

John 16.8-11, The Convicting Ministry of the Holy Spirit: An Exegetical Assessment

Tod Kennedy, 1980, 1981, 1983. 2017

1. Introduction

John 16.8-11 is especially helpful today when evangelism has taken on clothing of promotion and sales. The accuracy of the message no longer seems to be relevant. Mankind has taken the job of evangelism away from God and into his own hands.

2. The context and History

2.1. The overall context of John's gospel has four major sections. John 1-12 presents the public ministry of Christ. John 13-17 covers the private ministry with his disciples prior to the cross. This includes the upper room meeting and Gethsemane. John 18-19 presents the cross. John 20-21 covers the resurrection and the post-resurrection ministry.

2.2. John 13-16, a part of the private ministry, reveals Christ preparing his disciples for the cross and after. They will be left on earth in Satan's world system. They are to minister in enemy territory. The Holy Spirit will be sent to help them, teach them; he will also carry on a ministry to the world--unbelievers. This latter ministry is very necessary due to the nature of God, his plan, and the dichotomy clarified in John 17.

2.3. John 16 teaches that when Christ leaves earth for heaven he will send the Holy Spirit to take his place. Jesus summarizes the Holy Spirit's, ministry to the world of unbelievers in John 16.8-11, then the Holy Spirit's ministry to his disciples and all other believers in John 16.12-15. The passage under study specifically teaches the ministry of the Holy Spirit to the "world," unbelieving mankind.

3. Textual Examination

3.1. The Nestle-Aland 26 and the United Bible Society 3 texts are the same. NA 26 lists one variant, "my" in verse 10. The Majority Text agrees with these two texts, except that it includes the "my" in verse 10. The variant does not affect the study.

George: You can place apparatus here if you want it.

4. Grammatical and Syntactical Analysis

8 καὶ ἐλθὼν ἐκεῖνος ἐλέγξει τὸν κόσμον περὶ ἁμαρτίας καὶ περὶ δικαιοσύνης καὶ περὶ κρίσεως.* 9 περὶ ἁμαρτίας μὲν,* ὅτι οὐ πιστεύουσιν εἰς ἐμέ· 10 περὶ δικαιοσύνης δέ,* ὅτι πρὸς τὸν πατέρα ὁ ὑπάγω καὶ οὐκέτι θεωρεῖτέ με.* 11 περὶ δὲ κρίσεως, ὅτι ὁ ἄρχων τοῦ κόσμου τούτου κέκριται.¹

¹ Aland, Kurt et al. [*Novum Testamentum Graece*](#). 28th Edition. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012. Print.

4.1. The preposition, *peri*, is used to denote the object or person to which an action refers or relates. This goes with the action of "convict." This use takes the genitive. It is used twice with each noun and has the same use and meaning in each case. Translate it "concerning" or "about."

4.2. The parallel structure of John indicates his thinking. Note the use of the preposition *peri* and the use of the particle *`oti*. There is nothing in the text to indicate that *peri* and *`oti* are not meant in the same sense in all uses in this section. This is not strictly necessary, but is the normal and general way to take a section like this. In order to depart from a parallel or same sense we would like to have some reason.. We do not.

4.3. The particle *`oti* has a number of uses. See the good grammars and lexicons for this. Dr Philip R. Williams categorizes the uses as causal, indirect discourse, direct discourse introducing a substantival clause (subject, object, simple apposition), and epexegetical. You might still be able to acquire his notes from Northwest Baptist Seminary, Tacoma WA. We can rule out direct discourse. Indirect discourse does fit the context. Substantival in apposition to the objects of the preposition is technically possible, but the parallelisms and the abstract nouns, all feminine singular do not allow this in the present context. It is true that unbelief is sin. But is "righteousness" really "I am going to my Father"? Judgment in one special incident does equal "the ruler of this world has been judged," but that is not the general use of judgment here.

4.3.1. The epexegetical use of *`oti* introduces a clause that will qualify or clarify or complete (are epexegetical to) a word or phrase or clause. This definition is taken from notes by Philip Williams. The clause in each case clarifies or completes the object of the preposition in our context. This use is possible, but does not answer all the exegetical requirements as well as the causal use does. We could say "concerning sin, in that they are not believing on me" and mean that this clarifies and qualifies "sin." We could say "concerning righteousness, in that I am going to the Father..." We could say "concerning judgment, in that the ruler of this world has been judged." The problem remains that these then need further clarification themselves. They are too ambiguous. Also, the clarity of each segment is uneven. The explanations are not parallel, yet the grammar and syntax is parallel.

4.3.2. My rejection of the above uses of *`oti* in this passage is not due to a doctrinal bias. I like the idea that the sin of which the Holy Spirit convicts is unbelief. This makes a nice clear statement. I do not believe that this is what John had in mind. The context, wording, grammar, and syntax do not support the view.

4.3.3. The causal use of *`oti* is the only one left to consider. This usage opens up the passage and removes the questions and forced interpretations. It is the "natural" reading. The causal use tells the reason why there is conviction about sin, righteousness, and judgment. It gives us a firm base from which to understand the ministry of the Holy Spirit and the work of Christ. It vindicates the convicting work. The Holy Spirit convicts about sin (the abstract idea of Sin and guilt, not personal sins) because people are not believing on Christ. If men are in a state of faith, then sin and guilt is not an issue; they are under the substitutionary work of Christ. The Holy Spirit will convict about righteousness because Christ has ascended to the Father. Ascending to the Father and being accepted by him means Christ is qualified in his person and

work; therefore the Holy Spirit takes this fact and works. In order for men to ascend they must meet this standard. The Holy Spirit will convict about judgment because the leader and head of sinful creation has been judged. The precedent has been set. Satan's hold has been broken. Those who stay with Satan will partake of judgment also. 4.5. The abstract nature of the three nouns following the preposition lends itself to this interpretation. They are feminine singular. This singular should not be pressed to the numerical singular. The singular noun in all three instances refers to the quality of something in this context. Therefore the meaning "the sin of unbelief specifically" does not seem to fit the context. To summarize, we have emphasis upon the concept, the quality, the characteristic embodied in each noun.

5. Lexical Examination

A complete study for scratch must include the examination of a number of words in detail. This type of word study is not the point of this article. These words are reasonably understood and the details would be redundant. The meaning that is being presented would not change.

5.1. The particle *oti* is important and has been covered above. This word is abundantly used in Greek and has a number of meanings. The causal use is most appropriate in this passage.

5.2. The verb *elegcw* "to convict" has been the topic of much discussion. I refer you to the many exegetical commentaries. The range of meanings are: to bring to light, to expose, to set forth,, to convict, to convince, to reprove, to correct to punish. John uses this verb in John 3.20, 8.46, 16.8, and Rev 3.19. The common idea is to make known with refutation. Look at 1 Cor 14.24, Titus 2.15 and James 2.9 for other uses. The word in John 16.8 means to expose to information and press this information home to the person resulting in comprehension and response. The Holy Spirit performs this; it is not the work of man.

5.3. The "world," *kosmos*, refers to the mass of humanity, specifically the unbelieving segment in this context. I refer you to a concordance study of the word in the writings of John. Then note the other authors' usage. The word refers to an organized entity or body with the emphasis at times on the thought and standards as in Eph 2.2, on the people making up this system as in Jn 3.16, or on the place with all its adornment and characteristics as in Jn 17.11 or with emphasis on the organized enemy of God, human and angelic, as in Jn 17.14. In this context it refers to the world of man, specifically the unbeliever.

5.4. The "sin," *amartia*, is primarily an aberration in the sense of missing the divine standard. Its uses include personal sin as in Gal 1.4 and Eph 2.1, and 1 Jn 1.9; the nature of man in Rom 7.17,20; and sin as a quality and concept including guilt as found in Jn 8.21, 8.24, 9.41, 15.22,19.11, 1 Jn 1.8, and this passage. Therefore, the Holy Spirit convicts man of the fact that he is a guilty sinner. The emphasis is not individual acts of sin but on the totality of sin and the guilt that goes with sin (not emotional guilt, but the verdict of guilt). The unbeliever, because he is unbelieving, remains in this state or condition. The believer is not in sin and is not guilty because he is trusting Jesus

Christ, the righteous substitute. The righteousness of Christ has replaced the sin and guilt, 2 Cor 5.21.

5.5. "Righteousness," *dikaïosunh*, is an attribute of God not possessed by man but necessary for life with God. This attribute means absolute perfection. This describes God's being. Jesus Christ is the embodiment of righteousness. He is the standard. John uses this word seven times in his writings. Note in particular 1 Jn 2.29, 3.10, and Rev 19.11. Also note Rom 1.17, 3.5, 3.22, and Philippians 3.9. The person and work of the incarnate Christ was and always is absolute perfection. His righteousness was demonstrated and vindicated by His successful ascension. Jesus Christ the righteous one was accepted by the Father. Now, since He is no longer on earth as the visible expression of righteousness man needs an explanation. Because of these facts the Holy Spirit convicts men about the righteousness of Christ which they need and can only obtain through Him.

5.6. "Judgment," *krisis*, indicates a verdict has been reached or will be reached. It means condemnation and may include the punishment. Note Jn 3.19, 12.31, 2 Ths 1.5, 1 Jn 4.17, Rev 19.2, and Heb 9.27. Why will the Holy Spirit convict about judgment? Because Satan has been judged. He rules the world including the unbeliever. Judgment on the leader sets the precedent that the followers will not escape judgment. Therefore, the necessity for preparation by others while there is time.

6. Doctrinal Summation

6.1. Jesus Christ will send the Holy Spirit to believers on earth. This will occur after His ascension. The Holy Spirit will then begin an expanded ministry. This ministry will be to the believer (not the subject of these verses) and to the unbeliever. This ministry will take place during the church age.

6.2. The Holy Spirit will engage in a convicting ministry to the world of unbelievers. This means He will expose them to information and press this information home to the person resulting in comprehension and response.

6.3. The specific content which the Holy Spirit imposes upon the unbeliever is "concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment."

6.3.1. Sin: man is sinful and guilty.

6.3.2. Righteousness: the person and work of Jesus Christ was and always is absolute perfection. He is the standard of righteousness and the source for the righteousness needed by man to replace sin and guilt.

6.3.3. Judgment: man is under divine judgment due to sin (man is guilty) and lack of absolute righteousness.

6.4. The reason or cause for this threefold conviction by the Holy Spirit is explained by the *lōtī* clauses.

6.4.1. Men are at the time not believing in Jesus Christ; therefore they are still under sin and guilt. Faith in Christ will erase this.

6.4.2. The absolute righteousness of Jesus Christ was demonstrated and vindicated by His successful ascension to the Father. Man is compared to Jesus Christ, the absolute standard. Man does not have this righteousness.

6.4.3. Satan the first sinner and the leader and head of sinful creation, has been judged. This set the precedent. Those who stay with Satan will undergo judgment themselves.

6.5. Application of this doctrine to the content of the message in evangelism.

6.5.1. The gospel core (facts) is found in Jn 3.16-18 and 1 Cor 15.3-4. Christ died for our sins, was buried, and resurrected. Faith in Christ brings eternal life. Unbelief brings judgment.

6.5.2. The gospel framework and therefore the guideline for amplification is found in Jn 16.8-11. This framework is sin, righteousness, and judgment. These clarify and amplify the core gospel. Sin clarifies the need. Righteousness clarifies the standard and the source of the solution. Judgment clarifies the alternative if sin and guilt are not replaced with righteousness through faith in Christ.

6.5.3. Therefore, witnessing should emphasize the correct gospel content. The core gospel should be communicated; and it should be explained within the gospel framework which the Holy Spirit uses.

6.6. The doctrine of the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit directly applies to evangelism.

6.6.1. The message must be biblical; it must be accurate. This may seem to an unnecessary caution yet much of so-called evangelism communicates an unclear or wrong gospel.

6.6.2. Conviction is the work of the Holy Spirit. Leave the responsibility with him. Man can not convince the unbeliever, God must.

6.6.3. The believer is to depend on the work of the Holy Spirit. This depending is faith.

6.6.4. The believer should attempt to identify those whom the Holy Spirit is convicting. Concentrate on them. Plant the original gospel seed with others.

6.6.5. Do not take evangelistic victories or defeats personally. The ministry of evangelism is the grace work of God.

Partial Bibliography

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