

JOHN 16:5-15

In this section of the upper room discourse the themes we have seen Jesus teach to his disciples continue, and come together. He is departing, yet this is good news for the disciples as he will send his Spirit on them. There will be antagonism between Jesus' followers and the world – as the disciples have been chosen out of the world. In this section Jesus continues to give his disciples reassurance and to teach them about the work of the Holy Spirit – particularly about the Spirit's work towards those who don't know Christ (the world, human beings in opposition to God who do not recognise Jesus as God come in the flesh).

In verse 5 Jesus makes what appears to be a slightly odd statement – surely the disciples have been asking “where are you going?” (see 14:5,8). Yet their focus has been on the fact he is going away, none of them have really probed or understood the fact that Jesus is returning to the Father. If they did they would be filled with joy, rather than grief, and they would have begun to grasp the enormous redemptive significance that this returning has. They are simply filled with grief because he will not be physically present with them.

Jesus again underlines the benefits for them that he goes. He particularly underlines the sending of the Spirit (the counsellor – remember 14:16). He will only be sent once Jesus has been glorified through the cross (see John 7:39). After Jesus' death and resurrection the Spirit will be poured out on all people in the New Covenant in fulfilment of the great promises in the Old Testament (like Joel 3).

So far in these chapters in John we have learnt that the Holy Spirit brings great benefits to believers, as he is with us and in us. Here Jesus teaches about the work of the Holy Spirit towards those who do not know Jesus. He continues Jesus ministry. There has been much discussion about precisely what verses 8-11 means but I think it is fairly clear that Jesus is just stressing the continuation of his work through the Holy Spirit. He convicted people of sin – this was clearly seen by the way people responded to him, so the Holy Spirit will continue to do that. He showed up how inadequate people's “righteousness” was (particularly of those who thought they were righteous and religious) – now he is returning to his Father the Spirit will continue that work. He has showed up the foolishness of the world's judgements – now he is going to condemn the prince of the world (the one who has warped people's judgements) at the cross, and the Spirit will continue to convict the world of it's wrong judgement about God and the way to reach God.

The obvious question to ask here is “how will the Spirit do this”? In the context of what Jesus has been saying the answer seems to be – through his disciples as they take the word of God to people. The Spirit is promised to be with and in his followers. 15:26-27 says that the Spirit will testify about Christ, and that you must testify, I think indicating that the two go hand in hand. So as we speak about Christ, the Spirit is at work bringing this conviction.

It is important to notice that there is an objective and absolute nature to this conviction. Regardless of how people respond this conviction is occurring, and before God people are shown to be sinful, unrighteous and possessing wrong judgement. Wonderfully, there is also a subjective conviction that comes in many as the Spirit enables people to receive this conviction and drives them to see their need of Christ and enables them to believe and repent. But even if that does not happen, this conviction is occurring as people's true nature is revealed by their response to the gospel.

Jesus is pastorally careful as he speaks to his disciples (16:12). He knows that they cannot take this all in right now, and he has much more that his followers need to know about living in the time after he has gone. But again, the coming Holy Spirit will solve that problem, as he will teach the disciples guiding them into truth. This truth will be teaching from Jesus, which in turn is what he has heard from the Father. In 14:26 we saw that the Holy Spirit would enable the disciples to remember perfectly what Jesus taught them while he was on earth (which means we can have confidence in this gospel John has written). Now he promises they will know more (which means we can have confidence in the rest of the New Testament). All the Bible is the word of Jesus! We should throw away our red letter Bibles!

And finally notice why the Spirit does this – to bring glory to Jesus (verse 14).

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

How have the disciples reacted to all that Jesus has been telling them? How should they feel? (Vs 5-6)

Look up John 7:37-39 and compare it with John 16:7. Why is the cross and resurrection such an important turning point for disciples of Jesus?

In previous studies we have seen what the Holy Spirit does for disciples of Jesus. What will he do for the world? What will he reveal about them?

How is the sin of the world most clearly revealed (Verse 9)?

The Spirit will continue Jesus' work now he is returning to his Father (verse 10). What has Jesus revealed about the "righteousness" of the world? (See John 5:16-18, 5:39-40, 7:19, 12:42-43)

Does the world naturally judge rightly, especially in matters concerning God? (see John 7:21-24, 8:15-16). How is the prince of this world (the source of foolish judgement) condemned? (See John 12:31)?

How will the Holy Spirit do these things? Where will he be found, how will he do his work? (refresh your memory by looking back to John 14:17, and 15:26-27)

What does this tell us about our responsibility to speak to others about Jesus, and how does it give us encouragement as we do that?

What is the Spirit going to do for the disciples? (Verse 13) How is this an extension of the promise we have already seen in 14:26? How can he do that (Verse 14-15)?

Why will the Spirit do this? What is his aim? (Verse 14)

What do these verses tell us about how we should view our Bible? For example, are the words of Jesus in the gospels more valuable than the letter of 1 Peter (should we have "red letter Bibles")? What is the purpose of the Bible?