

The Spirit's Conviction and our Mission (John 16:7-11)

The Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, He came in mighty fullness then
 His witness through believers won the lost, And multitudes were born again ...
 [Later the reformation and] revivals came, When saints would seek the Lord and pray
 O once again we need that holy flame, To meet the challenge of today
 Come Holy Spirit, dark is the hour. We need Your filling, Your love and mighty power
 Move now among us, stir us we pray, Come Holy Spirit revive the church today

In John 15:26 Jesus talks about the Spirit's witness and our witness in v. 27 that would begin on the day of Pentecost and will continue till Jesus returns. In John 16:7 Jesus teaches more on this coming Spirit: *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.*⁸ *And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment:*⁹ *concerning sin, because they do not believe in me;*¹⁰ *concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer;*¹¹ *concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.*

In our last message we ended in v. 7, an amazing statement that it's actually better for Jesus to go and to send the Spirit to us instead. It's advantageous, or some translations say best, that Jesus goes back to heaven and sends His Spirit in His place. There's no better time to be a believer than in this age of the Holy Spirit, better than the glory days of King David and even the days of Jesus and His disciples. It was essential that Jesus was *God with us*, but now that His saving work is done, it's better to have *God in us* by the Spirit. Jesus says 'better than me by your side is my Spirit inside.' Jesus on earth in a body beside men could only be in one place at one time, but His Spirit's teaching and presence is in all believers at all times all around the world.

It was good for Peter to have Jesus by His side but Peter was a better man by far in the book of Acts with the Spirit on the inside of Peter. Thomas was a doubter unless he could put his finger in the side of Jesus, but in Acts with the Spirit inside Thomas he was a man of great faith refuting doubters. The sons of Zebedee by Jesus' side tried to negotiate top seats in the kingdom for themselves days earlier, but days later the Spirit transformed the sons of Zebedee to humbly offer kingdom blessings to others instead. With Jesus by his side, John tried to make a name for himself, but John with God's Spirit on the inside became a selfless apostle of love whose gospel doesn't even mention John's name. He's one Jesus loved despite his sin, changed by love

Better than Jesus beside you is the Spirit inside you. That's true on multiple levels for believers, now in the context of v. 8-11 Jesus focuses on what the Spirit does *to the world* of unbelievers. 16:9 explains they '*do not believe.*' This is the unbelieving world in context that v. 8 says God's Spirit convicts. When people are regenerated, the Spirit does a work on the inside, but with the unregenerate world there's also a work the Spirit does on the outside to convict through the Word and witness of believers. The Spirit could zap an unbeliever's heart or change it if He wanted without any instrument, but He chooses to use His instrument, the Word of God, usually through witnesses.

In 15:26 Jesus says '*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.*²⁷ *And you also will bear witness...*' That's right before He says in 16:7-8 the Helper will come to believers and convict the world, so in context this convicting and witnessing includes believers witnessing. The Spirit testifies and calls witnesses to testify, and that's us as 15:27 says. The Spirit witnesses and works through people by His truth.

The Spirit comes to believers in 16:7 and then through them to the world in v. 8. In the end of v. 7 Jesus tells His followers He'll send the Spirit to them and then v. 8 explains when this happens He'll convict the world about sin, righteousness, and judgment. Those are all legal terms, courtroom images in other passages. Christians sometimes talk of conviction as a bad feeling, ex: 'I'm convicted I ate too much at Thanksgiving.' But v. 8 is non-Christians being convicted like a criminal trial, by the facts of the case, not by feelings.

The Greek word *Helper* meant a legal counselor or advocate or attorney, it's the word used by the same author for the helping defense attorney/advocate representing believers. 1 Jn 2:1 '*If anyone sins, we have an **advocate** with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.*' That's another reason why it's better for us that Jesus didn't stay on earth; we need an advocate in heaven's courts to represent us to the Father. Jesus is our legal representative but unlike earthly lawyers, He paid our fees and paid our fine! No human attorney serves the sentence for us, but Jesus did on the cross. After finishing salvation's work He went to heaven and sits at the right hand of the heavenly bar of justice to always plead our case based on what He did for believers to satisfy justice. Better than Jesus by our side is Him at the Father's side interceding for us.

Back in Jn 14:16 Jesus promised the Father would give us *another advocate* (or Helper/Counselor, legal help, legal counsel): the Spirit of truth would be with them and in them forever. Jn 14:16 uses the same word as 1 Jn 2:1, the Lord Jesus was the first advocate/helper/counselor the Father sent, and He continues to be that for us in heaven, but the Spirit is another advocate/help sent by the Father to be with and in believers on earth now. Better to have Christ my advocate by the side of the Father always, and His Spirit, another advocate inside me always. Better to have Jesus as your advocate in heaven and His Spirit as your advocate in you, your constant counselor and helper. Better than having Jesus beside me is having His Spirit inside me.

In Jn 16:13 Jesus talks about the Spirit's counsel or guidance to believers, but in v. 8 He starts first with the Spirit's role to unbelievers in the world. To the world in v. 8 He's a prosecuting attorney. The world is on trial, this is the case of the people vs. God. The Prosecution in v. 8 will convict the people on all 3 counts: sin, righteousness, and judgment. Witnesses will be called forward to establish and prove guilt of the accused, beyond a shadow of a doubt, case closed. That's the sense of convict in v. 8, it's like a judge convicting criminals. They have no defense and the conviction verdict isn't dependent on them admitting their guilt in court. It's just like the convicted criminals in modern jails who still insist they're innocent even after they're convicted, doing time, penitentiaries can't make hardened sinners penitent, only God's grace can. The Greek word for convicted here means to prove guilty, whether or not they feel guilty.

Another difference in God's courtroom: there's hope before final judgment to hell. The world is convicted but there's grace to those who respond to the Spirit's arguments and offers for mercy if they change their plea to guilty. If they come confessing sin and guilt on all counts, casting themselves before the mercy of the judge, crying out for the other Helper/Advocate at the right hand of God to plead for them instead, to be their representative, there can be grace. The Spirit and His witnesses convict, call to repent, trust in Christ. There will be a final day of final judgment and final conviction of the world (Jude 15 uses the same word *convict*) but Jn 16:8 isn't that last day, it's the convicting of the world through preaching of sin, righteousness, judgment. Jesus preached this way. His first NT sermon began convicting the world of sin (Mt 5), true righteousness (Mt 6) and judgment (Mt 7). Jesus preached the 3 things of Jn 16:8 in the same order, the Spirit helps us follow His steps. The way of the Master is to speak of sin, righteousness, judgment.

Jesus said these words in Jn 16 knowing that hours later He would be called to a trial before the Jewish leaders and then before the world represented by Herod and Pilate. The Jewish mock trial called false witnesses and made a false judgment. Jesus had no sin but was convicted to die as a sinner. In v. 9 Jesus says His Spirit puts the world on trial, convicting of sin because they didn't believe Him. 3:16 is God so loved the world, whoever believes won't perish in judgment, 3:18 '*whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹ And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light...*' That's the judgment's condemning verdict

16:10 says the Spirit convict the world of righteousness because Jesus goes to His Father. The world's trial declared Jesus an unrighteous sinner to die on a cross, but Jesus rose and ascended to heaven proving His righteousness (God's court reversed man's verdict of Jesus and convicts man). Those who convicted Jesus of blasphemy were convicted as He rose proving He is God.

An ancient confession of faith, 1 Tim 3:16 says the Lord *'was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit...taken up in glory.'* Jesus was vindicated in the sense of *shown to be righteous*, as His glorified body rose from the dead and was taken up to heaven, proving Jesus is righteous, and convicting all who judged otherwise. God can't have unrighteousness in His presence, no sinner is there, so Jesus going there proves He has perfect righteousness.

The Spirit convicts the world of the sin of not believing in Christ in v. 9 and of righteousness they lack in v. 10 compared to the righteousness of Christ in the presence of the Father, and in v. 11 the Spirit convicts on one more count: *¹¹ concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.* This ruler is Satan as he leads this sinful world. The prince of the power of the air was being judged in the events of the cross.

12:31 *Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. ³² And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.* ³³ *He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.*

So Jesus' death on the cross cast out Satan, showing judgment to the world. Jesus defeated sin and Satan as He died and rose. In Jn 16:11 the Spirit uses Satan's overthrow to prove the sinful world's going down w/ its ringleader. If you were a Nazi and Hitler's being judged for war crimes, it would mean your day in court is coming, in a matter of time. As Saddam Hussein faced hanging, that sent a message to those on his side for when their day came.

The world is proved guilty on all 3 counts, sin, righteousness and judgment. Jesus is the star witness, but the Spirit also calls other witnesses, us in John 15:27, to prosecute and prove indictments of sin, righteousness, judgment. We take the stand, with our hand on the Bible we're called to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, with the help of God the Spirit. As we bear witness, like 15:27 says, as we share the gospel, we join the HS bringing convicting evidence of the world's sin and that none are righteous. Evangelism also warns of certain judgment to come if sinners don't repent. The Spirit drives home sin, righteousness, judgment (16:8) through us, v. 7.

Turn to Heb 3 as an example of how the Spirit prosecutes as we evangelize. He convicts in the sense of proving guilt objectively in Jn 16:8 whether or not I feel guilt subjectively. The word *convict* is used of believers showing sin one-on-one in Mt 18:15. With believers the Spirit works on the inside to convict, but with the world of unbelievers the Spirit works on the outside. The Spirit speaks through us speaking His convicting Word. It's the same sun that melts wax that hardens clay. Some are helped, some are hardened.

Heb 3:7 *Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, "Today, if you hear his voice, ⁸ do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion..."* [quote from Ps 95 that we studied last week, but notice v. 7 says it's what the *Spirit* says, 'Today'].

That isn't just something I said last week quoting something David said, or that the Spirit said through him in the past, back in OT times. v. 7 is saying present tense this is what God's Spirit is still saying to the NT church *'today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts ...'* When you hear a human voice preaching or reading from Scripture, that day you're hearing the voice of God's Spirit speaking to you, and if you don't respond rightly, your heart is being hardened. The Spirit says these things to the world, to anyone who hears God's Word, He convicts/reproves the world, but many hearts harden.

¹⁵ *As it is said, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion."* [He's talking about unbelieving Israel in the wilderness, as v. 19 says] *So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief 4:7 again he appoints a certain day, "Today," saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." ... ¹² For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart* [even hard hearts, it's the Spirit's scalpel for surgery]

The Word of the Great Physician is a precision tool in the hand of the Holy Spirit for spiritual open heart surgery. Even spiritually hardened arteries and closed valves can be opened by the double-edged surgeon's blade. It can cut away blockage or deepest cancer, to those who hear God's voice diagnosing their heart and don't harden, but humbly ask Him to purge all cancerous sin. We're not the doctor or surgeon, we're just sharing the report and diagnosis and X-ray (what God's Word says about sin, righteousness, and judgment). But we urge them to seek help from the Physician *today* before it's too late. The convicting cutting shows man his need that the same Scripture can heal.

You can go back to Jn 16. Carson argues the verb *convict* in 16:8 is always 'showing someone his sin, usually as a summons to repentance...[the Spirit does this in the world proving its] guilt, thus calling it to repentance...he most commonly does so through the witness of His disciples (15:26, 27).'¹

This Greek word *convict* in Jn 16:8 usually in the NT is Christians calling sinners to repent by showing them their sin, proving, reproofing, refuting, or rebuking, usually using the Word. The Spirit once used a donkey to convict sinful Balaam (2 Pet 2:16), but usually the Spirit of God uses human agents:

- John the Baptist convicted/reproved Herod for his sin in Luke 3:19
- Paul used the Word to convict/convince who Jesus was, Acts 18:28
- Timothy, "*preach the Word...reprove, rebuke, exhort...*" (2 Tim 4:2)
- Titus 2:15 commands declare the Word, '*rebuke with all authority*' and calls for using the Word to convict/reprove, 1:9. It's not just for leaders, though. In 1 Cor 14 the whole church is involved in it, if it worships rightly it convicts the world: '*if...an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.*' (v. 24-25)

So based on the context of the rest of the NT using this term *convict* for the Christian living and giving God's Word, and based on the context of 15:27 where the Spirit's witness is through our witness, I think that's what 16:8 is. How does the Spirit convict the world of sin, righteousness, judgment? It's through the witness of believers and through the Word of God. It can be by the worship of God's people, but it's especially through words of believers as they speak the Spirit-inspired Scriptures. The Word of God is '*the sword of the Spirit*' (Eph 6:17) and believers are called to wield the Spirit's blade that cuts and convicts. Our words can't pierce hard hearts, but God's Word can as the Spirit's sword. 2 Tim 3 says all Scripture was breathed out by the Spirit of God, inspired and profitable for teaching/reproof (same Grk word). So the Spirit uses Scripture through witnesses to convict/reprove the world. Acts 1:8 said the Spirit's coming is our power to witness to the world]

That's the explanation of Jn 16:7-11, let's close with real life illustrations that help us with applications in the book of Acts. To keep with language of a trial, exhibit A is Peter on the day of Pentecost. The Spirit began to convict the world as Peter drew the sword of the Spirit, thrusting it to his world, convicting them by the thrust of pointed Scriptures in v. 16-36 applied, proving like a prosecuting witness. Look at Acts 2:37: *Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"* The two-edged sword of the Spirit cut to the heart of the issue, convicting them their issue was their heart. Some didn't harden hearts, they begged mercy. The surgeon blade sliced them open, Scripture exposed their need like a spiritual cardio-gram. Peter showed the report and then pointed them to the Great Physician

In Acts 2:38 he calls them to repent to cleanse sin within and to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Repenting is a heart change, turning from sin to follow Christ by faith. Baptism is then a visible act symbolizing a cleansed heart, washed by the blood of Christ, dying to sin and self and rising to walk in newness of life. If you haven't been baptized since repenting, be baptized. If you've never repented, today if you hear the voice of the Spirit, don't harden your heart. God's Law commands you to love the Lord with all your heart all the time and all your neighbors as you love yourself. You are a lawbreaker in your heart, the Spirit convicts you today of sin, righteousness you lack, and judgment for sin. But today can be the day of salvation for you if you beg the Judge for mercy. He can give you a new heart. Believe in your heart He died and rose for the sins of your heart, He paid for your penalty, run from your sin to the Savior as Lord.

Acts 2 is exactly what Jesus was talking about in Jn 16:7-11, the Spirit came after Jesus left to convict the world through His witnesses. ⁴⁰ *And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them ...* He witnessed and exhorted to be saved. We don't just point out sin, we point to the Savior

Dictionary of Biblical Imagery: 'When there is a trial, evidence is required to prove the facts upon which the case depends. This is usually given by witnesses, although documents are also evidence...In modern times...the role of the witness is passive-to respond to questions and give information. In biblical times the role of witness was much more active, the witness being expected to be persuasive...impassioned delivery adding force...' ²

That's what all believers are called to be by Jesus, to be passionate in our witness and persuasive, praying the Spirit uses us in His convicting work. So what's the application for believers? We're to be witnesses as Jesus said in the upper room. With His Helper the Spirit, we seek to share Scripture to show the world its sin, the righteousness of Christ, and judgment to come if they reject Christ. Jesus said the coming Spirit would convict the world in Jn 16, here in Acts 2:4 the Spirit comes and v. 5 says among the Jews in Jerusalem were '*men from every nation*' (representatives of known world).

The Spirit began to convict the world thru Peter. In v. 23 Peter indicts the sin of rejecting Jesus '*you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.*' ... ³² *This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses.* ³³ *Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God...* that proved Jesus was righteous as He went to the Father like He said He would in Jn 16, and the judgment Jesus spoke of in Jn 16 is pictured in v. 35 where He sits until all enemies are under His feet. Other NT passages say Satan and demons were subjected in judgment under Him after the cross till final judgment: every knee bows. Jn 16 said the Spirit will convict of sin, righteousness, judgment, same order

Look at Acts 3:14 for a similar pattern. Peter says to his unbelieving world 3:14 *But you denied the Holy and Righteous One ...* He's indicting of sin, 'you denied,' and righteousness as Jesus is the 'Righteous One.' He proves it in v. 15 by saying God raised Jesus which Peter was a witness to. Then in v. 23 Peter warns of judgment, whoever *does not listen...shall be destroyed.* Sin, righteousness, judgment, same concepts, same order, the Spirit convicts and offers the same mercy in v. 19 if you repent, turn from sin to the Savior.

Exhibit B is Stephen in Acts 7. In Acts 7 hearts harden as the Spirit convicts. Stephen like Peter was filled with the Spirit to fulfill John 16:8-11. In Acts 7:51 after indicting by the Scriptures the hard hearts still weren't cut: ⁵¹ *You stiff-necked people, **uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit.** As your fathers did, so do you.* ⁵² *Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of **the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered,*** ⁵³ *you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it."* That's their judgment verdict as lawbreakers, their greatest sin was rejecting Christ who was in fact the Righteous One. So again the Spirit convicts through us of sin, righteousness and judgment. Jn 16:8 happens through human witnesses like Stephen.

⁵⁴ *Now when they heard these things they were enraged...* NKJV '*they were cut to the heart*'; this shows not all respond to the Spirit's convicting cutting work in the same way. For some like in Acts 2:37 hearts are cut, convicted, so they're anxious for the message of salvation, but for others like Acts 7:54 they're angry at the messenger. The witness can't control the response, he's not to worry about not offending, in fact he knows unless there is convicting and the offense of sin understood in relation to righteousness and judgment, there will be no hope or change. Conviction is what brings change about as the Spirit shows us how offensive our sin is of rejecting the Righteous One, how there's none righteous, no not one, and our sin deserves His judgment.

Our calling isn't to come up with a new seeker-friendly message that won't offend or convict anyone, we're to lovingly speak the truth as witnesses for the prosecution with the D.A.'s plea of mercy offered, and leave the results to the Judge of all the earth who will do right. The response of the guilty is in the hands of the sovereign Spirit, our job is to be instruments in His hand and point people to the grace of the nail-pierced hands of the Righteous One

Don't judge success by the response that day, just be faithful witnesses. For Stephen in v. 58 that day it ended with rejection and the end of his life. But the end of v. 58 mentions a young man named Saul who became Exhibit C. Turn to Acts 17 for our 3rd and final exhibit before the prosecution rests its case. Saul of Tarsus was trained to be a lawyer but the Lord arrested him on his way to prosecute Christians in Damascus and convicted and changed the young man to Paul, filled with the Spirit as a witness to convict the world.

In Acts 17 Paul stands before the court of Mars Hill and talks about their sin in v. 22-29 and God's command to repent in v. 30, v. 31 says '*because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man...*' Sin, righteousness, judgment, that's the consistent message before friendly or hostile crowds, Jews or Gentiles. In v. 32 some mocked him, others were willing to hear more another day. As Paul is on trial before Governor Felix but instead of speaking in his defense, Paul witnesses for Christ and the gospel of sin, righteousness and judgment. Acts 24:25 *And as he reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment, Felix was alarmed and said, "Go away for the present. When I get an opportunity I will summon you."* That's the consistent pattern of NT evangelism, in v. 24 Paul talked with Felix and his wife privately and he talked about faith in Christ. The good news includes the bad news of sin, righteousness, judgment. Faithful witnesses tell the truth, the whole truth.

Rom 1-5 presents the gospel like Jesus (Mt 5-7), Peter/Stephen/Paul in Acts
 - 1:16 '*I am not ashamed of the gospel* (good news of salvation from sin)
 - v17 '*in it the righteousness of God is revealed*' (convicts of righteousness)
 - v18 '*wrath of God is revealed against...all unrighteousness*' (judgment)
 - same sin, righteousness, judgment cycle at the end of chapter 1, list of *sins* (v. 29-31) and they know *righteous* decree that it deserves *judgment* (v. 32)

Like Jn 16:8: sin, righteousness and judgment, same order. Rom 3 indicts us
 -Rom 3:9-20 convicts the world of sin like Jn 16:8, all are guilty by the law
 -Rom 3:21-22 then proves a righteousness of God Scripture bears witness to
 -next verse then gives the judgment that we all fall short of the glory of God but by grace we can be justified, that means declared righteous by the judge based on the righteousness of Christ taking our sin's judgment on the cross!

We have good news of great joy this Christmas season. We're not righteous – no not one – but a Righteous One from heaven came, was born to live the perfect righteous life God requires (Mt 5:48), to fulfill all righteousness for us (Mt 3:15). He lived the life I never could and died the death I should, so as I stand behind Him in faith, the Father sees me in Him, my representative advocate in heaven. The Spirit convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. I stood condemned but Jesus 'in my place condemned He stood, sealed my pardon with His blood, Hallelujah, what a Savior!' That's the good news we're to be witnesses of with the power of the Spirit. Let's seek His help in sharing it this season, let's go tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere, that Jesus Christ is born and He is Lord and Savior.

¹ D.A. Carson, *John*, p. 534, 37.

² Leland Ryken et al., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, 504–505.