The Word Made Flesh

It Is to Your Advantage

The Spirit's Advantage, the World's Conviction, and the Truth We Must Speak

JOHN 16:4-15

Where We Are

We have been in the Upper Room with Jesus for weeks now. He has washed feet, spoken plainly about betrayal, promised that He would not leave His disciples as orphans, and prepared them for a world that will hate them because it hated Him first. Every word lands with the weight of a man who knows exactly what the next hours hold, even if those around the table do not.

Now He gives them perhaps the most counterintuitive claim of the entire discourse. The disciples are full of sorrow, confused, not even asking the questions they should be asking. And into that silence Jesus says something that should render everything about how they understand what is coming: it is to their advantage that He leaves.

Not merely acceptable. Not a painful necessity. An advantage. That claim is what this passage is built on, and it is what we are going to work through together today.

> JOHN 16:4B-15
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> "I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. But now I am going to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. 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. And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged."
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> "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you."

The Advantage You Don't Know You Have

It's going to be better to have the Holy Spirit in you than to have had Jesus walking beside you. That is a staggering claim, and we need to sit with how staggering it is.

Most of us quietly believe the opposite. We romanticize the idea of walking with Jesus in the flesh. If we could have been there, beside Him at the feeding of the five thousand, present when the blind received their sight, watching Him step out of the boat onto the water, surely faith would come easier. Surely obedience would be less of a fight. Surely doing to ourselves would not be such a daily battle.

Jesus disagrees. He looks at the very people who were there for all of those events and says it is to your advantage that I go. What you need is not a Jesus beside you but a Spirit within you. Those are not the same thing, and He wants us to understand why.

This is why we cannot be the kind of church that simply shuts down any activity of the Holy Spirit. At Legacy, we hold a deep conviction for the Word and the Spirit, not forsaking one for the other. What has happened in many corners of Christianity is that believers have developed an incomplete understanding of the Spirit, and so their relationship to Him becomes passive, something like a background program they don't realize is running. It goes unrecognized. They don't engage Him. And the result is that they have lost the very advantage Jesus is describing.

> *He is not any more quiet or passive than Jesus is.*

The Spirit helps us love one another, stand for and speak the truth, remember the words of God, and bear the fruit of Christlike character. He doesn't dwell merely *with* us the way Jesus dwelt with the disciples in the Upper Room. He dwells in us. That is a different thing entirely, and we must not take it for granted.

The Spirit Convicts the World

Jesus now tells His disciples what the Holy Spirit's arrival will accomplish in the world. He will convict the world concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment. Before we unpack each of those, we need to recover what conviction actually means, because the word has become so familiar in church life that we've stopped feeling its full weight.

To convict is to expose, prove wrong, and establish guilt. When the Holy Spirit convicts you of sin, He is not simply making you feel bad. He is exposing what is actually in you, demonstrating that it is wrong, and naming you guilty before a holy God. If your understanding of the Spirit begins and ends with power, signs, and wonders, and you miss this, you have missed the whole point of His arrival.

Concerning Sin

When we sin, when we think, act, or speak in a way that is contrary to the divine nature, the Holy Spirit speaks up. Because He now lives in you, He corrects you from the inside. You say the thing you shouldn't say or do the thing you shouldn't do, and you feel that sharp, visceral alarm going off in your soul. More than feeling bad, you feel guilty. Exposed. That's the Holy Spirit convicting you of sin.

And this is actually a sign that you are saved. Some of you feel anguish over your sin and read it as evidence that you're not saved, when in fact it is evidence of the opposite. Hebrews calls this the discipline of the Lord, and it is a mark of legitimacy: it is reserved for sons and daughters, not strangers.

Conviction also doesn't arrive alone. It comes with instruction. The Spirit exposes what is wrong and then teaches what is right. *It's wrong for you to hate your brother; love him. If but you said nasty words to gossip, You didn't speak advice I told you to go and be encouraging.* This is why the language of the Holy Spirit is the Scripture, because that is so often where correction and instruction meet.

Conviction is a deeply uncomfortable thing. But when you feel it, you must take action. You must not ignore it.

The Danger of Ignoring Conviction

Think of the nation of Israel. Four hundred years of slavery under Egypt. God raises up Moses as a deliverer, brings His people out of bondage, makes a covenant with them, and sets before them a promised land. Not a land without challenges, but one flowing with milk and honey: the first step toward restoring what was lost in Eden. The journey takes two years. They finally arrive at the edge of it, send twelve spies to scout the territory, and ten come back panicked by fear. "There is no way we can take this land." Two of the twelve, Joshua and Caleb, hold firm: "God is with us. We absolutely can." The people choose the majority. They reject the land. And that first generation wanders the desert for another thirty-eight years until they die off, and Joshua leads the next generation in.

Hold that story in your mind and read what Hebrews says about it.

> HEBREWS 3:12-14
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> "Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness, where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years. Therefore I was provoked with that generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their hearts; they have not known my ways.' As I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest.'"
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> "Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. As it is said, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion."

Their hearts were hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, and that hardness led to unbelief, until they were standing at the edge of everything God had promised and still could not believe His word actually with them.

Here's the progression we must not miss. Unchecked sin leads to an unrepentant heart, which leads to unbelief. To ignore the conviction of the Holy Spirit is to harden your heart by degrees, until you can stand at the border of everything God has for you and still turn away. This is why we must be diligent about our own sin, and honest with our brothers and sisters about theirs. We don't want anyone walking all the way to the promised land only to reject it out of unbelief.

Jesus ties it together explicitly. The Spirit will convict the world concerning sin *because they do not believe in me*. Every willful sin, at its root, is an act of unbelief. In the moment you sin, you are saying: God may be real, but His warnings aren't. All sin is rooted in unbelief.

> *Every time you willingly sin, you are walking in unbelief.*

So the Spirit convicts you. Now what? There are three biblical responses to sin, and none of them are optional.

I. Confession

You name it plainly to the Lord, to another, or to both. "I sinned. This was wrong, and I am guilty." Not a vague acknowledgment of imperfection. A clear, honest naming of what actually happened and what it was.

II. Repentance

You recognize that this was rooted in evil and unbelief, and you don't want to return to it. You turn. "Forgive me. I don't want to live there." Repentance is not self-punishment. It is a change of direction, made possible by the mercy of God.

III. Restitution

You ask what it looks like to make this right. Paul makes this concrete in Ephesians 4: if you stole, work hard and give generously. If you wounded someone, go and repair it. The response to sin is not only toward. It moves outward into action.

Concerning Righteousness

The Spirit is also going to convict the world concerning righteousness, because Jesus goes to the Father and will be seen no longer. In the days ahead, the world will declare Jesus an unrighteous man. They will try Him as a criminal and execute Him as one. It is the Holy Spirit who vindicates Him by raising Him from the dead, and the Father who further vindicates Him by receiving Him in the ascension. The One the world condemned was right. The world's verdict was wrong. The Spirit makes that clear to all who will hear it.

Concerning Judgment

The ruler of this world is judged. This is a direct reference to Satan, the accuser. And there is a striking parallel at Calvary that we must not miss.

In the natural, it appears that darkness wins. God is betrayed by a friend, abandoned by His disciples, falsely tried, beaten, scourged, and executed by His own people. The crowd chooses Barabbas. Darkness covers the land. And God is killed.

But Jesus and the New Testament written flip the entire thing on its head. It was not a moment of defeat but of victory. His disciples return and change the world. The ascension vindicates the Son. Light breaks through the darkness. Death is defeated, no longer something to be feared but embraced. Sin is paid for in full, silencing the voice of the accuser forever. Satan was being judged at the cross, not Jesus. His verdict was rendered. His fate was sealed the day all of His weapons failed.

He Will Guide You Into Truth

Jesus closes this portion of His teaching with something deceptively personal. "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth."

Notice what Jesus does here. He has truth to share, but He waits on the right method, the right person, and the right time to share it. He doesn't withhold it permanently. He delegates it wisely. And this is worth sitting in, because most of us are not wired this way by default.

We are not only responsible to share truth. We are responsible to share it in the way that will be most effective. Sometimes that means you are not the right one to speak. Someone else needs to say it. Sometimes it means you have to wait until the person can actually hear it. Sometimes it's a matter of how you say it: public or private, gentle or direct, through questions or through declaration. The goal when sharing truth is that truth would actually be received, not lost in the dynamics of the wrong who, the wrong when, or the wrong how.

If you are clear on the what, the next questions you need to ask are these: Who is supposed to say it? Can this person hear it right now? How am I supposed to say it? When? If you don't feel clear on all of those, between your conscience and the Holy Spirit, you may not need to speak yet. Because sometimes saying the right thing in the wrong way does more damage than saying nothing at all.

But hear this clearly: Jesus doesn't say, "You can't bear it now, so I'll never say it." He says the Spirit is going to tell you. The text does not give you a permanent license to withhold hard things from people you love.

> A MOMENT OF EXAMINATION
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> ### Which One Are You?
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> There are two kinds of people in this room, and this passage lands differently on each.
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> Some of you are like my and you get clear on the what and you run straight toward the hard conversation. You say the thing, bid you're done your part, and move on. But you haven't thought carefully about whether this person is actually hearing it at their room, whether you're the right one to say it, or whether your timing and tone are going to make the truth land or make it bounce off. You mean well. Your heart is in the right place. You're acting in faith. But you're acting in a way that will not produce the fruit you want to see.
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> Some of you never say anything. You don't allow yourself to bid a correction to speak. You assume someone else is supposed to do it. You always decide it's not the right time. This is just as dangerous. You end up enabling what you were supposed to confront. You see the problem, choose peace over truth, and the behavior continues. And what follows is usually resentment from you, toward the person you kept silent about, for years. We see this from employees, from spouses, from friends, even from parents with their children.
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> The answer is not silence. The answer is truth in the right time and the right tone, spoken with grace and courage together. *And one more thing: just because the Lord hasn't released you to say the hard thing doesn't mean He hasn't released someone else to.* Don't take what He's telling you personally and apply it to everyone around you.
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> *Speak with truth. Speak with grace. Speak with courage. And speak after listening.*

The Word and the Spirit

The Holy Spirit is your advantage. He is not a program running quietly in the background. He is a Person, equal to the Godhead, active and present, doing the convicting work that draws you toward holiness, the guiding work that leads you into truth, and the empowering work that makes you capable of things you are not capable of on your own.

Don't lose the advantage Jesus purchased for you by sending Him. When the Spirit convicts you, respond. When He instructs you, obey. When He prompts you to speak, speak well, with truth and grace and the wisdom to know your moment. When He tells you to wait, wait. And when you feel that deep soul cringe go off, don't silence it. It is the voice of the One Jesus sent so that you would never have to face what is ahead alone.