

## John 16:4-15 – Illumination and Instruction<sup>1</sup>

**Before the class** – Make copies of the handout, “Can You Understand?” for the Fellowship Question session.

**Fellowship question:** (Use *one* of these to break the ice, to begin some discussion, and to lead into the study):

What is one thing you understand now, that you could not have understood as a child? (This could be a subject, or a skill, or a life lesson.)

[Distribute the handout, “Can You Understand?” Allow some time to complete the brainteaser and to check the key for answers. Hint: All of these have something to do with the Holy Spirit.]

### Information

We can’t understand some things until it is our time to understand them. Recently, I heard a radio interview with sixth graders. One boy said he was so frustrated with adults who would say, “You’ll understand when you’re older.” He asserted, “I already know everything there is to know, so why can’t we just talk about it?”

We might laugh at that naivety. Until we face something for ourselves for the first time, we don’t “know” what that experience will be like, or be like for us, in particular. Can you think of some of those things that a sixth grader can’t know anything about yet? (the feeling of independence to drive a car; first true love; loss of a spouse; a doctor’s negative report; the first day on a new job, etc.) What are some things you don’t know anything about yet?

We know that the disciples either misunderstood Jesus or just could not understand Jesus. Part of that was due to the way Jesus taught by using parables. But even when Jesus spoke plainly, particularly when he talked about his upcoming crucifixion and resurrection, the disciples did not get it.

Why do you think the disciples couldn’t understand Jesus? (Ignorance, inexperience, sorrow, self-centeredness, different Messianic expectations, etc.)

As he approaches the cross, Jesus gives final words to his disciples.

- Have a class member read John 16:4-6.

Jesus’ teaching was timed by the disciples’ receptivity. He had not taught them everything they needed to know about him or his dream for the world. He had not taught them everything there

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<sup>1</sup> This lesson is copyrighted by Dr. Rick Jordan, Great Bible Teachers, Inc, 2024. More lessons may be found at [greatbibleteachers.com](http://greatbibleteachers.com).

was to know about God or eternity. For one and another reason, they were not prepared to grasp those teachings.

- Have a class member read John 16:12.

One thing the Church still has difficulty grasping or bearing is the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Jesus calls the Holy Spirit the Paraclete, which means one who supports another, as an attorney supports a client and walks with them through a difficult time.

In the early centuries of the Church, the doctrine of the Trinity began to form. Although the word “trinity” is not in the Bible, there are passages that affirm that God is one in nature, *and* God is three persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There were multiple attempts to interpret passages about the relationship between the Father and the Son, between the Son and the Spirit, and between the Spirit and the Father. This led to many debates that led to some beliefs becoming orthodox doctrines. Non-orthodox theologians were condemned as heretics. Even today, we continue to struggle with the concept of the Trinity.

“While individual theologians described God in Trinitarian terms as early as the second century, a formal doctrine of the Trinity grew out of a series of councils attended by leaders of the early church, the most important of which were held at Nicea (325 CE), Constantinople (381 CE), and Chalcedon (451 CE). Over a period of time and generally in response to perceived heresies, a doctrine evolved affirming a belief that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit had varying attributes but were all uncreated, eternal, limitless, omnipotent, and fully God as three-in-one. This avoided the idea that any part of the Trinity was subordinate to another. The church’s interpretation of the various biblical witnesses imagines three co-equal and co-eternal persons who share a single divine essence or nature. In applying these terms to the Trinity, some writers and catechisms have suggested that ‘nature’ describes what one is, while ‘person’ describes who one is.”<sup>2</sup>

Ironically, Jesus promises that the coming of the Holy Spirit will help us understand things like this doctrine. Yet we, like the earliest disciples still find the teachings of Jesus hard to understand.

- Have a class member read John 16:7, 13-15.

The Holy Spirit offers illumination and instruction. For example, that Jesus was crucified is a historical fact. But, what does that *mean*? How does it relate to God’s plan of atonement and reconciliation? How does one person of the Trinity cry out to another, “Why have you forsaken me?” What happens when one member of the Trinity dies? How is the role of the Spirit different before and after the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus? A man died, yes. But if it is to have any more meaning to us than a story of political intrigue and religious leaders’ insecurity,

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<sup>2</sup> Tony Cartledge, “Trinitarian Roots: Digging Deeper: Trinitarian Creeds” *Nurturing Faith*, May 22, 2016.

that wisdom must come from the indwelling Spirit of God, who will teach us as much as we are able to bear.

“Without the Spirit’s illumination Christ’s death would be complete tragedy; under his instruction it will be the great victory of the Lord over the adversary, the decisive event in the salvation of the world.”<sup>3</sup>

Sometimes, things are mysteries to us because we have not yet lived through them. It is as, or after, we live through an event or a stage of life that we can look back and with the Holy Spirit’s instruction, we gain spiritual understanding.

“The disciples were handicapped in their understanding. As long as he was with them in the flesh, his talk about coming again would not mean as much as it would after his ascension. Too, they were handicapped in understanding his teaching about resurrection until they had experienced his resurrection.”<sup>4</sup>

As life changes, our spiritual insights change. We rely on the Bible and on orthodox teachings, but these do not address some 21st-century issues. Let’s see if we can come up with ten 21st-century issues that the Bible does not directly address. [Jot these answers on the board. Try to get 8-10 answers, at least. Some examples might be guns, technology, American politics, social media, climate change, etc.]

How can the Holy Spirit help us as we look for a Christian response to modern issues? (The Holy Spirit uses principles from scripture when direct comment is not available; the Spirit nudges us to respond in a certain way; the Spirit helps us discern how Jesus would have addressed this issue, etc.)

Note that I asked in the previous question about seeking “a” Christian response. Good Christians disagree on many subjects whether they be political, dogmatic, or behavioral. Thus, a response from a Christian is “a”, not “the” Christian response.

Have your beliefs on a subject changed over time or due to circumstances, even though you have remained a Christian through that change? Could you share a story about that?

In verse 13, Jesus says that the Holy Spirit “will declare to you the things that are to come.”

“The verb used here is not typically used in prophetic contexts, so we are not to think of the Spirit’s role in predicting the future. Rather, as new issues and contexts and challenges

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<sup>3</sup> John Marsh, *The Gospel of Saint John*, The Pelican New Testament Commentaries (London: Penguin, 1968), 538.

<sup>4</sup> Ray Summers, *Behold the Lamb: An Exposition of the Theological Themes in the Gospel of John* (Nashville: Broadman, 1979), 206.

arose...the Spirit would be present to proclaim or interpret Jesus' teachings in the changing circumstances of their lives and missions."<sup>5</sup>

A major point that is made in the gospel of John is that the incarnation of Jesus demonstrates that God is "with us." The coming of the Holy Spirit signifies that God is "*within* us."

"There are five passages in the discourses given in the Upper Room which describe the work of the Holy Spirit... We must now consider the relation of the three Persons mentioned together in those five passages. The indwelling of the disciples by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit will give us the clue. The following [three] statements are made:

[1] The Holy Spirit will dwell with the disciples and be in them (14:17).

[2] The Father and the Son will come to all who love and obey Christ, and will make their home with them (14:23).

[3] Christ Himself will come to His disciples (14:18) and will be in them (15:4, 17: 23:26).

From these statements we learn that it is God Himself who comes to dwell in believers. The Holy Spirit is God dwelling in men in a new, spiritual and permanent way. This is borne out by a study of the rest of the New Testament, in which the Paraclete is called Holy Spirit, Spirit of God, Spirit of Jesus or Spirit of Christ (Acts 16:7; Romans 8:9; Galatians 4:6) without any difference of meaning."<sup>6</sup>

### **Transformational Exercise**

Let's look again at the list of things we said that the Bible does not directly address in the 21st-century world. I think we could agree that there will be even more issues in 50 years ... or maybe even next year. Here is one hint to help us consider our stance on these issues: we may ask ourselves, is this issue grounded in the spirit of the world or the Spirit of God? One way to do that is to look at the fruit of the Spirit that Paul talks about in Galatians.

- Have a class member read Galatians 5:22-25.

[Write on the board: "Fruit of the Spirit: Love; Joy; Peace; Patience; Kindness; Generosity; Faithfulness; Gentleness; Self-control"]

In silence, take one of these current-day issues and run it through these nine characteristics.

[After a minute of silent reflection, ask...] How is that helpful or not helpful?

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<sup>5</sup> Tony Cartledge, "Trinitarian Roots," *Nurturing Faith*, May 22, 2016.

<sup>6</sup> George Appleton, *John's Witness to Jesus* (World Christian Books, No. 8. London: United Society for Christian Literature. 1955), 82.

Some subjects are neutral, such as “money.” The question is, how is the money being gained or how is the money being used? Then, how does that compare with the fruit of the Spirit? Another example, “social media” is a 21st-century issue not addressed by the Bible. It may be used for good, for entertainment, for escape, or for evil. How would comparing those uses to the fruit of the Spirit be helpful?

Jesus tells us that we are not alone. God is living within us. The Holy Spirit offers understanding about why Jesus lived as he did and why he died as he did, and then gives us understanding about how we should also live and die. “If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.” (Galatians 5:25 NRSVUE)

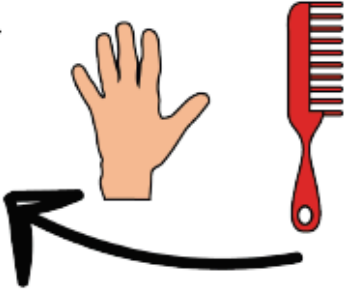
[Close in a prayer something like this:] *Spirit of the Living God, Spirit of the Resurrected Christ, we invite you to teach us, to correct us, and to live through us. Amen.*

# Can You Understand?

1.



2.



3.



4.



5.



6.



7.



- Answers
1. Can you understand?
  2. Comprehend (Comb-pre-hand)
  3. I See All (Eye C Awl)
  4. Comfort (Comb Fort)
  5. Parachutes (Pair of Cleats)
  6. Teacher (Tea Cheer)
  7. Correct (Core Wrecked)