

John 16:1-15: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 0 0] John chapter 16 verses 1 to 15. I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God, and they will do these things because they have not known the Father nor me. But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you. I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you, but now I am going to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, where are you going? But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. Nevertheless, 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, and when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment, concerning sin because they do not believe in me, concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer, concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

All that the Father has is mine. Therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you. In John chapter 16, we move to a greater focus upon the Spirit in Jesus' farewell discourse to his disciples. Chapter 14 particularly emphasized the Father. Chapter 15 particularly emphasized the Son, and in this chapter, the accent is upon the Spirit. Jesus had just been warning his disciples that they would be hated by the world for his sake, and he had been teaching them these things because he did not want them to fall away when the time came. They should be forewarned about what was going to happen so that they would be prepared when it did. He proceeds to elaborate upon the persecution in verses 2 and 3. He teaches that the disciples would be excommunicated from synagogues, much as the man in chapter 9 who was healed of his blindness. This also suggests a sort of legal context. The rulers of the people and the religious leaders would be casting them out of the assembly. But there is a sort of ironic reversal here. Although the disciples will be on trial by the religious leaders, through the work of the Spirit in and through them, it will be the world that will ultimately be on trial. In John's

Gospel, the work of the Spirit as the helper or the advocate is primarily legal in character. Once again, Jesus underlines the reason why he is teaching these things to his disciples. When this persecution starts to befall them, he does not want them to be without warning or without guidance when these situations arise. A few chapters earlier, the disciples had asked where he was going, but they had been silent for quite some time. It would have been natural for them to repeat their question, given a number of the statements that Jesus had made since. However, they are clearly subdued, and as Jesus notes, it's because sorrow has filled their heart. Wherever Jesus is going, the hammer blow for them is that he is going. This is a crisis that makes them feel that they're going to be left alone. However, as Jesus teaches them, his going away is for their advantage. Precisely in going away, the Spirit can come to them. As he ascends to the right hand of the Father and receives the Holy Spirit, he will pour out the Spirit's anointing upon the church, equipping it to act in his name and by his power. Were he not to go away, and if he just continued his ministry with them in the form that he had been to this point, the intensified work that the Spirit would bring would never actually arrive. Jesus declares that when the Spirit does come, he will perform three key acts. He will convict the earth concerning sin, righteousness and judgment. Concerning sin, because they do not believe in me. Concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you will see me no longer. Concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. The work of God, as Jesus has declared earlier in the gospel, is to believe in the one that he has sent. Conversely, sin is the rejection of the one that he has sent. Sin, in its most fundamental character, is relational. It is rejection of the Father and of the Son that he has sent. The Son is the one in whom the Father is known, and so those who reject the

Son are rejecting the Father in his fullest revelation of himself. Sin is not primarily just the breaking of abstract commandments. It is the rejection of the God who comes to us in Jesus Christ.

[4 : 31] The Spirit will convict the world of righteousness. This will occur as Christ goes to the Father, and he will be seen no longer. Earlier in the gospel, some of Jesus' hearers took offense at his statement that he came down from heaven. However, as he ascended back up to the Father, he would be vindicated in his statement concerning his origin, that he came down from the Father in the first place. His ascent to the Father would also reveal the true character of his mission.

As Saul of Tarsus saw the glorified Christ, for instance, he knew from his vision that Jesus of Nazareth was vindicated in his claims concerning his mission. Finally, the Spirit will convict the world concerning judgment, because Satan is condemned. There is a decisive judgment against Satan performed at the cross, and the Spirit declares that fact to the world. Just as Jesus did not act on his own authority, but on his Father's, so the Spirit does not act on his own authority. The Spirit will guide the church, and the apostles most particularly, into all truth, not least through inspiring the witness of the New Testament. This will be through taking what belongs to Jesus and giving it to the disciples. All that the Father has is Christ's. The Spirit will take what belongs to Christ and give it to the church. Once again, we're getting at the heart of Trinitarian truths here. We're seeing something about just how inseparable the persons of the Trinity are within John's understanding. Just as the Son does nothing of himself, but always acts from the Father, so the Spirit does not act of his own authority, but rather he acts in the authority of Christ. The three persons are bound together in an indivisible unity. Furthermore, through the promised gift of the Spirit, the church and the disciples of Christ will participate much more fully in what the Father has given to the Son. Beyond Jesus merely acting on his authority for them, they would be acting in his authority within the world more generally, as the Spirit anointed them to continue Christ's mission.

This is even indicated by the beginning of the book of Acts, which speaking of the things that Jesus began both to do and teach, also gestures toward what he will continue to do as he ascends into heaven, gives the gift of his Spirit, and continues to act now as the ascended Lord through the Spirit in his church and world. A question to consider. Jesus does not come, according to his teaching in John, to judge the world, but yet the Spirit is here associated with the condemnation of the world and the coming of judgment. How are we best to understand the relationship between the ministry of Jesus and the ministry of the Spirit in these respects?