The Spirit's Work in the World (John 16:7-15)

Introduction: My dad passed away almost 39 yrs ago; of course, my mom had gone through a trying grieving process. Days before his death, my eldest brother came from Australia to see him; mom kept asking my brother to talk to dad and asked if there's any final words from him – she's anxious, afraid, distraught, and saddened.

Final words are weighty and significant to the living. If there's important matter in the heart, one is not going to say anything inconsequential or trivial; the living wants to hear words of assurance, something to hold on to after the passing of the loved one.

Jesus had shared the last meal and some important words, esp. the Holy Spirit (Jn. 14-16; cf. the παράκλητος – the One-Coming-Alongside, Advocate, Helper, Comforter, Counsellor) with His disciples:

"All this I have told you so that you will not ***fall away***. **2** They will ***put you out of the synagogue***; in fact, the time is coming when anyone who ***kills you*** will think they are offering a service to God. **3** They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me. **4** I have told you this, so that when their time comes you will remember that I warned you about them … ***you are filled with grief*** …" (Jn. 16:1-5 NLT)

But the disciples are filled with uncertainty over Jesus' departure and fear of the hostility of the world as well as their persecution,[1] they are in despair, disillusioned and distressed!

Then Jesus continues, "But very truly I tell you, it is for your ***good*** that I am going away. ***Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you***." (16:7 NLT)

If I were one of the disciples, this would be in my mind: "Jesus, what do you mean that you ditching us are for our own good? Aren't you the Messiah?"

In the midst of fierce opposition and hostility, the Spirit will defend and strength the disciples as the enabling presence of God (cf. 14: 26; 15:26-27).

This Advocate is not just a mere substitute but is "Jesus' own emissary" with complete authority and executive power.[2]

Since Christ's physical presence is limited to one location at a time, the disciples will have the Holy Spirit ***within them*** as they face the challenges in proclaiming Jesus as the way, the truth, and the life (cf. Jn. 14:6), to ***embodying*** His presence and to continuing His work wherever they go.

As we continue the series, The Holy Spirit: the Gospel of John Edition, today we focus on The Spirit's Work in the World.

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[1] Cf. Jn. 15:18-19.

[2] See also Jn. 14:26; 15:26. Cf. Max Turner, *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts,* p. 81.

"When he comes, he will ***prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment*** …" (Jn. 16:8 NLT)

The world/"cosmos" ***doesn't know God or love Him***; it refers to ***the unbelieving and godless realms***, filled with ***forces of darkness and rebellion, anti-god agents and all kinds of subversive activities***.[3]

And we ourselves can attest that ***self-preoccupied and sin-tainted humans don't naturally drift toward God or holiness; it's usually the opposite!***[4]

Jesus going away is to the advantage of the disciples and the promise of the Spirit is a considerable reassurance that ***they would not be left defenceless in this hostile world***.

Jesus knows that it's ***beyond human strength and ability*** to "prove the world to be in the wrong" and to overcome the forces of evil; it's not by might or power but ***by the power of God's Spirit***.[5]

[3] Cf. Jn. 15:18-25.

[4] Recent research has found that a portion of non-religious folks who don't seem to express any type of real yearning for God; It's like they just don't have a God-shaped hole that needs filling. In fact, **68% of them said that religion was not at all important to them and spirituality was not all important either**. Another 22% said religion was not at all important and spirituality was not too important. That's 90% of the sample scoring about as low as you can possibly imagine. About 70% of them are not spiritual at all. While 94% are not religious at all. https://www.graphsaboutreligion.com/p/the-nones-project-dones?utm_campaign=The%20Culture%20Translator&utm_medium=email&_hsenc=p2ANqtz-8gzw_T1NzJ23AeR4F-n8AitR4VcKlRut-RHTf1OXRbSLzoofTUByTqGX5bsSm2o1tS6rcVMViDFbwcrHfNsTkLiyzN0d8RdSo6rmfQwTd6QWyXxkM&_hsmi=385574655&utm_content=385574655&utm_source=hs_email

[5] Cf. Zech. 4:6; Ezek. 36:26-27; 1 Cor. 2:6-16; 2 Cor. 4:4-6.

The primary significance of the word, "prove" (ἐλέγχω – **elegchó;** 17x in NT)[6], underlines the role of the Spirit as both ***the prosecutor and the judge*** …

> who brings to light the world's transgression and its guilt at the bar of divine justice,
>
> leaving no room for denial and leading to judgment:

The world is put on notice of its fatal errors and the verdict "Guilty as charged!" is declared.[7]

Jesus' reassuring message to the disciples is this: the Spirit's work in the world is …

> to shine light into darkness and
>
> to confirm the truths of Jesus' world-restoring mission:

"When he comes, he will ***prove the world to be in the wrong*** … about ***sin***, because people do not believe in me; about ***righteousness***, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and about ***judgment***, because the prince of this world now stands condemned." (Jn. 16:8-11 NLT)

[6] Cf. Jn. 3:20; 8:46; 1 Cor. 14:24; Eph. 5:11; Heb. 4:12; Jas. 2:9; Jude 15. The NT usage of *elenchō* encompasses several related ideas: **To convict:** To provide undeniable evidence that proves someone wrong, often leading to a sense of shame or a change of heart. **To expose:** To bring hidden things into the open, revealing their true character. **To rebuke/reprove:** To call someone to account for their fault or error. **To discipline:** To chasten, a stronger form of correction. (https://share.google/aimode/ORqDDDyez31b7irwE)

[7] Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John,* p. 438.

Let's go deeper into the three errors exposed by the Holy Spirit and draw out practical lessons.

1. "***sin***, because people ***do not believe in me***":

   Sin is essentially the world's ***unbelief or disbelief in what God has revealed about life in Jesus*** - a stubborn "bent on its own way rather than God's way"[8] which is the root of evil (cf. Jn. 1:11; 3:19; 15:22).

   The Holy Spirit confronts and convicts the world's defiant posture.

   A central theme woven throughout this gospel is ***rejection*** right at the beginning (Jn. 1:11)[9] — not merely as opposition but as ***a deliberate, spiritually revealing choice***.

   Rejection exposes the divide between light and darkness, belief and unbelief, and serves to fulfill Scripture while highlighting God's sovereignty in salvation.[10]

   Let's be clear:

Unbelief not merely a neutral stance or a matter of ignorance – it's a problem of wilful rejection of God's truth revealed in Jesus.

It's helpful to understand the different shades of unbelief in contemporary language:



[Cf. Karl Marx's atheism.]

The theme of rejection exposes the heart condition of every opponent to God's truths/Jesus but it is followed by ***the promise to receive God's restoring Word-in-Jesus***: "But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God." (Cf. Jn. 1:12 NLT)

2. "***righteousness***, because ***I am going to the Father***, where you can see me no longer":

   The world's ***wrong assessment of Jesus*** as a messianic pretender, a criminal, and a failure is

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[8] N.T. Wright, *John*, p. 87.

[9] "He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him. He came to his own people, and even they rejected him." (Jn. 1:10-11)

[10] See 4:1-42; 5:16-18; 6:41-66; 7:1-5; 8:31-59; 9:1-41; 10:22-39; 11:45-53; 12:37-43; 15:18-25; 19:1-16.

evidence of its "unrigteousness," i.e., its rejection of Jesus' identity, mission, miracles/signs, innocence, and its condemnation of God-in-the-flesh appearing. (Cf. 3:19-21; 7:7; 15:22, 24.)

From ***invoking ethnic prejudice*** (like the Samaritan woman in Jn. 4 and the religious leaders in Jn. 8)

to ***weaponizing self-righteous religious practices*** (like the Jewish opponents in Jn. 5)

to ***seeking after self-enriching benefits*** (like the crowd in Jn. 6)

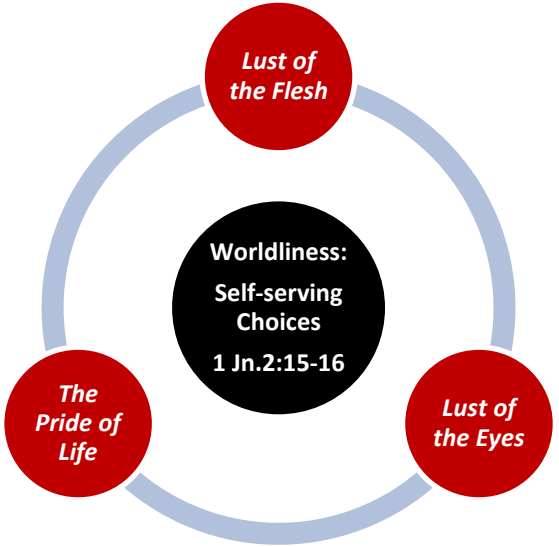
to ***disbelief and misunderstanding God's word*** (like the crowd in Jn. 7)

to ***acting out of jealousy and envy*** (like the religious leaders in Jn. 8-11)

to ***pursuing political manoeuvres and abusing power*** (like the Jewish officials and Pilate in Jn. 18-19),[11]

all are expressions of "***worldliness***" in contrast to Jesus' modelling of truth and grace.

[11] See for examples Jn. 4:1-42; 5:1-30; 6:41-66; 7:1-5; 8:31-59; 9:1-41; 10:22-39; 11:45-53; 12:37-43; 15:18-25; 19:1-16.



The Holy Spirit exposes self-justifying god-substitutes and establishes Jesus-honouring lifestyle.

The Holy Spirit completely reverses the world's verdict and presents irrefutable evidence of Jesus being the way, the truth, and the life:

identity, what living life to the full looks like,

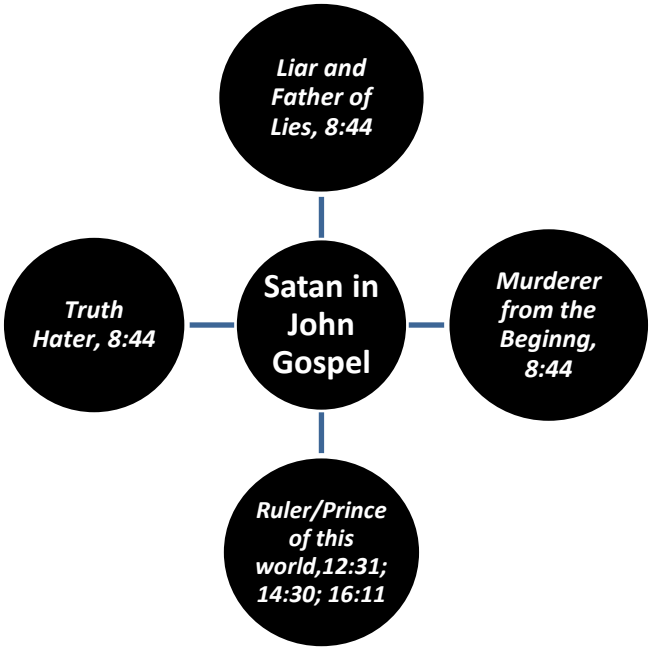
His perfect obedience to the Father's will,

and His successful completion of His earthly mission and promise of His return as Judge.

God's perfect standard of righteousness is defined in Jesus' life and work in contrast to the world's false, self-justifying righteousness.

3. "***judgment***, because ***the prince of this world now stands condemned***":

Satan is described earlier as the instigator of evil (Jn. 12:2, 27); we find four character descriptions in John:[12]



The Spirit declares that Jesus has won the cosmic battle and confirms His decisive victory over "the prince of this world" – ***Satan's his power is stripped away, his condemnation is sealed, and he is cast out***.[13]

The Holy Spirit corrects every distortion of truth and conquers any unholy alliance.

Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension proves that Satan's defeat is ***a present established reality***, and the message is clear:

All who have aligned themselves with his kingdom of darkness share the same verdict (v. 8; cf. Jn. 3:18-21).[14]

While Satan's ***ultimate demise will come in the future*** when God completes His world-restoring work at the second coming of Jesus, the devil and his cohorts are rogue terrorists …

who ***enlist and enslave*** their minions to ***sabotage*** God's world-restoring agenda,

[12] Other descriptions of Satan in NT: Satan masquerades as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14); "the devil" (Eph. 4:27; Jas. 4:7); the tempter (1 Thess. 3:5; Jas. 1:13-14); our "adversary" (1 Pe. 5:8); the serpent of old (Rev. 12:9).

[13] "The time for judging this world has come, when Satan, the ruler of this world, will be cast out … the ruler of this world … has no power over me …" (Jn. 12:31; 14:30 NLT)

[14] "There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him. But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God's one and only Son. And the judgment is based on this fact: God's light came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil. All who do evil hate the light and refuse to go near it for fear their sins will be exposed. But those who do what is right come to the light so others can see that they are doing what God wants." (Jn. 3:18-21 NLT)

who attempt to ***lead people astray*** and ***away from Jesus***,

to ***harass*** God's people and to ***derail*** their Jesus-directed mission.

In order to unmask and confront ***the sinister campaigns of deception and wickedness as well as the subversive tactics of the evil one in both the visible and invisible realms***, the sending of the Spirit assures the disciples that they are ***not left defenceless*** against the enemy – the empowering presence of the Spirit provides comfort, strength, and confidence to proclaim Christ in the face of fierce opposition:

"When the Spirit of truth comes, ***he will guide you into all truth*** … **He** ***will tell you about the future***. ***He will bring me glory*** by telling you whatever he receives from me … this is why I said, '***The Spirit will tell you whatever he receives from me***.'" (Jn. 16:13-15 NLT)

In the midst of trying and life threatening times, the Spirit will continue Jesus' work in and through the disciples:

He will guide the disciples into deeper understanding of all the truth,

He will enable the disciples to communicate clearly and with authority,

He will apply faithfully with timely word what He has received from Jesus and the Father,

He will unleash the power of God and bring all glory to Jesus.

So instead of feeling overwhelmed by fear, grief, and despair (16:2), they can ***boldly engage*** in this battle from the position of ultimate victory so that the kingdom of God will be manifested.

The Holy Spirit emboldens a mission-driven dependence and discernment in the disciples.

Conclusion:

Jesus tells the disciples this: the world cannot receive the Holy Spirit, because it isn't looking for him and doesn't recognize him. But they know him, because he lives with them now and later will be in them (Jn. 14:27).

The Spirit is the ***inseparable link*** between the bodily absent Christ and His followers; the work of proving the world wrong is therefore mediated through them.

The Spirit will "embody"/"incarnate" His earthly work in and through their life and witness.

So this is what we've learned about the work of the Spirit in the world today:

The Holy Spirit confronts and convicts the world's defiant posture.

The Holy Spirit exposes self-justifying god-substitutes and establishes Jesus-honouring lifestyle.

The Holy Spirit corrects every distortion of truth and conquers any unholy alliance.

The Holy Spirit emboldens a mission-driven dependence and discernment in the disciples.

So here are a couple of practical takeaways:

- Expect opposition – we are not on a cruise ship but a battleship: [15]Be prepare; be alert; be aware of the enemy's schemes.
- Our job is not to prove the world wrong – that's the work of the Spirit. But we are to be in the world but not taking on anti-God/faith values, beliefs, and behaviours.[16]

  Karl Barth, the world renowned theologian, once said, "Take your Bible and take your newspaper, and read both. But interpret newspapers from your Bible."

  We are responsible to know the truth, test the spirit of our time (*Zeitgeist*), listen to the Spirit's promptings, steward all spiritual resources, and speak with truth and grace.

[15] "If the world hates you, remember that it hated me first." (Jn. 15:18 NLT)
[16] "I have given them your word. And the world hates them because they do not belong to the world … I'm not asking you to take them out of the world, but to keep them safe from the evil one." (Jn. 17:14-16 NLT)