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Conviction of Sin

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In the early days of my walk with the Lord, under the influence of those who supposedly knew what they were talking about, I came to strongly associate the work of the Holy Spirit with conviction of sin. Oh, I knew that the Holy Spirit had been sent to reveal Christ to my heart, and, somewhat later came to realize how unreservedly the Apostle Paul identifies and equates the indwelling of the Holy Spirit with the indwelling of Christ in the believer. Simply put, according to Paul, the Spirit is the Spirit of Christ, and Christ is the life-giving Spirit, and He is my life.

But, mostly, where the rubber met the road in my walk, my knee-jerk association with the Spirit was that of One who personally confronted me with the presence of sin, insisting that I face up to my spiritual failures and lack of total devotion to Christ. We young people, following the lead of certain Christian leaders, reinforced this disposition by regularly testifying about our most recent experience of the Spirit's voice, convicting us of where we'd blown it. "The Lord convicted me of this or that." Boy, did I come under conviction from the Holy Spirit about such and such."

Our religious rhetoric was laced with that kind of focus and presumption. I still remember, though, to this day, of an incident that happened, probably forty eight years ago as of the date of this writing.

I was in attendance at a meeting of a visiting evangelist, or maybe I should call him a revivalist. It was a meeting not in my home church, but my pastor was there also. He was a man who, though not able to teach it with much depth, nevertheless, had a very pure and primitive sense about the grace of God.

The revivalist really took us all to task about our sadly below-par Christian walk. He covered all the failures common to the average Christian (somehow he was very familiar with them all), with a passion that left us staggeringly remorseful and grief stricken. So, at the invitation, down the aisle I went to take my place at the "altar of

repentance". As is the case in that sort of scenario, I experienced an emotional release, a feeling that I'd properly acknowledged my guilt with appropriate penitence.

After the "altar call" was over and everyone had been prayed with, I got up and headed for my, then, pastor, thinking that I'd receive some assurances from him that it was a good thing that I had done. Rather, dear old Grey Watson (all us kids, at times, called him by the nickname, "Joe", the nickname he gave to everyone, particularly the youth. How he loved to greet us with, "hey Joe", and hear us lovingly respond in kind.

No ecclesiastical pretensions about Grey. He commanded our respect by the purity of his humility.

Rather than receiving comforting and reassuring words from "Joe", what I got was a word of seasoned wisdom, letting me know that I'd been prey to cheap sermonic manipulation meant to glorify a man's ability to get people to the altar and appear to be a spiritual powerhouse. Like I said, that was about forty eight years ago, and I still remember it vividly.

The one verse of scripture that is most used to support this emphasis is, of course, John 16:8, spoken by Jesus on the occasion, before His crucifixion, when He promised his disciples that the Father was going to send the Spirit of Truth to them, and, along with the promise, explained the nature of the ministry of the blessed Spirit. The first part of verse eight more than any other scripture passage provided, as it was interpreted, the guilt-inducing coloring to the kind of pietism that stole much of our joy, and yet in which we tended to glory. "And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin...." (NAS)

Just that first part of Jesus statement was used to give us that reminder-of-sin association with the work of the Spirit. In those days I was only familiar with the KJ translation of the verse, "And when He is come, He will reprove the world of sin...."

Now, I'd like to comment on that part of verse eight in the context of the some of the rest that Jesus said on that occasion, and in commenting on it, I mean to leave the individual conclusions that my readers reach rather open-ended.

Have you noticed that the Lord was very specific about who would be the recipient of this allusion to sin? ".....He will reprove the world....." In interpreting Jesus meaning, you'd best keep in mind that the following chapter, seventeen, of John's gospel, records these words in the "High Priestly Prayer" of the Master. Speaking of those who had believed on Him, He said to His Father, "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." Well now, what do we have here? That had never been pointed out to me. I had never linked those two statements.

Chapters fourteen through seventeen are a contextual section of the gospel of John, and you'd best get the flavor of the whole of it in order to understand any one sentence or phrase. Jesus promised that when the Spirit would come, He would reprove, or convict, or convince (pick your translation) the WORLD of, or concerning, sin. But we are NOT OF THE WORLD.

Please note how that, even the immediate context in which verse eight is set, emphasizes the difference. In verse thirteen, the Lord says, "But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide YOU into all the truth....." Sin is an issue in the Spirit's ministry to the world (this present cosmological system, this arrangement of things into a deviant working order and those who live in it and by it), but in respect to the believing community that is "in the world, but not of the world", to that holy gathering, He promises that the Spirit of Truth will guide them into all the truth.

In the same gospel, Jesus proclaimed Himself to be that Truth. What do you, dear brother or sister in Christ, expect of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the glorified Christ, to have as His subject when you hear His voice? Jesus said that He would guide you into all that He is, all that is in Him. So watch out, watch out, don't equate the voice of conscience with the voice of the Spirit. They are not an equation. Our consciences can be very religiously orientated in such a way as to put a "world" spin on the voice of God.

Read further to verse fifteen, "All things that the Father has are Mine, therefore I said that He (the Spirit) takes of mine, and will disclose it to you." He's talking "you" here, not the world, and wow, what a

difference, what a promise, what an inheritance. The word translated, "disclose", in the NAS which I've quoted and its equivalent "show" in the KJ are translations of a Greek word that speaks of much more than mere conceptual communication. It means to show, reveal, disclose and transmit.

There is at the heart of the ministry of the Holy Spirit to the believing community, the very conveyance and infusion of that which belongs to Christ into the spirit of the believer. When Jesus said that the Spirit would "take of mine" and show, declare, reveal and transmit it to us, he was promising us that He, by the Spirit of glory, would share what He possessed from the Father.

What is that? The Father's fulness, nothing less. The Father's outpouring of Himself into His Son, nothing less. The relationship of the Father to the Son, nothing less. The oneness of the Father and the Son, nothing less. "All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said, that He takes of Mine, and will disclose it to You." (vs 15)

Verse twenty two, of the seventeenth chapter: "And the glory which Thou hast given Me I have given to them; that they may be one, just as We are one." That's the ministry of the Spirit to the church, the conveyance, the transmission of glory from Father to Son to us, and nothing lost in the transmission. So, just what is the Lord's attitude toward the world?

Well, if you'll go to our message text, you'll find that He convicts the world, not only of sin, but also of righteousness, and of judgment. Remember, according to John 3:16, the Lord loves the world, because behind its present arrangement and order, is its real order, God's design for the world.

The Spirit convicts the world of sin "because they believe not on Me." All sin is essentially unbelief that God loves us and will effectively come to us where we are in our need. That He did, and does, in Christ.

The world is in denial about that. The whole sick system has to do with trying to forget, cover up, suppress and paint over its psychosis. So God confronts the world with its sin, not because He gets pleasure

out of telling people what sinners they are, but in order to move on to convincing it "of righteousness, because I go to my Father."

Yes, Christ descended into the depths of man's depravity, stripped it of its power, and returned to the Father with the task completed. Nothing more demonstrates the righteousness of God than "the Christ event." The world cannot receive the truth of such righteousness, until it faces the actuality of its sin. "The sin problem" is not solved by denial. Now there is a difference between the dimensions of truth (reality) and actuality. Sin is an existential fact. Christ is the eternal Reality.

Sin did what it does, bring death, Christ did what He did and swallowed up death in victory. No one comes to the revelation of the eternal reality in Christ without confronting the existential actuality of sin.

Jesus continued: "Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged". God got to the very core of sin and judged "him", judged the fountain head of sin, false identity, the counterfeit human persona, the non-person, the invention of vain imagination as opposed to the real person birthed of God.

He judged "the prince of this world". He declared him to be a liar, thief and murderer, and destroyed him, rendered him impotent and ineffective, and gathered all who had been deceived by "him" to Himself and pronounced over them, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."

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