

Where We Are Going Series

Transforming Convictions (2 Tim. 3:14)

By
Andy Davis

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.

Transforming Convictions

I. Introduction

A. Illustration: Eye Exam Image

1. Since I wear contacts, and occasionally glasses, I have to regularly go through an eye test. Many of you may be familiar with it: finding the circle that appears to be sticking out of the diagram and getting the puff of air shot in your eye (which somehow manages to surprise you even though you know it is coming).
2. Part of a regular eye test is looking in the auto refractor at the circular picture of the field with rows and the house or the road with the hot air balloon. The picture begins with a blurry image, to the point you can't see anything, and it sharpens over time until the image becomes clear. Then, once the image comes into focus, it is blurred again to repeat the process.
3. Our convictions (the way we think) are similar to this eye test. Some people have views that they think are true, but their views aren't very clear. The person may not have spent a lot of time thinking about each conviction and doesn't have knowledgeable and persuasive reasons for holding their view. That would be like the blurry image. Others have spent time studying, investigating, and thinking about their beliefs on various topics and have both informed and well-reasoned views. This would be comparable to the clear image.
4. The better our eyes and the clearer our convictions, the better we will be able to navigate our world without harm.

B. When the life and ministry of Jesus is studied carefully, it will be readily noticeable that Jesus cared deeply about what people thought. As a regular practice, Jesus spent much of His time and effort preaching and teaching people, even those whom He just met. Also, if you look at the recorded conversations we have from the life of Jesus, He spent a significant amount of these convincing others to adopt His perspective. Jesus consistently debated with those who disagreed with Him using logic and offering good reasons for His views. Jesus pointed out where people made mistakes in their thinking. He highlighted when people didn't understand the Scriptures and He provided better alternatives. In many different ways, Jesus demonstrated His priority of helping other people develop better convictions.

C. If disciples are going to live healthy and faithful lives before God, they must understand what convictions are, the role they play in our lives, and how to develop accurate ones. Unless a person is actively changing the way they think through regular contact with the word of God, they will not be transformed to be like Jesus.

II. Explanation of Convictions

A. Earlier in this series, we introduced the three C's as convictions, character, and conduct. These are three important areas of discipleship that must be transformed in order for a person to become like Jesus. In order for the church to do its job, these three areas of life must come under the influence of Jesus. The first C will be examined in a little more detail than the brief introduction already provided. Convictions refer to what a person thinks. Spiritual

transformation starts with the mind. Once a person accepts the statements Jesus made about Himself, their lives will begin to change when they start thinking differently. Each individual person is responsible for what they think before God. As we discovered from Romans 14:22, “²² The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves.”

- B. The goal of looking at the world God’s way is for people to be blessed through it.¹ When we see the world as it really is, we will know what needs to be fixed and how to fix it. Wrong views always lead to harmful consequences. Correct views, when followed, always lead to healthy consequences. In comparison with the Christian worldview and philosophy, all other views on relationships, emotions, happiness, and any other topic are fractional, incomplete, and sometimes flat wrong.² Adopting the perspective of Jesus and the Bible results in the best quality of life possible in a broken world and never-ending bliss in eternity.
- C. A conviction is to have strong beliefs, views, or opinions and the effects these strong perspectives have on a person. The Concise Oxford English Dictionary further defines convictions as, “the quality of showing that one is firmly convinced of something.”³ It is our goal at Community Alliance Church to disciple people to the point that they develop strong personal convictions, based on truth and good information, to the point that they demonstrate their beliefs in the way they live their lives. We want to help others become convinced of the truthfulness of Jesus’s message in a way that leads individuals to having strong beliefs. A conviction is something you believe so strongly that it affects the way you live.⁴
- D. As we are learning more about convictions, we will look at a few key passages of Scripture that help us understand convictions in a deeper way. As people learn about Jesus and grow in their understanding of Him and their knowledge of God, it is our hope that each individual will become fully convinced of the truthfulness of the Bible and Christianity. Paul expresses the idea of a person’s convictions this way, “⁵ One person regards one day above another, another regards every day *alike*. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind.” (Rm. 14:5). A person who is fully convinced that a belief is true is completely confident and certain of the view they hold because it is based on good information.⁵ Paul is referring to certitude of belief—the strength of the belief.⁶ Each disciple should hold tightly to their views by having good reasons for them. When firm convictions exist, a person isn’t bothered by other people’s contrary views because a person knows the reasons for holding their view. While others may have beliefs and participate in certain activities simply because that’s what they do, the person

¹ Jonathan T. Pennington, [*Jesus the Great Philosopher: Rediscovering the Wisdom Needed for the Good Life*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2020), 51.

² Jonathan T. Pennington, [*Jesus the Great Philosopher: Rediscovering the Wisdom Needed for the Good Life*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2020), 201.

³ Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson, eds., [*Concise Oxford English Dictionary*](#) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁴ Jerry Bridges, [*The Discipline of Grace: God’s Role and Our Role in the Pursuit of Holiness*](#) (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2006), 167.

⁵ Logos 9 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Romans 14:5 “must be fully convinced”

⁶ Robert Jewett and Roy David Kotansky, [*Romans: A Commentary*](#), ed. Eldon Jay Epp, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006), 845.

with a conviction has a good justification for what they do. Having informed convictions is a sign of maturity (Eph. 4:14-15).

- E. It is the job of the Christian teacher and person doing the disciple making to not only inform their students on what to think, but why they should accept what is being taught. Paul encourages the young pastor Timothy, “¹⁴ You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned *them*,” (2 Tim. 3:14). Timothy was educated and “learned” he is to also “become convinced of” what he has been taught. Timothy is commanded to allow himself to be convinced of the truthfulness of the message of Scripture as it has been taught to Him. The responsibility of doing the convincing falls on the shoulders of the teacher, while the student is to be open to the truth they are hearing. The goal of gospel instruction is not merely information but real life assurance.⁷ This follows Paul’s personal pattern (Rm. 14:14) and the pattern of Luke (Lk. 1:4). Disciples should know the certainty of the things they have been taught. Timothy is not to be a mindless imitator of other people’s views, but an informed communicator of his own informed convictions.⁸
- F. Being convinced of the truthfulness of Christianity is not just the expectation for pastors; every disciple ought to know the reasons they have for their views on Jesus (“¹⁵ but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;” 1 Pet. 3:15). Every Christian should be able to articulate the reasons for their trust in Jesus to anyone who may ask them. If a Christian can’t give good reasons for why they are following Jesus, they haven’t yet adopted following Jesus as their own conviction.
- G. So important is being fully convinced of the truthfulness of the gospel that God plays a role in making this happen (“⁵ for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.” 1 Thess. 1:5). God Himself plays a role in convincing people of the truthfulness of the gospel in order to give them a confidence that is full and complete. This work of God has been experienced by all true Christians when they accepted and believed the gospel for the first time. God brings to them enough confidence in Jesus and the gospel to accept it as true, and He continues to perform this work in a person the more knowledgeable they become in the message of God. This is a work accomplished by the Holy Spirit.⁹ The Spirit convinces some of the hearers of the gospel of its truthfulness.
- H. The goal of developing convictions is to help people “stand fully assured in all the will of God.” (Col. 4:12) and “have the mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:16).¹⁰ By saturating our lives with the

⁷ Robert W. Yarbrough, [The Letters to Timothy and Titus](#), ed. D. A. Carson, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; London: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Apollos, 2018), 425.

⁸ Robert W. Yarbrough, [The Letters to Timothy and Titus](#), ed. D. A. Carson, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; London: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Apollos, 2018), 426.

⁹ Leon Morris, [1 and 2 Thessalonians: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 13, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1984), 46,

¹⁰ For a more detailed and academic look at Paul’s understanding of transformed thinking see Craig Keener’s *The Mind of the Spirit: Paul’s Approach to Transformed Thinking*.

Scriptures, we can think from God’s perspective and develop convictions that are based on kingdom principles.¹¹ Convictions are strong beliefs that we hold with psychological certainty (although imperfectly) for good reasons that influence the way we live. It is at this deeper level of thinking that Jesus influences true disciples. When individuals truly believe in Jesus, it will transform the way they think and the way they see the world.

- I. When a person’s views become assured, they live with a peace and confidence that produces good mental and emotional health. Peace and confidence are part of the valuable treasure at the end of the difficult journey of developing informed convictions (Col. 2:2). It takes hard work to sift through different views and discover the best reasons for your views, but the resulting benefits far outweigh the sacrifices. Becoming knowledgeable enough to have informed convictions also takes a significant amount of time. Community Alliance Church wants to create a safe space where it is okay to ask the tough questions. It is acceptable to express doubts. It is normal to wrestle through challenges and topics that don’t yet make sense. This is all part of a genuine pursuit of Jesus. It is okay to search and to question. All of these activities can happen confidently knowing truth is on our side. We never want to shut down or short circuit a genuine search for the truth. When disciples have the time and space to wrestle through their own convictions, much stronger followers of Jesus come out at the end.

III. How to Transform Convictions¹²

- A. Now that we understand what convictions are and what we mean by the first C, we can move on to the general process of transforming a person’s convictions. How are Jesus-centered convictions developed? How do you actually go about impacting another person’s way of thinking? We will turn our attention to this topic. The Bible tells us to set our minds on having the same perspective that Jesus Himself had (Phil. 2:5). How do we do this practically?
- B. The process of developing well-informed convictions begins with understanding the picture of the world presented by Jesus and Scripture. Through the Bible we learn God’s perspective on many subjects. Since God is all knowing and always tells the truth, the way He explains the world in His word can be trusted.¹³ A person must first become convinced that the Scriptures are a reliable interpretation of the way things are before they will be able to develop accurate personal convictions. A knowledge of the Bible is the first step in the process of developing Jesus-centered convictions.
- C. As Jesus was discipling others, it is evident that the reason they got their thinking wrong was because they were either ignorant of what the Bible said, they misunderstood it, or they failed to apply it properly. The reason people were mistaken, according to Jesus, was because they did not properly understand God’s Word. The process of developing accurate convictions begins with a knowledge of the Bible. God’s Word proclaims, promotes, and protects truth.

¹¹ Tom Yeakley, [Growing Kingdom Character: Practical, Intentional Tools for Developing Leaders](#) (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2011), 16.

¹² For more on this see Jerry Bridges *The Discipline of Grace: God’s Role and Our Role in the Pursuit of Holiness* chapter ten “The Discipline of Convictions”.

¹³ I don’t simply assume the truthfulness of who God is, rather, this is who God demonstrates Himself to be throughout history and in my own personal experience. The historical reliability of the Scriptures and the self-authenticating nature of the Bible give reason to trust the picture of the nature of God presented in the Bible.

Those who are ignorant of the Bible will make more mistakes in their thinking and will have more uninformed convictions. Sin has such a destructive effect on the formation of our beliefs that, without God’s help through the Bible, a person will not, on their own, come to a fully accurate understanding of the world. No matter how smart a person is or how careful they are in their thinking, there will be uninformed and mistaken convictions. Humanity in general, and every person in particular, needs the Bible to see things correctly.

- D. The second step in the process of transforming convictions is to accept the teachings, principles, and truths of the Bible as reality. Even if a person has a working knowledge of what the Bible says, this doesn’t guarantee their thoughts on the Bible are correct. It is impossible to benefit from a knowledge of the Bible without also accepting what the Bible says as true or as the Bible puts it: to believe. It is only by hearing and accepting that a person will gain eternal life and the benefits offered by Jesus. Most of the people who disagreed with Jesus knew the Scriptures very well, but they still didn’t have accurate convictions because they didn’t believe the Scriptures, which is why Jesus spent so much of His time confronting and reshaping other people’s convictions.
- E. If there is a discrepancy between what we think is true and what the Bible says, preference and priority is to be given to the Scriptures. Even when it is difficult to understand God’s word, disciples will accept His message as true and wrestle through what it might mean. The message of Jesus and the Bible will always be viewed as the words of life in the midst of confusion or a lack of understanding. A person must be humble enough to tell themselves, “God knows better than I do. If I disagree with God, He is right and I am wrong.” This attitude toward Jesus and the Bible occurs after a person has been convinced that Jesus is the One He claimed to be and the Bible is the true message of God. I’m not encouraging a blind leap here, but an appropriate response after a person is firmly convinced about Jesus and the Bible.
- F. The third step in the process of developing Biblical convictions is to view the world through the lens of Scripture. Allow the perspective presented in the Bible to be the filter through which you interpret the world. The view of God becomes our way of looking at the world and our experiences in it. Once the perspective of Jesus and the Bible are known and accepted, a person will make connections and applications between that perspective and the circumstances they face. Instead of us letting our own thoughts and feelings define reality, we allow God’s thoughts to define reality.
- G. One example from the life of Jesus may be helpful in seeing this three step process at work. Jesus was confronted by the Pharisees about allowing His disciples to pick heads of grain in a field on the Sabbath. The Pharisees thought Jesus was enabling His disciples to break the Sabbath and, therefore, the command of God.

¹ At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath, and His disciples became hungry and began to pick the heads *of grain* and eat. ² But when the Pharisees saw *this*, they said to Him, ‘Look, Your disciples do what is not lawful to do on a Sabbath.’ ³ But He said to them, ‘Have you not read what David did when he became hungry, he and his companions, ⁴ how he entered the house of God, and they ate the consecrated bread, which was not lawful for him to eat nor for those with him, but for

the priests alone? ⁵ Or have you not read in the Law, that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath and are innocent? ⁶ But I say to you that something greater than the temple is here. ⁷ But if you had known what this means, “I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT A SACRIFICE,” you would not have condemned the innocent.” (Mt. 12:1-7).

- H. Jesus starts His own convictions with an exhaustive understanding of the Scriptures as He ties together relevant passages of Scripture taken from different places of the Bible: 1 Samuel 21, the principles found in Exodus 31:12-18, 35:1-3, 1 Chronicles 23:31 and others, along with Hosea 6:6. He used the examples of David and the priests, who are godly people who “break” God’s rules and are, at the same time, approved of God.¹⁴ Jesus explained His perspective by starting with a deep knowledge of Scripture. In using principles and moral values in this manner Jesus expresses a robust understanding of the Bible. Jesus encourages the Pharisees to develop a deeper understanding of the word of God.
- I. Next, Jesus affirms the truthfulness of the principles from Scripture He just highlighted. Jesus offers these specific Scriptures and principles as a defense of His actions. Jesus takes what He finds in Scripture seriously, as an accurate presentation of the way life is to be lived. The reason Jesus used these exact passages is because He sees them as relevant for His immediate situation. He also draws a conclusion about the immediate situation based on these Scriptures. It is clear and obvious that Jesus accepts the accuracy and truthfulness of these passages.
- J. Lastly Jesus says, “you would not have condemned the innocent” (v. 7). In this statement, Jesus views His situation through the lens of the Scriptures. Just as David and the priests were innocent even when breaking God’s rules, so Jesus and His disciples are also innocent. Jesus sees the world and interprets how to live in it through His knowledge of the Bible and His acceptance of the truthfulness of the Bible’s message. Jesus consistently modeled this three-step process of developing convictions. In situations like this, Jesus reveals why He thinks the way He does, and in doing so, gives all disciples a pattern to follow.
- K. How are we as a church trying to have an impact on people’s convictions? This ministry focus is already starting to have an impact on our practices in a number of significant ways. Instead of wanting to simply teach people the Bible, which is the objective of many churches, we want to help develop people’s understanding of spiritual things. This shift in focus is subtle but significant. It changes the way we teach. We want to move people from where they are in their thinking to understanding and implementing the thinking of Jesus. This is a more difficult and demanding standard. We don’t want to merely lecture at people in the hope they will come to know a set of facts, we want to converse, challenge, question and debate with people in the hopes that they will come to understand God’s perspective on life. We don’t want to only tell people what to think, but train people how to think. We want to be a church that thinks Biblically about all of life.

¹⁴ It is interesting to note that Jesus assumes the accuracy of the charge for the sake of argument. He responds as if He was actually breaking the Sabbath when in fact He wasn’t breaking God’s command only the Pharisees mistaken understanding of God’s command.

- L. Another difference a focus on convictions is making is that we desire our leaders and teachers to know how people think today in general by paying attention to the intellectual and cultural trends of our time. We want to train our key people in knowing how to study, discern, and react to our modern culture in a Biblical way and provide resources for doing so. We can't shape the way people think without first knowing how they think. We want those who are communicating the word of God to ask good questions and listen intently to how people respond in order to know where their students are at in their thinking. Paying attention to what others are saying will help us know how to help them develop their convictions. Listening to students is just as important as the content we are teaching.
- M. We also want our leaders and teachers to become more knowledgeable about how people at varying stages of spiritual development think. A person's spiritual maturity greatly influences the way a person thinks. We will be learning more about the different spiritual development stages when we talk about the Four E's. Someone who doesn't believe in Jesus will think very differently than a new Christian. A new Christian will think very differently than someone who has been studying the Bible for years. A person who has been studying the Bible for years will think differently than a spiritually mature disciple who has been actively living out Jesus's mission for decades. Knowing where a person is at in their spiritual development will tell you a lot about how they think and where they need to go in the way they think.
- N. We are trying to be careful, purposeful, and strategic in what we teach. We want to provide opportunities for people to move their convictions from ignorance to a functional understanding of God's perspective. This means we need a balanced overall ministry plan without exclusively focusing on one or two stages of conviction development. We can't only have ministries for those who are spiritually mature and have nothing for new Christians. All parts of the Christian life must be addressed as a whole if we are going to help people develop their own personal convictions.
- O. We recognize, as a church, we have largely neglected our responsibility to convince people that Christianity is true on an intellectual level. We haven't spiritually cared for unchurched people on a corporate level in the recent past. The reason we have one Sunday School class specifically designed to meet the spiritual needs of unchurched people is to improve in this area. We want this focused class not to be a short term element of our ministry but a long term element. Our goal is to permanently have at least one opportunity for people who are searching and interested in checking Christianity out to be able to investigate the truthfulness of Jesus and His teachings in a safe and welcoming environment.
- P. Increasing the focus of our teaching on the big picture of both the Bible and the Christian life will also help us transform people's convictions. When a person is able to put all the pieces of their thinking together in a coherent whole, their convictions tend to deepen and become more solidified. We want to help people understand the big picture overview of both the Bible and the Christian life by making these a major point of emphasis.
- Q. We also have the future goal of training people in the spiritual disciplines of Bible study and meditation. Both of these practices, if regularly participated in, will help disciples develop informed and accurate convictions that are based on the Bible.

IV. Conclusion

- A. Helping people develop Bible-based, Jesus-imitating convictions is a major aspect of disciple making. Jesus not only modeled what good convictions look like, He encouraged His disciples to develop their own convictions in a healthy way.
- B. If lives are to be transformed to reproduce the lifestyle of Jesus, people first need to think the way Jesus thought. This is a process that takes time and energy. The only way to develop convictions is to do some hard mental work, but the resulting benefits far outweigh the cost.

V. Questions for Further Thought

- A. Has your belief in Jesus ever been significantly challenged? If so, when?
- B. Was developing personal convictions important to Jesus? Why or why not? Use Scripture.
- C. What might be some of the “wealth that comes from the full assurance of understand” (Col. 2:2)? What are the benefits of having well developed convictions?
- D. How could the way a person thinks impact their character?
- E. What habits will help an individual develop accurate and informed convictions?