

## **The Spirit's Witness and Work**

John 16:1-15

Pastor Jason Van Bommel

*"I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away.<sup>2</sup> They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God.<sup>3</sup> And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me.<sup>4</sup> But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you.*

*"I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you.<sup>5</sup> But now I am going to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?'<sup>6</sup> But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart.<sup>7</sup> 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 go, I will send him to you.<sup>8</sup> And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment:<sup>9</sup> concerning sin, because they do not believe in me;<sup>10</sup> concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer;<sup>11</sup> concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.*

*<sup>12</sup> "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.<sup>13</sup> When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.<sup>14</sup> He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.<sup>15</sup> All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you. – John 16:1-15, ESV*

### **An Impossible Task – Faithful Perseverance in Persecution**

Have you ever been asked to do something you thought was impossible? What did you need in order to be able to do the task? You probably needed encouragement or comfort if you felt overwhelmed by the size of the task. You probably also needed instruction as to how to tackle the task, and then you needed the ability/strength/power to be able to do the task, right?

The disciples were about to face an impossible task: They were about to see their beloved Master arrested and taken from them. Then, He will be crucified, publicly and brutally humiliated and killed. Though He will rise again from the dead and appear to them several times, He will not remain with them. He will go back into heaven, back to His Father. After the departure of Jesus, the disciples would be called to faithfully bear witness and persevere in faith despite intense and unfair persecution.

How could they face this impossible loss and this impossible task? Jesus takes time to teach and equip them on this final night, in His last moments with them before the agony of Gethsemane. His teaching to them on this final night divides nicely into three parts, corresponding to the three chapters, John 14-16. In John 14, Jesus' overall tone and purpose is one of comfort – "Do

not let your hearts be troubled.” In John 15, His message is primarily one of instruction, with the core command, “Abide in Me.” Now, in John 16, Jesus shifts to being primarily predictive. He is telling them what to expect – what the world will do to them and what the Holy Spirit will do through them and in them. From comfort to instruction to prediction, Jesus is equipping His disciples for what they will be called to face.

So, what will they face?

Jesus says they will be put out of their synagogues. The blind man Jesus healed in John 9 had already been put out of the synagogue. In Jesus’ day, being put out of the synagogue was a big deal – being expelled from the Jewish community meant you were to be treated as unclean. No one could come and eat at your home and no one would invite you to come and eat at their home. You would be treated as a Gentile dog.

As if being put out of the synagogue wasn’t bad enough, the disciples will also face the risk of death. In fact, Jesus told them, “*the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God.*” A warped sense of righteousness and religious zeal had spread through conservative Jewish communities. A saying had arisen: “Whoever sheds the blood of the wicked is equal to one who brings a sacrifice.”

Why would fellow Jews put followers of Jesus out of the synagogue and even seek to put them to death? Well, to a faithful Jew, the followers of Jesus were blaspheming God because they taught people to worship Jesus as God. Think of the Apostle Paul before he was saved by Christ: He was religiously committed to eliminating Christianity as a stain of wickedness on the purity of the Jewish people.

Jesus say this shows they don’t know God: “*And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me.*” Those who reject Jesus and who think Christians are blaspheming have not understood who Jesus is or who God is. Today, Islamic radicals have taken the place of zealous Jews in the bloody persecution of the followers of Jesus. On Friday, I read news reports of the families of the 19 Egyptian Christians who were beheaded by ISIS in 2015 finally being reunited with the remains of their loved ones. ISIS radicals beheaded Christians, burned Christians, drowned Christians and marked out the homes and churches of Christians for destruction.

The words of Blaise Pascal, a devout Christian and brilliant French mathematician and philosopher, are still true today: “*Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from religious conviction.*” Sadly, in church history, some of the most brutal violence against faithful Christians has been carried out by other so-called Christians in the name of Jesus. But the words of Jesus were still true of them: “*they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me.*”

People who truly know Jesus do not do violence in His name. Knowing Jesus and living as He lived means not treating other people the way they treat you, but being committed to overcoming evil with good, responding to hatred with love. This is why the task given the disciples was impossible – why the task given to us is impossible.

It's easy to strike back at someone who is threatening you. Peter was prepared to do this. He swung his sword and cut off Malchus' ear in the Garden of Gethsemane when they came to arrest Jesus. I'm sure he would have been happy to go down swinging, fighting for His Lord to death. But this is not the call. This is not the way of Jesus. Remember, Jesus had said in 14:9 to Philip what He could have said to all the disciples: *"Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me?"*

### **I. Christ's Departure & The Spirit's Coming**

The disciples did not truly know Jesus, even though they walked with Him, talked with Him, ate with Him and saw Him do great miracles. They needed Him to go away so they could truly know Him spiritually, through the coming of the Holy Spirit:

*"I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. <sup>5</sup> But now I am going to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' <sup>6</sup> But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. <sup>7</sup> 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 go, I will send him to you." - v. 4-7*

Jesus is telling His disciples that, as long as He was with them, they did not need to know about His plan to leave them and send the Holy Spirit to them. But now that the appointed hour had come, and He was about to leave them, they needed to know this, for the strengthening of their faith and the comforting of their sorrow. They need to know that Jesus' imminent departure is not only for His good – which He had addressed earlier – but that it is also truly for their good.

How could it be good? Jesus says, "It is to your advantage that I go away." How? Wouldn't we all have loved to be with Jesus, in His very presence, while He was here in earth? What wouldn't we give to be able to sit at the feet of Jesus and hear Him preach, to see Him multiply bread and fish for the 5,000, to see Him raise Lazarus from the dead? How could it be better for the disciples to have Him go away?

Well, Jesus explains the reason: *"If I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you."* Why not? Couldn't Jesus have sent the Holy Spirit to them and stayed with them? No. Jesus makes that clear. But, why not? Because the indwelling, abiding presence of the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Christ is the gift to the church Christ secures by His death, resurrection and ascension.

Yes, people in the OT experienced the Holy Spirit. Peter even calls the Holy Spirit who worked in the OT prophets “the Spirit of Christ” in 1 Peter 1:11. But now, the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Christ is sent to indwell every believer. In fact, Paul says, in Romans 8:9-10 – “*You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.*”

So, this is the promise of the Spirit for every believer now, after Christ’s victory over sin and death and His ascension to the right hand of the Father:

1. **We are in the Spirit, no longer in the flesh.** – The Holy Spirit is the controlling influence and the core identity of believers. We still struggle against the flesh, but we are no longer in the flesh; that is, our sinful nature no longer identifies and controls us.
2. **We have the Spirit of God in us as the Spirit of Christ.**
3. **Christ dwells in us by faith through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.**

So, which is best, to have the physical presence of Christ in front of us or the spiritual presence of Christ within us? Jesus goes on to explain how the Spirit’s coming is better for the disciples in terms of the Spirit’s witness to the world and the Spirit’s work in the hearts of believers.

## II. The Spirit’s Witness to the World

So, how does the Spirit witness to the world?

<sup>8</sup>And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: <sup>9</sup>concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; <sup>10</sup>concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; <sup>11</sup>concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

Jesus said the Spirit will convict, or convince or persuade, the world concerning three key things –

- A. Sin** – *All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.* – Romans 3:23 All people are guilty before the bar of God’s justice, falling short of the glorious standard of God’s Law.

People need to know they are sinners before the good news of a Savior will make any sense to them at all. If you don’t know you’re sick, you’ll have no interest in the doctor’s cure. When John the Baptist came to prepare the way for Jesus, he preached a message of repentance, and people came to him to be baptized, confessing their sins. Conviction of sin is the first step on the road to salvation.

The Spirit will convict the world concerning sin because they do not believe in Jesus. We have no other way of getting rid of our sin, of being freed and forgiven, but in and through Jesus alone. Without faith in Jesus, our sin remains.

**B. Righteousness** – Jesus said, *“concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer.”* Jesus is the perfect righteousness of God. As long as He was in the world, the world had a living, breathing, walking, talking demonstration of God’s righteousness. How good do you have to be to be acceptable to God? As good as Jesus! Jesus is the standard of righteousness, and nothing less than His holy perfection can or will ever be acceptable to God.

**C. Judgment** – This one is interesting, because Jesus says, *“concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.”* On the cross, Jesus triumphed over and judged the devil and his minions. Satan thought he was getting rid of Jesus, but instead he was sealing his own doom.

Our hope is found in this judgment of the devil, as Colossians 2:13-15 says: *“And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.”*

So, the Spirit comes to convince the world of judgment because the ruler of this world has been judged and Jesus has been victorious. Now everyone has the calling to either stand with Jesus, covered with His righteousness and having victory over the devil, or to continue to stand with the devil and risk facing the same consequence of judgment he has faced.

Some people glibly say they’d rather go to hell because all their friends are there. Others have famously said they’d rather reign in hell than serve in heaven. The Spirit comes to convict people of judgment to strip away these foolish notions and to bring to their minds and consciences the reality of being shut out of all of God’s goodness and benefits and shut up in judgment, darkness and terror forever.

**But HOW?** The Spirit bears witness to the world, but how? How does the Spirit convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment? Of course, the Spirit can do so directly by speaking to the minds and influencing the consciences of people apart from any means. But that’s not usually how He works. He most often chooses to use His people as His instruments in convicting the world.

Remember last week, we heard Jesus say to His disciples, “*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. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.*”

We bear witness in step with the Spirit, following the Spirit’s lead. The Spirit most often witnesses through us. Look at the apostles’ preaching in the book of Acts and you’ll often see these three themes – the sin and guilt of people, the perfect righteousness of Jesus, and the coming judgment. The call to repent of sins and trust in Jesus for salvation comes directly from these three issues. So, when we witness to the world, and we want to point them to Jesus, and not to ourselves, we would do well to focus in some way on these three issues.

Here’s one idea: Some of us were at Bob Canapp’s funeral on Friday. Funerals always provide a great opportunity to talk about these issues with unbelievers, and not just those who are at the funeral. You could mention to someone that Bob passed and you attended his funeral. You could wait to see what they say about funerals and then say something like, “I really enjoy going to funerals of believers, since I know they are in heaven, at home with the Lord.” Or “The funeral was great because I know for certain that Bob is in heaven with the Lord.” Then, you could ask: “Do you believe in heaven?” If the person says “yes” or “I guess so,” then you could ask, “Who do you think goes to heaven?” If they say, “Good people,” you could ask, “What do you think makes someone a good person?” or “How good do you think someone needs to be to go to heaven?” From there, you can look for opportunities to share the truth that no one is good enough to go to heaven on their own, because God is both perfectly holy and perfectly just, and none of us are good enough – except Jesus. And see if you can take if from there . . .

### **III. The Spirit’s Work in the Believer**

Well, how will we know what to say? How will we know the Gospel well enough to be used by the Spirit as a witness? This comes through the Spirit’s work in the minds and hearts of believers:

*“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.<sup>13</sup> When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. – vv. 12-15, ESV*

#### **A. Revelation of Truth**

The Holy Spirit is called “the Spirit of truth” for a second time by Jesus, emphasizing the Spirit’s role as a teacher. The Spirit guides believers into all truth. Just as the Spirit uses the witness of believers to convict the world, so also He is pleased to use the teachings of people as His instruments to guide His own into all truth. The disciples had been taught the Scriptures by

Jesus for three years, and yet it seems like precious little had stuck in their minds. When the Holy Spirit comes at Pentecost, He enlightens the minds of the disciples to both remember and understand what Jesus had taught them. He also enlightened their minds to understand the Scriptures they had all been taught since childhood.

The world needs the witness of believers and the conviction of the Holy Spirit, working together, to convince them of their sin, Christ's righteousness and the coming judgment. Likewise, believers need the Word of God, sound Christian teaching and the illumination of the Holy Spirit to guide them into all truth. Many people read the Bible and fail to understand what it means or to see the glory of Christ shining in its pages. Many people sit under solid, faithful Bible teaching and walk away still not knowing, understanding or believing the truth. Yet God the Holy Spirit is pleased to use the Word of God and the faithful teaching of servants of God as instruments to bring enlightenment to His own people.

We see the power of the Holy Spirit's work both in convicting of the world and teaching the disciples on the Day of Pentecost and then throughout the Book of Acts. We also see how much better indeed it was for the disciples to have Jesus go away and the Spirit come. At Pentecost, we see Peter, who had always been quick to open his mouth but rarely had anything truthful or helpful to say, stand up and deliver a brilliant sermon, weaving together several Scripture texts to focus on Christ. He preaches the themes of sin, righteousness and judgment, focused on Christ. The Spirit has come, and He is guiding Peter into all truth.

When Peter preaches, we also see the Spirit working on the hearts of the gathered crowd. They are convicted. They are cut to the heart, and they cry out in response to Peter's message, "*Brothers, what must we do?*"

None of this would have been possible without the Holy Spirit.

## **B. Application of Redemption**

The Spirit does more than just guide disciples of Jesus into truth. He makes it personal, making personal application to believers of the benefits of Christ.

*He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you. – vv. 14-15*

Jesus had earned everything:

- He has earned perfect righteousness by a life of flawless obedience.
- He has earned full forgiveness by His death on the cross, which satisfies God's divine justice and covers our guilt.

- He has defeated death, shattered the grave, and He has the keys of death and Hades.
- He has earned the right to sit on the throne forever, as God promised in His covenant with King David.
- He has defeated all of His and our enemies – sin, death, hell, the devil.
- He has an eternal kingdom and He is the heir of all things, the One who receives dominion over the universe.
- He has resurrection life and the power of new creation. With a word, He will bring into reality the new creation, the new heavens and the new earth.

Jesus has it all, and He is Lord of all!

The Spirit takes everything Jesus has earned and glorifies Jesus by declaring these things to us. He takes what belongs to Jesus and declares them to us. If we are in Christ, the Spirit tells us, all things are ours in Him. The Spirit declares to us:

- We have perfect righteousness in Jesus. His life of flawless obedience is counted as ours.
- We have full forgiveness of all of our sins, as the wrath of God is satisfied and our sins are covered by His blood, cleansed completely and forever.
- We have been given victory over death, the grave has been shattered for us.
- We will sit with Jesus in His kingdom as co-heirs with Christ forever.
- We will share in His resurrection life as we enjoy the new heavens and the new earth with Him forever.

In Christ, we have it all!

It is the Spirit who declares this to us: *“The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.”* – Romans 8:16-17, ESV

Provided we suffer! You might think, “I knew there was a catch!” Jesus earned all these things for us, and His going away sent the Holy Spirit to declare these things to us, to bear witness with our Spirit that we are children of God. But then why does suffering have to come? Why do we need to be despised and rejected by the world?

Because we are followers of Jesus, and so we walk in His footsteps. Because the world is still in rebellion against God and hates God and His children. Because no one enters glory but by way of a cross. So, shortly after Peter preached his brilliant sermon on Pentecost, he was arrested, beaten, imprisoned, threatened. God delivered him and continued to use him for years to bring the witness of the Gospel to many thousands. Still, at the end of his life, Peter faced a cross he



would not escape, and he laid down his life willingly for his Lord, as he boasted he was willing to do on this night.

In Christ, we have the great privilege of sharing in His full inheritance, and also sharing in His sufferings. By suffering, His kingdom advances in our hearts and lives and in the world. Will we accept His blessing and trust that *“God's work done in God's way will never lack God's supply.”* as Hudson Taylor said? Will we be committed to what Francis Schaeffer said was our life's calling, to be doing *“The Lord's Work in the Lord's Way”* – Francis Schaeffer?