

CULTIVATING CONVICTION

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I. INTRODUCTION

- A. The conscience of the nation is being tenderized right now. We have the option to be defensive and justify ourselves or we have the option to humble ourselves and let the sword of the Lord pierce us and deliver us from all kinds of sin.
- B. I believe there at least 5 right responses to the racial tensions in our nation right now.
 - 1. ***Come in humility*** – assume that you are guilty of racism at some level and give God several months to open your eyes to anything sinful in your heart so you can repent. The humanistic culture is calling people to tear their outer garments (external change) without tearing their hearts first (Joel 2:12 – Repentance of sin and turning to Jesus for change).
 - 2. ***Listen to others*** – listen to the stories and perspective of a black friend or someone in your life from another nation. Assume they have something to tell you that you're not aware of already. Let them speak without you getting defensive (slow to speak/slow to wrath).

“So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath, for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.” (James 1:19-20)

- 3. ***Have biblical expectations*** – Jesus said that racial conflict outside the church would mostly increase until His physical return (Matthew 24:7). Our main focus for change should be within the church because we have supernatural help to grow in unity. Racial unity within the church will be part of the church's end-time witness to the earth (John 17:22-23). The church has the advantage because we all have the same Spirit (Ephesians 4), the same standard (Bible) and the same reconciliation process (Mt 18:15-20).
- 4. ***Respond locally*** – you can impact your small sphere of influence (local church, friends, family, school, workplace) by bringing awareness, calling people to repentance and by initiating change in how people do inter-racial relationships.
- 5. ***Pray for change*** – Luke 18 says that we pray for justice without giving up. Systemic issues are fueled by demons and prayer addresses those demons (Ephesians 6:12). Pray for justice in the nation but also for racial unity within the church.

II. DON'T LET YOUR HEART BE DECEIVED

- A. The Bible warns us not to deceive our own hearts. The fact that we can deceive and blind our own hearts is a sobering reality. To deceive our own hearts is to totally convince ourselves that we are something that we are not to the degree that we cannot even see our own error. Deception implies blindness. Blindness means we cannot see reality and that we need someone else to help us see. Our refusal to let others point out our blind spots is a clear display of our pride in that we cannot be wrong, we know more than others and that we are without sin.

“Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise.” (1 Corinthians 3:18)

“For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.” (Galatians 6:3)

“If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one’s religion is useless.” (James 1:26)

“But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.” (James 1:22)

- B. One of the main deceptions the Bible talks about concerns people (believers and unbelievers) trusting in their own righteousness and justifying themselves based on their personal evaluation of their hearts. In context to the sin of racism, there is a huge temptation to defend and justify ourselves right now. Is your first response to prove that you are not sinning, or is your first response to listen to others and then ask the Lord in prayer and reading the Bible concerning the state of your heart?

“If you say, “Surely we did not know this,” Does not He who weighs the hearts consider it? He who keeps your soul, does He not know it? And will He not render to each man according to his deeds?” (Proverbs 24:12)

“But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. For I know of nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 4:4)

- C. Our lack of awareness of our sin issues does will not justify us when we stand before the judgment seat of Christ. The Apostle Paul often said that his conscience was clear before God. In this verse he’s saying that his clear conscience did not justify him and that the Lord would bring up the things he was unaware of during his life (sin and love).
- D. The prophet Isaiah was probably unaware of his wicked speech until He was in the presence of the perfect God.

“Woe is me, for I am undone! And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.” (Isaiah 6:5)

III. CULTIVATE CONVICTION IN THE WORD

- A. We must cultivate conviction in partnership with the Holy Spirit. The fact that we don't "feel" the Holy Spirit convicting us in an area of sin doesn't mean that we're not sinning. Reasons we may not feel conviction in a certain area:
1. God has not highlighted it in our lives yet.
 2. He has convicted us several times but we have resisted it.
 3. We have not given proper time and proper heart response to the Word of God.
- B. We have to partner with God in cultivating conviction by prayerfully reading the bible and responding to it in our hearts over time. We have to come in humility before the Word of God and then let God search out our hearts. The Word can divide things that we cannot even discern a difference between (soul/spirit, joint/marrow). The Word is the true discerner of our thoughts, not us.

“For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12)

“Moreover by them (His Words) Your servant is warned, and in keeping them there is great reward. Who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from secret faults. Keep back Your servant from presumptuous sins.” (Psalm 19:11-13)

- C. Ask God to examine your heart over time and to invite conviction to increase. Respond to the progressive increase of awareness of sin by confessing it and repenting of it.

“Prove me, O Lord, and try me; test my heart and my mind.” (Psalm 26:2)

“Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties, and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” (Psalm 139:23-24)