

John 14:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.

Analysis

Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him—This verse introduces the Holy Spirit using one of His most significant titles: τὸ Πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας (to Pneuma tēs alētheias), "the Spirit of truth." This designation appears three times in the Upper Room Discourse (14:17, 15:26, 16:13), emphasizing the Spirit's role in revealing and preserving divine truth.

The Spirit's identity as "truth" connects directly to Jesus's self-designation: "I am the truth" (14:6). The Spirit doesn't speak of Himself but glorifies Christ (16:14), guiding believers into all truth (16:13). This is the Spirit who inspired Scripture (2 Peter 1:21), who convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8), and who teaches believers all things (14:26).

Whom the world cannot receive (ὁ ὁ κόσμος οὐ δύναται λαβεῖν/ho ho kosmos ou dynatai labein)—The verb "receive" (λαβεῖν/labein) indicates active reception, not mere passive experience. The world's inability is not merely intellectual but moral and spiritual. The unregenerate cannot receive the Spirit because they are fundamentally hostile to God (Romans 8:7), loving darkness rather than light (John 3:19).

Because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him—The world lacks spiritual sight and knowledge. This isn't ignorance that education can cure but willful

blindness. Paul explains that the natural man "receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14).

But ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you—Jesus contrasts the disciples with the world. The present tense "dwelleth" (μένει/menei) describes the Spirit's current presence with them through Jesus's earthly ministry. The future "shall be" (ἔσται/estai) points to Pentecost (Acts 2), when the Spirit would indwell believers permanently. This transition—from "with you" to "in you"—marks the new covenant promise of Ezekiel 36:27: "I will put my spirit within you."

The verb "know" (γινώσκετε/ginōskete) indicates experiential, personal knowledge, not mere intellectual awareness. Believers have intimate acquaintance with the Spirit through regeneration (Titus 3:5) and ongoing sanctification (Romans 8:9-11).

Historical Context

Jesus spoke these words Thursday evening in the Upper Room, hours before His crucifixion. The disciples were bewildered by His announcement of departure (13:33, 14:2-4). They had walked with Jesus for three years, witnessed His miracles, heard His teaching, experienced His presence. Now He speaks of leaving them—but promises they will not be orphaned.

In first-century Judaism, the Holy Spirit was understood primarily as the power behind prophecy and Scripture. The Spirit had "departed from Israel" after the last Old Testament prophets (Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi). The Talmud taught that the Spirit's absence explained the cessation of prophecy and the bath kol ("daughter of a voice," inferior to direct revelation). Jewish expectation anticipated the Spirit's return in the Messianic age (Joel 2:28-29, Ezekiel 36:25-27).

Jesus's promise revolutionized pneumatology. The Spirit wouldn't merely come upon select prophets or kings temporarily, but would permanently indwell every believer. This was the "promise of the Father" (Luke 24:49, Acts 1:4) and the distinctive mark of the new covenant era.

The phrase "Spirit of truth" resonated with Old Testament imagery. David prayed for God's "truth" to lead him (Psalm 25:5). Isaiah prophesied God's servant would bring forth justice "in truth" (Isaiah 42:3). But Jesus identifies the Spirit personally as truth's embodiment and agent.

For John's late first-century readers, facing false teachers who denied Christ's incarnation (1 John 4:2-3), this verse provided crucial assurance. The indwelling Spirit enables believers to discern truth from error (1 John 2:20, 27), confirming apostolic testimony and protecting against deception.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. Why is the world fundamentally unable to receive the Holy Spirit, and what does this teach us about the necessity of regeneration?
2. How does the Spirit's title 'Spirit of truth' relate to Jesus's claim 'I am the truth,' and what does this reveal about the Trinity?
3. What is the significance of the transition from the Spirit being 'with you' to 'in you,' and how did Pentecost fulfill this promise?
4. In what practical ways do believers 'know' the Spirit through experiential relationship versus intellectual knowledge?
5. How does the Spirit's role in guiding into truth protect believers from deception and false teaching today?

Interlinear Text

τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας ὃ ὁ κόσμος οὐ
G3588 **Even the Spirit** G3588 **of truth** **whom** G3588 **the world** **cannot**
G4151 G225 G3739 G2889 G3756

δύναται λαβεῖν ὅτι οὐ θεωρεῖ αὐτὸ, οὐδὲ
G1410 **receive** **because** **cannot** **it seeth** **him** **neither**
G2983 G3754 G3756 G2334 G846 G3761

γινώσκετε αὐτὸ, ὑμεῖς δὲ γινώσκετε αὐτὸ, ὅτι παρ'
know **him** **ye** **but** **know** **him** **because** **with**
G1097 G846 G5210 G1161 G1097 G846 G3754 G3844

ὑμῖν μένει καὶ ἐν ὑμῖν ἔσται
you **he dwelleth** **and** **in** **you** **shall be**
G5213 G3306 G2532 G1722 G5213 G2071

Additional Cross-References

Ezekiel 36:27 (Spirit): And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.

John 16:13 (Spirit): Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.

1 John 2:27 (Truth): But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.

1 Corinthians 3:16 (Spirit): Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?

1 John 4:6 (Spirit): We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.

John 15:26 (Spirit): But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me:

1 Corinthians 2:14 (Spirit): But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

1 Corinthians 6:19 (Spirit): What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?

John 14:16 (Parallel theme): And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever;

2 Timothy 1:14 (Spirit): That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us.