

The Spirit of Truth

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[0 : 00] All right, well we are continuing in John this morning, so if you have your Bible with you, you can open it up to John chapter 16. In case you haven't been here over the past little while, it's the night before Jesus' death, and Jesus has been taking some time to encourage and comfort and instruct his disciples to prepare them for what's coming. Jesus has just been warning them about how things are going to get very difficult for them. He's told them that the world will hate them, that they will be persecuted. But even though Jesus is about to leave them, they will not be alone. Jesus has promised to send the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, and the Spirit, he says, will testify to the world about Jesus through the disciples. So let's pick up this conversation that Jesus was having with them that night, starting in verse 6. This is Jesus talking to them. He said, rather, you are filled with grief because I have said these things.

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. 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.

I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. 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, but he will tell you what is yet to come. 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. These words of Jesus are all about the Spirit, as Jesus calls him, the Spirit of truth. And Jesus tells his disciples here three things that the Spirit will do when he comes. The Spirit of truth will convict the world, that's verses 8 to 11. He will guide them, that's the apostles, into all the truth, verses 12 and 13. And he will glorify me, says Jesus, verses 14 to 15. So let's look at each of these briefly this morning. Starting with the first one, Jesus says that the Spirit of truth will convict the world. 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. Now these are some tricky verses here. You may notice in your own Bible some differences to the translation that's on the screen. Most translations say he will convict the world. A couple say he will prove the world wrong about. And Jesus says there are three things that the Spirit will convict the world about.

[4 : 07] Sin, righteousness, and judgment. Now this is where it gets tricky. In English, when we use that word convict, like being convicted of something, usually what comes after is a negative word, like fault, convicted of sin, convicted of a crime, convicted of perjury, convicted of murder, you get the idea. But it seems that the way Jesus uses this word, in his language, it's a little more flexible. It seems to carry this idea of uncovering, exposing, bringing to light. And it can even be used about positive things, like righteousness, or about an outcome, or a verdict, like judgment.

Being convicted of sin makes good sense to us. But these other ideas may sound strange to our ears. So I want to start by acknowledging that there are at least a dozen different ideas about what Jesus meant when he said these words. I read one very good commentator who listed off five different views on just these two verses, three verses. And he didn't like any of those five, so he offered his own sixth idea. So these have been talked about a lot. The challenge here is that Jesus has a kind of logic in these words that is maybe not as clear or apparent to us today, what he's talking about.

So what do we do with this? Well, I want to start just by pointing out what is clear from these verses, and then offer a best guess on some of the stuff that's not so clear. And let's start with the clear. It's pretty obvious, I think, what it means to convict the world about sin. Most of you have probably heard that language before. Jesus says that the Spirit will do that. He will expose. He will bring to light the sin of the world. He will help the world see its guiltiness before God. So that's very clear. Now what else is clear here? If we look carefully at these three clauses that because, because, because, there are a few more things that are clear. Jesus says, as a statement in the first clause there, people, that is the people of the world, do not believe in him. And it's kind of framed as a problem. So that's, that much is clear. The world does not believe in Jesus, and this is a problem. Another thing that's clear, Jesus says again, that he is going to the Father. He is about to leave the disciples. They won't see him anymore. And this is clear. Jesus has said this a few times already in this same evening to the disciples. Finally, in the third clause there, Jesus says that the prince or ruler of this world now stands condemned. And pretty much everybody agrees that this is a reference to Satan, to the devil, and how his fate is already sealed. He is guilty. He is liable to judgment, though we know from other passages that his punishment hasn't been executed on him yet.

[7 : 40] But the verdict is sealed. So that's what's clear here. The spirit, when he comes, he will convict the world of sin. The world does not believe in Jesus, and Jesus is going to the Father, and the ruler of this world's judgment is sure. So now we get to the less clear part here. And again, these things have been variously interpreted, so what I'm about to say, I want you to know, is my opinion and not Scripture.

What does it mean that the Spirit will convict the world about righteousness? I don't think this is a reference to the righteousness of Jesus. I think it's a reference to the world's righteousness. Just like he will convict the world about its sin, he will convict the world about its righteousness. Namely, the lack of righteousness. The world thinks it has righteousness. It's consistently characterized by that ominous statement at the end of the book of Judges. Everyone does what is right in their own eyes. But the truth, I think, that the Spirit has come to expose is that we are not righteous. We are not as good as we think we are. In the words of Isaiah, the prophet, all our righteousness is as filthy rags. When it comes to righteousness, we are deficient. We are lacking it. So the Spirit will convict the world concerning sin and concerning righteousness, our lack of it, and concerning judgment.

What does it mean that the

Spirit will convict the world concerning judgment? I think it means very simply that he will expose the reality that we are deserving of judgment, just like the devil is deserving of judgment.

So that's my take on these less clear parts of what Jesus said. And there is a sort of logic in here that I haven't really dug into too much. Jesus says that the Spirit will convict the world concerning sin.

Why? Because they do not believe in him. We notice that Jesus doesn't say why the world doesn't believe in him. Is this people who have already heard the message of Jesus and are rejecting it? Or is this people who have never heard about Jesus? Jesus doesn't say? And so we kind of have to guess at the reason.

[10 : 27] Perhaps the reason the Spirit convicts them of sin is because they are not believers in Jesus as they should be. And so the Spirit presses on them. He exposes our guilt. He helps us to see our need for Jesus, the Savior, for forgiveness. Jesus also says that the Spirit will convict the world concerning righteousness because I am going to the Father, he says, and you will see me no more.

This is kind of an unexpected reason. The first reason had to do with the world and them not believing. But this second reason has to do with Jesus and him not being here on earth anymore. If I'm reading it right, Jesus has up until now been doing that convicting of sin and righteousness, the lack of it, and judgment. Think back over what Jesus has been saying to the people. He's been exposing their guilt. He's been putting the light on the sin, not just of the religious leaders, but also of the people and calling them to repent.

And so I think that Jesus is saying that there is a need for that convicting work to continue. Jesus, the light that exposes, is about to leave the world. And so the Spirit will come and continue that work that Jesus has been doing, that work of convicting. So that's my take on this passage.

[12 : 08] Jesus is telling the disciples that the Spirit of truth, when he comes, he will convict, he will expose, he will shine the light on the reality that we are all guilty before God, that we lack

righteousness, and that we are deserving of judgment.

And I believe that this convicting is something that the Spirit of God continues to do today in our world. While Jesus was here, he did that important work of the Father.

And while Jesus is away, the Spirit continues it. And if you read carefully the New Testament letters and how the churches got started, you can see there in a few places that the credit is given to God's Spirit when someone comes to their senses and becomes aware of their sin and their need for Jesus.

The Spirit is the one that does that work in us, bringing the words of God to bear on our hearts. So I want to ask you, have you felt the convicting of the Holy Spirit in your own life?

About sin in your life? About righteousness? Your lack of it? Your need for Christ?

[13:42] About judgment that's coming? If you have not yet surrendered your life to Christ, I want to urge you today to do it.

If you hear the voice of God speaking to you today, don't harden your heart. Surrender it to his love, to his call.

We come now to the next thing the Spirit will do according to Jesus. Let's read it again in verses 12 and 13. Jesus says, I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear.

But when 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. Now, the temptation here is to go straight to application.

[14:49] To just read these words as if they are directed straight at us today. But before we get there, we need to stop and consider how these words were for the disciples.

These 11 men there with Jesus that night. Jesus says, I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear.

Think about how the disciples are feeling right now. This is the night before Jesus is arrested.

Or the night of Jesus' arrest. The night before Jesus is crucified. They've been feeling quite troubled. John chapter 14 verse 1. Their hearts are filled with grief.

As we just heard back in 16 verse 6. These emotions, you imagine, are swirling inside of them. And in the midst of all this, they've been just drinking in this teaching and these words of Jesus, like drinking from a fire hose.

[15:54] Jesus has been saying all these things to them. I mean, there's three chapters here. So imagine how they're feeling. Jesus says, I have even more to tell you.

More than you can even bear to hear in this moment. But don't worry. When the Spirit comes, He will guide you into all truth.

He will speak what He hears and He will tell you. What is yet to come. So one of the things that the Spirit will do when He comes is He will tell the apostles all the things that they could not bear to hear before Jesus left.

That's how the disciples will get, will receive all the things Jesus still needs to tell them. Jesus will speak those things to them through the Holy Spirit.

And the Spirit will be their guide just as Jesus has been their guide. I want to point your attention to one more little detail in these verses.

[17:10] Notice what Jesus says there at the end. He says, The Spirit will tell you what is yet to come. Do you hear that?

This is why we need to be careful not to just jump straight into applying all of this directly to ourselves because there's something unique and special going on here. The apostles are going to receive revelation from Jesus through the Holy Spirit about what is yet to come.

So this is the second thing that the Spirit will do is guide the apostles into all the truth by speaking to them the things Jesus still has to say to them and by speaking to them of things that are coming.

Maybe the word prophecy is rolling around in your mind as you hear this. And then Jesus does some fascinating thing here.

He elaborates on how this all works a little bit. Look at what he says here in verse 13. He says, The Spirit will not speak on his own. He will speak only what he hears and he will tell you what is yet to come.

[18:28] Isn't that mysterious? Maybe you remember back to some of those earlier messages where Jesus was saying to the people, I do not speak on my own or of myself.

I only speak what the Father tells me to, what I hear from him. Well, this is Jesus using the same language here about the Spirit.

The Spirit, Jesus says, is going to listen and what the Spirit hears, he is going to tell or say to the disciples, the apostles.

The Spirit is not the source of the words that he will speak. He is merely relaying them. We will come back to that in a moment. But let's go on now to the third thing Jesus says that the Spirit will do.

Verses 14 and 15. Jesus says, He, the Spirit of truth, will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you.

[19 : 34] 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.

So the third thing that Jesus says the Spirit will do, he will glorify me, says Jesus. I'll pull out some synonyms there to glorify because that's not a word we use all the time.

He will magnify, he will exalt, he will draw the attention to my glory, says Jesus. Wow. Those are pretty significant words for anyone who has a hard time believing that Jesus ever claimed to be divine.

Consider this. He claimed that the Spirit of God would bring glory to him. That's something God would never do if Jesus were not one with God.

Truly divine, truly worthy of glory. So the Spirit will glorify Jesus, but then Jesus gives us this very mysterious explanation as to how, in what way will he do this.

[20 : 48] Verse 14, he will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you.

So Jesus will be shown as glorious by how the very Spirit of God will take Jesus' messages and speak them to the disciples on Jesus' behalf.

I'll say it this way, there will be a man in heaven who tells the Spirit of God what to say and the Spirit of God will listen and will not add to or take away from any of his words but will serve this man by relaying his words to the apostles.

How can this be? Perhaps the disciples were wondering that night, how can you say things like Jesus? How can you say things like this?

You're going away and God's Holy Spirit, you're going to tell him what to say to us? That sounds a little wild to be coming from this man sitting right there with you or standing there with you.

[22 : 06] I imagine that something like this may have been rising in the minds of the disciples because Jesus seems to answer this question. Verse 15, Jesus reminds them, all that belongs to the Father is mine.

That is why I said that the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you. Now I know that sounds weird to us, doesn't it? Yet here again, Jesus just states it so clearly.

All that belongs to the Father, he says, is mine. As Jesus said earlier, I and the Father are one.

There is this unity of the Son with the Father. There is a sharing together in the divine nature that is so full, so true, that Jesus can say, all that belongs to the Father is mine.

Just as the Father sees fit to send his Spirit forth with messages for men, so I will send forth his Spirit with messages for you, says Jesus, because his Spirit, implied, is my Spirit.

[23 : 28] His authority is my authority. His words are my words. Let that sink in for a moment. man. Jesus speaks like no other man can, because he is not just a man.

He is the divine Son of God, truly God, truly man, at the same time. It may seem for a moment that Jesus lacks glory.

Here he is walking around in human flesh with us on the earth, especially in these hours ahead, as he is arrested and killed.

But the word who became flesh, it will be seen that he is glorious at the proper time. He will be exalted and part of God's plan to exalt him, to lift him up, is to have God's own Spirit serve the Son and bring his messages, his words, to the apostles and through them to the world.

And so this is the third thing the Spirit will do. He will glorify Jesus by relaying the words of Jesus to the apostles. So let me just quickly recap here and then we're going to talk about how this all applies to us today.

[24 : 59] Jesus tells his disciples that when the Spirit of truth comes he will do three things.

Number one, he will convict the world. Number two, he will guide them, that's the apostles, into all

the truth.

And number three, he will glorify me, says Jesus. We've already talked about the first way that this applies to us. The Spirit of truth continues to convict the world about sin and righteousness and judgment in the absence of Jesus.

He's still doing that convicting work today. Some of you felt that when you first surrendered your life to Christ. And so this should affect us in at least three ways.

First, it should bring an awareness to us of why we often feel like we do. about sin. God is gracious and merciful.

He works so that we can feel the ugliness, the dirtiness, the vileness of our own sin in his sight.

[26 : 17] Not to beat us down, not just to make us feel more and more guilty for its own sake, but so that we might come to our senses and turn away from the madness of sin. And seek the remedy, the cure, which is found in Jesus and be forgiven.

And so again, if you hear the voice of God speaking to you through his word, by his spirit, let me encourage you today. Humble yourself.

Submit yourself to his voice and obey and respond. Second, the spirit's convicting work should change the way that we think about people.

It's not just our own stubbornness at fault when people do not respond to the gospel. There is also a blindness. There is also a sense in which we are lost in the darkness.

we've lost sensitivity to our own sinfulness. And the good news is this, the spirit has picked up where Jesus left off and he is at work bringing us back to a realization of the truth.

[27 : 35] Yes, that we have sinned. Yes, that we lack that right standing with God. And yes, that we are deserving of judgment. And here is the way that I want to apply this to us today.

Sometimes it feels as though we simply can't get through to someone we love. We've talked to them about Jesus and yet for some reason it just seems like they just can't see it.

They just won't embrace him from the heart. The good news is this, while we can't change people's hearts, God, through the power of his spirit, can.

We need to keep this in mind. We are not called to share the message of Christ alone. God's spirit goes with his word.

And truthfully, his spirit does all the heavy lifting in people's hearts. love. And so I want to encourage you just to rest in the fact that God can convict of sin for those that you love who are lost.

[28 : 53] And when we share Christ with them, do so trusting that God's spirit will do the work of convicting. it may not be right now, this instant.

Maybe it'll be three hours later. Maybe it'll be three days. Maybe it'll be three months. But trust that God is doing what Jesus said the spirit will do.

Third, the spirit's convicting work should change the way that we pray. how do you pray when you pray for God to help people?

Do you say, as many of us fall into the rhythm of, Father, please bless and be with and help so and so.

And please bless and be with and help this person. And please bless and be with and help this person. Those prayers are good. Please don't stop praying them. God knows exactly what you mean in your heart when you say those words.

[29 : 56] But because we know what the spirit does, that he convicts people of sin, we can pray even more specifically than that. I want to draw your attention to how Paul prayed in Ephesians chapter 1 verse 16 and 18.

And I forgot to put this on the screen so I'll just read it to you. Paul said this to the Ephesians. He said, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation so that you may know him better.

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, in order that you may know the riches of his glorious inheritance in his people, his holy people, and that you may know his incomparably great power for us who believe.

Paul prayed that God would reveal specific things to the Ephesians by his Holy Spirit. God and we can pray the same way with confidence that yes, God does do that work of speaking truth, of changing minds and hearts and bringing conviction where it's needed.

[31 : 30] So pray for that for people whom you love, that they might come to their senses, hear the truth that they need for the specific situations in their lives.

So because the Spirit of truth convicts the world about things, we should respond, oh, yes, I got that on the screen, we should respond to the Spirit's convicting of our own sin, we should trust the Spirit to convict as we share Christ with others, and we should pray for God's Spirit to do this work in people's lives.

Finally, let's come now to this second main thing that the Spirit does according to Jesus. Jesus said He will guide them, the apostles, He was speaking to, into all truth.

And I'm going to give two applications here. The first and by far the most important application is this, because God's Spirit has spoken the very words of Jesus to these men, the apostles, and revealed certain things to them.

We should listen to the apostles of Jesus and obey their teaching as if the things they said are the very words of Jesus himself.

[32 : 55] That's what's going on here. They are functioning as spokespersons of Christ. There's a line of transmission here. Jesus will speak to the Spirit.

The Spirit will hear and speak to the apostles, and then the apostles will go out and speak what they hear to the world. This is why we call all the writings of the apostles, the letters in the New Testament that they wrote, this is why we call them the word of God, and not just the word, the words of men.

When Peter opened his mouth on the day of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2, it wasn't just Peter speaking, it was Jesus speaking to the Spirit, and the Spirit speaking to Peter, and Peter speaking the same words to the people.

And so the most important thing for us to do is to humbly recognize the special, unique role that the Spirit has come to play in the lives and ministries of the apostles, guiding them into the truth, and helping them to relay that truth to the world, to us.

So give your heart fully to trusting and obeying the words of the apostles of Jesus. There is a real sense in which the whole New Testament is red letters.

[34 : 29] Secondly, and I want to separate this out a little bit, the Spirit of Truth comes to live in every believer, not just the apostles.

And he also does the work of guiding every believer into the truth. We see this quite clearly in 1 Corinthians chapter 2, verse 13 to 16, which I will not go to because I'm getting on in time here. But it's there. You can read it on your own time. It's not in the exact same way that the Spirit guides us into truth. There's a difference. God in his wisdom saw fit to speak and to reveal to the apostles. And then, for the rest of us, he guides us into the truth by opening our hearts and minds to those words which he spoke through them to us.

us. And this usually is a very subjective and mysterious thing. How the Spirit guides each one of us into the truth.

[35 : 38] We sometimes like to speak of a little whisper that we hear. And truth be told, some people often confuse the whisper of the Spirit with their own thoughts from their own hearts.

amazingly, the Spirit seems to work beneath our hearts, doing this work of guiding us into the truth. Oftentimes, we look back on something in our lives and we realize that yes, boy, did God by his Spirit ever help us to see that clearly at just the right time.

But in the present, it's not always easy to discern his guiding. again, the passage up there is the one to look to for this.

Paul tells us that we have received the mind of Christ and that the Spirit of God enables us to make judgments and discern things. So I'm just going to give you the statement about how we should live in light of his guiding work in us.

Two things. We should be careful not to assume that every thought or whisper in our heads is from the Spirit. But we can trust, we can rely on this, that God's Spirit is at work in us to help us examine everything, including our own thoughts, in the light of God's Word, leading us to a knowledge of the truth.

[37 : 20] truth. I'm going to say that one more time. We can trust and rely on this, that God's Spirit is at work in us to help us examine everything, including our own thoughts, in the light of God's Word, which over time leads us more and more increasingly to a knowledge of the truth.

truth. So I'm just going to sum up this morning and then we'll pray. Jesus promised that the Spirit of truth would come, and He has.

Jesus taught that the Spirit would convict the world, and He does. And we should listen and obey His convicting voice when we hear it.

Jesus told the apostles that the Spirit would speak His words to them, guiding them into all the truth, and He did. And so we should listen to and obey the apostles of Jesus.

And God, by His Spirit, continues to guide all of His people in a different sort of way by His Spirit.

And so we should think carefully about everything in light of God's Word, trusting that the Spirit will do that work of getting our understanding to the truth.

[38 : 47] Let's pray. Father in Heaven, thank You for sending the Spirit. This is a mysterious part of our relationship with You.

Dare I say, some of us, we don't even feel the Spirit moving or at work. sometimes. Other times we think we do.

Do we? It's such a mystery. But our faith is in You. Our trust is in You. And as we look back on our lives, You have been faithful.

You've helped us find our way. You've opened our eyes to the goodness and grace of Jesus. And so we say thank You.

Thank You for the Spirit and the work that He does in our lives. Teach us more. Help us to live by faith in His power. We ask this in Jesus' name.

[39 : 50] Amen.