

**VOLUME THREE  
THE LIFE AND TEACHINGS  
OF  
JESUS CHRIST  
FROM THE LAST SUPPER THROUGH THE  
RESURRECTION**

EDITED BY  
RICHARD NEITZEL HOLZAPFEL  
& THOMAS A. WAYMENT

Chapter IV.

**THE LAST SUPPER  
ACCORDING TO JOHN**

C. WILFRED GRIGGS

Be of good cheer.  
JOHN 16:33

Apart from the emphasis on the fact that the Last Supper occurred at a Passover and that Jesus gave a morsel of food to Judas Iscariot, nothing in John's account of the Last Supper has to do with the eating of a meal. This event, however, occupies nearly one quarter of the Gospel account, and its importance can thus hardly be overstated. The unusual significance to John's Gospel of Jesus' last meeting with His disciples before His crucifixion may be illustrated by comparison with the narrative of the other Gospels. Matthew, Mark, and Luke contain accounts of the Last Supper, and although they devote only a few verses each to that event, they all include the institution of eating bread and drinking wine as tokens of establishing covenants with the Savior. John's Gospel, however, contains five chapters narrating what Jesus said and did on that occasion, and yet nothing is said concerning the new sacrament of bread and wine. In the Fourth Gospel, sacramental symbols and teachings had been given in earlier chapters, so the account of the Last Supper is focused on those matters that fulfill and expand on that Gospel's purpose and message.<sup>[109]</sup>

**The Background of the Last Supper in John**

In many scenes of the drama of John's Gospel, there are implied deficiencies or failings that Jesus alone can fill or overcome. A few selected examples will illustrate. At the wedding in Cana (John 2), wine (which symbolizes both enhanced life and sacramental covenant) ran out. Jesus miraculously supplied copious amounts of wine for the wedding feast and at the same time foreshadowed the giving of eternal life through the shedding of His own blood, represented by sacramental wine.

At the pool of Bethesda (John 5), a crowd of people with various physical infirmities hoped to be healed at one of the unpredictable times when the water became turbulent. One of the crowd, a man who had suffered a long-lasting illness, was unable to reach the pool during those auspicious occasions, and only through Jesus' divine power and concern for the man was he healed.

Later, near the Sea of Galilee (John 6), Jesus asked His disciples how they would feed the large crowd that had assembled to hear Him. The disciples made it clear that there was insufficient money and food (five loaves and two small fish) to give everyone something to eat. As in the earlier miracle at Cana, Jesus provided more than enough food through His divine power, and the disciples collected twelve baskets full of leftovers, again foreshadowing the infinite capacity of Jesus to sustain and

enhance life in a sacramentally significant miracle. Jesus gave sight to a man born blind (John 9), even though the man had no hope or expectation that he would be able to see during his lifetime. The significance of [the blind man's washing his mud-anointed eyes in the pool of Siloam, which name John translates as "that which is sent," is not lost to the reader, who understands that spiritual sight is gained by being washed in the blood of "The One Who Is Sent."

Not even a tomb can withstand the power of Jesus to give light and life in that dark environment, as seen when Jesus restored life to Lazarus (John 11). Mary and Martha, Lazarus' sisters, had faith in<sup>[110]</sup> Jesus but still needed to be taught at the graveside that He is the One through whom death is overcome and eternal life is made possible.

John thus placed in juxtaposition the following: a wedding and the associated wine miracle, a pool of expected cures and the divine healing, a hungry crowd and the heavenly gift of abundant sustenance, the granting of sight through the anointing and washing of a man in the darkness of being blind, and the overcoming of death at a tomb. These examples give striking emphasis to a major message of the Fourth Gospel that the Word of God came into the world to give life and light to mankind (John 1:1-9).

**The Last Supper of Jesus with His Disciples**

The account of the Last Supper in the Fourth Gospel presents a similar juxtaposition, one in which the expectations of participants in a Passover feast could not fully be realized except through the divine intervention and assistance of Jesus Christ. The importance of this juxtaposition is emphasized by our noting the irony that John is the only Gospel to mention the three Passovers of Jesus' ministry, since most scholars consider the Fourth Gospel the least chronological or historical of the Gospels.

The Seder, or Passover, was instituted to commemorate the redemption of Israel out of their bondage in Egypt and their being led by God into the Sinai desert, where they would become God's people and ultimately dwell under His aegis in the land He vouchsafed to them. The Israelites had to become a purified people during their wanderings in the Sinai, and they also had to be instructed before they could enter into their inheritance. Just as the waterpots for purification associated with the wedding of Cana could not truly purify souls, so the promise of dwelling eternally with God in a purified state could not be realized through participation in a Passover feast. It is in the context of the Passover and its symbolism, however, that John presents the purification and instructions that, through Jesus Christ, make possible our journey into eternal life with Jesus and God the Father of all.<sup>[111]</sup>

**Jesus Washes the Feet of His Disciples**

Ancient manuscripts do not agree on whether the supper was just underway or was completed when Jesus rose from His place and washed the feet of the disciples, though the giving of food to Judas later in the narrative favors the first option. The important matter is not when during the Passover observation Jesus performed that service but that He did so. Guests entering a home in antiquity usually had their feet washed prior to the meal, and a servant would have been assigned to the task. The disciples could not have anticipated having their feet washed by their Lord and Master. Peter actually tried to forbid Jesus, stating that he would never allow Him to wash his feet (John 13:6-8). Jesus responded that the washing was necessary for the disciples to have a portion

of inheritance with Him (13:8). Peter, still not understanding completely, assumed that if washing feet gave part of the inheritance with Jesus, more washing might give more, and he then requested Jesus to give him a bath (13:9).

Jesus explained that baptism was the complete washing for personal purification, and there was only a further need for one's feet to be washed (John 13:10). Even then, however, purification was not automatic or guaranteed by the deed, for Jesus added that though He had washed all their feet, not all of them were pure, referring to Judas, who would betray Him (13:10–11). Whereas baptism symbolized death and burial of the sinful person and the coming forth in a new and spiritual life, the washing of feet symbolized the putting off of the world, much as removing the dust from one's feet symbolized the rejection of evil (Matthew 10:14). As a prelude to Jesus' giving instructions about their ultimate return to the Father, it was necessary that the disciples be completely purified and freed from the world, as symbolized by the washing of their feet.

If the action of Jesus in washing the feet of His disciples was shocking and unexpected to them, His commission to them to serve each other and others similarly probably was no less surprising. If He, their Lord and Teacher, served them as typified by such a menial task, so were they to follow His example in their own service. In a couplet<sup>[112]</sup> that emphasizes this principle, Jesus reminded them that neither is the servant greater than his master nor is the Apostle (literally "one who is sent") greater than the one who sent him. The profound impact of His example and commission is better appreciated when we recall that Jesus washed the feet of the one who would soon betray Him. The other Gospels record that Jesus taught His disciples to love their enemies (Matthew 5:44; Luke 6:27), but John gives a divine example of Jesus performing an act of love toward one whom He knew to be His betrayer.

### **The Announcement of the Betrayal**

In the brief scene following the washing of the feet, Jesus acknowledged that one of those present would betray Him. John stated that by the time the meal ended, the devil had put it into the heart of Judas, son of Simon, a man of Kerioth, to betray Jesus to the Jews who sought His life (John 13:2). At the time of the Last Supper, however, only Jesus knew that one of His disciples was a traitor, so not even John knew at that time that the devil had taken Judas captive. All the disciples were at a loss, and Peter signified to the one reclining closest to Jesus (the typical manner of eating was to recline on low-lying couches or pillows rather than sit on chairs) that he should learn the identity from Jesus. In a whispered conversation, Jesus identified Judas to that disciple. Most people agree that the disciple was John, who identified himself only as the disciple "whom Jesus loved" (13:23). In the only reference to eating in this account, Jesus said that the one to whom He was about to give a morsel of food was His betrayer.

As Judas received the sop, Jesus told him to do quickly what he was going to do. Because Judas was the treasurer of the group and since nobody (except the disciple closest to Jesus) knew he was going to betray Jesus, all who heard Jesus tell him to act assumed that the charge had to do with the festival, either to give to the poor or to purchase something for the feast. As the conversation between Jesus and the disciple nearest Him was known only to them, it is logical and<sup>[113]</sup> economical to assume that the disciple was the author of the account, making this passage one of the few places that give an indication of the Gospel author's identity.

John's narrative affirms that, although Judas was in the service of Jesus' archenemy and was trying to subvert or destroy the Savior's mission, Jesus was the one who was really in command. He knew the identity of His betrayer (even from the beginning, according to John 6:64), and He sent Judas out to perform the traitorous act *after* demonstrating His divine authority and love by washing his feet and serving him food. Even Judas' treachery fit into the eternal plan of the Father. His betrayal of Jesus did not subvert the plan but rather put in motion the circumstances and events associated with the suffering and death of Jesus, the necessary components of His great Atonement.

C. S. Lewis once noted (in his essay "Fern-seed and Elephants") that the departure of Judas was stated in one of the most unforgettable statements in literature: "and it was night" (John 13:30).<sup>1</sup> Given the antithesis between light and darkness posited at the beginning of the Gospel and carried out in the conflict between those opposites in many of the events recorded by John, that statement surely signifies more than a chronological reference. It is as if all the powers of darkness were personified in Judas, who was the agent designated to attempt to overcome the Light that had come into the world. When he went out, he therefore took the darkness with him.

### **The Glorification and Departure of the Son of God**

In striking contrast to the darkness associated with Judas and the master of darkness he was serving, the two verses following his departure (John 13:31–32) contain the verb *glorify* five times in connection with Jesus and God. The repeated use of a word that signifies light, honor, and even triumph illustrates and celebrates the statement<sup>[114]</sup> made in the prologue of the Gospel: "His light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overpower it" (1:5). By speaking of His glorification at the time when he was approaching His own darkest hour of suffering for the sins of the world, Jesus affirmed that His glorification was accomplished through His atonement. Even in that setting, His command that Judas depart into the darkness of night resulted in a greater emphasis on His own light for the rest of His time with His disciples. The reader observes a distinct change in the atmosphere of the meeting, and the earlier oppressive and depressing scene associated with betrayal and darkness is replaced by one filled with encouragement, instruction, and triumph. The disciples were ready to be taught the way to God and eternal life, for they had been washed and the darkness had been expelled.

[Washed and pronounced clean. Mfs]

Jesus introduced His teachings and instructions concerning our eternal journey with the observation that He would soon leave the disciples. He had told the Jews earlier (John 7:33–34) that He would soon return to the One who had sent Him and that where He was going they would not be able to follow. Jesus repeated the same things to His disciples but additionally instructed them to love one another. Peter interrupted Jesus to ask where He was going (13:36), and Jesus stated that where He was going Peter could not then go, but He added that Peter would follow Him later. The Jews had not been promised that they could follow Him when Jesus said He was going away, and it is only within the context of having love for one another that Peter (and the other disciples) was told he would eventually follow Jesus and be with God and Christ.

### **Love for One Another**

Much of the succeeding record down to the prayer of Jesus in chapter 17 is given as a dialogue, with different disciples asking

questions and Jesus responding to them. Even when it appears that Jesus resorted to discourse, John noted that the disciples continued to raise questions among themselves and that Jesus responded also to those things they wished to ask (John 16:17–19). Dialogues have a vigor <sup>[115]</sup> and intensity that are not usually found in exposition, and the reader of dialogues is more easily invited into the narrative as a participant. As John's Gospel is directed to disciples, it is natural to invite his readers into the sacred intimacy of a conversation with Jesus concerning our heavenly journey to be with Christ and God.

Just as the contrast between light and darkness in this Gospel delineates the realms of God and the devil, so the opposition of love and hate separates the disciples of Jesus from those who are under the influence of Satan. Especially from chapter 5, the reader has observed an increasing rift in the response to Jesus, from those who accept and follow on the one hand to those who reject and oppose on the other. Jesus explained to His disciples that everyone would note the difference and observe that His followers would stand out because of their love for one another, just as the devil would try to accomplish his ends through hatred. Put in words often suggested in this Gospel: it would be as obvious as the difference between day and night.

### **Jesus Foretells Peter's Denial and Encourages the Disciples to Have Faith**

Peter persisted in asking why he could not go with Jesus, claiming that he was prepared to give his life on the spot. Jesus' reply that Peter would deny Him three times before the next morning showed that He knew Peter better than the Apostle knew himself and also that preparation and experience are necessary before we can return to God (John 13:36–38). The implied rebuke to Peter was immediately countered with a statement of encouragement and reassurance. Jesus enjoined all the disciples not to be troubled by what He said (14:1). The second half of the verse is grammatically ambiguous (a common characteristic of the Gospel) and is so almost certainly on purpose. The ambiguities that occur in the Gospel give a richness and variety of readings that enhance appreciation for the eternal scope of Jesus and His teachings. The word translated "believe" πιστευετε (pisteuete) in verse 1 is the form for both the indicative (declarative) and imperative moods. It can thus be translated in any of the following ways: <sup>[116]</sup>

You believe in God, and [kai] you believe in me.

Believe in God, believe also [kai] in me.

You believe in God, believe also [kai] in me.

Believe in God, and [kai] you believe in me.

(Note that the word Kai [kai] can be translated "and" and "also.")

The verb and the related noun forms can also be translated by "faith," so that one can read "have faith" in this passage and else- where. In every sense of the above translations, Jesus exhorts the disciples to let their faith and confidence in Him and in God overcome their fears and concerns.

### **The Journey to the Father through Jesus Christ**

Jesus taught the disciples the nature of the realm of His Father as well as the way to get there. The word mansions in verse 2 is a Latinism for the Greek original μοναι (monai), which means "stopping places" or "resting stations," thus giving the impression of a long journey rather than a large estate. The word in the last part of the verse not only means "place" but can also refer to an "opportunity" or "occasion," without specifying a particular site. Whether we wish to think of a permanent place or a more general heavenly journey, the emphasis Jesus gave was that the disciples

would be with Him and with God: "I will come again and receive you to myself, so that wherever I am you will also be" (John 14:3).

Even if the disciples did not know the ultimate destination, Jesus assured them that they knew the way. Thomas responded, implying that he spoke for all, when he said, "We do not know where you are going, [so] how can we know the way?" (John 14:5). That question generated one of the most famous statements of Jesus in response: "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life" (14:6). Jesus had earlier equated Himself with the truth that would set people free (8:32, 36), and He had also declared to Martha, a sister of Lazarus, that He was the Resurrection and the Life (11:25). The addition of "the Way" in this passage emphasizes the need to follow Jesus, for He continued, "No one goes to the Father except through me" (14:6). <sup>[117]</sup>

The use of *I am*, especially in John, has long been recognized as a Messianic formula, and it is in the language of deity that Jesus was teaching His disciples. Nevertheless, they did not yet comprehend that it was through His suffering and death that He would become the door of redemption and resurrection through which all must pass to return to the Father. Jesus had told a Jewish audience that He was the gate through which His sheep would enter into salvation and life, and He spoke using a Psalmic reference, saying that He was the Good Shepherd (John 10:7–11; cf. Psalm 23). John had noted in the prologue of the Gospel that through Jesus, we can be begotten in divinity ("to become children of God," John 1:12) and further, that "grace and truth came to be through Jesus Christ" (1:17). A major message of John's Gospel is to teach people not only how to be with God but also how to be *like* God through Jesus Christ.

### **Knowing the Father through the Son**

Jesus next stated (John 14:7) that if the disciples had known Him, they would know the Father, followed by the assurance that from that time (the approach of His hour and the events then unfolding and soon to occur) they would know and see God. Philip sought affirmation of Jesus' resemblance to the Father by asking for a vision of God, to which Jesus responded with a further declaration of the unity that He and His Father shared (14:8–9). If they did not fully grasp that relationship, He told them to accept His words and deeds as those of the Father coming through Him (14:10–11). The word here translated "works" or "deeds" (εργον [erga]) is often equated with the miracles of Jesus. John does not use the word found in the other Gospels and usually translated "miracles," suggesting that what is a miracle to mortals was to John simply the performance of an act for God and Jesus. The word used here (*erga*), moreover, is not limited to the miraculous but encompasses all that Jesus did. That helps explain the next verse, in which Jesus said that His disciples would not only do the same works He did but also do greater deeds in the future. Nobody would perform greater miracles than Jesus, but after His <sup>[118]</sup> departure, the disciples would expand upon the work of teaching the world and saving souls with God's power and under His direction. Their life would become their deeds, and the length of their life would make their deeds greater than those Jesus performed in His short ministry before returning to His Father. The disciples were reminded, however that they could not act on their own but that all they did must be in His name. Just as the Father would be glorified through His Son, so would He be glorified as Christ granted to His disciples the power to do the work of God (14:13–14).

### **Loving Christ through Obedience to His Commandments**

Jesus returned to the theme of love, this time telling the disciples that if they loved Him, they would keep His commandments (John 14:15). The difficulty of being obedient without divine assistance is suggested by Jesus' explaining that He would ask the Father to send another "paraclete" to be with them forever.<sup>2</sup> In 1 John 2:1, John identifies Jesus as our "Paraclete" in the presence of the Father, and many have noted the aura of legality sometimes associated with the term in that passage. It is true that a paraclete can be seen as a friend in court (or in this verse as our advocate before the bar of God), but the more general meaning is one who strengthens or gives assistance. Jesus had been the source of help and strength to His disciples, but He promised that after His departure, He would not leave them orphans. Their new "strengtheners," identified as the Holy Spirit in verse 25, would not merely help them keep His commandments; through the Spirit, they would also know and experience the unity with Him that He had with His Father (John 14:16-20).<sup>[119]</sup>

### **The Father and the Son to Be Known through the Disciples**

Judas, not Iscariot, asked why Jesus would soon manifest Himself to the disciples and not to the world (John 14:22). The answer was that in the future God and Christ would be manifest only to those who loved Christ and kept His commandments. There is not really as great a change here as a reader might first suppose. In the prologue, John noted that God did not manifest Himself to mankind except through Jesus (who is seen throughout the Gospel as making God known to the world through His love, words, and deeds). As Jesus prepared to be glorified and return to His Father, neither the Father nor the Son would manifest Himself to mankind except through the disciples (who were being taught to make God and Christ known to the world through their love, words, and deeds). Just as Jesus taught that the world was not able to receive the Paraclete directly, but only through the disciples, so the world could not receive a manifestation of God and Christ directly but only through the works of the disciples. After His resurrection, Jesus did not make public appearances outside the gathering of disciples, but He commissioned His disciples to make Him known to the world. Even Paul, to whom Jesus later appeared before he became a disciple, acknowledged that it was an unusual visit from the Resurrected Christ by saying that it was as if he had been born at the wrong time to have such a vision (1 Corinthians 15:8).

### **The Promise of Divine Peace**

After stating that His Father would send the Holy Spirit both to teach them everything and also to remind them of what He had said, Jesus again tried to give reassurance to His disciples concerning His imminent departure and the events associated with it. He repeated the admonition given at the beginning of the chapter that they should not be troubled, and in this passage (John 14:27) He not only said that they should not be frightened but also promised that He would give them peace. His peace is not the same as we understand peace in the world, meaning an absence of armed conflict, for He later told the<sup>[120]</sup> disciples that they would face much tribulation in the days and years ahead (16:1-4, 33). His peace is rather more positive, being the assurance that we are in harmony with God and in fellowship with the Holy Spirit. We could perhaps define this peace as the removal of conflict with God through the atonement of Christ.

### **The Disciples Should Rejoice at Jesus' Departure**

The disciples did not appreciate the significance attached to Jesus' going to His Father, for Jesus said that if they loved Him, they would rejoice at His departure (John 14:28). The account of the

Last Supper begins with the observation that Jesus knew His hour had come to pass from this world and return to His Father (13:1). Implicit in that statement was His being lifted up (12:32) that He might take away the sin of the world (1:29). His disciples did not yet understand that between His departure from them and His arrival in the presence of the Father were the constituent aspects of His Atonement, including suffering and death, His ministering in the spirit world, and His resurrection. Because they did not understand, their rejoicing was delayed until He appeared to them in His resurrected body.

We should not overlook the end of John 14:28, where Jesus simply observed that His Father is greater than He. Because of the many times Jesus said that He was one with His Father and that He and the Father were in and with each other, that statement is a powerful reminder that Jesus did not claim to be equal with His Father. Jesus often stated that He was sent into the world by His Father and that He spoke the words and accomplished the works He had been given to say and do. This verse reiterates the relationship between God and Jesus found often in the Fourth Gospel.

### **Jesus and the Ruler of the World**

Jesus continued to reassure and fortify His disciples, saying that by His foretelling of the betrayal, His departure to His Father, and His glorification, they might have faith and confidence when those events took place (John 14:29). Even as He warned them of His imminent<sup>[121]</sup> confrontation with the "ruler of this world," He stated that the devil (working through Judas Iscariot, who initiated that particular confrontation through his betrayal of Jesus) had no power or influence over Him (literally, "He has nothing in me" [14:30]). What Jesus was about to do, He did because He loved His Father and because His Father had commanded Him to do it (14:31). Just as it was earlier noted that Jesus was really in control in the matter of the betrayal, so here Jesus made it clear that all which was about to transpire was part of the Father's divine plan, not a satanic thwarting of God. Jesus would do what He must because He wanted to fulfill the will of the Father, not because He was succumbing to the power and authority of His archenemy.

The end of verse 31 could be read as a premature ending of the meeting, after which Jesus continued to enlighten and instruct His disciples. It can also be understood metaphorically, as He moved from discussing His coming ordeal to teachings about life and sanctification. In earlier episodes, notably the meetings with Nicodemus (John 3), the woman of Samaria at the well (John 4), and an audience in a synagogue at Capernaum (John 6), Jesus tried to raise the level of His hearers to a spiritual plane of discourse. Chapters 15 and 16 turn from the ominous foreboding of His imminent suffering and death in the last part of chapter 14 to the spiritual preparation of the disciples for their own journey toward divinity.

### **I Am the Vine, You Are the Branches**

Jesus' turning to the image of a vineyard and vines might seem at first to be unexpected or unusual, but further consideration shows this theme to fit well within the context of John's Gospel. Wine was a well-known symbol of life in antiquity, both because its color resembled that of blood and because it symbolized the source of divine power and wisdom. When Jesus miraculously produced a great amount of wine at the wedding feast of Cana (John 2), a feast that represented the celebration and continuation of life, He demonstrated to His disciples that He was the source of continuing and abundant<sup>[122]</sup> life after the usual symbol of life

failed. John wrote in the Gospel prologue that “in him was life, and the life was the light of men” (1:4), and the miracles in John’s Gospel display His ability to improve or restore life.

### **Jesus, the Source of Life as a Vine to the Branches**

Jesus restored to life the dying son of a royal official, even though He was not in the town where the boy dwelt (John 4:46–53). He healed a man who was essentially immobilized from an illness of some thirty-eight years (5:1–9), at a pool where people went for cures and relief from various ailments. This man was singled out as one who, because of his immobility, did not have access to the pool’s curative powers. Jesus provided what the pool could not. In addition, He miraculously provided life-sustaining nourishment to a crowd of thousands (the men in the crowd numbered about five thousand) in the Galilean hill country (6:5–14); to emphasize the abundance of His life-sustaining power, His disciples gathered twelve baskets of leftovers. A man whose life was limited from birth by blindness received sight from Jesus (9:1–11), and the culminating miracle of giving life occurred when Jesus restored Lazarus to life, even after he had been in the tomb four days (11:17–44). Just before restoring life to Lazarus, Jesus had told Martha, one of Lazarus’ sisters, that He is the Resurrection and the Life (11:25), just as He repeatedly stated to His disciples during the conversation He had with them during the Last Supper.

### **The Fruit of the Vineyard**

For Jesus to refer to Himself as the vine, with all of its life-giving symbolism, is obviously in harmony with one of the basic themes of John’s Gospel. Jesus told His disciples that He was the vine and they were the branches (John 15:5), meaning that they depended on Him for life. Jesus also brought His Father into the metaphor, calling Him the keeper of the vineyard. The word technically means “farmer,” but in this context, it clearly refers to the work of a vine-dresser. Vines must be trimmed back each season, or they will produce mostly foliage<sup>[123]</sup> instead of fruit. Not only are the branches in the metaphor dependent upon Jesus for life, but they must also submit to pruning by the Father to become fruitful. Just as Jesus had earlier stated that He could do nothing except through His Father (5:19, 30), so now He explained to His disciples that they could do nothing except through Him (15:5). Conversely, by remaining in Him as branches remain attached to a vine, they were promised that they could do whatever they desired (having been pruned of all inappropriate desires) and, further, that they would bear much fruit (15:8).

The result of their bearing fruit would be joy, of which Jesus promised them a fulness (John 15:11), predicated on their loving one another as He loved them. He explained that such love involves giving life to others (the disciples as branches received life from Jesus, their vine, so they could bear life-giving fruit for others), and Jesus prophetically stated that there was no greater love than to give one’s life for one’s friends (15:13). The disciples probably did not appreciate the full significance of that statement at the time, but they surely understood that He meant for them to follow His example in devoting their lives to extend to others the spiritual and eternal life Jesus was promising to them.

### **The Father, Jesus, and His Disciples**

Jesus emphasized His relationship to both His Father and His disciples by saying that what He received from the Father He passed on to His disciples (John 15:15). He reminded the disciples that they were as dependent upon Him as Jesus was upon His Father, for it was Jesus who chose them, not the other way around (15:16). Earlier, both during and following the sermon on the

Bread of Life, Jesus had taught that no one could come to Him unless brought to Jesus by the Father (6:44, 65). It is clear from such teachings that testimony and discipleship are gifts from the Father and that only through love, which was also a gift of the Father passed to the disciples through Jesus, their vine, could the disciples bear fruit (15:16–17).<sup>[124]</sup>

### **The Hatred of the World**

Jesus next emphasized the dichotomy between Himself and the world, assuring His disciples that they were identified with Him and not the world. They should, therefore, expect that the world would hate them, persecute them, excommunicate them from the synagogues, and even kill them (John 15:18–16:2). Those who do such things, said Jesus, would think they were doing a service to God (16:2), but He added that they did not know either the Father or Jesus (16:3).

### **The Gift of the Holy Spirit**

The disciples were promised that they would be strengthened against such difficulties by the arrival and companionship of the Paraclete (strengthened), the Holy Spirit. The Spirit would testify that they were with Jesus (John 15:26) and remind them of the things Jesus had told them (16:4). Through Jesus they would have love, peace, and life, but as long as they remained in the world, they would be subjected to the hatred, persecution, and death associated with the realm of darkness.

### **The Work of the Spirit**

After promising the Paraclete, or Spirit of Truth, to His disciples (John 14:16–17) and mentioning it later (14:26; 15:26), Jesus expounded on the purpose and activity of the Holy Spirit. He prefaced His comments with a reminder that He would soon depart from them to return to His Father. His statement that none of them was asking where He was going (16:5) might seem strange in view of Peter’s earlier question, “Lord, where are you going!” but that question had not been pursued in the ensuing dialogue. The earlier concern, expressed by Peter, Thomas, and Philip, appears to have centered on why they could not go with him or what would happen to them after He had gone. They had not really asked what was going to happen to Jesus as He went away. Even if the disciples had some awareness that Jesus was going to His Father, they did not know or understand the nature<sup>[125]</sup> of the journey He would take to get there. Jesus acknowledged that sadness had filled their hearts because He mentioned His departure (16:6), but He explained that His leaving was both necessary and beneficial to them. Unless He went away, the Holy Spirit would not come to them. We recall Jesus’ telling them earlier that they should rejoice because He was going to His Father (14:28), although the resulting joy would not be realized until they saw Jesus after His resurrection.

For men who had left homes, work, and all else to be with Jesus, His repeated assurances that He would not leave them without a divine helper and companion must have been gladly received.

### **The Spirit Judges the World**

Jesus had told His disciples that the Paraclete would bear witness of Him (John 15:26), teach all things, and remind them of His teachings (14:26); now He added that the Spirit would also convict the world in a threefold way: concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment (16:8). The Spirit has already been mentioned as a helper or strengthener to disciples, and many commentators have emphasized the legal meaning of *paraclete* as a defender or friend in court. A legal sense of the term is also present in this verse, but here it is one of prosecuting or convicting people of wrongdoing.

The verb translated “reprove” in the King James Version (16:8) has many meanings that are applicable here, and John often uses vocabulary that is rich in meaning and can be understood in more than one way. The verb can also mean any of the following: question, cross-examine, prove, refute, accuse, correct, disgrace, convict, expose, reprove, or test. Each of these meanings brings a somewhat different understanding to Jesus’ words about the activity of the Holy Spirit in the world. Perhaps it is worth noting that this passage is one of the very few when the Spirit is portrayed as working with the world. The usual emphasis is given to the activity of the Holy Spirit among believers and disciples.

In His explanation of the three aspects of the Paraclete’s reproving activity, Jesus first said the Spirit would convict the world “concerning <sup>[125]</sup> sin because they do not have faith in me” (John 16:9). This statement can also be understood in more than one way: (1) the nature of their sin might simply be that the world has no faith in Jesus; (2) because they lack faith in Jesus, they are still in their sin; or (3) because they lack faith in Jesus, they do not have a correct understanding of sin. It is not necessary to choose one of the possibilities, but certainly the lack of faith in Jesus is the fundamental issue in this statement.

The Spirit will examine the world “concerning righteousness,” Jesus said, “since I am going to my Father, and you will no longer see me” (John 16:10). Death on a cross was considered to show that one was cursed by God (Deuteronomy 21:23), and those responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus would concede no divinity in Him as He submitted to that horrible impalement. The world cannot see beyond a martyr’s death or a wrongful execution in His crucifixion. It is only through the Holy Spirit that we can understand the righteousness made possible through the suffering and death of Jesus. John the Baptist bore witness of that connection when he testified, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away [removes] the sin of the world” (John 1:29). The world could not comprehend that the death of Jesus was not the end of the matter, but through the Holy Spirit, we learn that Jesus went to His Father and that righteousness became possible through faith in Him.

The third role of the Holy Spirit is to refute or correct the world “concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has already been judged” (John 16:11). As Judas had earlier gone out to set in motion the betrayal and the ordeal of a number of trials lasting through the night and into the next day, the general impression would be that the contest between Jesus and His real adversary (Satan) was yet to come. Some argue that Jesus lost because He was sentenced to death and crucified. In this passage, however, Jesus used a verb tense that specifically indicates that the judgment between Him and His opponent had already been determined. What would appear to the world to be Jesus’ defeat would be understood through the Spirit as the means of His triumph over Satan. <sup>[127]</sup>

### **The Spirit as Teacher and Reminder to the Disciples**

Whether the disciples could then comprehend the significance of Jesus’ teachings concerning the Holy Spirit was not too important, for one of the activities of that Spirit would be to remind them of these teachings. Indeed, Jesus declared to His disciples that the Holy Spirit would lead them into all truth and would glorify Christ by the things He would teach (John 16:13–14). Jesus often stated that He spoke and did whatever His Father asked Him to say and do, and He noted that the Holy Spirit would do the same for His disciples (16:13). The Spirit would not speak on His own

but would say what He had been given to say. The manuscript tradition regarding verse 13 is not unanimous in stating whether the Holy Spirit would lead disciples in all truth or *into* all truth, but given the responsibility to convey God’s message and bring people to the Father through Christ, the difference between the two ideas should not be a problem.

### **The Sorrow of the Disciples Would Be Turned to Joy**

Jesus had introduced His teachings concerning the Holy Spirit with the statement that He was returning to His Father, and yet nobody asked where He was going (John 16:5). Following His comments on the Spirit, He made a similar declaration: “In a little while you will no longer see me, and again in a little while you will see me” (16:16). The disciples then began discussing what Jesus had said, asking each other what He meant by “a little while” and how they could not see Him and then they would see Him. Jesus either overheard them or discerned their perplexity, and He taught them that His departure would bring two results: they would weep and mourn at His leaving, but the world would rejoice. The difference between the two, however, was that their sorrow would later be exchanged for joy. The fate of the world’s joy was not discussed at that time.

To illustrate what the disciples would experience, Jesus spoke of childbirth, an example used elsewhere to illustrate different ideas (John 16:20–22). In that setting, as He was about to leave them, the comparison was apt, for just as in giving birth, the cause of the pain <sup>[128]</sup> (His departure) would ultimately lead to joy (His resurrection and return to them). The pain the mother experiences in giving birth is a necessary prerequisite for bringing life into the world, and the suffering of Jesus was required to bring eternal life to the children of God. No one actually forgets the pain of childbirth or other similar traumas, but concentrating on the joy of having a newborn child or the recovery from an operation or illness is what is important. Jesus explained that the sorrow of the disciples would pass, but when they experienced the joy of seeing Him again, that joy would endure and no one could take it from them (16:22). The emphasis on love and joy in this great discourse must have buoyed up the spirits of the disciples, who were saddened that Jesus was leaving them for a time. They had many doubts and concerns, most of which would be answered when they saw the Resurrected Christ, Perhaps that is why Jesus said, “In that day you will not ask me anything” (16:23). Of course, they would then also have the Holy Spirit to remind and teach them.

### **Praying to the Father in the Name of Jesus**

In what is almost a prologue to His own prayer, Jesus instructed His disciples that they would soon pray to the Father in His name (John 16:23–24). He noted that they had not asked anything in His name up to that time, but in the future they must do so to experience the joy of asking and receiving from the Father. Jesus would shortly give them an example of how to petition the Father for the things that would bring real joy. Although they could not fully appreciate it at the time, the events that would soon bring them sorrow would not only be the source of their subsequent and enduring joy but would also become the reason that all disciples would henceforth pray to the Father in the name of Jesus Christ. By His suffering, death, and resurrection, He became the Way, the Truth, and the Life, as He declared to Thomas a short time before (14:6), and one could only go to the Father through Him. <sup>[129]</sup>

### **Speaking in Plainness to the Disciples**

“These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs,” Jesus said. (John 16:25). Regarding the word translated “proverbs,” Arndt and

Gingrich (in their translation of Bauer's German Lexicon) say that in John's Gospel it signifies "a dark saying, figure of speech, in which especially lofty ideas are concealed."<sup>3</sup> However we might construe the sentence, the sense is that Jesus has been communicating matters that were not easy for His disciples to understand. It was easier to explain after the event that He had to suffer and die than it was before those things took place. Jesus appreciated the difficulty of explaining what was going to happen, but He told His disciples that soon He would teach them plainly, using figurative language no longer (16:25).

### **Speaking Plainly about the Father**

Jesus specifically stated that He would speak to the disciples openly about His Father. Throughout this meeting, Jesus had repeatedly stated that He was going to His Father, and throughout John's Gospel, He is portrayed as coming from His Father and representing His Father in His word and deed. The last statement of the Gospel prologue states that it is through Jesus that we can know the Father (John 1:18), and the disciples were taught in this meeting that Jesus is the Way through whom we must go to be with the Father (14:1-12). The emphasis given by Jesus in speaking openly about His Father is in harmony with a similar emphasis placed on the Father in the Gospel of John.

Jesus assured the disciples that God loved them because they loved Jesus and had faith that Jesus came from God into the world (John 16:27-28), Yet again He repeated that He was leaving the world and returning to His Father. That He had to tell His disciples so many times that He would leave them and go to His Father is <sup>[130]</sup> evidence that they had a difficult time accepting or understanding what was about to happen.

His last statements made them think they did comprehend the matter, however, for they happily replied, "See, now you are speaking plainly, and you are not speaking figuratively. We now know that you know all things and that you do not need anyone to question you; for this reason we have faith that you came forth from God" (John 16:29-30). Their confidence was overstated, however, for Jesus told them that they would soon leave Him alone and scatter, each to his own home. Even then, however, He would not truly be alone, for His Father was with Him (16:32). That statement was yet another validation that He was fulfilling the will of the Father.

### **"I Have Overcome the World"**

As He concluded the great discourse, and before He prayed with the disciples, Jesus said that through Him and through what He had said they might have peace. It would not be peace from tribulation, for they would face afflictions, but it would be His peace, as He had stated earlier (John 14:27). It was a peace based on the fact that the outcome of His suffering and their own future troubles had already been determined. As He said that the ruler of this world (Satan) had already been judged (16:11), so He now declared, "Take courage [Be cheerful], I have overcome the world" (16:33). The verb tense used here signifies something already accomplished, with continuing results. Although Gethsemane and Calvary were still ahead of Him on His journey to His Father, He saw from an eternal perspective that the outcome was assured. His victory over His adversary had already taken place. To His enemies, the cross was a symbol of death and defeat. To Jesus and His disciples, it would become the Tree of Life.

### **The High-Priestly Prayer of Jesus**

Jesus concluded the discourse of the last Supper on a positive and triumphant note. He had washed the feet of His disciples, had

dismissed the representative of darkness, had given instructions and <sup>[131]</sup> counsel concerning their future service and ultimate journey to God, and had assured them that they need not fear, for He had overcome the world. It was in that optimistic and buoyant context that Jesus prayed to His Father in the presence of the disciples. A fifth-century bishop, Cyril of Alexandria, wrote that Jesus was functioning as a high priest on behalf of the people when He offered this prayer,<sup>4</sup> and many since that time have referred to it as Jesus' high-priestly prayer. The temple association, and particularly the daily prayers offered in the sanctuary for the redemption of Israel, make that a fitting designation.

### **An Overview of the Prayer**

Although the prayer should be read and understood as a unified whole, we can identify three subdivisions within it. Jesus first spoke of His relationship to His Father (John 17:1-5), and in that part of the prayer He gave an accounting of how He had fulfilled the commission His Father had given Him. He next prayed for the disciples who were present (17:6-19), especially asking that the Father keep them in His name and protect them from the evil one. Finally, Jesus prayed for all people who henceforth would become faithful through the testimony of His disciples (17:20-26), which includes everyone who has come to know Christ down to the present day. Above all, He prayed that the Father grant all who have faith in Him to be with Him in His glory in eternity.

It is remarkable that so much of the prayer was devoted to Jesus' concerns for His disciples, both those present on that occasion and those of all future generations. When one thinks of all that Jesus would soon experience, from the mockery of trials, scourging, and being nailed to a cross, to say nothing of the suffering and agony He would take upon Himself for a sinful and wayward creation, His focus on the needs of others is nearly incomprehensible. That same focus on others, which was the divine purpose in His accomplishing the Atonement, continued through the ordeal of the night and the next day. He <sup>[132]</sup> consoled many along the way to the crucifixion, prayed on behalf of the soldiers driving spikes through His flesh, comforted those crucified with Him, and, out of concern for His mother's anguish at the scene of crucifixion, told John to take her away from the horrible scene. The disciples could not have foreseen all that lay before Him, but they must have been impressed by His petition to the Father on their behalf.

### **The Address to His Father**

It is customary for modern Christians to bow their heads and close their eyes when praying, but historically there have been many appropriate positions for prayer. When Jesus looked up and prayed with open eyes, He was following a custom common at that time. Illustrative of this posture for prayer is the contrary example of a publican who did not feel worthy to look toward heaven as he prayed (Luke 18:13). Sometimes people would prostrate themselves when praying, as Jesus did later in Gethsemane (Matthew 26:39). In these examples, we learn that it is not the physical position one assumes in prayer as much as the heartfelt communication that really matters.

Jesus began with a simple address, "Father." The intimacy of His relationship allowed for such a familial address, where for others a qualifier, such as *heavenly*, *loving*, or *gracious*, would usually be added for respect and honor. As Jesus next stated that "the hour has come," one recalls that the phrase has occurred often in John, always before chapter 12 with the observation that His hour had not come or was not yet present (John 2:4; 7:6, 8, 30). After that,

however, Jesus spoke of His hour as having arrived (12:23,27; 13:1; 16:32), reinforcing the idea that the major reason He came into the world was to approach that time when He would accomplish an atonement for the world through His suffering and death. The disciples did not understand what His “hour” signified, and they were terrified and dismayed as the events of that “hour” unfolded. But Jesus both knew and faced the looming cross with resolve and courage because He knew He was fulfilling His Father’s plan. <sup>[133]</sup>

### The Glory of the Son

The Gospel of John contains the words *glory* δόξα (doxa) and *glorify* δοξάζω (doxazo) more than any other New Testament writing, and glory is clearly an important concept to the author. Jesus used the term *glorify* five times concerning both the Father and Himself in the two verses immediately following the departure of Judas (and following the descriptive word “night” associated with the betrayer), as if the glory of Jesus shone more brightly after dismissing the darkness (John 13:31–32). Similarly, in the context of the prayer, one realizes that the glory of Jesus is associated with His suffering. Jesus had shown His willingness to serve by washing the feet of His disciples (13:5–12), and He later said that the greatest love one could show was to give one’s life for his friends (15:13). His greatest glory, bestowed on Him by His Father, was to serve and love the world by giving His life for it. It was necessary that the Father give Him “authority over all flesh” (17:2) so that Jesus could perform that divine service for those who were now His. The phrase “all flesh” shows that Jesus was to be the Savior of all people, not just a particular group or race. The second part of verse 2 states “everything which you have given to Him,” using the neuter form in the place of the expected masculine παν (pan) (all men, or all people). The neuter is more encompassing, implying that Jesus was performing an atonement for the entire creation, not just for the human component of the universe.

### This Is Eternal Life

The phrase “eternal life” in John 17:3 is widely acknowledged to refer to the kind of life Jesus may grant, not the *length* of life. Jesus had prepared the disciples for eternal life by purifying them (symbolized by the washing of feet), nourishing them spiritually (symbolized by the miracles of the wine at the wedding at Cana and the feeding of thousands in the Galilee), and instructing them in the discourse of chapters 13–16, but He now defined eternal life as knowing God and Jesus Christ (17:3). The word for *know* (γινώσκω) here is often associated with knowledge gained by experience or through inspiration (as <sup>[134]</sup> discernment or comprehension), rather than through the senses or by reasoning. The present tense indicates a growing knowledge based on repeated experience, rather than a one-time and final gaining of understanding. John has shown throughout his Gospel that only through Christ can one know God, and this verse also makes it clear that *knowing* Jesus Christ and God is eternal life, not just knowing *about* Them. It isn’t knowledge that brings life or teaches life but rather knowledge that *is* life.

Jesus concluded the section on His relationship to the Father by noting that He had glorified His Father through accomplishing the work the Father had given Him to do (John 17:4), even as He asked that the Father now glorify Him with the glory He had before the creation (17:1). Contrary to His archenemy, who sought honor and glory to aggrandize himself, Jesus saw His glory in terms of giving service to others and bringing greater honor to His Father.

### The Prayer for the Disciples Who Were with Jesus

As Jesus introduced His petition on behalf of the disciples in His presence, He declared that He had made manifest His Father’s name to them (John 17:6). Modern people often think of a name as separate from the individual, but in antiquity the name meant much more. In John 1:12. John wrote that those who became children of God were those “who have faith in His name,” which we understand as those who have faith in Him. John concluded the prologue of his Gospel with the observation that Jesus made God known in the world (1:18). Jesus often stated that He came to do the will of the Father, thereby showing the nature of God. Were this verse to signify no more than a particular word or name instead of the One associated with the name, there would likely have been some reference or allusion to it else, where in John’s Gospel.

The disciples are described in chapter 17 verse 6 as being given to Jesus (see John 6:44. 65), and thus as being no longer of the world. From John 1:5, 10–11, one sees that the world is in darkness, not knowing or accepting God, whereas the disciples are described as <sup>[135]</sup> those who have kept and are keeping God’s word (the perfect tense of the verb signifies precisely that). Jesus certified in the prayer that His disciples had not only received the words given by the Father to Him but also that they had received Him as the One sent by God into the world (17:7–8).

If we were to think that Jesus did not care for the world when He said, “I do not pray for the world,” we would misunderstand John’s Gospel. As pointed out above, the world in this Gospel often represents the opposition to and rejection of Jesus, and of course He would not pray that the world continue in its opposition to Him. He did, in fact, pray for everyone in the world who would hear the testimony of His disciples (John 17:20–26), and within hours after this prayer was given, He would suffer for the sins of the world (1:29) and thus be able to say He had overcome the world (16:33). The reader is reminded that earlier in the Gospel, Jesus told Nicodemus that “God so loved the world that He gave His Only-Begotten Son, in order that everyone who has faith in Him might not perish, but have eternal life” (3:16).

The complete harmony between the Father and the Son is emphasized in John 17:10, as Jesus stated that they share everything. Again, the neuter το πάντα (all things) can be understood to be even more inclusive than the usual form for men or people. That Jesus said He has been glorified by the disciples may have anticipated what they would do rather than what they had done, but just as Jesus said He had overcome the world before Gethsemane, so He could know in advance what service His disciples would perform.

Jesus stated that He was leaving the world (and the disciples), and He asked His Father to keep the disciples in His name (John 17:11) and, later in the prayer, to sanctify them (17:17). The added plea that they might enjoy the same unity as the Father and the Son was expanded to include all future disciples, and it was further amplified as Jesus asked that all would enjoy that unity *with* the Father and the Son (17:21).

Jesus had kept the disciples and protected them while He was in the world (John 17:12); now He asked the Father to keep them from the evil one (or from evil in general) after He had gone (17:15). None <sup>[136]</sup> had been lost, except Judas, referred to in a play on the same word as the verb as “the son of destruction” (“Not one of them was destroyed, except the son of destruction” [17:12]). The reference in John 17:12 to the fulfillment of

scripture in Judas' betrayal (Psalm 41:9, quoted in John 13:18) shows that even that act was within the divine plan of the Father. One should not, however, assume that Judas acted without volition. God's knowledge was not a causative agent depriving Judas of the responsibility to choose freely, act accordingly, and suffer the consequences of his actions.

Repetition often indicates emphasis, and twice in John 17:14–16 Jesus stated that the disciples were not of the world, even as He was not of the world, and He noted that the world hated them but first hated Him. Knowing that the disciples were commissioned to represent God in the world, Jesus did not ask that they be taken out of the world but that they be watched over as they continued in the work assigned to them. Jesus asked that they be sanctified in the truth, or by the truth, and then stated that the word of God is truth.

Because John's Gospel identified Jesus as the Word of God (John 1:1) and because Jesus told the disciples (14:6) that He was the Way, the Truth, and the Life, this verse could also refer to the disciples' being sanctified by Christ. That suggestion is strengthened by John 17:19, in which Jesus stated that He was sanctifying Himself so that the disciples would be sanctified in the truth. *Sanctify* means "consecrate" or "purify," and the disciples were to become consecrated to God and to be purified from the world, just as Jesus had shown them by His example of consecration or sanctification.

The section of the prayer concerning the disciples who were with Him ends with Jesus saying that He was sending them into the world just as He had been sent into the world. The Father gave those disciples to Jesus, having brought them out of the world. They were now to go into the world and bring out those whom the Father would give to them. That brings us to the last part of Jesus' prayer.

#### **The Prayer for All Disciples in the Future**

The same desires Jesus expressed to His Father for the disciples in the Upper Room were extended to all who would have faith in Him<sup>[137]</sup> through their testimony. He prayed for their unity, "that they may all be one," not only with each other but with the Father and the Son as well (John 17:21). Jesus had given glory to His disciples, the same glory His Father had given to Him, so they would be one as the Father and Son are one (17:22).

Jesus further stated that He was in the disciples as His Father was in Him, all "in order that they may become perfected in unity" (John 17:23). He added that He had extended the same love to them that His Father had given to Him. He expressed His desire to have all His disciples with Him (and His Father) in eternity so they might also see the glory He had before the foundation of the world through the love of His Father (17:24).

The final two verses summarize the major message of the Fourth Gospel. Jesus came into the world, but most of the world did not know Him or God who sent Him. His disciples, however, knew that He had come from God, and through Jesus they knew the Father. Through the love that the Father gave Jesus and that He extended to the disciples, they would achieve a perfect unity with the Father and Jesus Christ. Ending the prayer on the dual themes of unity and love, Jesus went forth to face arrest, trials, suffering, and death. After He overcame the world, He arose from the tomb and returned in triumphant glory to His Father. The promise of John's Gospel is that all who have faith in Him may also through Him dwell with the Father and the Son and have eternal life.

In addition to the purification and the position of inheritance with Jesus associated with the washing of feet, Jesus explained that an important spiritual teaching was also inherent in what He had done. If the physical body needs to be pure before going into God's presence, how much more must the soul be filled with the quality that most identifies and characterizes God. The disciples then went forth to a night of terror, anguish, and dispersion. Only after they saw the resurrected Christ would the assurances and promises of the Last Supper be realized in their own lives and ministries.

---

<sup>1</sup> "Fern-seed and Elephants," in *Fern-seed and Elephants and Other Essays on Christianity* (London: Fount Paperbacks, 1998), 90.

<sup>2</sup> παρακλητος (paracletos) literally means "called to the side of" or "one called to assist."

<sup>3</sup> Arndt and Gingrich, *GEL*, 634.

<sup>4</sup> In Joannern 17:9, 74, 505.