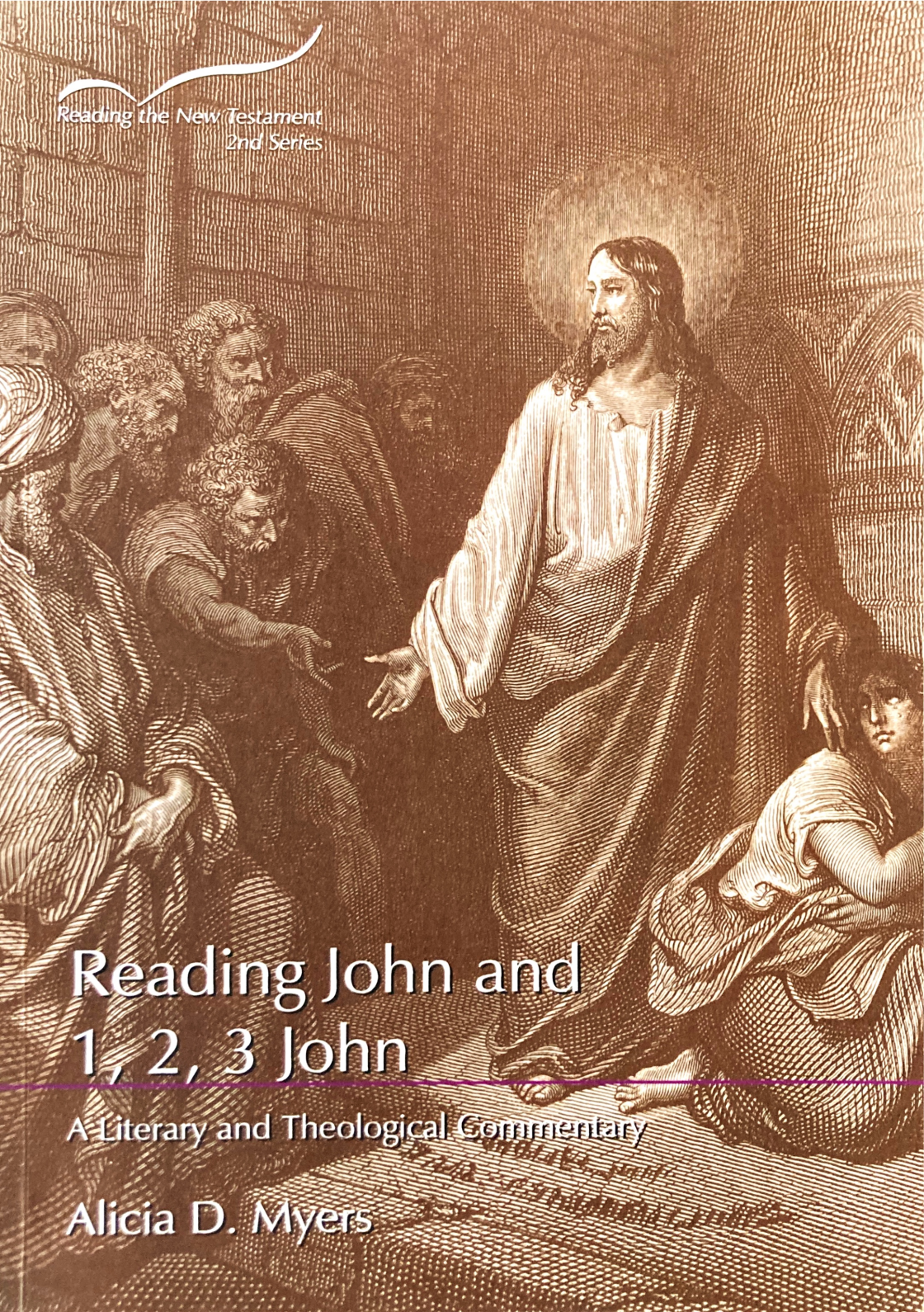




Reading the New Testament
2nd Series

Reading John and 1, 2, 3 John

A Literary and Theological Commentary

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literary symposium (*Symp.*; *Phaedr.*), consolation literature (Plutarch, *Exil.*, *Ad Apol.*, Seneca, *Helv.*, Cicero, *Ad Marc.*), and exits to death in tragedies (Euripides, *Tro.*; Sophocles, *Phil.*; Aeschylus, *Ag.*). Blending these genres, the Gospel consoles the audience about Jesus' death while also encouraging them that Jesus' death, unlike that of the dramatic characters they know so well, is far from tragic.

A number of scholars, including Parsenius, argue that 13:1-30 should be included as part of the discourse because it is the narrative scene that serves as the foundation for what Jesus says in 13:31-17:26. Certainly, there is merit to this observation since Jesus' actions often prompt a discourse in the Gospel of John (e.g., 5:1-18; 6:1-15; 7:1-13). I have sectioned 13:31-16:33 off here because it marks the departure of Judas Iscariot at 13:30 and differs from 17:1-26, which is Jesus' prayer to his Father. This intervening section, then, is Jesus' final speech to his disciples, "his own" who have remained with him to this point even though Jesus knows that future betrayals will also come (18:2-9, 25-27). As an extended scene with limited narrator interruptions, this speech also reaches out from the confines of the Gospel to the audience listening. When gathered to hear the Gospel of John, the audience hears directly from Jesus in 13:31-16:33, and they too receive encouragement and consolation. They may not have seen Jesus in the flesh, but they hear his words through the flesh of others and through the Paraclete who already resides in their midst.

A. 13:31-14:31: Commandment to Love

The first section of the FD stretches from 13:31-14:31 and lays out a number of themes that recur in 15:1-16:33, including Jesus' commandment to love (13:31-35; 14:15, 22-24), his return to the Father as a reason not to be troubled (14:1-7, 27-31), the unity between himself and believers that enables them to ask in his name (14:8-14), the coming of "another" Paraclete who is the Spirit of truth (14:15-21), and his gift of peace (14:25-31). According to Brant, this speech showcases the Gospel's "epideictic nature," its goal to motivate action based on praise and shame rather than logical arguments. Brant suggests that all of 13:31-17:26 "bolster[s] the beliefs and values of the audience, elaborating on, and interlacing four assertions about Jesus' death": his departure is a return to the Father; his death is a paradigmatic act of love; he lives on in the community when they love and recognize the Paraclete; and his "death is a revelation of God's glory" (2011, 210). In this way, the audience is encouraged to imitate Jesus' love and be consoled about his departure, which includes not only his death but also his resurrection and implied ascension (20:1-18).

John 13:31–14:31 can be outlined as follows:

- 13:31–35, Love Command
- 13:36–14:24, Explanations for Confused Disciples
 - 13:36–38, Jesus and Peter
 - 14:1–14, Jesus, Thomas, and Philip
 - 14:15–24, Jesus and Judas (not Iscariot)
- 14:25–31, Another Paraclete

The key section of this opening portion of the FD is 13:31–35. These verses set the tone for all that will follow in 13:36–17:26, from Peter's adamant confession of loyalty to Jesus' final prayer on behalf of *all* his disciples—past, present, and future. Because of the overlap in themes, as well as its importance, I will focus most of the commentary here on 13:31–35.

After Judas's disappearance into the night, Jesus makes a bold announcement: "Now was glorified the Son of Man, and God was glorified in him; and God will glorify him in himself, and *immediately* he will glorify him!" The Greek of these verses is as messy as the English translation but also as emphatic. The repetition makes the point clear: this is the hour of Jesus' glorification. The verses are two parallel phrases: the first with a chiasm (ABBA) pivoting on "the Son of Man and God" surrounded by the same verb *edoxasthē* (he was glorified), and the second with a repeating ABAB pattern that resumes the immediacy of v. 31, "now" (*nun*) and "immediately" (*euthys*). Jesus also emphasizes the transition to his hour by repeating his teaching from 7:33–34 and 8:21: "A little while I am with you; you will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, 'where I am going you are not able to come,' also I am saying now to you" (13:33). Even though the remaining disciples are Jesus' "little children," they too will endure the sorrow and frustration of his departure. He does not, however, leave them without hope.

In order to experience the continued presence of Jesus in spite of his physical absence, the disciples must imitate him; specifically, they must love as he loved. Jesus summarizes this key teaching, or "commandment" (*entolē*), in 13:34–35, using parallel phrases once again to highlight their importance:

- A. A new commandment I am giving to you:
- B. That (*hina*) you should love one another,
- C. just as I loved you
- B'. so that (*hina*) you should love one another.
- A'. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples,
- B". if you should have love for one another.

Close readers of the OT and other Gospels (Mark 12:29-31; Matt 22:37-40; Luke 10:27-28) will see that Jesus' command is not entirely new. John 13:34-35 resembles commands to love God (Deut 6:4-5) and love neighbor (Lev 19:18) that were commonly combined in first-century Judaism as a summary of the Torah (Marcus 2009, 843; Ruzer; Stern). What is new about Jesus' command in John, however, is his emphasis on imitation: *just as I loved you*. The disciples are to learn from Jesus' model of love, the laying down of his own life (13:1; 15:12-14; 19:28-30), which embodies both his love for his Father (10:17-18; 14:31; 15:9-10) and his love for the world (6:54; cf. 3:14-18).

Jesus' command to love is shorthand for all that follows in his FD because it is the core for the abiding unity that Jesus describes as existing between himself, his disciples, and the Father. As Lori Baron explains, love, whether *agapē* or *philos*, carries connotations of loyalty rather than just feeling (2010, 57). This is true in the contemporary world as well as the ancient world: we expect those who love us to show that love through faithfulness, just as we show our love through faithfulness. The one who loves is loyal to their beloved, fulfilling their desires. Jesus, however, commands even deeper love; he commands complete love (*telos*, 13:1; *teleioō*, 17:4; 19:28; cf. 1 John 2:5; 4:12-18). As he will explain, such love not only means a willingness to die for loved ones, or friends (*philoī*, 15:12-14), but also to live in unity with them so that one's thoughts and actions imitate those of the beloved, the most beloved being Jesus and the Father. Jesus has shown this type of love for God by speaking only the words his Father gave him and by doing the works he gave Jesus to do. This is why Jesus says to Philip, "The one having seen me has seen the Father" (14:9). Jesus not only invites his disciples into this relationship by their unity with him; he *commands* it. If they are his disciples, they will participate in this unity through love.

The disciples, however, need some help to understand and follow Jesus' teaching. Starting a chain of interruptions, Peter first insists that *he himself* will model complete love by dying on Jesus' behalf first (13:36-38). Peter has misunderstood his role. He cannot show complete love *until* Jesus first models it, which requires his death and resurrection as part of his return to the Father. Trying to usurp Jesus' role will lead Peter to betraying him, once again proving the validity of Jesus' words (18:25-27). Thomas and Philip follow with interruptions of their own. In his characteristically pragmatic tone, Thomas notes the obvious: "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How are we able to know the way?" (14:5). There is truth to what Thomas is saying: the disciples do not understand that Jesus is returning to the Father. Jesus highlights this in his response: "If you all had known me, you all would

also have known my Father" (14:7). My translation reflects a textual variant that creates a "contrary-to-fact conditional statement." Even though most English translations do not include it, this translation is probably closer to the original, given Jesus' continued conversation in 14:8-31 where he (1) promises, "Indeed, from now you all know and have seen him" (v. 9); (2) chides Philip for not believing that "I am in the Father and the Father is in me" (v. 10); (3) tells Judas (not Iscariot) that he will remain manifest to the disciples because of their love for one another (i.e., the keeping of his word) (vv. 22-24); and (4) uses another contrary-to-fact conditional statement, saying "if you all had loved me, you all would have rejoiced because I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than me" (v. 28; cf. 13:19). Even though the disciples have been with Jesus "from the beginning," they cannot understand until his revelation is complete.

The commands of the FD, therefore, can only be followed *after* Jesus' death, resurrection, return to the Father, and giving of "another Paraclete," the Spirit of truth (14:17, 26). A "Paraclete," meaning an advocate, encourager, and comforter, is one who comes alongside, calling and helping. The Spirit, according to Jesus, is "another Paraclete," continuing his own ministry, which is an extension of God's will. The Holy Spirit, Jesus explains, "will teach you everything and will remind you of everything which I said to you" (14:26). The work of the Spirit is evidenced in the Gospel with the "remembrance" passages in 2:13-22 and 12:15-16 where the disciples are said to have "remembered" and interpreted Jesus' actions and words in light of Scripture only after the fact; they needed the Spirit to "believe the Scripture and the word which Jesus spoke" (2:22; cf. 13:7). With the Spirit's teaching, the community can understand the extent of Jesus' revelation, that when they saw him they saw the Father, and they can have joy even in his physical absence. Only then do they receive Jesus' peace (14:27; 16:33; 20:19, 21, 26). This gift, as Jesus says, is why it is better if he should go away, even though his departure is painful (16:7).

B. 15:1-27: Metaphors of Love and Endurance

Even though 14:31 ends with the command, "Rise, let us go hence," Jesus continues with his speech in John 15. It is primarily this apparent contradiction that has led many scholars to argue for an editorial seam here in John's Gospel. Parsenios, again, asserts that Jesus' delayed departure to death in John's Gospel is far from an uncommon literary device. Instead, key characters and legendary figures offer one final "Big Speech" before they die, especially in Greek tragedies. Given John's other similarities to Greek dramas—the tendency to have Jesus appear alone with one other character in dialogue,