

Shame and Conviction: The Difference

Imagine stepping into a dark room. You step into the darkness, stumble forward and bam! You bump your shin into a piece of furniture. Imagine if a voice came from the darkness, “Don’t bump into the furniture, you fool.” But the room stays dark. You can’t see where you’re going but, you risk another step, wham! You bruise the other shin and the voice returns to the darkness, “There you go again. I thought I told you to quit bumping into the furniture. Now stop it you idiot!” But the room stays dark. Eventually, you’ll either rage at the darkness or collapse in the corner helpless to move.

Now imagine this scenario, you step into a dark room, bump into a piece of furniture and, while you are saying “ouch,” a voice says, “No need to keep on bumping into furniture-it hurts doesn’t it?” The imagine as the voice speaks, the lights turn on. You still have a nice bruise on your shin, but you have light to see where you are going. You have the regret of foolishly bumping into furniture, but you are relieved to have the help of the light.

I believe the reason people reject and run from the conviction of the Holy Spirit is that their experience of the shame of the world (or in the church) has lead them to believe that they’ll just feel worse about themselves without improving. That’s shame. That’s when the lights don’t come on. But, what if there was more to opening yourself up to the conviction of the Holy Spirit instead of just feeling bad? What if you found it to be the secret to

discovering an abundant life. That is true conviction. I have come to realize that conviction is really a free education from the greatest Teacher in the world.

The Holy Spirit is, first, a Teacher. I have learned that a really good teacher has a way of showing students what they are doing wrong and then instruct them in the right way. The point of showing students what is wrong is not for the student to feel ashamed of their mistake but, to show them ways to improve. If a teacher is not shaming but loving, why wouldn't I want to learn how to be more effective?

All of you know that I am a golfer. Golf is an amazingly difficult game. Golfers will spend amazing amounts of time and money trying new equipment or testing a tip from a golf magazine. The reason they do that is because they hope to improve. The scenery is great, the exercise can be good too. Spending time with friends is a bonus but every golfer is chasing hitting a ball longer or straighter. I read somewhere how much it costs to get a pro golfer like Greg Norman to spend a day at a corporate golf outing. He will give a few demonstrations and put on a clinic in return for a handsome fee. I was stunned to find out that some pros charge over \$200,000 a day for such an event. Interestingly, the article said, Tiger Woods doesn't even do such outings. You can't get him for a day at any price.

But, lets just stretch our imaginations a bit. Let's just imagine that I was able to obtain the personal services of Tiger Woods for a day. Whatever the price, I was able to get a hold of the funds and he agreed to work with me for a whole day. Now suppose we went to the practice range and Tiger says, "OK Jeff let's see you swing a few." I hit a few balls and Tiger interrupts, saying, "Let's stop right there for a second. I see something in your grip that isn't right. Let me show you how to hold the club better." Can you conceive me or

anyone in their right mind going off on Tiger Woods at this point? “Hold on, just a minute, you don’t like the way I’m holding the club huh? What makes you think you have the right to tell me how to swing a golf club?” It is unthinkable that I would reject the teaching and helpful advice of the world’s greatest player, especially after such a high price had been paid for such help.

It must be inconceivable to God that person after person rejects the conviction of the Holy Spirit after such a high price was paid to deposit him in your hearts. Being shameful people, raised in a culture of shame, we often feel that the Holy Spirit’s convicting role as something to be avoided or dreaded and yet we study, pray for and are delighted with His gifts and fruits. Conviction by the Holy Spirit is the greatest, most expensive Life Coach in the universe always by my side, showing me what and how to change. Understanding shame and conviction and the proper action to take in conviction is Step #3 in shucking the shame in our lives. Conviction helps me to grow. Conviction helps me not to bump into the same furniture today that I bumped into yesterday. Conviction corrects the character flaws, eliminates mistakes and helps me not wander down the same old paths of least resistance and greatest sin. Our scripture passage today is a familiar one. It is the story of the prodigal son but today I want us to look at it in a totally different light. The light of shame and conviction. When you read the parable in old ways, you will see two sons and elder and a younger. When you read this parable with new eyes I think you will see three sons the younger son who knew the shame of sin, the older son who acted out of shame and a third, new son who experienced celebration and conviction. Let’s look at an old story with new eyes.

¹¹Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. ¹²The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them. ¹³"Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. ¹⁴After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. ¹⁷"When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! ¹⁸I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.'²⁰ So he got up and went to his father. "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. ²¹"The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'²² But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate. ²⁵"Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ²⁷'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.'²⁸ The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and

pleaded with him. ²⁹But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. ³⁰But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!' ³¹" 'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. ³²But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'

Now let me make you aware of the process of true conviction. What the youngest son did was unthinkingly disrespectful. Are you surprised? Happens all the time. But notice, what happened with this younger brother caught in the consequences of “riotous living,” when he “came to his senses,” he recognized that if he continued, this course of life would lead to utter destruction. He saw his own folly. By the way, seeing one’s own folly is essential to finding the path to wisdom. Proverbs 16:22 says, “Understanding is a fountain of life to those who have it, but folly brings punishment to fools.” And, helping one to see one’s folly is a primary result of Holy Spirit conviction. Also notice, that this understanding drove him where? That’s right...it drove this sinning younger, convicted, wiser son TO the father. Simply, conviction always moves us back to the father. Verse 18 shows us that, “¹⁸I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.” Now contrast the demeanor of the older brother. A hard driving, dutiful performer that our a culture like ours applauds He works hard. He pleases others. He is conscientious and full of shame.

Also remember what we learned last week from the story of Adam and Eve, shame always causes you to hide from God, godly people. Any thought that causes one to hide from God is not a Godly thought and shame is not inspired by the Holy Spirit. Shame always causes us to feel more distant from God. Conviction always makes us feel closer to God. In conviction, the youngest son has divulged his deepest thoughts to the father, look what the youngest son says to the father in verse 19, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.” Contrast that to the oldest son, ²⁵“Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ²⁷‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’ ²⁸“The older brother became angry and refused to go in. The oldest son is unable to speak directly to his father. The fear of rejection keeps shame based people from ever sharing their true longings with those who can help the most. The younger son was in a distant land but came to his father’s embrace. The older was literally close by, but was always figuratively distant “in the field” and emotionally unavailable to the father.

Now let’s look at the transformation of the younger son into the “third” son I spoke of earlier. Note what the father does when the son, he offers grace and when the younger son accepts that grace, the robe, the ring, the sandals and calf something astonishing happens. Verse 24 says that they (father and son)...begin to celebrate. Catch that? The younger son, the father and anyone who would enter the party...celebrate Shame based families seldom

celebrate. The straight A report card might be met with a momentary pat on the head; but if there is one B, it is questioned. The very nature of God's kingdom is based on celebration. The kingdom of God is compared to a wedding party, the greatest of Middle Eastern celebrations. The conviction of the Holy Spirit is God's way of bringing a true process of remorse, but the weeping does not tarry forever and the scriptures tell us, "joy comes in the morning." Shame never invites, nor allows us into celebration, we are too busy brooding over our inadequacy to join the party. That's the older brother's response, "You never even gave me a young goat..." It is a statement of low esteem disguised as criticism of his younger brother and father. Instead of the radical honesty of the younger brother, who admitted his brokenness to his father, the older brother hid his feelings of unworthiness by putting others down.

Let me let you in on a little relational secret, if someone can't enjoy your success, it most certainly means that he/she doesn't feel successful themselves. If someone is putting you down, you can be sure it is an impoverished soul trying to prop themselves up. Take note of that those who always find themselves in criticism and not celebration.

"All these years I have been slaving for you." The shame filled older son tried to manipulate his father by essentially saying, "Aren't you ashamed of yourself dad?" The older brother is desperately longing for attention, love and accepted and is exposed not by a forthright, child like admission of need but by a manipulative technique. "You're a bad, unskilled father." Is the eldest son's attempt to say, "Give me the love I need." And sadly, the shame filled soul can't comprehend the availability of the father's love, because it

presumes that love is earned. The younger son returned from a far country with the hope of being a servant but was confirmed a son. The older, whose sonship was never in question, nonetheless perceived his life history as one of bondage.

The father? “³¹My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours.’” My love, my life, my heart, my affection, my material goods-all of it was and is always available to you. God’s love is not acquired by living right and serving well. God’s love is received only through the sweet surrender of a thirsty soul. And, we only get thirsty through the conviction of the Holy Spirit. Step #1: Quit chasing the rabbit. Step #2: Fix your eyes on Jesus. Step #3: Surrender to conviction, run to the father.

To say “Shuck the Shame” isn’t to say your sin is no big deal. It is, instead, to say don’t confuse the voice of the enemy with that of our advocate. God will never overlook your sin. He hates sin. But, he loves you, He is in your corner, he is the cheerleader of your life and the life of the party. He is calling and waiting for you-he will never turn away from you nor hide from you, don’t turn away from him nor hide from him. Come on home. It’s time to join the party.