

The Gospel of John

Session Thirty: Jesus's Teaching at the Last Supper, Part 2

Commentary

John 14:15-31

14:15–18. How do people know that they are Christians? How do you and I gain confidence that we are born again by the regenerating power of God's Holy Spirit? The world cannot know because the world cannot accept the Holy Spirit. But the disciples were told that the Holy Spirit lives with you and will be in you. Pentecost was still in their future, so at the present time the Holy Spirit was constantly with them. But after Pentecost, he would actually be in them and in every other believer since that day. Consequently, they were identifiable (as we are) as God's children, not orphans.

What did Jesus mean by the promise at the end of verse 18: I will come to you? Some interpreters suggest this refers to the resurrection while others see another promise of the second coming. But in the context of these verses, it surely means the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Jesus lives in us through the person and power of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit lives in us to identify his children. The doctrine of the indwelling Holy Spirit does not rest completely on this passage, but verse 17 is of great significance. Of this important verse Gromacki writes:

First, the spirit was dwelling "with" the apostles in the Gospel era. In Greek the words "with you" literally mean "beside you." In that sense, the Holy Spirit had a companion ministry to the apostles. He was beside them, but not inside them.

Second, Christ predicted that the Spirit would be in them. After the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, the same Spirit who was beside them would be inside them. Christ also changed verbal tenses to show the difference in the two relationships of the Spirit to the apostles. The verb *menei* ("dwells") is in the present tense, whereas the verb *estai* ("will be") is in the future tense (Gromacki, Robert. *The Holy Spirit*. Nashville: Word, 1999, p. 136).

Not only that, but this indwelling will be endless—the new Counselor will be with you forever. No orphans in the family of God, no abandoned people with no place to turn. The Holy Spirit will be a constant presence of Jesus with all believers.

14:19–21. How well we remember the song that states, "Because he lives I can face tomorrow; because he lives all fears are gone." Perhaps the idea for the lyrics had its birth in John 14:19. When did the disciples (later called the apostles) realize that Jesus was in the Father and that they dwelt in him? Did they have to wait for the second coming for that? Of course not. The reference to that day must refer to the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. That frightened, hesitant group of believers huddled in an upper room knew the power of the Holy Spirit broke forth upon them because it literally blasted them around the city, around the country and around their world.

But notice again the emphasis on behavior. A person does not show that the Holy Spirit lives in him by bizarre behavior or belief, but by knowing and obeying the commands of the Lord Jesus. How desperately we need balance in the church. Making too much of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit leads to mysticism; making too little of him leads to legalism. Only the balance can lead to unity. How like sinful human beings to divide the church over the Holy Spirit, sent by God to unite us.

As we might expect, interpreters have debated the meaning of the words on that day, although the context seems to point to the resurrection. As Morris puts it, "When he is risen and when the Spirit is come, then they will know the truth of his relationship to the Father, and they will know that he dwells in them and they in him" (Morris, Leon. *The Gospel According to John*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971, p. 652).

14:22–24. The Holy Spirit lives actively in us all the time; we do not need to pray for him to come to a certain meeting, or a certain occasion, or at a certain time. He is not some kind of theological or spiritual helicopter looking for a place to land.

The disciples always wanted to know why Jesus treated them differently than he did the world, and we find that question again in verse 22. But the answer is always the same. Jesus reveals himself to people he knows will respond to him and obey his teaching. The key word of these three verses is obey or perhaps even the phrase obey my teaching. Again the Lord linked himself with the Father and indicated that the Father and the Son through the Spirit take up residence in the lives of believers.

Judas is also mentioned in Luke 6 and Acts 1 but only here does he speak. Likely he is the same person as the Thaddaeus of Matthew 10:3 and Mark 3:18. His interruption, like those of Thomas and Philip, reminds us not only that the disciples were confused about all this doctrine, but also that they felt comfortable enough in the presence of the Lord to interrupt him with questions. But what is the answer to his question? Quite simply, love. The obedient children of the Father receive the Holy Spirit who will manifest (show) Jesus to them, although his true nature will still be hidden from the world.

14:25–27. The Holy Spirit reminds us of truth that Jesus taught. In the case of the disciples, it was an immediate application to their spiritual memories. In our case, it is assistance in understanding and applying the Word of God. In their lives and ours, constant awareness of the Spirit's presence is a daily practicality.

But Jesus also promised peace. Verse 27 reminds us of the early verses of this chapter: Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you ... Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. Let us remember that these were troubled, frightened disciples. They needed assurance of peace. But they were not peculiar in that need. Peace of spirit and mind is an essential part of a healthy home, a healthy workplace, and a healthy life. But only those who have peace with God can have the peace of God.

As Hughes expresses it, “To the unregenerate mind, the mysteries of God’s purpose in life remain barred. But to the believer, the indwelling Spirit gives comprehension and comfort. He brings before our troubled hearts the Word of God and applies its comfort. Words can never adequately convey the comfort of the Holy Spirit, but I have seen it, as I have stood in a hospital room with those whose lives are literally falling apart, and have witnessed the Holy Spirit bringing to their remembrance the promises of the Word” (Hughes. *Behold the Man* [2 vols.]. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1984, p. 57).

14:28–29. Here it is again—that constant nagging reminder to the disciples that Jesus would leave them. But this time he actually told them they should be glad. And when the Lord said, the Father is greater than I, he did not imply any denial of deity. Jesus was going back to heaven to take his appropriate role as our advocate by the Father’s throne. But he would not leave his people alone on earth, so he sent the Holy Spirit to live the life of Jesus in the disciples and in us.

The Holy Spirit teaches us by strengthening our faith to trust the Father. We have no competence in ourselves for Christian living, parenting, teaching, or leading. Second Corinthians 3 could not be clearer: “Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Cor. 3:4–6).

We wonder about the conditional past tense in the middle of verse 28—if you loved me. According to Carson, “now he goes over to the offensive, however mildly: their failure to understand, their failure to trust him, is also a failure of love. If they truly loved him (and the clear implication is that they do not), they would be glad that he’s going to the Father” (Carson, D. A. *The Gospel According to John*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1991, p. 506).

14:30–31. The Holy Spirit also strengthens our faith to witness to the world. Jesus told the disciples, the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me. Would not it be wonderful if we could say exactly the same thing about our lives? Imagine a Christian father asked by a little child, “Daddy, why do we give money to missionaries?” and the dad responds, “Sweetheart, it’s because the world must learn that we love the Father and we do exactly what the Father has commanded.” Perhaps a mother who has forgiven a child for the fifth or sixth time in the same day is asked why she is so patient and loving and she can reply the same way. That is what it means to have another Counselor in our lives.

The last phrase, Come now; let us leave, indicates that the upper room portion of the Lord’s teaching was finished. They probably walked out into the garden, and chapter 15 continues in that outdoor setting.

This dynamic passage ought to leave us with several crucial questions. How do we practice the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives? How do we guard against sinning in ways that offend the Holy Spirit such as quenching or grieving him? How do we flesh out the kind of demonstration the world must see to know that Jesus is alive and living in us through the Holy Spirit?

Two phrases in our text reach for our attention before we leave this section. First, Jesus' comment about the prince of this world is an obvious reference to Satan, although this Gospel does not mention the temptation of Jesus so prominent in the synoptic Gospels (Matt. 4:1–11; Mark 1:12–13; Luke 4:1–13). Tenney says, "Jesus did not fear Satan because Satan had no claim on him. There was nothing in Jesus' character or action that could be used against him. Satan had no valid accusation that could be used as leverage to divert Jesus from the will of his Father. His obedience had been perfect, and he intended to complete the Father's purpose irrespective of what it might cost him" (Tenney, Merrill C. *The Gospel of John*. Expositor's Bible Commentary. Vol. 9. Ed. by Frank E. Gaebelein. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981, p. 149).

Second, we pause for a moment at the closing words of the chapter, Come now; let us leave. John 18:1 says, "When he had finished praying, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley." We wonder about the geography at the end of chapter 14. Some interpreters suggest that Jesus and his disciples left the room at the end of chapter 14 and that chapters 15–17 describe discussions along the way with the prayer somewhere in route. Others find cause for textual dislocation and rearrangement of the text.

Perhaps the best approach indicates that they began to leave at the end of chapter 14 but did not actually get away until the beginning of chapter 18. Morris observes, "Anyone who has tried to get a group of a dozen or so to leave a particular place at a particular time will appreciate that it usually takes more than one brief exhortation to accomplish this. There is nothing at all unlikely in an interval between the uttering of the words and the departure of the group. And if an interval, then there is no reason why Jesus should not have continued to speak during it" (Morris, p. 661).

John 15:26–16:15

15:26–27. These two verses form a bridge into chapter 16. The Counselor, whom we met in 14:16, 26, will come from the Father and his chief work will be to proclaim the message of Jesus. We talk a great deal about spiritual gifts—a concept appearing in four major passages of the New Testament (Rom. 12; 1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4; 1 Pet. 4). A spiritual gift is a special order of grace that enables Christians to serve God effectively. Spiritual gifts come to us through the agency of the Holy Spirit who acts sovereignly in determining who gets what gift. He also provides the power for the exercise of these gifts.

We see that the Counselor is far more than just a defense attorney; he energizes us for the work he calls us to do. And part of that work reminds us that the Holy Spirit testifies to the world through witnesses like the disciples—and like us.

This verse ought to take away any casual carelessness we have about our role in God's plan for the world. How easy it would be to assume that God sends the Holy Spirit to descend upon whomever he wishes and to zap that person into regeneration. But we know that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. Jesus reminds the disciples, you also must testify.

16:1–4. These verses prophesy the conditions that the church endured in varying degrees from Pentecost to a.d. 313. Obviously, the early years of persecution were made more difficult by the absence of the Lord, and he made that point in these verses. The purpose of the Lord's teaching was to counteract the temptation these men would face to go astray as they faced two major types of persecution.

The first was excommunication: they will put you out of the synagogue. Peter and John were arrested at the temple; Paul, Barnabas, and Silas were thrown out of numerous synagogues; Martin Luther was exiled from the Roman Catholic church. These verses spin directly from John 15:18–20 where the Lord had predicted persecution because of hatred by the world.

The second dimension is murder: anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God. From Stephen to the thousands of modern martyrs, witnesses for Jesus have always faced the possibility of death. Like the Pharisees and Sadducees who pursued Christians in the New Testament, people today still persecute followers of Jesus for religious reasons. In fact, there were more martyrs for the Christian faith in the twentieth century than all previous centuries put together.

Hughes quotes Bonhoeffer's challenge from 1937 during Hitler's rise in Germany: "Suffering ... is the badge of true discipleship. The disciple is not above his Master ... Luther reckoned suffering among the marks of the true church ... Discipleship means allegiance to the suffering Christ, and it is therefore not at all surprising that Christians should be called upon to suffer" (cited in Hughes, p. 83).

The practical application of these warnings is in verse 4. These disciples would experience persecution in a matter of weeks, certainly months. And the Lord wanted them to recall this quiet night of teaching when chaos later broke out on the streets of Jerusalem. Some have puzzled over the sentence, I did not tell you this at the first because I was with you, especially in view of the prediction of persecution in Matthew 10:17, 21, 28. But this was personal instruction linked with the role of the Holy Spirit, something absent from Matthew 10.

16:5–7. The Lord told the disciples he was leaving them and going back to the Father. This caused them deep sorrow. But in fact, the glass was half-full rather than half-empty. If Jesus did not leave, the Counselor could not come, and he had important work to do in the world. Jesus did not say why the Holy Spirit could not come until he went away, but we understand from the New Testament that the Son's return to glory was a condition for sending the Holy Spirit to work in the world.

But that is our perspective. We dare not let our understanding, derived from the text of the entire New Testament, detract from the fear and confusion the disciples must have felt on this dreary night.

Imagine a mother of two children whose husband has been away on business. She must go to the airport to pick him up. She informs the children that they will be alone at home for three or four hours while she makes this lengthy trip across the city. They do not want her to leave; they fear what might happen to them; they want to go with her. But for a variety of reasons she must go alone. She assures them that all will be better for the family when she returns with their father, whom they have missed. The anticipation and reluctance of those children can be magnified many times by the sadness of the disciples on this occasion.

16:8. Many evangelistic sermons have been preached with three points prominently displayed—sin, righteousness, and judgment. We will look at these words in the following verses, but here we want to concentrate on the central verb convict that translates the Greek word *elegcho*. What did Jesus mean when he said the Holy Spirit will convict the world of guilt? Translations have handled the word differently, choosing English words like reprove or convince. In the Septuagint, we see the word primarily focused on correction (Job 5:17; Ps. 141:5; Prov. 3:11–12).

Since the New Testament speaks often of the Holy Spirit's work in the lives of believers, we find it a little more difficult to understand what the Spirit does in the world (*kosmos*). We must not miss the important words "to you" at the end of verse 7. The Holy Spirit does not float around the cosmos like Casper the friendly ghost, spreading general feelings of conviction. The New Testament makes it plain that conviction and awareness of sin come through the hearing of Scripture. Godet emphasizes the Holy Spirit's work "through the agency of the disciples" and says, "The discourse of St. Peter at Pentecost and its results are the best commentary on this promise" (Godet, Frederick L. *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, Vol. II. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, p. 309).

The reference to world, as we have seen repeatedly in this Gospel, centers in the unbelieving society which will be challenged and shaken in its devotion to sin by the power of the Word and the Spirit working through God's people. John centered on the Spirit's work to unbelievers in verses 8–11 and then switched to his work in believers in verses 12–15.

16:9. The last part of verse 9 offers the key to this section. The work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Christians convicts unsaved people because their message radiates Christ. Unbelief is the condemning sin that closes the door to heaven and opens the door to hell. People do not go to hell because they smoke, drink, or curse but because they reject faith in Christ. Furthermore, this sin characterizes every unregenerate person. God is not looking for perfect people but people who are willing to accept atonement that he has already provided.

16:10. The Holy Spirit also convicts the world in regard to righteousness. This element of the message is connected to the ascension which completed the glorification process and therefore

proved the righteousness of Christ (Pss. 17:1, 15; 24:1–4). It is not that the world does not believe in righteousness; unbelievers and believers alike magnify the work of people like Albert Schweitzer and Mother Teresa. But the world only believes in relative righteousness, and Christ's righteousness is absolute.

These chapters tell us how the Counselor, the Spirit of truth, can produce God's righteous fruit in our lives that is patterned after the life and righteousness of Jesus himself. People do not see their need for Christ and do not believe in him (v. 9) because they have a confused view of righteousness unformed by the truth. Justification is a central issue in salvation, and it has everything to do with righteousness. God declares believers righteous on the basis of the death of Christ who paid the penalty for sin.

16:11. Here is where so much preaching on this passage goes awry. A discussion of sin and righteousness seems to lead almost automatically to a warning about judgment for those who reject Christ. But the word because that appears after each of these key words indicates that the Lord was not talking about "judgment to come" as he did in 12:31–32. The final judgment of this world and Satan was accomplished at Calvary. That great enemy of truth is now living on borrowed time. Judgment will come, but the focus here is on an awareness that the prince of this world now stands condemned.

16:12–13. Verse 12 is a good example of progressive revelation—the principle that God does not dump all truth at one time and expect us to remember it but teaches us truths as we need to know them. The Bible itself is the greatest example of this as we read God's progressive unfolding of the plan of salvation from Genesis to Revelation. Does the phrase more than you can now bear mean the disciples were not able to understand everything or that they could not accomplish necessary ministry without the Holy Spirit's help? We should probably conclude that both were true. But when the Counselor comes, it will be a different situation. He will teach God's truth to believers.

Some people see this passage relating only to the revelatory work of the Spirit in the lives of those who wrote the New Testament. Certainly that is in view, but there is a broader emphasis here on illumination as well as revelation—the Spirit of God enabling us to understand what others have written about God's truth. How often Jesus told anyone who would listen that he had no personal agenda, no particular message of his own. He had been sent by the Father and would proclaim only the Father's truth. Now he said exactly the same thing about the Holy Spirit.

All truth is God's truth and it comes to us through creation, through the person of Jesus, and through the Scriptures. Tenney tells us that "'guide' implies leadership toward a person who is interested in travelling on the right path, but who needs help in finding it ... The believer may not have progressed far along the way of truth, but is desirous of going on in the right direction, and needs the good offices of the Spirit to conduct him on his way" (Tenney, Merrill C. John: *The Gospel of Belief*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948, p. 235).

16:14–15. When truth is communicated and believed, it brings glory to God. More specifically, the Holy Spirit, the Counselor, will glorify the Son of God by telling Christians even more about God’s truth than Jesus had time to do during his brief years on earth. These verses are fulfilled repeatedly when people in our day read the writings of Paul or Peter and know more about Jesus because the Holy Spirit first revealed it and now explains it.¹

¹ Gangel, Kenneth O. *Holman New Testament Commentary: John*. Edited by Max E. Anders. (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2000).