

- c. As Jesus explained to Peter the fate that awaited him, he turned to see John following behind them (21:18-20). The person isn't named, but identified as the "disciple whom Jesus loved" and further as the one who had leaned against Jesus' chest at their final meal before His arrest (cf. 13:21-23). Again, there are many views regarding the identity of this disciple, but early tradition pointed to John, the son of Zebedee and brother of James.

When Peter saw John, He immediately drew him into the conversation, asking Jesus what lay ahead for him ("what of this one"). There is some uncertainty about Peter's meaning and motive: Was he genuinely concerned about John or expressing a sense of unfairness? And was he speaking under the assumption that John would share his commission and so also his death? And was his concern more with John's calling ("what role will he play in your kingdom") or his fate ("will he also die in your service?")? Whatever was going through Peter's mind, Jesus' answer shows that He saw Peter's concern as a distraction: "*If I will that he remain until I come, what does that have to do with you? You follow Me*" (v. 22). This statement points to several important considerations:

- The first is the matter of *Jesus' sovereignty* in the calling, work and fate of His disciples. The Father's design in the Son is to form a new human community in Him, but that corporate design and its outworking has individual dimensions. All who are in Christ share the same destiny of *Christiformity* (complete conformity to Christ), but each has his own individual path and process toward that destiny (cf. Romans 12:1-6, 14:1-4; 1 Corinthians 12:1-27; Ephesians 4:1-13; Philippians 1:1-6). Every Christian is "in Christ" by God's will and power in the Spirit (ref. 1 Corinthians 1:30; 2 Corinthians 4:1-7; Ephesians 1:3-6; 1 Peter 1:1-5), but that same divine will has determined to endow each one with his own gifts and calling and direct each one along his own unique path toward the "goal of the prize of His upward call in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:1-16).
- The counterpart of this sovereign determination is the matter of *personal obligation* and *personal faithfulness*. The very fact that the Father, in the Son and through the Spirit, is forming and perfecting a human community implies that each member of that community has a distinct and critically important role in its life and progress. Looking to the coming of the Messiah, Zechariah prophesied that He (the Davidic "Branch") would build Yahweh's everlasting sanctuary through the power of the Spirit, but in connection with human labor (cf. Zechariah 4:1-10, 6:9-15). So Paul ascribed the work of Christiformity and "temple-building" to the *Spirit* (cf. 2 Corinthians 3:18 with Ephesians 2:11-22), while also insisting that Christ's *body* causes the growth of the body (Ephesians 4:15-16). This is no contradiction, but affirmation that the Spirit doesn't work in a vacuum, but through the mutual ministration of His gifts within the community of believers (ref. again 1 Corinthians 12-14). The life of the body is the instrument by which the Spirit accomplishes His transformative work.

It is often said that divine sovereignty establishes human responsibility, and this is especially significant in the case of the Christian life. Salvation involves personal participation in Christ's own life, which means sharing in the new paradigm of humanness that exists in Him. To be "saved" is to participate in the human nature of the Last Adam and this establishes the obligation, not of reformed practice, but of authentic human existence – the obligation of the "righteousness" that is conformity to the resurrected Messiah as partakers in His resurrection life and mind.

Every Christian participates in Christ in this way and so every Christian has the same obligation of faithfulness; each must conform to and strive to grow up in His new life in Jesus. The obligation of faithfulness is the obligation of *authenticity* – being who we truly are. But this faithfulness has a unique, personal dimension since each one who shares in Christ has his own individual process of Christiformity. So it was with Peter and John: Both were obligated to follow their Lord by faithfully conforming to their new life in Him, but each according to his own calling.

- These truths, in turn, have their own important implications. One of them is that no individual Christian or Christian ministration is more or less significant, valuable or necessary than another. There is no hierarchy among the Spirit's gifts and ministrations with respect to value or necessity. To the contrary, Paul indicated that even the gifts and ministrations that might appear less significant or honorable have their own unique distinction (ref. 1 Corinthians 12:12-24).

Another implication is that each Christian has his own personal and individual reckoning. The fact that we are saved to be part of Christ's corporate body doesn't exempt us from personal *accountability* any more than it exempts us from personal responsibility. Each one is obligated to live authentically in conformity to the truth – to be who he is in Christ – and each will give an account in that regard. But each Christian is unique, even as each member of the human body is unique, and this means that each has his own reckoning. Each will be judged according to his own identity and calling in God's purposes; there is no corporate judgment. Every believer (as every human being) will give his own account without reference to another's faithfulness or failure (cf. Romans 14:1-13; 1 Corinthians 3:10-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10; also Revelation 20:11-13).

- One final consideration is Jesus' mention of His *coming*. Paul would later develop the doctrine of Jesus' Parousia in his writings, but the Lord Himself had spoken to His disciples about His future coming. He specifically associated it with the end of the age when He'd reveal Himself to all men and complete His judgment of the world as its enthroned King (ref. Matthew 24-25; Mark 13; cf. also Luke 21). In that day, the kingdom He'd inaugurated would see its consummation (1 Corinthians 15:20-28).

Evidently Jesus' statement became known to others – whether through Peter or John or perhaps another disciple who overheard Him – and the story began to circulate among the early Christians that this particular disciple (John, if he was in fact “the disciple whom Jesus loved”) would not die before Jesus' Parousia (21:23). This implies that this individual was still alive at the time the account was written; otherwise, there'd be no reason for the writer to mention this. And if chapter 21 was a later addition by a different author, it had to have been written before John's death. (John was the last of the Twelve to die.)

- d. The closing summary parallels the end of chapter 20, but with a slightly different emphasis. While 20:30-31 emphasizes the *purpose* for the account – namely, the readers' true knowledge and faith, these final two verses stress the account's *veracity*. It is because its witness to the Messiah is true that it is able, under the leading of the Spirit, to bring about genuine knowledge and faith in Him.

Even in his closing the writer didn't explicitly identify himself, but only connected himself with the previous episode: “*This is the disciple who bears witness of these things...*” Thus there are two possible referents for this pronoun: Peter or John (assuming again that he is “the disciple whom Jesus loved”). But this disciple also identified himself as the one who penned the account (“these things”), which could refer to just the preceding episode or the entire gospel record. The subsequent statement (v. 25) suggests the latter, since the writer here contrasted what he'd written with the multitude of things Jesus did which were not set down in a written record.

Another question that arises from verse 24 is the referent of the pronoun “we.” Who were those persons (among whom the writer includes himself) who affirmed that the writer's witness was true? One possibility is that the pronoun refers to the apostles, since they alone experienced the Lord's Galilee appearance (and were with Him from the beginning). This interpretation, however, requires an early date for John's account, which is generally rejected. Another possibility is that “we” refers to the men responsible for the epilogue (assuming it was a later addition to the original account). Others believe the writer was referring to those who were with him at the time he penned his account (traditionally thought to have been written by John in Ephesus around 90 A.D.). Whatever the case, the crucial point is that the writer wanted to assure his readers that his record was no flight of fancy, but a careful, accurate account of Israel's Messiah, the Savior of the world.

Finally, John closed by noting that he'd provided only a glimpse of Jesus' life and work; his record didn't begin to capture all that He had done. He'd set down an account that would serve his goal of his readers' true knowledge of and faith in Jesus the Messiah, but while acknowledging that he had omitted much. He'd been selective in compiling his material – not merely because of his narrow purpose, but also because of the impossibility of providing a comprehensive account. If all Jesus had done was recounted in detail (exhaustively and with due explanation), the volume of that record would exceed the planet's capacity to contain it.