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God's Forever Presence

By John Allen Chalk

In the waning hours of Jesus' earthly life he gave final encouragement to his followers. This parting discourse in John 13-17 contains five separate and distinct but interrelated teachings by Jesus about the Holy Spirit.¹ Jesus employs "a verbal adjective with passive force" to describe the Holy Spirit as the Paraclete.² The Holy Spirit is only described as the Paraclete in the New Testament in this final discourse (14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). The word is used only one other time in the New Testament, by John again (1 John 2:1), to describe the advocacy work of Christ before the throne of God on our behalf!

The Paraclete Jesus promises his followers is one called alongside another as a helper or defender, a friend at court.³ The word came to Jesus out of the juridical sphere⁴ but not as a term of art referring exclusively to a lawyer.⁵ We learn the most about the Paraclete by studying these five sayings (14:15-17, 25-26; 15:26-27; 16:4b-11, 12-15) that John records from Jesus.⁶ The early church may have treasured and used the Paraclete sayings as an independent logion or logia.⁷

These five Paraclete sayings provide Jesus' followers with his assurance of an ever-present helper (14:15-17),⁸ an interpreter of Jesus' teaching (14:25-26),⁹ a fellow witness of Jesus (15:26-27),¹⁰ a prosecutor of the unbelieving world (16:4b-11),¹¹ and the revealer of the entire truth about God's saving work in Jesus (16:12-15).¹² In the first Paraclete saying Jesus promises us that our Father will assign¹³ the

Paraclete to be with us forever—in the here and now of the believing community and into the unlimited eschatological future.¹⁴ The Holy Spirit is "God's Forever Presence" to all believers in Jesus Christ.

God's Forever Presence, the Paraclete, continues the work of God in Christ on earth after the death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus. He is "another" Paraclete having the same nature as the exalted Christ (14:16; 1 John 2:1).¹⁵ The Holy Spirit will refresh the disciples memories regarding Jesus' teachings (14:26). He is "the Spirit of truth" by nature and therefore will bear witness to Jesus, the truth (14:6). The Paraclete accuses and prosecutes the entire realm of unbelief by convincing¹⁶ the world (whose ruler has no power over Jesus) (14:30-31) of three magnificent realities: (1) that Jesus is the only Lord and Savior and any other allegiance is rebellion and sin (16:8, 9; Rom 14:22-23); (2) that Jesus is God and his divinity has been vindicated in the resurrection (16:8, 10; Eph 1:19-23); and (3) that Jesus has indicted, judged, and condemned the unbelieving world's ruler on the cross and in the resurrection (16:8, 11; Col 2:14, 15; Phil 2:5-11). God's Spirit will glorify Jesus in the Spirit's declaration of Jesus to the disciples (16:14, 15).¹⁷ Jesus' followers will neither be orphaned nor desolated by his earthly departure because of God's Forever Presence "with" and "by" and "in" them (14:16-18).¹⁸ The Paraclete will actualize Jesus' life in his followers so that they see with Jesus' sight and live with Jesus' life (18:18-20).

God's Forever Presence, the Paraclete, is a purposeful gift to believers from the Father and the Son.¹⁹ The Father gave "all things" to Jesus upon sending him to us including the Holy Spirit without measure (3:34-35). The Paraclete's unbreakable connection with Jesus means that even in the Father's gift of him to Jesus' followers, the Paraclete will be sent in the name of Jesus (14:26). God's Forever Presence recognizes, prompts, supports, and teaches the sovereignty of Jesus Christ to believers (16:13-15). All the richness of the Godhead, given to Jesus Christ, now becomes plain to believers by the Paraclete's ministry to them (16:13-15; Eph 3:14-21). He guides believers into all truth. He reveals to believers what is to come. He glorifies Jesus by the declaration to believers of God's fullness in Jesus (16:13-15). As teacher, refresher of memories, witness, and guide, the Paraclete reveals the relationship of the Father and the Son (14:26; 15:26; 16:13-15). At last his followers, with the Paraclete's help, can obey Jesus' admonition: "Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me" (14:11).

Following his resurrection victory and prior to his ascension, Jesus breathed on his followers this purposeful gift of God's Forever Presence (20:22). Within a few days thereafter, in Jerusalem on Pentecost, Jesus inundated the first believers in Jesus Christ as risen Lord with the promised Paraclete (Acts 2:1-4, 14-21, 32-33, 38-39; 11:15-17). With God's purposeful gift of the Paraclete to believers, at Jesus' request and initiative, comes intimate, personal, permanent relationship with the Father and the Son. When the Paraclete comes "you will know that I am in the Father, and you in me, and I in you," Jesus promised (14:20). The Father and the Son come and make their permanent home in the believer by the Paraclete (14:23).

The Church and the believer have no greater assurance and no more powerful assistance than God's Forever Presence. As "the Spirit of truth" the Paraclete guarantees that all God's wisdom for us has been revealed and communicated in Jesus Christ (14:17; 15:26; 16:13; 2 Tim 3:16-17; 2 Pet 1:20-21). The believer is not left as a solitary witness to the truth of Jesus Christ; the Paraclete also witnesses to him (15:26-27).

We have no reason to fear either the world or the world's ruler because of God's Forever Presence (14:30-

31; 16:7-11). In the three most important battles waged by the Church and the believer—Sin, Righteousness, and Judgment—the Paraclete indicts, convicts, and judges "the world" and "the ruler of this world" (16:7-11; 12:31-32). These three words describe three fundamental issues for the Church and the believer throughout the entire period from Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension until his return.²⁰ Our fight, therefore, is not with the world or the world's ruler; that fight is waged successfully for us by the Paraclete! Here is our sole challenge: "Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me; or else believe me for the sake of the works themselves" (14:11-14; see also 7:38-39).

God's Forever Presence actualizes the presence of Jesus for the Church and the believer (14:18, 28). The Paraclete glorifies Jesus by speaking only God's truth in and about Jesus.²¹ The Paraclete effects the peace of Christ for us, a peace unlike any the world knows or the world's ruler can give (14:27; 16:33).

We are reassured that God's Presence with us is forever when the closing chapter of John's Revelation presents the Paraclete in joint invitation with the Bride saying to all who choose to believe that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior, "Come, . . . take the water of life without price" (Rev 22:17).

The age is not closed, therefore He must be with us here and now. There can be no waning of his grace or power. The pot of oil is in the Church, only she has ceased to bring her empty vessels. The mine is beneath our feet, but we do not work it as of yore. The electric current is vibrating around, but we have lost the art of switching ourselves on to its flow. It is not necessary then for us to pray the Father that He should give the Holy Paraclete in the sense in which He bestowed Him on the day of Pentecost in answer to the request of our Lord. That prayer has been answered: the Paraclete is here; but we need to have the eyes of our heart opened to perceive, and the hand of our faith strengthened that we may receive, Him.²²

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