

**Introduction:**

- A. *Illus.*: Over 100 years ago H. G. Wells wrote a short story called “The Country of the Blind” about an inaccessible, luxurious valley in Ecuador where, due to a strange disease, everyone was blind. After 15 generations of this blindness—till there was no recollection of sight or color or the outside world at all—a man from the outside, a man who *could* see, fell off a high cliff and survived, only to stumble into their forgotten country.

When he realized that everyone else was blind he remembered the old adage, “In the Country of the Blind the One-Eyed Man is King.” Wells wrote,

*He tried at first on several occasions to tell them of sight. ‘Look you here, you people,’ he said. ‘There are things you do not understand in me.’ Once or twice one or two of them attended to him; they sat with faces downcast and ears turned intelligently towards him, and he did his best to tell them what it was to see.*

But they never believed him. They thought he was crazy. Then the man fell in love with a girl there and that complicated things! The girl’s father, Yacob, went to talk to a doctor about him. The doctor said,

*“And I think I may say with reasonable certainty that, in order to cure him complete, all that we need to do is a simple and easy surgical operation--namely, to remove these irritant bodies.”* [His eyes!]

*“And then he will be sane?”*

*“Then he will be perfectly sane, and a quite admirable citizen.”*

*“Thank Heaven for science!” said old Yacob...*

The man would not be allowed to marry Yacob's daughter unless he submitted to the operation that would blind him. What would he do? Wells wrote,

*He had fully meant to go to a lonely place where the meadows were beautiful with white narcissus, and there remain until the hour of his sacrifice should come, but as he walked he lifted up his eyes and saw the morning, the morning like an angel in golden armour, marching down the steeps . . . .*

*It seemed to him that before this splendour he and this blind world in the valley, and his love and all, were no more than a pit of sin.*

And the man who could see escaped the country of the blind with his life. [www.online-literature.com/wellshg/3/](http://www.online-literature.com/wellshg/3/)

- B. That is where we live—in the country of the blind, proud of its science, sure of its health, oblivious to the light. It is not only pitiful, it is deadly. Jesus said, *“Men love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil.”* Jesus had his own name for “the country of the blind.” He called it “the world.” In his last words to his disciples before going to the cross, Jesus warned them of the hostility *they* would face—as *he* had—in this blind world.
- C. The thought of facing this blind world without Jesus grieved the disciples, naturally, and John 14-16 records Jesus' encouragement to his disciples just before he left them. Today I want to draw your attention especially to Jesus' words in **John 16:7-11. Rather than pulling his beloved followers out of this blind and hostile world...**

## **I. JESUS SENT THE HOLY SPIRIT TO CONVICT THE WORLD OF ITS BLINDNESS THROUGH US (16:8-11)**

- A. The people in the country of the blind think their blindness is normal and even good. Do you remember the story in **Jn 9** about Jesus healing a blind man? Just before Jesus did that, with the blind man standing there, Jesus said, “*While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.*” Then he put mud on the man’s eyes, and when he washed he was healed. The man didn’t even know who Jesus was.

Nonetheless, he was called before the authorities because he’d been healed on the Sabbath. They grill the man. Then they grill his parents, who plead ignorance. Then they bring the man back again and say, “*Give glory to God by telling the truth. We know this man [Jesus] is a sinner.*” He replied, “*Whether he is a sinner or not, I don’t know, One thing I do know, I was blind but now I see!*” Then he said, “*If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.*” And they bit back: “*You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us.*” That is how the world reacts to Jesus and to those whose blindness he heals.

- B. The Holy Spirit was sent to convince and convict the world of its spiritual blindness – v.8.... The Greek word behind this word, *prove* or *convict*, means to **convict of guilt until there’s a turning—till there’s repentance**. He doesn’t just want the guilty caught. He wants them redeemed!
- C. Jesus had said, “*While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.*” But what about when he is *not* in the world. That’s where the Holy Spirit comes in. He comes into our lives and, as Jesus himself put it, **now we are the light of the world.** The Holy Spirit does this convicting work in the blind through us. He **convicts the world from within us as individuals and within us as the church.** The unseen Holy Spirit makes his appearance through us.

I've always found **vv.8-11** to sound confusing. Listen... This is a kind of three-count indictment by the Holy Spirit in us, with the world being convicted by the Holy Spirit on all three counts.

## **II. THE HOLY SPIRIT CONVICTS THE BLIND WORLD OF ITS SIN (16:9)**

- A. The world generally knows what we mean when we talk about sin—at least some kinds of sin—but many they don't see what sin is actually most terrible. In fact, even people who know they've terrible things—who know they deserve hell—never see their worst sin. So the Holy Spirit sets out to convict the world of its deadliest sin. Because if people don't see their sin as it is they'll never seek the Savior God has provided.
- B. **V.9...** It is the reason given here that is interesting: *"because people do not believe in me."* Of all the things people are guilty of, the most serious by far is not believing in Jesus; not believing he is the Son of God sent as the Savior of the world and the Lord of all; not believing that there is no other name given to people whereby we can be saved; not believing that Jesus is *the* way, truth and life, and no one comes to the Father except through him. **After what Jesus has done to make God known to us and to pay for sin, to not believe I him is the ultimate transgression—the unforgiveable sin.** It is *the* sin that must be faced above all others!
- C. The Spirit convicts people of sin through various means. *Illus.:* I met Pranob when his friend brought him to talk to me about the gospel. He interacted with me very thoughtfully and was reading the Bible. His friend had talked to him often about Christ but as serious as he was, he didn't believe. Then he took a business trip to Buenos Aires. Of all the things that might catch one's eye in that

city, what struck Pranob was how dirty it was. Then the next morning, while shaving, somehow or other, Pranob was struck, looking at *himself* in the mirror, how dirty *he* was *inwardly*. He was like that city. And that is when he understood his need for Christ. The Holy Spirit used his friend, and me, and Scripture, and a filthy city. Not long after, I baptized Pranob. Now the next count:

### III. THE HOLY SPIRIT CONVICTS THE BLIND WORLD OF ITS RIGHTEOUSNESS (16:10)

- A. **V.10...** Isn't it strange to say someone has to be convicted of their *righteousness*? But it is the world's confidence in their righteousness that does even more damage than their cavalier attitude about their sin. The world's mantra is, "*I'm a good person!*" My Muslim friend was sure of his righteousness because of his self-denial during Ramadan. But the Bible says differently. The Bible says "*There is no one righteous. Not even one.*" And that "*All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*" Well what about the good things people do? Yes, people do good things, but even their good deeds are tainted, like someone with a terrible case of the flu offering you a drink from their water bottle. A good deed but it is tainted by my inward sickness. That's what the world needs to see—that their sin is in them, infecting even their good deeds, **because those good deeds do not spring from a love for God nor a desire to serve him.** Their motive is wrong—their intent. **Augustine** wrote of his past life, "*my sin was all the more incurable because I did not think myself a sinner.*" So the Holy Spirit must break through this self-righteousness with convicting truth.

B. The reason behind this conviction is, “because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer.” When Jesus was in the world his very presence was convicting. There was no one remotely as good nor as godly as he was. When Peter met Jesus he said, “Go away from me for I am a sinful man.” And when Jesus died on the cross, the centurion watching said, “Surely, this was the Son of God.” **But once Jesus returned to the Father, the Spirit took up this work of convicting the world—of showing them the utter inadequacy of their so-called righteousness.**

*Illus.:* You’ve seen a TV show or movie where a bad guy in disguise is finally caught and the cop rips off the mask. “It’s you!” they cry. Well, that’s the Holy Spirit’s job now—tearing off our masks. The poster boy in the Bible was Paul, AKA Saul. He reflected on his own spiritual qualifications before Christ in **Phil. 3:4-6**: “*If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless. But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.*”

That is what the Spirit of God does in this world, convicting it of its paltry righteousness by pointing to Jesus, the standard. And, as hard as this is to believe, one very important way the world sees the inadequacy of their righteousness is by looking at us, **especially the way we love one another.** When we love one another—and them—as Jesus does they are left without a sense of moral superiority and self-righteousness.

#### IV. THE HOLY SPIRIT CONVICTS THE BLIND WORLD OF ITS JUDGMENT (16:11)

A. **V.11...** This isn't talking about God's judgment but the world's. The world has terrible judgment about everything important, but in particular, their judgment about Jesus. The world judges Jesus in all kinds of ways—a prophet, a superstar, a moral paragon, a spiritual model. Others, like the Pharisees, disdain him or think him unimportant today. **Whatever the world judges Jesus to be, their judgment is always proved desperately unjust because they refuse to bow before him as Lord.** The Holy Spirit's task in the world is to get people to finally say, *"I've been terribly wrong about Jesus."*

B. Behind every wrong judgment about Jesus—whether he is damned by their unbelief or by their faint praise—is the lying, jealous prince of this world, Satan. Nothing is more important to Satan than denying Jesus the honor and homage he deserves. Denying Jesus the glory due him is at the heart of all Satan does in the world. So that is what is behind the reason given in **v.11**. The Holy Spirit will convict the world *"in regard to judgment because the prince of this world now stands condemned."*

The diabolical angel of light was caught in the act of criminally negligent judgment when he manipulated the crucifixion of Christ. But from the very cross Jesus defeated Satan. Even while he died under the approving eye of the devil, Jesus was quietly redeeming condemned sinners and silently slipping the keys of death from the belt of the dark prince. Paul wrote in **Col 2:15**, *"And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross."*

- C. So, in effect, the Holy Spirit says to the world, “*The Prince of this world, who filled your heads and hearts with lies about Jesus, is **himself** condemned, and now **you** stand liable for the lies you’ve believed and told about Jesus. You dare not turn a blind eye to Jesus any longer!*”

So there it is. The Holy Spirit catches the world red-handed and red-faced, guilty of sin, guilty even of righteousness, and guilty of terrible judgment. Dead to rights. Nothing to do but stammer while the Judge throws the book at them. **The Holy Spirit’s goal in convicting people of their sin, their false righteousness, and their terrible judgment regarding Jesus is not to destroy them, but to give them sight!**

#### **V. THE HOLY SPIRIT CONVICTS THE WORLD OF ITS BLINDNESS THROUGH US SO JESUS MIGHT GIVE THEM SIGHT.**

How do we cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that he might do his convicting, loving work through us? Three suggestions:

- A. Befriend the blind and then live among them as people who see and know Jesus. Paul tells us in **Phil 2:15-16** to “*become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life....*” Our behavior matters. We must pursue Christlikeness even while we hold out the “word of life” in this country of the blind.
- B. We pray for the Holy Spirit to convict and convince the lost people we care for—until they realize they need God’s grace through Jesus Christ. Only God can give sight, so we must pray.
- C. Be ready to speak as the Holy Spirit prompts you. We speak to people, as led by the Spirit, of their sin, their false

sense of righteousness, and of their poor judgment about Jesus.

*Illus.:* Let me conclude with a story told by the late **Charles Colson** in his book, *The Body*. He tells a story of a man he met in the country of the blind. He writes how he was in a southeastern city meeting with a prominent business leader whom he calls Mr. Abercrombie. The man had a noon Bible study to which he invited Colson to speak. Nineteen other movers and shakers joined Mr. Abercrombie to listen to Colson. He writes:

Mr. Abercrombie had asked me to speak at the luncheon and then allow time for questions. Somewhere in my talk I referred to our sinful nature. Actually, “total depravity” was the phrase I used. I noticed at the time that a few individuals shifted uncomfortably in their leather chairs, and, sure enough, it must have hit the mark. Because after I finished, the first question was on sin.

“You don’t really believe we are sinners, do you? I mean, you’re too sophisticated to be one of those hellfire-and-brimstone fellows,” one older gentleman said, eyeing my dark blue pinstripe suit just like his. “Intelligent people don’t go for that back-country preacher stuff,” he added.

“Yes, sir,” I replied. “I believe we are desperately sinful. What’s inside of each of us is really pretty ugly. In fact we deserve hell and would get it, but for the sacrifice of Christ for our sins.”

Mr. Abercrombie himself looked distressed by now. “Well, I don’t know about that,” he said. “I’m a good person and have been all my life. I go to church, and I get exhausted spending all my time doing good works.”

The room seemed particularly quiet, and twenty pairs of eyes were trained on me.

“If you believe that, Mr. Abercrombie—and I hate to say this, for you certainly won’t invite me back—you are, for all of your good works, further away from the kingdom than the people I work with in prison who are aware of their own sins.”

Someone at the other end of the table coughed. Another rattled his coffee cup. And a flush quickly worked its way up from beneath Mr. Abercrombie’s starched white collar.

“In fact, gentlemen,” I added, drawing on a favorite R. C. Sproul shocker, “If you think about it, we are all really more like Adolf Hitler than like Jesus Christ.”

Now there was stony silence . . . until someone eased the pain and changed the subject.

When lunch ended and I was preparing to leave, Mr. Abercrombie took my arm. “Didn’t you say you wanted to make a phone call when we were finished?”

I started to say it wasn’t necessary, then realized he wanted to get me alone.

“Yes, thank you,” I said.

He led me down the corridor to an empty office. As soon as we were inside, he said bluntly, “I don’t have what you have.”

“I know,” I replied, “but you can. God is touching your heart right now.”

“No, no,” he took a step back. “Maybe sometime.”

I pressed a bit more, however, and moments later we were both on our knees. Mr. Abercrombie asked forgiveness of his sins and turned his life over to Christ.

Colson concludes, “*Martin Luther was right. ‘The ultimate proof of the sinner is that he doesn’t know his own sin. Our job is to make him see it.’*” [pp. 190-191]

And in the country of the blind, the Holy Spirit has come to help us do just that—*make them see it.*

