

What Is a Personal Conviction?

By Melanie Stone

A personal conviction is a specific boundary of behavior that God has set for a person individually; however it is not necessarily a commandment defined in the Bible, nor is it a behavior meant for others to follow.

In James 4:13-16, James writes about the life of faith, which involves seeking God for His will with humility and dependency. When a person makes their own plans for their life without consulting God, it is because their heart is not submitted in faith, but it is reliant on self.

James 1:17 “Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.”

This verse describes the personal conviction. It is instruction from God for you and your life, but it is not necessarily instruction for anyone else. If you disobey a personal conviction, it is sin. If someone else does the same behavior, yet God has not convicted him or her, it is not sin.

For example, if God leads me to start a church in a specific city, I am to move to that city and start a church. However, just because I am led to do it, does not mean that you are led to do it. If I go, I am being obedient. If I don't go, then I am being disobedient, and it is sin for me. If God hasn't given you the same instruction, then you are not sinning if you don't go.

Personal convictions are either from our heart or from the Holy Spirit.

When we refer to a person's heart, we are not referring to the heart organ that pumps our blood, rather, we are referring to our spirit, the innermost part of us. It is also referred to as our conscience. Our heart will often steer us as to what we should or should not do. Some refer to it as a sixth sense. God uses our spirit, our own heart, to guide us.

1 John 3:21 “Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God.”

Proverbs 20:27 says, “The spirit of a man is the lamp of the Lord, searching all the inner depths of his heart.” God is a spirit being, and we are made to be like Him as spirit beings. To know God and to know what God wants for us, we need to pay attention to our spirit.

Our spirit should always line up with the Word of God and with the Holy Spirit. If it doesn't, the Word of God is right and we should obey the Word of God. The Word of God and the Spirit of God will always agree. If there is a disagreement between the two, something isn't right.

Conviction will come from our heart, and it will also come from the Holy Spirit. One definition of convict means to convince about a course of action, and the noun conviction refers to a fixed or firm belief. The Holy Spirit is in our hearts, and He is able to convince us about our course of action, leading each of us individually. The Holy Spirit will one, convict us of sin against God's commandments, and two, He will give us personal convictions for our individual paths in our relationship with God.

John 16:8 "And when He (the Holy Spirit) has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment."

As the one who convicts, the Holy Spirit has an anointing that let's us know what we are to do or not do. It is powerful when the Holy Spirit moves on a heart to yield to God's love.

In regard to the Bible's commandments, because we love people and want to protect them from the consequences of sin, we may try to convince people to obey the Word of God; however we must lean on the anointing of the Holy Spirit to move on people's hearts. The Holy Spirit will bring conviction, but He will not force or manipulate anyone's free will. We present the truth, we allow the Holy Spirit to move on their hearts, and we let people make their own choice. In regard to personal convictions, we can share our convictions, but we should not try to bring others into conformity to behavior in which they have no conviction.

A personal conviction isn't a conviction that someone else puts on you.

A personal conviction isn't a boundary you put on someone else or that someone else puts on you. For example, someone may have a conviction about eating meat, but since there is no commandment in the Bible against it, that person should not try to push his or her conviction onto someone else. Be careful of those who would try to add scripture to their personal conviction in order to control the behavior of others. Lean on the Holy Spirit for correct interpretation of the Bible.

I do think there are exceptions. If you are a leader, I believe you can set perimeters for behavior on your team as they represent you on the job, in public, or on the Internet. If you are a parent, I believe you can set boundaries for your children according to personal conviction; however when they are adults, they should be given the liberty to choose if your personal convictions will become their personal convictions.

Personal convictions are between an individual and God.

In Romans 14:1-23 Paul writes about personal convictions for food and the observation of certain religious days. He warns the Christians not to judge the personal convictions of someone else. Their convictions are between them and God.

In verse 4 Paul writes, “Who are you to judge another man’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls...” Paul makes it clear that we are not to draw boundaries for personal convictions for others. Those people belong to God, and God gives them their convictions.

In verse 12 Paul writes, “So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.” In the end, we stand before God, not one another. We will be required to give an account to God, not to one another. We should live for God, and we should look to God for what He wants from us. Obviously, we are to keep the commandments found in the Bible, but in Romans 14, Paul is referring to personal convictions of the heart.

Consider the faith of other Christians

Further down in Romans 14 Paul writes, “Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother’s way.” The rest of the chapter is about showing love and honor to another person by respecting their convictions. In verse 23 Paul defines a personal conviction to as “whatever is not from faith is sin.” Faith is our submission to Jesus as our Lord. If the Spirit moves you to submit in an area of personal conviction, if you go against that conviction, it is sin for you.

Also, Paul wrote to the Christians in Corinth in I Corinthians 8 and 10:14-33 about eating food that had been dedicated to idols. Some of the Christians had a personal conviction that it was wrong to eat food that had been dedicated to idols, and others did not have the same conviction. Paul agreed that there was no commandment against it, but he admonished them not to confuse or offend other Christians that were against it.

Mature Christians should respect the personal convictions of less mature Christians, so as not to cause them to falter in their faith. Apostle Paul talks about the consciousness of a person, the spirit of a person, where they sense convictions of the heart. If a mature Christian shows love to a less mature believer, he or she will show respect to the conscience of the less mature Christian and will honor their personal convictions so as not to offend the less mature.

Keep the main thing the main thing

God made us to be spirit beings so that we can have a relationship with one another. God gave us the Bible so we can know Him and His ways. God also gave us the Holy Spirit to lead us and direct us. We should follow the convictions of our heart, the Word, and the Holy Spirit.

Let's be confident in who we are in our committed and submitted relationship with God. When we do, we won't need to struggle with controlling our own actions or the actions of others. We won't wrestle with guilt for our behavior or feel the need to pass guilt onto others.

The main thing is that we love God and we love people. Our love includes honor for a person's value in the family of God, and our love includes respect for where a person is at in their spiritual growth. As long as we walk in love with God and one another, we will live in the spirit and keep ourselves from sin.