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Are Your Beliefs Convictions or Preferences?

- by David Gibbs

Did you know that legally every religious belief can be classified as a preference or a conviction? In a 1972 landmark case (*Wisconsin v. Yoder*), the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the only religious beliefs protected under the First Amendment are convictions and gave clear criteria for distinguishing them from preferences.

A belief is merely a person's preference when certain circumstances will motivate him to change it. The strength or intensity with which a belief is held does not keep it from being just a preference. Many Christians have entered the ministry, given huge sums of money, shared their faith with others, taught their children to believe – all on the basis of preference. The distinguishing mark of a preference is that it can be changed.

The court noted five factors that are most likely to change a person's preference: peer pressure, the influence of family members, the threat of litigation, the possibility of imprisonment, and the thought of death. If a person feels God is leading him to do something, but can be dissuaded by any of these factors, he did not have a conviction. What he believed at first was what he preferred, desired, and was determined to do, but it changed.

A conviction is a belief that does not change regardless of circumstances. It is not a matter of resolve or dedication, but is God-given firmness of position that does not yield to any of the above factors. Besides that, convictions have the following characteristics, as outlined by the court:

-Predetermined. A conviction is not a spur-of-the-moment decision. It is a pre-determined response to a situation that was likely to occur. This means that it does not matter whether other people stand with you in the crisis or not. Only conviction can enable you to stand alone. People with preferences follow the crowd.

When Shadrach, Meshack, and Abednego refused to bow down to the idol, it was not an on-the-spot reaction.

They had previously purposed not to defile themselves. There were plenty of other Hebrews in Babylon at the time, but these men were willing to take a stand by themselves.

-Nonnegotiable. When the three Hebrews were dragged before the angry king, he gave them a second chance, promising to let them off if they would bow down this time, but they were adamant about not worshipping a false god regardless of the consequences. Many modern Christians would have breathed a sigh of relief and said, "Praise God! He has given us a chance to rethink this!" Yet if we are willing even to discuss the possibility of compromising our beliefs, the court would consider this evidence that they are only preferences.

-Confident. The court said that if you need some indication that you are going to win your case before you are willing to stand for your "convictions," then they are just preferences. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were confident of the Lord's deliverance, but they said they would not change their minds even if He chose not to deliver them.

-Lived out. A lifestyle that is consistent with professed

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Children Shouldn't Be Sheltered! Or Should They?

- by Ronald E. Johnson

You have heard critics of Christian education say that a child cannot adjust properly to life if he is sheltered from the “real world.” Such a philosophy breeds the concept of open-ended learning; that is, children ought to be exposed to all aspects of life and thereby will be able to pick that which is good from society and reject that which is bad. Their idea is to let children experience, in small doses, what they theoretically will confront in adulthood. Proponents of this unrestricted form of education base their argument on the premise that children are best prepared for life by full exposure to information. It is an age-old philosophy better known by the term HUMANISM. The Scripture refers to it as “each man doing that which is right in his own sight.” Proverbs 21:2, Judges 21:25.

This “realism” approach has been practiced in secular schools for several decades, and has become “hard core” humanistic indoctrination since the 1950s. Current secular educators (and textbook publishers) make no apology for being agents of philosophy change. Their motivation is to change attitudes to removal of all absolute values. Modern secular institutions contend that the only hope for world peace is for all people to become humanistic in philosophy. To them, any absolute value concepts taught as fact are dangerous to world humanism; consequently, their purpose of education is to remove preconceived notions of morality and ethical values and to establish an open-concept of inquiry that will lead people to rational relationships based on reasoning. However, as in any movement based on man’s reasoning, the social trend is always increasingly away from moral character based on Divine laws. Thus, for several decades, secular institutions have been graduating classroom teachers who embrace the belief that information about every possible social relationship should not be withheld from children while they grow up.

Christian parents should keep in mind that “our generation” is a product of secular humanism. We too grew up under tutorage of secular humanists, thus, our perspective about distinctively Christian training is tainted. Our very upbringing was by and large secular (worldly). Christian

parents who contemplate enrolling their children in a private Christian school should realize that what may appear unnecessary sheltering of children from the world is, in fact, simply Biblical admonition. Our own background of humanistic education prohibits us from freely appreciating God’s standard: “train up a child in the way he should go.”

Hence, secular educators (and many Christians) adopt texts, activities, and materials that establish for their students a miniature atmosphere of typical adulthood values. Historical heroes are exposed not as men of honesty, integrity, and patriotism, but rather as selfish landlords who abused workers. Literature embraces the works of authors who champion the cause of revolution, free sex, crude language, and socialism. Activities encompass Halloween festivals, Santa Claus, Valentine dances, Easter egg hunts, and near-nude swimming parties. (Many Christian families assume that traditional holiday celebrations are innocent festivals. Historically, though, many social customs have their origin in pagan worship. Halloween is a commemoration of worship of demons in ancient Babylonian lands. Egg hunts during Easter date back to ancient Egyptian times when the egg and rabbit were symbols of worship of the goddess of fertility. Recognition of Saint Nicholas and Saint Valentine are Roman substitutes for fellowship with Christ.) Physical education and health classes are characterized by graphic and detailed descriptions of human relations, including the use of contraceptives and how to have abortions. Total life is revealed in its raw form. Remember, while in secular school, they view sex education films, hear lectures on revolution, receive instruction in abortion (legalized murder), are told that free enterprise is for “dirty capitalist” property owners, hear teachers mock and ridicule the concept of life after physical death, miss classes while teachers demand more pay, see heroes made of rock stars and hippy athletes. Crime, the central theme on T.V., is a national disgrace. Sensual romance is promoted, and fornication is a way of life among coeds; cheating is condoned, and theft abounds in society. Yes, they are exposed to the “reality” of a decadent culture, and they “re-live” what they see, hear, and experience!

The product of such secular education is evident in any public gathering and on the pages of any daily or weekly periodical. Government schools are producing a distinctively humanistic society: one that is destroying the character upon which America was founded. The society is decaying as only it can when God is forgotten. If the theory of humanistic exposure is supposedly good, why is the product turning out wrong? The basic premise is in error: children do not learn personal responsibility, accountability, and high morals by exposure to “raw” data from which they are supposed to select an appropriate lifestyle through reason. Man is born with a sinful nature that must be held in check through controls, discipline, and instruction in righteousness. Such necessitates implementation of an educational program carefully structured around the Word of God. Biblical truth stipulates that adults are to train children in the way they should go, and while instructing them, to expose them to things true, lovely, honest, just, of good report, and virtuous (Philippians 4:8). Nowhere in Scripture is there even a hint that children are to be exposed to evil. Contrary, Romans 16:19 reminds children to be “simple concerning evil.” Jeremiah 10:2 warns us that we should “Learn not the way of the heathen.”

Achievement of goals in life is based on the exercise of a person’s potential minus obstructions. God has promised in Philippians 1:6 “He [God] which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.” In evaluating applications of this verse in light of Romans 12 and I Corinthians 12, God seems to be suggesting that He has purposed that each Christian develop specific as well as general abilities (or gifts) Christ has given him. Romans 12 is the success formula chapter – reveals God’s plan: renewing the mind, “that you may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.” What goes into the mind is very critical.

The Lord has purposed that the body of Christ be composed of believers who exercise their particular gift in order to glorify the Lord through their lives. Philippians 1:6 suggests that God will exercise and perfect each believer’s gift. Hebrews 13:17 reminds Christians to obey those in authority over them, for the authority persons watch for their souls. That is, they are used of God to form the subordinate’s mind, will, and emotions. This forming can be extended to mean conforming to the image of Jesus Christ. Such conformation, or watching after the soul, includes restriction of experience of, or exposure to, negative things which damage or restrict perfecting of the soul into the image of Christ. A person’s soul consists of his mind, will, and emotions. Thus is visualized the absolute necessity of protecting the mind of a child from anything that takes away from a child’s conformation to the likeness of Christ. Negative practices

take away from a child’s potential. Many activities, experiences, and information act as negative factors thus limiting potential. Such things are here referred to as **NEGATIVE CHARACTER DRAINS**. The Lord has declared in His Word that negative character drains limit potential and are opposites to those things which are honest, just, true, pure, virtuous, and of good report (Philippians 4:8). Scripture admonishes Christians to abstain from that which is evil and to think on things which build character. People in authority over children are to make sure they perform or do that which is right in the sight of God. Therefore, it is imperative that there be a deliberate training program which very conscientiously protects the children’s minds. This training, then, requires the withholding of certain things which can be negative character drains on young minds, and the programming into the mind of that which conforms them to the image of Christ. It is without logic that adults, by neglect or on purpose, allow children to be taught and exposed to negative things – things which damage the soul.

Children are trained or “influenced to learning” basically in three ways. All three are based on the conditioning process in various degrees of magnitude.

1. **DIRECT**. This is deliberate, purposeful training in specific values, concepts, and data, so children will become predetermined types. Examples would include (a) the humanistic-based system practiced in authoritarian or totalitarian countries in which curriculum is structured so that students are deliberately taught to accept the state as final authority in all matters; (b) the system practiced in Old Testament Hebrew society in which parents and the church leaders programmed the children in the law, causing them to accept God as the final authority in life.

2. **INDIRECT**. This is also deliberate, but is subtle, subconscious programming with information carefully selected by teachers. This method encompasses the purposeful use of such subconscious techniques of mental programming as hypnosis, continuous eye fixations on pictures, listening to subtle lyrics in “rock” ballads, and reading or listening to propaganda that exalts or condemns specific values. The indirect approach is practiced by humanists who are well aware of the manner in which repetitious, subtle conditioning can form children’s values. It is perhaps Satan’s most effective tool against Christianity because of the availability of damaging information in the form of rock music, news releases, sensational magazines, “satisfy-me-now” advertisement for cigarettes, lotions, and beverages – all of which constantly bombard the minds of children, drawing them away from God-consciousness and toward self-gratification and desire for self-rule. Most secular textbooks are heavily permeated with indirect, but purposefully selected, material that slowly but surely forms

children toward humanism. It rests in the humanist concept that children learn by reasoning their way through data; therefore, children are exposed repetitiously to information that “looks at all sides of life as it is.”

3. ACCIDENTAL. The third type of learning is what the author refers to as the accidental or “I didn’t know that” method. This is the approach practiced by many secular educators and Christian parents. Without realizing the permanency of conditioning processes, adults in authority over children accidentally practice programming by allowing children to open their five senses to societies’ humanistic values. Parents or teachers who do not put restraints on children’s inquisitive, curious natures in effect leave the children to themselves. Such children become victims of subtle, subconscious conditioning: their treasure chests (souls) are “accidentally” programmed with things of this world. Their tutors do not necessarily plan for them to become humanists. In fact, the farthest thought from parents’ minds is to have their children turn out wrong; they do not realize that a “child left to himself” cannot turn out right.

Many parents and school staff unknowingly program negative character drains into their children through day-by-day activities. Television is perhaps the most devastating. Through it, children’s minds are bombarded with overt and subtle (conscious and subconscious) programming that Satan readily uses to draw children’s minds off things of Christ. T.V. focuses on self gratification – the “now generation,” which causes children to forget, or not even be interested in, spiritual values. Children exposed to, or having unrestricted

access to T.V. experience various negative characteristics: inability to rationalize, lack of discipline to read or study, appetite for and lack of resistance to sensual stimulations or temptation, appetite for pleasure and entertainment, and inability to concentrate for long periods of time. These results simply reflect the consequences of exposing the mind to “raw” worldly affairs. Similar consequences occur when children have access to pornographic literature, sensational romance magazines, public theatres, and discos. Rock music is probably second to T.V. in destruction of pure thoughts. Teens who habitually listen to rock music experience serious permanent negative characteristics: sensual appetites, loss of interest in Christian purity, disobedience to authority, breakdown of morals. What children are taught is critical. What they are not taught is just as critical!

Each time ancient Israel went into bondage, it was following a period in which a generation walked in the way of their ungodly heathen neighbors. They forgot the Law of their fathers and there arose a generation that knew not the God of their fathers. They practiced what seemed right to their teachers and lost interest in godliness: they practiced humanism. National character eroded and bondage was their plight until there arose a new generation trained in righteousness by repentant parents who SHELTERED their children from sin. Human nature has not changed. Like the children during Joshua’s time, students today must also be sheltered if they are to turn out right.

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beliefs is evidence of conviction. Actions show what we really believe. As James said, “Faith without works is dead.”

For example, you *believe* that the Bible is the Word of God and that it is the only source of truth and contains everything you need to deal with life’s problems. What do you do about that belief? Have you ever read the entire Bible through even one time? Do you read Scripture daily? Do you read it as much as you read the newspaper? Do you spend more hours watching television than you spend reading the Bible?

It is on the basis of questions like these that the court would decide whether your belief in God’s Word is a conviction or merely a preference.

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**Please be advised
that funds are
needed for the
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“Come Ye Apart... and Rest”

- by Dan Beachy

The one theme I hear recurring from many people I talk to is the challenge of getting everything done – not only getting everything done, but done in a timely manner. I find in my own life that there are so many important things to do that I cannot do justice to everything that is expected of me (or is it what I expect of myself?)

Is this an age-old human problem or is it a unique characteristic of the 21st century? Today we have more gadgets to help us do the routine tasks of daily living, yet it seems we are busier. Often these tools only help us to rush from one task to the next at a faster speed.

God Rested

Genesis 2:1-3 (KJV): “Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made.”

As I considered these verses, I saw that God rested or ceased from His work. This was not because He was tired or out of energy, but to model to us the important principle of rest. This is where the principle of the Sabbath originates. Later on in the guidelines for His people, God incorporated this concept into guidelines for daily living. In Exodus 16:5, the Israelites were to gather manna for only six days and rest on the seventh day.

Limits to Serving

As I was thinking of the life of Jesus, I was reminded of the many miracles Jesus performed and how busy He could have been in his three years of ministry here on the earth. In spite of the many hurting people, Jesus found time to restore His energy levels. In the midst of the pain around him, he found time to rest and he did not heal everyone that was sick. He learned that in His human body there were limits to how many people He could serve. Mark 6:30-32 (KJV): “And the apostles gathered themselves together unto Jesus, and told him all things, both what they had done, and what they had taught. And he said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat. And they departed into a desert place by ship privately.”

Too Busy to Eat

Here we see the apostles returning to Jesus very excited about all that had happened. Many people, looking for more free services, were searching for Jesus and his apostles. Verse 31 states that the apostles didn't even have time to eat. Instead of sending someone out to the local “fast food” restaurant for something to “grab on the run” so they could help more people, Jesus said “Come ye apart into a desert place and rest awhile.” In the middle of such an opportunity to help many people, Jesus instructs His apostles to “chill out and rest.” My human logic would be to try and serve as many people as possible. Yet Jesus knew that in order to provide the people with what they really needed, he and the apostles needed to just get away and rest.

Matthew 8:23-25 (KJV): “And when he was entered into a ship, his disciples followed him. And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but he was asleep. And his disciples came to him, and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish.”

The preceding verses tell us how busy Jesus and the apostles were serving people. Jesus and the apostles had just entered a boat to get away from the multitudes. I am amazed to see Jesus so peacefully asleep in the boat during the storm. When I am busy with activities and try to rest, I often find that my mind will not stop and rest even though I am weary. In the above passage, Jesus felt so at peace with what He was doing that He could lay down and rest. He was so relaxed that he slept through a storm that caused even seasoned fishermen to be afraid. Jesus slept until they came to waken Him because of their fear.

Rest for Our Souls

Matthew 11:19 (KJV) “Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.”

Jesus invites us to team up with Him and in the process we will find rest for our souls. When we can find rest for our souls, we are at peace. It is impossible to have meaningful rest when we are in conflict with ourselves and others.

I am drawn to Jesus' example of the importance of taking time to rest even when the demand for ministry is at its greatest. God calls us to minister to people's needs, not just to be real busy with activities.

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Please, Sisters!

- by Simon Schrock

According to my driver's license, I am a male. My height is 6'1". When I talk with people, I often look down to make eye contact. That doesn't sound very Christian, but my physical stature leaves me little choice and sometimes puts me in unpleasant and problematic situations. As far as I know, I would meet the standards of a normal male human being; at least, no one in my family has tried to admit me to a psychiatric hospital or insisted I see a psychiatrist.

When God created the human race, he made them male and female and declared them "very good." He created them with hormones to multiply and replenish the earth. He ordained for this to happen within the bonds of marriage after a man and woman become one flesh. According to God's plan, when He unites the two into one flesh, their bodies belong to each other. This union is graced with the gift and freedom of sexual expressions that bind them closer in their love for each other. This beautiful one flesh union is sacred to God and should be held in high regard. God wants me to respect the marriage union, as well as each individual, male and female. We are all a product of God's creation.

In His infinite wisdom, knowing the makeup of man, God warned men to guard against adultery, looking and gazing at a woman's body and entertaining lustful thoughts. Jesus said, "Ye have heard that it was said of them of old time, 'Thou shalt not commit adultery.' But I say unto you that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." (Matthew 5:27-28)

The God who made us male and female knew that Satan would challenge the beauty and sacredness of our sexuality. We men can get tripped into his snares as he tempts us to gaze at the opposite sex and lust after that which is not rightfully ours. This world has many men who practice looking "on a woman to lust after her." On the other hand, there are still men around who want to live in victory over

such thoughts. They want to live pure lives for the sake of the kingdom of Christ and their own marriage relationships.

This brings me to expressing what, at times, becomes an unpleasant situation. Remember, I am 6'1" and when I talk to a 5'4" person, I must look down to make eye contact; it would be rude to look over the top of his or her head. I attend various church functions and other gatherings of people where there are often persons present that I have not seen for some time. Usually about half of the people are females and seldom are they six feet in height. This means that as I shake hands and say "good seeing you again," my eyes look downward. There are certain parts of the woman's body that are not for public display, but to be modestly covered and concealed. I want to see this person as a beautiful part of God's creation; one who is divinely loved by Christ and can be a participant of eternal life. My discomfort level rises when I look down and see a woman whose attire does not adequately cover and conceal the parts of her body which belong to her husband or are to be preserved for a husband to be. It puts me on the defensive. Satan tries to get "an advantage" (see 2 Corinthians 2:11) by steering my thoughts into forbidden territory. It clouds the beauty of seeing a godly character. It cuts into the joyous fellowship in the Spirit of Christ.

I am not alone in my concern. I'm speaking the mind of a host of men who want to live pure lives for Christ. One dear older brother who made sales calls expressed his battle of the mind. His work took him into the homes of "church people." He often met women in clothing that distinctly revealed the upper form of the body which did not belong to him. Be assured, Satan was there to ignite the battle of the mind.

Perhaps females think it is all the man's fault by not keeping his mind on the Lord. That is a point to consider. However, please realize that the Creator made men with a



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chemistry that propels us toward a love relationship that expresses itself in a physical union. Certain eyesights stir the male chemistry. It is part of our normal makeup. It is what tripped King David into one of the most grievous sins of his life.

I know I live in an ungodly world. I step into a very immodest world almost on a daily basis. However, I know I am to be a light for Jesus Christ in this “adulterous and sinful” culture (see Mark 8:38). In my mind, I see these immodest persons needing to experience new life in Christ. The real discomfort I experience comes from women who profess to be Christians but do not practice the beauty of holiness in their attire. An immodest woman professing to belong to Christ can be a serious stumbling block to men of any age. Consider this an appeal to women who confess to knowing the Lord; instead of pushing the line on how much body you can uncover and still argue that it is modest, go the second mile in practicing modesty. Give attention to concealing instead of revealing. Take an extra step to meet the Bible call for “women to adorn themselves in modest apparel” (1 Timothy 2:9).

Adam Clark, a Methodist preacher and scholar who ministered fervently in the early 18th century, had a keen insight into the Scriptures. He taught that modest apparel meant going to the extra effort to conceal the private part of the female body. His comment on the word “apparel” in 1 Timothy 2:9 is enlightening: in Greek it is a compound word, *katastola*. According to Clark, the *stola* was a Greek dress – a long piece of cloth which hung down to the feet in front and behind, girded with a belt. The *katastola* was an additional piece of cloth which hung down to the waist loosely over the *stola*. Commenting further, Clark said, “A more modest and becoming dress than the Grecian was never invented.”¹ If women who profess to be Christians would practice something similar, it would help reduce the lust level for a lot of men.

The Christian woman should give careful attention to modestly concealing the part of the body that invites men to “lust after” her. You might say, “men shouldn’t be looking”. That may be valid. However, it is a two-way issue. If David just wouldn’t have looked; on the other hand, if Bathsheba would have practised modesty. These acts brought bitter reaping to both of them. Bathsheba was “very beautiful to look upon” (2 Samuel 11:1). Her beautiful body belonged to her husband Uriah, not David. Practising modesty reserves the body for the person in the one flesh union of marriage.

Christians should follow the Bible on this issue of modesty and not “copy the fashions and customs of this world” (Romans 12:1-2). The world has it all wrong on this issue. The rule of the world for the male to be formally dressed is to put on a shirt, close the top button, and tie an extra cloth around the neck and hang it down the front. Then on top of that, he is to wear a coat. The formal dress of a female allows her to display much of her upper body with sleeveless attire and very low necklines.

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According to Scripture, the woman should give special attention to covering her body. She should have an extra cloth of protection around the upper body. When this is done to promote modesty, it makes it easier for men who want to live pure lives for our Lord and Saviour. It will also present a clearer testimony of who is following Christ and who is patterning after the customs of this present world.

While this appeal is made to Christian women, it in no way lessens the responsibility of men. Their attire should support and encourage modesty in the female saints of God, and reflect “holy hands” of prayers as mentioned in 1 Timothy 2:8.

I know there are a lot of men around who enjoy gazing and lusting after immodest women, which Jesus called adultery in the heart. There are still a few men around who know about this sin and are committed to live in victory. Many sisters may not realize the testing that immodesty brings to men. Maybe you sisters will want to give extra attention to attire that will make it easier to enjoy the rich fellowship in Christ. One male saint said it well, “It is much more comfortable for the man when the woman is dressed modestly.” Please sisters, dress modestly.

1 Lloyd Hartzler, *Personal Appearance in the Light of God’s Word*.