

**JOHN 14:23–27.** (EHV)

Jesus answered him, “If anyone loves me, he will hold on to my word. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. The one who does not love me does not hold on to my words. The word that you are hearing is not mine, but it is from the Father who sent me. I have told you these things while staying with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and remind you of everything I told you. Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, and do not let it be afraid.”

Imagine if you knew for a fact that you were going to die tomorrow. How strange it would seem to your friends if you got together with them tonight and spent most of the time talking about plans for this coming weekend. In the same way, it initially seems strange to us that Jesus spent a lot of Holy Thursday, the night on which he was betrayed, the night before he died, talking about his ascension and the sending of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. But since his apostles weren't really picking up on or coming to grips with the fact that he was about to die, all Jesus's talk of going away was making them nervous and uncomfortable. At various points throughout his discourse, they asked him questions about what he was saying.

Their questions make sense. They loved him, so they didn't want him to leave them. And if he did leave them, they wanted to make sure that they would still be safe and that they would eventually go where he had gone.

But this is precisely why Jesus spoke to them repeatedly about how he was going to send the Holy Spirit. This is how he would remain with them so that they could still see him even if he wasn't standing visibly before their eyes. In the section before this, he told them, “I will not leave you as orphans. I am coming to you.” He isn't talking about how he would come back to them on Judgment Day. If he were simply going away and wouldn't be with them again until Judgment Day, then he *would* be leaving them as orphans. But he is promising them that when he goes away, he will still come to them in such a way that they, his true followers, will be able to see him even when he's gone.

What is he referring to? And how will it happen? Well, he explains that to us bit by bit in the verses in front of us, where he tells us about the the gifts the Holy Spirit gives us in God's word.

Judas—not Judas Iscariot, but Judas son of James, who was also called Thaddeus—has just asked Jesus why only Jesus's followers would see him after he left and not the whole world. Jesus answers him, “If anyone loves me, he will hold on to my word. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. The one who does not love me does not hold on to my words.”

In these words of Jesus he first of all answers Judas's question. The whole world won't see Jesus because the whole world doesn't hold on to his words, doesn't guard them, doesn't treasure them, and it is only through Jesus's word that he comes to us so that we see him.

But in answering Judas's question, Jesus also tells us some of the gifts the Holy Spirit gives us through God's word. By holding on to and treasuring God's word, we have the assurance of God the Father's love. “If anyone loves me, he will hold on to my word. My Father

will love him,” that is, will love everyone who holds on to Jesus’s word. Do you know how desperately we need God the Father’s love? Behind all our searching for and craving of acceptance, whether it’s acceptance by our earthly fathers or acceptance by our peers or general acceptance by society as a whole, whether we realize it or not, we are really seeking and craving God’s acceptance. We are subconsciously hoping and expecting that if our earthly father or our peers or society as a whole accepts us, then God certainly will have to accept us when we die. If you don’t believe me, just read the comments beneath any online article or media clip having to do with a celebrity’s death or memorial service. You will see that people generally expect that that celebrity is now in heaven, however they think of it—is now at peace, is now in a better place, is no smiling down on us. And why? For no other reason than that he or she was accepted and loved by so many people. For no other reason than that he or she gave pleasure and happiness in some way to so many people. So God must surely love them too, right?

People wittingly or unwittingly crave God’s acceptance, but God’s acceptance is not based on whether or not we are accepted or loved by other humans. Jesus tells us the basis of God’s love—it is based on whether or not we treasure, or hold on to, the word of his beloved Son because, as Jesus later says, the word that you hear from Jesus is not just his alone, but it is from the Father who sent him. So when you hold on to Jesus’s word, you are holding on to God the Father’s word too.

But God’s word doesn’t just assure us of God’s love. “If anyone loves me, he will hold on to my word. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.” This is why Jesus can say that he’s not leaving his apostles, or us, as orphans when he ascends into heaven. Through God’s word, God the Father and God the Son, Jesus Christ, come to the person who treasures God’s word and make their home with that person. The Greek word for “home” here is the same word that is translated as “mansion” or “room” when Jesus says, “In my Father’s house are many mansions *or* rooms.” Just as Jesus is preparing a home for us in heaven, so also through God’s word God the Father and God the Son make their home with us right now here on earth.

When you hold on to God’s word, God the Father is always right there next to you to love you, to guide you, to protect you. When you hold on to God’s word, God the Son is always right there next to you to instruct you, to reassure you, to forgive you. As long as you hold on to God’s word, wherever you go, there is a roof over your head, and God is always sharing that roof with you. As long as you hold on to God’s word, wherever you go, you are seated at a table, and God is seated there with you as your guest and your host.

Now you might be wondering: “This sermon is about the Holy Spirit’s gifts through God’s word, but the Holy Spirit hasn’t even been mentioned so far. The talk has only been about God the Father and God the Son. So I agree that Jesus is saying that these gifts are given through his word, but what does the Holy Spirit have to do with it?”

As I said before, Jesus is explaining how he comes to us after his ascension bit by bit. And now he gives us another bit that helps to explain even more what he has already told us so far: “I have told you these things while staying with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and remind you of everything I told you.” The way that God the Father and God the Son come to us through God’s word is

through God the Holy Spirit coming to us through God's word. Here we are already getting a foretaste of next Sunday, when we will ponder further the mystery of the Holy Trinity. Wherever God the Holy Spirit is, there God the Father and God the Son are, because the three are one and the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son.

Every illustration used to illustrate the Trinity limps, but maybe this will help us a little. God has joined our soul and our body together in this life. Your body is where your soul is and your soul is where your body is. The two can't separate without you dying; that's the definition of death—the soul leaving the body. But imagine if the two could be separated, and you could somehow actually send just your soul over hill and dale to a friend's house in a different state. Your friend wouldn't be able to see you, but you would actually be there. And if you could somehow communicate to your friend through your soul, your friend would know that you were there with him or her, even if he or she couldn't see you or touch you.

That's what God the Father and God the Son do through God's word. They send the Holy Spirit to us. And since God's word can only come from God, when we acknowledge it as God's word and hold on to it as God's word, we know that God is really there with us, even though we can't see him or touch him. His Spirit is there, and so we also know that the Father and the Son are there.

But notice what else the Holy Spirit gives us through God's word. Jesus promised his apostles gathered there with him in the upper room that he would send his Holy Spirit to teach them all things and to remind them of everything he told them. How important! How reassuring! If Jesus was going to return to heaven soon, imagine what a burden that could have been for the apostles as they gathered together and tried to compile on their own everything Jesus had said. "He said this." "No, he didn't say it that way. He said it this way." "No, he said it that way." But they don't have to worry about it. Jesus promises that his Spirit will teach them all things and remind them of everything Jesus had told them.

Now, when he says "all things," he doesn't actually mean all possible knowledge. Only God can and does know everything. We would explode if we had his knowledge. But when Jesus says "all things," he means everything that we need to know about God and his will, about life that is really life, about eternal life. Jesus is talking about what we call the sufficiency of the Scriptures. Even many people calling themselves Christian think that there is useful religious and spiritual knowledge that they can learn on their own or from meditating in nature or from other people's supernatural experiences. But no, Jesus says that he is going to teach his apostles *all* the things that they, and we, need to know. If it's not in harmony with God's word, then it's not what Jesus has taught and it's not something we *need* to know.

So the Holy Spirit gives us assurance and certainty through God's word. When we read Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John's accounts of what Jesus said and taught, when we read the letter of the apostles of Jesus detailing Jesus's teaching, we don't have to wonder, "Is this really what Jesus taught? Is this really God's word?" Jesus, the one who healed the sick, cast out demons, and raised the dead, the one who himself rose from the dead after being dead three days, promised these men that he would send the Holy Spirit, and that the Holy Spirit would teach them all things and remind them of everything he told them.

So if the Holy Spirit taught the apostles all things so that they could reliably record Jesus's word, if the Holy Spirit comes to us through the word he gave to the apostles so that God the Father and God the Son also come to us and make their home with us, then what do we ultimately have when we hold on to Jesus's word in faith? "Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, and do not let it be afraid."

The Spirit of Jesus gives us Jesus's peace through Jesus's word. And Jesus doesn't give us peace through his Spirit as the world gives peace, first because the peace he gives is different than the world's peace. The best peace that the world can hold out is only a physical peace and a temporary peace. Even if all the nations of the world laid down their weapons and joined hands, that wouldn't quiet the questions of your heart in the face of death: "What's going to happen to me? Where am I going? What about all the mistakes I've made in my life? Am I right with God?" Only Jesus gives that peace through his word. As the hymn verses say, "For me to live is Jesus, to die is gain for me; so, when my Savior pleases, I meet death willingly. My woes are nearly over, though long and dark the road; my sin his merits cover, and I have peace with God."

And Jesus also doesn't give us peace as the world gives peace, because the world's peace always comes at a cost. Treaties are only made either when a show of might and enough bloodshed have forced it or when deals are made. "This is what we'll do for you if you live at peace with us." But Jesus gives his peace freely. He freely offers it to all. "Come, take my forgiveness, take my victory over death and the devil, take my love, take my Father's love, take my home. I give it all freely. I give it all for eternity. Only believe in me. Believe that I alone give you all these things, and that I give them to you as a free gift, and they are yours."

The Holy Spirit gives all of these gifts freely through God's word—the love of God, God's presence with us, assurance and certainty of truth, and eternal peace. Receive these gifts from him. Receive them regularly. Receive them in Jesus's name by holding on to his Word. Then your heart will not be troubled. Then your heart will not be afraid. Amen.