

"THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH"

I. Introduction

- A. In the age of modern advertising, we are constantly being told that there is something that we lack, something that we need to get that will make the supreme difference in our lives, something that is so amazing that, once we have it, we will wonder how we ever lived without it.
 - 1. The thing is, you only have to think about the objects being marketed in these advertisements to see through such claims.
 - 2. Is there anyone who really believes that getting a razor that has five blades instead of a measly four is really going to revolutionize your life?
- B. Christians sometimes think this way about the Christian life or the church's ministry.
 - 1. If only we had this, or that, or the other thing, we would see much better results.
 - 2. But this passage makes it clear that this is not true.
 - 3. As Jesus prepares his disciples for his imminent departure he assures them, and us, that the coming of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost means that we have all that we need.

II. The Advantage of Jesus' Absence

- A. Our passage begins with Jesus once again calling the disciples' attention to the fact that he is about to leave them.
 - 1. He tells them, "I am going to him who sent me," which clearly means that he is going to God the Father.

2. Jesus also says that the disciples failed to ask him where he is going.
 3. This statement might seem to contradict the earlier passages in John's Gospel where Peter and Thomas did ask Jesus where he was going.
 4. But when you look at those examples in context, it is clear that Peter and Thomas were not really concerned with *where* Jesus was going but simply with the fact that he was no longer going to be *with them*.
 5. The disciples' sorrow over Jesus' departure was understandable, but it also displayed their lack of understanding.
 6. They did not realize the significance of where Jesus was going and what this would mean for them.
 7. One of the things that this shows us is that we can be so self-absorbed in our sorrows and disappointments that we can lose sight of the bigger picture of what God is doing.
 8. The disciples didn't want Jesus to leave them, but if he hadn't done so God's plan of redemption would not have reached its goal.
 9. That is why Jesus said it was to the disciple's advantage that he go away.
- B. The set of events that led to Jesus' departure was the climactic step in the outworking of our salvation.
1. Because Jesus went to the Father by way of the cross and the empty tomb, he ascended to the heavenly sanctuary in triumph.
 2. And by departing from the earth after accomplishing his great victory, Jesus delayed the consummation of his kingdom on earth.

3. Jesus' departure was to the church's advantage because it opened up an opportunity for repentance in this present age.
 4. In a sense, it was a stay of execution.
 5. It made it possible for the Spirit to be sent so that the nations could be reached with the gospel.
- C. This is why Jesus told the disciples "if I do not go away the Helper will not come to you."
1. Jesus had to ascend to the Father before the Holy Spirit could be sent to empower the church for its mission of taking the gospel to the world.
 2. The reason why this was the case was because the Spirit came to apply what Christ accomplished in the set of events that culminated in his departure.
 3. The Holy Spirit's basic task in the world is to unite the body of Christ to its glorified Head.
- D. Let's pause and think about what these things mean for us today.
1. The fact that Jesus is now with the Father in glory means that the battle in which we are engaged has already been won.
 2. All authority has been given to Christ.
 3. He has taken his seat at God's right hand, and he is ruling over his people from heaven.
 4. As our Larger Catechism puts it, the ascended Christ intercedes for us "by his appearing in our nature continually before the Father in heaven, in the merit of his obedience and sacrifice on earth, declaring his will to have it applied to all believers; answering all accusations against them, and procuring for them quiet of conscience, notwithstanding

daily failings, access with boldness to the throne of grace, and acceptance of their persons and services.” [WLC 55]

5. That is what Jesus is doing for you right now if you are a Christian.
- E. As far as the coming of the Spirit is concerned, this assures us that Christ will subdue all his people to himself and will conquer all of his and our enemies.
 1. Jesus has done all that had to be done for our salvation.
 2. All that remains is for Christ’s finished work to be applied to his people.
 3. This is why the Spirit was sent, and he will not fail to accomplish his task.
 4. The descent of the Spirit on Pentecost marks the beginning of the last days.
 5. The ruler of this world is judged.
 6. Christ’s death and resurrection broke the dominion of sin and death.
 7. Satan has been defeated.
 8. He can no longer accuse us before God.
 9. As Michael Horton explains, “The clock is running down on this present evil age. The firstfruits of the harvest, Jesus Christ, has been raised, entering the everlasting Sabbath rest in conquest. The war in heaven is over, though insurgent battles must still be waged on earth.” [*The Gospel Commission*, 50-51]
 10. To use a military metaphor, our conquering Lord has sent his Spirit to lead the ground campaign in the mopping up operations that are still taking place on earth.

III. Convicting the World

- A. In the next part of the passage, Jesus explains the kind of work that the Spirit will do in the period in between Christ's two comings.
 - 1. The coming of the Spirit is the signal that God's kingdom is arriving in this world.
 - 2. And the way that the kingdom comes is through the Spirit's work of convicting the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.
 - 3. In other words, the Spirit brings the world to a sense of its guilt and its need for Christ.
 - 4. This is how Jesus brings those whom he has chosen out of the world to himself.
 - 5. It is the Spirit's work of conviction that results in the salvation of Jesus' sheep.
- B. We see this happening in Luke's account in Acts 2 of what took place on the day of Pentecost.
 - 1. Luke tells us that, after hearing Peter's sermon, the people who were present that day "were cut to the heart."
 - 2. Their eyes were opened so that they could see the sinfulness of their rejection of Christ.
 - 3. They were made to see that Christ did not do anything to deserve condemnation because he was completely righteous.
 - 4. And they were confronted with the fact that judgment awaits all who are apart from Christ.
- C. When Jesus says that the Spirit convicts the world of sin, he makes special mention of the fact that the world does not believe in him.

1. This is something that is plain to see.
 2. The world certainly does not believe in Christ.
 3. A number of people respect Jesus as a good teacher, but they also believe that Jesus has been misunderstood and misrepresented by many of his followers.
 4. Others openly scorn Jesus and treat him with contempt.
 5. Others don't bother to form any opinion about Jesus at all.
 6. This passage shows us that a refusal to believe in Christ, whether it is respectful or hostile or indifferent, is sin.
 7. Unbelief is not a matter of not having enough information.
 8. It cannot be overcome by presenting the gospel in a flashy or relevant manner.
 9. Unbelief is a moral issue.
 10. The Holy Spirit was sent into the world in order to expose the sin of unbelief.
 11. He shows people that the reason why they reject Christ is because of their sin.
 12. He exposes the hardheartedness that causes people to neglect Christ and his gospel.
- D. As for the Spirit's work of convicting the world of righteousness, Jesus connects this to his departure from the world.
1. When Jesus was in world, his righteousness exposed all human righteousness to be nothing more than filthy rags.
 2. But now that Jesus has gone to the Father, this task has been assigned to the Holy Spirit, and it is a task that is absolutely essential for our salvation.

3. We all have a natural bent towards thinking that our righteousness is pleasing to God.
 4. But the Spirit shows us that our supposed righteousness is actually offensive to God.
 5. He shows us that we need a righteousness that comes from outside of ourselves -- the righteousness of Christ, which can only be received by faith.
- E. As for convicting the world of judgment, there are probably a couple of senses to what Jesus means by this.
1. First of all, it may mean that the Spirit convicts the world of its wrongful condemnation of Christ.
 2. Under the influence of Satan, who is the ruler of this fallen world, the world judged Christ to be under God's curse and sentenced him to die the accursed death of the cross.
 3. But the reality is that it is the world itself that is under God's curse for its rebellion against him.
 4. And while it appeared that Jesus' crucifixion was Satan's moment of victory, it actually sealed Satan's defeat.
 5. It was God's judgment upon the ruler of this world.
- F. Second, and closely related to this, the Spirit convicts the world of the inevitability of the coming day of judgment.
1. By the Spirit's power, people are brought to see that God's judgment will one day fall upon all of those who are apart from Jesus Christ.
 2. Our eyes are opened to the fact that we have offended holy God and that his justice demands that our sins be punished.

3. As painful as it is for us to be confronted by this reality, it is absolutely necessary if we are going to be saved from God's just wrath.
4. We have to see our desperate need for Christ before we will lay hold of him in faith.

IV. Guiding Us into All the Truth

- A. In the last part of the passage, Jesus tells the disciples about the Spirit's work of guiding them into all the truth.
 1. He begins by saying that "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now."
 2. Because Jesus left these things unsaid, it would have to be the Spirit who taught them to the disciples.
 3. The "many things" that Jesus mentions here are the teachings that are recorded for us in the New Testament.
 4. This passage tells us how the New Testament came to be written.
 5. The four Gospels are the Spirit-inspired testimony to what Jesus did and taught during his earthly ministry, while the rest of the New Testament is the Spirit-inspired explanation of what these things mean.
 6. And note that the things that the Spirit declares in the Scriptures are not his words but the words of Christ.
 7. In other words, if you are going to have a "red-letter" edition of the New Testament, there is a sense in which you should put all twenty-seven books in red letters, not just the words that Jesus speaks in the four Gospels.
- B. Jesus' teaching in this passage relates to what the writer of Hebrews says at the beginning of that epistle about how God has spoken his final word to us in his Son.

1. The Spirit was not sent to bring a new word but to bring about the effects of God's final word in sending Jesus into the world.
 2. The Spirit unpacks the revelation that God has given us in Christ.
 3. We are dependent upon all three members of the Trinity for our salvation.
 4. The Father gave us to the Son before time began.
 5. The Son secured our salvation when he came into the world in human flesh.
 6. And the Spirit is the one who brings us to a saving knowledge of Christ.
- C. The things that Jesus says in verses 12-15 refer primarily to how the Spirit empowered the apostles for the unique work that was entrusted to them.
1. This is consistent with what Jesus said back at the end of chapter 15 about how the disciples would bear witness because they had been with Jesus from the beginning.
 2. That was something that was unique to the apostles.
 3. They were eyewitnesses of Christ.
 4. As Sinclair Ferguson notes, "No doubt [Jesus' words in this text] have a continuing significance for Christians today, but not in the direct way in which they are often understood (the Spirit will lead *me* into all truth in an unmediated way). Rather, they indicate that it is by means of the apostolic witness (now inscripturated in the New Testament), not by direct revelation of the Spirit to individual believers or by corporate revelation to teaching officers (the claim which was to be developed in the Roman Catholic magisterium),

that Christ's person, his teaching and his future purposes are made known." [Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, 70-71]

5. Because the apostolic testimony was given by the power of the Holy Spirit, it serves as the church's constitution.
 6. The church is built upon the foundation of this testimony.
 7. The Spirit is still leading God's people into all the truth today, but he does so through the Scriptures.
- D. This is closely related to the fact that Jesus says that the Spirit will lead the apostles into *all* the truth.
1. This means that no further revelation was given once the apostolic testimony was established and recorded in Scripture.
 2. The Scriptures are a sufficient guide for Christ's church.
 3. Nothing else is needed.
 4. As it says in our Westminster Confession of Faith, "The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men." [WCF 1.6]
 5. We get ourselves into all sorts of trouble when we look outside of God's Word for the Spirit's guidance.
 6. In the words of John Calvin, "as soon as the Spirit is separated from the word of Christ, the door is open to all kinds of delusions and impostors."
 7. But if you rest content with what God has revealed in his Word, you will find that it really is sufficient for you.

8. You do not need anything else.
9. Whatever challenges you face in life, whatever disappointments, whatever trials, whatever temptations, whatever griefs -- your God has provided you with all that pertains to life and godliness in his Word.

*How firm a foundation, you saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in his excellent Word!
What more can he say than to you he has said,
To you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?*