

It's Time to Believe, Part 2



Gary Wilkerson March 16, 2020

Trusting the Helper Jesus Sends Us

"I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away" (*John 16:7, ESV*).

Imagine what it was like for the disciples to hear this from Jesus. They were nearby when he performed miracles. They saw the wind and waves obey his commands. Nobody in history ever spoke with the authority that Jesus had. In his presence, the disciples felt special, valued and loved. They were encouraged and filled with hope that, no matter what obstacles were thrown at them, Jesus was there to deliver them.

Christ was the source of their belief. He is ours, too. He grants us the gift of faith and causes us to walk in power. So, how could it possibly be to the disciples' advantage if he went away and left them, as he says in this verse?

If I were one of the Twelve, I would have said, "No way, Jesus! It can't be better for you to go away. You're my life source, my reason for being." Anyone living today would have said the same thing back then—every lost, confused soul who hungers for purpose and meaning; every person tormented by an addiction; every abandoned child who doesn't know where to turn for hope. How could the world be better for anyone if Jesus weren't in it?

Of course, what Jesus says next answers their concerns fully. "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" (*16:7*).

"The Helper" is the Holy Spirit, the manifestation of Christ and his power at work in the world. What Jesus did in one location when he walked the earth, the Holy Ghost does everywhere today. The Spirit heals the sick, casts out demons and saves the lost in every corner of the world.

So, yes, it is good that Jesus left the earth, ascending to the right hand of the heavenly Father, from where he sends us his Spirit who empowers us to live. It is the Holy Spirit who first compelled us to ask Jesus into our life, and we need his power every day to lead the life of promise, godliness and service he had designed for us.

How does this happen? How exactly does the Holy Spirit help us with these things?

I can think of endless ways that I need the Holy Spirit's help in my life. I could use a lot of help with my health, my finances, my work and my relationships. Yet those specific areas aren't the primary ways that Jesus says the Holy Spirit comes to help us. Instead, Christ says, "When he comes, he will convict the world concerning *sin* and *righteousness* and *judgment*" (*John 16:8, my emphasis*).

First, according to Jesus, his Spirit helps us is by convicting us of sin.

Now I'm confused again! I don't really need any help being convicted of sin; I do a pretty good job of recognizing my sins all the time. In fact, I'm acutely aware of all the ways I mess up. So, how does the convicting work of the

Spirit help me?

Jesus quickly breaks it down for us. He says the Spirit convicts the world “concerning sin, because they do not believe in me” (16:9). Jesus isn’t talking about Christians here; he’s talking about people who don’t know him, nonbelievers who don’t know to repent and call on Christ’s saving power. The convicting work of the Spirit is, first, to convict the world of its sin.

This is a great act of mercy. If you’re lost—living for yourself, unable to see your sin and existing without the Savior—he won’t let you continue down a destructive path. So, the Holy Spirit begins to convict you. He puts a hunger in the hearts of a fallen, hurting, wounded humankind—a race broken by its own pride and arrogant belief that it can find fulfillment on its own—and reveals to them their emptiness and futility. Then he shows them the Savior who died so that they may live for eternity.

Second, the Holy Spirit convicts “concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer” (John 16:10).

This type of conviction is a little harder to understand. What does it mean for the Spirit of Christ to convict us of righteousness?

When I was young, the meaning of this verse seemed very clear to me. I thought, “The Spirit convicts us of how high God’s righteous standard is. That’s how we realize we fall short of it. He wants to make clear how unable we are to achieve his righteousness.”

I couldn’t have been more wrong. You see, when we’re saved, Jesus immediately translates us out of the kingdom of darkness and into his kingdom of light. He washes us by his blood, cleanses us of all unrighteousness and makes us a new creation. “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Everything in God’s kingdom of light is new to us, opening our eyes to his reality. One of the Holy Spirit’s roles is to show us who we are in Christ, and that’s something we need to be convinced of every single day of our lives. Whenever we fail, our natural tendency is to say, “I’m a hopeless mess. How could I have fallen so far? I’m not righteous at all. I have to pray for Jesus to save me again.” That’s the opposite of what God calls us to do in our time of failure and need.

Others think God accepts them step-by-step as they obey him. They think God says, “Okay, let’s see if you can do this. Maybe you’ll get this one right.” No! When you come into his kingdom, you are instantaneously made holy. You don’t have to take a step toward it; he has already imbued you with holiness.

This is where the Holy Spirit convicts us of righteousness. When we stumble and are tempted to say, “I’ve sinned. I’m a failure. I belong back there in the kingdom of darkness”, the Holy Spirit is there to convince us, “No! Darkness isn’t your home anymore. You have no place there. Don’t believe your sense of failure. Instead, know and accept that you are unrighteous, made perfect by Jesus’ sacrificial gift. You are not unholy; on the contrary, you are wholly righteous. God’s Word says, ‘Do not call unclean what I have made clean!’ You wonder how God could love a sinner like you, but he proves his love by making you righteous.”

Third, the Helper convicts us “concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged” (John 16:11).

God is going to judge the world; that’s an inarguable fact. Many Christians don’t like to hear this, however. More than one believer has emailed me saying, “God no longer judges the world the way he used to. Nothing that we see happening is his judgment.”

That is absolutely unbiblical. God does still judge; in fact, his righteous wrath is as strong in this generation as it ever was. We escape that wrath by the blood of Jesus. Again, that is the mercy of God, to deliver a corrupt generation from judgment that an evil generation has called down on itself.

You see, it isn’t unjust of God to sit in judgment of the world; it would be unjust for him to not! The sin of this world

causes so much pain and injustice that must be addressed by our holy Creator. "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away" (*Revelation 21:4*). This glorious reality is the result of holy judgment.

Jesus points out another reason for God's judgment: It is meant to destroy the ruler of this world "because the ruler of this world is judged" (*John 16:11*). Satan has unleashed demonic forces that are meant to kill, steal and destroy. God would be unjust not to judge that. His wrath comes in part to wipe out all evil.

In all of these ways, the Spirit comes to show non-believers their sins and warn them of consequences, to show Christians the righteousness they have in Christ and to reveal that the devil's days are numbered. His evil works will be completely eradicated by God's righteous wrath.

If you don't know Jesus, ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the truth about him. He will convict you concerning sin, opening your eyes to the world's darkness and create in you a hunger for his kingdom full of light. If you reject him, you bring judgment on yourself, the same judgment that will fall on all evil in the world that stands apart from God's righteous reality. If you turn to Jesus, however, he will rescue you from that wrath. He will bring you fully into newness of life, making you a whole new creation blessed with purpose, direction and meaning.

If you already know Jesus and you continue to struggle with despair over your walk with him, let his Spirit convict you of the righteousness Christ has put in you. Every time you feel overcome by evil, the Spirit will give you strength to say, "No, no, devil, the Holy Spirit has convicted me that 'I have been made righteous in Christ!'"

His righteousness in you cannot be stolen or disparaged. That righteousness does not just cover your sin but takes it away completely. "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (*John 1:29*). He makes you perfect in the eyes of the Father, "so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish" (*Ephesians 5:27*).

The Holy Spirit puts you on course for eternity with a righteousness you can live out every day.

On the final day, Jesus will say, "Look at what we've done, Father! We have cleansed and washed them, made them righteous and perfect, to your eternal glory. It is finished." Then Jesus will turn to you and say, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master" (*Matthew 25:21*).

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