

A closer Examination of John 14:15-23

(John 14:15,16) 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 for ever;

Here Jesus promises ANOTHER Comforter. This word “another” is the critical word which suggests to some people that the holy spirit must be a third member of the godhead, somebody entirely distinct and separate from Jesus. At first glance it does appear that this is the reality, but as we read further in the passage other facts begin to appear which give a different understanding. In the very next verse, Jesus adds some more information which helps us to have a clearer understanding of who the holy spirit is. He says,

(John 14:17) Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.

Let us notice first of all that the world can neither SEE nor KNOW this comforter. He is and will be unknown by those who are not God’s people, but Jesus says that His people ALREADY know this comforter (although he has not yet come). Then Jesus says, “he dwelleth with you.” How can the Comforter be dwelling with them if He has not yet been given? It is clear that at this time the One who was dwelling with them was Jesus Himself. He further explains that in the future, when this Comforter comes He will be IN THEM.

(John 14:18) I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.

Here Jesus plainly identifies Himself as the Comforter. He says, “I will come to you (to comfort you).” So in verse 16 He says He will give ANOTHER Comforter and then in verse 18 He says that it is He who will come to us as the Comforter. So we have two verses which seem to contradict each other. The Trinitarians grab on to verse 16, while the non-Trinitarians grab on to verse 18. But the passage is not finished yet. Let us also bear in mind that Jesus already said that when this comforter would come, he would impact on people in different ways. The world would not know him, but the people of God would know him and in fact, already knew him. The only person whom the disciples already knew was Jesus Himself. That is very clear. In the following verse Jesus expands on the point that there will be a difference in His relationship to the world and to His disciples. The world will not see Him any more, but the disciples will.

(John 14:19) Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also.

How is this possible? Will Jesus be invisible to one group and visible to another? The obvious meaning is that the world will not recognize Him in the form in which He will come again, but His disciples will. This explains why Jesus refers to Himself as “another Comforter.” He is coming back in another form, with another identity in which He will be unrecognizable, except by His close friends. They will recognize that it is He, but others will think that it is somebody else, “another” person.

When would this happen? What occasion was Jesus speaking of, when He would come again and be recognized by His disciples, but not by the world? He was speaking of Pentecost. Notice Jesus’ next words: Because I live, ye shall live also. At the moment when Jesus was speaking these words, there was a sense in which the disciples were dead, not alive. But Jesus says, “in that day when I come again, you will live.” He was not speaking of His second coming because at that time all the world will see Him. But here, He is speaking of a time when His disciples will see Him, but the world will not. He is speaking of the day of Pentecost.

(John 14:20) At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.

This adds the icing to the cake. Jesus says “at that day,” (that day when He would come again to His disciples, in a different form and believed by the world to be, “another,”) His disciples would know something. They would know that He was in His Father, His Father was in Him, and He would be in us. This is as plain as it could be made plain. The Father in Jesus and Jesus in us. This is what the Comforter is. Jesus’ spirit, united with His Father’s spirit and coming to us, bringing Jesus to us in another form, unrecognizable to the world, but recognized by His disciples.

At Pentecost the disciples recognized that Jesus had come to them again and this is what Peter said to the Jews as he was preaching to them:

Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities. (Acts 3:26)

Notice what the verse says; first God raised up His Son and then “sent Him to bless you.” This is after the resurrection of Christ, but it is not referring to the second coming of Christ. God had sent His Son to bless the Jews. He was referring to the day of Pentecost. This was the coming of the Comforter.

(John 14:21) He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.

In this verse, Jesus promises to reveal or to manifest Himself to those who love Him. He is speaking of His own personal interaction with His people, not the interaction of another, third person. So Judas asks Him a straight question:

(John 14:22) Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?

Judas' question is "how?" How will Jesus show Himself to the disciples, but remain unseen by the world? We can see that Judas did not understand the idea of "another comforter." He did not understand that Jesus would be coming back in another form in which He would not be recognized by the world. This is why he asked the question.

(John 14:23) Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.

Notice, Jesus did not say, "this is because it will not be me personally, it will be another person." No, He does not say this. Instead He emphasizes what He has already said. He and His Father will make their home with the one who loves Him. He will be with the person, He will be in the person. This is how His disciples will know Him while the world does not even see Him.

So we see that when we look at the passage more carefully, there is no teaching that a third person will come instead of Jesus. What we see is that it is Jesus Himself who will come back in another form, a spirit form where He is able to dwell in many people at the same time.

This is why we are told so plainly in 1 John 1:3, "truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." Not with a third person, but with the Father and His Son.