



Part 57 – The Holy Spirit (1)

John 14:15-31

Throughout the Farewell Discourse, we can sense something of the disciples' anxiety as Jesus reveals the presence of a traitor in their midst, instructs them concerning his death, and states that he will be departing from them. Jesus speaks directly to their fear and dismay by promising that they will experience the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. In fact, twice in chapter 14 Jesus drives home the point that the Holy Spirit will come to them in a way that

will fully make up for the lack of his physical presence with them (vv. 15-18; 25-31).

The Farewell Discourse may be seen as consisting of eight sections. There is a prologue (13:31-38) and an epilogue (16:25-33) bookending six developing thematic statements by Jesus. Verses 15-31 make up the second of Jesus' six statements meant to exhort and comfort his disciples. Beginning in verse 16 Jesus introduces his disciples to the mystery of the Person and work of the Holy Spirit.

The Disciple's Love for Jesus

- As Jesus helps his disciples to anticipate his departure (via the cross and later his ascension) he describes the Spirit that is coming to them. The gift of the Spirit is conditioned, in part, upon their truly being united to Jesus by faith. The evidence for such union is found in their love for him. In the Upper Room Jesus has already demonstrated his love for his disciples and commanded them to love one another. Now he speaks for the first time of their love for him (a point to which he will return in 15:14). The gift of the Holy Spirit "is an outgrowth of the loving relationship between Jesus and his disciples, not an entitlement earned by the disciple."¹

Vs. 15 – "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." – The believer's relationship with God is one of love. It begins with the Father's love for the elect. He "predestined us for adoption" and "chose us in [Christ] before the foundation of the world" (Ephesians 1:4-5), "...but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Up to this point, it is God's love for his people which has been the dominant theme. But now John emphasizes the love of the disciple for God. And love, according to the Bible, "is never a sentiment or emotion; it is always moral."² Jesus' intention here is to define the way that God's image-bearers are to love him. Proper love for God will always involve obedience to his commands. This is how the Lord Jesus directs the love of his disciples.

The Divine Advocate Given to Jesus' Disciples

- There is often confusion or lack of clarity concerning the role of the Holy Spirit in the world and in the lives of believers prior to Pentecost. The simple answer is that the Holy Spirit was most certainly active prior to Pentecost. He was active in Creation (Genesis 1:2). He was active in the divine inspiration as the words of God were given to the prophets and committed to writing by such men as Moses (2 Peter 1:21).
- The Old Testament saints were not saved by obedience to the law. They were saved the only way sinners have ever been saved, by grace through faith in the coming Messiah. Adam and Abraham and Moses were just as dependent upon the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit for salvation as we are today. In his prayer of repentance, David prays for God to not take from him the Holy Spirit (Psalm 51:11).

Vs. 16a-b – "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper." – The Greek word translated "helper" (*paraclete*) in the ESV was commonly used to refer to a lawyer or "advocate." Its usage was forensic in nature. As one commentator puts it, "[The] NIV's 'Counsellor' is not wrong, so long as 'legal counsellor' is understood, not 'camp counsellor' or 'marriage counsellor' and, even so, the Paraclete's ministry extends beyond the legal sphere."³ The word encompasses such meanings as "to strengthen, to encourage, to aid." In 1 John 2:1 the NIV translates the same word as "one who speaks in our defense."

¹ Gary Burge, *John*, NAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000) p. 395

² Edward Klink, *John*, ECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016) p. 631

³ D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991) p. 499

Notice that Jesus refers to the Spirit as “another Paraclete.” In his first epistle, John refers to Jesus as a “Paraclete” (2:1). So, Jesus is a Paraclete who is now giving to his people “another Paraclete.” The ongoing work of the Holy Spirit will be a continuation of the presence and work of Jesus.

Vs. 16c – “...to be with you forever.” – The ministry of the Holy Spirit has always been God’s intention. Indeed, the title “Paraclete” is used to describe both the Son and the Holy Spirit. Jesus was our Paraclete enfleshed and dying in our place. The Holy Spirit is our Paraclete who applies the saving work of Christ to believers. “Nothing here denies a future and even greater presence with God in ‘my Father’s house’ (14:2-3), but it does mean that even in our present ‘dwellings’ God is also dwelling intimately with his people, guaranteeing what has been officially inaugurated – eternal life (20:31).”⁴

- The term “Paraclete” is not easy to translate. It is variously rendered “Comforter,” “Counselor,” and “Helper.” In the New Testament, only John uses the term (14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7; 1 John 2:1). It is a term typically used in legal or forensic settings. The breadth of options is likely helpful for John’s purposes as it applies some of the varied ways in which God helps his people. Jesus will explain to his disciples that his going away (ascension) is to their advantage because he will send the Paraclete to them (16:7). Jesus is not suggesting that the Holy Spirit has been absent. That would violate what the Scriptures reveal concerning the Spirit’s presence and work throughout creation and redemptive history. Rather, Jesus is speaking to the economic reality of God’s work. That is, Jesus is referring to how the Triune God reveals himself in relation to the experience of his people.

Vs. 17a – “...even the Spirit of Truth,” – This title given the Holy Spirit also appears in 15:26 and 16:13. He is the Spirit of Truth because he communicates and bears witness to the truth of Jesus Christ. He inspired the ever truthful Word of God and guides God’s people into the truth.

Vs. 17b – “...whom the world cannot receive,” – The word, *kosmos* or “world” (an important word in John) occurs about 40 times in chapters 13-17. It stands for that unbelieving and sinful mass of humanity to which the gospel will come, among whom the followers of Christ must live and work, and out of which the Lord will call his own.

Vs. 17c – “...because it neither sees him nor knows him.” – The terms “sees” and “knows” are likely synonymous. To know the Lord is to “see” him. The Holy Spirit is not “given” to the world. “The reality of God is mediated or experienced by the Spirit of truth in such a way that the believer knows and sees [him].”⁵

The Mysterious Union Sustaining Jesus’ Disciples

Vs. 17d-e – “You know him, for he dwells with you...” – Notice that the Holy Spirit is *already living* with the disciples. The Spirit’s presence does not wait till the day of Pentecost. He has already worked in them true faith in Jesus Christ and is already accompanying them in their pilgrimage of faith. We know of no other salvation than that which is communicated to our hearts and worked into our lives by the ministry of the Holy Spirit. In that sense the Holy Spirit’s ministry is no different today than it was among the Old Testament saints.

Vs. 17f – “...and will be in you.” – The “will be” does not indicate a beginning, but a continuing reality. As we have seen, the Holy Spirit already “dwells with” them. He will continue to be with them. Certainly, at Pentecost, the apostles will experience a degree of the Holy Spirit’s ministry that will be new. But the Spirit is already actively present, just as he has always been (Genesis 1:2).

- Christians are often told that prior to Pentecost, the Holy Spirit did not dwell within believers. That belief is based largely upon this clause and a few others like it. This is why we must understand how the Bible uses language to describe the believer’s experience in the economy of redemption. Do we truly want to suggest that the interior world of the believer was bereft of the presence of God prior to Pentecost? Does this truly square with the biblical witness concerning God’s omnipresence or even the experience of the Old Testament saints?
- The “in you,” of this final clause of verse 17 is not meant to indicate a new dwelling place for God that had prior to this been un-accessed. Rather, the prepositions of verse 17 (“with” and “in”) “are not to be played off each other but to be understood to be speaking with their own overlapping perspectives regarding the real presence of the Paraclete “with,” “beside,” and even “in” the believer.”⁶

⁴ Klink, p. 635

⁵ Klink, p. 636

⁶ Klink, p. 636