

# **CULTIVATING CHRISTIAN CONVICTION**

## **GOLDEN TEXT**

“For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you.” (1 Thessalonians 2:3).

## **USEFUL PRACTICE**

The cultivation of Christian conviction is imperative for the practice and defense of the faith in times of adversity.

## **SCRIPTURE READING**

### **1 Thessalonians 2:1-12**

- 1 You know, brothers and sisters, that our visit to you was not without results.
- 2 We had previously suffered and been treated outrageously in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in the face of strong opposition.
- 3 For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you.

- 4 On the contrary, we speak as those approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please people but God, who tests our hearts.
- 5 You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed—God is our witness.
- 6 We were not looking for praise from people, not from you or anyone else, even though as apostles of Christ we could have asserted our authority.
- 7 Instead, we were like young children[a] among you. Just as a nursing mother cares for her children,
- 8 so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.
- 9 Surely you remember, brothers and sisters, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you.
- 10 You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed.
- 11 For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children,
- 12 encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

## LESSON OBJECTIVES

- I) **To stimulate** spiritual conviction in Christians based on trust in God;
- II) **To understand** the need for a blameless life in a way that glorifies God;
- III) **To recognize** that sacrificial love and selfless work are essential for the growth of the Kingdom.

## INTRODUCTION

In the face of current uncertainties and attacks on biblical doctrines, it is essential for the believer to cultivate deep Christian conviction (2 Tim. 1:12-14). It is not up to the saved to waver in the midst of tribulations, but to press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called him (2 Cor. 4:1; Phil. 3:14). In this lesson, we will study the spiritual, moral and social aspects that form the conviction of our Christian faith. The aim is to awaken in every Christian the desire to be an authentic “ambassador of Christ” in a world of darkness.

### I - SPIRITUAL CONVICTION

**1. Power of the Spirit.** By divine guidance, the Gospel was proclaimed in Europe. Paul had a vision in which a man said to him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us” (Acts 16:9). From this revelation the message of the cross was announced in Philippi and later in Thessalonica (Acts 16:10-12; 17:1). The apostle makes it clear that the Gospel was not preached as mere rational discourse, “but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction” (1 Thess. 1:5 - NIV). In this case, the Gospel was boldly ministered in the power of the Spirit, in such a way that it resulted in the salvation and deliverance of the Thessalonians (1 Thessalonians 1:6-10). Thus, we can say that, in the absence of spiritual conviction, the Word of God is reduced to mere human intellectualism and its result is ineffective in transforming lives (Matt. 7:29; 1 Cor. 2:1-5).

**2. Trust in God.** The apostle declares that even though he had “suffered and been treated outrageously in Philippi” (1 Thess. 2:2a), his faith had not been shaken. He refers to the persecution he suffered before preaching in Thessalonica. Paul and Silas had been publicly beaten with rods. Then they put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks (Acts 16:22-24). However, despite being wounded, about midnight, they prayed

and sang hymns to God (Acts 16:25). After this severe trial, they did not lose heart, but, moved by the Spirit, they got to Thessalonica. In the city, in the midst of their struggles, and with bold confidence, they proclaimed Christ (1 Thess. 2:2b). From this perspective, we are encouraged not to lose heart in preaching the Gospel, but to trust in God, and never fall back, even in the face of threats of arrest or death (Rev. 2:10).

**3. Faithfulness in preaching.** The Apostle to the Gentiles assures that the Gospel announced in Thessalonica “does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you” (1 Thess. 2:3a). He shows that Christian doctrine does not proceed from cunningly devised fables, immoral conduct or schemes to seduce people into believing in lies (2 Pet 1:16/NKJV). On the contrary, Paul declares that the Gospel is from God, and that God himself had commissioned him as a herald, “not trying to please people but God, who tests our hearts” (1 Thess. 2:4b). Thus, the apostle's purpose was not to satisfy his hearers with false speeches (James 1:22). In this sense, we are exhorted to maintain faithfulness in preaching, to reject those who peddle the word of God for profit and to announce Christ with sincerity (2 Cor. 2:17).

## **II - MORAL CONVICTION**

**1. Righteousness in actions.** Conversion works moral transformation in the life of the saved believer (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus, the Bible advises us, among other recommendations, to put off falsehood and speak truthfully (Eph. 4:25); to no longer steal and to be honest (Eph. 4:28); not to let any unwholesome talk come out of our mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up (Eph. 4:29). In this regard, the apostle Paul claims the righteousness of his own actions when he states: “We never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed” (1 Thess 2:5). Here he emphasizes that he never used false sentiment to gain favor. He further asserts that his motivation was devoid of financial ambition. Only a false Christian seeks power and influence through lying flattery (Rom. 16:18). Therefore, an upright conduct is a virtue of the regenerate believer (Col. 3:23; 1 John 3:18).

**2. Unblemished reputation.** A person of recognized moral integrity is considered to have an unblemished reputation (Acts 6:3). See how Paul gauges his reputation with this phrase: “We were not looking for praise from people, not from you or anyone else” (1 Thess. 2:6a). This indicates that the apostle did not work in the Kingdom in search for human recognition. This stance was adopted by him everywhere, demonstrating the coherence and integrity of his apostolate. He did not seek “privileges” or “honor”

anywhere (1 Thess. 2:5,6). He wrote to the Corinthians that the believer should boast in the Lord and not in himself (1 Cor. 1:29-31). The conclusion is clear: those who aspire to fame and prestige fall into temptation and defile the Gospel. Our living should glorify God. To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus, for ever and ever! (Eph. 3:21).

**2. Blameless living.** The adjective “blameless” denotes a conduct that cannot be blamed (Eph. 5:27). In this context, the apostle invokes God and the church in Thessalonica as witnesses of his “holy, righteous and blameless” conduct (1 Thess. 2:10). These designations imply obedience in moral matters, an attitude of exemplary righteousness, and conduct without any cause for reproach (1 Cor. 9:16-23). They denote the pattern of behavior toward God, toward men and toward oneself (1 Cor. 9:27). Aware of the influence his life exerted on the faithful, the apostle says: “In order to offer ourselves as a model for you to imitate” (2 Thess. 3:9). Thus, the degree of commitment adopted by the believer to the values of the Kingdom is a reflection of the level of his communion with God (1 Cor. 10:32).

### III - SOCIAL CONVICTION

**1. Common welfare.** Common welfare reaches man in his physical and spiritual needs. No wonder, the Bible provides instructions for the spiritual and social well-being of human beings (2 Tim. 3:16,17). The role of the church is to proclaim the Gospel (Matt. 28:19) and alleviate suffering by promoting social well-being among the sisters and brothers (James 2:15-17). Habakkuk records that the social problems of his time resulted from sin, such as: reversal of values, violence and injustice (Habakkuk 1:1-4). Thus, social evil stems from sin. Aware of this, the apostle Paul writes: “We were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well” (1 Thess. 2:8). This feeling is compared to a caring mother who worries and protects her children (1 Thess. 2:7), it is also like the behavior of a loving father who is concerned about the problems of his children (1 Thes 2.11b). This is how Paul encouraged, comforted, and served as an example to the church (1 Thess. 2:11a). In this direction, the Christian duty encompasses moral and social aspects. Devoting oneself exclusively to one part to the detriment of the other does not portray the Gospel of Christ (James 4:17).

**2. Selfless dedication.** The apostle devoted himself with deep unselfishness to the propagation of the Gospel (Acts 20:24). Despite the inherent right of his apostolate, he decided to receive nothing “even though

as apostles of Christ we could have asserted our authority” (1 Thess. 2:6b). Therefore, to provide for himself, the apostle used his trade as a tentmaker (Acts 18:3). About this he reminded the sisters and brothers of his “toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone” (1 Thess. 2:9). In order not to become a burden to the church, he expended himself in exhausting hard work. Here it is important to emphasize that the Bible does not condemn financial support for gospel workers, since the apostle himself wrote that “those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel” (1 Cor. 9:14) and that “the worker deserves his wages” (1 Tim. 5:18). Thus, he explains that he did not use this fair prerogative because he knew the extreme poverty of the church of his time (2 Cor. 8:1,2), that he endured financial restrictions in order not to create an obstacle to the Gospel (1 Cor. 9:11,12) and that he did everything to win as many souls as possible (1 Corinthians 9:19). In this sense, we learn that sacrificial love and voluntary and selfless work are essential for the growth of the Kingdom and must be part of a deep Christian conviction as a clear contrast to the “spirit of Babylon”, which is the opposite of Christian altruism.

## **CONCLUSION**

Paul was subjected to a series of trials during his ministry (1 Thess. 2:2). Nevertheless, he left us an example of intense conviction of our election in Christ (1 Cor. 11:1). His spiritual conviction resulting from the power of the Spirit (1 Thess. 2:4), his moral conviction as a reflection of the fear of God (1 Thess. 2:5), and his social conviction demonstrated by selflessness in serving (1 Thess. 2:9) stand out. It confirms that, in our days, we lack this firm conviction in defense of the interests of the Kingdom of God on Earth.