

## Liberating Union with Christ

Jonathan K. Dodson | John 14:25-31 | February 12, 2017

Did you encounter anything this week that made your blood boil, your temperature rise? A moment when you felt so stressed out, you were ready to throw in the towel? Perhaps the ping-pong of faith, a back and forth experience between performing for God or being indifferent to God? Lack of purpose? If any of these resonate, you'll find hope in this passage. Three ways: Union with Christ, Peace of Christ, Mission of Christ.

### Union with Christ

Our passage opens with Jesus followers huddled around him and he says, I've taught you these things while I am *still with you*, reminding them *he's leaving*. Hearing this, it's as if they say, "You're leaving us?! What are we supposed to do?" Jesus responds, "**But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you**" (25-6). What is Jesus' consolation? *The Holy Spirit*, the Paraclete, translated Helper. It's very difficult to capture the fullness of the word Paraclete, but just a few verses earlier Jesus uses it to describe the Spirit as the one who: "**...dwells with you and will be in you**" (14:17). Now, this may sound a bit weird, a Spirit living inside of us? But philosophers and artists have recognized the need for a divine spirit for centuries. Musicians often insist songs come from a Holy Muse, from outside themselves. In a recent article, NPR jokingly referred to the vocals of Alison Kraus as "*a holy spirit wafting through the pop world.*" Seneca, the Roman philosopher wrote: "**a holy spirit indwells within us, one who marks our good and bad deeds and is our guardian.**" When we get in touch with depth of human experience, and the height of artistic expression *we have to reach for a holy spirit*. Jesus knows this and promises to send his Spirit to indwell them, not just to inspire creativity but to accomplish something more important: "**in that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you**" (14:20). Notice the bi-directional dwelling of Jesus: you in me, I in you. Somehow we can be "in Christ" and at the same time Christ can be "in us." Jesus attributes this mystical union *to the Spirit*. "**He dwells with you and will be in you.**" So while the disciples are anxious about Jesus' departure, he comforts them with the promise of his presence *through the Spirit*, which is one reason he is called *the Spirit of Jesus* (Phil 1:19). The Spirit is the relational glue of our newly constructed relationship with God. He enables us to enjoy Christ, and makes his work stick to us, so that when God looks at us he sees, not primarily our flawed, sinful behaviors but the flawless behavior of Christ. To be united with Christ, through his Spirit, is to be covered with his goodness. One Halloween I dressed up like a hick. I had an awful mullet, a John Cena t-Shirt with the sleeves cut off, ratty jeans and boots. The costume that was so good at first didn't realize it was a costume but when they did, they complimented me. They loved it! When we are *in Christ*, God checks us out, and he delights in us, drawn to the glory of Christ uniquely tailored for us. Jesus' goodness become our goodness, his beauty our beauty. The difference is he knows it's not a costume. It's our union with Christ by the Spirit. As a result, we're freed from spending the rest of our lives trying to impress God. Jesus has impressed him already, and inhabits us. See, union with Christ, through the Spirit, is how the ping pong of faith stops. Jesus catches the ball, closes up the table, and walks over and wraps us up. He takes us into himself, and put himself in us by the Holy Spirit. If you struggle with swinging from performance to indifference, Jesus is saying "Put down the

paddle and settle into union with me.” Then, Jesus tells them where the **Spirit comes from**: “[But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name](#)” (26). The Spirit comes from the Father, and is sent in the name of the Son. This tells us that all three persons of the Godhead are in on this together. They collaborate. Unity. But also diversity, order. The Father is not the Son, and the Son is not the Spirit. The Father sends the Son, and the Son lends his name to the Spirit. This reveals a divine hierarchy or order, which is reflected in our own longing for order in our world. And this unity and diversity, commonality and order paints a stunning picture of relational wholeness. No one has a chip on their shoulder, no one is domineering. And it’s out of [this interior life of the Trinity](#), of respect and initiative and mutual love that the Spirit comes to unite us to God. And lest the disciples forget all this rich teaching, Jesus promises the Spirit will *teach and bring to remembrance* these truths so they can pass them on when writing the NT.

### Peace of Christ

You might be thinking, okay, union with Christ by the Spirit sounds great, but you have no idea how hard my marriage is, how demanding work can be, the personal obstacles I face. It’s likely I don’t, but Jesus does and says to you: “[Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you.](#)” (27). Peace. Jesus identifies two kinds of peace: worldly peace and his peace. What’s the difference? Worldly peace is peace derived from secular tactics. Let’s explore a few. 1) **Peace of strategy**. Let’s say a problem at work pops up on you. What do you do? Begin developing a *strategy* to deal with it. The code you need to write, the information you need, the words you must say. We strategize our problems. One of the kids got sick. We’d never seen this before. We need more information. We google and read some articles, and stress goes through the roof. More information doesn’t bring peace. You’re facing some marital or financial struggles. You’re exhausted, so you talk your spouse into moving to an entirely new city. You get there and it doesn’t bring the security that’s missing. The problem with strategies don’t secure peace. At best they solve superficial problems. *Not as the world gives do I give*. Jesus’ peace addresses the deeper problem of needing strength to be honest with your spouse, discipline to spend wisely. How? [I have such deep relational security in Christ, I am freed to be honest, to fail, to even be misunderstood because I’m wrapped up in love of Christ.](#) 2) **Peace of escape**. When the going gets tough, when kids are screaming, when the future looks bleak, some of us resort to escape. Duck into the theatre, get a pedicure, avoid people altogether, or just pine for the weekend. Escape is temporary. You walk out of the movies and the demands are still there. You come back from the weekend and it’s still hanging over your head. Jesus’ peace is better because [it faces reality with ultimate rest](#). You can endure a rough day with the kids, sleep well with deadlines at work, because you can trust Jesus with the outcome of your kids and your project. Because he offers an internal rest that eclipses escape. [Escape is temporary. Union with Christ is forever.](#) 3) **Peace of comparison**. When it becomes apparent we’ve failed, we’ve sinned, it can be tempting to minimize our sin by telling ourselves “It’s really not that bad.” Bad compared to what? Compared to somebody else’s failure, which dodges the issue. This tactic introduces a false peace by comparing degrees of sin. It means we’re looking into others’ lives, speculating on them, and then judging them worse than ourselves, all for worldly peace. Underneath our comparison we’re saying “[I don’t want real peace because I don’t want to confront the stark reality of my sin. I don’t want to see how great Christ is because I prefer to preserve the illusion of how great I am.](#)”

But the reality of peace is much better—covered with his goodness and beauty we don't have to fake it. Real peace comes, not by comparing failures but by admitting them to Jesus. Being honest as you can about your own heart. He died and rose to get us costly peace. Don't abandon it. The Spirit is prompting you toward it, his peace, "*my peace I give to you.*" One of the most practical ways I've found over the years to get this peace, it to begin my day praying over my responsibilities, handing each one to God—the results of how the meeting goes, and how the results make me look—tremendous peace.

### Mission of Christ

In light of these staggering realities (union with Christ, peace of Christ through Spirit), Jesus suddenly changes his tone: "*Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful*" (27). These are imperatives, commands not suggestions. Literally, don't throw your heart around. Don't be cowardly! He goes on: "*You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I will come to you.' If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I*" (28). Why shouldn't we fear? Well, when Jesus says *I am going away and will come to you*, it's shorthand for *completing the mission of the cross and the resurrection*. He's going to go away through death and come back through resurrection to secure all the benefits we've been talking about. So the disciples should be rejoicing! Mission is almost complete! But instead, they're sulking. Looking to worldly tactics, oblivious to redemptive history unfolding before them. Jesus essentially says, "*Stop thinking about yourself. If you loved me, you would be happy for me and for the world.*" And maybe you need to hear that this morning. Buried in your worries and concerns, are you losing sight of what Jesus has done for you and for the world? Give up on fake peace; you've got the peace of Christ. Stop performing; you've got union with Christ. And get on with the mission. When Jesus says, "*if you loved me, you would have rejoiced because I'm going to the Father*"; he's saying **if you love me, you will love my mission**. You'll announce what I've done and live like I've done it. And then he has this puzzling phrase, "*for the Father is greater than I.*" He is going to ascend to the Father because the Father is greater. What does it mean? It does not mean Jesus is inferior, less God. John 1: "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*" Jesus means the Father is greater in his will, not his being. He's been saying all along that he takes his cues from the Father: "I do only what the Father tells me" (Jn 4:34; 5:19-20; 8:29). Jesus is dependent on the Father. Are you dependent on Jesus? Remember, there is order in the Trinity, and they are reordering the world, and inviting us into it! Then Jesus cuts to the chase summarizing the drama of his mission: "*I am leaving, the Ruler of this world is coming, he has nothing on me, I do this not for him, or even ultimately for you, I do it for the Father*" (30-1). "*I do as the Father has commanded.*" Sound familiar? "*If anyone loves Me, he will keep My commands*" (23). Jesus is in the middle of doing what we're supposed to do. Jesus is loving the Father the way we're supposed to love him. Jesus is obeying the Father the way we're supposed to obey. In flawless obedience, unflagging adoration, at the expense of his life, Jesus "does" what is necessary for us to get in him and he in us. Face like flint to the cross, in full anticipation of resurrection, Jesus is about to change everything. Then He closes, "*Rise, let us go from here.*" Jesus essentially says, "Let's do this!" Drops the mic. And walks toward the cross. Will you follow?