

Conviction -- Concluded

by Harmon A. Baldwin

To obtain a profound and abiding understanding of your own heart and its depravity, and to bring about a change in your life, you must pray earnestly, examine the workings of your soul, and submit to the worst revelations about yourself.

Scripture: Psalm 51:10, Psalm 139:23, Proverbs 28:13, 2 Corinthians 7:10, Galatians 5:16, Philippians 2:3, Hebrews 4:12, James 1:5, 1 Peter 5:6, 1 John 1:9

Topics: "Heart Purity", "Sincere Repentance"

Description

Harmon A. Baldwin preaches about the importance of seeking God's light to reveal the depths of depravity within our hearts. He emphasizes the need for earnest prayer, fasting, and a determined effort to obtain wisdom and self-revelation from God. Baldwin encourages believers to hold their hearts open to receive God's light, to examine their souls prayerfully, and to be honest in identifying and addressing sinful tendencies. He highlights the significance of deep self-examination, sincere repentance, and the continuous pursuit of purity of heart and life through God's grace.

Transcript

Reader, if clear light has not shone on your heart and revealed the depths of depravity still lurking there, you can undoubtedly obtain such light by following carefully these rules:

1. Pray that God may reveal to you your own heart. He has told us that if we lacked wisdom, we are to ask of him and he will give "liberally," and not upbraid us for our ignorance. Pray earnestly. Wrestle with God. If matters seem hard to unravel, fast and pray. Be determined that you will obtain. Take no denial. Do not slack your efforts, for if you do, you may lose all the ground you have attained.

"Pray -- Oh pray," says Dr. Peck,

that he will deign to come to your aid. Invite him as your friend -- your welcome guest. Beseech him to increase the light that reveals the defect of your Christian state, and uncovers to your view the most secret wrongs within you. Invite even the anguish, if need be, of the most humiliating self-exposures, and shrink not from the rod of correction, which shall drive you to the bosom of your only protector. Need you again be reminded how far beneath your privilege you have lived -- how numerous have been the evidences of your internal depravity -- how frequent have been your failures to honor God and advance the interests of his cause? Prayer -- humble, believing, mighty prayer -- prayer from your heart -- prayer as you walk the

streets -- prayer with your brethren, and especially prayer In the closet -- long-continued, inquiring, struggling prayer, will help you to know yourself better -- will bring the special grace of God to your aid. In darkness, in coldness, in hardness, if it must be, pray until the subduing, melting grace shall be given.

Your conviction, to be available, must not be superficial -- must not be the merely ordinary impression, with occasional increase, that you are not what you ought to be. It must be profound, penetrating, and abiding, or you will never make it the starting point of successful effort to obtain purity of heart and life.

2. Hold your heart open to receive light when it comes. It will come, if you hold on in this direction. There is danger when one thus thinks of searching into his heart of an almost unconscious fearfulness of the consequences preventing him; a fear that he will find something he will not want to see, or that he will not want to confess. Brother, if there is such a secret feeling as this lurking in your heart, which comes to your view just long enough for you to get a glimpse of it, you have light already. That feeling itself is carnality, and that, too, in its most treacherous form -- carnality, afraid of God and skulking away among the bushes to evade inspection. Trace it up, and bring it out to the light; analyze it, and see what its real elements are; go against it, and be determined that you will have God's penetrating light to flash through and through your heart, no matter what it may reveal. Are you in earnest? Then so is God, and God's word for it, your needs will come to the light very soon.

3. Examine carefully and prayerfully the inmost workings of your soul. Peck says; Again, we beseech you, examine your heart with the profoundest sincerity. Nay, shrink not from the revelations unfolded to your view. Submit to the worst. Whatever the pain -- whatever the loathing produced by the discovery of the facts, still invite this discovery. Secure it by every means in your power. * * * You will know -- you will feel in every part of your being -- that you are deeply depraved; that you cannot remain so; that you must be holy, or wrong your own soul, and wrong your Savior whose blood is freely offered to cleanse you from all sin. On this same point Fletcher says: Through grace detect these evils by close attention to what passes in your heart at all times, but especially in an hour of temptation. When you do anything, especially if it is out of the ordinary, stop as soon as possible and endeavor to find out what motive or motives have prompted you. Do not flippantly pass it off by saying that you did it for the glory of God. It may be you did, and it may be you did not. There could have been such a motive, and, along with it, a contrary motive, stronger and more influential than the right one. Look carefully and honestly. Force yourself to look. Nature will rebel, but "through grace" you must conquer. If you really want the victory, nature must be held to the rack by grace, in spite of its struggles and strong cries against such a course.

At first your motives will, as it were, skulk away, and you will have a hard time analyzing them. In fact, you cannot do it without the help of the Holy Spirit. They are deep-seated, and, as a consequence, they require supernatural power to uncover them. This is the reason why people hesitate to let the "thoughts of their hearts be revealed;" there is an almost unconscious knowledge that there are motives and desires hidden away in this store-house of uncleanness that will make the heart sick when they are brought to light.

Man naturally wants to know the best of his case; but the Holy Ghost is true to him, and will show him the very worst. This he will shrink from as long as possible. But if you want to be cured, you must let the physician probe the wound. The more you object and hold back, the longer your trouble will last. If you hold yourself still, the work will shortly be done, and you will rejoice in the glorious deliverance of the children of God. When you decide that the gain will repay you for all the seeming loss, and become quiet under the white light of heaven, God will begin to speak.

One small and seemingly insignificant act will, at times, be found to be backed by several motives, until you will actually wonder what was the ruling intention. To illustrate: You give a dollar to some public collection. When you hear its hearty jingle in the basket, and realize that it has already gone on its way, turn your eyes inward, and see what motives cluster around that single coin. You will be surprised when they show up something like this: 1. A desire to glorify God. 2. A covetous feeling, that wants the dollar for some other purpose. 3. A desire to be seen of men, that you may be applauded. 4. A desire to excel others in giving. 5. Hope of some kind of visible reward for giving to God's cause.

Again, you have an exceptionally free time in testimony. After you sit down and the blessing somewhat subsides, turn your eyes inward and you will see: 1. Spiritual pride that exalts itself above or at the expense of God. 2. Self-glory in your abilities and spiritual attainments. 3. A secret glory that you are freer than some other person. 4. Expectation of and reaching out after praise, which if no one utters after the meeting, you feel disappointed, and possibly speak about it yourself. 5. May be a little thanksgiving to God. Or, some one else instead of you gets the blessing, and now you find: 1. A feeling of envy, because they are blest and you are not. 2. A secret desire to reach to their measure in blessing. 3. A thought of the time you were as much blessed as they. 4. Complaint against God for leaving you out. 5. Perhaps a thought of some wrong, real or imaginary, that the person has committed. 6. Some gladness because your brother rejoices.

What an awful spectacle! This is the human heart unsanctified, yet possessing a measure of grace. This is the condition which the Spirit will reveal when the heart is thrown open for his light to penetrate.

To promote this deeper knowledge of the workings of his own soul, that wonderful man of God, Jonathan Edwards, among a number of other rules, held himself to the following:

Resolved: Frequently to take some deliberate action, which seems most unlikely to be done for the glory of God, and trace it back to the original intention, designs, and ends of it; and, if I find it not to be for God's glory, to repudiate it as a breach of the fourth resolution [not to the glory of God].

Resolved: Whenever I do any conspicuously evil action, to trace it back till I come to the original cause; and then, both carefully endeavor to do so no more, and to fight and pray with all my might against the original of it.

Resolved: To examine carefully and constantly what that one thing in me is which causes me in the least to doubt the love of God, and to direct all my forces against it.

Resolved: Never to say anything at all against anybody, but when it is perfectly agreeable to the highest degree of Christian honor, and of love to mankind; agreeable to the lowest humility and sense of my own faults and failings; and agreeable to the golden rule; often when I have said anything against any one, to bring it to, and try it strictly by the test of this resolution.

Resolved: To inquire every night, as I am going to bed, wherein I have been negligent; what sin I have committed; and, wherein I have denied myself.

Resolved: Never to do anything of which I so much question the lawfulness, as that I intend at the same time to consider and examine afterwards whether it be lawful or not, unless I as much question the lawfulness of the omission.

Resolved: Whenever my feelings begin to appear in the least out of order, when I am conscious of the least uneasiness within, or the least irregularity without, I will subject myself to the strictest examination.

When he subjected his heart and motives to such a strict examination as this day after day, it is no wonder that we afterward hear him testifying to the uncleanness and sinfulness of his heart in the following strong and, perhaps exaggerated language: My wickedness, as I am in myself, has long appeared to me perfectly ineffable, and swallowing up all thought and imagination, like an infinite deluge, or mountains over my head. I know not how to express better what my sins appear to me to be, than by heaping infinite upon infinite, and multiplying infinite by infinite. Very often for many years these expressions are in my mind and in my mouth: infinite upon infinite and multiplying infinite by infinite. When I look into my heart and take a view of my wickedness, it looks like an abyss infinitely deeper than hell. And appears to me that were it not for free grace, exalted and raised up to all the infinite height of all the fullness and glory of the great Jehovah, and the arms of his power and grace stretched forth in all the majesty of his power, and in all the glory of his sovereignty, I should appear sunk down in my sins below hell itself. Jonathan Edwards was a Presbyterian and at the time of writing these rules did not believe he could be delivered from these sins of his heart; but the plan he took in dealing with his soul would have surely brought deliverance if he had only added the belief that God could cleanse him. But since he did not, he had to struggle on looking at his bosom foe the greater part of his life, when cleansing was right at his door. But we have not so learned Christ. We know that when we get a sight of our hearts, and loathe ourselves before God, there is cleansing at hand for us.

By taking the course described above the disease of the soul will come to light. If you thus examine closely and honestly, you will find your heart reaching out for praise or preferment, or fearing the scorn or disapproval of others; an uncomfortable jealous feeling when others are praised in your presence and you left out, and a secret wish that you might be praised instead, and this perhaps accompanied by thoughts of the failings of the one praised, and a strong desire to tell them; pride of your own person, no matter how lacking in beauty, often complacently viewing your face in the mirror; pride of your attainments, your name, your family; unclean promptings -- the mind reaching out after unclean things, perhaps in desire to see immodest pictures or things gratifying to prurient curiosity; lustful glances, accompanied by secret desire for gratification that wars against the Spirit; impatient feelings when crossed or slighted; and, when any little matter goes contrary to your desire, a tendency to say unkind things. It is useless to go through the whole list, and the windings of sinful tendencies are so numerous that it would be impossible; but, if you are honest, and steadily and persistently hold your heart open before God, your uncleanness will loom up before your spirit's vision and cause you to humble yourself before him. Oh, for honest souls, who will be clean at any cost!

When the light of the Spirit shines on any one of these tendencies, trace it back in your life, and you will be surprised to find how many times it has shown itself and you passed it by not knowing what to call it. God will bring these things to your remembrance, if you honestly desire his guidance.

Take one manifestation of the carnal nature as an illustration of what is meant. Another person is praised in your presence, and you feel the strivings of jealousy. (To be sure you did not yield to these strivings; if you did you forfeited grace.) Get alone with God as quickly as possible. Throw your heart and mind open, and you will perhaps see that yesterday when Sister Blank had quite a free time you felt jealous of the praise she would get, or even jealous over the fact that God would bless her and not you. Perhaps you will remember that when church officers were elected and you were left out you felt so uneasy inside that you could scarcely hold up under it. The preacher calls on Sister Blank twice and only once on you, and how

uncomfortable you feel. Sister Blank has a larger house, more money, better education, better clothes than you, and, oh, how your heart burns and you have to pray much to keep the victory. You will see numerous instances where you have felt jealous of your husband, your wife, your neighbor's money, honor, preferment, blessings, till you will actually wonder how God kept you saved at all, and it may be you will be tempted to think you have not been saved; but hold still; this is God's way of answering prayer and giving you light.

Now you begin to see what carnality really is. This is light from heaven. Do not draw back. The sight will make you shudder, but press right up to the light. It is the blessed God that is shining. Press on; go ahead; hold yourself to the rack; and at length God will lead you right into the depths of your soul, where all around you are its vile tendencies, and you will see that they are in every move, in every word, in every prayer, in every testimony, in everything you say and do. How you will shudder and cry out to God! Hold steady. Let the light pour in till the whole brood is thoroughly routed and cast out. But here is where a great many fail; their spirit faints at the sight. But if you will be steady here, God will take you through to glorious victory.

Page after page might be taken from Wesley's writings to promote this deep knowledge of the sinfulness of the unsanctified heart. For your encouragement we will give one quotation from his sermon on "The First Fruits of the Spirit," which must suffice:

There is no condemnation to them which 'walk after the spirit,' by reason of inward sin still remaining, so long as they do not give way there-to; nor by reason of sin cleaving to all they do. Then fret not thyself because thou still comest short of the glorious image of God; nor yet because pride, self-will, or unbelief, cleave to all thy words or works. And be not afraid to know all this evil of thy heart, to know thyself as also thou art known. Yea, desire of God that thou mayest not think of thyself more highly than thou oughtest to think. Let thy continual prayer be --

'Show me, as my soul can bear,

The depth of inbred sin;

All the unbelief declare,

The pride that works within.'

But when he heareth thy prayer, and unveils thy heart; when he shows thee thoroughly what spirit thou art of; then beware that thy faith fail thee not, that thou suffer not thy shield to be torn from thee. Be abased. Be humbled in the dust. See thyself nothing, less than nothing and vanity. But still 'let not thy heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.' Still hold fast, I, even I, 'have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.' 'And as the heavens are higher than the earth, so is his love higher than even our sins.' Therefore, God is merciful to thee a sinner! Such a sinner as thou art! God is love; and Christ hath died! Therefore, the Father himself loveth thee! Thou art his child! Therefore he will withhold from thee no manner of thing that is good. Is it good, that the whole body of sin, which is crucified in thee, should be destroyed? It shall be done! Thou shalt be 'cleansed from all filthiness, both of flesh and spirit.' Is it good, that nothing should remain in thy heart, but the pure love of God alone? Be of good cheer! 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and mind, and soul, and strength.' 'Faithful is he that hath promised, who also will do it.' It is thy part, patiently to continue. in the work of faith, and in the labor of love; and in cheerful peace, in humble confidence, with calm and resigned, and yet earnest expectation, to wait till the

zeal of the Lord of hosts shall perform this.

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