

THE HOLY SPIRIT'S PART IN SALVATION (What is Conviction and Regeneration?)

INTRODUCTION

The Bible teaches that the Father plans salvation and the Holy Spirit applies salvation to the sinner. It is through the active work of the Holy Spirit that men are brought face to face with their need of Christ.

Because the Christian knows the Holy Spirit goes before him when witnessing, he has confidence that the Spirit can do a work in the sinner's heart. The Holy Spirit can do what a Christian cannot do. He can melt the heart of the unsaved to make them willing to believe

THE HOLY SPIRIT'S WORK OF CONVICTION

The Need. In the lesson on total depravity, it was pointed out that the unsaved man has been blinded by Satan in the mind (2 Cor. 4:4-5) and that he is spiritually dull with no capacity for spiritual things (1 Cor. 2:14). The question is how can a depraved mind understand the gospel or an incapacitated person become active for God? It takes a supernatural work, and this is the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit enables the spiritually blind to understand the facts of the gospel, and the incapacitated to involve themselves with Christ's claims on men.

The Work (John 16:8-11)

Background. The Lord had told His disciples that the world would hate and persecute them because of their Christian faith. In light of the hatred of the world, the problem facing the disciples was: "How can we meet the hatred of the world and witness effectively amid such hatred?" The Lord's answer was that He would go away and send the Holy Spirit to them who would help them to witness and enable them to take the offensive.

The Spirit's Work. "He shall reprove the world." The word "reprove" may be translated *convict*, *enlighten* or *convince* ("convince" means to give demonstrable proof of). The word "reprove" has to do with the making of some form of conviction.

1. The word "world" is a general term and it does not mean that the Holy Spirit has to convict the whole world because this context is about witnessing and this conviction comes to those who receive a witness. The Holy Spirit will convict of sin, righteousness and judgment that are all related to the gospel. POINT: The idea is that if any person in the world is convicted it is because the Holy Spirit has brought this conviction in his heart.
2. When a person receives the convicting work of the Holy Spirit, it does not mean that the person will turn to Christ for salvation, but he will be enlightened concerning the

gospel and convicted of sin. One can experience the convicting work of the Spirit and not be saved.

3. When a person receives the convicting work of the Holy Spirit, there are two reactions. He will either give a positive reaction to truth or a negative reaction and spurn the truth. POINT: Outward rebellion often means that a sinner has interacted with the gospel and is under conviction.
4. The Christian, no matter how great his knowledge of Scripture or his persuasive powers, does not have the ability in himself to bring conviction to a man's soul or convince him of the person and work of Jesus Christ. If a sinner is going to be convicted, it is going to be done by the Holy Spirit alone.

The Results of the Spirit's Work:

1. Convicted of Sin (Manward or sinward). "Of sin, because they believe not on me." The Holy Spirit will convict men of their sin and make it clear that by rejecting Christ, God's only answer to the sin problem, they shall be left to die in their sins (John 8:24 cf. John 3:18).
2. Convicted of Righteousness (Godward or Christward). "Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and you will see me no more." The unsaved world will see Christ's righteousness and their own lack of righteousness and be convicted of their need of Christ.
3. Convicted of Judgment (Satanward or self-ward). "Of judgment, because the prince of the world is judged." Satan and his cohorts were defeated at the cross and were sentenced to the Lake of Fire (Matt. 25:41). If God judged Satan, a superior creature, He will surely judge any man who is related to Satan. If Satan is sentenced to the Lake of Fire, how much more those who are related to Him because of rejection of Jesus Christ (Rev. 20:11-15)?

Theological Problems:

Question. Does all the world receive the above conviction from God?

Answer. The Bible teaches that all men have received some light concerning God, but they spurn whatever light they have been given (Rom. 1:18-23). However, the conviction mentioned in John 16:8-11 is related to the gospel and it is obvious that the gospel, while it goes out to millions, does not go to everyone. The conviction comes to those who hear the gospel.

Question. Why does God convict some more than others? Is this really fair?

Answer. It is obvious that God does bring more conviction on some than others. This *is* a mystery and must be rested back into the sovereign purposes of God.

Further study: Hebrews 6:4-6 cf. Hebrews 10:32f.

THE HOLY SPIRIT'S WORK OF REGENERATION

Meaning. Regeneration means to impart life (Titus 3:5; Matt. 19:28). Through regeneration, the Holy Spirit makes the Christian alive to God.

Need. Regeneration becomes all important when related to total depravity. An unsaved man, who is dead spiritually (Eph. 2:1-3) and not seeking God in his natural state (Rom. 3:10-11), needs a supernatural work of God to come alive spiritually. The work of the Holy Spirit is to impart life into the lifeless sinner.

Necessity. The Bible is clear that “except a man is born again (made alive) he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3), and this work is totally the work of the Holy Spirit (John 3:5,8). NOTE: There is a great difference between religion and regeneration. The difference is between being lost and saved, dead or alive to God.

Theological Problems

Question: Does the Christian experience regeneration?

Answer: Regeneration is an act of God and not experienced. When the act of regeneration takes place, a person is saved whether he experiences anything or not. However, the Christian does experience the results or effects of regeneration.

Question: Which comes first, regeneration or faith?

Answer: If viewed from man’s response, he believes and is regenerated. If viewed from God’s sovereignty, man is regenerated before he believes. It is best to say that regeneration and faith occur simultaneously.

Question: Does regeneration override man’s will?

Answer: The human will must be made willing or none will believe, and we should be thankful for the Holy Spirit’s convicting and regenerating work.

Further Study: John 3:1-8; Eph. 2:1-10; 2 Cor. 5:17

THE PRACTICALITY OF THE SPIRIT'S WORK IN SALVATION

It Teaches Confidence in Witnessing. The Christian preaches a “whosoever will” gospel to a “universal won’t” world. But the Christian’s confidence is in the Holy Spirit to make the message of Christ real to the unsaved world.

It Teaches Dependence Upon The Holy Spirit For Results. The Christian must pray and be rightly related to the Holy Spirit in the Christian life so he can be God’s channel for evangelism. NOTE: The Christian must understand the importance of being filled with the Spirit for effectiveness in witnessing.

It Teaches Patience in Witnessing. The effective witness lets God prepare hearts, so he can pick the ripe fruit, not that fruit which is green. The effective witness knows when the Holy Spirit is at work in a person’s heart. NOTE: Christians are commanded to speak to all men about Christ, but they cannot change the unsaved man’s heart--only the Holy Spirit can do that.

David Livingston, the great missionary to Africa, said in one of his darker moments, “We have a difficult, difficult field to cultivate here . . . but for the belief that the Holy Spirit works and will work for us, I should give up in despair.”

It Teaches That Opposition May Be Holy Spirit Conviction. When the unsaved rebel or are offended at the gospel, then this is an indication that the Holy Spirit has brought some kind of conviction. NOTE: An indifferent response to the gospel means that there is no communication and probably no Holy Spirit conviction.

It Teaches the Folly of Gimmicks in Evangelism. The work of the Holy Spirit helps the evangelist and personal witness to remember that the work of salvation is not hurried along by stronger appeals, stronger personalities, telling of stories, longer invitations or keener insight. Often these things merely cloud the real issue. NOTE: Any kind of a gimmick is really a mark of unbelief, for the Christian really does not believe that God can save the sinner.

Read: Acts 8:26-40