

The Gospel of John (90) **Jesus promised parting gifts to His disciples (2)**

Last Lord's Day we began to examine and consider the last two paragraphs of John 14, in which our Lord was giving His last instruction to His disciples before being arrested and taken from them. Let us read them again. Here is **John 14:25-31**:

“These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. ²⁶But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. ²⁷Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. ²⁸You have heard Me say to you, ‘I am going away and coming back to you.’ If you loved Me, you would rejoice because I said, ‘I am going to the Father,’ for My Father is greater than I.

²⁹“And now I have told you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe. ³⁰I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me. ³¹But that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave Me commandment, so I do. Arise, let us go from here.”

Verses 25 through 27 address the subject of Jesus promising blessing to His disciples. In His promise to His disciples, He spoke further of the gift of the Holy Spirit, which He had introduced earlier (14:16f). The Holy Spirit would be another Helper to them, just as Jesus Himself had been their Helper. The Holy Spirit would help them by teaching them the truth of God's Word and be enabling them to remember all the things that they had heard and witnessed during the previous three years of Jesus' ministry. But in addition to the gift of the Holy Spirit (but perhaps due and through the Holy Spirit), He would leave them “peace.” And as we stated last week, we should understand this peace to be both objective and subjective in nature.

Objective peace speaks of the legal and blessed standing that disciples have with God due to His having justified us. We **do not feel** this peace, for it speaks of our **state** or **standing** before God--we are at peace with God and God with us. Our faith in Jesus Christ alone for salvation resulted in God having justified us, that is, we were forgiven our sins and we received the gift of imputed righteousness. Upon our justification, we passed from a state of being at enmity with God and He with us, into a state of peace. Paul wrote of this in Romans 5:1, “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” This objective peace is the state of every true believer in Jesus Christ. This is the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy of all those who are in the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

Speak tenderly to Jerusalem¹, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins. (Isa. 40:2)

But in addition to God's declaration of our objective peace with Him through faith in Jesus Christ, the Lord Jesus promised His disciples **subjective peace**. This is the peace of God that every true Christian **may** experience, but may not due to various reasons. The Scriptures speak of a peace that Christians may **feel** that is not based on the circumstances that they are experiencing. Rather, this subjective peace “passes all understanding” in that this is an inward peace that may be experienced and enjoyed even when the Christian is enduring the most difficult situation in this life. This peace that the world knows nothing about “will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:7). This is the promised blessing of peace that

¹ This is not a promise to physical Jerusalem, but of the Jerusalem “above”, that is, Zion, the city of God of which all true believers through all of history are citizens (Gal. 4:26; Heb. 12:22; Rev. 21 & 22).

Christians may experience because they are citizens of the kingdom of God that is characterized by peace. As Paul wrote, “the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness *and peace* and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17).

Now it is important that we understand that our Lord Jesus gave His disciples this promise of peace just as He was about to be arrested and taken away from them. The next day He would die upon His cross. It is within this setting that He declared to them that He was “coming back”, which we should probably understand here to be a reference to His post resurrection appearances to them. Jesus said unto them,

“Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. ²⁸You have heard Me say to you, ‘I am going away and coming back to you.’” (14:26f)

It is here that Jesus made a statement that has been the center of much error and controversy through the course of church history. Jesus declared in **John 14:28b**, “*If you loved Me, you would rejoice because I said, ‘I am going to the Father,’ for My Father is greater than I.*”

The first portion of this verse is not difficult for us to comprehend or appreciate. Jesus said, “If you loved Me, you would rejoice because I said, ‘I am going to the Father.’” That He would be going to the Father would be a great blessing for Jesus Christ Himself, and His disciples should rejoice with Him that this would soon take place. I suppose if we were always thinking rightly, we would rejoice when any true disciple of Jesus Christ leaves this world to be with Christ. That state is “far better” than what he has in this world presently. Paul wrote, “My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better” (Phil. 1:23).

But it is the reason that Jesus gave why His disciples should rejoice that may be difficult to understand and embrace. Again, Jesus said, “If you loved Me, you would rejoice because I said, ‘I am going to the Father,’ *for* (because) *My Father is greater than I.*” This seems to contradict our understanding and proclamation of the equal standing of God the Father and Jesus Christ, God the Son. Our statement of faith makes this assertion of Him: “The Son of God, the second person in the Holy Trinity, being very and eternal God, the brightness of the Father’s glory, of one substance and equal with Him.” Our understanding of the Trinity is that God the Son is God just as God the Father is God and God the Holy Spirit is God. All three persons of the Holy Trinity are one essence, and therefore the persons are co-equal in all of their attributes and all three Persons are deserving of our praise and worship as one God. But here in John 14:28b Jesus declared, “*My Father is greater than I.*”

This verse has been commonly quoted by heretics who argue that Jesus Christ is not God as God the Father is God. They argue, “Jesus Himself declared, ‘My Father is greater than I.’” Some would argue that Jesus Christ is God, but that He is a lesser god than God the Father. Jesus is not, therefore, to be given honor and glory as is to be rendered unto God the Father. This is, of course, great error. The Holy Scriptures, the Word of God, declare forthrightly

For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, ²³*that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.* (John 5:22f)

Nobody honors the true God unless he gives the same honor to the Son. Indeed, all three Persons of the blessed Holy Trinity are to be given equal honor and esteem, for they are one God.

This verse was cited in the early Christian era as a denial of the equal standing of the Son with the Father by the heresy of Arianism. Arius was a Christian leader (bishop) in Alexandria Egypt, perhaps born in AD 250 or 256, and died in AD 336. Arius denied the deity of the Son of God. He taught that the Son of God was the first created being by God. He taught this based on a wrong understanding of verses like Colossians 1:15, which says of the Son of God, “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation” (also Rom. 8:29). This verse, of course, does not teach that Jesus Christ was created first, but that God purposed that His Son would be the firstborn Son, that is, the eldest Son of the large family of God, the primary heir of all things belonging to the Father. But Arius also declared based on John 14:28, that Jesus Himself confessed that His Father was greater than He. Jesus said, “*My Father is greater than I.*” And so,

Arius taught that Jesus is a creature--a finite, created being--who had a number of divine attributes. Arius taught that there was a time when the Son of God did not exist. Arius denied that the Son of God was the eternal Son of God as the Second Person of the Holy Trinity.

Arius had significant influence and his teaching was accepted in many churches. The heretical doctrine spread throughout the Christian world, which caused a great deal of conflict. When Constantine was the Roman Emperor (AD 306-337), he attempted to consolidate and bring conformity to Christian teaching. In order to address this Arian error, he called for a church-wide council, which was convened in Nicaea (about 40 miles southeast of Istanbul, Turkey) in AD 325) Emperor Constantine himself presided over the gathering. Arius attended this council to defend his teaching. His bishop in Alexandria, Alexander, did not attend, but sent in his place a young man named Athanasius. Athanasius emerged in the debate as the champion of Trinitarian theology. [He fought against the heresy of Arianism throughout his life.] For two months the two sides debated the biblical teaching. In the end the council declared that the doctrine of the Trinity is biblical teaching and that the Arians were heretics. The council adopted the statement of doctrine formulated primarily by Athanasius. It became known as *The Nicæan Creed* (325). It is the first formal statement of the biblical doctrine of the Trinity and of the person of Jesus Christ. Here is the formal statement of the creed:

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father [the only-begotten; that is, of the essence of the Father, God of God,] Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, consubstantial² with the Father. By Whom all things were made [both in heaven and on earth]; Who is for us men, and for our salvation, came down as incarnate and was made man; He suffered, and the third day He rose again, ascended into heaven; From thence He shall come to judge the quick (living) and the dead. And in the Holy Ghost.³

It is a sad thing that the doctrine of Arianism has continued throughout much of church history. Those who deny the deity of Jesus Christ are spiritual descendants of Arius. The groups that espouse this heresy include Jehovah Witnesses, Mormons, Unitarians, and all liberal Protestants who deny the deity of Jesus Christ.

Let us return to our text. In **John 14:28b**, Jesus declared these words, “If you loved Me, you would rejoice because I said, ‘I am going to the Father...’” And then He said, “*for My Father is greater than I.*” How, then, are we to understand this statement while affirming the clear teaching of Scripture of the same essence of the Son with His Father? How can the Father and the Son be the same in divine essence, but Jesus could say, “My Father is greater than I.”? There are two major ways in which this has been explained by solid expositors of the Scriptures.

1. First, there are those who say that Jesus was here speaking of His human nature only.

Of course the human nature of Jesus Christ is certainly less than God the Father. Those who argue this point would cite passages such as **Hebrews 2:8f**:

For in that He put all in subjection under him (mankind), He left nothing *that is* not put under him. But now we do not yet see all things put under him. *⁹But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than*

² This creed uses the word, *homoousios*, meaning “consubstantial”, or “one in essence”, which was incompatible with Arius' beliefs. It is a declaration that God the Father and God the Son are of one essence.

³ This creed was enlarged in detail at the Council at Chalcedon in AD 381. The creed of that council came to be known as the Nicaeno-Constantinopolitan Creed. A more full formal statement of the person of Jesus Christ came forth from the Council of Chalcedon in AD 451. It is the most complete statement of the person of Christ that is accepted by all who profess the Trinitarian teaching of the Holy Scriptures.

the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.

That Jesus was referring to His human nature as lesser and His Father to be greater was the opinion proposed by the early orthodox theologians in their refuting of Arianism. And there are modern commentators who also argue this position. Here are the words of **Leon Morris** (1914-2006):

“The Father is greater than I” presents difficulties to those who hold a Trinitarian faith. The reference, however, is not to Christ’s essential Being, but rather His incarnate state. The incarnation involved the acceptance of a certain subordination as is insisted throughout the New Testament. The saying must be understood in the light of “I and the Father are one” (10:30). John is not asserting, as the Arians maintained, that Jesus was a created being. He is talking about His departure of the human Jesus from this earth to be with His Father. In the light of this Jesus sees it as a matter for rejoicing that He returns to the Father. True love will recognize this.⁴

J. C. Ryle (1816-1900) was even more direct in his assertions of this understanding:

What did our Lord mean by saying, “My Father is greater than I”? I answer that the words of the Athanasian Creed contain the best reply. Christ is no doubt “equal to the Father as touching His Godhead, and inferior to the Father as touching His manhood.” This we may freely and fully admit, and yet not give up a hair’s breadth to Arians or Socinians, who always throw this text in our teeth. The enemies of the doctrine of Christ’s divinity forget that Trinitarians maintain the humanity of Christ as strongly as His divinity; and never shrink from admitting while Christ as God is equal to the Father, as man He is inferior to the Father. And it is in this sense that He here says truly, “My Father is greater than I.” It was especially spoken of the time of His incarnation and humiliation. When the Word was “made flesh” He took on Him “the form of a servant.” This was temporarily and voluntarily assumed inferiority (Phil. 2:7).⁵

William Hendriksen, (1900-1982), a sound Reformed commentator of the 20th century, also took this position. He wrote of our Lord’s words: “Although, to be sure, as the only begotten Son He was fully equal to the Father as to essence, (10:30), nevertheless, as Mediator between God and man, Himself a *man*, He was inferior.”⁶

2. There are those who say that Jesus was also speaking of His subordination to the Father as His Son from eternity.

The view that Jesus was speaking of His human nature only, when He declared that His Father was greater, is probably not right, or at least it is not a full explanation. **John Calvin** (1509-1564) rejected the understanding that Jesus was referring to His human nature when He had said, “The Father is greater than I.” Calvin wrote regarding this verse:

This passage has been tortured in various ways. The Aryans, in order to prove that Christ is some sort of inferior God, argued that *He is less than the Father*. The orthodox Fathers, to remove all ground for such a calumny⁷, said that this must have referred to His human nature; but as the Aryans wickedly abused this testimony, so the reply given by the Fathers to their objection was neither correct nor appropriate; for Christ does not now speak either of His human nature, or of His eternal Divinity, but,

⁴ Leon Morris, **The Gospel According to John** (William B. Eerdmans, 1971), pp. 658f.

⁵ J. C. Ryle, **Expository Thoughts on John**, vol. 3 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987, orig. 1869), p. 92.

⁶ William Hendriksen, **John**, New Testament Commentary (Baker Academic, 1953), p. 288.

⁷ “Calumny” is a lie or the act of saying a lie that is hurtful.

accommodating Himself to our weakness, places Himself between God and us; and, indeed, as it has not been granted to us to reach the height of God, Christ descended to us, that He might raise us to it.

John Gill (1697-1771): made allowance for the possibility of Jesus referring to His human nature, but proposed something further:

“*For my Father is greater than I*”: ***not with respect to the divine nature***, which is common to them both, and in which they are both one; and the Son is equal to the Father, having the self-same essence, perfections, and glory: nor with respect to personality, the Son is equally a divine person, as the Father is, though the one is usually called the first, the other the second person; yet this priority is not of nature, which is the same in both; nor of time, for the one did not exist before the other; nor of causality, for the Father is not the cause of the Son’s existence; nor of dignity, for the one has not any excellency which is wanting in the other; ***but of order and manner of operation***: these words are to be understood, either with regard to the human nature, in which He was going to the Father, this was prepared for Him by the Father, and strengthened and supported by Him, and in which He was made a little lower than the angels, and consequently must be in it inferior to His Father; or with regard to His office as Mediator, in which He was the Father’s servant, was set up and sent forth by Him, acted under Him, and in obedience to Him, and was now returning to give an account of His work and service; ***or rather with regard to His present state***, which was a state of humiliation: He was attended with many griefs and sorrows, and exposed to many enemies, and about to undergo an accursed death; whereas His Father was in the most perfect happiness and glory, and so in this sense “greater.” That is, more blessed and glorious than He; for this is not a comparison of natures, or of persons, but of states and conditions: now He was going to the Father to partake of the same happiness and glory with Him, to be glorified with Himself, with the same glory He had with Him before the foundation of the world; wherefore on this account, His disciples ought to have rejoiced, and not have mourned.⁸

In reading various views I must defer and prefer the way that **Donald Carson** (b. 1947) explained the passage. He spoke of the incarnation but also of the eternal subordination of the Son to His Father. This is not saying that the Son is less than God in His essence, that the Father is in that way “greater.” To teach that would be terrible error. But rather, The Father is greater than the Son in the sense that God the Father has always been as Father to His Son and God the Son has always been Son to His Father. Here are Carson’s words:

Although the interpretation of v. 28 advanced here turns on the distinction between the Father in His glory and the Son in His incarnation, nevertheless this verse also attests to the pattern of functional subordination of the Son to the Father, already alluded to, that extends backward into eternity past. ‘The Father is the *fons divinitatis* [“the divine fountainhead”] in which the being of the Son has its source; the Father is God in sending and commanding, the Son of God is sent and obedient. John’s thought here is focused on the humiliation of the Son in His earthly life, a humiliation which now, in His death, reached its climax and its end’ (Barrett, p. 468).

George Beasley-Murray also rightly stated the issue:

The intent of “the Father is greater than I” is clear in the context, but the statement has caused immense discussion through the history of the Church, and it played a prominent part in the Arian controversy. The problem has been to reconcile the declaration with intimations in the Gospel of Jesus’ oneness with the Father in the godhead (e.g. 1:1-18; 10:30; 20:28) and with the Church’s creedal affirmations of the co-equality of the Father and the Son. Without doubt the statement in v. 28 is one with many representations in the Fourth Gospel as to the obedience of the Son to the Father (e.g. 4:34; 8:29) and His

⁸ In Gill’s New Testament commentary on John 14:28. I have placed the words in bold italic to help with clarity of understanding.

dependence on the Father for every aspect of His ministry (e.g. 5:19; 12:48-49), as well as of in the Father (e.g. 1:14, 18; 5:21-27)). It is doubtful therefore if the reference of v. 28 can be limited solely to the conditions of the incarnation (as maintained, e.g. Cyril of Alexandria, Augustine, etc.), but respect must also be had to the relations within the Godhead (so Tertullian, Athanasius, etc.).⁹

But perhaps **R. C. Sproul** (1939-2017) put the matter most succinctly:

The Father is greater than the Son, not in substance, but greater in the economy of redemption. Thus, the Father sent the Son, not the other way around. Jesus told His disciples they should rejoice because He is going back to His place of glory, His place at the right hand of the Father.¹⁰

But the point and emphasis of the verse should be stressed. Jesus was telling His disciples that they should not sorrow, but rather rejoice because He was returning to His Father. He declared to them, “***If you loved Me, you would rejoice because I said, ‘I am going to the Father,’ for My Father is greater than I.***” The Lord had accomplished what His Father had sent Him to do. He was made a “little lower than the angels” in order to elevate us to a position greater than the angels. He was returning to His former glory that He had shared with the Father before the world began (cf. John 17: 5). He was returning to the domain to which He belonged. In a very short time, there would be

“many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice:

‘Worthy is the Lamb who was slain
To receive power and riches and wisdom,
And strength and honor and glory and blessing...’” (Rev. 5:11f)

II. Jesus further prepares His disciples of His departure (14:28-31)

As difficult as His departure and the manner of His departure would be for His disciples, our Lord wanted them to view His departure as necessary, temporary, and beneficial for them. We read His words in **verses 29** through **30**:

“And now I have told you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe. ³⁰I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me. ³¹But that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave Me commandment, so I do. Arise, let us go from here.”

In verse 29 our Lord declared why He had imparted these matters to His disciples. **Verse 29** reads, “***And now I have told you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe.***” It is interesting that John the Gospel writer had recorded our Lord saying almost exactly the same words on an earlier occasion. In John 13:19 we read Jesus words, “Now I tell you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe that I am He.” In that context He was speaking of one of them that would betray Him, namely, Judas Iscariot. Here in John 14:29 Jesus was speaking of His entire Passion that would soon commence with His arrest. He was speaking of His death, His resurrection, and His exaltation to the Father. He spoke about this matter in advance so that they would believe these things when they transpired before them. He told them in advance that “when he was removed from them, and gone to his Father, they might then believe that he was truly God, the Son of God, the promised Messiah; and that he was then in glory, and at the right hand of God” (John Gill).

⁹ George R. Beasley-Murray, **John**, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 36 (Thomas Nelson, 1999), p. 262.

¹⁰ R. C. Sproul, **John**, St. Andrew’s Expository Commentary (Reformation Trust, 2009), p. 281.

By way of application, there are some matters that our Lord would have us hear and learn now, although they may not appear at the present clear or relevant to us, nevertheless, we will see their value and relevance at a later time.

Then Jesus made this statement in **verse 30**, ***“I will no longer talk much with you.”*** The opportunity for Jesus to speak with His disciples was drawing to an end. The reason that He would not speak to them much more is because ***“the ruler of this world is coming.”*** This statement opens up a whole other matter that we would do well to address. We might do so by answering several questions:

(1) First, who is “the ruler of this world”?

Very obviously, he is the devil. When Jesus was about to be betrayed, Luke had written of the devil’s involvement. “Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was of the number of the twelve. He went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers how he might betray him to them. (Luke 22:3f). And earlier in John’s Gospel when Jesus had given the morsel of bread to Judas, John had recorded these words, “Then after he had taken the morsel, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, ‘What you are going to do, do quickly’” (John 13:27). And now John records Jesus saying, ***“the ruler of this world is coming.”*** All of the events of our Lord’s arrest, trials, abuse, and crucifixion, were satanically inspired and executed. Evil men with wicked designs conspired to murder Jesus, and satan was behind it all.

The Word of God contains a number of names for the devil. These include Abaddon and Apollyon¹¹ (Rev. 9:11), Beelzebub¹² (Matt. 12:24; Luke 12:9), Belial¹³ (2 Cor. 6:15), the angel of the abyss (Rev. 9:11); the devil¹⁴ (Rev. 12:9), the enemy (Matt. 13:25, 28, 39), the evil one (Matt. 5:37; 6:13), the father of lies and the murderer of men’s souls (John 8:44); the prince of demons (Matt. 9:34; 12:24), the prince (ruler) of this world (John 12:31; 14:30), the prince of the power of the air (Eph. 2:2), and the tempter (Matt. 4:3; 1 Thess. 3:5).¹⁵ But here, Jesus called the devil “the ruler of this world.”

(2) Second, how is the devil the “the ruler of this world”?

The devil is the king over “the domain of darkness” (Col. 1:13), which is the evil spiritual realm that is contrary and opposed to the will and ways of God. God had originally created devil as one of his holy angels, whom He had appointed as “the anointed cherub” (protecting angel) over mankind within His creation.

When did he fall into sin? Probably in the garden when he drew Adam and Eve into sin. Ezekiel 28, which speaks of the ancient king of Tyre, goes beyond a historical person and describes the devil and his fall into sin. Here is Ezekiel 28:12ff:

“You were the seal of perfection,
Full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.
¹³You were in Eden, the garden of God;
Every precious stone was your covering:
The sardius, topaz, and diamond,
Beryl, onyx, and jasper,
Sapphire, turquoise, and emerald with gold.
The workmanship of your timbrels and pipes

¹¹ both meaning destroyer

¹² prince of demons

¹³ worthless

¹⁴ Accuser (of the brethren)

¹⁵ Robert L. Reymond, **A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith** (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), p. 659. Actually Lucifer is not a biblical name for the devil (cf. Isa. 14:12)

Was prepared for you on the day you were created.

¹⁴“You were the anointed cherub who covers;
I established you;

You were on the holy mountain of God;
You walked back and forth in the midst of fiery stones.

¹⁵You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created,
Till iniquity was found in you.

¹⁶“By the abundance of your trading
You became filled with violence within,
And you sinned;
Therefore I cast you as a profane thing
Out of the mountain of God;
And I destroyed you, O covering cherub,
From the midst of the fiery stones.” (Ezek. 28:12-16)

What happened to the authority of this “anointed cherub” after he fell into sin? God had originally granted this angel the role of caretaker or protector of mankind. When he sinned becoming the devil, God did not remove his authority. The devil continued to be the ruler of this world, but due to his corruption and pervasive influence, the world had fallen under the reign of his evil power. Man in his sin had shifted his allegiance from the true God His Creator to the devil. We read elsewhere that “The whole world lies in the power of the evil one” (1 John 5:19). After the fall God continued to be the sovereign king over creation, but it was a world in full rebellion against Him. The mediatorial kingdom of God through history is the work of God taking back His creation into willing submission to Himself. And so, as the kingdom of God ruled by Jesus Christ invades this fallen world. And even as Christ’s kingdom expands and extends throughout the world, the kingdom of darkness, or the domain of the devil suffers defeat and contraction.

And so, how does the devil rule over this fallen world? Here is a good description by **Robert Reymond** (1932-2013):

While he does not exercise totally free reign over men because of divinely imposed limitations and restraints (Job 1:12; 2:6; Matt. 12:29; Rev. 20:2, 3), satan is said nonetheless to rage against men (Rev. 12:12), to prowl around like a roaring lion looking to devour the sons of men (1 Pet. 5:8), to work in the sons of disobedience (Eph. 2:2), to blind the minds of unbelievers so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ (2 Cor. 4:4), to turn men away from God to serve him (1 Tim. 5:15), to take men captive to do his will (2 Tim. 2:26), to deceive the nations (Rev. 12:9; 20:3, 7), to sow tares in the field of the world (Matt. 13:25), to obstruct world missions (1 Thess. 2:18), to masquerade as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14), to make war against the saints (Christians) (Rev. 12:17), to throw Christians into prison (Rev. 2:10), to oppress with physical and mental illness (Acts 10:38), to lie and murder (John 8:44), and to hold (under God) the power of death (Heb. 2:14).¹⁶

(3) Third, is the devil yet “the ruler of this world”, even after the crucifixion, resurrection and enthronement of Jesus Christ as Lord?

The answer is “no”, but “yes” to a degree. When the Lord Jesus died upon His cross, He defeated the devil in a great spiritual battle, wresting authority from the devil, assuming for Himself authority as the rightful, promised King of kings and Lord of lords. Peter wrote very clearly about this victory of Jesus Christ over the devil and his forces. It was through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that He “has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, *angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him*” (1 Pet. 3:22). These angels and authorities would include the devil and his angels (demons).

¹⁶ Ibid, pp. 659f.

The devil continues to reign over the hearts and minds of the unbelieving world. He is the prince of the power of the air” (Eph. 2:2). But he is powerless to stop the successful advance of the Kingdom of God lead by Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ conquers the people of the devil and brings them into willing submission to His kingdom. Paul wrote of this in Colossians 1:

⁹For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; ¹⁰that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; ¹¹strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; ¹²giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. ¹³***He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love,*** ¹⁴***in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.*** (Col. 1:13-14)¹⁷

Does the devil still have power? Yes, but he does not have the power to withstand or defeat the kingdom of God advanced through the gospel. He was cast down from his former position of uncontested power, having been defeated and supplanted by the faithful Son of God, the Son of David.

Revelation 12 speaks of what occurred when Jesus died, rose, and ascended to His throne.

Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars. ²Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth.

³And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. ⁴His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born. ⁵She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne. ⁶Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

⁷And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, ⁸but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. ⁹So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

¹⁰Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, “Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down. ¹¹And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death. ¹²Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time.”

¹³Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male Child. ¹⁴But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent. ¹⁵So the serpent spewed water out of his mouth like a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood. ¹⁶But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. ¹⁷And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ. (Rev. 12:1-17)

Contrary to the popular futurist spin on this passage that it speaks of a future deliverance of Jews from an end time political antichrist during an end time tribulation period, it speaks of what Christ obtained

¹⁷ Consider also these verses that speaks of our Lord’s defeat of the devil: John 3:8; Matt. 12:29; Luke 11:21-22; John 12:31; 16:11; 1 Cor. 15:24-26; Col. 2:13-15; Heb. 2:14f.

through His obedience unto His Father unto death. It then describes the difficult tribulation that the devil has unleashed on Christians these last 2,000 years. This church age is the tribulation period described in the Scriptures (see John 16:33). And this tribulation will continue for the people of God unto the end of this age when Christ will return and judge the world of men and angels.

How are we to understand the devil to be the “ruler of this age” and yet Jesus Christ is Lord of all the earth? We might provide an illustration of the Promised Land that God had given to Israel as a possession, but then He commanded them to go take it. Before the people of Israel had entered Canaan under Joshua, God had said this to them:

Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, “When you pass over the Jordan into the land of Canaan, ⁵²then you shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you and destroy all their figured stones and destroy all their metal images and demolish all their high places. ⁵³And *you shall take possession of the land and settle in it, for I have given the land to you to possess it.* (Num. 33:51-53)

It was theirs by right, by inheritance, but they must take possession of it. And so it is that Jesus Christ is Lord over heaven and earth, and He is taking it back through history from the devil as the kingdom of God expands throughout the world. And the devil cannot stop its advance. The disciples returning from a short-term mission trip exclaimed to the Lord Jesus:

The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!” ¹⁸And He said to them, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. ¹⁹Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you.” (Luke 10:17-19)

The devil is powerless to stop the advance of Christ’s kingdom. The devil had thought, however, that he would and could defeat Jesus by having Him betrayed and crucified, effectively bringing an end to the exploits and victories of Christ. This is why Jesus said to His disciples in this context of **John 14:30**, “*I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me.*” God in His sovereign purpose and wisdom would have the devil himself in his evil desires and designs, instigate the event through which the lord Jesus would defeat him soundly and completely.

And of the desire and intention of the Lord Jesus? He would proceed on this course before Him because He loved the Father and purposed to fulfill all that His Father sent Him to accomplish. Jesus said to His disciples in concluding this section: “*But that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave Me commandment, so I do. Arise, let us go from here*” (14:31). The Father gave Him the commandment to come into this world and redeem His people. And that Jesus Christ submitted willingly to His cross demonstrates not only God’s love for us, but the love of Jesus Christ for His Father.

“When Christ who is your life appears,
then you also will appear with him in glory. (Col. 3:4)

The Athanasian Creed

(4th century AD)

Here is the traditional language of the Athanasian Creed:

“Whoever wants to be saved should above all cling to the catholic¹⁸ (universal) faith. Whoever does not guard it whole and inviolable will doubtless perish eternally. Now this is the catholic faith:

“We worship one God in trinity and the Trinity in unity, neither confusing the persons nor dividing the divine being. For the Father is one person, the Son is another, and the Spirit is still another. But the deity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is one, equal in glory, coeternal in majesty. What the Father is, the Son is, and so is the Holy Spirit. Uncreated is the Father; uncreated is the Son; uncreated is the Spirit. The Father is infinite; the Son is infinite; the Holy Spirit is infinite. Eternal is the Father; eternal is the Son; eternal is the Spirit: And yet there are not three eternal beings, but one who is eternal; as there are not three uncreated and unlimited beings, but one who is uncreated and unlimited. Almighty is the Father; almighty is the Son; almighty is the Spirit: And yet there are not three almighty beings, but one who is almighty. Thus the Father is God; the Son is God; the Holy Spirit is God: And yet there are not three gods, but one God. Thus the Father is Lord; the Son is Lord; the Holy Spirit is Lord: And yet there are not three lords, but one Lord.

“As Christian truth compels us to acknowledge each distinct person as God and Lord, so catholic religion forbids us to say that there are three gods or lords. The Father was neither made nor created nor begotten; the Son was neither made nor created, but was alone begotten of the Father; the Spirit was neither made nor created, but is proceeding from the Father and the Son. Thus there is one Father, not three fathers; one Son, not three sons; one Holy Spirit, not three spirits. And in this Trinity, no one is before or after, greater or less than the other; but all three persons are in themselves, coeternal and coequal; and so we must worship the Trinity in unity and the one God in three persons. Whoever wants to be saved should think thus about the Trinity. It is necessary for eternal salvation that one also faithfully believe that our Lord Jesus Christ became flesh.

“For this is the true faith that we believe and confess: That our Lord Jesus Christ, God’s Son, is both God and man. He is God, begotten before all worlds from the being of the Father, and he is man, born in the world from the being of his mother—existing fully as God, and fully as man with a rational soul and a human body; equal to the Father in divinity, subordinate to the Father in humanity. Although he is God and man, he is not divided, but is one Christ. He is united because God has taken humanity into himself; he does not transform deity into humanity. He is completely one in the unity of his person, without confusing his natures. For as the rational soul and body are one person, so the one Christ is God and man.

“He suffered death for our salvation. He descended into hell and rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead. At his coming all people shall rise bodily to give an account of their own deeds. Those who have done good will enter eternal life, those who have done evil will enter eternal fire. This is the catholic faith. One cannot be saved without believing this firmly and faithfully.”

¹⁸ The word “catholic” means universal. It is not the same as the Roman Catholic Church, that claims to be the only true church. Athanasius was speaking of biblical Christianity when he wrote of the “catholic” church.