



THE CONVICTION THE HOLY SPIRIT BRINGS

One important truth that Jesus sought to convey to His apostles in the upper room that Thursday night preceding His death was the truth that He would be sending the Holy Spirit to them. The Holy Spirit would provide the help required for their future task. In fact, Jesus was going away so the Holy Spirit could come. In the immediate future, as Jesus began His reign as Lord over the church (Acts 2:36), the Holy Spirit was to begin His work of teaching and guiding. In light of these facts, it was to the apostles' advantage for Jesus to depart so the Holy Spirit could come and begin His work. The apostles needed Him, and without Him the world could not be saved.

John 16

“But 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. And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment; concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me; and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.

“I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now” (vv. 7–12).

When the Holy Spirit came, He would engage in a convicting ministry with a threefold function. (1) It would bless the apostles, the followers of Christ. (2) It would confirm the integrity of our Lord's earthly life and death. (3) It would be the means by which non-Christians could come to repentance—the kind of repentance that leads to a covenant relationship with God.

In John 16:7–12, Jesus especially highlighted how the Holy Spirit would convict the world concerning His teachings, death, and resurrection.

REBELLION

The Spirit was to convict the non-Christian world concerning sin. Jesus said, “And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin . . .” (16:8). He convicts the world of the reality and guilt of the sin of rejecting Him. The world has its own standards of what is right and wrong. It minimizes righteousness and glorifies sin. It approves of sin instead of condemning it, and it crucified Jesus instead of accepting Him. Charles R. Erdman reflected on this truth:

This does not mean that unbelief is a sin; of course it is; but it means that the Holy Spirit will convict the world of being sinful, on the ground, or evidence, of its rejection of Christ. It is a sin not to believe in Christ; but the truth here taught is that the rejection of Christ shows one to be a sinner. Christ is good, holy, and pure; to reject him is to convict oneself of being opposed to goodness and holiness and purity and love. When Christ is preached he becomes the Touchstone of character.¹

The Holy Spirit—through the inspired apostles and the inspired Scriptures—would show the world not only the reality of sin but also the destructive nature of sin. He would identify what sin is,

¹Charles R. Erdman, *The Gospel of John: An Exposition* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1946), 145.

clarify its character, and describe the destiny to which it leads.

Jesus said, "And He, when He comes, will convict the world . . . concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me" (16:8, 9). All sin can be described as transgression of the laws or commands of God. However, we can say, as Jesus did, that the greatest sin is that of rejecting Him, the Son of God, who was sent to bring us God's Word and His way of salvation. This is the fatal sin. After Jesus left, the Holy Spirit would supply a reminder of the words Jesus had spoken, the deeds He had done, and the salvation He had brought into the world. Those who rejected the message and the person of Christ would find themselves condemned. The Spirit's testimony was to confirm this truth as He worked through the apostles and other inspired men.

RIGHTEOUSNESS

In addition, the Spirit would convict the world in respect to righteousness. Jesus said, "And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin *and righteousness* . . ." (16:8; emphasis mine). The Holy Spirit was to show the world what true righteousness is and prove that Jesus, the One they had crucified, was the Righteous One of God. He would lead those who desire righteousness into a right relationship with God and guide those with sincere hearts to the righteousness of faith. Such righteousness comes through walking in the commandments of God. For one to receive and remain in it, he must be led into it and sustained in it. The Holy Spirit, by giving the world the truth sent from God, would accomplish these wonderful purposes.

Our Lord explained to the apostles that the world needs conviction "concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me" (16:10). He had shown the apostles and the world what righteousness is. Although Jesus would no longer be here to preach it and live it, the Holy Spirit was to take on this teaching role using the written Word. The world had rejected Jesus as being unrighteous, but the Spirit would confirm His righteousness by proclaiming His resurrection from the dead and His ascension into heaven. He would declare Jesus' mediatory, intercessory work at the Father's right hand.

RETRIBUTION

Third, the Holy Spirit would convict the world regarding the judgment. Jesus said, "And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness *and judgment*" (16:8; emphasis mine). The Spirit was to tell the world of a present judgment and a future judgment. Jesus preached that judgment had come: "Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out" (12:31). He also proclaimed a final, eternal judgment that lies ahead (12:48; Matthew 25:34–46). Part of the Spirit's task was to reveal similar messages to the world. God will call everyone into account on the day that He has appointed, and the world must be confronted with this truth. Otherwise, sinners would ignore the concept of accountability. Through the Spirit's testimony, this message can continually be presented to the lost people of the earth.

The Holy Spirit was coming to convict people "concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged" (16:11). In His righteous life, in His death for sin, and in His teachings, Jesus had brought about the judgment of the world. He had judged its ruler, the prince of darkness, along with all who were following him. This judgment was clearly announced in Jesus' life and in His death on the cross. Nevertheless, the message of the world's judgment must be clearly kept before the world. The Spirit was to carry on this work when He came.

CONCLUSION

In Jesus' conversations with the apostles about the coming of the Holy Spirit, He confined His remarks to what the Holy Spirit would do for the world, the people who were away from God. He reminded them of three significant areas in which the world had to be confronted: sin, righteousness, and judgment—that is, in the areas of rebellion, righteousness, and retribution. The people of the world must be taught about their separation from God, their need for righteousness before God, and their accountability to God.

With these words in mind, what should be preached today to non-Christians from the inspired Scriptures? What does the lost person need to hear? Jesus has condensed it to one sentence: "When He comes, [He] will convict the world

concerning sin and righteousness and judgment; concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me; and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged” (16:8–11).

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“But some days later Felix arrived with Drusilla, his wife who was a Jewess, and sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus. But as he was discussing righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix became frightened and said, ‘Go away for the present, and when I find time I will summon you’” (Acts 24:24, 25).

“To convince any unbeliever of sin, righteous-

ness, and judgment is beyond human ability. It may be possible to fix upon him the guilt of some specific sin if there is sufficient evidence to bring him before a jury; but to make him acknowledge the deeper fact, that he is a sinner, evil at heart, and deserving of punishment because he has not believed in Christ, is quite another matter. To bring a man to some standard of ethics is not too difficult; for almost every person has ideals that coincide with the moral law at some point. To create in him the humiliating consciousness that his self-righteousness is as filthy rags in comparison with the spotless linen of the righteousness of God cannot be effected by ordinary persuasion.”²

²Merrill C. Tenney, *John: The Gospel of Belief* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1948), 237.

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