

The Convicting/Convincing Work of the Holy Spirit – *John 16:5-15*

Introduction – Jesus returns to the topic of His impending departure and the great advantage that departure will be for the disciples and the world. In 15:26 we are told that the Father will send the Helper and in 16:7 we are told that the Son will send Him (and these verses argue for the “filioque” clause in the Western Nicene Creed which states that the Holy Spirit “...proceeds from the Father and the Son.” While true, this is incidental to the main point of this passage. The Holy Spirit will be sent to the disciples and through Him the world will be convicted, the Word will be completed, and Jesus will be glorified.

Sorrow Has Filled Your Heart (vv5-6) – Jesus had meant everything to them, and they had left all to follow Him. He just told them to expect persecution (15:18-20) but He is leaving them. They might have thought, “why doesn’t He stay here and protect us?” It is hard on this side of the Cross (and Resurrection and all the events following) to sympathize with how the disciples felt and the confusion they had. And yet, how often for us do the words “*we know all things work together for good*” fall flat in the midst of one’s own present circumstances? In such times remember how much the disciples could not see then, but now know. And notice, Jesus says, “...now I go away...” as though this was His decision. And so it was (John 10:17-18). Whatever violence was used to remove Christ, it was actually His voluntary work at His appointed time (Acts 4:27-28).

The Advantage of Christ’s Departure (v7) – Christ understands their sorrow, nevertheless, He is going to depart lest the Helper (the Advocate, the Comforter, the Holy Spirit) will not come. At first glance, it isn’t clear why the Holy Spirit could not come until after Christ departed. I believe the problem is not a strange metaphysical problem (the Spirit and the Son could not both be present upon the earth). By “departed,” Jesus means more than His going away. The reigning work of Jesus through His Holy Spirit could not be fully inaugurated until His vicarious death, His justifying resurrection, and His coronating ascension and exaltation had occurred. These events really changed the world (2 Cor 5:17-21). The outpouring of the Spirit would change the power of the Message going forth; and this is what Jesus now describes.

Convict and Convince the World (v8) – When the Holy Spirit comes, Jesus says He will convict (*elegcho*) the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. While *elegcho* does have the sense of bringing a shaming conviction, Jesus is making the point that this activity is so wonderful that it surpasses His physical presence with them. The word is also translated “convince” (i.e. 1 Cor 14:24, 2 Tim 4:2) with the idea of persuading someone to the truth (about sin, righteousness, and judgment). At Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit comes and Peter preaches, “...they were cut to the heart, and said...” *Men and brethren, what shall we do?”* (Acts 2:37). They were convinced...and convicted.

It is clear that bringing the message of the gospel, that Jesus is the Son of God, that we all stand condemned in our sin, that His death provided the only payment for those sins, and that we must call on Him in faith to be saved, is an impossible message to convey and convince the world by human means. Paul would say that we plant and water, but only God brings forth the increase (1 Cor 3:6-7). “*the men of the world are very corrupt and ill-principled in reference to the doctrine of the gospel, and have very many mountains standing in the way thereof...(yet)...The Spirit of the Lord is an effectual convincer where he pleaseth to work*” (George Hutchison). Here is what the Spirit convinces the world of –

“Of sin, because they do not believe in Me” (v9) – All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23) – and nobody believes that in their spiritually dead state (Eph 2:1ff). No one believes they need a Savior and so no one believes that Jesus is that Savior until the Spirit convinces them of such by granting them faith (Eph 2:8-9).

“Of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more” (v10) – Jesus now sits on the throne of righteousness. And that righteousness is imputed to His elect by means of the Holy Spirit making the risen Christ our justification (Rom 1:4, 5:8-10, 19). The Spirit not only convicts us of our sin, and therefore our lack of any righteousness of our own, but then convinces us that Christ’s righteousness is ours so that we stand before God justified (Rom 4:25-5:2, 8:1, 29-30).

“Of judgment because the ruler of this world is judged” (v11) – The work on the cross also marked the end of the rule of Satan upon this world (John 12:31, Col 2:15), and when someone is converted, they are freed from their slavery to sin (Rom 6:17-18). Jesus came to destroy the devil’s work (1 John 3:8). He died to destroy the devil (Heb 2:14). The devil was the prince of this world, but he was judged on the cross, thrown down from his place of rule, and left to wander about like a roaring lion. Satan’s name means “accuser” and his primary role is that of accusing – God, truth, us, reality. But no one can bring a charge against God’s elect (Rom 8:33). We are saved by grace alone and so the devil is the one left judged.

How and When Does the Spirit Do This? (vv12-13) – Notice above that every paragraph, almost every sentence, is backed up by the Word of God. The New Testament is the result of the Holy Spirit guiding the apostles “*into all truth.*” The Word of God is Spirit-breathed (2 Tim 3:16) and so the Bible you hold in your hand is the fulfillment of these verses. The Spirit now accompanies this Word when it is read or preached and, according to His will (for He blows wherever He wishes like the wind) this Word is used by Him like a spiritual knife, cutting you open, convicting and convincing you at His pleasure (4:12-13). Preachers use the Word, or rather the Spirit uses the preachers, to build upon the foundation laid by the apostles (Eph 2:20, 4:11-16). Through the apostles, history (Christ died) is laid out in doctrine (Christ died for our sins). The Spirit opens our eyes to this body of doctrine and enables us increasingly to embrace it and experience its power (Eph 1:15-21). This Word also teaches us of things to come, for instance the clear warning for that generation about the destruction of Jerusalem which happened as prophesied in 70AD.

And All to Glorify Christ (vv14-15) – The purpose of the Spirit is to point people to Christ. He is like the bright floodlights over a pitch-black field. The floodlights are not there to be looked at. They are there so that we might see the field. Misinterpreting this passage leads some to look at the light rather than to see from the light, for a “new word” from the Spirit, neglecting the very Word that has been given. The Spirit works for the glory of Christ. He does not work for His own glory, nor for the honor of a man He may inspire. He seals us and is our guarantee, and all to the praise of the gracious glory of God the Father Who has done this work through Jesus Christ (Eph 1:13-14).

Convincing the World; Convincing You – The result of the Spirit’s coming to the apostles is the Bible held in your hands. That same Spirit testifies to you personally and to world generally of the truth of that Word. That same Spirit has taken that Word and transformed millions of lives over the centuries and continues to do so. It is this Spirit who testifies to our spirit that we also are children of God (Rom 8:16) and Who then leads us in our fruit-bearing walk (Gal 5:16, 22-23), and all to boast in Christ alone (Gal 6:14). Oh, that He might convict and convince you to such an end, and having done so, convict and convince you all the more.