

## Conviction

In past few articles, we have looked at the comforting nature of the Holy Spirit's message from God to us. There is love for, and understanding of, our humanity expressed, and assurance given of an eternal home prepared for God's children. There is also a teaching and correctional nature to the Spirit that leads us to examine our lives in the light of God's will. It is that duty, which the Father has delegated to the Spirit, that we often forget to be thankful for and sometimes ignore.

The Word convict, used in the New Testament, has both the verb and noun forms. For the verb, the Word declares guilt based upon observed evidence compared to a standard. For the noun, it identifies the person as being guilty of a criminal offense and serving a sentence of imprisonment. The word conviction carries the same suggestion of guilt but also has a meaning that may be good or bad. It describes a person's firmly held belief or opinion on a topic.

A person's conviction is the first stage of repentance and occurs when the evil nature of sin has been made known and proves that the person is guilty. The most apparent Old Testament example of conviction is Psalm 51. David, seeing his sin pointed out by Nathan the prophet, is overwhelmed with sorrow for his crime and cries out to God for merciful judgment. The message Nathan gave to David was provided by the Holy Spirit, *"for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God"* (2 Peter 1:21).

In the New Testament, the central passage bearing on the subject of conviction is John 16:7-11. In this passage, Jesus says that when the Holy Spirit comes *that He "Will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment"* (John 16:8). The same work through Nathan to David is accomplished through the followers of Christ to the world. The work of conviction is that the Holy Spirit addresses the heart of the guilty through the gospel. The Word of God shows how inadequate human standards of righteousness are and the extent of separation from God because of sin. The Word then causes the conviction of sin to lead to godly repentance.

In discussions of the Gospel Plan of Salvation, we talk of hearing, believing, repenting, confessing, baptism, and living faithfully until death. But to move from belief to repentance requires the conviction of the Holy Spirit. We can see the result of such conviction in the cases of people turning from the world to Christ in the Book of Acts.

In the first sermon preached, as recorded in Acts chapter two, Peter used the testimony of David and the prophets to accuse and convict those present in Jerusalem of crucifying the one that God had made both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:14-36). The result of bringing their action under the light of scripture caused a change in the guilty ones. *"Now when they heard this, they were **pierced to the heart**, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brethren, what shall we do?'"* (Acts 2:37). The Word translated pierced carries the idea "to metaphorically pain the mind sharply." The words severely wounded them in their consciences. The words of the Spirit pointed out their sin, showed them proof of their guilt, and they convicted themselves of their sin.

Paul saw Jesus as he traveled to Damascus to arrest the followers of Jesus. The vision instantly convicted him of his sin, the persecution of Christ by persecuting His followers. But Paul was not saved by that conviction. The conviction of his misplaced faith caused him to make significant changes in his life. He obeyed the command to go to the city. He was in a sorrowful, repentant

condition when Ananias came to him and told him to be baptized. Paul obeyed, was baptized for the forgiveness of his sins, and became the Apostle to the gentiles. Paul heard, was convicted, he repented, and obeyed.

Jude wrote that God sent His messengers *"to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their ungodly deeds which they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him"* (Jude 1:15). In the Old Testament, that might mean foreign peoples or prophets sent to His unfaithful children. In the New Testament, the work of the Holy Spirit provides *"teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness"* (2 Timothy 3:16). A study of the Bible will give the same results that the Apostle's sermons did in Acts 2. The study of the Bible will cause the guilty person to recognize their guilt, and the conviction will cause them to seek the mercy offered through Christ.

Often when we discuss faith, we turn to the Hebrew writer, *"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen"* (Hebrews 11:1). In this verse, conviction expresses the good sense of an unshakable understanding of the evidence presented in God's Word. The words of God's Son (Hebrews 1:2-3), delivered by the Holy Spirit to the writers of the New Testament:

- Convict us of sins,
- Show us how to turn from sin to Christ, and
- Lead us on to our heavenly home.