

The Gospel of John (97) The Work of the Holy Spirit (1)

Introduction:

Before us today is the fifth declaration of our Lord Jesus in His farewell discourse to His disciples. This is set forth in John 16:1-15. It may be summarized in this way: it is as if the Lord were telling His disciples, “I will empower you by the Holy Spirit (Paraclete).”

Jesus first told of the trial that His disciples would encounter (vs. 1-4a), which 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. Here is **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.

We may consider this portion of God’s word by employing the following outline:

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)

I. Jesus prepared His disciples for the trouble before them (16:1-4a)

Our Lord was about to be betrayed into the hands of men. He gave His disciples these departing words to better equip them to face the trial before them and to accomplish their future ministry in His absence. The context of the passage is primarily the mission of the disciples to proclaim Christ to the world. It may not seem to be so, but if we read the few verses that precede this passage—the last two verses of John 15-- it becomes apparent that this is the emphasis of our Lord. Here is John 15:26-27: “But when the Helper comes,

whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning.” Then we may read the opening verses of John 16, which are a continuation of our Lord’s words:

“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.

It would be due to their faith in Jesus Christ and their proclamation of Him to the Jews and to the world that they would encounter great hostility and resistance.

When Jesus said in **verse 1a**, “*These things I have spoken to you*”, He was referring to the difficulty His disciples would encounter because of the world’s hatred of Him and them. He had told them,

“If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. ¹⁹If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. ²⁰Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also. ²¹But all these things they will do to you for My name’s sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me. (John 15:18-21)

And then in verse 1 He stated why He had told them these things, so “that you should not be made to stumble.”

The word translated as “stumble” depicts someone tripping and falling on a pathway that he is traveling. The Greek word is *mey skandalistheyte* (μὴ σκανδαλισθητε).¹ Here the NKJV translates it as “not made to stumble.” The KJV reads, “not be offended.” The NIV translates the Greek word as “will not fall away.” The ESV conveys the word as “to keep you from falling away.” The main idea is that of a professing disciple abandoning his resolve to follow Jesus, to fail to continue in faith and obedience to Jesus Christ. As we have often said, the Word of God teaches that temporary believers do not have salvation.

There are different reasons why some professing disciples (Christians) of Jesus Christ forsake Him. Some apostatize from Christ because some difficult *doctrine* of Christ offended them and they reject Him because of it. We had read in John 6 of many of His (professing) disciples who did just that. When Jesus taught them of the sovereignty of God in bringing them salvation, many became “offended” and forsook Him. Here is **John 6:61-66**.

⁶¹When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples complained about this, He said to them, “Does this offend you? ⁶²What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before? ⁶³It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life. ⁶⁴But there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him. ⁶⁵And He said, “Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father.”

⁶⁶*From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.* ⁶⁷Then Jesus said to the twelve, “Do you also want to go away?”

Here “many of His disciples” forsook Him. They were not true disciples, but false disciples. They forfeited any hope of salvation for they had failed to persevere in their faith in Jesus Christ. They became offended when they heard certain doctrines taught by Jesus of which they objected. Only those who continue in faith are true disciples of Jesus. He had declared back in John 8:31, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.”

But there are also those who forsake Christ because of the *hardship* they encounter or might encounter if they continued to claim to be His disciples. Our Lord spoke of these temporary believers, these false

¹ We derive our English word “scandalize” from this Greek word.

professors, who only believe in Him for a while. In His parable of the sower Jesus taught of four kinds of soils, that is, four kinds of people who hear the good news of the Kingdom of God. One of these soils depicted the apostate, the temporary believer. Here is **Matthew 13:18-21**:

“Therefore hear the parable of the sower: ¹⁹When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside. ²⁰***But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles.***

Interestingly, the word translated here as “stumbles”, is the same Greek word as in our text of John 16:1 (σκανδαλίζεται). And so, when our Lord declared in John 16:1, “These things I have spoken to you, that you should not be made to stumble”, He was telling them that He was preparing them so that they would not apostatize from Him when they began to encounter and experience the hatred and hostility of the world.

This was the same reason that the writer to the Hebrews addressed persecuted Jewish Christians in his epistle. He appealed to them,

²³Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. ²⁴And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, ²⁵not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

²⁶For if we sin willfully (apostatize) after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, ²⁷but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. ²⁸Anyone who has rejected Moses’ law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. ²⁹Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? ³⁰For we know Him who said, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. And again, “The LORD will judge His people.” ³¹It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

³²But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings: ³³partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated; ³⁴for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven. ³⁵Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. ³⁶***For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise:***

³⁷“For yet a little while,
And He who is coming will come and will not tarry.

³⁸Now the just shall live by faith;
But if anyone draws back (forsakes Christ),
My soul has no pleasure in him.”

³⁹***But we are not of those who draw back to perdition (hell), but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.*** (Heb. 10:23-39)

John Bunyan (1628-1668) illustrated what some apostates are like in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. When they encountered what they perceived to be great danger that threatened them, they turned back from their journey to return to the city of destruction. Christian encountered these two characters as they were returning on the path which he was traveling. Here is the interchange of Christian and these two men:

Now when he was got up to the top of the hill, there came two men running amain; the name of the one was Timorous (fearful), and of the other, Mistrust: to whom Christian said, “Sirs, what’s the matter? You run the wrong way.” Timorous answered, that “they were going to the city of Zion, and had got up

that difficult place: but,” said he, “the further we go, the more danger we meet with; wherefore we turned, and are going back again.”

“Yes,” said Mistrust, “for just before us lie a couple of lions in the way, whether sleeping or waking we know not, and we could not think, if we came within reach, but they would presently pull us in pieces.”

Then said Christian, “You make me afraid; but whither shall fly to be safe? If I go back to mine own country, that is prepared for fire and brimstone, and I shall certainly perish there. If I can get to the Celestial City, I am sure to be in safety there: I must venture. To go back is nothing but death: to go forward is fear of death, and life everlasting beyond it. I will yet go forward.” So Mistrust and Timorous ran down the hill, and Christian went on his way...

But oh, how nimbly now did he go up the rest of the hill! Yet, before he got up, the sun went down upon Christian; and this made him again recall the vanity of his sleeping to his remembrance; and thus he again began to condole with himself: “Oh thou sinful sleep; how, for thy sake, am I like to be benighted in my journey! I must walk without the sun; darkness must cover the path of my feet; and I must hear the noise of the doleful creatures, because of my sinful sleep.” Now also he remembered the story that Mistrust and Timorous told him of; how they were frighted with the sight of the lions. Then said Christian to himself again, “These beasts range in the night for their prey; and if they should meet with me in the dark, how should I shift them? How should I escape being by them torn in pieces?” Thus he went on his way. But while he was thus bewailing his unhappy miscarriage, he lift up his eyes, and behold there was a very stately palace before him, the name of which was Beautiful; and it stood just by the highway side.

So I saw in my dream that he made haste and went forward, that if possible he might get lodging there. Now, before he had gone far, he entered into a very narrow passage, which was about a furlong off the porter’s lodge; and looking very narrowly before him as he went, he espied two lions in the way. Now, thought he, I see the dangers that Mistrust and Timorous were driven back by. (The lions were chained, but he saw not the chains.) Then he was afraid, and thought also himself to go back after them, for he thought nothing but death was before him. But the porter at the lodge, whose name is Watchful, perceiving that Christian made a halt as if he would go back, cried unto him, saying, “Is thy strength so small? Mark 4:40. Fear not the lions, for they are chained, and are placed there for trial of faith where it is, and for discovery of those that had none. Keep in the midst of the path, and no hurt shall come unto thee.”

Then I saw that he went on, trembling for fear of the lions, but taking good heed to the directions of the porter; he heard them roar, but they did him no harm. Then he clapped his hands, and went on till he came and stood before the gate where the porter was.

Now our Lord was about to depart from His disciples, but in order to preserve them from “stumbling”, that is, to forsake (apostatize from) Him, He told them in advance of the hatred of the fallen world toward them and of the persecution that they would encounter as they sought to bear witness of Him to the world. He would not have them surprised or alarmed at what they would encounter, so He told them in advance so that they would know what to expect. Again, Jesus said to them “These things I have spoken to you, that you should not be made to stumble.” He would have them know that the course they were taking would be beset with difficulty and hostility, with opposition and persecution. As one stated:

How great a stumbling-block it often is to young and unestablished Christians to find themselves persecuted and ill-used for their religion, it is needless to point out. Our Lord knew this, and took care to arm the eleven apostles with warnings. He never kept back the cross, or concealed the difficulties in the way to heaven.²

We next read in **verse 2** of Jesus giving specific and direct warning to His apostles standing before Him of what they would encounter. Jesus told them “*They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service.*” The Jewish leaders had already threatened those in Jerusalem that anyone who followed Jesus would be excluded from involvement in their

² J. C. Ryle, **Expository Thoughts on John**, vol. 3 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987, orig. 1869), p. 151.

synagogues. We read of this in the context of the parents of the blind man who Jesus had given sight. The Jewish leaders had queried the man, but then called his parents to testify of him. In John 9:18ff we read:

But the Jews did not believe concerning him, that he had been blind and received his sight, until they called the parents of him who had received his sight. ¹⁹And they asked them, saying, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?"

²⁰His parents answered them and said, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; ²¹but by what means he now sees we do not know, or who opened his eyes we do not know. He is of age; ask him. He will speak for himself." ²²***His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had agreed already that if anyone confessed that He was Christ, he would be put out of the synagogue.*** ²³Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him." (John 9:18-23)

And then we read in the book of Acts that Paul, prior to his conversion, believed that he was serving God by hunting down Christians, imprisoning them and even murdering them. Paul later testified of his hatred and cruelty, his blind zeal and murderous intent.

Then he said: ³"I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers' law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today. ⁴I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women, ⁵as also the high priest bears me witness, and all the council of the elders, from whom I also received letters to the brethren, and went to Damascus to bring in chains even those who were there to Jerusalem to be punished." (Acts 22:2-5)

The Lord Jesus warned His apostles, "***the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service.***" We can well imagine the reluctance of the apostles to welcome Paul when he had first come among them soon after his conversion. In Acts we read,

And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple. ²⁷But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. (Acts 9:26-27)

But here in John 16, although our Lord was speaking directly to His eleven apostles, He was foretelling the experience of countless disciples throughout church history who encountered the hostility and murderous actions of religious leaders who claimed to be godly people. We are not referring to the terrible persecution of Christians by the pagan Roman Empire in the early centuries, but of the many centuries-long persecution of Christians who believed differently than the established "church."

When John's Gospel was written, probably in the 90's AD, the official Jewish position was of extreme hostility and resolve to persecute Christians. There was a traditional reciting of 19 Benedictions every Sabbath by Jewish worshippers. Most of these concern essentials of faith and practice. The thirteenth Benediction, however, was a blessing calling for God to curse Jewish Christians. It reads this way:

And for slanderers let there be no hope, and let all wickedness perish as in a moment; let all Your enemies be speedily cut off, and the dominion of arrogance uproot and crush, cast down and humble speedily in our days. Blessed art thou, O L-rd, who breaks the enemies and humbles the arrogant.³

When John wrote these words of our Lord that he had heard from his lips perhaps 60 years before, he and other Christians were the objects of intense hatred and hostility by the leading Jews.

Roman Catholicism was the worst offender in history persecuting godly people who purposed to believe the Scriptures and who rejected the heresies of Roman Catholicism. The institute of the Inquisition was

³ There is some debate as to when this benediction was added to the others, bringing the total from 18 to 19. But it very likely was in place at the Jewish Council of Jamnia in AD 90.

established by Pope Gregory IX (c. 1232) for the suppression of “heresy.” It was active chiefly in northern Italy and southern France, as well as in Spain, making use of the most wicked devices of torture to cause those whom they regarded as heretics to recant and return to the fold of Rome and express loyalty to the pope. *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs* chronicled the many centuries of persecution in which huge numbers of people were persecuted and murdered by Rome. Throughout its history Rome persecuted movements that it regarded as heresy. These included the godly Waldensians⁴ in northern Italy, who were reformed in many ways centuries before the Reformation, and smaller groups such as the Henricians⁵, and the Arnoldists, the Lollards⁶, and many others. The Catholic Church in France perpetrated the Saint Bartholomew’s Day massacre of 1572, in which as many as 30,000 French Protestants (Huguenots) were murdered in a single day through treachery and trickery. But religious persecution also was carried out by “Protestants”, so-called, in those lands in which they maintained state churches. Religious persecution by religious people in power has been the common experience since the day that our Lord declared these words.

Why do these people who profess such devotion to God purpose to persecute and prosecute those who espouse biblical Christianity? Our Lord gave the reason in **verse 3** when He said, “*And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me.*” In reality they are godless people who persecute true, godly people. The devil is their master who fills their hearts with hatred and rage against the Lord and His people. Non-Christians are godless people according to the Lord Jesus. It is “normal” and “natural” for them to harbor great hatred and manifest horrific hostility upon those who believe on the Son of God.

This matter should warn us against assuming that great zeal necessarily indicates great piety. As one once wrote,

Let us never forget that religious earnestness alone is no proof that a man is a sound Christian. Not all zeal is right: it may be a zeal without knowledge. No one is so mischievous as a blundering, ignorant zealot. Not all earnestness is trustworthy: without the leading of God’s Spirit, it may lead a man far astray, that, like Saul, he will persecute Christ Himself. Some bigots fancy they are doing God’s service, when they are actually fighting against His truth, and trampling on His people. Let us pray that we may have light as well as zeal.⁷

Our Lord then declared to His apostles why He had told them these things at this time. We read in **verse 4**, “*But these things I have told you, that when the time comes, you may remember that I told you of them.*” Knowing ahead of time that great trouble is coming is a way to prepare and gives time to resolve to stand and withstand what may come one’s way. Jesus told His disciples that they were to “remember” that He had told them that these events would take place. They were to “remember” so that they would not be shocked or surprised, that might have led them to “stumble” or “fall away” when “the time comes.” **Matthew Henry** (1662-1714) wrote,

Note, when suffering times come it will be of use to us to remember what Christ has told us of sufferings. (1) That our belief of Christ’s foresight and faithfulness may be confirmed; and, (2) that the trouble may be the less grievous, for we were told of it before, and we took up our profession in expectation of it, so that it ought not to be a surprise to us, nor looked upon as a wrong to us. As Christ in His sufferings, so His followers in theirs, should have an eye to the *fulfilling of the Scripture*.

II. Jesus prompted His disciples to ponder His departure to the Father (16:4b-6)

We continue to read our Lord’s words in verses 4 and following:

⁴ <https://www.gotquestions.org/Waldensians.html>

⁵ <http://articles.ochristian.com/article3144.shtml>

⁶ <https://www.gotquestions.org/Lollards.html>

⁷ Ryle, p. 147.

“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.”

Jesus said, “***And these things I did not say to you at the beginning, because I was with you.***” During our Lord’s three year ministry His disciples were with Him. And although they witnessed first-hand much hostility toward their Master, there was very little, if any, directed toward them. It would be understandable that He would receive the brunt of hostility and resistance from the existing powers when He was among them.

While He was with them, He bore the shock of the world’s malice, and stood in the front of the battle; against Him the powers of darkness levelled all their force, not against *small or great*, but only against the *king of Israel*, and therefore He did not need to say so much to them of suffering, because it did not fall much to their share; but we do find that from the beginning He bade them prepare for sufferings... (Matthew Henry)

But then He made this rather puzzling statement: “***But now I go away to Him who sent Me, and none of you asks Me, ‘Where are You going?’***” It would seem that our Lord was rebuking His disciples for not seeing the importance and relevance of what was about to occur. Jesus was very soon to “go away to Him”, that is, God the Father, who had sent Him. But his informing them of their coming hardship had captured their attention. Jesus said, “***But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart***” (v. 6). They were so consumed in their thinking of the difficulty that lie before them that they could not contemplate rightly and clearly the profound importance and implications of Jesus returning to His Father.

This may give a word to you and me about becoming so focused and concerned about what we may be experiencing today, that we lose sight of the larger purpose that our Lord is accomplishing through these events in history. We are not to be captivated or controlled by fear or apprehension of what may come our way. We are to keep our eyes on our Lord Jesus who has returned to His Father and is reigning on His behalf and He has given us the Holy Spirit to encourage and strengthen us for whatever we might encounter before us. **Matthew Henry** wrote:

Note, it is the common fault and folly of melancholy Christians to dwell upon the dark side of the cloud, to meditate nothing but terror, and turn a deaf ear to *the voice of joy and gladness*. That which filled the disciples’ hearts with sorrow, and hindered the operation of the cordials Christ administered, was too great an affection to this present life. They were big with hopes of their Master’s external kingdom and glory, and that they should shine and reign with Him: and now, instead of that, to hear of nothing but bonds and afflictions, this filled them with sorrow. Nothing is a greater prejudice to our joy in God than *the love of the world*; and *the sorrow of the world*, the consequence of it.

Perhaps we should meditate on this with view to what we suspect may be coming our way in the near future. The Lord Jesus is carrying out His purpose of expanding His kingdom throughout the world and we are privileged to be involved in that glorious work. Yes, there will be trials and troubles, but there is glory in waging and winning the battle and standing with Christ victorious in the end.

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. He should not need to state the matter to us, but He does so, because He does not want 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 pastored 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.

Our Lord had forewarned His disciples of the great challenges and hardship that they would face because of the hatred of the world toward 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. He would be their “Helper”, which may be the best way to translate the Greek word here, which is *parakletos*

(παράκλητος).⁸ 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.

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. He 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. He 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, 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 *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.

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, a 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

⁸ As here in the NKJV, but also in the NASV and ESV.

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.⁹

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 fully precisely how these three 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.

Next Lord's Day, Lord willing, we will address in detail the meaning and implications of the work of the Holy Spirit set forth in these three verses.

"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)

⁹ Charles Spurgeon, **The Soul-Winner** (William B, Eerdmans, 1963), pp. 32f.