

John 16:7-33
November 23, 2025

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: What is your understanding of the Holy Spirit's role in "the world" versus the Holy Spirit's role in the life of a believer? [Let people engage]

Transition: The role of the Holy Spirit is one of the greatest gifts we've received as soon as we accepted Jesus as our Lord and Savior. When you look at the roles the Spirit has in our lives as believers, it is practically overwhelming. He indwells in us. He guides us into "all truth." He speaks only what he hears from the Father. (Does that sound familiar?! Jesus did the same thing.) He groans for us when we are struggling and don't even know what to pray for. He stands in the gap for us and acts as our intercessor. We see in Gal 5:16 that we're invited to walk with the Spirit as he empowers us to live for Jesus and to resist sin. He's always trying to speak to us in his still, small voice.

But the Spirit has another role for unbelievers. If you're like me, you probably don't think so much about how the Spirit is always at work in the life of a lost person. But He definitely is. John will describe in our text how the Spirit goes about His work in "the world" or the unsaved. So perhaps we consider how we can join with Him to reach the lost souls in our own circles of influence. We as believers are the link between the Spirit's convicting work and the unbelievers. I invite you to embrace that the Holy Spirit wants to work through us with those who do not know him. Let's read the text.

BOOK:

⁷ But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. ⁸ When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹ in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; ¹⁰ in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; ¹¹ and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

¹² "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. ¹³ But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. ¹⁴ He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. ¹⁵ All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you. ¹⁶ "In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me."

The Disciples' Grief Will Turn to Joy

¹⁷ Some of his disciples said to one another, "What does he mean by saying, 'In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me,' and 'Because I am going to

the Father’?”¹⁸ They kept asking, “What does he mean by ‘a little while’? We don’t understand what he is saying.”

¹⁹ Jesus saw that they wanted to ask him about this, so he said to them, “Are you asking one another what I meant when I said, ‘In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me’?”²⁰ I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy.²¹ A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born, she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world.²² So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.²³ In that day you will no longer ask me anything. I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.²⁴ Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.

²⁵ “Though I have been speaking figuratively, a time is coming when I will no longer use this kind of language but will tell you plainly about my Father.²⁶ In that day you will ask in my name. I am not saying that I will ask the Father on your behalf.²⁷ No, the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God.²⁸ I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father.”

²⁹ Then Jesus’ disciples said, “Now you are speaking clearly and without figures of speech.³⁰ Now we can see that you know all things and that you do not even need to have anyone ask you questions. This makes us believe that you came from God.”³¹ “You believe at last!” Jesus answered.³² “But a time is coming, and has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me.³³ “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What stood out to you? What questions do you have? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you learn about man? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you learn about God or Jesus or the Holy Spirit? [Let people engage]

Q: What is your takeaway? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

We as believers are the link between the Spirit’s convicting work and the unbelievers. I invite you to embrace that the Holy Spirit wants to work through us with those who do not know him.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary (Vol. 1, pp. 361-367)*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

The Spirit as Reprover Witnesses through the Church (John 16:5–11)

For three years, Jesus had been with them to protect them from attack; but now He was about to leave them. He had told them this earlier in the evening (John 13:33), and Peter had asked Him where He was going (John 13:36). However, Peter's question revealed more concern about *himself* than about the Lord Jesus! Also, his question centered on the immediate, not the ultimate. It was necessary for Jesus to explain why it was important *for them* that He return to the Father. The major reason, of course, is that the Holy Spirit might come to empower the church for life and witness. Also, the ascended Savior would be able to intercede for His people at the heavenly throne of grace. With all of their faults, the disciples dearly loved their Master; and it was difficult for them to grasp these new truths.

It is important to note that the Spirit comes *to the church* and not to the world. This means that He works in and through the church. The Holy Spirit does not minister in a vacuum. Just as the Son of God had to have a body in order to do His work on earth, so the Spirit of God needs a body to accomplish His ministries; and that body is the church. Our bodies are His tools and temples, and He wants to use us to glorify Christ and to witness to a lost world.

Sometimes we hear people pray, "Lord, send Your Spirit to speak to the lost! May the Spirit go from heart to heart." Such praying is no doubt sincere, but is it biblical? The Spirit does not "float" in some ghostly way up and down the rows of a church building, seeking to win the lost. The Holy Spirit works through the people in whom He lives. When the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, He empowered Peter to preach; and the preaching of the Word brought conviction to those who heard.

The key word here is *reprove* (John 16:8). It is a legal word that means "to bring to light, to expose, to refute, to convict and convince." It could be translated "pronounce the verdict." The world may think that it is judging Christians, but it is the Christians who are passing judgment on the world as they witness to Jesus Christ! Believers are the witnesses, the Holy Spirit is the "prosecuting attorney," and the unsaved are the guilty prisoners. However, the purpose of this indictment is not to condemn but to bring salvation.

The Holy Spirit convicts the world of one particular sin, the sin of *unbelief*. The law of God and the conscience of man will convict the sinner of his *sins* (plural) specifically; but it is the work of the Spirit, through the witness of the believers, to expose the unbelief of the lost world. After all, it is unbelief that condemns the lost sinner (John 3:18–21), not the committing of individual sins. A person could "clean up his life" and quit his or her bad habits and still be lost and go to hell.

The Spirit also convicts the sinner of *righteousness*, not *unrighteousness*. Whose righteousness? The righteousness of Jesus Christ, the perfect Lamb of God. The world would not receive the Son of God (John 1:10), so He has returned to the Father. When He was here on earth, He was accused by men of being a blasphemer, a lawbreaker, a deceiver, and even a demoniac. The Spirit of God reveals the Savior in the Word and in this way glorifies Him (John 16:13–14). The

Spirit also reveals Christ in the lives of believers. The world cannot receive or see the Spirit of God, but they can see what He does as they watch the lives of dedicated believers.

The Spirit convicts the lost sinner of *judgment*. Do not confuse this statement with Acts 24:25 (“of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come”). Jesus was referring to His judgment of Satan that was effected by His death on the cross (John 12:31). Satan is the prince of this world, but he is a defeated prince. Satan has already been judged and the verdict announced. All that must take place is the executing of the sentence, and that will occur when Jesus returns.

When a lost sinner is truly under conviction, he will see the folly and evil of unbelief; he will confess that he does not measure up to the righteousness of Christ; and he will realize that he is under condemnation because he belongs to the world and the devil (Eph. 2:1–3). The only person who can rescue him from such a horrible situation is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. There can be no conversion without conviction, and there can be no conviction apart from the Spirit of God using the Word of God and the witness of the child of God.

Witnessing is a great privilege, but it is also a serious responsibility. It is a matter of life or death! How we need to depend on the Holy Spirit to guide us to the right persons, give us the right words, and enable us patiently to glorify Jesus Christ.

The Spirit as Teacher Guides the Church (John 16:12–15)

Our Lord was always careful to give His disciples the right amount of truth at the best time. This is always the mark of a great teacher. The Holy Spirit is our Teacher today, and He follows that same principle: He teaches us the truths we need to know, when we need them, and when we are ready to receive them.

When you compare John 14:26 with 16:13, you see the wonderful way that God arranged for the writing of the New Testament Scriptures. The Spirit would remind them of what Jesus had taught them; this gives us the four Gospels. The Spirit would also “guide” them into all truth; and this would result in the epistles. “He will show you things to come” refers to the prophetic Scriptures, especially the Book of Revelation.

It is essential that we see that the work of the Spirit of God is never divorced from Jesus Christ or the Word of God. “He shall testify of Me” (John 15:26); “He shall glorify Me” (John 16:14). People who claim that the Spirit of God led them to do things contrary to the example of Christ or the teaching of the Word are mistaken and are being led astray by Satan. Jesus is the truth (John 14:6), and the Word is truth (John 17:17), and the Holy Spirit is “the Spirit of Truth.” Where the Holy Spirit is at work, there must be truth.

The phrase “He [the Spirit] shall not speak of Himself” (John 16:13) does not mean that the Spirit never refers to Himself, for when He wrote the Bible, the Spirit often mentioned Himself. Rather, it means that He does not speak apart from the Father and the Son; He does not “manufacture” a different message. You have the entire Godhead mentioned in John 16:13, because the Spirit of God does not ignore either the Father or the Son. They work harmoniously together.

The teaching of the Spirit through the Apostles was not different from the teaching of the Spirit through Jesus Christ. Some theologians like to contrast the “Christianity of Christ” with the “Christianity of Paul.” They claim that Paul “ruined” Christianity by making it so theological and complicating the “simple message” of Jesus Christ. What a sad interpretation this is. What Jesus said in John 14:26 and 16:13 completely refutes this false teaching. The same Holy Spirit communicated the truths found in the four Gospels, the epistles, and the Book of Revelation; and He also wrote the history and doctrine found in Acts.

It is the ministry of the Spirit to enrich us with the treasures of God’s truth. He enlightens us with God’s truth and enriches us with God’s treasures. The Word of God is a rich mine of gold, silver, and precious jewels (Prov. 3:13–15; 8:10–21). What a joy it is to have the Spirit illumine His Word.

We do not study the Word of God in order to “argue religion” with people, or to show off our grasp of spiritual things. We study the Word to see Jesus Christ, to know God better, to glorify Him in our lives. As we witness in this hostile world, the Spirit uses the Word He has taught us; and we share Jesus Christ with the lost. It is our job to witness; it is the Spirit’s job to convict. Perhaps some of us need to quit acting like prosecuting attorneys—or judges—so that the Spirit can use us as faithful witnesses.

LET THERE BE JOY!

John 16:16–33

This section—John 16:16–33—concludes the Upper Room Discourse and deals primarily with the emotions of the disciples. They were sorrowing, they were confused about some of Jesus’ teaching, and they were afraid. It is an encouragement to me to know that the disciples were real men with real problems, yet the Lord was able to use them. We sometimes get the false impression that these men were different from us, especially endowed with spiritual knowledge and courage; but such was not the case. They were human!

One of the recurring themes in this section is *joy* (John 16:20–22, 24, 33). The Eleven were certainly not experiencing much joy that night! But what Jesus said to them eventually made a difference in their lives, just as it can make a difference in our lives today. Tenderly and patiently, our Lord explained how His people can have joy in their lives.

There Is a Principle to Grasp (John 16:16–22)

The principle is simply this: God brings joy to our lives, not by substitution, but by transformation. His illustration of the woman giving birth makes this clear. *The same baby that caused the pain also caused the joy.* In birth, God does not substitute something else to relieve the mother’s pain. Instead, He uses what is there already but transforms it.

Every parent knows what it is like to have an unhappy child because a toy is broken or a playmate has gone home. The parent can do one of two things: substitute something else for the broken toy or absent friend, or transform the situation into a new experience for the unhappy child. If Mother always gets a new toy for the child each time a toy is broken, that child will grow up expecting every problem to be solved by substitution. If Mother always phones another playmate and invites him or her over, the child will grow up expecting people to come to his

rescue whenever there is a crisis. The result either way is a spoiled child who will not be able to cope with reality. The way of substitution for solving problems is the way of immaturity. The way of transformation is the way of faith and maturity. We cannot mature emotionally or spiritually if somebody is always replacing our broken toys.

Jesus did not say that the mother's sorrow (pain) was replaced by joy, but that the sorrow was transformed into joy. The same baby that caused the pain also caused the joy! And so it is in the Christian life: God takes seemingly impossible situations, adds the miracle of His grace, and transforms trial into triumph and sorrow into joy. "The Lord thy God turned the curse into a blessing" (Deut. 23:5; see Neh. 13:2).

Joseph's brothers sold him as a slave, and Potiphar put him into prison as a criminal; but God transformed that hopeless situation of defeat into victory. Egypt's persecution of Israel only caused them to multiply and prosper the more. King Saul's murderous pursuit of David only made him more a man of God and helped produce the psalms that encourage our hearts today. Even Jesus took the cross, a symbol of defeat and shame, and transformed it into a symbol of victory and glory.

Now that we understand this principle, we can better understand the problems and questions of the disciples. In John 16:16, Jesus announced that in a little while, they would not see Him; then, in a little while, they would see Him. It was a deliberately puzzling statement (John 16:25, He spoke in proverbs ["dark sayings"]) and the disciples did not understand. This also encourages me as I study my Bible and find statements that I cannot understand. Even the disciples had their hours of spiritual ignorance!

What did Jesus mean? Possibly He was talking about the soon-to-occur events in connection with His death and resurrection. After His burial, they would not see Him for a little while; but then He would rise from the dead and they would see Him again. He had told them on previous occasions that He would rise from the dead after three days, but His words did not sink into their minds and hearts.

However, I think that Jesus was speaking primarily about His return to the Father ("Because I go to the Father"—John 16:16). This ties in with John 16:10—"Because I go to My Father, and ye see Me no more." The disciples did not live to see the return of Christ, but they did die and see Him when they arrived in glory. In comparison to eternity, the time that the church has been awaiting the Lord's return has really been but "a little while" (see 2 Cor. 4:16–18). In fact, the phrase "a little while" is used in this very sense in Hebrews 10:37—"For yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry."

Instead of asking Jesus to explain His words, the men began to discuss it among themselves, almost as though they were embarrassed to admit their ignorance. However, you do not get very far by exchanging your ignorance! It is when we come to the Lord and ask for His help that we learn the important lessons of life.

Egypt was glad when Israel departed (Ps. 105:38), and the world was glad when Jesus Christ moved off the scene. Both the religious and political leaders of that day expected to see the early

believers die out and the “Christian movement” disappear; but such was not the case. Jesus sent His Holy Spirit to His church, and the church is carrying the Word of His grace to the ends of the earth. The early believers even rejoiced when they were persecuted (Acts 5:41).

To the mother experiencing birth pains, every minute may seem an hour. Our concept of time changes with our feelings. Thirty minutes in the dentist chair may seem like hours, while hours fishing or dining with friends may seem like a very short time. The mother feels as though the birth is taking a long time, when really it may be only “a little while.” When the baby has been born, pain is forgotten as joy fills her heart.

The world today does not want Jesus Christ or His church. The world is rejoicing while we are suffering, longing for our Lord to return. In fact, all of creation is suffering “birth pangs” because of sin, awaiting His return (Rom. 8:22). When the Bridegroom is away, the bride mourns (Matt. 9:15). But, in “a little while” He shall return and we shall go with Him to heaven to enjoy the Father’s house.

While the immediate application may have been to the sorrowing hearts of the disciples, the ultimate application is to all of God’s people as they await the coming of Jesus Christ. To us, it seems like a long wait; but God does not measure time as we do (see 2 Peter 3). But while we are waiting, we must deal with our trials and hurts on the basis of *transformation* and not *substitution*, if we expect to mature in the Christian life.

There Is a Promise to Believe (John 16:23–28)

The central theme of this paragraph is prayer: “Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full” (John 16:24). It is important to note that the text uses two different words for “ask,” although they can be used interchangeably. The word used in John 16:19, 23a, and 26 means “to ask a question” or “to ask a request.” It is used when someone makes a request of someone equal. The word translated “ask” in John 16:23b, 24, and 26b (“pray”) means “to request something of a superior.” This latter word was never used by Jesus in His prayer life because He is equal to the Father. We come as inferiors to God, asking for His blessing; but He came as the very Son of God, equal with the Father.

In John 16:23, what period of time did Jesus mean by “in that day”? I think He was referring to the time after the coming of the Spirit. He promised them in John 16:22 that He would see them again, and He kept His promise. He spent forty days with them after His resurrection, teaching them clearly the truths they needed to know in order to take His place and minister on earth (Acts 1:3ff). “That day” cannot refer to the day of His return for His church, because there is no evidence in Scripture that we shall pray to Him after we get to heaven.

Jesus knew that they wanted to ask Him a question (John 16:19). He assured them that a day would soon come when they would not ask Him questions. Instead, they would pray to the Father and He would meet their needs. This was the promise that they desperately needed to believe: that the Father loved them and would hear their requests and meet their needs. While Jesus was on earth, He met all the needs of His disciples. Now He would return to the Father, but the Father would meet their needs. Here is the wonderful promise and privilege of prayer.

Our Lord had mentioned prayer many times in His ministry, and He had set the example for prayer in His own life. He was indeed a man of prayer. In His Upper Room message, Jesus emphasized prayer (John 14:12–14; 15:7, 16; 16:23–26). He made it clear that believing prayer is one of the secrets of a fruitful Christian life.

In John 16:25–27, Jesus explained that there would be a new situation because of His resurrection and ascension, and because of the coming of the Holy Spirit. He would no longer speak to them in terms that demanded spiritual insight for their understanding. He would speak to them plainly and reveal the Father to them. There in the Upper Room, He had used a number of symbolic images to get His message across: the washing of their feet, the “Father’s house,” the vine and branches, and the birth of a baby. In the days that followed, these images would become clearer to the disciples as they would be taught by the Spirit of God.

The purpose of Bible study is not simply to understand profound truths, but to get to know the Father better. “I will show you plainly of the Father” (John 16:25). If our reading and Bible study falls short of this, it does more harm than good.

There would be not only a new situation in teaching, but also a new situation in their praying. He had already intimated this in John 16:23. Jesus would return to heaven to be with the Father, and there He would minister as our High Priest, making intercession for us (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25). He would also minister as our Advocate (1 John 2:1). As our High Priest, Jesus gives us grace to keep us from sinning. As our Advocate, He restores us when we confess our sins. His ministry in heaven makes possible our ministry of witness on earth, through the power of the Spirit.

When you read the Book of Acts, you discover that the early church depended on prayer. They believed the promises of God and asked God for what they needed. It would do all of God’s people good if they reviewed regularly what Jesus taught about prayer in this Upper Room Discourse. There is indeed joy in praying and in receiving answers to prayer. There is joy in meeting the conditions Jesus has laid down for successful praying. I think it was George Müller who said that true prayer was not overcoming God’s reluctance, but overcoming God’s willingness.

There is joy in prayer, and there is joy in realizing the principle of *transformation*. Jesus shared a third kind of joy, the joy of sharing His victory over the world.

There Is a Position to Claim (John 16:29–33)

In John 16:29–30, the disciples suddenly moved out of their spiritual stupor and made a tremendous affirmation of faith. First, they claimed to understand what He had been teaching them, though this claim was probably presumptuous, as their subsequent actions proved. They seemed unable to grasp the meaning of His promised resurrection. They were bewildered even after His resurrection as to the future of Israel (Acts 1:6ff). I am not criticizing them, because we today have just as many blind spots when it comes to understanding His Word. All I am suggesting is that their affirmation was a bit presumptuous.

They not only affirmed their understanding, but they also affirmed their faith and assurance. “Now we are sure ... by this we believe.” It was quite a statement of faith, and I believe the Lord

accepted it. In His prayer recorded in the next chapter, Jesus told the Father about His disciples and reported on their spiritual condition (John 17:6–8). Certainly He knew their weaknesses, but He was quick to approve their growing evidences of faith and assurance.

But it is possible to have faith, understanding, and assurance *and still fail the Lord*. Unless we practice that faith, apply that understanding, and rest on that assurance, we will fail when the time of testing comes. That is what happened to the disciples, and Jesus warned them that it would happen.

He had already warned Peter that he would deny Him, but now He warned the entire band of disciples that they would all forsake Him. John does not quote the Old Testament prophecy (Zech. 13:7); it is quoted in Matthew 26:31. This statement from the Lord should have been a warning to Peter not to follow Jesus when He was arrested. “Let these go their way!” was our Lord’s word in the Garden (John 18:8). He knew that it was not safe for them to tarry.

Jesus has promised never to leave us alone (Matt. 28:20; Heb. 13:5); yet His own disciples left Him alone. Peter, James, and John went into the Garden with Him, but then fell asleep. Jesus knew that the Father would be with Him. “I am not alone, but I and the Father that sent Me” (John 8:16). “And He that sent Me is with Me. The Father hath not left Me alone” (John 8:29). What an encouragement it was to the Son to know that He was doing the Father’s will and that He could depend on the Father’s help.

At one point, however, Jesus did feel the absence of the Father: “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” (Matt. 27:46; Ps. 22:1) When He was made sin for us, He was separated from the Father. He was alone that we might never be alone. He was forsaken that we might never be forsaken.

John 16:33 is the summary and climax of the Upper Room message. Why did He give this message? So that the disciples might have peace in a world of tribulation. Note the contrast between “in Me” and “in the world.” In Christ there is peace; in the world there is tribulation. This is the position we need to claim: we are *in Christ*, and therefore we can overcome the world and all of its hatred.

George Morrison defined peace as “the possession of adequate resources.” In Jesus Christ, we have all the resources that we need. But peace depends also on appropriate relationships, because spiritual resources depend on spiritual relationships. “In Me” is the key. In ourselves, we have nothing; but “in Christ” we have all that we need.

Every believer is either *overcome* or an *overcomer*. “And this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith” (1 John 5:4). The world wants to overcome us; this is why Satan uses the world to persecute and pressure believers. The world wants us to conform; it does not want us to be different. When we yield ourselves to Christ and trust Him, He enables us to be overcomers. We must claim our spiritual position in Christ and believe Him for victory.

“Be of good cheer!” is one of our Lord’s repeated statements of encouragement. Literally it means, “Cheer up!” There is the “good cheer” of His pardon (Matt. 9:1–8), His power (Matt.

9:18–22), and His presence (Matt. 14:22–27). Here in John 16:33, He announces the “good cheer” of His victory over the world. We are overcomers because He has first overcome for us. As we review this section, we can see how these three explanations our Lord gave all fit together. He revealed a wonderful principle—God transforms sorrow into joy. But this principle will not work in our lives unless we believe His promise and pray. God has ordained that His work is accomplished through believing prayer. But we will not be able to pray effectively if we do not claim our position as conquerors in Jesus Christ.

But John 16:33 is also a preface to His great High Priestly Prayer. He had taught them the Word; now He would pray for them. The Word and prayer must always go together (Acts 6:4). He used the word *world* nineteen times in this prayer, for in it He shows us how to overcome the world. He Himself was facing the hatred of the world *and the devil*, yet He would be able to endure the suffering and win the victory.

There is joy when we permit God to transform sorrow into joy. There is joy when God answers prayer. There is joy when we overcome the world.

Let there be joy!

Blum, E. A. (1985). *John*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 328-330) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

16:7. The departure of Jesus was necessary—though painful and difficult—for the disciples. In fact, His leaving was profitable and beneficial (the meaning of the Gr. *sympherei*, here rendered **good**). Without His departing (which included His death, burial, resurrection, and Ascension) there would have been no gospel. Atonement for sin was necessary for Jesus to save His people from their sins (Matt. 1:21). Also **unless** he departed there would have been no glorified Lord to **send ... the Counselor** (the Holy Spirit) to apply the atonement. “The Counselor” translates the Greek *paraklētos*. This word was used of legal assistants who pleaded a cause or presented a case. This Counselor is the promised Spirit who came into the world in a new and distinctive sense on the day of Pentecost.

16:8. One of the Spirit’s new ministries was to **convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment**. Conviction is not the same as conversion but is necessary to it. The words “convict ... of guilt” translate the one word *elenxei*, “to present or expose facts, to convince of the truth.” The Spirit works on the minds of the unsaved to show them the truth of God for what it is. Normally this process includes human aid (cf. 15:26–27).

16:9. **Sin** is rebellion against God and this rebellion reached its climax in the crucifixion of Jesus. Today the greatest sin is the failure to **believe in** Jesus (cf. 3:18; 15:22, 24). Most people do not readily admit to being guilty of sin. They will admit to failures or vices or even crimes. However, sin is against God, and people have suppressed the truth of God (cf. Rom. 1:18, 21, 25, 28). The mighty working of the Holy Spirit is necessary to convince and convict people of their desperate plight.

16:10. In crucifying Jesus, the Jewish people showed that they thought He was unrighteous, that only a wicked person would be hanged on a tree and thus be under God's curse (Deut. 21:23; Gal. 3:13). But the Resurrection and the Ascension vindicated Jesus as God's righteous Servant (Acts 3:14–15; Isa. 53:11). The Spirit convicts men of their faulty views of Jesus when the gospel with its stress on the Resurrection is proclaimed (1 Cor. 15:3–4).

16:11. The third area of the Holy Spirit's convicting work concerns **judgment**. The death and resurrection of Jesus were a condemnation of Satan (12:31; Col. 2:15), **the prince of this world** (cf. John 14:30). By Jesus' death, He defeated the devil, who held "the power of death" (Heb. 2:14). (Though defeated at the Cross, Satan is still active [1 Peter 5:8]. But, like a condemned criminal, his "execution" is coming [Rev. 20:2, 7–10].)

People in rebellion should take note of Satan's defeat and fear the Lord who holds the power to judge. As the fact of coming judgment (both Satan's and man's) is proclaimed, the Spirit convicts people and prepares them for salvation (cf. Acts 17:30–31).

16:12–13. The disciples were not able to receive any **more** spiritual truth at that time. Their hearts were hardened, their concern was for their own preeminence in an earthly kingdom, so they saw no need for Jesus' death. Sorrow over His departure and dismay over the prophecy of a traitor among them, along with the prediction of their own desertion, rendered them insensitive to more spiritual truth. **But ... the Spirit of Truth** (cf. 15:26) would come after Jesus' death to lead the apostles **into the truth** about Jesus and His work.

The Spirit, Jesus said, would **not** teach the disciples **on His own** (i.e., on His own initiative) but would teach **only what He hears** from the Father. This points up the interdependence of the Persons in the Trinity. The Father would **tell** the Spirit what to teach the apostles about the Son. Also the Spirit would teach **what is yet to come**. This statement helps one understand the promise, **He will guide you into all truth** (lit., "all *the* truth"). This was a promise to the apostles that their partial understanding of the person and work of Jesus as the Messiah would be completed as the Spirit would give them insight into the meanings of the soon-to-come Cross and the Resurrection as well as truths about Jesus' return (cf. 1 Cor. 2:10). The New Testament books are the fulfillment of this teaching ministry of the Spirit.

16:14–15. Because Jesus is the *Logos*, the revelation of the Father (or as Paul expressed it, "the image of the invisible God" [Col. 1:15]), **all that belongs to the Father is** also the Son's. The Spirit of Truth brought **glory to** Jesus as He revealed to the apostles things pertaining to the person and work of the *Logos* (**taking from what is Mine and making it known to you**). The Spirit worked in the apostles' minds so that they could perceive, understand, and teach about the Savior.

I. The prediction of changes (16:16–33)

Jesus' instruction of His disciples shifted at this point from the Spirit's future work to what the immediate future would hold for them. Someday Jesus will reappear, but sorrow, pain, and spiritual failure would be the apostles' lot first. Then, however, joy, prayer, and peace will be their portion.

16:16. The words **in a little while** were bewildering to the disciples (and also possibly to the initial readers of John's Gospel). Also the prediction, **you will see Me**, was not immediately understood. Did Jesus refer (a) to the coming of the Holy Spirit or (b) to His Second Advent or (c) to His brief, 40-day ministry between His resurrection and His Ascension? The last interpretation fits this passage best.

16:17–18. The **disciples** were confused about the time interval. The words **they kept asking** (Gr. Imperfect tense) indicate that considerable dialogue took place among the disciples without their arriving at an answer. They could not reconcile Jesus' statements because He said: (a) **In a** short time they would not **see** Him, (b) they *would see* Him, and (c) He was **going to the Father**. Only His death, resurrection, post-resurrection ministry, and Ascension would make it all clear.

16:19–20. As a Master Teacher, **Jesus** understood the confusion among His students. He did not clarify His teaching; He knew it would all come into focus with the passage of time and with the aid of the Spirit's teaching ministry (cf. vv. 12–13). **I tell you the truth** (cf. comments on 1:51) introduces a solemn prediction that their coming grief would be followed by joy. His death would be bitter agony for them but **the world** would be happy over it. However, the very event, the death of the Messiah, which would cause them to **weep and mourn** would bring them gladness: **your grief will turn to joy**. His resurrection and the Spirit's work of interpretation would enable them to know that He had to die so that they could have forgiveness of sins. Later the church would rejoice in His death (cf. 1 Cor. 1:23; 2:2).

16:21–22. Jesus illustrated the truth of **pain** replaced by **joy** by the pain of childbirth followed by the joy of new life when **a child is born**. The disciples were entering the process of pain (**your time of grief**), but the light of **joy** was just ahead. When they saw Him after His resurrection, their joy erupted—joy that will never end since He died to sin once but now lives forever (cf. Rom. 6:9–10; Luke 24:33–52; Heb. 7:24–25).

16:23–24. The forthcoming events brought about changed relations. Since Jesus would not be with them physically (**in that day** means after His Ascension), they would not be able to **ask** Him questions. But the Holy Spirit would help them (vv. 13–15).

I tell you the truth again introduced an important statement. They would be His ambassadors and therefore had the right to **ask** the **Father** for **whatever** they needed to accomplish His will. The words **in My name** are not a magical formula which enable the user to get *his* will done; instead those words tied the requests to the work of the Son in doing the *Father's* will (cf. "in My name" in 14:13–14; 15:16; 16:24, 26). Up to this point the disciples had **not** prayed **in the name** of Jesus. Now they are to do this since Jesus' death and the Spirit's coming would enable them to enter into God's new program of the Church Age. Answered prayer brings complete **joy** (cf. 15:11; 16:22) because God is at work in them.

16:25. **Though** Jesus was a Master Teacher and taught His disciples for three years by example and word, yet their perception of His revelation of the Father remained limited (14:9; cf. 2:22; 6:60; 13:7, 15–17). Veiled utterances (His **speaking figuratively**) would give way to plain speech. In His post-resurrection teaching (cf. Acts 1:3) the Son spoke **plainly about the Father** (cf. John 14:25–26).

16:26–27. The coming new **day** would give the disciples intimacy with **the Father** and clarity of understanding. The disciples would have direct personal access to **the Father** by the **name** of, that is, through Jesus (cf. “in My name” in 14:13–14; 15:16; 16:24). Jesus would no longer need to pray **on their behalf** since they could ask for themselves. This truth does not negate the promise of Christ’s intercessory work in overcoming a believer’s sin (cf. Rom. 8:34; 1 John 2:1–2). The disciples were now in a personal love-and-faith relationship with the Father. Only children have this privilege of access to their Father (Rom. 5:2).

16:28. Jesus summarized His mission in one sentence: His Incarnation (**I came from the Father**), His humiliation (**and entered the world**), and His resurrection, Ascension, and exaltation (**now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father**). This is what the disciples had come to believe.

16:29–30. The response of the **disciples** to the Lord’s teaching was that **now** they understood and believed. They felt the teaching was so plain that recognizing Jesus’ omniscience (**You know all things**) and divine origin (**You came from God**) was their only proper response.

16:31–32. Though the disciples were honest and sincere in their affirmations of faith (v. 30), **Jesus** knew their limitations far better than they did (cf. 2:24–25). The words **You believe at last!** could also be translated “Do you now believe?” (NIV) This seems to capture the thought better. They did believe but it was not complete faith or strong faith until after the death and resurrection of Jesus and the advent of the Spirit. **You will be scattered** is a fulfillment of Zechariah’s words which spoke of the Shepherd (the Messiah) smitten by decree of the Lord Almighty, which resulted in the scattering of the sheep (Zech 13:7). In spite of the disciples’ loyalty, faith, and love, they soon failed Him miserably. His prediction, **You will leave Me all alone**, was fulfilled by all His disciples deserting Him (Matt. 26:56) when He was arrested and by Peter’s denial (John 18:17, 25–26). **Yet** the Father had not forsaken Him; **I am not alone for My Father is with Me** (cf. 8:29; Pss. 23:4; 73:25–26), though the Father did forsake Jesus when He was on the cross (Matt. 27:46).

16:33. Jesus’ instructions about **these things** (chaps. 14–16) were intended to sustain them, to give them **peace** in Him. Believers have a dual existence: they are **in Christ** and **in this world**. In union with Jesus, His disciples have peace, but the world exerts a hostile pressure. The world system, the enemy of God and His people, opposed Jesus’ message and ministry (cf. 1:5, 10; 7:7). **But** Jesus won the victory over the system; He has **overcome the world**. As the “strong man” who came and ruined Satan’s kingdom (Matt. 12:25–29), Jesus is the Victor. Jesus wanted the disciples to remember this fact and to rejoice in His victory. **Take heart!** means “Be courageous.” (In the NT the word *tharseō* [“take heart, be courageous, cheer up”] was spoken only by the Lord [Matt. 9:2, 22; 14:27; Mark 6:50; 10:49; John 16:33; Acts 23:11].) Because He won they, in union with Him, can win also (Rom. 8:37).

White, J. E. (1998). *John*. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), *Holman Concise Bible Commentary* (pp. 484-485). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Work of the Spirit (16:5–16)

Jesus chided His disciples for their concern over their own situation upon His departure rather than concern over where Jesus was going to be (16:5). Again turning to His discussion of the Holy Spirit, Jesus made clear that His departure was worthwhile if only to allow for the coming of the Counselor whom Jesus Himself would send (16:7).

In a carefully detailed statement, Jesus outlined the convicting work of the Holy Spirit, all related to the work and person of Christ. First, the Holy Spirit will convict the world in the area of sin that results from disbelief in Jesus (16:9). Second, the Holy Spirit will convict the world in the area of righteousness in light of the life of Jesus (16:10). Third, the Holy Spirit will convict the world in the area of judgment because Jesus defeated the prince of the world who now stands condemned (16:11). Only through the Holy Spirit can an individual be brought to repentance leading to faith. It is not good works that elevate our status before God but the cross-work of Christ. The Holy Spirit enables the follower of Christ to live out the Christ life.

The Spirit of Truth will guide the disciples into all truth (16:13). His purpose will be to reveal Christ (16:14). The mark of the work of the Holy Spirit, then, is whether Christ is made central and glorified.

I Have Overcome (16:17–33)

The disciples were experiencing understandable anxiety and confusion regarding all that Jesus had shared with them. Jesus comforted them by proclaiming that no matter how dark the hour may prove to be, the dawn will follow! Two “dawns” seem to be at hand, the first being the resurrection and the second being the day they will be with Jesus forever in heaven.

Prior to Jesus’ death, the disciples had no need to pray in His name, for Jesus was there to be asked personally! This dynamic element of conversation was not to be lost, only now it would be through the Counselor that Jesus would send. The death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus serves as the intercession on our behalf before God, thereby eliminating the need for Jesus’ direct intercession (thus not a contradiction of Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25; 1 John 2:1). Persecution will surely come, including trials from living in a fallen world, difficulties in life, and even discipline from God. But Jesus’ words of comfort are paramount with His passionate plea to “take heart! I have overcome the world” (16:33).

Allen, J. P. (1972). John. In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), The Teacher’s Bible Commentary (pp. 681-682). Broadman and Holman Publishers.

The Cost of Discipleship (John 16:1–33)

The passage-While walking through deserted streets at that late hour Jesus continued his quiet instruction. When he was no longer to be seen in the flesh they would still have his friendship. But they must maintain contact, like a twig to its vine (chap. 15). And, there was a compelling reason.

He told them plainly that there would be hardships (vv. 1–4). They understood that language and became sorrowful (v. 6). So Jesus took them into his further confidence. He explained their benefit from his going away, and promised their ultimate victory. This was his last opportunity to teach them before his death. He would prepare them as best he could for their ordeal ahead.

Special points—Under the stress of persecution they would need a defense. Obviously Jesus could not be physically present with all his believers at all times. How, then, could they have his counsel and his strength? If he went away, he said, it would be to their advantage (v. 7). This must have startled them. Yet when the Comforter came, he would be to them as a “Lawyer,” an advocate for their defense.

A significant point is made in regard to the Holy Spirit. “I will send him unto you,” Jesus said (v. 7). But note that though he would come to the believers, “He will convince the world of sin” (v. 8, RSV). The Christians, therefore, are the link between the Spirit’s convicting work and the unbelievers. He must work through us with those who do not know him.

For us the Holy Spirit becomes “guide” (v. 13). The first disciples could not possibly understand the scope of the kingdom (v. 12). No era can foresee the nature of the gospel’s application to the life of the age to come. Yet this is no barrier. The Master himself is present to interpret and apply. Thus, no epoch is dependent on the methods of the past. No problem in the future is too much for Christ to guide his church to the attack.

An insight into the humanity of the eleven disciples is given in verses 17 and 18. “We do not know what he means” (RSV), they murmured to one another. It is a confession often spoken, one to be expected. They had stumbled at his “a little while.” They did not realize what a very little time remained. The cross would appear in a few hours. But their sorrow would in another brief time “turn into joy” (v. 20, RSV). He must also have had in mind even a fuller joy than the resurrection—that of Pentecost.

Truth for today—The last word of the section is prophetic, “I have overcome the world” (v. 33). Jesus was always sensitive to fulfillment. He spoke in terms of expectancy. The victory is actually in prospect when the deciding force is applied. The issue is not seriously in doubt! You can say that polio is conquered—since Dr. Salk. That is true, even though the vaccine needs to be applied. There are battles yet to be won; but Jesus already has accomplished the victory.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). John 16:7-33. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.