

The Upper Room Discourse - the Ministry of the Holy Spirit to Unbelievers
a study for the College and Career Class at Gulf Coast Baptist Church by Steve Thomas
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Introduction

Jesus told his disciples that the Comforter would be sent to them when He went away (John 14:16). It was to be another (allos - another of the same kind) Comforter. The Holy Spirit of Truth is this Comforter. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is different and distinct to unbelievers and believers. God often treated unbelievers differently than He did believers throughout time. In Romans 1:24, 26, 28 we see God's actions towards the unrighteous marked out here. God "gave them up" or "gave them over" to "uncleanness", to "vile affections", and to "a reprobate mind". The word reprobate means "abandoned" or "rejected". God has never given the believer up or over, as we will see later in our study, God will guide and keep the believer.

In John 16, Jesus mentioned that the Comforter would **reprove** (convict or convince) the word of three things: sin, righteousness, and judgement (John 16:8-11). This is evident later in the New Testament. These topics align exactly with the information found in the gospel for initial salvation in 1 Cor 15: Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again. The idea of Christ's righteous acts for our sins and the coming judgement for those sins must be understood before the unbeliever can see a need for a change of mind. If unbelief is not a sin, and there is no contrast between Christ's righteousness and the unbeliever's behavior, and there is no coming judgement for that sin, then as it says in 1 Cor 15, Christ died in vain. But the Holy Spirit convicts men that those things are true, and it often leads to a change of mind and belief in the gospel.

It is hard for you...

Saul of Tarsus was an individual that needed convincing. In the book of Acts we see Saul's behavior. Saul was the authority present when Stephen was martyred (7:58). Saul was "consenting" or "coolly applauding, gratified with" the death of Stephen (8:1). This shows us what was going on in the mind of this man. Saul was also making "havok" of the church (8:3). This word means "to insult, ravage, devastate, or ruin". When God finally arrested Saul, he was in the act of "breathing out" threatenings and slaughters against the believers (9:1). Saul was the enemy of God at this time (Rom 5:6-10). Later in the book of Acts, Paul describes himself and his feelings towards Jesus and the Church in an account to Agrippa (Acts 26:9-11).

It can be seen that Paul felt this way, and that he was clear in his conscience while doing it. A. T. Robertson has this to say on the topic: ***But the conscience is not an infallible guide and acts according to the light that it has (1Co 8:7, 1Co 8:10; 1Pe 2:19). The conscience can be contaminated (Heb 10:22, evil-poneras). All this and more must be borne in mind in trying to understand Paul's description of his motives as a persecutor. Alleviation of his guilt comes thereby, but not removal of guilt as he himself felt (1Ti 1:13-16).*** But God did not leave Saul in this state. God arrested him on the road to Damascus. Christ described Saul's behavior when speaking to him in Acts 9:4-5: "...Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, **I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.**"

This phrase describes what was happening with Saul at his time. Adam Clarke has this to say : *“This is a proverbial expression, which exists, not only in substance, but even in so many words, both in the Greek and Latin writers...The origin of the proverb seems to have been this: sometimes it happens that a restive or stubborn ox kicks back against the goad, and thus wounds himself more deeply: hence it has become a proverb to signify the fruitlessness and absurdity of rebelling against lawful authority, and the getting into greater difficulties by endeavoring to avoid... sufferings.”*

The Holy Spirit was seeking to convince Saul in his state as an enemy of God that he was a sinner in danger of judgement and in need of the righteousness of God. Saul was not easy to convince, but the Holy Spirit did His work well. Saul became Paul and Paul was used to spread this gospel of which he was convinced to others.

The hearing of faith

Other NT believers show evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit as well. In Gal 3:2, Paul tells the Galatians that they received the Spirit by faith. In Ephesians 1:13-14, Paul describes the transaction that takes place when an individual hears the truth of the gospel. Col 1:23, 1 Th 2:13. The Spirit is doing the work of convincing the unbeliever of the truth of the gospel. The individual then has the choice to believe that truth or to push back. Many will not believe until it is too late. Repentance is necessary for salvation. The individual who hears about the Christ, His righteous work, and the coming judgement, will need to change his mind to believe the facts of this good news. This saving faith is a gift from God (Eph 2:8-9). Grace is the gift from God, and the convincing is done by the Spirit of God.

Conclusion

The Holy Spirit has been doing the work that was promised by Christ in the upper room. Saul of Tarsus was convinced of Sin, Righteousness, and of Judgement. Every believer since Pentecost has the Holy Spirit to thank of this conviction and their salvation.