

Gospel of John Ch. 15–16:15 **A Primer for Reading Faithfully**

Note: This treatment of John 11 does not seek to exhaust its theological, exegetical, and interpretive dimensions, but aims to provide a foundation for faithful attention to Holy Scripture, that all who belong to him will seek to know the fullness of Christ.

This primer presents important, but more abstract or complex concepts in smaller font to facilitate both an in-depth study of the fuller dimensions of John 11 related to the rest of the Canon, and a general study of John 11 (limited to the large font).

Suggestions for Reading Scripture Well

- **Read repentantly and faithfully:**

- Every day of the Christian life is marked by mortification and vivification—death and life. In all that we do, we must die to sin and cling to the life given to us in Christ. This includes reading Scripture, when we must crucify the temptation to see things according to the flesh and yield to the life-transforming illumination of the Holy Spirit. Remember, the same God who has breathed out his word to us is the same God who, through his Spirit, reveals all of what he has said to his church.

- **Read with a growing Rule of Faith (Summary of Scripture):**

- The text God has graciously and mercifully created and sustained for us is not natural; it is holy—a creaturely reality sanctified by the triune God to serve his self-presence. At the Father's sending, the Spirit of Christ has elected and overseen the entire historical course of the biblical text, shaping and preserving it to undertake a specific role in God's plan of salvation.

The Holy Spirit has set aside Scripture for service to God by superintending the production of the text (including not just inspiration of the human authors, but also the shaping of the culture, language, circumstances, etc. of their writing) and its Canonization (understood as Spirit-produced acknowledgement of the word of God). And this sanctifying work is ontologically definitive—the Lord of all creation has provided his church with one story that reveals the purposes and glory of God in Christ.

- Because it is one story, any part of Scripture finds the fullness of its meaning in the increasingly larger contexts of paragraph, book, Testament, and Canon. To rightly and fully understand a passage, and avoid taking it out of context we must become increasingly familiar with the entire Canon of Scripture, including the relationship between the two Testaments and the place of each book within those Testaments.

The movement from the Old Testament to the New Testament can be described as, “the same, but different, because it is better/greater.” The OT establishes the pattern for how God has chosen to work, and the NT follows that pattern and expands on it in a way that far exceeds that limits of the initial expression of God’s economy.

- Two examples:

(1) The scenes and parts of a well-told murder mystery make complete sense only after the reader comes to the end of the story and can then reflect on those parts with the end in mind and with the entire plot and character development in view.

(2) Jesus *cleanses* the temple in Mark 11:15-17? The words before and after these three verses tell us what we need to understand the Author’s message. The day before Jesus entered the temple (v. 15), he *cursed* a fig tree just outside Jerusalem so that it would never again produce fruit (vv. 12-14). Immediately after Jesus drove out those who sold and bought in the temple and reminded the people that, “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations” (v. 17), the disciples saw the *cursed* fig tree withered to its roots (vv. 20-21). The very order of the text shows that Jesus did not “cleanse” the temple, he *cursed* it.

The text *shows* us that the earthly temple was out of season. Notice that Jesus does not curse the tree for not bearing fruit while in season. Rather, he curses the fig tree for not bearing fruit *because it was not the season for figs*. The Christ judged the earthly temple to be unfit for the kingdom of God he was bringing (Mark 11:10). To know how and why the earthly temple had become unfit, we repent of any desire to know more than what God has revealed, and faithfully attend to the rest of Scripture (*i.e.*, “the words before and after these three verses”). For the one Author has ordered his text to show us that those whom the LORD promised to bring to his holy mountain—those who make acceptable temple sacrifices (Isa. 56:1-8, from which the Gospel-writer quotes at Mark 11:17)—are those joined to the true Temple (Luke 2:18-22; 1 Pet. 2:4-5) through the perfect and final sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ himself (Heb. 9). The earthly temple was only necessary until the true, heavenly Temple came.

- **Read with a text-driven hermeneutic of love**

- Hermeneutic of love: To constantly and faithfully attend to all and only what the sanctified text tells us and shows us.
- Text-driven: God has ordered the text to create its own context of meaning and to lead the lovingly attentive reader throughout this context to enjoy the fullness of Christ.
- Scripture is both “Christocentric” (it centers on Christ) and “Christotelic” (its end and goal is Christ).

The Big Picture of the Canon and the Telos of God's Mystery

- **People & Place (see Deut. 7:6-11 and Rev. 21:1-3).** God has always purposed to create a people for himself and to give them a place where they can and will worship him and him alone. Working with the physical descendants of Abraham, God uses Old Testament Israel and its possession of the promised land of Canaan to picture his people in their place of worship, which people and place would come more truly and fully in the church, and most completely and permanently in the new heavens and new earth to come.

In fact, God began his process for creating a people for himself and giving them a place to worship him alone when he created Adam and Eve and set them in the Garden of Eden. But this was only the beginning of his plan. When God said, "Let us make man in our image," he never intended to fully accomplish that act of creation in Adam and Eve. True, Genesis 1:27 tells us, "God created man in his own image." But we also know from Colossians that only Christ is the perfect image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation (*i.e.*, the new creation of man in Christ) (Col. 1:15-20).

Neither man, nor Satan, nor anyone or anything else thwarted God's plan in the garden. God has always determined to manifest his glory by bringing a people to himself in Christ. He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). And God has always purposed to give the church the holy city of new Jerusalem in which to worship him completely. In that place, we will worship God with an unsinning heart throughout eternity: "nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life (Rev. 21:27).

- **Exodus Pattern of Creating People & Place.** Yahweh set the pattern for how he creates a people for himself and gives them a place of worship when he delivered Israel from Egyptian slavery, led them through the wilderness, and placed them in the promised land of Canaan (Deut. 8).

Yahweh repeats this pattern in Christ, whose death, burial, and resurrection becomes the second and greater exodus by which Yahweh truly delivers his people from the greatest Pharaoh (Satan) and from the greatest form of slavery (sin and death) (Rom. 6; Heb. 2).

- **The Means of People & Place is "Tabernacle" and "Temple."** God literally "tabernacled" or "tented" with OT Israel as he led them through the wilderness (Exo. 33:7-11). Once in the promised land of Canaan, God gave Israel the earthly temple as the specific place to worship him (2 Chron. 7).

When God led Israel into the promised land of Canaan, he instructed Solomon to build the earthly temple, the house of Yahweh, which he chose and consecrated, saying that his name would remain there forever and that his eyes and his heart would be there for all time (1 Chron. 22; 2 Chron. 7). But Solomon knew even as he completed the earthly temple, Solomon knew that nothing man-made could house the living God: "But will God indeed dwell with man on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, how much less this house that I have built!" (2 Chron. 6:18). Solomon was correct to realize that neither earth nor heaven can contain the God who created all things. But he could not imagine that the answer to his rhetorical question would be, "Yes, God will indeed dwell with man on the earth." Not even the wisest man in all the earth could conceive of the incarnation.

- **The Context of People & Place is War.** "God" is Yahweh's title (Deut 4:32-39). The exodus demonstrates that Yahweh is the one and only Warrior-King who fights for and delivers his people to himself. The OT exodus sets the pattern of deliverance/salvation in the

context of conflict. It is in war that Yahweh acts by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm to show that he is the only true God, creating a people for himself and providing them a place of rest.

The prophets anticipated the Lord of Hosts (military terminology) acting again on behalf of his people to restore Israel (*e.g.*, Isa. 31; Jer. 25; Zeph. 2; Zach. 8).

Over-arching OT Issue: Is Yahweh the one and only God? Israel denies it by their idolatry. And the surrounding nations reject Yahweh in their pagan forms of worship and their mockery of Israel's God.

John Ch. 15---Jesus Prepares His Disciples by Explicating Three Relationships

A Brief Review

Relationship Between Testaments: The events in the OT establish the pattern for things to come. In the NT, Yahweh acts again in ways that are the same, but different because they are better/greater.

John Ch. 12: Transition from public signs to intimacy with disciples.

John Ch. 13: Disciples are cleansed and set apart, including the removal of the betrayer.

John Ch. 14: Jesus will leave with the purpose of preparing a place for his disciples; He promises the Spirit that will produce truth and cause the Father and Son to dwell in the disciples.

John 14:31 “Rise, let us go from here”—literal change of location provides a shift in Jesus’ focus, from preparation through the Spirit of truth to the expectation of a fruitful people. Although some interpret this phrase eschatologically, Jesus’ focus is on the fruit to be born by new humanity in the midst of the wilderness journey—Jesus does not take his people out of the world, but sends them into the world just as the Father sent him. The Sent One becomes the sender.

First Relationship: Jesus and His Disciples.

(1) In a single verse, Jesus takes his disciples back to the first vine planted by Yahweh, and tells them that Jesus has come as the replacement and fulfillment of OT Israel.

- *Psalms 80:8–12:* In the context of the restoration of Israel, the psalmist tells us that in delivering OT Israel out of Egyptian slavery and placing them in the promised land of Canaan, God planted a vine. He cleared the ground for it, and it initially took root and began to bear fruit.

But then we see that Israel's walls were torn down and its fruit plucked. Why? Because the fruit it bore was “wild grapes”—not true fruit.

- *Isaiah 5:5–6*: The consequences of OT Israel not bearing true fruit was that it was dug up and removed, exiled.
- *Psalms 80:14–19*: God does restore “Israel,” but look who it is that the psalmist prays for—it’s the “son of man.” And it is the “God of hosts” (military terminology) who will restore Israel.

Yahweh mixes metaphors here to tell us through the psalmist that the one and only true Warrior-King will have his vineyard (his people in their place), and he will accomplish this in the son of man whom he has made strong for himself.

Jesus is the “true” vine, in contrast to OT Israel, who was a “false” vine in that it did not bear true fruit. In John 10, Jesus contrasts himself with strangers, thieves, and false shepherds, who failed to live up to their calling, by calling himself the “good” shepherd. Likewise, here Jesus contrasts himself with OT Israel, which failed in its mission to bear the fruit of righteousness, spread abroad, and bless the nations.

Jesus fulfills this prophecy of Isaiah: “In days to come Jacob shall take root, Israel shall blossom and put forth shoots and fill the whole world with fruit.” (Isa. 27:6).

How does he do this? We will see that Jesus chooses those who will be true branches and who will bear much fruit, the fruit of Christiformity. But remember that in John 12:24, Jesus has already explained that like a grain of wheat, the Son of Man must die if he is to bear fruit. Thus, Yahweh will plant his true vine that will bear the fruit he has always promised by sending the Son, Yahweh in the flesh, to his cross-death. Those who are joined to him by faith share in his crucifixion of sin and become true branches that bear true fruit.

- God the Father, as the vinedresser, is in ultimate control of the whole fruit bearing process.

(2) The Father does two things to ensure that the true vine bears true fruit: he removes and he prunes. To produce the fruit he desires, the Father removes some branches that are “in” (*i.e.*, in the sphere of influence; not “of”—possessed by) Jesus, and he prunes others.

Some, at this point, will depart from the text into some kind of bad allegory to speak of “removing” as, for example, “excommunication”; and “pruning” is equated with “church discipline,” or the purifying effect of a “trial of faith.” But God’s sanctified text (wholly set apart by him to serve his purposes perfectly) tells us all we need to know. “Removes” is further explained in v.6; and “prunes” is given its particular shape by v. 3.

What we see here in v. 2 is that the antithetical parallelism of the first part of each statement (“every branch in me that bears no fruit” / “every branch in me that does bear fruit”) is matched by a corresponding divine action, expressed by a play on words: ἀίρει, pronounced airey (“remove”) / καθαίρει, pronounced kathairey (“prune”). This first

divine action is judgment (negative); the second is discipline (positive)—one is for destruction, and the other is for our well-being and for the glory of God.

(3) Jesus explains what it means to be “pruned” by using the adjectival form (καθαρός) of the verb (καθαίρω) translated “to prune” to tell the disciples that they are “clean.” Already, the disciples are considered clean on the basis of Jesus’ words to them. The ones whose feet Jesus washed, and the ones from whom the unclean betrayer was removed, they are able to bear fruit. Remember that in washing the disciples’ feet, Jesus showed them their need for continual sanctification. Also remember that in Ephesians 5, Paul tells us that Christ sanctifies, cleanses his church by his word to make his body holy—that the body of Christ will be perfect and without defect.

(4) “Abide in me. . .” Jesus gives this command to make it clear to his disciples that continual fellowship in the true vine is necessary for true fruit-bearing. The point is this: we are never “pruned” to the point that we can bear fruit apart from Jesus. Just as Jesus demonstrated that his disciples, although clean, still needed their feet washed, so we must understand that because we bear fruit in the midst of an unclean world, we need to be consistently cleansed of its affects. And just as Christ sanctifies his body by his word, we always remain a part of HIS body.

The only way to bear true fruit is to abide / remain in the true vine. What does that look like? Well. . . .we’re getting there.

But know this: Jesus uses a peculiar form of imperative (μείνατε, pronounced meinãtē— aorist imperative, constative command) to stress the solemnity and urgency of Jesus’ disciples remaining in him to bear fruit—this is our top priority during this wilderness journey between Jesus’ ascension and his return.

(5) “I am the vine; you are the branches.” Jesus is not simply being redundant. No part of God’s word is superfluous, or without cause. Jesus here solidifies the strict order of this “mutual indwelling” that is unfolding. His disciples are commanded to remain in him as he remains in them, such that they bear much fruit. So that the true vine will fill the whole earth with its fruit, this order never changes.

By contrast, apart from the true vine, branches can do “nothing.” By themselves, Jesus’ disciples cannot accomplish anything regarding the Kingdom of God, the righteous vineyard he is finally planting—a branch never becomes a vine.

(6) Moreover, a “disciple” who fails to abide in the true vine will be removed from God’s glorious planting and destroyed.

Jesus is recapitulating his words from v. 2: The one who is in Jesus’ sphere of influence that does not bear fruit is the one who does not abide in Jesus, and he is removed for destruction (Ezek. 37:24–28); The one who is in Jesus’ sphere of influence and does bear fruit is the one who abides in Jesus, and he is pruned and bears much fruit.

(7–11) Since v. 1, Jesus has been building tension so that he can make his final points by resolving that tension. Since v. 1 we have been asking: What is fruit? What does it mean to abide in the true vine (because I do not want to be removed for destruction)?

(7) Jesus begins his resolution by comforting his disciples with the promise of answered prayer. Those in whom Jesus' words dwell—those who are continually cleansed and set apart for holy service to God—they will have done for them whatever they ask, since their prayers will be in conformity to God's will and grand purpose, *i.e.*, his vineyard—his people in their place.

(8) And then Jesus tells us what it means to bear the fruit of the true vine: Christiformity. John has frequently made reference to God the Father glorifying himself and being glorified in and through the Son. Amazingly, Jesus says here that the Father is glorified in the branches of the true vine. But what do those branches look like? They look like the vine. The consequence (fruit, or result) of abiding in Jesus is that you look like him, shaped by his word.

Excursus: God has always been concerned with creating a people in his image that would increase throughout the land he has given them, in which they should worship him alone. Cf. Gen. 1 and Rev. 21.

(9–10) Jesus resolves the tension regarding what it means to abide in him by talking about love. He comforts his disciples by telling them that in the same way the Father has loved him, Jesus has loved them. He explains that to abide in him means to abide in this love that finds its ultimate source in the Father. And finally, we learn that to abide in Jesus' love means to keep his commandments. For this, we have Jesus' keeping of the Father's commandments as our example.

Jesus replaces “words” with “commandments” here and connects them with his love in a way that echoes OT Israel's entrance into the promised land of Canaan. *Read Deut. 10:12–22.*

In Jesus, it is the same, but different because it is better/greater. By his death, He has set us free from slavery to sin and death and has promised to be with us during this wilderness journey. We have the promise of glorification through his resurrection, and the promise of reigning with God in his Kingdom through Jesus' ascension. And at his return, Jesus will finally establish God's people in their place of rest and eternal worship.

But here is the trick: Even now, that Kingdom is invading this world. The new heaven and new earth that are coming are not created out of nothing. This first heaven and earth are passing away in the sense of being cleansed of all that is unholy. It is being cleared away as the true vine is spreading throughout the earth and its branches are bearing fruit—the whole world will be filled with Christiformity, to the praise of our triune God.

(11) Far from burdening the disciples with commandments, then, Jesus reveals these things to them (and to us) for the purpose and with the result that we share his joy. Jesus constantly found his full delight in knowing the Father's purposes, making them his own, and obeying them completely. And that is what he offers us.

Second Relationship: Jesus' Love Among the Disciples

(12–17) Jesus has just explained the relationship between his disciples and himself. Now Jesus uses an *inclusio* (cf. 14:1,27) to explain how the disciples should relate to one another. An *inclusio* is a literary device that marks off a section of text by identical or similar words or phrases at the beginning and end of the section to focus on a particular point, the subject matter of which is set forth in the markers. By speaking of his command that the disciples love one another in v. 12 and then again in v. 17, Jesus is focusing on that issue in between those verses—in vv. 12–17 Jesus is explicating the relationship his disciples should maintain among one another between his ascension to come and his return thereafter.

But there are two ways to understand this discussion on love:

1. In v. 13 Jesus describes the *extent* of the love the disciples should demonstrate toward one another, and then in vv. 14–16 he discusses his making the disciples his friends by revealing the Father's will to them and his choosing them such that his disciples will indeed love one another to the fullest extent.

Problems: (1) That Jesus is discussing his actions towards the disciples in vv. 14–16 as the basis for which the disciples will love one another (thus, “so that” in v. 17) is not clear from the text in those verses. (2) Moreover, Jesus says in v. 17 that he has commanded “things”—he commanded that they do more than one thing, *i.e.*, more than the one example of love Jesus gives in v. 13.

2. Jesus describes the *paradigmatic manner* in which the disciples should love one another in vv. 13–16. Thus, in keeping with his command that the disciples love one another “as I have loved you” (v. 12), Jesus gives three examples of his love for the disciples. First, he tells them that he will love them to the fullest extent by giving his life for them, his friends. And the disciples will prove themselves to be Jesus' friends by loving one another (*i.e.*, “what I command you”). Second, Jesus tells the disciples that he has loved them by revealing to them all that the Father made known to him. Jesus brought the disciples into the great purposes of God by sharing with them the Father's eternal plans brought to fruition in the Son. And third, Jesus loved the disciples by choosing them and setting them apart as the first to bear the true fruit of Christiformity, the fruit that marks the new humanity created in Christ.

Application to later disciples: 1. We should sacrifice ourselves for one another, including time and resources, and yes, even our very lives (think of Chinese pastors who regularly put their lives at risk for the sake of the flock); 2. We should consistently set the great purposes of God before one another—we should preach the gospel to one another (think of our time together in care groups); and 3. We do choose and set apart for service when we “lay hands” on ministers with a specific calling, *e.g.*, elders. [In this regard, notice that τίθημι, pronounced titheymē, and translated “appoint” in v. 16, is the same root word in ἐπιτίθημι (pronounced epititheymē) which is used in Acts 6:2–3,6, 13:2–3, and 1 Tim. 5:22 to describe when those in the body would “lay hands” on others to set them apart for service].

Third Relationship: Disciples and the World

(18–19) Jesus now makes an abrupt transition from the disciples’ love for one another and the world’s hatred for them. The nature of the transition is consistent with the reason for the world’s hatred—the disciples have been snatched out of the world and they no longer look like the world. Rather, the increasing Christiformity of God’s people will convict the “world” (understood as sinful humanity).

(20–21) Jesus reminds his disciples of the rule he impressed upon them at the meal in ch. 13. (He does not contradict himself in speaking of the disciples as “servants”—we are to understand v. 15 in the sense that Jesus no longer calls his followers servants only, but friends as well). The application of the principle this time means that the disciples will receive the same treatment from the world as Jesus received from it. The implication is that ultimately we have no control over the reception of our witness to the world—people’s response to our witness will depend on their stance toward Jesus. [Think here of the implications for our evangelism].

(22–25) Finally, Jesus explains that his speaking to the world and performing works has finally convicted the world of its sin. This does not mean that the world would not have sin if Jesus had not come. Rather, in rejecting God’s ultimate expression of his love in Jesus, the world has removed any excuse for not “knowing” God. Otherwise, if God had not spoken his final word of love to the world in Jesus, then the world would not yet have given God its final answer. But with the world’s hatred (deep rejection) of Jesus, sin (even previously committed sin) stands in its full significance as sin.

* *“No excuse for their sin.”* Whatever pretense/pretext the world might have conjured up to justify its evil before the coming of Christ it has entirely lost now that God has said all he has wanted to say through Jesus. Jesus’ revelation simultaneously exposes sin and provides the remedy. This theme is further developed in 16:8–11. The world that rejects Jesus’ revelation, however, hates the exposure of its sin, or “wicked things” (3:9–21), and thus denies any need for a remedy.

* *“They hated me without a cause.”* See Psalm 35 and 69.

John 15:26–27—Transition from the World’s Relationship to the Disciples to the Work of the Spirit in the World and in the Disciples

Jesus’ Revelatory Ministry Continues through the Spirit and the Disciples

(26–27) In the preceding verses, Jesus has explained that the world (humanity in rebellion to the God of the universe) will hate (deeply reject) the disciples because it hates Jesus. How, then, will this hatred continue if Jesus is departing to go to the Father? By the witness of Jesus’ Spirit-empowered disciples.

Jesus simultaneously comforts his disciples and commands them. When they encounter enormous opposition from the world, they will not stand alone. The Spirit of truth will come along side them. Indeed, we have seen that he will be in them, producing truth. We will see in 16:13 that the Spirit will guide the disciples in all truth. But here we see that the Paraclete (Helper/Comforter/Advocate/Witness) will also assist the disciples by bearing truthful witness about Jesus, *i.e.*, the declaration of Jesus’ own trustworthy self-revelation in word and deed as the one sent by the Father, to reveal him to a world estranged from him because of its sin.

Although history might disagree, let us put Trinitarian questions of an ontological nature aside as not immediately in view. Rather, the text is telling us that Jesus and the Spirit are economically equivalent—they have a similar ministry. Both function as paracletes (ἄλλος παράκλητος, pronounced *allos parakleytos* “another paraclete,” Jn. 14:16), helper/advocates who each bear witness to the world, but successively. Jesus came to say and do all that the Father revealed to him. After Jesus’ cross-death and ascension, the Spirit will continue the work of Jesus, bearing witness about him. Thus, the world’s hatred of Jesus will continue. And look who also bears this hate-inspiring witness. Jesus’ disciples. Jesus commands them to bear witness—“You also *must* bear witness.

Now, what qualifies the disciples to bear witness about Jesus? Because they have been with him from the beginning. Notice, however, that this also applies to the Spirit. The context is one who, in the face of the world’s baseless rejection, will vindicate Jesus by telling the truth. What is needed, and what Jesus will always have on earth, is an eye-witness and a character-witness—one whose relationship to the accused will enable him to speak with authority. In this context, the Spirit is ideally suited to be the chief witness for Christ because he was the intimate companion of Jesus throughout his ministry:

- Birth: *Luke 1:35*—the Holy Spirit is responsible for Jesus’ sinless nature as the representative of new humanity.
- Earthly Ministry: *Matt. 3:11–17; Luke 4*—The Spirit descends on Jesus as the one appointed to baptize new humanity with the Holy Spirit. And it is the Spirit who drives Jesus into the wilderness and empowers him there to withstand the temptations of the devil to demonstrate that he will completely obey the Father in his mission as the Christ. And so he did, with the Spirit constantly present.

And, amazingly, the Apostles (remember, Jesus is talking to the Eleven) are also suited to be witnesses for Christ. While they were not present at his birth, they have been with him since the beginning of his earthly ministry. And the Spirit who has always been with and empowered Jesus will now come alongside his disciples to make their remembrance and declaration of Jesus' words and works trustworthy and authoritative.

What do you think this looked like? While the Apostles certainly bore witness of Jesus to the world directly, the Spirit as Lord superintended the formation of the apostolic witness into the NT, the completion of the Scriptures. We are not eyewitnesses of Jesus' ministry. This command of Jesus to bear him witness applies to us derivatively, *i.e.*, through the Apostles. The Spirit who inspired the writing of the Scriptures illuminates our understanding of them so that we become trustworthy and authoritative witnesses of the words and works of Jesus.

What implications does this have on your desire and need to faithfully attend to all of the Scriptures?

John 16:1–15— Work of the Spirit in the World and in the Disciples

Jesus' Concern For His Disciples Is For Their Witness Over Their Lives

(1) The purpose for Jesus telling his disciples about the hatred and persecution that the world will show them is to keep them from "stumbling." Literally, so that they "will not be caused to stumble/take offense."

(2–3) As they witness to the world, Jesus' disciples will suffer all manner of persecution, including a break in fellowship with Jews, and even death, most likely by Jews. Jesus' concern is that this enormous hostility directed at the disciples and at their message not cause the disciples to begin to take offense at their own witness. Remember, the world will hate them because Jesus has chosen them out of the world to be his witnesses to the world. And so, if they abandon that witness, they will look more like the world again, and not have to endure its persecution.

It is true, if we abandon the gospel, we will not suffer near as much at the hands of the Christ-hating world as we surely will when we preach the gospel faithfully and boldly. But we have the same comfort as the Apostles.

(4) Jesus tells the Apostles of the coming persecution so that when it comes they will remember that he told them before it happened. Do you see the connection with v. 1? To keep them from being caused to stumble in their witness to the world, Jesus tells them before it happens that the world will reject them and even kill them. But how does this foreknowledge and foretelling help? Their/our faith is strengthened by assurance that what is happening is not outside either the knowledge or control of our Lord. Cf. Deut. 18; Matt. 17.

The Disciples Will Also Benefit From The Spirit's Conviction Of The World

(4b–7) The reason why Jesus had not told his disciples about the climax of persecution to come before vv. 1–4 is because he has been with them. Remember, Jesus has just previously described himself as a paraclete to the disciples (cf. 14:16). While with them, he has helped and comforted them. But more than this, while physically present, Jesus has been the focal point of the world's hatred. He has been the lightning rod for the Jews' increasingly violent opposition. And this has kept the disciples safe (cf. 11:9–10).

But now that Jesus is going to the Father, his physical presence will be removed from the disciples. And Jesus chastises them for not asking where he is going. The disciples have in fact literally asked Jesus, "Lord, where are you going?" (cf. 13:36). But these instances are better understood as objections to Jesus' leaving rather than genuine questions designed to learn more about the purposes of God unfolding before their eyes. Rather, faced with Jesus' departure, the disciples remain focused on themselves and the extreme difficulty that surely awaits them if abandoned by their Lord—"sorrow has filled your heart."

To refocus the disciples' thinking so that it reflects his love for them in revealing the salvific purposes of the Father, Jesus tells them the truth: it is to the disciples' advantage that he go to the Father. How? It is only by ascending to the Father that "the Helper" will come to the disciples. Why? Because only after the Son has been raised from the dead in glory and has been seated at the Father's right hand can he send the Spirit of the risen Lord. There is no ontological conflict that would prevent Jesus and the Spirit from being simultaneously present with the disciples. Rather, the concern here is that the disciples are given a Paraclete who can assist them in their witness to the world. If Jesus sent the Spirit before his ascension to the Father, then the disciples would have only the Spirit of the suffering, humiliated Christ. But by sending the Helper after his death, resurrection, and ascension, Jesus will give his disciples the Spirit of the humiliated and vindicated Christ. In vv. 8–11, we see why it is the coming of this Helper that will be advantageous to Jesus' disciples.

(8–11) Commentators provide multiple ways to understand this *periscope* (selection of text or unit of thought). But these fall generally into two categories: (1) Jesus is saying that the Spirit will prove the world wrong about sin, righteousness, and judgment; or (2) the Spirit will shame the world and convince it of its own guilt regarding these three areas, calling it to repentance.

The first category understands ἐλέγχω (pronounced elegchō, usually translated "convict") more objectively, while the second category thinks of its use here more subjectively, or personally. This verb is used 17 other times in the NT (Matt. 18:15; Luke 3:19; John 3:20, 8:46; 1 Cor. 14:24; Eph. 5:11,13; 1 Tim. 5:20; 2 Tim. 4:2; Tit. 1:9,13, 2:15; Heb. 12:5; James 2:9; Jude 15,22; Rev. 3:19). While some argue that in every instance the verb has to do with showing someone his sin, usually as a summons to repentance there are three instances where this is not necessarily the case (John 8:46; Eph. 5:11,13).

- Three things help shape the meaning here: 1. The Spirit's conviction of the world is for the advantage of the disciples. 2. It is the Spirit of the exalted, vindicated (1 Tim. 3:16; Rom. 1:4, 8:11), and reigning Son of God that does this convicting for the advantage of the disciples. As we will see in vv. 12–15, he will help the disciples understand the full implications of Jesus' cross-death, resurrection, and ascension to the Father. 3. "Sin," "righteousness," and "judgment" have no article or genitive modifier in vv. 8–11—these terms are understood in their objective sense.

Thus, I think we are to understand Jesus telling his disciples that in the face of persecution to come (15:18–25), I will send you the Helper to aid in your witness to the world about me (15:26–27), and even when the persecution reaches its climax after I have physically departed to the Father (16:1–5), know that my going is to your advantage in that the Spirit will keep you from stumbling in your witness (16:1) by demonstrating to you that the world is wrong in its understanding of sin, righteousness, and judgment (16:8–11). This, of course, does not preclude the work of the Spirit in the world to call it to repentance. That work certainly takes place through the Spirit and Jesus' disciples. But the focus of the text here is the work of the Spirit that is to the advantage of the disciples.

- Work of the Spirit in Jesus' Death; Resurrection; and Ascension: *Heb. 9:14; Rom. 1:4; 1 Tim. 3:16; Phil. 3:21*—Jesus offered himself unblemished to God and was raised from the dead by the power of the Spirit. And his ascension to the Father takes place in a spiritual, glorified body—one brought into being by the Spirit. In fact, such is the oneness of the Spirit and Jesus at his ascension that Paul, in 1 Cor. 15:45, is able to say that Jesus, as the last Adam, became a life-giving Spirit.

The Spirit will prove the world wrong with respect to sin in that the world rejects the full and final revelation from God the Father through the Son that the world is estranged from God (cf. 15:18–25). The Spirit will prove the world wrong with respect to righteousness in that the world rejects Jesus as the one sent by the Father, and Jesus will go to the Father in an event that unmistakably vindicates him and proves him righteous. Remember, the wages of sin is death. But after Jesus became sin on our behalf and died, he was raised in glory. The verdict of the Father is a resounding "not guilty." And the Spirit will prove the world wrong with respect to judgment in that contrary to its perception that all is well, the world stands condemned as its ruler is judged and cast out by the cross-death of the Christ (cf. 12:31–32). It is in the climax of salvation history that both "judgment" and "righteousness" are realized in their once for all eschatological significance.

(12–15) The Father has spoken all he has wanted to say through the Son (cf. Heb. 1). But it is the Spirit who guides Jesus' followers "in" (ἐν is the preposition used here, not ἐν) all truth, *i.e.*, all that the Father has given the Son to reveal. This divine guidance was prayed for by the psalmists (*e.g.*, Ps. 25:4–5; 43:3; 86:11; 143:10). And Isaiah recounted how God led O.T. Israel in the wilderness by his Holy Spirit (Isa. 63:14), and also predicts God's renewed guidance in the future (Isa. 43:19; cf. John 7:38–39).

Yet the Spirit will speak only what he hears from the Father through the Son. The object of revelation is "what is yet to come." But this cannot be the crucifixion event because that will have already occurred before the coming of the Spirit. Rather, the focus is on the events following Pentecost. The emphasis of the Spirit's guidance is not on predictive prophecy, but on helping the believing community understand their present situation in light of Jesus' by-then-past and consummated revelation of God. This entails both a more profound penetration into the content of revelation, and the application of that revelation to the behavior of the community within the world.

Therefore, may the body of Christ seek to know his fullness by together faithfully attending to all that he has said to us.