

Only Convicts go to Heaven

INTRODUCTION: The title of my message this morning is, *Only Convicts go to Heaven*. The Holy Spirit convicts before He comforts but His name is comforter (Jn 14:26; 15:26. Jesus told His religious hearers that they were **self-justifiers** who deceive themselves (Lu 16:15).

The Apostle Paul says that if we **compare ourselves** to others we are without understanding (2 Cor 10:12). Now, the majority of you have probably come to chapel today with a **cover on your conscience**, a blindfold to keep it from seeing the extremely bright light of God's word, or a **gag to keep your conscience from speaking** (Jn 3:19-21).

Scripture says that every man **bribes his conscience with dead works** so he won't have to face his **condition/predicament/dilemma** before God (Heb 9:14). Scripture is clear that no one goes to Heaven unless he or she first recognizes that they are a **convict, a criminal, and a fugitive** under God's moral government (Rom 3:19-20; Gal 3:22-24).

Now God uses His moral law to show us our condition. **The Holy Spirit is the one who convicts, He is sent by God to secure a guilty verdict.** He educates the conscience by the requirements of God's law before a person can be liberated by the Gospel.

So why is He sent to obtain a verdict? **We will never see our sin the way God sees it until we understand what we owe God, what God's demands are upon us.** God requires righteousness of us as creatures. Now God does not require that of animals, and if we were simply made of dust and gas and slime that would not be required of us either.

But righteousness is not inherent in us. And so like Jesus' unbelieving hearers we want to **justify ourselves**, but the Holy Spirit is sent to break into our life (to see things from God's infallible perspective) **so that we will say the same thing about our sin that God says. As self-justifiers, we resist with all of our might—saying the same thing God does about our sin—and as long as we do not agree with God, a quarrel with God remains.**

What is righteousness? It is life before God as He requires. A person who is righteous in God's sight is right with His righteousness. Those who do not know Christ have a **method of dealing with their sin (their absence of God-approved righteousness).**

They think about the way life ought to be for them, they think about what they deserve, they think about what would make them happy, they think about the offenses that others have done against them and they think about the things they are doing right and believe that they have some good works and good actions.

But according to Scripture **this kind of righteousness can't take you to heaven or make you right with God because it is self-righteousness** (and that kind of righteousness does not come from God) (Phil 3:9). In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus talks about hungering and thirsting for righteousness (Matt 5:6). **This means becoming critically aware, acutely aware of a righteousness that you do not possess.** When the Holy Spirit does His work of conviction, you become devastated in realizing that you do not have this righteousness and you are not right with God. Then the Holy Spirit moves a person from devastation to the point of desperation.

When we long for God's righteousness, we understand that **the only righteousness that can satisfy God is a righteousness external to ours.** It's righteousness apart from the law, righteousness **apart from all the things we are trying to do.** It's a righteousness that can only be received by grace (Rom 3:21-22).

The sinner's only hope is to have the power of the **Holy Spirit invade his life**, to be 'traumatized' by grace. When the Holy Spirit does that work, **you're no longer apathetic about your natural state.** You no longer have the **false hope you can fix yourself.** Only then will you hunger for God's mercy. **The Holy Spirit does His convicting work and that's when our self-righteousness collides with the sheer grace of God (and we 'dump' our self-righteousness like a container of rotting garbage).**

The Gospel proclaims that the son of God has come in the flesh and given Himself for sinners (Jn 1:14; Rom 8:3; Gal 4:29; 1 Tim 3:16; Heb 2:14; 1 Pet 3:18; 1 Jn 4:2). I want you to think for a moment about **your concept of God.** You see everybody on the planet is **living out their view of God**, whether an atheist, a Hindu, a liberal, a skeptic or a Christian (by nature we are 'truth about God suppressors'—Romans one). Salvation = coming to know God through Christ (Jn 1:18).

Now those who don't know God tend to systematically neglect the Scriptures. But when they begin reading the word of God or listening to sermons, their first response is often **"if that's who God really is, I've got to clean up my life."** (See **Romans 3:21**). Well that's certainly a recognition that slays our false hopes of being saved by works. **But countless individuals stop there and merely dig deeper into their own deceptive self-righteousness.** That's the exact opposite of believing the gospel (in which God's righteousness is given freely to believing sinners).

According to Scripture, all of us are lawbreakers and we woefully underestimate the stranglehold that sin has upon us. That bondage to our sin comes from surprising places. One of the major ones is self-deception. That means **you trick yourself into thinking you're smarter than you really are (Jer 17:9).** When I say 'smart', I'm not talking about physics or world history or your social popularity, I'm talking about **thinking you're smart about reality.**

You see absolute reality is God and His sovereign rule over His creation. Now our English language has a number of words connected with **someone's who's fooled**: foolish, self-deceived, naïve, gullible, ignorant, patsy, out of touch, in the dark, etc (**Prov 1:7; Rom 1:18-20ff.; 2 Cor 4:4**).

Now because of our pride and hunger for esteem and recognition, we don't like to admit where we've been fooled. Well I want to tell you something that perhaps you've never heard before. It takes the **convicting work of the Holy Spirit for us to come out of hiding and admit what we are in God's sight (Eph 2:1-4).** Nothing is more painful than having your life of moral failure brought to light and then stand there in shame and have to answer for your misdeeds as judgment and condemnation is heaped upon you (people prefer self-deception).

Conviction is painful. It's like an arrow piercing the heart when we understand that because of our transgressions we deserve to be swept in God's universe as some unholy corrupt thing that leaves a blot and a stench in its wake. That's an unbearable thought (moral deformity). And no one thinks that thought unless he or she is convicted by the Holy Spirit.

So how does God draw sinners out of their **self-justifying hiding places**? How does He make them willing to face the trauma and reality of what we are in God's sight? Well the answer is in our text this morning.

It says in John 16:8 that the Holy Spirit will convict or reprove. Consider how desperately this 'convicting work' is needed—for the **'world' wants to keep its ignorance of God.** John 1:10 – *"He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him."* And by 'world' we do not mean merely the seedy corrupt back streets of Las Vegas. For 'world' (when used of those not born again) means **the entire satanically energized world system with its temporal values, lusts, and pride** (1 Jn 2:15-17; 5:19; Eph 2:1-3).

Our Lord Jesus frequently talked about the fact that **the world vehemently opposes Him and God's truth** (Jn 15:18-19). Jesus' apostles also indicated that **those who are of the world seek out their own kind and will not hear the Christian message** (1 Jn 4:4-6).

So what hope is there that those who make up this world will drop their prejudices against God—love Christ—hate their sin—believe the gospel? Doesn't it seem like there is nothing in them or in the world that could change their loyalties to sin and self? Nothing at all! If you said "yes" you would be correct. **But God has an almighty solution to man's dilemma** (of being born in love with the world and hating God). He has sent His Holy Spirit into the world and is calling men and women out of the world to Himself. **But the way He is doing this involves bringing conscience-crushing conviction of personal sin.**

(John 16:8) The New Testament term **"convict"** (reprove) is a legal term which means to **pronounce a judicial verdict** by which the guilt of the culprit is defined and fixed and established. **The Holy Spirit not only accuses people of their sin but brings them to an inescapable sense of guilt** so they realize their shame and helplessness before God (the Puritans call this a spirit of bondage).

Our text indicates that this conviction applies to three general areas: **sin and righteousness and judgment.** The Spirit is a **prosecuting attorney, He cross-examines the sinner.** When He presents God's case against humanity, **it creates an inescapable awareness of sin. He creates a depth of conviction which can't be excused or evaded by taking refuge in the fact that "everybody else is doing it."** The Holy Spirit removes our alibis, excuses, rationalizations—**He cancels out our ability to wriggle out of this conviction.**

He convinces us of our misdeeds. And with that conviction of our sins against God comes a growing awareness **that the essence of our sin is centered in our unbelief.** Unbelief is not merely a difference of opinion rather it is a **total rejection of God's message and God's messenger—unbelief is a total disregard for God the Father's infallible testimony concerning His Son (1 Jn 5:9-10).**

Now in our country a person can be convicted of a particular crime (armed robbery, etc.) in a court of law and have to face the appropriate penalty. But **only the Holy Spirit can convict of unbelief (a high crime under heaven)**. In His discourses Jesus insists that **sin is unbelief** and is therefore a fundamental repudiation/rejection of His message and His mission (Jn 3:18, 36).

V. 10 -- Now the Holy Spirit also **convicts of righteousness (Jn 16:10)**—and that means an absolute standard for moral behavior which is enforced by the very character of God (Rom 3:20). That means all thought and action is to be compared to that divine standard. **Now apart from that standard of righteousness, there is no convicting awareness of the holiness of God and the holiness He requires of us as creatures.**

Christ Himself is the standard of righteousness (Col 1:15). We must look to Him as God's perfect son in order to realize our own deficiency (Rom 1:4). **Christ reveals that there's an infinite gap that human's cannot bridge**. Therefore the first step in the Holy Spirit's preparation for salvation is the **awareness that a divine mediator is necessary (Jn 14:6; 1 Tim 2:5)**. Christ has come in the flesh. He is the perfect image of God.

Righteousness had previously been defined by God's precepts (Rom 3:21), **now it is revealed in the incarnate Christ who exemplifies righteousness perfectly in all of His relationships (Acts 3:14; 7:52; Rom 3:10; 1 Jn 2:1, 29; 3:7)**. The Holy Spirit also convicts of judgment. Judgment always occurs when an **act or thought is evaluated by an absolute principle and standard**. (But I am not a 'bad' person.)

Judgment is what takes place when human sin is confronted by the righteousness of Christ; its condemnation is self-evident. In this context, **judgment refers especially to the condemnation of Satanic self-will and rebellion which is exposed in all its hideousness by its opposite**, by the righteousness of Christ, by the obedience and love exhibited by Jesus toward the God the Father.

The cross of Christ utterly condemned Satan the Prince of this world. **Satan is all ready under judgment, his sentence is fixed, it is permanent (John 16:11)**. The lake of fire has been prepared for the devil and his angels (Matt 25:41), and for all humans who insist on living a **self-determined life and who choose to disbelieve the gospel of Jesus Christ (Lu 13:3, 5)**.

So how shall sinners who are **convicted have any hope of acceptance and favor by God?** Well this is the very reason **Christ came to earth, to do for sinners what they could not do for themselves**. Christ came so that sinners might be freely forgiven and be declared righteous in God's sight because of Christ's work in their place (1 Pet 2:24; 3:18).

This is the good news of the Gospel. Every true Christian is a herald of this message that **God can be just in pardoning sinners freely, that God can be just in declaring the ungodly to be righteous (Rom 4:5-8)**. This is amazing news God can be righteous in Himself—absolutely righteous and just when He declares a believing sinner to be right with Himself (2 Cor 5:21).

When He justifies sinners He reveals that He is righteous (Rom 1:16-17; 3:25-26). God takes great pleasure and glory in justifying the ungodly who believe upon Christ and repent. **Only “convicts” go to Heaven because the Holy Spirit must show us how God sees our sin (this is the ‘convicting’ ministry of the Spirit).** We must know who we have offended on high, how we have offended Him. **We must know the penalty for those offenses and what God has done in sending Christ.** This knowledge is produced by the convicting work of the Spirit.

The good news of the Gospel means that those who believe on Jesus God will not count their trespasses against them (Rom 4:8). But how serious is unbelief? It’s deadly. Those who do not believe, those who refuse to fall at the feet of Christ as their Lord **will have their trespasses counted against them forever.** You see unbelief is a commitment to live and believe a lie about God—that He is not a just judge—that **He has not paid an infinite price to reconcile sinners to Himself (2 Cor 5:18-21).**

Unbelievers **believe what is false about God.** In so many words they tell themselves “I can be unholy and unrighteous, I can stay/remain the way I’m living and still live with the Holy One forever in Heaven.” No, that’s why Christ came to deliver sinners from their sin. *Young man, young woman when you view porn, when you dress immodestly, when you gossip, when you cheat, when you disrespect your parents, you know exactly what you’re doing. Our hearts are idol factories. Nothing in your life will ultimately change until you repent and are born again.*

Nothing will change until you receive a new heart in the Holy Spirit who loves what God loves. **You will not go to war against your idols until you see the glory of God in the face of Christ (2 Cor 4:6).** You were created to know God (His transforming love, grace, faithfulness). This is why you were born; this is why you’re on earth. He owns you, He made you, and life with Him is wonderful.

Only then (by the convicting work of God’s Spirit) will you see your idols for what they are: bitter merciless foes of your eternal soul. No man or woman ever divested/delivered himself of idols and became a true friend of God and a worshipper by mere personal reform or regret or tears (1 Thess 1:9). **Only God can make you a new person through the work of Christ (2 Cor 5:17).**

Nothing can reverse our sinful selfish path but the cross of Christ (Gal 6:14). When He was slain in the place of sinners, He was bearing the just penalty of all who would ever believe. **He became officially guilty of the sins of His people.** This was a **massive guilt transfer.** God’s holy justice was poured out upon Christ so that **He bore the penalty of all who would ever believe.** He voluntarily reaped their wrath, their death, their separation from God.

Christ died to slay enemies of our soul that were too strong for us. Now all those who put their faith in Him are delivered by His blood, they’re delivered from sin as a cruel tyrant that takes people to hell and keeps them in servitude and bondage. **You see the power of sin cannot be cancelled until its penalty is born.** By His bloody death Christ breaks the power of cancelled sin; He cuts its enslaving chains. He severs ruling lusts from which sinners cannot free

themselves.

You see the sinner will not stop serving its lusts until he knows his debt is paid, until he knows his guilt has been removed and his chains have been severed by the cross of Christ. Only then will he be set upon a path of serving God with gratitude. Your conscience is an extension of God's courtroom. **Your conscience has God's law written on it; therefore your conscience is a place of disputes, of verdicts, of the establishment of guilt (Rom 2:15).**

Your conscience demands to see justice done. **And because you are created in the moral image of God your conscience will never be satisfied until it sees justice done against your sins.** This is exactly what Christ has accomplished at the cross. The true believer in Christ can say in the death of Jesus real justice was done against my sins.

1. The First Commandment: *Have no other gods before Me.* We haven't loved God supremely—we haven't treasured Him and valued Him; and pressed on to know Him. We have chosen things in place of God and disregarded Him—despising His ownership of us. We have regarded His loving rule over us to be an intrusion. We have made *other gods* out of our own will, our own way, and our own cravings.

2. The Second Commandment: *You shall not make for yourself an idol.* We have set our affections on the world—we have worshipped and served the creature and creation instead of God. We have made idols of our lusts and desires. We have refused to love God by a life of continual thanksgiving to Him.

3. The Third Commandment: *Do not take the Name of the Lord God in vain.* We have not sanctified and set apart the Name of the Lord—we have used God's Name casually and irreverently. We have dragged His Name into our conversations without reverence and fear; with no thought of His holiness. We have had no passion and sentiment for His honor and glory. We have been too cowardly to defend His character when others have dishonored His Name in our presence.

4. The Fourth Commandment: *Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy.* Though not a N.T. ordinance; the principle of setting aside time to draw near to God is timeless. We have failed in this by not leaving our pursuits and pastimes to actively seek God. We have not made it a priority to worship God; to serve Him; and make Him known to our fellow creatures. We have not come away from our schedules to give Him the best of our thoughts and conversation. We are by nature *Sabbath-breakers*.

5. The Fifth Commandment: *Honor your father and mother.* We have disobeyed by dishonoring our parents countless times. We have deemed them unworthy of our obedience and respect. We have talked back to them and undermined their authority. We have promised obedience and withheld it. We have been ungrateful and have disregarded their God-appointed authority in our lives.

6. The Sixth Commandment: *You shall not murder.* In 1 John 3:15 we are told that to hate your brother is murder because it is a spirit of murder. Have you despised and resented those who have mistreated you? Have you held a grudge and wished for their downfall, misfortune; failure; and destruction? Have you entertained violent thoughts against those who have offended you? Have you lashed out in angry words? (Matt 5:22). Do you harbor unforgiveness? Have you sought your own vengeance by backbiting; gossip; and slander?

7. The Seventh Commandment: *You shall not commit adultery.* This encompasses all sexual sin. We have allowed lusts to rule us. We have looked upon others as sexual objects of desire in our minds. Jesus said that to do that can be adultery in the heart (Matt 5:28). We have entertained discontent with our marriage partner and allowed imaginary lovers to enter the mind. We have loved our lusts above God's honor. We have not cared to reflect God's purity in our thinking; desiring; and looking.

8. The Eighth Commandment: *You shall not steal.* We have many times taken what is not ours. We have robbed employers of a full day's work. We have cheated on tests and homework. We have robbed God by using our resources for our pleasures without a thought of giving to His Kingdom and the spread of the Gospel. We have stolen the reputation of others by gossip and tale-bearing. We have borrowed from others and not returned; and we have cheated others out of fairness by our greed.

9. The Ninth Commandment: *Do not bear false witness against your neighbor.* We have lied and covered our sin. We have altered the truth to protect ourselves. We have exaggerated; embellished; and distorted the truth to make ourselves look more favorable. We have misrepresented the character of others. We have not sought the truth in the inward man; but have lied to ourselves about God's faithfulness. We have allowed dishonesty to enter our speech.

10. The Tenth Commandment: *You shall not covet.* We have desired what is not ours but another's. We have believed it should be ours and not our neighbor's. We have envied; been jealous of what others have. We have been secretly happy at the misfortune of those around us. We have been secretly saddened by the promotions and prosperity of those around us. We have complained and grumbled—indulging in self-pity and discontentment. We have felt elevated by the moral downfall of others. We have compared ourselves to others instead of living in gratitude to God for grace.

SUMMARY: The modern "gospel" fails to bring the human condition to light; therefore it comes short of producing true conviction of sin which is the condition for the new birth.