

Persons Ought to Endeavor to Be Convinced of Sin: How Can You Say You Have Not Sinned

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Jonathan Edwards Messages

By Jonathan Edwards

Bible Text: Jeremiah 2:23; Jeremiah 32:35

Preached on: Friday, June 8, 2012

Still Water Revival Books

4710-37A Avenue NW

Edmonton, Alberta

Canada T6L 3T5

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The following sermon by Jonathan Edwards is called “Persons Ought to Endeavor to Be Convinced of Sin.” It is taken from Jeremiah chapter two verse 23.

“How canst thou say, I am not polluted, I have not gone after Baalim? see thy way in the valley, know what thou hast done.”¹

God is in this chapter expostulating with the Jews concerning their degeneracies and wickedness. He puts them in mind of their former love and obedience that he may show them once they were fallen, tells them of the great mercies he had bestowed upon them and expostulates with them about their ingratitude and abuse of his kindness and sets for the exceeding heinousness of their wickedness and corruption. And there are threatenings added of God’s vengeance and to all their wickedness they added impenitence and an insensibility of their own pollution. They were not ashamed or sensible of any cause for it. If that is a thing taken notice of in the text in which it may be observed, number one, that they were unconvinced of their own sin and wickedness notwithstanding that they were so exceeding sinful, their corruptions and wickedness was exceeding great. This had been set forth in the preceding of the chapter.

Yet they justified and cleared themselves and said they were not polluted and that they had not gone after Baalim. There is a strange disposition in men to justify themselves in wickedness, let their wickedness be never so great yet that won’t prevent men’s pleading for themselves in their own ways as though they were harmless. Men will justify the most wicked and vile practices that are not only sinful, but so to a very high degree.

Thus, the Jews, though they had forsaken God and were wholly given to idolatry and upon every high hill and under every green tree wandered, playing the harlot, Jeremiah two verse 20, yet they were not sensible that they were polluted and would stand up and say that they had not gone after Baalim. They had not a sense of their guilt though they had so much guilt.

¹ Jeremiah 2:23.

Number two, we may observe God's counsel and command to consider and see their own wickedness.

"... see thy way in the valley, know what thou hast done."²

By the valley seems to be meant the place where they were wont to worship idols and, probably, the valley of the son of Hinnom where they were wont to offer their children in sacrifice to Moloch, Jeremiah 32 verse 35.

What horrid wickedness was that not only to worship idols, but to burn their children alive in sacrifice to idols as they did in the valley of the son of Hinnom, Jeremiah 7:31. Well might God say concerning that:

"...know what thou hast done."³

Number three. Their wickedness is described.

"...thou art a swift dromedary traversing her ways."⁴

...i.e., being very crooked in her paths and often changing her way, not faithful to God in the true religion, not walking in God's way that is a straight way, but often in very greatly turning aside often changing their religion agreeable to the 11th verse of the context.

"Hath a nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods? but my people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit."⁵

And God goes on further to describe their wickedness in the next verse.

"A wild ass used to the wilderness, that snuffeth up the wind at her pleasure; in her occasion who can turn her away?"⁶

Jeremiah two verse 24.

Doctrine. Persons ought to endeavor to be convinced of sin. Briefly, what is intended by conviction of sin? Number one, it is a conviction of the heinousness of sin and, number two, how much of it they are guilty of.

A conviction of the heinousness of sin is number one. Wickedness of heart, Deuteronomy eight verse two.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Jeremiah 2:11.

⁶ Jeremiah 2:24.

“... to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart.”⁷

1 Kings 8:38.

“...know every man the plague of his own heart.”⁸

Number two, wickedness of life, Psalm 50 verse 21.

“I will... set [these things] in order before thine eyes.”⁹

Why we should earnestly endeavor to be convinced of sin, number one, we shall never forsake sin unless we are convinced of sin. Number two, this is needful to prepare us to come to Christ. They that are whole will have no need of a physician, Mark two verse 17. Needful to humble them. Humiliation is by conviction of sin, Galatians three verse 24.

“Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ.”¹⁰

In this way God’s mercy is more prized. Free grace is acknowledged.

Application. Number one. It is not how great an evil it is to quench the Spirit and his convincing influences, 1 Thessalonians 5:19. Convictions of sin are from the Spirit, John 16 verse eight. He shall convince the world of sin. Some have these influences of the Spirit of God. He is for a time striving with them, awakening of them, making them a degree sensible of their guilt and danger, distressing of them in their sins, not allowing them to be quiet in them. But they quench the Spirit. They drown his convincing, awakening influences and backslide again and return to their own ways.

There are many ways a persons quench the Spirit, but all the ways may be comprehended in this, namely, in allowing of sin and in some degree indulging of some lust. When the Spirit of God is quenched it is always by this means. Some quench the Spirit allowing and indulging a slothful Spirit, not improving the strivings of the Spirit.

Persons can obtain the strivings of God’s Spirit, but when they have them they can’t strive with them. They can do much towards improving what convictions of strivings they have, built many though their neglect of a diligent improvement of the strivings of the Spirit of God provoke him to leave them.

Some quench the Spirit by giving no aid to and allowing wicked and blasphemous thoughts, quenching thoughts and envious disposition. Some by exposing themselves to temptation going into company and putting themselves in the way of temptation running needless ventures in confidence of their own strength. Some quench the Spirit by giving

⁷ Deuteronomy 8:2.

⁸ 1 Kings 8:38.

⁹ Psalm 50:21.

¹⁰ Galatians 3:24.

away to sensuality, too much indulging carnal appetites either in act or in thought. Some quench the Spirit by entering into some contention and quarrel. There is nothing more contrary to the nature of the Holy Spirit than the spirit of hatred and contention.

The Spirit of God is a Spirit of love. The apostles make the Spirit dwelling in us and love dwelling in us the same thing, 1 John 4:12-13.

Some quench the Spirit by not duly bridling their tongues allowing them to boast great things, James one verse 26, James three verse 27. Some quench the Spirit by directly refusing the strivings of the Spirit. Because uncomfortable fears and terrors deprive them of the comfort of their lives and they can't enjoy the quietness that others do, they sometimes labor to stifle particular convictions of conscience, endeavor to blind it and stop its mouth because it hinders their enjoyment of their beloved lusts.

But by the doctrine we may learn the great evil of thus quenching the convictions of the Spirit which is so directly opposite to the duty therein recommended. Those instead of striving for convictions of sin strive against them to get rid of them.

There is exceeding great provocation in this. There is no kind of sin so provoking to God as those committed against the inward convictions and strivings of his Holy Spirit. There is one sin against the Holy Spirit that is unpardonable, Mark three verse 29. And there are many other sins against the Holy Ghost that are not unpardonable, but they are more heinous and provoking to God than other sins. No sins are so heinous as this sort, though there be but one that is absolutely unpardonable. And as there is great provocation in it, so there is the greatest folly in it. The sin of quenching the Spirit is no less dangerous than it is provoking. That is, lost by it, which is most necessary for us, namely, conviction of sin. In a heart as so hardened by no kind of sins as it is by those that are against the inward strivings of the Spirit. Let those, therefore, that have had the convincing influences of the Spirit and have quenched them and lost them consider it. You formerly have had convictions of sin. You were concerned about your soul's salvation. God came and knocked at the door of your heart and you had a happy opportunity of obtaining eternal life. God was near to you. You had an inestimable price in your hands to get wisdom, Proverbs 17 verse 16. But you have lost it. You have returned as a dog to his vomit, 2 Peter two verse 22.

It has happened to them according to the true proverb. You have got into your old course of living careless and wicked and with an harder heart, without doubt, than ever you had before. Others that had the convictions of the Spirit when you had they have obtained converting grace. They are passed from death to life, 1 John three verse 14.

They did not backslide as you have done, but passed forever that they are arrived at the land of uprightness. They are got unto Christ that have been called out of darkness into marvelous light, 1 Peter two verse nine. They are in a save and happy and blessed condition and will surely be happy to all eternity.

And so probably it might have been with you if you had gone unimpressed forward and had not foolishly backslidden.

What cause have you to lament that you have done as you have done? Now you are as far off as ever you were. Yea, further. It is now very uncertain whether ever you will obtain. Your state is more dark than ever it was, Matthew 12 verse 45.

“...and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first.”¹¹

2 Peter two verse 20.

“For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning.”¹²

And let those that now have the convincing influences of the Spirit of God in any degree beware that they don't quench them. If you have the Spirit improve his influence, strive to your utmost and take the utmost care to avoid everything in which the Spirit might be driven away from you.

Application number two, of exhortation. To exhort all to labor and strive for conviction of sin. Labor that you may be convinced of the sinfulness and wickedness of your heart, that you may see what a fount of abominable filthiness it is and labor to be convinced of the sin of your life. Labor that you may see your way in the valley and know what you have done, that you may see your sin in its heinous, dangerous and dreadful nature. It is exceeding needful for you, in order to your spiritual and saving good, than if you are thoroughly convinced of sin you will be prepared for Christ and you may rationally hope that a conviction of righteousness will follow. That you may obtain this conviction of sin, let the following direction be attended first. Be much in thinking on your own sins. This is a duty directly required by the words of the text.

“...see thy way in the valley, know what thou hast done.”¹³

Think of your sins in order. Sit down and make a business of recollecting your sins in a revolving of them in your mind, viewing of them in all their circumstances. Set them in order before you. Begin with you childhood and go through your whole life. Follow your own track. View the path that you have gone in through all its mazes, through all its windings and turnings. Bring to mind as many of your sins as you can and let there be a distinct conviction of them. Be as particular as you can and that you may be thorough in the work, it may be profitable for you to observe some method and order in your self reflections. Think of your sins according to the order of time or according to their several natures, your sins against the light of nature or sins against the conscience or according to

¹¹ Matthew 12:45.

¹² 2 Peter 2:20.

¹³ Jeremiah 2:23.

the commandments that have been broken by them or according to the lust that you have exercised in them. Think wherein you have ratified your sensuality, your pride, your covetousness, your hatred, your envy and revenge. Think distinctly of your sins, of your thoughts and imaginations, your words, your deeds. Think on the time of your sins, sins on sabbath days and sins on ordinary days. Think on your sins according to their circumstances, sins committed alone, sins committed in company, according to the objects, sins committed more directly against God, sins against your neighbor, also of the aggravations of your sins in order. Think of the aggravations of your sins in general, the light you have lived under and how favored you have been beyond the heathen, outward mercies enjoyed, means that have been used with you, aggravations of particular sins.

It may be profitable to dwell on one sort at one time and another at another. At one time set yourself to think over the sins of your childhood and at another time the sins you have lately committed. And let these self reflections be often repeated. Think over the same sins and the same aggravations again and again and by repeatedly thinking of them you may probably see new aggravations. You may discover more sins and more of the heinousness of your sins. And never give over this exercise so you find a great deal of difficulty in it. If you find it difficult to do it in any tolerable manner by reason of the wandering and unfixtness of your mind, as though it seems to be to no purpose, you seem to have no success in it, you don't see what you should do it for, you are not as convinced or humbled for it, yet you continue in it and repeat it and labor in it notwithstanding.

I don't want to invite you to this method is supposing that you are attending it of itself will ever be effectual for the convincing of you of sin, for if you should spend your life in it it will never do it unless God sets in. But hereby you will, as much as in you lies, lay yourself in the way of the convictions of the Spirit of God. And though you may attend it long and find no benefit, yet if you continue in it this is a way for you to become the subject of the Spirit's convincing influences.

Second. Another thing that I would advise you to in order to your being convinced of sin is that you would be very much in confessing your sins to God in your prayers. You should join this ever more with your meditations. Let them run parallel. When at any time you have set yourself by solemn meditation to reflect on your sins, always finish it with confession of those sins that you have been meditating on. When you have recollected them in your thoughts bring them and spread them before God in their order, in their aggravations. Be as particular in your confessions as you are in your meditations. Don't only confess in general that you are a sinful creature but mention over before God these and those particular sins with their circumstances. Tell God how you yielded to such and such temptation and what contempt you therein showed of his authority and the light you made of the threats. You need be under no restraint in secret prayer. It would not be proper for you to be so particular in family prayer.

Confess over the sins of your childhood and reckon over before God in your prayers all the aggravations you can think of, general aggravations, aggravations of particular sins and continue in it and often repeat it. And when you have confessed your sins, join them

with a confession how that upon the account of those sins you are utterly unworthy of the least mercy of pardon, of converting grace so that God should hear any of the prayers that you put up to him. God might justly reject all. Labor to keep those things in mind and to practice accordingly, you that are concerned for the welfare of your souls.

Third. The third thing I would advise you to in order to being convinced of sin is to labor that you have a great sense of the dreadful of God's wrath and a fearful punishment that sin exposes to. If your mind be impressed with an awful apprehension of the terribleness of God's anger that is provoked by sin and of the dreadful consequences of sin and see how sin has eternal death in its womb, and so are sensible how hurtful, dangerous and dreadful a thing sin is, that will engage your attention to take notice of your own sins. That which persons are afraid of and have a terrifying sense of they will be upon a watch to observe it and take notice of it.

He that is not much afraid of sin and makes a light matter of it there may a great deal of heinous sins pass in such a one unobserved because he is careless about it. He has nothing that fixes attention to the observation of it. But when a man is sensible that sin has hell in it, it will make him think much of it. A man that has a terrifying sense of the anger of God for sin, he can't help think of his sins. He can't keep his mind off from them. He will be thinking of his sins and the aggravations of them. He will find out his own iniquity, though it be an unpleasant thing to him. Yet he can't help dwelling on it because he is afraid. It is frightful to him to think of his sins, but yet he can't help thinking of them.

It may be illustrated by this comparison. When a man passes to and fro amongst men that he thinks he has no concern with, he may pass by multitudes and not observe them, but if he thinks they are all his enemies and seek his life, he won't pass by a man but he will be afraid. This may teach us a reason why ordinarily those who have the greatest sense of wrath and a dreadfulness of eternal damnation are soonest humbled, for those terrors engaged of mind to take notice of sin and its aggravation, to reflect on what has in them provoked that wrath of God and expose them to that fearful damnation and to look into the heart and to search that. Therefore, think much of hell.

Fourth. If you would be convinced of sin, evermore strive against sin. The more you strive against sin, the more you will see your own sinfulness. Allowing of sin will be the way for you to have more of sin, but not the way for you to be convinced of it. The directest course that you can possibly take to be thoroughly convinced of sin is to set yourself with all your might to strive against it, not to allow any sin in any degree. No sinful act or word or thought. Strive against all sin, against profaneness, against self righteousness, wanderings of mind, slothfulness in duty. Strive with all your might against all evil dispositions towards your neighbor, all manifestations of it, all evil speaking, all worldliness. And when you have wicked thoughts, blasphemous thoughts or any workings or exercises of corruption in any degree and {} against the converted, by no means in the least allow it. Watch against them. Strive with all your might.

Some that maybe think that they must have wicked, blasphemous thoughts in order to see their own hearts and so think they must allow them. How greatly they miss it, how gross is their mistake. Allowing sin is not the way to be convinced of sin. Allowing wicked thoughts tends to the direct contrary. It always tends to harden in sin and so to stupefy. Nothing tends so much to stupefy the heart so much as a loud sin and when the mind is stupefied it won't be apt to be sensible of sin.

It is a tender conscience and not to stupefy that is convinced of sin. But the way to keep the conscience tender is to the utmost to resist sin. When sin is allowed there will be least of a sense of it and it is easy to conceive the reason why it should be so. It is rationale to suppose that where there is least opposition to sin there sin should be least felt and where there is greatest opposition there must it be felt most for sin is felt only by opposition.

By this persons find the strength of sin and experience what sin is. A man doesn't know the strength of an enemy, but by fighting with him. He that lets his enemy alone won't so easily find out what he is as he that engages him.

And strive to your utmost in all duty. Hereby know your opposition to duty and the strength of that opposition. The more you strive against sin and in duty and lay out your strength, the sooner you will probably obtain a thorough conviction of sin. And, hence, persons aren't ordinarily thoroughly convinced and humbled till they come to strive with all their mind, to wrestle and lay out themselves.

Fifth, be much in heart work. i.e., watch in your own heart observing the evil workings of it, striving against them. Where your business is, there you will be experienced. He whose business is much in the field will understand the state of his field and he whose business is much with his heart will be most likely to know his own heart, to know the wickedness and perverseness of it, to find out what lies in the secret corners of it. Be much therefore in heart work, in self examination, self reflection, watching and striving against heart sins. Let this be your daily and continual work.

Sixth, when you do in any measure see your own sinfulness, don't take off your mind from the subject because it is unpleasant. It is a frightful sight when a person sees his own heart. Sometimes persons say that they dare not see it. They can't bear to see it, but be exhorted never to fly from convictions, let them be as terrible as they will. The lance that lays open a wound is painful, but we must not start away from it.

Seventh, beware of discontent under affliction. We have now been taught from God's Word that there is a foundation for full contentment to the soul in Christ Jesus and that we need to have nothing else but the knowledge of his excellency in the enjoyment of his love in order to our complete satisfaction. Why therefore should we be discontented at the loss of other things? It becomes them that do profess to believe in Christ to take their full contentment in him and to show that they do so when it comes to a trial, when they lose other enjoyments and other objects are taken away. Why should we be discontented though some of the strings are cut off, as long as we hold the fountain? And why should

our minds be in a tumult because the shadows fell, as long as we remain in possession of the substance?

In sermon. Persons ought to endeavor to be convinced of sin, Jonathan Edwards.

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