

# How We Make Disciples: Reviewing the Three C's Series

## Convictions: Thinking Like Jesus (1 Cor. 14:20)

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By  
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### At A Glance:

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*These sermon study notes are designed to be a tool used after listening to the sermon. This resource is a guide to help deepen understanding regarding the Scriptures and ideas presented in the sermon. Those who use these study notes are encouraged to look up, read through, and think about Scripture references in this guide. There is more information in these notes than what is presented in the sermon. These study notes are designed to be used as an independent study tool to help the formation of Biblical convictions, character, and conduct.*

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# Convictions: Thinking Like Jesus

## I. Introduction

### A. Illustration: Female Cycling Champion Hannah Arensman

1. I'm going to do something a lot of people think is a bad idea, I'm going to talk about a political hot button topic. Why are transgender athletes so controversial right now? There is a fight going on over whether transgender athletes should be allowed to participate in women's sports or kept out. Both sides are trying to use the power of law to get their way.
2. It's interesting that no one is talking about transgender women being involved in men's sports. Why is that issue not controversial? Because women who participate in men's sports don't have a biological advantage in the same way men do when they participate in women's sports. This silence and one sidedness is an acknowledgment of the biological reality all while many people try to deny these differences.
3. Another recent story came out about a legendary women's champion cyclist, Hannah Arensman, who decided to retire due to transgender men consistently winning races. Now she is voicing concerns about transgender athletes destroying women's sports. This champion had previously won 35 races on the national cyclocross circuit. She said the reason for her early retirement is because no matter how hard she trains and how much work she puts in, she is at a biological disadvantage and cannot win against men. She is tired of working so hard only to be beaten unfairly. This champion cyclist retired at the young age of twenty-five.
4. On the other side, the transgender athlete that beat Hannah, said they felt like a superhero and received a lot of support for their success. The victory was viewed positively as a step of acceptance and tolerance. Some people were hoping similar outcomes would be seen in the rest of society. If transgender athletes were restricted from participating in women's sports, this would be viewed as unfair discrimination and transphobia.

B. The so called "culture wars" that are so prevalent in our time are the result of competing ways of viewing the world—different ways of thinking. Why do some people want to keep trans athletes out of women's sports while other people are passionate about letting them participate? Because each side sees the world differently and they value different priorities as a result. How and what people think matters significantly.

C. The way we think shapes our lives. Human life is built from the inside out. This reality is affirmed in the Bible, "23 Watch over your heart with all diligence, For from it *flow* the springs of life." (Pr. 4:23). What happens in our soul has the biggest impact on how we live. God gives us the wise advice to pay attention to and protect our internal world so that we can live healthy lives. This includes how we think.

D. Contrary to the attitude of our day, devoting attention, and care to the way we think is of critical importance. In fact, it is one of the most important qualities about us. This is true both of life in general and following Jesus in particular. Contrary to the mistaken perspective that

trivializes thought—especially individual’s religious beliefs—how a person thinks will have a major impact on who they are and how they live. This cannot be avoided. The way a person thinks will be the most influential and decisive factor in determining how they act and how they decide to live.

## II. Command

- A. It’s hard to believe it has almost been a year since we first introduced our new mission statement. Since the elders have a goal to create a healthier church culture that is more focused on building the kingdom of God on earth by intentionally investing in making disciples, it is important for us to regularly remind ourselves of that which is most important. God Himself did this regularly with the people of Israel. In various ways, God built strategies into the life of His people so they would remember their purpose and identity in connection with God. Passover was an annual reminder about their uniqueness as a people and the fact that God had set them apart for His purposes. Their worship songs presented the details of various events in their history. There were even physical reminders set up so the people of God would recall God’s actions on their behalf—such as crossing the Jordan river. God regularly sent prophets that pointed people back to God’s purposes for them and encouraged people to return to their God given mission. If God was careful to help His people remember their identity and purpose in a variety of ways, repeatedly, it is a good idea for us to do the same. As human beings, it is easy to drift, get distracted, and be forgetful. For these reasons, we are going to review our mission statement by taking another look at The Three C’s of Convictions, Character, and Conduct.
- B. Here at Community Alliance Church we have a specific strategy for staying faithful to the final command Jesus gave to His disciples called The Great Commission (Mt. 28:18-20). The reason this command is so important is that it gives the direction of and reason for the church. Jesus tells those who are following His way of life to “make disciples” of the entire world. Each local church, a group of disciples who live in the same community who partner together for the purposes of God, is to be focused on figuring out ways they can participate in the disciple making mission of Jesus. While this may look quite different from church to church, each church has the same end objective: expanding the kingdom of God on earth through the activity of making disciples.
- C. Our church has captured this command in what we call the Three C’s. Each C brings to mind a critical area of life that is involved in the discipleship process that leads to transformation of life. Each of these C’s are highlighted in the ministry of Jesus and were part of His disciple making strategy. This message will revisit the first C which is “convictions”. If a person is going to be transformed to live the way Jesus lived, this process begins with the way people think. If a person does not think differently, they will never live differently either. Thoughts are the place where we can and must begin to change.<sup>1</sup>
- D. Transformation of how a person thinks is so important to spiritual health and growth that is it commanded by God, “<sup>20</sup> Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but

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<sup>1</sup> Dallas Willard *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 2002), 95.

in your thinking be mature.” (1 Co. 14:20). This command disagrees with and condemns the anti-intellectual attitudes prevalent in the modern Western church. This command is clarified as it is put both positively and negatively. Disciples are told to, “not be children in your thinking” and “in your thinking be mature”. The mental ability of disciples should operate in an adult grownup way. The way a person thinks should be as developed as possible given each person’s ability. While this will be different from person to person given IQ levels, education, thinking skills, and mental conditions, the command still applies to everyone who is a Jesus follower.

- E. The term for “thinking” refers to the process of using your mind to consider something carefully.<sup>2</sup> This is what it means when Jesus says, “You shall love the Lord your God...with all your mind” (Mt. 22:37). God has given humans the ability to have complex and abstract thinking, distinct from animal life. The question becomes, how will each person use this wonderful gift given to us by God? Disciples should be good stewards of their mind which they have been given by God. They are to use it properly—as God intended it to be used. Our minds are to be used for the purposes of God.

### III. Goal

- A. The goal of being faithful to this command is to think like Jesus. Every disciple should make it their aim to live their life by having the perspective of Jesus on reality. The truth of the Bible becomes the way disciples see the world. As the truth of the Bible is accepted as fact, it becomes the lens through which the world is understood and interpreted. This will include the perspective of the Bible in general as Jesus both affirms the accuracy and reliability of the Bible and is presented as the embodiment of its message.
- B. The apostle Paul put the goal of thinking in the life of discipleship this way, “<sup>16</sup> For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE WILL INSTRUCT HIM? But we have the mind of Christ.” (1 Cor. 2:16). The Bible and the teachings of Jesus should impact how we think about everything. As a person progressively learns about Jesus and His perspective, they eventually “have the mind of Christ” as the Holy Spirit enables the individual to understand the spiritual message of God (1 Cor. 2:11-15). Disciples should be thinking accurately and often about God, His Word, and His perspective. We are told to “set our minds” on these things (Col. 3:2). Developing the mind of Jesus will require much more than thinking about “things that are above” when we are in church on Sunday morning or in a Bible study. For the disciple, this becomes a constant activity that they focus their thoughts on when their mind is free to focus on topics of their own choosing. It is how they direct their mental energies in a consistent way. A disciple puts their mental focus on God as often as they are able. The kingdom of God will be the primary topic of thought and conversation just as it was in the life of Jesus. A significant part of living the Christian life is to change the way we think and process information.
- C. Mature disciples will think like Jesus thinks as an outworking of how they have directed their mental energy and abilities. They won’t have to pray and ask, “What does Jesus want me to do?” Rather, they will be asking, “How should I be implementing what Jesus said?” They will possess a familiarity with Jesus that they will by default, take on His outlook as they have the

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<sup>2</sup> Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on 1 Cor. 14:20 “in your thinking”

mind of Jesus in them. The perspective of Jesus will be the natural posture and way of looking at the world for the mature disciple. This doesn't mean a person won't continually be dependent on Jesus. If something thinks this way, they clearly don't yet possess the mind of Jesus which was deeply dependent on the Father.

- D. Given what has been stated so far, God commands disciples to be mature in the ways they think about things to the point that they develop the perspective of Jesus, it is natural to wonder how to go about doing this practically. If I am to grow in my convictions, I need some method for doing so. Otherwise, I will be left at a point of frustration where I'm told to do something but left with no idea about how to do what I'm told.

#### IV. Description

- A. Understanding the two primary elements of convictions will be very helpful when trying to mature the way we think. Both elements that make up a conviction need to be present and developed if our convictions are to be fully formed. If one or the other is lacking, it is not a personal conviction yet. Instead of being like those who don't know God, disciples are again commanded to, "<sup>14</sup>You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned *them*," (2 Tim. 3:14). The two elements are "things you have learned" and "become convinced of".
- B. We'll start with the first quality of a conviction: understanding the intellectual content. Convictions first start to develop when a person encounters new information. In this verse, spiritual information comes from a teacher. In Timothy's case, the teachers are Paul, his mother, and grandmother. While there are different levels of learning according to modern methods of teaching, as we track the flow of thought from Paul to Timothy we see, "continue in the things you have learned" means that Timothy has knowledge of the content, has seen the teaching modeled in life, and understands the difference the teaching makes (2 Tim. 3:10-11). The things that Timothy is being taught comes from, "the sacred writings" (2 Tim. 3:15) also called "Scripture" (2 Tim. 3:16).
- C. Convictions begin to be developed when a person clearly understands the content of what is being taught from the Bible. While primarily intellectual, the instruction is not separated from either character or conduct. It is life instruction not merely an abstract intellectual pursuit. This instruction is grounded in and flows from the Word of God. Good Bible teachers don't just provide content but also provide a living model of what is being taught—Jesus is the prime example of this. Jesus didn't just tell, He demonstrated. Eventually, the things that are learned leads to transformation of life so that the person who is learning is able to carry out every good work God has for them to do (2 Tim. 3:17). The activities of this learning include teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16).
- D. The second, and most neglected aspect of developing convictions is, "and become convinced of" (v. 14). It is not enough to understand content to form convictions. For something to become a conviction, a person must be convinced the content that is understood is true. There is a persuasive element involved with convictions. This is where Bible based convictions usually fall short. In general, the leaders, teachers, and preachers, of the church fail to help people become convinced of what is being taught due to intellectual shallowness in the church.

- E. For views to develop to the point that they become a conviction, the person must be “fully convinced in their own mind” (Rm. 14:5), a person will need the Biblical position presented in such a way that it becomes the most compelling and best explanation compared to all the alternatives. This is a difficult task as the current culture resists and in some cases outright rejects this aspect of convictions. Some people may even consider this immoral. If one person thinks or presents their view as better than another’s it is commonly viewed as prideful and intolerant. However, this is simply the way the world works. Not all ideas are equal. Some are better than others. Only one view is true because there is only one way the world actually is. This is just as true in science as it is in religion. It is not intolerant to say two plus two equals four. Two plus two does not equal one, or two, or three, or five. Any other answer will be wrong. It is inherent to the very nature of truth to be exclusive.
- F. The church should be a place for people to explore, ask questions, doubt, raise challenges or objections, and mentally explore alternatives. These are all part of the process of developing mature thinking and convictions. Questions should be welcomed not ignored, pushed aside, or shamed. The church and those who are being disciplined should find themselves in a safe environment in which they can grow intellectually. In fact, this is a central part of the Christian life. Good teachers intentionally ask questions, just as Jesus did, to help confront people in the way they think and challenge them to mature in their understanding.
- G. For people to grow and develop their own convictions they must both understand what is being taught AND be convinced it is true. When a disciple has fully formed convictions, they, “know the exact truth about the things you have been taught” (Lk. 1:4). If one or the other component of convictions is lacking, a person remains immature in their thinking.
- H. While the process of learning how to think differently and develop convictions takes a lifetime and results in major transformation, the steps to engage this process don’t have to be big or a major inconvenience. Small steps can help a person be transformed in their thinking so they eventually possess the mind of Jesus and understand the will of God. One habit that I regularly participate in for the development of my own personal convictions is to listen to the podcasts put out by Greg Koukl and his staff at an organization called Stand to Reason. Mostly, I listen to these podcasts while I am driving. This doesn’t take much effort and it doesn’t take any extra time out of my schedule yet it helps tremendously in the way I think. I listen to these podcasts, mostly, as I’m driving to and from work. I get about 7-10 minutes in each trip. Since I drive home for lunch, I am able to invest 40 minutes a day simply during my travel time. In a week, this adds up to 200 minutes of time devoted to my spiritual growth all as a natural part of my regular schedule without any extra time being spent. Yes, this habit takes mental concentration but this is a small price to pay. It is easy to add specific spiritual habits to our lives that can deepen our understanding of spiritual things without much hassle. There are many good Bible based Christian teachers who have various broadcasts and podcasts to help shape your convictions such as William Lane Craig, Hugh Ross, Alisa Childers, Mike Winger, Melissa Dougherty, J. Warner Wallace, and Frank Turek among others. Find one you like and learn from them regularly.

- I. With the vast opportunities available today to learn about the Bible and the Christian life, there are a lot of different options to grow in our convictions. If you spend any time on YouTube, you can turn it into a discipleship opportunity. Another staff member of Stand to Reason, Tim Barnett, has a YouTube channel called “Red Pen Logic”. As a former science teacher, in 3-5 minute videos, Tim puts the red pen to popular meme’s and social media that is challenging or criticizing Christianity. In a short video, you will learn how to think better about the truth of Christianity and your convictions will grow. Watch one video a day. It will only take a few minutes. Small changes can make a lasting impact on your life.
- J. Obvious other habits that will develop our personal convictions are reading (or listening to) books on spiritual subjects. The options here are seemingly endless with the large amount of Christian literature available today. Studying the Bible is another option. Going to conferences and other Christian events. Being part of a small group or having a mentor provides an opportunity for someone more experienced and knowledgeable in the Christian life to provide personalized instruction to you. Any activity that will help you learn and deepen your understanding of God and His perspective can be used to grow your convictions. Find something that will help you on a regular basis. Don’t wait for someone else to approach you or provide what you need, take the initiative, and seek out your own growth. Take an active role.

#### V. Result

- A. As disciples respond in obedience to the command to be mature in their thinking and develop strong personal convictions, God tells us what the result will be, “<sup>2</sup> And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.” (Rm. 12:2). As a person’s thinking develops and matures, their lives are transformed as a result. If convictions are neglected, the Christian life will be significantly hindered. Failing to apply the life of the mind to the things of God will slow down or prevent altogether a person’s spiritual growth. The promised result of, “renewing of your mind” is being “transformed” and coming to know “the will of God.”
- B. Those who put in the time and work to develop their personal convictions will know what God wants them to do and will be transformed as a result. Those who don’t develop mature convictions will by default end up being “conformed to this world”. It is pretty much automatic that individuals who don’t put in the work to set their minds on the things above will end up thinking almost the same as the culture in which they live. They will end up thinking, prioritizing, and living as the people who don’t even believe in God.
- C. “Be transformed” is yet another command. Being renewed in our minds is not optional, it is a requirement for following Jesus. Every disciple has the responsibility and duty to be changed in their nature or essence.<sup>3</sup> In this context, it means a person must change the way they think. Individuals who are following Jesus are given the task of learning how to think differently about themselves, how life is to be lived, what is valuable, and the world in which they live. This process of renewing our minds involves establishing convictions.<sup>4</sup> God requires disciples to be lifelong learners of His perspective and ways.

<sup>3</sup> Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Rm. 12:2 “be transformed”

<sup>4</sup> Jerry Bridges, [\*The Practice of Godliness\*](#) (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 1983), 124.

- D. Disciples who prioritize and incorporate the life of the mind into their Christian life will see changes that others do not. For myself, this was the most important missing ingredient to my Christian life. When I learned my mind had to be involved in my loving God and following Jesus, my life literally transformed. I went from years of minimal growth to seeing significant changes in my life rather quickly. The more fully developed convictions I had the more I lived as Jesus wanted me to. I have personally experienced the reliability of this truth. The more I learn with each passing year the more my life is transformed and the less I look like the culture around me. This transformation doesn't happen overnight, but it does happen over time. What Paul says in this verse is trustworthy.
- E. Disciples who possess the mind of Jesus are also the most spiritually fruitful followers of Jesus. People who don't know very much about Jesus and who can't clearly articulate their views to others or defend their perspective against competing ideologies are generally incapable of making a significant impact for the kingdom. When questions or challenges arise, they are found flat footed with nothing to say. In our current culture, if we present an intellectually shallow Christianity people will quickly dismiss us and treat our message as irrelevant. Ignorance creates incompetence. This principle holds true no matter what area of life we are talking about: including spiritual things. If a person knows little about Jesus, the Bible, and living the Christian life, they will have little meaningful substance to draw from and offer to others.

## VI. Conclusion

- A. Disciples are not allowed to be intellectually lazy about the things of God. We are commanded, several times, to be mature in our thinking so that we can develop the mind of Jesus which transforms our lives. We are to love God with our minds.
- B. Disciples are encouraged, “<sup>22</sup> The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves.” (Rm. 14:22). Each disciple is personally responsible to God for the views they hold and the moral positions that follow from those views. Our trust in Jesus and our understanding of God is built from the convictions we have.

## VII. Questions for Further Thought

- A. Can you name a belief that you have and a conviction that you have (remembering the two elements of convictions)? How are they different?
- B. How does Jesus demonstrate mature thinking in Luke 11:16-26?
- C. Is there anything the Bible teaches that you aren't sure if it is true? How might you become convinced?
- D. What hinders disciples from developing their own personal convictions?
- E. What is one habit you can start to help you become mature in your thinking?