

The disciples were bewildered and grief-stricken men. All they knew was that they were going to lose Jesus. But he told them that in the end this was all for the best, because, when he went away, the Holy Spirit, the Helper, would come. When he was in the body he could not be everywhere with them; it was always a case of greetings and farewells. When he was in the body, he could not reach the minds and hearts and consciences of men everywhere, he was confined by the limitations in the Spirit. Everywhere a man goes the Spirit is with him. The coming of the Spirit would be the fulfillment of the promise: "Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (*Matthew 28:20*). The Spirit would bring to men an uninterrupted fellowship forever; and would bring to the Christian preacher a power and an effectiveness no matter where he preached.

We have here an almost perfect summary of the work of the Spirit. The word that John uses of the work of the Spirit is the word *elegchein*, translated *convince* by the Revised Standard Version. The trouble is that no one word can translate it adequately. It is used for the cross-examination of a witness or a man trial, or an opponent in an argument. It has always this idea of cross-examining a man until he sees and admits his errors, or acknowledges the force of some argument which he had not seen. It is, for instance, sometimes used by the Greeks for the action of conscience on a man's mind and heart. Clearly such cross-examination can do two things—it can *convict* a man of the crime he has committed or the wrong he has done; or it can *convince* a man of the weakness of his own case and the strength of the case which he has opposed. In this passage we need *both* meanings, both *convict* and *convince*. Now let us go to see what Jesus says the Holy Spirit will do.

(i) The Holy Spirit will *convict men of sin*. When the Jews crucified Jesus, they did not believe that they were sinning; they believed that they were serving God. But when the story of that crucifixion was later preached, they were pricked in their heart (*Acts 2:37*). They suddenly had the terrible conviction that the crucifixion was the greatest crime in history and that their sin had caused it. What is it that gives a man a sense of sin? What is it that abases him in face of the Cross? In an Indian village a missionary was telling the a story of Christ by means of lanternslides flung on the white-washed wall of a village house. Then the picture of the Cross was shown, an Indian stepped forward, as if he could not help it: "Come down!" he cried. "I should be hanging there—not you." Why should the sight of a man crucified as a criminal in Palestine two thousand years ago tear the hearts of people open throughout the centuries and still today? *It is the work of the Holy Spirit.*

(ii) The Holy Spirit will *convince men of righteousness*. It becomes clear what this means when we see that it is *Jesus Christ's righteousness* of which men will be convinced. Jesus was crucified as a criminal. He was tried; he was found guilty; he was regarded by the Jews as an evil heretic, and by the Romans as a dangerous character; he was given the punishment that the worst criminals had to suffer, branded as a felon and an enemy of God. What changed that? What made men see in this crucified figure the Son of God, as the centurion saw at the Cross (*Matthew 27:54*) and Paul on the Damascus Road (*Acts 9:1-9*)? It is amazing that men should put their trust for all eternity in a crucified Jewish criminal. *It is the work of the Holy Spirit.* It is he who convinces men of the sheer righteousness of Christ, backed by the fact that Jesus rose again and went to his Father.

(iii) The Holy Spirit convinces *men of judgment*. On the Cross evil stands condemned and defeated. What makes a man feel certain that judgment lies ahead? *It is the work of the Holy Spirit.* It is he who gives us the inner and unshakable conviction that we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God.

(iv) There remains one thing which at the moment John does not go on to mention. When we are convicted of our own sin, when we are convinced of Christ's righteousness, when we are convinced of judgment to come, what gives us the certainty that in the Cross of Christ is our salvation and that with Christ we are forgiven, and saved from judgment? *This, too, is the work of the Holy Spirit.* It is he who convinces us and makes us sure that in this crucified figure we can find our Saviour and our Lord. The Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin and convinces us of our Saviour.

## THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH

John 16:12-15

"I have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of Truth has come, he will lead you into all the truth. For he will not speak on his own authority and out of his own knowledge, but he will speak all that he will hear, and he will tell you of the things to come. He will glorify me, for he will take of the things which belong to me, and will tell you of them. All things that the Father has are mine. That is why I said that the Spirit will take of the things which belong to me, and tell them to you."

To Jesus the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth, whose great work is to bring God's truth to men. We have a special name for this bringing of God's truth to men; we call it *revelation*, and no passage in the New Testament shows us what we might call the principles of revelation better than this one.

(i) *Revelation is bound to be a progressive process.* Many things Jesus knew he could not at that moment tell his disciples, because they were not yet able to receive them. It is only possible to tell a man as much as he can understand. We do not start with the binomial theorem when we wish to teach a boy algebra; we work up to it. We do not start with advanced theorems when we wish to teach a child geometry; we approach them gradually. We do not start with difficult passages when we teach a lad Latin or Greek; we start with the easy and the simple things. God's revelation to men is like that. He teaches men what they are able and fit to learn. This most important fact has certain consequences.

- a. It is the explanation of the parts of the Old Testament which sometimes worry and distress us. *At that stage* they were all of God's truth that men could grasp. Take an actual illustration- in the Old Testament there are many passages which call for the wiping out of men and women and children when an enemy city is taken. At the back of these passages there is the great thought that Israel must not risk the taint of any heathen and lower religion. To avoid that risk, those who do not worship the true God must be destroyed. That is to say, the Jews had *at that stage* grasped the fact that the purity of religion must be safeguarded; but they wished to preserve that purity by *destroying* the heathen. When Jesus came, men came to see that the way to preserve that purity is to *convert* the heathen. The people of the Old Testament times had grasped a great truth, but only one side of it. Revelation has to be that way; God can reveal only as much as a man can understand.
- b. It is the proof that there is no end to God's revelation. One of the mistakes men sometimes make is to identify God's revelation *solely* with the Bible. That would be to say that since about A.D. 120, when the latest book in the New Testament was written, God has ceased to speak. But God's Spirit is *always* active; he is *always* revealing himself. It is true that his supreme and unsurpassable revelation came in Jesus; but Jesus is not just a figure in a book, he is a living person and in him God's revelation goes on. God is still leading us into greater realization of what Jesus means. He is not a God who spoke up to A.D. 120 and is now silent. He is still revealing his truth to men.

(ii) God's revelation to men is a revelation of *all* truth. It is quite wrong to think of it as confined to what we might call theological truth. The theologians and the preachers are not the only people who are inspired. When a poet delivers to men a great message in words which defy time, he is inspired. When H.F. Lyte wrote the words of *Abide with me* he had no feeling of composing them; he wrote them as to dictation. A great musician is inspired. Handel, telling of how he wrote *The Hallelujah Chorus*, said: "I saw the heavens opened, and the Great White God sitting on the Throne." When a scientist discovers something which will help the world's toil and make life better for men, when a surgeon discovers a new technique which will save men's lives and ease their pain, when someone discovers a new treatment which will bring life and hope to suffering humanity, that is a revelation from God. All truth is God's truth, and the revelation of all truth is the work of the Holy Spirit.

(iii) That which is revealed comes from God. He is alike the possessor and the giver of all truth. Truth is not men's discovery; it is God's gift. It is not something which we create; it is something already waiting to be discovered. At the back of all truth there is God.

(iv) Revelation is the taking of the things of Jesus and revealing their significance to us. Part of the greatness of Jesus is his inexhaustibleness. No man has ever grasped all that he came to say. No man has fully worked out all the significance of his teaching for life and for

belief, for the individual and for the world, for society and for the nation. Revelation is a continual opening out of the meaning of Jesus.

There we have the crux of the matter. Revelation comes to us, not from any book or creed, but from a living person. The nearer we live to Jesus, the better we will know him. The more we become like him, the more he will be able to tell us. To enjoy his revelation we must accept his mastery.

### SORROW TURNED TO JOY

John 16:16-24

"In a little while you will not see me any more; and again in a little while you will see me." Some of his disciples said to each other: "What is the meaning of this that he is saying to us- 'In a little while you will not see me, and again in a little while you will see me'? And what does he mean when he says: 'I am going to my Father'? What does he mean when he talks about 'A little'? We do not know what he means." Jesus knew that they wished to ask him their questions, and he said to them: "You are discussing among yourselves what I meant when I said: 'In a little while you will not see me, and again in a little while you will see me.'" This is the truth I tell you- you will weep and you will lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be grieved, but your grief will turn into joy. When a woman bears a child she has grief, because her hour has come. But, when the child is born, she does not remember her pain because of her joy that a man is born into the world. So you too for the present have grief. But I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you. In that day you will not have any questions to ask me. This is the truth I tell you- the Father will give you in my name whatever you will ask him. Up till now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may stand complete.

Here Jesus is looking beyond the present to the new age which is to come. When he does, he uses a conception deeply rooted in Jewish thought. The Jews believed that all time was divided into two ages- the present age and the age to come. The present age was wholly bad and wholly under condemnation; the age to come was the golden age of God. In between the two ages, preceding the coming of the Messiah, who would bring in the new age, there lay the Day of the Lord; and the Day of the Lord was to be a terrible day, when the world would be shattered into fragments before the golden age would dawn. The Jews were in the habit of calling that terrible between-time "the birth travail of the days of the Messiah."

The Old Testament and the literature written between the Testaments are both full of pictures of this terrible between-time. "Behold the Day of the Lord comes, cruel with wrath and fierce anger, to make the earth a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it" (Isaiah 13:9). "Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the day of the Lord is coming, it is near, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness" (Joel 2:1,2). "And honour shall be turned into shame, and strength humiliated into contempt, and probity destroyed, and beauty shall become ugliness" (2 Baruch 27). "The Day of the Lord will come as a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up" (2 Peter 3:10).