

The Church of the Servant King

Survey of the Bible Series – The Gospel of John (SB_JN16B_Jesus Describes the Work of the Holy Spirit)

John 16:5-15

“But now I am going to Him who sent Me; and none of you asks Me, ‘Where are You going?’ ‘But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. (Jn 16:5-6)

Most likely, the disciples were so focused upon their personal loss as a result of Jesus’ announcement of His departure that they completely overlooked asking Jesus for details. They were less concerned with Jesus’ future than their own. Their preoccupation with their own problems (“sorrow has filled your hearts”) prevented them from understanding the immanency of His departure emphasized by the word “now.” Theirs was a completely “natural” response that results in times when the believer doesn’t understand what God is doing.

Principle: It is “naturally” impossible to focus upon another person’s dilemma when you are consumed with your own problems.

Principle: Believers are called upon to live “supernatural” lives empowered by the Holy Spirit’s ministry to their soul that is saturated with Truth. Those who worship Him must worship Him in Spirit and in Truth (Jn 4:24 – “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth”).

Application: In spite of all of your personal problems (which we all have), are you able to focus upon the needs of others?

But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper shall not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. (Jn 16:7)

It was to the disciples advantage that Jesus “go away” for several reasons. Of course, Jesus was referring to His impending death by crucifixion, but the disciples probably were thinking of some other type of departure, e.g. a trip. Nevertheless, Jesus’ “departure” by death was necessary for the following reasons:

- Propitiation of God’s essence (particularly His righteousness) was essential for the world’s redemption.
- To fulfill Scripture (e.g. Psa 22; Isa 53)
- Without Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection, there would be no Gospel and no hope for man.
- Apart from His departure, He could not send the Holy Spirit.
- Apart from His departure, the strategic evidence that would be the hinge pin upon which all of God’s case would rest in the appeal trial of Satan would be missing.
- As long as Jesus was with them, His work was localized and it would be impossible to communicate with them equally at all times and in all places. The Holy Spirit would equip them for a wider and more effective ministry.

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 behold Me; and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged. (Jn 16:8-11)

In these verses, Jesus describes the work of the Holy Spirit with the unbelieving world. The Greek word for “convict” is *elegksei* which is the 3rd person, singular, future, active, indicative of *elegcho*. This word means to bring to light, to expose, to set forth, to convince or convict.¹ I believe that a better translation of the word is “convince” rather than “convict.” The reason – the translation “convict” conveys some meanings that I do not believe to be consistent with the manner in which the Holy Spirit operates. Certainly, when the Holy Spirit “convinces” a person of the Truth, there will be a subsequent “conviction” in that person’s soul to align with the Truth. But, when I hear most people use the term “convict” in association with the Holy Spirit’s ministry, it is associated with the idea that the Holy Spirit is in the business of generating a certain “feeling” of guilt.

How do I support this argument? My view follows a line of reasoning from Scripture that can be summarized in the following bullets:

- I don’t believe that Scripture teaches that the Holy Spirit leads by creating a feeling of guilt; rather, Scripture seems to be clear that the Holy Spirit’s ministry is one of illuminating Truth – either Gospel Truth to the unbeliever or the Truth of Scripture to the believer.
- The translation of *elegksei* as “convict” which is interpreted to mean that the Holy Spirit creates a feeling of guilt is inconsistent with my understanding of the manner in which the Holy Spirit’s illumination of the Truth affects the conscience.
- If the conscience is defined as one’s norms and standards, then as the Holy Spirit illuminates the mind with information (i.e. the Gospel) and the volition accepts that information as Truth, the norms and standards (i.e. the conscience) of the soul are compared to that Truth.
- To the extent that the norms and standards are out of synch with the Truth, the believer’s conscience will “convict” the individual (unbeliever or believer).
- So, if my analysis of this process is correct, it is the conscience of the individual’s soul that “convicts” the believer, not the Holy Spirit.
- Also, it is important to note that the Holy Spirit is portrayed in John as working in concert with the testimony of human believers (Jn 15:26-27 – “He will bear witness of Me and you will bear witness also.”).

Why, you might ask, is this distinction important? Well, it is important because there are many whose lives are governed by feelings – e.g. if there is a feeling (like guilt), then I know I am being led of the Spirit to make an adjustment. If there is no guilt, then no adjustment is necessary. However, this method of determining what is right or wrong according to the divine perspective of matters is flawed. The following bullets illustrate this rationale:

- A person can hold norms and standards (i.e. a conscience) contrary to the Truth (i.e. divine will and revelation), yet accept those norms or standards as true.
- In that instance, the individual can be said to have accepted as true what is in reality a false norm or standard from the divine viewpoint.
- *Question:* When that individual makes decisions on the basis of that false norm or standard that he/she has accepted as true, will that individual be “convicted” (i.e. have a feeling of guilt) by his/her conscience? *Answer:* No.
- *Question:* If the individual who makes such a decision on the basis of that false norm or standard that has been accepted as true and that individual has no “conviction” that it is false, then has that individual acted in accordance with divine norms, standards or viewpoint? *Answer:* No, that person has acted according to his/her own norms and standards (i.e. conscience) rather than a conscience shaped or influenced by divine viewpoint.
- *Question:* How is this relevant to our study of John 16:8? *Answer:* For the unbelieving world (the subject of the passage), the Holy Spirit’s ministry is to “convince,” “bring to light,” or “expose” the Truth regarding “sin, righteousness, and judgment.” This means

¹ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (The University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1957, 1979), 249.

that the Holy Spirit's ministry in the life of the unbeliever involves the enlightenment of the unbeliever's consciousness that has been darkened by relativism, subjectivity, rationalism and self-righteousness. At that point, the unbeliever is faced with a choice. He/she can reject the "convincing" ministry of the Holy Spirit and experience a hardening of the heart process that leads to a darkened mind (e.g. Ro 1:18-32; Eph 4:17-19) and conscience (i.e. a "seared" conscience – 1 Tim 4:2) or accept divine illumination regarding "sin, righteousness and judgment."

Question: So, what does "sin, righteousness and judgment" in view of the Holy Spirit's illuminating ministry in the soul of the unbeliever mean? *Answer:* Jesus explains the meaning of these terms in part at least.

- "Sin" – Jesus associates this aspect of the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit with unbelief in Him. The question sometimes arises that if unbelief is a sin and Jesus paid for all sins on the Cross, then how can an unbeliever be condemned? The answer – although unbelief is a sin (an arrogant rejection of God's provision) and Jesus' death paid the penalty for all sins, unbelief is tantamount to the rejection of God's gift and the re-offering to God of a substitute plan – one's own righteousness. Our "righteousness" is tainted or flawed and cannot satisfy the perfect righteousness of God as did the substitutionary death of His Own perfect Son. Thus, God cannot accept such an offer or substitute for His own perfect plan and the unbeliever remains in a condemned state. Another way of viewing this principle – although the death of Christ was satisfactory payment for "sin," the death of Christ did not expiate (completely remove) judgment of human good. Human good (i.e. self-righteous actions performed with a motivation of offering something pleasing to God from a flawed nature contrary to God's plan) will be the basis of judgment of the unbeliever at the Great White Judgment Throne (Re 20:11-15 – "works" or "deeds") and of the believer at the Bema Seat Judgment (1 Co 3:11-15 – "wood, hay, and stubble").
- "Righteousness" – Jesus associates this aspect of the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit with His ascension to the Father. In their crucifixion of Jesus, the Jews thought they were killing an unrighteous man who was guilty of blasphemy (Matt 9:3; 26:65; Jn 10:30-36; 1 Pe 4:14). Only the wicked were hanged on a tree and cursed in such a manner as death through crucifixion (Deut 21:23; Gal 3:13). The resurrection and ascension validated Jesus as God's righteous Servant (Acts 3:14-15; Isa 53:11). The Holy Spirit has a convincing ministry to the unbeliever in regard to Jesus as God's righteous Servant and the validation provided through the indisputable fact of His resurrection and ascension.
- "Judgment" – Jesus associates this aspect of the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit with the strategic evidence provided in the appeal trial of Satan (i.e. the substitutionary death of God's Son). The evidence provided by Christ's substitutionary death on the Cross was Satan's death nail. Even though Satan had been condemned to the Lake of Fire in eternity past at the time of His fall (evidenced by John's use of the perfect tense of *krino* – which could be translated "has been judged in the past with results that continue infinitely into the future"), the evidence of the death of God's only Son provided the strategic rebuttal to all of Satan's objections to that sentencing. Every decision that man makes to accept God's grace provision of His Son's death on the Cross is a tantamount to a tactical victory in the appeal trial of Satan. Jesus' death was a paradox to Satan – Satan desired to expedite the death of Jesus not realizing that it would provide the strategic victory. Satan desired to prevent the establishment of the kingdom with Jesus as ruler in fulfillment of so many OT prophecies. Satan had not anticipated the resurrection evidently. It was the redemption of the earth and all it contains (including man) that Satan sought to prevent. Jesus' death and the associated judgment of Satan, the ruler of this world, is the basis for this aspect of the Spirit's "convincing" work.

I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear *them* now. "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 He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. "He shall glorify Me; for He shall take of Mine,

and shall disclose *it* to you. “All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said, that He takes of Mine, and will disclose *it* to you. (Jn 16:12-15)

In these verses, Jesus describes the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the disciples, particularly the 11 who were also apostles, first to Israel and later to the Church. Jesus indicates that He had many more things He wanted to communicate to them, but they were subject to the further unfolding of the Kingdom program. The further unfolding of the Kingdom program was contingent upon whether Israel would repent and accept the Jesus they crucified as their Messiah or not (e.g. Acts 1:6, 7; 3:19-21). I believe that at this point, while Jesus was still in His unresurrected and non-ascended state, that it was possible that He did not even know the details regarding the soon to come suspension of the Age of Israel and the intercalation of the Church (Acts 1:7 – “It is not for you to know times or seasons which **the Father** has put in His own authority”). Nevertheless, it was the Holy Spirit’s purpose and ministry to guide the apostles into all the truth after Jesus’ departure. The deficiencies in their understanding of His death in contrast to their expectations of a King and kingdom would be clarified through the ministry of the Holy Spirit in their lives. In addition, they would be given a new understanding of the spiritual life – be it Kingdom related should Israel repent or Church related as was the case when Israel did not repent after Christ’s death.²

² See Charles F. Baker, *Understanding the Gospels, A Different Approach* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Grace Publications, 1978), 260-261 for a like view.