

THE LIGHT OF CONVICTION VERSUS THE LIGHT OF CONVERSION

If you look in the average theology book, you probably won't find listed a special section on the doctrine of CONVICTION related to salvation. It might be referenced somewhere (briefly), but this KEY doctrine is often overlooked. I point out two areas of concern:

- 1) Many confuse an "experience" of conviction with true conversion. Conversion denotes turning from sin to God. However, a mere temporary experience of "the enlightenment of conviction" does not equal conversion.
- 2) Many downplay or eliminate the factor of human responsibility in relation to the convicting ministry of the Spirit (cf. the issues of infant baptism). Divine conviction inherently calls for human response (cf. Ezek. 33:11).

THE LIGHT OF CONVICTION:

The Spirit convicts the world of sin, etc. (cf. Jn. 16:8-11). This "enlightening" ministry exposes the truth to them but does not necessarily result in conversion. With the "enlightenment" of Divine conviction comes human responsibility. To whom much is given – much is required (cf. Lk. 12:48). This is what Hebrews 6 is addressing.

Hebrews 6:4-6 (NKJV) For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit,...to renew them again to repentance...

In Hebrews 6:9 the writer goes on to show that he is not speaking about "things that accompany salvation". Therefore, Heb. 6:4-5 is describing a pre-conversion conviction ministry of the Holy Spirit. In this process, the individual is brought, as it were, to the very "door of salvation", but then they do not RESPOND positively. They do not enter into the good of it. The convicting ministry of the Spirit has taken place, but not the regenerating work of the Spirit (cf. Acts 6:10; 7:51).

"...he who 'convicts' another places the truth of the case in dispute in a clear light before him, so that it must be seen and acknowledged as truth. He who then rejects the conclusion which the exposition involves, rejects it with his eyes open and at his peril. Truth seen as truth carries with it condemnation to all who refuse to welcome it." - **B.F. Westcott**, *The Gospel According to St. John* [London: Murray, 1908], 2:219

2 Peter 2:20 (NKJV)

For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the KNOWLEDGE of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. (emphasis mine)

Here, Peter, too, is describing people who have come to know the light of conviction but have stopped short of true conversion.

Consistently, we see that conviction does “enlighten” on one level, but if it is merely an intellectual interaction with the truth that stops short of a true heart commitment, then it does not equal true conversion.

Conviction “enlightenment” that stops short of true conversion is merely temporary. It isn’t life-changing and it doesn’t last (cf. Lk. 8:11-15; 1 Cor. 15:2; Col. 1:23; Heb. 3:14).