

Series: The Upper Room Discourse

John 16:5-15

Conviction for the world, guidance for disciples

by Scott Grant

A bad marriage

It has been said that the relationship of a believer to the Holy Spirit is like a bad marriage. The husband lives with his wife but doesn't appreciate her. Perhaps we don't appreciate the Spirit because he always seems to be in the background, away from the spotlight. In fact, as we'll see today, the Holy Spirit is the operator of the spotlight, which he shines on Jesus. Jesus, of course, appreciates him. When he speaks of the Spirit, it's easy to detect tremendous respect in his words. Jesus also helps us appreciate the Holy Spirit by helping us understand him: who he is and what he does. In John 14:15-31, we saw that the Spirit creates and encourages our relationships with God. Today, in John 16:5-15, we will see the Spirit's interaction with both believers and unbelievers.

The subject of the previous section, John 15:18-16:4, was the world's hatred toward disciples of Christ. So Jesus sends the Holy Spirit, the Helper, to disciples. The Spirit is to our advantage (16:5-7), because he convicts the world (16:8-11) and leads us (12-15).

The advantage of the Spirit

John 16:5-7:

(5) "But now I am going to him who sent me; and none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' (6) But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. (7) 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."

Jesus tells them, as he has earlier in the discourse, that he is departing to the Father, whom he calls "him who sent me." But none of them asks him where he's going. In John 13:36, Peter asked Jesus where he was going. In John 14:5, Thomas' words contained within them a question as to the Lord's destination. At this point, however, interest seems to be completely lacking. Jesus is saying that at this particular moment, no one is asking where he's going.

The explanation for their silence is found in verse 6, which begins with the word "but." Actually, both verses 6 and 7 begin with this word. The word is different from the word that begins verse 5. Verse 5 begins with *de*, which connotes a mild adversative or can simply mean "and." Verses 6 and 7 begin with *alla*, which connotes a strong adversative. In verse 6, Jesus explains the reason they don't ask where he's going; in verse 7, he explains what they would have discovered had they asked.

Jesus says that the disciples are sorrowful "because" he has said these things, which pertain to his departure. In fact, sorrow has "filled" their hearts. With their hearts filled with sorrow, they have no capacity to ask a question that, from their perspective, may generate an answer that provokes even more sorrow. Jesus doesn't chastise them; he knows he's giving them truth that's difficult to accept on the spot. Truth often has a percolation period.

But if they had asked, they would have received an answer that would have filled their hearts with joy, not sorrow. That answer would have been what Jesus tells them in verse 7. As noted earlier, verse 7 begins with the strong adversative "but" (*alla*), which addresses the disciples' sorrow. The pronoun "I" is

emphatic. It is Jesus, not the dire circumstances, whom they should trust. In telling them that he's putting forth "the truth," he's confronting their potential disbelief in what he's about to tell them. The truth is, believe it or not, that his departure is to their advantage. His departure, the object of sorrow so deep that it filled their hearts, actually profits them.

Let's put ourselves in the position of the disciples. Nothing more devastating than the departure of Jesus - and the method of his departure, execution as a criminal -- could have befallen them. It was the worst thing that could have happened. Yet it was the best thing that could have happened. It's good for us to keep in mind: What seems like the worst thing may actually be the best thing.

Jesus explains that if he doesn't leave, "the Helper," who is the Holy Spirit, will not come. Now that would be the worst thing. If the Holy Spirit doesn't come to them, they will not receive his wonderful ministries, which center on creating and nurturing relationships with God. The Holy Spirit will only come if Jesus leaves them for the Father - and leaves them via the cross, cleansing them from sin and clearing the decks, so to speak, for the Spirit.

Note that Jesus will "send" the Helper, just as the Father "sent" him (verse 5). As the Father sent the Son, so the Son sends the Spirit. He will be like Jesus, because he will carry out the ministries of Jesus.

For faith's sake, we may tend to think that it would have been more advantageous for us to have lived when Jesus lived, to see him, touch him and hear him. But it is actually to our advantage that he left and sent the Spirit to dwell in us. These are the best days of all, not for any material reasons but for spiritual reasons. The very Spirit of God is present within us. Do we see this as an advantage? Do we see these as the best days?

One of my favorite songs is "There is a Redeemer," which was reworked by Melody Green and performed by Keith Green. One of the reasons I like it is because the refrain includes all members of the Godhead: "Thank you, O my Father, for giving us your Son / and leaving your Spirit till the work on earth is done." I play it on the guitar from time to time. Recently, the last line in the refrain has caused me to choke up, because I'm gaining more familiarity with the Spirit - who he is and what he does. Last summer I read through the Upper Room Discourse and then Acts through Revelation, looking for nothing but the Spirit. I was deeply moved at a few points as I saw what the Spirit was doing. I've seen more of the "advantage" that he is. I've seen how he nurtures my relationship with God.

The first advantage that Jesus speaks of in this passage, however, is one that concerns the Spirit's involvement with the world.

The conviction of the Spirit

John 16:8-11:

(8) "And he, when he comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment - (9) concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; (10) and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer behold me; (11) and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged."

Jesus speaks of the Helper's "coming." In verse 7 he spoke of the Helper's "coming to you," meaning the disciples. In John 14:7, he said the world was not able to receive the Spirit. But believers have the Helper. Therefore, the Helper carries out his ministry to the world through the church. Romans 10:14: "How then shall they call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?" We are the preachers, so to speak, who declare the gospel in word and deed.

Don Richardson in his book "Eternity in their Hearts" cites examples of how hundreds of primitive cultures that had never heard the gospel were prepared for it through various traditions. Many cultures got close to the gospel without anyone telling them about it, but none of them got all the way. God certainly could have

revealed the gospel to them separate of any outside influence, but apparently he wants to use "preachers" - he wants to use us. He wants to involve us in his plan of redemption.

The Helper will "convict" the world. Jesus continues with the courtroom image. Earlier Jesus said both the Spirit and the disciples would testify to the world (John 15:26-27). The Helper testifies to the world about Jesus, and we testify. But only the Helper convicts.

This takes the pressure off us. We don't have to prosecute anyone, convince any jury or render any judgment; all we have to do is testify - tell people what we know about Jesus. The Helper takes care of the rest. He truly is "the Helper."

The Helper convicts the world of three things: sin, righteousness and judgment. It convicts the world of what it does have (sin), what it doesn't have (righteousness) and the effect of what it does have and doesn't have (judgment).

Those who constitute the world have all three elements sized up wrong. First, they don't believe they're sinners in need of a savior. Second, they believe they're righteous enough. And third, if they believe in a judgment at all, they'll get by all right, because they're not truly sinners and because they're righteous enough. But Jesus sizes up these elements differently.

First, the Helper will convict those who constitute the world concerning sin, because they don't believe in Jesus. They are in fact sinners: They have rejected God and enthroned themselves. The way to God is faith in Jesus Christ. If they believed in Christ, no conviction regarding sin would be called for, because they would not be guilty of sin. Christ was condemned in place of all believers; he absorbed their guilt. But unbelievers are guilty of sin. The Holy Spirit convicts them of this guilt so that they will embrace the forgiveness God offers in Jesus Christ.

Second, the Helper convicts those who constitute the world concerning righteousness, because Jesus is departing to the Father and the disciples will no longer see him. Jesus was the only righteous man - he was the only man who didn't reject God. He was the embodiment of righteousness: a living, breathing example. But he's no longer here. How can anyone be convicted concerning righteousness if they don't know what righteousness looks like? People who have some measure of righteousness as an objective see all the unrighteousness around them and deem themselves righteous enough. But if they were to come face to face with true righteousness, they'd have the opportunity to fall flat on their faces, as Peter did when he told Jesus, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" (Luke 4:8).

If Jesus were to continue on with the disciples in body, they, when testifying about Jesus, would have "beheld" Jesus and directed people to look at him. But not to worry, Jesus tells them; the Helper, who is the Spirit of Christ (Galatians 4:6), will show the world righteousness, giving it a point of comparison with its own supposed righteousness. Jesus is no longer here as an example of righteousness, but his Spirit is. And the Spirit gives the world examples of righteousness through believers, in whom he is producing righteousness.

Last Saturday about 25 people, mostly college students, descended on the home of Dorman Followwill, the PBC college pastor, while he and his family were on vacation. They built the family a new picket fence, installed new dry wall inside and conducted various other repair and cleanup projects. Several people in the neighborhood took note, dropped by and asked questions. The Holy Spirit was ministering to the world through the righteousness he had nurtured in those college students, which was expressed in love for their pastor's family.

Third, the Helper convicts those who constitute the world concerning judgment, because "the ruler of this world," who is Satan, has been judged. Although the verb tense places this judgment in the past, the timing of Satan's judgment is in the immediate future. It will take place at the cross, and it is so certain that John records Jesus as saying it has already taken place. Similar language regarding Satan's demise in John 12:31 appears in the context of the impending crucifixion. The cross was Satan's biggest defeat, for it removed his greatest weapon: fear of death, which involves fear of judgment (Colossians 2:15, Hebrews 2:14-15, 1 John 4:17-18). If the world's ruler has been judged, certainly the world will be judged as well. The

judgment of the ruler of this world tells the people of this world that they shall not escape judgment either, as long as they belong to its ruler.

Although final judgment for people of world is yet to be, judgment is happening even now. God judges the people of the world simply by giving them the self-destructive things they want (Romans 1:28-29). The Helper impresses upon them that the ensuing deterioration of life is attributable to what they have, sin, and what they don't have, righteousness. They are guilty, and the Helper convicts them.

We don't need to convince people that they are sinners; we don't need to convince people of the righteousness of Christ; we don't need to convince them that they are being judged by God. Thankfully, we have no part in the conviction. We are neither prosecutors nor judges. But we are witnesses. We can tell people about sin, righteousness and judgment and leave the convicting up to the Helper.

Thus we see God's case against the world prosecuted by the Holy Spirit. It is a mission of mercy. If it weren't, God would have put an end to the world long ago. But he loves the world (John 3:16). He is patient, "not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). The Spirit convicts the world not to condemn it but to liberate it. He convicts the world in order to hold forth the possibility of redemption. The 3,000 people convicted by the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost were pierced to the heart, but they were also baptized into the kingdom (Acts 2:37, 41).

The main character in Dostoyevsky's "Crime and Punishment," Raskalnikov, murders two women and is eventually convicted and sentenced to hard labor. But he has difficulty coming to grips with the fact that what he did was a crime. On a purely intellectual level, he reasoned, the murders seemed justifiable. As long as he clung to this belief, he remained in his own personal prison. Dostoyevsky writes of Raskalnikov: "How happy he would have been if only he could have considered himself guilty. ... If only he could feel remorse - searing remorse, shattering the heart, banishing sleep - the kind of remorse with terrible pangs that conjure up the noose and the whirlpool! He would have rejoiced! Agony and tears - that, too is life! But he felt no remorse for his crime." Happy is the one whom the Holy Spirit convicts of rejecting God and believes the truth of the conviction.

The Spirit convicts the world. He does something quite different for followers of Christ.

The leading of the Spirit

John 16:12-15:

(12) "I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. (13) But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own initiative, but whatever things he hears, he will speak; and he will disclose to you the things that are coming. (14) He shall glorify me, for he will receive from me and shall disclose to you. (15) All things that the Father has are mine; therefore I said that he receives from mine and will disclose to you.

Jesus wants to tell them more than what he's told them, but they're not ready to hear it. This unpreparedness to hear is something we've seen throughout the discourse, most recently in this passage, when fear of potential sorrow silenced them (verses 5 and 6).

Not to worry, though. Jesus says the Spirit will tell them what he wants to tell them, when they're able to hear it. Here, once again, the Holy Spirit is called "the Spirit of truth" (John 14:17). Jesus will communicate to them the truth through the Holy Spirit, who will guide, or lead, them into all the truth.

Notice here the distinction between the way the Holy Spirit ministers to the world and the way he ministers to followers of Jesus. He convicts the world, but he leads the disciples. Sometimes the question is asked: "How can you tell the difference between guilt and the conviction of the Holy Spirit?" The answer: There isn't a difference. They are two ways of saying the same thing. The Spirit convicts someone of guilt. No matter how one words it, in terms of guilt or conviction, neither is applicable to a believer. The Holy Spirit does not convict a believer of sin, at least not in the judicial sense that is the intent of this passage. Nowhere

else does the New Testament link conviction with the Holy Spirit, which leaves us to believe that the conviction of the Holy Spirit is for the world, not believers. The Spirit leads believers to see the truth, but it has nothing to do with conviction and guilt. The same word that is here translated "convict" (*elegcho*) is applied to believers in the non-judicial sense of "reprove" in 1 Timothy 5:20, Titus 2:15 and Revelation 3:19.

How does the Holy Spirit lead us into all the truth that Jesus wants us to know? Before he led us he led the disciples, who were to become apostles and author the New Testament. What Jesus wants us to know is in the scriptures. The Spirit leads us into the truth contained in the scriptures and shows us, when we're able to "bear" it, the truth we need to believe.

What is the nature of the truth that the scriptures contain? Note the word "for" in the middle of verse 13, indicating that what follows is an explanation of the Spirit's leading us into all the truth. This explanation continues through verse 15.

The first part of this explanation is that the Spirit will not speak on his own initiative. Instead, he will "hear" and then speak. This concept is carried through verse 15, in parallel structures. The Spirit speaks the things he hears (verse 13), discloses the things that are coming (verse 13), discloses the things he receives (verse 14) and again discloses the things he receives (verse 15).

Verse 13 contains the words, if translated literally, "the things that are coming." This could be a reference to future events that the Spirit will disclose to the apostles (NASB - "what is to come"; NIV - "what is yet to come"). If that were the intended meaning, however, it would be the lone departure from the receive-disclose theme, which appears in the three other pairings. More likely, "the things that are coming" are coming to the Spirit, as are the "things" that the Spirit hears in the first pairing in verse 13. The verb "come" is also used in verse 7 in the sense of something coming "to" something else - in that case, in the sense of the Spirit coming to the disciples. The Spirit then discloses these things "to you," meaning the disciples, just as he does in verses 14 and 15.

The word for "receive" (*lambano*) in verses 14 and 15 can equally be translated "take" (NASB, NIV), but the concept is introduced with the word "hear" in verse 13, which is a receptive operation. In all four pairings in verses 13 through 15, then, the Spirit receives things and then conveys them.

In verse 13, the Spirit speaks the things he hears and announces the things that are coming to him. These things pertain to the truth Jesus wants them to know. In verse 14, this truth is further explained. The truth that he receives and announces concerns the glorification of Christ. Note that the Spirit will glorify Jesus, "for" he will receive and disclose. The Spirit's purpose in receiving and disclosing things is to glorify Jesus - to show Jesus to be everything he in actuality is. Thus the Spirit leads us into "all" the truth by showing us all of who Jesus is.

Then Jesus says in verse 15 that "all things that the Father has are mine," speaking of what he in actuality is - uniquely related to the Father. When the Spirit glorifies Jesus, he shows Jesus to be uniquely related to the Father. He shows him to be the Father's beloved Son, and the only way to the Father. Note that Jesus' purpose for speaking of his connection to the Father is explained by what follows the word "therefore" in verse 15. What follows, once again, are words about the Spirit's receiving and disclosing. In verse 14, the Spirit's purpose in receiving and disclosing is to glorify Jesus. In verse 15, the Spirit's purpose in receiving and disclosing is to demonstrate Jesus' unique relationship to the Father. The Spirit glorifies Jesus by showing him to be uniquely related to the Father, to be the only way to the Father.

The source of these "things" that the Spirit discloses is Jesus. Jesus wanted to tell them more "things" (verse 12), but they weren't ready for them. In verse 13, the Spirit leads them into the things of "truth" that Jesus wants them to know. In verses 14 and 15, the Spirit receives these things of truth from Jesus and then discloses them. And finally, these things of truth concern the truth of who Jesus is.

Thus the Spirit leads us. When we think of the Spirit's leading us, or when we ask for his leading, it often concerns circumstantial leading. We speak of the Spirit's leading us to particular people, places or conclusions. And certainly this kind of leading is within the sphere of the Spirit's ministry. This is evident

in Acts 8:29, where the Spirit led Philip into the chariot of the Ethiopian eunuch, and in Acts 16:7, where the Spirit led Paul and others away from Bithynia. But in seeking such spiritual guidance, we forget about the most important spiritual guidance, which is contained in this passage. In John 16:12-15, the Spirit leads us, and he leads us to Jesus. He shows us who Jesus is. He leads us into deeper and more worship-oriented relationships with Jesus. We ask for guidance, and the Spirit shows us Jesus. This is the most important guidance we can receive. The Spirit leads us, and he leads us right into the arms of Jesus.

Even in his circumstantial leading, when he leads us to people, places or conclusions, he's leading us to Jesus. We face difficult decisions and pray for guidance. In the prayer, not in the guidance, we draw close to Jesus, which is what's most important. And then when we do see how the Spirit has led us circumstantially, we rejoice not so much over the circumstance but for the chance to see, once again, in ever-deepening fashion, that God is faithful.

Two weeks ago I attended my high school reunion. One of the women from our class is blind. Near the end of the reunion, I was conversing with my friend Holly, who was one of the organizers of the event. The woman who is blind was on her way out and addressed Holly by name in order to thank her. At first I was taken aback. I didn't know how this woman knew where Holly was and how she had recognized her. Then I noticed that the woman's husband had her by the arm. He had led the woman, who wanted so much to thank Holly, right to her. Holly then gave the woman a gigantic hug. That's what the Holy Spirit does for us: He leads us, and he leads us right into the arms of the one we want to thank: Jesus, who is waiting with a gigantic hug.

A tremendous advantage

Having the Spirit is a tremendous advantage. As we testify to the world about Jesus, the Spirit convicts the world of its guilt and offers the gift of redemption, taking the pressure off us to be persuasive and convincing. And the Spirit shines a light on Jesus and leads us into the arms of our loving Lord.

- SCG, 1995

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