

Holy Spirit Conviction

Last week, Mr. Smith was irreligious and unconcerned. But this week, he begins to contemplate his sinful state. As he remembers many of the bad things he has done in his life, he becomes very disturbed and despondent. He feels guilty not only for the things he has done but for what he continues to do. He sees himself as a wicked person. He realizes that he deserves to go to hell because of his wickedness. He resolves to change into a good person who deserves to go to heaven by giving up his bad things and starting to do good things. But try as he might, he cannot give up his bad things and start to do good things. He realizes he has no power to change. Thus, not only does he know he has done bad things in the past, he knows that he will continue to do bad things. His despondence turns to all-out despair. He cannot eat or sleep. His sins are disgusting to him as are the sins of others, but he knows no remedy for the situation. He finds no relief for his soul and does not know what to do.

What would many religionists who come in the name of Christianity say about Mr. Smith? They would say that Mr. Smith's experience is evidence that he is under "Holy Spirit conviction" (or "Holy Ghost conviction"). This is especially true of the Puritans and other "experiential" (or "experimental") Calvinists. Some would say that this is the Holy Spirit's way of preparing the heart to receive salvation, but many who deny preparationism would nevertheless say that Mr. Smith is under the conviction of the Holy Spirit. Some would say that the Holy Spirit is working *in* Mr. Smith, while others would say that the Holy Spirit is working *on* Mr. Smith. No matter what form it comes in, it is heresy. In this article, we will examine true vs. false Holy Spirit conviction.

False Holy Spirit conviction consists of three main heresies. The first heresy is that when a person is under so-called "Holy Spirit conviction" prior to regeneration, that person is actually thinking and doing things that are good and pleasing to God. This is the heresy of partial depravity. Words such as "illumination" and "awakening" are often used when the heretics speak of the first work of the Holy Spirit. Instead of being totally spiritually dead, people under "Holy Spirit conviction" have a glimmer of life or wakefulness that makes them different than those who have not been "illuminated" or "awakened." These partially depraved people can actually discern some truths, are interested in religion and even pray and do "good works," but they do not believe the gospel. Some go further and are actually disturbed about their sin and their sinfulness, even leading to deep depression and somatic symptoms because they cannot find the remedy to their sinful state. Even though these people remain unregenerate, their interest in truth and their prayers and piety and sorrow over sin are pleasing to God, as they are wrought by the Holy Spirit. Some heretics even go so far as to say that, in this enlightened state, those under pre-regeneration "Holy Spirit conviction" are not totally self-righteous.

This leads to the second heresy of false Holy Spirit conviction, which is that the Holy Spirit's operations lead people to bring forth dead works and fruit unto death. The false Holy Spirit conviction heretics would not admit this, because they believe that whatever the Holy Spirit works in the unregenerate sinner is pleasing to God. These heretics love to talk about the experiences of themselves and others while they were under pre-regeneration "Holy Spirit conviction." But in addition to talking about their pre-regeneration interest in truth, prayers,

piety, and sorrow over sin (all of which are abominations to God and dead works and fruit unto death when they are performed by an unregenerate person), they will inevitably talk about a period of time during their “Holy Spirit conviction” in which they were trying to go about to establish their own righteousness. Realizing they were practicing wickedness, they were convicted of sin and were ignorant of the remedy, so they tried to get relief by resolving to change their character and conduct. They would say that the Holy Spirit, when convicting a person, leads that person, at least temporarily, to legalistic thoughts of salvation by works and to hopelessness and despair due to ignorance of the only ground of salvation.

The third heresy is that this is a gracious operation of the Holy Spirit that can be resisted by the sinner; thus, not all who are under Holy Spirit conviction will actually be saved. This is so close to the “prevenient grace” of the Arminians and Roman Catholics that it is almost indistinguishable. In this heresy, there is a period of time in which the Holy Spirit “woos” and “strives with” and “draws” the sinner, and the sinner must yield to the Holy Spirit’s work during this finite period of time. If the sinner resists the Holy Spirit’s work by rebellion or negligence or some other way, then the Holy Spirit withdraws, and the sinner is “left to himself.”

As in all matters pertaining to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3), we who are God’s people turn to God’s Word for our doctrine, “*let[ting] God be true, and every man a liar*” (Romans 3:4). We will take our doctrine of the work of the Holy Spirit from God’s inspired, infallible Word rather than from the corrupt opinions of men. What does God’s Word say about the work of the Holy Spirit? (The scope will be limited to the ordinary perpetual work of the Holy Spirit rather than the extraordinary work of the Holy Spirit that has now ceased.)

The Holy Spirit regenerates. “*Jesus answered, Truly, truly, I say to you, If one is not generated out of water and Spirit, he is not able to enter into the kingdom of God. That having been generated out of the flesh is flesh, and that having been generated out of the Spirit is spirit. Do not wonder because I said to you, You must be generated from above. The Spirit breathes where He desires, and you hear His voice; but you do not know from where He comes, and where He goes; so is everyone having been generated from the Spirit*” (John 3:5-8). “*It is the Spirit that gives life. The flesh does not profit, nothing! The Words which I speak to you are spirit and are life*” (John 6:63). “*For the letter kills, but the Spirit makes alive*” (2 Corinthians 3:6b). “*But when the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works in righteousness which we had done, but according to His mercy, He saved us through [the] washing of regeneration and renewal of [the] Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ, our Savior; that being justified by His grace, we should become heirs according to [the] hope of eternal life*” (Titus 3:4-7). “*And I shall put My Spirit within you, and you shall live*” (Ezekiel 37:14a). The Holy Spirit is called “*the Spirit of life*” (Romans 8:2).

The Holy Spirit sanctifies. “*And some [of you] were these things, but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and in the Spirit of our God*” (1 Corinthians 6:11). “*But we ought to thank God always concerning you, brothers, beloved by the Lord, because God chose you from the beginning to salvation in sanctification of*

[the] Spirit and belief of [the] truth, to which He called you through our gospel, to obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14).

The Holy Spirit gives freedom. *“For the Law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus set me free from the law of sin and of death” (Romans 8:2). “And the Lord [is] the Spirit; and where the Spirit of [the] Lord [is], there [is] freedom” (2 Corinthians 3:17). “But if you are led by [the] Spirit, you are not under Law” (Galatians 5:18).*

The Holy Spirit gives belief of the truth of the gospel. *“But you know Him, for He abides with you and shall be in you. ... He shall teach you all things and shall remind you [of] all things that I said to you” (John 14:17b, 26b). “And when the Comforter comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of Truth who proceeds from the Father, that One will witness concerning Me” (John 15:26). “But when that One comes, the Spirit of Truth, He will guide you into all Truth” (John 16:13a). “For we are the circumcision, the ones who worship by the Spirit of God, and who glory in Christ Jesus, and who do not trust in flesh” (Philippians 3:3). “But we ought to thank God always concerning you, brothers, beloved by the Lord, because God chose you from the beginning to salvation in sanctification of [the] Spirit and belief of [the] truth, to which He called you through our gospel, to obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14). “And the Spirit is the [One] witnessing, because the Spirit is the truth” (1 John 5:6b).*

The Holy Spirit speaks of and glorifies Christ. *“And when the Comforter comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of Truth who proceeds from the Father, that One will witness concerning Me” (John 15:26). “But when that One comes, the Spirit of Truth, He will guide you into all Truth, for He will not speak from Himself, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will announce the coming things to you. That One will glorify Me, for He will receive from Mine and will announce to you” (John 16:13-14). “If you are reviled in [the] name of Christ, [you are] blessed, because the Spirit of God and of glory rests on you. Truly, according to them, He is blasphemed; but according to you, He is glorified” (1 Peter 4:14).*

The Holy Spirit gives access to the Father. *“And likewise the Spirit also joins in to help our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes on our behalf with groanings that cannot be uttered” (Romans 8:26). “For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father” (Ephesians 2:18).*

The Holy Spirit gives love, peace, joy, and hope. *“And the hope does not put [us] to shame, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through [the] Holy Spirit given to us” (Romans 5:5). For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in [the] Holy Spirit” (Romans 14:17). “And may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, for you to abound in hope, in power of [the] Holy Spirit” (Romans 15:13). “But I exhort you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ, and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in [your] prayers to God on my behalf” (Romans 15:30). The Holy Spirit is called “the Comforter” (John 14:16,26; 15:26).*

The Holy Spirit causes people to confess the true gospel and keeps people from confessing a false gospel. *“Because of this I make known to you that no one speaking by [the] Spirit of God says, Jesus [is] a curse. And no one is able to say Jesus [is] Lord, except by [the] Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12: 3). By this know the Spirit of God: every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in [the] flesh is from God” (1 John 4:2).*

The Holy Spirit is a guarantee of heaven. *“And not only [so], but also we ourselves having the firstfruit of the Spirit, also we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly expecting adoption, the redemption of our body” (Romans 8:23). “For as many promises as [are] of God, in Him [they are] yes, and in Him [are] Amen, for glory to God through us. But He confirming us and anointing us with you in Christ [is] God, even He having sealed us, and having given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts” (2 Corinthians 1:20-22). “And the One having worked in us for this same thing [is] God, who also [is] giving us the earnest of the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 5:5). “For we through [the] Spirit eagerly wait for [the] hope of righteousness out of faith” (Galatians 5:5). “in whom also you, hearing the Word of Truth, the gospel of your salvation, in whom also believing you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is an earnest of our inheritance, to [the] redemption of the purchased possession, to [the] praise of His glory” (Ephesians 1:13-14). “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed to [the] day of redemption” (Ephesians 4:30). “Guard the good Deposit [given] through [the] Holy Spirit indwelling in us” (2 Timothy 1:14).*

The Holy Spirit gives assurance of salvation. *“For you did not receive a spirit of slavery again to fear, but you received a Spirit of adoption by which we cry, Abba! Father! The Spirit Himself witnesses with our spirit that we are children of God” (Romans 8:15-16). “And because you are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba! Father!” (Galatians 4:6). “And the [one] keeping His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit which He gave to us” (1 John 3:24). “By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because of His Spirit He has given to us” (1 John 4:13).*

The Holy Spirit causes obedience. *“And I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you shall keep My judgments and do [them]” (Ezekiel 36:27). “But the fruit of the Spirit is: love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control. Against such things there is not a law. But the ones belonging to Christ crucified the flesh with its passions and lusts. If we live in [the] Spirit, let us also walk in [the] Spirit” (Galatians 5:18-25). For the fruit of the Spirit [is] in all goodness and righteousness and truth, proving what is pleasing to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:9-10). “that He may give you, according to the riches of His glory, by [His] power to become mighty in the inward man through His Spirit, that through faith Christ may dwell in your hearts, having been rooted and founded in love” (Ephesians 3:16-17). “Having purified your souls in the obedience of the truth through the Spirit to unpretended brotherly love, love one another fervently out of a pure heart, being regenerated, not by corruptible seed, but incorruptible, through the living Word of God, and remaining forever” (1 Peter 1:22-23).*

The Holy Spirit joins people to the true church. *“For also we all were baptized by one Spirit into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, even all were given to drink into one Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:13). “So, then, you are no longer strangers and tenants, but [you are] fellow citizens of the saints and [of the] family of God, being built up on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being [the] cornerstone, in whom all the building being fitted together grows into a holy temple in [the] Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in [the] Spirit” (Ephesians 2:19-22). “[There is] one body and one Spirit, even as you also were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Ephesians 4:4-5).*

Compare these passages with the story of Mr. Smith at the beginning of this article. Has Mr. Smith been regenerated? Has Mr. Smith been sanctified? Does Mr. Smith have freedom? Does Mr. Smith have belief of the truth of the gospel of Christ? Does Mr. Smith have access to the Father? Does Mr. Smith have love, peace, joy, hope, and comfort? Does Mr. Smith confess the true gospel? Does Mr. Smith have a guarantee of heaven? Does Mr. Smith have assurance of salvation? Is Mr. Smith walking in obedience? Has Mr. Smith been joined to the true church?

The following are two of the most comprehensive passages on the work of the Holy Spirit and a comparison between those who have the Spirit and those who do not. As you read these passages, note what the Holy Spirit does, what characterizes those who are regenerate, and what characterizes those who are unregenerate:

“[There is] therefore now no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to flesh, but according to Spirit. For the Law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus set me free from the law of sin and of death. For the Law [being] powerless, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in [the] likeness of sinful flesh, and concerning sin, condemned sin in the flesh, so that the righteous demand of the Law might be fulfilled in us, those not walking according to flesh, but according to Spirit. For the ones that are according to flesh mind the things of the flesh. And the ones according to Spirit [mind] the things of the Spirit. For the mind of the flesh [is] death, but the mind of the Spirit [is] life and peace; because the mind of the flesh [is] enmity towards God; for it is not being subjected to the Law of God, for neither can it [be]. And those being in the flesh are not able to please God. But you are not in flesh, but in Spirit, since [the] Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone has not [the] Spirit of Christ, this one is not His. But if Christ [is] in you, the body indeed [is] dead because of sin, but the Spirit [is] life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of the [One] having raised Jesus from [the] dead dwells in you, the [One] having raised the Christ from [the] dead will also make your mortal bodies live through the indwelling of His Spirit in you. So, then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to flesh, for if you live according to flesh, you are going to die. But if by [the] Spirit you put to death the practices of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by [the] Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery again to fear, but you received a Spirit of adoption by which we cry, Abba! Father! The Spirit Himself witnesses with our spirit that we are children of God” (Romans 8:1-16).

“But God revealed [them] to us by His Spirit, for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the things of a man, except the spirit of a man within him? So also no one has known the things of God except the Spirit of God. But we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit from God, so that we might know the things that are freely given to us by God. Which things we also speak, not in words taught in human wisdom, but in [Words] taught of the Holy Spirit, comparing spiritual things with spiritual [things]. But a natural man does not receive the things of [the] Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he is not able to know [them], because they are spiritually discerned. But the spiritual one discerns all things, but he is discerned by no one. For who has known [the] mind of [the] Lord? Who will teach Him? But we have [the] mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:10-16).

Compare these two passages with the story of Mr. Smith at the beginning of this article. Has Mr. Smith been set free from the law of sin and of death? Does Mr. Smith have life and peace? Is Mr. Smith’s mind subjected to the Law of God? Is Mr. Smith able to please God? Does Mr. Smith have a spirit of slavery to fear or a Spirit of adoption that witnesses with his spirit that he is a child of God? Does Mr. Smith know the things of God? Is Mr. Smith receiving the things of the Spirit of God? Does Mr. Smith discern the truth of God?

Where, then, do those who believe in pre-regeneration Holy Spirit conviction get their ideas? In most instances, it comes from their false interpretation of John 16:8-11: *“And having come, that One will convict the world concerning sin, and concerning righteousness, and concerning judgment. Concerning sin, because they do not believe into Me; and concerning righteousness, because I am going to the Father, and you no longer see Me; and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.”* They believe that at least the first conviction (concerning sin) is prior to regeneration, and many believe that all three convictions are prior to regeneration. Let us examine this passage in light of the rest of Scripture to see if their interpretation holds up.

“Concerning sin, because they do not believe into Me.” Does the Holy Spirit convict an unregenerate person of sin? Let us again take the example of Mr. Smith. When Mr. Smith feels guilty for the things he has done and continues to do, when he sees himself as a wicked person and realizes he deserves to go to hell, when he knows that he will continue to do bad things, when he is disgusted by his sin, is he being convicted by the Holy Spirit? As we have seen in other passages, the Holy Spirit is not a spirit of bondage to fear but a Spirit of freedom. The Holy Spirit is not a spirit of hopelessness and despair but a Spirit of peace, joy, and hope. In addition, the Holy Spirit does not cause a person to look to himself for relief, as Mr. Smith did for a period of time. And the Holy Spirit does not cause a person to be ignorant of the only remedy, even for a second. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of TRUTH. The Holy Spirit speaks of and glorifies CHRIST. There is no such monstrosity as a person who is convicted by the Holy Spirit who is ignorant of the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Think of the passages mentioned above that describe the unregenerate. The unregenerate walk according to the flesh, mind the things of the flesh, are in bondage to the law of sin and death, are

at enmity towards God, are not and cannot be subjected to the Law of God, are not able to please God, and do not understand the things of the Spirit of God because they are foolishness to them. Here are some other passages describing the unregenerate: *“Jesus answered and said to him, Truly, truly, I say to you, If one is not generated from above, he is not able to see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). “[There is] not [one] understanding; [there is] not [one] seeking God. ... and they did not know a way of peace; there is no fear of God before their eyes” (Romans 3:11,17-18). “For I testify to them that they have zeal to God, but not according to knowledge. For being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, they did not submit to the righteousness of God” (Romans 10:2-3). “But also if our gospel is being hidden, it has been hidden in those being lost, in whom the god of this age has blinded the thoughts of the unbelieving, [so that] the brightness of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God, [should] not dawn on them” (2 Corinthians 4:3-4). “having been darkened in the intellect, being alienated [from] the life of God through the ignorance which is in them because of the hardness of their heart” (Ephesians 4: 18).*

The Holy Spirit does not convict these blind men of their sin. There is no Holy Spirit enlightenment to their condition. They are not truly seeking God. They only want relief if it fits in with their self-righteous notions. They remain dead, blind, self-righteous, ignorant sinners.

What, then is true Holy Spirit conviction of sin? Note again what Jesus Christ said: *“Concerning sin, because they do not believe into Me.”* This is speaking of gospel repentance. When the Holy Spirit regenerates someone, He immediately convinces that person that all of his former life and works were idolatry, dead works, and fruit unto death, because he did not believe in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit causes that person to renounce, eschew, cast off, abhor, detest, and turn away from belief in a false god, a false christ, and a false gospel.

The second thing the Holy Spirit convicts of is righteousness: *“Concerning righteousness, because I am going to the Father, and you no longer see Me.”* This is speaking of believing the gospel. When the Holy Spirit regenerates someone, He immediately convinces that person of the truth of salvation by the atoning blood and imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ alone. The Holy Spirit causes that person to embrace, love, and cherish the true God, the true Christ, and the true gospel. This righteousness that Jesus Christ speaks of is His own perfect righteousness that is imputed to His people by which they are counted perfectly righteous in the eyes of God’s law and justice. Whereas before the Holy Spirit regenerated them they were ignorant of the righteousness of God, going about to establish their own righteousness, and not submitted to the righteousness of God (Romans 10:3), the Holy Spirit now convinces them that *“Christ [is] the end of Law for righteousness to everyone that believes” (Romans 10:4).* They are free from the law of sin and of death; they have access to the Father; they have love, peace, joy, and hope; and they have certain assurance of their salvation based on the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

Christ relates His righteousness to His going to the Father so He would no longer be seen. This has to do with His resurrection and ascension. Christ’s resurrection and ascension is proof that God the Father was totally satisfied with the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. He was totally

satisfied because Jesus Christ accomplished exactly what He set out to accomplish, which was the full salvation of everyone whom He came to save. Jesus Christ fully satisfied the demands of God's law and justice on behalf of everyone for whom He died. Had Jesus Christ not fully accomplished salvation for everyone for whom He died, He would not have conquered death, and He would have remained in the grave. The reason Jesus Christ could not be held by death is that He had totally, absolutely defeated death in fully atoning for the sins of His people. If there is or will be even one person for whom Christ died who is suffering or will suffer the second death, then death was not defeated, and Jesus Christ was not raised as the victor over death. To truly believe and preach the resurrection and ascension is to believe and preach the full, accomplished atonement of Jesus Christ with which God the Father was fully satisfied that was effectual to save everyone whom Christ represented. God the Father exalted Jesus Christ at His right hand as the Savior of His people who made full purification of their sins. There would have been no resurrection and no exaltation had there been even one person for whom Christ died who would end up in hell.

The third thing the Holy Spirit convicts of is judgment: *“Concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.”* This is speaking of the authority that God the Father has given to God the Son to be the judge of the world at His second coming, as evidenced by the casting out of Satan: *“Now is [the] judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world shall be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all to Myself. But He said this, signifying by what kind [of] death He was about to die” (John 12:31-33).* *“The [one] practicing sin is of the devil, because the devil sins from [the] beginning. For this the Son of God was revealed, that He might undo the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8).* *“And the great dragon was cast out, the old serpent being called devil, and, Satan; he deceiving the whole habitable world was cast out onto the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. And I heard a great voice saying in Heaven, Now has come the salvation and power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of His Christ, because the accuser of our brothers is thrown down, the one accusing them before our God day and night” (Revelation 12:9-10).*

When the Holy Spirit regenerates someone, He immediately convinces that person of the truth of Christ's second coming to judge all men without exception. *“Your people He shall judge in righteousness, and Your poor in justice. The mountains will lift up peace to the people, and the little hills through righteousness. He shall judge the poor of the people; and He shall save the sons of the needy; and He shall crush the oppressor” (Psalm 72:2-4).* *“But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. And before Him shall be gathered all the nations; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And indeed [He] will set the sheep off His right, but the goats off [the] left [hand]” (Matthew 25:31-33).* *“And He commanded us to proclaim to the people and to witness solemnly that it is He who has been marked out by God [to be] Judge of [the] living and [the] dead” (Acts 10:42).* *“because He set a day in which He is going to judge the habitable world in righteousness, by a Man whom He appointed; having given proof to all [by] raising Him from [the] dead” (Acts 17:31).* *“in a day when God judges the hidden things of men, according to my gospel, through Jesus Christ” (Romans 2:16).* *“For all*

shall stand before the judgment seat of Christ” (Romans 14: 10b). “For we all must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive the things [done] through the body, according to what he did, whether good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5:10). “Then I solemnly witness before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, He being about to judge [the] living and dead [at] His appearance and His kingdom” (2 Timothy 4:1). “For the rest, the crown of righteousness is laid up for me, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me in that Day, and not only to me, but also to all the [ones] loving His appearance” (2 Timothy 4:8). “And I saw an angel coming down out of Heaven, having the key of the abyss, and a great chain on his hand. And he laid hold of the dragon, the old serpent who is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, and threw him into the abyss, and shut him up, and sealed over him, that he should not still lead astray the nations, until the thousand years are fulfilled. ... And the Devil leading them astray was thrown into the Lake of Fire and Brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet [were]. And they were tormented day and night to the ages of the ages. And I saw a Great White Throne, and the [One] sitting on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled; and a place was not found for them. And I saw the dead, the small and the great, standing before God. And books were opened. And another Book was opened, [which is] the [Book] of Life. And the dead were judged out of the things written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead in it. And death and hell gave up the dead in them. And they were each judged according to their works. And death and hell were thrown into the Lake of Fire. This is the second death. And if anyone was not found having been written in the Book of Life, he was thrown into the Lake of Fire” (Revelation 20:1-3a,10-15).

As we can see clearly from God’s Word, the first work of the Holy Spirit is regeneration. As soon as the Holy Spirit indwells, He regenerates. All other works of the Holy Spirit are the fruit of that regeneration and indwelling, including sanctification; causing repentance; causing belief of and confession of the true gospel while preventing belief of and confession of a false gospel; speaking of and glorifying Christ; giving access to the father; giving love, joy, peace, and hope; guaranteeing heaven; giving assurance of salvation; causing obedience; and joining people to the true church. This is true Holy Spirit conviction. Compare what the Word of God says about Holy Spirit conviction to the false Holy Spirit conviction of the Puritans and other “experimental Calvinists,” and you will see that true Holy Spirit conviction and pre-regeneration Holy Spirit conviction have nothing in common. One is true and the other is a lie. One is of God and the other is a figment of man’s imagination.

Some questions inevitably arise when this topic is discussed; below are three of the most common ones.

Q. If it is not by the work of the Holy Spirit, then how does one of God’s unregenerate elect come to be interested in spiritual things and to come into contact with the true gospel and be saved?

A. God providentially orders all events so His unregenerate elect will come into contact with the true gospel. This includes ordering all events in the unregenerate elect person’s entire life, from

conception onward, to bring him to a place of coming into contact with the gospel. All of the elect person's experiences prior to regeneration are providentially ordered by God for His glory. It is not the Holy Spirit who causes these things to happen; it is God in His providence who causes these things to happen. The Holy Spirit has specific roles that are spelled out in Scripture (see the Scripture references above). It is important to note that, although providentially ordered by God, everything that an unregenerate elect person thinks, says, and does prior to regeneration is an abomination to God, dead works, and fruit unto death. His distress over his state or his sin, his interest in religion, and even his desire to find the truth that leads him to come into contact with the true gospel are all wicked.

Q. Most of us know of instances where an unregenerate person has been distressed over his state or his sin and has been interested in finding a remedy, including becoming more religious. If this is not Holy Spirit conviction, then what is it?

A. This is natural conscience conviction. Romans 2:14-15 says this: "For when nations not having Law do by nature the things of the Law, they not having Law are a law to themselves, who show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience witnessing with [them], and the thoughts between one another accusing or even excusing." A man in his natural state can have some awareness of his own sinfulness and can even be deeply affected by it. But as long as he remains unregenerate, he is not under Holy Spirit conviction. Again, everything he thinks, says, and does is an abomination to God, dead works, and fruit unto death. And all of it is providentially ordered by God.

Q. How do we know who is under true Holy Spirit conviction and who is under false Holy Spirit conviction?

A. It is very simple. All who believe the gospel are under true Holy Spirit conviction, and all who do not believe the gospel are not under true Holy Spirit conviction. So when you see someone who is "under Holy Spirit conviction" according to himself or others, the question to ask is this: Does he believe the true gospel? Of course, if you do not believe the true gospel yourself, you will not be able to judge whether or not this person believes the true gospel. So you must believe the true gospel first. Please contact us if you would like to know more.

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