

# The Spirit Convicts the World

by John Murray

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*The Holy Spirit's activity in reference to the world is to bring conviction of sin, righteousness, and judgment, exposing the world's erroneous conception of these things.*

**Duration:** 51:29

**Scripture:** John 16:8-11, John 16:13-14, Acts 2:23-24, Ephesians 2:14-15, Colossians 1:15-17, Hebrews 11:35-38

**Topics:** "Conviction"

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## Description

In this sermon on John chapter 16, the preacher focuses on the role of the Holy Spirit in convicting the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. The Holy Spirit is sent by Jesus to work powerfully and effectively in all nations and peoples. Through the death of Jesus on the cross, the judgment of the world is manifested, as he was the epitome of righteousness, virtue, truth, holiness, goodness, and love. The Holy Spirit's activity in convicting the world is a result of God's counsel and design, using even the ungodly actions of man to glorify Christ.

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## Transcript

The Gospel According to John, Chapter Sixteen. Gospel According to John, Chapter Sixteen, beginning at verse eight. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment.

Of sin, because they believe not on me. Of righteousness, because I go to my Father and ye see me no more. Of judgment, because the prince of this world is in connection with verse seven of this chapter.

We found this morning that Jesus is here speaking of the event of Pentecost as the sending forth of the Holy Spirit in the fullness of power and grace, so that he might be working efficaciously in all nations and kindreds and peoples and tongues. Christ, by his death, broke down the middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile. So that now there is no longer Jew nor Gentile, male nor female, bond nor free, but Christ is all and in all.

And the Gospel is proclaimed to all races and kindreds. And we found that when the Holy Spirit comes forth or came forth on the day of Pentecost, that that was a decisive event, an event once for all, an event which is not to be repeated. Because the Holy Spirit came to abide, to continue in the church, well, carrying on his activities.

When the Holy Spirit came, we found that he came in the capacity of advocate. And he came particularly to do two functions. First, to reveal unto the disciples all the truth, to make them the organs and the depositories of revelation, so that we and the church of God in all ages might be in possession of that finished revelation which God has deposited for us in the Scriptures.

And he also came to glorify Christ. To glorify Christ because Christ is the image of the invisible God, because to Christ have been committed all things. And so Jesus said, he shall not speak from himself, but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak.

Now in these words which are the text for this evening, our attention is particularly centered upon the activity of the Holy Spirit in reference to the world. With reference to the disciples, he said he will lead you into all the truth. And he would glorify Christ by taking of the things of Christ and showing them unto them.

But now our attention is drawn to a different feature of the Holy Spirit's activity in his coming as a result of Pentecost. And our attention is drawn to the world. When he has come, he will convince the world of conflict, the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment.

And it is well for us to take account of that particular emphasis. In this particular gospel, our attention is drawn to the interest that God the Father had in the world. And we read in perhaps the best known text in scripture, God so loved the world, that his God the Father so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved. And this is the interest of God the Father in the world. He so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son.

And likewise, in this same gospel, our attention is drawn to the activity of Christ. He welcomes to the world. What was the witness of John the Baptist? Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.

And in the first epistle of John, we read in similar fashion, he is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world. And there is the interest of Christ in what the scripture calls the world. And now, when we come to the distinctive action or activity of God the Holy Spirit, the same expression is brought to our attention.

When he has come, he will convict the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. It is well for us to take that into account, because it is in line with the significance of Pentecost. The significance of Pentecost is particularly that the Holy Spirit comes in the fullness of grace and power to be active in all nations, and kindreds, and peoples, and tongues, because the middle wall of partition has been broken down.

And just because he came in the fullness of grace and power to be active in the world, our attention is appropriately drawn to this fact, that when he has come, he will convict the world of sin, of righteousness. Now having that before our minds, that is the interest of the Holy Spirit in the world. What is it that comes into particular focus? When the Holy Spirit is going to do something with reference to the world, what is it that comes into the focus of his interest? As he contemplates the world, what does the Holy Spirit have in view? And like it, it is sin, righteousness, and judgment.

Sin, righteousness, and judgment. That's what the Holy Spirit has particularly in view, in his activity with reference to the world. And our thought must be drawn to this all-important consideration, that the interests of God's Lord, the interests of Christ's kingdom, and the highest interests of man are concerned with sin, righteousness.

Now let me ask this question. To what extent do sin, and righteousness, and judgment loom in? To what extent are these things central in our thought? Because if these things are not central in our thought, then we are not thinking God. And if we are not thinking God's thoughts, it is because of ungodliness, or godliness, or godlessness.

Oh my friend, ask himself, do sin, righteousness, and judgment occupy our interest, our thought? When the Holy Spirit comes, he comes with a meaning. And you must remember that that activity of conviction is in accord with the particular capacity in which the Holy Spirit comes. We found this morning that he comes in the capacity of advocate, of pleader.

And the figure is as well that of a lawsuit for a law court. And the function of an advocate in the law courts is to convict a criminal, to convict, to bring the evidence to bear upon his conviction. And that is precisely what the Holy Spirit is doing when he comes into the world.

He's acting still in his capacity as advocate. And acting in that capacity, he brings conviction to bear upon the world. He brings in a sentence of condemnation with reference to the world.

And his sentence of condemnation, his sentence of conviction, his concern with sin, righteousness, Now, first of all, then, he is concerned with sin. The conviction of sin. What is sin? Well, generally, when we think of sin, we think of very notorious transgression.

We think, of course, of the murderer. We think of the adulterer. We think of the thief.

We think of the propane person. We think of the adulterer. And, of course, quite properly, all we put is sin.

And these notorious transgressions, of course, are sin. They are notorious transgressions of the law of God. And sin is any want of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God.

And it is quite proper for us to think of these notorious outward transgressions as sin. All we put is sin. And that, of course, is what the world itself, to a certain extent, considers sin to be.

If you go out into the world and ask people what is sin, if they have any understanding, they'll point to the notorious transgressions of God's law. And they'll say that is sin. But we forget something that is all important if that is the only distance that we go in trying to assess the canon.

If that's all the distance we go, then we are grievously in error. And that is what is in the background of this text. That the world is grievously in error with respect to what really constitutes.

Now, sin is in its very essence to be against God. To be against God. Paul expresses it by saying that the carnal mind is enmity against God.

And, of course, these notorious transgressions are sin, both because they are against the law of God, and therefore against God. But we must go deeper. And realize that if sin is to be against God, then sin manifests itself in the recoil of the human heart from every manifestation of the glory of God.

The recoil of the human heart against the claims of God's glory upon us. And it is where the glory of God is most manifest, that the enmity of the human heart is most violent. And that brings us to the real point of this particular text.

He shall convict the world of sin because they believe not on me. And Jesus is there putting his finger upon what is the real manifestation of the sinfulness of the human heart. The epitome of iniquity is irresolute belief or disbelief.

Jesus Christ himself, you see, is the supreme manifestation of the glory of God. The glory of God is manifest in the face of Jesus Christ as it is known by others. He is the image of the invisible God.

He is the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of his person. And sin manifests itself particularly and most violently at the point of revelation in Jesus. For disbelief of Jesus is the epitome of iniquity.

That is where the iniquity of the human heart. Now you will find that that was the attitude of the world when they crucified the Lord. What did they say with reference to it? They said with reference.

You remember on one occasion what did they say? What did they say? Give God praise. We know that this man is a sinner. The very person who was the supreme manifestation of the glory of God was in their esteem a sinner.

Not worthy of being accepted and worthy in their esteem of condemnation. And there is exposed the falsity of the world's attitude. The epitome of iniquity, the essence of iniquity is to reject claims of Christ.

And you go out into the world and deal with those people who are outwardly respectable, who are perfectly honest in their discipline, who are perfectly decent in all their family relationships. And as far as outward character is concerned, they are spotless. No crime can be made against them.

You cannot put your finger on any outward notorious adoration from the Lord God. They are clean in their lives. They are honest in their dealings.

They are truthful in all their statements. And if you would tell these people because they are not believers in Christ Jesus that they are sinners, they will be insulted. You see that is what this text of sin.

Because they believe not on me. And if we do not put all our hope and confidence in Jesus for time and for eternity, then we are guilty of what is the very epitome of sin. The very epitome.

When Paul said, as it is recorded in the sixth chapter, save in the cross of the Lord, Paul was not a sinner. Paul had never been an adulterer. He had never been a murderer.

He had never been guilty of any of these outward transgressions. Thus touching the law, he was a Pharisee. And he was in that respect impeccable.

As far as the criteria of judgment exercised by this world was concerned, he was an admirable character. And consequently when Paul says that he was crucified unto the world, and the world crucified unto him, he was not thinking at all about the totally outward transgressions, because he had never been addicted to them. What is Paul thinking of? He's talking about self-complacency.

And that's the epitome of iniquity. And that's what this world was guilty of. That was what the Pharisees were guilty of.

When they crucified the Lord of glory, self-righteousness, and it isn't the outward transgressions. Who is the greatest sinner in the sight of God? It's not the gangster, it's not the thief, the murderer, but the person who is self-complacent, and who rests upon his own integrity, his own righteousness, for acceptance of sin. Because they believed not in me.

The whole estimate of the world is condemned by this action. Threw out of the bush the instruments who were the proclaimers of the gospel. Now, second, we have this of righteousness, because I go to the Father.

Now, I admit, that's a very puzzling term, and perhaps you are more puzzled over it as I am. Of righteousness, because I go to the Father, and ye see me no more. So what was this world's conception? You must remember that this action of the Holy Spirit is to convict the world of righteousness.

That is, to convict the world of what righteousness really is, and correct the totally erroneous conception of it. Now, what was the conception of righteousness entertained by this present evil world? Well, you can find that in the whole history of the people of God. What did this world do with those who were the witnesses to righteousness, who were God's chosen instruments of bearing witness to the righteousness? Did they listen to Noah as a preacher of righteousness? Did they listen to Lot, that righteous man dwelling among them? And they vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their... Take the record of the saints of God throughout all ages, and how did the world treat them? Did the world treat them for what they were? You remember how eloquently that is stated in the epistle to the Hebrews, the eleventh chapter, when we read, Others were taught, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.

And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover, of bonds and impurities. They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword, they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and in mountains, and these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the crown.

But you see the world, and you know sometimes when you find a person who is persecuted for righteousness' sake, and who is in perhaps very destitute condition, who is forsaken of his friends, who may be even despised by his family. The erroneous estimate that we have, instead of glowing in that witness, so erroneous is our estimate, so utterly awry is our judgment in reference to what righteousness is. But it isn't simply the treatment according to the sense of God that exposes the erroneous conception that this world entertains of righteousness.

We must go to the Lord and Savior Himself. And He, of course, was the Holy and the Just. There was a preacher once in Scotland of the moderate persuasion that is what would correspond to righteousness.

And he was preaching in a church in the morning, and he said, If virtue came down from heaven, the whole world would bow down and worship. If virtue came down from heaven, all the world would bow down and worship. And then there was an Evangelist, and he heard the sermon in the morning, and he said, Virtue came down from heaven, and they crucified it.

You see the difference? That's what was meted out to the Lord of Glory. He was the righteous one. He was the very picture of righteousness.

He was righteousness in Christ. And what did the world say about Him? This is what the world said about Him. For a good work we slowly not, but for a blasphemy, and because that thou When He cast out demons, in pursuance of His own word, if I with the finger of God cast out demons, then is the kingdom of God come nigh unto you.

And what did they say about it? Thou hast a demon, for not man. By the prince of the demons He cast out demons. What did the world say about Him? We have a law.

By our law He ought to die, because He made Himself. They condemned Him to be worthy of death, and that was the holy judgment. Does that not expose the awful iniquity of this world's judgment, that the person who was the very epitome of fractures, the person who was the very incarnation of righteousness, this world judged to be worthy of death.

And they said crucify Him, crucify Him. We will not have this man. And He convicts the world of righteousness by doing what? By showing what God's estimate Jesus has in Him.

And He see me no more. Jesus is referring to His resurrection and to His exaltation, to His endowment with all power in heaven. That was God's vindication of Him who was the hope.

And you remember how Peter, in his sermon on the day of Pentecost, as the instrument of the Holy Spirit, in bringing conviction to bear on the world, with reference to this very question, you remember what Peter said. This Jesus hath God made, therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, He hath shed forth this, which ye now see delivered at Pentecost. He is contrasting the treatment that was meted out by His present world to the whole and just one.

Him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain. Whom God hath raised up, hath reduced the pains of death, because it was not possible. And you know just of it.

Whom He delivered up and denied Him in the presence of Pilate when He was determined. Whom God hath raised from the dead, whereof we all are witnesses. And His name, through faith in His name, hath made a pattern of righteousness, because I was bearing witness that God hath exalted Jesus and therefore vindicated Him as the righteous and Holy One.

That He, the Passion, who was cast out, hath worthy of death, exalted to the right hand, exalted all, all principality, power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also that God hath highly exalted Him and given Him the name that is above everything in order whereof for one reason at least, to give vindication of what really is right. My friends, we need to examine in the light of these very things. The world rejected God's glory.

Some do. That is the significance of the resurrection. And do we really view things? Do we view this very conception of righteousness in the light of Jesus' resurrection and exaltation? If we do not, if our conception of righteousness is not prayed in terms of Jesus' passion for the righteousness in the cause of the majesty in heaven, it is because our world is still governed by the wisdom of this world.

And this is not anything that my friends, it is odd that the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus should go so high in our interest and in our thought that our conception of righteousness should not. That is what the Holy Spirit does. He takes the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus, confounds this world and therefore

exposes the iniquity.

And now we have heard me because the prince of this world and here again you have something that no doubt often puzzled you as to the connection. What connection is there between these two things of judgment because the prince, well obviously the Holy Spirit is still acting in his capacity as advocate and is playing conviction to bear upon the world because of its erroneous conception of judgment. And of course the erroneous conception of judgment was manifested in the cross of Christ.

And how was this world's conception of judgment in the cross of Christ? Just because all the ingenuity and the hellish wisdom of the great arch enemy was manifested in the crucifixion. That was the masterpiece of Satan's device. Jesus himself said this is your world.

How in darkness it was in the cross of Christ that the judgment of this world was manifested because it was the judgment executed. Who was himself all is. There is the and there is its in the judgment that was.

And now, how is that executed? What does the Holy Spirit do in order to bring conviction to bear upon the world? In order to revert its the prince of this world. Oh how wonderful this is. God makes the very wrath of man to praise him.

He uses the very the very the very activities of ungodly man to accomplish. You remember that text. Him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.

He has taken and by wicked hands have crucified. Don't you see my friends that the crucifixion of Jesus is the arch crime of human history. From the standpoint of human iniquity.

From the standpoint of its being perpeccated by the enemies of righteousness and of truth. It is in that very same event in which the devil and all his hosts have conspired to in that very same event the prince of this world now is the judge. Now he shall destroy the power of the prince of death.

He destroyed him that had the power of death. That is the devil. And delivered them who through fear of death were all their lifetimes subject to bondage.

He spoiled principalities and powers and made a show of them openly. Try not to go over the law and the blood. There is the ingenuity of the artist.

Also the supreme wisdom. The supreme grace. And the supreme love of God.

Jesus destroyed the prince of death. And that truth should be wrought. We are not always disposed to think of renouncing all other victories over the truth.

It is of all importance. And how could it be? I will put enmity between thee and the woman and between thy seed and her seed. He shall bruise thy head.

Thou shalt bruise his head. The first promise that God gave was in terms of the judgment that would be excellent. And that's where one runs through the Scripture.

And it comes to expression here in this very pronouncement of Jesus. Of judgment because the prince of this world and because the prince in the cross of this world on to the present time through the face of Christ taken out of the grasp of Satan translated out of the kingdom of God. It's all together because as Jesus heals again the Holy Spirit has been convicting the world of judgment.

Of judgment because the prince of this world and the Holy Spirit has been bringing to him that great victory which Jesus has been bringing upon the hearts and minds and in all kindreds and peoples of tongues of that glorious act. And by faith in Jesus by creating in them that understanding of what sin is of what righteousness is and of what judgment is he has been translating out of the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of God's own Son. And now in conclusion how does it work? My friends if we are to be the heirs of eternal life if we are to be heirs of God's devil and joint heirs with Jesus Christ then this activity of the false must have been brought to bear with us with Fatima and we have been in the deep of righteousness.

One thing that is all important before I close out meditation in these words you remember that one of the central functions of the Holy Spirit is to glorify Christ isn't it? He shall glorify me and don't you see that everything which the Holy Spirit uses in this function of conviction is focused in Christ we must read the text entirely unless we find in these very words which are concerned with the activity of the Holy Spirit in connection with the Word I say unless we discover in connection with these words the same function of the Holy Spirit in glorifying Christ Christ is poured out in this very convicting power. Why? Listen. Of sin because they believe not on me of righteousness because I go to the Father and He see me no more of judgment because the prince of this world now is the judge now shall the prince of this world and I that is the secret of this it is the bringing of Christ in his person in his work in his accomplishment into the focus of this world's interest into the focus of this world's thought.

Oh let us not let us not be involved in the erroneous judge of sin righteousness but may it be true of each one of us that the Holy Spirit is so glorified so exalted Christ in our apprehension that our whole conception of sin of right begun Christ is that by that which oh let shall be focused upon in that place which He occupies in accordance with the determined to the right hand of God we see Him not now because that faith generated by the Holy Spirit that faith that is implanted in our hearts and that faith that is sealed by the focus of Christ in His exalted glory and let it be with us that we reach or be to us all and in all precious to us above all that can be that precious to us and then will come this work of the Holy Spirit in the world that He will convict the righteous into the possession of that inheritance that is incorruptible and undefiled and that paid it not away which Christ by His work of judgment, by His work of redemption has secured for all those whose supreme interest we pray that God is planted in our minds so that we shall go forth embracing that we shall go forth with this inestimable that Christ is for may He ever be He may be all of us

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