

Divine Convictions

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All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the King James Version. Italics for emphasis are ours.

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INTRODUCTION

Divine convictions definitely seem out of fashion today. The unchecked development of the “entertainment culture” has brought in all kinds of worldly influences, much of it through the wrong music, worldly television programs, and ungodly sites on the Internet (all of which rely on atmospheric vibrations to be communicated).

It is true that many people have reacted to overbearing legalism and the hypocrisy that goes with that system, and they have rejected a godly lifestyle as too rigid, confining, and impossible to attain. Yet, the Lord intends for us to live by *every* word of God.

Siding with the Holy Spirit and the Word of God brings great protection for our souls. Establishing the standards of the Word of God that have the Cross at their center keeps us from evil. But on the other side, it is very easy to think that

we can get away with fulfilling the desires of our flesh. Sadly, many have found out that this type of “fulfillment” only results in feelings of uncleanness and defeat; and down the road, it reveals itself in a worldly lifestyle.

This booklet reveals the necessity of divine convictions and how they can enable us to reach for the prize of our high calling in Christ.

Chapter One

THE PROBLEM OF GUILT

“For innumerable evils have compassed me about: mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of mine head: therefore my heart faileth me.

“Be pleased, O LORD, to deliver me: O LORD, make haste to help me.

“Let them be ashamed and confounded together that seek after my soul to destroy it; let them be driven backward and put to shame that wish me evil.

“Let them be desolate for a reward of their shame that say unto me, Aha, aha.

“Let all those that seek thee rejoice and be glad in thee: let such as love thy salvation say continually, the LORD be magnified.

“But I am poor an needy; yet the LORD thinketh upon me: thou art my help and my deliverer; make no tarrying, O my God” (Psalm 40:12-17).

“And he changed his behaviour before them, and feigned himself mad in their hands, and scrabbled on the doors of the gate, and let his spittle fall down upon his beard” (1 Samuel 21:13).

“And Saul went on this side of the mountain, and David and his men on that side of the mountain: and David made haste to get away for fear of Saul; for Saul and his men compassed David and his men round about to take them” (1 Samuel 23:26).

Psalm 40 was written by David when he was frightened and facing death. His actions, which included feigning madness and fleeing Saul (1 Samuel 21 and 22), resulted in the entire city of Nob being destroyed, as well as the deaths of eighty-five priests. David held himself responsible for those deaths. He entered into tremendous, indescribable guilt. He was filled with guilt, shame, and remorse for the time that he was in retrogression in Gath.

Fulfilling the Flesh Damages the Soul

Many Christians live in unjustified guilt. Usually that is because they do not understand grace and the Finished Work of Jesus Christ. But guilt can be bona fide. Don't try to talk anyone

out of guilt until that person has repented. If a person is living in sin and hasn't repented, guilt, and the shame that goes with it, is bona fide. Now, David was experiencing guilt reactions because he was reflecting on his failures, reinforced by Satan's accusations (see Revelation 12:10).

For a person to sin, first he has to live in the flesh. Secondly, he has to accept the consequences of the law of sin and the law of spiritual death.

By the way, nobody has the right to get into anyone's business, no matter who you are. Remember, God is in control. Unless something pertains to you directly, stay out of it. And even when the matter does pertain to you, unless it is a judicial offense, you are very limited in your rights.

Everyone has experienced having fleshly desires. Those desires may not seem to be evil—they may even appear to be perfectly harmless. Yet, even if we do the things we desire, we can never be fulfilled if they are not God's desires, too. A Christian can never be fulfilled by living in the flesh. Recently, some young people attended a concert where the members of the group they went to hear believed in the power of crystals instead of the power of the Holy

Spirit. It wasn't rock music, but neither was it God's music. They went because they desired to be entertained with that crowd singing good lullaby songs. The Christians who attended that concert were being entertained by worldliness.

You may not like or agree with my convictions, but you are not going to change them. We need to have the convictions of the Bible. We do not need to be entertained by the world. Take your boyfriend or girlfriend on a date where you get on your knees and pray up a revival. Go out and have a nice dinner, then give the waitress a tract.

Here is the point: No one who is spiritual will ever be fulfilled by making a provision for the flesh. It doesn't matter who you are. If you do fulfill your flesh and you are a Christian, you will feel unclean. Even if it is simply a lustful thought, you will feel unclean.

Side with the Spirit and the Word

Fulfilling the flesh not only leaves one feeling unclean, it also causes damage to a person's soul.* The Word of God teaches couples not to have a physical relationship before marriage (see 1 Corinthians 6: 18-20; Proverbs 6:32b). No one will ever change my mind about this subject.

Fulfilling fleshly desires stirred up by libido waves will destroy your soul. “It is good for a man not to touch a woman” (1 Corinthians 7:1) means that it is good for a man not to touch a woman in an inappropriate manner. A man should honor and esteem his future wife and cherish her as a precious vessel, pure and clean.

Furthermore, even if he never touches her physically, if he entertains lustful imaginations toward her, he was already carnal before those imaginations came in. Let me illustrate it this way: On one side, there is the flesh. On the other side, we have the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. The Cross is in the middle. The flesh may restrain itself, and it may live in human good. Still, it is on the wrong side of the Cross. We will not be tempted when we are on the side of the Spirit and the Word. We are only tempted when we are on the other side, where we make provisions for the flesh and where we don’t fear God’s presence.

A man told me he lived in hell every day for four years, having left his wife and children for another woman.

“There had to be days that were better than others,” I said.

“Not a day,” he insisted. “I lived in the hell

of guilt for four years. The Holy Spirit would never let me be happy in what I was doing.” Finally, after years of conviction, he repented, and he left that relationship.

That is an example of bona fide guilt: a problem for the flesh, but a solution for the soul that would be restored to God.

**We suggest reading Standing Firm in Godly Convictions, by Pastor Carl H. Stevens, Grace Publications, 1998.*

Chapter Two

THE BATTLE BETWEEN THE SPIRIT AND THE FLESH

“For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would” (Galatians 5:17).

“Casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;

“And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled” (2 Corinthians 10:5-6).

A spiritual man cannot be fulfilled when he fulfills his flesh. When carnal imaginations are acted out, they may stimulate you, but they will never fulfill you. It can be so frustrating to have desires in the flesh and not experience them, but it is even worse to fulfill those desires. If you do, your life becomes a living hell, filled with guilt,

shame, and remorse when you try to be spiritual. That is because the flesh is against the Spirit and the Spirit is against the flesh.

This is how it is when you belong to God. Trying to fulfill your flesh or letting someone play with your flesh causes a war within. I said recently to some young women, “Even though you are pure, make certain that you dress purely and modestly. Walk with God’s people, and don’t become a stumbling block for those whose flesh is easily stimulated through the eye gate. When you live by divine convictions, you will see your temptations eliminated, practically speaking, except for what happens in the angelic conflict.”

God has all this arranged with the Holy Spirit. If a Christian goes out and fulfills his flesh, he pays a horrible price of guilt. If he were to spend sixty seconds lusting after a woman, he would pay a very great price, even if he never fulfilled anything physically. Why? Because the Holy Spirit would convict him of mental adultery (see Matthew 5:28). Though he could rebound and confess, he still would experience a season of bona fide guilt because he sinned willfully. The issue has to be resolved once and for all—at the Cross.

Natural Life Reactions

In Psalm 40:12, David was scared to death. He considered himself responsible for the destruction of so many lives at Nob. His thoughts at that point were, "God is going to get me."

The truth is that David had taken on the identity of a guilt complex, and it was a legitimate guilt complex. He took on the identity of shame, because he should have been ashamed. His identity was based on what he did.

Inasmuch as the flesh is condemned already (John 3:18), when I live in the flesh, I am already condemned, even if I am saved as far as my position goes. David had a guilt reaction, and a guilt reaction brings vulnerability to deception in the natural life. His natural life was being attacked because he was living in it.

For this reason, God said we are to cast down every imagination and every thought that exalts itself against the doctrine of God (see 2 Corinthians 10:5). Every Christian who is reading this probably already knows that after acting upon carnal imaginations, our experience can become like a living hell. Once we have satisfied the flesh, we are left unfulfilled and guilty.

Avoiding the Appearance of Evil

“Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body” (1 Corinthians 6:18).

Here, the Word of God is saying that there are many sins that can be done outside of our bodies (for example, stealing, cursing, being hateful). But if we commit fornication, that is a sin inside the body. It is the most difficult thing in the world to get rid of the terrible feeling, the wounds, and the damage that this sin causes.

Proverbs 6:32 says fornication destroys the soul. It will affect any future sexual relationship unless a person enters into cleansing and purging through the Cross, the Word of God, and the Holy Spirit. When he does that, he receives a brand-new-creation attitude toward himself and toward God.

A girl was once alone in a car with a man she had dated just a few times. When he reached over and tried to touch her leg, she smacked him in the face, got out of the car and walked a half-mile back to her dorm. He was more than a little surprised! She told him, “I was taught not to let a man do that,” and then she got out of the car.

She let the guy have it and gave him a whopper of a bruise. That was their fourth and last date. That guy must have been very careful before he thought about trying that on anyone else.

The Bible doesn't say these things to legislate behavior; it says these things to protect us. The Bible doesn't say these things to impose superficial convictions; it says these things to help deliver us unto divine convictions. Christians need to abandon the leaven that they have been leavened with, get right with God, and start agreeing with every word of God.

Chapter Three

STANDARDS ESTABLISHED BY THE SPIRIT

“This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh” (Galatians 5:16).

“But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof” (Romans 13:14).

Living clean isn’t “hard”—I never want to hear that again. Sinning is hard, the way of the transgressor is hard (Proverbs 13:15). But the way of God is not hard. His yoke is easy, His burden is light (Matthew 11:30).

Never say, “I’m doing all right, but it is difficult.” No! No, it is not difficult to live godly. It is not hard. Going the way of transgressors is hard. The way of Christ is easy. And because His yoke is easy and His burden is light, you can find rest without shame, without guilt, and without condemnation. You will find peace that is perfect by

yoking up with Christ.

If you think that your little child cannot walk in God's way by learning to identify with Christ and taking up His yoke, then one day you are going to be held accountable. A time may come when you cannot control that child and you have to deal with the consequences of his behavior publicly.

There is always a right crowd and a wrong crowd. Stay with the right crowd. Some young people would violate their father's rule under which he brought them up for years. For example, they stay out until one-thirty in the morning when they have been told to be home at eleven. Someone who tries to talk a young person into violating the investment of his father and mother is part of the wrong crowd, even if he doesn't do anything terrible.

The Word of God says that rebellion is as witchcraft (1 Samuel 15:23). If you allow rebelliousness in the home (sometimes masked as an independent spirit) to go on, then as parents you are wrong. If you walk with the wise, then you will be wise. If you walk with fools, then you will be a fool (see Proverbs 13:20).

Raising Children in the Way

No parents want to admit it when their child is wrong, but they have to face it. Lovingly, justly, graciously, kindly, but firmly, these situations have to be handled, not ignored as a passing “phase.”

“These are just children,” you say. Well, these children can be taught to act like ladies and gentlemen.

As Christians, we ought to be available to those parents and children who are having problems. We ought to be willing to invest in as many lives as we can on a personal level. We should love each one and never penalize anyone without offering a provision to show our love. We must not, however, compromise our standards of discipline.

Most parents are completely supportive of godly standards. Most people who have had such difficulties are broken and humble, and they love the support we can offer as friends. Many would pledge their cooperation because they have divine convictions. If parents teach their children to live by these godly standards now, their children will be spared much heartache from making the wrong choices later.

The Rebound Provision

“Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before,

“I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13-14).

The apostle Paul was disciplined by God for four years in Jerusalem—just for going to Jerusalem against God’s will. Paul, however, rebounded much more quickly from his failure than David did. Paul went into amazing recovery toward greater grace right away.

In the original Greek text of Philippians 3:13-14, Paul admitted, “I count not my thinking, my estimation of God, as being right—I count not myself to be a possessor of grace. I haven’t taken complete possession of ‘this one thing’ but I will.” Paul used the word *epilanthanomai*, which means “forgetting.” It was caused by his convictions. Paul was saying, “I consider everything that I did in the past as being in oblivion, and I am putting the past, with all its failures and mistakes, behind me forever through the action of faith with God.”

Paul put his failures behind him and determined to “reach forth” (*epekteinomai*) into the Word of grace. And he did it immediately.

Paul said, in effect, “I am not going to live in a guilt complex. I have confessed that what I did was wrong. Four years was a long time for me to be sentimental toward my Jewish people, and that caused me to disobey God’s will. I just didn’t get it. But I am going to forget those four years of retrogression. I am forgetting it, and I will now reach forth toward greater grace. I haven’t attained greater grace yet. It is a process. But I am reaching forth unto it.”

CONCLUSION

In Romans 8:1, Paul made a declaration that he would not live in guilt. He was on the road to *greater* grace, and he declared that his recovery was complete. David, on the other hand, didn't dare to make such a bold declaration. At the time that he wrote Psalm 40:12-17, David had not yet rebounded, because guilt kept him from doing so. At that stage, David was afraid for his life. He could have rebounded; the opportunity was right in front of him. Still, he didn't do that until later.

We don't have to wait to rebound. In an instant, we can reestablish divine convictions in our lives that will govern our actions. The God of all grace loves us deeply, and He only wants what is best for us. His Word details our path to victory and the abundant life. The Holy Spirit will guide us into all truth (John 16:13). Not only that, He will also work in us to will and to do God's good pleasure (Philippians 2:13).

If you are burdened with guilt, come to the throne of grace and find help in your time of need. Your advocate, Jesus Christ, is waiting for you there. When He has control of your life, you will be filled not with fearful apprehension but with divine convictions, bringing life to everyone you touch.