

# Conviction of Sin

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, if you are visiting, we are going through a series called The Christian Life, A Doctrinal Introduction.! It's taken from Sinclair Ferguson's book by that title.

So what we are talking about are those doctrines that we find in the Bible that connect directly to the Christian life.

We're not talking about any and every doctrine that we find there. Instead, we are talking about the kind of doctrines that connect, that have to do immediately with the Christian life.

We talked about that these things are for living. We have no interest. I have no interest in this class to give a seminary lecture where we just go through these things mentally and understand them mentally.

These things are for our comfort. These things are for our joy. These things are for our holiness. These things are practical. And when they cease to become practical, they don't do us the kind of good that God wants us to gain from them.

[ 1 : 11 ] And so we talked about man's fall and God's plan. Then last week we talked about God's call. That's his summoning us.

The Christian life on this earth begins with God calling us. Him summoning us by name. And so he finds us in darkness and he calls us into his light.

He finds us as orphans and away from the father's house. And he calls us into the house and he makes us his children. And so we are called the children of God.

And because God calls us that, that is what we are. So God's call. And now today we're going to talk about conviction of sin.

And so you see what we're talking about. We're talking about those, those kind of things that happen at the beginning of the Christian life. When we're initially called, when we're initially born again and awakened to new spiritual realities.

[ 2 : 17 ] And so we're going to talk about the conviction of sin. So it does happen initially, but I have a, I have a question for you. True or false. It's a true or false question.

The conviction of sin is really only at the beginning of the Christian life. Is that true? No, it's not. Conviction of sin is not something that just is at the beginning of the Christian life.

It perhaps begins at the beginning of the Christian life, but surely it doesn't end there. Sin in our hearts is like an onion.

Perhaps at the beginning, God takes off that brown, I don't know what it's actually called, but that brown papery covering and exposes the onion for the thing that it is.

But there are layers to onions, aren't there? And the deeper you go, the more you see that, oh, we have some additional layers here.

[ 3 : 20 ] We peel off one layer and another layer deeper down reveals itself. And so that is a picture of what conviction of sin is in the Christian life. It begins at the beginning of the Christian life, but it continues through the entirety of the Christian life.

And it really has to do with the fact that God is calling us to himself. And so this is where these doctrines are interconnected because God calls us to himself and he calls us to be with him.

In one sense, that's a final thing. But in another sense, that's a process. And so as we go through our Christian life, we get closer and closer to God.

We get closer and closer to his light, to his holiness. We see, we understand more of his character. We understand more of what he has said to us in his word.

We understand more of his love. We understand more of his grace. We understand more of his commands, his character. And the more we see him and the more we are exposed to his light, the closer that we get to him, the more we see of ourselves.

[ 4 : 38 ] And so because God's call to us is his continual call. The conviction of sin is something that's ongoing in our Christian life.

So as Martin Luther famously said in his 95 theses, when the word of God, when the gospel says repent, it's calling us to a whole life of repentance.

So as we are convicted of our sin, we are to repent of that sin. That is not something that we do at the beginning as a one time act.

It's not something that we do, you know, just sporadically through our lives. It is something that is ongoing. And so I think we should take you should take heart.

If you're a Christian and you're serious and you say, yeah, I am seeing more and more of my sin. That's the way it's supposed to be.

[ 5 : 42 ] That means you're coming closer to God. That should be an encouraging thing to you because God is not showing you anything that isn't there.

He's not showing you anything that is just made up. He is calling you closer to himself. And as you repent and as you believe, you are walking closer and closer to him.

So God's call begins at a definite time. His his come here. You are my child. He summons us by name. And so he was like that shepherd that we heard last week that comes to the gate of the fold and he calls his sheep by name.

And so he called me by name. He said, Jason. And I came. I came to him. But as we begin the Christian life, as we walk along, he keeps calling me closer.

He keeps calling you closer. This is his heart for us. He wasn't satisfied to walk with Adam one time in the garden. It was his custom to walk with his son in the garden in the evening.

[ 6 : 50 ] And that is what he is after. This continual walking with God like Enoch walked with God. Now. So the call is ongoing. Conviction of sin is ongoing.

And that's important to know because the Christian life is a it's a preceding thing. It's a it's an ongoing reality. It's this constant pull toward God toward heaven toward holiness.

It's a it's a process. It's a living thing. It's a growing thing now. And so I want to just pause right there. Especially since we have visitors and I want you to at least hear this, too.

And I just want you to ask yourself, how does that check out with your Christian life? Is your whole Christian life in the past or is it going on now?

Now, many people know that one time feeling, that one time event and where, you know, I was at this conference.

[ 7 : 53 ] I was at this camp or I was at church and it happened. And and let me say that's good as far as it goes. There's nothing wrong with that. But my question is, is it still happening?

Is that call? Is that conviction still happening? Life isn't just about birth. Life isn't just about birth. Life is about living. It's about going. It's about doing. Life is a day after day thing. And I trust that that's what it is for you. I know that's what it is for you.

For many, many, many of you. You are having daily, ongoing dealings with God. And yes, there is an up and down. But there's this ongoing reality to it.

And so for evidence of spiritual life, you don't point to something. Merely that happened in the past. Something that happened 15 years ago that says, yeah, I'm alive because that's what happened.

[ 8 : 57 ] You should be able to point to things now. You should be able to point to things now. For example, I was thinking of this.

25 years ago, I had a wonderful, wonderful conversation and enjoyable relationship with my grandfather. He talked with me.

We went walking together. We went fishing together. But that doesn't mean he's alive. He's not alive. Something that happened in the past is not an indication that maybe that life is ongoing now.

You should be able to point to something that is going on now. And so I want you to examine yourself. That's what the Bible tells us. Make your election and calling sure.

Make it sure. Sure for yourself. So let's get back to the conviction of sin. We need to start at the beginning. And I need to start with a question for you. And this is where I do want some feedback.

[ 10 : 03 ] And I want some answers. Here's a question. Then what is the conviction of sin? We need to start with some sort of definition or at least so we know what we're talking about. What is the conviction of sin?

What are some ideas or what are some things that go along with it? What do I mean by that? Anyone? There. Doing anything that displeases God or not doing what seeks to be God.

So that's what we are convicted of? Okay. I am. Okay. So then let's keep going. What else is the conviction of sin? What is that?

A troubled conscience. A troubled conscience. That's a part of it. What do you mean by that? I don't feel good about myself.

Why? Something is wrong. Something is separating me from God's fellowship. Okay.

[11:02] Okay. Very good. What else? Yes, sir. Knowledge of wrongdoing. Knowledge of wrongdoing. I know this is wrong. What else?

Sense of guilt. Sense of guilt. Well, that's related to what Mark was saying. That's related to what our friend here is saying. Okay. So you know you're a sinner.

You know you have guilt. You have this troubled conscience about the things that you have done or not done. When we're talking, think about in the legal terms.

In a courtroom setting, what are some words that go along with conviction? If you're in the legal setting and there's conviction, what else is going on? No. Violation of the law or standard.

Yeah. There's violation of the law or standard. Very good. And so what else is there? A sentence. A sentence of punishment. That's the way it's supposed to be anyway, right?

[12:07] That the law has been broken and the judge comes in with a sentence. The jury comes in with a conviction, a condemnation of saying you are guilty.

And the judge says, in our system, the judge says, now this is what will happen to you. And so those are all good things. Those are all what we're talking about.

It's to be convicted. It's to be declared guilty. It's to feel condemnation inside of your own heart. You feel yourself to be convicted. Sinclair Ferguson in this book.

Well, first of all, Sinclair Ferguson must have been a sort of unusual boy because this is what he says in his book. He talks about when he was a young boy. And in the U.K.

And since we have U.K. people here, they're probably more aware of this than I am. But in the U.K., when he was a child, capital punishment was still administered. And it must have been a much more public thing and a much more widely known thing than it is here because I think people here are convicted a lot and we don't even think anything about it.

[13:13] But they're executed here and we don't think anything about it. But this is what he said. I used to awaken when he was a little boy. I used to awaken with a sense of horror on this rare morning when an execution was to take place.

That's why I say what an unusual boy. Who's thinking about that when you're a little boy? But this is what he goes on to say. What could it be like to be roused that morning from fitful slumber to realize one's identity as the condemned prisoner and to remember that this was the day appointed for life to end?

That waking up. That realization that I am the condemned prisoner and doom is coming.

It's at hand. That's what we're talking about when we're talking about the conviction of sin. It's that sense, that driving from the spirit of God to say you are guilty.

You're the man. It happened with Saul of Tarsus. And Jesus himself said, why are you kicking against the goads? And that's a picture from driving cattle.

[14:31] You're poking the cattle with your goad. And Jesus is saying, that's what I've been doing, Saul. So what did Saul think about himself generally before Jesus came and started poking him and saying, you're the man?

What did he think about how did Paul evaluate his life and think about himself? What was his sense of self identity? He was a Pharisee. He was a Pharisee.

Now, what does that mean? He held to the highest standards of righteousness. Think about what he said about himself in Philippians.

He had every box checked off in his own mind. You know, that sense of, man, I'm doing pretty good.

It's when like at the end of the day, you have your to do list and everything's done. That's how Paul Saul of Tarsus woke up. He looked at himself in his relationship with God.

[15:33] He looked at himself in his standing and every box was checked off just right. He was good. And he said, ask for legalistic or legal or righteousness in regard to the law.

What was his estimation of himself? Blameless. You can't pin anything on me. But then God started speaking to him about his sin.

Perhaps Roman seven is talking about that where it wasn't it wasn't these these rites and ceremonies. It wasn't the the the laws of the. You know, the fathers or anything like that. It was the sin of covetousness, which is is a heart sin. So Paul. You covet. You want what doesn't belong to you.

And what did Saul do that to that God poking him? Well, he revolted against it. There's nothing that a self-righteous person hates more than being exposed to the fact that just maybe you're not as righteous as you thought.

[16:49] So he's kicking. He's revolting. He's trying to push it away. And it wasn't until Jesus Christ came in glorious power and said enough is enough and overcame Saul's heart that then Paul was able to say, you know, he died for me and I'm the worst of sinners.

I'm the least of the apostles. You know, all that legalistic righteousness. It's nothing. It didn't do me any good. It wasn't what I needed.

That's what the conviction of sin does. It exposes men's hearts. It's the spirit exposing us. Not to just our sin.

And this is important to realize. Paul turned away from his legalistic righteousness. And what did he turn to?

Who did he turn to? He turned to Jesus. That's important. Conviction of sin is always a two sided thing.

[17:51] It has to do with our sin, but it's also and probably mainly about convincing us about who Jesus is. So turn in your Bibles to John chapter 16.

John chapter 16. And we want to read this section because this section tells us what Jesus taught about conviction. And I think it's.

It's very helpful. It's very helpful. John chapter 16 and verse 7. And you know, this is the last night. And Jesus is giving his disciples all this.

This final message that is meant to encourage them. That is meant to comfort them. And John chapter 16 and verse 7. He's already talked. I'm going to send another comforter.

Another advocate. Another paraclete. Someone who who can come along beside you. And in some way, take my place while I'm I'm gone. John chapter 16, verse 7.

[18:55] We're going to read just through verse 11. But I tell you the truth. It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the counselor will not come to you.

But if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment. In regard to sin, because men do not believe in me.

In regard to righteousness, because I am going to the father where you can see me no longer. And in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

And so conviction is a part of the Holy Spirit's work as counselor and advocate.

It's part of the Holy Spirit's work of exalting Christ and bringing men to Christ and comforting men in Christ. After Jesus is gone.

[19:56] So this is a part of the Holy Spirit's ministry. The Spirit comes to glorify Christ, to make much of him. And that means that he must convict us.

It's a teeter-totter. If Jesus is to go up, we have to go down. And as Jesus is raised up, we invariably and always go down.

It's the words of John the Baptist. He must increase. I must decrease. And so as the Holy Spirit defends Christ and vindicates him, in doing that, he condemns sin and sinful man.

He condemns sin and us. So, let's just work through this a bit by bit.

When did Jesus send the Holy Spirit? It was on a single day. What day was that? It was at Pentecost.

[21:13] It was at Pentecost. I want you to think, what happened on that day? You know, so turn in your Bibles and your brains to Acts chapter 2, and Peter is preaching in front of all of those people in Jerusalem.

What happened that day? Jesus was vindicated, and men were condemned. Jesus was vindicated, and men were cut to the quick.

They cried out, what? Brothers, what are we to do? What must we do to be saved? And that's important because that is really what this ministry is all about.

It is preparing men. It is getting men to go to Christ. So, let's dig a little deeper into this passage in John chapter 16.

The Spirit convicts the world of guilt in three areas. Jesus says, these three areas, this is where the Holy Spirit brings conviction. First, in regard to sin.

[ 22 : 17 ] You see that in verse 9. In regard to sin, because men do not believe in me. Now, some people have this idea that the only sin that sends us to hell is the sin of unbelief.

And that's not true. That's not how the Bible paints the picture. Men go to hell for all of their sins. But the apex, the height of their sin is unbelief in the face of Jesus Christ coming to them in the gospel. The height of their rebellion is after all of their sins. Now, God offers them grace. And he offers them a welcome. He offers them a chance of rescue and salvation.

He pours forth his love in Jesus Christ. And the height of all of their rebellion is to say, no, no thanks. I don't need him.

I don't want him. And so, therefore, the Spirit's convicting work is to convict men for their sin of unbelief.

[ 23 : 27 ] Of continual rejection of Jesus. So, they're guilty before God. And they're rejecting the only one who can save them. And so, they are Christless and hopeless.

And the Holy Spirit brings men to see that. That not only do I have all of these other sins. I've sinned against his grace. I've sinned against the Savior.

And so, he shows them how great a Savior Jesus is. And how wrong it's been for them to ignore him.

So, it's a conviction of the sin of unbelief. It's also a conviction of, what does he say next? Verse 10, in regard to righteousness. That's a very interesting thing to say.

We don't generally think of, you're being convicted of righteousness. And we need to figure this out.

[ 24 : 30 ] So, in regard to righteousness. Because I'm going to the Father where you can see me no longer. What is Jesus talking about? Well, he's not talking about our righteousness.

Or our lack of righteousness. Whose righteousness is he talking about? His righteousness.

His righteousness. Whose righteousness is the Spirit convincing men of? It's Jesus' righteousness. So, 1 Timothy 3.16.

The mystery of godliness is great. And now he's going to explain this godliness. This gospel. He appeared in a body.

He's talking about Jesus. That's his birth. He appeared in a body. He was vindicated. He was declared righteous by the Spirit. That's his resurrection.

[ 25 : 26 ] So, we're talking about his birth. And now his resurrection. He was seen by angels. That's after his resurrection. Was preached among the nations. Was believed on in the world. Was taken up in glory.

Jesus' resurrection and ascension to the Father. Was his declaration. Was the Father's declaration. Was the Spirit's testimony. That Jesus Christ was righteous.

That he had no sin. So, the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Is the Spirit's bold, living, inescapable declaration.

That Christ Jesus is righteous. He is good. He is perfect. There's no faults in him. He is without blemish or spot.

Now, here's where the rub comes for us. What does that mean for men? What did we do with him? What did Peter say?

[ 26 : 30 ] At Pentecost. This man was handed over to you. By God's set purpose and foreknowledge. And you, with the help of wicked men. Put him to death.

Nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead. So, we had the Son of God in our hands.

And he was perfectly righteous and spotless. And we put him to death. That was our condemnation. But God raised him from the dead.

So, you see what the Spirit's conviction is about. He convinces men of Christ's righteousness. And in doing so, He puts the finger right on us.

And He says, But this is what you did. You killed Him. Now, even if we weren't there, and none of us were, we sing that song, I hear my voice crying out among the scoffers.

[ 27 : 37 ] It was my sin that held Him there until it was accomplished. The reason He is there dying is because of my sin.

But the Spirit raised Him up. And then He convinces men of Christ's righteousness and our unrighteousness. Now, that's not all.

The one who went to the Father is coming in judgment. So, the Spirit convicts men of judgment. Because the Prince of this world now stands condemned. Prince of the world, that's a reference to Satan.

Where was Satan's condemnation written and declared for all to see and hear? It was at the cross. It was at the cross where Satan and his entire rebellion was condemned, judged, judged, and judged.

And the point is, is if God condemns the Prince of this world, how much more the world? If He condemns the head, how much more the body?

[ 28 : 49 ] How much more certain is our condemnation? We've joined Satan in his rebellion. So, His time is short, and that means my time is short if I'm a sinner.

Because the judge is coming. Judgment is coming. The judge is on the doorstep. And the Spirit, in convicting us, convinces us of that reality.

I have joined the Prince of this world. He stands condemned, and here I am. I've joined His side. My judgment is coming.

Now, this is what I want you to see. Do you see how this condemnation is a complete reversal of all the ways that we used to think about ourselves and about Jesus?

It's not just, it is not just, it is, but it's not just, a guilty conscience. It is that. It's not just us feeling the condemnation in our heart.

[ 30 : 02 ] It's a complete turning everything that was upside down right side up. So, I once said Jesus was not worth following, and now all of a sudden I realize He is worth following.

And He was not righteous in my eyes, and I was righteous in my eyes, and now it's the exact opposite. And I had no fear of judgment, and now I realize Jesus is coming in judgment.

It's a complete reversal, see, of our pre-Christ way of thinking. And so, instead of us calling Christ into question, we are called into question.

Our status is called into question. The contempt and the indifference and the opposition that we had for Christ rebounds on us. And so, everything that was upside down is put right side up.

He was declared guilty. He was declared a blasphemer. He was numbered with the wicked, the transgressors, the rich, and his death, and he was condemned. But now, it's not him condemned.

[ 31 : 03 ] It's me. It's me. Peter preaches hard, unbelieving hearts who 50 days before or so put the Lord of glory to death are now cut to the quick and they see his righteousness and their own wickedness.

So, the conviction, when we talk about conviction, we're talking about glorifying Christ and humbling us. All that sense of, I don't need a savior, I can live without him is completely undone.

And now, I realize I need a savior and Jesus Christ is the savior that I need. Now, I want to get to three important questions as we finish up in our last five minutes.

The first is, is conviction necessary? Is conviction necessary for salvation? And the answer, and hear me out, is yes and no.

And what I mean by that is this, if we, if you mean we need convinced of our sinfulness and the glory of Jesus Christ and how we need him as a savior, then yes, the answer is yes.

[ 32 : 22 ] But if we mean, but the answer is no, if we say all Christians in coming to Christ have this agonizing sense of their guilt, where it's this hard, laborious sense of guilt, this is where we don't want to stereotype or to put the spirit of God in a box because honestly, not every person that comes to Jesus Christ comes through that road of extreme sense of guilt, of agonizing over it.

And I just want to quote Charles Spurgeon on this. Among the many thousands of souls who have been brought to know the Lord under my instrumentality, I've often noticed that a considerable proportion of these and of the best members of our church too were won to the savior not by legal terrors, but by gentler means.

I asked an excellent young woman, what was the first thought that set you really seeking the savior? Oh, sir, she replied, it was Christ's lovely character that first made me long to be his disciple.

I saw how kind and how good and how disinterested and how self-sacrificing he was and made me feel how different I was.

I thought, oh, I'm not like Jesus. And that sent me to my room and I began to pray and I came to trust him. Now, did she see her sin?

[ 34 : 07 ] Yeah, she did. She said, I'm not like Jesus. But what was it that made her see her sin? It was his lovely character. character.

Now, this is important because not everyone is thrown into a state of despair, into a state of overwhelming guilt. Some are and some aren't.

Listen to John Owen here. God is pleased to exercise a prerogative and sovereignty in this whole matter and deals with the souls of men in unspeakable variety.

Some he leads by the gates of death and hell into rest in his love. In the paths of others, he makes plain and easy for them.

So, some of you, some people, you know, they go through Dante's Inferno, all seven circles of hell before they find rest in Jesus. And others are like Maria and the sound of music.

[ 35 : 10 ] They come dancing over the hills right into Jesus' arms. But the point is this. They both end up in the same place with low thoughts of themselves and high thoughts of Jesus.

And that's the Spirit's work. So, is conviction necessary? Yes, if you mean that he has to be exalted and I have to be humbled.

but no, if it means that there has to be this personal, definite, deep, sharp, agonizing guilt for all your sin, there's going to be some of that but we can't put a measure on what needs to take place.

Now, the second question, how much conviction is necessary? We're going to go really quick here. How much conviction is necessary? Let me answer that. Just enough to get you to Christ.

Just enough to get you to Jesus Christ. If a needle will clear out some pus, you don't need the scalpel. But if you need the scalpel, you need the scalpel.

[ 36 : 15 ] The Lord knows how much it's going to take to get you to Jesus Christ. And so, for some, he does use gentler means and for some, he uses harsher.

So that's the second point. And I guess I want to say it really quickly. So if you didn't have this overwhelming sense of agonizing guilt but you are at the feet of Jesus and you're trusting him, that's fine.

He knew what he needed to do to get you to Jesus. Now third, what is the purpose of conviction? This is the very last thing. The first thing is it's to exalt Christ and the second thing is to get you to Christ.

The end of conviction is not our feeling guilty. That's not where it stops. That's what Jesus is saying in John chapter 16.

It is to get us to Jesus Christ and to make much of him. And that's why my ears perk up and that's why I really start listening when I hear a Christian talking about how bad they are in their sin.

[ 37 : 29 ] And that's fine, but if that's all they talk about and they never get to how good and lovely Jesus is, well, that might be the devil's conviction at work.

The Spirit's conviction is about about us finding God's mercy and grace. It's about us ending happily and resting in Jesus' love. And so whenever I hear someone talking about their sin but not about Christ, I feel like I have to say, brother or sister, let's get to Jesus.

Let's get to Jesus. He's more than enough for you. You didn't pass the judgment. He did pass the judgment. You're full of sin. He was full of righteousness. And so faith and conviction is not all about my sin.

It is finally and mostly about Jesus, the Savior of sinners. And so if your conviction isn't getting you to Jesus, I want you to make a beeline for him.

Go to him. Find rest in his love. And we can thank God that he does this work in us, continually, this work of conviction, because it ends us in Jesus' arms, and that's a good place to be.

[ 38 : 50 ] Well, we're dismissed.