

Personal Conviction For Separation
From a Message by Simeon Rudolph
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I greet you this morning in the name of Jesus the greatest treasure that God has gifted to man, the gift of his son. How thankful and how humble we ought to be that God has chosen us to give us His treasures. What would it be like if God had decided to share with us the worst instead of the best? God has nothing better to share than His love. The fact is that we are unworthy and always will be unworthy of all the good that God has blessed us with.

I say amen to previous message on “The Treasures of God” it has blessed my heart and I trust it will continue to be blessed as we further consider that.

The previous message turned out attention what God has for us and brings to us now instead we will focus on that which we hold for God: *Personal Conviction for Separation*.

I'm thankful to be part of the people who are interested in separation. It is one of the basic requirements of being a part of the people of God, it is a requirement to be a separate people, not just a separate people but a separated person unto God. I think that is what this title is emphasising. Yes it is good to be part of a people who are separate but the question that each one over and over again needs to ask one selves is: Am I a person who is separated unto God?

You may turn with me to the book of Romans chapter 14.

The Bible has much to say about personal conviction, we will not be looking at nearly all the scriptural directives on this subject but here is a passage where Paul addresses this matter, and gives some direction and some warning. I would like to read this passage at this time.

[Romans 14:1-23](#)

Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, *but* not to doubtful disputations. ²For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs. ³Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him

which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him. ⁴Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand. ⁵One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day *alike*. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. ⁶He that regardeth the day, regardeth *it* unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard *it*. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks. ⁷For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. ⁸For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's. ⁹For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living. ¹⁰But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. ¹¹For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. ¹²So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. ¹³Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in *his* brother's way. ¹⁴I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that *there is* nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him *it is* unclean. ¹⁵But if thy brother be grieved with *thy* meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died. ¹⁶Let not then your good be evil spoken of: ¹⁷For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. ¹⁸For he that in these things serveth Christ *is* acceptable to God, and approved of men. ¹⁹Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another. ²⁰For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed *are* pure; but *it is* evil for that man who eateth with offence. ²¹*It is* good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor *any thing* whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak. ²²Hast thou faith? have *it* to thyself before God. Happy *is* he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth. ²³And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because *he eateth* not of faith: for whatsoever *is* not of faith is sin.

God's people are people of conviction, they are conscientious, they feel strongly about issues of right and wrong, therefore we as God's people

stand out in a society around us that is almost wholly given to relativism. You know in the world around us right and wrong, truth and error are not established principles they are only questionable concepts. You can debate them and you can decide what is right and wrong, what is truth and error. That is not the mindset of God's people. God's people are people of conviction.

We will discuss the subject in two areas;

First: We ask the question what is personal conviction?

Second: We want to consider why is personal conviction for separation important?

First: What is personal conviction?

Webster gives this definition for conviction: A strong belief or opinion on a matter, convinced to the point of practice.

It is not just what we think about issues or matters but it is what we do about what we know. That is our conviction. However it is important to understand that our practice is not our conviction, our practice is only the evidence of it however we cannot call a belief a conviction if it is not something that leads us to practice or to act upon it. We understand that belief is a matter of faith, opinion is a matter of feeling.

The subject before us will focus on areas of our lives where faith makes us conscientious not where feelings make us opinionated. I think Paul is drawing a line here between those two in Romans 14. For illustration: I know some people that have some convictions in areas like whether it is better to sweeten your food with honey or sugar or whether the family should eat white or brown bread and things like that but those are matters of opinion, they may be convictions but they are not matters of faith. Verse 17 Paul says very directly: For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink.

Second: What is personal conviction? Very simply it is convictions that are personal. It is belief that you and I have and hold as a person but all of our brethren and sisters may not have or hold.

Now convictions can be divided into three areas.

1] There are our scriptural convictions, convictions that are based on clear Bible teaching, Bible teaching that leads us will directs us into practice in various areas. An illustration would be the practice of the Christian woman's veiling, it is part of our separation, there is a clear scriptural teaching that not only we believe but that we practice, sisters especially, brethren believe it and support the practice. Another illustration would be the non-swearing of oaths, and the Bible is very clear on that teaching and it is part of our separation that we will not and do not swear or take the oath.

The ordinance of feet washing. You may say: Well is this part of our separation? Well certainly it is. It is a clear Bible teaching that we have convictions on and we believe that to be a people separated unto God we practically apply that ordinance. That is the first area in the three areas of our convictions, there are other scriptural convictions, there are many more that could be added to that list.

2] Second there are convictions that are group or church convictions.

The areas in which the church has spoken and made applications to Bible principles and has set standards for us, we call them our separation standards, very practical, they apply to many practical areas. The plain cut coat for us brethren, the plain cape dress pattern for our sisters. For me as a member of the Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite church to wear another cut of coat would violate my conscience and it ought to. It is one of the convictions that we ought to hold. And sisters the same for your dress. It is part of the conviction that we ought to hold that the church has helped us to form. There are many other practical areas, in more recent years the church is helping us to build convictions on matters like the use of the Internet and we are saying that we will not freely and openly use the Internet with our computers. If we have cellphones we should be developing and holding the conviction that we won't use the camera cellphone, not because the Bible says it but because the church is helping us to establish that believe, that conviction. We want scriptural convictions and group convictions, we want those to be our personal convictions. Yes, we want to hold those as persons but there are many church members who are weak in the area of separation because that are the only convictions they hold, and usually those members are weak on some of those convictions that ought to be strong.

3] There is a third area that this title addresses in our convictions and that is our personal convictions.

These convictions that we may hold as persons apart from the scriptural or group convictions, in the areas of right and wrong for us as persons.

You may say: Is this scriptural to have this? Some say: Well if that is true you could create disunity. And granted Paul addresses that problem here, how that we should not be judging others by our personal convictions however in verse 22, [Romans 14:22](#) Paul is directly encouraging this. "Hast thou *faith*? have *it* to thyself before God. Happy *is* he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth."

Now that word *faith* there, hast thou faith, Paul is not saying that our faith in Christ is something that we should be silent about, not at all, it would be inconsistent with the rest of the scriptures, but Paul is talking about personal convictions. Personal faith, personal consciousness or areas where we are conscientious we develop convictions for separation that scriptures do not outline directly, the church has not spoken on, but we have driven some stakes in our own lives, we have developed some personal convictions in areas that are good for us and help us to support and help us to hold the other and more important convictions.

I will give you a few examples of personal convictions. I do not hold the examples that I will give, I do not hold all these as convictions for myself but I know spiritual brethren and sisters among us who would and do. In verses five and six Romans 14 Paul addressed the issue of keeping special days.

I know some brethren who would keep Ascension Day very similar to how they would observe the Lord's Day, it is their personal conviction that physical work should be set aside on that day all that except which is absolutely necessary. If they are a farmer they would violate their conscience to get out the tractor on that day to do the general farming. We do not hold that conviction as a group.

I know brethren who have the conviction that they should not have a computer or use a computer. They say that we as a church have drawn the line against the television and to them and to their conscience the computer

screen is too near and like the television screen so they have the personal conviction that they will not have it, that they will never obtain a computer.

There are some brethren among us who will not use a credit card. They read the Book of Revelation and find there a warning about the danger of persons with numbers and they applied that to things as practical as the credit card and they are satisfied to live without a credit card. It is a personal conviction.

There are some sisters among us who have the personal conviction that they would not purchase pink material for their dress. They reason that if our church has drawn a line against red material why would a sister want to wear a dress that is half red? Again the church has not spoken on that issue but it is a personal conviction for some sisters.

Back in Pennsylvania, I'm not sure if you have any highways here like that, there is a highway called the Pennsylvania Turnpike, when we get on to that highway we enter the entrance you need to get a ticket or if you have an "EZPass" that affords you entrance and when you get off you need to pay for the privilege to drive on that highway. There are some brethren among us who have the conviction that they should not drive on the Pennsylvania Turnpike on the Lord's Day. They reasoned that if it would be wrong to buy gas on the Lord's Day how could it be right to buy the privilege to drive on a certain road on the Lord's Day?

Well that's just a few illustrations of personal convictions. Again they are not scriptural convictions, they may be based on scriptural principles for those who hold them, they are not our group convictions but yet they are convictions that have value in separation and for separation. This message is about why do we need some of these beliefs in order to be a separate people?

What is personal conviction?

It is commitment to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, this commitment, our commitment to Christ is a commitment to live in obedience to His word, in submission to His Church and an openness to be directed by the Spirit of God through the conscience. You may say or you may ask: Well if we are

all committed to the Lordship of Jesus Christ will we not all be united perfectly in our personal convictions?

In [John 21:22](#) after Jesus gave Peter some specific directions for his personal life, Peter turned to his brother John, his fellow disciple John and asked the Lord: What shall this man do? Jesus replied was: What is that to thee? Follow thou me.

[Romans 14: 4](#). I think the Bible echoes Jesus words, Who art thou who judges another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth.

The personal convictions that we may hold, while they may be important to us, we may stand by them, yet we may never use them to judge or condemn our brother or sister whom may not hold them nor say that they are not committed to the Lordship of Jesus Christ because they do not hold the same personal convictions that I may hold.

Four: What is personal conviction?

It is the boundary lines that we draw for ourselves on the pathway of life. The boundary lines that we draw for ourselves on the pathway of life, not for others, for ourselves. No we should not be ashamed to recommend our personal convictions to others but we should never require them of others.

To illustrate this picture with me a highway with guard rails on both sides, maybe you don't have those kind of highways here but we do in Pennsylvania, it is not unusual at all to drive on a highway that has a guard rail on both sides, maybe one in the centre between the lanes and one on the outside. We are aware that the guard rails are the outer limits where we may drive our vehicle but to choose where we drive we do not use the guardrails we used the painted lines, we watch for those.

God in the church has set the guardrails for our spiritual journey in life, but every Christian and every spiritual person needs to draw or paint some lines on life for himself inside the guardrails.

Even our discipline booklet says this is the minimum standard. These are the guardrails and if we are conscientious persons, church members, we will be drawing some lines within these outer boundary lines. Imagine what would happen on the highway if a driver would use the guardrails as the boundary line will stop the person who does that spiritually finds that

life's journey is rough and dangerous and he will not be able to continue on the way to the end. It would be disastrous. But when the Christian paints some boundary lines for himself with his personal convictions inside, well within the guardrails he will find that he is thankful for those guardrails, they are there if he needs them if some mishap should occur but he finds the way of life moves and is easy to follow, spiritually safe.

Further what is personal conviction?

It is the hedge that we place around our conscience. The hedge that we place around our conscience. Our conscience is the human faculty where the Spirit of God meets with and communicates with the spirit of man. It is a very important yet very delicate member of our being. To function properly our conscience must be both enlightened and protected, kept tender.

In [Job 1:10](#) Satan accused Job of being faithful because God had placed a hedge around him and it really wasn't really fair for God to count Job as a faithful man because of this hedge that Satan could not enter in. God opened the hedge that Satan found out that he was wrong, Satan was wrong, Satan still could not reach Job. Why? Job had placed a hedge around himself with his personal convictions. Job protected his integrity with more than the protection of God but with the protection of personal convictions.

A few illustrations from Job's life.

Now God required sacrifice for sin, Job knew about that, but Job did more than God required, he offered each morning a sacrifice for each of his children for he said: "It may be that they have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." He didn't wait until he knew that his sons and daughters had failed to offer a sacrifice, his personal conviction was that we offer a sacrifice every day perchance they have sinned. God did not require that but Job's personal conviction had drawn that requirement for himself and for his family.

It would be good to turn to the book of [Job, chapter 31](#) in the book of Job, I don't think we will take time to do that but you will find a discourse on a number of Job's personal convictions. He said: "I have made a covenant with my eyes, why should I think upon a maid?" He talked about

his compassion for others and how impartial he was in relating to those around him.

Now the second area of the message.

Why is personal conviction for separation important?

We are talking about what personal conviction is and touching on its importance but I would like to focus more directly now on why are these personal convictions important in our separation?

First: Personal convictions are important because of my personal nature.

I don't know some of you here very well but I know each person well enough to know that you like myself have a nature that is human, and regardless of how strong we are we have a nature that tends to move with the crowd and do what other people do. Personal convictions effectively discipline ourselves and help us to make principle our guide for life not people. Yes, all of us need the strengths, the example of other Christians around us but there is not a Christian who is strong enough to have only people as his standard, only other people. We must have Bible principle as our standard for right and wrong and personal conviction helps us to establish Bible principle as our guide for life.

Second: Why is personal conviction important?

It is because of my personal influence. Paul talked about this in [Romans 14:7](#) where none of us liveth to ourselves and no man dieth to himself. What we do, what I do, what I say, where I go, how I dress, everything I do affects others either for right or wrong.

When Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself, ([Daniel 1:8](#)) his three friends stood by him and supported him in that. I wonder if Daniel's three friends would have been strong enough if Daniel would not have had the personal convictions that he did in that hour.

The question that I would raise brothers and sisters is: Are your friends, parents is your family strong enough to stand without the influence of your strong personal convictions?

Third: Why is personal conviction important?

It is important for my personal stability. Convictions give us consistency, uniformity; they bring those things to our lives. They help to spare us from the ruins of double mindedness. Joseph's personal convictions helped him to understand that morals were not relative to time and place. The person who is always presently deciding what is right and wrong is a person that is about to go wrong. There is no person strong enough to be constantly trying to decide where the line is between right and wrong. We develop spiritual strength when we firmly anchor that line and live by it and stop trying to decide every day what is right and wrong.

How do we do that? How do we anchor that line? One of the ways is by our personal convictions.

Fourth: Why is personal conviction important?

It is for my personal protection. Personal convictions protect my conscience, my character, and they also protect the other convictions that we hold, my scriptural convictions and the group convictions.

I will use this to illustrate what I mean: Most of you came here this morning in a vehicle. On the back and front of most vehicles there is an accessory that we call the bumper. Why does your vehicle have a bumper on it anyway? Does it drive better because of the bumper? Do you get better gas mileage? No, it is there for protection. If in the event that you would bump here on the back or front bump into another object it helps to protect the more important parts of the vehicle from being damaged. And our personal convictions are somewhat like that for us. They are the things that occasionally we get some bumps on, and that doesn't hurt us to be occasionally challenged on what we stand for, the convictions that we hold. The person that cannot stand for any personal convictions that he holds is not likely to be able to stand for the more important convictions that we hold.

Having used the car bumper for an illustration let me quickly say that in the natural realm that there is a driver who thinks that the bumper is to be used for bumping, he is only proving that he does not know what he is doing. If our personal convictions are convictions that are bringing unrest, disunity and difficulty in the brotherhood there is not just something wrong with the conviction there is something wrong with the driver behind those convictions. God will not lead us in areas and help make us conscientious

in areas where we will make it difficult for others, rather our personal convictions if they are what they ought to be they will be an encouragement to others, if they help us to be spiritually stronger they will help others to be strong.

Fifth and last: Why is personal conviction important?

Because of my personal accountability. Paul mentions this in [Romans 14:10 through 12](#): “For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. ¹¹For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. ¹²So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.”

There will come a day, and it could be quite soon, that we will all stand before the judgement seat of Christ and answer not for others but for ourselves. We understand that the judgement will be a personal judgement, not a group judgement but a personal judgement.

We want to be persons who can stand in judgement in all good conscience and be able to answer with joy and not with grief. An answer of a good conscience that we have by the grace of God lived by the directives of Scripture, we have with the help of our brethren, with the help of the church kept ourselves separate from the world, separate from sin and further that we have with the help of the work of the Spirit of God, with the help of our personal convictions we have remained separated unto God unto the end.

May God bless us with strong convictions for today and forth that will carry us to being able to answer with joy on the judgement day.