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John 16:5-11

THE SPIRIT CONVICTS THE WORLD

It's old hat now, but my first experience with Skype was in connection with a death. The family of the deceased were sitting in the living room discussing funeral arrangements. On the couch sat one of the daughters holding a conversation with her tablet. On the tablet was the face of her husband who was in England at the time. It struck me almost as bazaar. And yet, what a blessing for us these days that when a loved one is far off, we can stay so connected.

It must have been hard for the disciples when their Lord Jesus announced that He would be leaving them. There was never a stronger bond of love on the face of the earth than between Christ and His disciples. It was the night before His death. They were in the upper room. Jesus said, *Now I am going to him who sent me, yet none of you asks, 'Where are you going?'* Because I

have said these things you are filled with grief. 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.

For our salvation Christ would have to leave them. He would proceed to Gethsemane and then to flogging and the cross. After that He would rise again and ascend into heaven. But the work of salvation did not end there. From the right hand of God Christ would send the Holy Spirit. Martin Luther paraphrased Jesus this way: *If I remain, you have in Me nothing but a physical and natural comfort, and you could not attain the high, great, spiritual realm and the eternal existence.* The Holy Spirit would give them faith to save them, would sanctify them, enlighten them, preserve them, and give them peace. The Holy Spirit would fill them the mind of Christ and God's peace and create the fellowship of the Church. The Holy Spirit would bring Christ to them through Word and Sacrament, would light them on fire to carry out the Great Commission and would back their words with power.

In fact, the Holy Spirit would back their preaching with such power that Jesus said, *When he comes he will*

convict the world. It was as though Jesus was telling them, “You disciples are a ragtag bunch, unknown, dismissed, despised and even beaten up by the world. But you will be like masters over the world -not because you are something spectacular, but because the Holy Spirit will work through your preaching. He is the master who puts the world in its place.

Then Jesus goes on to say in what ways the Holy Spirit will convict the world. At first glance, what Jesus says seems obscure and doesn't make sense. These words can only be understood in the context of salvation. He says: *When the Holy Spirit comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.*

Let's begin with the third one that the Holy Spirit will convict the world in regard to judgment because the prince of this world now stands condemned. In other words, without Christ, without God's Word, without the Holy Spirit, whatever assessment this world makes on any matter, whatever consensus, whatever conclusions

are reached, whatever values the world places on anything, however the world delineates between good and bad, anything the world makes a judgment about can only be perverse, muddled, backwards, blind, wicked and wrong. The world thinks the way it thinks because its prince is the devil. Therefore the world in its thinking is judged because the devil is judged. The Holy Spirit uses God's Word to convict the world and judge it. A person can notice how anytime God's Word is preached or taught or written or spoken about the world feels judged. It gets people's dander up. The world doesn't like it. The world retaliates.

You and I have felt the same judgment from the Word of God. We were born with a sinful, non-spiritual nature. Because of this, even now our thinking may be wrong on something, not in line with what God's Word says -until the Holy Spirit sets us straight with God's Word and changes our thinking.

In particular, the world's thinking is hostile to God as regards our relationship to Him and how we are saved. Therefore Jesus said, *[The Holy Spirit will convict the world] in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me.* Consider how blind the world is in regard to sin. A man can wrap explosives around himself and throw

himself into a crowd for maximum carnage, invoking the name of his god. This exact scenario can happen again and again and again each time the person invoking the same god. Yet each time the world insists that the person must have been a lone wolf and that the religion of that god whose name they invoked is really a great and peace-loving religion.

But if a Christian merely uses words to say God designed marriage to be between a man and a woman, the whole world rages that all of Christianity must be eradicated from the planet like a deadly plague.

The world cannot make a right judgment about sin. But interestingly, it is not because of sin that the Holy Spirit condemns the world. Jesus said, "It is because men do not believe in me." It is the same thing Jesus said in the last chapter of Mark: *Whoever believes and is baptized shall be saved. Whoever does not believe will be condemned.* Jesus does not say whoever sins will be condemned. But whoever does not believe in Him. Salvation is not obtained by our lack of sinning, but by acknowledging our sin, repenting of it and turning to Jesus Christ for forgiveness. Christ's forgiveness is free and offered to all at no cost, for He paid for everything in full Himself when He died on the cross. We are

saved not by doing anything, but by believing in Jesus our Savior. But the world acknowledges neither sin nor its need for a Savior correctly.

The flip side of that coin is the second thing Jesus said: *[The Holy Spirit will convict the world] in regard to righteousness because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer.* The world looks at you and me and says, “You Christians aren’t any better than the rest of us. In fact you’re worse.” We won’t disagree. But there is a righteousness that is not in us or in our lives, a righteousness outside of us and above us that puts us in good standing with God. Our righteousness is Christ. Christ is our righteousness. He has ascended to the right hand of God. Christ’s holiness, Christ’s good deeds, Christ’s good heart, Christ’s sinless life -that’s all that matters to God. To all believers God credits Christ’s righteousness to us as though it were ours. Though God wants us to live righteously here on earth, nevertheless, our righteousness here on earth does nothing at all to bring us closer to God nor to get us closer to heaven. Christ is the only righteousness that matters. Christ’s righteousness saves us. The Bible says, *Your life is hidden with Christ in God.*

But the world can't see this righteousness because Christ has ascended into heaven. The world loves to congratulate itself and it makes no sense to the world that all its achievements & good intentions and most shining personalities count for nothing before God. The world particularly resents it when the Holy Spirit, through the preaching of God's Word, convicts the world and says, "All your achievements are like filthy rags. Quit tiring yourselves out and look to the one who achieved for you an everlasting righteousness that will give you true peace with God and a place in heaven.

From Christ's words we see that He sends the Holy Spirit to back the preaching of His word in such a way that He puts the world into an uproar and judges it. This certainly happened in the days of the apostles. We also witness it even today. Yet that same Spirit who convicts the unbelieving world also convinces some by bringing them to faith in Jesus for salvation. He gives birth to the Church, sanctifies the Church, preserves the Church and saves the Church. As regards our own sinful nature, may we always willingly permit ourselves to be convicted by the words of the Holy Spirit. More importantly, may we always joyful remain convinced that Jesus Christ is our only true Savior and Friend.

