and purposes in the earth.

Clearly, asking in prayer isn't out of bounds. After all, Paul wrote:

> *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and pleading with thanksgiving* ***let your requests be made known to God****.* (Philippians 4:6 NASB, emphasis added)

And James declared "You do not have because you do not ask." (James 4:2)

Nevertheless, it is a lean, haggard view of prayer that reduces it to merely asking for things. Yet we turn to Jesus' farewell discourse and find Him turning four times to the matter of asking the Father. In fact, in the course of this rolling, extensive conversation, Jesus seemingly offers His disciples (and by extension, us) four promises that, at first blush, almost read as "blank checks," pre-signed by the Savior Himself.

For as long as John's gospel has been read, these four sweeping promises have challenged and excited Christians who read them. And many have seen that excitement turn to disappointment as they lifted these passages from their wider context and sought to "cash" those checks. We should explore why that might be. And what that wider context reveals. But first, a spotlight on the quartet of promises themselves.

JESUS' FOUR "BLANK CHECKS"

Blank Check 1

John 14:12-14 NASB (emphasis added)

Truly, truly I say to you, the one who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do; because I am going to the Father. **And whatever you ask in My name, this I will do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it.**

Blank Check 2

John 15:7-8 NASB (emphasis added)

If you remain in Me, and My words remain in you, **ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.** My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.

Blank Check 3

John 15:16 NASB (emphasis added)

You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, **so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you.**

Blank Check 4

John 16: 23-24 NASB (emphasis added)

And on that day you will not question Me about anything. **Truly, truly I say to you, if you ask the Father for anything in My name, He will give it to you.** Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; **ask and you will receive**, so that your joy may be made full.

Read in quick succession, as presented here, these statements bear striking similarities. Yet, Jesus interspersed these declarations throughout the conversation, returning to the theme repeatedly, even as His topic shifts from His imminent departure to His oneness with the Father to the sending of the Spirit to the sure expectation of persecution. Yes, the commonalities are apparent. If this discourse was a song, it would have four distinct verses but with the same chorus: "Ask—and it will be granted . . . given . . . received . . . done for you."

Yet closer examination reveals subtle but key differences, both in the various contexts and in the framing of the promises themselves. An examination of each follows.

1. GLORY AND GREATER WORKS

As soon as Judas Iscariot is securely out of the room, Jesus dives right into His farewell agenda. And it begins with talk of glory and glorification:

> *Therefore when [Judas] had left, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man **glorified**, and God is **glorified** in Him; if God is **glorified** in Him, God will also **glorify** Him in Himself, and will **glorify** Him immediately. (John 13:31-32).*

That's a lot of glory in one sentence. This opening is significant for reasons we shall shortly see.

Then Jesus proceeds to speak of His departure. He is going away. And where He is going they cannot follow. This hits as distressing news and the disciple's dismay and confusion sends Jesus into the "Let not your hearts be troubled . . ." portion of the conversation. (John 14:1ff).

This is followed by some teaching about His unity or oneness with the Father. (John 14:7-11) Which in turn is followed by one of the most startling and implausible of all of Jesus' many provocative statements:

> *Truly, truly I say to you, the one who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do; because I am going to the Father. (John 14:12)*

Countless expositors have wrestled with the implications of that shocking declaration. Here's how Regent University School of Theology professor Scott Adams frames this issue:

> *In 14:12b, Jesus stated that the believer will perform "greater works" in light of His departure to the Father. The question that is naturally provoked concerns the nature and meaning of the term greater in relation to works. Believers will do works μείζονα τούτων, that is, greater than those performed antecedently because of His departure to the Father.*[1]

Adams aptly points out that Jesus links this "greater works" prediction to His "going to the Father." In other words, it is when Jesus takes His position enthroned at the right hand of the Father while simultaneously being "in" believers who are also "in Him" that greater works than His will be possible.

One's position on cessationism carries a significant impact on how that stunning statement is interpreted. If the era of miracles ended with the completion of the biblical canon, then one should not look to miraculous answers to prayer as the fulfillment of Jesus' proclamation here. D.A. Carson spends two-and-half pages[2] attempting to lower the reader's expectations on that front. He begins that exercise by writing:

> *The "greater works" may therefore be the gathering of converts into the church through the witness of the disciples. (cf. 17:20; 20:29), and the overflows of kindness that stem from transformed lives.*[3]

Perhaps Jesus did mean conversions and kindness when He prophesied that those who believe in him would do "greater things" than He had done. But consider this writer skeptical on that front. But what we can be sure of is that Jesus clearly meant *something* by "greater works." After all, he began His declaration with the solemn *double amen* of "truly, truly . . ." This double amen construction (ἀμὴν ἀμὴν) appears in Jesus' statements 25 times in John's gospel—invariably before a significant doctrinal or prophetic declaration. When Jesus deploys it in advance of a saying, we can be sure He is being intentional and thoughtful about whatever words come next.

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[1] Scott Adams, *Prayer in John's Farewell Discourse: An Exegetical Investigation*, p 81
[2] D. A. Carson, *The Farewell Discourse and Final Prayer of Jesus*, pp. 48-50
[3] D. A. Carson, *The Farewell Discourse and Final Prayer of Jesus*, p. 48

The key to the meaning of what followed His double-amen statement may possibly lie in the two sentences that follow Jesus' "greater works" proclamation. Our first "blank check":

> *And whatever you ask in My name, this I will do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it. (John 14:13)*

Surely it is no coincidence that Jesus followed His stunning "greater works" statement with this promise of favor in prayer. It is a *prediction* followed by a *promise*. Prediction: "greater works." Promise: "whatever you ask."

And please note that this prediction-promise combo is linked to the glorification of the Father—the subject with which Jesus began the entire discourse. Jesus plainly states the purpose of the promise. Jesus says He will do "whatever" the believer asks in order "that the Father may be glorified in the Son."

This is the key to unlocking any paradoxes embedded in this passage. God the Father's glory is the overarching objective here. Of course, it is! One of the most significant unfulfilled prophecies of Scripture is this one from Habakkuk:

> *For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea. (Habakkuk 2:14)*

The first Adam's assignment was, in a sense, to fill the earth with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, and do so by extending the kept and cultivated Garden model to the entire planet. Here, the Second-and-Final Adam is declaring the renewal of that original project. And here He is establishing the process and method by which that project will be carried out. Specifically, believers—individually and collectively in union with Christ, just as Christ is in union with the Father—asking Him for supernaturally powered outcomes. With the granting of those outcomes to the Son's "body" resulting in the Father being glorified in the Son.

Would the earth progressively being filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord qualify as a "greater work" than Jesus did in His three-year ministry? It would seem so. Also, as many expositors have pointed out, hundreds of millions of prayer-empowered, Spirit-indwelled people dispersed across the planet is also "greater" in scale than what Jesus did as one individual in one spot on the earth.

This leads us to the second "blank check."

2. GLORY AND FRUITFULNESS

The next "ask" promise is embedded in Jesus' well-known, oft-quoted "I am the vine and you are the branches" metaphor. But this follows His powerful revelation about the sending of the Holy Spirit after His departure. (John 14:16-30) That promise:

> *"If you remain in Me, and My words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. (John 15:7-8 NASB)*

Please note that once again God's glory is at the forefront of Jesus' mind and words, but with an added ingredient—the bearing of "fruit." Specifically, Jesus declares that fruit-bearing by the believer does two things, it glorifies the Father and validates the believer as authentically belonging to Jesus.

The vine and branches metaphor follows Jesus' announcement that His imminent departure is actually a better thing for His followers because He will send the Spirit—"The Helper." (John 14:16-31) This is no coincidence.

It is the Spirit who will baptize believers into Christ. (1 Corinthians 12:3) It is the Spirit who will make it possible to "abide" in Him. (1 Corinthians 6:17) It is the Spirit who will enable and empower the fruitfulness of Jesus' promises here. (Romans 8:4-9) It is the Spirit who will help us in our weakness in prayer because "we do not know how to pray as we ought." (Romans 8:26) And it is the Spirit who will bring to their remembrance all the words He'd spoken to them. (John 14:26)

So, of course, the mention of the arrival of "The Helper" seamlessly brings Him to the prospect of His followers abiding in Him and His words abiding in them! And this surely informs Jesus' second "blank check" promise of fruitfulness through answered prayer. But He will come around to this promise again, only eight verses later.

3. APPOINTED TO FRUITFULNESS

In verse seven of John 15, Jesus issues the first and primary stipulation of the New Covenant. The scribes and Pharisees had identified 613 stipulations in the Old Covenant. But here (and elsewhere) Jesus offers only one—"love one another."

Then, the hand-picked eleven who had been called by the Master away from fishing and tax-collecting and lounging under fig trees, heard Him say something extraordinary:

> *You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you.* **(***John 15:16 NASB)*

Here we find the thrilling third verse of this promissory song. And as with the previous instance, it is tied to Kingdom fruitfulness. But in this case the cause-effect relationship is reversed. Previously, the promise of favor in prayer precedes the prediction of fruitfulness. But here, fruitfulness precedes the promise of favor in prayer.

In the first instance, prayer favor results in fruitfulness. In this one, the "so that" of the NASB seemingly suggests that fruitfulness results in favor in prayer. So, which is it? Both, it seems. Abiding in Christ, by the Spirit, causes Kingdom prayers to produce results, and thereby, fruit. And, in turn, fruit bearing creates momentum for favor in prayer.

4. FULL JOY

As Jesus rounds third and heads for home in this conversation, His focus swings once again to the promise of the Spirit and His role among New Covenant believers in the New Covenant era. (John 16:5-15) This is followed by a veiled reference to His impending crucifixion. (16:22) His comments address the grief they will feel initially and the joy they will ultimately experience when they discover that Death does not get the final word. The Savior revisits the subject of joy a few verses later, as He promises heavenly favor in prayer for a fourth and final time:

> *And on that day you will not question Me about anything. Truly, truly I say to you, if you ask the Father for anything in My name, He will give it to you. Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full. (John 16:23-24 NASB)*

Previously these promises have been tied to the Father's glorification and to the purpose of fruitfulness. But here, in this final instance, there is only one objective in view. Joy. "Full" joy for the believer.

THE UNCOMFORTABLE CHALLENGE

We've seen four declarations:

1. "whatever you ask"
2. "ask whatever you wish"
3. "whatever you ask"
4. "anything"

Each of these immediately followed by four corresponding assurances:

1. "I will do it."
2. "it will be done for you"
3. "He may give to you"
4. "He will give it to you"

The full picture that emerges here confronts us with an awkward challenge when we lay our personal experience in prayer alongside that image. Is there a single believer—no matter how mature—who doesn't see more disappointment than breakthrough where their "asking" in prayer is concerned? How are we to navigate this challenge?

One very natural response is to simply shrug away the apparent meaning of Jesus' words here. To allow years of accumulated disappointments—small, large, and heartbreaking—to numb the sense of expectancy those assurances tend to inspire. But four repetitions embedded in the most significant conversation of Jesus' teaching-discipling ministry is a heavy thing to try to hand-wave away.

So, what is the believer determined to live in the fulness of the finished work of Jesus Christ to do? How should we then live? And pray? And expect when we pray?

This writer first turned to N.T. Wright's *John for Everyone, Part 2* for light. There, in commentary about John 13:31-32 (Blank Check #1,) Wright says:

> *The all-important phrase 'in my name' doesn't, of course, just mean adding 'in the name of Jesus' to anything we might think of, however stupid, selfish or hurtful. The 'name', after all, as in many cultures, is supposed to reveal the character . . .*
>
> *Praying 'in Jesus' name', then, means that, as we get to know who Jesus is, so we find ourselves drawn into his life and love and sense of purpose. We will then begin to see what needs doing, what we should be aiming at within our sphere of possibilities, and what resources we need to do it. When we then ask, it will be 'in Jesus' name', and to his glory; and, through that, to the glory of the father himself (verse 13).* ***But, when all this is understood, we shouldn't go soft on that marvellous word anything. He said it, and he means it.***[4] *(emphasis added)*

Elsewhere, including in interviews, Wright has pointed out that these promises are not blankets for personal convenience but cooperative tools for carrying out the believer's mission—as we've seen, glorifying the Father and bearing fruit. Wright suggests that when Jesus promises that the Father will give the disciples "whatever you ask," it must be contextualized within their commissioning to go out into a hostile world and bear "fruit that will last."[5]

Even so, the near daily experience of we believers who pray for outcomes that are not, to use Wright's words, "stupid or selfish or hurtful" remains that we sometimes don't see the "asked" for result. Yet sometimes we do. And our logical, process-oriented brains desperately long for insight as to why. We crave a formula.

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[4] N.T. Wright, *John for Everyone, Part 2*, p.45
[5] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VcHCYjItqPQ&t=40s; https://ntwrightpage.com/2016/03/30/the-glory-and-the-prayer/

DISAPPOINTMENT, HOPE, FAITH, AND EXPECTANCY

One common solution to this pain-point has already been mentioned. We can get instant relief by simply shrugging and assuming that Jesus could not have meant what His words seem to mean because our experience contradicts them. Or that His words applied only to His hearers in that moment and for their lifetimes, not ours.

Another popular refuge is to limit the "fruit" believers are commissioned to bear to "souls" alone. In this case, eschatology moves into the driver's seat. If nearly all kingdom progress and expansion is pushed off into the age after Jesus' physical return to earth, then the only rational objective is to get as many people into the ark as possible before the door closes.

Years ago, a sketch comedy television show created a humorous fake commercial for a fictional dating service for thirty-something singles called "Lowered Expectations." In a similar, sadder way, the impulse to avoid disappointment by expecting little or nothing as a result of prayer is a powerful one. Disappointment stings. And the higher the stakes—a disease-stricken child's life, a spouse's willingness to stay in the marriage, a wayward son or daughter's lifestyle choices, a tormented loved one's depression—the deeper the disappointment if we don't see the breakthrough we've asked for.

Yet the New Testament taken as a whole makes much of *faith* and *hope*. These two are runners up only to *love* in Paul's tripartite construction in 1 Corinthians 13:13 (faith, hope, and love). On more than one occasion Jesus looked around at hopeless or discouraged followers and asked, "Where is your faith?"

It's hard to square a low-expectation brand of Christianity with the New Covenant revelation of Jesus' living, active, Body—endowed with His authority and endued with heavenly power—pushing back darkness wherever they go and methodically making His enemies a footstool for His feet. (Acts 2:34-35; 1 Corinthians 15:25-27; Hebrews 10:12-13; et. al.)

So how do we bridge this gap between revelation promise and real-world experience? How do we live in the tension between Jesus' stunning declarations and our staggering disappointments?

NAVIGATING THE GAP

The way forward involves four elements: Honor, Trust, Humility, and Perseverance.

First, we must avoid the trap of interpreting the Scriptures in the light of our personal experience rather than interpreting personal experience in the light of the Scriptures. In the wake of genuine disappointment, it's so very tempting to put the promises of God on trial with our personal results as "Exhibit A." The alternative is to esteem the revealed will and Word of God. Honor.

Second, to be a mature believer is to become comfortable with mystery. To surrender one's need to be fully "in the know." To abandon the hunger for foolproof formulas, patented processes, simplistic solutions. In this already-but-not-yet era we "know in part and prophesy in part." (1 Corinthians 13:9) If we could clearly see the invisible realm all around us, we would likely have a far greater understanding of the spiritual obstacles, dynamics, and complexities involved in the delivery of what is being "asked." Trust.

What's more, living in that now-and-not-yet tension requires a humble willingness to try and fail. To respond in obedience to the prompt while leaving the results up to heaven's host and heaven's King. To be willing to ask boldly and big; and in the asking, to risk looking foolish. Humility.

Finally, the willingness to contend for heaven's agenda with dogged determination. To absorb the blow of disappointment, pick oneself up off the ground, and run back toward the sound of clashing swords. To take seriously the privilege of partnering with the King in advancing His agenda by giving human, material voice to His desires and decrees. And to continue to do so, again and again. Perseverance.

TAKEAWAYS

So, what are we to do with these four "blank-check" statements embedded in this oh, so very consequential conversation? We've seen that those checks are not quite as blank as they seem lifted from their context. Indeed, the context adds much in the way of guiding us on embracing and applying them in faith and hope. The setting of those four statements offers us four exhortations:

1. Keep the glory of the Father and the Son constantly in view.

Jesus directly linked two of the four statements to the glorification of the Father (and the Father's glorifying of Him). The finished work of Christ offers us the extraordinary opportunity to participate in the grand enterprise of covering the earth with the knowledge of God's glory.

2. Expect fruitfulness to organically result from abiding.

Jesus twice linked these prayer promises to the matter of the believer's fruitfulness. This strongly suggests that prayer is at least one vehicle through which "fruit" is borne. And it goes without saying that we should define fruit the same way the Vine defines it.

3. We simply cannot do this without the power of the Spirit.

Jesus bracketed several of these declarations with explanations concerning the role of the soon-arriving Holy Spirit. We do well to take note of that. And our effectiveness in prayer would improve as a result. Why? Because we don't know what we don't know.

It's probably fair to say that most of the praying we do is done either from our heads or

our hearts (in contrast to by the Spirit.) We often pray solely from our head-knowledge-what we know about the situation and what we're told the desired outcome is. We pray based only on what we can perceive with our five natural senses. Or, moved with human compassion and empathy, our praying flows exclusively from our soulish emotions.

Yet, Jesus in His farewell discourse positions the Holy Spirit as being our Helper—the One whose role is to lead us into all truth and to show us things to come. The revealer of the will and ways of God. Paul surely had this in view when he wrote:

> *For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons and daughters of God…. Now in the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know what to pray for as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. (Romans 8:14, 26-27, NASB)*

How could our asking not be more consistently effective if it was consistently informed and animated by the Holy Spirit?

4. Embrace the happy news that the Father cares about our joy.

As previously noted, Jesus' fourth and final "ask anything" declaration had the believer's overflowing joy as the objective. And there are few things more joy-inducing than making a Kingdom-advancing, darkness-dispelling request on behalf of the object of God's intense love and seeing that request produce a breakthrough—salvation, healing, deliverance, provision, or freedom.

That's fun. That's authentic joy.

Finally, let's heed the advice of N.T. Wright, quoted above. Let us not "go soft on that marvelous word *anything*." Let's believe Jesus meant what He said. Let's contend in prayer with honor for God's Word, trust in His goodness, humility about the limits of our own knowledge, and perseverance in the face of setbacks.

THE FOUR PRAYER PROMISES IN JOHN 13–16

Verse	Text (NRSV)	Context Keys
John 14:13–14	*"I will do **whatever you ask** in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it."*	**The Glory of the Father:** Jesus ties prayer directly to revealing God's character. Answered prayer acts as an earthly reflection of the perfect unity between the Father and the Son.

Verse	Text (NRSV)	Context Keys
John 15:7	*"If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, **ask for whatever you wish**, and it will be done for you."*	**Fruitful Union with Christ:** The promise is dependent on intimacy. When Jesus' words live inside a believer, their desires naturally unwarp, reshape, and transform to match His desires.
John 15:16	*"You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you **whatever you ask** in my name."*	**The Mission Command:** This is a "blank check" for mission equipment. The Father guarantees provision because the disciples are sent out into a hostile world to enforce and
John 16:23–24	*"...Very truly, I tell you, **if you ask anything of the Father in my name, he will give it to you**. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete."*	**A New Era of Direct Access:** Because of Jesus' departure and resurrection, a new relationship is born. Believers no longer need a human mediator; they have open, direct communication with the Father.

Sam Storms
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THE JOY AND POWER OF FRIENDSHIP WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT (JOHN 14-17)

"The Holy Spirit has long been the Cinderella of the Trinity. The other two sisters may have gone to the theological ball; the Holy Spirit got left behind every time. But not now. The rise of the charismatic movement within virtually every mainstream church has ensured that the Holy Spirit figures prominently on the theological agenda. A new experience of the reality and power of the Spirit has had a major impact upon the theological discussion of the person and work of the Holy Spirit" (Alister McGrath).

It's important that we remember from the start that although much of a technical and theological nature will be said of the Holy Spirit in this paper, what we are talking about is the precious *person* of the Holy Spirit who has agreed to live in us forever as the temple of God. This is the glorious *person* who, in spite of often being grieved by human sin, preserves and upholds and sustains saving faith in our hearts so that we don't slip away from Jesus and down the slope into eternal damnation. And he does this every moment of every day even when we ignore his presence and presumptuously take his mercy for granted.

This is the majestic *person* who gently but powerfully opens our eyes to behold wonderful things in God's Word (Ps 119:18). This is the breathtaking *person* who enlightens the eyes of our heart (Eph 1:15-18) so that we might comprehend the majesty and mercy of our calling in Christ Jesus and the hope we have for an eternity in God's presence. This is the awesome *person* who lovingly restrains our sinful impulses and opens our eyes to see the beauty of God in a sunset and, contrary to everything we deserve, enables us to behold the saving grace of Jesus in his redemptive work.

This is the stunningly beautiful *person* who remarkably and inexplicably supplies us with encouragement and consolation and confidence and joy and peace and hope. This is the splendid *person* who never grows weary of turning our attention to and riveting our sight upon the all-satisfying splendor of Jesus, even when our heart instead feels drawn to dwell on the sordid and joy-stealing filth of this world.

This is the precious *person* who keeps our hearts united to Christ when we feel tempted to give ourselves over into sexual immorality, who continually supplies us with strength to say No to greed and envy and unforgiveness and say Yes to the real joy of purity.

When we pause and think deeply about what is being said when we speak of grieving the Spirit or quenching the Spirit, we discover something more than a little profound. It is truly breathtaking. I pray that the Spirit himself will guide, direct, and illumine our minds to properly grasp the glory of his personality and power.[6]

> "Take away the dispensation of the Spirit, and his effectual operations in all the intercourse that is between God and man; be ashamed to avow or profess the work attributed unto him in the gospel – and Christianity is plucked up by the roots."[7]

Gordon Fee was one of the more prominent NT scholars of our day. In one of his books, he refers to the struggle one student had with understanding how the Holy Spirit could be a person. "God the Father makes perfectly good sense to me," said the student, "and God the Son I can quite understand; but the Holy Spirit is a gray, oblong blur" (5-6).

I can sympathize with this student's struggles. After all, the words "Father" and "Son" are used every day in our world to describe close, intimate relationships with actual persons we know. But the word "Spirit" doesn't immediately suggest a personal being with whom we might enter into a relationship. So let me ask you a question: How many of you today can honestly say that you have a personal relationship with the Holy Spirit?

Often times when we are sharing our faith with non-Christians, we say to them: "Wouldn't you like to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ?" That's easy to understand. After all, Jesus was a human being. Yes, he was and is and always will be God, but he is God in human flesh. You could touch him and hug him and hear him speak and look into his eyes. But the Holy Spirit is, well, a spirit! How do you hug a spirit? You can't see a spirit. You can't eat dinner with a spirit. So how are we supposed to have a personal relationship with the Holy Spirit? Perhaps we ought to ask the question: Should we *even expect* to have a personal relationship with the Spirit?

Yes, we should. So let me take a few minutes here at the start to help you understand why the Holy Spirit is not a "gray, oblong blur" but is in fact a genuine, thinking, feeling, willing, person with whom we are to enter into a close intimate relationship.

Before I do that, I need to say something about people who actually think it is unbiblical to think or talk much of the Holy Spirit. They aren't being blasphemous in this regard, but are simply trying to honor what they believe is the point of what Jesus said in John 16:13-15.

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[6] For a complete listing of all 328 references to the Holy Spirit in both the OT and NT, see Gregg Allison & Andreas Kostenberger, *The Holy Spirit* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2020), 216-219.

[7] John Owen, *Pneumatologia: A Discourse concerning the Holy Spirit,* in *The Works of John Owen,* vol. 3, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 8.

> "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you."

The point they derive from this statement is that the Spirit will never draw attention to himself. His divinely appointed task in the economy of redemption is to shine a light on Jesus. "He will glorify me," said Jesus. Therefore, anything that tends to glorify the Spirit himself is not of God. The Spirit is supremely Christocentric. Any ministry today, any teaching, vision, mission, or otherwise that elevates the Spirit above the Son, is decidedly unbiblical.

This is a healthy reminder for many who have severed the person and work of the Spirit from the person and work of the Son. Those who make experiencing the Holy Spirit an end in itself have failed to grasp the principal goal for which the Spirit has come.

However, we must be careful to avoid the error of *reductionism*, as if the whole of the Spirit's ministry can be reduced to Christology, as if the Spirit does *nothing but* glorify Christ. It's the mistake of arguing that the *primary* purpose of the Spirit's coming is the *sole* purpose of his coming. The principal aim of the Spirit in what he does is to awaken us to the glory, splendor, and centrality of the work of Christ Jesus. But this does not mean that it is less than the Holy Spirit at work when what he does awakens us also to his own glory and power and abiding presence.

We should remember that the Holy Spirit inspired hundreds of biblical passages that speak about himself and his work! The Holy Spirit makes himself known through a variety of spiritual and physical manifestations. People often could see the presence of the Spirit (cf. Acts 8 and 10). Consider his descent on Jesus in the form of a dove at his baptism, or his appearance with rushing wind and tongues of fire at Pentecost.

In Acts 13:1-2, it is the Holy Spirit who gives direction in response to fasting and worship. Acts 15:28 suggests that the apostles and elders of the Jerusalem church sought the Spirit in their decisions to find out what "seemed good to the Holy Spirit." The Spirit also bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God (Rom. 8:16), and cries, "Abba, Father" (Gal. 4:6). He provides a guarantee or a down payment of our future fellowship with him in heaven (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5) and reveals his desires to us so that we can be led by those desires and follow them (Rom. 8:4-16; Gal. 5:16-25). He gives gifts that manifest his presence (1 Cor. 12:7-11). And from time to time, he works miraculous signs and wonders and miracles that strongly attest to the presence of God in the preaching of the gospel (Heb 2:4; compare 1 Cor. 2:4; Rom. 15:19).

The Holy Spirit is a Person

Let me begin by saying something about the words used in the Bible to describe the Holy Spirit. In the OT the Hebrew word most often translated "spirit" is *ruach* (94x). Says Anthony Thiselton: "It is an accident of convention that 'spirit' (*ruach*) in Hebrew is feminine, and 'spirit' (*pneuma*) in Greek is neuter. It does not suggest that Greeks viewed children as subpersonal merely because *teknon*, 'child,' is neuter. God and the Holy Spirit transcend the human genders, so that both 'masculine' and 'feminine' qualities are ascribed to them, as biblical passages about fatherly and motherly qualities apply to them."[8]

Sadly, there are times when the precious Spirit of God is treated as if he were no more than an ethereal energy, the divine equivalent to an electric current: stick your finger of faith into the socket of his "anointing presence" and you'll experience a spiritual shock of biblical proportions! The mechanical manipulation and virtual de-personalizing of the Spirit has frightened many evangelicals and made them understandably skeptical of any claims to miraculous activity. In view of such patterns of "ministry," any talk of experiencing the Spirit is summarily dismissed as dishonoring to his exalted status as God and a failure to embrace his sovereignty over us rather than ours over him.

Here is why we believe the Holy Spirit is not just a power or a principle but a genuine person. When you read about the Spirit in the Bible you quickly discover that all the attributes that we typically associate with a person are found in the Spirit. For example, the Holy Spirit has a mind. He thinks, reasons, understands, deliberates, and reflects. We read this in Isaiah 11:2 – "the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord"). In John 14:26 the Spirit is described as teaching us all things. In Romans 8:27 we read that "he who searches the hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit". Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2:10-11 that "no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God."

The Holy Spirit also has feelings. He experiences emotions. In Romans 8:26 we are told that the Spirit "groans" and in Romans 15:30 that he feels "love." Paul warns us in Ephesians 4:30 not to "grieve" the Holy Spirit. In other words, our unrepentant sin causes pain to the Spirit. It is distressing and disturbing to him. When the early church had to make a decision on whether or not to accept Gentiles into the body of Christ on the same terms as Jews, we read in Acts 15:28 that "it seemed good to the Holy Spirit" to do so.

The Holy Spirit has a will. He deliberates between options and makes choices. We read in Acts 16:7 that "the Spirit of Jesus did not allow" Paul and his companions to enter into Bithynia but instead led them into Macedonia. And in 1 Corinthians 12:11 Paul says clearly that when it comes to who gets what spiritual gifts that the Spirit "apportions

[8] Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Holy Spirit – In Biblical Teaching, through the Centuries, and Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 121-22.

[gifts] to each one individually as he wills."

The Holy Spirit performs all the functions of a personal being.

- He talks (Mark 13:11; Acts 1:16; 8:29; 10:19; 11:12; 13:2; 21:11; 1 Tim. 4:1; Heb. 3:7; Rev. 2:7 ["what the Spirit says to the churches"; see also 2:11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22])
- He testifies (John 15:26; 16:23)
- He can be sinned against (Matt. 12:31)
- He can be lied to (Acts 5:3)
- He can be tested/tempted (Acts 5:9)
- He can be insulted (Heb. 10:29)
- He enters into relationship with other persons (2 Cor. 13:14)
- He encourages (Acts 9:31)
- He strengthens (Eph. 3:16)
- He teaches (Luke 12:12; John 14:26; 1 Cor. 2:13)

We see clear and undisputed evidence that the Holy Spirit is a person in John 14:16 where Jesus says that the Father will give to us "another Helper" or "another Comforter" or "Counselor." Someone who helps and comforts and counsels is by definition a person, not merely a power or impersonal force. But notice also that Jesus refers to the Spirit as "another" Helper. In other words, Jesus is saying that the Helper the Father is sending you is "just like me." He's "another" Helper. He will help and comfort and counsel you just like I have while I've been with you physically on the earth.

The Holy Spirit is a Divine Person

The Holy Spirit is more than a person. He is a divine person. That is to say, the Holy Spirit is God. We all affirm that the Father is God and that the Son is God but so too and no less so is the Holy Spirit God. Several things in the Bible affirm this to be true.

1. What is said of God is said of the Spirit (Acts 5:3-4).

"But Peter said, 'Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit . . .? You have not lied to man but to God" (Acts 5:3-4).

2. The Holy Spirit is identified with Yahweh (Acts 7:51, quoting Ps. 78:17, 21; Heb. 10:15-17, quoting Jer. 31:33-34).

3. The activity of God = the activity of the Holy Spirit (e.g., in creation, conversion, etc.).

4. "God said" = "the Spirit said" (Isa. 6:9/Acts 28:25).

5. We are the "temple of God because the Holy Spirit dwells in us" (Eph. 2:22; 1 Cor.

6:19). If the Holy Spirit is not God, how could we properly be called the temple of God simply because the Spirit indwells us?

6. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is the only unforgiveable sin (Mt. 12:31; Mk. 3:28).

7. Attributes/Actions of God are ascribed to the Spirit.

a. Omniscience (Isa. 40:13-14; 1 Cor. 2:10-11)
b. Omnipresence (Ps. 139:7-8)
c. Omnipotence (as seen in the Spirit's role in creation [Gen. 1], providence [Ps. 104:30], regeneration, etc.; see especially Zech. 4:6)
d. Eternality (Heb. 9:14)
e. Holiness (used of the Spirit only twice in OT: Ps. 51:11 and Isa. 63:10)

8. The names of the Spirit suggest (require?) his deity.

a. Spirit of glory (1 Pt. 4:14)
b. Spirit of grace (Heb. 10:29)
c. Spirit of life (Rom. 8:2)
d. Spirit of truth (John 14:16; 15:26; 16:13)
e. Spirit of wisdom and revelation (Eph. 1:17)

9. The linking of the Spirit with the Father and Son (Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14; 1 Cor. 12:4)

Take special note of several texts in Paul's letters where the work of saving sinners is formulated in Trinitarian terms: Rom. 5:1-8; 2 Cor. 3:1-4:6; Gal. 4:4-6; Eph. 1:3-14. See also 1 Thess. 1:4-5; 2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Cor. 1:4-7; 2:4-5; 2:12; 6:11; 6:19-20; 2 Cor. 1:21-22; Gal. 3:1-5; Rom. 8:3-4; 8:15-17; Col. 3:16; Eph. 1:17; 2:18; 2:20-22; Phil. 3:3.

Consider what Paul says in Romans 8:9 – "You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him."

Here the Holy Spirit is referred to in three ways: (1) as the Spirit; (2) as the Spirit of God (the Father); and (3) as the Spirit of Christ. There are not, however, three Spirits, but one Spirit who simultaneously sustains the same relationship to both Father and Son. Note also: ***the presence of the Holy Spirit is the key criterion in determining if someone is a Christian. To have the Holy Spirit is to be a Christian. To be devoid of the Spirit is to be devoid of Christ.***

When Paul says that the Spirit is "of God" or "of Christ" he does not mean the Spirit was created by God the Father or by God the Son. Rather he is "of God" because he shares God's nature. He is one with God in terms of the divine essence.

The Spirit is a Divine Person with a Purpose

But I also want you to see that the divine person of the Holy Spirit has a clear and distinct purpose in your life. I hardly need to remind you, but I will anyway, that everything we know of God the Father and of Jesus does not come naturally. Rather, we owe everything to the ministry of the Spirit. Everything we understand in God's Word, whatever degree of insight we gain into the measureless truths it embodies, we must attribute to the ministry of the Spirit. Whatever positive moral change we've experienced in life, whatever conformity to Christ we've seen develop in our spiritual walk, the Holy Spirit did it. Whatever strength we receive when our weakness threatens to overwhelm, whatever encouragement we feel at times of despair and doubt, whatever sanctifying influence we sense in our souls, we owe to the third person of the Godhead.

Let me unpack the Spirit's purpose with six "P's".

First, the Holy Spirit dwells or lives in you to provide you with ***power*** to do what you could never do in your own strength. He provides the power or the God-given ability to do what God wants us to do and what, apart from the Spirit, we otherwise could not do.

- Power for hope (Rom. 15:13)
- Power for miracles (Lk. 24:49; Acts 1:8; Rom. 15:18-19)
- Power for prayer (Eph. 6:18-19; Rom. 8:26-27)
- Power for praise (Eph. 5:18-19; Phil. 3:3)
- Power for preaching (Acts 4:33)

Second, the Holy Spirit has been given to us for ***practice***. By the word "practice" I have in mind what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:7 where we are told that the Spirit imparts spiritual gifts to us and energizes us to practice them for the building up of the body of Christ.

Third, the Spirit is in us for the purpose of ***purity***. That is to say, the Spirit sanctifies our motives and actions and delivers us from the power and pollution of sin. The Spirit lives within us to cultivate and to develop his fruit in our lives (Gal. 5:22-23).

Fourth, the Spirit is here with us and in us for the purpose of ***presentation***. That is to say, he presents to us the truth of God's Word. He reveals, he illumines, and he awakens us to the meaning of who God is and what his will is for our life (Eph. 1:17; 1 John 2:20,27).

Fifth, the word ***presence*** points to the Spirit's role as the one who makes known to us and mediates for us the person of Jesus. His role is to shine a floodlight, as it were, on the person of Jesus. As Jesus later says in John 15:26, "when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he

will bear witness about me." And again in John 16:14 Jesus says that when the Holy Spirit comes "he will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you."

Sixth, and finally, the Holy Spirit is in us for the purpose of ***prevention***. That is to say, he restrains our sin. He not only positively enables us to live in obedience to Christ's commands, but he also exerts a restraining or preventative influence in keeping our sinful impulses in check.

The Promise of the Spirit's Presence in Us
John 14:15-17

[15] "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. [16] And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, [17] 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. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you" (John 14:15-18).

There are two things that I want you to see about our Lord's promise of the Holy Spirit. Never forget that the disciples in the upper room with Jesus were facing the most excruciating crisis of their lives. Jesus is about to leave them. He's going to be crucified. He's told them repeatedly that he will soon depart. Needless to say, they are crestfallen. They are crushed and worried and probably terrified of what the future might hold once Jesus is gone.

The second thing you should note is found in v. 15. Jesus says this: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." I suspect that the disciples in the first century were just as overwhelmed by that statement as you and I are today. "Yes, I love you, Lord. But Lord, I'm so weak. I'm so prone to serve my own interests and not yours. I'm selfish and arrogant and prideful and greedy. How can I ever hope to keep your commandments, especially once you are no longer here with us?"

Jesus knew this would run through their minds. On the one hand, they are discouraged and frightened by the prospect of Jesus' departure. On the other hand, they are terrified by the call to obey his commands. So what does Jesus do? He tells them: "Don't worry. Don't be afraid. Don't be discouraged. Don't be overwhelmed. I know my departure is of great concern to you. And I know that you feel utterly incompetent and ill-equipped to obey my commands. That is precisely why I'm going to ask the Father to send the Holy Spirit to you. He will help you. He will encourage you. He will strengthen you. He will guide you when you start to wander off the path. He will teach you. He will remind you of what I've said. He will comfort you when you are frustrated and depressed. He will counsel you when you are confused."

I want you to see several critically important truths about what Jesus says concerning the coming of the Spirit. By the way, the Spirit is sent to us in fulfillment of this promise on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2).

First, there is considerable debate over how we should translate the word in v. 16 that is rendered by the ESV as ***"Helper".*** I'm inclined to say that all of the suggestions carry a measure of truth. Yes, the Holy Spirit comes and indwells us to help us in every conceivable way. Others render this word as ***"Counselor"*** or ***"Advocate."*** The point is that the Spirit is like someone who stands alongside and defends your case in court. Thus the idea would be of a legal assistant. The word is used in this sense of Jesus in 1 John 2:2. Some render it ***"Comforter",*** inasmuch as the Spirit comforts us in trials and struggles and pain.

Regardless of the word we choose, the point is that the Spirit is one who is to be experienced. Remember that Jesus is trying to reassure them in their discouragement and fear by saying that another Helper or Counselor or Advocate will come. Their sense of abandonment will be overcome by the Spirit, pointing to some sort of experiential ministry on his part to encourage and uplift.

Second, when he comes, he comes forever! He will be "with" us, says Jesus, "forever" (v. 16b). He will never leave us. He permanently indwells us. This is surely one of the most encouraging promises found anywhere in Scripture. Jesus does not say the Spirit will be with us "only as long as we behave ourselves" or "only as long as we don't commit a sin" or "only as long as we live up to expectations." Can we grieve the Spirit by our sin? Yes (Eph. 4:24). Can we quench the Spirit by treating prophetic words with contempt? Yes (1 Thess. 5:19-20).

But the Spirit will never abandon the children of God. He will never leave us or forsake us. It is in light of this that a brief word needs to be said about what David prayed in Psalm 51. Remember that this is his psalm or prayer of confession following his adultery with Bathsheba and his complicity in the murder of her husband, Uriah the Hittite.

David can't bear the thought of the loss of intimacy of fellowship and its attendant joys, and thus prays: *"Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me"* (v. 11). What does David mean when he prays that God would not take his Spirit from him? Does he envision the possible loss of his salvation? Does he envision the withdrawal of divine grace? No.

Aside from the saving activity of the Holy Spirit in the OT and the empowering ministry by which believers are sanctified and enabled to live holy lives, the Holy Spirit was poured out on select individuals to equip them to perform important tasks in the covenant community of Israel. For example:

(1) Craftsmen who worked on the tabernacle/temple (Exod. 31:1-6)
(2) Civil administrators (such as Moses and the 70 elders in Num. 11:16-17,25-26)
(3) Military commanders (such as Joshua; Num. 27:18)
(4) Judges (appointed and empowered to rule over Israel as in Judges 3:10; 6:34)
(5) Samson (Judges 14:5-6,19; 15:14; 16:20)

(6) Prophets (1 Chron. 12:18; Micah 3:8)
(7) Kings over Israel (Saul in 1 Sam. 10:1,6,10; 16:14; and David in 1 Sam. 16:12-13)

Thus, there was a ministry of the Holy Spirit in the OT, unrelated to personal salvation or character, designed solely to empower, enable and equip someone for a task to which God had appointed him/her. Such, I believe, is what David has in mind in Psalm 51:11. His prayer is that God would not withdraw the enabling anointing of the Spirit that empowers and equips him to lead Israel as King. Indeed, he may well have had in mind that disturbing scene where "the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul" (1 Sam. 16:14) and prays that such would never befall him.

Third, the Holy Spirit is not given to the world at large but only to believers in particular. "The world cannot receive" him, says Jesus in v. 17. The world has no knowledge of the Spirit, no experience of the Spirit. Why? Because the world doesn't know me. Only those who know and love and believe in me will receive this presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus says much the same thing later in v. 19. "Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me." And in v. 22, Judas (not Iscariot) asked him, "Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?" What these texts indicate is that this special relationship of intimacy and love and the abiding presence of the risen Christ in us through his Spirit in us is something that the world cannot understand or see or know and will never experience until such time as someone repents and turns to Christ in faith.

Fourth, the Holy Spirit won't just be "with" us, as if a companion walking alongside. He will be "in" us. He lives inside, not just alongside. He doesn't come to us speaking to us from outside who you are. He comes into us. He lives in us. He makes his dwelling and his home in our hearts, minds, affections, and in our bodies. We are his temple (Eph. 2:21-22). The apostle Paul asks this question: "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?" (1 Cor. 3:16). Again, later in 1 Corinthians 6:19 he again asks: "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God?"

Clearly Jesus is saying that the Day of Pentecost marks a massively significant shift in the way God's people relate to the Holy Spirit. We know that people in the OT were regenerated by the Holy Spirit. We know that the Holy Spirit would come "upon" certain people to empower and equip them to do specified tasks. The Spirit is described as coming "on" those who constructed the tabernacle, and as coming "on" the kings of Israel to equip them and aid them in leading God's people. The Spirit would come "on" prophets and military commanders and others to do what God had commanded them. But in no case did the Spirit come "into" them and remain there forever. The permanent, abiding presence of the Spirit "in" the believer is something that first came to pass on the Day of Pentecost.

Fifth, the presence of the Holy Spirit in us is nothing less than the presence of Jesus himself in us. Look again at John 14:18 – "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you." Some think this "coming" of Jesus refers to his appearance to the disciples after the resurrection (see John 20:19-23). Others argue that this "coming" of Jesus is the second coming that will occur at the end of history. But I'm inclined to believe that when the Spirit comes to them to indwell them forever it is Jesus who comes to indwell them forever. That's not because the Spirit and Jesus are the same person, but because they are the same God!

Sixth, the coming and abiding presence of the Holy Spirit in us is equivalent to an orphan being adopted and taken into the home of loving parents who devote themselves to doing everything that a child needs done. "I will not leave you as orphans," says Jesus in v. 18. Yes, Jesus will "leave" them physically. He is about to be crucified and raised from the dead and will ascend to the right hand of the Father in heaven. But when the Spirit comes it is the Spirit "of Christ" who comes. And whatever bereavement or loss or loneliness that his disciples might otherwise have felt will be overcome by the presence of the Holy Spirit in them.

The Teaching Ministry of the Holy Spirit
John 14:25-26

[25] "These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. [26] 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)

Why are you and your church committed to the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible? Why do you think I preach from the Bible verse by verse, chapter by chapter, book by book? It is because I believe what Jesus said here in vv. 25-26. There are other statements in Scripture and other reasons that account for my approach to the Bible, but here we see one of them.

Jesus says to his disciples: "Men, don't be afraid of forgetting all the things that I've taught you. When times get tough and you find yourself fuzzy and vague about something I said during our time together on earth, I assure you of this: the Holy Spirit, whom I told you earlier would be sent by the Father to dwell in you forever, he 'will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.' If you are afraid that when you sit down to write about it you'll make a mistake, don't worry. The Holy Spirit will keep you from error and will make clear to you everything that you need to say and write and communicate."

I know it's difficult for people in 2026 to understand this, but the disciples in the upper room didn't have I-phones to take pictures or record lectures. So what assurance do we have that what they later wrote in the NT epistles is what Jesus really said and did? The assurance comes from the ministry of the Holy Spirit!

The Spirit will not make up things that never occurred. He will stir your memory, says Jesus. He will bring back into conscious awareness the multiplicity of things I taught in the Sermon on the Mount. It's almost as if he is saying to the apostle John:

> "John, let me single you out as an example. Many years down the road you will sit down to write a record of who I am, what I did, and what I said. You will want to make known to people everything you heard from me in what people will eventually call the Upper Room or Farewell Discourse. And my promise to you is that the Spirit will bring it all back to your remembrance and that he will teach you what it means so you can make it known to others."

People often apply this promise to the present day, to those of us who weren't in the upper room with Jesus. Is that legitimate? In one sense, Yes, and in another sense, No. First of all, the words were spoken specifically to the apostles and constitute a promise to them regarding how they would recall and write down all they heard from Jesus and saw him do. So in that sense it is not a promise that we today can apply indiscriminately to ourselves. But in another sense the answer is Yes, the promise is also for us. How so?

Look with me at what the apostle John, who recorded these very words of Jesus, said to all Christians in 1 John chapter two. There is no doubt in my mind that when he wrote these verses there was in his mind the words of Jesus in John 14. In this text John is telling them (and us) that many people are false teachers (he actually calls them "antichrists"). But we need not fear them and shouldn't listen to them. Why? Because we have the Holy Spirit who teaches us:

> "But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge. . . I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you. But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie – just as it has taught you, abide in him" (1 John 2:20, 26-27).

The "anointing" here is a reference to the Holy Spirit who dwells within us forever. And John says that we don't need to listen to these false teachers because we have the Spirit who teaches us the truth about Christ. Notice closely: the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit is in us. The anointing presence of the Spirit "abides" in us. And his ministry is more than sufficient to keep us from falling into error or theological heresy regarding the incarnation and atoning death of Jesus.

But what does John mean when he says that we have no need for anyone to teach us? This cannot mean that there is to be no official teaching in the church but only individual or private study, for John is, in this very statement, teaching them/us! Also, the NT speaks often of "teaching" in the church (Acts 4:18; 5:28,42; 2 Tim. 2:24) and of "teachers" (Eph. 4:11; 1 Cor. 12:29). John's statement must be interpreted contextually.

His point is that the original gospel truths which they received (v. 24) were not to be supplemented or altered by the "new" teaching of these antichrists. Any "new knowledge" or "revelation" must be tested or measured by the standard of the original proclamation.

The competency of the Holy Spirit is indicated by the words "is true and is no lie" (v. 27). Here, then, are the two safeguards against error: the apostolic message and the Holy Spirit, both received at conversion ("you heard" [v. 24] and "you received" [v. 27]). One is objective (the word, the message) and the other subjective (the Spirit). Both are essential.

So, yes, the Holy Spirit continues to illumine our minds to enable us to understand the truth of Scripture. He instructs and convicts us. He guides our thoughts and preserves in our hearts our confidence in the truth of the gospel.

The Witness of the Spirit to Jesus
John 15:26-27

[26] "But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. [27] And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning." (John 15.26-27)

What is the Christian's response to hatred, persecution, opposition, and the world's rejection of Jesus? In the first place, we shouldn't be surprised by it. In fact, one reason Jesus says what he does in this passage is so that his followers won't be caught off guard or surprised when the opposition to them erupts. He says in 16:4, "But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you." And John the Apostle, who recorded these words for us, said the same thing in his first epistle: "Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you" (1 John 3:13).

The followers of Jesus will have the same effect on the world of rebellious unbelievers as Jesus did. We will seem to be out of step with the trajectory of society. We will appear to be "on the wrong side of history." We will refuse to embrace the changing ethics of our day. If believers are in union with Christ and devote all their allegiance to the one to whom all loyalty and worship are due, the world of rebels will not respond with kindness.

But we still need to know what we are to do when hatred and opposition appear. The answer is given in vv. 26-27. There we are told that Jesus will send to us from the Father the Holy Spirit, the "Helper" who will live in us and be with us forever. When the hatred of the world feels like it will overwhelm us, we draw on the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. When opposition to the gospel increases, we are assured that there is one with us now who will "help" us hold our ground and not compromise. When we

wonder how we should respond to questions that are asked about Christianity we have the assurance of the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit who will give us the words to speak.

When Jesus spoke these words in the upper room they had immediate practical application to his disciples in the first century. Notice that he tells them: "It isn't just that the Holy Spirit, the Helper, will teach you about me and remind you of all that I've said. He will also empower you and encourage you to stand firmly and courageously in the face of opposition so that you can testify and bear witness to this world about who I am."

Why the Spirit Inside You is Better than Jesus Beside You
John 16:5-15

[5] But now I am going to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' [6] But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. [7] 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. [8] And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: [9] concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; [10] concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; [11] concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. [12] "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. [13] When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. [14] He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. [15] All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you. (John 16:5-15)

I stole the title for this section of the paper from the sub-title to J. D. Greear's book, *Jesus Continued: Why the Spirit Inside You is Better than Jesus Beside You*. It's an excellent book that I recommend you read. Even if you don't get around to reading it, I suspect that the sub-title will surely capture your attention. Is it really true that having the Holy Spirit live inside us forever is actually better than walking and talking in the physical presence of Jesus at our side?

Something similar to this is found in 1 Peter 1:8. There Peter says that you and I can love Jesus and believe in Jesus and rejoice in Jesus even though we do not "see" Jesus. Peter and the other apostles and hundreds of men and women who were contemporaries of Jesus and lived in Palestine when he did, had the incredible privilege of seeing the Son of God incarnate. They were eyewitnesses of the God-man Christ Jesus. We are not.

But Peter wants you to understand that this doesn't put you at a disadvantage to him or the others who were physically alive when Jesus walked the earth. As great and glorious as it would have been to see Jesus, the fact that we didn't does not mean that

our faith and love and joy in him are any less genuine or less fervent or less passionate or less pleasing to God. Of course, the day is coming when we will see him perfectly and forever, but at least for now, we are in the same position as were those to whom Peter wrote his letter.

In fact, let me go even further and say something that may strike you as outrageous when you first hear it. I first heard it from a sermon that John Piper preached. I thought he was nuts when he said it, but on deeper reflection, I think he's right.

"The gospels," said Piper, by which he means the written record of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, "the gospels, are better than being there!"

Let's not forget that hundreds, perhaps thousands, of people who were alive when Jesus walked the earth saw him with their physical eyes and yet never truly "saw" him in the most meaningful sense of that term. The "sight" that you and I have been given of the glory of God as revealed in Jesus is immeasurably greater than the physical sight of those who lived in the first century. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 4:6 that "the God who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." This is a spiritual perceiving, a very real and life-changing, heart-warming revelation of the glory and splendor and beauty of Jesus that many who saw him with their physical eyes never experienced. But you and I do.

How do we gain this "sight"? We gain it from the Holy Spirit speaking to us through the Word of God. When you and I read Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, we can see the fullness of the revelation of God in Christ. The people who lived when Jesus walked the earth only had momentary, brief encounters with him. They might have heard him speak briefly as he passed through their villages. They might have watched a short snippet, as it were, of his ministry to the poor and sick. And I'm sure it was wonderful. But we have the panorama of God's revelation of Christ in the four gospels. We see and know far more of him through this written record than they could ever have known. Here's how Piper put it:

> "The gospels are better than being there. You are taken into the inner circle of the apostolic band where you never could have gone. You go with him through Gethsemane and the trial and the crucifixion and the resurrection and the meetings after the resurrection. You hear whole sermons and long discourses—not in isolated snatches on hillsides but in rich God-inspired contexts that take you deeper than you ever could have gone as a perplexed peasant in Galilee. You see the whole range of his character and power which nobody on earth saw as fully as you can now see in the gospels: you see his freedom from anxiety with no place to lay his head, his courage in the face of opposition, his unanswerable wisdom, his honoring women, his tenderness with children, his compassion toward lepers, his meekness in suffering, his patience with Peter, his tears over

> Jerusalem, his blessing those who cursed him, his heart for the nations, his love for the glory of God, his simplicity and devotion, his power to still storms and heal the sick and multiply bread and cast out demons.
>
> Though you do not now see him, yet in another sense you do see him far better than thousands who saw him face to face. You see the glory of God shining in this man's face at every turn in the gospels. And because you see him with the eyes of the heart, you love him and trust him and rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory. This is true Christianity."

Now, whether or not you agree with Piper isn't important. What's important is to realize that your historical distance from Jesus in the first century is no impediment or obstacle to your loving him and trusting him and enjoying him. That's the important thing to remember! And here in John 16 Jesus himself is saying that it is actually better or to our benefit that he not be physically present with us or otherwise the Holy Spirit could not be sent to indwell and empower us.

Now, let's be clear about what Jesus means when he says in v. 7 that in order for the Helper, the Holy Spirit, to come he, Jesus, first must leave. The words "go away" in v. 7 do not simply refer to the physical departure of Jesus when he ascended into heaven to the right hand of the Father. He is talking specifically about his impending death. His going away is primarily a reference to his arrest, his trial, his crucifixion, his resurrection, all of which is then consummated by his ascension into heaven.

In other words, the reason why the Holy Spirit can't come until Jesus "goes away" isn't because there is some logical objection or physical obstacle why they can't both be present on earth at the same time. No. The reason is that according to God's promise the blessing of the Spirit's indwelling presence in our lives is dependent on Christ making full and final atonement for our sin. It is only after and because our guilt has been taken away and the judgment we deserved has been endured by Jesus that the promise of the Spirit's coming to indwell and empower us can occur.

Therefore, it is greatly to our "advantage" that Christ "go away" because in doing so he will suffer for our sins, propitiate or satisfy the wrath of God against us, and in doing so reconcile us to the Father. All this is necessary before he can send the Spirit to take up his residence in our hearts.

A Summation of the Holy Spirit's Ministry through the Church

The question before us is how or in what ways or through whom the Spirit employs to honor and exalt Jesus. The place both to begin and end in our desire to understand the Spirit's work in this regard is the Upper Room Discourse, John 13-17. In these five chapters we are introduced to no fewer than eleven things that the Spirit will do in his work of honoring and exalting the Son of God.

(1) As the Spirit of truth (14:17; 16:13), he will always and only speak what is true of Jesus and his redemptive work for sinners.

(2) As the Helper (14:16), he will take up where Jesus left off by ascending into heaven. He will comfort, counsel, and be an advocate for us even as Jesus was (note that Jesus describes the Spirit as "another" Helper, v. 16).

(3) After the Spirit is given, he will not depart as Jesus did in his ascension to the right hand of the Father. Rather, he will be "with" us "forever" (14:16). All that the Spirit does, he does until the time of Christ's return.

(4) The Holy Spirit teaches "all things" that are important for the church to know about the person and work of Jesus (14:26).

(5) The Holy Spirit teaches about "the things that are to come" (16:13).

(6) The Spirit will also declare to us what "is Christ's" (16:14-15). Our Lord's words "what is mine" likely point to all that can be known about Jesus and all that he wills for the Spirit to reveal.

(7) The Holy Spirit will awaken and stir up remembrance (14:26b) of all that Jesus has said during his earthly sojourn.

(8) The Spirit will bear witness or testify to the supremacy of Jesus in all things (15:26).

(9) He will convict the world concerning sin (16:8-9) and by God's grace awaken them to their need for a savior, who alone is Jesus.

(10) He will convict the world concerning the righteousness they lack and the righteousness that is found only by faith in Jesus (16:10).

(11) He will convict the world concerning judgment by condemning Satan, "the ruler of this world" (16:11; 1 John 5:19).

Beginning in v. 8 and extending through v. 11 Jesus talks about what the Holy Spirit will do when he comes. But the mistake people make when reading this passage is in thinking that the Holy Spirit does all these things immediately and directly without the use of means or men and women. In other words, people have this idea of the Spirit moving freely in the air, as it were, exerting his influence of conviction on the hearts and minds of non-Christians concerning the issues of sin, righteousness, and judgment.

Now, in one sense I suppose that is true. We should never put restrictions on what the Holy Spirit does. But in another and far more important sense we need to understand that this ministry of the Spirit is what he does in and through and by means of you and me!

Look again at v. 7. Jesus says that if he goes, he will send the Spirit "to you," that is, to the disciples, and to all Christians in subsequent generations. He doesn't say I will send the Spirit to the "world" of non-believers but to "you, my followers, the soon-to-be-birthed Church of Jesus Christ." Let's return for just a moment to what Jesus said earlier about the coming of the Helper, the Holy Spirit. Here is what Jesus said in John 14:16-17,

> "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).

The Spirit's primary work when he comes is to live in us and to empower us to carry on the work of Jesus in a far more expansive way than anything Jesus could have done while on earth. Jesus was only one person, limited to one place in space. But through the Spirit he is present everywhere his people are found. It is through the disciples that Jesus continues his ministry through the Spirit whom he sends to them. It is through our preaching of the gospel and our lives given in love for one another that the Holy Spirit brings conviction to the hearts of people in the world.

So, my point is that we miss the point of our Lord if we think he is sending the Spirit to do this work of bringing conviction to non-Christians independently of Christians. No. The Spirit accomplishes what is described in vv. 8-11 precisely as he indwells us, lives in us, empowers us, and energizes us to bear witness to the person and work of Jesus. We, the Church, are the means by which the Spirit does his work in the world.

When you find yourself in close contact with non-Christians, whether at work or in your family or somewhere in the course of daily life, do you find yourself thinking: "Holy Spirit, I'm so glad that you are present to convict this person of his/her sin in rejecting Jesus. I also hope you will convict them concerning their deficient views of that righteousness that makes us acceptable to God. And I suspect that this person doesn't think that real judgment is coming. So let me step out of the way, shut my mouth, and pray that you will work immediately and directly on their hearts. I wouldn't want to gum up matters by saying something or doing something and getting in your way."

Is that what you think Jesus is saying here in John 16? No. The promise isn't that when the Spirit comes, he works apart from us or without us but that he works through us. We are the witnesses to the glory of Christ and the sin of unbelief, a witness that we are empowered to bear and make known through the indwelling presence of the Spirit.

The Three-fold Work of the Spirit in and through the Church of Jesus Christ

In John 16:8-11 Jesus identifies three things the Spirit will do when he comes to indwell

and empower the witness of the Church, us. We read in v. 8 that he will "convict" the world. This word translated "convict" has been rendered in other ways in other versions of the Bible. Some translate it with the English word "convince," as if to say that the Spirit will persuade the world by arguments and proofs of the true meaning of sin, righteousness, and judgment. But I don't think that is correct. The NIV translates this one word with the phrase: "he will prove the world to be in the wrong." More than likely, to "convict" means to show someone their sin in order to call them to repentance. It can also carry the sense of "expose" in the sense that a person is awakened to their guilt and shame. The idea is that our presence in the world and our witness to it through the indwelling presence and power of the Spirit has the goal and effect of shaming the world and convincing it/them of its own guilt and calling them to repentance.

There is a very real sense in which our presence makes people feel guilty. I'm not suggesting that we go out of our way to be a downer or that we parade our Christian faith in a self-righteous and holier-than-thou attitude. The mere presence of the Holy Spirit in us will make non-Christians feel uncomfortable. They are "convicted" or made painfully aware of their own sins, perhaps only because they know about our devotion to Jesus Christ. That is the sort of thing that Jesus is talking about here.

The Spirit will empower and energize the testimony of Christians, taking our words and witness and using them to make a powerful statement, an incisive, articulate, clear and unmistakable indictment of the world. Our testimony incriminates the moral and spiritual bankruptcy of the unbelieving world around us. Jesus had already forced a division in the world by showing that what it does is evil. In John 7:7 Jesus said this: the world "hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil." Likewise, the Holy Spirit does this through our witness to it and by means of the lives we live.

So here Jesus says that the Spirit's role, working primarily through the Church, is to show the world that it is guilty of ("concerning") its sin, its righteousness, and its judgment. This is one way in which the Spirit's ministry glorifies the Son. There are three aspects to the Spirit's work.

First, the Holy Spirit, working through the visual lives and verbal witness of Christians will expose and convict the world of its "sin". The reason for this "sin" is that "they do not believe in me" (16:9). The "sin" of the world, of which it is convicted, is the failure or refusal to believe in Jesus (v. 9). The world typically does not even perceive that it needs life. The convicting work of the Spirit through us is gracious and merciful: it is designed to bring people in the world to recognize their need and in doing so to turn to Jesus.

What is it about Jesus that they don't believe? They don't believe that he is God in human flesh and that his words are ultimate and absolute truth. They reject the notion that his life given on the cross is our only hope for reconciliation with God. But unbelief

is more than simply not embracing certain theological truths about who Jesus is and what he's done. It is the stubborn and idolatrous refusal to treasure him as altogether beautiful and majestic**.**

The problem today is that virtually everyone in your city will claim that they "believe" in Jesus. What we need is a deeper and more robust definition of what saving belief in Jesus really is. For this we turn our attention to 2 Cor. 4.

> "And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:3-6)

Unbelief is here defined by Paul as the failure to see "the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ." Therefore, belief is a beholding of the beauty of the light of God's glory revealed in Jesus. Belief is not mere intellectual acknowledgment. It is heartfelt adoration; an awakening of a new sense in the soul in which we relish and revel and rest in all that God is for us in Jesus. To believe Jesus is to treasure him above all else.

Not to believe is worse than simply saying "I don't think he is who he claims to be." It is to deny the undeniable, to prefer something more than the one who is eternally preferable. Unbelief is more than a function of the intellect. It is an expression of one's will. Not to believe is to willfully repudiate and reject. It is more than simply not being convinced of a claim. It entails willful repudiation.

In other words, unbelief is idolatry. Some mistakenly think that not to believe leaves a vacuum. It is solely a matter of not embracing a claim intellectually. No. Unbelief in Jesus is not the same as when I say I don't believe in unicorns or Bigfoot or the Loch Ness monster. Unbelief in Jesus is idolatry because it is always a reflection of belief or trust in something other than Jesus. It is the worship of someone other than Jesus. And that is idolatry.

Second, the Holy Spirit, working through the visual lives and verbal witness of Christians like you and me, glorifies Jesus by exposing and convicting the world of its "righteousness" because Jesus goes to the Father (v. 10). But how can we speak of the world's "righteousness"? Jesus is saying that the world believes it is "righteous" but the verdict of God is otherwise. Isaiah said it best when he described our "ways" and "all our righteous deeds" as being little more than a "polluted garment" or "filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:5-6). The Jewish leaders believed that the temple was the locus of righteousness, but Jesus found it necessary to cleanse and judge it. Their Sabbath observance was considered "righteous," but they then condemned Jesus for healing a

man on the Sabbath who had been paralyzed for 38 years (John 5:16). The people slavishly observed the Mosaic commandments, thinking that in doing so they established a righteousness before God that he was obligated to recognize and honor.

Non-Christians in the world today are deluded and deceived into thinking that the so-called "righteousness" of their lives is adequate to put them in good standing with God. They don't commit adultery. They pay their taxes. They have never committed murder. The world has been lulled by Satan into a false sense of security. They think their "righteousness" is enough. They believe that so long as they avoid overtly scandalous sins that harm other people, their lives are "good enough" for acceptance by whatever "god" there may be. But the Holy Spirit glorifies the person and work of Jesus by convicting the world that its so-called "righteousness" is far from it; that it is in fact filthy rags, and is in fact far short of what God requires.

While Jesus was on the earth he performed this task. His life and words and ministry exposed the so-called "righteousness" of the people. By the light of his own life and ministry he exposed the darkness in which the world was living (John 3:19-21; 7:7; 15:22,24). But now he is going to the Father and won't be present in person to do this any longer. So, when the Holy Spirit comes he will continue this ministry through the testimony and lives of the followers of Jesus. Jesus will no longer be present to discharge the task, so it now falls on us, through his Spirit, to do it.

Third, the Holy Spirit, working through the visual lives and verbal witness of Christians like you and me, will expose and convict the world of its "judgment" because "the ruler of this world is judged" (v. 11). The world does not believe there is judgement to come. Or if they do believe it, they're convinced that God will grade on the curve. Virtually every non-believer in the world is a universalist. They are persuaded that everyone who dies, regardless of their relationship to Jesus, will be in heaven, "up there, looking down on us." A few might suggest that the worst and most perverted of sinners will be judged, but if there is one thing in which virtually all non-Christians are united it is the belief that so long as they are sincere and don't hurt others, they will never enter into judgment.

But Jesus says that the Holy Spirit, through God's people, convicts the world of its impending judgment because the prince of the world, Satan, whose children they are, already stands judged and condemned by the death and resurrection of Jesus. The systems of this world and its values and the behavior of those who occupy it are under the influence and authority of Satan himself (1 John 5:19). But in the death and resurrection of Jesus, Satan is exposed, judged, and sentenced to eternal damnation. The "world" is made up of Satan's children. If you think that is a harsh judgment, recall that Jesus was speaking to the religious leaders who trusted in their own "righteousness" and said: "You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires" (John 8:44). Thus, if Satan stands condemned by the cross, so too will those who align with him against Christ and his kingdom.

The Spirit's Future Revelatory Role in Glorifying Jesus

Jesus has already spoken of what the Spirit would do when he comes on the Day of Pentecost. In John 14:26 he said that the Spirit would work to bring to remembrance things Jesus said and did. But here in John 16:12-13 the Spirit is said to provide additional truths by revelation, truths not yet disclosed but soon to come.

But this revelatory work of the Spirit has limitations or boundaries. Notice, for example, that the Spirit is dependent on Jesus for everything he says (16:13). "He will not speak on his own authority" but will only reveal what is given to him by the Son and the Father. Furthermore, nothing he says will deviate from what Jesus has already made known. Furthermore, any new revelations the Spirit brings will focus on bringing attention to Jesus (16:15).

The "things that are to come" may refer to the trial, death, and resurrection of Jesus, but this doesn't make sense as the Spirit won't even be given until Pentecost, well after the events of Christ's death. He surely at least has in mind what will transpire in consequence of his death and resurrection. But we cannot deny that there is also reference here to how the Spirit will operate in prophetic ministry, as well as disclosing the future of God's kingdom on earth. Jesus may also have in mind the revelatory truths found in a book like Revelation.

Many would restrict this truth about the Spirit's work to the immediate company of the apostles and those who would write the books of the NT. It most assuredly does apply directly to them. In fact, the writings of the NT (and the biblical canon as a whole) are the ultimate and final standard by which all claims to new revelation must be judged. If a "word" or "alleged truth" that someone claims to have received from the Spirit does not perfectly align with the written Word of the Bible, it isn't from God.

Conclusion

As we conclude, let's not forget the primary point of the Spirit's presence with us. It isn't so that we can stand by idly and silently and trust that whatever work needs to be done in the hearts of non-Christian men and women of the world will be done by the Holy Spirit alone. No. The Spirit has come to indwell and empower you and me to bear witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ. And it is through that witness, both visible and vocal, that the world is convicted of its sin, its false conception of what real righteousness is, and of the reality and certainty of the judgment that will come upon all who do not know and trust and treasure and prize Jesus above all.

Addendum A
How Does Jesus Refer to the Holy Spirit?

Some are quick to point out that Jesus himself uses neuter pronouns to describe the

Holy Spirit. We read in John 14:17, "even the Spirit of truth, *whom* [neuter pronoun] the world cannot receive, because it neither sees *him* [another neuter pronoun] nor knows him. You know *him* [neuter pronoun], for he dwells with you and will be in you." On the other hand, Jesus also refers to the Spirit in the masculine gender. For example,

> "But the Helper [masculine noun], the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he [a masculine demonstrative pronoun] will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (John 14:26).
>
> "But when the Helper comes, whom [masculine] I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who [neuter] proceeds from the Father, he [masculine demonstrative pronoun] will bear witness about me" (John 15:26).
>
> "And when he comes [masculine participle], he [masculine pronoun] will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment" (John 16:8).
>
> "When the Spirit of truth comes, he [*ekeinos*; masculine demonstrative pronoun] will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority [literally, "from himself," *heautou*; masculine possessive pronoun], but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He [masculine pronoun] will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you" (John 16:13-14).

Many conclude on the basis of these texts that Jesus obviously conceived the Holy Spirit as a person. But there may be more to the story than that. In a paper delivered to the *Institute for Biblical Research* (11-17-01), Dan Wallace has argued that such grammatical arguments for the Spirit's personality are invalid. He contends that in John 14:26 and 15:26 the noun *pneuma* "is *appositional* to a masculine noun, rather than the subject of the verb. The gender of *ekeinos* thus has nothing to do with the natural gender of *pneuma*. The antecedent of *ekeinos*, in each case, is *parakletos* [a masculine noun], not *pneuma*" (6). As for John 16:13-14, again the masculine gender of *ekeinos* is more likely due to *parakletos* in v. 7 than to any attempt to predicate personality of the Spirit. Wallace also addresses similar cases in Ephesians 1:14 and 1 John 5:7-8. None of this is to suggest, however, that Wallace himself denies the personality of the Holy Spirit. He simply argues it must be established on other grounds.

Addendum B
The Terminology for the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament

The Hebrew term *ruah* (often spelled *ruakh*), often translated as breath, wind, or spirit, appears 378 times in the OT (only 264 of which are translated by the Greek *pneuma* in the LXX). 94 of these 378 instances refer to the Spirit of God. God's Spirit is called "your Holy Spirit" three times in the OT (Ps. 51:11; Isa. 63:10-11). The Hebrew *ruah* often denotes the human spirit as a disposition or evidence of life – see Hos. 4:12; 5:4; Isa.

54:6. See Prov. 11:13; 15:13; 16:18; 18:14; 29:23; Eccles. 1:14,17; 2:11,17; 3:21; 4:4,6; 10:4; Job 7:11; 10:12. Richard Averbeck points out that almost 40% of the times *ruah* is mentioned in the OT it "refers to the literal movement of air."[9] In addition to the many instances where *ruah* refers to natural weather (e.g., Ps. 1:4), the breath of life (e.g., Gen 6:17), and even God's breath expressed through the wind of nature (e.g., Exod. 15:8), we find that approximately 120 times it is used for elements of the human spirit, be it the "vitality of life (e.g., Gen 45:27; Josh 5:1; 1 Kgs 10:5; Isa 38:16), moral and spiritual character" (both positive and negative; see Isa 26:9 and Isa 29:24), as well as "capacities of mind and will" (Exod 28:3), and "various dispositions or states of the human person and personality."[10] No significance should be placed on the fact that *ruah* is feminine as we saw in answering the first question about the Holy Spirit as a person.

Addendum C
"The" Holy Spirit, or Holy Spirit?

It is not uncommon to hear people speak of "Holy Spirit," dropping the definite article "the." Does the NT support this?[11]

The word *pneuma* (spirit) occurs 145x in Paul's letters. The full name, Holy Spirit, occurs 17x. Paul also uses the term "the Spirit of God" or "His Spirit" 16x and "Spirit of Christ" 3x. The word *pneuma* occurs 17x in the nominative case, all with reference to the Holy Spirit. 15 of the 17 have the definite article, hence, "*the* Holy Spirit." Twice the word *pneuma* is without the definite article and clearly refers to the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:9; Eph 4:4). In the case of Ephesians 4:4 the modifier "one" functions the same way as the definite article and in Romans 8:9 there are at least 6 instances in the immediate context where the definite article is used. *Pneuma* occurs 30x in the genitive, 28 of which refer to the Holy Spirit. Of these, 18 are articular (have the definite article).

It is interesting to compare 2 Corinthians 13:14 with Philippians 2:1. In the former the definite article is used while in the latter it is absent, yet both verses are clearly saying the same thing. In the 13 instances where *pneuma* occurs in the genitive in a prepositional phrase, 9 refer to the Holy Spirit, 6 of which have the definite article.

When *pneuma* appears in the accusative case, 8x it has the article and clearly refers to the Holy Spirit. Twice it occurs with the definite article when referring to the human spirit. There are 4x where the reference is clearly to the Holy Spirit and the article is absent. There are 5x where the article is absent and the meaning is "a spirit of" (all most likely with reference to the Holy Spirit). Twice *pneuma* occurs with a preposition, but without

[9] Richard E. Averbeck, "The Holy Spirit in the Hebrew Bible and Its Connections to the New Testament," in *Who's Afraid of the Holy Spirit: An Investigation into the Ministry of the Spirit of God Today,* edited by M. James Sawyer and Daniel B. Wallace (Dallas: Biblical Studies Press, 2005), 18.
[10] Ibid., 19.
[11] I was greatly helped in addressing this issue by Gordon Fee, *God's Empowering Presence* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 14-26.

the article, and in both cases it is the Holy Spirit in view. Finally, there are 4x where *pneuma* appears with a preposition and the definite article is not used. The most difficult to interpret are the 37 instances where *pneuma* is found in the dative case. 32 of the 37 lack the definite article and 5 have it.

The bottom line is that there is no explicit theological reason for either the presence of absence of the definite article ("the"). In virtually all instances, the reason for one or the other is either stylistic, grammatical, or due to some other factor in the immediate context.

Many drop the definite article ("the") because they think its presence depersonalizes the Holy Spirit. "The" Holy Spirit, to their way of thinking, reduces the Spirit to an impersonal power. They are of the mind which says that the absence of the definite article highlights the Spirit as a person. In English it would be the difference between referring to me as "Sam" as over against "the Sam." But in Greek, there is no theological difference between instances where the definite article appears and where it is absent. The Holy Spirit is always a person, and the use of the definite article does not in any way detract from this.

So, the reason why many (almost always charismatics, who more greatly emphasize the Holy Spirit) like referring to him as "Holy Spirit" is because it sounds more personal, more intimate, almost as if "Holy Spirit" is a personal name, like Jesus or Sam or Bill or Sally. There is nothing necessarily wrong in this, but neither is it misguided to say, "*the* Holy Spirit." The latter in no way means that we don't think of the Spirit as a personal being. The personality of the Spirit, therefore, is not determined by whether or not the NT or an individual Christian makes use of the definite article. It is determined by the way in which the Spirit is described. He has all the attributes of personhood (mind, will, emotions) and performs all the actions of personhood.

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THE UNTROUBLED HEART

"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 (ESV)

"Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me." John 14:1 (ESV)

INTRODUCTION

Among Stan Laurel's reported dying words (of Laurel and Hardy fame) was: "I'd rather be skiing."

When the nurse responded she didn't know he skied, Laurel quipped: "I don't. But I'd rather be skiing than this."

Gethsemane would soon reveal how genuinely Jesus recoiled from the dreadful cup set before Him. Yet His final discourse was not self-focused; it was disciple-centered, spilling over with care and comfort for His followers. He could have chosen another path than the cross, but His heart's affections kept Him thinking of the disciples. His final words convey His heart.

I've had the sacred privilege of being present with saints in their final days. For those who remain lucid until death, their final words are holy. I especially think of the closing days of one of our church's patriarchs, an elder named Dale. He was by nature a gentle and beautiful soul, soft-spoken, known for his kindness, benevolence, and enduring optimism.

As he lay dying, Dale blessed his sons one by one, and offered them wisdom. As if the veil between heaven and earth grew very thin, Dale's words were precise, Spirit-infused and compelling. The value of Dale's words outshone any material inheritance he planned to confer upon his heirs.

Dale also had words for me, both blessing and instruction.

He blessed me and then exhorted me: "Alan, forgive John. I know what he did was wrong, but he does love this church and he feels like he needs to protect it. I believe you can reconcile."

John and I did reconcile.

Of course, the sinless Son of God never frittered His time nor squandered His words. Still, I think of His final discourse as a precise and distilled picture of what Jesus wanted most for His disciples.

D.A. Carson sees inheritance language in Jesus' final discourse: "Jesus departs, but he leaves his followers large bequests."[1]

At the heart of this bequest are an exhortation and an offer:

The exhortation— "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me." John 14:1 (ESV)

The offer— "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 (ESV)

At the heart of Jesus' final discourse is both the command and the gift of an untroubled heart.

The grammar is interesting. Though most English translations render verse 27 as the ESV does, the Greek sentence oddly weds the plural and the singular.

The Greek literally reads: "Let not your [plural] heart [singular] be troubled."

In other words, "Don't let y'all's heart be troubled."

The Savior yearns for us to know His peace both individually and collectively.

What does He mean by an untroubled heart and how can it be appropriated?

ANXIETY – THEIRS AND OURS

Josephus portrays Passover Jerusalem as crowded and politically volatile, and crucifixion was a familiar Roman instrument of terror. The disciples needed no imagination to understand Rome's capacity for violence.[2]

Rome had the power to punish and the disciples knew it.

But Jesus seems to be addressing something more than (different than) abject fear of Roman punishment—He seems to care about His disciples' internal angst.

Having left everything to follow Him, the thought of Jesus' death and departure would leave the disciples wondering if it had all been a mistake.

The downcast souls of the Emmaus Road disciples will soon demonstrate the disappointment poignantly: "We had hoped He was the one to redeem Israel." (Luke 24)

But beneath their fear of persecution lay another fear that Jesus repeatedly addresses: abandonment.

Trauma research has shown that trauma leaves its deepest soul scars when the traumatized person feels isolated and alone. To face abuse or mockery or persecution is difficult, but to do so alone is debilitating.

Uncertainty about the future, especially when joined to a sense of helplessness or aloneness, can become fertile ground for anxiety.

The precipitous rise of generalized anxiety in our day heightens the importance and relevance of John 14-17 for this generation.

Jonathan Haidt points to a striking temporal convergence. From 2010 onward, as smartphone-based childhood rapidly displaced play-based childhood, reported major depression among American adolescents rose sharply—145 percent among girls and 161 percent among boys in the data he cites. Haidt argues that the phone-based childhood is a major causal factor.[3]

A 2023 study of American college students found that 37% of students said they felt anxious always or most of the time, 31% felt anxious about half the time.[4]

In what Jonathan Haidt has called the "rapid rewiring of the adolescent brain," today's culture has produced a generation in which most young adults are anxious half or most of the time.[5]

In the final discourse, Jesus doesn't use the usual Greek verb for "worry" (merimnao). Is "troubled heart" a synonym for "anxiety," or does the phrase convey important nuances?

WHAT IS THE "HEART"?

When preachers speak of reaching both "head" and "heart," we mean both "thought" and "feeling." But the biblical notion of "heart" means something much more than our emotional center.

The heart is to be treasured and protected as a source of deepest motivation: "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it." Proverbs 4:23 (NIV)

Brown-Driver-Briggs categorizes the meanings of the Hebrew *lēb/lēbāb* as the "inner man," including mind, knowledge, thinking, reflection, memory, inclination, resolution,

determination, conscience, moral character, appetites, emotions and courage.[6]

Paul can speak of the heart as the sphere in which Christ's peace rules: "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts …." Colossians 3:15 (NIV) The heart can be a home for the peace of Christ.

The heart doesn't just have feelings; it has "thoughts." (e.g., Genesis 6:5 (ESV) "The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.")

Solomon asked God for a "leb shomea," a "hearing heart" (1 Kings 3:9).

In the Old Testament, the nephesh (soul) represents the living self, but the heart seems to be the inner center of that self with all its deepest thoughts, motivations, and desires.

In the New Testament, the heart can:

think — Matt. 9:4
"Why do you think evil in your hearts?"

understand — Matt. 13:15
"understand with their heart"

reason — Mark 2:6
"questioning in their hearts"

believe — Rom. 10:10
"with the heart one believes"

decide/intend — 2 Cor. 9:7
"as he has decided in his heart"

desire — Matt. 5:28
love — Matt. 22:37
experience sorrow — John 16:6
"sorrow has filled your heart"

experience joy — John 16:22
"your hearts will rejoice"

In *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (BDAG), "kardia" is principally defined as the "center and source of the whole inner life."[7]

I think of an illustration in *Ordering Your Private World* where Gordon MacDonald tells

about a friend who was an officer aboard a US Navy nuclear submarine.[8] One day on duty in the Mediterranean, ships were passing overhead forcing the sub to make a lot of violent maneuvers to avoid collision. In absence of the captain, MacDonald's friend was in charge of giving the commands at each moment – amidst all the jarring movements, the captain, who had been in his quarters, suddenly appeared at the bridge asking, "Is everything all right?" The duty officer declared, "Yes sir!" The captain looked around and said, "It looks all right to me" and exited.

MacDonald writes: "All around that submarine the potential danger of collision was lurking. It was enough to make any alert captain show concern. But that danger was outside. Down deep inside the sub was a quiet place where there could be absolute control of the ship's destiny. And that was where the captain instinctively headed. On the bridge, the center of command, there was not a hint of panic; only a calm and deliberate series of actions being carried out by a highly trained crew of seamen doing their jobs."

That inner sanctum of the submarine, the bridge, is an apt image of the heart. The heart is a command center, deeper than thought and emotion. If the heart is troubled, then the whole vessel will be unsettled. But if the heart is untroubled, no amount of surface agitation can spoil its mission. It is good to bring anxiety treatment for both body and mind. Medicine and cognitive therapy have an important place in the healing process. But an untroubled heart is something deeper than symptom relief or cognitive reframing.

The biblical image of heart cannot be equated with mind or emotions nor is it synonymous with the biblical notions of "soul" (psyche) and "spirit" (pneuma). It has been suggested that the heart has a "mediating position" between soul and spirit.[9]

In sum, the heart is the deep command center of one's entire life. It is to be treasured and guarded, for from it flow our deepest thoughts, feelings, desires, and behaviors. The heart can be troubled or untroubled. And Jesus yearns for every disciple to have an untroubled heart.

WHAT IS A TROUBLED HEART?

The word Jesus uses for troubled ("tarasso") means to disturb, to agitate, to stir up, to unsettle.

The invalid at Bethesda speaks of the water being "stirred up" (John 5:7). Paul speaks of teachers who stir up trouble at the churches (see Galatians 1:7, 5:10). And, interestingly, "tarasso" is used several times to describe Jesus' soul (John 11:33 at Lazarus' tomb and John 12:27 as He considers the move toward the cross). Judas' betrayal "troubled" Jesus "in his spirit" (John 13:21).

A troubled heart is a heart that is "stirred up" and "disturbed."

The person with a troubled heart is, to use Dudley Hall's words, "not sitting down on the inside."

The untroubled heart is not the absence of emotional pain. It is quite possible to be emotionally sad, even intensely grieving, and have an untroubled heart. Oh, how many saints I've witnessed in that precious place, saying, "I am glad he's in heaven and I'm at peace, but I'm so very sad because I miss him so."

The troubled heart is not the brain's amygdala response that I experienced last summer while on a hike in Montreat, North Carolina when I paused at a vista and suddenly noticed I was standing two feet from a huge Timber rattlesnake, coiled beneath me. That God-given jolt of alert put me into freeze then flight (definitely not fight). As soon as I was safely away from the snake, the fear quickly abated.

But imagine the rest of my hike on Lookout Mountain! Every stick looked like a snake. I quit enjoying the vistas and started staring at the ground. For the rest of the hike, I lost my carefree heart.

The diagnostic manual of psychiatry (DSM-5-TR) defines fear as "the emotional response to real or perceived imminent threat, whereas anxiety is anticipation of future threat."[10]

The troubled heart has received a signal that something is wrong. Something is threatening or out of place or dangerous. When the heart believes that anxious signal as truth, it predicts that version of truth for future life.

Bessel van der Kolk, author of the seminal *The Body Keeps the Score*, describes trauma as an event that overwhelms the central nervous system, altering the way memories are processed and recalled.[11]

Imagine if, instead of merely seeing the rattler at my feet, I had stepped on it and been poisoned. Though the hypothetical snakebite would have been the only snakebite I'd ever experienced, and though being bitten ever again would be highly unlikely, it would be challenging to ever deeply enjoy a hike on that mountain again.

Further, imagine if I had been hiking alone and was bitten. The isolation would severely heighten the trauma.

Bessel argues that the presence or absence of safe human connection is one of the major factors determining whether an overwhelming experience becomes an enduring trauma.

The event itself matters profoundly, but research also shows that perceived helplessness,

isolation, and the absence of safe human connection can intensify its traumatic impact.[12]

Jesus' promise of His ongoing presence with the disciples is more than reassurance; it is preemptive and protective. Instead of declaring "peace, peace" where there is no peace, Jesus starkly predicts the trouble the disciples will face (John 16:33) and promises that He'll be with them:

John 14:3 (ESV) — 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.

John 14:16 (ESV) — 16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever,

John 14:23 (ESV) — 23 Jesus answered him, "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 14:28 (ESV) — 28 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.

John 15:5 (ESV) — 5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

John 16:14 (ESV) — 14 He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

Our two-month-old grandson, Ezekiel, recently required a significant surgery to correct a prematurely fused skull. The endoscopic craniectomy removes a strip of skull to allow the brain to grow and develop normally. We prayed for the pediatric neurosurgeon and the medical team. We prayed for the success of the surgery and the protection of the life of the baby. But I found myself praying just as fervently for the protection of his infant soul—that this frightening experience would not be encoded as lasting trauma.

When, pre-surgery, Ezekiel needed to receive a CT scan, the technicians hoped that the baby might just be asleep when taken into the big, open machine. But, instead, our son Bennett was feeding the baby a bottle, the child lying on his back on the mobile table, the father crouched over him, holding the bottle and smiling and speaking lovingly. So, the technician encouraged Bennett to just ride into the scan with the baby. So, he did. And Ezekiel was still. While the big machine did its work, instead of fearing the unknown, the baby took nourishment and gazed at the smile of his father.

After the successful surgery, the parents were allowed to stay in the PICU with Ezekiel. Because of the large, painful incision on the back of his head, the baby couldn't lie down. So, the parents held him for most of the first two days. Held as he slept. Held as he cried. Held as he ate.

I later mused with Bennett, "Whatever strain the experience placed on his little body, he was surrounded throughout it by a more powerful message: You are held. You are loved. You are not alone."

I think Jesus offers something like this in His final discourse. He says "You'll go through some difficult and scary things, but you won't be going through it alone. I'll be with you. You'll be with me. Therefore, you'll be OK. I do not promise that your; souls will not face sorrow; they will. I do not promise that your bodies will not face discomfort or even death; it is possible. But your heart need not be troubled."

The troubled heart is an inner command center that has received messages of fear and trauma and internalized the messages as truth. But Jesus' presence and Jesus' truth are the cure.

According to psychologists, anxiety is rooted in both the perception of a difficult or negative future happening AND in the perceived inability to handle it.

What Jesus offers the disciples (and us) is a realignment of heart that will enable them to rightly assess both the danger and the capacity to make it through.

Jesus does not merely offer a technique or a process. He offers Himself—and He offers His peace. He offers His own untroubled heart. He offers a share of His own peace.

MY PEACE I GIVE YOU

When Paul assures that "the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts..." (Philippians 4:7), he heralds an inestimable gift—the "peace of God," a peace whose source and guardian is God. But Jesus goes even further in John 14:27: "My peace I give to you." He does not merely point the disciples toward peace; He gives them His.

This heart-level peace "passes understanding" because it is better than our best thoughts. It passes understanding because the intellect cannot bottleneck it. It is a peace that might defy logic. It is certainly a peace that does not depend on natural and rational explanations.

When Jesus declares "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you..." (14:27), He offers a share of His very heart.

Jesus offers not a plan for peace or a process for peace, but a transfer of peace.

In the same way that the Son of God knows and has the peace of the Father, so all who are in Christ can know and have the peace of the Son.

Such a conveyance of heart "passes understanding." It is mystical. But it is also practical.

Jesus "gives" His peace not only by mystical impartation through the Spirit, but also through His own reassuring demeanor.

Jesus embodies what family-systems theorists have called a "non-anxious presence."[13] When a child sees that Mom isn't worried, the child feels safe. When the surgeon reassures the patient, saying, "I've done this procedure 100 times," the patient feels secure.

I once was on a private plane with my young children and, as we attempted to land in a narrow valley between two peaks, we bounced in the air more than I have ever bounced. I honestly thought we should abandon our attempt to land on the small air strip. As we shook and bounced, five-year-old Abby looked at me repeatedly, and finally she said, "Daddy, are you scared?" When I smiled and lied, "No," she just enjoyed the rest of the ride like a roller coaster at the fair. Imagine how much sweeter the peace I could have transferred if I'd actually had it!

The child has a way of adopting the peace of the father.

The disciple has a way of appropriating the peace of the rabbi.

This deep, spiritual sharing of Christ's own peace is partly explained by Paul to the Corinthians:

> *"For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God." 1 Corinthians 2:11 (ESV)*

Paul here is speaking of "the spirit" of a person rather than the heart, but the message is parallel. There are thoughts so deep within the heart that only the human spirit can discern or communicate those thoughts. There are likewise thoughts so deep in the heart of God that only the Holy Spirit Himself can know those thoughts.

Paul further explains that we, in Christ, have not received "the spirit of the world," but we have received the "Spirit who is from God" for this purpose, "that we might understand the things freely given us by God." (1 Cor. 2:12, 13).

Through His Spirit, God makes known even His deepest thoughts to such a wondrous extent that "we have the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16)!

Puritan theologian Thomas Goodwin explains the passage this way:

"And therefore in that 1 Corinthians 2:12 by 'having the Spirit,' we are said to 'have the mind of Christ,' 1 Corinthians 2:16; for he dwells in Christ's heart, and also ours, and lifts up from one hand to the other what Christ's thoughts are to us, and what our prayers and faith are to Christ."[14]

Goodwin's image is one of the Spirit carrying between Christ's heart and ours. The movement is two-way. Christ's thoughts and affections toward us are communicated to us, while our prayers and faith rise toward Him.

In Goodwin's words, Jesus is saying: "You shall have my heart."

If the peace that Jesus gives us is His own untroubled heart, then it cannot be duplicated or manufactured.

Carson says "the peace Jesus leaves to us is *his* peace in at least two ways. First, it is the peace which he himself provides; and second, it is part and parcel of the peace which he himself experienced during his mortal life."[15]

The peace Jesus promised, Carson says, is not like what the world gives "both because of the distinctive *nature* of the peace Jesus gives, and because of the distinctive *way* in which Jesus gives it."[16]

In other words, there is no other peace like Jesus' peace and there is no one who can convey His peace except Him.

I chuckled at a recent Facebook post: "I now know how to not worry – I just need everyone I know to text me every 15 seconds to let me know they aren't mad at me."

That's the peace that the world gives. It sometimes last more than 15 seconds … but not always.

Jesus' offer is altogether different and better.

The world's version of peace strives to remove the trouble, mollify the conflict, alleviate the difficulty. The worldly peace requires either: a) I win, and prevail in such a way that the threat is gone; or b) There is a happy, mediating position where differences are settled and there is no more strife.

Jesus makes neither of those outcomes a condition of His peace. His peace is other worldly.

CONCLUSION

Jesus' twice-repeated exhortation, "Do not let your hearts be troubled," carries good news with it. And the exhortation does not stand alone. In the very discourse in which Jesus commands an untroubled heart, He gives His peace and promises His Spirit. As surely as it was good news for Jesus to tell a paralytic, "Take up your mat and walk," it is good news when the Messiah commands, "Do not let your hearts be troubled."

His exhortation means that we have agency. There is something we can do. The heart

can be guarded. The heart of Jesus can be appropriated.

The untroubled heart of Jesus is a gift to be received by faith. But it is not a choice between trying harder to be a fearless person or caving into anxiety. No, the choice is between receiving the heart of Jesus freely or attempting to merit the peace of Christ through self-effort.

The choice is not between "deciding to follow Jesus, no turning back" and cowering in the face of threat. No, the choice is implied in the opening verse of the discourse: "Believe in God; believe also in me." (14:1).

Dane Ortlund sums the choice this way: "There are two ways to live the Christian life. You can live it either *for* the heart of Christ or *from* the heart of Christ."[17]

Reflections on the offer of Jesus' untroubled heart to believers lead to some deep reassurances:

1. Jesus' heart yearns for our hearts to know and experience His own peace. An untroubled heart is His will for our lives.

2. The heart, though undefined in scripture, seems to be the deepest command center of our being. As such, Jesus' offer of an untroubled heart is an offer of deepest treasure— a gift to be cherished and nourished and guarded.

3. Jesus' offer of an untroubled heart is not an offer of a trouble-free life. Instead, Jesus demonstrates in the final discourse that He will be with us in our troubles. Christ's presence does not immunize believers from trauma or its psychological effects. But trauma need not have the final word over the heart, and healing never has to be faced alone.

4. The offer of an untroubled heart is the offer of Jesus' own heart. His heart is conveyed, transferred, both mystically and by our witness of His "non-anxious" presence. It is His own peace that He wants us to have.

5. Though this sharing of His own untroubled heart is pure gift, we have agency. Anxiety need not have the final word over us. There IS something that we can do, but it isn't work—it is faith. We can think much of the Gospel and we can gaze upon His radiant countenance and we can keep returning our attention to Him when the troubles of the world roar.

Dane Ortlund again:

"There is an entire psychological substructure that, due to the fall, is a near-constant manufacturing of relational leveraging, fear-stuffing, nervousness, score-keeping, neurotic controlling, anxiety-festering silliness that is not something we say or even

think so much as something we exhale. You can smell it on people, though some of us are good at hiding it. And if you trace this fountain of scurrying haste, in all its various manifestations, down to the root, you don't find childhood difficulties or a Myers-Briggs diagnosis or Freudian impulses. You find gospel deficit. You find lack of felt awareness of Christ's heart."[18]

To a band of disciples who would soon see their Messiah mocked, scourged and crucified, Jesus' heart pulsates with deepest compassion. And, like a dying man choosing carefully his closing words, Jesus says essentially, "Here's what I want most for you. I want you to have what I have. I want you to have this treasure, this immeasurably rich inheritance. Here, have my heart. Here, receive the peace of my heart. Here, take as yours my own untroubled heart."

"My peace I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."

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[1] D. A. Carson, *The Farewell Discourse and Final Prayer of Jesus: An Exposition of John 14–17* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 69.

[2] Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 20.105–107; *Jewish War* 2.75.

[3] Jonathan Haidt, *The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness* (New York: Penguin Press, 2024), 24.

[4] Haidt, *The Anxious Generation*, 27.

[5] Haidt, *The Anxious Generation*, 98.

[6] Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), s.vv. "לֵב" and "לֵבָב."

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[10] American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 5th ed., text rev. (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association Publishing, 2022), 215.

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[12] Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York: Viking, 2014), 81, 212.

[13] Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* (New York: Guilford Press, 1985), 27.

[14] Thomas Goodwin, *The Heart of Christ in Heaven towards Sinners on Earth*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, vol. 4 (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1862), 102.

[15] Carson, *The Farewell Discourse and Final Prayer of Jesus*, 77.

[16] Carson, *The Farewell Discourse and Final Prayer of Jesus*, 77.

[17] Dane C. Ortlund, *Gentle and Lowly: The Heart of Christ for Sinners and Sufferers* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 181.

[18] Ortlund, *Gentle and Lowly*, 185–86.

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BETTER THAN FOLLOWING: THE NEW REALITY FOR CHRIST'S FOLLOWERS

On Jesus' last night with his disciples before his crucifixion, he knew that life would never be the same for them. The next sixty hours or so would mean the glorious completion of his mission but the utter disruption of their lives. Even as he bore the grief of what lay just before him, he turned his attention to the ones he loved most and prepared them for life after following him. When his "glory" was assured by enduring the cross and being raised again, they would not follow him as they had been. Instead they would dwell with him and remain in him, enjoying with him full access to the Father and fulfilling God's long-intended purposes for his covenant people.

In the chapters of John's gospel often called the Farewell Discourse, Jesus prepared his closest friends for their transition from following him to living with his divine life. They would no longer tramp on foot wherever he needed to be, they would soon go wherever he sent with constant companionship and connection to the source of life. Among its other riches, this discourse describes the "new normal" of life for Jesus' followers after his resurrection and ascension.

THE FAREWELL DISCOURSE IN JOHN'S GOSPEL

Near its end, John clearly states his purpose for writing and one feature of his gospel's general narrative structure.

> *Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name (20:30-31 CSB).*

Three things are clear in this purpose statement that bear on the Farewell Discourse

1) John wants his readers to have eternal life through the name of Jesus. Here John uses the shorthand "life" for the fuller and frequent expression "life of the ages", or "eternal life".
2) This depends on their believing that Jesus is indeed Messiah, Son of God.
3) John hopes to provoke that belief by reporting on these selected signs and how Jesus himself explained their meaning, how they identify him correctly by this name.

It's not surprising, then, that John's prologue introduces these key ideas:

1) The Word that became flesh was the life that gave light to men.
2) The evangelist testifies that some, including himself, received this Word and thus received the right to become God's children (1:12).
3) And though John doesn't refer to signs until 2:11 to characterize the miracle at the wedding in Cana, he speaks both there and in 1:14 of the revealed glory of Jesus as the result.

> *Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee. He revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him (2:11)*
>
> *The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We observed his glory, the glory as the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth (1:14).*

In the first case, the sign of turning water into wine revealed Jesus' glory, and in the earlier mention it was the incarnation that made that glory observable to those who believed. Perhaps the incarnation should be considered John's ultimate "sign" that reveals divine glory in the Word and fosters believing in those who recognize it. The glory revealed is another way of speaking of the truth in "the name", that this one is God's Son and Messiah.

Perhaps surprisingly, Jesus mentions eternal life only a few times in his discourse and once in his prayer, but each time is significant in its moment and draws on the larger theme throughout the gospel. Jesus claims in 14:6 while assuring them about their way ahead, that he is "the way, the truth, and the life." In the immediate context of his going to the Father to prepare for them and returning to include them in his Father's house, it makes sense to read this as "I am the way to the Father, the truth about the Father, and the life of the Father." The long awaited resurrection, the "life of the ages" belongs to the Father and the Son, and he is making it theirs as well. A little later he speaks of his own resurrected life and their participation in it. "Because I live, you will live, too" (14:19). The life he promises to prepare for them is full involvement in his own resurrection.

When Jesus begins his prayer, presumably overheard by all and recorded by John, he includes his own assessment of the "eternal life" he had come to offer and was going to the Father in order to secure for his own (17:2-3). First he states how he and the Father cooperated to include humans in their kind of life. The Father had given the Son authority over all people so he could grant eternal life to those the Father had given him (v. 2). Then Jesus describes eternal life as knowing, personal knowledge of "the only true God" and "the one you have sent—Jesus Christ" (v. 3). One does not have to die or be collected on the last day to participate in God's life, he must rather be granted to know the true God as he is revealed in his sent Messiah, Jesus.

This is the longest discourse in John's gospel (nearly 15 percent of the whole) and the longest continuous segment of teaching in any of the four gospels. It's placed at a

critical moment in the narrative, after Jesus' public ministry and just before his arrest and all that ensued. It seems reasonable to expect John to consciously pursue his purpose in such a section, but he does so without using the term "sign" (though he exhorts them to ". . .believe because of the works" 14:11). Instead, he's addressing what it means for believing in his name unto life to have the visible "sign" of the incarnate Jesus removed from view. John uses "life" only a few times, but "believe" more often in this block of teaching.

The life Jesus describes here, the new elements of relating to God through him and living in the world as his people, is "the life of the ages," the kind of life God had always intended and now accomplished for his people. The glory of the Messiah is seen in his death and resurrection and shared with those who know him for who he is and thus find their life in his. Jesus' name, his glory as Son and Messiah is the very issue at stake in the near term for those in the room with Jesus that night. Would their faith survive what was about to happen to Jesus and what they feared might happen to them? Would they continue to believe what Jesus had shown by signs and explained by word about himself and the Father who sent him?

Implications:

- Those who would share in God's life must know and believe who Jesus is, and that doesn't happen all at once. John portrays the believing of the disciples as occurring in fits and starts. The disciples hearing Jesus say these words believed and were about to abandon him for a couple of days. Genuine disciples can experience uneven progression in their understanding of and confidence in Jesus.

- Mighty works of God ("signs") reveal who Jesus is, but only when explained by him. As Jesus put his words above his own deeds as revelatory opportunities, his followers must rejoice in signs and listen to learn what they point towards.

- Eternal life does not begin when a sinner repents and believes because it has been the experience of the triune God all along. The believer joins a party already in progress and must learn how to enjoy it properly. Yet the resurrection of Jesus was the historical moment of this life entering human experience and making the life of God available to all who know who he is and that the Father sent him. Those who speak of eternal life must understand and explain it better to alleviate much confusion in the churches and in the culture.

MUTUAL LOVE FOR OTHER DISCIPLES

Before Jesus began the extended discourse with his followers on the night of his betrayal, arrest, and all that followed, he demonstrated, explained, and directed his men to follow him after his departure by doing for each other as he had done (and would do) for them. (An argument can be made that the discourse actually begins with Jesus'

explanation of his washing their feet in 13:12 ff., rather than with the beginning of chapter 14.)

In 13:12-17 Jesus returns to the table with his men and explains his washing their feet, adding instruction for their future. He has enacted a parable and now prophetically exhorts them from it. What he has just done exemplifies how they are to proceed themselves. He first affirms their calling him Teacher and Lord and giving him honor as such, but he calls attention to the voluntarily humble deed he has just performed, the dishonor he has taken on for their sake. This, he says, is an example for them in their ongoing relationships with each other.

Jesus had already spoken with Peter in the process of washing the feet of the group's leader and frequent spokesman. In vv. 8-10, once he realizes who is doing the washing, Peter objects that it is completely out of order, but Jesus replies that without this washing, Peter will "have no part" with Jesus, the servant. Typically, Peter reacts in the opposite extreme by insisting that he must then be bathed completely. But Jesus corrects him saying that only his dirty feet need the washing; he and his brethren (with one exception) are already bathed. In this way Jesus has addressed the significance for a single person of this footwashing exercise. It is necessary for participation and for maintenance of a status already accomplished. Only then did Jesus speak to the group about the parable's significance for them as a company.

He concludes in vv. 16-17 by instructing them in the implications of his lesson: they must do for each other what he has just done for them. They are his servants and messengers and he is their master who is sending them. But knowing these proper arrangements of relationship is not enough, they must act on them among themselves as those blessed with these relationships. Jesus' footwashing model is definitive for their ongoing practices as a community of his followers. Having each become a participant in Jesus by his bathing their bodies and washing their feet, they must now do for each other what they all need: wash each other's feet of daily grime and muck.

But he has more to say about their future as a community later in this chapter. In vv. 34-35 he issues what he calls a "new command" to love each other as he has loved them. This echoes the explanation he has offered earlier. When he includes the manner of required love, he says it is "just as I have loved you," which must refer to the footwashing moment but also reflects on their entire life together over the previous few years. And Jesus knew that it would soon include the ultimate expression of his love in the events of the following few days. His death, resurrection, appearances, ascension, and sending of the Spirit would revise covenant love forever, but first for this very group of people. They would experience the newness of love lived out in the "life of the ages" about to be made theirs.

In the near context is a second aspect of the newness of the command. An immediate concern of these followers is that Jesus is going away, and he tells them that where he is

going they cannot follow (v. 33). Their lives have come to be defined and directed by their physical, observable connection to the word-in-flesh Jesus. Friend and foe knew them as his followers, and they had begun to reorganize their lives around that new reality. But how would that persist if Jesus is going where they cannot follow? Jesus explains that "everyone will know that they are [his] disciples" (v. 35), no longer by their physical proximity to him, their public association with him, but by their visible, mutual love. They would be obviously committed to each other's good as a testimony to who their Teacher and Lord is.

Implications:

- Crucial to the new realities of a world where the dead are raised to share in God's life is the necessity of community. The life of the ages is enjoyed and pursued together by those who have received it. This sustains the participants and testifies to the outsider that something new is happening.

- The love required of believers has more to do with serving than feeling. It will include many rich emotions and much enjoyment, but it is intentionally focused on what others need and how they can be helped. Those who love Jesus will serve his people.

THE BENEFIT OF JESUS' TEMPORARY ABSENCE

The place given to Jesus' presence and absence provides a clue for interpreting the extended passage. The discourse in chapters 13-16 traces the ongoing theme of Jesus' presence with his disciples and with the implications of his temporary absence. Then, in his prayer of chapter 17, Jesus includes his request to have them present with him and the Father, but in a superior way than they had previously experienced

Jesus mentions his going where his men cannot follow and so initiates the emotional tenor of the entire dialogue (13:33, 36). Besides learning that there is a traitor among them and hearing Jesus tell Peter that he will deny his master three times before daylight, the disciples are grappling with the idea that Jesus is leaving them for somewhere they cannot follow (v.33), something he had previously told his opponents among the Jews (8:21) but seemed horrible for them. He further explains that his going away is temporary and that to hear of themselves. He will return and include them in his Father's house (14:3). This house has "many rooms" and can accommodate them all, but they will have to wait to occupy them. Later he promises them that his going away will benefit them in ways better than his physical presence with them so far (16:7). The Holy Spirit he sends will benefit them in greater ways than his physical presence with them has.

Near the end of the discourse, Jesus and the disciples return to the subject of his going and returning to them (16:16- 19). Jesus tells them "In a little while, you will no longer see me; again in a little while, you will see me" (v. 16) and repeats himself in v. 19. The

disciples quote him fully (v. 17) and in part (v. 18). John seems to signal that the conversation is ending where it began, with the imminence and implications of Jesus' departure and return (after his resurrection). This framing should indicate that this matter of presence, absence, and return carry a lot of meaning for the whole discourse. Jesus then prays for his disciples to be with him to witness his glory with the Father (17:24). He wants their presence at least as much as they desire his.

For Jesus' disciples on that night, these words about going and returning represented a disturbing change in their relationship with him. For John's first readers and hearers the same words explained how their ways of living with Jesus were even better than the brief season of physical access to him enjoyed by the first disciples. The information and exhortation Jesus offers in these chapters explain the "new normal" for post-resurrection disciples.

Implications

- To follow Jesus after this interruption in their proximity will mean something very different for his disciples. They would then experience what all subsequent believers and followers of Jesus know as their life with him; they will be with him in fuller and better ways than before. Our own discipleship is lived out in this reality, and it must be a feature of how we experience and offer a relationship with Jesus and teach others to pursue it.

- These disciples had only recently begun to identify themselves as those who stay with Jesus wherever he goes. They had continued following him as their new purpose in life and their hope for eternal life, even when he made it clear that he would be crucified and raised again. Disciples gain their identity and purpose from their proximity with Jesus, especially in his crucifixion and resurrection, and find that it includes relationship with the triune God.

- Jesus' prepared his disciples for the crisis of their next 60 hours and for the glory of what would follow, a shorter and longer term preparation. This discourse describes a unique moment in salvation history with ongoing effects for how humans ever after relate with God.

The Farewell Discourse features two important images that Jesus uses to speak about how these few people would relate to him after his departure. In 14:1 ff. he draws on the love of devout Jewish men for the temple in Jerusalem, what Jesus called his "Father's house" (2:16). Then, in 15:1 ff. , he develops another image from the Old Testament, God's people as his vineyard.

RESIDENTS IN THE FATHER'S HOUSE

Chapter 14 begins with and further develops the image of a new residence for Jesus' followers that turns out to be the long-promised restored temple of Yahweh. In this

metaphor, those who want to follow Jesus do so by residing with him on his terms and with the Father and Spirit. Thus the synoptic gospels' image of physically following Jesus is expanded to the constant presence and availability and interaction of God with his people. This temple imagery extends on the biblical timeline backward to the garden of Eden and forward to the descending city of God that fills the earth with his presence.

At this crucial moment, Jesus tells his disciples that he is returning to the heavenly abode of his Father (by his death and resurrection) to prepare their place with him in it. The "many rooms" he assures them of may well represent the privileged quarters of the priests who served in God's temple in Jerusalem. These ordinary Jewish men would be priests in his Father's house and dwell there with Son and Father.

In line with the trajectory of John's gospel, this points to the new temple Jesus promised he would raise up in three days (2:19-22). John identified this temple as Jesus' own body, and now the time had come for Jesus to offer his body for that purpose. What's new here is that "the Father's house" includes these men who belong to Jesus, and he will return to provide their residence with him in it.

The house is the Father's and the Son is returning to him to prepare rooms for his own. He will then return to them to include them as permanent residents. (This image is parallel to the "living stones" of 1 Pet. 2:4-5 and Paul's building erected on the already laid foundation in Eph. 2:19-22, 1 Cor. 3: 10ff.) Subsequent references to the Son's and the Father's coming to and remaining with the disciples continue this image of a many-roomed residence with God. All parties will reside here and enjoy the fruit of Jesus' becoming the temple raised as promised on the third day.

Another load-bearing image in the discourse likewise echoes promises and warnings going back to the first garden, the landless patriarchs, and the gadfly prophets before and after Judah's exile. God has always wanted his people as a fruitful vine, and Jesus here announces its fulfillment in himself and the men in that room with him.

BRANCHES FOR THE FATHER'S DESIRED FRUIT

Chapter 15 begins with and further develops the likewise familiar image of a fruitful vine bearing what God as gardener has always wanted from his chosen people. Prophetic passages, especially Isaiah 5:1-7, use this metaphor to challenge God's covenant people with their failure to bear fruit desired by the one who has chosen his vine and made every provision for it to thrive. Isaiah brings God's message of judgment against a vineyard with all his provision but no fruit. (One excellent clue to help determine what Jesus means by bearing fruit is found in God's charges against his faithless people through the prophets.)

In this metaphor Jesus' followers finally become faithful covenant partners with God because they are vitally and fruitfully connected to him as branches to a vine. The idea

is that of abiding in, staying vitally connected to Jesus as the True Vine being tended by the Father as gardener. At last, Jesus says, a faithful remnant of Israel will accomplish the divine commission to "be fruitful and multiply" for God's glory and purposes.

As the temple metaphor encourages Jesus' followers to "reside", the vine encourages them to "remain" attached and drawing from the vine, Jesus. To remain is to receive and return God's love, to keep Jesus' word, to ask and receive so as to bear fruit desired by God. And the two metaphors share a pairing of temple and garden that goes all the way back to Eden, continues in the images of fruitful plants in the decoration of both tabernacle and temple, and culminates in a New Jerusalem with a temple from which a river flows with life-giving trees on either side whose very leaves heal the nations. Temple and fruitfulness belong together as surely as true worship generates renewed life.

Implications

- Eleven Jewish men heard Jesus use images familiar to them from the scriptures and claim that he and they would fulfill what was intended in those images. After his ascension and the new realities granted with the Spirit, they began living as a temple and vineyard with God and dependent on Christ. All believers since have been granted that same status and calling.

- Ordinary Jews were promised prime accommodations in the place God lives. They would bear fruit where their fathers had failed and been exiled for it. These connections to the Old Covenant enrich the sense of blessing belonging to the least believer in Christ.

MORE AND BETTER LOVE

Jesus has already claimed to have loved them exemplarily, John says "to the end"(13:1). He has told them (and will repeat it, 15:12, 17) to love each other in the same way. But he isn't finished with the centrality of love for this new reality. It's not surprising that the two-part answer Jesus gave to the question of which command of God was the greatest is represented in this discourse. Jesus and the disciples are bonded by mutual love, but the first part of the great command is included, too. They will love God by receiving Jesus' words as God's and by keeping them. And he will be present with them to make the Father's love available and real for them.

Jesus offers his disciples the same kind of reciprocal, covenantal love they already knew from Deuteronomy, for instance, a love expressed by God in faithful deeds of salvation and provision and by his people in keeping his instruction and enjoying his presence. But in this case, the words come to the disciples through Jesus from the Father, and they love Jesus by keeping his commands (14:15). The Father's eternal love for the Son provides the model of his love for his followers, but they must remain in that love, and they do so by keeping his commands. The new element here is not that love is

expressed by obeying God but that the words to be obeyed are those spoken by Jesus. He is the one whose word must be heard and kept. And Jesus states that they will be doing just as he has done, loving the Father by keeping his word (15:9-11). To keep the "first and greatest command" means to align one's whole life with the words of Jesus.

When disciples remain in Jesus' love by their attending to his words, they find yet more experience of his Father's love and the Son's. A lover of Jesus has and keeps his commands. Yet Jesus promises that one who so loves him will be loved by the Father, he will be covenantally faithful to that one. And the Son will continue to love him by revealing himself (14:21, 23). It is in this context that Jesus states, as discussed earlier, that "we will come to him and make our home with him," the "Father's house" will be shared with the keepers of the temple.

The disciples have seen Jesus live before them as the first and only Israelite to fully keep the first command. He has loved his Father and shown them how it's done. On this, their last night together before the climax and culmination of God's purpose, Jesus makes it clear that he is going to the cross out of love for the Father and not because the world's ruler has his way (14:30-31). He explains his way of life before them as keeping his Father's commands (15:10). He has loved his Father before them, and as he prays in 17:23, has loved them as the Father loves him. His great purpose is that the love of the Father for his Son will be in them (perhaps, "among" them) and he, the Son himself, in them as the lover extraordinaire.

The new reality ahead of these disciples is like the one they knew as devout Jews in its reciprocal obligation as response to God's covenantal initiative. At the same time it is new because it will be ultimately revealed in Jesus' death and resurrection, his love for the Father answered by the Father's rescue of the Son from death. And it will be effectively instituted by the grant of the Spirit. They will be keeping commands as Jesus gave them and kept them himself and by the same Spirit. They will be receiving divine love as exemplified and mediated through Jesus. They will love their God with all their being as they never could before.

Implications:

- To love God covenantally is to keep his words, to live in his world on his terms. Now that Jesus has spoken definitively and finally about God and his ways, his words and commands are the focus of loyalty and love. Someone has said that keeping God's commands should be done as one keeps a garden rather than keeping a rule. It is the glad response to being given a garden to keep.

- Those who live to love God find even more to enjoy of God's love for them. Jesus has intensified this reality by his cross and resurrection, by opening the access and interchange of life between God and humans. He has sent the Spirit as the effusion of divine love to abide with them.

CERTAINTY AND FUTILITY OF OPPOSITION

After his resurrection and their new experience of resurrected life, Jesus' disciples would continue his mission with the same kind of opposition he had encountered. He had done all his signs and offered all his words under duress and in his followers' full view. He had shown them how it was done and they would need to be prepared to do the same. As they asked and received from the Father in Jesus' name, so they would endure hatred and reprisal for his name.

Before he spoke to his disciples about their future with opponents, he demonstrated his own attitude toward those interfering or distracting him in his mission. The obvious example is his knowledge that Judas was in the room and ready to betray him to the Jewish leaders who wanted him dead. John begins the narrative stating that the devil had put this betrayal into Judas's heart (13:2). Yet when Jesus washed feet, two of them had belonged to Judas. And though he announced to the group that one of them would betray him, Jesus seemed reluctant to identify Judas openly, identifying him only by a signal known to a few (vv. 21, 26). Once Satan had entered Judas, Jesus dismissed him with an ambiguous charge to do quickly what he was about to do (v. 27). Jesus was honest but unperturbed by a traitor in his closest band, though the news distressed the others.

In the next moment Jesus dealt with a second personal impediment. Hearing Jesus say that he was going somewhere his disciples could not yet follow, Peter spoke up to say he would lay down his life to follow Jesus anywhere (13:33, 36). Jesus replied that Peter, rather than lay down his life, would deny him three times before the rooster crowed the next morning (v. 38). Jesus had a man in his founding group appointed to lead and destined to fail before morning as a follower. It would require Jesus himself to approach and restore Peter to his call as shepherd of Jesus' flock (21:15-17). And just before Jesus begins his prayer in chapter 17, he responds to his disciples' claim to finally understand and believe Jesus by casting doubt on the firmness of their conviction (16:30-32). They would, in the next few days, scatter to their own homes and leave him alone. Jesus faced betrayal and abandonment in the very moments of his instructions to them about the opposition that would confront them.

In the context of telling them about abiding in him as branches in the true vine and about their love for one another, Jesus prepares his men for the opposition they would encounter from the very ones who had resisted him (15:18-25; 16:1-4). Again, as a servant is not greater than his master, so they would not be treated better by "the world" than he had been. The servants would be despised and persecuted as Jesus the master had been, by the same powers and for the same causes. One reason to prioritize their love for each other would be the hatred they would endure together.

Jesus uses the term "the world" to describe these opponents. In John's gospel, Jesus has been criticized, then hounded by "the Jews," leaders of the Jewish people. The first

obvious example is in 5:18 when they want to kill Jesus because he has healed a paralytic on sabbath and then claimed God as his Father, making himself God's equal. Previously they had demanded a sign from Jesus that he had authority to disrupt the temple marketplace (2:18).

Most recently, this same group, represented by the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem had decided that Jesus must die to save the nation (11:49-53). When numerous Jews gathered in Bethany after Lazarus had been raised from death and were believing in Jesus, they agreed that Lazarus too was a problem solved only by murder (12:9-11). A man resuscitated by Jesus was a threat to their power. The disciples well knew the kind of resistance Jesus had faced, and they learn here that it will continue but be directed to them as his representatives and witnesses.

Interestingly, every chapter in John before chapter 14 mentions "the Jews" at least once. They are important characters in the story, even referred to in the prologue as "his own" who "did not receive him" (1:11). They are mentioned again in each of chapters 18-20 (but not 21). They are starkly absent from chapters 14-17, but they are mentioned by this other designation, "the world", as those who opposed Jesus and would oppose the disciples. Perhaps this more general term points forward to the fact that as apostles, these men would face organized human resistance to God's eternal life from Gentiles, too.

As those belonging to and abiding with Jesus, they would have not only his *access* to the Father but his *opposition* from the very world order being displaced by his eternal life. The opposition would be no more "personal" than the access. They would be hated, resisted, and persecuted because they were sent by Jesus to represent him, to bear his name on his mission. Those humans who had boasted in their authority would not gladly yield their dominion but fight ruthlessly to maintain it.

Jesus reminded his men that the ruler of this world had designs on him, but had nothing in him to gain purchase for his destruction (14:30). He also promised them that the trouble they would certainly have in the world should not intimidate them because he had (already!) overcome the world (16:33).

Implications

- These disciples had one traitor and one failure in their number. Jesus was grieved but unfazed by this reality and wanted the same for them. Every generation and collection of disciples since has faced the same challenge.

- Instead of the Messiah replacing the current powerful people in their lives, these believers learned they would be dealing with the same kind of people. He had overcome them, but they would remain in the line of their fire. The presence and conflict of two kingdoms besets every community of Christ and provides the foil for his victories on the ground.

FULLER THAN JUST FOLLOWING

Since Jesus has entered his glory through his death and resurrection, his people share that glory by living life with him, drawing on his life for their own. A disciple of Jesus Christ loves, believes, obeys, and represents him as an active, engaged, and empowered partner in his kind of life. That life is new for the disciple but Jesus has enjoyed it with the Father and Spirit for eternity. To be his people means to live his kind of life here and now, to show and tell others how it is different from the world and better than they know.