

J. C. RYLE'S NOTES ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN
16:1-7

1. These things I have spoken to you, that ye should not be offended.
2. They shall put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he does God service. 3. And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor me. 4. But these things I have told you, that when the time comes, ye may remember that I told you of them. And these things I did not say to you at the beginning, because I was with you. 5. But now I go away to him who sent me, and none of you ask me, "Where are you going?" 6. But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. 7. Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Comforter will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send him to you.

1.--[*These things...not be offended.*] The chapter we now begin is a direct continuation of the last chapter, without break or pause. Our Lord's object in this first verse is to cheer and revive the minds of the Apostles and to prevent them being discouraged by the persecution of the unbelieving Jews. "I have spoken the things which I have just been speaking in order to obviate the depressing effect of the treatment you will receive. Lest you should stumble and be offended by the conduct of your enemies, I have told you the things you have just heard."

Stier remarks that "these things" include both the warning of the world's hatred and the promise of the witnessing Spirit. Foreknowledge of the world's hatred would prevent the disciples being surprised and disappointed. The promise of the Spirit would cheer and encourage.

The word "offended" is literally "scandalized." It is a remarkable instance of a word that has greatly changed its meaning since the last translation of the Bible, to the great perplexity and injury of many Bible readers.

It is needless to point out how great a stumbling block it often is to young and unestablished Christians to find themselves persecuted and ill-used for their religion. Our Lord knew this and took care to arm the eleven apostles with warnings. He never kept back the cross or concealed the difficulties in the way to heaven.

2.--[*They shall put...synagogues.*] In this verse our Lord tells the disciples most plainly what they must expect. "They will excommunicate you, and cast you out of the Jewish Church, and expel you from their assemblies." The Greek words are curious: "They will make you out-of-synagogue men." How great a grief and loss this was to a Jew we have little idea, unless we have studied the work of Christianity among the Jews in modern times. Nothing affects a Jew so much as expulsion from the synagogue, or excommunication.

There is no nominative here to which we can refer "they." It is a Hebraism equivalent to "You will be put out."

Hengstenberg observes: "The disciples were not to depart voluntarily out of the synagogue but to await what would happen to them on a full proclamation of the Gospel. This gives a very intelligible hint to the faithful in times of the Church's decline: viz., that they should keep far from their thoughts the idea of arbitrary secession. The new formation is right only when the casting out has gone before."

Calvin remarks: "We have no reason to be alarmed at the Pope's excommunications, with which he thunders against us on account of the Gospel. They will do us no more injury than those ancient excommunications that were made against the apostles." The curse causeless shall not come.

[*Yes...kills you...does God service.*] In this clause our Lord warns the eleven that they must not be surprised if even death was the final result of discipleship. There would be no length of persecution to which their enemies would not go. "The hour comes when he who has killed you will think that in so doing he offers God an acceptable service."

How true this has proved, the history of all religious persecution has abundantly showed. Who can doubt that Saul before his conversion was sincere? "I verily thought that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth" (Acts 26:9). The persecutions carried on in Spain, Portugal, France, and England by Romanists against Protestants are painful examples of the same thing. Men have actually thought that killing people was doing a holy and a good action.

The extent to which conscience may be blinded--until a man actually thinks that he is doing a godly deed when in reality he is committing a huge sin--is one of the most painful phenomena in human nature. Many of those who burned our Reformers in the days of Queen Mary were sincere and in earnest. Earnestness is not the slightest proof that a man is right in his religion. It is one of the most monstrous idols of modern times. The folly of those who are content with earnestness and say that all earnest men go to heaven, is abundantly shown by this text.

Ferus remarks that "good intentions and meanings are no better than impiety, if they do not spring from God's Word."

3.--[*And these things they will do, etc.*] Here, as in a former verse, our Lord points to blind ignorance as the true cause of the enmity of the Jews against Himself and His disciples. "They do not rightly know my Father, in spite of their professions of religious knowledge, nor Me whom the Father has sent. Hence they hate and persecute." (See my notes on ch. 15 verse 21.)

4.--[*But these things I have told you, etc.*] Here once more our Lord repeats His reasons for telling the disciples what they must expect. "I have told you what treatment you will receive, in order that you may not be surprised when the time of trial comes but remember that I foretold you

all, and [that you may] not be cast down. Nothing unforeseen, nothing unpredicted, you will feel, happens to us. Our Master told us it would be so."

The word "I" in the sentence--"that ye may remember that I told you"--is emphatic in the Greek. It seems to mean, "Remember that I myself, your Master, told you."

Our Lord adds the reason why He had not dwelt on these trials before. "I did not tell you much of these things at the beginning of your discipleship because I was with you, and would not disturb your minds with painful tidings while you were learning the first principles of the Gospel. But now that I am about to leave you, it is needful to forewarn you of things you are likely to meet with."

Of course it cannot be said that our Lord had never and in no sense before this time foretold persecution and the cross to His disciples. But it must mean that He did not think it needful to dwell much on the subject so long as He was with them and taking care of them.

5.--[*But now I go... "Where are you going?"*] These words seem to convey a reproof to the disciples for not inquiring more earnestly about the heavenly home to which their Master was going. Peter, no doubt, had said with vague curiosity, "Where are You going?" (John 13:36); but his question had not originated in a desire to know the place, so much as in surprise that His Lord was going at all. Our Lord seems here to say, "If your hearts were in a right frame, you would seek to understand the nature of my going and the place to which I go."

Let us observe that our Lord spoke of His departure as a "going back to Him who sent Him," His mission being finished and His work done.

6.--[*But because I have said, etc.*] Here our Lord continues the reproof of the last verse. The minds of the eleven were absorbed and overwhelmed with sorrow at the thought of their Master going, and they could think of nothing else. Instead of seizing the little time that was left in order to learn more from His lips about His place and work in heaven, they were completely taken up with sorrow and could think of nothing else but their Master's departure.

We should do well to mark how mischievous overmuch sorrow is, and to seek grace to keep it in proper control. No affection, if uncontrolled, so disarranges the order of men's minds and makes them unfit for the duties of their calling.

7.--[*Nevertheless, I tell you the truth, etc.*] In this verse we see our Lord mercifully condescending to show His disciples the necessity for His leaving them. It was expedient. It was for their good. It was for the real ultimate benefit of themselves and the whole Church that He should go away. If He did not go away, the great outpouring of the Holy Ghost, so often promised, could not come down on them and the world. If He went

away, He would send the Comforter. If he did not go away, the Comforter would not come.

There is undeniably much that is deep and mysterious about the contents of this verse. We can only speak with reverence of the matter it unfolds. It seems clearly laid down that the Holy Ghost's coming down into the world with influence and grace was a thing dependent on our Lord's dying, rising again, and ascending into heaven. It seems to be part of the eternal covenant of man's salvation that the Son should be incarnate, die, and rise again; and that then, as a consequence, the Holy Spirit should be poured out with mighty influence on mankind, the Gentile Churches be brought into the fold, and Christianity spread over a vast portion of the world. This seems plainly taught, and this we must simply believe. If anyone asks why the Holy Ghost could not be poured down without Christ's going away, it is safest to reply that we do not know.

One thing is very clear. The universal invisible presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church is better than the visible bodily presence of Christ with the Church. Christ's body could only be in one place. The Holy Ghost can be everywhere at one and the same time. Whatever the disciples might think, it was far better for Christ to go up to heaven and sit at God's right hand as their Priest and send down the Holy Ghost to be with the Church till He came again than for Christ to tarry with them as He had done. Flesh and blood might have liked better to keep Christ on earth, eating and drinking and walking and talking in Palestine. But it was far better for the souls of men that Christ should finish His work, go up to heaven, take up His office there in the holy of holies, and send down the Holy Spirit on the Church and the world.

Calvin remarks: "Far more advantageous and far more desirable is that presence of Christ, by which He communicates Himself to us through the grace and power of His Spirit, than if He were present before our eyes."

Alford remarks: "The dispensation of the Spirit is a more blessed manifestation of God than was ever the bodily presence of the risen Savior."

Bishop Andrews remarks: "We shall never see the absolute necessity of the Holy Ghost's coming until we see the inconvenience of His not coming."

The expression "I tell you the truth" is a very solemn, emphatic one. It is like, "Verily, verily I say, whether you believe me or not, it is true."

The expression "I will send" seems again to point to the equal procession of the Holy Ghost from the Son and the Father. In another place it is, "The Father will send." Here, "I will send."

After all, no text throws more light on this deep verse than Psalm 68:18: "Thou hast ascended up on high, and received gifts for men; that the Lord God might dwell among them." These words surely point out that the Holy Ghost's dwelling among men was a gift purchased by the Son.

Does not the verse teach us that those who make much of the so-called "corporal presence" of Christ in the Lord's Supper as a thing we should

hold and believe, are in great error? There is something of far more importance to the Church, between the first and second advents, than any corporal presence of Christ, and that is the presence of the Holy Ghost. This is the *real presence* we should make much of and desire to feel more. Our question should not be, "Is Christ's body here?" but "is the Spirit, the Comforter, here?" Excessive craving after Christ's bodily presence before the second advent is in reality a dishonoring of the Holy Ghost. We should make much of the Spirit.

Ecolampadius remarks: "Those who try to defend an eating of Christ, or a presence of Christ, in the Sacramental bread, as if His body was at the same time with us and in heaven, are manifestly at variance with this text."

Henry remarks here: "The presence of the Holy Spirit is a greater comfort and advantage to us than the presence of Christ in the flesh. Christ's bodily presence was comfortable, but the Spirit is more intimately a Comforter than Christ in His fleshly presence because the Spirit can comfort all believers at once in all places, while Christ's bodily presence can comfort but few and that only in one place at once. The benefit of Christ's presence was great, but the advantage of the Spirit's renovation and holy inspiration is much greater."