

## STUDY 18

# Reconciliation and Fullness

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### INTRODUCTION

Prophetic testimony is given by John—the baptiser (John 1)—that Jesus is the one who both effects reconciliation, and baptises with the Holy Spirit. Jesus' gifts include:

1. **Reconciliation:** Jesus is 'the Lamb of God who takes away the sin[s] of the world' (John 1:29);<sup>1</sup> it is accomplished as he cries: 'It is finished' (19:30).
2. **Fullness:** Jesus is 'the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit' (John 1:33) and from his fullness, grace upon grace (v.16) is received to flow to all who believe in him; they receive the promised Holy Spirit and out of their depths flow rivers of living water—gushing up to eternal life (John 7:38; 4:14).

Superb beyond measure are the promises Jesus makes to those who drink from him:

On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, 'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me,<sup>38</sup> and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, "Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water."<sup>39</sup> Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified (John 7:37–39).

The necessity of the coming of the Holy Spirit to induct the disciples into the fullness of unity, action and purpose with Father, Son and Spirit—reconciliation—is set forth by Jesus in John 14–17. The prayer of John 17 indicates what Calvary will achieve:

I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word,<sup>21</sup> that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.<sup>22</sup> The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one,<sup>23</sup> I in them and you in me, that they may

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise specified, all scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version (italics mine).

## *Reconciliation and Fullness*

become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me (John 17:20–23).

Jesus' prayer in John 17 is answered in his atoning death. A settled, established, enduring peace (very unlike a 'tit-for-tat' managed peace) is promised to the disciples shortly before Jesus' arrest: 'my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives' (John 14:27). Following the shattering events of the cross, the resurrected Jesus comes to his disciples and profoundly fixes this peace in them, as he says, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you', and as he breathes on them says, 'Receive the Holy Spirit' (John 20:21–22). The judgement of the world and the driving out of its false ruler (John 12:31) issues in the stunning revelation of grace.

### **DONE, DONE, ALL DONE!**

The gospel comes to us like the final words of an auctioneer: 'Done, done, all done!'

The work of reconciliation, in the sense of the New Testament, is a work which is *finished*, and which we must conceive to be finished, *before the gospel is preached*.<sup>2</sup>

Jesus Christ is now going to the nations by his word and Spirit proclaiming the gospel (Rom. 10:17). The New Testament message is that 'we have now received reconciliation' (Rom. 5:11) in such full measure that:

... if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! <sup>18</sup> All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; <sup>19</sup> that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us (2 Cor. 5:17–19).

So, 'we are convinced that one has died for all' (v. 14), and atonement is made for the whole world (1 John 2:2).

Believers have been given a *relational* fullness (not a *quantitative* fullness) in Christ Jesus, such that nothing extra needs to be blended with it: 'For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority' (Col. 2:9–10). Sure of this, Paul always went in that fullness, saying: 'I know that when I come to you, I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ' (Rom. 15:29).<sup>3</sup> This is no hyped-up status for visiting, but the settled standing of a justified person, filled with the Spirit, walking by faith.

### **OUR UNION WITH THE TRIUNE GOD**

John Calvin highlights the indispensable role of the Holy Spirit as *the bond that unites us to Christ*:

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<sup>2</sup> James Denney, *The Death of Christ*, The Tyndale Press, London, 1964, p. 85.

<sup>3</sup> See comments by Geoffrey Bingham, *The Baptism in the Holy Spirit* (NCPI, Blackwood, 2003), pp. 42–43.

## Reconciliation and Fullness

First, we must understand that as long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us. Therefore, to share with us what he has received from the Father, he had to become ours and to dwell within us.<sup>4</sup>

In John 14–17, Jesus prepared the disciples to understand and anticipate a full faith-union and communion with the Father and the Son, through the coming, indwelling, and non-departure of the Holy Spirit, saying:

On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you (John 14:20).

Indwelling Jesus by faith, praying in his name (John 14:14), the disciples would have full access to the Father, and fully participate in his plan. Jesus had promised:

On that day you will ask nothing of me. Very truly, I tell you, if you ask anything of the Father in my name, he will give it to you (John 16:23).

They would be in full flow from *that day* onwards. The river flows as the Spirit (which was *not yet* in John 7:39) is breathed on them (John 20:22), as *that day* arrives! Life is then new, in a very new way, for the church. John V. Taylor notes:

... it is only in the epistles and the Gospel of John that the Spirit appears in that fulness in which the Christian church has always known him, and it is clear that it is only the church which has ever known him in this unparalleled way. In a disturbing flash of insight the Gospel of John says with reference to the death and resurrection of Jesus: 'the Spirit had not yet been given, because Jesus had not yet been glorified', which R. P. C. Hanson suggests might be better rendered: 'it was not yet Spirit', as one might say, 'it was not yet spring'. That is exactly how it must have appeared to anyone looking back from the end of that prodigious first century. There had never been anything like it before, and it had all stemmed from Jesus.<sup>5</sup>

The giving of the Holy Spirit is a gigantic moment, bringing reconciliation and fullness to the disciples, and so to the world:

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.'<sup>20</sup> After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.<sup>21</sup> Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.'<sup>22</sup> When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.<sup>23</sup> If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained' (John 20:19–23).

This passage seems to be John's unique way of including the events of Pentecost (cf. Acts 2:1ff.) within his own account of the gospel.<sup>6</sup> Pentecost was always with a

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<sup>4</sup> John Calvin, in *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion—1* (ed. John T. McNeill, trs Ford Lewis Battles, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1960), ch. 3.1.1, p. 537.

<sup>5</sup> John V. Taylor, *The Go-Between God: The Holy Spirit and the Christian Mission*, SCM Press, London, 1989, p. 85.

<sup>6</sup> Ian Pennicook, *Rivers of Living Water* (NCTM NSW studies, 2005, p. 55. Available as pdf from website: <[http://www.newcreation.org.au/studies/pdf/Rivers\\_living\\_water.pdf](http://www.newcreation.org.au/studies/pdf/Rivers_living_water.pdf)>).

He asks why it is that John's gospel, at this point at least, must always be examined against the background of Luke's account of Pentecost. He says:

## Reconciliation and Fullness

view to seeing and receiving the benefits of Calvary. Calvary is not primarily with a view to Pentecost. John is selective of the *signs* Jesus did (and discourse too) in order to structure his gospel with his stated evangelical purpose in mind (John 20:31), namely coming to believe in Jesus as Messiah, the Son of God, and having life in his name.

### JOHN 14–16 AND 17

These 4 chapters of discourse come to us—*interestingly enough*—as a tightly woven, dense block of theology, with much overlap, but defying neat manageable divisions:<sup>7</sup>

- Jesus comforts his disciples (14:1–4)
- Jesus the way to the Father (14:5–14)
- Jesus promises the Holy Spirit (14:15–30)
  
- The vine and the branches (15:1–17)
- The world hates the disciples (15:18–16:4)
- The work of the Holy Spirit (16:5–33)
  
- Jesus prays for himself (17:1–5)
- Jesus prays for his disciples (17:6–18)
- Jesus prays for all believers (17:20–26)

It is, I think, an important observation that Jesus' counsel to not be *troubled* at his going (14:1), as well as his admonition regarding their *need to abide* in his love (15:6–10), or remain in him, together with his foreshadowing of the *hatred* that the disciples too would experience, and his teaching of the advantage that it was to them that he was going (16:7), are interspersed with vital teaching concerning the person and work of the *Holy Spirit*. These insights would prove indispensable in understanding their future life in relationship to Jesus, and to the Father:

I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.<sup>13</sup> When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.<sup>14</sup> He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you.<sup>15</sup> All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you (16:12–15).

The Father hears Jesus' prayer for glorification—a full revelation of true glory. This culminates in a profound *union* as the prayer of Jesus (John 17), for full union and communion, is to be answered through the cross. The prayer of Jesus, from 17:11, for oneness is not that the disciples (and later, the churches) may get their act together and express some semblance of unity, so that amidst church infighting all might

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My question is, 'why cannot John tell his story his way and present this aspect within the context of his own structure?' Many commentators seem intent on taking Acts as the base and then attempting to slot John's account of the giving of the Holy Spirit into it, with the occasional result that John's giving of the Spirit is reduced to a sort of semi-giving, a proleptic giving [cf. Luke, who includes the ascension, in Luke 24:51 and in Acts 1].

<sup>7</sup> For example, at a Christian school I know of, one of the teachers has an amazing gift for being able to co-ordinate the whole school timetable, yet be aware of the whereabouts and task of each student or teacher at any one time.

## Reconciliation and Fullness

longingly sing: *Bind us together, Lord, bind us together, with cords that cannot be broken.* Surely Jesus is asking that the cross may accomplish such a finished work with sin that the new creation (cf. John 1:1; 20:22) may begin!

### Relational Not Spatial

Ian Pennicook presents a case for John 14–17 being a continuation of the promise made in John 7 concerning the coming of the Spirit.<sup>8</sup> Revisiting the much-loved passage in John 14:1–4 from that perspective can greatly assist us to hear it anew:

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me.<sup>2</sup> In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?<sup>3</sup> And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also (vv. 1–3).

Many have viewed Jesus' return, spoken of here, as meaning either *at the Parousia* or *at their death* (as we commonly use the passage at funerals), to take them to a spatial place. In our block of text John has deliberately interwoven 5 units of teaching concerning the Holy Spirit (John 14:16–17; 14:26; 15:26–27; 16:7–11; 16:12–15). It is highly likely that Jesus is speaking not primarily of his return at the Parousia or at our death, but of his *coming again* which will occur when *another Paraclete* comes to help them. The *place* prepared for them, in this manner of interpretation, would not primarily refer to a *spatial* matter, but rather a new *relational* union:

And if I go and prepare a place for you, *I will come again and will take you* to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also (14:3).

Jesus answered him, 'Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and *we will come to them* and make *our home* with them' (14:23).

John's intent appears to be that the preparation of the place (many *mansions*, or *rooms* or *dwelling places*) is that activity which the work of atonement achieves by cleansing sinners in the word (15:3) and work of the cross, fitting them for total union (15:4) and full salvation—setting them in a broad place (Psalm 31:8)—making *room* for gathering in people of *every kind* (John 10:16; 11:52; Matt. 13:47). The prayer, then, would be asking that atonement will achieve the desired goal, namely utter and total union with human beings through grace alone, working through faith.

### Another Advocate with You Forever

Jesus makes a highly significant promise concerning the coming of *another* Advocate to be with them (with us), not to depart, *forever*:

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you *forever*.<sup>17</sup> This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.<sup>18</sup> I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you.<sup>19</sup> In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I

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<sup>8</sup> Ian Pennicook, *Rivers of Living Water*, pp. 36–37.

## *Reconciliation and Fullness*

live, you also will live.<sup>20</sup> On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you . . .<sup>25</sup> I have said these things to you while I am still with you.<sup>26</sup> But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you (John 14:16–20, 25–26).

Up to this point, Jesus himself had been their counsellor and Advocate, their Paraclete. Soon, it will be through the Holy Spirit that the crucified, risen, ascended Jesus Christ brings all of his powers to the new believer. Francis Moloney writes:

Despite the absence of the physical Jesus, his revealing mission is not coming to an end; it is moving toward a new era when the role of the *former Paraclete*, Jesus, will be taken over by *another Paraclete*, the Spirit of truth.<sup>9</sup>

In Jesus' own baptism he is the one upon whom the Spirit descends from heaven like a dove; and upon whom the Spirit *remains* (John 1:32). This, we can now see, marked a new beginning for humanity, in particular as the Spirit came later to abide and *remain* on the redeemed also. This is a new beginning for all creation.

John may well have had in mind the very different situation we meet in Genesis 6:3 where the Spirit *does not* abide in man forever: 'Then the LORD said, "My spirit shall not abide in man for ever, for he is flesh, but his days shall be a hundred and twenty years"' (RSV). Jesus comes to give the gift of God—'rivers of living water' (John 4:10; 7:38; cf. Ps. 65:9, 'the river of God is full of water')—eternally, forever!

This relational union is for the mountain-moving activity for which they have been chosen. In this new union, their prayer will be *as potent as his*,<sup>10</sup> for:

Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father (John 14:12).

### **LIVING IN THIS UNION, THIS FULLNESS**

Jesus Christ comes to restore the fountain of life for humanity—replacing the wrongly contrived, cracked cisterns that can hold no water (Jer. 2:13), and bringing to nothing the evil works of a sinful humanity. Geoffrey Bingham has written:

It is only when Man is filled with and by God that he is truly human, truly the image of God. When his fullness—so-called—comes from idols he is empty of God. In Romans 1:28–31 sinful Man is said to be filled with evil, but evil is not morally substantial and so Man has a sickening emptiness, his broken reservoir dry of and empty of God . . . 'They were *filled* with all manner of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. *Full* of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity, they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.'<sup>11</sup>

The apostles proclaimed that those baptised into Christ and filled with the Spirit, *have now received reconciliation* from God, and *have come to fullness* in Jesus Christ! This, therefore, is our present position now—no less than when faith gives

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<sup>9</sup> Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John: Text and Context*, Brill Academic Publ. Inc., Boston, 2005, p. 248.

<sup>10</sup> Ian Pennicook, *Rivers of Living Water*, p. 40.

<sup>11</sup> Geoffrey C. Bingham, *The Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, pp. 39–40.

## Reconciliation and Fullness

way to sight, either beyond the grave or at Christ's return. 'By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit' (1 John 4:13).

Often, however, our *secured* union in Christ is not only contested by the cosmic powers of evil (Eph. 6:12), but is also confused by an uncertain reading of Scripture:

I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. <sup>2</sup> He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. <sup>3</sup> You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup> Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. <sup>5</sup> I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup> Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. <sup>7</sup> If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. <sup>8</sup> My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples (John 15:1–8).

Can Christians also be thrown *into the fire and burned* (v. 6)? Is insecurity hanging over one, as an ever-present threat of being chopped off for not abiding? How does one abide? 'What'—asks Ian Pennicook—'does "He removes every branch *in me*" mean [John 15:2]?'<sup>12</sup> Is it a cause for uneasy living, insecurity? Is there a possible withdrawal of that settled peace we have already mentioned?

In addressing this matter, most commentators move from the pre-crucifixion context in which the discourse takes place to that of the post-Pentecost church. One says John's primary thought was of apostate Christians. Another assumes that John chapters 15–16 form an amplification of the original discourse in chapters 13–14, and that the contents were composed from John's leftover material. Another commentator suggested the purpose of the verse is to insist that there are no true Christians without some measure of fruit. Another says that John is speaking of converted Christians, once abiding in Jesus, but now dead. Ian Pennicook has well asked: 'how can verse 3, for example, look back to the Cross, the only place where cleansing is to be found, while other parts, such as the promise of the Spirit, look forward?'<sup>13</sup> His reply includes directing us to the text as it stands here and, within the whole of Scripture, citing Psalm 80:7–8, 14–17, which when put together reads:

Restore us, O God of hosts;  
let your face shine, that we may be saved.  
<sup>8</sup> You brought a vine out of Egypt;  
you drove out the nations and planted it . . .  
<sup>14</sup> Turn again, O God of hosts;  
look down from heaven, and see;  
have regard for this vine,  
<sup>15</sup> the stock that your right hand planted.  
<sup>16</sup> They have burned it with fire, they have cut it down;  
may they perish at the rebuke of your countenance.  
<sup>17</sup> But let your hand be upon the one at your right hand,  
the one whom you made strong for yourself.

If we see Jesus as the genuine Israel, the true vine, then the passage becomes quite intelligible. The disciples need to stay in him, as the irrational hatred of the world is

<sup>12</sup> See Ian Pennicook, *Rivers of Living Water*, pp. 47–48. Quoted from p. 47.

<sup>13</sup> Ian Pennicook, *Rivers of Living Water*, p. 47.

## *Reconciliation and Fullness*

soon to be launched upon them (John 15:18–19). *Pruning* in John 15:2 is, thus, more than the process of sanctifying snips, chopping away the dead wood and unwieldy growth in the lives of Christians.

The judgement coming upon *unbelief* within the original vine, Israel, will mean that true fellowship and union with God will not be possible apart from the forgiveness and reconciliation Jesus gives in the gospel (John 20:23). The true Israel—Christ—has come, and one needs to be part of the true vine. The disciples have been cleansed by his word, and are abiding in the vine, so that fruit-bearing life is now flowing out through them. Karl Heim says of this passage that *the whole vine is Christ*:

What Paul expresses by the picture of the human body Christ in the Gospel of John illustrates by a metaphor from plant life when He says: ‘I am the vine, you are the branches.’ Just as with Paul not the head but the whole body represents the personality of Christ of which the members of the Church have become part, so in John’s Gospel not the stem only but the whole vine is Christ. That is to say the disciples do not merely grow like branches and fruits from Christ the stem. They are in the vine as its component parts. Only if they abide in Him can they bear fruit. ‘For apart from me you can do nothing’ (Jn. xv.5).<sup>14</sup>

How wonderful to be united with the Triune God, fully secured in the gift of the Holy Spirit, and relationally engaged in the grand work of bringing the finished work of the gospel of reconciliation, through Jesus Christ, to the whole world. What a great gospel. Yet what a great task, to bear witness to such a mixed-up world, and how dimly we so often see Jesus!

We are reminded that the scope of God’s work is gigantic. So much to do. So many things to cover. All of it, in its tiniest details to its mammoth fulfilments, can never be assessed by the finest of human minds nor the most comprehensive of computing devices. It all defies the most massive coverage . . . the program opened to us on the day of Pentecost requires power for accomplishment by the successive stream of the human community of God, to say nothing of all the other powers which God has working for Him in His venture of bringing the creation to its *telos*—its goal, end and completion.<sup>15</sup>

This enormous and humanly impossible task has begun in the work of Jesus Christ’s atoning death, and it continues in his ascended power as the Spirit of God opens the heart of Calvary’s reconciliation to the world. We are inducted into the fullness of God, that we might share in the Father’s grand-scale action; yet we know all can only ever be done, and brought to fruition—completion—by Christ himself in the power of the Holy Spirit: *Abide in Jesus Christ!*

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<sup>14</sup> Karl Heim, *Jesus the World’s Perfecter: The Atonement and the Renewal of the World*, Muhlenberg Press, Philadelphia, 1961, p. 220.

<sup>15</sup> Geoffrey C. Bingham, *The Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, p. 25.