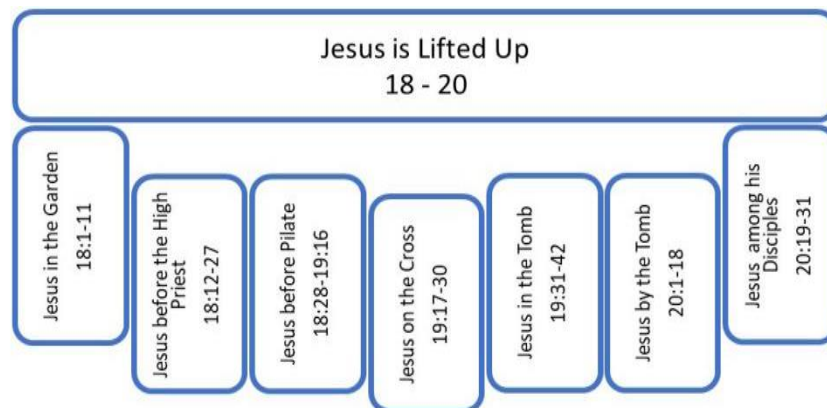


## Lesson 27: John 15:18-16:15 Witness in the World

### Introduction



The world. The last third of John 15 is about the world. In the central section of Jesus' teaching on discipleship we first got the defining metaphor of the vine and the branches, challenging us to abide. That is what disciples do. They abide in Christ. That is what disciples are, they are those who abide in Christ.

The middle section of John 15 brings in other themes Jesus has already introduced. We can add a word to the basic call of the disciple: abide and love. That's what disciples do. They abide and love. Those are the fundamental skills to be mastered by the follower of Jesus. Abide and love. We also begin to recognize how many themes Jesus weaves back into his explanation of the vine metaphor. The more we reflect on the text the more overwhelming it can be. There is a lot going on here. We have been organizing these themes in this way: Jesus calls to a heart of abiding, to acts of abiding and to fruit of abiding.

All of this focuses on our relationship with Jesus and our relationship with one another. Abide in Jesus, love one another. The command to love presented here is not a command to love those outside the body of Christ. That is not the focus. The focus Jesus gives his disciples here is to love each other. That is how he phrased the new commandment in 13:34 and that is how he repeated it in 15:12. It is not "love the world." It is "love one another." Jesus makes the point that we have a special calling, a special familial responsibility to love our brothers and sisters in Christ. If we cannot love fellow believers, can we really love outside of our family at all? Loving one another is not optional for the disciples of Christ. Jesus wants us to be known by this. This is our branding. It's often hard. There are a lot of very not lovable Christians, or at least they are not lovable to us, or we don't feel loved back. It's not easy. Still, this is the vision our master has cast for us to pursue. This is the path of growth, the path of becoming more like Jesus. This is the way to God's heart. Abide in Christ and pursue love for one another.

What about the world? Jesus does not leave out the world in this central section. Our relationship to the world is also placed here in chapter 15 as a central concern for our understanding of discipleship. And he doesn't just address the idea of the world in this central section, it's through chapters 13 to 17. He refers to the world 39 times in these chapters. The only term he references more than the world is "Father". Just as it is critical that we learn to abide in Jesus and love one another, we've also need to understand our relationship to the world.

It is not an easy relationship. There is a right separation from the world. And we have this responsibility to first love one another. We see the separation in Jesus prayer in chapter 17. It is specifically for believers. Jesus is going to pray, "I do not ask on behalf of the world but on behalf of those you have given me out of the world." His concern in that prayer is for the community of believers, for all those who have become children of God. They are born again into a new family. That family exists in special relationship to God the Father and in relationship to one another, separate from everyone else in the world. There is a right separation of disciples from the world.

There is also a right engagement with the world. John 3:16 tells us the Father so loved the world, he sent his only begotten son to die for the world. John 3:17 goes on to tell us that the Father did not send the Son into the world to judge the world but that through him the world might be saved. God has a heart for the world. The special call to love one another is not an exclusion from love for the world. Just as the Father loves the world and the Son loves the world, the disciples of Jesus share his heart for the world. So there is right separation from the world. There is also right engagement with the world.

The engagement Jesus has in mind here in this text is witness.

We have two passages to consider. The disciples' relationship to the world is addressed in both this last part of chapter 15 and also in the first section of chapter 16. We will take these two sections in turn. We start with John 15:18-16:4a. Let's read the whole passage and then we'll walk through the text.

### **The World's Opposition to Witness (John 15:18–16:4a)**

<sup>18</sup> If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before *it hated you*. <sup>19</sup> If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. <sup>20</sup> Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also. <sup>21</sup> But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know the One who sent Me. <sup>22</sup> If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. <sup>23</sup> He who hates Me hates My Father also. <sup>24</sup> If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would not have sin; but now they have both seen and hated Me and My Father as well. <sup>25</sup> But *they have done this* to fulfill the word that is written in their Law, 'They hated Me without a cause.' <sup>26</sup> When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, *that is* the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me, <sup>27</sup> and you *will* testify also, because you have been with Me from the beginning. <sup>1</sup> These things I have spoken to you so that you may be kept from stumbling. <sup>2</sup> They will make you outcasts from the synagogue, but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God. <sup>3</sup> These things they will do because they have not known the Father or Me. <sup>4</sup> But these things I have spoken to you, so that when their hour comes, you may remember that I told you of them.

Witness to the world is not going to be an easy mission. The word, "hate", dominates this section as much as love dominated the previous section. It creates a stark contrast. Consider the first three verses 18-20.

<sup>18</sup> If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before *it hated you*. <sup>19</sup> If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. <sup>20</sup> Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also.

John announced the antagonism of the world against Jesus in the beginning, in the prologue. "He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him."

*What is meant by "World"?*

We need to clarify what we mean by the term, "world." "World" in John usually refers to people or to society, not to a physical place. John is rarely talking about the earth when he says "world." To some degree the physical place is included when Jesus talks about coming into the world or leaving the world and going back to the Father. Jesus speaks of himself in chapter 3 and in chapter 6 (3:31, 6:33, 38, 51) as descending from heaven to the world. The Spirit descends as a dove out of heaven (1:32). The voice of the Father comes from heaven (12:28). We do not quite understand the

relationship between heaven and physical reality. Jesus in his glorified body ascends into heaven. It might be better to say that heaven is supra-material or beyond the material, rather than understand heaven as purely spiritual. We don't know for sure. We can only speculate but we do not consider heaven to be a specific location in the material universe. We think of heaven as up, not because heaven is physically above the earth but because God is above us is authority and nature, in all things he is more, he is beyond us. So, we look up to God. We imagine God coming down to us.

Though we struggle to understand what it means to exist in heaven, we have a fairly clear idea of what it means to exist on earth. This is our realm. We can understand the world as a place of existence distinct from that existence, whatever it is, in heaven. Jesus came from that state of existence into our state of existence, into our physical, time-bound reality.

Even when we are using the word "world" this way - the place to which Jesus came - it means more than physical location. Jesus coming into the world means that Jesus comes into physical human society. John does not emphasize in the prologue that Jesus came to live on the earth as a location. John emphasizes that Jesus came and dwelt among us. Jesus came to live among people. The physical world is not said to not know Jesus, or to reject Jesus. It's people that don't know Jesus, or people that reject Jesus. The standard use of "world" in John is the indication of human society. The world is a collection of individual human beings that come together in community and wield power and influence over one another.

When we are told that God so loved the world, we are being told that God loves the individual human beings that make up the nations and cultures of the world. That Jewish culture of Israel made up the localized aspect of the world that Jesus was interacting with. In that sense, the world can refer to Israel. It is a different way of thinking for a Jew. The Jew would think of Israel as God's people and everybody else as the world. They are the Gentiles, the pagans. Jesus' usage includes Jewish society as one of the societies that make up the world and is fundamentally opposed to God.

The world consists of a complex of set of values, desires and perspectives that oppose the values, desires and perspective of heaven. Among the Jews of Jerusalem, the Sadducees, Pharisees and Hellenists all represented a different set of values and perspectives, and yet are all included as belonging to the world because their values, desires and perspectives flow from human and Satanic sources.

We have to include Satanic because this is the perspective Jesus has given us here in the Gospel of John. Human society is influenced by the serpent. He is the ruler of the world mentioned in 12:31. Though Jesus mostly interacts directly with human beings without reference to Satanic influence, his discussion with the crowd in chapter 8 revealed Satan's influence as did his comments about Judas in chapter 13. Satan is behind the scenes, influencing the desires and the outlook of foaming rebellion against God.

But even without the influence of Satan, the values, desires and perspectives of human society is inevitably opposed to the values, desires and perspective of heaven. Jesus' teaching will not be accepted because fallen human nature, separated from God, desires evil more than good, what is false more than what is true. We are each broken. As a result, our societies are broken. This is the truth of 3:19, "The light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil."

The world Jesus came to save hates the truth Jesus brings. The world does not hate all the truth of Jesus. The world shaves it down to an acceptable form. But as Jesus presses into our bondage to sin, as he rejects the fashionable immoralities of our societies, as he claims exclusive authority over absolute truth, as he demands submission, his message draws out the resistance. Jesus' word understood inevitably offends.

That has been the pattern in this Gospel. Miracles are great. Everybody loves being fed. Everybody loves healing. Not everybody is going to like the teaching that comes with the miracles. John

described ever increasing tension, beginning with the Jewish leaders at Passover in chapter 2 all the way through the official plan to kill Jesus at the end of chapter 11. Jesus was not content to build a large and happy following. Jesus forced followers in Galilee to come to terms with what he was saying by pushing towards them the offensive declaration, “eat my flesh, drink my blood. Listen to what I am saying to you.” Jesus then challenged a crowd in Jerusalem by calling them slaves to sin. They claimed that they believed. Jesus forced the issue. “You are slave to sin. You are children of Satan.” Jesus did not begin his teaching with the intent of creating offense. But Jesus would also not allow self-deluded followers to twist his message for their own comfort. Jesus came to save. He did not bring sugar water or a placebo or a band-aid. Jesus brought a diagnosis and offered real medicine to save the sick from coming death. But who needs a doctor when they deny the disease?

The world closes its eyes and its ears to the dire judgment of Jesus. His good news has the smell of death. Most would rather shut out the light to reject the true problem than to face it. And that is the world of human beings about which Jesus speaks.

*Sent to Witness in a Hostile Environment (18-20)*

Let’s read verses 18-20 again with this explanation of the term “world” as human society made up of human individuals committed to a complex set of values, desires and perspectives derived from human sources and influenced by Satan. That’s our understanding of the world. As such, the world is fundamentally opposed to the values, desires and perspective of heaven. This is 18-20 again,

<sup>18</sup> If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before *it hated you*. <sup>19</sup> If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. <sup>20</sup> Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also.

There is a kind of encouragement here. It is a hard truth, a hard encouragement. Jesus lets his disciples know, “It’s not you. It’s me.” If we are faithful to the message of Jesus, we will experience opposition, hatred, even persecution at times from the world. There is also an assumption of witness here. “If they kept my word they will keep yours also.” Jesus assumes his disciples are going to be speaking into the world. Jesus glorified the Father and showed love to the world by speaking truth to the world. He took from the Father and gave to the world. The disciples of Jesus continue that mission. We take what Jesus has given us from the Father and we speak that truth into the world.

*The Hostility is Against the Father and Son Represented by the Witness (21-24)*

Jesus continues in verse 21-22,

<sup>21</sup> But all these things they will do to you for My name’s sake, because they do not know the One who sent Me. <sup>22</sup> If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin.

There are two points here. Opposition to Jesus is opposition to the Father. “Because they do not know the one who sent me.” It’s opposition to the Father. And the message of Jesus forces a choice. “If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin.” When faced with Jesus, when faced with the Gospel message, the human being is now responsible for how they respond to that Gospel message. These two points are repeated in 23-24, even stronger language, so let’s go ahead and read that,

<sup>23</sup> He who hates Me hates My Father also. <sup>24</sup> If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would not have sin; but now they have both seen and hated Me and My Father as well.

Again, opposition to Jesus is opposition to the Father. I have emphasized before how Jesus connects faith in himself with faith in the Father. There is no true religion that proclaims a belief in God and yet, rejects Jesus Christ. To know Jesus is to know the Father. To reject Jesus is to reject the Father. The expression of that truth here is the strongest we have encountered so far, “He who hates me

hates my Father also.” Jesus is the touch point. Lots of people believe lots of things about God. By coming into the world, God focuses the truth about himself onto Jesus. To hate the Gospel of Jesus Christ with its condemnation of sin, claim of authority, exclusive way of salvation, is to hate God. Jesus does not allow for an alternative position.

Jesus is a catalyst. He creates a reaction, whether positive or negative. Jesus is repeating here what he said of the Pharisees at the end of chapter 9. The Jews of Israel did not have opportunity to commit the specific sin of rejecting the Messiah until the Messiah came. His coming revealed truth about the hearts of most of Israel’s leaders and citizens. Before the coming of Jesus everybody could be really happy about the idea of the Messiah. We all want the Messiah! Let the Messiah come! They carried on the ritual worship of Yahweh. But when faced with Yahweh in the flesh, they want no part in him, revealing the falseness of their religion all along. Jesus offended them. Jesus, the fulfillment of the promises of the heart of the Old Covenant offended them. Did they really believe in the Old Covenant? No! His presence drew out the sin of their own belief, their own self-righteousness, their own false understanding of Scripture. The true state of the heart is revealed by their response to Jesus. Now, I have to be careful about this.

As Christians, we can do and say all kinds of things in the name of Jesus that are offensive. We can miscommunicate the Gospel. Last week a friend of mine posted a picture of a church sign, you know, one of those signs outside of the church, and it read, “Don’t let worries kill you let the church help.” Yeah, the church is not always the lighthouse she is meant to be. So, opposition is not always opposition against Jesus. Sometimes it’s opposition against the behavior, the words, the attitudes, the actions of the people who claim to be disciples of Jesus.

When we encounter opposition from the world, wisdom demands that we pause for some self-reflections to consider our own part in the tension. What offends? My insensitivity, my politics, my poor communication, my poor timing? Or is it not me? Has this person been hurt by the church? By someone else? Have they grown up under legalism? Have they been injured by a Christian parent or rejected by a Christian leader or so-called Christian friend? Do they really hate Jesus, or have they been hurt by followers of Jesus so that they developed a false image of Jesus? Jesus’ words here are not meant to give us a free pass from critique. We can’t assume that all opposition is against our pure explanation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And Jesus is not trying to validate in us a victim complex.

He does mean to equip us with the truth that no matter how loving you are, how aware, how patient, how clear, the Gospel message rightly understood is going to create opposition. In fact, even though your goal is to be kind and gentle, if you never produce opposition in your witness then something is off with your Gospel. Something’s not being said. Are you avoiding calling sin - sin? Are you avoiding the idea of hell? Are you avoiding the truth that Jesus is the only way? Are you avoiding challenging wrong perspectives about Jesus? In Jesus’ own message, sin, hell, the truth of his nature, the exclusivity of his claims are all essential to the good news he preached. When we leave these things out, we’re giving a partial Gospel.

When Jesus told the Samaritan woman, she had five husbands and her current man was not her husband, he was bringing her sin into the conversation. She embraced his message. When Jesus told the crowd at the Feast of Booths, “You are slaves to sin,” they hated him and rejected his message.

Jesus is not surprised by the hatred of the world. He tells us in verse 25 the Psalms foretold it, “But *they have done this* to fulfill the word that is written in their Law, ‘They hated Me without a cause.’”

This expected opposition is not an excuse for complete separation. Our response is not to cut ourselves off from the world. Just as he willingly came to a world that would reject him, Jesus expects his disciples to continue to engage with the world. Verses 26 and 27 state his expectation.

*Opposition Does Not Remove the Expectation for Witness (15:26-16:4a)*

<sup>26</sup> When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, *that is* the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me, <sup>27</sup> and you *will* testify also, because you have been with Me from the beginning.

The reference to the Spirit here links us to the next passage. We will consider more the role of the Spirit in witness in just a moment. It is enough here to recognize that the Spirit continues on the work of Jesus Christ. And we play a part in that. The role of human witness now shifts from the incarnate Jesus to the disciples he has prepared. We are his body. We assume the responsibility of human witness to the human world.

That is what disciples do. Disciples witness. John the Baptist is introduced in the prologue as the one who came as a witness to the light. John the writer gives us this Gospel as his witness, telling us at the end, "this is the disciple who bears witness of these things and wrote these things (21:24)." We read about Andrew going to get Peter, exclaiming, "We found the Messiah." And we read about Philip going to get Nathaniel, announcing, "We found him whom Moses wrote about (1:45)." We even see a Samaritan woman running to tell her village, she thinks she may have met the Messiah.

Disciples witness. John the Baptist testifies, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" Peter testifies, "We have believed and come to know that you are the Holy One of God." Martha testifies, "Yes, Lord; I have believed that you are the Christ, the Son of God." Mary Magdalene testifies, "I have seen the Lord." Thomas testifies, "My Lord and my God." Disciples testify to what they believe about Jesus.

As a student in college my brother and I helped lead a small group Bible study. One night a local Christian pastor asked if he could attend. I was nervous because we knew each other and I knew we did not see eye to eye on faith in Jesus as the only way to God or on the importance of sharing the Gospel or on the Bible as literally God's Word. But he said he had a visitor with him from Tanzania who he'd like to introduce to us. So, I said, "Okay. Come on." I did not feel like I could say no.

We went ahead with our planned study about the ministry of reconciliation in 2 Corinthians 5. And here are some of the things Paul says in that passage,

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he had done, whether good or bad. Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men (10-11)...[and he says]...For the love of Christ compels us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died (14)...[and]...Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. He made him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in him (20-21).

This stands out to me in Paul's language here, "We persuade men." "The love of Christ compels us." "We are ambassadors of Christ, entreating you to be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ." My brother and I began to talk about the idea of being trained to share our faith. How do we do this? How do we entreat? How do we persuade? And I knew the visiting pastor disagreed with us, the need for evangelism, the exclusivity of the Gospel, but the text from Paul seemed so clear.

And I'll never forget what happened next. Instead of saying anything himself, the pastor turned to the guest he had brought from Tanzania and asked him, "Brother John, how do you train people to do evangelism in Tanzania?" I have no idea what he expected Brother John to say. Brother John paused and then he said, "We do not train people to share their faith." That's not what I hoped he would say. But Brother John continued, "We do not train people to share their faith. We just do it. If you are traveling on the bus, you talk about Jesus. If you are at a wedding, you talk about Jesus. If you are at a funeral, you talk about Jesus. You do not need training. You just tell people about Jesus."

Amen! Thank you, brother John! A disciple is a witness. A witness is someone who gives testimony to what he or she has seen or heard. You just share what you know about Jesus.

Jesus told his disciples these things to prepare them for what he knows is coming. Jesus knows how quickly society can turn from calling out, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord” to “Crucify him, crucify him.” The praise of society can turn on you quickly. Jesus concludes the section in 16:1-4a.

<sup>1</sup> These things I have spoken to you so that you may be kept from stumbling. <sup>2</sup> They will make you outcasts from the synagogue, but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God. <sup>3</sup> These things they will do because they have not known the Father or Me. <sup>4</sup> But these things I have spoken to you, so that when their hour comes, you may remember that I told you of them.

Recognizing how much opposition Jesus experienced from his own people and recognizing how strongly the values, desires and perspectives of the world are set against the Word of God and the Gospel of Jesus Christ, it is a wonder not that we receive opposition, but that anyone would ever believe our message. There will be opposition. Will there be any reception?

I’ve often felt that way. Why would anybody believe me? But that feeling runs contrary to the world-wide evidence that God is at work, bringing people to himself from every culture and every walk of life. God is creating a remnant in every people, every tribe, every nation. So against all odds, against the opposition of the world, of secular society and nationalistic religions, against apathy and relativism, people are placing their faith in Jesus Christ.

Jesus is not surprised by opposition to the Gospel. He is also not surprised by the success of the Gospel. He said in 15:16, “You did not choose me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain.” How is it that we produce fruit that remains? Well, we don’t. The branches do not produce the fruit. The life-giving power that comes from the vine produces fruit. It is not on us to convince people to believe in Jesus. We abide in Christ. And we give witness to the hope we have in him. And we trust him to work in the hearts of people to convict them of their need for a savior.

### **The Holy Spirit’s Work of Witness to the World (John 16:4b-15)**

This assurance that we do not bear responsibility for changing hearts through our witness comes in the next section. It comes in John 16:5-15. I already addressed this section in a previous lesson. I am not going to go through it in-depth now. I just want to focus on this one idea in the passage that we do not witness alone but in harmony with the Holy Spirit. First, I’m going to make a comment on our structure. Then I will read the passage. Then I will highlight that one point.

First, a word on our structure. Remember that chapters 13-17 are arranged chiastically. Our center is chapter 15, or more precisely 15:1-16:4a. That’s the central section. The two inner sections that frame this central section, are the second half of chapter 14 and the first half of chapter 16. These are the pair of passages in which Jesus promises the Helper, the Holy Spirit. We addressed both of these passages together in an earlier lesson, focusing on that idea of Jesus going away and sending the Holy Spirit.

Chiastic pairs share common words or common themes, but often provide distinct information about the shared theme. For example, in chapter 14 the idea connected to the sending of the Holy Spirit is showing love through obedience. The idea has to do with the believer’s heart. The true believer loves God, therefore obeys. This is a work of the Holy Spirit. That focus in chapter 14 lead right into the vine and branches metaphor in chapter 15, which provides an image for our spiritual relationship with Jesus. Abiding in Christ is walking in the Spirit. We depend on him to work in us, to guide us, to empower us, to transform us from the inside.

We are now coming to the second passage on the Holy Spirit in chapter 16. This passage parallels the first in regard to Jesus sending the Spirit and calling the Spirit our Helper, our Counselor and in calling him the Spirit of truth.

And with all the parallel information, there is also new information. The focus in chapter 16 is not on the Spirit's work in us as believers, but on the Spirit's witness to the world. Just as the focus in the end of chapter 14 led right into the language of abiding at the beginning of 15, so also, the focus of chapter 16 flows naturally from Jesus' conversation about the disciples' relationship to the world at the end of 15. So there's a natural flow. We move from Holy Spirit into the language of abiding, and then we move to the language of the world, and then we move to the Holy Spirit witnessing to the world. The world hates Jesus and hates those who speak the words of Jesus. Still, the disciple is given the mission to speak the words of Jesus to the world. How can our witness have any fruit if the world hates our words?

The fruit comes because it is not our words alone, but our words in harmony with the work of the Holy Spirit. Let's read the passage. This is John 16:4b-16:15.

And these things I did not say to you at the beginning because I was with you. <sup>5</sup> But now I am going to Him who sent Me; and none of you asks Me, 'Where are You going?' <sup>6</sup> But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. <sup>7</sup> But 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. <sup>8</sup> And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment; <sup>9</sup> concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; <sup>10</sup> and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me; <sup>11</sup> and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged. <sup>12</sup> I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear *them* now. <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose *it* to you. <sup>15</sup> All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said that He takes of Mine and will disclose *it* to you.

Let's focus in on verses 8-11. This is the part I did not address in the previous lesson on this passage. The main idea is in verse 8. When the Holy Spirit comes, "He will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment." This is that one idea I want us to focus on, that our witness is not our witness alone. Our witness is in harmony with the work the Holy Spirit is doing among people of the world. Where we have previously concentrated in the work of the Holy Spirit in the believer, this text indicates the Holy Spirit's work is among non-believers, among people who have yet to believe in Jesus Christ. It is a work of conviction. What does that mean? What is the Holy Spirit doing?

We have noted that Jesus used the term "parakletos" in referring to the Holy Spirit. In my Bible that's translated as "helper." In normal Greek usage it was a legal term, meaning "someone who gave help, assistance or counsel in a legal case." The word "convict" here in verse 8 is also a legal term. A person charged with a crime is convicted when the judge declares him guilty. Verse 8 could mean that the Holy Spirit declares the world guilty as a judge presiding over a case.

That seems to fit with verse 8, but once we move on to the explanations in 9-11 the idea of the Spirit proclaiming the sentence of guilty over the world does not match up exactly. I agree with Carson that what's in here is something more personal. The Holy Spirit is working in the hearts and minds of individuals to convict them that they have come up short in regard to sin, righteousness and judgment; to convict them that they need a doctor, that they need a Savior, that they're in trouble.

We have a huge barrier as witnesses to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. How are we going to proclaim the Gospel in such a way that brings individuals to repentance and faith when those people hate the message of Jesus and have rejected him? The more clearly they hear it, the more they reject it. If the moral state of human beings is corrupted to the point that they claim to be on fine terms with God even while slaves to sin and lost in darkness, how does a person in that state ever come to see his need for a savior and the truth that Jesus is that savior? How do I convince the apathetic or self-satisfied Muslim, Hindu, cultural Christian, atheist, agnostic, relativist? How do I convince them that they are lost without hope, guilty of sin and in desperate need of the grace of Jesus Christ?



In the end, I don't. I can't. I can't bring anybody to faith in Jesus Christ. I can give witness. I can learn to address emotional stumbling blocks and intellectual barriers. I can learn to communicate the Gospel clearly. I can ask good questions. I can build relationship. I can put in effort to become better at my part. But in the end, I can produce nothing apart from Jesus. The Holy Spirit must open the eyes of the heart. The Holy Spirit must do the work of conviction. So, Jesus tells us, "And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment."

Jesus goes on to explain those three ideas.

In verse 9, He says the Holy Spirit convicts the world "concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me." The primary sin of the Jews who interacted with Jesus was their denial of him as Messiah. They rejected his words and they rejected the miraculous works he did through the power of the Holy Spirit. And without recognizing him, they cannot move towards receiving him as their Savior. And now this is true of the whole world. God has died on a cross to save the world from its sin. And as long as a person remains in rebellion against Jesus Christ, they cannot receive him as their Savior. They need to be convicted of their sin of rejecting Jesus.

In verse 10, Jesus says the Holy Spirit convicts the world "concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me." Not only does the Gospel message need people to open their eyes to their own sin, the Gospel message also needs people to see the emptiness of their own righteousness. Paul eventually saw all of his righteous works as a Pharisee as dirty rags. He's quoting from Isaiah. Isaiah uses the same language. What is our righteousness in the end? National religions blind people to the reality that you are not okay. Those natural religions make us feel okay, gives us stuff to do so that we can feel righteous. And if we go to church and pray and do some extra ritual and try to behave morally to some degree, then our religious systems give us a pat on the back, saying "good job" and leads us to imagine that our ritual and morality and faith has somehow overcome the great deficit of sin, that we have our own righteousness. Non-religious people play a similar mental game by which they convince themselves that they are basically good and basically decent, that they're sincere and their pet causes prove them to be righteous. As long as I'm sincere and I care about something, I'm a good person. There's no problem.

When Jesus was present among the Jews, he himself convicted them of their faulty sense of righteousness. He was God's righteousness among them. Consider the healings Jesus performed on the Sabbath. That challenged the religious people. "This is righteous to do these rituals! How dare you heal?" The Pharisees could not get past the fact that he made mud on a holy day, even when it led to healing a man born blind **from birth (42:55)**. Jesus' word pierced through the false assurance of human ritual and morality. And now, as he is leaving, Jesus is telling us the Holy Spirit will continue this work of conviction "because I am returning to the Father and will no longer be present among you to do it myself."

In verse 11, Jesus says the Holy Spirit convicts the world "concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged." Paul described human ability to judge moral and spiritual truth this way,

"Walk no longer as the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart (Ephesians 4:17-18)."

That's the judgment that comes out of the human heart, and that is influenced by Satan. The world cannot judge moral and spiritual truth rightly. It might get some things right occasionally but it cannot come with a true system of values and desires and perspectives. Jesus challenged the crowds in Jerusalem, "Do not judge according to appearances, but judge with righteous judgment (7:24)." And he claimed of himself, "My judgment is true (8:16)." The word of Jesus sanctifies. The word of Jesus sets us free. But before we accept the authority of Scripture, we must recognize the darkness, the futility of our own human judgments. We must accept that we are blind before we're going to seek help to see.

The conviction of our judgments is connected here to the judgment of this world's ruler. The world is influence in its sense of value and desire and truth by the thief, the liar, the murderer who is Satan. He began his influence with Eve, turning her against the good Word of God. He has been at work ever since the fall of the first Adam to keep humankind bound and separated from the life of God. He failed to tempt or thwart the second Adam. Satan has been shown false and has been condemned by the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus could not be kept down because Jesus was true and righteous. He is the one who really holds authority. The world aligns with the values of Satan in rebellion against heaven. The world has been judged with its ruler for rejecting and murdering the Son whom God sent, the true King Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is at work in the hearts of men and women to convict them of their false values, false perspectives, false judgments.

Can we expect blind people, blind to their own sin, their own sense of righteousness, their own false judgments, can we expect them to believe a word we say about Jesus Christ? Yes, we can. Because it is not up to us to overturn their blindness. That is the work of the Holy Spirit. We witness to the hope we have in Jesus and entrust the results to God. He produces the fruit.

### Reflection questions

1. Read John 15:18-16:4a. What stands out to you as interesting, important, strange or confusing? What are some questions that come to mind?
2. How does this passage help develop John's description of conflict between Jesus and the world from the prologue, specifically 1:5, 10-11?
3. In a quick survey of the Gospel what are three examples of opposition to Jesus' own self-witness?
4. How does John 15:18-16:4a help you understand your place in the conflict between the light of Jesus and darkness of the world?
5. Read John 16:8-11. What stands out to you as interesting, important, strange or confusing? What are some questions that come to mind?
6. How do you understand the role of the Spirit, specifically in each of the three statements in 9, 10 and 11?
7. How does this passage help you to understand the hope of 1:12 and 15:16?
8. In a quick survey of the Gospel what are three examples of positive response to Jesus' own self-witness?
9. How would you summarize the work of witness in the world in a way that recognizes the negative reality and the positive reality? What should a disciple who engages in witness expect?
10. How have you seen both sides of this reality in your own life?