

Conviction To Godly Righteousness

Conviction of Sin and Repentance

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Given 29-Sep-01; Sermon #524

Sunday morning, during our most recent visit to St. Louis, Evelyn turned on the television set to get some news. While searching for the Headline News station, she came across a preacher giving a sermon on an aspect of conviction. Overall, for the while that we watched and listened to it, it was a pretty good sermon. As far as we could tell, he was not telling any lies. But at the same time, the sermon had a serious lack in it. Something very important to practical application was being left out.

The sermon was full of generalities about the elements of conviction, even taking illustrations from the book of Daniel. However, at the same time, the message contained no details regarding what one should be convicted about, where or in what situation people were to be persuaded that they were right. It was just that they were to be convicted about the Christian God, Jesus Christ, and the Christian religion.

He never said once, during the time we were listening to his illustration, that the listener should be convicted about keeping even one of the Ten Commandments. He never once mentioned a single attitude that is either right or wrong. He never mentioned how certain we should be that Christ is our Savior. He never spent any time at all on slips of the tongue that cause hurt, poor judgments others have made, being offended for no good reason, or causing offense to anyone.

There was absolutely no mention of how convicted we ought to be that human nature is absolutely wretched and incurably so! He made no mention of how convicted we should be of our needs during our pilgrimage to fighting human nature and overcoming it. In addition, there was no mention of how convicted we should be about resisting the evil of this world.

There is a cliché that says that the devil is in the details. This cliché means that meaningful and, indeed, sometimes very serious parts of some situations are often hidden from the cursory view. This principle is often true in regards to faith and Christian living.

In the course of our life, we have learned that the details of a contract are in the fine print and they are often in a vocabulary style that even makes the lawyer squint and proceed slowly. In the same manner, the heart, a person's mind, the seat of one's conduct and motivation, is hidden from view and *always* in the fine print of one's

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conduct. Outsiders cannot read it, and so often, even the person himself is deceived by his own heart. This is because the human heart is so frequently responding to its invisible master—Satan and his horde of principalities and powers, those influences that dominate the world.

I want you to turn with me to Matthew 7, with Jesus speaking in the midst of the Sermon on the Mount. He says to those people who were standing before Him:

Matthew 7:9-11 Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?

Jesus' supposition here is general, but it is also clear. It is that human nature, though generally evil, is capable of doing good things from time to time. This proclivity plays a role in deceiving us into minimizing the fact that it is, at its very core, dedicated, consecrated, and devoted to evil.

Did you notice Jesus said, "You, being evil?" The only qualification He gave is that it can do good things. But He is saying very clearly, at the bottom line, at the foundation of, human nature is evil.

Let us go back to Psalm 51, to David's psalm of repentance, because he said a couple of things here that are interesting in this regard. When he saw his sin, he also saw his nature.

Psalm 51:10 Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.

David asked God to create a clean heart in him.

Psalm 51:2 Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

Psalm 51:7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

Note the four terms that he used to indicate the condition he was in. Purge, wash, create, and renew. It is obvious from David's appeal that he thought the heart he already had needed to be replaced. This is an admission from a man greatly loved by God—that he did not have a perfectly clean heart even following conversion. David was a converted man, but a clean heart must be created.

In addition to that, there is a somewhat misleading translation at the tail-end of verse 10 where it says, "right spirit." It is better understood as "steadfast spirit." The human heart vacillates between good and evil, confusing the person. It is only natural we are going to accept this as being the way God intended it. He did not intend this at all. David understood after his sin what he needed besides a clean heart was one that was also stable and was not vacillating between both good and evil. He wanted it to be good all the time.

In Jeremiah 17:9, Jeremiah says, "The heart is deceitful above all things and incurably wicked." One of the things it means is the heart is capable of deceiving us into thinking we are essentially good, but occasionally do bad things. The fruit of this in practical application is that it loves to think well of itself, but in reality it is always looking out for its own best interests and other's interests are not given the same serious consideration.

The second startling thing is that it cannot be changed, it can only be replaced—replaced with a better nature. So Jesus was correct, from David's point of view as well. Jesus did not say we are essentially good, but occasionally do some bad things. Rather just the opposite. Part of His purpose is to show that the essential nature of the human nature—its basic motivation—is evil, but we occasionally do good things. Sometimes that is hard for us to admit and it is very humbling to realize this, but we are coming along at the end of the day, as you might say, and it has been this way for a long, long time.

Genesis 6:5 And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

With that thought in mind, let's go to chapter 8, verse 21.

Genesis 8:21 And the LOORD smelled a sweet savor; and the LOORD said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite anymore every thing living, as I have done.

I want you to notice three things from these two verses. First, Genesis 6:5 was before the Flood and Genesis 8:21 is after the Flood. There is nothing in the second verse to indicate that a change in man's heart, to something less evil than it was before the Flood, occurred during the Flood. It was still the same heart. So in other words, the heart of all eight on board the ark still had the same potential to commit evil when they left the ark as they did when they got in the ark. Genesis 9 gives you the impression that bad things began to occur shortly after they got off the ark when Noah got drunk and a sexual perversion took place.

The second thing I want us to notice is in Genesis 8:21 where it says, "For the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." That is kind of interesting because it gives me the impression that it does not start out evil, but becomes evil. It grows evil because it is influenced in that direction and, for the lack of a better word, it absorbs evil and then acts according to it.

All of us are familiar with another cliché that goes like this: "Like taking candy from a baby." This cliché indicates something that is very easily accomplished—something that someone may have expected that they were going to have a battle doing, but it turned out to be very easy. Why is a baby able to easily give up something very pleasurable, but a child just a few years older is already reluctant to share desirable things with others? It is because in the somewhat older child, the competitive, self-centered spirit of this world is being absorbed and already being acted upon. "This is mine," as they draw the thing to themselves. It is because the world's values and what the self holds as valuable and desirable is becoming stronger and self-serving motivations are coming to the fore to dominate the attitude and the child's conduct.

Willing cooperation with a real young baby gives up the candy—very willing to cooperate, very willing to sacrifice what it has. But it is fading into the background now. However, it also indicates that the potential to be influenced the good way is also possessed by the newborn. It is not condemned to absorb the world at its worst.

Proverbs 22:15 Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him.

This verse gives hope that using the proper childrearing methods will work to protect a child from the worst of the world's influence. It also shows that following God's instructions regarding childrearing can even alter a child's heart after it has begun

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absorbing the ways of this world. Hear that, parents! A child does not have to turn out the way the overwhelming majority of children do turn out, and that is a childrearing problem.

I can remember hearing Herbert Armstrong say at least twice in my hearing (he was saying it to the ministry), "You parents are the best defense your child has from Satan the Devil. You stand between your child and the ways of this world." It is our responsibility to stand there and protect them from it. Proper childrearing is one of those ways. The other way is our own example and attitudes in the way we deal with them within the family and the way husbands and wives deal with each other. Very often where the child gets his **worst** dose of worldliness is right in the family—the family that should be protecting him.

Even though that child has already begun to go much of the way of the world in attitude and conduct, this verse shows that God says that child can be turned around a great deal. "Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction [standing for right childrearing methods] shall drive it far from him."

Let us go back to Genesis 8 again, because the third thing I want us to notice is the word 'imagination' that appears in Genesis 6:5 and 8:21. It is the same word that is translated 'formed' in Genesis 2:7 where it says, "The **LOORD** God formed man of the dust of the ground."

With that understood, what it is saying there in Genesis 6:5 and 8:21, is that what man intends to do is formed, manufactured, generated in the heart. Understand it is not saying it *has* to be done. But, it is in the heart that the formation of attitude and actions begin, and this agrees exactly with what Jesus says, when He said, "Out of the heart proceeds . . .," then He gave a list of about eight or ten evil kinds of conduct. It is in the heart where motivation begins. Human nature reveals itself in the details of our motivation for very much of what we do.

Altruism is a very nice word. It has a very nice meaning and it has nice effects in a person, but it is all too rare in a human and in human behavior because at the very depths of human nature lies evil. It is very difficult for altruism to be expressed. The evil is demonstrated in self-centeredness. Self-centeredness, including leaving even God out of the picture, thus dominates human conduct and attitudes. Satan's spirit turns us in on ourselves. It is that simple. It causes us to think (we do not actually think this all the time) that the world revolves around us.

I John 2:15-16 Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If

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any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

All that is going on in the world, all of the horrible things that are going on, is the product of human nature. **All** that is in the world—that is what the verse said. Even the good along with the bad, except for what God does and that which is actually motivated and done by His Spirit in us. I think that you will agree that in spite all of these horrible things, there are also some attractive and pleasurable things going on in it as well.

However, the world, like human nature in the overall sense, is evil. The record is clearly written in the history of mankind. It is evil because it works to destroy relationships and actually produces slavery of many sorts, thus inhibiting mankind from reaching its full potential. This is what self-centeredness does. It actually puts people into slavery of many sorts. Sometimes it is literal, as Israel was in Egypt. Sometimes it is a psychological bondage that a person is in. Their mind is enslaved to thinking about themselves all the time and people become mentally ill because the self-centeredness is so pronounced. How many people are involved in marriages in which they are slaves to a controlling partner? It happens often, frequently.

We are going to go back to Galatians with the understanding that this world, in the overall sense, is evil. And Paul agrees with John when he writes here at the very beginning, speaking of Christ:

Galatians 1:4 Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father.

However, despite all these things, it is attractive to human nature because our collective human nature produced it and feels comfortable as an accepted part of it, at least participating in some of it. This is where the real danger for us lies because there is a great deal more detail within this world than meets the eye—bad things.

At various times to this point in the sermon, I have implied three levels of human conduct. One, there is what one sees and does on the outside. This is conduct which is readily in view.

Two, moving within, there is the person's heart. This is hidden from view. What a person's thoughts are can be so well hidden that even the person himself does not even

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understand that his own motivations are essentially evil and self-centered as God sees them.

In Ephesians 2 is the very familiar third level that I want us to get into our minds at this time.

Ephesians 2:1-3 And you has he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past you walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversations [or our conduct] in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature [the essential part of our attitudes and conduct] the children of wrath [subject to death], even as others.

So we find in other places that the heart is automatically tuned into Satan's wavelength. Thus, his influence is always a possibility at anytime after birth. I think it is good to understand that unlike God, Satan—though very powerful, far more powerful than any human being—is not omniscient. His direct influence is only where he is located.

However, he also has a horde of demons generating the same basic evil influence wherever they happen to be located. They have had such a long time to influence mankind into their distinctive, destructive attitudes and thinking patterns that their influence is thus everywhere that one goes.

It is in Satan. It is in his demons. It is in our fellow human beings—mankind—everywhere. So it cannot be totally and completely avoided. Everywhere we go, under every situation there is the possibility of being subjected to influence that is coming from the world, or may come directly from Satan, or may come directly from another demon, or may come from a human who is perpetuating the same type of attitude and obedience as the demon would if they were there in their place.

It is a pretty scary proposition for anybody who really, truly wants to overcome and knows that they need an awful lot of help to deflect the influence of this foul spirit. The combination of demons and deceived humanity sharing essentially the same foul spiritual influence works to predispose all born to grow into forms of some kind of evil.

There, brethren, are the details of the motivation of man's conduct. Satan, the demons, the world, including all of the people who are around us—and two of them are hidden

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from view. We can see human behavior and human attitudes to some degree, but we cannot see the demons. We cannot see Satan.

Without God's revelation, we would not know what we know. We would not know that what I have just said is true and we would be virtually helpless before the onslaught. Because mankind is automatically attuned to Satan's spirit—his manner of thinking—he is a very receptive conductor of Satan's self-centered, destructive characteristics. It kind of makes it a scary world.

I am going to give you some specific details of what Satan and his spirit will show in attitude and conduct, what it will motivate. His spirit will motivate one to show passionate and quick anger rather than a meek and quiet temperament. One will show cynicism, scoffing, doubt and skepticism rather than belief. He will show melancholy and a sense of victimization rather than joy.

His spirit will motivate one to show an impatient, disdainful, and even contentious self-righteous intolerance of other's weaknesses, ignorance, culture, or beliefs rather than a compassionate understanding and thankfulness that oneself is not so burdened.

Because the heart is almost bursting with rivalry, antagonism, conflict, and competition, to best others in some way will be a constant companion rather than cooperation and collaboration. A person will have a tendency to be suspicious, doubtful, cramped, and narrow in thinking, bigoted rather than open and sensitive like a child.

There will be a tendency to be proud, cavalier, haughty, even pompous and dismissive of others rather than modest, unpresuming, and unassuming. A person will be driven to live with fear and anxiety-ridden timidity and foreboding rather than a calm and open friendliness.

Some strongly under the influence of Satan will abuse others in an effort to control situations in order to protect themselves from some perceived loss. There will be a tendency to be easily irritated and provoked, cross, cranky, touchy, and quarrelsome rather than accepting, amiable, gracious, and content with one's lot.

Human nature is given to instability, imbalance, inconsistency, unreliability, and extremism rather than firmly balanced, constant, durable, steadfast, and sound in thinking. Some will exhibit slyness and craftiness rather than dealing with open honesty, honor, integrity, and grace.

Some will hide talents, abilities, and accomplishments because their self-centeredness

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will not permit them to sacrifice any of *their* time for other's well being. There will be a tendency for mankind to be hard, cold, stubborn, perverse, hard-hearted, and bull-headed rather than kind, compassionate, responsive, sympathetic, merciful, tender, sensitive, and warm.

There will be a tendency to judge others critically and harshly while easily forgiving or neglectfully overlooking one's own weaknesses. Those who are being influenced by Satan and his demons are those who always have a put down or a cutting remark to make and it is always "in jest" that it is done, not realizing that what they are doing is elevating themselves in an effort to burst somebody else's balloon.

We could go on and on with these contrasts, but I wanted to make the point that it is in the **details** that human nature is evil.

You might wonder where I got this list of characteristics. I got them right out of the Bible with the aid of a thesaurus. All I did was open the Bible to I Corinthians 13, which is the love chapter; Matthew 5-7, which is the Sermon on the Mount; and Galatians 5, which contains the list of the fruit of the Spirit and the works of the flesh and did a bit of thinking while thumbing through a thesaurus. All I had to do was compare God's characteristics with the works of the flesh, or by looking at the characteristics of love, find their opposites, and put this together. Anybody with a thesaurus can do it.

Are there any of these characteristics that I mentioned that *you* are convicted must be removed from your character? Are there any of these that you are actively, resolutely already working on? To be convicted means that one is fully persuaded, that one has a strong fixed belief that this or that characteristic or habit must go or be strengthened, depending upon whether it is evil or good.

Does anybody here, because of your conviction, know—and know that you know—that you must follow through to do a certain thing? A certain thing that might glorify God in the doing of it and make God pleased with what you are doing?

Let us go back to Daniel 3. This is the episode between Nebuchadnezzar and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. Nebuchadnezzar is speaking when he says:

Daniel 3:15-16 Now if you be ready that at what time you hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of music, you fall down and worship the image which I have made; well: but if you worship not, you shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?

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Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer you in this matter.

They meant that, "We don't have to think this through because we already know what we're going to do." They showed that there are alternatives.

Daniel 3:17-18 If it be so, [that is, if it is God's will] our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king [that is, if it is His will to do so]. But if not [if He lets us die], be it known unto you, O king, that we will not serve your gods, nor worship the golden image which you have set up.

Their course was unequivocally set. They knew already *exactly* what they were going to do. Whether they died, they died. If they lived, hallelujah! But regardless, they were not going to kneel down.

Conviction involves belief in God and the rightness of His way so there is assurance, determination to carry through, and devotion, which is the ardent dedication to what is right to God.

We are going to go back to Jesus' teaching, in John the 16th chapter.

John 16:7-8 Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is expedient [or advantageous] for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.

In most modern translations, the word "reprove" is translated "convict." "When it is come it will reprove, that is convict, the world of sin." That word came to the English language out of the Latin. In Latin it means 'cause to see.' "And when it is come, it will cause us to see sin, righteousness and judgment." What we need to understand here is that this is not a demonstration of an intellectual belief or truth, but rather this word has in it the sense of 'to bring under guilt.' In other words, the word carries with it a psychological impact. It has an emotional wall with it as well. It is not merely, "Oh, yeah, I see that. Well, isn't that nice. I think I'll make that a part of my makeup."

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No, it is something that in terms of sin says, "Oh no!" It hits the person right in the gut! "I AM A SINNER. I CAUSED JESUS CHRIST TO DIE WITH MY SINS—not everybody else's—mine!" It carries with it a psychological impact. This has a much greater effect on a person than merely knowing something.

I do not know how many people in this world can tell you sin is the transgression of the law. I am glad they know at least that much. But has it affected them? Has it made a change in their life?

So in this context, that word has the sense of bringing one to a *full* understanding, with the emphasis on the word full—not just merely that it is "truth," or something that I believe. It has the sense of bringing one to a full understanding along with deep feelings of self-reproach, regret, sorrow, and self-condemnation of having done wrong. In some cases it is not having done something wrong but rather the certainty, based on God's Word, of the rightness of God and His truth and His way.

I do not know whether you recognize this, but this was the heart and the core of Jesus' ministry. What He was saying was that He was going to go back to the Father in heaven and then by His Spirit, He was going to affect those that God called in the same way that Jesus did whenever He was right in front of them, explaining things, teaching them, convicting them in person of what they needed to do and be.

Now turn with me to Mark 1:14. When I say that this was the heart and the core and the center of Jesus' teaching, He was carrying on a tradition that began with all of the prophets and came right up to Him, who was THE Prophet.

Mark 1:14-15 Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent you, and believe the gospel.

This is how Jesus began His ministry—preaching the repentance of sin. He did not miss a beat from John the Baptist, who preached the same thing. Malachi preached it. Zechariah preached it and Zephaniah preached it. All the way back to Moses, and maybe Abel himself, they all preached repentance—turning from sin—hoping of course, that God would bring conviction to people and actually cause and motivate them to make the right choices and to change. Jesus *never stopped preaching repentance*.

Matthew 5:17 Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I

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am not come to destroy, but to fulfill [or fill to the full].

If you do away with law, you do away with sin. It is stupid for these people to say that Jesus did away with the law. If you do away with law, you do away with sin, and there is *nothing* to repent of! Jesus was saying, "Don't think that I'm coming here to do away with the standard of human conduct."

Matthew 5:18-19 For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Without ever saying the word repentance, that is what He is preaching—*repentance*—because He said this is the standard we have to live up to. Of course then, Jesus went on through His whole ministry to expound and expand upon the Ten Commandments more fully.

Now until God, by means of His Spirit—which Psalm 104:30 says He sends forth—we have only a vague concept of sin and the blinding influence it has on humanity. Apart from conviction by God's Spirit, we will never fully see sin's personal inwardness, nor its universality, nor its awfulness.

I am here to tell you that virtually every failure to grow and to overcome is based upon a poor conviction of sin. I am here to tell you that every heresy has its roots in this same thing. If you feel that the Bible exaggerates its assessment of how sinful man is, you are going to feel different about Jesus Christ and His works, and in our relationship with God, we are going to be casual and unappreciative.

I believe that one of the major roots of America's problem in light of the World Trade Center bombings lies right here, and it is the reason there will be no repentance. America has some sense of crime and its effect, but virtually no sense of sin and its relationship to God, to themselves individually and the bombing. They cannot make the connection.

We have to be able to see that when ***I stop sinning, the bombing stops!*** Until Americans get to that place where they apply it *individually*, nothing is going to ***change!***

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We can only get worse and of course, the penalty, and the pain, and the damage, and the disaster will also be worse.

These truths need to be revealed. They have been revealed to us and that is why I said that what has happened in New York City and Washington is a wake-up call for us—those to whom the truth has been revealed. We can repent! We can change our minds. Until it is revealed, we may care that there is much suffering going on in the world and perhaps even in one's life, but we do not trace that suffering to sin and especially we do not trace it to sins we personally are committing.

The world has a wrong conception of the gospel. It is mostly thought of in terms of love and grace. That is right as far as it goes, because love and grace are part of the gospel even as love and grace have been part of God's dealings with mankind and His purpose from the very beginning because God changes not. But, so also is the reality of sin and punishment. God *must* punish for sin or God would not be God. Without punishment for sin, **righteousness loses its meaning!** Please understand that, because God must also be just if having Him as God is going to have any meaning at all to us.

What is wrong with the love and grace emphasis is they are limiting, standing by themselves, because nothing changes in the world or in the person until the person is finally, deeply convicted of sin as being the cause of all these massive problems—whether in the world, in the church, or in the self. I might add here, his own sins.

Nothing changes until we do. That has to be our approach—that it is my change that is going to make or affect the difference. We cannot wait for somebody else to do it. We have to do it. Unless a person is truly convicted of the seriousness of his sinfulness, his perspective of Jesus Christ is skewed, because his lack [of conviction of sin] will make one think differently of Him, less of Him, than what He truly is.

Christianity is not merely a better morality, a higher revelation of God, or a system of beautiful ethics. Jesus Christ is not merely a better teacher, a wiser man, an example, and a prophet. He is *THE* sacrifice for the sins of the world and our—my—personal Redeemer, Savior, and High Priest by whose life we are saved. His redemption and life as our High Priest are our *only* hope.

You are not going to make it, no matter how righteous you are, because no matter how righteous you are, you are going to sin again, and again, and again. It is a reality that we have to face up to, and it is only His death that can pay for those sins that we have not even yet committed. He is our only hope. If we think little of sin, it means we are going

to think little of our only hope as well.

So give yourself a break. Do you want to be in the Kingdom of God? Begin asking God for an appreciation of sin and what it is doing. If sin means little or nothing to us, our understanding of our obligation to Him is seriously lacking. Do you understand that **because He died, He owns us and we are obligated to do whatever He says?** Everything that He says! He wants no equivocation at all.

Of course He is merciful, but I am setting the standard way up here so we have something to shoot at. We are **obliged** to him for every breath of air that we breathe. We show our obligation to Him in our attitude toward sin. But if we think little of sin, our appreciation of Him and our devotion to Him is going to suffer greatly, and the tendency toward pride and self-righteousness is going to be increased.

The second thing the Spirit of God is going to convict us of is righteousness. This is referring back to John 16:7-8. First, convict of sin. Second, convict of righteousness. There are two things here in this term and we are going to turn first to Philippians 3, where Paul makes mention of righteousness.

Philippians 3:7-9 But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.

Paul is not saying here that we need not be concerned about striving to keep the commandments of God, because that would fly in the face of the very things our Savior taught—"If you would enter into life keep the commandments"—and things that the apostle Paul said. He said, "Does this do away with the law? God forbid. Does faith do away with the law? God forbid." Jesus said if we love Him we will keep His commandments. That is the response He is looking for, because it is evidence of our love for Him.

Righteousness comes in two parts. The first aspect of righteousness is a judicial one God makes upon the repentance of the sinner who comes under the blood of Jesus Christ. By divine edict, God wipes out, wipes the slate clean, and then accounts, imputes, the righteousness of Christ to the person, where in actual, physical reality it should not be, but spiritually, because of God's grace, He counts us as though we were

Christ.

Romans 4:5-7 But to him that works not, but believes on him that justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness [that same righteousness he was talking about in Philippians 3]. Even as David also describes the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputes righteousness without works, saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.

We sing this very frequently, usually around Passover time. It is number 32 in the hymnal. We sing that song.

Romans 4:8-10 Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin. Comes this blessedness [that is being accounted sinless] then upon the circumcision [that is Jews or Israelites] only, or upon the uncircumcision [Gentile] also? For we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness. How was it then reckoned? When he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision?

In order to prove this you have to go back to the events in Genesis 12, 13, 14, 15, and so forth, where this was actually acted out. Abraham believed God; he had faith in God *before* he was circumcised. Paul is saying then circumcision is nothing in this case. What matters is not the circumcision. What matters is the **FAITH**, the faith in the blood of Jesus Christ.

Romans 4:11-12 And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also: and the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised.

This righteousness of which he is speaking is an imputed righteousness that results from a complete clearing of a person's accumulated debt incurred because of law breaking—sinning. It is a righteousness that exists in fact, not because one has kept the righteousness of the law, but because of the combination of God's grace and the

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forgiven one's faith in Jesus Christ as his Savior.

This accounts the person righteous and justifies him so that he is then able to draw near to God and go on to perfection. During the course of going on to perfection through the mediation of Jesus Christ and his striving to maintain righteousness by keeping the law, the righteousness becomes real, in fact, through the experience of obedience. That is the second stage of righteousness.

In order to do this, one must be convicted of God's way of living; one must be convicted of the vision of where he is going with his life and why he is doing this. This is why we are commanded to believe the gospel. It—the gospel—provides the outlet for one's release from the guilt of sins from the past. The gospel tells us where to go with our righteousness. We have to be convicted that the Kingdom of God lies before us and that we are going to be in the image of God. That is why we are obligated to Jesus Christ. That is why we are required to do these things. That is why we must sacrifice.

So, we are seeing two sides of a triangle here. In order to be a complete person, one has to be convicted of sin and one has to be convicted of righteousness—the righteousness of God's way and where it is leading.

Now a triangle has three sides and so, there in John 16:7-8, a third side was mentioned. We are to be convicted regarding judgment. Sin, righteousness, and judgment—all three of them have to have not only a mental understanding and agreement with them, there has to be impact in us where the agreement has a psychological motivation to it.

Those convicted will also carry with them then a clearer understanding and belief of judgment, and judgment too has two aspects to it. We have sin, righteousness, and judgment.

I Peter 4:17 For the time is come that the judgment must begin at the house of God [meaning the church]: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?

We are under judgment. The Bible says, "All must stand before the judgment seat of Christ." Not everybody stands before the judgment seat of Christ in the same way that we do. We are being judged in a way different from the rest of the world. God is really scrutinizing us.

What we are looking at here is judgment in an active sense—the sense of evaluation.

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We are being judged as we live our lives. He is actively scrutinizing us and evaluating us, and sometimes this makes us feel, "Oh man, I don't want to have God looking at me." Oh yes you do! You want to have God look. This is good. This is in no way evil at all. It is a good thing. It is a *very* good thing that He pays so much attention to us.

God has separated us away from this world for this very purpose. It is God's intention to create a maturity in us and to save us. It is His intention to use each day to separate us further and further from our sins and from this world.

At the same time we know this is going on, there is also always the element of judgment in terms of retribution—a sentence being handed down, a judgment, as we must call it. A retribution that takes place beyond the grave for all of those who reject the creation, that is the spiritual creation, of God in them. They will face a final judgment in the Lake of Fire. It is our hope to face our final judgment in the resurrection of the firstfruits at the coming of Jesus Christ and to be found worthy to be in the Kingdom of God.

So conviction has three sides to it and every one of them must be in place for there to be overcoming to any extent. Conviction—where does it come from? We have already seen it is the work of the Holy Spirit in us. Conviction is the fruit of a close relationship with God in prayer, study, meditation, and application to the very best of our ability.

It is the result of striving to relate the things we read, things that we hear in sermons about God, about His character, His creation, and His way, and comparing them with ourselves and this world and its ways. It is the fruit of being open-minded and humbled before His Word, meditating on ways to find that we have done wrong or, meditating on how to do the right always along with a sense of loving evaluation taking place.

Too often our thinking and study time is in short supply because we are so busy doing whatever. God will not be put off as a secondary responsibility. If we take it casually, we will not come to know Him as He really is and we will *never* become truly convicted.

God is the most fabulous Personality in all the universe. He loves us with a burning desire that we be like Him and thus enabling us to spend eternity with Him. To know Him is to love Him. To love Him is to be convicted to please Him. We cannot love Him unless we spend quality time with Him.

So brethren, the Feast of Tabernacles lies before us. It is as good a place as exists at any time, at any place in all of the year to renew your relationship with God. Spend time with Him during this Feast of Tabernacles and make this a starting point for spending time with Him, quality time, getting to know Him better and better everyday of your life.

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So let us do it!