



2021 Weekly Devotions

Week of: Oct 18th - Oct 24th

Sermon: October 17th



SMYRNA BAPTIST CHURCH
building community ◊ equipping believers ◊ serving Jesus

October 18

John 16:8-9

Luke wrote in the first verse (v.33) of our passage yesterday, “But when they heard this, they were cut to the quick (heart).” Peter had just finished preaching another sermon, after having been delivered from jail for the second time, about Jesus’ crucifixion on the cross, resurrection, and ascension. He told them that he and the other apostles had no choice but to keep preaching about what they had seen and heard concerning Christ as true witnesses of these events (5:32). He also included, in the sermon, the fact that “it was at their hands” that Jesus was murdered. Luke described the impact as deep conviction in the hearts of the people. We will deal later with how the people responded to the conviction but for today I want to focus on why they even felt conviction.

The term “conviction” actually means to render as guilty. In other words, when a person feels conviction, what he is feeling is a sense of guilt. In a courtroom we would say, “He was convicted of a particular crime or infraction of a law.” It is the realization that we are wrong. Think about it as having listened to evidence or reason and then to draw a conclusion that you are wrong. So, the people had listened to Peter’s sermon and drawn the conclusion that they were guilty – they were convicted or cut to the heart. But why does this happen?

In the Gospel of John, it is written that when the Holy Spirit comes, “He will convict the world concerning sin” (John 16:8). Now, Pentecost had not taken place yet at the writing of this statement in John; It was about 40 days away at this time. One of the ministries of the Spirit would be to bring conviction, not in a condemning way necessarily but in a convincing way. What I mean here is that He convicts in order to open our eyes to the fact that we need a Savior. Judgment will ultimately be left to the Father and the Son while the Spirit’s work is to illuminate Christ so that we will see His beauty and our need. In John 16:14 it says, “And He (Spirit) will glorify Me.” Jesus is telling us that the Spirit’s task is to help us see the value of Christ. Let’s take a brief look at what the Spirit will convict a person of. John writes, “And when He comes, He will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.” What does He mean?

The Spirit will convince a person that he/she is a sinner. The word in this passage for sin is in the singular not plural. This means that John is talking about sin in general and not one in particular. In other words, he is not trying to convince us that it is wrong to kick the cat, rather it is wrong to sin against God period. Feeling bad because you kicked the cat is not the same as feeling bad because you realize you have sinned against a holy God and are a sinner. That is the work of the Spirit. The Spirit will also reveal to us the perfection of Christ (righteousness), and the impending judgment that is due us apart from Christ.

What am I saying today? Dear ones, conviction is intended to be an act of God’s grace and mercy. The Spirit is leading us from within. He is revealing truth to us that requires a response. Back in Acts 5:32 Luke wrote that the Holy Spirit bears witness of Christ and was given to those who obey God. Either way a person responds, renders us without excuse. For those who experience the Spirit’s conviction but choose to rebel against Him, condemnation and judgment will fall upon them. For those of us who experience conviction and humbly agree with God and repent, there is forgiveness, restoration, and intimacy with the Godhead that draws us even closer to Him so that we are given more amazing truth and understanding of His goodness. So, conviction is a work of the Spirit and we should be encouraged that He is at work in us and loves us too much to leave us in error.

October 19

Hebrews 4:12

Yesterday the devotion dealt with the fact that the Holy Spirit was sent in part to convict us of our sin and ultimately of our need for a Savior. Please do not miss the fact that He does not convict in order to condemn or “beat you down”, but instead to open your eyes to your need for help. This is, as I said yesterday, an act of God’s love, grace, and mercy to us. Today I want us to see the most obvious means by which the Holy Spirit brings about conviction in our lives. Our focal passage to ponder is found in Hebrews 4:12 where it says, “For the Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” Let’s delve in and see what God is teaching us today.

It is vitally important that we see the connection between Hebrews 4:12 and 4:11. We are told to be diligent in verse 11, to enter into the “rest” that is to be ours as those redeemed by Christ. We are exhorted to be diligent regarding our relationship with God so that we do not fall “through following the same example of disobedience.” I want you to ask the question, “disobedience to what?” Well, we need to go back to Hebrews 4:2 where it says, “For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard.” Do you see that what the author of Hebrews is doing in the famous 12th verse of chapter 4? He is teaching us the value and importance of the preached Word of God. The problem that the Israelites faced following the exodus was that they did not live in obedience to the word that was preached to them by Moses and Joshua. The majority of them, because of unbelief, died in the wilderness rather than entering the promised land. In 4:11 we are encouraged to be diligent in our obedience to the preached word of God so that we will not suffer the same fate due to unbelief and disobedience to the preaching of God’s Word.

So, when we come to verse 12, we are told how absolutely valuable the Word of God is and how it works in our lives. As I mentioned yesterday, the Holy Spirit is the One who convicts us of sin. We add to that today the truth that the Word of God is the tool by which He accomplishes most of that work. The Word is like a sword that cuts right down to the depths of our being. The Word, the preached Word, reveals our thoughts and intentions of the heart. It is important to note that God is, I think, revealing that the goal of life should be to “enter into this rest.” Our greatest need is to be saved from sin and to spend eternity in heaven in the presence of God. In order to do that we must learn to trust God which is demonstrated in our obedience to Him. To be able to trust Him and walk in obedience, we must hear His Word in order to know what is required of us.

Brothers and sisters, I have said it before, and I will say it again – faith is not believing in whatever you want to hard enough to make it happen. Faith is believing and obeying what we KNOW is revealed in His Word. In other words, we already have “a word” from God and faith is demonstrated in whether or not we are going to obey what He has clearly revealed in the Bible. We are told to be diligent in this so that we will not fall as they did in the wilderness because of unbelief. To wrap this up, the Holy Spirit produces conviction by applying the written and preached Word of God which is able to reveal the true nature and condition of our hearts so that we will be led to “do business” with God in light of the assessment the Word produces. The Word, applied by the Spirit, reveals in us what is good or bad. So, the Spirit of God uses the facts of the Word of God to bring about change in us.

October 20

John 12:9-11; Acts 17:32-34

God has been so gracious to us to send us the Holy Spirit to walk with us, guide us, teach us, comfort, and convict us. The past two days have been spent pondering how the Spirit convicts us for the purpose of leading us to Jesus Christ. We learned yesterday that a vital tool in His hands is the Word of God itself. Today I want us to ponder the reality that even though this is true, there will still be people who reject the conviction they clearly feel and choose rather to disobey, disregard, and even deliberately fight against Him. In our passage for Sunday, we see the response by the people in regard to Peter's sermon was to kill him and the other disciples. They felt the guilt and rather than confessing and repenting, they wanted to silence, by death, the messengers. Folks, this is nothing new.

Paul was preaching in Athens on Mars Hill in the Areopagus and had a similar experience. He accurately and boldly preached Jesus to the people and we read of their responses to the preached Word. In Acts 17:32 Luke writes, "Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some began to sneer, others said, 'We will hear you again later concerning this.' But some men joined him and believed." You see, the response to the Truth is almost always - some will reject it, some will put it off, and some will believe. The level to which sin has a hold on people is deep.

Another example of an unfortunate response to God's truth is found in John 12:9-11. Here John records the reaction of the chief priests to the resurrection of Lazarus. Surely one would assume that seeing a dead man brought back to life after four days would be enough to cause everyone to believe in Jesus, right? Shockingly, the answer is no. John writes, "But the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death also; because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and were believing in Jesus" (John 12:10-11). This reveals how much they hated Jesus and the hold that Satan had on their hearts and minds. Friends, a man dead for four days was brought back to life and just so nobody would believe that Jesus was the Messiah, they plotted to kill Lazarus – again. How deep is the hold of sin on the hearts of many?

You must understand the force behind such ludicrous and senseless behavior is Satan himself. These people are not simply stupid, they are blinded. They killed Jesus believing they were serving God. I want you to ponder this point today because you will need to be mindful that not everyone who hears the truth is going to be motivated by it to do the right thing or make proper decisions. Jesus summed it up well in John 3:19 where He said, "This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil." If you have trouble understanding this it may be because you still fail to realize the degree to which human beings are sinful. When the Bible says we are sinners by nature, it means that we, as sinners, prefer darkness rather than light. Light exposes our sin or shortcomings, and we are uncomfortable with that. Personally, I am fine when we are talking about other's sins, I am far less comfortable when someone exposes mine. The natural reaction is to silence the messenger or otherwise get rid of that which makes me look or feel worse about myself. Thank God if the Holy Spirit has broken that tendency in your own life and pray that He will for others.

October 21

Matthew 12:30

I find it interesting that Gamaliel, the most noted and liberal Pharisee of his time takes a bit of a middle ground in his handling of the disciples in our passage for Sunday. On the one hand, it seems fairly reasonable and maybe even wise to handle the situation the way he did. What he ultimately counsels them to do is to put their emotions in neutral and take a wait and see approach. Using some other fanatics of the past who fizzled out miserably, Gamaliel encourages the people to step back and let time tell the true nature of the latest religious/political movement. He simply says if the disciples teaching is of the Lord, then it will prosper but if it is not then it will die out and be of no consequence. He further admonishes that if it is "of God" then they would not want to oppose the will of God anyway. Now, let's examine this a bit closer.

Gamaliel was the most well-known rabbi of his day. His grandfather was the prominent rabbi Hillel. The apostle Paul was taught by Gamaliel to be a strict Pharisee (Acts 22:3). A point that I found myself pondering as I read our sermon text was how he could be such a prominent rabbi of Jewish literature and tradition and totally miss Jesus as Messiah. The truth of course is that many of the Pharisees made the same mistake. As much as we may want to applaud him for settling the persecutors down and buying the disciples a little more time, we must realize that a better response would have been to join the disciples in bold proclamation of the Gospel and obedience to Christ as Lord. What he was actually indicating is that he was not willing to take a stand either way. In a very real sense, he was playing both sides of the fence.

Jesus made it quite clear that either you are with Him, or you are not (Matt. 12:30). At one point He said, "No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62). The point of His statement is that when you make the decision to follow, you have to be all in. It is similar to His teaching that you must count the cost of being His follower before beginning the journey. Contrast that with Gamaliel who was basically taking a wait and see approach. Further, you could contrast his indecisiveness with the all-in attitude of the disciples. Here we have disciples who are just being released from jail for their commitment to Christ and one who is straddling the fence.

One last point to ponder today is the thought that if something works it must be of God. Is that necessarily true? I would say no. Now, on the one hand, if we are thinking about the ultimate sovereignty and providence of God, then we can say that what is of the Lord will come to pass. However, there are many movements in this world that appear to be successful that certainly are not of God and not pleasing to Him. Think of the false religions in the world. Is God pleased with Islam, Hinduism, or other world religions? Is God for Mormons and Jehovah Witnesses? I think not and yet they prosper in our world today. If worldly success is not the measuring tape, then what should be? I would submit to you today in closing that the only way to know with complete certainty if something is of God is to filter it through His Word. If nothing about a movement or decision is prohibited or if it does not break any of God's principles, statutes, commands, or areas of biblical wisdom then you are probably good to go even if it doesn't appear to work in the eyes of the world.

October 22

Galatians 6:17

I doubt that there is any way to really know the damage done by prosperity gospel preachers who claim that if you have enough faith you can pretty much guarantee yourself health, wealth, and the absence of suffering and hardship. The presence of those things, we are told, is a lack of faith. The false teachers tell us that we have been healed in every way by the stripes of Jesus so we just need to claim these wonderful benefits that assure us of smooth sailing through life. The problem of course is that the Bible does not teach that garbage at all. In fact, the Bible says, "For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort in abundance through Christ" (2 Cor. 1:5). We are told that we enter heaven through many tribulations (Acts 14:22). My concern is that far too many people have given up on Christianity and God because someone told them that suffering was not part of the Christian way when in fact, suffering is an instrument that God often uses to prune us and shape us into the image of Christ. The Christ, by the way, who suffered brutally at the hands of lost people.

In our passage for Sunday, the apostles were flogged before being released. A good flogging would most likely have been thirty-nine lashes with a whip. The Old Testament law allowed for no more than forty lashes, so it was standard to beat a person with thirty-nine stripes so as not to break the law. How do you suppose that fits in with the heretics of our day saying that Christians should be healthy, wealthy and living on easy street? If you are not convinced yet, consider what Paul said at the end of his letter to the Galatians. He wrote, "From now on let no one cause trouble for me, for I bear on my body the brand marks of Jesus" (Gal. 6:17). The brand marks that Paul is referring to are the results of physical abuse that he took for being a follower of Christ. Paul had endured tremendous amounts of persecution because of his faith. If you take a look at 2 Corinthians 11:23-28 you will see that Paul's life of faithfulness was characterized by suffering. Once he was even dragged out of the city and left for dead because they had beaten and stoned him so severely.

Luke wrote, "So they went on their way from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name" (Acts 5:41). They had been jailed and then beaten and considered it a blessing to have suffered for Christ's name. Notice the phrase, "considered worthy" to suffer. I must admit that I write this next point simply based on what I think could be possible in times of suffering for Christ's name. I imagine that in moments of persecution, God does something extra special for those who are suffering. For the apostles to use the phrase "considered worthy" indicates that something is gained in the midst of suffering. That something is surely a deeper level of intimacy and revelation of breathtaking attributes of God. Whatever it is that God reveals to His children in the moment of suffering, those who suffer determine the pain was worth the increased knowledge of God.

Of course, another reason one might consider it a great privilege to suffer for Christ's name is a deep love for Him. Obviously, the disciples understood the pain and suffering that Jesus endured to save them and were so grateful that they considered it a privilege to suffer for the One who suffered for them first. My point to ponder today is simply that we should recognize suffering for Jesus as a great privilege. Can you imagine standing before the Lord looking at His scars and being able to show Him some of yours as His follower? There is a comradeship that develops between soldiers who have fought and suffered together in war. The same is true among soldiers of the cross.

October 23

Acts 5:39

In one of my “points to ponder” this week, I took a rather hard stand against Gamaliel. The truth of the matter is that it is possible that he meant well in his speech to the people and that he was truly driven by an understanding of the sovereignty of God. It is possible that he was beginning to be drawn to Christ and that he was softening towards “The Way” even as Nicodemus did over time. With that possibility in mind, I want to focus our time today on the last statement that he made which was, “If it (the Gospel being preached by the disciples) is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be found fighting against God.” Surely that would prove to be a losing battle.

I think so often of times when someone may have stood against a direction we were attempting to go as a congregation or rejected a point made in a sermon. I understand that I am asking for the benefit of the doubt when I say this, but assuming that leadership was reacting in accordance with God’s prompting and that the points made in a sermon were biblically correct, it always troubled me that a person failed to see that they were opposing God rather than me. I have had people (a few) through the years say to me after a sermon, “That’s your opinion.” The truth of the matter is that it is not my opinion at all. Declaring the Word of God accurately and exegetically has nothing to do with my opinion and everything to do with what God is actually saying. There have been times when I had to make statements in a sermon that I did not want to make. Also, there have been times when I have led in a direction that I did not want to go. The truth is that it is and has never been about what I want and everything to do with what God wants. We do not get to make up the rules and we do not have the right to ignore what our Master tells us to do.

Not only is it foolish and unbiblical to resist the Lord and His perfect will, it is also fruitless. Isaiah wrote, “For the Lord of hosts has planned, and who can frustrate it? And as for His stretched-out hand, who can turn it back?” (14:27). It is written in the 2nd Psalm, “Why are the nations in an uproar and the people devising a vain thing? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His anointed, saying, Let us tear their fetters apart and cast away their cords from us! He who sits in the heavens laughs, the Lord scoffs at them.” In other words, it is a waste of time to oppose God because when He has determined to carry out a plan, nothing can prevent Him from doing it. Psalm 115:3 says, “But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases.

Now, it is good to know that His perfect plan can’t be stopped and that you would be absolutely foolish to think you can stand against God and win. You do not want to be found in a place of opposition to God. First of all, that would not work and secondly, it would put you in a place being run over. God is omniscient which means He knows everything. We are not! God is, by nature, pure goodness and holiness. We are not! God can see the end from the beginning and has all of the details to make the perfect and right decision every time. We do not! God’s will will be done and you cannot stop it nor should you want to. Trust the Lord and take Gamaliel’s advice. Sometimes it is to sit back and let time pass as you do your best to determine if what is happening is of the Lord or not. Evaluate the circumstances based on the Word of God and the known attributes of God, get wise counsel, pray, and learn to listen to the Holy Spirit. You would not want to end up someday realizing that you were opposing the very plans of God.

October 24

Romans 8:38-39

One of the main ingredients for growing in strong faith is to be "fully persuaded." Being fully persuaded will enormously affect our walk of faith. Such confidence in having heard God's Word to us about any issue, gives us the perfect aptitude to rest calmly in that promise, even as we are working to develop and grow in His will and instructions. Standing up strong in faith comes only by having applied what we have heard and advanced in. Strong faith comes by being fully persuaded, and in turn, being fully persuaded comes by believing that what the Lord has said to us, He will bring to pass (cause to happen). This "persuaded-ness" comes by personally knowing the One who is perfectly trustworthy. While this knowledge of God comes by reading His Word, establishing a relationship with Him is achieved by being willing and obedient to what we have read.

One might ask, "How do we do that?" Well, that's where the "fully persuaded" comes in. To be persuaded is to be convinced and to know without doubt. The Apostle Paul, in Romans 8:38-39 says, "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." In just reading the passage alone, the sense of unwavering faith is felt. The King James Version of the same Scripture begins with, "For I am persuaded..." It matters not which way it's broken down, there is absolutely no reservation heard, seen, or detected in the apostle's words. That's how sure Paul was of God's love for us. It is so solid and reinforced that nothing and no one can separate God's love from us.

So, then, if one can be fully persuaded, it would imply that it is possible to be partially persuaded as well. Let's take a look at partial persuasion for a moment and see how it differs. One who is partially persuaded acknowledges the truth and has a good understanding of truth but is not committed to living according to that truth. Comparatively speaking, it's a person who reads the Bible and maybe even goes to church—either regularly or irregularly—and hears the Word of God being preached. They are aware of what Scripture says, and they have knowledge of right and wrong. But because they care more about doing what makes them happy than doing what pleases God, they choose not to obey what they know to be right and righteous. YES... it's a choice. We are fully persuaded that being fully persuaded is a decision and a determination that each of us must make. Is it an easy choice? For most, the answer is no. Even Scripture tells us that our flesh is at war with our spirit. Our flesh is the enemy of God (Romans 8:7), but we must choose to bring our flesh under subjection. We must decide to obey God's Word above all else. It is the only way to stand firm in a fallen society. We must have the attitude, "I'm ALL in."

That's a perfect example of what it means to be fully persuaded. Whether it is about our love for Christ or our love for our spouses, we must be intentional and unyielding; reminding ourselves of God's Word every chance we get. The enemy will never let up until Jesus puts an end to him so we must have an even greater determination not to allow him to be successful. With the Lord on our side, we cannot be defeated. God promised to be with us always, and as Romans 4:21 states, "I am FULLY PERSUADED that what God has promised, He is able to also perform."