



Conducted by
Alf Marsden

"I was reading from John's Gospel Chapter 16 just recently. Would you say that the world has been convinced of sin, of righteousness, and of a coming judgment?"

Many readers will know the words of Jesus as recorded in John 16, where He says, **"When He is come He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment"** (16:8). The 'he' who should come is, of course, the Holy Spirit. A brief explanation of that section of John's Gospel will, I think, help our understanding.

Jesus was coming to the end of His earthly ministry; He was about to finish the work He had come to do. He had warned His disciples about this, but it is quite evident from the scripture that they did not understand the full implications of what He was saying. Naturally, they were sorrowful about His impending departure; we all feel the same when we are about to lose someone on whom we have come to rely. Jesus knows and understands their sorrow, but makes them a staggering promise, **"It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you: but if I depart, I will send Him unto you"** (16:7). In John 14:16 Jesus indicates to them that the presence of the Comforter will be of a permanent nature, **"And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever"**. Jesus here fulfils His promise that He will not leave them comfortless. There is to be another Comforter like Himself, **"Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive"** (14:17). This Comforter will abide with them for ever. He (indicating personality) will guide them into **all truth. Because** He is the Spirit of truth, He will be eminently qualified to reprove regarding sin, righteousness, and judgment to come. So, having briefly set the scene, we must now turn our attention to the main part of the question, and see how He, the Holy Spirit, will reprove (convince) the world.

OF SIN

He would be a bold man who would say that the world is convinced of sin; as a matter of fact, people seem to be convincing themselves that there is no sin, not in the way the Christian understands sin, anyway. In this they seem to be aided and abetted by a weak clergy who seem to spend much of their time explaining it away. In actual fact, the true meaning of sin is defined quite explicitly at this point in the scriptures; sin, as defined for us by Jesus, is **"a refusal to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, the Christ of God, and the Saviour"**.

It is this refusal to accept Him which causes Jesus deep distress. You will remember that He wept over Jerusalem. **"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem . . . how often would I have gathered thy children, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not. Behold, your house is left unto you desolate"** (Matt. 23:37,38). It is sad enough to be rejected, but to be rejected by one's own people is quite another dimension of sorrow, especially when one has come to lay down his life for them.

I wonder if we are urgent enough in our presentation of the Christ? Perhaps we put Him forward as one would an article of clothing on a market stall, and in effect say, "Well, He's there; take Him or leave Him". One would hardly class that as an aggressive promotional technique. Jesus used the word 'desolate' when referring to His rejection by the nation of Israel. Perhaps we should be trying to portray to others the utter and complete desolation of being without Christ. Perhaps we should try to

paint a picture of a person wandering in desert wilderness, no compass, no water, the sun beating down relentlessly and no hope of shelter from it, entirely alone and lost, and only the stark reality of death beckoning. Isn't this what the arid waste of sin is like, metaphorically speaking. Oh, I know that the world disguises it by the insistent demands of selfish ambition, pleasures, and the glittering tinsel of the so-called good life, but at the end of it all, when the soul realises that it has been seeking dross, what remains if we do not have Christ? Only the certainty of the domain prepared for the Devil and his angels, hell itself. Have we ceased to believe **that**? Is it too severe to be told to people? That sort of desolation was envisaged by Christ Himself relative to His rejection. Have we any right to minimise the consequences of the rejection of Jesus? The Holy Spirit works through us, and the consequences of the rejection of Christ is what He wants to convince the world of.

OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

I like the translation in the Jerusalem Bible concerning righteousness, "**And when He (the Comforter) comes, He will show the world how wrong it was . . . about who was in the right, proved by my going to the Father, and your seeing me no more**" (John 16:8-10). Have you ever chosen the wrong side? I'm quite sure you have. Isn't it disappointing and embarrassing when that happens. But stop and think for a moment. Suppose you've gambled with your eternal destiny, and you've staked **everything** on the wrong side. You will have, you know, if you haven't chosen Christ and given your eternal destiny into His hands.

Jesus was **proved** to have been in the right. Why? Because He was utterly vindicated in His claims to be the Son of God and the Saviour; the very fact of His resurrection from the dead, and of His ascension to the right hand of the Father in Heaven testifies to God's approbation of all that Jesus said and did. Well might those who had been instrumental in His death cry out in despair when they heard the condemnation by Peter on the Day of Pentecost, "**Now therefore the whole nation of Israel must know beyond the shadow of a doubt that this Jesus, whom you crucified, God has declared to be both Lord and Christ**" (Acts 2:36. J. B. Phillips). To their credit, many of them did what Peter commanded them to do, and so formed the first community of believers.

Isn't it a wonderful thought that God established **His** righteousness in Christ. Even more amazing, and surpassing in wonder, is the thought that we can participate in this righteousness; Paul puts it like this, "**How he (God) hath made him (Christ) to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him (Christ)**" (2 Cor. 5:21. The words in brackets are my own). Jesus, the righteous One who never sinned, bore our sins on the Cross, so that **in Him** we might also become the righteousness of God. What a sacrifice! What a Saviour! And what benefits and privileges are ours when we choose him to be our champion. He was **proved** to be right, and so shall we if we choose Him as Saviour. Today, the Holy Spirit, through the word of God, the Bible, reproveth the world because of its standards, and because of its rejection of Christ as the righteousness of God. Choose the world, and you've chosen the **wrong** side.

OF JUDGMENT

It's never easy to accept judgment — especially adverse judgment — on your performance, even when such judgment is true. I remember carrying out appraisals during my working life, and if you had to say to someone, "You didn't do very well in that area, did you", one could see the hackles rising and the excuses formulating. "I did as well as I could with what was available. Why don't you try using the equipment I was provided with". And so it went on.

That God has a right to judge His creation surely cannot be in dispute, but rest assured, a **righteous** God will make a **righteous** judgment. Generally speaking, we are

judged according to well-established standards; from God's point of view, His standards are contained in the Bible. As we have seen, we **must** start by accepting His standard of righteousness, Christ Jesus His Son. When we have done this, it would be wrong to think that Christ in some mysterious way, would **automatically** ensure our **future** righteousness; no, the Christian has to work at his own salvation with fear and trembling. He has to go on, all through his life, **adding** to his initial faith in Christ. In this, he will be helped by the in-dwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, and by close attention to the Bible. The 'once saved, always saved' theory is alien to the Bible.

What I am saying, of course, is that we shall be judged according to the lives we live while here on earth; when we die it will be too late to change things. There will be no purgatorial re-furbishment. If we go through our lives not choosing Jesus, then the judgment will be to condemnation, because Jesus says, "**And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men preferred darkness rather than light**" (John 3:19). Jesus is referred to as 'the light of the world', and who would say that this dark and benighted world doesn't need His light. It is no use striking out blindly and blaming God and His Christ for all the world's ills. The plain fact of the matter is that **man** is responsible for the way he manipulates people and things. God **has** intervened, and He has illuminated the standards by His Light, Christ. If man chooses to ignore those standards and **set his own**, then he can have no quarrel with the judgment of God. The prince of this world, Satan, has already been judged and **vanquished**; do you want to spend eternity in the place prepared for him and his angels? If so, be content to remain in his domain now. You can, however, choose Christ, and this is what the Holy Spirit through the word encourages you to do. But **it's your choice**. As for me, I shall continue to follow the One who has been **proved** right.

(All questions, please, to Alf Marsden, 20 Costessy Way,
Winstanley, Wigan. WN3 6ES).

HAVE YOU BEEN CONVERTED ?

Conversion, whatever else may be said of this word, always produces marked changes. And these changes are not only evident in outward acts, but in inward thoughts as well. Our future goals and plans will be affected by whatever it is we have been converted to. Surely no one would dispute this, and yet many Christians claim to have been converted to Christ, but the only difference in their life is that now they attend church services, whereas before they didn't. Is this all there is in true conversion to Christ?

The truly converted Christian is one who has surrendered himself totally to Jesus. Jesus speaks of this very thing in John 11:25. Jesus said that anybody who loves his life will lose it, and anybody who hates his life in this world or age will preserve for eternal life. When speaking of love for self, Jesus uses the word *phileo*, the passionate, affectionate type of love. In other words, anyone who clings to his life with a passionate attachment will lose his life. The converted Christian is one who has let go of his own ego. Jesus isn't saying to be his disciple you must hate yourself, but rather He is demanding to be first. And being first must even include you! Jesus must come before yourself. This is the first step in true conversion.

The person who has truly given himself to Jesus will be different. And the difference will be noticeable. One of the key thoughts in the Sermon on the Mount is, "**Be not therefore like unto them . . .**" But being different outwardly is just not enough. Jesus is calling for a radical change among his followers. True spirituality is inward, with the outward reflecting the inward difference. In Matt. 5:20, Jesus taught that our righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees. In other words, they have outward conformity to the law, but you must have an inward conformity to the law.