

## BIBLE SERIES: "EXPLORING OUR AWESOME BIBLE"

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### JOHN 16 – 17 JESUS' LAST DISCOURSE: HIS PRAYER TO BE ONE IN UNITY



In His final discourse during the Passover, Christ continues to comfort them, knowing He will soon die, but also tells them they should expect to be misunderstood and persecuted as He was.

He said, "These things I have spoken to you, that you should not be made to stumble. They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service. And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me" (John 16:1-4).

He warns them as Christian Jews they would be persecuted by their kin and expelled from their beloved synagogues. They didn't expect this at all, thinking Jesus was the Messiah who would be welcomed by His people. The synagogue was their social and religious center for instruction and fellowship, and being excluded would be very tough since they had relatives and children going there every Sabbath. And those who persecuted them would think they were really serving God. A case in point is Paul before his conversion, believing he was doing the right Jewish thing by persecuting Christians. Later, Catholic priests in the Spanish Inquisition tortured and killed heretics believing they were doing God a service.

Jesus continues, "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 depart, *I will send Him to you*. And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you" (John 16:1-14).

Notice first, it is *Jesus* who that will send the power of the Holy Spirit to them. He also mentions He is going to the Father and not to the Father *and*

*the Holy Spirit*. After all, if there were two Persons in the Godhead in heaven while Jesus was on earth, it would be an *insult* to leave the other Person out of the scene, but He just mentions the Father.

In addition, since Jesus is talking about the Helper (Gk. *paraclete*), which in Greek grammar is of the masculine gender, it says "he," but it doesn't mean it's a person, as we have already discussed and also of the antecedent noun having priority.

*The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* comments, "Other NT writers [besides John] did not use *parakletos*, but they occasionally made a *similar point* by using phrases such as "the Spirit of Jesus" (Acts 16:7), "the Spirit of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:19), or the Spirit of Christ" (1 Pet. 1:11). In the figure of the Paraclete more than anywhere else, the Spirit of God wears a human face, and it is *the face of Jesus*" (1982, Vol. 3, page 660). Quite a remarkable admission that the face of the paraclete is Jesus Christ and *not* a third Person.

Jesus encourages them by saying that although He is going to die, they will again see Him when He is resurrected by the Father. Also, He mentions the Holy Spirit will work in people's hearts by pricking their conscience, as Peter later witnessed in Acts 2:36-38, by them being convicted of what sin really is (the breaking of God's holy laws, 1 John 3:4), what righteousness truly is (obeying God's laws in the spirit and letter, Psalms 119:172), and what judgment is all about (we are going to be judged by God's laws), creating a healthy fear, or deep respect, for God, His ways and laws.

*The People's New Testament* notes, "In the record of what was said by the mouth of Peter, we find that the Spirit convicted (1) of sin, in that those who heard had rejected the Lord of life and glory; (2) of righteousness, in that it was demonstrated by the manifestations of that hour that God had exalted the Lord whom they had condemned to his own right hand; (3) of judgment, in that they were assured of the 'wrath to come,' and warned to 'save themselves from this untoward generation'" (notes on John 16:8).

Then He says, "These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; but the time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but I will tell you plainly about the Father. In that

day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you; for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God. I came forth from the Father and have come into the world. Again, I leave the world and go to the Father" (John 16:25-28).

This is an important section to understand in order to refute Trinitarian arguments. The term "figurative language" is *paroimia* in Greek and it's where we get the word "parable." As Barclay mentions, "The Greek is *paroimia*; it is the word used for Jesus' parables, but basically it means a saying that is hard to understand, a saying whose meaning is veiled to the casual listener, a saying which demands thought before its meaning can become clear" (*Daily Bible Study*, on John 16:25).

In Christ's day, it was typical in Jewish and Hellenistic culture to *personify* many spiritual concepts such as Wisdom, Love, and the Holy Spirit, and give them attributes as if they could think, speak or act, but no one then thought they were talking about actual persons. Instead they were abstract ideas converted into parables or allegories to make them more real or to hide their meaning. So He explained the use of *word pictures* or *metaphors* (such as the paraclete) to describe their future relationship with His Father and Him.

He had already given them several parables in His talk, such as the one about the grapevine and in particular, about the Helper, the paraclete, as the Holy Spirit entering a person and having God the Father and Christ's influence in them. Unfortunately, some later took this figurative language of the Helper or Comforter and interpreted it literally, but that was not how it was intended. So it's not a person, but God the Father and Christ living in them through the Holy Spirit.

For instance, John was well aware that Christ used figurative language to describe the paraclete, and later, in his First Epistle written to the Church, he could then use more clear and precise language to dispel any doubts of what Jesus had meant by the paraclete. He wrote, "And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate [Gk. *parakletos*,] with the Father, *Jesus Christ* the righteous" (1 John 2:1). Christ is the Advocate. If there was a third person in heaven, called the Paraclete, then there would be *two* Advocates, or mediators--Jesus Christ and the Holy

Spirit. Yet as Scripture indicates, "For there is one God and *one Mediator* between God and man, the Man *Christ Jesus*" (1 Timothy 2:5).

In a rare candid moment, *The New Catholic Encyclopedia* even admits, "The majority of NT texts reveal God's spirit as *something*, not someone; this is especially seen in the parallelism between the spirit and the power of God. When a quasi-personal activity is ascribed to God's spirit, e.g., speaking, hindering, desiring, dwelling (Acts 8:29; 16:7; Rom. 8:9), one is *not* justified in concluding immediately that in these passages God's spirit is regarded as a Person; the same expressions are used in regard to *rhetorically personified things* or *abstract ideas* (see Rom. 6:6; 7:17). Thus the context of the 'blasphemy' against the spirit (Mt. 12:31) shows that reference is being made to *the power of God*" (1965, "The Spirit of God," Volume 13, page 575, emphasis added).

John continues with the narrative, "His disciples said to Him, 'See, now You are speaking plainly, and using no figure of speech! Now we are sure that You know all things, and have no need that anyone should question You. By this we believe that You came forth from God.' Jesus answered them, 'Do you now believe? Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me. These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world'" (John 16:29-33).

Jesus comforts them again although He knows they still hardly understand what will soon happen to Him, and He forgives them for abandoning Him, knowing they still don't have the Holy Spirit in them to give them the godly courage and proper discernment about spiritual things.

Before ending, Jesus' prayer to the Father has some of the most inspiring words ever uttered. He focuses on the glory He had before coming down to the earth and about the caring for His disciples.

We read, "Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: 'Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom

You have sent. I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with *the glory which I had with You before the world was*. I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. Now they have known that all things which You have given Me are from You. For I have given to them the words which You have given Me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me” (John 17:1-8).

This is one of the scriptures that shows Christ shared the glory with God the Father from the very beginning--before the universe existed.

He then says, “I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours. And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them. Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world” (John 17:9-16).

It might seem strange that He says He doesn’t pray for the world, but Jesus is not trying to save the whole world now. It is an unconverted world that is mostly not being presently called. Those who do need His prayers are those whom God is working with now. He asks the Father to protect them and to be kept in the Father’s name. That is why twelve times in the New Testament the name of the true church is given as the Church of God—for it bears the Father’s name as overall in charge.

Jesus then says that spiritual truth is wholly found in God’s Word and about the unity He wants among the brethren, just as there is unity between

the Father and Him. He says, “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth. I do not pray for these alone, *but also for those who will believe in Me through their word*; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me” (John 17:17-23).

We again see the Holy Spirit is not a person, for this unity is *only* between God the Father and the Son. Also the term “one,” which in Greek can mean the numeral one (*heis*) or *figuratively* as one in spirit (*hen*). Here Christ reveals God and Him are “one” by using the Greek *hen* – which means they are one in spirit, but not numerically one. God the Father and Jesus Christ are not one Being, but two, sharing their glory (*doxa* in the Greek), meaning the shining power of the Holy Spirit. Notice also the equivalence of terms here: “That *they* may be *one* just as We are *one*.” We as brethren certainly are not one numerically, and Jesus is saying God the Father and Him are one as we are, for we share that same attribute of unity, although imperfectly.

Jesus ends His prayer by saying, “Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them” (Jn. 17:24-26).

Here is another scripture that reveals the pre-existence of Christ, for it says God the Father *loved* the pre-incarnate Christ “before the foundation of the world.” He asks God for His disciples to be with Him in the coming kingdom. That is His focus—not on self. He wants the Father’s love to finally be also in His disciples—and that includes us! What a wonderful ending to His prayer before God!