

## I AM CONVICTED

**John 8:9** And they which heard it, **being convicted by their own conscience**, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst.

The word “**convicted**” appears only once in the King James Version, here in this verse in the middle of the story about the woman caught in the act of adultery and brought to Jesus. However, the Greek word is “elencho” and it actually appears seventeen times in the New Testament, translated into English terms like “convinced,” “rebuked” and “reproved.”

**John 16:7-8** Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will **reprove** the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:

The ministry of the Holy Spirit is to **convict (elencho)** mankind of their sin. The Spirit's motive for this work is to steer the guilty party toward redemption, because **elencho** means: “to show someone his sin and to summon him to repentance.” Thus, the ultimate goal of **conviction** is to restore the relationship between a person and God. People would never see their need for a Savior without the Spirit convicting them of their sin.

**CONVICTION** is essential to character, loyalty, integrity and faithfulness to God. Whether we compromise and sin is directly tied to the strength of our convictions. We often think that strength of conviction comes to the forefront only when everything is on the line, or perhaps even when our eternal salvation is at stake. But this is a serious mistake. Strength of conviction in our everyday choices is what determines whether we will have the necessary conviction when everything is truly on the line. We all admire men and women of conviction. We have an innate awareness that we should stand for some things no matter what they cost.

In the world today, many events are bringing Christians and Christianity more intensely under the scrutiny of the general public and even the government. And as this scrutiny intensifies, we may have our convictions severely tested (as others already have experienced) ...

Nearly 35 years ago, an Amish farmer refused to send his children to Wisconsin public schools because it was against his religious convictions. The state of Wisconsin sued him twice and both times he lost, facing jail and the possible loss of his children to a state-assigned foster home. Appealing to the U.S. Supreme Court as his last resort, he was told that the First Amendment protected his religious convictions and that he did not have to send his children to public schools.

In this landmark 1972 case, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that a person's **religious convictions are protected** by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, but one's **religious preferences are not**. In setting this precedent, the courts established the guidelines against which similar and subsequent cases would be judged. In doing so, the Court laid down principles regarding persons who claim to hold religious beliefs. They determine whether one is really convicted.

## PREFERENCES ... OR CONVICTIONS ???

**Firstly, the Court stated that "one cannot hold a belief unless one can somehow describe that belief."**

**1 Peter 3:15** But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear:

Though the Court does not ask for eloquent, highly organized and systematized testimony such as a teacher should give, it will not accept hunches, feelings or "it-seems-to-me" testimony either. The Court wants a witness to show thoughtful consideration of his beliefs.

**Secondly, the Court required that “beliefs must be individually and personally held.”**

In John 8, Jesus confronted opponents who clearly had not internalized the beliefs they claimed to hold.

**John 8:39-40** They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham. But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham.

The Court views this as hiding behind a title. Christ's enemies said, "I am a son of Abraham." Today, one would say, "I am a Christian; my church teaches this." The Court says, "Fine, tell us what that means to YOU."

Righteousness will be individually judged by God; it is not transferable!

**2 Corinthians 5:10** For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.

**Ezekiel 14:14** Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord GOD.

**Thirdly, the Court established that “beliefs fall into one of two categories – convictions or preferences.”**

In U.S. courts, only convictions are protected by the Constitution, not preferences. It may be surprising how the Court defines a preference ...

**A preference is a very strong belief.** We can hold a preference with great intensity and strength. How strong? In the court’s opinion? Strong enough that one will give all of their wealth to support it. Strong enough that a person will energetically proselytize others to their faith. Strong enough that one will go into full-time service to propagate their belief. And yet, in the eyes of the court, such a person may still be operating on a preference, not a conviction.

Though a preference may be a very strongly-held belief, according to the Supreme Court **a preference is a belief that one will change under certain circumstances.** Through long experience judging cases, the Court has learned that certain pressures, if brought to bear, will motivate people to change their beliefs. These people do not have a conviction but a preference and thus are not protected by the Constitution.

**Evaluate yourself against these pressures:**

- **Peer Pressure**
- **Family Pressure**
- **Threat of Lawsuit**
- **Threat of Jail**
- **Threat of Death**

Do you see the common factor here? **What does your belief mean to YOU?** What are you willing to sacrifice to exercise your belief? If you feel you should do something but have the right under certain circumstances not to do it, it is merely a preference according to the Supreme Court.

The Court says that a conviction is a belief you will not change. Why? What creates a conviction? The Court’s answer: **A man must believe that his God requires it of him.**

**A belief that is God-ordered is a conviction.** It is not merely a matter of resolve or dedication, but a matter of believing with all our heart that God requires it of us.

The Court says that if we hold our beliefs as God-ordered, we will withstand all the above tests. The Court also says that a conviction is not something we discover, but something we purpose. It is not something we just happen to run across, but something that is part of the very fiber of our personality.

**Fourthly, the Court ruled that “if you require other people to stand with you before you stand, your beliefs are preferences.”**

In effect, the Court asks, "What do other people have to do with what God requires of you?"

**Romans 8:31, 35-39** What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? ... Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The three Hebrew boys (Daniel 3) did not require others to stand with them. They told the king that giving them another chance would change nothing—their answer would be the same. Their beliefs were nonnegotiable, because no one was greater than God in their lives.

**Fifthly, the Court states that "you have no right to say you have a conviction unless you live that conviction with some consistency."**

**James 2:18-20** Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?

If the Bible requires something, it is God-ordered. If it is God-ordered, it should be a conviction. If it is a conviction, then not to do it would be a sin, or disobedience to God. **Before we state that what we believe is a conviction, we must be prepared to say that its opposite is a sin.**

Everyone knows that on the witness stand, after swearing or affirming to tell the truth, not everybody is honest in court. So the Supreme Court was left with solving the dilemma of determining whether a person was telling the truth about his convictions. Their answer was actually very simple. **The truth can always be found in a person’s lifestyle.**

**Luke 6:45** A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh.