THE ADVOCATE, THE HOLY SPIRIT

John 14:15–31

Key Verse: 14:26

“But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”

How do you say goodbye to somebody close? It can be so hard. Saying goodbye can make us sad, empty, or even scared. In these chapters Jesus has to say goodbye to his disciples. But in his case, something very special would happen after he was gone. The disciples’ relationship with him could actually continue, but in a different way. We learn a lot from his words about how we can have a relationship with Jesus today. We especially want to learn how we can experience the Holy Spirit as our Advocate, and why that’s so important. May God open our hearts and speak to us personally today.

At the beginning of this chapter Jesus acknowledged that his disciples’ hearts were troubled. They were troubled because Jesus said he was leaving. But Jesus promised that he was preparing a room for each one of them in the Father’s house, and that he would come back to take them to be with him forever. He makes these same promises to each and every believer. He also gave them a vision to do even greater things than him, by believing in him and praying in his name. Now in verses 15–31 he continues to reveal to them how they could live without his human presence anymore.

Look at verse 15a. Jesus says, “If you love me…” So far, Jesus has shown his own love for his disciples. He has encouraged them to love one another as he has loved them. But now, for the first time, he mentions *their* loving *him*. He repeats this concept of loving him in verses 21,23,24 and 28. It tells us that we shouldn’t just be takers but also givers. A relationship with Jesus isn’t a one-way but a two-way street, with us first receiving Jesus’ love, but then also showing our love for Jesus. Even though Jesus would no longer be with them humanly, they could keep on loving him. In fact, they *should*.

But how could they keep on loving Jesus when he wouldn’t be physically present with them anymore? He says, “keep my commands.” He repeats it again in verses 21, 23 and 24. His commands are his teaching or his word. He says we need to both “have” his commands and “keep” or “obey” them. He says this is how we show that we truly love him. To us, love may seem to be a beautiful feeling or saying really nice words. But real love is shown in our commitment and our conduct. Real love for Jesus is shown not in just getting emotional but in having and keeping his commands.

This makes us wonder what his commands are. In 13:34 Jesus gave us the new command to love one another, so it’s a definite way to show our love for him, by loving our fellow believers. But here, and again in verse 21, Jesus uses the plural word “commands,” meaning he gave many commands or teachings he wants us to follow. To truly love him, we need to be paying careful attention to *all* Jesus’ teachings, *all* his words. We need to be putting his words ahead of our own ideas. And we need to be struggling to put what he said into practice.

But that’s just the beginning. Jesus goes on to what he really wants to talk about. Read verse 16. He’s saying that if we keep his commands, he will be praying for us and asking God to give us “another advocate.” He’s implying that until now, he himself had been his disciples’ advocate while he was with them. But after he was gone, God would send them “another advocate.” This new advocate would be similar to him but also different. Like Jesus, he would help the disciples and be with them. But unlike the human Jesus, this new advocate would be with them forever. He would never leave them.

Who is this advocate? Read verse 17. He’s the Spirit of truth. In this verse Jesus says the world doesn’t see or know him, but his disciples do. They’re familiar with the Spirit because he reveals truth in the same way Jesus does. In verse 17 Jesus says that the Holy Spirit lives with disciples and will be in us. Though he’s invisible, and many people don’t recognize him, he’s very real, and disciples of Jesus do recognize him. It’s such a great privilege to have the Holy Spirit in our lives and be able to recognize him.

Though the Holy Spirit would replace him, Jesus wasn’t dumping or abandoning his disciples. In verses 18–20 he goes on to describe what his relationship with them will be like. In verse 18 he promised to come to them. Most likely this refers to when he visited them after he rose from the dead. What would his coming do for them? Read verses 19,20. The Risen Jesus would make them alive spiritually. And he would give them the same kind of intimate relationship with God that he had. Sin drives us far away from God. But through his death and resurrection Jesus gives us a deep, intimate relationship with God. He goes on to describe this relationship and how it’s possible. Read verse 21. In light of this verse our relationship with Jesus is ongoing and growing. As we continue to love Jesus by having and keeping his commands, God the Father loves us more; Jesus the Son also loves us more and shows more of himself to us. In this real relationship we keep growing in our knowledge of God and his love, and of Jesus and his love. The key to stay in this relationship is obedience.

Look at verse 22. First it was Thomas, then Philip, and now Judas is asking a question. Judas really wanted Jesus to show himself to the world. To him, this was what the Messiah should do, so that people would believe in him. Judas was like Jesus’ brothers back in chapter 7 who wanted him to do the same thing. It shows they didn’t really believe in him. Jesus didn’t get disappointed with Judas’ comment. What did he say? Read verses 23,24. In brief, Jesus is saying that he shows himself only to committed disciples, only to those who obey his teaching. He won’t show himself to those who aren’t serious about obeying his teaching. This is God’s way of working. We want to be shown everything first, and then maybe we might commit and obey. But God wants us to commit and obey first, then he shows everything to us. Jesus also reiterates a beautiful promise here: “My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.” He’s promising an ongoing, deep love relationship with God the Father and Jesus the Son to those who obey his teaching.

How is that possible? Read verses 25,26. The human Jesus would no longer be present to give his disciples his teaching and his words. But the Father would send them the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, to teach them all things and remind them of everything Jesus said.

Here we find one of the most important ministries of the Holy Spirit in our lives. He teaches us and reminds us of Jesus’ words. Earlier Jesus called him “the Spirit of truth.” Why? Because Jesus’ words are the words of truth. Jesus said earlier, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (8:31,32). Jesus’ words lead us to the truth, and to real spiritual freedom. This is why we need the Holy Spirit to remind us of Jesus’ words. When Jesus first taught his disciples, they actually didn’t understand much of what he was saying, and they quickly forgot all about it. But later, with the Holy Spirit’s help, they could remember everything Jesus said and come to understand the deep spiritual meaning of his words. We all need a good Bible teacher. But ultimately, the one we really need is the Holy Spirit, to remind us of just the right word of Jesus, at just the right time, helping us grasp what it really means and how it applies to our practical lives.

What also stands out in this passage is the other name Jesus gives the Holy Spirit. In verses 16 and 26 he calls him “the Advocate.” What does that mean? In Greek the word is “Paraclete,” and it literally means someone who comes alongside us. It suggests that we’re struggling, and he comes to be with us in our struggles and help us. He comes to counsel and comfort us. In the Bible the devil is called “the Accuser.” He accuses us day and night in God’s presence of all our sins (Rev12:10). But the Holy Spirit is called “the Advocate.” Though we’re nothing but sinners, if we put our trust in Jesus, he defends us. He testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children (Ro8:16). He helps us in our weakness (Ro8:26a). So often “we do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with wordless groans” (Ro8:26b). The Spirit brings us the comfort of God’s forgiveness, and eventually, the power and the wisdom to actually change. He’s better than any high-powered, expensive attorney. Some people think Bible study is a waste of time, and not very practical. But actually, as we learn to have and obey Jesus’ commands through personal Bible study, the Holy Spirit comes into our lives to do the most amazing, life-changing things and give us the most practical help in our daily struggles. It’s amazing that he comes to us, free of charge, to be our true Advocate, if only we struggle to know and obey Jesus’ teachings.

What else does the Holy Spirit do for us? Read verse 27. Jesus repeats here what he said in verse 1: “Do not let your hearts be troubled.” It’s the Holy Spirit, our Advocate, who gives us the peace of Jesus in our souls. It’s through him that Jesus gives us his peace. Peace of soul—it’s what so many people really need and really want. But it’s so elusive. The world gives us peace that’s only for a little while, and that’s not so deep: Time off from work or study, a vacation spot, or even just silence. But the peace Jesus gives us is so deep and so lasting. We have his peace even as we face all kinds of busyness, all kinds of responsibilities, all kinds of trouble, all kinds of scary things. If we allow the Holy Spirit into our lives and learn to rely on him instead of ourselves, he gives us the peace of Jesus deep in our souls.

Look at verse 28. Jesus wanted to help his disciples focus not on his going away but on where he was going—he was going back to the Father, to share his eternal glory. If they really loved him, they would get out of their self-centered­ness and be glad for him. Look at verse 29. Jesus again mentions that he was predicting these things ahead of time to help them believe (13:19). In verse 30 he says “the prince of this world is coming”—referring to the devil, who would seem to have the upper hand when he got Judas Iscariot to betray Jesus and have him arrested and crucified. But Jesus says he has no hold over him. How could he say that? Read verse 31. Jesus was not a victim of his circumstances. He wasn’t dragged or forced into what he was doing. He freely chose to submit to the Father’s will and go to the cross. Why? It was because he loved the Father. His obedience to God came from his love for God. Jesus taught us to love him and show our love by our obedience to his commands. But it wasn’t just theory; he set us the best example when he did exactly what the Father commanded him and went to the cross. We need to learn his kind of obedience.

Read verse 26 again. May God help us learn how to love Jesus by obeying his commands. And may we experience the Holy Spirit as our true Advocate in daily life, and especially let him teach us and remind us of everything Jesus said.