

CONDEMNATION OR CONVICTION

ANDY SNOKE

"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit" (Romans 8:1).

Are you experiencing condemnation or conviction? There is a difference. When we experience that deep conviction in our souls that we must change, we are convicted. Conviction is clean and to the point. Conviction brings souls to the altar and causes them to lay their sins and burdens at the feet of Jesus. Conviction cuts to the heart and helps us change our nature by the power of the Holy Spirit. Conviction comes by the Holy Spirit.

Condemnation is quite different. Condemnation comes from the enemy of our soul, also known as the accuser of the brethren. Condemnation will keep us captive to our past, and prevent a life of freedom in the Spirit.

Here are some examples of being under condemnation and being accused by our enemy.

The Bible reminds us that Satan is the accuser of the brethren: *"Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, 'Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down'" (Romans 12:10).*

The enemy of our soul spends day and night accusing the Christian, which

brings self condemnation.

We find Satan accusing righteous Job:

"There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil. And seven sons and three daughters were born to him. Also, his possessions were seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred female donkeys, and a very large household, so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the East.

And his sons would go and feast in their houses, each on his appointed day, and would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. So it was, when the days of feasting had run their course, that Job would send and sanctify them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job said, 'It may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.' Thus Job did regularly" (Job 1:1-5).

"And the Lord said to Satan, 'From where do you come?' So Satan answered the Lord and said, 'From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it.' Then the Lord said to Satan, 'Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?'"

So Satan answered the Lord and said, "Does Job fear God for nothing? Have You not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But now, stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face!" (Job 1:7-11).

We find in the passages that the enemy of our soul stands before God bringing accusations against God's faithful. Just as Satan brought accusations against righteous Job, he continues this same work today. If the enemy of our soul can trap a person on a feeling of overwhelming guilt, undeserving of God's love, he has accomplished his intentions.

John 8 gives a story of the woman caught in adultery. She was under condemnation from the law and was accused by her enemies. In fact, under the law she was to be stoned to death. But Jesus presented a higher truth, the truth of complete forgiveness.

"But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.

Now early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people came to Him; and He sat down and taught them. Then the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery. And when they had set her in the midst, they said to Him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?" This they said, testing Him, that they might have something of which to accuse Him. But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger, as though He did not hear.

So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first." And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. Then those who heard it, being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?"

She said, "No one, Lord." (John 8:1-11).

When we from time to time struggle with a sense of condemnation, we would do well to remember these same words from the Master, *"Neither do I condemn you; but go and sin no more."*

On the day of Pentecost, Peter the apostle preached the first full gospel message in all of history. He had the privilege to be the first human being to preach Jesus Christ, crucified, resurrected from the dead and ascended into heaven. In his message he was not very "politically correct" in his words. Peter clearly laid the blame on those who crucified the Living Christ:

"Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36).

Immediately afterwards, the Holy Spirit sent "conviction" not condemnation.

"Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call" (Acts 2:37-39).

It was conviction that brought many souls to the foot of the cross. The process for deliverance was simple: Repent! Repent and the Lord would do the rest of the work.

It hard for us to understand that our sins can all be washed away completely. The Lord does not forgive incrementally, but completely. Though we are all sinners, conviction and repentance should set us completely and forever

free of our sins.

Our sins are as a giant chalkboard, with every sin we have ever committed written in chalk. When Jesus comes, they are all erased, completely. Repentance and conviction brings us all to this point.

"Come now, and let us reason together," Says the Lord, "Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool" (Isaiah 1:18).

I am sure that the apostle Paul had many reasons and occasions to condemn himself. He was the influence behind the persecution of the church of his day. Christians were put to death due to the persecution of Saul of Tarsus, later to be called Paul.

Yet, after Paul's conversion, he learned a valuable lesson. Paul chose to leave his past in the past, covered by the blood of Jesus. He chose to live looking forever forward to where God would lead him, and not backward from where he came.

"Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:13-14).

I often wonder about the value of modern day thinking. It is customary for those who have suffered past trauma to be encouraged to remember their past in great detail. They are often counseled to relive it. To rethink it. To remember all of the sordid details. I am sure that faulty memories heap more of a burden of helplessness on the victim than what is necessary.

The apostle Paul presents his recipe for the recovery from the trauma of his past in very simple steps:

1. Forget those things which are behind.
2. Reach forth to those things which are ahead.
3. Press towards the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Jesus Christ.

I have heard others say something like this: "In life, learn to spend more time facing forward, looking through the windshield of life, instead of dwelling on looking in the rear view mirror, representing your past."

We often struggle with our thoughts. It is no easy task at times to change our way of thinking. I enjoyed the following devotion presented by Dr. David Jeremiah regarding our thoughts:

"We do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen" (2 Corinthians 4:18).

"We need filters to strain certain questions from invading our thoughts. For example, the question Why? is natural and normal, but sometimes only God knows the answer. When we obsess with the Whys, we might forget the Who. And what about the phrases, If only... and What if...? Those, too, are normal; but again, only God can answer them. He does not want your thoughts to torment you. He stands ready to forgive your sins and to bring good from your mistakes. The sufferings of this present world are not worth comparing to the glory to be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18).

My Niece Amber Snoke, posted a very thoughtful slogan that goes like this: "If you think you've blown God's plan for your life, you, my friend, are not that powerful" (Author Unknown).

"For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. 13 And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:11-13) †

A LAMP UNTO MY FEET

BRANDON SNOKE

I worked with a fellow who was an oiler on a crane in the Denver, Colorado area when he was young. An “oiler” is a worker whose responsibilities are to maintain, clean, repair and often drive a crane to the job site. The crane operator he worked for (his uncle), would give him one wrench at the beginning of each day. He would tell Mike, **“If this fits it, tighten it.”** The next day he would give Mike a different sized wrench and give the same instructions.

Today, we are doing something similar. I am giving you **one** wrench (Psalms 119:105) with the same instructions, **“If it fits, tighten it!”**

Psalms 119:105 - *“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.”*

Let me begin with a short story.

My son Joel and I hiked the Flat Tops Wilderness, Colorado, a couple of summers ago. We decided to do things differently from our previous backpacking trip when we hauled 45-pound packs with cast iron skillet, a dozen eggs, two one-pound steaks, and a machete plus the essentials.

We packed light this time. Joel bought two lightweight backpacks and we left the cast iron skillet at home. Our packs were only about 30 pounds this time. Our trip was planned to take 4 days but was shortened to two days because of mountain storms. We had a good map of the area and my GPS. Much of the trail was very narrow, rarely marked and often not visible due to very minimal traffic. Often we didn’t know if we were on a game trail or the hiking trail. I frequently checked the map and GPS to be sure we were on the right trail. You don’t want to get lost in the mountains.

To add to the challenge, the GPS sometimes lost our original trail, and we often had to find alternate routes around snowfields or swollen streams. Joel soon proved an aptitude for deciphering the GPS and the map. I was grateful for Joel’s skill in map and GPS interpretation. He was always able to get us back on the trail.

On the latter part of our hike, I was very fatigued and didn’t worry about staying on the trail. **I just walked behind Joel.** I knew by now that he knew where we were heading better than I did, **so I just focused on the rocks or streams in front of me.** **Psalms 119:105 came to my mind at this time, “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.”** This Psalm was likely written by King David.

King David had a long, tough struggle during his life. He went from the simple life of a shepherd boy to being anointed as king at the age of about 15, killed Goliath a few years later, fled from Saul for several years, and finally became king. Later he had to flee from one of his own sons, Absalom.

I am certain King David learned through the years of struggle, poor choices and good choices, that it was easier to just follow the path of the Lord and to walk behind his Redeemer.

David, who was called by God as His king of Israel, was still vulnerable to poor choices during his reign. Sometimes David would go it on his own, like the time he desired Bathsheba who was married to one of his soldiers (Uriah). David decided to send this soldier, Uriah, the husband of Bathsheba, to the front lines of battle, ensuring that Bathsheba would become a widow, allowing David to marry Bathsheba.

David was judged for this sin, with the loss of his first-born son with Bathsheba.

David also knew the safety in following the Word of God and letting it be the lamp unto his feet. David boldly challenged the giant Goliath with nothing more than a

shepherd’s bag and a sling. Why the confidence? In David’s own words,

“And David said to Saul, Let no man’s heart fail because of him; thy servant will go and fight with this Philistine. And Saul said to David, Thou art not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him: for thou art but a youth, and he a man of war from his youth. And David said unto Saul, Thy servant kept his father’s sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock: And I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him. Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God. David said moreover, The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine. And Saul said unto David, Go, and the Lord be with thee” (1 Samuel 17:32-37, KJV).

We may never in our lives actually come face to face with a giant like Goliath, but we do come against giants in other forms. It may be a personal battle against temptation, or lack of faith, or depression or any number of things that seem so insurmountable. But our God who has preserved us up to this day is fully able to deliver us now.

A Friend Named Toni

I received a call one day from a lady who cleaned our company workhouse in Aztec, New Mexico, years ago. Her name is Toni. Toni called me to get permission for a truck driver to leave a trailer on the Aztec property overnight. While she was on the phone, I asked how she was doing. She asked if I had heard about her son. She then told me he committed suicide. She then told me she sometimes doesn’t want to live.

I told Toni that I was a firm believer in the resurrection, and that was a hope we all can hold on to. She agreed that was the only thing keeping her going.

Toni was facing her Goliath!

Goliath

Now, there is another part of the story of the Goliath encounter. When David killed Goliath with a sling and a stone, he had no sword in his hand (1 Samuel 17:50). A sword was a common instrument of warfare known by all to be absolutely essential to defeating an enemy, but David had no sword! How many times do we face a mountain or a Goliath without the advantage of conventional means of defending ourselves or visible means of overcoming? David’s God, who is our God, improvised and gave David victory without a sword. David then ran to Goliath’s body, stood on it and removed the head of Goliath with Goliath’s own sword.

My Sons

I was thinking last night about God’s knowledge of our past and our future. I was wondering how God knows every step of my future. God’s ways are so beyond our understanding, and certainly mine, but it could be likened to this:

As a father when my sons were young, I knew them well enough to predict many things they would do or say. This is because they were my sons, with my DNA and their mother’s DNA. We tailored customized guidelines and direction for them based on our knowledge of their traits as sons of Brandon and Donna.

For example, they both loved to read, so we supplied them with good exciting stories by Frank Peretti and The Hardy Boys. We didn’t push sports on them but taught them a good work ethic through practice and example. We used broad strokes

with an ethical brush.

When they were older they occasionally smoked cigars, so I found one of their cigars and soaked it in Tabasco Hot Sauce hoping to break their habit, but it did not immediately work.

When we were adopted into the family of God, we became the sons and daughters of The Most High. He knows our name. And his word is tailored to us specifically as His sons and daughters.

"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path."

His Word is darkness to those who do not believe, to those who are not yet adopted into this family.

"But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (1 Corinthians 1:23-25, ESV).

Metaphorically Speaking

The unbelievers still think they need a sword, but we know that a sling and stone will do as long as it is provided by the Lord. We know that God gives the victory, and He can do it with whatever is in our hand.

Then Moses answered, *"But behold, they will not believe me or listen to my voice, for they will say, 'The Lord did not appear to you.' The Lord said to him, 'What is that in your hand?' He said, 'A staff'" (Exodus 4:1-2, ESV).* The Lord essentially told Moses that what Moses had in his hand, was enough.

God knows us much better than we know our own children. He doesn't need Tabasco Sauce. His Word, including the many parables of Jesus, which confounded the Jews, is everything we need!

When Light Is Present, Darkness Flees

This is true. Darkness has no choice but to recede in the presence of light. I explored an underground ventilation shaft in Peoria, Illinois, many years ago. It was abandoned, had not been used in 20 years, and had standing water in it. The shaft was about 12' wide by 12' tall and as long as a football field.

To enter I had to climb down 2 flights of stairs and make two turns. The dynamics ensured that it was absolutely pitch black, not one photon of light was present. I had a single flashlight, a very bright one for its day 30 years ago. I was quite proud of that flashlight, but it was no match for the thick darkness.

I could only see my feet when I pointed the light down or the wall on either side when pointed that way. To proceed forward I held one hand in front of me and illuminated it with my light. That way I didn't step any further than my light would reach.

"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path."

God will not always light the whole room or the full length of the road, but He is faithful to illuminate our feet, and lead us one step at a time. **Just as Israel moved only when the pillar of fire moved,** we must take care not to go beyond the light that God has given us.

Back To The Hiking Story

We were in a wilderness area, which comes with its own perks, like no bridges over streams, no warning signs for the hundreds of concealed sinkholes filled with 32 degrees Fahrenheit water, no flat camp areas, and no rain shelters, but an abundance of mosquitoes, big, mean, ugly mosquitos!

On the way in, we tried to keep our boots dry by taking them off and wearing flip flops with pant legs rolled up when crossing ice-cold streams. We each had our own pair of flip flops until a rushing stream washed one of Joel's away. From then on we could only cross streams narrow enough to reach across from both sides with our poles and transfer the shared flip flop. We were well prepared with a tent, sleeping bags, rain ponchos, and 3 flip flops.

It began to rain that first day. By the time we made camp, my hands were so cold I had trouble untying my boots. I carried my 357 revolver in a chest holster for protection from bears or large mosquitoes. I was tempted to fire it just to warm my fingers on the hot barrel.

Our tent was on a slope, but it was sufficient. We had a fire, which was just about right. We were in the wilderness and had just what we needed, but no more. I remember that night we had a choice of standing over a warm fire in light rain or climbing into a cold dry tent.

Sometimes that is what God gives us. Just enough supplies for the wilderness. Just enough shelter from the rain. Just enough lamp for our feet. Just enough light to our path.

"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path."

I would like to add one more point here. David went face to face with Goliath that day, one on one, but all of Israel was behind him. At the first sign of victory, Israel, as one body, attacked the Philistines and routed the whole Philistine army.

In our local service, we talked about faith and how sharing our stories of faith and victory builds up our faith and the faith of others. Sharing our praise reports and testimonies in church is every bit like David holding up the head of Goliath. When David held up the head of Goliath, it gave Israel courage and faith that they too could defeat their enemy...and they did. ✚

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