

Conviction

by Harmon A. Baldwin

Harmon A. Baldwin's sermon emphasizes the critical role of conviction in seeking holiness and understanding one's need for spiritual cleansing.

Scripture: Psalm 51:10, Isaiah 1:18, Romans 8:13, Philippians 2:12, 1 John 1:9

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Sanctification"

Description

Dr. Jesse T. Peck and Harmon A. Baldwin emphasize the importance of conviction in seeking holiness, explaining that God does not forcefully remove the carnality in our hearts but requires our willing consent and understanding of what needs to be cleansed. The Holy Spirit reveals the depth of sin within us until we willingly exchange it for purity. Conviction for cleansing involves a clear realization of our unclean condition and a pressing need for deliverance, leading to a deep desire for a full transformation.

Transcript

God is not a thief, and so he will never take away the carnality of our hearts without our knowledge and consent; nor is he a robber, and hence he will not force us to give it up; neither is he a deceitful Being, therefore he will not cleanse us from it unless we know what we are yielding. When we see the fairness of his demands, and give our willing consent, he will give us purity in the place of the uncleanness he takes away. Hence the Holy Spirit reveals sin as far as possible in all its heinousness, until the soul gladly makes the exchange. As God sent hornets and made the Canaanites glad to leave their country, so the Holy Ghost with convictions like hornets, disturbs the soul until it yields gladly to the death of self.

Many people have wrong ideas of the conviction necessary in seeking holiness. Some think it is simply a knowledge that we need such an experience; others that it is a feeling that if it is not obtained we will be lost; still others that it is some strange sensation which seizes us and impels us toward God, or so impresses us that we know now is the time to seek; yet others that because God commands we are to obey without any feeling; and yet others an intellectual realization that we are unclean, and hence must be cleansed. But all these conceptions fall below the mark. Wesley, after a wonderful description of a soul's view of the workings of the carnal mind, adds: In this sense we are to repent, after we are justified (Using the word 'repent' in the same sense as we shall use 'conviction.') And till we do so, we can go no farther. For, till we are sensible of our disease, it admits of no cure. Again he says: A deep conviction that we are not yet whole; that our hearts are not fully purified; that there is yet in us a 'carnal mind,' which is still in its nature 'enmity against God,' that a whole body of sin remains in our hearts, weakened indeed, but not

destroyed; show, beyond all possibility of doubt, the absolute necessity of a further change. * * * We still retain a depth of sin: and it is the consciousness of this which constrains us to groan for a full deliverance, to him that is mighty to save. Hence it is, that those believers who are not convinced of the deep corruption of their hearts, or but slightly, and, as it were, notionally convinced, have little concern about entire sanctification. They may possibly hold the opinion that such a thing is to be, either at death, or some time, they know not when, before it. But they have no great uneasiness for the want of it, and no great hunger or thirst after it. They cannot, until they know themselves better, until they repent in the sense above described, until God unveils the inbred monster's face, and shows them the real state of their souls. Then only, when they feel the burden, will they groan for deliverance from it. Then, and not till then, will they cry out, in the agony of their soul, --

"Break off the yoke of inbred sin,

And fully set my spirit free!

I cannot rest till pure within;

Till I am wholly lost in thee!"

Such we believe with Wesley is the conviction necessary to intelligently seek cleansing -- a clear conception of what the evil nature is from which you pray to be delivered--its deep, deceitful workings, and the danger if it is not taken away.

Dr. Jesse T. Peck, in "The Central Idea of Christianity," says:

But let us not be superficial. Whatever is valuable in religion must be grounded in conviction. * * * Conviction is a law term. It implies that the accused has been arrested, tried, and condemned -- brought in guilty of the crime alleged against him in the indictment.

But in theology this term has a special sense. It is the work of the Holy Spirit, imparting to the soul positive evidence of its guilt, its depravity, and its exposures. * * *

But there is a conviction of inward impurity -- of 'sin in believers,' which is eminently the work of the Holy Spirit. Depravity of the heart, however concealed, cannot remain long concealed. Its first motions, as we have seen, are felt with surprise by the truly regenerated. They produce more or less of pain and exposure, but if properly resisted, they do not bring a feeling of guilt upon a spirit trusting in Christ. Further experience, however, shows that the life of the Christian is to be almost a continual battle, not merely with outward foes, but with himself. The recognition of these inward wrongs will depend not only upon what they are, but upon the habit of attention to the state of the soul, and the degree of divine influence secured by the cooperation of the human agent. The truly devout man will, however, frequently find his attention silently but powerfully drawn to these inward impurities. Sometimes when, so far as his consciousness reports, no train of reflection has led to it ; -- in the midst of passing engagements, and of other thoughts, the conviction will flash upon him suddenly, and he will feel like hiding himself from the sight of men, burying his face in the dust, and crying out for deliverance. At other times this sense of wrong tendencies assumes an amazing distinctness in the midst of spiritual exercises, and even of powerful outpourings of the Holy Spirit. This cannot be due to unprompted reason. Left merely to ourselves, we would sensibly or insensibly yield to the rising evil, and allow the conquest of the heart by its own subjugated foes. Whatever influence we may attribute to the associations of the hour, and the habits of life, they are not sufficient to

account for the searching light that breaks in upon the soul, and the power which humbles it to the dust. The great Reprover 'of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment,' is there in the faithfulness and authority of God, performing the work for which he has appeared among men.

These convictions, let it be expressly stated, differ from those felt by the unpardoned sinner. They are convictions of inward depravity, and not of guilt; they are connected with felt aversion to the impurity recognized, and a conscious dependence upon the Savior's merits for gracious acceptance; they produce pain, but not condemnation; they are not infrequently strongest in the midst of fervent spirit-pleadings for gracious influence, and increase with the advance of the soul in its longings after God, and in the elements of higher Christian life.

When you sought God for pardon, if you really obtained it, you saw that you were a sinner condemned of God. Your past life loomed up before you, the Spirit pointed to one sin after another, and, as he thus revealed them, you groaned and wept and confessed to God, and to men also, if they had been wronged. Your sins looked hateful to you because they separated you from God. But now you seek cleansing from the "inbred monster" that has troubled you all through your Christian life, kept you from mounting into God, from living as humbly and walking as carefully as you in your inmost soul knew was your privilege; and which, in short, has lain like a treacherous vampire at the fountain of your heaven-brought experience, and continued its unwelcome existence by drawing from your spiritual vitality, leaving you weak and at times almost helpless in consequence. Now you see its real nature, and are forced to cry out for deliverance. This is the rational definition of conviction for cleansing. It arises from the soul's intelligent apprehension of its unclean condition and pressing need, and is not a mere fanciful idea of some vague blessing God has promised to give.

But there are thousands of persons who seek, and even profess, the experience of holiness who have never thus seen their hearts, and who have very vague ideas, if any at all, of what real deliverance from inbred sin means, of what real holiness is. Many of them, no doubt, are honest, and, if they but clearly saw what they should do, would gladly do it; but because their teachers have led them wrong, they are in the dark, making a loud profession, and, in their works, denying the power of God. Although there may be exceptions to the rule, yet we are convinced, both from the study of the doctrine and from the history of the holiness work, that the foregoing type of conviction is necessary in order to obtain a genuine experience. Every method possible may be tried without this conviction, and because of its lack the soul will land somewhere short of the work of grace needed. Here is the great failure in much of the holiness teaching and profession of to-day -- a great lack of light on the conditions and needs of the soul. Faith is preached until, apparently, nothing more can be said; theories are spun until they are worn thread-bare; but comparatively few in the power and sweetness of the Holy Ghost probe into the depths of inbred uncleanness, and bring to view the hidden chambers of imagery, the Achans, the Agags, and the Ishmaels of the soul.

Every method possible may be tried without this conviction, but to no effect We knew a young man who at different times fasted and prayed for deliverance from inbred corruption, neither eating nor drinking for six or seven days at a time, but to no avail. At length he stopped long enough for God to speak, and was directed by the Spirit to hold still and not seek until the Lord should direct. Now notice the way God took to help a soul that was honest, and also what God considered his needs. For some time he went along blest and free, enjoying himself in God. Finally, one night after having an exceptionally free time in meeting, he felt the stirrings of self-glory. Immediately the burning finger of God was pointed at it, and the Holy Spirit said, "That is carnality." This was the first time he had actually known the real nature of the carnal mind.

This was the entering wedge. Back over his Christian experience the Spirit led him, revealing this outcropping of self; then the same with another manifestation, till clear, blazing light shone on all the principal phases of the inbred foe, revealing it in all its iniquitous nature. Now it was comparatively easy on his part to pray through, for the seeker saw the disease and its danger, and was glad to find the only physician who could heal.

If preachers would but faithfully let the light shine in this way, first having their own hearts melted with real love, until their hearers would actually feel the burden of their unclean hearts, there would be more who would obtain the prize. It must be acknowledged that this is a slower process, and that the natural heart shrinks from being thus exposed; that it will be a source of burden, and possibly of misunderstanding, for the preacher. Many times his heart will ache, and melt like wax in a furnace; but the actual results that follow will repay a thousand times. This is the divine plan, and the path followed by the worthies of a hundred years ago.

To-day, however on the contrary, the many so-called holiness preachers are holding up before their people the glory side of the experience, almost or entirely to the exclusion of the "repentance" side. Their sermons are stirring, and cause an eagerness for its attainment, but as they neglect to tell the steps necessary to be taken, and to show the people their actual condition, their efforts avail little or nothing, so far as real deliverances are concerned.

A favorite method with such preachers is to work on the fears of their listeners; preach elaborate sermons on what the experience will do for a person, and, when they get the people to trembling because they do not possess it, turn the battery, and tell them they will go to hell if they do not get it; that without it they will eventually backslide; that without it they cannot see God; or tempt their appetites with the sight of the delicious fruit of Canaan, and, when they are all wrought up, promise it to them if they will only believe.

If one retains a clear experience of justification, there is no doubt but that sooner or later light will shine on his heart, and when it really does shine, there will be very little need of such exhortations. He will be seeking it everywhere. If one does need such talk to cause him to move, he is either not clearly saved, or sufficient light has not been shed on his trouble to make him see his need. In either case he needs different treatment. Let the preacher or teacher thoroughly probe the seat of the trouble, and, if the man is honest, he will soon be so aroused as to move out in earnest after full redemption.

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