

The Spirit Who Convicts and Guides (John 6:4b-15)

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Wouldn't it have been amazing to be one of Jesus' disciples? Imagine getting to spend the better part of 3 years in his physical presence, day and night. You'd get to watch him change water into wine, heal the official's son, and a crippled man who had been an invalid for 38 years. You'd get to see him feed a multitude of thousands with 5 loaves and 2 fish, walk on the sea during a storm, and give sight to a man who had been born blind. And on top of it all, you would be there when he cried into the tomb, "Lazarus, come out," and a man who had been dead 4 days rose from the grave.

Imagine hearing perfect words of grace and truth from Jesus' mouth. If you had a question about anything, you could ask him. If you needed help with anything, he was right there. Sure, he had his fair share of enemies, ok, maybe a lot of enemies. But to be with him and walk with him and learn from him, what a privilege! Do you think that would make it easier to be a follower of Jesus? Would you discover a new confidence in the truth of his word or a new power in the pursuit of godliness?

If trading places with Peter, James, and John in Jn 16 were possible, you would be a fool to do it. Why? Because the spiritual blessings that are presently yours, Christian, living as we do on this side of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, are immeasurably better. As the people of God, it is far better for Jesus to be with us by the Spirit than with us in body alone. V. 7, "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."

That's not at all what Jesus' disciples thought when he spoke of his imminent departure and warned them of the persecution they would experience for his sake. They were grieved and confused. V. 6, "Because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart." The turmoil in their souls exposes the depth of their self-centeredness, their preoccupation with their own comfort and lack of interest in what God was doing.

When Peter asked back in Jn 13:36, "Lord, where are you going?" he wasn't so much interested in understanding the purposes of God as he was protesting Jesus' departure and arguing he deserved to remain with the Lord on account of his own spiritual loyalty. Little did he recognize just how much he needed a Savior! Jesus



marvels in Jn 16:5, that even when disciples have a prime opportunity to pursue a deeper understanding of his saving mission they don't ask.

Yet the self-centered root of their sorrow doesn't stop Jesus from comforting them. The Lord is patient and gentle with us, even when our suffering is self-imposed! You think it's better for me to stay than to leave. You think my departure is a big disadvantage as far as you're concerned. Here's the reality. You should want me to go away. Why? Because if I do not walk the obedient path of death, resurrection, and ascension, you will not receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The reason he must depart by the way of the cross is not simply so our sins can be forgiven, or we can be righteous in the sight of our Holy God, as necessary as they are. What Jesus has his eye on, what he longs to see come to pass, is what forgiveness of sins and right standing with God ultimately achieve – the promise of God with us, the blessing of intimate relationship with our Creator and Redeemer, experienced through the gift of the indwelling Spirit.

Listen to the Apostle Peter's words on the Day of Pentecost. Acts 2:32-33, "This Jesus God raised up, and of that we are all witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing." The Spirit wasn't waiting on the sidelines up to this point. He was active in creation and redemption throughout the Old Testament. But after his ascension, the crucified and risen Lord poured out the Spirit into the hearts of his people in unprecedented, New Covenant measure.

Consider the breadth of his work. When he walked the earth as a man, Jesus could only be in one place at one time, ministering to a relatively small handful of people. Today, the Spirit is working in the hearts of millions of believers all over the planet! Or consider the depth of his work. When he walked the earth as a man, Jesus ministered to people from without, calling and inviting them to follow him. Today, the Spirit is transforming people from within, granting an internal power to trust and obey Jesus that the saints of old could scarcely have imagined.

It is exceedingly good to know Jesus is coming back in bodily form. It is also exceedingly good that he left in bodily form in the first place, because when he left, he sent the Helper, the Holy Spirit. And the mission of God in the world and the

church advances through the work of the Spirit! How so? Jesus mentions two specific ways.

1) THE SPIRIT CONVICTS THE WORLD OF THEIR NEED FOR JESUS

V. 8, “And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.” To be convicted (in a spiritual sense) is to be gripped by a trembling knowledge in the depth of your soul that something you’ve thought, something you’ve done, or something you are, is morally wrong in the sight of God, that you’re not outside the problem of evil. You’re part of it. In this case, Jesus promises the Holy Spirit will convict men and women in the world of their guilt in three areas.

First (v. 9), the Spirit will convict the world “concerning sin.” What does the world believe when it comes to sin? That most of us, myself included, are not bad people at all. Sure, we’ve all made mistakes. Even still, I’m basically a good guy.

When the Holy Spirit grants the grace of conviction, what happens? My conscience is stricken with an acute awareness that I’m hopelessly and inexcusably guilty in the eyes of the Holy One who created me and to whom I am accountable. I haven’t just made a few mistakes or done some bad things. In act, attitude, and nature, I have lived in opposition to God’s authority and merit nothing but death. Rom 3:23, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...”

My biggest problem is not how to make more money, get healthier, or be true to myself. It’s that I have not believed in Jesus. I haven’t trusted him. I haven’t submitted to him. I’ve lived my way instead of his way. Conviction of sin means feeling your desperate need for someone to rescue you from yourself and from the judgment you know you deserve. Such conviction, feeling the depth of my need for salvation, isn’t a comfortable gift. But it is a priceless gift, an act of unspeakable love on the Spirit’s part. Recognizing I have a massive spiritual problem is the first step toward embracing the solution.

Second (v. 10), the Spirit will convict the world “concerning righteousness.”

What does the world believe when it comes to gaining right standing before God? All he requires is that you be the best possible version of yourself. No one’s perfect. God knows that. So give it your best shot and you’ll be fine. If you try to be a decent

person and don't become a Hitler or Stalin, when you die, you'll be bound for heaven.

When the Holy Spirit grants the grace of conviction, what happens? I realize there's only one person in the history of the world who has earned right standing with God. And it's not St. Mary, St. John, or Mother Teresa. It's Jesus, the obedient Son of God. Righteousness isn't something I can gain for myself by doing good things. Righteousness is a gift from God, a gift Jesus alone can give because he earned it on our behalf by keeping the law we inevitably fail to keep.

When he speaks in v. 10 about going "to the Father," he's talking about creating a way for sinners to come home to God through the power of his life, death, and resurrection. As the Apostle Paul declares in Rom 1:6-17, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for the salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed." To despair of our righteousness, to perceive the utter poverty of our "good works," and rejoice in the beauty of Christ's righteousness, is a priceless gift, an act of unspeakable love on the Spirit's part. Embracing God's salvation requires abandoning my futile attempts to save myself.

Third (v. 11), the Spirit will convict the world "concerning judgment." What's so wrong with the world's judgement, with our evaluation of what is right and wrong, true and false? If it feels true it must be true. If it feels good, it must be good. Believing something is right makes it right and if you try to tell me otherwise, you're just exposing yourself as an oppressor. Besides, is there really a God out there who's going to hold all of us accountable for our actions? Hasn't the world been going on the same way it's always gone for millennia? Why should I think his judgment matters more than mine? There's no end to the story. It's just a tale of the survival of the fittest.

When the Holy Spirit grants the grace of conviction, what happens? I begin to realize my judgment is nothing more than the subjective validation of my own desires. I'm saying something is true or good simply because I want it to be true or good, not because it's actually true or good. I begin to realize the quest for truth doesn't end in a disillusioning pile of cultural constructs. Objective truth is found in God. It's defined by his Word, and decisively revealed through the person and work of Jesus, the Word made flesh.



The judgment that matters isn't mine or yours. It's God's. He's the standard. He's the benchmark. And what has he told us? That we are part of a cosmic battle between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the Evil One. And the triumph of his kingdom and the vindication of all who serve him is guaranteed. In fact, it's so certain, so secure, that Jesus speaks of it as a finished act in v. 11 even before it's accomplished.

How did Jesus defeat Satan? By delivering us from the guilt of sin and the power of sin through his death and resurrection. He destroyed Satan's ability to condemn you, Christian, and keep you enslaved. He delivered you from the domain of darkness, purchasing your freedom at the cost of his own blood. Col 2:15, through the cross God "disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him."

Ps 2:10-12, "Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him."

Knowing that, believing that, convinced in your heart that a day is fast approaching when great and small alike will appear before the judgment seat of King Jesus, is a priceless gift, an act of unspeakable love on the Spirit's part. Why? Because salvation requires not only recognizing the true nature of the problem (sin), the true nature of the solution (righteousness) but also the urgency of turning from sin and holding fast to Christ in light of the prevailing judgment of God. Remembering it's the Spirit who convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment has significant implications.

First, the work of persuading people we love to join us in the joy of knowing Jesus is ultimately God's work, not ours. Has he sovereignly ordained to use us? Yes. Does it matter that we make the gospel clear and commend the truth we proclaim through the way we live? Absolutely. But the grace of conviction is not yours to grant, Christian. You can say all the right words, in all the right ways, at all the right times, and the spiritually dead heart in the man or woman before you or on the other end of the phone will remain completely cold to the things of God.

But when the Spirit moves, when he pours out the grace of conviction, the spiritual lights come on, faith rises, and a new life is born. It's what God promised he would

do centuries before Jesus arrived in the passage from Ezekiel Chris read earlier. The Spirit grants spiritually dead men and women a new heart and a new spirit that perceives the truth of sin, righteousness, and judgment, and delights to trust and obey Jesus accordingly.

The same principle applies in the good work of parenting. So much of the burden, the anxiety, the ceaseless striving and behavioral manipulation we experience as moms and dads comes from trying to do the Spirit's job for him. Maybe if I administer the right amount of discipline, or protect them from all the bad influences, or convince them to meet with the pastor, then the spiritual lights will come on. If we live like that, if we think it's our job or within our power to convict our kids and bring them to faith (instead of trusting the Spirit work), two really bad things will happen.

First, we end up focusing on their behavior more than their heart because their behavior feels like something we can control. In the process, we create little pharisees who know how to keep all the rules until they leave home and the whole façade comes crashing down. Second, we functionally teach them that God isn't really that worthy of their trust in the first place! What your kids need the most from you, moms and dads, is the example of a parent who is cheerfully convinced only God can change their heart and God is able to change their heart! We point our kids to Jesus to the degree we love them, instruct them, and pray for them with abiding confidence in the Spirit's power.

Let me mention a final application under this point. Notice how Jesus defines each one of these issues where the world needs the grace of conviction in relation to his person and work. What is sin? The unbelief that rejects Jesus. What is righteousness? A gift from God received through faith in Jesus. And why does it all matter? Because it's not your judgement of Jesus but his judgment of you that will ultimately prevail. In the end, Jesus wins, which means nothing is more important than your relationship to him! The conviction the world needs has everything to do with Jesus.

Here's the implication for us, KingsWay. The primary work the Spirit is doing today isn't convincing people to be heterosexual, stand for the national anthem, hate Donald Trump, or whatever other issue you're tempted to get worked up about social media. What the world needs is not more Republican party members or a return to the cultural values of the 1950s. What the world needs is to see Jesus,

trust Jesus, and love Jesus for the all-satisfying Savior he is! But that's not just what the world needs. That's what the church needs. That's what we need. Because we never outgrow our need for Jesus.

2) THE SPIRIT GUIDES THE CHURCH IN OUR KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS

V. 13. "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth..." What sort of truth are we talking about? Look at v. 14. "He will take what is mine and declare it to you." V. 15, "All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you."

All that the Father has – love, wisdom, power, majesty, authority, compassion, holiness, everything that is true about his divine character – has been definitively and perfectly revealed to us in the person and work of Jesus. Heb 1:3, "He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature..." We know what the Father is like because the Son shows us what he's like. And how do we grow in our grasp and understanding of the glory of God in Christ? Through a two-fold work of the Holy Spirit.

First, the Spirit inspired the apostles to communicate the truth about Jesus through the written words of the Bible. And I'm not just talking about the four books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Everything Paul writes in Ephesians, everything John writes in Revelation, it all explains and unpacks the significance of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection (the good news of the gospel) and the claim it makes on how we live. The Bible doesn't leave Jesus behind when the red letters end. The entire book is about Jesus, from beginning to end!

Second, the Spirit grants us the gift of illumination as we read God's Word. If I said, "This flashlight will illuminate a dark room," what am I saying? I'm saying that it fills the room with light. It takes things that were otherwise hidden or impossible to see, and makes them visible. It doesn't create new furniture, or new windows, or new flooring. It simply reveals what's been there all along. That's exactly how the Spirit works when it comes to helping us understand the written Word he inspired. He opens our minds, enabling us to see and understand and be amazed by things we never could grasp apart from his help. 1 Cor 2:12, "Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God."

Through inspiration and illumination, the Spirit “takes” what Jesus has and is (the self-revelation of God) and “declares” it to us. He enables us to understand the Word of God that bears witness to Jesus in all it says. That’s how the Spirit “guides” us into the truth. So before you read the Bible, ask for his help! When you come across something hard to understand, ask for his help! Having a study Bible with explanatory footnotes can be helpful. Talking to mature, Christian friends who’ve studied the Bible for years can be helpful. But none of their help compares to the illuminating power of the Spirit.

Now look back at v. 13, because Jesus equips us here to distinguish the illumination of the Spirit of God from other spiritual influences. He says the Spirit who guides us in the truth never acts as a rogue agent. He doesn’t speak “on his own authority.” He only speaks and declares what the Father has revealed through the Son and the Son as entrusted to the Spirit.

So if someone says in a sermon, a book, or a conversation, that after praying long and hard, the Spirit impressed something on their heart or mind, test the truthfulness of their words by asking, “Is what they’re saying consistent with what Jesus has already said, with the truth of God’s Word?” So many people justify doing something that violates the Word of God because they feel a “peace” about it, as if the Spirit who inspired the Word to begin suddenly saw fit to lead them in a contradictory direction. He will never do that, my friends!

The Spirit’s calling card, the trademark sign of his authentic guidance and work, is affirming and applying the Word of the gospel. It’s why Jesus says in v. 14 the Spirit will “glorify me.” If something someone says in the name of being “inspired” by the Spirit is inconsistent with the gospel or fails to make much of Jesus, then you can know for certain the Holy Spirit is not guiding them no matter how much they claim he is.

The Spirit’s primary work, the main way he guides the church, is by drawing our attention to Jesus, glorifying Jesus by helping us see Jesus, love Jesus, and obey Jesus. Where the Spirit is moving, Jesus will be exalted. Where Jesus is not exalted, the Spirit is not moving. **The authentic ministry of the Spirit is word-centered and Christ-focused.**

What Jesus is saying here directly impacts the way we evaluate our corporate gatherings, brothers and sisters. Are there times when Kevin is leading us in singing



and God feels so close, so near, your heart is practically bursting with joy? Absolutely. Praise God for those times where he manifests his presence in a pronounced way. But if next week you don't feel the same feelings or the music doesn't "inspire" you the way it did last Sunday, does that mean the Spirit of God is missing in action? Or that someone on stage isn't being led by the Spirit? Not at all.

Here's the biblical litmus test. Was the truth about Jesus declared and exulted in our midst? Remember the most important thing the Spirit does in our midst. He makes much of Jesus! That's the Spirit's calling card. So if the gospel was proclaimed, if the truth about Jesus was proclaimed, then the Spirit is working, the Spirit is moving, and we should be profoundly grateful. Our awareness of his work inevitably ebbs and flows on the tide of our emotional frames. But that doesn't stop him from working, both when we feel it and when we don't.

If the gospel is being proclaimed, if the truth about Jesus is being declared and celebrated, the Spirit is working, the Spirit is moving, and for that we should be profoundly grateful. Being a Spirit-led church requires being a gospel-centered church. It's one of the things I love the most about our church. May we always be so, brother and sisters, knowing the Spirit is fiercely committed to magnifying the worth of the Son.

CONCLUSION

The Spirit convicts the world of their need for Jesus, and the Spirit guides the church in our knowledge of Jesus. On both fronts, the mission of God advances through the work of the Spirit. Praise God for sending us a Helper! May we be a people who are confident in his power, grateful for his presence, and dependent on his ability to convict those who do not know Jesus and guide those of us who do.

It is better by far for Jesus to be present with us through the Spirit than to be present with us in body alone. Let's ask him to move in our midst as we prepare to sing.