

J. C. RYLE'S NOTES ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN  
14:4-11

4. And where I go ye know, and the way ye know. 5. Thomas said to him, Lord, we do not know where you are going, and how can we know the way? 6. Jesus said to him, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father but by me. 7. If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also; and from now on ye know him and have seen him. 8. Philip said to him, Lord, show us the Father, and it suffices us. 9. Jesus said to him, Have I been with you so long, and yet have you not known me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father; so how can you say, Show us the Father? 10. Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? The words that I speak to you I speak not of myself; but the Father who dwells in me, he does the works. 11. Believe me that I *am* in the Father and the Father in me, or else believe me for the sake of the works themselves.

4.--[*And where I go...ye know.*] This remarkable sentence was evidently meant to stir and cheer the disciples by reminding them of what their Master had repeatedly told them. It is as though our Lord said, "Do not be cast down by my going away, as if you had never heard Me say anything about heaven and the way to heaven. Awake from your despondency, stir up your memories. Surely you know, if you reflect a little, that I have often told you all about it." Is it not, again, like a tender parent saying to a frightened child, who says he knows not what to do and is ready to sit down in despair, "Come, you know well enough, if you will only consider"?

Poole observes on this verse: "It is pleasant to notice how Christ continues His discourse to the disciples like a mother speaking to a little child crying after her when she prepares to go abroad. The child cries; the mother bids it be still for she is only going to a friend's house. It still cries; she tells it she is only going to prepare a place for it there, where it will be much happier than at home. It is not yet satisfied; she tells it again that though she goes, she will come again and then it shall go with her and she will part from it no more. The child is yet impatient; she endeavors to still it, telling it that it knows where she is going and it knows the way by which, if need be, it may come to her."

Let us note that disciples often know more than they suppose or admit, but do not use their knowledge or keep it ready for use. Ferus compares them to infants lying in their cradles who have fathers and fortunes but do not know it.

Let us note that Christ looks graciously on the little knowledge His people possess, and make the most of it. He can make allowance for their minds being clouded by grief or trouble and their consequent forgetfulness of truth for a season.

5.--[*Thomas said to Him, etc.*] This verse shows how foolishly a disciple may talk under the influence of despondency. Here is one of the eleven faithful Apostles declaring flatly that they neither knew where their Master was going nor the way! The saying is characteristic of the man. Thomas always appears a doubting, slow-minded believer. But we must not judge disciples too sharply for words spoken under deep distress. When the passions and affections are much stirred, the tongue often runs away with a man and he speaks unadvisedly. Nor must we forget that disciples have very different gifts. All have not equally strong faith, clear understanding, and good memory.

Trapp quaintly remarks that believers in the frame of Thomas are like people who hunt for their keys and purses when they have them in their pockets.

6.--[*Jesus said...and the life.*] This wonderful saying is a brilliant example of a foolish remark calling out a great truth from our Lord's lips. To the ill-natured remark of the Pharisees we owe the parable of the Prodigal Son (see Luke chapter 15); to the fretful complaint of Thomas we owe one of the grandest texts in Scripture. It is one of those deep utterances, which no exposition can thoroughly unfold and exhaust.

When our Lord says "I am the way," He means, "the Father's house is to be reached through my mediation and atonement. Faith in Me is the key to heaven. He who believes in Me is on the right road."

When our Lord says "I am the truth," He means, "The root of all knowledge is to know Me. I am the true Messiah to whom all revelation points, the truth of which the Old Testament ceremonies and sacrifices were a figure and shadow. He who really knows Me knows enough to take him safely to heaven, though he may not know many things and may be troubled at his own ignorance."

When our Lord says "I am the life," He means, "I am the Root and Fountain of all life in religion, the Redeemer from death and the Giver of everlasting life. He who knows and believes in Me, however weak and ignorant he may feel, has spiritual life now and will have a glorious life in my Father's house hereafter."

Some think that the three great words in this sentence should be taken together and that our Lord meant, "I am the true and living way." Yet the general opinion of the best commentators is decidedly unfavorable to this view of the sentence. To my own mind, it cuts down and impoverishes a great and deep saying.

Musculus remarks that no prophet, teacher, or apostle ever used such words as these. They are the language of one who knew that He was God.

[*No man comes to the Father but by Me.*] Here our Lord teaches that He is not merely the way to our Father's home in heaven, but that there is no other way, and that men must either go to heaven by His atonement or not go there at all. It is a clear distinct limitation of heaven to those who believe on Christ. None else will enter in there. Rejecting Christ, they

lose all.

We should mark carefully what an unanswerable argument this sentence supplies against the modern notion that it does not matter what a man believes--that all religions will lead men to heaven if they are sincere, that creeds and doctrines are of no importance, that heaven is a place for all mankind (whether heathen, Mahometan, or Christian), and that the Fatherhood of God is enough to save all at last of all sects, kinds, and characters! Our Lord's words should never be forgotten: "There is no way to the Father but by Me." God is a Father to none but those who believe in Christ. In short, there are not many ways to heaven. There is only one way.

"Coming to the Father" in this place, we must remark, includes not only coming to Him in glory at the last, but coming to Him in a friendly relation for peace and comfort now in this life.

"By Me" is literally "through" Me--as a door, gate, road, path, entrance. It is an expression which would be peculiarly expressive to the Jews who were taught from their childhood to draw near to God only through the priests.

7.--[*If...known my Father also.*] This is a deep saying, like every saying which handles the mysterious union of the Father and the Son in St. John's Gospel. The meaning seems to be: "If you had rightly, properly, and perfectly known Me as the Divine Messiah in all the fulness of my nature, you would then have known more of that Father to whom I am inseparably united. No one can rightly know Me without knowing the Father, because I and the Father are One."

[*And from now on...seen him.*] The meaning of these words seems to be: "Understand from this time forward that in knowing Me you know the Father, and in seeing Me see the Father, so far as the Father can be seen and known by man." Although the Son and the Father are two distinct persons in the Trinity, yet there is so close and mysterious a union between them that he who sees and knows the Son, in a certain sense, sees and knows the Father. Is it not written of the Son that "He is the express image of the Father"? (Heb. 1:2.)

The whole difficulty of the verse arises from the extreme mysteriousness of its subject. The relation between the eternal Father and the eternal Son and the eternal Spirit, who, while three Persons are one God, is precisely one of those things that we have no minds to take in and no language to express. We must often be content to believe and reverence it without attempting to explain it. This only we may lay down with certainty as a great canon and maxim: the more we know of Christ, "the more we know of the Father."

8.--[*Philip said...show us...suffices us.*] We are not told Philip's motive in making this request. Perhaps, like Moses, he and the other disciples had a pious desire to see a more full vision and revelation of God's glory as an authentication of their Master's Divine mission. "Show me Thy glory" (Ex. 33:18). Perhaps Philip's petition is recorded to show how

little clear knowledge the Apostles yet had of their Master's nature, and how little they realized that He and the Father were one. "If we could only see once for all the Divine Being whom You call the Father, it would be sufficient. We should be satisfied and our doubts would be removed." At any rate, we have no right to think that Philip spoke like the unbelieving Jews, who always pretended to want signs and wonders. Whatever sense we put on the words, we must carefully remember not to judge Philip too harshly. Living as we do in the nineteenth century, amidst light and creeds and knowledge, we can have faint ideas of the extreme difficulty that must have been felt by the disciples in fully realizing their Master's nature in the days where He was "in the form of a Servant" and under a veil of poverty, weakness, and humiliation.

Melancthon remarks that Philip's petition represents the natural wish of man in every age. Men everywhere feel an inward craving to see God.

9.--[*Jesus said...not known me, Philip?*] This verse is undoubtedly a gentle rebuke. The expression "so long time" is noteworthy when we remember that Philip was one of the very first disciples whom Jesus called. (See John 1:43.) The meaning seems to be, "After three long years, Philip, do you not yet thoroughly know and understand who I am?"

[*He who has seen me has seen the Father.*] This deep sentence can only mean, "He who has thoroughly seen me with the eye of faith and realized that I am the eternal Son, the Divine Messiah, has seen as much of my Father, whose express image I am, as mortal man can comprehend." There is so close and intimate a union between persons in the Trinity that he who sees the Son sees the Father. And yet we must carefully beware that we do not, like some heretics, "confound the Persons." The Father is not the Son, and the Son is not the Father.

Musculus observes that to see with bodily eyes is one thing, and to see with the eyes of faith quite another.

[*So how...show us the Father?*] This question is a further gentle rebuke of Philip's ignorance. "What do you mean by saying, Show us the Father? What clear knowledge of Me can you have if you can ask such a question?"

Let us note how Jesus calls Philip by name. It was doubtless meant to prick his conscience. "You, Philip, an old disciple, so ignorant! Ought not you, after following and hearing Me for three years, to have known better than this?"

10.--[*Do you not believe, etc.*] This question continues the rebuke to Philip. It means: "Do you not yet believe and realize what I have taught-- that there is a mystical union between Me and the Father, and that He is in Me and I in Him?"

This question surely seems to indicate that our Lord had often taught His disciples about the union between Himself and the Father. But, like many of the things He taught, the mighty truth passed over their heads at first and was not remembered till afterward. How little reason have ministers to complain if their teaching is little regarded when this was Christ's

experience!

[*The words that I speak...Father...he does the works.*] There can be little doubt that this is a very elliptical sentence. The full meaning must be supplied in this way: "The words that I speak to you, I speak not independently of the Father; and the works that I do, I do not do them independently of the Father. The Father who dwells in Me speaks in Me and works in Me. My words are words given Me to speak, and my works are works given Me to do, in the eternal counsel between the Father and the Son. Both in speaking and working I and my Father are one. What I speak He speaks, and what I work He works."

The whole difficulty of the verse arises from forgetting the close and mysterious and insoluble union between the Persons of the Trinity. How little we realize the fulness of the expression, "The Father dwells in Me."

11.--[Believe Me...Father in Me.] Direct instruction follows the rebuke of the preceding verse. Our Lord repeats for the benefit not of Philip only but of all the eleven, the great doctrine He had so often taught them. "Once more I say, Believe, all of you, my words when I say that I and the Father are so closely united that I am in Him and He in Me."

The word rendered "believe" in this verse is in the plural number. Our Lord does not address Philip only but the whole company of the Apostles.

What an example we have here of the necessity of repeating instruction over and over again. Our Lord had evidently taught these things before to the eleven, and yet they had either not understood or not remembered.

[*Or else believe me, etc.*] Here our Lord condescends to the weakness of the disciples. "If you will not believe the close union of Myself and the Father because of my word, believe it because of the works I work. They are such works as no one could work of himself, and without the Father."

Let us carefully observe how our Lord here, as elsewhere, specially names His works, or miracles, as testimonies of His nature and Divine mission. To leave out miracles in the list of the evidences of Christianity is a great mistake.