

THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

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July 22 , 2001

Scripture Reading: John 16:1-15

The main emphasis of my message today will be on the work of the Holy Spirit. This message is really a continuation of the truth Jesus taught His disciples in John 15. In that chapter, Jesus used the figure of a grapevine to emphasize the importance of producing fruit.

In the fifteenth chapter of John, Jesus emphasized the need for his followers to produce lasting fruit, and He also taught that the main evidence that proves we are a people who bear fruit is not something that can be measured scientifically. We know that we bear fruit by the extent that we love and the extent that we are hated. Love and hate are not things that we can measure by counting.

Then, at the end of chapter 15, Jesus introduced the Holy Spirit as the One who would give His disciples power to reach their goal to become people who bear fruit.

So, in the fifteenth chapter of John, we learn about the goal of the church, the standards used to measure whether or not the church is reaching its goal, and the source of power needed to reach the goal.

And then chapter 16 begins with these words, "All this I have told you so that you will not go astray." With these words, Jesus pointed out a very important difference between the way the world views goals and the way the church should look at their goals.

In the world, the main purpose of a goal is to help people produce a certain outcome. And, in most cases, the outcome is something that can be measured. But, in the church, the main purpose of a goal is to help people not to go astray. Jesus said, "All this I have told you so that you will not go astray." In God's kingdom, people cannot control (and should not even try to control) outcomes. Instead, we must concentrate on obeying our heavenly King, leaving the results to God. Our goals should emphasize what we do and not what we hope will be the outcome of what we do.

And then, as we work to achieve our goals, we must remember our source of strength to reach the goals comes from the Holy Spirit. Without the power of the Holy Spirit, it is impossible for us to bear fruit. And without the Holy Spirit it is impossible to face the opposition that will come our way once we begin to bear fruit. Without the Holy Spirit, we cannot do what God has chosen us to do.

It is this point that Jesus emphasizes in the first half of the sixteenth chapter of John. In this chapter Jesus goes into detail to describe the work of the Holy Spirit. He does this so we can understand how important it is to trust in the power of the Holy Spirit to do the work that we have been chosen to do, that is the work of bearing fruit. So let's take a look at Jesus'

detailed description of the work of the Holy Spirit.

We will begin by looking at verses 5-7. In these three verses, Jesus makes it clear that His disciples will be better off if He leaves them. In verse 5 Jesus said, "Now I am going to Him who sent Me, yet none of you asks Me, 'Where are You going?'" This seems to be a strange thing that Jesus said, because John 13:36 records Peter asking Jesus the question, "Where are you going?" But when Peter asked that question, he was not really interested in where Jesus was going. He was much more concerned about the fact that he and the rest of the disciples would be separated from Jesus. He was not so concerned about where Jesus was headed.

When my wife, Janiene, decides to leave me at home to watch the kids while she goes out to run an errand, I sometimes feel anxious, because I am working on a project and do not feel I can afford the time to watch the kids. On such an occasion, I might ask Janiene, "Where are you going?" But when I ask her that question, I am not really interested in her destination. I really don't care which store she is going to. I am only concerned about the fact that she is leaving at a time when I need her.

This illustration might help you to understand what I think was going through Peter's mind when he asked Jesus the question, "Where are you going?" Peter really didn't care where Jesus was going. He was much more concerned about the fact that Jesus was leaving at a time when they needed Him.

But Jesus wanted Peter and the rest of the disciples to care about where He was going. He wanted them to understand that He was going to return to the place He came from. There would no longer be the physical intimacy that they had been experiencing for the last three years, but there would be something far better. It would be better; because when Jesus returned to heaven, everything that He had laid aside in order to become a man was restored to Him. As a man, He was restricted to time and space. But once He returned to heaven, He was released from such restrictions. Jesus wanted His disciples to see that His relationship with them would not be lost. It was only going to change, and change for the better. In exchange for the physical intimacy they had enjoyed, they would now experience an unlimited power to change lives. Even though Jesus did change lives before He returned to His heavenly Father; at that time, He was restricted by time and space. But His Holy Spirit would not be tied down to any such restrictions.

And what would be the effect of this unrestricted power? Let's take a look and see, noticing first the effect the power has on the world.

In verse 8 Jesus said that the Holy Spirit will "convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment." Let's look at these things one at a time.

First of all, how does the Holy Spirit convict the world of sin? One might expect that the Holy Spirit will come to convict people of specific sins such as murder, theft, or adultery. But the answer that Jesus gives takes in much more than specific acts of unrighteousness. In verse 9 Jesus draws our attention to unbelief. The Holy Spirit will convict the world of its

failure to believe.

Romans 3:18 says "the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness." When people reject or suppress the truth that they know, that is where sin begins. The ungodly acts such as murder and theft and adultery are what grow out of man's decision to suppress the truth. And it is this failure to embrace the truth—this unbelief—that the Holy Spirit tries to bring to our attention. Jesus Christ Himself is the ultimate expression of truth revealed to us by God. When we sin, we are rejecting truth, and when we reject truth, we are rejecting Jesus. The Holy Spirit wants to convict us of this fact.

While living in Taiwan, when I talked to the average person about God, I would rarely use the Chinese words for God or sin. Instead, I would talk to people about truth. I would ask them if they believed in truth, and most people said that they did. Then I would ask them if they ever failed to live according to the truth that they knew. Again, most people would agree that they had. Now the goal of the Holy Spirit is not only to help people admit to the fact that they have rejected truth, but He also tries to help people feel bad about the fact they have failed to believe, so bad that they will desire a solution to their unbelief. The Holy Spirit comes to convict people of the fact that they are suppressing truth.

And the Holy Spirit also convicts people of righteousness. He not only helps the world understand the true nature of sin, but He also helps the world see that perfect righteousness is a possibility.

Perfect righteousness was achieved in the life of Christ. When Jesus ascended into heaven it proved that He was perfectly righteous, because no person can approach God unless that person is perfectly righteous. In John 16:10 Jesus declared that the world would have the proof that perfect righteousness was achieved when He would ascend into heaven. So when Jesus returned to the Father, He proved that He Himself was righteous and He proclaimed that He made a way for people to become righteous. Of course, this is very difficult for people of the world to understand. But Jesus said that the Holy Spirit will come to convict people of this truth.

And then, finally, Jesus said the Holy Spirit will also come to convict people of judgment. Whenever sin and righteousness meet there must be judgment. When the reality of sin and the reality of the possibility of experiencing righteousness come together in a person's mind, then a decision must be made. When a certain person from the world is convicted that he is guilty of suppressing truth and is also convicted that there is a solution to his sin problem, then that person can no longer remain neutral. He must choose righteousness or choose sin, and he will be judged according to His choice.

God does not take pleasure in condemning people to spend eternity in hell. But God sent Jesus to this earth to defeat the forces of evil and to condemn Satan and all the demons who follow him to spend eternity in hell. If people insist on clinging to Satan, then they will be judged with him. This is a terrible truth; but it is a truth that we must not be afraid to emphasize, because the Holy Spirit has come to convict the world of this truth.

The Holy Spirit works to help people understand that they are failing to live according to the truth that they know. The Holy Spirit works to help people understand that; even though they have failed, there is still a way that they can become righteous. And the Holy Spirit helps people to understand that they will be held responsible for their choices. To be aware of the reality of sin and the possibility of righteousness; and, at the same time reject righteousness will result in judgment.

For the past 27 years, I have been spending the better part of my life trying to communicate the truth about God to people of the world. I would have quit long ago if I were not confident that the Holy Spirit, and not me, is the One who does the convincing. One of the very first things I learned as a new believer is that witnessing is sharing Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit and leaving the results to God. Sometimes the people who seem to be least likely to believe in the message will become the most faithful followers of Christ. I have learned that the work of the Holy Spirit to convict people is very mysterious. Knowing that the Holy Spirit never gives up His work in the hearts of people encourages me to go on with my work. I will never know how many lives I will touch. But it does not matter; because I know that, if I am able to communicate truth about God, then the Holy Spirit will use that truth to convict the world. The Holy Spirit's power to convict the world of sin and righteousness and judgment is unlimited.

And the work of the Holy Spirit does not stop when people make decisions to put their faith and trust in God. The Holy Spirit not only works to convict people who are living according to worldly standards, He also works to help those who have decided to come out of the world and live by heavenly standards. According to John 16:13, the Holy Spirit also helps the believer, and He does so in three ways. The first part of verse 13 says that the Holy Spirit guides the believer into truth. The middle part of verse 13 says that the Holy Spirit speaks what He hears. And the last part of verse 13 says that the Holy Spirit tells people what is yet to come.

The Holy Spirit guides us into truth. It is like being on a guided tour where we journey from one place to another. We never know what to expect, but we are confident that the guide knows. In verse 12 Jesus said, "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear." Jesus knew that truth must be revealed one step at a time.

When I first became a Christian, there was much I did not understand about the Christian life. I decided to enter into full-time ministry without realizing all the difficulties I would have to encounter. Had I known everything from the beginning, I would have never taken the first step. Over the years, I have discovered that the Holy Spirit guides us in such a way that we will always have enough strength to take the next step.

And the Holy Spirit speaks what He hears. This means that we have a way to discern whether what we hear is coming from the Holy Spirit or coming from another source. If what we are hearing or thinking is not consistent with all the previous revelation from God that is recorded in the Bible, then we should not consider the source as being the Holy Spirit. The truth the Holy Spirit speaks to us today will always be consistent with everything God has revealed in the past through special revelation.

Finally, the Holy Spirit tells the believer what is yet to come. This means much more than just predicting what will happen in the future. It also means that the Holy Spirit will tell the believer how truth should be applied to new situations as he walks into the future.

When the disciples heard Jesus say this, they had no idea how to proceed in the future. They only had a memory of the things that Jesus had said. They had no idea how to interpret or apply all that they had learned. But we know now that the Holy Spirit guided them and inspired them to write down what they remembered. Their writings are now compiled in a book that we call The New Testament. As they walked into the future, the Holy Spirit continued to speak to the disciples so they would have the wisdom needed to know which creeds and which traditions were best suited to help people grow in their relationship with Christ. And even today, the Holy Spirit never stops working to come up with new ways to speak truth to people. We must understand this and be always sensitive to the voice of the Holy Spirit. We must always be seeking new ways to communicate the old truth.

Some people say that the gift of prophecy and the gift of the word of knowledge and the gift of word of wisdom no longer exist, because all the truth that we need is revealed to us in the Bible. But such an argument fails to consider the ongoing need that people have to apply the age-old truth of the Bible to our present situation. We still need the discernment to do this. We still need these gifts of the Spirit to help us walk into the future.

Verse 14 summarizes the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. In that verse Jesus said, "He will bring glory to Me by taking from what is Mine and making it known to you." The work of the Holy Spirit is to help the believer know Jesus. He guides us into this truth step by step. He helps us to discern if what we are hearing is accurate or not. And, as we walk into the future, the Holy Spirit continues to speak to us so that we will know how to apply the truth to new circumstances.

But the focus is always on Jesus. The Holy Spirit does not advertise Himself. He does not want to draw attention to His own power; rather, He wants to use His power to help people know Jesus. When we see a group of people who claim to be led by the Holy Spirit, but who focus their attention on certain demonstrations of power rather than on the person of Christ, then we have reason to be suspicious. But when we see people growing in their relationship with Jesus Christ because of what the Holy Spirit has done, then we have reason to rejoice. The work of the Holy Spirit always reveals Jesus Christ in such a way that people will grow spiritually.

The Holy Spirit works to help people of the world, and He works to help believers. Then, last of all, we see that the Holy Spirit works in complete unity and harmony with God the Father and God the Son.

It is impossible for us to completely understand the Trinity, but I believe the words of Jesus recorded in verse 15 come as close as we can get to a simple and clear explanation. Jesus said, "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." The Father sent the Son; the Son sent the

Spirit; and the Spirit represents the Son as the Son represented the Father. The three interact with one another in a way that makes them inseparable, but they also act in a way that distinguishes each from the other. They are three individuals, but yet one God. All that the Father has belongs to the Son; and all that the Son has to teach is administered through the Holy Spirit. The words of Jesus are so simple, and yet they are so profound.

And so the detailed explanation of the work of the Holy Spirit comes to an end, and so does the lesson that Jesus wanted to teach through the allegory of the grapevine. The Holy Spirit is the source of power that we need to produce fruit. Without Him the world cannot be convicted and believers will have no guidance. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus Christ and of God the Father.

Sometimes people ask me how they can know that they are experiencing the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives. I believe that today's Scripture lesson can now help us better answer that question. We can know that unbelievers are experiencing the power and influence of the Holy Spirit when they are being convicted of the fact that they are not living according to the truth they possess and when they are convicted that righteousness is a possibility and that judgment is a reality. When we see an unbeliever coming to these convictions, then we know that he is allowing the Holy Spirit to speak to his heart.

And we can know that believers are experiencing the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives when they are growing step by step in their relationship with Jesus Christ and when they are producing fruit; that is when they are helping other people to know Jesus Christ.

And how do we experience this power? Unbelievers experience it when they desire with all of their hearts (and express their desire in prayer) to know truth and know righteousness and to avoid judgment. Believers experience it when they desire with all of their hearts (and express their desire in prayer) to know Jesus and to make Him known.

May the Holy Spirit cause these kinds of desires to grow and multiply in our midst.