Sometimes well-intentioned people argue for the right thing the wrong way. Their position may be right even though at least one of their arguments is not. This seems to be the case with a popular exegetical and theological argument for the personality of the Holy Spirit. The right position is that the Holy Spirit is a person, and the fallacious argument is that the masculine demonstrative pronoun ἐκεῖνος in John 14:26, 15:26, and 16:13–14 proves it. Trinitarian theologians through church history have rightly defended the personality of the Spirit, and an astonishing number of defenders appeal to this argument for support.

THE ARGUMENT

The argument goes like this: John 14:26, 15:26, and 16:13–14 prove (or at least suggest) that the Holy Spirit is a person because the antecedent of the masculine ἐκεῖνος is the neuter πνεῦμα. (Table 1 highlights those words.) The masculine ἐκεῖνος is significant because we would expect the neuter ἐκεῖνο instead since that would agree grammatically with the neuter πνεῦμα, but these three passages (or at least one of them) break a grammatical rule to emphasize that the Holy Spirit is a person and not a thing.
Table 1. Πνεῦμα and Ἐκεῖνος in John 14:26, 15:26, and 16:13–14

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NA27</th>
<th>ESV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>John 14:26</td>
<td>ὁ δὲ παράκλητος, τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἁγιόν, ὃς πέμψει ὁ πατὴρ ἐν τῷ ὄνοματί μου, Ἐκεῖνος ὑμᾶς διδάξει χρήσις καὶ ὑπομνήσει ὑμᾶς πάντα ὅσα ἔγον ὑμῖν [ἔγα].</td>
<td>But 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 that I have said to you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John 15:26</td>
<td>ὃταν ἔλθῃ ὁ παράκλητος ὦν ἐγὼ πέμψω ὑμῖν παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς, τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας ὃς παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκπορεύεται, Ἐκεῖνος μαρτυρήσει περὶ ἐμοῦ.</td>
<td>But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John 16:13–14</td>
<td>ὃταν δὲ ἐλθῇ Ἐκεῖνος, τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας, ὃς ἐξετάζει χρήσις ὧδε ὡς ἐξοµίζει ἑαυτῇ καὶ τὰ ερχόµενα ἀναγγέλει ὑμῖν. Ὁ Ἐκεῖνος ἐµὲ δοξάσει, ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ ἐμοῦ λήψει καὶ ἀναγγέλει ὑμῖν.</td>
<td>When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most of the adherents of this view (see below) simply assert the argument but do not provide reasons for it. The most common reason that πνεῦμα is the antecedent of Ἐκεῖνος—assumed if not explicitly stated—is proximity. That is, Ἐκεῖνος occurs closer to πνεῦμα than it does to any other possible antecedents. Some adherents boldly state that their argument is unambiguous, obvious, and the only possibility.

ADHERENTS OF THE ARGUMENT

An impressive number of Greek grammarians, exeges, commentators, and theologians have made this argument from at least the 1500s to the present. They span all the main branches and denominations of the church (e.g., Reformed, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Baptist, Pentecostal, Roman Catholic), many languages (e.g., English, French, Spanish, German, Greek, Russian, Chinese, Japanese, and many more). We found many of these adherents using Logos Bible Software and variations of the search query («Bible = John 14:26», «Bible = John 15:26», «Bible = John 16:13», «Bible = John 16:14») + (Spirit, pneuma, πνεῦμα) + (person, personality, personhood, personal) + (gender, masculine, neuter, ekeinos, Ἐκεῖνος).
German, Dutch), and several continents (e.g., North America, Europe, Australia). Here is a chronological sampling of about 110 notable adherents—some more nuanced than others:4

c. 1591—Martin Chemnitz (1522–86):

John 15:26, when Christ speaks of the Holy Spirit in the neuter gender. “The Spirit (to pneuma) of truth which proceeds from the Father,” He then changes the gender and adds “He (ekéinos) will bear witness of Me,” signifying that He is not speaking of some created emotion which occurs in the believers, but of a person. For it is frequent and common in the sacred writings that when there is mention of persons, a term may vary in respect to the related and antecedent words by the change of the genders, for example, in Matt. 28:19, “Teach all nations (ta ethnē—neuter), baptizing them (autous—masc.).”5

1610—John Gerhard (1582–1637):

This fact can be brought out by consulting a parallel passage, John 14:26: “The Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit whom the Father sends in My name, He will teach you all things.” In this verse…the neuter to pneuma is later rendered by the masculine ἐκεῖνος, and this change of gender used in reference to personal actions always indicates a person (cf. Gen. 3:15; Eph. 1:14; Col. 2:19)…. [This is brought out also in] John 15:26: “When the Comforter comes whom I will send you from the Father, namely the Spirit of truth, He (ἐκεῖνος) will witness concerning Me.”

In this passage…there is a change of gender….6

1676—Leonard van Rijssen (ca. 1636–ca. 1700)7

1679—Francis Turretin (1623–87):

The exchange of gender teaches this, joining to pneumati (which is of the neuter gender) the masculine pronoun better adapted to denote a person: hotan elthē ekéinos to pneuma tēs aλétheias (Jn. 16:13). In Eph. 1:13, 14, we are said to be sealed with “the Holy Spirit of promise” (tō pneumati hagō hos estin arrabōn). For no reason can be given why such a change should be made in Scripture except that thus the person of the

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4We have abridged this essay by including only a sampling of direct quotations. If a work has multiple editions, we try to quote the most updated edition while ordering the quotation chronologically based on when the first edition was published.


6Robert D. Preus, The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism, 2 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1999), 2:131. Preus is quoting John Gerhard, Loci Theologici, III, 280 (1610–25). Gerhard was Chemnitz’s successor and probably inherited the argument from him. They were both Lutherans.

7Leonardo Rijssenio, Summa Theologiae Elencticae (Bernae, 1676), IV.xii, cont. I, arg. 2. Richard Muller cites Rijssen as saying, “The name ‘Paraclete’ or ‘Comforter,’ moreover, is an indication of a personal work (officium personale), and the word pneuma, a negative noun, is joined with a masculine pronoun in John 16:13” (The Triunity of God, vol. 4 of Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003], p. 351).
Holy Spirit may be more clearly designated.

1693—John Owen (1616–83):

The Scripture, speaking of the Holy Ghost, though Πνεῦμα be of the neuter gender, yet having respect unto the thing,—that is, the person of the Spirit,—it subjoins the pronoun of the masculine gender unto it, as John 14:26.9

1782—John Brown of Haddington (1722–87)10
1814—Ethan Smith
1816—Reginald Heber (1783–1826)12
1863–1865—Frédéric L. Godet (1812–1900)13
1867—Daniel Gans14
1870—R. L. Dabney (1820–98)15
1871—a. R. Fausset (1821–1910)16
1871—Philip Schaff (1819–93)17
1882—William Hamilton18


1882—George Smeaton (1814–89):
Nor ought we to omit a noteworthy peculiarity in the three passages which refer to the Comforter. A change of gender in the use of the masculine demonstrative pronoun (ἐκείνος) forestalls the possibility of putting any other sense than a personal reference upon the words. Thus it is said: “The Comforter, the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, He (ἐκείνος) shall teach you all things” (John xiv. 26); “When the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceedeth from the Father, He (ἐκείνος) shall testify of me”; “Howbeit when He (ἐκείνος), 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 show you things to come. He (ἐκείνος) shall glorify me” (xvi. 13, 14).

1882—B. F. Westcott (1825–1901)
1886—Augustus H. Strong (1836–1921):
3. The Holy Spirit is a person.
A. Designations proper to personality are given him.
(a) The masculine pronoun ἐκείνος, though πνεῦμα is neuter....

1887—James P. Boyce (1827–88)
1887—Charles Hodge (1797–1878):
The first argument for the personality of the Holy Spirit is derived from the use of the personal pronouns in relation to Him.... Our Lord says (John xv. 26), “When the Comforter (ὁ παράκλητος) is come whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth (τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας) which (ὁ) proceedeth from the Father, He (ἐκείνος) shall testify of me.” The use of the masculine pronoun He instead of it, shows that the Spirit is a person. It may indeed be said that as παράκλητος is masculine, the pronoun referring to it must of course be in the same gender. But as the explanatory words τὸ πνεῦμα intervene, to which the neuter ὁ refers, the following pronoun would naturally be in the neuter, if the subject spoken of, the πνεῦμα, were not a person. In the following chapter (John xvi. 13, 14) there is no ground for this objection. It is there said, “When He (ἐκείνος), 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 show you things to come. He shall glorify me (ἐκείνος ἐμὲ δοξάσει): for He shall

receive of mine, and shall show it unto you.” Here there is no possibility of accounting for the use of the personal pronoun He (ἐκεῖνος) on any other ground than the personality of the Spirit.

1888–94—William G. T. Shedd (1820–94)
1889—J. E. Wolfe
1890—H. C. G. Moule (1841–1920):

Let me ask that the Greek be once more opened, and this divine grammatical anomaly once more studied—the neuter Πνεῦμα associated repeatedly and markedly with the masculine Παρακλήτος, the masculine ὁ, ἐκεῖνος, εὐτός [in John 14:16–17; 15:26; 16:7–8]. And let this be read in the light of the wonderful context, in which this blessed Paraclete, this Advocatus, “called in” to the aid of the otherwise “orphaned” Church, is seen to be such, and to act so, as to be indeed the Substitute, the more than substitute, for the unspeakably real personality of the Saviour in His seen presence…. It scarcely needs the impressive testimony of the Greek grammar of the sentences to assure us with deep and restful certainty that to the mind of the Saviour that night the Spirit was indeed present as a Person.

1894—George B. Stevens
1895–99—Herman Bavinck (1854–1921)
1898—E. W. Bullinger (1837–1913)
1898—Henry B. Swete (1835–1917)
1898—R. A. Torrey (1856–1928)
1905—Alfred G. Mortimer (1848–1924)
1906—Archibald E. Thomson

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33Archibald E. Thomson, “The Authority of the Holy Spirit,” BSac 63 (1906):
Gender and Number. Little remains to be said about variations in gender and number. Two passages in John call for remark, inasmuch as they bear on the personality of the Holy Spirit. In 14:26, ὁ δὲ παρὰκλῆτος, τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἄγιον ὁ πέμψει ὁ πατὴρ ἐν τῷ ὄνοματι μου, ἐκεῖνος ὑμᾶς διδάξει, the relative ὅ follows the grammatical gender of πνεῦμα. Ἐκεῖνος, however, skips over πνεῦμα and reverts to the gender of παρὰκλῆτος. In 16:13 a more striking example occurs, ὅταν δὲ ἔλθῃ ἐκεῖνος, τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας. Here one has to go back six lines to ἐκεῖνος again and seven to παρὰκλῆτος. It is more evident therefore in this passage that John is insisting on the personality of the Holy Spirit, when the grammatical gender so easily called for ἐκεῖνος. Cf. ὅ in Jo. 14:17, 26 and αὐτό in 14:17.

It is customary when speaking of persons to use the personal pronouns, I, thou, he, they. While personification of things material and immaterial is common, such uses of the personal pronouns are quite obvious and do not cause confusion. The use of personal pronouns in relation to the Holy Spirit in Scripture is sufficiently frequent to justify a conclusion that He is a person.... The Greek of the New Testament is quite explicit in confirming the personality of the Holy Spirit by use of the pronouns. As πνεῦμα is neuter, it would naturally take neuter pronouns to have grammatical agreement. In several instances, however, the

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masculine pronouns are found (John 15:26; 16:13, 14). The use of the masculine form, ἐκεῖνος, makes the personality of the Holy Spirit clearly the intent of the passage. It is inconceivable that the Scriptures should turn from the normal neuter to the masculine unless a person is in view.41

1947—Geoffrey F. Nuttall (1911–2007)42
1947—René Pache (1904–79)43
1949—Walter T. Conner (1877–1952)44
1949—Henry C. Thiessen (1883–1947)45

The personal pronoun is used of Him. Take John 16:7–8 and 13–15 where the masculine pronoun 'He' is used twelve times with reference to the Holy Spirit. Now that is a very striking thing. Jesus says, 'Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth' (v. 13)—and so on. And this, of course, is of particular importance when we remember that the noun itself is a neuter noun, so the pronoun attached to it should be in the neuter. Now this is not always the case but it is in the vast majority of instances. It is most interesting and it shows how important it is to realise that the inspiration of Scripture goes down even to words like pronouns! So that is the first argument, and those who do not believe in the person of the Spirit will have to explain why almost the whole Scripture uses the masculine pronoun.46

1952—W. H. Rigg47
1953—William Hendriksen (1900–82)48
1955—W. H. Griffith Thomas (1861–1924)49


Here **accidence** refers to the rudiments of grammar. The Greek word for “spirit” is *pneuma* (from which we derive English words that have to do with air, such as *pneumatic* and *pneumonia*) and is a neuter gender word. According to every normal rule of grammar, any pronoun that would be substituted for this neuter noun would itself have to be neuter. However, in several places the biblical writers did not follow this normal rule of grammar, and instead of using a neuter pronoun when referring to the neuter noun *pneuma*, they deliberately contradicted the grammatical rule and used masculine pronouns. Indeed, they used two different kinds of pronouns, all in the masculine gender. This shows that they considered the Spirit to be a person and not merely a thing.

**John 16:13–14.** In this passage the masculine demonstrative pronoun is used for *pneuma*. (Demonstrative pronouns are the words *this* and *that.*) The same demonstrative pronoun is found twice in these verses: once in verse 13 (“But when He”) and once in verse 14 (“He will glorify Me”). In these last two instances, instead of the translation “He,” the better translation would be “that one.”

**John 15:26.** Here the masculine demonstrative pronoun occurs referring to the Spirit. Some explain the gender of the pronoun as referring back to the masculine word *Helper*. However, this is less likely, since *Spirit* is the nearer antecedent.

These departures from the normal rules of grammar in connection with the use of several kinds of pronouns are evidences that for John and Paul the Holy Spirit was more than a mere influence—He was a person.
The fact that Jesus spoke of another Paraclete shows that the Paraclete must be as personal as Jesus himself. These considerations completely override the neuter gender of the noun pneuma in Greek. Moreover, they are in full agreement with the striking use of the masculine pronoun (ekëinos) of the Spirit in John 16:13 (placed immediately before pneuma) which underlines the personal characteristic of the Spirit.

By no stretch of imagination can the teaching in these Paraclete sayings

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be made to refer to [an] impersonal force.67

1981—Robert L. Thomas (1928–)68
1983–85—Millard J. Erickson (1932–):

The first evidence of the Spirit’s personality is the use of the masculine pronoun in representing him. Since the word πνεῦμα (pneuma) is neuter and since pronouns are to agree with their antecedents in person, number, and gender, we would expect the neuter pronoun to be used to represent the Holy Spirit. Yet in John 16:13–14 we find an unusual phenomenon. As Jesus describes the Holy Spirit’s ministry, he uses a masculine pronoun (ἐκεῖνος—ekeionos [sic]) where we would expect a neuter pronoun. The only possible antecedent in the immediate context is “Spirit of truth” (v. 13). [Footnote: It has been suggested that a possible antecedent is the masculine noun παράκλητος (parakletos) in verse 7. Its distance from the pronoun makes this a rather unlikely possibility, however.] Either John in reporting Jesus’ discourse made a grammatical error at this point (this is unlikely since we do not find any similar error elsewhere in the Gospel), or he deliberately chose to use the masculine to convey to us the fact that Jesus is referring to a person, not a thing.70

1983—Robert Hanna71
1983—Bruce Milne72
1987—David F. Wells (1939–)73
1987—J. I. Packer (1926–)74


Here [John 15:26] Jesus refers to the Spirit as whom and as He. Some scholars may reply that in this text the Greek word for Helper is not the masculine gender and that, according to the rules of grammar, the pronoun must agree with the noun in gender. However, there is an intervening clause ("the Spirit of truth who…") that uses the neuter gender for Spirit. It is followed immediately by the word He. If the writer meant for the Spirit to be thought of as an impersonal neuter force there would be no reason to use the masculine pronoun He in such close conjunction with a neuter noun.

If the matter is unclear in John 15, it is crystal clear in John 16:13… Here there is no grammatical reason whatsoever to use the masculine pronoun He unless Jesus intends in this didactic passage to declare that the Holy Spirit is a person.78

It is no accident that in 15:26, when Jesus goes on to say “he will testify about me,” John uses the masculine pronoun ekeinos, even though it breaks concord with the (formally) neuter status of the preceding relative pronoun: i.e., “the Spirit is thought of in personal terms” (Barrett, p. 482).79

79D. A. Carson, The Gospel According to John, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), p. 529. Cf. also idem, For the Love of God: A Daily Companion for Discovering the Riches of God’s Word, vol. 1 (Wheaton: Crossway, 1998), entry for March 24: “In Greek, every noun is grammatically designated masculine, feminine, or neuter. The word for ‘spirit’ is neuter. When a pronoun referring to ‘spirit’ is used, it too should be neuter. In this chapter, however, the pronoun is sometimes masculine, breaking grammatical form, a way of gently affirming that the Holy Spirit is personal.”
1994—Wayne Grudem (1948–)83
1994—Richard A. Young (1944–)84
1996—Sinclair B. Ferguson (1948–)85
1996—Robert A. Morey (1946–)86
1996—Peter Toon (1939–)87
1996—Thomas F. Torrance (1913–2007)88
1996—W. E. Vine (1873–1949)89
1997—S. Lewis Johnson (1915–2004)90
1998—James R. White (1962–)91
1999—David Coffey92
2000—Donald G. Bloesch (1928–2010)93
2000—Gary M. Burge (1952–)94
2000—Raoul Dederen95
2001—Harold F. Carl96
2001—Don Garlington97


95Raoul Dederen, Handbook of Seventh-Day Adventist Theology, 12 vols. (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 12:134.
Pneuma ("spirit") is a neuter word in Greek (although the corresponding Hebrew term, ruah, is feminine). However, the biblical writers sometimes use masculine pronouns with it, emphasizing the personality of the Spirit. In John 14:17, Jesus speaks of “the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.” (Cf. John 14:26; 16:14; 1 Cor. 12:11.)


Andrew T. Lincoln, The Gospel According to Saint John, BNTC (London: Con-
A COUNTERARGUMENT

An impressive number of exegetes and theologians have advanced the argument we are challenging, so we present this simple counterargument respectfully and corrigibly. We reached this conclusion independently of others, and we were pleased to discover later that a few others have likewise challenged the argument (see below). So we are encouraged that we are not alone in our dissent.

Our counterargument is simple: The common argument is invalid because the antecedent of the masculine ἐκεῖνος is not the neuter πνεῦμα but the masculine παράκλητος. (See the propositional displays in tables 2–4, which highlight the masculine pronouns that agree with παράκλητος and underline the two neuter pronouns that agree with πνεῦμα.) Of course, we agree that the Holy Spirit is a person, and the three passages in John 14–16 are good places to advance that argument. But the basis of that argument is not a grammatical-theological connection between ἐκεῖνος and πνεῦμα. Rather, its basis is contextual, including the nature of a παράκλητος and how Jesus speaks about the personal function of the πνεῦμα.

Table 2 displays ἐκεῖνος ὑμᾶς διδάσκει πάντα as the main clause with either ὁ παράκλητος functioning as the pendent nominative or ἐκεῖνος functioning as a pleonastic pronoun—the difference is inconsequential.113
Table 2. The Antecedent of Ἐκεῖνος in John 14:26

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NA27</th>
<th>ESV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ὁ δὲ παράκλητος, τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον, ὃ πέμψει ὁ πατὴρ ἐν τῷ ὄνοματί μου, Ἐκεῖνος ὑμᾶς διδάξει πάντα καὶ ὑπομνήσει ὑμᾶς πάντα ἃ εἶπον ὑμῖν [ἐγω].</td>
<td>But 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 that I have said to you.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here is how Wallace describes the pendent nominative and pleonastic pronoun:

This nominative substantive is the logical rather than syntactical subject at the beginning of a sentence, followed by a sentence in which this subject is now replaced by a pronoun in the case required by the syntax. The pendent nominative carries one of two semantic forces: emotion or emphasis. The second usage, which is far more common, could be labeled nominative of reference. (In fact, a helpful key to testing whether a certain nom. is pendent is the question, Can I translate the nom. at the beginning of the clause, “With reference to…?”)

Occasionally a demonstrative is used when no ambiguity would result if it had been deleted. This especially occurs in the nominative case: The demonstrative repeats a subject just mentioned (usually a substantive participle), even though the verb is not introduced until after the pronoun. In effect, the pronoun resumes the subject that is now separated from the verb by the participial construction. The pronoun is called pleonastic, redundant, or resumptive. In such cases, the pronoun is usually best left untranslated. However, at times, it has great rhetorical power and the English should reflect this.114

Τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον is appositional to ὁ παράκλητος, and the antecedent of ὃ is τὸ πνεῦμα. “The appositional clause here can therefore be regarded as parenthetical: ‘The Counselor (the Holy Spirit whom [ὁ] the Father will send in my name) will teach you all things….’”115

Taking the antecedent of Ἐκεῖνος as ὁ παράκλητος thus is most plausible from a grammatical standpoint.

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Table 3. The Antecedent of ἐκεῖνος in John 15:26

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NA²⁷</th>
<th>ESV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Ὅταν ἐλθῇ ὁ παράκλητος  
δὲν ἐγὼ πέμψω υμῖν παρὰ τοῦ πατρός,  
τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας  
ὁ παρὰ τοῦ πατρός ἐκπορεύεται,  
ἐκεῖνος μαρτυρήσει περὶ ἐμοῦ. | But when the Helper comes,  
whom I will send to you from the Father,  
the Spirit of truth,  
who proceeds from the Father,  
he will bear witness about me. |

Table 3 displays ἐκεῖνος μαρτυρήσει περὶ ἐμοῦ, and the next subordinate clause is the opening words: Ὅταν ἐλθῇ ὁ παράκλητος. Again, “the appositional clause headed by τὸ πνεῦμα is parenthetical: ‘Whenever the Counselor comes (the Spirit of truth who is coming from the Father), he will testify concerning me.’”¹¹⁶ So taking the antecedent of ἐκεῖνος as ὁ παράκλητος is most plausible grammatically.

Had the evangelist wanted to show the Spirit’s personality, he would in fact have written something like Ὅταν ἐλθῇ τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας, ὁ παράκλητος, ἐκεῖνος μαρτυρήσει περὶ ἐμοῦ. The fact that πνεῦμα and not παράκλητος is the appositive renders the philological argument in these two texts void.¹¹⁷

Table 4. The Antecedent of ἐκεῖνος in John 16:7–14

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NA²⁷</th>
<th>ESV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| ἀλλ᾽ ἐγὼ τὴν ἀλήθειαν λέγω ὑμῖν.  
συμφέρει ὑμῖν ἵνα ἐγὼ ἀπέλθω.  
ἐὰν γὰρ μὴ ἀπέλθω,  
ὁ παράκλητος οὐκ ἐλεύσεται πρὸς ὑμᾶς:  
ἐὰν δὲ πορευθῶ,  
pέμψω αὐτὸν πρὸς ὑμᾶς. | Nevertheless, I tell you the truth:  
it is to your advantage that I go away,  
for if I do not go away,  
the Helper will not come to you.  
But if I go,  
I will send him to you. |

¹¹⁶Ibid.
¹¹⁷Ibid., p. 108.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Greek</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>καὶ ἐλθὼν ἐκεῖνος</td>
<td>And when he comes,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ἐλέγξει τὸν κόσμον</td>
<td>he will convict the world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>περὶ ἁμαρτίας</td>
<td>concerning sin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>καὶ περὶ δικαιοσύνης</td>
<td>and righteousness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>καὶ περὶ κρίσεως</td>
<td>and judgment:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>περὶ ἁμαρτίας μὲν,</td>
<td>concerning sin,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ὁτὶ οὐ πιστεύουσιν εἰς ἐμὲ·</td>
<td>because they do not believe in me;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>περὶ δικαιοσύνης δὲ,</td>
<td>concerning righteousness,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ὁτὶ πρὸς τὸν πατέρα ὑπάγω</td>
<td>because I go to the Father,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>καὶ οὐκέτι θεωρεῖτέ με·</td>
<td>and you will see me no longer;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>περὶ δὲ κρίσεως,</td>
<td>concerning judgment,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ὁτὶ ὁ ἄρχων τοῦ κόσμου τούτου κέκριται.</td>
<td>because the ruler of this world is judged.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ὁ δὲ Εὐαγγελιστὴς Ἡλίας, ἐκεῖνος ἐμὲ ὁδὸν ἔδωκεν ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ πᾶσῃ·

ὅταν δὲ ἔλθῃ ἐκεῖνος,

τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας,

ὁδηγήσει ὑμᾶς ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ πᾶσῃ·

ὁ δὲ Εὐαγγελιστὴς Ἡλίας, ἐκεῖνος ἐμὲ ὁδὸν ἔδωκεν ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ πᾶσῃ·

ὅταν δὲ ἔλθῃ ἐκεῖνος,

τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας,

ὁδηγήσει ὑμᾶς ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ πᾶσῃ;

ὅταν δὲ ἔλθῃ ἐκεῖνος,

τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας,

ὁδηγήσει ὑμᾶς ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ πᾶσῃ·

ὅταν δὲ ἔλθῃ ἐκεῖνος,

τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας,

ὁδηγήσει ὑμᾶς ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ πᾶσῃ;

ὅταν δὲ ἔλθῃ ἐκεῖνος,

τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας,

ὁδηγήσει ὑμᾶς ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ πᾶσῃ;

ὅταν δὲ ἔλθῃ ἐκεῖνος,

τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας,

ὁδηγήσει ὑμᾶς ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ πᾶσῃ;

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τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας,

ὁδηγήσει ὑμᾶς ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ πᾶσῃ;

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ὁδηγήσει ὑμᾶς ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ πᾶσῃ;

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ὁδηγήσει ὑμᾶς ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ πᾶσῃ;

ὅταν δὲ ἔλθῃ ἐκεῖνος,

τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας,

ὁδηγήσει ὑμᾶς ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ πᾶσῃ;

ὅταν δὲ ἔλθῃ ἐκεῖνος,

τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας,

ὁδηγήσει ὑμᾶς ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ πᾶσῃ;

ὅταν δὲ ἔλθῃ ἐκεῖνος,

τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας,

ὁδηγήσει ὑμᾶς ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ πᾶσῃ;

ὅταν δὲ ἔλθῃ ἐκεῖνος,

τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας,

ὁδηγήσει ὑμᾶς ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ πᾶσῃ;

ὅταν δὲ ἔλθῃ ἐκεῖνος,

τὸ πνεῦμα τertation
Table 4 is larger than tables 2–3 because the larger context is more important in this passage. Looking only at John 16:13–14 leads many to accept the argument that the antecedent of ἐκεῖνος is τὸ πνεῦμα. But once again, taking the antecedent of ἐκεῖνος as ὁ παράκλητος is the only grammatical possibility, and it is not a stretch at all given the structure of the sentence. There are more words in between the latter two occurrences of ἐκεῖνος and ὁ παράκλητος, but the proximity is not sufficiently insurmountable to discard normal grammatical rules that the author himself has already employed twice previously in chapters 14 and 15.

ADHERENTS OF THE COUNTERARGUMENT

While many have used the prevailing argument over at least the last 500 years, some have challenged it and offered a much more plausible reading. The earliest dissenter we have found is Leonard Woods. Several others have followed, but few seem to be aware of their position.

1851—Leonard Woods (1774–1854):

Some Trinitarian writers have argued from the use of the pronoun ἐκεῖνος here applied to the Spirit. But the argument is plainly inconclusive. This word, which is of the masculine gender, relates to the masculine noun παράκλητος. If the Spirit is called παράκλητος, it is a matter of course that the masculine pronoun should be used in reference to him. It does indeed appear rather favorable to the doctrine of the personality of the Holy Spirit, that he is called ὁ παράκλητος, the Comforter, or Advocate; because this, in its common use, is a personal appellation. But here the argument stops. There is no reason to think that the masculine pronoun would have been used in reference to πνεῦμα, the Spirit, had not a masculine noun been first introduced, with which the pronoun could agree in gender. Considering the genius of the Greek language, which applies words of different genders so indiscriminately, we must look upon any argument derived merely from the gender of the noun, or pronoun, as unsatisfactory. Indeed if the use of the masculine gender is here made an argument for the personality of the Holy Spirit; the use of the neuter gender in the word πνεῦμα, and in the pronouns and adjectives agreeing with it, may with equal reason be made an argument against it.


Nouns in Greek are in either one of three genders. They are either masculine, feminine, or neuter. They have certain endings which indicate to what gender they belong. The word “spirit” happens to be in the neuter gender. But that does not mean that the Greeks considered that which

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118Thanks to Roque Albuquerque for pointing us to this source.

is designated by the word “spirit” as being an inanimate object and therefore impersonal.

Because the Greek word for “spirit” is neuter, Greek grammar requires that the pronoun used when referring to that which is designated by this Greek word, must be neuter.

The same procedure applies in the case where the word “which” is used. In John 14:17, 26, the pronoun is in the neuter gender, and yet the translators use the word “whom.” Why did they not follow the same procedure in the cases where they used “which”? In all these instances the pronoun is neuter in the Greek text. They also offer “Him” as the translation of the neuter pronoun of the third person (John 14:17). In every instance the pronoun should be “whom” not “which.”

But again, in John 14:26, the word “he” is from a masculine pronoun in Greek. But the pronoun here is masculine because its antecedent “Comforter” is masculine. The masculine gender of this pronoun does not teach the personality of the Spirit any more than the pronoun in the neuter gender speaks of the Spirit as an impersonal force. The genders of the pronouns in the Greek text which refer to the Holy Spirit are determined by the genders of their antecedents.

Thus, the masculine gender of the Greek text does not teach the personality of the Spirit, nor can one therefore erroneously infer that the Spirit is not a Person but only an impersonal force just because the word “spirit” is neuter and its pronoun is therefore neuter.


16. The Spirit itself. Or, “the Spirit Himself,” as in many versions (see RSV). The grammatical gender of the word for “Spirit,” Gr. pneuma, is neuter. Consequently, the pronoun “itself” must likewise be neuter in the Greek. When the Holy Spirit is referred to by the masculine name paraklētos, “Comforter,” the masculine pronoun is used (see John 15:26; 16:7, 13). It is obvious that the personality of the Holy Spirit cannot be argued by the gender of the pronouns that may be used (cf. AA [Acts of the Apostles, E. G. White, 1911] 53; TM [Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers, E. G. White, 1911] 64).

1980—Curt S. Mayes argues in his ThM thesis on the subject that the common argument is “indefensible”:

The general rule—always the starting point—states that a pronoun agrees with its reference in gender and number. What justification can be given for choosing the construction ad sensum over the general rule in this case [John 14:26]? πνεῦμα is preferred to παράκλητος on the basis of proximity. This, in the writer’s mind, is incredible. That a referent which is not in concord, but a few words nearer in the text, should be chosen over a noun which agrees strictly and gives just as good a sense is


nearly indefensible. Pronominal referents by no means have to be the nearest noun.

The fact that John often uses ἐκεῖνος as the equivalent of a personal pronoun (= he or they) may be significant for the Spirit’s personality. But the question is, how is the masculine form in this passage to be explained? Is it meant to teach theology or agree with παράκλητος? Surely the latter is a grammatically sound conclusion.

1996 and 2003—Daniel B. Wallace briefly refutes the common argument in his grammar and more fully in his journal article cited previously:

The use of ἐκεῖνος here is frequently regarded by students of the NT to be an affirmation of the personality of the Spirit. Such an approach is based on the assumption that the antecedent of ἐκεῖνος is πνεῦμα: “the masculine pronoun ἐκεῖνος is used in John 14:26 and 16:13–14 to refer to the neuter noun πνεῦμα to emphasize the personality of the Holy Spirit.”

But this is erroneous. In all these Johannine passages, πνεῦμα is appositional to a masculine noun. The gender of ἐκεῖνος thus has nothing to do with the natural gender of πνεῦμα. The antecedent of ἐκεῖνος, in each case, is παράκλητος, not πνεῦμα. John 14:26 reads ὁ δὲ παράκλητος, τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἁγιόν, ὁ πέμψει ὁ πατὴρ ἐν τῷ ὄνομα μου. ἐκεῖνος ὑμᾶς διδάξει πάντα (“the Comforter, the Holy Spirit whom the Father sends in my name, that one will teach you all things”). πνεῦμα not only is appositional to παράκλητος, but the relative pronoun that follows it is neuter! This hardly assists the grammatical argument for the Spirit’s personality. In John 16:13–14 the immediate context is deceptive: ὅταν δὲ ἐλθῇ ἐκεῖνος, τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας, ὁδηγήσει ὑμᾶς ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ πάσῃ ... ἐκεῖνος ἐμὲ δοξάσει (“when ever that one comes—the Spirit of truth—he will guide you in all truth… He will glorify me”). The ἐκεῖνος reaches back to ν 7, where παράκλητος is mentioned. Thus, since παράκλητος is masculine, so is the pronoun. Although one might argue that the Spirit’s personality is in view in these passages, the view must be based on the nature of a παράκλητος and the things said about the Comforter, not on any supposed grammatical subtleties. Indeed, it is difficult to find any text in which πνεῦμα is grammatically referred to with the masculine gender.

There is no text in the NT that clearly or even probably affirms the personality of the Holy Spirit through the route of Greek grammar. The basis for this doctrine must be on other grounds.

In sum, I have sought to demonstrate in this paper that the grammatical basis for the Holy Spirit’s personality is lacking in the NT, yet this is frequently, if not usually, the first line of defense of that doctrine by many evangelical writers.

123Ibid., pp. 27, 33.
124Wallace, Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics, pp. 331–32.
The word Spirit in Greek (pneuma) is in the neuter gender, whereas the word Paraclete (parakletos) is in the masculine. It is often said that in this verse John observes the neuter gender of the word Spirit in his use of pronouns (ho, auto), but in later passages he will use masculine pronouns with the word Spirit (14:26; 15:26; 16:8, 13–14), suggesting that this Spirit is not simply an impersonal force or atmosphere. However, in each case the antecedent is the masculine word parakletos (Paraclete), so no such significance is attached to the masculine pronouns (Wallace 1996: 331–32). The personhood of the Spirit is conveyed in these texts by what is said about the Paraclete, not by the grammar.  

Charles R. Swindoll (1934– ) and Roy B. Zuck (1932– ) present a grammatically sound explanation of the passage, though they do not mention the prevailing view.  

It is often argued that the use of the Greek masculine pronoun ἐκεῖνος (ekenos, he) for the Spirit in passages such as John 14:26; 15:26; and 16:13–14 affirms the personality of the Holy Spirit (Barrett 1978: 482; Borchert 2002: 159; Morris 1995: 583 n. 73 [citing Westcott]; 606 n. 64; 621 n. 27; and others cited in Wallace 1996: 331 n. 42). However, the most likely reason for John’s use of the masculine pronoun in these passages is that the antecedent is the masculine noun ὁ παράκλητος (ho parakletos, the helping presence). If so, John’s use of a masculine pronoun to refer to the Spirit is best explained as a function of grammar rather than theology, and arguments for the personality of the Holy Spirit must be made on other grounds (so rightly Wallace 1996: 331–32, who points out that it is difficult to find any text where the neuter noun πνεῦμα [pneuma, spirit/Spirit] is grammatically referred to by the masculine).  

A closer study, however, shows that Jesus isn’t breaking the conventions of Greek grammar. The masculine pronoun is never applied to the neuter pneuma. Rather, in every instance, it refers back to the title Paraclete (parakletos). As this is a masculine noun, there is nothing at all noteworthy about the pronouns. (The word pneuma just happens to be in the vicinity, as a further description of the Paraclete.) Not everyone is guilty of the pronominal argument. A number of works, past and present, rightly identify the referent. But this, of course, merely obeys the rules of gender agreement and so attracts no comment. It is only recently that the mistake has been overtly flagged by Daniel Wallace..

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As we have seen, the pronominal argument has gained a wide hearing over the past century. Because of its popularity and its impeccable pedigree, scholars and preachers are slow—perhaps even reluctant—to note Wallace’s corrective. So, for example, the various commentaries and theologies which have been published since 1996 which continue to repeat the fallacy.\footnote{Andrew Malone, “Essential Theology: The Personhood of the Holy Spirit and Masculine Pronouns in John’s Gospel,” Essentials (Autumn 2005): 7–8.}

2007—Graham Cole:

We should also note one argument for the personhood of the Spirit—common in evangelical circles—which must not be embraced too facilely. The argument contends that in John’s account of Jesus’ teaching about the Holy Spirit, although “Spirit” (pneuma) is neuter, the masculine pronoun ekeinos (translated “he” e.g., ESV) rather than the neuter one ekeino (which would be translated “it”) is used repeatedly (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:8, 13–14)…

However, David Wallace argues in his Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics that the antecedent of the masculine pronoun in the key passages is not the neuter “Spirit” (to pneuma) but the masculine “the Paraclete” (ho parakletos) and thus the pronominal argument is a fallacious one in this instance. If Wallace is right, then the pronominal argument for the personhood of the Spirit is far less compelling than Packer and many others seem to think.\footnote{Graham A. Cole, He Who Gives Life: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007), pp. 67–68.}

\section*{OBJECTIONS TO THE COUNTERARGUMENT}

While some of the proponents of the argument seem unaware of other possible interpretations,\footnote{Francis Turretin: “For no reason can be given why such a change should be made in Scripture except that thus the person of the Holy Spirit may be more clearly designated.” Charles Hodge: “Here there is no possibility of accounting for the use of the personal pronoun He (ekeinos) on any other ground than the personality of the Spirit.” R. C. Sproul: “Here there is no grammatical reason whatsoever to use the masculine pronoun He unless Jesus intends in this didactic passage to declare that the Holy Spirit is a person.”} others offer two related objections to the counterargument: (1) the nearest possible antecedent is πνεῦμα and therefore must be the right one, and (2) in the case of John 16:13–14, παράκλητος is too far away from ἐκεῖνος to be its antecedent.\footnote{A. T. Robertson exemplifies this objection: “In 16:13 a more striking example occurs, ὅταν δὲ ἔλθῃ ἐκεῖνος, τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας. Here one has to go back six lines to ἐκεῖνος again and seven to παράκλητος. It is more evident therefore in this passage that John is insisting on the personality of the Holy Spirit, when the grammatical gender so easily called for ἐκεῖνο.”}

Does the nearness of ἐκεῖνος to πνεῦμα indicate that it is its antecedent? No. Function rather than proximity is the determiner. In 14:26 the logical subject of the sentence is παράκλητος, and τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας is an appositive followed by a neuter adjectival
relative clause: ὃς πέμψει ὁ πατὴρ ἐν τῷ ὀνόματί μου. To resume his flow of thought, Jesus uses the masculine ἐκεῖνος indicating that it is the παράκλητος he is talking about. In 15:26 we find nearly the same syntactical structure. Jesus is discussing the παράκλητος. But this time there is also a masculine adjectival relative clause modifying παράκλητος: ὃν ἐγὼ πέμψω υμῖν παρὰ τοῦ πατρός. This is significant, because it shows that John knows how to match the gender of his pronouns with their antecedents. The masculine pronoun ὃν agrees in gender with its antecedent, παράκλητος, and the neuter pronoun ὃ agrees in gender with its antecedent, πνεῦμα. It is to be expected, then, that ἐκεῖνος points back to παράκλητος rather than πνεῦμα.

Does the distance of ἐκεῖνος to παράκλητος in John 16:7–14 make it impossible or even unlikely that they stand in a pronoun–antecedent relationship to one another? On first glance, it might seem so. But upon closer investigation, it is clear that there is no other option. First, the distance (6 verses or 69 words) is not as far as it may seem. Though παράκλητος occurs in v. 7 and ἐκεῖνος in v. 13, there is only one sentence (vv. 8–11) between the two. And that sentence, whose subject is the παράκλητος, is an aside that interrupts the flow of thought. Verse 7 flows seamlessly right into vv. 12–14.

Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you…. 13When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. 14He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

Second, John uses masculine pronouns between παράκλητος in v. 7 and ἐκεῖνος in v. 13 to point back to παράκλητος, demonstrating that the Helper is the subject all the way through. At the end of v. 7 he uses αὐτόν and at the beginning of v. 8 he uses ἐκεῖνος. Third, he uses the masculine again after its occurrence at the beginning of v. 13. Verse 14 continues the flow of thought by beginning with ἐκεῖνος.134 From the beginning to the end, the one under discussion is the παράκλητος, which perfectly accounts for the repeated use of

134In v. 13 he uses ἀυτὸν, which, though it could be neuter, everyone rightly parses as masculine.
CONCLUSION

The consistent testimony of Scripture is that the Holy Spirit is a person, but John’s use of ἐκεῖνος in John 14:26, 15:26, and 16:13–14 has absolutely no bearing on the subject. A careful analysis of the texts in their contexts with sound principles of grammatical gender firmly in place demonstrates unequivocally that the antecedent of ἐκεῖνος is the masculine παράκλητος. The gender of the nouns and pronouns in these chapters neither supports nor challenges the doctrine of the Spirit’s personality. It is time to put this erroneous argument to rest once and for all.