

THE CONVICTION OF SIN

John 16:7-11

INTRODUCTION

- We saw previously the necessity of repentance in order for man to be saved
- But in order for repentance to work in the sinner's heart, there must first be a preparatory work
- There must be first a conviction of sin, and a godly sorrow for it, in order for the sinner to repent of it
- Conviction has been defined as "the attainment of a sense of sin and a need of salvation through the work of the Holy Spirit."
- We use this word in different ways today, as when someone has a strong belief about something, they have "conviction", or when a court finds a criminal guilty, a "conviction" is pronounced
- In the Scriptural use, it is the guilt pronounced and felt within a person's own heart.
- *"The meaning of conviction as a law term is being found guilty. In common language it means being persuaded or convinced. In theology it means being condemned at the bar of one's own conscience as a sinner in view of the law of God. It is the antecedent to repentance, and is often accompanied by a painful sense of exposure to God's wrath. It is the work of the Holy Spirit, showing the heinousness of sin and the soul's exposure to divine wrath. The means of conviction are various: Gospel truth, the law read or heard, reflection, calamity, etc. It often comes suddenly and may be stifled, as it surely is, if not heeded."* (Unger's Bible Dictionary)

I. MAN'S OBLIVATION TO THE CORRUPTION OF SIN

- A. In our natural state, we are ignorant to the degree of our sin before God
 1. The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God" (1 Corinthians 2:14)
 2. All of us enter this world spiritually dead – estranged from God through sin, and insensible to our state (Ephesians 2:1)
 3. The great difficulty we face in evangelism is not so much in getting sinners saved, it is in getting sinners *lost*
 4. Most people are in a stupor of ignorance concerning their spiritual condition (Proverbs 20:6)

5. Like Christian in Pilgrim's Progress, the great burden of sin people carry on their backs is unknown to them, until the Holy Spirit awakens them to the fact
- B. Man is content to remain in this state of ignorance to sin
1. To acknowledge our sin is to overthrow our pride and self-righteousness
 2. It is to cease from self-love, and to begin self-loathing
 3. We like to feel good about ourselves, not see ourselves as evil
 4. It is painful and humiliating to have our sins brought to light
- C. Satan desires to keep man ignorant of his sin (2 Corinthians 4:4)

II. GOD'S OPERATION OF THE CONVICTION OF SIN

- A. Conviction is the opening of the eyes
1. Christ came "that they which see not, might see" (John 9:39; cf. Revelation 3:18)
 2. The light of the gospel penetrates and overcomes the spiritual blindness of the lost (2 Corinthians 4:4)
- B. Conviction is the ploughing of the heart
1. The hard, fallow ground of the unregenerate sinner must be ploughed up by conviction and repentance in order for the seed of the gospel to bear fruit (Jeremiah 4:3)
 2. The seed that falls on stony ground has no root (Mark 4:16-17)
 3. *"The way the Spirit of God takes, is like that we take in preparing the ground: do you think any farmer would have a crop of corn next year unless they plow now; and you may as well expect a crop of corn on unplowed ground, as a crop of grace, until the soul is convinced of its being undone without a Saviour"* – George Whitefield (1714-1770)
- C. In conviction the heart is "cut" and "pricked" (Acts 2:37; 5:33; 7:54)
- D. It is the Spirit's ministry to reprove (convict) the world of sin, righteousness and judgment
1. The word translated "reprove" (*elegxei*) is also translated as convict and convince
 2. The Spirit has "striven" with sinful man in this way since the fall (Genesis 6:3)
 3. "Holy Ghost conviction" is the only conviction that brings forth true repentance

- E. God uses the law to bring the conviction of sin
1. The law converts the soul, and makes wise the simple (Psalm 19:7)
 2. By the law is the knowledge of sin (Romans 3:20)
 3. The law and commandment shatters false views of our own righteousness, and shows us our true state before God – dead in sin, and condemned before him (Romans 7:9-11)
 4. “For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12)
 5. This shows the vital importance of using the law in evangelism
 6. *“It is a great mistake to give a man who has not been convicted of sin certain passages that were never meant for him. The Law is what he needs...Do not offer the consolation of the Gospel until he sees and knows he is guilty before God. We must give enough of the Law to take away all self-righteousness. I pity the man who preaches only one side of truth - always the gospel and never the Law”* (D.L. Moody)
- F. The Spirit awakens the conscience of man to discern good and evil
1. “Conscience” literally means “with knowledge”
 2. God has given man a conscience as a “law written in the heart” by which conviction of sin takes place (Romans 2:15)

III. OUR OBLIGATION TO CONFESSION OF SIN

- A. When conviction of sin comes, most sinners respond wrongly
1. They walk away from Christ and his penetrating light (John 8:7-9; Mark 10:22; John 3:19-21)
 2. Many there are who prefer darkness and denial to the light of reality
 3. They resist the strivings of the Holy Ghost (Acts 7:51)
 4. They resist the call of Christ (Matthew 23:37)
 5. They become angry and hostile to the preachers who expose their sin (Acts 5:33; 7:54)
- B. Other sinners respond rightly
1. They respond with “an honest and good heart” (Luke 8:15)
 2. They cry, “What shall we do?” (Acts 2:37)

3. They flee to Christ for mercy (Acts 2:41)
- C. The contrite sinner takes *personal* responsibility, when the sin is exposed
1. He does not say, like Adam, "The woman...she gave me of the tree" (Genesis 3:12)
 2. He does not say, like Eve, "The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat" (Genesis 3:13)
 3. He does not say, like Aaron, "the people...they are set on mischief" (Exodus 32:22-25)
 4. He does not say, like King Saul, "But the people took of the spoil" (1 Samuel 15:21)
 5. He says like David, "I have sinned" (2 Samuel 12:13)
 6. He says like the Prodigal, "I have sinned" (Luke 15:21)
 7. He says, like the publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner" (Luke 18:13)

CONCLUSION

1. Without conviction of sin, you cannot be saved
2. Ask yourself, Have I come to a true knowledge of the fact:
 - ✓ That I am a sinner – even the *chief* of sinners
 - ✓ That I am condemned
 - ✓ That I am helpless to deliver myself
3. Do you feel that perhaps you are a sinner of some degree, but have you solicited God in prayer to show you the true state of your wicked heart?
4. Will you pray with David, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." (Psalm 139:23-24)
5. In our evangelism we must be careful to allow God to work conviction in the hearts of sinners
6. *"Where there is genuine conviction of sin it is not necessary to urge, coax or press in the energy of the flesh; sinners will come without being forced; they will come because they must. If we are to get Holy Spirit Fruit, God must prepare the ground; the Holy Spirit must convict of sin before men can truly believe. It is right to tell people to believe when God has done His work in their hearts, but first they must feel their need. Let us wait until the Spirit of God has done his part before we say, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.'"* (Oswald J. Smith)