

FREEDOM IN THE CROSSHAIRS #7

Conviction Versus Condemnation

John 8:32

You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.

There is a close connection between knowing the truth and being made free.
On the other hand, there is a close connection between believing a lie and being
brought into bondage.

The Bible tells us that our enemy is not 'flesh and blood'. Paul says...

2 Corinthians 2:11

**Our enemy is the Devil, who will take advantage of us if we are ignorant of his
devices.**

The Devil's Devices

Deception and Accusation

Revelation 12:9-10

**Satan is...the serpent of old...called the Devil, who deceives the whole
world...The one who is the 'accuser of the brethren, who accused them before
God day and night' has been cast down to the earth...**

We have seen how Satan's work of accusation takes many forms...

SATAN IS AN ACCUSER

- **He accuses us to God, and he accuses God us**
- **He accuses other Christians to us and us to other Christians**
- **He accuses us to the world, and he accuses the world to us**

Notice that all these operations involve our relationship with others.
But tonight, we look at the deadliest of all Satan's operations...

When Satan accuses us to ourselves

This is the deadliest form of Satan's accusations and the most difficult accusation
to discern because the Devil can disguise himself as the voice of the Holy Spirit!

The Apostle Paul tells us how he does this deception...

2 Corinthians 11:13-14

**For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.
2 Cor 11:14-15 NLT
Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.**

The voice of self-accusation can sound like your own voice or the voice of God.

Billions of born-again believers have been trapped in this deception for one reason:
They have not learned to discern the difference between...

Conviction Versus Condemnation

I would like to do 3 things tonight:

1. Define the 2 terms
2. Show how we can discern the difference
3. Apply the principles in prayer and communion

I. We Must Begin with the Definition of Terms

A. What is ‘Conviction’?

1. In the world system, conviction is a legal term that refers to a formal declaration that someone has been found guilty of a crime; but in the Bible, the meaning is a little different...

Conviction

Conviction is the work of the Holy Spirit that convinces a person of sin by the Word of God or by a person’s inborn consciousness of a sense of right and wrong.

2. Notice first that conviction is the work of the Holy Spirit! Jesus promised that after His resurrection, He would send the Holy Spirit into the world...

John 16:8

And when He (the Holy Spirit) has come, He will *convict* the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.

a. The Greek word for ‘convict’ can also mean ‘convince’; so, conviction is the work of the Holy Spirit to ‘convince’ us that we are guilty of sin.

3. Conviction of sin is a good thing because God convicts us of sin for a good purpose...

Nelson's Bible Dictionary

The purpose of conviction is to lead a person to repent of his sins (Acts 2:37-38; Romans 2:1-4) and to turn to God for salvation and eternal life.

4. Make no mistake. Conviction of sin is not a pleasant experience. But in a very real sense there is no salvation without it! No one can become a saint unless first convinced that they are a sinner!

Matthew 9:10-11 NIV

Now it happened, as Jesus sat at the table in the house, that behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to His disciples, "Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

- a. Here we have 2 groups of people, the Pharisees, and the sinners.
- b. Jesus chose to spend His time with the sinners and the Pharisees were offended.

Matthew 9:12-13 NIV

On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

- 5. Jesus knew they were *all* sinners, including the church-going Pharisees. He knew they were *all* spiritually 'sick'; but here's the difference...
- 6. The Pharisees judged themselves to be 'well' without need of a physician; they saw themselves as righteous without need of repentance. So Jesus spent His time with those who *knew* they were sick, those who knew they were *sinners!*
- 7. The real difference was that one group (the tax collectors and sinners) was convicted of their sinful condition and the other group (the Pharisees) was not!
 - a. When you are *convinced* that you are sick from your own sin you will seek a Physician.
 - b. When you are *convinced* that you are a sinner you will repent.
- 8. Jesus is saying, "Until you are convinced that you are sick, I can't heal you; until you are convinced that you're a sinner I can't save you"!

9. So we see that conviction of sin is not pleasant, but it is t God is dealing with us with a good purpose in mind.

10. On the other hand there is something that Christians often confuse with conviction...

B. What is ‘Condemnation’?

Condemnation

The judicial act of declaring one guilty and dooming him to punishment. In the Bible, the word condemnation is synonymous with damnation, judgment, punishment, and destruction.

1. Conviction is a good thing. Condemnation is the worst thing we can imagine. It’s why the Father sent His Son into the world!

a. Everyone can quote John 3:16...

John 3:16

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

b. But very few can quote the next 2 verses...

John 3:17

For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

2. Remember, *Jesus said He would send the Holy Spirit* to convict the world of sin; here we see *the Father sent the Son*, so the world be not condemned!

a. The Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin and the world would be *condemned* by sin unless the Father had sent His Son!

Nelson’s Bible Dictionary

To condemn is to declare a person guilty and worthy of punishment. It is a judicial term. Condemnation is the opposite of justification.

b. Justification means to be made right with God through faith in Jesus Christ. That is the only cure for condemnation. Next verse...

John 3:18

He who believes in Him (the Son God sent) is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

3. Those who truly believe in Christ are not condemned; those who do not believe are condemned already. *A true-born child of God will never suffer condemnation.* This is what the Apostle Paul told the Christians in Rome...

Romans 8:1

There is therefore now *no condemnation* to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

a. The great Puritan Bible scholar comments on the meaning...

Matthew Henry

It is the unspeakable privilege and comfort of all those that are in Christ Jesus that there is no condemnation to them. He does not say, "There is no accusation against them," for this there is; but the accusation is thrown out, and the indictment is made void.

b. The next verse tells us how God makes this possible...

Romans 8:2

For the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus HAS MADE US FREE from the law of sin and death...

c. Before we come to Christ, we are all under the Law. But the Law cannot save us. It can only condemn us because we all have broken God's law.

d. After we are saved, the law can convict us of sin but it cannot condemn us because we are 'in Christ Jesus'.

Albert Barnes

There is no final condemnation under the gospel. The function and design of the gospel is to free us from the condemning sentence of law. This is its first and its glorious announcement, that it frees lost and ruined people from a most fearful and terrible condemnation.

4. It is the voice of the Devil that comes to accuse us and condemn us. But God says there is no condemnation for us. The question is, 'What do we say'?

Romans 8:31,33

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns?

5. God has justified us. He has already pronounced us as righteous in His sight. So 'who is he who condemns?' We know the answer; the voice of condemnation always comes from the Devil, the Accuser of the brethren.

6. I will always be grateful for something Bob Mumford taught us many years ago about what he called...

C. The Problem of Post-Baptismal Sin

1. Post-baptismal sins are the sins we commit *after* we believe in Christ and are baptized.

2. When we first get saved, we realize that all our previous sins have been forgiven! No thoughts of condemnation even enter our mind. But when we sin as a Christian, here they come!

a. David Alsobrook wrote about this in his book, "The Accuser".

David Alsobrook

It was easy to say, 'Before I got saved, I did this and that'. I'd be talking about the most horrible sin and feel no condemnation whatever because all that happened before I got saved. But then some little things that were sins would bother me continually after I got saved.

David Alsobrook

It was easy to forgive myself for the things I did BEFORE I was saved, but it was so much harder for me to learn to accept God's forgiveness for the things I did AFTER I received Christ.

3. The Devil knows better than to condemn us when we first get saved; he waits until we sin as a Christian to attack us.

4. We fall for it if we can't discern the difference between conviction and condemnation.

David Alsobrook

There are very definite CONVICTIONS for those who are in Christ Jesus. There is no CONDEMNATION to those who abide in Christ. I am not under CONDEMNATION. I have passed from death to life. I shall not see condemnatory judgment so long as I abide in Christ.

5. The problem is that conviction can *feel* like condemnation!

David Alsobrook

Conviction can make you quite miserable; the chastening of the Lord can be a truly sobering thing.

6. So the question becomes...

II. How Can We Discern the Difference Between Conviction and Condemnation?

I found this excellent list of contrasts online:

8 Contrasts of Conviction Versus Condemnation

Conviction is from God; condemnation is from Satan

Conviction leads to life; condemnation leads to despair

Conviction ends in joy; condemnation ends in sorrow

Conviction makes us want to change; condemnation makes us think we can't change.

Conviction leads to new identity in Christ; condemnation leads to old identity in sin

Conviction brings specific awareness of sin; condemnation leads to vague uncertainty about sin

Conviction looks to Jesus; condemnation looks to self.

Conviction is a blessing; condemnation is a burden

Let me give my own shorter version of this list.

A. 3 Key Contrasts Between Conviction and Condemnation

A. First: Conviction is from God; the result of God searching our hearts; condemnation is from the Devil, the result of searching our hearts for ourselves.

1. As we have taught you before, there IS a proper place for self-examination.

2 Corinthians 13:5

Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves.

- a. It is good to look at our lives to confirm if we are Christians or not.
- b. This is not about conviction or condemnation; it is a clear command to honestly look at our lives for evidence of true faith.
- c. Another proper place for self-examination is the communion table:

1 Corinthians 11:28

A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup.

- d. This is not about conviction or condemnation; it is a clear command to repent of any known sin or attitude before receiving the bread and the cup.

2. On the other hand, there is a kind of *morbid self-examination* the devil uses to condemn us for not ever being good enough.

- a. Testimony: I have noticed that this is the device the devil uses to ensnare those who are the most zealous for the Lord; those who are the most serious about God.

David Alsobrook

When we desperately want to serve the Lord, we tend to look inward; but the inward look is not always the right one. When you ‘search your heart’ you will find all kinds of things that will burden you, weigh you down, and bring you low. In fact, you will just want to quit praying. You will get to the point of saying, ‘It’s impossible. I’ll never be what God wants me to be if that is the way it is.’ You will throw in the towel.

3. Christians who have been raised up in a *legalistic church*, (like the Church of Rome), are especially susceptible to this kind of condemnation. It comes from *too much introspection*, self-searching and self-consciousness and opens the door to the devil’s condemnation instead of God’s conviction. Instead, pray like David...

Psalms 139:23-24

Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me and lead me in the way everlasting.

4. We need to stop doing God's job for Him! We need to trust Him to do what He said He would do...

Jeremiah 17:10 NASB

I the Lord search the heart, I test the mind...

5. God will search us and convict of us of what He wants to deal with!

6. Which leads to the 2nd way we can know the difference between conviction and condemnation.

B. Conviction is very specific in nature; condemnation is very general in nature.

1. When I am under conviction there will be a very specific, distinct sin that God is dealing with.

a. The conviction of the Holy Spirit will address *one thing at a time*; He will be very specific.

2. On the other hand, the condemnation of the Devil will be a very general sense of judgment against my Christian life as a whole or my total failure at being a Christian.

3. The conviction of the Holy Spirit will be very clear about my sin; something I did, something I said, or some evil thought I entertained.

4. On the other hand, the voice of condemnation will feel be very vague and non-specific. The voice of condemnation sounds like this...

The Voice of Condemnation

- **“How can you call yourself a Christian and do the things you do?”**
- **“How can you call yourself a Christian and say all the things you say?”**
- **How can you call yourself a Christian and think this kind of thoughts?”**
 - **“You will never measure up to true holiness.”**
 - **“You are nothing but a hypocrite.”**

a. Notice that none of these thoughts are about *specific* sins that would lead to conviction; they are *generalized* accusations that lead to condemnation.

5. The 3rd way we can discern the difference between conviction and accusation is to recognize the purpose of each operation.

C. Third: The purpose of conviction is to bring us back to God; the purpose of condemnation is to drive us away from God.

David Alsbrook

There is a vast difference in the purpose of conviction and of condemnation. When Satan condemns the child of God, he does so to rob him of his effectiveness; he does so to kill, to destroy, to burden. When the Holy Spirit convicts, He does so to cleanse, to release, to deliver and to set free.

Here's another way to say it...

Conviction leads to repentance that restores our fellowship with God; condemnation leads to remorse that attacks our relationship with God

1. Consider the result of what you are feeling:

a. If it's conviction it will motivate me to confess and repent of my sin that will restore my fellowship with God

b. If it's condemnation it will tend to paralyze my spiritual life because it attacks my relationship with God.

David Alsobrook

I was praying because Satan was continually bringing up my past failures. They would fill me with such regret, with such a sense of shame and remorsefulness. I thought it was good to feel that way, a sign of my repentance. But it was filling me with condemnation, and I was losing faith for God to meet my needs. I did not realize it was the voice of the accuser.

2. Sin does not affect our relationship with God, it affects our fellowship with God.

a. Consider the sin of the Prodigal Son; he sinned against his father and suffered a loss of fellowship; but his sin did not affect his relationship with his father. Though he sinned, he remained a son.

b. The same thing is true of us when we sin.

3. When we are born again, God becomes our Heavenly Father; our relationship is eternal! Nothing we do can ever change the relationship. Sin interrupts our fellowship with our Father, not our relationship!

Rather than a review, let me close with a question...

The devil comes to accuse us to ourselves about our sins. But...

III. Conclusion

A. What really happens to our sins when we confess and forsake them?

3 Things Happen When We Confess and Forsake Our Sins

- 1. God remembers them no more**
- 2. He removes them an infinite distance away from us**
- 3. He buries them in the depths of the sea**

1. God remembers our sins no more.

Isaiah 43:25 NASB

"I, even I, am the one who wipes out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins.

Isaiah 43:25 NLT

"I—yes, I alone—will blot out your sins for my own sake and will never think of them again.

a. Notice it does not say God 'forgets' our sins-it says He 'will not remember' them! He chooses to never think of them again! And so should we!

2. God removes them an infinite distance away from us.

Psalm 103:12

As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

a. Why does God remove our sins as far as 'east from west' instead of 'north from south'?

There is a north pole and a south pole. There is no east pole or west pole.

The distance from the north pole to the south pole can be measured.

But there is no east and west pole!

I can only go north as far as the north pole, where 'north' ends.

If I keep going north past there I'm going south.

I can only go south as far as the south pole, where 'south' ends.

If I keep going south past the south pole I'm going north.

North and south have distance limits.

East and west do not. I can go east forever. I can go west forever.

God has removed our sins as far from us as east is from west!

3. God buries our sins in the depths of the sea.

Micah 7:18-19

Who is a God like You, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy. He will again have compassion on us and will subdue our iniquities. He will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.

4. Conviction of sin leads to repentance and forgiveness:

a. God remembers them no more

b. He has removed them as far from us as east from west

c. He has cast them into the depths of the sea

d. No wonder...

Romans 8:1

There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus!

How dare we let the Accuser bring them back to our minds!!!

Closing Prayer and Communion

Title