

John: sermon #17
The Holy Spirit's Ministry
(John 15:18-16:15)

Introduction

Jesus' continuing discourse turns to two related themes: persecution and the Spirit's ministry. The two go hand-in hand. Prior to this night Jesus forewarned his disciples that they would be persecuted for following him. Now he tells them how they will be able to prevail when it comes—the threefold ministry of the Holy Spirit.

This discussion offers us many insights about God's triune nature. We learn here that the Holy Spirit is God. Jesus refers to him as "he" not "it." Moreover, he names the Spirit together with all three persons of the Godhead: Jesus the Son will send the Spirit from the Father. The implications are huge: because the Spirit is a person, and is God, we have God himself indwelling us. Because that is so, we are able to serve the Lord in this present evil world. We learn elsewhere that we do so by 1) walking in the Spirit (Gal. 5:16), 2) witnessing in the Spirit (Acts 1:8), and 3) worshipping in the Spirit (Phil. 3:3). Here we learn that followers of Jesus stand victorious in the midst of the world's systems and hatred because of the Spirit's three-fold ministry as *Counselor* (guiding and encouraging Jesus' followers), *Witness* (testifying through Jesus' followers) and *Teacher* (guiding Jesus' followers). These are important words of encouragement for us today—both corporately and individually. Let's listen, learn and worship.

1. The Spirit as *Counselor* guides and encourages us (15:18–16:4)

15:18 "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. 19 If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. 20 Remember the

words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. ²¹ They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me. ²² If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. Now, however, they have no excuse for their sin. ²³ He who hates me hates my Father as well. ²⁴ If I had not done among them what no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. But now they have seen these miracles, and yet they have hated both me and my Father. ²⁵ But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: 'They hated me without reason.' ²⁶ When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me. ²⁷ And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning."

16:1 "All this I have told you so that you will not go astray. ² They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God. ³ They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me. ⁴ I have told you this, so that when the time comes you will remember that I warned you. I did not tell you this at first because I was with you."

Jesus pulls no punches when he tells his disciples that their situation in 'The world' (mankind's 'system', cut off from God) will be dangerous. The opposition will be progressive: from hatred (15:18–19), to persecution (15:20), to excommunication, and even to death (16:2). These three stages may be seen in the early church's history set out in the book of Acts. But why does the world system, including the "religious world," hate those of us who follow Jesus? Jesus gives four reasons:

a. We are identified with Christ (15:18, 20)

If they hate Jesus (and they did), they will also hate those who are identified with him. In John 15:20, Jesus quoted the statement he had made earlier (13:16), and the logic of it is clear: Jesus is greater than we are, so he must receive the praise and glory. But **the world gives him hatred. Therefore it will hate us as well.** But it is encouraging to know that when we are persecuted, Jesus enters into our suffering, for **he**

is the head of the body and we are the members. Anything that the enemy can do to us has already been done to Jesus, and he is “with us” in suffering.

b. We do not belong to the world (15:19)

When we turned to Christ, we turned away from the world. Of course, we remain *in* the world physically, but we are not *of* the world spiritually. As those who “share in the heavenly calling” (Heb. 3:1) we are no longer interested in the treasures and pleasures of sin in this world. This does not mean that we are isolated from reality or insulated from the world’s needs. Rather, it means that we now look at the things of earth from the perspective of heaven, our true home. The world, of course, functions on conformity. As long as a person follows the fads and fashions and accepts the world’s values, they will “get along.” But Christians refuse to “conform” to the world (Rom. 12:2). We are new creations in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17) who no longer want to live the old life (1 Peter 4:1–4). **We are light and salt in this world (Matt. 5:13–16), but a dark world does not want that light and a decaying world does not want that preserving salt. In other words, as Christ-followers we are “out of step” with the world, but we are “in step” with Jesus, we are seated in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.** (John 17:14, 16; 1 John 4:5).

c. The world is spiritually ignorant and blind (15:21)

If you had asked the religious leaders in Jerusalem if they knew the God they were seeking to defend, they would have said, “Of course we know him! We are Abraham’s children!” But Jesus said that they *did not* know the Father and, therefore, they could not know the Son (John 16:3). Though they knew a great deal *about* the God of Israel, they did not know him *personally*. **Jesus taught them the word and demonstrated his deity in miraculous signs and godly behavior—yet they were willingly blind to his identity: “The world did not recognize him” (John 1:10). It is the same today. Satan blinds the minds of those who embrace the world (2 Cor. 4:3–4) and sin blinds their hearts (Eph. 4:17–19).**

d. The world will not be honest about its own sin (15:22–24; 16:1–4)

The people (religious leaders in particular) had no excuse (“cloak”) for their twin sins of unbelief and hatred toward Jesus. **They had seen Jesus’**

works and heard his word, but they would not receive and act on this evidence—they hated both Jesus and his Father, and by implication they hate Jesus’ followers. How does the Holy Spirit, the Counselor (Comforter, KJV) encourage believers when they experience this hatred and opposition? It is primarily through the Spirit’s testimony in Scripture. He ministered to Jesus the same way. In 15:25, Jesus quotes Psalms 35:19 and 69:4 where he found assurance that he was not hated for anything he had done. Today the Spirit ‘counsels’ us through Scripture with words of encouragement and instruction.

The Spirit also witnesses to and through us during times of persecution (15:26–27). He reminds us that what we are experiencing is “the fellowship of sharing in his [Christ’s] sufferings” (Phil. 3:10) and that it is a privilege to bear reproach for his name (1 Peter 4:12–19). The Spirit witnesses to us so that we can witness to the world (Mark 13:11). **Jesus told his disciples that persecution need not cause them to stumble (“go astray,” John 16:1). Indeed Jesus’ followers can expect persecution. In particular he warned of persecution from ‘religious’ people who think they are serving God.** The word translated “service” in John 16:2 means “priestly service.” This statement is certainly applicable to Saul of Tarsus, who thought he was serving God by destroying the church (see Acts 7:57–8:3; 22:3–4; and 26:9–12). **As we face hardship (even persecution) in following Christ, we can be assured that the Spirit, the Counselor, will minister to us just as he ministered to Jesus and these first disciples.**

What Have We Learned in this section? How Does This Apply Personally (Practical Theology)?

- 1. We learn that Jesus said we would be persecuted for following him and He tells us how we will be able to prevail when persecution comes.**
- 2. We learn that the Spirit is a person, and is God, so we have God himself indwelling us so we are able to serve the Lord in this present evil world.**
- 3. We learn elsewhere the 3-fold ministry that we walk in the Spirit (Gal. 5:16), witness in the Spirit (Acts 1:8), and worship in the Spirit (Phil. 3:3).**

4. We learn that if they hated Jesus (and they did), they will also hate those who are identified with him, and he is “with us” when we suffer in this.
5. We learn that when we turned to Christ, we turned away from the world. Of course, we remain *in* the world physically, but we are not *of* the world spiritually.
6. We learn that Satan blinds the minds of those who embrace the world (2 Cor. 4:3–4) and sin blinds their hearts (Eph. 4:17–19).
7. We learn that the world will not be honest about its own sin, sometimes even “religious” people who think they are serving God.
8. Summarizing this first point, we learn that as Christ followers we are “out of step” with the world, but we are “in step” with Jesus, and we are seated in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. (John 17:14, 16; 1 John 4:5). *In this the Spirit as Counselor guides and encourages us* (15:18–16:4)

2. The Spirit as *Witness* leads us to testify (16:5–11)

⁵ "Now I am going to him who sent me, yet none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?'" ⁶ Because I have said these things, you are filled with grief. ⁷ But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. ⁸ When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹ in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; ¹⁰ in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; ¹¹ and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned."

For three years, Jesus had been with his disciples and had protected them from attack; but now he was leaving. He had told them this news earlier in the evening (13:33), and Peter had asked him where he was going (13:36). However, Peter’s question revealed more concern about *himself* than about the Lord. Also, his question centered on the immediate, not the ultimate. **It was necessary for Jesus to explain why it was important *for them* that he return to the Father. The**

major reason, of course, is that the Holy Spirit might come to empower the church for life and witness. Also, the ascended Savior would be active as High Priest, interceding for his people.

It is important to note that the Spirit comes to *Jesus' disciples*, not to the world. This means that today he works in and through the church. As Christ-followers we are his tools; his temple—and he uses us to glorify Christ by witnessing to a lost world. The key word in this work is *convict* (16:8). It's a legal word that means “to bring to light, to expose, to refute, to convict and convince.” The Spirit convicts the world and does so through the testimony of Jesus Christ and his followers. Believers are the ‘witnesses’, the Spirit is the ‘prosecuting attorney, and the unsaved are the guilty. If all this sounds rather harsh, we quickly note that the purpose of this conviction of the world is not to bring it condemnation, but salvation.

Through his ministry in and through the church, the Holy Spirit convicts the world of three things:

1. Unbelief (16:9)

The law of God and the conscience of man convicts the sinner of their *sins* (plural); but it is the specific work of the Spirit, through the testimony of believers, to expose a lost world's *unbelief*. This is the big sin of the world, and the sin that condemns lost sinners (3:18–21). A person could “clean up his life” and remain in unbelief and thus continue to be lost.

2. Righteousness (16:10)

Note that what the Spirit convicts the world of here is not *unrighteousness* but *righteousness*. What righteousness is this? The righteousness of Jesus Christ, the perfect Lamb of God. The world would not receive the Son of God (1:10), so he has returned to the Father. When he was here on earth, he was accused by men of being a blasphemer, a lawbreaker, a deceiver, and even a demoniac. The Spirit of God reveals the Savior in the word and in this way glorifies him (16:13–14). The Spirit also reveals Christ in the lives of believers. The world cannot receive or see the Spirit of God, but they can see what he does as they watch the lives of his followers.

3. Judgment (16:11)

Jesus is here referring to his judgment of Satan that was effected by his death on the cross (12:31). Satan is the prince of this world, but he is a defeated prince. Satan has already been judged and the verdict announced. All that must take place is the executing of the sentence, and that will occur when Jesus returns in glory.

When a sinner is truly under conviction, they see the folly and evil of unbelief; they confess that what they do does not measure up to the righteousness of Christ; and they realize that they are under condemnation because they belong to the world and the devil (Eph. 2:1–3). The only person who can rescue them from this horrible situation is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. There is no conversion without this conviction, and conviction comes through the ministry of the Spirit who uses the word of God, including the testimony of the children of God. Offering our testimony of Christ to the world is a great privilege and a serious responsibility. It is indeed a matter of life or death to those to whom we testify. We can depend upon and cooperate with the Holy Spirit as he creatively (and often unexpectedly) guides us to the right persons, gives us the right words, and enables us to patiently glorify Jesus Christ.

What Have We Learned in this section? How Does This Apply Personally (Practical Theology)?

- 1. We learn that the major reason for Jesus returning to the Father, of course, is that the Holy Spirit might come to empower the church for life and witness.**
- 2. We learn that another reason for Jesus returning to the Father is that as the ascended Savior He would be active as High Priest, interceding for his people.**
- 3. We learn that the Spirit comes to *Jesus' disciples*, not to the world. This means that today he works in and through the church.**
- 4. We learn that as Christ-followers we are his tools; his temple—and he uses us to glorify Christ by witnessing to a lost world.**

5. We learn that the key word in this work is *convict* (16:8). It's a legal word that means "to bring to light, to expose, to refute, to convict and convince."
6. We learn that the Spirit convicts the world and does so through the testimony of Jesus Christ and his followers.
7. We learn that believers (us) are the 'witnesses', the Spirit is the 'prosecuting attorney, and the unsaved are the guilty.
8. We learn that the purpose of this conviction of the world is not to bring it condemnation, but salvation.
9. We learn that the specific work of the Spirit, through the testimony of believers, is to expose a lost world's *unbelief*.
10. We learn that what the Spirit convicts the world of here is not *unrighteousness* but *righteousness*.
11. We learn that Jesus is here referring to his judgment of Satan that was effected by his death on the cross (12:31).
12. Summarizing this second point, we learn that we can depend upon and cooperate with the Holy Spirit as he creatively (and often unexpectedly) guides us to the right persons, gives us the right words, and enables us to patiently glorify Jesus Christ. *In this the Spirit as Witness leads us to testify (16:5–11)*

3. The Spirit as *Teacher* guides us (16:12–15)

¹² "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. ¹³ But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all 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. ¹⁴ He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. ¹⁵ All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you."

Jesus always carefully taught his disciples the truth at the best time, even though he knew that without the Holy Spirit they could not as yet understand all that he was saying. He was the greatest teacher. Now the Holy Spirit has come and gives us

spiritual discernment (understanding). He is our teacher today. The Holy Spirit, as our teacher, leads us into all truth, beginning with the truth that Jesus taught.

Comparing 14:26 with 16:13 we see the wonderful process used by the Spirit to teach these first disciples—a process reflected in the New Testament: The Spirit reminded them of what Jesus had taught them, reflected in the four Gospels. The Spirit guided them into all truth, reflected in the epistles. And He showed them “things to come”—leading them into what was, humanly, an uncertain and threatening future as reflected in the book of Revelation.

It is essential to understand that the work of the Spirit is never divorced from Jesus Christ, the Living Word or from Scripture, the written word. **“He will testify about me” (15:26); “He will bring glory to me” (16:14).** People who claim that the Spirit of God led them to do things contrary to the example of Christ or the teaching of scripture are mistaken and are being led astray by Satan. **Jesus is the truth (14:6), and God’s word (personified in Jesus and conveyed through scripture) is truth (17:17), and the Holy Spirit is “the Spirit of truth.” Where the Holy Spirit is truly at work, truth will prevail.**

The phrase “He [the Spirit] will not speak on his own” (16:13) means that He does not speak apart from the Father and the Son; He does not “manufacture” a different message. The entire Godhead is mentioned in 16:15 because the Spirit of God does not ignore either the Father or the Son. They work harmoniously together. They are truly one in being (essence) and in doing (act).

The teaching of the Spirit through the apostles was not different from the teaching of the Spirit through Jesus. The same Holy Spirit communicated the truths found in the four Gospels, the epistles, Revelation; and Acts (where we see how he led the church into new ‘territory’ and circumstances). Today the Spirit uses Scripture (which he inspired) to enlighten us with God’s truth and to enrich us with God’s treasures.

One final note: the truth that the Spirit guides us into is the truth that is Jesus. Some people study Scripture in order to argue religion or to discover ‘new truths’ unknown before. But such approaches are contrary to the intent of the Spirit who inspired Scripture—his intent; his ministry is to reveal God to us in the person of Jesus—the one who is the way, the life and the truth.

Then he sends us out with that truth to bear witness to it to an unbelieving world. The Spirit then uses our testimony of Jesus to do what we can not do – convict the world of unbelief and open their hearts to believe.

What Have We Learned in this section? How Does This Apply Personally (Practical Theology)?

- 1. We learn that now the Holy Spirit has come and gives us spiritual discernment (understanding). He is our teacher today.**
- 2. We learn that the Holy Spirit, as our teacher, leads us into all truth, beginning with the truth that Jesus taught.**
- 3. We learn that the Holy Spirit reminded them of what Jesus had taught them, reflected in the four Gospels.**
- 4. We learn that the Holy Spirit guided them into all truth, reflected in the wonderful Christian Living of the epistles.**
- 5. We learn that the Holy Spirit showed them “things to come”—which included some pain, suffering and persecution.**
- 6. We learn that the Holy Spirit was leading them into what was, humanly, an uncertain and threatening future as reflected in the book of Revelation.**
- 7. We learn that Jesus is the truth (14:6), and God’s word (personified in Jesus and conveyed through scripture) is truth (17:17).**
- 8. We learn that the Holy Spirit is “the Spirit of truth.”
Where the Holy Spirit is truly at work, truth will prevail.**
- 9. We learn that the Holy Spirit does not speak apart from the Father and the Son and He does not “manufacture” a different message.**

10. We learn that the entire Godhead is mentioned in 16:15 because the Spirit of God does not ignore either the Father or the Son.
11. We learn that the entire Godhead works harmoniously together. They are truly one in being (essence) and in doing (act).
12. Summarizing this third point, we learn the truth that the Spirit guides us into is the truth that is Jesus. We learn that the intent of the Spirit who inspired Scripture—his intent; his ministry is to reveal God to us in the person of Jesus—the one who is the way, the life and the truth. Then he sends us out with that truth to bear witness to it to an unbelieving world. The Spirit then uses our testimony of Jesus to do what we can not do — convict the world of unbelief and open their hearts to believe. *In this the Spirit as Teacher guides us* (16:12–15)

Conclusion

How blessed we are as followers of Jesus to be indwelt and led by the Holy Spirit of God. As our counselor He guides and encourages us (and how greatly we need that at all times, but particularly in these perilous times); as witness to Jesus He leads us to testify concerning our Lord; and as our teacher He leads us ever deeper in participating in the life of God: participation to the Father, in Christ, by the Spirit.

May our hearts and minds—indeed our whole being—be ever open and responsive to the work of the Spirit in our lives.

What Did We Learn Here Today? What Is Useful To Us Personally?

Homework: Please review and study our GCI Statement of Beliefs (2009) on *The Holy Spirit* to consider a practical day-to-day relationship: The Holy Spirit is the third Person of the triune God, eternally proceeding from the Father through the Son. He is the Comforter promised by Jesus Christ, who **unites us with the Father and the Son**, and **transforms us into the image of Christ**. The Spirit **works out in us** the regeneration Christ accomplished for us, and by continual renewal

empowers us *to share in the Son's glorious and eternal communion with the Father as his children.* The Holy Spirit is the **Source of inspiration and prophecy** *throughout the Scriptures,* and the **Source of unity and communion** *in the church.* He **provides spiritual gifts** *for the work of the gospel,* and is the **Christian's constant Guide** *into all truth.* (Matthew 28:19; John 14:16; 15:26; Acts 2:38; Matthew 28:19; John 14:17, 26; 1 Peter 1:2; Titus 3:5; 1 Corinthians 3:16; Romans 8:16; 2 Peter 1:21; 1 Corinthians 12:13; 2 Corinthians 13:14; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11; John 16:13)

Please consider the following from our message today: *The Bible is the window.* **What we see when we look through the window of the Bible is Jesus.** We see that he is **in** the Father and the Father is **in** him. We also see that he is **in** us and we are **in** him (**John 14:20**). In seeing this reality—the reality of God the Father, Son, and Spirit, and humanity's inclusion **in that life**—**we understand ourselves and our relationships with one another.** Of the **32** areas we learned in practical theology today, what areas would you like to grow **in** grace and truth. **How would you have the Triune God adjust or change or update your life so these areas of learning are a practical theological result in reality and not just another sermon – unapplied?** Please join all our brothers and sisters in GCI in prayer for greater knowledge, understanding, and wisdom regarding the love, efforts and work of the Holy Spirit's Ministry in our personal lives. The Holy Spirit's Ministry **unites us, transforms us, works out the life of Jesus in us, and empowers us.** He is our **Source** of inspiration and prophecy and our **Source** of unity and communion. The Holy Spirit **provides** our spiritual gifts and is our **constant Guide** as followers of Christ. **From the message today, what is it that you want the Holy Spirit to adjust, change or update in your life? May our hearts and minds— together - indeed our whole being—be ever open and responsive to the work of the Spirit in our lives.**

Sermon Series is provided by Ted Johnston via the Senior Pastor Team of Tom and Alberta Ecker to assist ... Bible studies in series covering a book of the Bible. **This issue continues a series in the gospel of John** with material from *The Bible Expository Commentary* by Warren Wiersbe, *The New Bible Commentary*, *The Parable of Joy* by Michael Card, and *The Gospel of John* by F.F. Bruce.
Note: Bold script above covered in Worship Services.