

CONVICTIONS AND PREFERENCES

INTRODUCTION

I believe it will be helpful for us to sort out some of the real precious Biblical convictions we need to have, and some preferences or maybe some prejudices we may have, that are not necessarily Biblical. For Biblical references, you may want to read Romans 14:1; Philippians 1:17; and Jude 3. Those passages in the Scripture talk about your doctrines and about false teachings and differences, and those kinds of things.

Objective: With this lecture we want to try to answer the question:

“What is a conviction?”

- I. Principles — absolute & imperative
- II. Preferences
- III. Prejudice — emotional & denominational

I. PRINCIPLES — ABSOLUTE & IMPERATIVE

We call a “conviction” a principle, or a Biblical absolute. It is a Biblical principle, but it is not just a method, theory, or an action. It is a **principle**. And it is a Biblical **absolute**. The Bible says that, “...*without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness*” (Hebrews 9:22). That is an absolute Biblical principle. What we are talking about is a fundamental Bible truth on which all fundamental, Bible believing Christians agree. Is God portrayed to us in three personalities: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit? All fundamental, Bible-believing Christians would agree on this point. There are two types of principles:

- A. Absolute Principles
- B. Imperative Principles

A. Absolute Principles

We share five absolute principles:

1. **The Bible**

And of course we can expand on that. It is God's Word. It is inspired in its original form. It is without mistakes. So, the Bible is one of these absolute principles that every Christian must believe in. If you do not believe in the Bible, you cannot be a Christian.

2. **God**

By “God” we mean “the eternal existing God.” We mean the Creator of the whole universe who will continue to exist forever and ever. He is love. He is invisible etc.

3. **Christ.**

Christ, the Son of God, existing before the foundation of the world. He was incarnate in flesh. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He was sinless. He died a sacrificial death for others on the cross shedding His perfect blood as an atonement for others. He arose again from the dead. He ascended into Heaven, and is now sitting on God's right hand. He will come again.

4. **Atonement**

The atonement is salvation through the blood of Jesus Christ alone. The Bible tells us it is by faith alone that we receive forgiveness through that blood. By paying with His blood Jesus atoned or paid for our sins. So we can add nothing to that. No



prayers. No Bible reading. No church attendance. Not being a good person. It is strictly and only the work of the blood of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary.

5. Justification

It comes from the word “justify.” I am not perfect. I have sinned. But, one day God is going to ask me, “Do you have the right ticket?” Do I have the entrance ticket for Heaven? And I will say, “Yes! I have got the ticket!” The ticket is the confessing of our sin, or my sin, and the accepting of the washing of the blood of Jesus that brings forgiveness. Any other answer is not good enough. So, I have my ticket. Then God will ask the Lord Jesus, “Is what he said true?” And they will look it up in the Book of Life. Jesus justifies us before God by writing our name in the Lamb’s Book of Life at the time we are saved. Sure enough, Abraham Bible’s name is written in the Lamb’s Book of Life.

Now, these are fundamental principles. Absolute principles. The cults do **not** accept these principles. Other religions do not accept these principles. The Mormons have the Bible, plus the Book of Mormon. The Bible is not good enough for them. Now, the Charismatics do not have that problem. So, they are not a cult. The Charismatics believe completely all of these absolutes. Many other denominations believe all of these absolutes. A *cult* does not. The Muslims believe in God, so according to point number two, they could be Christians. But they do not believe point number three about Christ. There are also other denominations of so called Christian people who do not believe number four about the atonement. So, if there is a person who agrees on these points, you know he is a brother or sister in Christ.

B. Imperative Principles

Resulting from the absolute principles, there are certain commanded actions we must do.

1. The Ten Commandments

They are given to us so that we can portray through our actions that we believe the absolute principles.

2. The Great Commandment

Deuteronomy 6:1-15 tells us that we must believe in one God only. Praise Him. Honor Him. And continually instruct the next generations about Him. Children and grandchildren.

“Hear, O Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the Lord, the God of your fathers, promised you. Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children.” (Deuteronomy 6:3-7)

Then it continues about teaching them. That is the Great Commandment. To *love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.* That is, of course, also repeated in the New Testament. So, this is an **imperative** action. If you believe the absolute principles, then you **must** do this. If you do not do this, then apparently you do not believe that.

3. The Great Commission

The Great Commission was given by our Lord Jesus Christ. Matthew 28:19-20 *“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”* In a sense it is an expansion of the Great Commandment. The Great Commandment dealt with taking care of your own family. The great commission is going into other countries, into other places and to other people that we have not met before and sharing with them the absolute principles.

4. General Imperatives

For instance, we read *“give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”* (1 Thessalonians 5:18), and *“To obey is better than sacrifice”* (1 Samuel 15:22). There are also many other imperative principles.

Now, we want to conclude this section by saying that, “Principles establish a basis for convictions.” If you do not have those principles, you probably do not want to go to jail for them... On the other hand, if you do have these principles, if they are an integral part of your faith then you will want to stand up for them. The church you go to will require that you adhere to those principles.



II. PREFERENCES

- A. Borderline Concepts
- B. Distinguishing Between Principles and Preferences
- C. Illustrations of Preferences
- D. Summary

A. Borderline Concepts

Romans 14:1 talks about that, "Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters."

1. *It Is Not An Absolute*

For most believers, speaking in a different language is a matter of *preference*. So, it is not an *absolute*. The Bible, I believe, is very clear that speaking in tongues is not an absolute. But, do not tell me that speaking in tongues is evil, because the Bible says that the believers did speak in tongues. It is in the Bible. In the Bible some people had a foot washing. And there are some believers today that have foot washings. There are many other things that do not seem to be absolute requirements.

2. *Non-Moral, Reversible Preferences*

One *prefers* this, another *prefers* that. These *preferences* are non-moral and can be changed. One believer thinks one thing, and another believer may believe something else and still be a believer. Some groups of people may think, "Oh! It would be terrible to stand up in church and clap your hands!" And we have some others who think it is just wonderful to praise God and raise your hands. These opinions can be changed. Maybe there are some people here who do not believe in clapping their hands or raising their hands now but, two years from now, you may have learned more about it and you may feel that it is OK.

Once I asked a group of people to sit down and pray. And one man got up and left the room because, to him, sitting down and praying was sin. He made a mistake. By saying it was a sin, he was saying it was an absolute principle. But it is not. David prayed sitting down, and nowhere in the Bible does it say, "If you sit down to pray, you do something bad." So, it is a preference that this man has. Now, for you as leaders, I think it is very important to understand some of these things. You get a lot of criticism. Some of you are helping maybe some Adventists or Pentecostals. People are asking you questions about the Charismatics, and many things, so you need to know about some of these differences.

B. Distinguishing Between Principles and Preferences

We are going to talk about what to do in order to distinguish between principle and preference. What to do in order to distinguish between *principle* and *preference*? How do you distinguish between those two? **You must distinguish!** The Bible says, "*Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*" (2 Timothy 2:15)

1. *You must be intellectually honest*

Once we had a lecture called "Prayer" in which we talked about different ways people pray. We told how some people feel the need to yell very loud if it is important, and when it is not very important, they just use their ordinary voices. Now, that is what the priests of Baal did on Mt. Carmel in front of Elijah. Exactly that. The heathen do that. Intellectual honesty tells us that cannot be right. That cannot be an absolute principle.

2. *We must recognize differences of opinion*

People do have differences of opinion. One of the things I had to learn when I got married was, surprise of all surprises, sometimes my wife was right! Now, before we got married, I thought she was always right. ☺ But after I got married, I learned that sometimes she really was right. We had to learn to agree to disagree. One of my supporting churches has a special doctrine with which I differ somewhat. The pastor said, "Now then, in the last step, in the final analysis, wouldn't you say it really is like that?" I said, "Well, brother, in the very final analysis, no, I would not say that." And he must allow people to have differences of opinion. This is one of the beautiful things about being a believer. As a matter of fact Jesus said, "*I no longer call you servants... Instead, I have called you friends*" (John 15:15). If we

have fifty people in the room, that means we have fifty different beliefs. Fifty slightly different personal, **individual** relationships with Jesus.

3. ***You must learn to think for yourself***

Not what Abraham Bible says. Not what your pastor or your district superintendent says. Not only what your Director says. Brothers and sisters, we are talking about a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. I cannot take you to Heaven. I cannot speak on your behalf at the eternal judgment seat. It is only you -- you and your *relationship* with the Lord Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

C. Illustrations of Preferences

1. ***The Lord's Supper***

Many believers think you go to Heaven because you partake of the Lord's Supper. One believer told me last week that, when he was young, in his church he was taught not to chew the bread because it is the body of Christ and he would be chewing the body of Jesus. Now as an adult he does not believe that any longer. You can go to Heaven with or without the Lord's Supper. Maybe it is nice. Maybe it is good. Maybe it is helpful. But you do not need it to go to Heaven. There are some churches who very seldom celebrate the Lord's Supper.

Another illustration, about baptism.

2. ***Mode of Baptism***

Most believers agree that believer's baptism is a requirement. But there are some churches who do not believe it is necessary. There are some churches who believe it must be in running water. Other people believe that baptism needs to be done in a certain way, whether three times under the water, or just sprinkling.



3. ***The Security of the Believer***

Some people believe that once you ask Jesus Christ for forgiveness, you are absolutely going to Heaven. No matter how many sins you commit, or what your lifestyle is, you will absolutely go to Heaven. There are others who believe that after receiving forgiveness of sins you can later on, so to speak, have a spiritual divorce. They believe that salvation is dependent not on good works but on the *continuation* of one's faith. So, these are preferences. One denomination believes this; another denomination believes something else.

4. ***The Gifts of Believers***

There are many different interpretations and preferences people have about the spiritual gifts.

These are preferences. We may differ, but we are still brothers and sisters in Christ.

D. Summary

Principles are the **major** issues. Preferences are the **minor** issues. Principles do not change. Preferences **may** change. Most of you believe in celebrating the Lord's Supper frequently now. Maybe three years from now some of you will not believe that is necessary. As we grow older, as we mature, our preferences may change, but principles should remain the same.

III. PREJUDICE — EMOTIONAL & DENOMINATIONAL

Prejudices usually involve making *preferences* into *principles*. We have two sub-sections here.

- A. Emotional Prejudice
- B. Denominational Prejudices

A. Emotional Prejudice

Through our emotions we tend to take preferences and emotions and make them into a principle. Two different people can read the same Bible verses and come to their own opinionated ideas. Now, what we must learn to do is have a meeting of the minds with brothers and sisters. Recognize that there are different regiments in the Lord's Army, Navy, or Air Force. But I heard of some of our brothers rejecting Charismatics and accepting Mormons. That is a pretty bad mistake, because they have taken a preference and exchanged it for a doctrine. Because the Mormons dress nice and they are very quiet, we tend to think, "Well, they are like us." We need to learn to stand together with other Christians against definite evil. So, emotional prejudice is usually a *personal* type of preference.

B. Denominational Prejudices

1. Aspects of Greatness

People can tend to dwell on certain fundamental things and make them bigger and out of proportion. In order to show that they are different and better, they must exaggerate their own good points, their own doctrine.

2. Aspects of Uniqueness

Many denominations do that in the forms of baptism and worship, because they need to prove that they are different and better. By teaching that way, they are creating the feeling that these preferences are principles.

3. Aspects of Weakness

Prejudices are developed because of certain aspects of weaknesses.

a) Fear and ignorance of others.

Some churches, because they feel insecure, reject any ideas from outsiders--from Westerners or other denominations. In the Far East, I was with some leaders who told me of their church leaders who had given them a list of twenty things they were not allowed to do. No contact with Westerners. No listening to Western music, Christian music, or messages. No evangelism if you need a government permit. No evangelism in government buildings. You cannot be a leader in a factory because it is compromising with the world. No work in the medical field, because that is sexual perversion. And the list goes on and on and on.

b) Exaggerated differences.

For instance, sometimes the differences between registered and unregistered churches are exaggerated. Many western missionaries that I have spoken to say that differences between Baptists and Pentecostals are *greatly* exaggerated. They tell me, that the basic differences they have found are in the different ways of praying, and of course speaking in tongues or not speaking in tongues. But the other differences are greatly exaggerated.

c) Intellectual arrogance.

The Orthodox Church went through this problem, I think it was 450 years ago when they made a new version of the Bible. The Church split, and now you have the Orthodox Church, and the old form of Orthodox Church. Most of the old form of Orthodox Church, I believe, went to Siberia. I have seen some of them there. We have the same issues today in America. Some churches split over what is called the Authorized King James Version. You are going to have some new versions, and of course some of the meanings are going to change. I heard about one lady talking about the King James Version, which is basically the same as our Synodal Russian Version. And she said, "The King James Bible was good enough for St. Paul and so, it is good enough for me." Of course, she never knew that the Apostle Paul did not speak English. Now, I have been working in many different languages, and my conclusion is that the different translations in different languages are pretty accurate. They are very closely saying the same thing. And I just want to give thanks to these godly men, godly translators who gave their hearts to do right things.

***Discern between
prejudices and
convictions.***

IV. CONVICTIONS

Definition: Conviction is conformity to a Biblical absolute.

A Bible Characters — who stood for their convictions

David, Ruth, Esther, Mordecai.

B. Heroes of Faith — who paid for convictions

The twelve apostles.

The early martyrs and some others, such as Wycliffe from England, John Hus from Czech, Martin Luther from Germany etc.

C. Contemporary Heroes need to stand for their convictions

In the past century the number of people who died for Christ is bigger, then the number of all the martyrs of the previous 20 centuries together. These people were set for the defense of the Gospel. Earnestly contended for the faith. Stand — defend — fight — die. There is no such thing as a denominational conviction.

CONCLUSION

Many Baptist beliefs are preferences. Many Pentecostal beliefs are preferences. Many Seventh Day Adventist beliefs are preferences. Do not waste your time arguing about these preferences. Make friends, not enemies, of your brothers in the Lord. In English, we have the saying, “Only the Church shoots its own wounded.” Do not do that.

Do not go to jail because you are a Pentecostal or because you are a Baptist. But instead, develop a strong conviction about Biblical absolutes. That is what you want to defend. You never want to compromise about those. No matter what, you will stand up for those Biblical absolutes. That is your conviction. When you talk to friends or other people you must remember those three things: preferences, prejudices and convictions. Are you talking together about a conviction? Is he talking about a preference? Or is he simply prejudiced? Maybe you want to stop and analyze what you are saying, and think, “Wait! Am I just being prejudiced here?” before you get red in the face.

I hope that this will help you to purify and defend the true faith.

**No matter what, you will stand up for those
Biblical absolutes. THOSE must be your
convictions!**

Blessings to you, our dear friends!

We are happy to present the video, audio and paper materials that have been prepared by **New Life for Churches**. You have the privilege *upon completion of your practical assignment* to use this lecture with others.

Practical assignment

Completed

- Make a complete list of your convictions ☐
- Share with at least one other person the difference between convictions and preferences and why it is so important to distinguish between them ☐