

3. Even as the Upper Room episode brought Jesus' self-disclosure to its climax, so it displayed in climactic fashion the apostles' lack of understanding. By deed and word, Jesus sought to explain the significance of what was about to transpire, but these, His closest disciples, failed to grasp His meaning. Whether Peter with Jesus' foot-washing, the confusion over His identification of the betrayer, the argument over who was the greatest during the Passover meal, or the questions posed by Thomas and Philip, the gospel writers make it painfully clear that these men remained largely in the dark concerning their Lord and His mission. They believed they knew Him, but all of their convictions were about to be shattered and reconstructed.

And so, when Jesus insisted that knowing Him was identical with knowing His Father, Philip responded by asking Him to show them the Father (14:7-8). Jesus was making the point that His apostles knew neither Him nor His Father, and Philip proved Him right: They were witnessing the Father in the very One speaking to them, but that truth eluded them, even after three years with Him as His closest circle of followers (14:9). And not recognizing the Father in the Son, they revealed that their knowledge of both was flawed. Scholars have speculated what Philip had in mind when he asked Jesus to show them the Father; some think he was requesting a verbal description, while others believe he expected some sort of visionary manifestation. In the end it's impossible to know, because John wasn't concerned with Philip's expectation, but the fact that the theophany he sought was already present in the person of the Son.

- a. Jesus had repeatedly told His disciples (and His detractors) that He spoke His Father's words and performed His Father's works, but now He asserted a more intimate and thorough connection between the two of them: He is *in* the Father and the Father is *in* Him. It wasn't merely that He spoke and acted according to His Father's instruction; His words were His Father speaking: When the Son spoke, the Father was doing His own work (14:10). Jesus' words conveyed the truth that He was in the Father and the Father was in Him, but so did His works; if the apostles couldn't arrive at this truth from what He said, his actions should have led them there (14:11). And this was especially the case in terms of the work they were about to witness – the work which would bring to a climax the mutual testimony and glorification of Father and Son (cf. 12:23-28, 13:23-32, 17:1).

Jesus' assertion of being one with His Father identified the unity of their will and purpose (cf. 10:25-32), but He was saying more than this. The Father and Son are one in intent, word and work because they share the same essence; the Son is the incarnation of the Logos that is identical with God (1:1, 14). The God who'd made Himself known in the preparatory salvation history through His deeds and words in the mouths of His prophets had now revealed Himself exhaustively in His Son (Hebrews 1:1-3). This God was Yahweh, the covenant God of Israel, who had promised to return to Zion in connection with the coming of His messianic Servant. He'd now fulfilled that promise in the person of Jesus of Nazareth; Jesus was Yahweh returned to Zion to accomplish His work of liberation, cleansing, renewal and ingathering (cf. Isaiah 40:1-11 with Matthew 3).

- b. Jesus' works testified to His relationship with His Father, but those same works would also attest the same sort of relationship with His disciples. For, He was going to reproduce His works in those who believe in Him. And when that happened, their working His works would show that He is in them and they are in Him, just as His working His Father's works showed that He is in the Father and the Father is in Him. Not only so, but Jesus insisted that His disciples' works were going to exceed His own, and that because He was going to the Father (14:12).

Considered in isolation, this statement is more baffling than instructive. But Jesus wasn't trying to confuse His apostles. Rather, He was hinting at a theme He was about to introduce, namely the crucial role of the Holy Spirit in His return and abiding presence with them (ref. 14:25-31, 15:26-16:15). These men, chosen by Him to proclaim His gospel and interpret Him to the world, were going to continue His work in the power and leading of the Spirit. In this way, Jesus Himself would continue working (cf. Acts 1:1-2). The apostles needed to understand that their Lord wasn't commissioning and charging them only to abandon them to their task; He would return and abide with them by His indwelling Spirit and so continue His work through them. As Jesus did His Father's work through their mutual indwelling (10:37-38), so they would do His work as abiding in Him and Him in them (ref. 14:16-26, 15:1-7, 26-27, 16:5-16).

This dynamic of the Spirit's indwelling and empowering helps explain Jesus' statement that His disciples would do "greater works" than He had. He wasn't saying that their works would transcend or be superior to His, whether in orientation, accomplishment, significance or power. Indeed, that would be impossible given that His works, as theirs, were performed in the power and leading of the one and same Spirit. But in one critically important sense Jesus' work transcended all that followed after, for He accomplished the supreme work of forgiveness, cleansing and renewal which was the basis for everything His disciples said and did. In fact, it was because of this very supremacy that His disciples would do greater works than His, and that in two respects:

- The first pertains to the matter of *scope*: Jesus came to the lost sheep of Israel and He carried out His self-disclosure and ministration within the confines of that nation and its boundaries. But He'd come to restore and reconstitute Israel in Himself toward the end that the Abrahamic mandate should be fulfilled: Jesus came to Israel so that Israel could at last mediate Yahweh's blessing to all the earth's families. He was rebuilding His Father's covenant house on the foundation of twelve apostles whom He appointed to convey and interpret Him to the world of men.
- The second, then, pertains to the matter of *completion*: The work which Jesus initiated He entrusted to His disciples and He empowered them, by His Spirit, to carry out that work unto its completion at the end of the age (cf. Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:1-8). Their work was greater in terms of outcome; through them, Jesus would complete what He began.

- c. The same dynamic which explains Jesus' disciples doing greater works than He'd done also illumines His insistence that He would give them whatever they asked in His name. Such an open-ended promise raises all sorts of questions, and the fact that Jesus stated it a second time suggests that the apostles were just as startled and puzzled by it as people are today (14:13-14). But however peculiar and puzzling it may seem, Jesus showed this promise to be a fundamental principle of His future relationship with His disciples by returning to it repeatedly in the balance of the discourse (cf. 15:7, 16, 16:23).

Many Christians take this promise at face value as Jesus giving them a virtual blank check for whatever they want, the only qualification being that they must submit their petition in His "name." For some, attaching Jesus' name to their requests functions like a kind of verbal talisman moving Him to act on their behalf; as long as they include that formula, they will receive what they ask for. Others believe that offering up petitions in Jesus' name amounts to connecting them with His *will* (cf. 9:31; 1 John 5:14-15). This view isn't entirely incorrect, but the alignment of will and petition typically occurs in the wrong direction, with Jesus' will being conscripted into the service of the petitioner's agenda. In the end, human nature insures that both approaches to Jesus' promise (and others as well) tend to arrive at the same place.

Jesus *was* implicating His will when He specified petitions being offered in His name; indeed, asking in His name necessarily entails asking according to His will, for who Jesus is (signified by His "name") is inseparable from what He wills and does. But this dynamic doesn't work in the way many assume; once again, the connection between Jesus and His disciples *by and in the Spirit* is the key to discerning the true meaning and significance of this promise.

The mutual indwelling of Father and Son is the reason the Son's words and works are identical with the Father's (vv. 8-11). But Jesus was here promising that the same dynamic was going to characterize the relationship between Him and His disciples: Their words and works would be His when He indwelled them and them Him. And this conjunction would come about when He departed to His Father and then returned in the person of His Spirit to gather His disciples to Himself. At that time both He and His Father would make their abode in them as they became the "dwelling of God in the Spirit" (vv. 12-20).

This is the context for interpreting Jesus' promise. The relationship of mutual indwelling and "christiformity" effected by the Spirit (14:25-26, 16:13-15; cf. 2 Corinthians 3:18) is the reason His disciples receive whatever they ask in His name (15:7). *The crucial premise behind the promise is that Lord and disciple have become one even as Father and Son are one.* The Son always receives what He asks of the Father because His petitions are identical with the Father's mind and will (11:1-42, 17:1-26). Thus the Father is glorified in what the Son desires and seeks (as also by what He says and does), and so it is with the Son's disciples in whom He is perfecting His life and work (cf. 14:13 with 15:7-8).