

International Sunday School Lesson
Study Notes
March 15, 2014

Lesson Text: John 16:4-15
Lesson Title: The Spirit of Truth

Introduction

John 12:36 through John 17:26 records a period in which Jesus privately speaks to His disciples at the close of His earthly ministry. Several key events take place such during this time such as the Last Supper (John 13:1-20), the dismissal of Judas (John 13:21-30), Jesus' announcement that He is about to be glorified (John 13:31-55), and the promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit (John 14-17).

The passage from John 13:31 through John 16 constitutes one great farewell address broken only by the questions and interruptions of the disciples. Our Lord's words, "these things have I spoken unto you" reveal a conscious effort on the part of Jesus to give the disciples the truth and instruction they needed to faithfully continue once He had left them (John 14:25; 15:11; 16:1, 4, 6, 25, 33).

Our text in John 16:4-15 continues Jesus' revelation to His disciples of the function of the Holy Spirit in their lives and the world. Having made clear that the hatred of the world would be directed toward the disciples if they continued to follow Jesus, He went into greater detail just what that hatred would mean to them. There was no doubt that the enemies of the cross would persecute those who followed Jesus. Coming persecution was a certainty. Jesus said, *"They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me"* (John 16:2-3).

The unbelieving world still lives in complete ignorance of the Father and of the Son. To be ignorant of one is to be ignorant of the other. As a result of this ignorance and persecution that will come upon Jesus' disciples as a result of this ignorance, the Spirit of Truth is needed for both a lost world and a suffering church. Thank God for the Person of the Spirit of Truth, or, as we more commonly call Him, the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit of Truth and Explanation (John 16:4-7)

Verse 4

“But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them. And these things I said not unto you at the beginning, because I was with you.”

Jesus continues to explain to His disciples the certainty of coming persecution after His death and departure. “But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them,” reveals the truth that when “the time” of persecution begins, the disciples will “remember” what Jesus had said. If the persecution comes to pass as Jesus had said, then the good things Jesus had said must be equally dependable. That would renew their hope and trust in the words of the Lord.

“And these things I said not unto you at the beginning, because I was with you.” Jesus is explaining why He has waited until now to tell them about what was going to happen when He left them. It wasn’t necessary for Him to tell them all these things at the beginning of His ministry because He “was with them.” His presence in the flesh meant He could give them guidance and instruction day by day. It also meant the enemy was less likely to attack them with Jesus’ presence so near.

Verse 5

“But now I go my way to him that sent me; and none of you asketh me, Whither goest thou?”

“But now” means the circumstances are about to change. Jesus was about to go to the cross which was the “way” or purpose for which God had “sent” Him. “And none of you asketh me, Whither goest thou” is a difficult statement to interpret. In John 13:36, Peter asked Jesus, “*Lord, whither goest thou?*” In John 14:5, Thomas asked Jesus, “*Lord, we know not whither thou goest.*” So, what does Jesus mean when He said, “None of you asketh me, Whither goest thou?”

Both Peter and Thomas asked their questions primarily for themselves and for the immediate. Neither probed any further into Jesus’ answers to them when they asked their questions. In Jesus’ statement, “And none of you asketh me, Whither goest thou,” Jesus is saying, “I’m telling you about all that is about to take place and none of you sense the need to inquire further into my destination” (John 14:28).

Verse 6

“But because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart.”

The reaction to Jesus’ explanation to the coming persecutions and His departure resulted in “sorrow” filling the hearts of the disciples. “Sorrow” is the Greek word *lype* {loo-pay} which means “sadness, grief, heaviness.” Jesus had

previously told the disciples, “*Let not your heart be troubled...*” (John 14:1). Their heart was “stirred or agitated” in John 14:1. Now, their “heart” is “filled” with sorrow. The word “filled” indicates that sadness and heaviness had completely taken over their thoughts and feelings.

Lest we criticize or judge these men prematurely, we should ask ourselves how often this is the case with us. Maybe we are filled with joy after a great Sunday school lesson or church service and then we read a text message or email and circumstances have changed. “These things” can often change what we think and feel. But they should never overshadow or cause us to forget the promises of God.

Verse 7

“Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.”

“Nevertheless,” or no matter how you are feeling or what you are thinking, “I tell you the truth.” What an encouraging contrast! The disciples may not be thinking about Jesus or remembering His promises, but He was thinking about them! “I tell you the truth” is powerful. The personal pronoun “I” is emphatic in the Greek. Jesus is saying, “I who love you, I who am a few hours away from the cross, I who am ready to lay down my life for you, is telling you the truth.” Their misunderstanding of what Jesus was saying does not change the fact that what He is saying is “truth.”

“It is expedient for you that I go away.” The word “expedient” means “profitable.” To the disciples the departure of Jesus seemed disastrous, but actually it was for their profit. First, it would be better for them not to depend on the visible, bodily presence of Christ. Second, if Jesus didn’t departure, the “Comforter” would not come unto them. Therefore, if Jesus goes, the Holy Spirit comes.

The coming of the Holy Spirit as our “Comforter” is inseparably linked to the going of Jesus Christ by the way of the cross back to the Father. By Jesus’ going away, He would secure the salvation of the disciples and all who would believe, guarantee the coming of the Holy Spirit to abide with us, and be back in the presence of God the Father.

The Spirit of Truth and Conviction (John 16:8-11)

The Holy Spirit is not only going to be in the world to protect the disciples from persecution, and comfort the disciples and believers of all ages, but he is also coming to bring sinners to a knowledge of Jesus Christ and the need of salvation.

Verse 8-11

“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 judged.”

“He” is a reference to the Holy Spirit. When “he” the Holy Spirit comes into the world he will perform a much needed work in the “world.” This is the one place in Scripture where the Holy Spirit is spoken of as performing a work in “the world.”

The word “reprove” has two meanings. One, it can be translated “convict.” In this meaning the word “reprove” is used as a judicial term and in courtroom terminology. It pictures a thorough cross-examination which gives unquestionable proof of guilt. *The Holy Spirit’s ministry is to render a sentence of damnation on everyone who rejects Jesus Christ.* Two, it can be translated “convince.” The Holy Spirit reaches into the heart to convince a sinner that they need Christ. This is somewhat different than the word “convict.” In this way the Holy Spirit “brings up” your sin so you will see your need. He deliberately causes you pain so you will realize your need. *The Holy Spirit’s ministry is to convince you that you cannot be saved by your own righteousness.*

First, the Holy Spirit will “reprove the world of sin.” He convicts and convinces a person of the seriousness of rejecting Jesus Christ. Failure to believe in Jesus Christ is the ultimate sin that results in men and women and boys and girls going to hell (Mark 16:16).

Second, the Holy Spirit will “reprove the world of righteousness.” The worse man gets the lower the standard of righteousness goes. Every person needs “righteousness” or, to be right with God. The Holy Spirit works in the soul of man to convict and convince men of that need.

Third, the Holy Spirit will “reprove the world of judgment.” The Greek word for “judgment” is *krisis* {kree-sis}. The word means “accusation, damnation, condemnation.” The Holy Spirit is sent into the world to convict and convince men that God will judge sin.

“Of sin, because they believed not on me” means the greatest sin in the world today is unbelief. The word for “sin” in verse 8-9 is the general word for sin in the New Testament, a word meaning “to miss the mark” and it is always used in a moral sense in the Bible to describe sins of both omission and commission. John 3:18 says, “*He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already...*”

“Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more” means the Holy Spirit will convince us that the only way to be right with God is through Jesus Christ. When Jesus went back to the Father and was accepted by Him back into heaven it was a guarantee that His righteousness was what sinners needed to be accepted into God’s heaven. Christ was righteous and would have never been accepted into God’s presence if He wasn’t. When you put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ, His righteousness becomes your righteousness and you can enter into God’s presence and God’s heaven. And that’s part of the convicting work of the Holy Spirit in the world.

“Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.” The “prince of this world” is a reference to Satan. Since God judged Satan for his rebellion, He will also judge you. The Holy Spirit will convince you that no one who rejects Jesus Christ escapes judgment.

The Spirit of Truth and Revelation (John 16:12-15)

The Spirit’s work with the believer is quite different from His work with the unbeliever. Having spoken of the Spirit’s reproof work among the world, our Lord now speaks of the Spirit’s revealing work among His own.

Verse 12

“I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.”

Although Jesus had told His disciples much about His coming suffering and death, there was still “many things” that He needed to tell them. But He would tell them no more at this time because they were not able to “bear them now.” The word “bear” means “incapable of holding or retaining.” They just couldn’t handle it at this time.

Verse 13

“Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.”

“Howbeit” or “but when” the “Spirit of truth, is come,” the will have One to “guide” them “into all truth.” As the days go by after Pentecost, the Holy Spirit who is here called “the Spirit of truth,” will lead the disciples into a deeper knowledge of truth. The Holy Spirit will “not speak of himself,” but what He teaches is what “he shall hear.” The text doesn’t indicate whether or not he “hears” from the Father or the Son, but the point is the Holy Spirit will “speak” what the Father and the Son tell Him to speak. The Holy Spirit never speaks or teaches anything contrary to the Father and the Son. The Holy Spirit never

advertises Himself or promotes Himself. His teaching is always consistent with previous revelation. Oh how it must grieve the Holy Spirit today to hear all the false teaching and extra biblical revelation that preachers and teachers claim to have received from the Holy Spirit!

Although the Day of Pentecost would come suddenly, learning the truth of God would be a slow and lifelong process interwoven with the spiritual growth of the individual. There is no such thing as instant maturity or instant attaining of all truth.

The Holy Spirit will also “shew you things to come” is challenging to interpret. Although the Holy Spirit has on occasion revealed the future that is not characteristic of His ministry and work as a whole. It is probably is best to interpret “shew you things to come” as the things the disciples and apostles needed to see in regard to the church age. Even today the believer is able to “see things that are coming” through the divine revelation which is the Word of God.

It is the ministry of the Holy Spirit to reveal God’s truth. What you actually have in this verse is the promise that the disciples will have “all truth” and that believers will have “all truth.” And where do we have that “truth” today? In the Scriptures.

Verse 14

“He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you.”

“He” is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will “glorify” Jesus Christ. Commenting on these powerful words, Doctor Merrill C. Tenny writes, *“Like a spotlight which brings some object into brilliant relief against the blackness of the surrounding night, but which calls not attention to itself, the Spirit’s chief mission is to make men conscious of Christ rather than Himself.”*

It is the things of Christ that the Holy Spirit will “shew unto you.” His ministry is to show believers the things of Christ. Anything you know about Jesus Christ has been made possible by the work of the Holy Spirit. You didn’t learn it on your own or discover it on your own. A man may know the word of God but if he doesn’t know the Spirit of God it will lead to all kinds of problems. At the heart of every cult and every false doctrine are men who intellectually know things about the word of God that was never revealed to them by the Spirit of God.

Verse 15

“All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you.”

Once again, the Trinity, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are all in one verse. The “Father” is here. “I” and “mine” of course is Jesus. And “he” is the Holy Spirit. There is no division in the Godhead!

“All things that the Father hath are mine” means what the Father has the Son has (John 17:10). Since the Son has “all things” the Father has, when the Holy Spirit comes, “he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you.” Jesus has what the Father wants us to have and the Holy Spirit takes what Jesus has and shows it unto us! Although the three interact perfectly; they also interact separately. All that the Father has belongs to the Son; and all that the Son has to teach is administered to us through the Holy Spirit!

Conclusion

While the primary application of our lesson was for the disciples as they faced the sorrow and uncertainties of Christ’s death and departure, the truths taught in these verses are for every believer. Through the Holy Spirit the believer finds the comfort needed to face whatever may come and dispel any sorrow or fear. Through the Holy Spirit the unbeliever is convinced and convicted of sin, righteousness, and judgment. And through the Holy Spirit the Son of God is glorified and the cause of Christ is magnified.

Whatever the Holy Spirit says or does will be consistent with God the Father and with Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit never speaks or acts independently of the Trinity. Whatever the Holy Spirit says or does, it will never contradict the word of God. So, if you want to know whether or not the Holy Spirit is speaking to you or leading you in your life, read the Bible. And if the Bible supports it, you can be sure the Holy Spirit is speaking.

Amen.