

## **THREE FOLD CORD - PERSONAL CONVICTION**

*November 2008. Latimore Mennonite Church. PA.*

I greet you in Jesus name. Again we are happy that we can worship in this way. I welcome each of you to the services. I'm glad for those of you who can be here this afternoon that haven't been here this morning. I trust that you can worship with us and stay awake on this Sunday afternoon.

I bring greetings in Jesus name and I also want to bring greetings from the Waterloo congregation in New York State, it wasn't mentioned and one or two of you asked me where I was from so I just wanted to pass that on and you are welcome to come and visit us if you ever have the opportunity.

I appreciated Brother Wendell's devotions the Three-fold Cord, that thought comes from [Ecclesiastes 4:12](#) we are not turning there but there it says a Threefold Cord is not quickly broken. I like the way the subjects are laid out this afternoon because we are talking about three different aspects that when woven together make for a strong church. The church is built up of many aspects and members and the aspects we are discussing this afternoon when they are woven together helps make a strong church. I think as I pondered these it is possible to go off the track into a ditch in many, many ways.

If one for example in one of our three topics this afternoon if one would only major in personal convictions and just major in that personal relationship with God then we believe it is a temptation to go down the road of pietism or individualism and we don't want to go that way.

The second topic is talking about congregational loyalty, that is needed, however if one majors in that if I may put it that way then personal relationship with God and personal convictions takes a back seat and we have seen people go down the road into dead formalism and not much spiritual life and that is not much good either.

Neither in relation to the third topic you know if we majored in that at the expense of the other two we could develop pride in our church organisation and God hates pride, the Bible is very clear on that.

So I think that there is value in the Threefold Cord aspects.

Personal conviction is what has been assigned to me.

I would like to begin with an illustration. I'm told that back in the days of the 1900s we have what we call World War 1 when the United States entered the war and began the draft. We are told that there was not a lot of provision for conscientious objectors, there was not a lot of provision for that, and there were faithful Christians that asked for that exemption and said that they could not go and join the army and fight in the war in Europe because of the teachings of Jesus and their belief in that. Some of them went to prison, there were a few that died in prison, but the Lord blessed those that stood true and strong for what was right in the Bible and had personal convictions.

I'm also told that as the years went around and the Korean War and the Vietnam War came the country had more provision for conscientious objectors and they had what they called the 1W program and that is something that the younger generation doesn't know much about. I was a boy when that was in session and I lived at Danville and there is the Danville unit, I have some faint memories of that, but I'm told that there were many young men from the Mennonite churches that went into the 1W programs during the Korean War and Vietnam war, but when they left their homes and went, many times to the city to the state hospitals places like that, they were free from parental restraints, they were free from the church and many of them, too many of them, did not have personal convictions and too many of them drank, they smoked, they went to parties, they married strange wives and they lost out spiritually to God and to the church.

I was ordained in a little congregation called Bridgeport down towards Philadelphia and right across the river from Bridgeport is a town called Norristown. In Norristown there was and still is a large

state hospital and there was a very large 1W unit there and I had an uncle that served there and I worked with him for 11 years and he told me a little bit of his experiences there and what he told me verified what I just told you. Many, many young men came there and they drank and they smoked and married strange wives. He lived in a dormitory and I think they each had their own room or something but occasionally the managers of that building would go through all the apartments of these Mennonite and Amish young men and they would search for alcohol and beer and forbidden things, and many times they found them. Isn't that sad?

That was very sad, it was a very poor testimony.

And you know young people the question has been raised: "If the draft would come tomorrow and you young men would be taken which suddenly have to go away a place away from your parents, away from the church, what would change, would anything change? Would your habits change? Would your practices change? Would your hairstyle changed? Would your conduct change?"

There is some talk that if the draft would come there is a possibility that our sisters could be drafted, and we sort of shake about that, but that is a possibility we don't know if it will happen. But do you know what would happen if you had to go away all by yourself?

Now we want to have a church program as much as we can to set up units like Danville, Wilmington, Zanesville and so forth if we could if that is possible.

But we are talking about personal convictions. What would you do, what would you say, how would you act if you are all alone?

What is personal convictions?

If you want a text for the message I thought of second Timothy 1:12, turn there with me. I didn't specifically have one but I thought of this one. This is Paul's last words to Timothy the second epistle of

Paul to Timothy and he is talking to Timothy: don't be ashamed, stand true, God has not given us the spirit of fear but a power of love and of sound mind, don't be ashamed of me, (2 Timothy 1:7-8) and now look at verse 12

### 2 Tim. 1:12

For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.

I know whom I have believed.

What is personal conviction? That is our first point, that is our first question.

Well it is a strong belief, it is a firm persuasion, I know whom I have believed. That is what personal conviction is a strong belief that you are standing on and that you are holding to.

Now in the context of what we are talking about today we are talking about strong beliefs that are based on the Bible, strong beliefs that are based on Bible doctrine and the teachings of Jesus, scriptural principles, God's eternal truth. That is what we are talking about, strong beliefs that are based on God's word and we are going to stand on them and we are going to do them.

We also come across the thought that personal conviction is the belief that you possess in your heart. Personal convictions are the beliefs that you possess in your heart.

You see it is not always so much what we say, it is not so much always the words that come out of our mouth although that is important for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh (Matthew 12:34) But it is what we possess, it is what we would do when we are by ourselves, that is what it is. It is what you would do when all restraints are taken away and you are on your own, what are your personal convictions?

Now in studying for this message I came across a very interesting article in an old Christian Contender that the late Henry Weaver wrote, I'm going to share a few things right now from that.

He gave this thought and I have been thinking it through and I think it is true; What is personal convictions this is number three. Number one was strong belief firm persuasion, number two the beliefs you possess in your heart.

Number three, I gleaned this from Brother Henry, is the constraining force of guilt, personal convictions they are and can be the restraining force of guilt. And it is true you look at the dictionary: conviction carries with it the thought of being proven guilty, the force of guilt. We don't often think of it that way but it is true. One aspect of personal conviction is that I want to do what is right, I am determined to do what is right because I know if I don't do that I will be feeling guilty, the Spirit of the Lord will condemn me.

In the Bible we read of Joseph: How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God? ([Genesis 39:9](#)) I think Joseph he knew what God's standard was, he knew what God's standards of right and holiness were and he was going to do them, and he knew that if he would give in he would be condemned, he would be condemned by God, his conscience would be tearing him apart. I have heard the phrase: "Our conscience screams at us." That may sound, maybe that's a casual way to put it but you know the feeling when your conscience is condemning you it is like a hammer, you are wrong, you are wrong.

Personal conviction is: I am going to do what is right because I know it is right and I am also going to do what is right because I know if I don't do what is right the Spirit of the Lord will condemn me. And that is the feeling of guilt.

Sometimes people say: "You know I don't have any convictions on that, I have no problems doing that" whatever it is.

Well if you think that through, just because you lack conviction does that say you are more free? Not necessarily. Lacking conviction may seem on the surface that you are more free and you can do things, but if you are doing things in violation of what the Bible teaches sooner or later you will come up against a constraining force.

You are not free. Maybe you will go all through life and do as you will but you will stand before God in judgment and then you're up against a force you will not get around.

But I'm thankful in the brotherhood that when someone says they don't have convictions and do something they really shouldn't that we tap them on the shoulder and talk to them we say:

"Brother, sister, we are concerned about this, that what you are doing is not right, it is not good, you're on a course that will take you the wrong way."

"Well I don't have convictions against that."

"Well let me explain to you why you should have convictions on this."

And you know then you come up against something and that is not a good feeling either. It is far better to develop personal convictions and live by them and work with them than to think you have freedom without it.

What has been observed already is when a person doesn't have personal convictions and they think they have more freedom let's say on dress issues: "I don't have convictions for this practice that our church encourages or asks for."

But when I go out then and adopt a pattern that the world has, you know I end up coming in bondage to the patterns of the world and after a while I forgot to change or the fashion.

You know men's hairstyles is a clear illustration of that. It is far better to have convictions to have simple short haircuts like our church asks of us then to try and follow the world's pattern. When I was a young man in Bible school I remember our principals worked very, very hard on some young men, your sideburns are too long, cut your sideburns shorter, keep your hair off your forehead. I saw 10 to 15 years later that change and all of a sudden sideburns seemed to disappear, haircuts became very short we call them low maintenance haircuts, and then it was rather ironic that church leaders had to say you know you are cutting your sideburns too short, your hair is cut

too short, and sometimes church leaders thought we would never have to say that, but it happened.

Now I notice it has switched again, have you noticed that sideburns have become long, hair has become bushy. Who are you following when you change? Who is the person following when a man changes his hairstyle? Well he is following the fashions of this world and that brings you into bondage. Much better to be free with convictions based on God's standards of holiness.

Another question, second question I would like to raise if you are taking notes: Upon what does conviction rest?

I have alluded to this already. Convictions rest upon God's standards of right and wrong,, convictions rest upon God's standards of holiness, the holy Scriptures, this is the way walk ye in it ([Isaiah 30:21](#)).

### [2 Tim. 3:15-17](#)

And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. [16] All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: [17] That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

You see conviction is based on God's standards and that is what is able to help us through. Convictions are not based on popular opinion, popular vote or what the crowd is doing it is based on God's standards.

Now a related thought and again I am borrowing from Brother Henry Weaver on this, I thought it was interesting and I'm not saying that I have thought this through but I think it is true: Convictions rest on law and authority. That is what Brother Henry said: Convictions rest on law and authority.

And that is true, you know it starts with God's laws and God's authority and then the best way that convictions are developed is when parents have convictions and they are firm and settled in then we

teach that to our children because children need to learn that there are laws, there are authorities, there are boundaries. Children need to learn here is the line, this is the boundary, and that is where the boundary will be. And we as parents need to be consistent, it is not always very easy but it is a must, we have to be consistent because if the boundaries change every so often that is not going to help develop convictions in our children. We have to have boundaries and then they learn that if we cross the boundary there is a punishment, if they stay within the boundary there is freedom, there is no guilt, you know there is no guilt because of the boundary.

And along with that we want to endeavour to help our children sense accountability. You know it is not just laying down the law with the rod, that is part of that, but we want to reach their hearts and we will want our children to want to listen to father and mother, through their sense of accountability they want to do that because if children do not develop a sense of accountability you know what happens, they start doing things behind mother's and father's back and gradually children get that concept in their head: What can I get by with, what can I get by with behind mother's and father's back?

That spells big trouble. It goes into school life, it goes into church life, it goes on to their employer/employee relationship. You know that as long as a person doesn't know about it and I can get by with it then everything is okay. That just destroys personal convictions, it does that, personal conviction is built on law and authority and order.

What are some personal convictions we should have? Just briefly I thought of Daniel in the book of Daniel, I'm thinking about Bible accounts, Bible characters for this point.

We have been studying [Daniel](#) in Sunday School. In [chapter 1](#) Daniel had conviction that he is going to purpose in his heart to do what is right. That is a conviction we need to have -I will do what is right regardless of what it costs. Now I suppose we could say that through the whole book of Daniel, but we need that, we need that conviction; I am going to do what is right regardless of what it costs. That is something we need.

**Chapter 2**, remember what this chapter of Daniel was about? The King's dream, he couldn't get the interpretation so Daniel being a man of prayer, before he was to be put to death he asked for an opportunity to pray and he and his three friends went and prayed, and I think a related factor to convictions is that we must be men and women of prayer, I am going to pray, I am going to be a man of prayer, I'm going to be a woman of prayer, I'm going to be a young man or young sister of prayer.

Pray in seeking God's help that is number one for me. I am not able to plan my own live on my own, I am not able to pull myself up by my own bootstraps, Lord I need you, I don't have the answers. And so we seek God's help in prayer, that must be a strong conviction of ours, I need the Lord's help I am not able to do it on my own.

**Chapter 3**, Daniel wasn't seen in that chapter but there are three the Hebrew men, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego who wouldn't bow down to the idol and you know they said: I am going to worship God. That must be our conviction. We talked about idolatry this morning. God is number one in my life! That must be our conviction, God is number one I am going to worship Him, I am not going to bow down to anything else. God is number one, that must be our conviction.

**Chapter 4** we have Nebuchadnezzar relating to Daniel that he had a dream and Daniel told him: Humble yourself before God. Nebuchadnezzar was proud. We need to be humble people. I'm not sure how to word that as far as convictions but we must be humble people. We must have the conviction that we dare not be proud, we must just humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, (1 Peter 5:6) be willing to be number two, be willing to be second, be willing to be you know not to be the most popular person, be willing to be looked down on, we don't need a pat on the back, we need to do what is right, that is more important than pats on the back. We must have that conviction.

Another interesting thing from chapter 4, remember the King told Daniel his dream and then Daniel sat aside for an hour did it say, and

then the King finally said: Don't be afraid Daniel, putting it in my own words, Just speak tell me what the interpretation is. That took a lot of courage, but Daniel spoke the truth regardless of the cost and that is a conviction we must have: I am going to speak the truth regardless of what it costs, I am going to speak the truth. Oh how we need that. We live in a world where truth is shaded, fudged and so forth, but I am going to speak the truth regardless of what it costs.

We were sitting at family worship reading about John the Baptist recently, you know he spoke the truth about divorce and remarriage and lost his head didn't he? ([Mark 6:18](#)) Now that sort of struck me.

**Chapter 5.** Belshazzar lived a life that was not ready to meet God, we must have the conviction to be living such a life that you are ready to meet God. That is so important and then we studied chapter 6 today in Sunday School, I won't get into that, but we need to have the same kind of convictions that Daniel had.

Another Bible character that I just want to mention is Joseph in Genesis 39. Joseph was far away from his home, far from his father, far away from godly influences and he said: I will not do this great wickedness and sin against God ([Genesis 39:6](#)).

We must have convictions for moral purity, we must have convictions for holy living. Immorality is sin, impurity is wrong, and we must have those convictions, convictions in those areas because our world is very wicked, it is very immoral and very impure. And if we are going to maintain that conviction we are going to have to be careful about the books we read, about the magazines we read, romance books big question mark. Worldly romance books there is no place for them. Christian romance books big question mark, I strongly discourage that, don't fill your mind with them it is not good for you.

We need a proper reserve between men and women, young men, young women. You know convictions for purity carry over for convictions in pure courtship practices, we need that young men and young women. The hands-off policy is a must, it is a must and it is not an ideal in the sky, it is a realistic practice, I can assure you of

that, I can testify of that. It is a practice that works with God's help and when you have a pure courtship you can look back with no regrets, none at all. We must have convictions in that area.

David was a man of conviction, one Samuel 17, you know he was going to stand for truth regardless of what his brothers said, Elihab said I know the pride and naughtiness of thine heart. (1 Samuel 17:28) That wasn't true of David, it was false. You know we need to have convictions to do what is right even if we have some family members that think we are going off track and we are too extreme. Now let's be careful that we are kind and gracious, I will touch on that, but let's stand for truth regardless of false accusations, even if family pulls you backward.

I thought of Timothy we read when Paul was talking to Timothy. And I would just like to drop this sort here: Timothy evidently had convictions to be a part of the church, he had convictions to be a faithful member. Paul encouraged him: Be strong as a church leader. And you know that takes conviction about Christian doctrine, convictions about Christian practice, proper church life. Toward the end of Timothy second Timothy chapter 3 Paul said: But continue thou, just continue on, continue thou in the things that thou hast learnt. (2 Timothy 3:14) and we know that Timothy had convictions.

Those are just a few thoughts about personal convictions we need and there is many more, I am not going to list them. I would like to go on now and discuss another couple of questions yet:

Number four, if you are taking notes, I would like to raise the question: Why do some people seemingly not have convictions? Why do some people seemingly not develop convictions?

There could be a lot of points but I would just like to share four.

One is that maybe they don't recognize the weaknesses of their own flesh. You see I need to think that I am weak, we need to realise how weak we are, I need the convictions, personal convictions based on

the Bible to help me stand because sooner or later we will face situations, if we don't have personal convictions, our flesh will take us down, it will happen quick, it can happen quick, in an unguarded moment if I have weak convictions. Satan is working full force and he wants me to fall and he gets people to fall. We need convictions. Let's remember that our flesh, we are still in the flesh and our flesh is weak and we need to crucify our flesh but it is still alive, we just need to crucify it and starve it.

Number two. Failing to submit to our parents' desires is another reason why some people seemingly don't develop convictions. We need to be sensitive to the council and direction of parents, young people and even us older ones we need to respect the desires and interests and concerns of our parents. Honour thy father and mother ([Matthew 15:4](#)) and that doesn't apply just to 16-year-olds, it applies to me yet, I want to honour my father and mother. For all of us a lack of respect for parental direction is just going to drag you down from developing convictions and related that is:

Number three is: That we fail to submit to our brethren. Sometimes, many times God's plan is that we submit one to another, God's plan is for us to be accountable to brethren and sisters. I need my brethren and sisters and I'm glad to be a part of the church fellowship that helps me and I want to submit to my brethren. And when we have an attitude that I want to work with my brother and I want to do my part then convictions can grow, and it is a blessing.

The fourth point I would just like to drop is this: Why do some people seemingly not develop convictions?

When there is too much variation in practice within our church group. I believe that it is a fact that if we have too much variation among us, now there are always will be some, but if there is too much it is a hindrance to developing convictions. What happens sometimes is young people think, and not just young people, it often comes up there: "Well they do this over there and they do this over here and why do we have to do this here?"

Well I am not here to answer why this is done over there and this is done over here or there but if there is too much variety it hinders conviction. I will just leave it at that and it is something that we need to work on.

Now the last part of the message I just like to make a couple of personal observations about convictions, my observations and I will try to be practical.

Number one: Personal convictions are personal. Personal convictions are a personal matter maybe we could put it that way. For example: I came across this illustration in an old Testimony (Eastern Mennonite Testimony).

A young man was passing out gospel tracts and he gave one to another young man of the world as I got it and this young man of the world took to the tract and then he had a question for the young man passing out the tract he said: The car that you have, have you ever tried to see how fast you can get it to go?

Well that was a sort of a strange question yet he was thinking: How fast do you drive? Will you do that when you're all by yourself? And this young man according to the article here was very thankful that he could honestly say: No I have never tried to see how fast it would go.

But how do you drive when you are by yourself?

We draw from another little story. I taught school in Ohio before I was married in the little town of Kidron. I don't know if you've ever been there but in Kidron there is a hill comes down the bottom centre of town and there is a little creek and both roads come down, and when I was there over those years, one older person gave me this story he said: In the early 1940s there were some carnal Mennonite young men and they would come driving down into town and I don't know how they did it but somehow they would get their cars to back-fire coming down the hill and because of the way that the land was situated it would echo all over the countryside. Very soon after that World War II began, the draft came so those very young men applied for C.O. status (conscientious objector) and this older man that was

telling me about it said that there were some strong community sentiment that these young men were not worth to become conscientious objectors and a comment that was made then he said was that they would make very good army tank drivers.

Now wasn't that a shame?

What are your personal convictions? It is a personal matter how you drive for example or maybe I am majoring on that point rightly but it is a personal matter, How do you drive when no one else is there to observe? And we could bring out a lot of other points.

Number two another observation is this: Personal convictions, I am wording it this way, are more concerned about what is right then what others think. I am concerned about what is right not what others think. Suppose you are with a group of young people and you hear another young person talking in a disrespectful way about their parents, what would you do? Are you concerned about what is right more than what people will think? If you are concerned about what is right you will not join in with that, you will try to steer it the other way and maybe a word of rebuke, maybe a word of encouragement to respect your parents. You know if I'm concerned about what is right I will be willing to be mocked rather than go along so that I am not mocked. Isn't that true? And that is not just for parents for young people it is for parents too, we all need to face that. You know what is right is more important then what people think of me, I am going to do what is right.

Number three. Another observation I concluded thinking about this: Our personal convictions are built, strengthened or weakened by little things. Our convictions are either built by little things or weakened by little things.

If I have disrespectful thoughts in my mind about my brethren and sisters, about my church you know it is going to weaken my convictions. Young people if you have disrespectful thoughts in your head about your parents it is going to weaken your convictions. Every time we complain, every time we think wrong thoughts our convictions go down but every time we have our personal devotions, every

time we pray and every time we seek the face of God and every time we make steps in the right direction our convictions are strengthened. Convictions are not built in a day, they are strengthened or weakened bit by bit.

Number four. We need to humbly live out our convictions, we need to humbly live them out.

What I mean by that lets exemplify Christian graces. I may feel very strongly and you may feel very strongly about a certain issue and about a certain practice that it is right but let's be humble and let's be gracious because if people sense a feeling of arrogance or "I am right and you are wrong" or "I'm up here and you are down there" we need to reckon how others develop convictions, in fact it somewhat works in reverse.

Another observation is this: Parents have a very large influence on the kind of convictions that children will have. That's just how it is and I want to quote from to you from a Christian Contender article. I just want to read you a paragraph:

"Conviction is built by parents who are serious about Bible principles, church standards, personal devotions, highway regulations and paying their bills on time. Parents to teach their children Bible truths and how to apply by setting biblical guidelines and restrictions in areas that church does not speak on and then firmly and lovingly standing on those guidelines. Parents who guard the children's associations and exposures including their friendships, reading materials, tapes, job atmosphere. Parents who love the Lord and worship Him from a pure heart."

That's just how it is and I know that I have not attained, my family is not all grow in and I am still with the Lord's help working to do that.

But if we want to pass on convictions and help our children to have good and right convictions and strong convictions it lays a lot at the feet of parents although children make a choice as well.

In conclusion I would like you to turn to Philippians 2, I want to read verse 12. It is an interesting verse that I came across in preparing for this message.

[Philip. 2:12-13](#)

Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. [13] For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

Paul had confidence that they had convictions and that they were going to do what was right even if he was not there, work out your own salvation in my absence, you will do it, I have confidence that you will do it. God can give us the strength to do that.

Convictions, personal convictions are very personal, they are what we possess and how we conduct ourselves, yes even in the absence of others.

I would like to throw up one more thought in conclusion.

A number of years ago I heard a brother in our churches make a comment that sort of shook me, but he made this comment publicly in one of our services that if our church group loses out or apostasises he'd probably lose out too. And I sort of understand where it was coming from because he was trying to, his point was of the influence our brethren and sisters have on us. And that is true but that statement really shouldn't be the case, we should have personal convictions based on God's Word that if others will lose out we are still going to stand for truth that way or there will never be a remnant when Jesus returns.

May God help us to be faithful.

Wherefore my beloved brethren the steadfast, unmovable always abounding in the work of the Lord.

[\(1 Corinthians 15:58\)](#) And the Lord will bless us.