

Can You Hear the Sirens? Experiencing the Spirit's Conviction in a Shameless World

I don't know why my wife and I did this.

The first year we owned our home, we made no effort to change the batteries in our smoke alarms. After a few months, the alarm in the kitchen gave off a little chirp, reminding us to change the battery. We spent about a month just ignoring the occasional chirp. But after a while, it started to beep every two minutes.

So I tried everything to get rid of the annoying chirp. I hid the alarm in the basement. That didn't work. I buried the alarm in a box in the garage and covered it with some old guitar magazines. That didn't work either. Finally I came to my senses and just replaced the old battery with a new one (voila!).

In the same way, the role of the Spirit is to dredge up all the sin that we've buried and hidden away. Only when we come to our senses and listen to the alarms of the Spirit's conviction can we experience new life.

Jesus told the disciples that when the Spirit comes, He would convict the world of "righteousness, sin, and judgment" (John 16:8)—righteousness and sin because we can't know we've missed the mark until we know what the mark of righteousness is. Jesus is that mark and nothing else. And the Spirit convicts us of judgment because we must know that without repentance, we are headed for a Christ-less eternity.

But we don't just experience conviction when we come to faith in Jesus. We also experience ongoing conviction of sin as believers (John 1:7-9). The barriers to a life of Spirit

conviction are:

1. Self-Righteousness

This is the universal delusion of humanity. Both religious and nonreligious people are convinced they can just be good enough for God. Like the Pharisee in Jesus's parable (Luke 18:9-14), the super-religious are convinced they are better than the riffraff. Likewise, the unbeliever thinks he is better than all those really bad people like murders and sex-traffickers. But we all have the wrong standard. Jesus saves us from self-right-ness.

2. Blame-Shifting

Once we acknowledge wrongdoing, then someone must take the fall. It is human nature to transfer the blame to everyone around us. Adam said to God, "This woman you put in the garden with me ..." It's everybody else's fault but his. And the woman responded, "This sneaky servant deceived me ..." See the pattern here? It's difficult to hear the Spirit's conviction when we fail to own our stuff. We have an old saying in the South: "When it's everybody else—it's you." We need to resist the temptation to blame-shift to others.

3. Downplaying

Sometimes in ministry, I hear people admit wrongdoing but then they try to soften the ugliness of it. Sure, they blew it, but was it really that bad? We recently had a good friend who was caught in a grave pattern of sin and deception against his leaders. His initial response was to take ownership. But when he realized he needed to confess it to the church, he began to modulate and downplay the gravity of it. Unfortunately, it resulted in some very destructive things in the life of the church. We felt crushed by his betrayal. But we were more hurt by the fact that he blew it off and thought it was "no biggie."

4. False Prophets

In the Old Testament, the prophets constantly warned Israel not to listen to lying prophets. These false prophets had Israel convinced God wasn't going to judge them for their idolatry. But God's true prophets warned that Babylonian exile was coming. Listen, the Holy Spirit can't bless stupid. Let's surround ourselves with wise people who will speak the truth into our lives. If you've got lying well-wishers in your inner circle who keep giving you bad advice, then it's time to get some new prophets.

The Spirit means to bring our sin scratching and yowling into the light of the cross. Only when we embrace His cleansing power can we be saved. And it's only when we demolish those barriers to conviction that we begin to grow in the Christian life. The question is, can you hear the sirens?

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