

LESSON 7

Living with Conviction in a World of Relativism

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good testimony. Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

— Hebrews 11:1-2

Introduction

It's been said that *"Truth is a beautiful thing, but it usually depends on who is holding the microphone."* (author unknown). Man's eternal struggle to find truth and make sense of this world is as old as he is. It's not a new problem, and it affects everyone. Even God's people. In Judges 21:25, we read: *"In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in their own eyes."* This is such a sad commentary, especially for the people of God. Ironically, mankind's inherent desire for truth and reliability in life was put there by God Himself. Man needs this to thrive, yet too often is enticed by sin and does whatever pleases him, even if clearly wrong or evil. This dichotomy creates an internal spiritual war that tears at his heart. In an effort to salve his conscience and feel some degree of moral respectability, mankind tries to create false systems of morality - worldviews that appears respectable but have no truth or depth, serving only man's selfish purposes.

Conviction is not really a philosophy. It's simply the courage to accept the cosmic reality of God's truth and be willing to live what it teaches. It does not waver, and remains securely anchored in the wisdom of our Creator. It has no need to reform or constantly adjust itself. It doesn't depend on the desires or wisdom of man and depends solely on the One who never changes. The Hebrew writer said, *"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."* (Hebrews 13:8). A good point to remember!

Conviction

Let's talk about Oscar Wilde again. His short story, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, recounts the life of a vain young man who bemoans his eventual aging as he views his portrait being painted by a friend. As if a deal is suddenly made with the devil, his mortality is immediately suspended, and the painting absorbs the aging and degradation in his life as he outwardly remains youthful. Dorian feels free to live as he wants and starts a hedonistic lifestyle, destroying his life and mind in moral corruption.

The face in the picture slowly shows his mental and physical deterioration while his outward appearance remains unchanged in his youth. Gray eventually cannot stand the horrible face in the picture and so destroys it. Tragically, as he does so, the evil in the painting transfers back to Gray, and he dies a terrible

death as a twisted and tortured figure. The only difference between Dorian and most men is that those who reject God are usually unaware of their slow and ugly transformation leading to spiritual death. In the story, the picture serves as his conscience. Wilde never intended the picture as anything other than what it is, but surprisingly, it easily compares with our own reflection as we peer into scripture.

How does this relate to our worldview? As humans, we're torn between our physical nature driven by comfort and pleasure, and our spiritual nature in which reside the qualities that reflect God's nature. Enticed by this world, a part of us desires to serve ourselves and deny God. Part of us realizes our God-given purpose and desires to love Him, be like Him, and serve Him. For those who run from God, they still struggle with their Godly portion and must create a sense of morality, if for no other reason than to survive in society. Think how hard it is to maintain this duality – and yet, this is most of the world!

If we say we really want truth in our lives, what's the big deal about having a *conviction* to serve God? Well, firstly it forces us to do something we don't really like to do: **think**. Most would prefer an easy life where happy choices are made for us, and everything flows along without any problems. We don't like difficulties, difficult decisions, and dealing with unpleasanties. Unfortunately, much of life is filled with these difficulties – and this is not accidental. Growing up and living in this world involves many decisions about our behavior – these challenges can instruct and test us, provide opportunities to grow spiritually, develop our spiritual side, and help us grow toward God. Life isn't just a cosmic waiting room where we twiddle our thumbs and read an old magazine as we wait to see what happens when we die. Many people secretly believe something like that, trying to fill their lives with fun and interesting things just to provide a little more excitement.

The second problem conviction causes is that it **defines human responsibility**. We are currently living in a society that considers responsibility a dirty word. We don't want to restrain our thoughts and actions, and we *really* don't like to take the blame for the consequences. We feel the best thing to do with responsibility is to shift it onto somebody else. No one wants to be left feeling guilty and having to clean up the mess. For many in this world, that has become an art...especially for politicians.

Relativism is the coward's way of living. It's trying to form a worldview that creates as little stress as possible, avoids difficulty whenever possible, and prevents any pain in life. Anyone with any foresight knows that's not only impossible, but not beneficial for the soul. The universal truth of conviction in God is not designed to cause pain but rather to make us happy and fulfilled. Problems will occur in life because we create them by abusing free will, harming ourselves and others. Life is fragile, and we become ill, slowly moving toward death. Our relationship with God allows us to move through all the pain and struggles and remain joyful. Serving oneself and cloaking it in relativism, on the contrary, will only lead to innumerable difficulties in life, all with no easy remedy or relief. Truer words were never spoken than Proverbs 14:12: *"There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death."*

The Hazards of Living a Life with Godly Conviction: (The Honesty of Christianity)

- **Persecution** – remember I Peter 4:4: *"In all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excesses of dissipation, and they malign you"*

- **Temptation** – this doesn't go away just because we now belong to God; *"For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin."* – Hebrews 4:16
- **Struggles with always doing the right thing** – there will always be hard choices, and sometimes hard consequences – but God will always be with us and promises joy and comfort
- **Potential isolation** – from family and friends – never from God or our church family
- **Occasional heartache** – loss of friends and family who refuse salvation, but death and illness no longer have to destroy our joy and hope, and we will see God

The Blessings of Having Biblical Conviction in Your World:

- **A firm, permanent moral standard** - based on truth, rooted in scripture; allows you to remain steadfast, even in the face of difficult situations, facing opposition, or changing cultural standards; you will always know the right direction to follow
- **Protection against temptation and compromise** – with your heart anchored in God's truth, you are better equipped to withstand temptation and even understand and learn from it. It ensures your faith remains genuine and active, rather than just a hollow, outward appearance.
- **Moral understanding with confidence** – assured guidance, even in morally "gray" areas; allows for use of a full array of biblical principles to help with difficult decisions
- **A righteous example and strong witness to others** – people notice a person of conviction and are encouraged
- **Comfort in times of persecution** – assurance of God's care and direction; He will never abandon you
- **A secure relationship with God** - unhindered by doubt and unbroken by life's problems; a relationship that will last for eternity
- **Certainty about your primary purpose in life** – no doubts or second-guessing, and guaranteed to be the best way possible
- **Certainty about your destination after death** – freedom from the worry and finality of death, leaving us free to serve God in peace

Falsely Perceived Benefits of Moral Relativism:

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The Consequences of Accepting Moral Relativism into Your Heart:

- **Difficulty deciding the best and most helpful moral choices for your life** – how can you test your decisions without a definitive moral standard such as God?
- **Uncertainty beyond the grave** – death becomes a *fear* and is to be avoided at all costs
- **Moral ambiguity when deciding about your treatment of others** - the author G. K. Chesterton once mused, “*Tolerance is the virtue of the man without convictions.*”
- **Uncertainty about any relationship with God (if He exists)** – can man really ignore this question?
- **Difficulty helping others to make moral choices for themselves** - “*Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.*” – Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
- **Difficulty finding/ explaining the purpose of life and existence** – other than God, who *else* can you ask?
- **Difficulty in recruiting others to follow your moral standard** – why should they trust *you*?
- **Situational uncertainty for difficult moral decisions** – no way to know when you’re wrong, and your conscience will leave you with guilt, no matter what you do... might as well try the Magic 8 Ball...

Conclusion

Christian conviction requires humility, something that’s always in short supply. It is difficult to live, but our strength comes from God and not from our ‘hunkering down and gritting our teeth’. Relativism is for the selfish, the prideful, or those whose love is not centered where it belongs. We were not put on this

earth to serve our purposes but rather serve *His* purposes. Being relativistic in our morality will not sustain us. On the other hand, God will always provide:

“Yet those who wait for the LORD Will gain new strength; They will mount up with wings like eagles, They will run and not get tired, They will walk and not become weary.” – Isaiah 40:31

Man will always want to do things his way, but his hunger cannot be satisfied by humanity’s false moral thinking. It’s always amazing that so many spiritually starving people are seated at the greatest spiritual banquet ever spread before mankind, and yet they won’t eat. They eventually starve to death, waiting for what they think will be something better to come along later. Spiritually, they die alone and uncertain in a world they never understood. So much for relativism.

Memory Verse

But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. For each will have to bear his own load.

– Galatians 6:4-5

For Discussion

1. How does a person deal with temptation if morality is merely subjective? Does temptation even have any meaning for this person?

2. If morality is purely subjective, how do people and societies find agreement when defining right and wrong legally and socially?

3. How does one deal with free will if objective moral standards are real (ie. – Christianity)?

4. How are accountability and responsibility defined in a relativistic society or worldview?

5. Which do you think is more burdensome to the individual: relativism or Christian conviction? Why?

6. If you decide to “pick and choose” which of God’s commands to follow or not, how are you able to decide?