

John 16:1-15  
The work of the Holy Spirit

Introduction

Jesus prophesies the persecution that is going to come to the disciples after He leaves them. Those who will persecute them are not necessarily atheists, agnostics, communists and secularists, but people who are religious and who think they are doing a service to God in persecuting Christ's people. How often Christians have been persecuted in the name of religion. We may expect the same today.

This is another warning given in the light of His departure, but He says it is good that He is going away, for it is to the disciples' advantage. Hard to believe, because they were going to left, like orphans, in a cold and unkind world, by their almighty friend. Yet His departure was a gain, not a loss; good, not evil. Reason – His departure meant the Holy Spirit's coming. This is why it was to the disciples' advantage. If Christ had remained on earth, He could not have been in more than one place at a time. But the Holy Spirit can fill every place where believers are present. By the unseen Holy Spirit, Christ could be with all His believers all the time everywhere.

In actual fact, after Christ went and the Holy Spirit with His gifts came, there were remarkable changes. The disciples were twice the men they were before. They did more for Christ in His absence than when His presence was with them.

Jesus gives teaching about the Holy Spirit in relationship to the world, the disciples and to Christ.

The Holy Spirit will convict the world

When Jesus speaks of the Holy Spirit's coming, we must take care that we do not misunderstand Him. The Holy Spirit was in believers and people of God in Old Testament times. But after the ascension, the Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost with far greater power and intensity than ever before. This is the coming alluded to here.

**He will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment** (John 16:8). The word for convict, *ελεγχειν*, is used for cross-examination of a witness or man on trial, with a view to seeing and admitting mistakes and owning up to wrongs done. So the Holy Spirit convicts of sin, **because men do not believe in me** (John 16:9).

When the Jews crucified Jesus, they believed they were serving God. But later they realized their mistake. **They were cut to the heart** (Acts 2:37). They saw the crucifixion as the greatest crime in history, caused by their sin. Throughout the book of Acts, the Holy Spirit's convicting work continues. C.f. The Jews accused by Stephen, the Philippian jailer.

The work of conversion must start here, when the Spirit convicts a man of his need, guilt and danger, else he will not appropriate God's remedy. He does not come to make us comfortable in our sins. The more we see our need, the more we value Christ and appropriate Him. N.B. the greatest sin is not murder, adultery, arson etc, but failure to believe in Christ. The world may regard this as a trifle, just an optional extra, no big deal, but in truth it is an appalling sin. Turning ones back on God's greatest gift is the height of ingratitude to the one who died for lost sinners, and saying goodbye to only hope. It ensures eternal ruin as nothing else does.

Then comes conviction of righteousness. Christ was crucified as a criminal. He was tried and condemned as an evil heretic. He was given the punishment the worst criminals had to endure. But He rose from the dead and ascended to heaven. The Father vindicated Him and His claims. His righteousness was displayed. The Holy Spirit convicts us of the truth of His righteousness, e.g. Paul on the road to Damascus; **God was pleased to reveal His Son in me** (Galatians 1:16).

The Spirit also convicts us of judgment. At the Cross, evil stands condemned. The Devil did his worst, and was defeated and overthrown. He was condemned and his doom was certain. Evil and the Devil have not had the last word. Judgment is certain, because it is foreshadowed by the Devil's judgment. The Holy Spirit gives an inner and unshakable conviction that we shall stand before the judgment seat.

Only the Holy Spirit can convict of these things. No preacher, no sermon, no illustration can produce this conviction. This is why we must pray for blessing on the Word and its preaching. If prayer is just pious words for their own sake, it is useless. But when prayer is meant as an expression of helplessness and utter dependence on God, then this crucially important prayer will be answered.

The channel through which the Holy Spirit works is the people of God. Jesus speaks of the Holy Spirit coming to the disciples. When the Holy Spirit convicts and convinces, He works through Christian men and women. Therefore if men and women of our generation are to be convicted of sin and converted to Christ, it will be through us and the church which is holy and filled with the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is searching for a base from which He can do His holy work of convicting and converting. He is looking for human hearts and holy churches. Much preaching and praying is in vain because we are so involved in sin, and compromised with doubtful things, and our lives are on such a low level that there is little difference between our lives and the lives of decent unconverted people. Such lives are no base from which the Spirit of God can operate to do His convicting work.

#### The Holy Spirit will lead us into all truth

There were many things which the disciples could not understand. They had neither the capacity nor the experience. C.f. how they failed to grasp the fact of the atonement through His death. But when the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Truth came, He would guide them into all truth and reveal things to come.

Earlier Jesus had said. **He will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you** (John 14:26). This was preparation for the writing of

the Gospels, Epistles and Revelation. This text applied in different ways to them from the way it applies to us. The Holy Spirit led the Apostles into all truth by enabling them to write Scripture. He leads us into all truth by enabling us to understand Scripture.

This is crucial in our attitude to the New Testament Scriptures. When He leads us into all truth, it is into the truth given to the Apostles, not into novel truth, not a different truth from that in Scripture. He will never guide us contrary to Scripture. Scripture is the final judge and court of appeal for all the Holy Spirit says to man. Scripture is the unique, once for all, revelation. We must refuse anyone who claims we need any other literature to find the way of salvation.

### The Holy Spirit will glorify Christ

The Holy Spirit is reticent and self-effacing. He does not draw attention to Himself, but to Christ. He glorifies Christ, makes much of Christ, not much of us, denomination or doctrines, or even of Himself. He came to glorify Christ. He takes the things of Christ – the glories and blessings and greatness – and reveals them to us.

This is the test of the Holy Spirit's work. There is much talk and dispute over the Holy Spirit's work. This test must be applied, to help discern the true work of the spirit. Is this glorifying to Christ, or is it just emotional experience, or does it just increase attachment to the mass or Mary?

### Conclusion

The Holy Spirit came to convict the world, to lead disciples into all truth, and to glorify Christ. How dependent are we on the whole Trinity for salvation? It was the Father who planned it, the Son who executed it, and the Holy Spirit applies it. We need seek the Holy Spirit more earnestly, and use Him more diligently. We must not quench or despise the Holy Spirit. This is the cause of so much of our weaknesses and powerlessness.

Use the book which He uses. Humbly and faithfully test all which claims to be of God, and see which is the gift of the Spirit. If it doesn't glorify Christ, it condemns itself.