

“THESE THINGS I HAVE SAID TO YOU”:
AN INVESTIGATION OF HOW PURPOSE CLAUSES
GOVERN THE INTERPRETATION OF JOHN 14–16

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Abstract: *The phrase ταῦτα λελάληκα ὑμῖν only occurs six times in the entire Bible, all of which are in John 14–16. This article argues that this phrase is a deliberate structural marker that concludes a section and—since often accompanied by ἵνα—indicates the purpose of Jesus’s teaching in that section. The first part of the article briefly considers this phrase and argues for its placement at the end of sections of the Last Discourse. The remainder of the article is a reading of the discourse according to the structure provided by this phrase, showing how each purpose statement should govern how the prior section is to be understood and applied. This is an approach taken by no mainstream commentator, and as such the goal of this article is to argue that the Last Discourse is best understood if these structural markers and purpose clauses are allowed to determine its application.*

Key words: *John’s Gospel, Last Discourse, purpose statements, authorial intent, structural markers, application, discipleship*

The purpose statement in John 20:31 is well known, and commentators see it as significant in coloring the whole of the book and determining how it should be read.¹ However, the Farewell Discourse also contains a number of purpose statements, which have received less attention.

The phrase ταῦτα λελάληκα ὑμῖν only occurs six times in the entire Bible, all of which are in John 14–16.² Here I shall argue that this phrase is a deliberate structural marker that concludes a section and—since often accompanied by ἵνα—indicates the purpose of Jesus’s teaching in that section.³ This reading is not one followed by any of the major commentators, and as such warrants consideration in more detail.⁴ If the occurrences of this phrase are intentional markers indicating

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¹ See discussion in D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John* (PNTC; Leicester: Apollos, 1991), 87–95.

² John 14:25; 15:11; 16:1, 4, 6, 33. There is also ταῦτα ἐν παροιμίαις λελάληκα ὑμῖν in 16:25, but the addition of ἐν παροιμίαις gives a different flavor to this, and the lack of accompanying purpose clause means this does not have the same force of concluding a section as do the other occurrences we are considering.

³ The ἵνα should be seen as fully telic. Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 673.

⁴ Köstenberger sees ταῦτα λελάληκα ὑμῖν as “a recurring structural marker in the farewell discourse” but does not combine this with the purpose clauses in governing how each section of the discourse should be read. Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 456 n. 38.

how the Farewell Discourse is to be understood, they should play a significant role in exegesis. If, on the other hand, they do not function in this way, it would be wrong to read the whole discourse through these lenses. Thus, this is no mere linguistic triviality; rather, it concerns the purpose for which Christ spoke these final words to his disciples and how this part of Scripture should be read and taught.

I. ταῦτα λελάληκα ὑμῖν ἵνα

As observed above, the phrase *ταῦτα λελάληκα ὑμῖν* occurs six times in Scripture, all of which are in John 14–16.⁵ The complete absence of this phraseology elsewhere in the NT, and its frequency here, indicates that this usage is no mere accident. Each time it is used, it is at or near the end of a unit of speech, suggesting that it is a kind of structural marker for this section of John.⁶ Furthermore, it is often accompanied by a purpose statement introduced by *ἵνα*, alerting us to the purpose of the preceding section. Also, in 15:17 is found the structurally similar phrase *ταυτα ἐντέλλομαι ὑμῖν*, which similarly concludes a section, and has an accompanying purpose clause introduced by *ἵνα*. Due to this similarity, we shall consider it as an equivalent structural marker to *ταῦτα λελάληκα ὑμῖν*.⁷

Following these purpose clauses, the structure of the Farewell Discourse is as follows:

Section	Purpose clause(s)	Purpose of section
13:31–14:31	<i>ταῦτα λελάληκα ὑμῖν παρ' ὑμῖν μένων ... (14:25) καὶ νῦν εἶρηκα⁸ ὑμῖν πρὶν γενέσθαι, ἵνα ὅταν γένηται πιστεύσητε. (14:29)</i>	Belief
15:1–11	<i>ταῦτα λελάληκα ὑμῖν ἵνα ἡ χαρὰ ἢ ἐμὴ ἐν ὑμῖν ᾗ καὶ ἡ χαρὰ ὑμῶν πληρωθῇ. (15:11)</i>	Joy
15:12–17	<i>ταῦτα ἐντέλλομαι ὑμῖν, ἵνα ἀγαπάτε ἀλλήλους. (15:17)</i>	Love

⁵ Of course, there is some debate over the precise extent of the Farewell Discourse, and whether chapters 13 and 17 should be included. Constraints of space limit further discussion of this issue, and there is a clear enough unity to chapters 14–16 that they may fruitfully be examined as a unit regardless of what conclusions are drawn about chapters 13 and 17. It is interesting to note, however, that these chapters do have similar purpose clauses to the ones we are considering: *λέγω ὑμῖν πρὸ τοῦ γενέσθαι, ἵνα* (13:19); *ταῦτα λαλῶ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ἵνα* (17:13); *καὶ ἐγνώρισα αὐτοῖς τὸ ὄνομά σου καὶ γνωρίσω, ἵνα* (17:26). The tenses in 13:19 and 17:13 are present rather than the characteristic perfect tense of *λελάληκα* in chaps. 14–16, and it is significant that these markers do not end sections, perhaps lending weight to our reading of the perfect tense *λελάληκα* in chapters 14–16 as *ending* a section, concluding what Jesus has said to his disciples.

⁶ Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John XIII–XXI* (AB 29A; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970), 650; George R. Beasley-Murray, *John* (WBC 36; Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 269; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to Saint John* (New York: Crossroads, 1982), 3:92–93; Thomas L. Brodie, *The Gospel according to John: A Theological and Literary Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 477.

⁷ Brown, *John*, 684.

⁸ Although the verb is different here, the combination of this verse with v. 25, and John's habit of interchanging similar verbs with no intended difference in meaning, means that v. 29 may be treated as an example of the purpose statement we are considering.

15:18–16:4	<p><u>ταῦτα λελάληκα ὑμῖν ἵνα</u> μὴ σκανδαλισθῆτε. (16:1) <u>ταῦτα λελάληκα ὑμῖν ἵνα</u> ὅταν ἔλθῃ ἡ ὥρα αὐτῶν μνημονεύετε αὐτῶν ὅτι ἐγὼ εἶπον ὑμῖν.⁹ (16:4)</p>	Not falling away
16:5–33	<p>ἀλλ’ ὅτι <u>ταῦτα λελάληκα ὑμῖν</u>¹⁰ ἡ λύπη πεπλήρωκεν ὑμῶν τὴν καρδίαν. (16:6) <u>ταῦτα λελάληκα ὑμῖν ἵνα</u> ἐν ἐμοὶ εἰρήνην ἔχητε. (16:33)</p>	Peace

None of these section breaks is controversial, though the break that would be harder to justify without these section markers is the section beginning at 15:12. Carson, who does not see *ταῦτα λελάληκα ὑμῖν* as a structural marker, sees the break at 15:9, with a new section beginning on the theme of love.¹¹ The structure proposed here sees 15:9–11 as continuing the section on remaining in Jesus, though with John characteristically introducing the key word that will be developed in the next section: “love.”¹²

A reading that foregrounds the purpose clauses increases the need for correctly identifying sections. The way the passage has been divided here makes the purpose of the vine metaphor to be *joy* (15:11). This will significantly impact how this metaphor is understood, in particular in discussions of the possibility of apostasy for the disciples. If the reading proposed here is correct, the vine image is not intended to provoke doubt and introspection about one’s eternal security, but rather *encourage* the fearful disciples.

As well as requiring the passage to be broken up as above, the reading proposed here also assumes that in each case the referent of the *ταῦτα* is not simply the verse or two preceding, but the whole of the preceding section.¹³ Barrett sees the *ταῦτα* in 14:25 as referring to “the words of consolation which Jesus has spoken,” suggesting that *ταῦτα* does indeed refer as far back as 14:1 or even 13:31.¹⁴ Schnackenburg (followed by Beasley-Murray) sees the phrase *ταῦτα λελάληκα ὑμῖν* in 15:11 as concluding the section about the vine, and thus the referent of the *ταῦτα* is not simply verse 10, but the whole of the preceding section.¹⁵ More universally seen as concluding a section are 16:1 and 16:4, with many commentators seeing them referring back to the whole of the previous section from 15:18.¹⁶ Several commentators see 16:33 as referring back to the Farewell Discourse as a

⁹ The purpose clauses in 16:1 and 16:4 should be read together as both concluding the previous section, with the same purpose: that the disciples do not fall away.

¹⁰ Here *ταῦτα λελάληκα ὑμῖν* is looking back to the previous section, and has no purpose statement. Thus, its placement here confirms the section break at 16:4.

¹¹ Carson, *John*, 520.

¹² Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 93.

¹³ The other possibility is to see *ταῦτα* as referring to the *whole* of the Farewell Discourse each time, rather the immediate context. Keener, *John*, 977; Morris, *John*, 656.

¹⁴ C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to St John* (2nd ed.; London: S.P.C.K., 1978), 467.

¹⁵ Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 103–4; Beasley-Murray, *John*, 269.

¹⁶ See, e.g., Barrett, *St. John*, 484–85; Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 92; Carson, *John*, 530.

whole;¹⁷ this is the position of Barrett, though he does see a primary reference back to the section beginning at 16:1, as we are suggesting here.¹⁸

Thus, while there is support from commentaries for the individual parts of our argument—both the structure of the discourse and the referents of ταῦτα—it still is necessary to deal with the fact that no commentator puts them together in the way attempted here.

Some commentators make very little of the repeated phrase ταῦτα λελάληκα ὑμῖν; an example is Carson who sees it as a way of Jesus reflecting on his own teaching, or Michaels who sees it as Jesus signaling “a momentary pause.”¹⁹ Morris notes the uniqueness of this phrase to this part of John, but builds nothing on this,²⁰ whereas Barrett merely has a “cf. 14:25” each time the phrase is used after this point.²¹

Brown, Köstenberger, and Schnackenburg all see ταῦτα λελάληκα ὑμῖν as a structural marker that controls to a greater or lesser degree how to divide up the discourse, though none of these combine this insight with consideration of the purpose statements as directing the interpretation of the text.²² Ridderbos notes the conjunction of this recurring phrase with the purpose statements,²³ but as he does not see this phrase as a structural marker, he does not allow these purpose statements to control his exegesis of the preceding section.²⁴

Brodie is the one commentator who combines consideration of the structural marker ταῦτα λελάληκα ὑμῖν with that of the purpose clauses introduced by ἵνα: “At the conclusion of each major passage, each portrayal of action, there is a picture of practical effects, of what the action implies for real life. In each case this down-to-earth picture is introduced by the word *tauta*.”²⁵ However, as with previous commentators, whilst the structure of the text is defined by the ταῦτα phrase, there is relatively little emphasis given on the purpose statements when it comes to the exegesis of the text.

This brief survey of commentaries has shown that there is good reason to see ταῦτα λελάληκα ὑμῖν as a structural marker, and that in each case there is some scholarly support for our suggestion that the ταῦτα refers back to the whole of the preceding section. Among these commentators there is not a *consistent* reading of ταῦτα in this way, nor is there very much engagement with the purpose clauses, in the way that there has been with John 20:31. Thus our reading here is without ex-

¹⁷ See, e.g., Carson, *John*, 549.

¹⁸ Barrett, *St. John*, 498.

¹⁹ Carson, *John*, 505; J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 810, 826.

²⁰ Morris, *John*, 656 n. 67.

²¹ Barrett, *St. John*, 476, 484, 498.

²² Köstenberger, *John*, 456 n. 38; Brown, *John*, 650; Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 92.

²³ Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary* (trans. John Vriend; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 510.

²⁴ See for example his comments on 15:11 (*John*, 519).

²⁵ Brodie, *John*, 434.

PLICIT support from commentators, though it very much builds on insights accepted by many scholars.

The best test of whether this analysis is correct will of course be if it fits the text: if these purpose clauses can be seen to provide a fitting conclusion to each section of the discourse. Thus, the main body of this essay will be an exposition of the Farewell Discourse using the structure provided by these purpose clauses, and with the exegesis governed in each case by the stated purpose of that section. To conclude, we will assess how persuasive this reading of the Farewell Discourse is, and reflect on how this reading may give focus to its interpretation and application.

II. EXPOSITION OF THE FAREWELL DISCOURSE

1. 13:31–14:31: JESUS EXPLAINS HIS “GOING.” PURPOSE: BELIEF. After the strong break in 13:30—*ἦν δὲ νύξ*—the last discourse proper begins, and in verse 33 we find the first occurrence of a key word in the farewell discourse: Jesus’s *going*. The verbs *ὑπάγω* and *πορεύομαι* appear repeatedly, in each case referring specifically to Jesus departing from the world, that is to his sacrificial death. This understanding of *going* as referring to Jesus’s death is strengthened by the themes of Jesus’s hour having come, and the glory he is to bring his Father (12:23–33).

This is the essence of what Jesus intends to teach his disciples in the Last Discourse: that his *going* means not simply an absence, but in fact is achieving something significant, and beginning the next and greater stage of salvation history.

Chapter 14 is bracketed in verses 1 and 27 by the phrase “Let not your hearts be troubled.” In both cases, the reason why the disciples’ hearts might be troubled is that Jesus is *going* (13:33, 36; 14:28). The way the disciples are not to have troubled hearts is explained in 14:1b: “Believe in God, believe also in me.”²⁶ This again forms a bookend with the purpose clause for the section in 14:29: “that you may believe.” Jesus’s teaching about his going is for the purpose of encouraging *faith* in his disciples. The faith in verse 29 is explained by 14:1: It is not simply belief in fulfillment of predictions; rather, it is belief in Jesus himself.

If we note the further repeated word in this chapter, *μονή* (occurring only in 14:2 and 14:23 in all of this Gospel), we may summarize the two halves of the chapter as follows: 14:1–14: Jesus’s going means the disciples will dwell with the Father; 14:15–27: Jesus’s going means he will come and dwell with the disciples (by the Holy Spirit).

a. 14:1–14: *Jesus’s going means the disciples will dwell with the Father.* The first half of the chapter focuses on Jesus’s going as his *absence*. It is Jesus’s absence that will lead the disciples to have troubled hearts, and so Jesus reassures them that his going is in fact to prepare a place where they may be with him.

Thomas, as a representative of all the disciples, has not understood that Jesus’s *going* is much more than a simple departure from one place to another, so he asks: “How can we get there?” Jesus answers not in geographic but relational cate-

²⁶ Context suggests that both verbs here should be taken as imperatives. Carson, *John*, 487–8.

gories. He is the way (to the Father), he is the truth (about the Father), he is the life (from the Father).

Morris helpfully draws attention to the necessity for faith to accept these words: “‘I am the Way,’ said One who would shortly hang impotent on a cross. ‘I am the Truth,’ when the lies of evil men were about to enjoy a spectacular triumph. ‘I am the Life,’ when within a few hours His corpse would be placed in a tomb.”²⁷

Jesus’s followers need to be taught what the cross will accomplish—access to God, revelation of God, and life from God—or they will have troubled hearts. Jesus spoke these things to deepen his disciples’ *faith* (14:29).

In verses 8–11, Jesus demonstrates that even when he is with them their experience of God is deficient, as they still don’t realize that when they see him they see the Father. In other words, the main problem for the disciples is not simply that Jesus is *going*, it is in fact that they have not understood Jesus’s true identity, nor what is taking place in salvation history. The “greater works” Jesus promises the disciples will do, and the promise of answered prayer, are realities guaranteed by Jesus’s departure, and part of what it means for the disciples to relate to the Father through Jesus. When Jesus is taken from them, the disciples will only be able to *trust* him (v. 29) if they understand these realities.

b. 14:15–27: *Jesus’s going means he will come and dwell with the disciples (by the Holy Spirit)*. The second half of the chapter is focused on the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send to be with the disciples. The parallelism between the coming of the Spirit to the disciples (vv. 16–17) and the coming of Jesus (v. 18) means that the coming of Jesus spoken of in these verses is neither resurrection appearances nor the return of Christ but rather his coming to dwell with his disciples by his Spirit.²⁸ This continues the idea that things will be “greater” after Jesus’s *going*. Jesus’s disciples will enjoy a “greater intimacy of relationship” with him, and his presence with them will now be permanent.²⁹

While the primary focus is on the Spirit, the twin themes of love and obedience are also very prominent in this section. Judas’s question provides the key to understanding how these relate. Judas asks why Jesus will show himself to the disciples and not to the world. Perhaps, like Thomas, he is thinking in purely geographic terms. Jesus’s answer again reorients the question *relationally*. Since Jesus’s “showing himself” to the disciples is in fact by means of the Spirit coming to dwell with them, it is clear why this is for disciples only, not the whole world. Jesus’s answer, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word,” is a way of him explaining who his disciples are: those who keep his word.

Taken out of context, such statements as this and 14:15 might be read either as meritorious conditions that must be met in order to be disciples, or even if not meritorious, as conditions that should unsettle the disciples and make them question their salvation.

²⁷ Morris, *John*, 641.

²⁸ Brown, *John*, 645.

²⁹ Köstenberger, *John*, 430, 434.

If we take into account the purpose for this chapter, a different picture emerges. Jesus is saying all this “so you may believe.” Jesus expects his disciples to grow in faith as a result of his teaching, not to be unsettled.³⁰

Jesus concludes in verses 28–31 by explaining that far from being a reason for troubled hearts, his going away is a reason for joy. Jesus reorients the disciples’ *geographic* question about his absence, and shows the *relational* and *salvation-historic* achievements of his “going.” Only if the disciples understand this will they be able to keep *believing* in him (v. 29), even when he is taken from them.

2. 15:1–11: *Abide in Jesus. Purpose: joy.* While there is a break between chapters 14 and 15, as evidenced by “Come, let us leave,”³¹ nonetheless there is continuity between them. The key issue is what will happen when Jesus departs. Jesus is still expounding the results of his departure, and this passage speaks of how the results of this departure will not be separation but union.³²

In particular, the question is this: How will the disciples remain with Jesus, and what does it mean for Jesus and the Father to “come to him and make our home with him”?³³ The three sections that make up chapter 15 will answer this question in terms of relationship with Christ (15:1–11), relationship with other believers (15:12–17), and relationship with the world (15:18–16:4).

The vine image introduced in 15:1 is rich in OT symbolism. In taking this designation upon himself, Jesus is identifying himself as the true people of God. Whereas in the OT the vine image was often used in the context of condemning the fruitlessness of God’s people,³⁴ Jesus, the true vine, is fruitful. Remarkably though, the fruit comes through the *branches*—Christians who abide in Christ.

Verse 4 introduces the key word of this section: μένω—abide. This occurs ten times in verses 4–10, and emphatically highlights that the only way to be fruitful is to abide in Jesus. Apart from Jesus they can do nothing, but if they remain in him they *will* bear much fruit. To the scared, weak disciples on the eve of Jesus’s death, this is an amazing promise, and one that will result in joy (v. 11).

There is debate about precisely what the “fruit” is here. Our first thought should be to look to the OT image of the vine as God’s people, and the fruit they were supposed to bear. Thus, we should read “fruit” in a very general sense, including holiness, obedience, right worship of God, love for God and neighbor, and mission. As Carson points out, this fruit embraces “all of the believer’s life and the

³⁰ Köstenberger similarly allows the purpose clause in v. 29 to color his reading of v. 28. He says that v. 29 “clarifies that Jesus’s comment in 14:28b is designed not to shame his followers but rather to build their faith.” Köstenberger, *John*, 445.

³¹ 14:31. Space prohibits a full consideration of what is meant here. It is sufficient for us to note that there is some break between chapters 14 and 15, regardless of the physical location that might be implied here. Suggestions that chapter 15 is spoken on the way to the mount of Olives (with Jesus perhaps using vine imagery drawn from the surroundings) seem speculative and do not shed light on the content of chapter 15 itself.

³² Andrew T. Lincoln, *The Gospel according to Saint John* (BNTC 4; London: Continuum, 2005), 408.

³³ John 14:23.

³⁴ Lincoln, *St. John*, 402.

product of his witness.”³⁵ However, as we shall see, later in this passage the particular emphasis is upon *love*.

Verse 6 gives us the warning of the passage—that branches not abiding in Jesus will be broken off, gathered, and burned. In doing so it elaborates on the “taking away” of verse 2. These verses occasion great debate: Can a Christian fall away? Can someone be “in Christ” and then fall “out of Christ”?

While a systematic answer to such questions is possible, this is not the point of the verse.³⁶ Read in the light of the purpose statement “that your joy may be complete,” this passage is intended to encourage Jesus’s disciples to remain in Christ, and to be joyful about the blessing and fruit that will result. Jesus is not analyzing the doctrine of perseverance—he is *encouraging* perseverance. The purpose statement of verse 11 shows that Jesus not only expects that his disciples *will* persevere, but will do so fruitfully and joyfully!

Verse 7 elaborates what it means to abide in Jesus. It parallels verse 4, yet this time Jesus’s *words* are to remain in the disciples—showing that “remaining in Jesus is synonymous with remaining in Jesus’s word (cf. 8:31), just as here Jesus’s words remaining in the disciples is synonymous with Jesus remaining in them (cf. v 5).”³⁷

The ultimate reason for the disciples’ fruitfulness is that it is to the glory of the Father.³⁸ We should note here the awesome nature of this union with Christ that is being spoken of. Christians are united to Christ (“in him”) and as such their role is to glorify the Father, just as Christ’s role, mission, and delight has been to glorify the Father (John 17:4). Indeed, when he has “gone away” Christ will continue to glorify his Father through his fruit-bearing disciples.³⁹

Verses 9–11 form a kind of bridge, both finishing the first section of chapter 15, and beginning the second. Following on from verses 1–8, they continue to explain what it means to be “in Jesus”—it means being loved by him. Indeed, abiding in Jesus is paralleled with abiding in his love. This is done by keeping his commandments.⁴⁰

Verse 11 contains the structural marker, and the purpose of this section: joy. This whole section, about what it means to abide in Christ, is intended to bring joy to the disciples. We should not miss this aspect of the image of the vine and its fruit: “the fruit of the vine is wine with all its traditional associations of joy, glad-

³⁵ Carson, *John*, 517.

³⁶ Köstenberger sidesteps the issue of precisely what union with Christ the apostates enjoyed and simply states that this verse refers to “those who sustain some type of connection with Jesus but who nonetheless end up failing to exemplify the perseverance that would mark them as truly transformed, spiritually reborn individuals.” Köstenberger, *John*, 452.

³⁷ Lincoln, *St. John*, 404. This also links back to v. 3; the disciples are “clean”—*καθαροί*—through Jesus’s words. So, by implication they will also be “pruned”—*κωαίλει*—by God through Jesus’s words. Thus, their means of abiding in the vine will be the words of Jesus abiding in them.

³⁸ 15:8; cf. 12:28.

³⁹ Lincoln, *St. John*, 405. If the disciples do this, they will prove to be Christ’s disciples. Again, the emphasis here is not that the disciples should worry whether they have passed this “test”—rather, the point is that the disciples’ life of fruitfulness will testify that they are Jesus’s followers, just as Jesus’s life of bringing glory to God testifies that he is the Son.

⁴⁰ Ridderbos, *John*, 453.

ness and conviviality. . . . The joy that Jesus wishes to impart is no temporary drowning of sorrows, however, but a permanent and deep-rooted delight that can be experienced in the midst of troubles by remaining in his love and by loving others.”⁴¹

Reading this section in light of the purpose statement means that it will not be read as a reason for introspection (“Am I saved?”) but as an encouragement to those who are in Christ to keep remaining in him, and to expect much fruit and great joy.

3. *15:12–17: Love one another. Purpose: Love.* Verses 9–11 serve to introduce the theme of love, leading to the imperative in verse 12: “Love one another as I have loved you.” Just as the Father has loved the Son, so the Son has loved the disciples, and so the disciples are to love one another. There is a parallel movement in verse 15; all that the Father has made known to Jesus, Jesus has made known to the disciples.

The love Jesus has shown the disciples is shown in verse 13 to be the greatest form of love—love even unto death. Verse 14, while showing that doing Jesus’s commands is a necessary characteristic of being his friends, is surely meant to reassure not warn.⁴² Jesus has spoken of laying down his life for his friends; here he tells the disciples that if they are those who keep his commandments (i.e. abide in him), they are his friends. The fact that Jesus expects this condition to be met is seen in verse 15, where he tells them he no longer calls them servants, but friends.

Verse 16 brings together election and ethics—the disciples were chosen to bear fruit. Even if we do see a reference to mission here,⁴³ the *inclusio* of “love one another” in verses 12 and 17 proves that the primary purpose of this section is to encourage love between the disciples. This is what it means to obey Christ, this is how to remain in his love. The end of verse 16 parallels verse 7, showing the Father will give the disciples all they need for their mission of bearing fruit.⁴⁴ This emphasis on the disciples’ mission being love is entirely appropriate, as the eternal love of the Trinity is to be manifested to the world by the disciples who have been brought into this Trinitarian love. Given the relational nature of the whole of the Farewell Discourse, it is entirely appropriate that the central section focuses on the love of the Father for the Son, the love of the Son for his people, and that the purpose of this section is that the disciples—who have been brought into this Trinitarian relationship—should love one another.

4. *15:18–16:4: Expect persecution. Purpose: not falling away.* While the first two sections of chapter 15 describe the benefits of abiding in Christ, the last part of the chapter explains the accompanying hardships. The disciples are to learn that the world will treat them as it treated him: some will hate them (vv. 18–19), some will persecute them (v. 20), but also some will listen to them (v. 20). Verse 21 encapsulates how the world’s lack of knowledge of the Father will lead them to persecute

⁴¹ Lincoln, *St. John*, 405.

⁴² Carson, *John*, 522.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 523.

⁴⁴ Lincoln, *St. John*, 407.

Christians on account of Jesus.⁴⁵ Indeed, as Lincoln points out, “When they experience the world’s ill, Jesus’ followers are to recognize that this is a sign of their continuity with Jesus’ mission, since this is precisely the reaction Jesus himself experienced.”⁴⁶

Verses 22–25 are puzzling at first sight. How can the people have been without sin before Jesus came? The point is surely that the sin of rejecting Jesus is decisive.⁴⁷ Jesus’s emphasis on works here as the reason why the people have no excuse, is because these works testify that Jesus has come from the Father,⁴⁸ or as Lincoln puts it, these *are* the works of the Father (5:17, 19; 10:32, 37–38; 14:10).⁴⁹ This highlights what has already been clear in John: “For the Fourth Gospel, the primary expression of sin is failure to believe in Jesus as the one sent by the Father.”⁵⁰ Again, we see how issues surrounding the Trinity (and the disciples’ place in Trinitarian life) is *the* cause of opposition in John. And again, as in so many of the previous disputes, Jesus shows how the Jews’ own law condemns them.⁵¹

It is often argued that the third paraclete saying in verse 26 is inserted because it breaks the flow.⁵² However, we may see two reasons why it is entirely appropriate here. The coming of the paraclete is how the world will be witnessed to, despite its opposition, and he will also reassure and strengthen disciples so that they do not fall away under this persecution.⁵³ Indeed, these two reasons come together as we see that the disciples themselves will bear witness—thus the witness of the Spirit will be through them, as he strengthens them in the face of persecution.⁵⁴

16:1–4 form a conclusion to this section, both highlighting the extent of the persecution the disciples will face and explaining the purpose of this section: to forewarn the disciples, so they will not fall away when persecution comes.⁵⁵ The purpose of Jesus’s frank teaching about the opposition the disciples will face from

⁴⁵ Carson, *John*, 526.

⁴⁶ Lincoln, *St. John*, 409.

⁴⁷ “By coming and speaking to them Jesus incited the most central and controlling of sins: rejection of God’s gracious revelation, rebellion against God, decisive preference for darkness rather than for light.” Carson, *John*, 526.

⁴⁸ Ridderbos, *John*, 525.

⁴⁹ Lincoln, *St. John*, 411.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 410.

⁵¹ John 5:39–40; 7:19; 8:39–41.

⁵² See discussion in Carson, *John*, 527–28. Carson cautions against entering the filioque debate on the basis of v. 26, as the point here is the mission of the Spirit in history (“procession” would be too loaded a term to use given the debate) rather than the relations in eternity.

⁵³ Ridderbos, *John*, 526.

⁵⁴ This is the one point in this section where the apostles are particularly in mind—they are qualified to bear witness about Jesus because they were with him from the beginning. At most other points in this discourse we are warranted in drawing direct links between what was promised to the first disciples and what is promised to later Christians.

⁵⁵ There is one further irony in this section: the reference to “their hour” in v. 4. It is *their* hour, as they seem to be in control, yet it reminds us of another “hour” spoken of in the Gospels—the crucifixion. When Jesus’s enemies seem to be winning, Jesus is in fact achieving his purposes through this. Again, the disciples follow in the footsteps of their master—even if this will lead them to death as their way of glorifying God. Carson, *John*, 532.

the world is not meant to unsettle them but rather steady them so that when it does happen they are not unprepared. This purpose statement shows that the section must be taught with appropriate seriousness: the opposition believers may face is of a kind that might lead some to fall away. Yet the purpose statement also gives confidence—Jesus has spoken to them so that this will *not* happen. Like the vine image, the teaching here does not imply the possibility of genuine believers losing their faith, but rather is part of the means by which Jesus ensures genuine believers will persevere.

5. 16:5–33: *Further benefits of Jesus’s going. Purpose: peace.* The purpose given for Jesus’s teaching in this section is that the disciples might have peace (16:33). This is in contrast to the sorrow that has filled the disciples’ hearts because of what Jesus has said to them (v. 6). Verse 6 is the one occasion in the discourse where this phrase “I have said these things to you” does not occur at the end of a section, and so it is harder to determine the referent of ταῦτα. One possibility is that it refers to Jesus’s going, a subject to which Jesus has returned in verse 5. More likely is that it refers in particular to the opposition from the world explained in 15:18–16:4.

On this understanding, chapter 16 is not merely a repeat of chapter 14. There is a new situation in view here: the hostility from the world that is an additional reason the disciples’ hearts may be troubled.⁵⁶ This new situation makes sense of Jesus’s statement in 16:5: “But now I am going to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’” Peter had indeed asked just this question in 13:36, but the situation now is different and the question needs to be asked again, just as Jesus needs to teach about the Holy Spirit again. Furthermore, Peter’s question in 13:36 had its focus on Jesus’s departure and absence, and what that would mean for the disciples, whereas in context here Jesus is suggesting the disciples should ask about his *destination*: he is going to the Father. The disciples have still not understood the salvation-historical significance of Jesus’s death, in particular the Trinitarian relations that mean his going will not be a defeat but victory, and will not make the disciples’ situation worse, but *better* (v. 7).

In the first half of chapter 16, Jesus explains the role of the Holy Spirit, firstly in relation to the world (following on from 15:8–16:4) and then in relation to the disciples.

a. *The work of the Holy Spirit in the world (16:5–11).* The disciples were to testify about Jesus (15:27) and this testimony will be made possible and effective by the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit will only come when Jesus goes (cf. 7:39), when his redemptive work is complete.⁵⁷ This is why it is *better* for the disciples that Jesus should go.

The Spirit’s work in the world will be to convict of sin, righteousness, and judgment. Whatever the precise nuances of these terms, they should all be understood in relationship to Jesus himself. Indeed, we might see a link back to Jesus’s threefold description of himself in chapter 14. Jesus is the way to God, and the

⁵⁶ Bruce Milne, *The Message of John* (BST; Leicester: IVP, 1993), 228.

⁵⁷ Barrett, *St. John*, 486.

Spirit will convict the world in regard to its greatest sin: failure to believe this (15:23–25). Jesus is the truth about God, but in his absence the Spirit will make God known to the world, and reveal his perfect standard of righteousness which the world fails to attain. Jesus is the life, and through the gospel the Spirit will continue to present the stark alternative of life through Christ, or condemnation along with the prince of this world (cf. 3:18).

This Spirit-empowered testimony is one example of the “greater works” that Jesus’s followers would do (14:12). These works are not simply quantitatively greater, as if it is about simply more people being saved; there is a qualitative difference as well: evangelism in the age of the Spirit has a greater power even than when Jesus was physically present on the earth.⁵⁸ Thus despite opposition from the world, and the obstacles involved in mission, the work of the Spirit means the disciples can be at peace.

b. *The work of the Holy Spirit in the disciples (16:12–15)*. The second great work of the Spirit in this passage is to teach the disciples. Indeed, this teaching ministry of the Spirit will be greater than that of Jesus himself, in the sense that “only through the internal presence of the Paraclete do the disciples come to understand Jesus fully.”⁵⁹ This ministry of the Spirit should not be seen in any way as rivalling that of the Son; rather in these verses all three members of the Trinity are involved. All that Christ has is from the Father, and from this the Spirit will teach the disciples. The Spirit’s teaching will bring glory to Christ, which will ultimately bring glory to the Father (17:4). It is better that Jesus *go*, because through his redemptive work the disciples will come to know not simply *that* God is Trinity, but will come to know him *as* Trinity.

The initial promise of illumination is for the original apostles, and therefore these words of Jesus are part of the reason the Gospel of John should be seen as authoritative. It seems likely, however, that there is a wider application here of the Spirit’s illuminating work in all disciples: not revealing new information, but continuing to make Christ known and to glorify him in the lives of his followers.⁶⁰ This ministry of the Spirit would be a reason for peace in the hearts of the disciples, as they prepared for the departure of the one they had known as “teacher” (John 1:38).

c. *Jesus is going to the Father (16:16–33)*. Time expressions dominate this final half of the chapter, as a contrast is drawn between two periods, introduced in verse 16. “A little while, and you will see me no longer” is easy to understand. This refers to the period immediately following Jesus’s death, his *going* which has been the subject of the last discourse. It is harder to pin down the referent of the second period: “again a little while, and you will see me.” Some suggest Jesus is referring to his resurrection appearances to the disciples, others that he has in view his return at the parousia.⁶¹ In a similar way to our interpretation of 14:18 (“I will come to you”), the best understanding is that Jesus is speaking here of the coming of the Holy

⁵⁸ Cf. Brown: “the ‘greater’ refers more to their eschatological character” (*John*, 633).

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 711.

⁶⁰ Carson, *John*, 541–42.

⁶¹ Brown outlines the various options. Brown, *John*, 729.

Spirit.⁶² These verses are further tied together by the “in a little while” in 14:19. The disciples’ confusion is due to their having not yet grasped that by the Spirit Jesus can be present even though having *gone*, can be seen even when he has returned to the Father (16:10).⁶³

Hence this section, though focused on timings (what is now, what is to come) might more accurately be described to be about Jesus going to the Father, and the implications this has for the disciples—in this way linking it very closely to verses 4–15 which also draw out implications of Jesus going to the Father.

The blessings promised “after a little while” (v. 16) or “in that day” (v. 23) are joy and access to the Father. The illustration of the woman giving birth has allusions to Isaiah 25, where the birth has connotations of resurrection, which in turn in Isaiah is often associated with the Spirit.⁶⁴ Thus this illustration is not simply setting out the pattern of temporary pain followed by joy, rather it is a vivid picture of the joy that will come through the beginning of the time of resurrection, the age of the Spirit characterized by joy and peace.

Furthermore, this age of the Spirit will mean a new access to God. The disciples will no longer need to ask Jesus to speak to the Father on their behalf. The presence of the Spirit will mean they can ask the Father directly *in Jesus’s name*, that is, with the privileges and confidence of the Son of God himself. Just as the Father loves the Son, so now the disciples are loved by God (cf. 15:9). Whereas in chapter 14 the sign of being a disciple was obedience, here it is belief in Jesus as the Son of God.

It is Jesus’s identity that comes into focus at the end of the last discourse. Verse 18 may be seen as a summary of the gospel as a whole: Jesus *coming* from the Father (revelation), and *going* to the Father (redemption). Finally, the disciples believe. Though in chapter 14 the purpose of Jesus’s teaching about himself, the Father, and the Spirit was that they would believe, here his purpose is that they might have peace (v. 33). These purposes are not unrelated (indeed there is much similarity between chapters 14 and 16) but “peace” is one step further on; it is a consequence of belief, and finally the answer to the “troubled hearts” of 14:1 where the discourse proper began. The peace that Jesus promises is ἐν ἐμοί; it is peace through relationship with Christ (and thus also the Father) through the Holy Spirit. Continued fellowship with Christ even after his *going* is the antidote to troubled and sorrowful hearts, and is the means to peace. Life will not be easy following Jesus’s death, as the disciples will be scattered—and in a typical Johannine irony it is they who will leave Jesus, not the other way around—but they can “take heart,” as Jesus has overcome the world (v. 33).

⁶² Ibid., 727.

⁶³ Ibid., 731.

⁶⁴ Isa 11:1–9; 32:15–17; 44:3–5.

III. CONCLUSION

The exposition given above shows that consideration of the purpose statements enables a fruitful exegesis of the Farewell Discourse. In some cases, such as 15:17 and 16:1, the analysis given here is very much in line with how these passages are usually understood, and so our reading fits well, but does not add anything significant. In other cases, such as 15:11, the reading given here gives particular focus to how the text should be understood, and suggests a different understanding to how it is normally taken. In this case of the vine image, consideration of the purpose statement takes the focus off questions of eternal security, and onto what is central to this image: union with Christ and the resultant fruit, all of which is a cause for joy.

In chapters 14 and 16, the purpose statements help give focus and unity to two chapters that touch on many seemingly disparate themes, by highlighting the related themes of belief in Christ (14:29) and peace in Christ (16:33). Putting all the purpose statements together, we see the effect Jesus intends this Farewell Discourse to have in the lives of his disciples: belief, joy, love, perseverance, and peace. Not only are these very positive attributes, but they are all very *relational*, as all depend on the union with Christ that is explained in chapter 15.

To pay attention to these structural markers and their accompanying purpose clauses is to understand the Farewell Discourse according to the purpose for which it was spoken. The belief, joy, love, perseverance and peace this discourse should promote are all aspects of union with Christ, all results of Christ's *going* (his death and resurrection), all part of the reason why it is "better" that Christ should go.

Christian disciples today are in the same period of salvation history that Jesus is describing here: he has *gone*, but he has also come to his people by the Spirit, with all that entails. Thus, this Farewell Discourse is crucial for Christian discipleship, as Jesus followers learn what it means to follow him in this age of the Spirit.

Reading the Discourse in light of the purpose statements also fits well with the evangelistic thrust of the Gospel as a whole.⁶⁵ In the Farewell Discourse, unbelievers are given a window into what the normal Christian life looks like. There is honesty about the difficulties disciples will face, but there is also the expectation of what life will be like for disciples who take to heart Jesus's words: a life marked by trust, joy, love, perseverance, and peace. This is the "life to the full"⁶⁶ that is promised by the Good Shepherd, the life that is available to all who believe that Jesus is the Christ, and by believing have life in his name.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Cf. 20:31 and Carson's argument for an evangelistic purpose for the whole gospel. Carson, *John*, 87–95.

⁶⁶ John 10:10.

⁶⁷ John 20:31.