

The Gospel of John (98) The Work of the Holy Spirit (2)

Introduction:

Last Lord's Day we began to examine this fifth declaration of our Lord Jesus in His farewell discourse to His disciples, which is contained in John 16:1-15. Here our Lord promised His disciples once again that upon His departure to His Father He would send them the Holy Spirit (cf. John 15:26). The Holy Spirit would enable them to be faithful witnesses of Him to the world, even as they faced the hatred and persecution of the fallen world to which they were to bear witness.

As we consider these 15 verses before us, we first read that Jesus told of the trial that His disciples would encounter (vs. 1-4a). This would take place after He departed from them (vs. 4b-6). But He assured them that He would send unto them the Holy Spirit who would give them guidance and power in their witness to the world (vs. 7-15). We learn from these verses that the work of advancing the kingdom of Jesus Christ involves resisting and overcoming the hostility of evil people and satan, and that, although the work is very daunting and difficult, the Lord has given the Holy Spirit to His people to enable them to accomplish their mission. Let us read the passage once again--**John 16:1-15**.

“These things I have spoken to you, that you should not be made to stumble. ²They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service. ³And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me. ⁴But these things I have told you, that when the time comes, you may remember that I told you of them.

“And these things I did not say to you at the beginning, because I was with you.”

⁵“But now I go away to Him who sent Me, and none of you asks Me, ‘Where are You going?’
⁶But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. ⁷Nevertheless 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 depart, I will send Him to you. ⁸And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: ⁹of sin, because they do not believe in Me; ¹⁰of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; ¹¹of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

¹²“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. ¹³However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. ¹⁴He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. ¹⁵All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you.

The outline we developed for this passage is as follows:

1. Jesus prepared His disciples for the trouble before them (16:1-4a)
2. Jesus prompted His disciples to ponder His departure to the Father (16:4b-6)
3. Jesus promised His disciples the help of the Holy Spirit in their witness to the world (16:7-15)
 - a. The Holy Spirit's conviction of the world (16:7-11)
 - b. The Holy Spirit's guidance of the church (16:12-15)

We addressed the first two points last week. Today we will address the third. In verses 7 through 15 we read that...

III. Jesus promised His disciples the help of the Holy Spirit in their witness to the world (16:7-15)

This section may be divided into two divisions. First, we read of the Holy Spirit's conviction of the world (16:7-11). Second, we read of the Holy Spirit's guidance of the church (16:12-15). Let us consider these.

A. The Holy Spirit's conviction of the world (16:7-11).

The Lord declared to His disciples in **verse 7**, "*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 depart, I will send Him to you.*" Christ Himself is the truth and He can say nothing other than what is true. But sometimes in sorrow or in times of distress, His people lose sight of this reality. Our Lord should not need to state that it is to our advantage He does what He does, for what He has done for us through His Son has amply testified to this reality. As Paul wrote, "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32). No, He should not need to His disciples, "*I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away*", but He does so, because He did not want their (our) hearts to be distraught. He had said these things before, but now He repeated them, for His desire was for their joy and comfort. In John 14:25ff we read His words,

"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."

John Gill (1697-1771), the Reformed Baptist who had served the church that Charles Spurgeon would later pastor in the 19th century, was rather wordy, but was very thorough in his explanation of matters. This is what he wrote regarding our Lord's words of assurance to His disciples that it was for their advantage that He go away.

Christ's death here, as in many other places in these discourses of His, is signified by going away, a departure, taking a sort of a journey, such an one as indeed is common to all mankind; death is the way of all the earth, and which Christ took by agreement with his Father; a dark way is the valley of the shadow of death, and so it was to Christ, who went away in the dark, under the hidings of His Father's face; it is a man's going to His long home, and a long journey it is, till He returns in the resurrection morn; though it was a short one to Christ, who rose again the third day. The phrase supposes the place and persons He went from, this world and His disciples; and the place and persons He went unto, the grave, heaven, his Father, the blessed Spirit, angels, and glorified saints; and is expressive of the voluntariness of His death; He was not fetched, or thrust, and forced away, but He went away of Himself; and is a very easy and familiar way of expressing death by, and greatly takes off the dread and terror of it; it is only moving from one place to another, as from one house, city, or country, to another; and shows, that it is not an annihilation of a man, either in body or soul, only a translating of Him from one place and state to another. Now the death of Christ was expedient, not only for Himself, which He does not mention; He being concerned more for the happiness of His people than of Himself; but for His disciples and all believers; for hereby a great many evils were prevented falling upon them, which otherwise would; as the heavy strokes of divine justice, the curses and condemnation of the law, the wrath and vengeance of God, and eternal death, ruin, and destruction; as well as many good things were hereby obtained for them; as the redemption of their souls from sin, law, hell, and death; peace; reconciliation, and atonement; the full and free forgiveness of all their sins, an everlasting righteousness, and eternal life. Moreover, Christ's going away was expedient for His people; since He went to open the way for them into the holiest of all, by His blood; to take possession of heaven in their name and stead; to prepare mansions of glory for them; to appear in the presence of God for them; to be their advocate, and make intercession for all good things for them; to transact all their business between God them; to

take care of their affairs; to present their petitions; to remove all charges and accusations; and to ask for, and see applied every blessing of grace unto them. The particular instanced in, in the text, of the expediency of it, is the mission and coming of the Spirit.

Indeed, our Lord spoke the truth, when He said, “*It is to your advantage that I go away.*” But perhaps the greatest and most relevant advantage to them for going away was that He would then send to them the Holy Spirit.

Our Lord had forewarned His disciples of the great challenges and hardship that they would face because of the hatred of the world for them and the rage of the devil against them. But He would send them the Holy Spirit that would assure them of the successful accomplishment of their mission. The Holy Spirit would be their “Helper”, which may be the best way to translate the Greek word here, which is *parakletos* (παράκλητος).¹ Not only would He lead them, but He would infuse courage in them, that no foe would prevail against them or prevent their successful accomplishment of their mission to bear witness of Him to the world.

How would the Holy Spirit assist them, specifically? The Lord said to His disciples in **verses 8 through 11**:

⁸And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: ⁹of sin, because they do not believe in Me; ¹⁰of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; ¹¹of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

The Holy Spirit would help His disciples in their mission by convicting the world. He would be the **Comforter** for His people, but He would first be the **Convictor** of the world. This work as the Convictor is, of course, with regard to bringing about the conversion of the world unto Jesus Christ. Here are the words of **John Calvin** on this verse:

He will convince the world; that is, He will not remain shut up in you, but; His power will go forth from you to be displayed to the whole world. He therefore promises to them a Spirit, who will be the Judge of the world, and by whom their preaching will be so powerful and efficacious, that it will bring into subjection those who formerly indulged in unbounded licentiousness, and were restrained by no fear or reverence.

The Holy Spirit both *convinces* the sinner of the fact of his guilt before God and He *condemns* the conscience of that sinner by causing him to know and feel the wrath of God upon him because of his sin. The Holy Spirit then *comforts* the believing sinner that God has forgiven his sins because of Jesus Christ.

The Lord Jesus spoke here of “the world”, which is not to be understood as including every person living throughout the world, but of people from all over the world. The mission of the disciples would not be as His was during His earthly ministry, which was to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. 15:24). But because of His glorification through His crucifixion, His resurrection, and His ascension to the throne of God in heaven, Jesus Christ became Lord of all the world. He was sending His disciples into all the world with the gospel, and the Holy Spirit would bring about the conversion of the world; that is, His kingdom would include Gentile believers along with a remnant of Jewish believers out of the world.

Here are the words of **Matthew Henry** on this matter:

See who they are whom He is to reprove and convince: *The world*, both Jew and Gentile. (1) He shall give the world the most powerful means of conviction, for the apostles shall go into all the world, backed by the Spirit, to preach the gospel, fully proved. (2) He shall sufficiently provide for the taking off and silencing of the objections and prejudices of the world against the gospel. Many an infidel was

¹ As here in the NKJV, but also in the NASV and ESV. In other places of the New Testament the preference for translation may be “Advocate” (1 John 2:1) or “Comforter.”

convinced of all and judged of all (1 Cor. 14:24). (3) He shall effectually and savingly convince many in the world, some in every age, in every place, in order to their conversion to the faith of Christ. Now this was an encouragement to the disciples, in reference to the difficulties they were likely to meet with, [1] that they should see good done, satan's kingdom *fall like lightning*, which would be their joy, as it was His. Even this malignant world the Spirit shall work upon; and the conviction of sinners is the comfort of faithful ministers. [2] That this would be the fruit of their services and sufferings, these should contribute very much to this good work.

For better understanding our Lord's words we might answer several questions. First, what do we mean by the Holy Spirit bringing "conviction" to individuals? This is not a mere human persuasion through reason and argument convincing a sinner that we are right and he is wrong about essential matters of the gospel. The Spirit's conviction is brought through the proclamation of the Word of God by a witness, but whose witness is blessed by the Spirit, who gives the sinner a keen sense of truth about the spiritual truths of the gospel. The conviction of the Holy Spirit, therefore, is a mind-changing, heart-stirring, will-shaping work in which the sinner becomes thoroughly convinced that he has been in ignorance of what he did not know, in error with what he thought he knew, and in rebellion to what is true, good, and right before God.

Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892) wrote of this work of conviction in bringing people to true conversion as one of the evidences of regeneration, or being born again:

A new and heavenly mind must be created by omnipotence, or the man must abide in death. You see, then, that we have before us a mighty work, for which we are of ourselves totally incapable. No minister living can save a soul; nor can all of us together, nor all the saints on earth or in heaven, work regeneration in a single person. The whole business on our part is the height of absurdity unless we regard ourselves as used by the Holy Ghost, and filled with His power. On the other hand, the marvels of regeneration which attend our ministry are the best seals and witnesses of our commission. Whereas the apostles could appeal to the miracles of Christ, and to those which they wrought in His name, we appeal to the miracles of the Holy Ghost, which are as divine and as real as those of our Lord Himself. These miracles are the creation of a new life in the human bosom, and the total change of the whole being of those upon whom the Spirit descends.

As this God-begotten spiritual life in men is a mystery, we shall speak to more practical effect if we dwell upon the signs following and accompanying it, for these are the things we must aim at. First, regeneration will be shown in *conviction of sin*. This we believe to be an indispensable mark of the Spirit's work; the new life as it enters the heart causes intense inward pain as one of its first effects. Though nowadays we hear of persons being healed before they have been wounded, and brought into a certainty of justification without ever having lamented their condemnation, we are very dubious as to the value of such healings and justifying. This style of things is not according to the truth. God never clothes men until He has first stripped them, nor does He quicken them by the gospel till first they are slain by the law. When you meet with persons in whom there is no trace of conviction of sin, you may be quite sure that they have not been wrought upon by the Holy Spirit; for "when He is come, He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment." When the Spirit of the Lord breathes on us, He withers all the glory of man, which is but as the flower of grass, and then He reveals a higher and abiding glory. Do not be astonished if you find this conviction of sin to be very acute and alarming; but, on the other hand, do not condemn those in whom it is less intense, for so long as sin is mourned over, confessed, forsaken, and abhorred, you have an evident fruit of the Spirit. Much of the horror and unbelief which goes with conviction is not of the Spirit of God, but comes of Satan or corrupt nature; yet there must be true and deep conviction of sin, and this the preacher must labour to produce, for where this is not felt the new birth has not taken place.²

Specifically, our Lord declared that the Holy Spirit will convict the unconverted world in three matters: "of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment." He then explained more precisely how these three

² Charles Spurgeon, **The Soul-Winner** (William B. Eerdmans, 1963), pp. 32f.

arenas of spiritual truth would be brought home to the sinner by the Holy Spirit. In verse 8 He expressed the fact and then in verses 9 and 10 He gave a more detailed explanation.

⁸And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: ⁹of sin, because they do not believe in Me; ¹⁰of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; ¹¹of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

Let us consider each one of these important matters. First, Jesus said that...

1. The Holy Spirit would convict the world “of sin, because they do not believe in Me.” (v. 9)

The Holy Spirit alone can accomplish this work of grace in sinners for their sin has so adversely affected them. As **Donald Carson** (b. 1947) expressed:

He convicts the world of its sin *because (hoti)* the people who constitute the world do not believe in Jesus (v. 9). If they did believe in Jesus, they would believe His statements about their guilt and turn to Him. As it is, their unbelief brings not only condemnation (3:18, 36) but willful ignorance of need. The world’s unbelief not only ensures that it will not receive life, it ensures that it cannot perceive that it walks in death and *needs* life. The Holy Spirit presses home the world’s sin *despite* the world’s unbelief; He convicts the world of sin *because* they do not believe in Jesus. This convicting work of the Paraclete is therefore gracious; it is designed to bring men and women of the world to recognize their need, and so turn to Jesus, and thus stop being ‘the world’.³

The Holy Spirit would convict the world “of sin.” Sin is biblically defined as the transgression of God’s law. God’s law is His Word written and preserved for us as our Holy Bible. We are commanded to both believe and to obey God’s Word, His law. The greatest “law”, if we could use that term in this context, is to believe the gospel, to believe on His Son, Jesus Christ. We declare God’s command to believe the gospel. Paul put forth the gospel before the pagan crowds in Athens in the form of a command, a “law” that was to be believed and obeyed. After he had rebuked them of their idolatry, He commanded them to repent, that is, to turn from their false worship to believe and obey the Lord Jesus Christ. Here are his words:

Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but *now commands all men everywhere to repent*, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead. (Acts 17:30-31)

When this message is proclaimed and the Holy Spirit performs His convicting work upon the heart, the hearer of this message is struck with a sense of his sin. The Holy Spirit enables him to understand and believe his own guilt and he feels shame for his former folly. He desires and seeks to believe and obey God’s command. As we read of some who had heard Paul in Athens. Acts 17:32 through 34 record,

And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, “We will hear you again on this matter.” ³³So Paul departed from among them. ³⁴However, some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

The Holy Spirit had convicted this man and woman and others of sin, for they had formerly not believed on Jesus Christ. This is the greatest sin which will bring the greatest cause for damnation: the refusal to believe on Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. God the Father has exalted His Son after the world had maltreated and crucified Him. And God the Father now demands that all people everywhere acknowledge the innocence and righteousness of His Son and that He is now enthroned and is deserving of the regard and

³ Donald Carson, **The Gospel According to John** (William B. Eerdmans. 1991), p. 537.

respect, submission and subservience, of all people everywhere. The Father will one day cause all people everywhere to acknowledge and confess His Son to be Lord. Because God the Father

“has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil. 2:9-11)

Our Lord declared here that the Holy Spirit would “convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me.” The conviction of sin by the Holy Spirit is necessary in order for a sinner to come to salvation in Jesus Christ. Apart from the Holy Spirit convicting a soul of sin, that soul will not come to Jesus Christ in repentance and faith. But this suggests a problem when we consider the understanding of many regarding the conviction of sin that leads to salvation. There is a conviction of sin that brings salvation, which is set forth before us in this chapter. But there is also a conviction of sin that is not wrought of the Holy Spirit that fails to bring salvation. Feeling guilty for sin is true to the human condition apart from the spiritual work of the Holy Spirit in the soul. God has given to every human being a conscience. Every human being is born with the capacity of feeling guilty (convicted) of sin.

More specifically, **what is the conscience?** The conscience is that faculty that every human being possesses that distinguishes between right and wrong which results either in a sense of personal condemnation or justification. The human conscience identifies what is right and what is wrong, and as a result moves an individual either to feel guilty or not guilty about himself. God gave each of us our conscience. When we feel guilty, it is not simply because we have violated a human standard of our own, but we violate God’s laws that were written on our hearts from creation (cf. Rom. 2:14, 15). But the conscience is not reliable and unchangeable, and therefore it is no reliable standard of morality. The standards of conscience will vary from person to person. The reason for this is that a person’s sin will affect his conscience.

How does sin affect the conscience? The conscience cannot be destroyed, for it is an aspect of human nature. But the conscience can be defaced or twisted and rendered insensitive. Through the influence of one’s involvement and exposure to sin, a person may sear his conscience to such a degree that his sensitivity to sin is not what it once was. What he once condemned in himself, he now excuses. Some may so deaden their sensitivity to sin that they view what is evil as good, and what is good as evil. There are things they think and do today which they themselves would have condemned not that long ago. Although the capability to distinguish between these two principles, good and evil, is always present, what the individual defines to be good and evil has changed. The conscience is not, therefore, an infallible guide. Scripture must inform and shape the conscience. Scripture must reinforce the values that are programmed in our conscience.

What are the effects of a guilty conscience in a person? First, a guilty conscience will result in damaging one’s own conception of himself and how he views the world about him. He may withdraw into himself. His ability to think and focus his mind may be greatly diminished. He may lose touch with reality. He comes to the point he is not able to function on a day to day basis. Many mentally disturbed people are so because they are consumed with feelings of guilt within their conscience. Second, a guilty conscience will result in damage to human relationships. Feelings of guilt separate people from one another. Guilty people will feel alone, and may prefer to be alone. They are ashamed when those who know their sin see them. They may be suspicious, and even very critical of others, in order to justify themselves. Or, they may be very permissive and non-condemning of others, for to condemn them would only reaffirm their own guilt, for they do the same things. Third, a guilty conscience will result in damage to one’s relationship with God. Here, too, sin separates us from God. God bars us from coming into His presence because of our sin. God declared through His prophet, “Your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear” (Isa. 59:2). But sin also bars us from wanting to approach Him. Our guilty conscience prohibits us from feeling we can come into His presence, for to do so, we would see ourselves as justly condemned by Him.

We only need to consider the result of the sin of our first parents in the Garden of Eden. When God came to them, they fled from Him. They knew they were “naked.” That is they knew they were sinners.

They were ashamed; they could not face holiness. They would sooner flee from God rather than to come into His presence.

How do people deal with their guilty conscience? Most of the time they will do what they have to do to repress it. They may employ a number of ways to accomplish their desire. First, they may justify their sin by blaming others. This has been the way that worldly psychology has historically dealt with guilty feelings. "It's really not your fault; it was your mother's." Actually, anything that you can convince a guilty person to transfer his blame will do, whether it be society's fault or your DNA. Second, they may try to mollify their conscience by redirecting their lives on other matters. They give themselves over in an obsessive way to their work, their hobby, a sport, or some other activity to take their minds off that which so troubles them. Third, they may seek to soothe their conscience through drugs or alcohol. Fourth, they seek to ease their guilty consciences by redefining their own and society's standards of morality. They say something like this: "The reason we feel so bad about ourselves because of this lifestyle or behaviour, is because society has imposed its standards on the collective conscience of our culture. We must, therefore, educate people to be tolerant, accepting, even affirming to our belief and behavior." And so what was once seen to be wrong must come to be seen as not wrong, even right. But the law that God has written on the heart will still be there. Yes, maybe the conscience has been seared to a degree, but the slightest reminder of the law of God brings back with great force that weighs upon on a person's soul; he condemns himself. A fifth way they may deal with a guilty conscience regarding one's sin is to gather with others who have experienced similar things and who now practices that sin. There is a soothing of conscience when there are many that do the same things. A sixth way people deal with a guilty conscience is that they may seek to soothe their conscience by doing good deeds. They believe that their works of righteousness will offset their acts of sin. They feel better about themselves because they do works of kindness toward others. And a seventh way that people will deal with a guilty conscience is that they will use religion. They go to church not because they love God but because they feel guilty and church going and church involvement give them a temporary reprieve from their misery. Liturgy is particularly appealing to folks with guilty consciences. They burn candles and incense, chant and recite formulas. They bathe in rivers, offer sacrifices, cut themselves, and punish themselves. These kinds of things help people who feel guilty feel better about themselves, that is, for a while, but the relief is temporary; it does not last.

We read of the conditions in the days of ancient Israel during the period of the Judges. "In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25). That is what the world is like when the individual conscience is the guiding principle. The only unchangeable standard that God has made available to you and me is that of the Holy Scriptures. In this Word, God, Who cannot lie, God, Who cannot change, has revealed His will regarding what righteousness is and what sin is.

But given the fact that all people everywhere may and do experience guilt over sin because of the conscience that God has given them, not all guilt for sin should be assumed to be the work of the Holy Spirit. There is a great difference between believing oneself to be guilty for sin due to your conscience alone, and the conviction that the Holy Spirit brings upon a person that leads to salvation. Yes, the Holy Spirit convicts people of the world in their conscience, but it is due to Him at work informing, convincing, and convicting that conscience of sin that leads to salvation.

And so, how may we distinguish between the guilty feelings the human conscience can produce apart from the Spirit and the guilty feelings and sense of condemnation that the Holy Spirit produces in a soul being drawn to salvation? First, the conviction of sin that the Holy Spirit produces brings that soul to see his sin in the light of his estrangement from, and unbelief in Jesus Christ. Again, this is what Jesus said, that the Holy Spirit "would convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, **because they do not believe in Me.**" And second, the conviction of sin that the Holy Spirit produces will lead the sinner to see that **his greatest sin of all of his sins** has been the failure and refusal to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Unless and until the soul sees his sin the face of Jesus Christ, there is little hope that soul has truly been convicted of sin by the Holy Spirit. And third, the conviction of sin that the Holy Spirit produces brings that soul to repent (turn) from his sin to believe upon, submit to, and purpose to live with Jesus Christ as his Savior and Lord.

Let us consider the words of the Apostle Paul as recorded in 2 Corinthians 7. That church had significant problems which the apostle had addressed in his letter to them. The members of that church responded in true repentance. Paul described their true repentance in **2 Corinthians 7:8-11**.

⁸For even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it. For I perceive that the same epistle made you sorry, though only for a while. ⁹Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. ¹⁰For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. ¹¹For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter.

Here we read that there is a sorrow over sin that “led to repentance.” But there is also “the sorrow of the world that produces death.” One kind of sorrow over sin leads to salvation; the other kind of sorrow for sin results in damnation. We might distinguish these two forms of sorrow to be (1) the conviction of sin that all people experience due to their conscience and (2) the conviction of sin that the Holy Spirit works within the conscience. One leads to repentance; the other leads to death;

How is true repentance manifested? Both the sorrow of the world and the sorrow produced by the Holy Spirit are characterized by “sorrow” over sin. But true repentance is seen in that the repentant once is “made sorry in a godly manner.” He is not sorrowing only because he was discovered or caught in his sin, but he is sorry for having committed the sin itself. Moreover, true repentance is seen in that the one sorrowing for his sin produces “diligence”, that is, great desire and effort to clear oneself, or to make amends or restitution, or to undo what he had done. But further, the one sorrowing for his sin possesses a self-loathing, as suggested by feelings of “indignation”, “vehement desire”, and “zeal” to show forth one as having truly turned from his sin. He desires to be vindicated, that is, to prove that his repentance is real, is thorough, and is permanent. But the ultimate test of whether or not one’s sorrow over sin is wrought of the Holy Spirit is if that soul desires to turn from his sin because of his faith in Jesus Christ. Again, Jesus said “And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, *because they do not believe in Me.*”

The lesson to be learned here is that when we proclaim to the world the gospel and in doing so we desire to people brought under conviction for their sin so that they will repent of their sin, we must press upon them to see their sin chiefly as living in unbelief and defiance of the Lord Jesus Christ. Their sin was an act of rebellion and high treason against the King of kings and Lord of lords. And their sin was the cause of the cruel suffering and death of the Son of God on His cross, in which He willingly gave Himself as a sacrifice for that sin and all of the sins of that sinner. When you attempt to produce in people an awareness of personal sin that leads to salvation, do not stop at just setting forth the law of God, but set forth the law of God and the resultant sin as it relates to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin because it has not believed on Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior of sinners.

2. The Holy Spirit would convict the world “of righteousness because I go to My Father and you see Me no more.” (v. 10)

This “righteousness” may be understood, first, as the Holy Spirit convincing the world, that is, those who are converted out of the world, of the righteousness of Jesus Christ Himself. Throughout His earthly ministry the Jewish leadership and the crowds influenced by them, believed Jesus of Nazareth to be a deceiver and a charlatan, a great pretender to righteousness, who was worthy of condemnation and death. Jesus Himself declared that He was the friend of those despised and despicable “tax collectors and sinners.” The Jewish leaders accused Him of blasphemy and sedition, that He worked His deeds by the power of the devil himself. But the Holy Scriptures show forth the resurrection of Jesus Christ by God the Father as God vindicating Jesus of all the false charges leveled against Him. The world cast Him out as a man worthy of crucifixion. But the Father raised Him from the dead and enthroned Him in heaven. Through His

resurrection and ascension to His Father, He was demonstrated to be fully righteous. The Holy Spirit convicts the sinner who undergoes conversion of this spiritual truth. Jesus Christ is the perfect, sinless, Son of God, “who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens” (Heb. 7:26).

But this “righteousness” of which the Holy Spirit convicts those who are converted out of the world may also be viewed as the Holy Spirit revealing to the sinner the corruption and bankruptcy of his own righteousness. Non-Christians generally believe that their righteousness is quite good enough to enable them to stand on the Day of Judgment and pass God’s scrutiny of their lives. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to reveal to that sinner that his own righteousness is as “filthy rags” and that they will not enable him to pass the bar of God’s judgment on the Last Day.

And so, the Holy Spirit convinces the world of its need for the gift of righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ alone, if he is to stand blameless on the final Day of Judgment. The Holy Spirit first convicts of sin, that we are guilty and must give an account of ourselves of every word, every thought, every action, that we have ever done in this life. The sinner comes to understand and lament concerning himself: “How, then, as a guilty sinner can I stand in the judgment?” “How can I be found to be truly ‘righteous’ and allowed entrance into eternal life by the Judge who will only permit the righteous to do so?” There is no way that anyone of us can acquire a life of righteousness that will stand the thorough scrutiny of an infinitely holy God. The Holy Spirit convicts the world of its need for “the gift of righteousness” that comes through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. The truth revealed and expressed throughout the Bible is made known to the sinner by the Holy Spirit, that God will not only pardon the sinner of his sin, but that He will regard him as a believer as wholly righteous on Judgment Day because the righteousness of Jesus Christ Himself is counted as his through faith, which was declared and bestowed freely and fully by God through faith in His Son. As the Apostle Paul wrote in **Romans 4:3-8**:

³For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” ⁴Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt.

⁵But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness, ⁶just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works:

⁷“Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven,
And whose sins are covered;

⁸Blessed is the man to whom the LORD shall not impute sin.”

Again, here are the words of **John Gill** of explaining this spiritual truth:

He, the Spirit of God, convinces men of the insufficiency of their own righteousness for such purposes; that they have no righteousness that deserves the name of one, and that what they have will not justify them before God, and entitle them to heaven: and this He does, by showing them the corruption of their nature, their daily sins and infirmities, in thought, word, and deed; the purity of the divine perfections, and the spirituality and extensiveness of the law of God; which when a man is thoroughly apprised of, he can never hope for and expect justification before God by his own righteousness: hence the Spirit of God proceeds to convince men of the glory, excellency, fulness, and suitableness of the righteousness of Christ; which He does, by revealing it to them in the Gospel, setting it before them, and working faith in them to lay hold upon it; when they desire to be found in Christ, not having on their own, but His righteousness; which convictions appear by the mean thoughts they have of their own righteousness, by hungering after Christ’s, by disclaiming all but His, by their constant mention of it, dependence on it, and satisfaction in it; and thus to convince of it, is the peculiar work of the Spirit, since naturally men are fond of their own righteousness, are ignorant of Christ’s, and set against it.

3. The Holy Spirit would convict the world “of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.” (v. 11)

When Jesus Christ died upon His cross, He conquered the devil, deposing him from the uncontested power that he had over the nations of the world. The devil is called “the prince of the power of the air”, and “the god of this age.” He had the nations of the world under his control, and no one could escape his reign and rule. He kept people in ignorance and error, preventing them from seeing and believing in the true God, the Creator of all that is. But down through history God had created His own people, His own nation, that being Israel, through which He promised that He would bring forth a King to establish the kingdom of God, who would be comprised of believing, compliant citizens. He would save His people bringing them into His kingdom after having snatched them out of the devil’s kingdom. As Paul said of the Colossians, it may be said of every true believer in Jesus Christ.

He has delivered us from the power of darkness (the devil’s kingdom) and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. (Col. 1:13f)

Upon the cross Jesus Christ stripped the devil of his uncontested power and he could no longer prevent the salvation of Gentiles, along with a remnant of Jewish people, from coming into the kingdom of Jesus Christ. But the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ also signaled the future Day of Judgment of all the world because God had exalted this Man, who was also His eternal Son, to be the Ruler and Judge of the world. God the Father has committed all judgment unto His Son, for He is the Son of Man.

“For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son... And He has given Him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man.” (John 5:22, 27)

J. C. Ryle (1816-1900) wrote of what God accomplished in Christ as set forth in verse 11:

The “Prince of this world,” of course means the devil. How great his power was over mankind before Christ came into the world, and how great a change Christ’s death and resurrection produced in the general condition of mankind, are things which at this period of time we can hardly realize. The coming of the “kingdom of God,” or “kingdom of heaven,” was a reality 1800 years ago, of which we can now form little idea. The Holy Ghost produced a general conviction that a new order of things had begun, and that old king and tyrant of this world was dethroned and stripped of much of his power.⁴

Conclusion:

We see from these words of our Lord Jesus our need for absolute dependence on the Holy Spirit to expand the kingdom of Jesus Christ throughout the world. Those of the world must first be convicted of sin before they will be converted from sin. They must be convinced of righteousness, before they seek and believe on the gift of righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ. And they must be convinced that God has committed all judgment unto His Son so that they might live for and look for their deliverance on that great Day in which the righteousness of God will be manifested upon all human sin and injustice.

B. The Holy Spirit’s guidance of the church (16:12-15).

“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. ¹³However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. ¹⁴He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. ¹⁵All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you.”

⁴ J. C. Ryle, **Expository Thoughts on John**, vol. 3 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987, orig. 1869), pp. 163f.

The Lord had taught His disciples all that they could handle for the time. But the Holy Spirit who would soon come upon them would expand their capability and capacity of understanding. He would guide them “into all truth.” This truth will not be different in nature or content than what He had taught them, but the Holy Spirit would build upon what Jesus Himself had taught them.

The Holy Spirit would also teach them “things to come.” Upon the event of Pentecost and in the few years that followed, everything would change for them. In time they would see more clearly their calling to take the gospel to the entire Gentile world. They would come to see the need to plant and organize churches. They would need to grow in their understanding of their new covenant relationship with God through Christ even as they interacted and engaged the Gentile world with the gospel. And they would learn that there would be a prolonged period of time before the Lord Jesus would return to judge the world and fully manifest His everlasting kingdom. The Holy Spirit would guide them through all of these matters, teaching them and directing them in their apostolic office in establishing and expanding the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

But again, all that the Holy Spirit would do for them and to them would serve to make Jesus Christ known more fully to them and to the world through them. The Lord Jesus repeated this assertion in verses 14 and 15: “He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you.”

Thank God for sending and giving us the presence and the enablement of the Holy Spirit. Although we face what might appear to be a humanly impossible task of winning sinners to Christ out of this fallen world, the Holy Spirit will enable us to rise to our calling and commission. Praise God for His glorious gift to us.

“May the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus,
after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you.” (1 Pet. 5:10)
