

Conviction or Conformity

Prayer

This morning I would like each of us individually to consider if we hold fast to that which we know is right or do we adapt to fit in.

There have been several psychological experiments carried out on groups of individuals to assess this very question. In one such case the researcher took aside 5 groups of 10 high school students. The teacher would put three chairs at the front of a classroom in a spaced out fashion. On each chair he placed a circle. On the first chair he taped a page with a printed small circle, on the next he typed an obviously larger circle and on the third he taped what was obviously the biggest circle. Next for each group the teacher took aside 9 of the students and told them that when he asked them to point at the chair with the medium size circle. They were instructed not to tell the 10th participant nor were they to hint or laugh or give away the test in any fashion. The teacher would then bring in all the students and ask them to point at the smallest circle. Of course everyone got it right... Next he said point to the largest circle and everyone in the class that had been briefed pointed to the medium circle. Without fail the 10th student would look around quickly and would then point at the medium chair. The teacher repeated this process twice for each group. People 80% of the time this experiment was carried out the stooge of the experiment buckled and despite knowing what was obviously correct, went along with the consensus of the group. The experiment was conducted with elementary kids with the results being slightly better... With adults, and this is shocking, the results were similar to the teens...

I believe this is because we all have an inherent need to fit in, to be liked by those around us. Ask yourself this morning... If you know the correct answer, are you willing to fit it at any cost? In our culture, people can be wrong and its no big deal. Oops they made a mistake, so what? Have we come to the place where we are so willing to fit in that we will compromise that which we know to be true? Clearly as the results of the research indicated, as a species it would seem so...

It seems like it is a survival instinct doesn't it? We want to blend into the crowd and not really stand out too much. Now for many pride will kick in and they will say: "I'm an individual and I stand out" not gonna point any fingers this morning, just asking that what is being said is considered in your own heart.

Think about community for a minute. Have you ever seen a Goth kid? They wear dark make-up, they dress in dark clothes, and so on... They say that no one can tell them what to do, they want to be individuals and they are rebelling against societal convention. Kind of like the punks of my generation... Now let me point something out... they are all wearing a uniform. All dark clothes, all dark make-up and so on... Further did you notice that all Goth kids hang with other Goth kids... They want to fit in. They are seeking identity and acceptance within a group. Consider the

cheerleaders in a school. When I say cheerleader this morning an image or a stereo type pops into your head doesn't it? How about Jock, Nerd or Preppy? How about Yuppie?

How about this... If I said to you kids love rules more than their parents, would you think I'm crazy? Have you ever played hopscotch with your daughter? One toe over that line and you are dead man... How about go go go stop, if you're moving you're done. How about hockey? We will enforce an icing call but if a fight breaks out, as long as both guys drop their gloves its okay.

I have seen it time and time again. Let me use an example you may or may not relate too. Let's say there is a guy... Let's call him George. He comes to church on Sunday and he says all the right things, he uses his church lingo. "Praise God" "Brother, Sister", "Amen", "Hallelujah" and so on. He smiles and is friendly and expounds on the good things of God. Now George leaves the church service and goes home. Monday night, he's got the guys from work over for Monday night football... Now the game is going well and his team scores a touchdown. The guy next to him says "F***-Yeah" and so he responds with: That was so "F***in awesome!" Now George is on a bowling team and they get together on Tuesdays to bowl a few games, but tonight is Tom's birthday and so for each strike they make, they have to pound back a vodka Jello shot. Now George is a great bowler, so by the end of the night, he staggers to the pay phone and calls his wife to pick him up. Lets go to Wednesday morning, George has to go to work and he has a headache. He is a owner of a large hardware store. He gets a coffee and goes into his office. He does some paperwork and heads to the water-cooler where he runs into two of his managers who are taking about a third manager in the store named Sarah. The one guy says: Sarah is so blonde she needs a stop sign at the top of a ladder. The other guy laughs and says yeah grab a flashlight and shine it in her ears and let's all watch her eyes light up. So George pipes up and says: "I see her with her hands on her head all the time..."The guys say: "What do you mean?" George says: "We need to cut her some slack guys... I'm sure she is just trying to hold on to a thought" - They all laugh.

On and on it goes... George put on a different shell or persona for every social situation he walks into. He want to blend in and fit in with every group he is with... George is a Christian so he knows, that foul language is wrong, he knows that getting drunk is wrong, he knows running down people is wrong, he knows that his behavior is inappropriate, sexist and discriminatory, yet he wants to conform to fit in.

Turn with me this morning to Romans 12:1,2 NKJV

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

My friends for too long people have played church. They have made it just another activity. They have masked themselves to fit in. We are told that we are not to be conformed to this world.

This is not a new problem in the church. Consider Romans 12:1,2 for a moment, we have this scripture because this is what Paul was dealing with; Conformity to the world and its ways. If you are conforming to the world, you are most certainly not lifting up your bodies as a living sacrifice in worship to God.

On my wall at home, I have a little placard in the shape of cross, it says: "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" which as we know is Joshua 24:15. Is it on my wall for a decoration or to serve to remind me, each and every day whom I serve?

Let's open this scripture context up even more. Let's read Joshua 24:14-27 NKJV

"Now therefore, fear the Lord, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the Lord! And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

So the people answered and said: "Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods; for the Lord our God is He who brought us and our fathers up out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, who did those great signs in our sight, and preserved us in all the way that we went and among all the people through whom we passed. And the Lord drove out from before us all the people, including the Amorites who dwelt in the land. We also will serve the Lord, for He is our God."

But Joshua said to the people, "You cannot serve the Lord, for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins. If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, then He will turn and do you harm and consume you, after He has done you good."

And the people said to Joshua, "No, but we will serve the Lord!"

So Joshua said to the people, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the Lord for yourselves, to serve Him."

And they said, "We are witnesses!"

"Now therefore," he said, "put away the foreign gods which are among you, and incline your heart to the Lord God of Israel."

And the people said to Joshua, "The Lord our God we will serve, and His voice we will obey!"

How often it is that people place idols in their lives. It may be money, sports, it may be the pastor; it can be stained glass windows, the old pulpit. Did you know that some people I know of actually threatened to leave a church because of a new pulpit? All of these things and many more take away from the worship of God.

The most common form of idol worship and conformity that I have seen in the church is Christians worshiping their form of worship. People will fight to keep worship exactly the same as what they had growing up. They desire it to remain the same because of remembered feeling. They will employ the rhetoric of others to discount and change in worship or addition of new songs. They will try to put words into God's mouth and say the song isn't honoring the Lord and make charges against it. They will say it is too difficult to learn or they don't like the style. Regardless this very common occurrence indicates that they have made the form of worship and Idol...

Years ago, I studied song writing with Paul Baloche and he told me that sometimes he will even do the same songs and change the style from Sunday to Sunday. This week the worship set is in a reggae style, next week it will be county, and so on. Have you ever heard: "I don't like to sing the old hymns" or conversely "If it doesn't have a good drum beat and guitar, it ain't worship"

Why do you think we do hymns and modern worship music... it isn't to please everyone, it isn't for variety. It is to prevent the formation of idols on the form of worship...

As yourself today whom you will serve?

- First question... Will you serve the world or God?
- Second question... Will you serve society or God?
- Third question... Will you serve yourself or God?

We have talked about how apathy is the opposite of love and how it can destroy a church ... Today, I am broaching the aspect of our commitment.

My friends, like salvation, commitment begins with a choice... We read Joshua's challenge to the Israelites. He wasn't talking about a lunch commitment he wasn't talking about a weekend. No, he was asking them to commit for a lifetime. God is totally committed to you and he expects nothing less in return. He wants us to commit to him with every aspect of our lives.

Turn with me to Hebrew 12:1-3 CEV

Such a large crowd of witnesses is all around us! So we must get rid of everything that slows us down, especially the sin that just won't let go. And we must be determined to run the race that is ahead of us. We must keep our eyes on Jesus, who leads us and

makes our faith complete. He endured the shame of being nailed to a cross, because he knew that later on he would be glad he did. Now he is seated at the right side of God's throne! So keep your mind on Jesus, who put up with many insults from sinners. Then you won't get discouraged and give up

Here is a side note... Last week we talked about the importance of fellowship. Can you see how it can hedge you up in your commitment to live for Jesus?

Oh look, there's an elephant in the room...

Can't we get through life without fully committing?

Before I answer that... let me say this: "Those who don't learn from history are doomed to repeat it..." We have our bible for a reason.

Consider that later in the life of Israel, Israel had divided into Israel and Judah. Now Israel got into some serious trouble over their sins and in the book of Jeremiah we can read about how God warned Judah not to conform to the example that Israel was setting.

Turn with me to Jeremiah 3:8 NKJV

Then I saw that for all the causes for which backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I had put her away and given her a certificate of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but went and played the harlot also

CEV

I knew that the kingdom of Israel had been unfaithful and committed many sins, yet I still hoped she might come back to me. But she didn't, so I divorced her and sent her away. Her sister, the kingdom of Judah, saw what happened, but she wasn't worried in the least, and I watched her become unfaithful like her sister

Do we believe that the bible is given to us as our handbook for life?

Good, then we need to view this verse in the context of the principle into which it is directed. Lack of commitment leads to conformity and when we lose our commitment to God or place commitments before our commitment to God, he is grieved by our behavior just as he was with Israel and Judah.

Moving on to Jeremiah 5:6-11 CEV

The people have rebelled and rejected the LORD too many times. So enemies will attack like lions from the forest or wolves from the desert. Those enemies will watch the towns of Judah, and like leopards they will tear to pieces whoever goes outside. The LORD said: People of Judah, how can I forgive you? I gave you everything, but you

abandoned me and worshiped idols. You men go to prostitutes and are unfaithful to your wives. You are no better than animals, and you always want sex with someone else's wife. Why shouldn't I punish the people of Judah? I will tell their enemies, "Go through my vineyard. Don't destroy the vines, but cut off the branches, because they are the people who don't belong to me"

Now Matthew 7:21 NKJV

Not everyone who says to Me, ' Lord, Lord, ' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ' Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name? ' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!

Why does this commitment matter so much?

My friends I have been successful, let me speak to you this morning from experience.

I was afraid of ministry. My parents were successful musicians with awesome careers ahead of them. They made killer coin. Then they got saved and committed their lives to Jesus. When I was a little kid at Revival Tabernacle, I once asked my Dad why he chose the ministry. My dad once told me that he once put people on barstools now he was going to take them back off and put them into the pews.

Now not everyone's story goes this way and I believe that God wants us to prosper, but that is not what I saw for many years as my parents struggled and were ridiculed for their faith. I remember many mean things said to me and my mom and it was not pleasant. In short, I had determined that I loved the Lord but that was not for me, I was going to be successful and prosperous.

That said, I was away from home on jobs all the time, and I became a work-a-holic. I made I killer coin especially on my jobs in the USA. My wife and I were pulling in well over six figures a year. Guess what folks... I came to feel unfulfilled in my jobs, buying whatever I wanted lost its appeal pretty fast, my work and lifestyle had pulled me away from any form of commitment to the church. I surrounded myself with so many acquaintances that I had called friends. I came to realize that they were networking and socializing with me because they all wanted something from me. I had fellowship with plastic fake people.

I had made money and success my Idol.

I was sacrificing my relationship time with my wife and kids for dollars and toys...

Now, many of you have heard my testimony of God asking me if I would be willing to give it up for him. Now can you understand why the choice for me was really a no

brainer? I still had the fear of living with no money and no job, but for me it was a decision or a choice to be committed and walk in faith instead of fear.

Let's look at Ezekiel 23:37-39 CEV and inspect Israel just a bit more...

They have been unfaithful by worshiping idols, and they have committed murder by sacrificing my own children as offerings to idols. They came into my temple that same day, and that made it unfit as a place to worship me. They have even stopped respecting the Sabbath

These people were so much in fear and felt the need to conform so strongly that they literally sacrificed their own children as burnt offerings to Baal and Moloch. Then they would come to God's house and worship him. It was Israel's lack of commitment that led them down the path of conformity. They conformed to the religious Gods of the land rather than eliminate them from their lives.

If I had continued down that success path, more and more of my time would be demanded away from my children and my wife as I progressed higher and higher in the echelons of my career... The cost of commitment to the idol of career, money and success was too high. I needed God to take me out of that, to rework me into what he wanted me to be and to put my feet upon the rock.

Let's examine ourselves this morning...

Many of you may say: "Well that's you" or "I could never get that bad" but I ask you to consider this...

How many of us place our kids in activities knowing that they will conflict with church? Are these things bad? No they are not... not in and of themselves, in fact in many cases these activities are awesome. The danger comes when we place them in a higher priority to God.

Do we come to church and worship and then conform the rest of the week?

What messages are we giving our children who are watching us and learning by what we do? Are we telling them that anything that comes between them and God and fellowship with the church need to be second priority or are we teaching them that church is a lower priority to every other thing. Now hear me... I am not condemning camping or going to sports occasionally and things like that, what I am addressing is when these things become idols in our lives and take on an importance to us that puts God on the back burner.

I am not condemning anyone here today, my job is to love each of you. What I am trying to impress upon you is that for you, and your family there is nothing more important than getting your family to know God; To instill in them the

understanding that there is nothing more important to their success and happiness than God. I want my kids to value God more than me...

When I stand before God, I want to hear him say: "Well Done, good and faithful servant." I don't want to hear: "I never knew you, depart from me"

This morning I urge each person here and any who hear this message to understand that we are not called to what we read in Romans 12:1,2

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

It is a choice, will you be real with God and the people around you. People cannot see through the shells you put up, but they can see when a person is real, sincere and letting the light of the world shine through them.

Prayer