

The God Who Convicts
John 16:7-11 August 8-9, 2015

Introduction

- The story is told of a trial that was held in a small-town courtroom some years ago. The prosecuting attorney called his first witness to the stand – a grand-motherly, elderly woman. The attorney began by asking her simple questions in order to establish her credibility with the jury. One of the questions he asked was “Mrs. Jones, do you know me?”
- This was her response: “Why, yes, I do know you, Mr. Williams. I’ve known you since you were a young boy. And frankly, you’ve been a big disappointment to me. You lie, you cheat on your wife, and you manipulate people and talk about them behind their backs. Yes, I know you.”
- Of course, the lawyer was stunned. And not knowing what else to do, he pointed across the room and asked, “Mrs. Jones, do you know the defense attorney?” She replied, “Why, yes I do. I’ve known Mr. Bradley since he was a youngster, too. I used to baby-sit him for his parents. And he, too, has been a real disappointment to me. He’s lazy, bigoted, and he has a drinking problem. The man can’t build a normal relationship with anyone, and his law practice is one of the shoddiest in the entire state. Yes, I know him.”
- At this point, the courtroom was laughing hysterically at the exposure of these two men who portrayed themselves with such dignity. The judge called the courtroom to order and had both counselors approach the bench. In a very quiet voice, he whispered, “If either of you asks her if she knows me, I’ll have you jailed for contempt.”
- I’ve always found that story funny. I mean no one really likes to have their ugliness exposed, especially for others to see. But today, we’re going to learn how the Holy Spirit is a little bit like that elderly grandmother. As we continue our sermon series on the Holy Spirit we’ll be studying the God Who Convicts. So if you would turn with me in your bibles to **John 16:7**, I’m going to pray.
- Before we read our passage I want us to understand the greater context: Jesus has been speaking to His disciples in the upper room and He’s been telling them that He’s going to be leaving them and that when He leaves their going to face difficult times – various trials and tribulations. Understandably, the disciples are concerned by this. And so we pick up our text in **verse 7**.
- **John 16:7-11 PP** “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.”

- Despite the fact that Jesus is going away, He says that it’s to their advantage that He leaves because they will not receive the Helper – the Holy Spirit – unless and until He ascends to the Father in Heaven.
- This echoes what Jesus had told His disciples a little earlier in **John 14:16 PP** when He said “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever”
 - The Greek for “another helper” (GK *allos parakletos*) means one of the same exact kind who will come alongside to help.
 - And Jesus said that this Helper – who’s exactly like Him – will be with us forever.
 - And throughout this series we’ve been learning about all the different advantages we have because of the Holy Spirit living within us, sealing us, indwelling us, empowering us, and leading us.
- But interestingly, the first thing that Jesus highlights about the work of the Holy Spirit is that when he comes He’s going to convict us – and not only us, but the entire world.
 - The Greek word for “conviction” **PP** (GK. *elegchō*) means to bring to light or expose, and describes a criminal being found guilty of a crime in a court of law.
 - So when the Spirit works to convict us He’s going to bring to light in our own minds and hearts an awareness of the things of which we would be found guilty. This is different from our conscience which informs us of what we know we should or shouldn’t do ahead of time. Conviction works after the fact and brings to light our guilt.
- Specifically, our text says the Spirit is going to convict us of three things: sin, righteousness, and judgment. So we’re going to break down each of these three aspects of the convicting work of the Spirit. **PP** And we begin with the Spirit’s work to convict of sin.

Conviction of Sin

- **John 16:9** “concerning sin, because they do not believe in me”
- The convicting work of the Spirit will always begin with making us aware of our sin.
- **Romans 2:15 PP** tells us that “...the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness...”
 - God has given every one of us a conscience and a natural understanding of good and evil. But that understanding can be skewed and perverted by our culture, what we’re taught growing up, and our own refusal to listen over time.
 - So the Holy Spirit will come along and convict us when we mess up even if we’ve ignored our conscience or if our conscience has been seared.

- This past week, my kids were all swimming at my parent's place, enjoying the water, and generally having a good time. All of a sudden they notice this brown thing floating in the water. After their Caddyshack moment they calmed down and realized that it was a hamburger. Now, we have strict rules of no food around the pool and of course they all started pointing fingers at each other.
- The next morning during our family devotional the infamous floating burger came up and all the boys again started blaming each other. In the midst of the commotion, my little princess crept over to my wife and whispered to her, "Momma, it was meeee. I put the burger in the pool." She's only four and she wouldn't describe it this way yet, but I know she couldn't take the conviction she felt – especially since it was causing her big brothers to argue and fight.
 - She was more than happy to ignore her conscience ahead of time, but the Holy Spirit continued to bring her sin to light in her mind until she confessed it. And that's how the Spirit works, and we've got to be sensitive to that.
- But there's something really important we have to see here in this passage: the Spirit isn't merely concerned with convicting us of our sin generally, there is one sin in particular that He will convict of, and that's the sin of not believing in Jesus.
- Notice the text says, **"concerning sin, because they *do not believe in me.*"**
 - And a little earlier in this conversation Jesus said **John 15:26 PP** **"But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about *me.*"**
 - The Holy Spirit is constantly pointing us to Jesus, and He will convict the world first and foremost of its lack of belief in Christ.
 - And that's very difficult for many people to accept. They are incredulous when they hear that not believing in Jesus is itself sin. But that's exactly what Jesus is saying here.
 - He's saying that the Holy Spirit will convict the world of sin and the primary sin, the greatest sin of all, the only unforgiveable sin – which in **Matthew 12:31** Christ calls the blaspheme of the Spirit – is to not believe in Jesus Christ and disregard what the Holy Spirit witnesses to the world about Him.
 - If we reject that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that He lived a perfect life, and overcame sin and death by rising again to life so that we might be forgiven – then we are guilty of the only unforgiveable sin. Everything else, God will be willing to overlook and forgive us for because of what Jesus has done for us. There is nothing else from which we cannot be forgiven. But if we don't accept Christ, then there is no forgiveness.

- You know, we can trumpet from the rooftops that abortion is wrong, and homosexuality is wrong, and racism is wrong, and any other sin you want to choose is wrong, but none of that really matters if people aren't first convicted of their unbelief in Christ. We've got to proclaim the forgiveness of Sin by God's grace through our faith in Jesus Christ.
- The conviction of the Spirit for the sin in our lives whatever that sin may be, will always be calculated to bring us to a realization of our unbelief and lack of submission to Jesus Christ.
 - Any atheist, Hindu, Muslim, Jehovah's Witness or any other false religion out there can acknowledge their wrongdoing, but if it doesn't lead to conviction and repentance for their unbelief in the gospel of Jesus Christ it doesn't really matter.
 - And Christian, here's a sobering thought for you, the areas in which we continually struggle with sin show us those areas where we have yet to fully yield to Christ. I'm not saying that you're not saved, but at the heart of habitual sin is unbelief and rejection of Christ as your Lord in that area of your life.
 - We've got to lay aside our pride and selfishness and sinful desires and feel the conviction of the Spirit on our souls calling us to faithful submission to our Lord in every aspect of our lives.
- In one of my favorite books, the *Screwtape Letters*, **C.S. Lewis**, **PP** pretending to be the devil, writes "I, the devil, will always see to it that there are bad people. Your job, my dear Wormwood, is to provide me with people who do not care."
 - We cannot fall into the trap of apathy over our non-belief and lack of submission to Christ. When we do that we're playing right into the schemes of the devil.
- And that brings us to the second thing the Holy Spirit convicts us of, **PP** our righteousness.

Conviction of Righteousness

- **John 16:10** "concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer"
- "Righteousness" **PP** refers to our standing before God. What the Spirit convicts us of is our lack of righteousness. We have no ability to stand before the Lord and claim that we have the right to remain with Him. The Spirit will work on people's hearts and show them their sin and show them that because of their sin – their unbelief in Christ – they are not worthy of eternal life with God.
- R.C. Sproul tells the story of a well-known professional golfer who was playing in a foursome with former President Gerald Ford, fellow pro Jack Nicklaus, and Billy Graham. After the round was over, one of the other pros on the tour asked the golfer, "Hey, what was it like playing with the President and Billy Graham?"

- The pro said with disgust, "I don't need Billy Graham stuffing religion down my throat!" With that he headed for the practice tee. His friend followed, and after the golfer had pounded out his fury on a bucket of golf balls, he asked, "Was Billy a little rough on you out there?" The pro sighed and said with embarrassment, "No, he didn't even mention religion."
- You see, the pro was upset because just by being with a godly man He realized his inadequacy before the Lord. He was convicted of his sin and unrighteousness.
- And yet, the Spirit doesn't want to merely reveal to us that we are unrighteous, more than that, He wants to show us who is righteous: Jesus Christ. That's why Christ added "because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer." The Father would not accept Christ if Christ were not totally and completely sinless and holy. Therefore, Christ alone of all humanity is righteous, and the Spirit testifies to that fact.
 - This is why faith in Christ alone offers the promise of eternal life in heaven. God knows we're sinners and knows we can't save ourselves and are unrighteous. And so because of His great love for us He sent Jesus – His one and only Son – to live a perfect life and overcome sin and death so that He would be the perfect sinless sacrifice for all of our sin so that we could be made righteous. So that we could be saved from hell and look forward to heaven. The instant we believe in Jesus and submit to Him as our Lord and Savior we receive the Holy Spirit who is the guarantee of our salvation, and we are empowered to live lives of thankful and joyful service to our savior. That's the gospel and that's what the Holy Spirit is constantly driving us to.
- **Philippians 3:8-9 PP** "Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith"
- You see, the normal human standard of righteousness is to compare ourselves to other people or to compare ourselves to the society in which we live or to compare ourselves to public opinion. When the world thinks about righteousness, it thinks of it in relative terms.
 - Jesus said, "No. The Holy Spirit will convict men of the ultimate standard of righteousness, which is Me. I am the ultimate standard of righteousness."
- **F.B. Meyer** put it this way **PP** "We are constantly meeting people who are perfectly indifferent to Christianity, because they say they do not feel their need of it. Why should they trouble about it, when they suppose themselves able to do perfectly well without it? In dealing with these, it is a great mistake to entice them towards the Gospel by describing

the moral grandeur of Christ's character and teaching. We should at once seek to arouse them to a sense of their great sinfulness.”

- We’re all sin-riddled, flesh-filled jars of clay. And unless we repent of our unbelief and turn to Christ to be our righteousness, we’ll face the coming judgment and be sent to Hell. And that’s the final thing this passage tells us the Spirit will convict the world of the judgment that is to come.

Conviction of Judgment

- **C.H. Spurgeon** **PP** said “The fashionable theology of the day is “Convince men of the goodness of God! Show them the universal fatherhood and assure them of unlimited mercy. Win them by God’s love, but never mention His wrath against sin, or the need of an Atonement, or the possibility of there being a place of punishment! Do not censure poor creatures for their failings. Do not judge and condemn. Do not search the heart or lead men to be low-spirited and sorrowful. Comfort and encourage, but never accuse and threaten!””
 - Apparently, things haven’t changed much, because there are still way too many churches who want to tickle the ears of their congregations and fill the seats with people who don’t want to hear about the righteous expectations God has for His people and the judgment that is to come for those who haven’t turned to Christ as their Lord and Savior.
- Whether we want to acknowledge it or not, **PP** there will be a final judgment for every single one of us that will evaluate whether we’re worthy to remain with God forever in heaven or whether we’ll be cast into hell with Satan and his demons.
- Our passage concludes in **John 16:11** by saying that the Spirit will convict “concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.”
- The Spirit is urging us to see our unbelief in Christ, acknowledge our inability to stand before the Holy God of the universe on our own merit, and He is warning us that apart from Christ there *will* be eternal judgment.
 - The consequence of sin and unrighteousness *is* death (**Rom. 6:23**) All who remain under the worldly ways of thinking apart from Christ will be eternally damned.
 - Listen, this isn’t some scare tactic that the Spirit is trying to condemn you with. **PP** This is a loving cry of warning that the bridge is out up ahead! There is poison in the food! There is death through those doors! Don’t go there, don’t persist along that path, don’t believe the lie, and don’t blaspheme the Spirit and fall into judgment.
 - And Jesus said, if you’re not convinced of that, just look at the devil – the ruler of this world.
 - Satan has already been defeated. **PP** He’s already been cast down to earth along with his rebel angels (**Rev 12:7-9**) and Christ dealt Him a mortal blow

at the cross when death could not hold Him – “Oh death, where is your victory? Oh death where is your sting?” (1 Cor. 15:55). Christ proved that He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world (1 John 4:4). And when that final Day of Judgment comes (Rev 20:10), we will all give an account – Christian and non-Christian....and at that time Satan will be cast into the burning lake of fire along with all those who chose to listen to his lies and ignored the convicting power of the Holy Spirit and rejected Christ.

- And the reality is that if people are truly honest with themselves, they know that there will be a day of reckoning. And if they were to honestly tell you why they don't believe in God or judgment or Jesus, it's because they know that they are hell bound. It's easier to not believe that there is judgment and hell then to let go of our stubborn pride, repent, and turn to Jesus.
- Jesus said in John 3:19 PP “And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.”
- So what are we going to do about it? This is all good theologically but what are we going to do about this?
 - Well, first we've got to look at ourselves. PP If you're a Christian and the Holy Spirit has been bringing to light some sin in your life and you keep ignoring it, there's something very wrong with your faith. You've got to see that in that area of your life, Jesus Christ is not your Lord, you are.
 - You need to get out of the driver's seat and let Jesus back in control. Do whatever it takes. Confess your sin to people around you who can hold you accountable. Get rid of the objects that are tempting you to sin. Break off that relationship that is pulling you down. Walk in the truth of who you are in Christ and let go of the lies that the devil wants you to believe.
 - Recognize how much the standards of this world, and the goals of this world, and all the other lies of this world are influencing you and make the choice to allow the conviction of the Spirit to drive you to repentance, turning from your sin, and turning back to God.
 - And if you're here and you haven't submitted to Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, can I be so bold as to suggest that the Lord has you listening to this message for a reason? If you've heard nothing else today, please hear this. God loves you so much and is willing to take whatever you've been holding on to. Jesus loves you so much that He was willing to die in your place so that you could spend eternity with Him.

- What's holding you back from accepting His forgiveness and His righteousness? What is it? Whatever that is, it's not worth eternity in hell. Let it go, and find forgiveness and true joy and peace in Jesus.
- Second, **PP** once we've looked within ourselves and have submitted more fully to Christ, well now we need to go and tell others what Jesus has done for us. Share your testimony...be a witness to the power of God to save you and transform you from the person you were to the person you are today.
 - I've got to be honest, I don't think we do this very well. I don't think we're very bold in our faith with our non-Christian friends – if we even have any non-Christian friends. How intentional are you in reaching out to them and building a relationship and sharing your faith? If there isn't at least one person who you're working at building that relationship with so that you can tell them about what Jesus has done for you then, again, there's something wrong with your faith.
 - Listen, don't just invite your friends to church and think that your job is done. That's great and all, but you've got to be sharing what Jesus has personally done for you. Let them see what your life was like – testify to the depths of your sin and what Jesus has saved you from and let them know that Jesus wants to do the same thing for them.

Conclusion

- Like that judge at the beginning of our sermon, I think we get so scared about our sins being exposed that we want to put a gag order on sharing what Jesus has done for us. We've got to let the grandmother speak to us, and we've got to be transformed by God's free gift of grace moving in our lives.
 - Listen, I was a fornicator, and an idolater, a pitiful husband and father, full of my own pride and self-sufficiency and prone to fits of anger when I didn't get my way. And guess what, I still struggle with some of those things – I'm not perfect. **PP** But by God's grace, Jesus has saved me and He continues to transform me into the man He wants me to be. And by God's grace I never want to quench the conviction of the Spirit in my life. And it's my prayer today that none of us will quench the conviction of the Spirit in our lives either. Amen. Amen.