

The Comforter – *John 14:12-31*

Introduction – We are working our way through what is called Jesus’ Farewell Discourse (ch 13-17). It is a combination of announcements the Lord gives, actions He takes, teachings on both, and a final prayer to His Father for Himself and His disciples. This is the night of His coming betrayal, only hours away (13:1). Interrupting dinner, Jesus gets up and washes the disciples feet, then sits back down and instructs them to do the same (13:12-16). His soul troubled, He announces that one in this inner circle will betray Him (13:21) and after all the confusion that brings, He tells them He will be leaving them (13:36). He tells the disciples to not let their hearts be troubled over this (14:1) and gives them reasons for His departure, calling them to believe Him and all His departure will accomplish (14:11). He then begins to address how they will join Him in that accomplishment as well as how His departure will actually bring them into deeper communion with Him and with the Father.

An Extended Walk through the Passage – There are many verses in this passage that must be understood in context and yet in such a way that “in context” isn’t used to make the verses actually mean pretty much nothing. Here is an overview of the passage with extra comments that will hopefully embolden our faith for a deeper understanding and fearless application of the text.

There are four ideas made in vv12-18 and they interact with one another – (1) Verse 12 opens with a remarkable promise that another result of Christ’s departure is that because He goes to the Father, His disciples will do greater works than Jesus did while on earth. (2) Then, in the next two verses (13-14), He makes reference to prayer and all that would be accomplished by it. (3) In verse 15 a connection is made between loving Jesus and keeping His commandments – they go together. (4) In addition, Jesus will pray to the Father Who will send another “Helper” to abide with them forever (v16). While Jesus is the truth (v6), this is the Spirit of truth (v17) who is dwelling with them as Jesus speaks and will dwell in them in the future. In some way, even though He is departing, all of this means that He is not leaving them as orphans and will come to them (v18).

The next verses riff off these four ideas. There is a mutual indwelling the disciples will experience with the Father and the Son, “seeing” Jesus in some way that the world cannot because He has departed (vv19-20). Keeping Christ’s commandments manifests love for Him which will cause the Father to love the one obeying and Christ will be revealed in some greater way (vv20-21). This causes Judas (not Iscariot) to wonder why Christ will not manifest Himself to the unbelieving, disobedient world (v22). Jesus answers (is this an answer?) that the one who loves Him will keep His commandments and the Father and the Son will come and make their “mansion” in such (v23). This unity, mutual indwelling, obeying, and love are all tied together; even the words of Jesus are not His alone, but the Father’s (v24).

Again, the Helper is mentioned; He will teach all things and bring to remembrance all things (v25). As in v1, peace for troubled hearts is promised (v27). In fact, they are to rejoice that He is going away to the Father, for the Father is greater than Jesus (v28 – and remember, Jesus is the Way to the Father, so it is good that He goes to the Father). As with foretelling the betrayal, so Jesus tells them why He is glad He tells them these things now (v29). The ruler of this world is about to bring his plans to bear, but he is nothing and His plans will come to nothing, as even the world will soon see (vv30-31).

Greater Works, Answered Prayer, Love that Gladly Obeys, and the Indwelling Comforter – So let us meditate upon these four ideas and how they work together and must be understood together. We will only begin this meditation, for these ideas continue to come up in the rest of the Discourse.

Greater Works... – Those apostles did indeed do amazing miracles and we are told these were signs of their apostleship (2 Cor 12:12, Heb 2:4). But the greater works Jesus foretold because He was at His Father’s right hand was far more eternal than that. After Jesus departed (to heaven at His ascension) they continued in prayer (Acts 1:14) and 10 days later the Holy Spirit did descend and come upon them (Acts 2). At Pentecost, three-thousand souls believed and were saved at the preaching of Peter. After Peter and John were arrested and then released, they prayed that they might obey the Lord’s command (to disciple the nations) with power and boldness (Acts 4:29-31, 33). Those greater works have continued over all the continents of the world; you and I sit here 2000 years later because of the greater works of the Spirit-empowered church over centuries bringing the Word and its efficacious, life-saving work to the world.

Answered Prayer... – There are two ditches to avoid when it comes to vv13-14 and related verses (Matt 7:7, Mark 11:24, Luke 11:9, John 15:16, 16:23-24, James 5:13ff, 1 John 3:22). The first is obvious. We can't pray for the illogical (make round squares), the immoral (grant me every sinful activity without cost), or other prayers like create seven more moons circling the earth, take me back to live in the 16th Century, grant the ability to read everyone's mind. But what about lawful desires? They aren't always answered, or their answer is unwelcome. So, we are tempted to fall into praying "*if it be your will...*" as an all-purpose escape clause, which makes praying ineffective in the end. Now there is a proper humility for us to have as we pray in the midst of a circumstance we wouldn't choose – as Jesus did in the garden of Gethsemane (Matt 26:39). However, in this context of a deep, mutual indwelling with the Triune God and a love that brings forth obedience, we will be shaped to pray for that which is according to His perfections and for His glory. We will pray "in His name," that is, on His behalf, and that will be more and more our will as well – just as there is a united will between Jesus and the Father.

Love that Gladly Obeys... – Romans 5:5 says that "*...the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.*" The Holy Spirit is the love of the Father for the Son and the Son for the Father, their mutual indwelling. That perfect love is a Person Who dwells in believers. This is why John would write in his epistle, "*He who says 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected (completed) in him. By this we know that we are in Him*" (1 John 2:4-5, also 5:3). While this can be understood as a test (I know I am in Christ if I keep His word), it more importantly is gracious good news. God is Personally at work in every believer, "*to will and to do according to His good pleasure*" (Phil 2:14). He will complete this good work He has begun (Phil 1:6). And the Spirit, sealed in us, is His guarantee of this inheritance (Eph 1:13). The old man could not obey God. But now the love of God is ours, indwells us, and we find ourselves given the desire and ability to walk according to His Word.

The Indwelling Comforter... – We have seen Him, the Holy Spirit, and His work in the other three ideas, but there is more. The Greek word, "*Parakletos*" has a broad range of meanings, "advocate," "legal advisor," "helper," "companion," "counselor," and "comforter." The old KJV translation "*Comforter*" did not then sound like a warm quilt but rather was a word that encompassed the broader range. He strengthens us, intercedes for us, bears His fruit in us, and makes us able to understand spiritual things that the world cannot (1 Cor 2:10-15). Simply put, He brings the Word to life in our hearts. And that Word is not only data, instruction, and teaching. That Word is Jesus Christ – in you, the hope of glory (Col 1:27). He has made His home in you, along with the Father who calls you His sons as well, heirs according to the promise. This is why Jesus says, "*Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age*" (Matt 28:20). He says, "*I will never leave you nor forsake you*" (Heb 13:5). This is why Jesus will later say, "*It is to your advantage that I go away...*" (John 16:7), and why He can say "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, either let it be afraid" (14:27). And as I said, these truths must be given much meditation.