

THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

John 16:1-15

Key Verse: 16:13

“But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.”

In today’s passage, Jesus teaches us about the work of the Holy Spirit. Soon Jesus would be arrested and tried. He would be beaten and crucified. Despite his impending sufferings, Jesus had on his mind his disciples. He told them how the Holy Spirit would come to help them to overcome the world and to carry out the task of evangelism. May God help us to know the work of the Holy Spirit so that we may overcome the world with his help!

I. SO THAT YOU WILL NOT FALL AWAY (1-6)

Look at verses 1-3. *“All this I have told you so that you will not fall away. They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they are offering a service to God. They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me.”* Jesus again warned his disciples about persecutions. They would be put out of the synagogue. Some of them would be killed. Why did Jesus continue to talk about their persecutions? He warned them in advance so that they would not fall away. Like a mother who goes on a trip, Jesus helped his disciples to prepare for their future.

What kind of persecutions would they receive and from whom? Look at verse 2 again. *“They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they are offering a service to God.”* Ironically, persecutions would come from their own religious authorities. Jesus’ disciples would suffer excommunication—an ultimate shunning from their society. Their persecutors would even kill them, thinking that they were offering a service to God. Indeed, we find such account in the Acts of the Apostles. Before his conversion, Paul (who was called Saul then) had been a rising young rabbi in Jerusalem. He was convinced that he was serving God when he actively persecuted the Christians (Ac 26:9). He arrested Christians, both men and women, throwing them into prison (Ac 22:4). He was even in charge of stoning Stephen to death (Ac 8:1). When the Risen Christ appeared to him on the way to Damascus, Jesus said to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads” (Ac 26:14). As a stubborn ox would hurt himself by kicking against the goads, Paul was hurting himself by going against God. He thought he was offering a service to God, until he met the Risen Christ. He didn’t know God, even though he thought he was serving God (3). Likewise, many other religious leaders persecuted Jesus’ disciples, some out of jealousy and others out of ignorance. The Pharisees and the Sadducees were political rivals, but when it came to persecuting Christians, they were united.

Look at verse 4. *“I have told you this, so that when their time comes you will remember that I warned you about them. I did not tell you this from the beginning because I was with you.”* Jesus wasn’t repeating the painful topic to give them anxiety. In fact, he didn’t talk much about persecutions from the beginning, because he didn’t want them to be alarmed. But during the Upper Room Dialogues, Jesus prepared them using graphic language. He wanted to help them to remember his words of warning so that they might be prepared to face the persecutions. Why did they have to be persecuted in this way? It’s because the work of God is often followed by Satan’s work. Persecution is evidence that there is work of God going on. Servants of God must fight a spiritual battle against inner fear and despair as well as external persecutions. Jesus did not prepare his disciples to fight the battle with human means. He didn’t train them with self-defense skills such as Taekwondo or Judo. He didn’t help them to be experts in legal matters to argue with the Pharisees. Instead, he trained them to have faith in God. He helped them to pray, love each other humbly. *“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms”* (Eph 6:12).

What was the disciples’ response to Jesus’ warning? Look at verses 5-6. ... *but now I am going to him who sent me. None of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ Rather, you are filled with grief because I have said these things.* The disciples were filled with grief. When they heard about Jesus’ impending departure and about their upcoming persecutions, their hearts were troubled. They were in shock that none of them even asked him, *“Where are you going?”* This time, even Thomas and Philip were speechless.

II. WHEN THE HOLY SPIRIT COMES (7-15)

In this situation, what did Jesus tell them? Look at verse 7. *“But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.”* Jesus called his disciples to be spiritual leaders to do God’s work. But as long as they depended on Jesus as their rabbi, they would remain weak. Up until this point, they were indeed dependent on human Jesus. Jesus took them everywhere he went. He taught them about the spiritual world from A to Z. But now it was time for him to go away, meaning he was going to die for the sin of the world. So it was now time for them to depend on God by faith, not on their rabbi. That’s why Jesus said that it was for their own good that he was going away. Look at verse 7 again. *“But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.”* Jesus promises that he would send the Holy Spirit to become their Counselor, their Advocate. The Holy Spirit would help them to live by faith in God. Let me ask you a question. Do you depend on God for a difficult problem in life? Or do you turn to your family and friends more often than to God? Jesus wants us to depend on him. He wants us to have faith in God!

At the moment, his disciples were in despair, but Jesus was not discouraged. Jesus taught them the work of the Holy Spirit. Look at verses 8-11. *When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because people do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.* The Holy Spirit helps us in many ways. Here Jesus teaches us how the Holy Spirit helps us in three particular ways.

First, about sin. Verse 8 in NLT reads: “And when he comes, he will convict the world of its sin, and of God’s righteousness, and of the coming judgment.” The Holy Spirit convicts the world of its sin. The word “sin” here is singular. There are many sins people commit before God. But the most serious sin is the sin of unbelief. Jesus says in verse 9: “... about sin, because people do not believe in me.” Unbelief is a sin against God. The first man Adam sinned when he doubted God’s love and disobeyed God’s command. Cain did not trust God. He rejected God’s kind words of counseling and murdered his brother Abel. The people of Noah’s time did not believe in God. They ignored God’s warning and were drowned in the great flood.

Today, many people are insensitive about their sin. Like lepers who don’t feel pain as their fingers and toes rot away, people feel neither shame nor guilt about their sin. Everyone is infected by this disease called sin. There is no one righteous, not even one (Ro 3:10). Billy Graham says that we are sinners in three ways. We are sinners by birth—the sin stained blood from Adam flows in each of us. We are sinners by choice. We made a choice to go against God. Finally, we are sinners by practice. When we commit a sin the first time, we may feel a twinge of guilt in our conscience. But it is a lot easier the next time. We commit the sin repeatedly.

When the Holy Spirit comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin. He will convict us about our sin. To know that we have sinned before God is the important first step in our reconciliation with God. If a sick person does not acknowledge his sickness and refuses to go to doctor, he cannot be healed. The Pharisees were sinners. They needed a healing from God. But they refused to admit that they were sick. On the other hand, tax collectors and prostitutes in Jesus’ time knew that they were sinners. They came to Jesus and he healed them. But the Pharisees criticized him for hanging out with the sinners. What did Jesus tell them? He said to them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (Mk 2:17).

The Holy Spirit convicts the world of its sin. He does so to help sinners to come to God for healing. St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:3 that no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit. Let us pray that the Holy Spirit may convict our students of their sin so that they may confess their sin and receive the grace of salvation. Let us pray that God may convict us of our sin so that we may repent sincerely before him and follow his ways.

Second, about righteousness. What is righteousness? To be righteous is to be right with God. It is to have a right relationship with God. A sinner cannot have a right relationship with the holy God. The devastating effect of sin is that it separates us from God. The first thing Adam and Eve did after they sinned was to hide from God. Sin broke their relationship with God.

So what does it mean that the Holy Spirit will convict us about righteousness? Jesus says that when the Holy Spirit comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about righteousness, because he was going to the Father. Jesus was going to die on the cross as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He would rise on the third day and he would ascend to heaven to be with God. In other words, Jesus would show how to be righteous through his crucifixion and resurrection.

The world is in the wrong about righteousness. Many people say that they will go to heaven simply because they are pretty good. They somehow believe that they can obtain righteousness by being morally decent. The Pharisees considered themselves righteous because they kept the Law of Moses. But we know that no one can make himself right with God by his own effort. Only Jesus can make us right with God, because only Jesus paid the price of our sins by dying on the cross. Only Jesus shed his innocent blood to wash away our sin-stained blood. Romans 3:22 reads: “This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.” When the Holy Spirit comes, he will convict us about this wonderful grace of justification by faith in Jesus.

Third, about judgment. Jesus says that when the Holy Spirit comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned (8-11). Some people believe in the love of God but not in the judgment of God. They get offended when we talk about the judgment of God. Some time ago, a mega-church pastor in Michigan made headlines when he questioned the existence of hell. He said that a loving God would not send people to eternal torment forever, whether they believe in Jesus or not.

Such claim is not biblical. Jesus talked about hell and God’s judgment many times. We should not be deceived by Satan’s lies (2Pe 3:4). Ever since Adam’s disobedience, Satan had held mankind hostage under the power of sin and death. The fear of death was Satan’s weapon. But Jesus paid the price of sin by dying on the cross. And God raised him from the dead on the third day, crushing Satan’s head. Jesus took away the sting of death. He took away Satan’s weapon. Still, Satan (called the prince of this world) is exercising his power, by wiggling his tail because his head was crushed by Jesus’ resurrection. And when Jesus comes again in his power and glory, he will judge Satan finally. This is how the book of Revelation describes his final judgment on Satan: “And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever” (Rev 20:10).

God's judgment is not a theory. God has a track record of judgment. In Noah's time, he sent a great flood to judge the mankind. He rained down burning sulfur on the sinful cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (Ge 19:24). Our God is a God of love. At the same time, he is a God of judgment. Let us not be deceived by people who say things like, "Well, a loving God won't send you to eternal hell." God sent his one and only Son Jesus to save us. By dying on the cross, he opened the way of salvation for us. If there is no judgment, why did Jesus have to suffer and die? Let us pray that the Holy Spirit may convict each of us as well as our Bible students to accept the judgment of God. Jesus will come to judge the living and the dead! Knowing this, we must live a life of faith and mission to the end.

III. HE WILL GUIDE YOU INTO ALL THE TRUTH (12-15)

Look at verse 12. *"I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear."* Jesus had more things to say about the work of the Holy Spirit. He didn't want to overwhelm his disciples. So he added just two more ways that Holy Spirit would help them.

First, the Holy Spirit guides us into all the truth. Look at verse 13. *"But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come."* The Holy Spirit can guide us into all the truth. He is our ultimate counselor. He is our ultimate teacher. When we don't know what to do in this dark world, the Holy Spirit guides us step by step. When we don't know what to pray for, the Holy Spirit helps us with prayer. Romans 8:26 says: "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans."

The Holy Spirit also speaks to us what is yet to come. Of course, this does not mean that he tells about the future of stock markets or real estate markets. He tells us about the end of the world, the Second Coming of Jesus, and the New Heaven and New Earth. People don't know where they come from, why there are here in this world, and what will happen to them when they die. They know only two things for sure: death and taxes. But we believers know about the future, particularly the glorious Second Coming of Jesus. And we know what God wants us to do while waiting for his return. The Holy Spirit guides us into all the truth as we study the word of God.

Second, the Holy Spirit glorifies Jesus. Look at verses 14-15. *"He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you."* The Holy Spirit glorifies Jesus by making known the truth of Jesus. The Spirit makes all that belongs to Jesus known to his disciples. And all that belongs to the Father belongs to Jesus. The Holy Spirit helps us to know the words of Christ as we study the Bible with learning minds. He helps us to know the secrets of the

kingdom of God that Jesus spoke about. The three persons in the trinity work together to guide us into the truth of God.

The disciples were troubled. They felt that their future was uncertain. But their real problem was lack of faith in God. They needed the help of the Holy Spirit. We need the help of the Holy Spirit. Then how can we receive the Holy Spirit? We must ask God to give us the Holy Spirit. Jesus promises in the gospel of Luke that our Father in heaven will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him (Lk 11:11-13). We must also learn to be sensitive to the presence of the Holy Spirit who dwells in us. The Holy Spirit is very gentle. The work of the Holy Spirit is not reported by worldly news programs. The Holy Spirit works quietly in the hearts of believers. This is the reason why Jesus teaches us about the work of the Holy Spirit.

In conclusion, Jesus promises that when the Holy Spirit comes, he will guide us into all the truth, convicting us about sin, righteousness and judgment. The Holy Spirit helps us to come to know Jesus personally. He helps us to know the meaning of God's word as we study the Bible. He even helps us with our prayer. May God help us to be led by the Holy Spirit everyday!