

Adult Teaching Resources

May 22, 2016



Close Encounters of the Jesus Kind: Conversations with Jesus (April 3-May 8)

At Home with God — John 14:23-29

Make Them One — John 17:20-26

Someone's Coming — John 14:8-17

Trinitarian Roots — John 16:12-15

Getting On in Galatia: Paul's Angriest Letter (May 29-July 3)

You Did *What*? — Galatians 1:1-12

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Trinitarian Roots

John 16:12-15

FIT Teaching Guide

by Rick Jordan

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Baptists Today*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Baptists Today* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Baptists Today* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Before the Lesson: Make copies of the handout, “Can You Understand?” for the Fellowship Question session.

Fellowship Question

Use *one* of the following to break the ice, to begin discussion, and lead into the study:

What is one thing you understand now, that you could not have understood as a child? (This could be a subject or a skill or a life lesson, etc.)

[Distribute the handout, “Can You Understand?” Allow some time to complete the brainteaser and to check the key for answers. Hint: All of these have something to do with the Holy Spirit.]

Information

There are some things we can't understand until it is our time to understand them. Recently, I heard a radio interview with sixth graders. One boy said he was so frustrated with adults who would say, “You'll understand when you're older.” He asserted that “I already know everything there is to know, so why can't we just talk about it?”

We might laugh at that naivety. The fact is until we actually face something for ourselves for the first time, we don't “know” what that experience will be like, or be like for us, in particular. Can you think of some of those things that a sixth grader can't know anything about yet? (the feeling of independence to drive a car; first true love; loss of a spouse; a doctor's negative report; the first day on a new job, etc.) What are some things you don't know anything about yet?

We know that the disciples either misunderstood Jesus or just could not understand Jesus. Part of that was due to the manner of teacher Jesus had, using parables. But even when Jesus spoke plainly, particularly when he talked about his upcoming crucifixion and resurrection, they did not get it.

Why do you think the disciples couldn't understand Jesus? (Ignorance, inexperience, sorrow, self-centeredness, different Messianic expectations, etc.)

As he approaches the cross, Jesus gives final words to his disciples.

Information *continued*

[Have a class member read John 16:4-6.]

Jesus' teaching was timed by the disciples' receptivity. He had not taught them everything they needed to know about him or his dream for the world. He had not taught them everything there was to know about God or eternity. For one and another reason, they were not prepared to grasp those teachings.

[Have a class member read John 16:12.]

One thing the Church still has difficulty grasping or bearing is the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Jesus calls the Holy Spirit the Paraclete, which means one who supports another, as an attorney supports a client and walks with them through a difficult time.

In the early centuries of the Church, the doctrine of the Trinity began to form. Although the word "trinity" is not in the Bible, there are teachings that point to the idea that God is one in nature, *and* God is three persons — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There were multiple attempts to interpret passages about the relationship between the Father and the Son, between the Son and the Spirit, between the Spirit and the Father. This led to many debates that led to some beliefs becoming orthodox doctrine. Non-orthodox theologians condemned as heretics. Even today, we continue to struggle with the concept of the Trinity.

Ironically, Jesus promises that the coming of the Holy Spirit would help us understand things like this doctrine. Yet we, like the earliest disciples still find the teachings of Jesus hard to understand, even though Jesus has explained it to us over and over.

[Have a class member read John 16:7, 13-15.]

One role of the Holy Spirit is that of teaching and granting spiritual understanding. For example, that Jesus was crucified is a historical fact. But, what does that *mean*? How does it relate to God's plan of atonement and reconciliation? How does one person of the Trinity cry out to another, "Why have you forsaken me?" What happens when one member of the Trinity dies? How is the role of the Spirit different before and after the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus? A man died, yes. But if it is to have any more meaning to us than a story of political intrigue and religious leaders' insecurity, that wisdom must come from the indwelling Spirit of God, who will teach us as much as we are able to bear.

"Without the Spirit's illumination Christ's death would be complete tragedy; under his instruction it will be the great victory of the Lord over the adversary, the decisive event in the salvation of the world." (John Marsh. *St. John*. The Pelican New Testament Series. New York: Penguin. 1968. p. 538.)

Sometimes, things are mysteries to us because we have not yet lived through them. It is as, or after, we live through an event or a stage of life that we can look back and with the Holy Spirit's instruction, gain spiritual understanding.

"The disciples were handicapped in their understanding. As long as he was with them in the flesh, his talk about coming again would not mean as much as it would after his ascension.

Information *continued*

Too, they were handicapped in understanding his teaching about resurrection until they had experienced his resurrection.” (Ray Summers. *Behold the Lamb*. Nashville: Broadman. 1979. p. 206.)

As life changes, our spiritual insights change. We rely on the Bible and on orthodox teachings, but these do not address some 21st century issues. Let’s see if we can come up with ten 21st century issues that the Bible does not directly address. [Jot these answers on the board. Try to get 8-10 answers, at least. Some examples might be guns, technology, American politics, etc.]

How can the Holy Spirit help us as we look for a Christian response to modern issues? (The Holy Spirit uses principles from scripture when direct comment is not available; the Spirit nudges us to respond in a certain way; the Spirit helps us discern how Jesus would have addressed this issue, etc.)

Note that I asked in the previous question about seeking “a” Christian response. Good Christians disagree on many subjects be they political, dogmatic, or behavioral. Thus, a response from a Christian is “a,” not “the” Christian response. Have your beliefs on a subject changed over time or due to circumstances, even though you have remained a Christian through that change? Could you share a story about that?

In verse 13, Jesus says that the Holy Spirit “will declare to you the things that are to come.” THE BIBLE LESSON writer notes, “The verb used here is not typically used in prophetic contexts, so we are not to think of the Spirit’s role in predicting the future. Rather, as new issues and contexts and challenges arose...the Spirit would be present to proclaim or interpret Jesus’ teachings in the changing circumstances of their lives and missions.”

A major point that is made in the gospel of John is that the incarnation of Jesus demonstrates that God is “with us.” The coming of the Holy Spirit signifies that God is “*within* us.”

“There are five passages in the discourses given in the Upper Room which describe the work of the Holy Spirit...We must now consider the relation of the three Persons mentioned together in those five passages. The indwelling of the disciples by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit will give us the clue. The following [three] statements are made: 1) The Holy Spirit will dwell with the disciples and be in them (14:17). 2) The Father and the Son will come to all who love and obey Christ, and will make their home with them (14:23). 3) Christ Himself will come to His disciples (14:18) and will be in them (15:4, 17: 23:26). From these statements we learn that it is God Himself who comes to dwell in believers. The Holy Spirit is God dwelling in men in a new, spiritual and permanent way. This is borne out by a study of the rest of the New Testament, in which the Paraclete is called Holy Spirit, Spirit of God, Spirit of Jesus or Spirit of Christ (Acts 16:7; Romans 8:9; Galatians 4:6) without any difference of meaning.” (George Appleton. *John’s Witness to Jesus*. World Christian Books, No. 8. London: United Society for Christian Literature. 1955. pp. 82f.)

Transformational Exercise

Let's look again at the list of things we said that the Bible does not directly address in the 21st century world. I think we could agree that there will be even more issues in 50 years ... or maybe even next year. Here is one hint to help us consider our stance on these issues: we may ask ourselves, is this issue grounded in the spirit of the world or the Spirit of God? One way to do that is to look at the fruit of the Spirit that Paul talks about in Galatians.

[Have a class member read Galatians 5:22-25.]

[Write on the board: "Fruit of the Spirit: Love; Joy; Peace; Patience; Kindness; Generosity; Faithfulness; Gentleness; Self-control"]

In silence, take one of these issues and run it through these nine characteristics.

[After a minute for silent reflection, ask..] How is that helpful or not helpful?

Some subjects are neutral, such as "money." The question is, how is the money being gained or how is the money being used? Then, how does that compare with the fruit of the Spirit. Another example, "social media" is a 21st century issue not addressed by the Bible. It may be used for good, for entertainment, for escape, or for evil. How would comparing those uses to the fruit of the Spirit be helpful?

Jesus tells us that we are not alone. God is living within us. The Holy Spirit offers understanding about why Jesus lived as he did and why he died as he did, and then gives us understanding about how we should also live and die. "If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit."

[Close in a prayer something like this: *Spirit of the Living God, Spirit of the Resurrected Christ, we invite you to teach us, to correct us, and to live through us. Amen.*]

Comments or Questions for Rick Jordan? You may send comments to the lesson plan author at rjordan@cbfnc.org. Rick is also available to lead workshops and conferences on Christian Education, with particular emphasis on how best to use the FIT Faith model.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartlege

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Baptists Today*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Baptists Today* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Baptists Today* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Trinitarian creeds — While individual theologians described God in Trinitarian terms as early as the second century, a formal doctrine of the Trinity grew out of a series of councils attended by leaders of the early church, the most important of which were held at Nicea (325 CE), Constantinople (381 CE), and Chalcedon (451 CE). Over a period of time and generally in response to perceived heresies, a doctrine evolved affirming a belief that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit had varying attributes, but were all uncreated, eternal, limitless, omnipotent, fully God as three-in-one. This avoided the idea that any part of the Trinity was subordinate to another.

The church’s interpretation of the various biblical witnesses imagines three co-equal and co-eternal persons who share a single divine essence or nature. In applying these terms to the Trinity, some writers and catechisms have suggested that “nature” describes *what* one is, while “person” describes *who* one is.

Saying farewell — Jesus’ lengthy farewell to the disciples, as portrayed by the Fourth Gospel, emphasizes his need to depart and the assurance that the disciples would not be left alone. This was a primary theme of chapter 14, in which Jesus sought to comfort the disciples and give them a sense of peace. Jesus would not leave them alone, but would send the Spirit to “teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you” (14:26). Jesus commanded the disciples to love others as he had loved them, and described their ongoing relationship as being like a vine and its branches (ch. 15). The disciples might feel distressed by thoughts of Jesus leaving, but he insisted that it would actually be to their advantage, because only then could he send the Spirit (16:7) to help them in their struggles with the world.

The Spirit/Paraclete is mentioned five times in the farewell discourse, at 14:16 and 26; 15:26; 16:8-11, and 16:12-15.

A true Spirit guide — In speaking of the Spirit’s role in facing future challenges, William E. Hull wrote: “Ultimate reality was not to be sought in a set of timeless facts which may be mastered at any moment but in companionship with the Spirit of truth who leads one on a pilgrimage of discovery (cf. 14:4-7).” Insightfully, he added “The Spirit would not be the source of innovative fads that victimize the church with the tyranny of the temporary; rather he is the source of insight to understand and of courage to apply those truths which the church has received. Most of us have more truth (e.g., in the Bible) than we are able to bear. Our need is for a skillful guide (cf. Acts 8:31) who can help us take responsibility for the deeper implications of the gospel which we have not been willing either to understand or to apply” (“John,” in the *Broadman Bible Commentary* [Nashville: Broadman Press, 1970], 341-2).

Prophetic preaching — Gail O'Day comments on the relationship between preaching and the Paraclete: "Each time a preacher attempts to proclaim the Word of God in a new circumstance, he or she shares in the work of the Paraclete. At its heart, preaching belongs to the ongoing conversation among past, present, and future in the life of the church. ... It is at the same time both old and new, past tense and contemporary. The preacher is bound both to the traditions of the church, so that his or her work is an act of reminding, and to the present moment, so that his or her work is also an act of discovering how the Word of God speaks in a new day. The gift and presence of the Paraclete allows both the preacher and the congregation to share in a fresh experience of the Word of God" ("The Gospel of John," *The New Interpreter's Bible* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1995], 778).

The glory of the hour — As Jesus spoke of being glorified through the "hour" of his passion, he knew that it would not come easily. "Now my soul is troubled," he said in the disciples' hearing. "And what should I say — 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again" (12:27-28).

In the moments after Judas left to betray him and so set Jesus' climactic "hour" into motion, Jesus said "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once" (13:31-32). Later on, in the "high priestly prayer," Jesus prayed "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you" (17:1, see also v. 5).

In the Fourth Gospel, then, the glory of Jesus and the decisive events of the passion are closely entwined.

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartlege

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Do we follow doctrine, or Christ?

A belief in the Trinity is one of many tenets held by a majority of Christian believers, but there is no universally agreed upon doctrine. Christians of varying traditions differ on issues as basic as the manner of salvation or the security of the believer, and as pointed as whether women should be subordinate to men in the church and whether birth control amounts to rebellion against God.

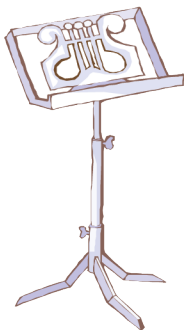
Doctrine can be useful, but in the hands of purists, it can also become quite divisive. Some Baptists I know are very fond of Catholic doctrines quite different from traditional Baptist thinking, while others have adopted fundamentalist beliefs as a measure of accountability, and yet others continue to maintain we should have “no creed but the Bible.” Many church members have little knowledge of and give little thought to the detailed and divergent promulgations of church authorities through the years, whether Catholic or Protestant, conservative or progressive or in between.

While ecclesial efforts to delineate clear doctrine can be helpful, our faith does not depend on them. Jesus did not promise to guide his followers by leaving behind a complete set of timeless dogmatic principles, but promised to lead them into changing times through the person of the Holy Spirit. Jesus left one primary command: to love one another as he loved us (John 13:34). He then promised that the Spirit of truth would come to guide us through life’s evolving circumstances.

The Paraclete, according to John’s gospel, is not a reservoir of doctrine, but an ongoing revelation of Jesus. As George R. Beasley-Murray wrote of John 16:14: “The revelation, then, is Jesus; not a system of doctrines, but *him*” (Beasley-Murray’s emphasis). Doctrinal formulas that seek to convey the truths of Jesus are important, “But dogmatic formulations and exposition can never take the place of the revelation in Christ; they can never exhaust that revelation; of necessity they are always relative to the times in which they are expressed and they have to be restated for different ages and cultures” (*John*, vol. 36 of Word Biblical Commentary, Accordance electronic ed. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987], 290).

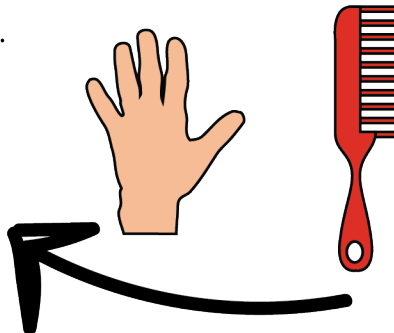
The point of Jesus’ farewell discourse is that we are to abide, not in doctrinal conformity, but in him — a point he emphasized with the metaphor of the vine and its branches in chapter 15: “Abide in me as I abide in you” (15:4). The presence of the Paraclete does not simply expose us to Christ’s teaching, but to Christ himself. Our response is not to affirm certain beliefs about Jesus, but to follow Christ’s lead in loving others. As Jesus revealed God’s love to us, so we are to reveal God in Christ in us to others. As the Spirit leads us to experience Christ’s presence in the midst of our varied and changing situations in life, we can trust that he will grant fresh expressions of divine revelation for the challenges we face today, and for a future we can only imagine.

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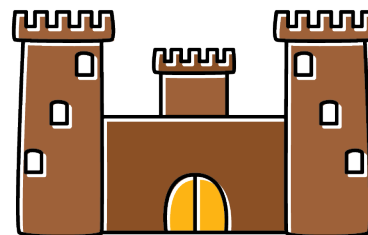


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5.



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7.



Answers
 1. Can you understand?
 2. Comprehend
 (Comb-pre-hand)
 3. I See All
 (Eye C Awl)
 4. Comfort
 (Comb Fort)
 5. Paralelles
 (Pair of Cleats)
 6. Teacher
 (Tea Cheer)
 7. Correct
 (Core Wrecked)