

Exegesis

Vs. 8-11 – “And when he is come, he will *reprove* [emphasis added] the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me; Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.”

For unbelievers, the Spirit's job is to "reprove;" whereas, for believers, he is to act as a "guide" (vs. 13). The Greek term translated as "reprove" is **ἐλέγγω** (*e-léng-khō*) and it means to convict, convince, or correct (cf. 3:20; 8:9, 46; Lu. 3:19; Tit. 1:9; Heb. 12:5; Rev. 3:19). Carson explains that in classical Greek, the verb emphasizes "putting to shame, treating with contempt, cross-examining, accusing, bringing to the test, proving, [and] refuting."¹ This term conforms quite nicely with the lawsuit motif throughout this gospel account. Essentially, the Lord is casting the Holy Spirit as the main *prosecutor* of the world.² God the Spirit is an *advocate* who *intercedes* for Christians (cf. Rom. 8:26); in contrast, he acts like an *attorney* who *incriminates* non-Christians (cf. Ac. 2:26-37; 1 Cor. 14:24-25).³

However, to be clear, this incrimination is a means to *repentance* (cf. Rom. 2:4), and so, at this point, the courtroom metaphor breaks down. The Holy Spirit uncovers the world's deficiencies *so that* unbelievers might acknowledge their unrighteous state and be saved. A typical prosecuting attorney has very little interest in exonerating a defendant. Thus, the Spirit is unlike any lawyer we've ever known; he is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9). The Spirit's primary objective is a remorse that leads to absolution, not a one that leads to extermination (cf. 2 Cor. 7:10). To paraphrase Jesus' words from earlier in the Farewell Discourse, the Holy Spirit removes the "cloak" which conceals sin (vs. 15:22) so that man might be clothed in the righteousness of God (cf. Eph. 6:14; Phil. 3:9; Rev. 19:8). This is a task he undertakes for the believer and unbeliever alike (cf. Eph. 4:30-32; 1 Thess. 1:5; 2 Tim. 3:16).

But what, exactly, will the Spirit "reprove" the world of? He will prove, beyond all reasonable doubt, that the unbelieving world stands *guilty* concerning three standards: "of sin," "of

¹ Carson (1991), p. 534.

² Klink (2016), p. 679, "...the Paraclete will confront the world with its failure and prove its guilt. Whether or not the world recognizes it, the mission of the Paraclete in the "cosmic trial" is to convict the world of its guilt before God."

³ Köstenberger (2008), p. 471, this is the *only place* in scripture where the Holy Spirit is said to do anything in "the world."

righteousness," and "of judgment." Herein, the Lord explains the *reasoning* behind the world's guiltiness.⁴

The Spirit will "reprove" the world "of sin, *because* [emphasis added] they believe not on me...." If *belief* is the primary characteristic of those who stand redeemed (cf. 1:12; 3:16; Heb. 11:6), then *unbelief* is the primary charge against those who stand condemned. Though every sin plays a part in sentencing a man to eternal punishment, the sin of *faithlessness* ultimately paves the way to hell. A person will not repent if they do not see their need for repentance; they will not be saved if they think they do not need a Savior. Not even God can rescue a man convinced they do not require saving (cf. Lu. 12:10). The world seals its fate by refusing Jesus Christ. However, while some may persist in their unbelief, being willfully ignorant, others will turn from their ways upon hearing the Spirit's unrelenting testimony. Every sinner who repents is a testament to the Holy Spirit's power to *convict* a person of their innate sinfulness; it is proof that a brood of vipers can become the children of God.

The Spirit will "reprove" the world "of righteousness, *because* [emphasis added] I go to my Father, and ye see me no more...." Who will reprove the world now that Jesus is returning to his Father (cf. 7:7)? Who will be the voice of divine reason when the Word incarnate returns to the one who sent him? The Holy Spirit will pick up where Jesus leaves off.⁵ Though the apostles will "see [Jesus] no more," the task of reprovng the world of righteousness will be taken up by the Spirit. Admittedly, it sounds odd to say that the world will be "reproved...of righteousness." However, the term "righteousness" is sometimes used in a comparative sense, as when one type is shown to be *inferior* to another (cf. Mat. 6:1, 33; Rom. 3:23; Phil. 3:2-11). Throughout all four gospels, the kind of righteousness that the Lord exhibits is compared to the sort that is put forth by the religious leaders (cf. Mat. 5:20). The contrast is startling, with the former thoroughly condemning the latter. Compared to Jesus, the Pharisees, and Sadducees had a righteousness that was as clean as rags used during menstruation (Isa. 64:6; cf. Dan. 9:18). Thus, as Jesus employs the term here, "righteousness" is used in a *negative* sense.⁶ When the Spirit convinces the world "of [its] righteousness," he is revealing what it has always been: *unrighteousness* (cf. 2:13-23). Contrary to what the world might think, "there is none righteous, no, not one" (cf. Rom. 3:10). But that does not mean righteousness is unattainable. Though the Spirit will remove the cloak of worldly righteousness, he will clothe the believer in the "wedding garment" of true righteousness (Matt. 22:1-14; cf. Rom. 3:22; 5:9; 1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor.

⁴ Klink (2016), p. 679.

⁵ Carson (1991), p. 538.

⁶ Klink (2016), p. 680; Carson (1991), p. 537-538.

5:21). Every sinner who repents is a testament to the Holy Spirit's power to *convict* a person of their innate unrighteousness; it is proof that the prideful can be humbled.

Lastly, the Spirit will "reprove" the world "of judgment, *because* [emphasis added] the prince of this world is judged." Though execution has yet to come—i.e., the Great White Throne Judgment (cf. Rev. 20:11-15)—the world has been sentenced to death *already* (cf. 3:18). This is because "the prince of this world [aka Satan] is judged." In the void left by Jesus' departure, the Spirit will work towards convincing the world that they stand, not as a liberated people, but as a condemned people with a "profoundly wrong and morally perverse" judgment (cf. 7:24).⁷ If they are not convinced that their conclusions about Christ were wrong, the world will share in their father's fate (cf. 8:44-45; Mat. 25:41). After all, God's sentencing has already taken place; only hellfire awaits the unbeliever. That is, unless they take the free pardon offered by Jesus Christ through faith (cf. 8:36; Isa. 55:7; Ac. 13:38). And should a person believe in the Son of God, they will, like their Savior, be considered to have already "overcome the wicked one" (1 Jn. 2:13). If Jesus says, "be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (16:33), then all those who put their faith in him are made overcomers too (cf. 1 Jn. 5:4-5; Rom. 8:37).⁸ Every sinner who repents is a testament to the Holy Spirit's power to *convict* a person of their innate wickedness; it is proof that the blind can be made to see.

⁷ Carson (1991), p. 538.

⁸ Köstenberger (2008), p. 472-473.

VIDEO DESCRIPTION

Deep Dive: The Gospel of John | Week 64 | John 16:8-11

SPEAKER: Ben Hyrne, Pastor

As we discussed last week, Christ's crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension paved the way for the Spirit's inauguration. Without God the Son returning to God the Father, God the Spirit would never have come on the Day of Pentecost (Ac. 2).

But what will the Spirit do when he comes? What are his objectives? What will he try to accomplish? The Holy Spirit has two tasks. For believers, he will act as a "guide" (Jn. 16:13), aiding followers of Christ, whereas, for unbelievers, the Holy Spirit will act something like an attorney, convincing the world that they need Christ.

How will the Spirit convince the world that they need Jesus? He'll reprove unbelievers concerning "sin," "righteousness," and "judgment" (Jn.16:8). This three-fold plan will either lead a person to repentance and absolution or it will ensure their destruction. Though God is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9), still, there are those who choose death.

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