

**THE SERMONS, LECTURES, AND SONGS OF
SIDNEY EDWARD COX**

Message: Conviction of Sin

Editorial Note: This sermon were delivered to the Grace Bible Church in Detroit, Michigan sometime in 1971. Sidney Cox was 84 years of age in 1971.

Sidney and Violet Cox resided in Detroit during their retirement years. In 1962, they retired to the Salvation Army retirement home in Detroit, "The Eventide." Violet was in failing health and ultimately died in 1967. Sidney continued residency there until a late in life move to Birmingham in 1972.

During the latter part of his life, Sidney Cox had developed a close relationship with the Christian and Missionary Alliance ("CMA"). CMA operates as a vast network of churches, similar to a "denomination." Grace Bible Church was a CMA church to which Sidney and Violet belonged during their years in Detroit. Sidney was often asked to lead Bible studies and often filled their pulpit to preach.

John Douglas Cox, grandson of Sidney Cox. December 29, 2008.

I want to speak to you this morning on a subject that is very important and I want your thought. I want you to think with me this morning. One of the developments in this strange age in which we live is that we can absorb truth without thinking and that we can sin without sinning.

Did you hear that? Now if you don't get anything else out of this morning's service, you think those two things over because that's the atmosphere of the age in which we live - we can get truth without thinking about it. A lot of you folks are not thinking, even now. We can sin without sinning. That's the age in which we live.

But I want you to think this morning. Here's a subject that I wanted to bring before you in the months gone by, I didn't get around to it. I want to talk to you this morning on the subject "Conviction of Sin." "Conviction of Sin."

I'm going to read two scriptures, both of them from the Gospel of John. We've already in the Sunday School class, we've been walking through the Holy pathways of the Gospel of John; we're going to do the same again. While I read these two scriptures, will you please turn over in your mind the difference between them. They both have to do with conviction, but there's a difference, and I wonder if you can see the difference as I read them to you.

Here are the two scriptures: John 16:8 – "He, when he is come," now here is the Lord Jesus talking about the coming of the Holy Spirit, and He says, "He, when he is come will convict the world in respect of sin, of righteousness and of judgment." Now if you have the word 'reprove' there, you are reading the King James version; I'm simply reading the same verse from the Revised version. "He, when he is come will convict the world in respect of sin, of righteousness and of judgment." John 16:8.

Now, here's the other verse. See if you can see the difference between the two of them. You'll remember in the 8th chapter of John that a very interesting incident took place – a woman was brought before the Lord, presumably to be condemned by Him because of her sin. But, He stooped and wrote in the sand and then said to those who were listening, “He that is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone.” Now these are the words that immediately follow after that: “And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one.”¹

Conviction by the Holy Spirit. Conviction by conscience.

Now, this is a subject that's very seldom dealt with. By the way, when was the last time you heard a sermon on the subject of “Conviction of Sin.” I don't mean a reference to it, because we find that quite frequently. But when did you hear anybody seek to expound a subject as important as this. I've been preaching for over 60 years and I only remember one man in all of those 60 years who ever dealt with this subject in my hearing adequately at all, and I shall be grateful to him forever for what he said. His name was Dr. J. E. Conant and he wrote a book called, *No Salvation Without Substitution*, and it's worth its weight in gold.²

I heard this man speak on the subject and explain it – “Conviction of Sin.” I haven't heard anybody since. I've heard a lot of people refer to it, we do that quite frequently, don't we; and sometimes with a tear in our voices as we say, “We don't see old-fashioned conviction of sin like we used to do.” As if there was something in the past that we don't see in the present; and if you're thinking that, you are so right, we don't see it in the present. When was the last time you saw somebody so gripped by the Holy Spirit because of his sin that he comes and kneels at an altar or finds a place somewhere where he can stand before God and unbear his heart and weep tears of remorse and repentance because of his sin. When was the last time you saw anything like that?

There was a time when we saw it occasionally, but we don't see it. Conviction by the Holy Spirit. It's a very important subject, isn't it, because remember that conviction leads to repentance and repentance leads to conversion; and if as there is an imitation conviction of sin, it will lead to an imitation conversion; and all you have to do is to look around in the religious world around you and you wonder. You wonder. What was it that produced the imitation Christian life that you see in the average place where you look?

Conviction of Sin.

We talk about it as an old-fashioned thing and it is. It's an old-fashioned thing; but remember, the one who produced it in the days gone by, when old-fashioned things were in evidence can produce it today. He's the one who did it then. He's the one who can do it now.

Now my dear, if you're going to consider a subject of any kind, a Bible subject in particular, the first thing we need to do is to get a definition of it so that we know what we're talking about. Because if we

¹ John 8:7-9.

² Judson Eber Conant was a prolific writer, evangelist and pastor. His call was to Christians from all over the country to the life of holy living and evangelism. His works on evangelism and salvation are still distributed, published and referred to by many authors.

just throw out the thought, even to a room like this where we know each other so well, even in this room we throw out the thought of “Conviction of Sin,” and I was to say, “What do think ‘Conviction of Sin’ is? Well, what do you think, or what do you think, or what do you think, or what do you think?” You know you’d be surprised how many answers we would get as to what we think “Conviction of Sin” is. And so we’d better find a definition.

Now my dear, if you try to find a definition of “Conviction of Sin” you’ll have to search just about as diligently as if you were trying to find a sermon on it. The only person I know who has given us an adequate definition of “Conviction of Sin” is one of the old-fashioned theologians of yesterday; we turn to him quite frequently and remember him; his name is Matthew Henry. Now there’s a name that’s got hoar frost over it, hasn’t it? He’s got a long, gray-white beard that gets longer all the time. But you turn to him, and he’s the only one I know who gives us an adequate definition of “Conviction of Sin.”³

Now my dear, I want to read it to you and here’s what I want you thinking now, because it’s in a series of phrases and I want to follow each one of them and stop long enough. And if we don’t get anything out of this sermon except a moment or two of consideration of this definition by Matthew Henry of what “Conviction of Sin” is, it will be worthwhile coming and I’m not going to delay things that I want to say when we’ve got something that is as important as this.

Now here’s what he says, “In a religious sense,” now that’s the way his definition begins, and of course, the moment he says that, we are aware of the fact that there is conviction in a sense that isn’t religious. Conviction isn’t a purely Bible word; isn’t purely a religious word; it’s a legal word. You find it everywhere, in every community. A crime is committed; a man is arrested; he is brought before a judge or a jury and he is convicted of his crime and punished accordingly. Now, that’s legal conviction. But when Matthew Henry talks about it and when the Bible talks about it, they’re not talking about legal conviction, he describes it as, “Conviction as seen within the realm that we speak of as ‘religious.’” Now I don’t like that word ‘religious’ anymore than you do, but for the time being, let’s leave it there. We know what he means – “In a religious sense.”

Now he begins to describe it, “It is the first degree of repentance.” In other words, it is the first step toward repentance. Now repentance is over here. The first step toward it is conviction. It’s the first step toward repentance. Remember my dear, we do not repent of a sin unless we are convicted of it. Conviction makes us uncomfortable in the presence of sin, and when I say that I’m talking about our sin, not the sin that’s out there that we like to think of in general, your sin and mine. When we are convicted of that we are most uncomfortable in its presence, and that’s the thing that leads to repentance. Without conviction, no repentance and without repentance, no conversion.

³ Matthew Henry (1662 – 1714) was an English commentator on the Bible and Presbyterian minister. Matthew Henry's well-known six-volume *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments* (1708–1710) or *Complete Commentary*, originally published in 1706, provides an exhaustive verse by verse study of the Bible covering the whole of the Old Testament, and the Gospels and Acts in the New Testament. After the author's death, the work was finished (Romans through Revelation) by thirteen other nonconformist ministers, partly based upon notes taken by Henry's hearers, and edited by George Burder and John Hughes in 1811. Henry's commentaries are primarily exegetical, dealing with the scripture text as presented, with his prime intention being explanation, for practical and devotional purposes.

Now there's the path that lies before us. That's the reason why we emphasize the thought, "Conviction of Sin" is most important, because without it, there will not be repentance and there will not be conversion.

Now, it is the first degree, or the first step toward repentance and now he describes what it is. He says, "It is an affecting sense that we are guilty before God." An affecting sense my dear, is a sense that does something to you and produces something. You can have a sense of guilt without doing anything about it; and whether you know about that or not, I do. I've had a sense of guilt many a time and haven't done anything about it and so have you. And after a while, the sense disappears. It didn't do what it was intended to do. But, conviction by the Holy Spirit as we're talking about there is a sense that produces something. It is an affecting sense. It produces an effect and the effect is, we are guilty before God.

Now my dear, let's do a little thinking about that. You have seen lots of folks who have been disturbed about their sin, but was it because that their sin was directed against God or was it because of something connected with the sin itself – fear of being found out for instance; the fear of what the result might be.

Now here is conviction defined by this old-fashioned man and he says, "It is the first step toward repentance and it implies an affecting sense" – a sense that produces something; and that which it produces is the realization of our guilt before God; and along with that, the realization that we can not do anything about it.

Now here is his words, "That we can do nothing of ourselves to gain His forfeited favor. Sin casts a shadow over the face of God and we stand on one side and He stands on the other until that thing is removed. We forfeit His favor and this conviction brings to us this realization," let me read it to you now, "that sin is very odious." Now that's an old-fashioned word too. You know what it means, don't you. It means, it stinks. That's what it means, but old-fashioned Matthew Henry didn't say it that way. He says, "It is very odious, and hateful, yea the greatest of evils."

Now conviction brings us face to face with that, the first step towards repentance; it implies an affecting sense that we are guilty before God; that there is nothing we can do about it; and therefore, if anything is to be done about it, God Himself must do something about it; that we have forfeited His favor; that sin is very odious and hateful, ugly – the greatest of evils.

Now my dear, again, what kind of a world do you live in? You live in a world that's dedicated to the proposition of 'perfuming evil' so that it smells so nice. And not only that, it is so beautiful. Now all you have to do is to just let your thoughts go into the world into which you are living and sin smells so nicely, doesn't it; and it is so beautiful, but when conviction of the Holy Spirit comes, then sin stinks! – and it is ugly beyond words to describe it.

Now my dear, how many people do you know who think of sin in that way? – or should I? Dare I? – do you think of it in that way? How do you think of it? - because it's what happens in our own hearts and in our own thinking that matters. We can go over this ground and go out and it doesn't matter the snap of our finger, but if it causes us to do some thinking.

Now we ought to remind ourselves of this, and we've said this in this room a good many times that everything in God's plan of redemption, every step in it, every ingredient in it, if I can use that word,

Satan has imitated. There is an imitation conviction of sin; a sin that looks right, that seems so obvious, that produces something. It doesn't smell too bad and it looks fairly nice – the ugliness has gone out of it. The stench has gone but there it is, still – an imitation conviction of sin.

Now when we say that my dear, are we scriptural? Does the Bible say it? Because some old preacher, who just happens along on this morning and you know quite well is saying this thing, that doesn't necessarily make it true, does it? What we want to know is, what does this book say about that? Is there an imitation conviction of sin that can lead to a false conversion – a house built upon sand instead of rock? Remember my dear that the two houses, one built on sand and one built on rock looked exactly the same until the storm came, then you found the difference.

Now, what about this matter? Again, in order to understand it, we ought to define it and once more my dear, you've got to go back to this strange old man that we invited to come from the glory, because he's been there a long time now, and be one with us this morning. Matthew Henry, we're so glad you came to church this morning. You're helping us, you sure are.

Now we're going to ask him to define 'natural conviction' and 'saving conviction.' Now we're getting two words that make it clear - a natural conviction that leads in one direction; a saving conviction that leads in another. Now this is what he says. Now you listen to him now, his old voice hasn't been talking to us for quite a while. We've been majoring on somebody else and we haven't turned to Matthew Henry for a while, if you're anything like me, and this is what he says. "Natural conviction, which arises from the natural conscience. It's produced by the natural conscience." Now that's something that we all possess – a natural conscience; "And the natural conscience can be stirred into producing something," but this is what it is that stirs it – "Fear of punishment; moral suasion." Now here's the old man talking: "Moral suasion or alarming providences, and they stir our natural conscience until there is an imitation repentance of the thing that has become awkward to us, followed by an imitation conversion and an imitation way of life that is unacceptable to God." Moral suasion?

Let me give you two illustrations of that. When you turn to the life of Paul, the last part of his life, almost at the end of it as far as Palestine was concerned, before he was taken to Rome and there appeared before Nero and finally executed. When he was there, he met two men, he faced two men and brought to bear upon each one of them moral suasion. One of them was named Felix and the other was named Agrippa. Now you watch Paul talking to Felix – moral suasion, and Felix trembled, but there is no indication that Felix ever turned from his sin. Troubled, disturbed, trembling – but no turning to God.

Now when he stood before King Agrippa, moral suasion again; and this time King Agrippa says, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian."⁴ But there was no indication, there is no indication that the 'almost' ever changed to anything but almost. It makes you wonder if the writer of a very lovely hymn that we sing so frequently with the line, 'Almost, but lost' whether he wasn't thinking about King Agrippa - moral suasion that can disturb the natural conscience.

Alarming providences. How many times have we heard of folks who will turn seemingly to God in a frantic moment – the boat is sinking, the car crashes, the operating room is all ready and you don't know and the doctor shakes his head and, "I don't know whether you're coming through," and somebody cries frantically to God, "If you'll just get me out of this thing, I'll give you the rest of my life." Now I'm not

⁴ Acts 26:28.

implying that everyone who says that forgets about it, but I think the proportion of those who remember and those who forget, when the alarming providence has passed would be in the same proportion as the ten lepers – one came and nine didn't; one keeps it, nine do. I'm only guessing here whether that's the proportion. Personally I think that most folks who make some kind of an agreement with God in the midst of an alarming providence as old Matthew Henry describes it, most of them forget about it when the alarming providence has gone.

Now my dear, here's this old man defining something, but he says this, that "Saving conviction is the work of the spirit, and the spirit uses three things." One, and I don't want you to gag about this, one is the law. Now remember when he talks, he's not talking about the letter of the law, he's talking about the spirit of the law - the law that has been filled full of the spirit. When the Lord Jesus said, "I didn't come to destroy the law but to fulfill it,"⁵ He meant to fill it full of a spiritual content that was not there before. And when He said, "It was said of old time thus and so, but I say unto," He wasn't talking about two different things, He was talking about the same thing filled with a spiritual content.

Now the Holy Spirit will use that to bring conviction – a quickened conscience; that old conscience of yours, touched by the quickening power of the Holy Spirit; and when that happens, we see things and are conscious of things that we didn't see and were unconscious of before - the spirit filled law, the quickened conscience and the message of the Gospel. Now the old conscience is not greatly disturbed by the message of the Gospel, but the quickened conscience is. Now, here's this old man talking to us about natural conviction that leads in this direction and spiritual conviction that leads in an entirely different direction.

Now, let's summarize it and put it together here. Keep your eye on it, here's a pathway over here. What do we see there? Here's a pathway over here. What do we see here? Here's a man convicted by his conscience, walking this pathway, what will be the steps that he will take? The first one will be, he is convicted of the law he has broken. But on this side, that's not the highlight of his conviction at all. He is convicted of the Christ he has rejected. You see the difference? I have broken the law. I have rejected Christ. You see? Here is a step again. He is convicted of the sin he has committed. But on this side, he is aware that that sin by virtue of the cross of Christ has been canceled! Now only the Holy Spirit can ever produce that - the difference between sin committed and sin canceled.

Another old-fashioned man wrote a song about that. His name is John Newton. You'll find some of his songs, at least one of them in our songbook. He's the man who wrote *Amazing Grace, How Sweet the Sound*, and described himself as 'a wretch like me.'⁶ Now that's not a perfumed word, not at all. That means exactly what it says. Now this is the man and he wrote this song, and I'll quote three verses for it, and he said this:⁷

I saw One hanging on a tree,
In agony and blood,
Who fixed His languid [dying] eyes on me,

⁵ Matthew 5:17.

⁶ John Henry Newton (1725 – 1807) was an English Anglican clergyman and former slave-ship captain. Following his conversion to Christianity as an adult, he studied theology and became the author of many hymns, including *Amazing Grace* and *Glorious Things of Thee are Spoken*.

⁷ From John Newton's Hymn, *I Saw One Hanging On A Tree*.

As near His cross I stood.

Sure, never to my latest breath,
Can I forget that look;
It seemed to charge me with His death,
Though not a word He spoke.

My conscience felt and owned the [my] guilt,
And plunged me in despair,
I saw His blood my sin had covered,
And helped to nail Him there

Now that's conviction by the Holy Spirit. When was the last time you saw a sinner, an honest to goodness sinner. You don't see many of them, but when was the last time you saw an honest to goodness sinner say not, "I have done this," but, "I helped to crucify Christ by my sin. I drove the nails into His hands!" That my dear, is conviction by the Holy Spirit.

The man on this side thus convicted of his guilt will turn to a better way of living, but the man on this side has tried that before and he turns not to a better life, but to a new life altogether.

In this life, good works are produced. On this way, faith is produced. In this life, there is work in abundance. On this side, there is worship. On this side, there is activity. On this side, there is adoration. On this side, nice words about God. But on this side, acceptable words to God. A repentance of a past life. A repentance toward Christ. A conversion to a higher ideal of living. A conversion to Christ. One is sand, the other is rock. One is the way that seemeth right unto man, the other is the way that is right unto God.

Now my dear, that's important in two ways: it gives us an opportunity to evaluate what we call 'our Christian life,' and I don't say that with any sting in it at all. It gives us a chance to be honest and to evaluate what happened in our own Christian life. And then the other important thing is, it gives us a chance to know how to approach other people when we are doing the only thing God told all of us to do – the Lord Jesus told all of us to do and that is to go out and be witnesses. When we understand this, then we don't go out to a sinner and tell him what a bad sinner he is; we go out and tell him what a great Saviour he has. You see the difference.

I preached a sermon along this line, one occasion. At the close of it, I didn't give an invitation and I shall not this morning. But at the close of it, a man came to me who had been a Christian worker for 25 years and he said, "As you were describing the path of conviction by conscience, and you went down the line, you described me exactly; and I'm standing before you right now with a great big question mark in my heart as to whether I've been saved at all." Now God did something for that man. When the Holy Spirit produces something like this, He does it because He has the answer to the dilemma.

By the way my dear, - no, I won't say that – I will remind you of this: that what God did for my friend who faced the fact honestly, He can do for you if you in turn will look honestly into the mirror and then turn to the Word for the blood and the cleansing.

Shall we bow our heads for a moment of prayer. [Sidney Cox leading them in singing]:

It is no secret what God can do,
What He's done for others,
He'll do for you,
With arms wide open,
He'll pardon you,
It is no secret what God can do.

Our Father, we not only thank Thee in this moment that Thou can'st do something, but that Thou art far more anxious to do it than we are to have it done. We pray our Father that every one of us may be crystal clear as to our standing before God so that we not only can live adequately as we should, but work fruitfully as we would like to do. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord.