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The Impact of Biblical Theology on the Exegesis of the Gospels
with special application to
The Promise of Divine Presence in John 14:15-31

Introduction

Seeking to understand Biblical Theology has captivated much of my interest for half a century. From early exposure to Geerhardus Vos as explained by J. Robert Vannoy and Thomas Taylor, I have been on a pursuit that continues. Though some believe(d) that J. Barton Payne (1922-1979) had answered all but one or two of the remaining questions for understanding the Biblical Theology of Scriptures before his unanticipated death while mountain climbing on Mt. Fuji, I believe he would be stunned by the breadth of publications on Biblical Theology in the forty-seven years following his death.

In his 2009 Tyndale Lecture comparing Systematic and Biblical Theology (Cambridge, UK), the late I. H. Marshall helpfully observed:

A preliminary look at systematic theology. It seeks to identify what is taught about God and the world. It is orderly, rational, comprehensive – mystery and incomprehensibility vary in understandings. Theology as dogmatics, based on revelation; is what theologians as scholars and believers affirm. There is something essential in belief. Not a simply a historic account of Christian doctrine that such and such a person believed. If we believe x then do we believe y. When we face what Christians do believe, the questions move to what we ought to believe. This relates to the agency of theologians – are they to be able to write on theology if they are NT scholars? Calvin and the Church of Scotland affirm that Theologians should be ordained – involved in church ministry.

What is biblical theology? Marshall defined it as a systematic account of what was believed and taught by the Biblical writers. This is easier defined than done. They were from different geography, places and times. Great variety in the way they wrote. Amos' theology does not have the focus on Christ. He was not a Trinitarian prophet. Jesus did not emphasize the

indispensability of the Holy Spirit in all the gospels. The writers were using different vocabularies and characters to express their view. In a sense they were all writing ad hoc. A child can learn to play a piano before understanding what is happening within the box, whether traditional or electronic or digital.

We can note five fingers, but we will have to go deeper to see the connection of the fingers as a part of the hand. How are the statements related to one another? This brings us to the problems of diversity and incompleteness. There is a quest for collecting ideas getting beneath the surface. There are two major approaches to this effort:

Synchronic view: core beliefs - It is not all that difficult to find a common theological agreement of the writers of the New Testament, though their vocabulary etc. would be very different.

Diachronic view: the historical 'rope' – That which separates the older from the new. The individual documents are gathered into a rope of many strands. The strands hold together and form the connection from one discipline to the other.

A child at age 6 and at age 66 is the same person but dramatically different from the 6 year old. The cross section of the rope would look very different from one part to another. The discipline of New Testament Theology speaks of the relationship of one to another part to the other. Marshall concludes that we have to go back and forth to establish what is legitimate and what is not in our treatment of Scripture. Twenty years before him, Allan MacRae in his book, *The Prophecies of Daniel*, argued from Daniel 12:4 that as students of Scripture move forward and backward in the study of the Scriptures, knowledge of God's Word would increase. Bruce Waltke also argued that when interpreting Scripture, one must work from the micro to the macro in expanding steps before returning to develop the micro-text of Scripture.

An example of the needed interaction between text and interpretation was given earlier this month (July 2, 2026), in the 2026 Tyndale Fellowship Biblical Theology lecture in High Leigh, England. Benjamin Gladd, from the United States, argued for the understanding of Mark's Gospel as fulfilling the missing dimensions of the conquering of the Promised Land under Joshua. Jesus as the Joshua figure of the New Testament conquered the demonic strongholds left untouched by the Israelites (Mark 1:12-13). He maintains that Mark cites Malachi but is more prominently looking at Exodus 23:20 with the emphasis on driving out the unclean spirits. He observed further connections with Leviticus 18:20-25 on the cleansing of the

morally defiled and Ezra 9-11 as an example of the conceptual pattern of the Pentateuch. He was challenged by the history of David having conquered that same territory in his reign. Gladd's work provides us with an additional example of the outworking of the process of biblical theology when studying the Gospels.

As an example of the interaction, I have given considerable attention to the idea of New Exodus in seeking to define what it is and how it works out in the Upper Room Discourse of John 13-17. Each of the Synoptic Gospels give attention to the manner in which the ages of history climax. But the manner that John sets out to address this time is distinctive. Mlakuzhyil (2011:42; 9, 478) suggests that the Fourth Gospel is a "*five act drama*". As a part of that development, he finds five sections in John 13 – 17 (13:1-38; 13:31-14:31; 15:1-16; 4d; 16:4e-33; 17:1-27). After surveying an array of attempts to identify the whole section, he prefers to identify it as "Jesus' Farewell of the Hour". This section is set off by the presence of divine love (*agapan/agape*) in the opening of 13:1 and in the conclusion of 17:26. At the centre of the whole section is the call for their personal commitment (John 15:7) and continuation in him to be fruitful disciples (15:1-17). Coloe (2007:155-162) argues additionally that the call of John 15:1-17 is, a *relecture* as an expanded application of the previous discussions in John 14:1-31.

The focus of this paper is in John 14:15-31, addressing the promised presence of God in relationship with the disciples. But we cannot simply dive into that section without considering the context. John 14 is a chapter widely known for several verses used in Gospel presentations and funeral messages, but many of the remaining verses are less well known.

Because approaches to the Fourth Gospel vary so widely, it may be helpful to establish the approach of this work, by quoting the position advocated by Stuhlmacher (2018:57):

If we are to approach the Gospels, not with wholesale scepticism—which in the final analysis is uncritical—but rather with the "critical sympathy" they deserve, then our method must presuppose the historical reliability of the Gospels, not their unreliability. At the core of the Gospel tradition stands the living tradition of instruction and story telling that the circle of Jesus's disciples formed and collected before Easter. After Easter, the same disciples handed this tradition on to the church and personally vouched for it as church members. Because the tradition was a living one ... it was supplemented and partially reformulated and

brought up to date. But it was not fundamentally changed or created out of nothing, only to be placed back into the mouth of Jesus after the fact.

I. Background Context

From the unsettling context of Judas's departure (John 13:30), of Jesus's having announced his forthcoming departure from them (John 13:31-33), and Peter's challenge to the perspective from which Jesus was working (John 13:36-38), John 13 concludes. Peter assured Jesus that he would remain loyal to Jesus, even if it cost him his life. Jesus refuted his perspective by announcing that Peter would deny that he even knew him. What an unsettling context! If we permit an unmentioned transition between the end of John 13 and the beginning of John 14, as argued by John Lightfoot (1883:12:380-383), there is a clarifying distinction between what had been said and what will follow.

From the backdrop of such tumult, things did not look promising for the disciples. They were set on the restoration of the kingdom to Israel with great pomp and magnificence. Instead of ranking power and respect, they had been the objects of poverty, persecution, and disregard.

II. Old Testament Concepts of God Dwelling with People

Perhaps it would be helpful to first ask if the people of Israel aware of the concept of God dwelling with people. We begin with the response to the Exodus.

The Song of Moses - Exodus 15

In Exodus 15:13, 16-18, the song of celebration, led by Moses over the defeat of the Egyptian army, anticipates a prepared place of holy habitation. Alexander (2017:289) argues for accepting the recent deliverance over Pharaoh as the setting and circumstance for the song. It is not given as the primary historical account of the events but to compliment the account of the victory (Alexander, 2017:293). Gispén (1982:150) summarises, "Finally Moses turned his thoughts to the present and future of Israel, of the people who stood around him and sang with him. They had been led by God's grace thus far, and tended like a flock (cf. Exod 13:1; Ps 77:21) after the Lord delivered them. Moses, by faith, saw the people already there where by the Lord's power they had yet to go: to His holy dwelling place, to the pasture He had prepared for them, to Canaan." Of all the material contested in the Hebrew Scriptures, this song is thought to be one of the oldest passages therein preserved (Alexander 2017:294). He agrees with others who identify

the song as a fulcrum point between divine power and presence, for the understanding of the Exodus (Alexander 2017:297). In Exodus 15:16-17, the verbs shift from referring to the past to the anticipated activity in the future, though that is not represented in a number of contemporary English translations. Alexander (2017:308) notes that the settling of Israel into the promised territory in Canaan, provides an anticipation of the coming time when there will be universal redemption and restoration.

In Exodus 15:16-17, Kathryn Davis (2022) observes, a threefold reference is made to bringing the people he has purchased into a prepared place, with him, where he will reign forever and ever. May this not provide an echo for the assurance Jesus gives to his disciples that he is going to prepare a place for them, return and receive them unto himself that they might join with him?

The verse that follows, Exodus 15:18, has been viewed by some authors as reflecting an annual re-housing of the Ark of the Covenant into the most holy place. In view of the absence of supporting evidence in Scripture, Gispén (1982:151) helpfully diffuses such claims. While there are examples of such practices in other religions of the Ancient Near East, he argues that claims for finding allusions to the practice in Psalms 93, 97, and 99 are unwarranted.

Four Other Old Testament Examples

There are many other examples of references to the presence of God with His people. We will consider four.

1. Exodus 25:8 In Exodus 25:8 YHWH instructs Moses to make a sanctuary so that he may dwell with them. In instructing Moses on the ordination of Aaron and his sons for the priestly office (Exod 29:45), YHWH explains that he will dwell among the children of Israel and will be their God. A visible expression of His presence dwelling with the people was demonstrated when the glory cloud appeared at the completion of the construction of the tabernacle (Exod 40:34-38).

2. Leviticus 25:1-6:13 In concluding the emphasis on his relationship with his people and their dwelling in the land, (Leviticus 25:1-6:13), YHWH declares himself to be their God regarding their relationships. He begins with their relationship to time and their stewardship of his creation (Lev 25:1-24). Further, he addresses their relationships with their fellow humans (Lev 25:25-55), particularly when they come into times of economic adversity. At key points, he emphasizes their accountability by reminding them of who he is and what he has done for them,

including deliverance from Egypt (Lev 25:55). From that relationship, he calls his people to obedience (Lev 26:1-3). In response, he promises to provide for his people's physical, emotional and relational needs (vv. 4-8). He promises to enter into a covenant with them (v. 9). Even more, he promises to dwell among them in a sharing relationship, even promising to feed them, walk among them, be their God, and identify them as his people (vv.10-12). Without their obedience, there would be no such relationship. The passage is set apart by an 'inclusio' of their relationship of serving but with their status given in reverse order. They are now to be his servants/slaves (Lev 25:55). Before they had been servants/slaves to the Egyptians (Lev 26:13).

3. 2 Samuel 7:5-8, 15-16 In 2 Samuel 7:5-8, 15-16, YHWH enters into a covenantal relationship between David and, a house for YHWH's name is promised. YHWH reminds David that he has accompanied him in all the ventures he has undertaken (v. 8). He promises that his mercy will not be taken from David, unlike the removal that King Saul had experienced. When the temple was dedicated, in his dedicatory prayer, Solomon asks for YHWH to reaffirm the Davidic covenant (1 Kings 8:23-26). In the following words, he declares that the heavens and heaven of heavens cannot contain him, let alone the temple he has constructed. The reaffirmation with Solomon (1 Kings 9:3-9) corroborates the validity of Solomon's acclamation.

4. Zechariah 2:10-11 In a reference to the Second Exodus, YHWH promises Zechariah (Zech 2:10-11), that he would come and dwell in the midst of the regathered people who will represent many nations. Beyond that, there are concepts of God dwelling in the heart of the individual.

These Scriptures provide a sampling of examples of the Old Covenant people's awareness of the presence of God in the world. They were aware that God was not only present as the Sovereign ruler over the world, but vitally concerned with the personal and global affairs and activities of all people who dwell upon the earth. But, as Plummer (1900:280) concludes, "But the united indwelling of the Father and the Son by means of the Spirit is purely Christian".

III. The Development of thought in John 14

Reflecting back to the paradigm shift of thinking from the disciples to what Jesus promised in the opening of the chapter, rather than wealth, pomp, and magnificence, Jesus here promises that the Father and he would come to their abode, whether in poverty, prosperity, amidst persecution, peace, or in prison, and make their abode with the faithful disciple.

Contrary to the claims of some who promise fortune, health and wealth offering one's "best life now", Lightfoot (1883:12:253), offers a possible illustration of the experience of the daughter of Nicodemus, whose father had been noted for his great wealth (John 3:1f). She and her family, in contrast, were in such a miserable condition that she was reported by Rabban Jochanan Ben Zacchai, that he had seen her gathering barley grains from the dung of the Arab's cattle. When asked who she was, she identified herself as the daughter of Nicodemus Ben Gorion. Lightfoot speculates that because he became a follower of Jesus, the family of Nicodemus may have been left in poverty and destitution. Have there not been many who have followed in this train?

In opening the chapter (John 14:1), Jesus instructs the disciples to exercise faith in God and in him. This implies more than a concept, but a trusting relationship between the hearer and the God with whom Jesus interrelates. The reference to the heart may be identified as the intersection of the mind, will, and emotions within an individual.

In the continuation, Jesus makes promises about their immediate circumstances and long term desires. Farrow (1999:293) helpfully suggests, in a manner similar to the opening of John's Gospel, this is to be read from the back rather than from the front; it does not interpret Jesus' end from the standpoint of his beginning, but his beginning from the standpoint of his end.

Four Questions

1. From the framework of Peter's question (John 13:36-37) Jesus responds to question of context, what is happening? He calls for the disciples to place their trust in Him, even as they must trust in God, they must also trust in Him. He then engages with a sequence of questions from three disciples to direct the areas of conversation for his instruction. **2. Thomas** asks where Jesus is going (John 14:5). **3. Philip** asks who the Father is (John 14:8). **4. Judas** (not Iscariot) asks how Jesus will manifest himself to them but not to the world (John 14:22).

In His instruction, Jesus refers to his forthcoming going and coming. Lincoln (2005: 384) suggests that John creatively brings together the dynamics of Jesus' going and coming with the effect that what is portrayed in the Synoptic Gospels as happening at the end of the age, in John, those promises become the experience of the followers of Jesus in the present. In this, Lincoln seems to be taking a moderating position from Bultmann (1971:624) that the "eternal life" in the Fourth Gospel is merged into "eschatological existence" in the present life experience.

In response to their believing faith, Jesus assures them of his continuing care. In his Father's house (*oikia*), there are many dwellings (*monai*). They will have a home. But what is the Father's house? Perhaps, the reference to house relates back to John 2:16, where it refers to the temple in Jerusalem. Arriving at the meaning of this passage has generated no small debate. Schnackenberg (1982:3:61-62) critically evaluates several ideas to uncover the reference to a dwelling place, eternal in the heavens. He contrasts the ideas of Jesus providing assured freedom for his followers in John 8:31 where Jesus promises freedom to those who obey his words. As his disciples, they will know the truth and the truth will set them free (v. 32). That freedom is secured because Jesus remains (*menei*) in the house forever in contrast to the servant/slave who does not remain in the house forever (v. 35). Coloe (2007:110-111) contends that the whole idea of a house with any structure or proportions, must be eliminated. The house, she argues, is instead a household of interpersonal relationships. She draws this from the reference to the servant/slave not remaining in the *oikia* (house) in John 8:35. She contends that *oikia* has no reference to a physical structure, but to a familial status. Her distinction presses beyond John's use of the word in John 11:31 and 12:3, where he refers to a physical structure. Why should it not be permitted to be so understood in John 14:2?

Further, Jesus promises that there are many dwellings (*monai*). This is a term used only twice in the New Testament, here and in verse 23. George Trench (1918:316) notes that the word was "the technical term for the nights' halting-places, or stages, along the imperial highways: and there may be here implied the idea of gradual advance toward an ultimate goal". It is a designated place in which to dwell, where he would receive and entertain them, but where? Bultman (1971:601) rightly rejects the efforts to make that place, "the whole universe" or "the whole wide world". He affirms that when Jesus departed from the earth, he did not vanish into nothing.

Kerr (2002:276-277), while acknowledging that many writers presume the reference is to heaven where Jesus promises the disciples a place to reside, disagrees. He observes the proximity of a reference to Passover (John 13:1; 11:55; 12:1) and the Father's house (John 14:2). He also sees a similar proximity of reference to the Father's house in John 2:16 which is also in a Passover context (John 2:13-22). In John 2:16, Jesus sternly rebukes merchants in the Jerusalem Temple for having transformed it from a "house of prayer for all peoples" into an unsavoury centre of commerce. Therefore, Kerr argues, the house reference in John 14:2 also rightly refers

to a temple, rather than heaven. He seeks to build that connection from the events in John 13 by the events Jesus undertook at the meal in washing the feet of the disciples (Kerr 2002:278-280). The viability of his case depends on a longer textual reading in Greek manuscripts to distinguish between larger (*louw*) and lesser (*niptw*) washings and a series of additional components. While his arguments are possible, may the setting not be that of hospitality practices that were regularly practiced then (cf. Luke 7:36-50; John 12:3)?

The next phrase identifies many dwelling places. The Authorized Version uses the word “mansions” to translate this word. That comes from a Scottish background the translation from the Latin *mansere* that simply means dwelling (Plummer, 1900:273). In some locations, the idea of mansion has generated ideas of luxury, wealth, and grandeur that have become fuel for many concepts unsupported by the original text. Nothing is said of differentiation in luxury or beauty. Kerr (2002:300), citing other positions, identifies the term with permanence, a home. Rather than limiting the emphasis to a role or dwelling, he prefers to emphasize the family relationships that are implied with the reference to becoming children of God (John 1:12) and the return to the Father (John 14:2) in the context of Jesus’ love (Kerr, 2002:302). He also relates these opening verses to the setting in Exodus 15:17 (Kerr, 2002: 303-305).

But why is there a reference to “many” places? There is a common assumption that Jesus is extending a wide invitation, not only for the disciples gathered there but also for the “whosoever” (John 3:16; 5:24; 6:37) and for those “other sheep” that he would bring in (John 10:15-16). There is no shortage of places for all. In contrast, at the wedding in John 2, the setting of his first sign miracle, there was a shortage of provision. However, agreeing with Kerr’s temple emphasis, Beale (2004:146) prefers that the “many rooms” refer to the plurality of sanctuaries included in Ezekiel 28:18 and elsewhere in the Old Testament (Jer 51:51; Isa 62:9; Pss 65:4; 84:3; 96:8). In the one place of worship there were different rooms such as the outer court, the holy place and the most holy place, but do those rooms indicate many places? Beale (2004:200) contends that in early Jewish writings there was an anticipation that in the coming temple every believer would have a dwelling place. Must that preclude the possibility of a heavenly dwelling?

While the term *monai* is used only twice in the New Testament, the term *meno*, meaning remain or abide, is used 34 times in the Fourth Gospel in a variety of ways. Fifteen of the thirty-four uses are in John 14 and 15. Some contexts are profoundly encouraging while others are not at all joy inducing. In John 10:39-40, because the presence of Jesus was unwelcome in Judea, he

had to escape and *remain* across the Jordan. In John 3:36 it is the wrath of God that *remains* on the one who does not believe in Jesus. Schnackenberg (1982:62) contends that in John 8, Jesus mediates lasting eschatological existence by remaining. He observes that in contrast, in John 14, by departing, he goes to prepare an eschatological place for them, a place where they can feel at home, welcomed as though someone was anticipating their arrival.

Coloe (2007:110-111) argues that the use of “preparation” relates not to a safe haven for the believing disciples, but to providing a resting place for the Ark of the Covenant (1 Chr 15:1, 3, 12; 2 Chr 1:4) and the selection of the place for the temple (2 Chr 3:1). She argues this from the four uses of “place” (*makom*) in Genesis 22:3-14 (vv. 3, 4, 9, 14) and in Genesis 28:11-19 (vv. 16-17). She further argues that the house and place will only be a series of interpersonal relationships where the Divine presence indwells believers. She claims that because Jesus died under the title “the Nazarene”, his role as the Branch (*tsamach* Heb; *anatole* Grk) anticipated in Zechariah 6:12 reached its conclusion at the cross (Coloe, 2007:112). Therefore, for her the idea of Jesus coming to receive believers unto himself in order to take them to be with him, has been fulfilled because he brought heaven to earth at the cross.

Surprisingly, Bartholomew and Goheen (2004:232) discount the entire concept of Jesus going to prepare a place. They contend that the idea does not fit with the context. Rather, in a paraphrase they argue, “In my Father’s presence [i.e. house] there is room for all. As I go to the Father via the cross I prepare the means for you to enter his presence wherever you may find yourselves. Having opened the way for you to enjoy the same intimacy with the Father that you have seen me enjoy. I will return to you in the form of the Spirit, so that even whilst you live on earth you will share with me in heavenly places”. Discounting any concept of a heaven to anticipate, they then comment that the place in the Father’s house is not in heaven at all, rather, the disciples are invited to live in the presence of God with Jesus, “where they find themselves”.

In contrast, Schnackenberg (1982:81-82) argues that the fulfilment of this promise was expected to take place at the end of time (Ezek 37:26f; Zech 2:14; Rev 21:3, 22f). This dwelling is here included in a spiritualized way in the presence of the community. The disciples are now ‘where Jesus is’ in the sphere of God’s love. This does, however, not mean that this promise is ultimately fulfilled in this inward and spiritual community with Jesus and God. Since John has not lost sight of physical death and even uses, in 12:25f, the same phrase ‘Where I am, there shall my servant be also’ in the context of a martyr’s death, he also clearly expects that the final

revelation and sight of glory will take place in the heavenly world. It is then that the Father will ‘honour’ the disciple who has followed Jesus in service (12:26). From a different angle, Bauckham (2020:27), argues that, “Jesus was *with* the disciples on earth (14:9, 25; 17:12) so that they might be *with* him in heavenly glory (17:24; cf. 14:2)”.

The Second Question (John 14:5-7)

The promise of Jesus presupposes that the disciples know both where he is going and how to get there. That statement invokes a response and a question from Thomas. Though Jesus has taught much in the previous three years, Thomas was not at all convinced that he knew where Jesus was going. And as Dodd (1953: 412 n. 1) observed, if one does not know where someone is going, how can he know the way?

Jesus responds by claiming to be the way, the truth, and the life. Carson (1991: 491) shows that the definite articles compel understanding that each component must be understood rather than merged. The reader is required to understand that an exclusivity is required by these claims. All that they had learned, seen, and done in their years came together in this point. He had told them to follow him (1:39). He had identified himself as the door (10:9) and as the good shepherd (10:11). Thomas seems to have been a practical disciple who asked questions. He understood the high stakes in returning to Jerusalem (11:16). He had heard Jesus speak of his own impending death (John 12:32-33). Now he was looking for a clear line of direction. Jesus identifies himself as the way. The term “way” is used frequently in the Old Testament for the instruction of YHWH’s people. In Deuteronomy 5:33 (5:29 Heb) the people are instructed to follow the way YHWH directs. Ford (2021: 274) observes a series of parallels between terms used in John 14:1-7 and the Old Testament. In Genesis 3:24, he notes that the “way to the tree of life” is restricted from Adam. In Exodus 13:17-21 and Nehemiah 9:19, frequent references to “the way” are made. In Deuteronomy the terms “way you have travelled”, “this place”, “trust in”, “goes before you”, “on the way”, “to seek out a place”, “the way”, “that you should take”, are used in the Greek Old Testament translation of Deuteronomy 1:29-33 and the Greek of John 14:1-7. The similar uses of the terms show the work of YHWH in leading the way and preparing a place for his people in their journey from Egypt and the similar references to place, prepare and way in John 14:1-7. Amidst many other references to promised direction in the prophetic books of the Old Testament, Ford (2021:275) observes that in Job 38-41, God asks a series of nine

questions of Job, probing areas of dwelling, truth, life. He raises a series of questions about who ...? Where is the way to the dwelling ...? What is the way ...? (vv. 2, 5, 8, 19, 24, 25, 36, 37, 41).

Further, Jesus identifies himself as the truth. He is the embodiment of truth (John 1:14, 17-18). His life and ministry remain in accord with the word that God has given to make persons holy (John 17:17). Ford (2021:276) connects the truth claim to the earlier references in John's Gospel (1:14; 3:33; 4:24; 5:33; 8:16; 8:32). But he also finds a foundational position of truth in YHWH in Exodus 34:6-7. The word "truth" (*emet* Heb *alethea* Grk) is one of the character identifications in the Covenant LORD.

Jesus identifies himself as the life. As the life, Jesus identifies as the source of life. That includes physical life by creation (John 1:4), spiritual life by a new birth, bringing those who believe on him from spiritual death to spiritual life (John 3:15-20, 36; 4:14; 5:24-40; 6:25-71; 8:12; 10:10; 11:25; 12:25,50). In his response, Jesus links the disciples to his Heavenly Father. Jesus affirms that no one comes to the Father except through him. At no place in the New Testament have we any reference of a person receiving new life apart from Jesus Christ.

Now that he was departing, Jesus provides assurance to the disciples that they would have an abiding and enduring relationship with the Father (John 14:7). Because the disciples had lived with Jesus, had seen how he behaved, what he did and did not do, they were able to know something about God the Father as affirmed in John 1:18. As McWhirter (2006:46) notes, "Jesus emanates the glory of the Messiah, the Son of God".

The Third Question: Who is God? (John 14:7-11)

Philip asks for more information beyond what was given. He was sure he would then be satisfied. Jesus confronts the "gaps" in his learning. Rather than disregarding the question or the questioner, Jesus engages in a series of diagnostic questions for the benefit of Philip and all the hearers. Where have you been? What do you know and understand? What have you been processing? What do you believe theologically about the relationship between the Father and the Son? While Jesus fully knows everything, he did not assume where Philip was in his thinking. Rather, he invited him to greater belief. Jesus invited Philip to believe the message Jesus gave, as endorsed by the Father. He called upon him to believe that the work Jesus did was in partnership with the Father. He also called him to believe that Jesus shared a real relationship with the

Father. If Philip lacked confidence in the theological implications of the work of Jesus, he was instructed to believe on the basis of the evidence in the works that Jesus demonstrated.

Preparations for the Transition

Having provided a basis for their hope, Jesus explained that his departure would be for their benefit. A greater responsibility would rest upon the shoulders of the disciples. They would be responsible to carry on the works that he had been doing. Ford (2021:281) observes that Jesus never called upon his disciples to replicate any of the sign miracles he performed in the first eleven chapters of John's Gospel. However, through reading John and the other Gospels, one can see that the New Commandment (John 13:34-35) calls for disciples to surpass what Jesus did in humility and loving service.

Because Jesus was departing from the disciples, there is a greater opportunity for ministry. When he walked the earth physically, if one wished to see him, that person would have to go to the location where Jesus was as with the Greeks who sought him (John 12:20-21). The Gospel message would extend geographically through the ministry of the disciples (John 17:20; 20:29). The going away of Jesus was a prerequisite for the coming of the Holy Spirit (John 7:39; 16:7). Carson (1991:496-497) notes that the works of the disciples would be greater, because the disciples would serve in the effects of the completed salvific work of Christ. They would be able to pray to Jesus and ask for his help. They would then have access to the very throne of the Father through the mediation and advocacy of Jesus (John 14:13-14; 15:7, 8, 16; 16:23f).

With the greater opportunity comes the sphere of responsibility. In a largely unknown book that David Ford (2021:286) commends, Ecclestone (1987:9) helpfully compares the Fourth Gospel to a manual of obstetrics and post-natal care for Christian communities. In John's day they had been through the birthing process as both a mother, learning immediately on the job the responsibilities of having given birth to a child, and as a newborn child learning to function in the whole new context of life outside the womb. John has recorded what Jesus did in the course of his preparatory ministry, but now they would have to function in the new relationship under the direction of the Holy Spirit.

One's profession of love for Jesus must be accompanied by obedience to what he requires. This is a non-negotiable obligation. Yet that is not always acknowledged. In Ecclestone's insightful work, much is made of the blessings and entitlements that come to the believing community, but little is given about the obligations of obedience.

What obedience does Jesus require? As noted above, in the context of John's Gospel, the first command is love for one another (13:34). Implied with that commandment is the requirement of willing service unto and for one another (13:13-14). The second commandment for those who believe in God is to believe in Jesus (John 14:1). In his response to Philip, he adds one other commandment, believe in the evidence. The issuing of a new commandment and the call for opening implies deity.

This theme of obedience combined with love, may be an echo of Deuteronomy 5 where Moses summarizes the Law in the covenant reaffirmation with Israel. The people of that generation, not their fathers, were under obligation to learn and obey the commandments and regulations (Deut 5:1-5). They are reminded that YHWH is the initiator of their relationship, having brought them out from Egypt (Deut 5:6). In forbidding the making and worshiping of idols (Deut 5:7-10), YHWH marks out the terms for those who do not obey and for those who do. Disobedience is tied to hatred while obedience is an evidence of love. Later in that chapter (v. 29), YHWH expresses his desire for Israel, that they would always have it in their heart to fear him and obey him, in order that they and their children might prosper. These connections between love and obedience are underscored in the following chapter with the sacred call for Israel to listen to YHWH alone and love him with all their mind, heart, and strength (Deut 6:4-5). Ecclestone (1987:114-115) observes that John was writing to people from a widely diverse background. They have been through a growing and learning process of implementing things as Jesus had directed them. He was not simply writing of the events to document their past, but to learn from them how the Holy Spirit is at work in their present circumstances.

The Promised Paraclete

In response to their loving obedience, Jesus promises to send another Paraclete, (one called alongside another to assist) translated as Advocate or Comforter. Perhaps the reason for referring to another is because Jesus has been their living, accompanying advocate. In 1 John 2:1, he is identified as having a continuing role as an advocate for believers.

Brown (1971:1135-1142) provides a helpful treatment on this term, explaining what the Paraclete does and what the term means. A strong argument is made for the term to be translated as Advocate. John Lightfoot (1883:380-383) contests, at this time, the disciples were in need of comfort, not an advocate. They were going to be losing their leader and teacher. He promises that they would not be left as orphans (John 14:18).

Some of the benefits that Brown lists of the Paraclete are: He is a gift to the disciples from the Father and the Son (John 14:16). He is the Spirit of Truth (14:17; 15:26; 16:13). He will remind the disciples of the things Jesus taught them (14:16). The disciples will recognise him (John 14:17). He will be in the disciples and remain with them (John 14:17). The world cannot accept the Paraclete (John 14:17). The world neither sees nor recognizes the Paraclete (14:17).

Smalley (1998:258) notes that Brown grounds his understanding of the coming of the Paraclete as a sequence of adaptations by John of practices in Judaism. He sees the tandem relationships between Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, and John the Baptist and Jesus; the description of angelic ministry in specific individuals and circumstances at the conclusion of the Old Testament as the ground for this development of an *alter ego* for Jesus. By contrast, he notes that Johnston also working from a Judaisitic background sees the Paraclete as an impersonal energy or force sent as the ‘spirit of truth’. In seeking to find a mediating position, Smalley (1998:259) argues that the as an agent from the Father and the Son, among his creation and in his church, like the Father and the Son, he instructs truthfully without speaking on his own authority.

Paraclete and Islam

It should be noted as an aside, that some Muslim apologists advocate that the Paraclete who is anticipated by Jesus is their leader, Muhammad. Note four questions:

1. Is there any such teaching in the Qur’an? Not that I have been able to find.
2. Did Muhammad claim to be God rather than man? No he identifies himself as a man.
3. Because the Paraclete was to live and abide forever, is the prophet still alive and did he anticipate living forever? In the Holy Qur’an (Al ‘Imran 3:144:68) he instructs, “Muhammad is only a messenger. Messengers have passed away before him. If he should die or be killed, will you (all) revert to your old ways? Anyone who turns on his heels will never injure God in any way, while God will reward the grateful”.
Note that he asks what will happen to their loyalty if he should die or be killed.
4. Because the Paraclete was to be invisible, did Muhammad have a physical body? Muhammad had a physical body. His grave is observed in Medina, Saudi Arabia.

In further preparing his disciples for his impending death, Jesus promises them that he will not leave them as orphans. He then promises that he would encounter death and live again. In his return to life, they would also live. He promises that they would comprehend his

relationship with the Father and the Father's relationship with him. But further they would understand his relationship with them (John 14:18-20).

The Fourth Question: How will Jesus Manifest His Presence? John 14:22

In verse 21, Jesus provides a summary and review but shifts from the collective references to personal and individual references. This applies the message to each disciple: If one has my commandments and keeps them (cf. verse 15), then that one loves me.

If one loves me, [then] my Father will love that one
and I will love him and manifest myself to him.

In this verse Jesus addresses what the disciples know. The responsibility is to personally follow through in obedience to those things each one knows to do. That will provide validation on whether or not he loves Jesus. Jesus continues with an emphasis on the development of their relationship. If they love him, his Father will love them. While the language of becoming children of God is noted in John 1:12, this is the first reference identifying believing disciples as personally loved by the Father, implying an inclusive family relationship.

Perhaps that last sequence left the other Judas (not Iscariot) bewildered, provoking the question in verse 22: "Lord, how has it happened that you will you manifest your presence to us and not to the world"? Swete (1914:53) raises a series of questions pointing to the idea that Judas is observing a completely missed opportunity. Rather than Jesus having taken his place in the front of the national and international struggles of the day, he was only focusing on a handful of disciples. Was Judas only speaking for himself or might he have been expressing what some or all of the other disciples were questioning?

In responding (vv. 23, 24), Jesus does not rebuke Judas for his incomprehension. He further explains elements of what he has said in verses 15 and 21.

If one loves me, he will keep my words (*ton logon mou*)
my Father will love him and we will come to (*eleusometha*) him and
we will make (*poiesometha*) our dwelling (*monen*) with him (*par' autw*).

But the one who does not love me does not keep my words (*tous logous mou ou terei*)

And the word that you hear is not from me, but the one who sent me, my Father.
Love for Jesus and obedience to him are inseparably connected. Léon-Dafour (2005:70) connects this emphasis back to Deuteronomy where great stress is placed on the law providing divine

revelation that leads to life. But in the previous verses he has stipulated his commandments. In verse 23, he incorporates the more encompassing term “my word”. This may well include the whole mission of Jesus. But what is it that Jesus is calling for from the one with whom he and the Father will remain? Ford (2021:285) observes, “What is given to ‘the world’ is a God-centred family community, loved by God and loving God, its life shaped by ‘my word’”. While true, he seems to immediately project the text from the individual responsibility to the corporate relationship and witness.

But to the one who does not keep the word given, that person forfeits all the blessings that Jesus promises. The negative formula with which the statement that began the answer to Judas in verse 23, ends in verse 24: ‘He who does not love me does not keep my words’ is an indirect reply to Judas’ question. It can hardly have been the evangelist’s intention, after making this promise, to warn the disciples. It is, however, obvious that the ‘world’ does not heed or observe Jesus’ words. It neither loves nor understands him (cf. 8:42) and therefore Jesus cannot and does not reveal himself to those of that world.

Scholtissek (2020:123-124) views the relationship in John 14:23 in conjunction with John 14:2-3 as a double structure where the Son is in the Father, the child of God is in the Son and the empowerment of the Spirit compels the believer to move from the immediacy with the Father and the Son into relationships with other believers and partnering with Jesus in engaging with the world that he was sent to save (John 3:16-17; 17:17, 20-23; 20:21-23). Later, he observes, that after the resurrection, the believer enters into the arena of this relationship with the Father and the Son in anticipation of the more complete experience promised in the opening of the chapter (Scholtissek, 2020:454).

Tenny (1948: 222) notes that love promotes obedience which prepares the person to receive progressive revelation. If a person ignores what he is first instructed to do, he forfeits further instructions. Failure to obey reveals an absence of love. An absence of love invites disobedience. Disobedience is an insult to the Father.

There is much that could be examined in the remainder of the chapter with great benefit, but attention is now turned to John 14:31, which concludes the chapter. Jesus announces his own obedience as the demonstration of his love for the Father, by calling the disciples to join him by arising to depart from where they were. He was leading with integrity. He uses language that

strongly echoes the words of the Exodus when Pharaoh declared to Moses and Aaron that they must get up and get out of Egypt (Exod 12:31).

One further passage is important for the consideration of this study. Written by a person named John, Revelation 3:20 invites, “Behold I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him and he with me”. At the minimum, with exposure to John 14:23, we must at least ask if there is not a correlation between the two passages. Is it only a reference to the triumphal marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev 19) or, may it include a living experience of a relationship that an obeying believer may have in the circumstances of life?

What are we to make of the statement of the promise made by Jesus? There has been considerable debate on the meaning and implementation of what he promised. A sampling of positions may be helpful. We begin with those who see the fulfilment as having been completed.

Bultmann (1971:624) sees the anxiety about what is coming to Jesus as replaced by the statement promising that Jesus and the Father will accompany the believer. Because “the Word has become flesh” (John 1:14), the believer is not released from responsibility in the present world, rather, while living in the presence of the Father and the Son, he is to live in anticipation of what is to come. Bultmann compares this context to the paradox in Paul where a person is justified now, but awaits the completion of justification in the future.

Lincoln (2005:396) argues that the coming of the Father and Jesus is set in the context of the Paraclete (vv. 16, 17, 26-27). In this mutual sharing of the relationship and ministry, the Holy Spirit is the mediator of the presence of Jesus and the Father. Tenny (1948:223) emphasizes that the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus to the disciples convinced the disciples of his existence but only in a forty day window. Therefore the Holy Spirit’s invisible ministry becomes the permanent means of carrying out the work of Jesus. Bennema (2005:159) finds the emphasis enigmatic but arrives at a very similar conclusion. Köstenberger (2009:395) observes that the “little while” reference in John 14:19 and “on that day” in verse 20 may be understood as the post-resurrection appearances, they are preceded by the promise to not leave the disciples as orphans in verse 18. The implication seems more enduring than the convincing proof of the forty days following the resurrection.

Carson (1991:504-505) acknowledges the option advanced by Lincoln and Tenny, but observes that others identify with Augustine in finding this text in conjunction with vv. 25-26, argues for the indwelling of the Triune God within the believer. He notes that John’s thought is

distinguished from pantheistic ideas by: (1) his insistence on the historical realities of the supreme revelation in Jesus Christ; (2) his unswerving theism, indeed monotheism; (3) his frank links between, on one hand, personal devotion to Christ that breeds obedience and therefore moral probity, and, on the other, his candid report of Jesus' promise that Christians will *experience* God. In keeping with that position, Pannenberg (1968:173) observes that John 14:23 undergirds other passages in presupposing that the Spirit belongs to the divinity of God and is significant for believer's inclusion in the true community with God. Schnackenberg (1982:84) views the disciples who were present, as mainly representatives of the future community. The promise of the anointing with the Paraclete is most likely to apply to all believers in view of the statements in 1 John 2:20, 27 where the Spirit teaches them everything.

Kerr (2002:139, 343) sees that the dwelling of the Son is with the Father and interprets John 14:23 as the disciples being taken into that home, rather than the Father and Son coming to dwell in the home of the disciple who loves Jesus and keeps his word.

Haenchen (1984:127) properly asks, addressing the mystical union between the Father and the Son, if they are one (John 10:30) and the One sending is present with the one sent, how should this verse be interpreted? How is the sense of presence and remaining in or with the believer to be understood? He responds by seeing the relationship as the fulfilment of the Spirit. Lenski (1943:1010) presses that idea that the love response of the Father responds to the love for Jesus on the part of the person. The plural of "we will come" incorporates the love of the Son with the Father. He sets aside the contention that the coming in verse 23 happenings at the embarking upon the eschatological coming at the end of time, because we have no other promise of the Father and the Son coming together at that time. Nor does he accept that this response is fulfilled in the immediate setting of Jesus making a post-resurrection appearance to the disciples. He sees the promise as an ongoing relationship of the Father, the Son, the Spirit and the believer. He argues that the use of the middle (*par' auto poiesometha*) "will make abode with him" is an invisible, spiritual presence resulting in their immediate permanent joining of themselves with the loved one. The believer then becomes the abiding place (*mone*) for the Father and the Son in anticipation of the future dwelling in the place prepared by the Son in the Father's house (Lenski 1943: 1011).

As such, the Christian becomes the bearer of the message of grace and judgment for the hearer in the context of the world. The ability of the unbeliever to hear or not hear is contingent

on whether the believer provides the information or not. If he has it but does not provide it to others, they remain in unbelief. If, however, the unbeliever hears the message from the believer but does not receive it, he remains in his unbelief. Lenski (1943:1011) connects this idea to the earlier teaching of Jesus in warning his hearers, to not disregard his teaching (John 7:16-18) because he was speaking as one sent.

Haenchen (1984:127) contends that John rather pursues the approach of the decision remaining under the auspices of the Father and not with man. “Man can no more produce a new birth than he can choose to be born – he cannot select or determine his parents or his place in history by making a decision. Man remains within “this world” in his own decisions, and there is nothing earthly than can produce the rule of God. The mystery of divine election cannot be transposed to the realm of anthropology. For this reason, there is no such thing as a miracle that constitutes proof of God”.

As noted above, Carson alludes to Augustine’s work. What was his position? In rich language, he contends that the full Trinity is present with the believer. Augustine (1874: 282-283 Tract LXXVI), in teaching on the Gospel of John, says, “There is therefore a kind of inward manifestation of God which is entirely unknown to the ungodly, who receive no manifestation of God the Father and the Holy Spirit: of the Son, indeed, there might have been such, but only in the flesh; and that, too, neither of the same kind as the other, nor able under any form to remain with them, save only for a little while; and even that, for judgment, not for rejoicing; for punishment, not for reward. ... for the future He may be seen only of those with whom, as those that love Him, the Father and Himself are making their abode. ...But further, lest any should imagine that the Father and Son only, without the Holy Spirit, make their abode with those that love Them, let him recall what was said above of the Holy Spirit, “Whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him: but you know Him; for He shall dwell with you, and shall be in you (ver. 17). Here you see that, along with the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit also taketh up His abode in the saints; that is to say, within them, as God in His temple. The triune God, Father, and Son, and Holy Spirit, come to us while we are coming to Them: They come with help, we come with obedience; They come to enlighten, we to behold; They come to fill, we to contain: that our vision of Them may not be external, but inward; and Their abiding in us may not be transitory, but eternal. The Son doth not manifest Himself in such a way as this to the world: for the world is spoken of in the passage before us as those, of whom

He immediately adds, “He that loveth me not, keepeth not my sayings.” These are such as never see the Father and the Holy Spirit: and see the Son for a little while, not to their attainment of bliss, but to their condemnation; and even Him, not in the form of God, wherein He is equally invisible with the Father and the Holy Spirit, but in human form, in which it was His will to be an object of contempt in suffering, but of terror in judging the world.

Luther (1961:158), in considerable measure following Augustine, fleshes out this concept of the presence of God with the believer. He is not only safeguarded from the wrath of God that abides upon those who do not believe in Jesus (John 3:36), but he shall also have God dwelling with him here on earth. He envisions Christ as saying, “We will be his daily guests, yes, members of his household and his table companions. This will happen to you and not to the world, which is not worthy of such honour and glory, since it will not hear and accept My Word; yes it even hates and persecutes Me. But you who cling to Me and keep My words, be unafraid, and be unconcerned about the world’s attitude toward Me and you. Let the Father and Me care for you; for you already have a sure dwelling in heaven, a dwelling prepared for you by Us. Moreover, since it is your lot to suffer in the world, which will tolerate neither Me nor you, you shall also be Our castle and dwelling on earth. Here we will reside until the end”. Continuing, he envisions Christ saying, “For we are at home here, I and the Father; We will dwell here. You will not prevent this; and if you try, you shall perish in the attempt as Jerusalem and Rome did” (Luther, 1961:159).

Schnackenberg (1982:153-154) contends that “In the twentieth century, consciousness of the presence of the Spirit has, to a very great extent, disappeared, even in the believing community, and has therefore to be aroused as a prior condition. It is possible to say that the only person who will understand the words about the Spirit is one who has already experienced the presence of the Spirit. A Christian who lets himself be ‘taught’ and ‘reminded’ of Jesus’ words by the Spirit is led by that Spirit into a closer relationship with Jesus. The one who once came becomes for him, through the Spirit, the one who is present and close now. Jesus’ words become for him ‘spirit and life’ (6:63, 68), strength, admonition and consolation. In this way, he can more easily understand the present and the future and find an answer to the questions raised by the contemporary world and his own existence. The Spirit who is present in this way is not prevented from, but is rather urged to lead man to reflect about the traditional words of Jesus and to be more oriented towards Jesus’ will and attitude. Admittedly this does not take the form of a

mere repetition and codification. It is rather a reinterpretation that is applicable to the place and the period. Jesus' words and intentions have to be interpreted 'in the Spirit', that is, in *his* Spirit. However difficult it may be in individual cases, the Holy Spirit none the less encourages Christians and makes them capable of doing this, gives them new insights and new impulses. He is the dynamic principle that urges the church forward.... In the epistle to the community, it is clear that hearing the words of those responsible for the transitional teaching and hearing the inner voice of the Spirit can be combined. This means for the contemporary Church that those bearing the office and the simple faithful are both guided by the Spirit and are, in the Spirit, dependent on each other. Tensions and conflicts are inevitable in human relationships, but they can be endured and overcome in the knowledge that the Holy Spirit is present and active in the Church. Only a community that bears witness in faith to the presence of the Spirit can become at the same time a witness that will prove the unbelieving world guilty".

Ecclestone (1987:44) observes that at this strategic place, Jesus employs the covenantal theme from Deuteronomy, as observed above, calling for love for God that is demonstrated in obedience in all of life. He writes that this is a commitment that goes beyond simply seeking to meet the basic necessities in a civil manner, to have a passionate commitment to individuals, communities and nations (Ecclestone, 1987:45). Ford (2021:285), building on Ecclestone, summarizes this passage: "What has been given to "the world" is a God-centered family community, loved by God and loving God, its life shaped by "my word." Jesus' act of footwashing paradigmatically confronts the world with a strange, challenging, indirect sign, lived out by the fragile community of his fallible friends."

Dods (1903:160) observes, that this is not a cultic expression or experience but a spiritual and relational one. In contrast to the limited "us" of the questioner, set against "the world", Jesus responds with a broader "if anyone". Then Dods adds, "He that longs for more satisfying knowledge of spiritual realities, he that thirsts for certainty and to see God as if face to face, must expect no sudden or magical revelation, but must be content with the true spiritual education which proceeds by loving and living. To the disciples the method might seem slow – to us also it often seems slow, but it is the method which nature requires. Our knowledge of God, our belief that in Christ we have a hold of ultimate truth and are living among eternal verities, grow with our love and service of Christ. It may take us a lifetime—it will take us a lifetime—to learn to love

Him as we ought, but others have learned and we also may learn, and there is not possible experience so precious to us.

“It is, then, to those who serve Him that Christ manifests Himself, and manifests Himself in an abiding spiritual, influential manner. That those who do not serve Him do not believe in His presence and power it to be expected. But were those who have served Him asked if they had become more convinced of His spiritual and effectual presence, their voice would be that this promise had been fulfilled. And this is the very citadel of the religion of Christ. If Christ does not now abide with and energetically aid those who serve Him, then their faith is vain. If His spiritual presence with them is not manifested in spiritual results, if they have no evidence that He is personally and actively employed in and with them, their faith is vain. To believe in a Christ long since removed from earth and whose present life cannot now influence or touch mankind is not the faith which Christ Himself invites. And if His promise to abide with those who love and serve Him is not actually performed, Christendom has been produced by a mistake and has lived on a delusion” (Dodds, 1903:2:160-161).

Conclusion

While much more could be written, the conclusion reached by this writer is that the promise of Jesus to come again (John 14:2-3) is a wonderful promise that awaits fulfilment in God’s own time table. The promise in John 14:23 awaits the obedient response of anyone who believes in Jesus and strives to keep his word to live with the accompanying presence of God the Father and God the Son, with the accompaniment of the Holy Spirit in the day to day life experience of the present time.

A retired Bible translator, who had invested his life in providing the Scriptures into the languages of people groups in the majority world, responded when asked what it was like to translate the Scriptures into a language for the first time, “It was like the experience of installing wiring in a house while the electricity is already running through the wires”. In a similar manner, coming to grips with the awareness of the presence of God the Father and God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit in the life circumstance of the believer who is seeking to keep the words of Jesus, is indeed an energising and enriching means of engaging the world with the truth of who Jesus is and of refuting the untruth that is relentlessly and persistently unleashed in the world. As Bauckham (1993:161) says, it speaks to the rich and the powerful as much as to the poor and oppressed.

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