

THE CRISIS OF CONVICTION



In this article, we revisit an often overlooked and forgotten fundamental of Gospel preaching: the convicting power of God, an essential component in the experience of conversion. Conviction is that divine power that convinces and draws the sinner to Jesus. Thus, unless men are convicted and convinced of their awful sinfulness before a holy God they will never come to the Lord Jesus Christ.

“No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.”
-John 6:44

Jesus presents us with an absolute, the theological implications thereof, are often overlooked/neglected in this hour of seeker-sensitive, easy-believism. Sadly, the tendency today is to overlook, redefine, or ignore altogether the necessity of conviction in the new birth experience. If we fail to understand the dynamics of the gospel, and conviction in particular, we are ill prepared to be a witness for Jesus. Now, if conviction is absolutely essential in the conversion of souls, then we must desire to see lost sinners come under conviction, yes? This being true, let us consider what the Bible tells us about true Holy Ghost conviction.

FIRST, HOW MIGHT WE DEFINE CONVICTION?

John 6:44a No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him...

Now, we've heard this term "conviction" many times before, but what does it actually mean? According to Webster's 1828 Dictionary, "conviction" can be described as...

Conviction: (*Webster's*) The act of compelling one to admit the truth of a charge;

the act of convincing of sinfulness; the state of being convinced; the state of being sensible or aware of guilt. By conviction, a sinner is brought to repentance.

Thus, conviction is the experience of the sinner being awakened to the sinfulness, the penalty, and the only remedy of his sin. There is perhaps nothing in the human experience more disturbing, unsettling, and gut wrenching than Holy Ghost conviction. If it were not for its glorious end, it would be accurate to call conviction awful and terrible torment of the mind and soul. And remember, we, above all, must desire/have this happen to those we hope to win to Jesus.

AS I MENTIONED, CONVICTION IS AN ABSOLUTE NECESSITY FOR CONVERSION

John 6:44a No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him...

Our text irrefutably teaches the absolute: no man will come to Jesus apart from God's convicting power. Now, contrary to popular thought, fallen humanity has no innate interest in God, but rather, is predisposed to evade and hate Him. And thus, there has never been even one man who sought God of his own accord: not because we can't, but we won't.

Psalm 10:4 The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts.

I heard a preacher say, "the increased popularity of the occult proves men are spiritually hungry, searching for a God they don't know." Such a statement presupposes three unscriptural and illogical concepts:

a. Sinners can seek God apart from God.

Romans 3:11 ...there is none that seeketh after God.

b. Sinners can sincerely seek God and not find Him.

Jeremiah 29:13 And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.

c. Sinners are completely oblivious to God, His nature, and His law.

Romans 1:20 For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse...

Such unscriptural notions reveal how little we understand about the gospel and the new birth. No, men infatuated with the devil may mean many things, but certainly not that they are hungry for God. The Bible teaches that sinners, by their sins, are utterly alienated from God. This separation is not merely a difference of opinion, or a philosophical misunderstanding. No, the sinner has willfully set himself against God: his ultimate enemy. The sinner is a rebel against God, His authority, His law, His gospel, and His Son. Sinners are willfully separated from God and have chosen to remain in a hostile position of opposition toward Him.

Romans 8:7 Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.

We no longer believe this, the sinner is somehow, unconsciously seen as some kind of victim. And this one truth alone necessitates the utter need for the prevenient grace of conviction: they will never come, except the Father draw. Thus, as our text teaches, without conviction, no sinner will ever seek God.

THERE ARE THREE ESSENTIALS IN HOLY GHOST CONVICTION

John 16:8 And when he is come, he will reprove (convict) the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment...

There can be no Holy Ghost conviction apart from *the reproof regarding sin, righteousness, and judgment*. And perhaps there are no *three* topics more rejected in the professing church, and more hated in the world. Should we wonder why there is so little Holy Ghost conviction? Yes, the gospel preacher's message, if anointed and led by the Spirit of God, will emphasize reproof. And his rebuke will concentrate on the sinner's sin, his lack of righteousness, and

the judgment he will soon face. Now, the world and religious hypocrites hate such preaching, declaring it to be, “judgmental/offensive/counterproductive.” Over the years, the professing church, carnal, backslid, and seeking the approval of man, has been seduced by such reasoning. Above all, they seek to avoid the *preachy image*, bending over backwards to be non-offensive and make the sinner feel comfortable. There is an obvious denial of Biblical conviction. That leads me to our next point...

THE CATALYSTS FOR CONVICTION

Romans 10:14 ...how shall they hear without a preacher?

Without a true Gospel preacher there can be no Holy Ghost conviction to draw the sinner. Gospel preaching is God’s ordained means to communicate the gospel. And as we pointed out, his message, for the most part, will be a message of reproof: declaring the law to expose sin, lifting up Jesus to define righteousness, and boldly warning of the great and terrible day of God’s judgment. If we don’t get back to preaching the fundamental gospel message, men will never truly be drawn to Jesus. There can never be Holy Ghost conviction without Holy Ghost preaching (not Holy Ghost singing, not even Holy Ghost living alone). No, the human vessel, consecrated wholly to God, filled with God’s Spirit, declaring God’s Word is essential to God’s method of drawing.

John 12:32 And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.

Yet, the modern church, Biblically illiterate and carnally motivated, has thought to promote the gospel like a bargain rummage sale. They say, “if we are prosperous, joyful, blessed, folks will come to get what we have.” Indeed, they may, but this is not the right motivation (see John 6). Or, they reason, “if they see miracles, they will believe the gospel.” They apparently forget that Jesus, in the parable of the rich man and Lazerus, renounced such thinking...

Luke 16:31 ...if they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

Others say, “If they just see Jesus in us they’ll come knocking at our door.” But the Bible says...

Isaiah 53:3 He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

In light of the absolute stated in Isaiah 53 how can this be? No, as the Bible teaches, we must first GO, before they will ever be under conviction and then COME.

THE NATURE OF THE CONVICTION EXPERIENCE

John 6:44 No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him...

As we've mentioned, conviction is synonymous with reproof for sin, which produces a crisis. Holy confrontation always draws a line, gives an ultimatum, and forces a moral choice.

Hebrews 12:11 Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous...

Conviction literally compels lost sinners to do what they would never do themselves. To consider what they would never consider otherwise: look at the Greek word translated draw in John 6:44...

Draw: (Greek) *hel-koo'-o*, Literally or figuratively to drag.

It is a crisis, not a circus: serious, grave, and sober. A man diagnosed with cancer has some hard decisions to make, nevertheless, they are necessary. Likewise, the man under the eternal sentence of divine conviction realizes his latter end. It is no laughing matter. Conviction is, above all, loving, compassionate, and merciful beyond human comprehension: but to the unregenerate it seems tormenting. It is an affront to the sensibilities, a slap in the face of fallen human pride, and an offensive and brutal attack on sinful self-worth. And it will only lift when the sinner either repents or resists to the point of grieving God's Spirit.

FINALLY, THE DIFFERENT RESPONSES TO CONVICTION

John 7:12, 41, 43 And there was much murmuring among the people concerning him: for some said, He is a good man: others said, Nay; but he deceiveth the people...Others said, This is the Christ. But some said, Shall Christ come out of Galilee? So there was a division among the people because of him.

Conviction brings men face to face with the Biblical Jesus, and then they must make a gut-wrenching choice. They must either believe the gospel and therefore forfeit their own life to gain Christ, or reject Christ, so as to justify their sin. There is no middle ground, conviction either breaks a man or hardens him. For those who resist conviction reactions can run from insanity to violent persecution, but react, all men do.

May God help us to get out of the way and allow God's Spirit to drag sinners to Jesus.

–B.W.