

How Biblical Convictions become Christian Character

By Jay Wegter

INTRODUCTION: *We were created to run on God's truth. Divine truth 'gives us God': His works, ways, wonders, worth, will, wonderfulness.* God's truth has infinite power because all of His attributes stand behind His truth, and because God has staked His reputation upon the unbreakable quality of His truth (Ps 138:2; Jn 10:35). The following passages illustrate just how foundational to life the truth of God is.

"For You, O LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, have made a revelation to Your servant, saying, 'I will build you a house'; therefore Your servant has found courage to pray this prayer to You. "Now, O Lord GOD, You are God, and **Your words are truth**, and You have promised this good thing to Your servant" (2 Sam 7:27-28) (The Davidic Covenant and prayer of King David). "The sum of **Your word is truth**, and every one of Your righteous ordinances is everlasting" (Ps 119:160).

"But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship **the Father in spirit and truth**; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. "God is spirit, and those **who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth**" (Jn 4:23-24).

"When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, *that is* the **Spirit of truth** who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me, and you *will* testify also, because you have been with Me from the beginning" (Jn 15:26-27). "But when He, the **Spirit of truth**, comes, He will **guide you into all the truth**; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come" (Jn 16:13).

"**Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.** "As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. "**For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth**" (Jn 17:17-19).

I. Without regeneration by the Spirit, all men suppress the truth of God

Apart from regeneration by the Holy Spirit, all men oppose God's truth; no one is neutral toward the truth of God. "This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and **men loved the darkness** rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. "**For everyone who does evil hates the Light**, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. "But he who **practices the truth comes to the Light**, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God" (Jn 3:19-21).

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men **who suppress the truth in unrighteousness**, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His

eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures” (Rom 1:18-23).

“But a natural man **does not accept the things of the Spirit of God**, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised” (1 Cor 2:14).

What does a natural man do with God’s truth? He *suppresses it* (Rom 1); he *suggests it can’t be known for sure* (Jn 18:38); he *‘tosses it over his shoulder suggesting ‘anything is possible’*; he *relegates the truth to mere moral advice*; he *may say he agrees with it, but does not obey it* (James 1:21-25); he *confines the truth so that it will not order his life*; he *hears it with some interest* (he may admire it or even agree with it) *but does not receive it because he does not repent of sin*.

God’s truth is an ethical issue because all truth is God’s truth. God is the Author of truth, thus, truth has no existence independent of God. God’s truth is ultimate reality. God’s attributes, power, authority, and reputation all stand behind His truth (Ps 138:2). A man’s relation to the truth reveals his relation to the God of truth.

II. Regeneration radically changes our relationship to the Word of God

God brought us forth by means of the truth (the very truth we inwardly opposed).

“For you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, *that is, through the living and enduring word of God*” (1 Pet 1:23).

“In the exercise of His will **He brought us forth by the word of truth**, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures” (James 1:18). “. . . since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints; because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, **of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel**” (Col 1:4-5).

“In Him, you also, **after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation**—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise” (Eph 1:13).

Regeneration by the Holy Spirit is the key to believing the truth. Fallen man has chosen not to retain the knowledge of God in his thoughts, and he has changed the truth of God into a lie. The carnal mind is at enmity against God, thus the natural man regards the preaching of the cross to be foolishness. He won’t receive the things of the Spirit of God because they are spiritually discerned. **He must be born again to receive the gospel** (and thereby have his heart of stone replaced with a heart of flesh—Ezekiel 36:26ff.) (Gordon Clark, “Regeneration: the Key to believing the Truth). See also Acts 13:48; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14; 1 Corinthians 12:3.

The believer thinks God's thoughts after Him; he appraises all things; he has the mind of Christ. "For to us God revealed *them* through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the *thoughts* of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the *thoughts* of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. **Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God,** which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual *thoughts* with spiritual *words*. But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. **But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one.** For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE WILL INSTRUCT HIM? **But we have the mind of Christ"** (1 Cor 2:10-16).

The believer is transformed by the Word of God. "Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be **transformed by the renewing of your mind**, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom 12:1-2).

"Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and *all* that remains of wickedness, in humility **receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls**" (James 1:21).

"For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted *it* not *as* the word of men, but *for* what it really is, the word of God, **which also performs its work in you who believe**" (1 Thess 2:13). "**Sanctify them in the truth;** Your word is truth" (Jn 17:17).

"And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose. For those whom He foreknew, **He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son**, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified" (Rom 8:28-30).

"Behold, **You desire truth in the innermost being**, and in the hidden part You will make me know wisdom" (Ps 51:6). See also Psalm 86:11-13.

The genuine believer is willing to be searched and examined by the Word of God, the truth. "Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way" (Ps 139:23-24). "**Examine me, O LORD, and try me; test my mind and my heart**" (Ps 26:2).

"For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and **able to judge the thoughts and**

intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but **all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do**" (Heb 4:12-13).

The believer loves Christ who is the truth of God incarnate. "Jesus said to him, **"I am the way, and the truth, and the life;** no one comes to the Father but through Me" (Jn 14:6).

"In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; **and though you have not seen Him, you love Him,** and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls" (1 Pet 1:6-9). "For to me, **to live is Christ** and to die is gain" (Phil 1:21).

"More than that, **I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord,** for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith, **that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings,** being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead" (Phil 3:8-11).

The believer is "of the truth," "believes the truth," "set free by the truth," "lives by the truth," "obeys the truth," "walks in the truth," "loves the truth," "practices the truth," "knows the truth," "stands in the truth." "For I was very glad when brethren came and testified to your truth, *that is*, how **you are walking in truth.** I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children **walking in the truth**" (3 Jn 1:3-4).

"We will know by this that **we are of the truth,** and will assure our heart before Him in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight" (1 Jn 3:19-22).

". . . but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not **obey the truth,** but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation" (Rom 2:8).

". . . and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they **did not receive the love of the truth** so as to be saved. For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged **who did not believe the truth,** but took pleasure in wickedness" (2 Thess 2:10-12).

“If we say that we have fellowship with Him and *yet* walk in the darkness, **we lie and do not practice the truth**; but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 Jn 1:6-7).

We must change, for God is immutable, unchanging. He has created the universe in order to display forever His moral majesty, His holiness. We must be conformed to His holiness by means of the truth if we are going to live with Him forever. For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He *disciplines us* for *our* good, **so that we may share His holiness**” (Heb 12:10).

But when we are judged, **we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world**” (1 Cor 11:32).

III. Biblical convictions hold us, we don’t hold them

(EX. **I will argue a belief, but die for a conviction.**) In terms of belief, a *conviction* is the mental state of being convinced—the fixed state of belief. To hold a conviction is to ‘be held by’ **an unshakeable belief without need of further proof or evidence** (See Hebrews 11:1-3.). This morning we will explore how conviction becomes character and why biblical convictions are at the very core of godliness.

The Bible stresses the central importance of truth and doctrine: “In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, *constantly* nourished on the words of the faith and of the **sound doctrine** which you have been following” (1 Tim 4:6). “But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for **sound doctrine**.” “Likewise urge the young men to be sensible; in all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds, *with* **purity in doctrine**, dignified, sound *in* speech which is beyond reproach, so that the opponent will be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us” (Titus 2:1, 6-7).

Our Savior was sent into the world to bear witness to the truth (Mt 18:37). The incarnation of Christ and His work on Calvary was the great cost necessary to put mankind back in possession of the truth. The Lie in Eden offered independence from God upon the false basis that God’s glory opposes our highest good. **The gospel of Jesus Christ restores believing sinners to the truth that God’s glory is our highest good.** And God’s glory is inseparable from His purpose to be benevolent to us His creatures. God’s righteousness (His commitment to His Name, and His zeal for His glory) has become the cause of our salvation (Rom 1:16-17; 3:23-26). **Thus, to ‘possess the truth’ is to be experiencing the knowledge of God and His glory and the liberty it produces.** The knowledge of God revealed in our salvation is the foundation of our Christian convictions (Hallelujah!).

Salvation in Christ changes our reliance from self and the world to God who is the source of all we need. The Lord has pledged to be our God and to pour His benevolence upon all those who rely upon Him and place their trust in Him. Faith in God’s Word allows us to continually ‘see’ God as our source of life. **Thus, the fight for security and satisfaction in God is fight of faith** (1Tim 1:18)—it is always about perceived source or supply. The prophet Jeremiah documents Judah’s tragic return to

the world as its imagined source. “For My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, to hew for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water” (Jer 2:13).

God giving us Himself in Christ is the foundation for our biblical convictions. Christ prays thematically in this manner in His high priestly prayer in John chapter 17. “The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me” (Jn 17:22-23ff.). God giving Himself to His people and the saints giving themselves to God is the pattern for holy living. This glorious plan will reach its consummation in eternity, and this is what will make heaven a place of endless bliss—Revelation 21:3-4.

Why is the Trinity so crucial to our saving knowledge of God? It is a remarkable and wonderful truth that our Triune God is a perfectly self-contained ‘community’ of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and as such our transcendent God is satisfied in Himself. In other words, He needs nothing from the creation. However, our Creator desires to share Himself and extend His glory. In order to accomplish His plan, He chose to deal with the sin barrier (impenetrable from man’s side) that separates His creatures from His glory.

In sending the Son as Redeemer, He satisfies His infinite claim and demand for perfect righteousness, and in the cross He satisfies His righteous and just demand to punish all sin. Through Christ, our suffering and righteous Substitute, God satisfies the claims He has upon us for righteousness. Thus the propitiation accomplished at the cross becomes the basis of God setting Himself free to pour our infinite benevolence upon us beginning with forgiveness, and consummating in glorification (Rom 3:26). God wills to be known through the message of redemption. Doctrinally we can say it in this way: *satisfaction (propitiation) through substitution (atonement) by means of imputation (Christ’s sin bearing).*

These areas of divine satisfaction then become the basis for believers to pursue satisfaction in Him: 1.) As Triune God He is satisfied in Himself. 2.) In His plan of redemption He satisfies His just claims for righteousness and justice against our sins. 3.) These first two aspects of satisfaction become the foundation for our full pursuit of satisfaction in God. This immediately becomes relevant to practical theology—for satisfaction in Who God is in Himself, and what He has done in Christ becomes the reason we pursue satisfaction in Him. Thus who God is toward us in Christ forms the foundation of our convictions. Praise be to God; our convictions are not merely cold hard facts, but are grounded upon God’s loving purposes to share Himself and extend His glory (now our rational, reasonable service of worship).

IV. Biblical convictions enable us to live unto God (‘God-ward’ lives)

We are to grow up into Christ and thus be protected from every ‘wind of doctrine’ (Eph 4:14). We are to follow the doctrine of the Apostles (1 Tim 4:6; 6:1). We are to guard against those who promote a ‘different doctrine’ (1 Tim 6:3). **We are to commit ourselves to doctrine which conforms to godliness** (1 Tim 6:3). The goal of biblical instruction is “love from a pure heart and a good

conscience and a sincere faith” (1Tim 1:5). **When these truths or doctrines are ‘actualized’ in our practice, they become the convictions** by which we navigate through life as the people of God (they order our lives, rectifying us, conforming us).

Our convictions deepen as we are conformed to the truth of God. Convictions are **truth in action**, therefore they build character. They are essential if we are to imitate the Father as commanded in Ephesians 5:1-2. “Therefore be **imitators of God**, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.” Convictions enable a believer to speak the truth of God with sincerity. A true disciple lives to speak the truth as a ‘truth-broker’—in so doing he or she is a *spiritual influencer* of others (Col 3:16).

God calls us to align ourselves with what God is doing in the world so as to imitate the Father (Eph 5:1-2). Christ’s cause (The Great Commission) must become our cause (Mt 28:18-20). We need to diligently study what will remain after Judgment Day, for the world is passing away (1 Jn 2:15-17).

Biblical convictions tell us what will survive the coming judgment of God. Thus, our convictions totally shape our eternal value system. A believer with biblical convictions has kingdom values and moral authority as the result of following Christ (Heb 12:25-29).

Therefore, biblical convictions gives us profound discernment in all of his life choices (1Cor 2:14-16; Heb 5:11-14). Convictions enable us to serve as a ‘spiritual paramedics’ helping others recognize and mortify idols in their life. Biblical convictions enable us to gladly count the cost of following Christ—refuting the world’s lie that love of self and love of pleasure will make him happy.

V. Biblical convictions enable us to align our lives with God’s purposes

The saint’s aim is to conform himself to God’s truth. This is one of the reasons the book of First John was written—to keep truth and life joined. **The Gnostic error was that you don’t have to do the truth to have the truth.** The book of First John puts that to the lie by indicating that it’s not enough to agree with the truth (or merely ‘audit’ the truth, and assent to the truth) we must walk in the truth.

John’s first epistle puts forth a number of tests which show if a person is *of the truth*. “Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. We will know by this that we are *of the truth*, and will assure our heart before Him in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart and knows all things” (1 Jn 3:18-20). (EX. Witnessing to Edwin, “I just do my own thing.” Jesus said that only those who do the Father’s will are going to heaven—Matthew 7:21.)

Sin and truth are at war; you cannot keep them both—truth liberates and sin enslaves (Jn 8:31-36). But the great error in the church today is that we may hold truth theoretically, in the abstract without diligently practicing it. **The apostle John continually asserts that truth is highly ethical. You really only know what you do—if you don’t practice the truth, you don’t really possess the truth.** The goal of First John is to make sure that we are operating and living completely in the realm of God’s truth. **To live in the realm of truth means you are a product of your convictions—‘a**

product of the product’ so to speak. What you are in life and character is because the truths of Scripture are exerting the transforming power necessary to shape and mold your life and character—the Word does its work (1Thess 2:13).

The book of Ephesians is the book of God’s loving, gracious, and glorious purpose for His people. And the great evidence that the believer is the object of God’s redeeming mercy is that the saint *radically aligns himself with God’s purpose*. To be *aligned to God’s purpose* is to be diligent in doing God’s will—and God’s will is that we be conformed to Christ in holiness (Rom 8:28-30; Eph 1:4). “Enlightened eyes of the heart” see spiritual realities in a vivid way (Eph 1:18).

The purpose of mortification (putting sin to death) is to arrive at the goal for which God in His grace laid hold of us—namely, conformity to Christ (2 Thess 2:14; Rom 8:29ff.). God always accomplishes His purposes with a precise goal in view. God declares the end from the beginning (Is 46:10). God decrees, He predestines, He foreordains—He works with the end in mind.

We must learn to cultivate the habit of mortification of sin with the END in mind. Mortification of sin is not an end in itself. We are not putting sin to death merely for the purpose being practical moralists, or because a virtuous life is superior to an unethical life. ***In our struggle with the flesh; we must begin with the right end in mind.*** The goal of mortification is life with God in glory. All we do in our efforts at sanctification by way of mortification should serve an ultimate end—the end for which we were created anew in Christ Jesus (2 Cor 5:17; 1 Jn 3:1-3; Eph 5:27).

Since sin has twisted the image of God, the Lord in redeeming us, recreates and restores His people to the perfect image of God. Since we are new creatures created anew in Christ, we are to abandon the old sinful behaviors and attitudes and adopt the new. Our efforts at mortification are not merely focused on abstinence; but upon replacement behaviors. Therefore in mortification we are to *put on the new man and put off the old man* (Eph 4:22-32; Col 3:8-17ff.) (Chris Lundgaard, *The Enemy Within*).

As a redeemed child of God your life is now defined by; filled with; enveloped by; and encompassed with God’s loving purpose to make you like Christ. These purposes of God are spiritual realities which are intended to fill your consciousness, vision, and desires. They are to shape your goals, your hope, and your motives—in other words: *they must become your core convictions*.

But in order for God’s loving purpose to control us, we must be “filled with the knowledge of His will” by paying close attention to His Word (Col 1:9-12). Your relationship to God’s Word is a faithful barometer of your walk with God (EX. Note the ‘Tremendous Jones’ quote).

A genuine believer studies God’s Word in order to understand it because he knows he can’t live without God’s Word. He also studies the Word because those who have salvation live lives characterized by ongoing fellowship with God. They continue seeking God through His Word, through prayer, and through Christian fellowship—that is daily ‘foundry’ in which convictions are forged.

VI. Biblical convictions are there to transform us into Christ's likeness

Let's consider for a moment how radically biblical convictions shape your character. A believer is changed from the inside out when he sees God as his highest good, and finds his purpose in God's infinite worth, and lives for Him knowing He's worthy of his praise, his best, his adoration, his loyalty and his enjoyment. God requires of us that we structure our lives so as to live as His possession. "Who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds" (Titus 2:11-14).

God is man's environment. This means we preach to ourselves who God is: the Creator of the cosmos with this world and its history serving as the 'stage' for His works, His ways, His wonders, and His will consummating in redemption (Rom 16:25-27). The Holy Spirit is given to us to write these things upon our hearts as we diligently study them and meditate upon them (1 Cor 2:12-13). Scripture refers to this as having the 'mind of Christ' (1 Cor 2:16).

Developing biblical convictions means becoming utterly serious about God's claim upon our lives. We are not our own, we are bought with a price; we are God's own possession, thus we are to live as His possession (1 Cor 6:19-20; Titus 2:14). This is only possible by constantly renewing our minds. "Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom 12:1-2).

"That, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in *the likeness of* God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth" (Eph 4:20-24). **To deepen our biblical convictions is to be conformed to the truth so that it dominates exceptionally in one's life (the condition for fruitfulness and harvest—note Matthew 13 and the parable of the soils).**

In our path to Christian maturity, we often find that we have a patchwork of Christian ideas mixed with humanistic concepts—transformation by the Word corrects this problem. When the Scriptures are not the authoritative guide for all life and practice, subjectivism and relativism rush in to fill the ethical vacuum in a person's life.

The Word of God demands our allegiance (2 Tim 1:13; 2:15; 3:15-17). All of our thought and behavior are to be conformed to the truth of God's Word. Every saved individual is designated a *bondservant*. The *bondservant* forsakes his demand for personal freedom in order to carry out his or her responsibilities in love and obedience (Jn 12:24-26). God demands the right to shape our entire life by His Word and to define every square inch of our life and existence (Hindson and Eyריך, *Totally Sufficient*, p. 173).

For believers the mindset of a bondservant is essential to a God-honoring relationships, and especially marriage. The *bondservant's* obedience to God is to be 'universal' (extending to every area of life including thoughts and motives). We are to apply the gospel to this requirement in faith and dependence—admitting that we cannot supply this level of 'supernatural' obedience apart from the

enablement of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:13-26; Eph 5:16-21; 3:16-19; Col 3:14-18; 1 Pet 1:13).

God's enabling power is not a principle that operates apart from our surrender to the Lord. Believers are to *present themselves to God as a living sacrifice*, and are to *renew their minds* constantly by the Word (Rom 12:1-2). Only in this way will the Christian discover the ability to achieve personal transformation. Only in this way will the patterns of selfishness of the old life be broken. (Note: the metamorphosis that is in view in Romans 12:1-2.)

Mind renewal by the Word is central to transformation. Mind renewal by Scripture 'cleans the faulty data out of our thinking processes' and replaces erroneous thinking with God's truth. The discipler is to emphasize this theme: don't underestimate the power of the Word and the Spirit to transform lives, AND don't underemphasize the power of sin to destroy lives. Discussion: Comment on this statement, "Grace in Christ removes the guilt of sin for true believers; but grace in Christ does not remove the mortal danger of sin." Explain how Scripture cures a faulty view of grace (See Titus 2:11-14) (Ibid, p. 174).

Scripture promises that those who build their lives upon biblical doctrine will experience wonderful freedom and joy from an unwavering commitment to the Word of God (Jn 8:31-32).

Discussion: Why is there no true freedom apart from God's truth in Christ? In our age of conflicting life-views and underdeveloped Christian worldviews, it is absolutely vital to the success of our relationships to abide by God's standards—only then will joy consistently take place.

The starting point in laying a biblical foundation is to consistently stress the limitless power of God to change lives. Disciples need to go beyond listening to actually affirming the sovereignty of God over their relationships: "Is God big enough to be sovereign in your relationships?" (Ibid, pp. 175-176).

Our transformation by the Word of God takes place in the context of spiritual fellowship in the body of Christ. Our relationship with God is manifested in our relationships with others (1 Jn 4:7-13; 19-21). As John Piper says, "*It is my greatest joy to experience the in-filling grace of God overflowing from me for the good of others.*" This is 'reflexive love'—which overflows from our satisfaction in Christ (1 Jn 4:19), "we love because He first loved us." The habitual consciousness of who God is toward us in Christ in all His mercy and love is a major part of our equipping to love the brethren (Col 3:12-13).

Through 'the word of His grace' (Acts 20:32), and union with Christ we are made "fit" to wear the *garments of grace* in order that we might serve the Body. The "garments of grace" are described especially in Ephesians 4-5 and in Colossians 3-4. The "garments of grace" are the Christian virtues and behaviors which constitute our Christ-like behavior toward one another in the Body of Christ.

The language used by the Apostle in these chapters is "put on" (put on like a garment the character qualities of Christ). Put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience (Col 3:12b). Our practical sanctification is lived out by *replacement behaviors* as we put off the old behaviors and choose to "wear" the garments of grace in our relationships with believers.

In this way, our lives are transformed, and others see that we have become partakers of Christ and of grace. The Gospel of grace provides the rationale for us to love sacrificially; to be spent on behalf of the brethren; to live for the edification of others. (Illustration for *put off*; *put on*: the college

student who was sprayed by a skunk had to put off the defiled clothes and put on fresh clothes before he could enter the house.)

Each member of Christ's Body is to commit himself or herself to the Great Commission (Matt 28:19-20) which is not only directed at evangelism, but equally at discipleship (2 Tim 2:2). And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man that we may present every man complete in Christ (Col 1:28). (See the book, Instruments in the Hands of the Redeemer: People in need of Change helping People in need of Change, by Paul David Tripp). The mindset is, "The Lord placed me in the Body so I can be here for others." Discussion: Why is discipleship a kind of 'continuum' we never outgrow (we are always both giving and receiving edification)?

VII. Biblical convictions are never theoretical

God's truth is not safe in a theoretical category or compartment. Scripture indicates that the larger that gap between faith and practice, the more danger there is that we're living a life of hypocrisy. This is why we need to develop first-hand convictions. **Having first-hand convictions is much different than merely sitting under a strong pulpit ministry.** Countless Christians have 'second hand convictions' (second-hand meaning that, "I believe such and such because my pastor believes it").

By contrast, first-hand convictions mean that you personally diligently study the truth, love the truth, live the truth, and proclaim the truth. The Berean believers in Paul's day showed the diligence necessary to **develop first hand convictions**: "Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11).

Convictions are filled with ethical obligation because all truth is moral in nature—truth always calls for action. To be 'of the truth' is to practice the truth, it is to do the truth. God's truth is a call to live a courageous life. New thinking produces new actions.

When Christ told us that we cannot serve two masters, He was indicating that no man can live a dichotomized worldview with divided loyalties (Mt 6:24). **Your devotion to whom and what you serve is like a laser beam: it is focused, not scattered. Head and heart cannot pull in opposite directions for very long—you will be conformed to that which you love.** You will live and do your functional worldview. At the college where I teach, we have conferences called "Truth & Life Conferences." We want to help students address the 'disconnect' between what they profess to believe, and how they live. By deepening biblical convictions, we keep faith and life joined.

VIII. Biblical convictions are held by both our mind and our heart

When you have first-hand convictions, your heart affections are conformed to biblical truth. Therefore you love the truth in the inner man. "Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being, and in the hidden part You will make me know wisdom" (Ps 51:6). **Even the battle to mortify sin takes place at the level of our convictions.** John Piper says it this way: "All spiritual warfare takes place at the level of spiritual sight. Your pleasure is the measure of your treasure." This is why truth is never held at the theoretical level only—it is to be rooted in our desires and affections.

Scripture warns that if we hear the truth and agree with it, but don't practice it, we have deceived ourselves. “But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for *once* he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the *law* of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does” (James 1:22-25). Many in Christendom today are attempting to do what they hate (holiness) and not do what they love (sinning). **It is a cardinal principle that God's truth will only effectively order your life IF you are seeking your highest satisfaction in God.**

To believe the truth so as to do the truth is a 'whole soul' act. This means that your mind, affections, will, and conscience are all joined in embracing the truth and relying upon it. In his high priestly prayer, Jesus indicated that believers are set apart to God in holiness and it is the Word of God that has the power to sanctify us, setting apart to God and His purposes. “Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth” (Jn 17:17).

A true believer is set apart to God in all his faculties: in his mind, his body, and his heart. For Christ has made it clear, true believers don't merely agree with historical facts of Christ's life, they follow Jesus (Lu 9:23). Therefore, a believer is a true disciple or follower of Christ. That person's time, talent, affections, and resources are poured into aligning themselves with God's purpose. Christ's cause becomes their cause. **Thus, to follow Jesus is to be controlled by biblical convictions.**

Our convictions are also joined to a clear perception of the desirability of Christ. As we keep on believing the promises of God in the gospel, we exhibit Christ and display Him to our heart affections. As a result, we adore Him as advocate, as High Priest, as our sealing and righteous covering, as our covenant, and as our propitiation. When we love Christ, we have a deep appreciation of His work for us (1 Pet 1:3-9).

His atoning work exerts a transforming power in our lives—the application of His cross to our lives shatters our cowardice, it breaks up our stealth (covert, undercover) Christianity. We find ourselves emboldened in His service, and we welcome the truth that God reserves the right to define every square inch of our experience. The strongest believers are Christians of deep conviction—they follow Christ, for surrender to Christ produces endurance and boldness in service (Eph 6:18-20).

CONCLUSION: *The Body of Christ is made up of individuals who are complete in Christ (Col 2:10). So serious is the matter of 'what makes us complete' that Jesus sets up an antithesis between proposed sources of 'completeness'.* To buy into man's system of completeness is to reject God's work in Christ as the source of one's acceptance with God. Again Jesus blisters self-justifiers by proclaiming, “How can you believe when you receive glory from one another, and do not seek the glory that is from the one and only God?” (Jn 5:44).

Paul placed all of the Corinthians' carnal behaviors under the microscope of God's wisdom in the cross and found each one of them to be symptomatic of the world's wisdom; a wisdom

antithetical to the cross of Christ (James 3:13-18). The Apostle stated in his Corinthian letters that the message of the cross-centered life is the ***spiritual diet of the mature***. But only those who are sick of the world's wisdom are ready for this diet (1 Cor 2:15-3:3).

At the center of our biblical convictions is the cross of Christ. The cross, the diet of the spiritually mature, produces substantial spiritual growth. The cross-centered believer increasingly perceives that his relationship with the Lord is the foundation for all of his other relationships.

Thus, the man or woman *constrained by Christ's love* will have all of his relationships transformed *because* his motives will not be dominated by ***self-protection and self-enhancement*** (the flesh by natural instinct is committed to protection from judgment, criticism, diminishment, as well as to self-advancement). The controlling, constraining love of Christ will equip the believer to love God and others (2 Cor 5:14-15).

Only the person secure in Christ's justifying love can face his sin with courage; only the individual who solidly appropriates the word of justification can afford to hear the worst things about self. Apart from deep confidence in Christ's ***justifying love***—judgment, condemnation, and criticism (perceived or real) make our defense mechanisms 'go ballistic'. Figuratively speaking, we are ready to attack, or "kill" the person who brought our failure to light and *made us feel diminished*. This non-evangelical response to hearing about our sin is a destructive force that can tear fellowships apart (Gal 5:15). The foolish, and frequently the immature, cannot tolerate admonishment; it is the wise man that welcomes correction and shows gratitude for it (Prov 9:8).

If we are not made whole by Christ's righteousness imputed, then we will attempt to find our completeness in other things. This self-deception must give way in order for the gospel to transform us. In order for gospel formation to take hold, the members of the Body of Christ must determine to be examined by the proclamation of God's Word. Apart from the news of redemption in the cross, we tend to *shoot the messenger*. If the atonement is not our daily hiding place, we will have false refuges from judgment—and every false refuge has its social consequences (note how destructive the Corinthian "fig leaves" were to true community in that local church).

The believer who preaches the Gospel to himself each day will be equipped for heroism in dealing with personal sin. He will gladly make it his daily practice to 'consent' to be clothed by Christ's righteousness, and thereby live by faith in Christ (Gal 2:20). The truth of the gospel continually transforms us. As a consequence, his or her relationships will be characterized by supernatural love, humility, and unity. "Ask God to change your heart so that, like Paul said in Galatians 6:14, you can say, 'May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ'" (C. J. Mahaney, *The Cross-centered Life*, p. 23).