

J. C. RYLE'S NOTES ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN
14:12-17

12. Verily, verily, I say to you, he who believes in me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater *works* than these shall he do, because I go to my Father. 13. And whatever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14. If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do *it*. 15. If ye love me, keep my commandments. 16. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever; 17. *even* the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; but ye know him, for he dwells with you and shall be in you.

12.--[*Verily, verily...the works...do also.*] Here we have another comforting word addressed to the disciples. They must not suppose there would be an end of miraculous works when their Master went away and that they would be left weak and helpless and unable to do anything to arrest the attention of an unbelieving world. On the contrary, our Lord assures them, with two emphatic "verilys," that miracles would not cease with His departure. He would take care that believers should have power to do works like His own, and to confirm their word by signs following.

I cannot doubt that this promise refers to the miraculous gifts which the first generation of Christians had power to exercise, as we read everywhere in the Acts of the Apostles. That the sick were healed, the dead raised, and devils cast out by disciples after the Lord ascended, is quite plain, and this fulfilled the words now before us.

I can see no reason to suppose that our Lord meant the promise to be fulfilled after the generation He left on earth was dead. If miracles were continually in the Church, they would cease to be miracles. We never see them in the Bible except at some great crisis in the Church's history. The Irvingite theory--that the Church would always have miraculous gifts if men only had faith--seems to me a violent straining of this text.

[*And greater works...do.*] The meaning of these words must be sought in the moral and spiritual miracles which followed the preaching of the Apostles after the day of Pentecost. It could not be truly said that the physical miracles worked by the Apostles in the Acts were greater than those worked by Christ. But it is equally certain that after the day of Pentecost they did far more wonderful works in converting souls than our Lord did. On no occasion did Jesus convert 3,000 at one time and a "great company of priests."

[*Because I go to my Father.*] These words must point to the great outpouring of the Holy Ghost that took place after our Lord's ascension into heaven, whereby the miracles of conversion were wrought. There was an immediate and mysterious connection, we must remember, between our Lord ascending up on high and "receiving gifts for men." If He had not gone to the Father, the Spirit would not have been sent forth. (Eph. 4:8.)

Melancthon thinks the promise of this text is clearly bound up with the following verse, "He shall do greater works because I go to the Father, and because then whatever ye shall ask I will do."

13.--[*And whatever...will I do.*] Here comes another great piece of comfort for the troubled disciples: viz., a promise that Christ will do everything for them which they pray for in His name and for His sake. Whatever help, strength, support, or guidance they need, if they ask God for it in Christ's name, Christ will give it.

This is one of those texts that authorizes all prayers being made through Christ's mediation, as in Prayer-book collects.

The "whatever" must, of course, be taken with the qualifying condition, "whatever really good thing ye ask."

The connection with the end of the preceding verse should not be overlooked: "When I go to the Father, I will do whatever ye ask."

[*That the Father may be glorified in the Son.*] This is a difficult sentence. The meaning probably is: "I will do whatever ye ask, that my Father may be glorified by my mediation, by sending into the world a Son through whom sinners can obtain such blessings." Christ's power to do anything that He is asked brings glory to Him who sent Him.

14.--[*If ye shall ask...I will do it.*] This verse is a repetition of the preceding to give emphasis and assurance to the promise. It is as if our Lord saw how slow the disciples would be to believe the efficacy of prayer in His name. "Once more I tell you most emphatically, that if you ask anything in my name, I will do it."

We should notice both in this verse and the preceding one that it is not said, "If ye ask in my name the Father will do it," but "I will do it."

15.--[*If ye love...commandments.*] Here we have a direct practical exhortation. "If ye really love Me, prove your love not by weeping and lamenting at my departure, but by striving to do my will when I am gone. Doing, and not crying, is the best proof of love." The commandments here mentioned must include all the Lord's moral teaching while on earth, and specially such rules and laws as He had laid down in the "Sermon on the Mount."

I cannot but think that in this verse our Lord had in view the disposition of His disciples to give way to grief and distress at His leaving them, and to forget that the true test of love was not useless and barren lamentation, but practical obedience to their Master's commands.

Let us notice how our Lord speaks of "my commandments." We never read of Moses or any other servant of God using such an expression. It is the language of one who was one with God the Father and had power to lay down laws and make statutes for His Church.

16.--[*And I will pray the Father, etc.*] This verse holds up to the eleven

another grand consolation, viz., the gift of another abiding Comforter in place of Christ, even the Holy Ghost. "When I go to heaven I will ask the Father to give you another friend and helper to be with you and support you in my stead, and never leave you as I do." In this remarkable verse, several points demand special notice.

One principal point is the mention of all the three persons in the blessed Trinity--the Son praying, the Father giving, the Spirit comforting.

When our Lord says, "I will pray the Father and He shall give," we must needs suppose that He accommodates language to our minds. The gift of the Holy Ghost was appointed in the eternal counsels of the Trinity; and we cannot literally say that the gift depended on Christ asking. Moreover, in another place our Lord says, "I will send Him."

Burkitt remarks that the future tense here points to Christ's continual intercession. As long as Christ is in heaven, Christians shall not lack a supply of comfort.

When we read of the Holy Ghost being "given," we must not think that He was in no sense in the Church before the day of Pentecost. He was ever in the hearts of Old Testament believers. No one ever served God acceptably, from Abel downward, without the grace of the Holy Ghost. John the Baptist was "filled" with Him. It can only mean that He shall come with more fulness, influence, grace, and manifestation than He did before.

When we read of the "Spirit abiding forever" with disciples, it means that He will not, like Christ after His resurrection, return to the Father, but will always be with God's people until Christ comes again.

The word "Comforter" is the same that is translated "advocate" and applied to Christ Himself in 1 John 2:2. This has caused much difference of opinion. The word is only used five times in the New Testament and is four times applied to the Holy Spirit.

Some, as Lightfoot, Bishop Hall, and Doddridge, maintain that our translation here is right, and that it is the office of the Spirit to comfort and strengthen Christ's people.

Others, as Beza, Lampe, DeDieus, Gomarus, Poole, Pearce, Stier, and Alford, maintain that the word here should have been rendered "Advocate," as in John's Epistle; and that this word aptly expresses the office of the Spirit as pleading our cause and making intercession for the saints, and helping them in prayer and preaching. (See Rom. 8:26, Matt. 10:19,20.) I decidedly prefer this latter view. Those who wish to see an able argument in its favor should study Canon Lightfoot's volume on New Testament Revision (p. 55).

Lampe sensibly remarks that the word "another" points to the phrase meaning "Advocate" rather than "Comforter." That Jesus is our "Advocate" all allow. "Well," our Lord seems to say, "you shall have another 'Advocate' beside myself." Why use the word "another" at all if "Comforter" is the meaning?

It is only fair to say that "the consolation of Israel" was a Jewish name of Messiah (Luke 2:25), and that some think that Christ was one Comforter and the Holy Ghost another. But I do not see much in this.

17.--[*Even the Spirit of truth.*] The Holy Ghost is most probably so called because He brings truth specially home to men's hearts--because truth is His great instrument in all His operations--and because He bears witness to Christ the truth. Elsewhere we read, "It is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth" (1 John 5:6).

[*Whom the world...neither sees him nor knows him.*] Here our Lord teaches that it is one great mark of the unbelieving and worldly that they neither receive, nor know, nor see anything of the Holy Ghost. This is strikingly true. Many false professors and unconverted people receive Christ's name and talk of Him while they know nothing experimentally of the operations of the Holy Spirit. It is written, "The natural man receives not the things of the spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; neither can he know them" (1 Cor. 2:14).

[*But ye know...dwells...shall be in you.*] Our Lord's meaning here must be that the eleven knew something experimentally of the Spirit's work. They might not be fully acquainted with Him, but He was actually in them, making them what they were; and He would remain in them and carry on the work He had begun to a glorious end. "Whether you know it thoroughly and rightly or not, He is actually in you now, and shall always be in you and never leave you."

Let us mark in this and in the preceding verse how our Lord speaks of the Holy Spirit as "a Person." We should never speak of Him as a mere "influence" or dishonor Him by calling Him "it."

Let us never forget that "having the Spirit or not having the Spirit" makes the great distinction between the children of God and the children of the world. Believers have Him. Worldly and wicked people have Him not. (Jude 19.)