

"BRETHREN -- What Shall We Do?"

Acts 2:37

John 16:8

INTRODUCTION:

These words are taken from Peter's sermon, in which we discover that the Holy Spirit brought conviction and concern to the hearers. They heard this and were cut to the heart. And said to Peter and the rest of the Apostles, Brethren, what shall we do?

It is not recorded that they were impressed by his learning, nor were they really stimulated by his ideas. Nor were they stirred by his literary ability. Nor were they amused by his good humor, his jokes, and his ability as an entertainer. But that they were cut to the heart.

They were pricked in their heart. This is a rare verb here which means to pierce, to sting sharply, to stun, to smite.

Homer uses it as horses denting the earth with their hoofs. Rom. 11:8. It affected the heart. What shall we do? Now this is deliberate. The sermon went home. They felt the sting of Peter's words and a compulsion to show us - show us what we ought to do.

Now this is what the Holy Spirit does.

The grand old man of Methodism, Dr. John Scott, Lidgett, came to write the story of his life. He had a long exceptional ministry. He chose the very attractive title - and it was typical of the man. Because he summarized what he felt that the many years of Christian service, as he looked back over the corridor of time. He took up his pen and began to write, the narrative of his

see what God can do. Now a smoother message would be easier than the kind of preaching that was done at Pentecost. It would be more comfortable, and it would maybe be more appealing. But it would be more along with the modern plan. But if hearts are going to be changed - they must be cut. They must be burdened with this.

Now there is a strong opinion today that we have not had enough preaching on sin and repentance. The law must be preached before the Gospel to awaken the conviction of sin. I think this was John Russley's famous strategy. That he preached the law in the strongest sense to search out hearts. Only as people really become convinced of sin, did he mix more and more of the Gospel, to reach the spiritual life those who the law has slain.

There really is no true preaching without the doctrine of sin. And this means, that to explain this, you have to be confronted with the holiness of God in order to see your guilt. We need to preach the moral law of what God demands and what our consciences confirm as being due.

Only people inwardly distressed by consciences failure are likely to hear the Gospel and are likely to do anything about it. Otherwise, we are casting our pearls before swine.

Carl Barth, in setting forth the passage in Romans 3:20 - that the law discloses sin. The law of God, which as the law of his covenant grace, calls men away from anything of his own righteousness, to repentance and obedience, unto God. He gives three reasons to show why this conviction of sin can never be separated from Christ.

First, because sin is sin in its purest form in relation to Christ. He asked the question where do we see the three moments of evil. Rebellion against God, enmity

life. The title was "My Guided Life". That was a testimony in itself. He bare witness to the fact that he had always been aware that God was directing his steps. He had a sense that the divine spirit steered him along his course. This was the reality of his experience.

Not everyone feels that. Not everyone accepts the possibility of such supervision, and such guidance. There are many people that believe that life is aimless. Like A. E. Housman, who said, life is a long fool's errand to the grave. There are others who say that life is just a mutle along the way. It's no thrill to purpose that a man wonders on the stage of existence for a few years and then those years pass by.

But there are other people convinced that we are all in the grip of a destiny for our own lives. That the Christian really is the man that believes this - in divine guidance. Isaiah said and the Lord will guide you continually. Isa. 58:11. Now the Bible describes this guidance as coming to the Christian by way of the Holy Spirit.

No wonder Peter, following this sermon, I don't know what it would have been like to have been preaching this sermon before a seminary crowd. But his sermon was something that disturbed. Because there are people today who join the church and hardly feel it. Their business associates won't even notice it. Even the wife won't notice the difference. Or the relatives will not see any difference. Not even a stranger would notice it. And perhaps God does not even notice this.

But there is more and more of this today being promoted that speakers should talk about subjects of good will, courage, hope, and like selling religion. But being a Christian is taking up a cross, it is making a sacrifice. And it is calling sinners to repentance. Now this may be out of date. But we need to do this so that men can

with one's neighbor, and sin against one's self.

The answer is in Christ. Because Christ, who man offends, is God meeting him in the flesh.

Second, Christ is the judge who (discloses the sinfulness of sin.) He alone is really man's rightful Lord and he has the authority.

Third, sin is shown as (not an accident) in Jesus Christ - but it is the truth of all man's being and activity. He makes it impossible to think that we are more or less guilty because we have committed big or little sins. But all sin - great, small, less obvious, were taken by Christ on the cross.

And the fourth thing he said was that (in Christ we see the significance or the seriousness of sin). How that it is measured by God. It was not necessary that God should become a man and that the son of God should die on the cross simply to deal with the interruption in the course of the world. But the seriousness and the terrible nature of human corruption gives us something of the measure and the fact of the love of God.

We have heard missionaries talk about this in regard to the conviction of sin. As Bishop Linton once who worked among the Muslims said that the appeal to this group in Persia - it was the person and character of Christ. And not just the conviction of sin. He says the sense of sin developed in converts but it was not the main part. That preaching the person of Christ.

This sense of need, this sense of sin, in so-called Christian lands. It was sin against God that we need to emphasize. And it is also the (sin of rejection of

the son of God - a knowledge of what was being offered. Before men really come to a conviction of the deeper sense of the term and we can present the Gospel blessing.

We have to appeal to the great sense of need that a person has. But no true and lasting experience of salvation can be had without the conviction of sin. We must have this.

For example, here is a man with a distinguished career in the Naval Air Force. He becomes an entertainer - singing with big named bands, and in night clubs. In Las Vegas, he met a young lady - a dancer, and he married. After a few years his life fell apart. He was drinking too heavily. He and his wife were fighting constantly. He was contemplating suicide. Then one day in Louisville, Ky., he and his wife decided to start reading the Bible. He read through the first three Gospels and was not particularly impressed. The resurrection especially was a stumbling block. But as he came to the conclusion of John's Gospel, the story of Thomas he identified with this doubter. Here is an honest man, he thought. He doesn't believe it either. As he read on however, through the story of Thomas, and his encounter with the living Christ, he was deeply moved. And he remembers turning to his wife and saying, "I don't understand all about this. But I am sure of one thing now, Jesus Christ is not dead - he is alive someplace and I need to find him."

Shortly after, he and his wife decided to go to a church one Sunday morning. Although neither had attended church for years. It happened to be laymen's Sunday and they heard a local businessman talking on the practice of tithing. When they got back to their motel room, his wife wanted to start tithing but he felt that they didn't have enough money to do this. But finally after some time of arguing and showing his wife out of spite - he agreed. And they sent a small amount to their old churches. One that he had attended as a boy in Mississippi.

And to her home church in Illinois. In a very amazing way, an income tax refund check was forwarded to them several days later. Just when they had run out of cash. Soon after he left show business and went to work in a hotel. A banking concern in Florida - there he learned to find God's guidance in prayer. He visually was so over-whelmed by the power of the living Christ that he entered the ministry. Now here is the interesting thing about it - he said, I believe I knew Jesus Christ as Lord before I knew him as Saviour. I understood the power of his resurrection, before I ever really grasp why he died for me on the cross. He came to a real sense of sin, and of gratitude to God for the atonement. But he had failed to come to Christ at that point.

Now it seems to me that there are perhaps two sides of the same coin. Without the knowledge of sin, we cannot appreciate Jesus Christ. But without a knowledge of Christ, we cannot appreciate the sinfulness of our sin.

Let us carry our discretion of this further.

I. CONVICTION OF SIN IS THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT - John 16:7-8.

¹ I will send him to you. And when he is come, he will convince the world of sin and of righteousness, and of judgement.

At Pentecost Peter preached that the spirit, and the spirit accompanied his preaching with a convicting, converting power. We must be aware that it was not clever or logical persuasion, it was not angry denunciation that brought these men to a true sense of their conviction. Now we must do our part, but we cannot do the part of the Spirit. It is not within our power to convince and to convert the world. That is the office of the Holy Spirit. Only his still small voice

can make a man say against thee and thee only have I sinned. Acts 5:32.

✓ II. Second, the Holy Spirit convicts of the sinfulness of sin. It helps us to understand our offense against the Holy God. We are able to see that we are separated from him and that quite often when people come to the altar confessing - they will say I want to pray God to forgive me of my sins. Men think of sin as what we do - not so much as what we are. But a man needs to know not only that he is bad but that he is lost. The Holy Spirit comes and brings the knowledge that he is lost, that he has sinned, and that he is a sinner. This is the deep sense of sin that is evidence in David's Psalm. He begins asking God to blot out my transgressions. Then he feels the need to have God cleanse him. And he goes on to reveal a constant thought - my sin is ever before me. Then he realizes that his sin is not only a matter of personal weakness. Or of social transgression, but it is a real failure in his obligations to God. Against thee, and thee only have I sinned, and have done this evil in thy sight.

His sin is not just a momentary lapse - it is a direction that his whole life has been taken since infancy. Behold, I was shaken in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me. He had been driven to the depths of brokenness as the understanding comes to him of what God desires - not only conformity in an outward act but purity in the inner attitude or soul. Behold thou desire this truth in the inner parts. So David convicted of sin - he learns what it means to have a broken and a contrite heart. Psalm 51:1-17.

Every one's life includes things which cause dissatisfaction and shame. But the bad conscience of a natural man is not at all the same as the conviction of sin. To preach sin means not to make capital out of the people's frailties - it is not a trick. But it is to measure our lives by the holy law of God.

Maybe I can illustrate the seriousness and interference of sin. The way it shuts us off from God and really prevents us from hearing his voice. Some years ago there was a great (underwater cable) that was being layed across the Atlantic. Hundreds of miles had been covered, a serious fault was found in one of the sections. The current became faint and uncertain. And the testing message sent from the shore end from time to time was not understandable. The fault was finally localized. The section in which it occurred was taken up and at last the cause was revealed. One small shred of wire had dropped into the insulating coat when the cable was being prepared and had forced its way through the coat, and earthed the current - grounded it. Communications were destroyed, over hundreds of miles because of one tiny piece of wire. In the same way, one apparently insignificant sin can prevent us from hearing God's message and receiving his guidance through the spirit. Cleansing is a pre-requisite. When we are right with God, then we may look for his lead at all times. And the Holy Spirit convicts us that the message needs to get through, concerning this one little sin.

It is just like Philip walking on the desert road in Gaza. He came upon the Ethiopian. Reading from the Scriptures as he rode, the Spirit told him to go up and join his chariot. Acts 8:29 we learn this wonderful story of how the spirit works.

The Spirit convicts of sin. It convicts of the sinfulness of sin.

✓ III. IT CONVICTS INDIVIDUALS IN VARIOUS WAYS.

Now the way the Holy Spirit may convict your heart may be different than someone elses. There is no pat formula. There is nothing 100% that we can say. But the ministry of Jesus gives us a clue at this point. And it helps us to know that the Holy Spirit works in different ways - in different lives.

For example, the self-righteous Pharisees in Matt. 23, we see there were certain woes that were given out to them.

On the other hand, he welcomed outrageous sinners, with no word of condemnation in Mark 2:15, Luke 7:36.

Perhaps, the way the Spirit deals with us may be according to our religious background. Some people live as modern pagans, in this day in which we live. But for the purpose of deliverance - the joy and understanding, I think the Holy Spirit convicts. There are some who go about this by trying to emphasize friendship and contacts with unchurched individuals. There is a youth movement which does this. Saying that there must be contact with those in high school. There must be informal meetings in a house. There must be weekly times to get together for informal talks about the person of Jesus Christ and his claims. And in this way move on to the place where the Holy Spirit helps with the need of getting rid of sin.

But the fact of sin comes to us when we magnify the person of Christ.

I think this is often true in young people who are brought up in a non-Christian home. Many of them, perhaps in high school, or sometime along the way make contact with a Christian friend who introduces them to the claims of Christ. Now, he is not particularly burdened with a sense of sin. But he is attracted by the obvious joy, and the great assurance of Christians. This was the testimony of the young man who in high school contacted some Christians. He thought their joy was great. He longed somehow to have that peace and certainty. But it was not until after he became a Christian that he truly knew the demands of discipleship. Did he realize how far short he had fallen.

On the other hand, there are young people who have been reared in a Christian

home all of life, they have attended church. They have believed in the basic truths of Christianity. But they have had long periods of struggle with inner turmoil. A tormenting conscience - before sinnerhood and the burden rode off.

✓ IV. WHAT DOES THE HOLY SPIRIT USE TO BRING CONVICTION OF SIN *(elaborate on this)*

Brethren, what shall we do? What did the Holy Spirit use at this time of Pentecost to bring about the conviction of sin in the hearts and lives of these hearers.

✓ First, the preaching of the word. I think that Peter preaching the truth - the word of God, was one thing used of the Spirit. It is like the writer of Hebrews tells us - the word is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of the soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Heb. 4:12.

By the declaration of the word of God, especially the Holy standards declared - such as the Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount which magnifies Jesus. That men are brought to cry out, Brethren, what shall we do? What must I do to be saved?

Is not my word like a fire, saith the Lord. And like a hammer that breaketh a rock in pieces.

Now this does not mean that we are to thump people on the head with the Bible like a sledge hammer.

In Jamica, the government employs women to break up rock for use on the country roads. These women sit by the roadside, not blasting the rocks with one blow, but tapping them with a light hammer over and over again, until finally the rock gives up along its flaw line and falls to pieces. So God's Word used firmly, persistently, and gently will break in pieces the hardest heart.

The Word of God, the preaching of the Word is used by the Holy Spirit to bring conviction.

✓ Second, living the Word in life. I think the Holy Spirit uses this to bring conviction. The lives of Christians. The Lord Jesus indicated this when he said to his disciples, the world would hate them - just as it had hated him. Because the Christian did not belong to the world, but had been chosen by Christ out of the world, his life was a rebuke to the standards of the world. And therefore he would be rejected by it. All this they will do to you on my account.

John is the way H.S. has of getting at the unsaved, is through those who are already saved - channels - (wives win unconverted husbands by holy living.

John 15:21-22, 24.

Now Jesus anticipated just as his work and behavior among men, and his life brought their sin to life and caused men to reject him. The same quality of life ought to be in his followers. And it would bring condemnation to the sin of the world.

How then can we expect the world to be convicted of its sin. Until they see a higher standard of holiness in the church. That puts a burden upon you - doesn't it. You, who are members of a church.

J. G. Machen said, if the consciousness of sin is to be produced - the law of

God must be proclaimed in the lives of Christian people, as well as in word. It is useless for the preacher to breathe out fire and brimstone from the pulpit - if at the same time those who occupy the pews go on taking sin very lightly. And being content with the moral standards of the world.

The rank and file of the church must do their part in proclaiming the law of God by their lives. That the secrets of men's hearts will be revealed and condemned. And conviction will come. So preach the word and second, live it. Your life will cause men to say, Brethren, what shall we do? There is something wrong with my life, when I look at your life, and I judge by the standard you live. And the Holy Spirit will use that to bring conviction to that man's life.

Third, the prayer of God's people.

This is the third thing that the Holy Spirit uses in the convicting process. The praying of God's people to bring conviction of sin.

Now remember the church people, the 120 had been praying for ten days. They had been in prayer - in a prayer meeting, when Peter preached the sermon.

Prayer meetings are dying out in our modern churches and somehow, so is real conviction of sin. I wonder if we think it is only a coincident.

I think the preacher not only has a right to expect, but a duty to demand God's people that they pray for him, and that he may give utterance and speak as he ought to speak. Not as a lecturer but as a prophet of God, as an ambassador of Christ. Eph. 6:19-20.

What was it that added boldness to Peter as a preacher. It was the knowledge

that people were lifting him up in prayer. As he declares Christ and defies sin - the Holy Spirit works.

Fourth, Lifting up the Lord Jesus. Now this is the fourth thing that produces the conviction of sin. When Jesus Christ is lifted up. And that is what Peter did on that day, and after doing that, men said - Brethren, what must we do?

Now the Holy Spirit is going to convict, my dear friends, by way of summary in three ways as we bring this message to a close now. In John 16:8 - he will convince, and he will convict the world of sin, righteousness, and of judgement. I want to consider these elements very briefly.

First, convict the world of sin.

He is going to show the world what it completely needs to change - it's mind as to sin and what sin is.

He is going to convince them of sin because they do not believe in me, said Jesus. The fundamental sin of all is unbelief. And the Holy Spirit is going to press home to men that the root sin is showing the world's inexcusable rejection of Jesus - unbelief toward God. *Old Gentleman, over 80 yrs. Burst in Tears - hand you preach, is there any hope for me, rejected Lord Jesus Christ who - came down to save!*

Now pressing home the truth about sin - the lost man is going to see that sin is not just an animal instinct, but here is a rebellion against God and what he has done against God. And this is the greatest failure that he is going to point out.

Second, convince the world of righteousness. John 16:10. The world is just as ignorant of true goodness as it is of true sin. Because Jesus is the

of perfect righteousness. This is the righteousness that God reverses the world's verdict and vindicates the righteousness of Christ.

Now righteousness is the opposite of sin. And the Holy Spirit points to the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus. Rom.10:4. The sinner is made to see how far short of this righteousness he falls. And how impossible it is for him to achieve it in his own power.

✓ Third, going to convince the world of judgement because the ruler of this world is judged - John 16:11.

Sin, that is chosen by man, and righteousness that is refused by man must result in condemnation.

The Holy Spirit now is going to convince men that judgement is to come. Because judgement has already come.

The cross and the resurrection handed down the full condemnation of judgement against Satan. And God left no doubt about this. And any man who claims anything else is on a sinking ship.

The lost man who is convicted of judgement faces a choice. Either he is going to cling to Satan and knowingly accept Hell, or else he is going to receive Christ and accept his wonderful salvation and the glory of Heaven.

V. 36
Conviction came in Peter's sermon when he pointed to the cross. He indicted the crowd in V. 36. God has made him both Lord and Christ. And this Jesus whom you crucified. Now this was a time in all humility when the Preacher humbly said, not we but you, have done this. And conviction was aroused in this way that they were responsible for the crucifixion, and they were responsible who sin hurt God.

It is our own greed and compromise, our indifference that nailed him to the cross.

Men and brethren, what shall we do? The Holy Spirit had convicted their hearts just like he has convicted yours tonight. Now Peter was ready with an answer for these people who had been pricked in their hearts. He gave them a word - repent. That is, Godly sorrow which leads to repentance. That which rolls the burden away from hearts is a contrite true sorrow, that changes your mind and your life. Turn right about and do it now. You crucified this Christ. Now crown him in your heart as Lord and Christ. Do this first and then be baptized, everyone of you. This change marks a break. The first thing is to make a radical change in the heart and life.

Now this is the kind of Godly sorrow that will lead to a change of nature. The two thieves on the cross - the rebellious one merely regretted that his crimes had brought him to the cross. He had no change of heart. Had he escaped, he would most likely returned to his life of crime.