

No Longer Orphans, by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. x6050501
1 Peter 3:13-18 and John 14:15-21
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I invite you to open your Bibles to our second scripture reading, John 14:15-21, and do a little Bible study with me. John has gone to considerable trouble to make five points two times each. In the first and last verses of the section, verses fifteen and twenty-one, John gives us the necessary conditions of God's love: that we love Jesus and keep his commandments. The next point is made in verses sixteen and eighteen: after Jesus is gone, we will have another advocate, or *Paraclete* in Greek, to keep us company. The third point, verses seventeen and nineteen, is that the world will not recognize the *Paraclete* or Jesus. The fourth point, verses seventeen and nineteen, is the Disciples will recognize *Paraclete* and see Jesus. The fifth point, from verses seventeen and twenty, is the *Paraclete* and Jesus will live in Disciples.

We are in the Easter season of the church year. As disciples, we have witnessed the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. He has warned the Disciples that he will be leaving soon to join his father in heaven. You might imagine the feeling of loss the disciples would have had in hearing that news. Perhaps you have had a similar feeling of loss at one time or another. It might be the loss of a parent or spouse. You could always look to him or her for guidance or the final word. Once the person is gone, there is the feeling of loss.

Perhaps you were in a club or other organization where there was a good strong leader who guided group well and when his or her term of office ended, everyone wondered how the group would get along without that leader.

Jesus said, "I will not leave you orphaned." It was said back in Jesus' day that the disciples of rabbis were orphaned at deaths of those rabbis. The disciples of Socrates called themselves orphans at his death.

The disciples of Jesus might have felt like they were on a ship without a rudder or in a bus without a driver, but Jesus said he would not leave them orphaned. Jesus becomes present in the form of spirit--feeling. "*Paraclete*" is the presence of Jesus while Jesus is absent. It is a heavenly intercessor or advocate with God. It is like having someone speak for the disciples. The *Paraclete* comes to the disciples and dwells with them, guiding and teaching them about Jesus.

Verses seventeen and nineteen say the world as a whole will not see the *Paraclete*: it does not know Jesus. The disciples will, however, see him. In fact, it will dwell with them. A spirit is not something that can be seen in a visual sense. It is obvious, therefore, that the world could not see it. The disciples, though, were a different case. It is probably a matter of attitude more than anything else. Those who look for a *paraclete*, an advocate, a holy spirit, will receive it. Those who refuse to accept it cannot receive it.

Verses fifteen and twenty-one talk about keeping Jesus' commandments. Twice, Jesus says, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." There is only one commandment of Jesus in mind here: "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another."¹ That commandment is repeated twice in the Gospel of John and then again in the letters of John.

By following this commandment and loving each other we are proving that we love Jesus. Furthermore, John quotes Jesus in verse twenty-one, "those who love me will be loved by my

¹John 13:34

Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.” Keeping the commandment of love is a necessary condition of receiving the love of God. Yes, God loves us, but we don't feel it until we reach out for it, and the only way we can reach out for it is by loving each other.

Because God's love is expressed in the gift of Jesus, if we turn away from Jesus, we turn away from God's love. If we cannot love each other, then we are turning away from Jesus. What a crime it would be to reject the love of God by refusing to love each other.

This passage from the Gospel of John has importance to me in three ways. The disciples we are talking about are not just the disciples who lived with Jesus way back then. They are all who learn from Jesus as teacher. All who follow Jesus are his disciples. That makes us his disciples too. That makes this scripture apply to today, not just to the people to whom John was writing nineteen hundred years ago.

This passage tells me I do not have to be an orphan. I belong. I am loved by God and I know it when I love other people. I am not an orphan because God is my parent. But I belong in another way too. These people I love— the people I am commanded to love by Jesus— are the church. In other words, I belong to you. You are my family. Knowing that this loving body will never die, I know I will never be an orphan.

This passage can give meaning to anyone today who feels lonely or desolate, like an orphan. Haven't you felt that way at times? Isn't it nice to know you are not an orphan if only you love Jesus by loving other people? On a purely sociological basis, this makes sense to me too. The loneliest people I know are the people who cannot let go of their own self-pity. They are the ones don't dare say “hello” first. They cannot help others because they are too busy thinking about themselves. All they have to do to overcome their loneliness is to stick their necks out by giving of themselves to others. They will then stop complaining about their own problems when they begin ministering to others with their problems and realize that their problems are nothing in comparison.

People who give themselves to other people are the luckiest people in world. They are the ones who are not lonely because they have seen Jesus. By seeing Jesus, they are not desolate and they know they will never be orphans. This is not something they do expecting love in return, either. If they did, they would be disappointed. Giving love to others does not guarantee anything in return from them. It will, however, guarantee a feeling of the love of God. That does not disappoint.

Jesus may be gone from this physical earthly life, but he said, “I shall not leave you orphans: I am coming back to you.”