

Pastor Tom Mortenson

Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

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The Conviction of Sin

1 John 1:9

Prayer: *Father, we just again, we thank you for just the fact that we can gather, that we do have this freedom still and so we pray this morning, Lord, as we open up your book, we pray for the gift of your Holy Spirit. Lord, you've given us the book, we now need your Spirit to help us to unpack it, to make it understandable and to make it of permanent value. And we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well we've been spending the last few weeks speaking about wisdom. And we described wisdom in three different ways: We described it as practice, as process and as a person. This morning I want to focus on one critical aspect of the process part that we call the conviction of sin.

The simple fact is because wisdom is a process it's not something that just descends on us in one fell swoop, it's something that grows in us over time, or not. And it grows by a progressive revelation of the word of God in and by the conviction of the Holy

Spirit.

You see, when Jesus knew that the cross was imminent he began explaining to his disciples that he would be shortly leaving them as sheep amongst wolves and that they were to be as wise as serpents and as gentle as doves. That wisdom would be critical because they were facing a future that was filled with pain, it was filled with rejection. There were so many difficult things in store for the disciples that Jesus laid it all out ahead of time so they would at least be prepared so that when these things began to happen, they would not be caught unawares. This is what Jesus says in *John 16*. He said: *"These things I have spoken to you, that you should not be made to stumble. They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service. And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me. But these things I have told you, that when the time comes, you may remember that I told you of them. And these things I did not say to you at the beginning, because I was with you."*

So Jesus tells them, number one, he tells them that he is leaving; number two, that the religious community is quickly going to turn vicious and that life is going to become very difficult; and thirdly, that he's going to be sending them a Helper. Jesus gives

the disciples both the good news and the bad news and the bad news is that God has no intention of isolating them and us from this world. And the good news is that we're not alone; Jesus is going to send a Helper. Again *John 16*, Jesus says: *"Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment."*

So Jesus says a Helper is coming, he's going to convict the world of sin, righteousness and of judgment. A Helper is coming who will guide you into all truth; a Helper who will tell them things to come, who will take the very essence of Jesus Christ and declare it to them. This helper would be called the "Holy Spirit." Jesus is describing a partnership between God and man, a partnership that's going to turn the world upside down.

When Jesus spoke that word, the Helper had not yet come as the cross and the resurrection, they were still future events. We know that Jesus remained with his disciples for forty days after the resurrection and then just like he said, he went away, ascended up to him who had sent him. Ten days later that Helper came on the day that we call Pentecost which is fifty days after the resurrection. Now for many of us the reality of that day seems

especially distant. We know the Holy Spirit existed in the past at the birth of the church and we know that the Holy Spirit's going to be coming in the future with the return of the Lord Jesus for his kingdom; it's just that right now, right here in the present, it feels like the Helper is missing. Verse 8 says: *"And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment."* And we start to think, Lord, with all due respect, that just doesn't seem to be happening. I mean many folks are wondering just what is the Holy Spirit doing? Where is the conviction of sin? I mean the world seems to be getting progressively more and more evil with each passing day. And things which only a few years previously were absolutely rejected as wrong and evil are now being celebrated openly. I mean I don't feel the need to catalog all of the evil because we've spoken about it many, many times, but it's not just the world that seems to be collapsing it seems also to be the church. I mean on a personal level, there's many folks within the Christian community who seem oblivious to the convicting power of the Holy Spirit. Divorce, adultery, abortion, homosexuality, these are household items now in the household of faith. And the effects of tolerating such gross sin in the church has had a devastating effect on the ability of the Holy Spirit to convict any one of us as sin because all of us have this inmate talent, this innate ability to rationalize and relativize our own sin. I mean instead of looking vertically to

God for conviction, we are looking horizontally to each other to see if we're on track with the Holy Spirit, and that is a huge mistake. We wind up placing our convictions on this sliding scale that judges my life conduct not by God's word but by other people's behavior. And the problem is that standard, it never, never stays static, it's fluid. It moves with the culture and like all things fluid, it moves in the direction that moral gravity takes it and that's almost always downward.

I mean I remember years ago someone once described what happens when the church becomes disengaged from judging itself by the word of God and instead it begins to judge the world not just by the culture but by the distance that it's keeping from the culture. I mean if you picture it like hands on a clock, this person said, you know, you picture the culture where it is right now, it's at 12:00 o'clock, and here's the church, it's pretty far away from the culture, I mean, we're at quarter to 12:00. The culture's at 12:00, we think that's a safe distance. Well the problem is the only measure that we have of where the church is is its distance from the culture. And so when the culture starts moving from 12:00 o'clock to 12:15, the church finds itself now at 12:00 o'clock exactly where the culture was and is feeling okay because it still feels that distance from the culture, but all it's really doing is lagging morally behind. And in so doing it's feeling morally

superior not realizing it's simply lagging behind. Perhaps if we could see in realtime, we could actually track that downward spiral, we might have a chance but we know for a fact that God says our hearts are congenitally blinded. *Jeremiah 17:9* says: "*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?*" You see, we have this unique capacity to take the most grievous offenses against a holy God and reduce them to mere pittance, and we do that by relativizing absolutes. I'll show you how this happens.

A while ago there was a book that came out about Sammy the Bull Gravano. Anybody ever heard of Sammy the Bull? He's a pretty famous guy. The book was entitled "*Biography of a Mafia Hitman*". This was about a man who was personally responsible for nineteen murders. And according to the author, Peter Maas, Sammy was quite a guy. After he was arrested, he did a number of things. Number one, he started cooperating with the authorities; number two, he brought down a whole bunch of different Mafia figures; and number three, he stated his morals clearly. Sammy never planned a hit where innocent bystanders could be shot. Now if we compare his action then to the random drive-by shootings we read about all the time today in which innocent women and children are routinely mowed down, then suddenly Sammy Gravano begins to look almost okay. I mean after all he only took out people who were in the mob in the

first place. I mean these are people who understood mob justice and all the risks that that involved. You see, I'm sure Sammy considers himself far more moral than random drive-by shooters. And we can ask that very question: Isn't he? The answer is yes, Sammy, you are more moral than they are. But Sammy, you aren't going to be judged relative to them. You're going to on your own before God, Sammy, and so is each one of us. But right here, right now what does Jesus mean when he says of the Holy Spirit: *"And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment."* Well, you might say it sure doesn't look like that. But you have to understand that conviction has two very different components: One is external and one is internal. The external part of conviction implies marshalling all of the evidence and presenting so that we all know who the guilty party is. If it's telling Sammy Gravano that there's abundant evidence that ties him to nineteen bodies, Sammy, you are convicted. Well the Holy Spirit in John 16 is speaking just that. He will marshal all of the evidence of our sin without regard to whether or not we agree to it. Luke 12:3 says: *"Therefore whatever you have spoken in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have spoken in the ear in inner rooms will be proclaimed on the housetops."* Matthew 10 says: *"For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known."*

You see, the external part of conviction is not necessarily about convicting us, it's simply a matter of gathering all of the evidence. And there's absolutely nothing that's ever going to escape God's gaze. It's the other part of conviction, it's the internal part that is absolutely crucial because that's the part that actually leads to repentance. And that's where we take the evidence of our sin that the Holy Spirit provides and we do something unique with it. We agree with God about it. And that's what we call confession. Confession is simply the act of agreeing with God that we have transgressed his law.

You know the scripture that we repeat each month at communion emphasizes the importance of confession in order to seek repentance. God says in *1 John 1:9*: *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* Now the Greek word for "confess" here in that scripture is "homologeō" which is a combination of two Greek words "homo" or "same" and "logeō" which means "to speak." I've mentioned this many, many times before, the Greek word for "confess" means to "same speak" or to simply agree. So when God's Holy Spirit convicts you about sin and you agree with him, you are same speaking with the Spirit of God about your condition. When we same speak with God about our sin, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Now if you look there, you see that scripture is conditional. It's got an "if" clause in it. If we do A, God will do B. If we refuse to do A, God is under no obligation to do B. *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.* You see it's the Holy Spirit's job to convict us and yet consciously or unconsciously we can resist his convicting spirit. And the reason why we find it so difficult to agree with the Holy Spirit is that we don't necessarily want what follows, and what follows is repentance. Repentance requires doing an about-face with regard to sin. And again, to rehash an old analogy about repentance really is, I've said this many, many times as well. I said picture yourself in a car with your spouse or your best friend and you're arguing about whether or not you're going out of the city or into the city. And you're absolutely convinced that you're headed into the city and you'll stake your life on it. Your friend or your spouse insists that you're going out of the city and feels likewise. And so you see a sign that says "New York City, 100 miles" and you insist on going in your direction because you know for sure you're going into the city. 30 miles later you see a sign which says "New York City, 130 miles." Oops. You instantly recognize that you've been mistaken. You are going out of the city, you're not going into the city. Your friend or your spouse is correct. You have been wrong. At this point you may feel shame, you may even feel sorrow about your mistake, but until you

actually get off the highway, until you change your direction, you have not yet repented. That's why repentance is a change of heart and mind that includes action and behavior and not just sorrow and remorse. I mean after all both Judas and Peter experienced sorrow and remorse for betraying Christ and Peter's led to repentance; Judas, as we know, led to suicide. I mean it's what we do with the convicting power of the Holy Spirit that makes all of the difference.

I mean there's a reason why we don't instantly respond to the convicting power of the Holy Spirit, and the reason is simple: We love our sin. We don't want to give it up. We figure as long as I can keep the Holy Spirit at bay, we can put off genuine repentance, and we keep the Spirit at bay by refusing to internalize his conviction. You see, if we keep things external then we can justify almost anything, including murder. I mean Sammy Gravano, he's not just a hitman, he's a hitman with ethics. He'd never kill any innocent bystanders. He'd only kill those who he felt deserved it. You see, Sammy doesn't compare himself with the one standard that God demands, and that is his own perfection. Instead Sammy compares himself with other less civilized hitmen. On the basis of that comparison, he's almost honorable. I mean we may not be Sammy Gravano but we may well do the very same thing. You see, God's Holy Spirit is constantly challenging you and me about the sin in

our lives and our answer is to constantly push that challenge aside, constantly keeping conviction at the external Sammy Gravano level. And we do it by three different pathways: One, we simply deny our sin; two, we defend ourselves; and third, we defy the Holy Spirit.

Let's look at number one. We deny sin by keeping it at the theoretical level. You know, I'm a sinner and so are you. I mean that's not hard to acknowledge because we know that it's true for all of us. The Holy Spirit's conviction is not just that I am a sinner but that I have sinned. It's the difference between wholesale and retail. See, it's one thing to say I'm a sinner because I sin, it's quite another thing to say I'm a gossip, I'm a liar, I'm an addict because that's what sins actually are. The Holy Spirit convicted me of all of those sins at one time or another along with a host of others. I remember part of the process was I was reading Romans 1, it's a long list of the depravity of the wicked. And as I was reading, one line jumped out at me. Let me just read to you this list. This is Romans 1:28. God is describing what happens in the latter stages of the decay of a culture. It says: *And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife,*

deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

Now I was reading this list and there was a line that jumped out of this list. The line was: They are gossips. And I was reading this, I was aware the Holy Spirit was saying, "You're guilty." I actually remember engaging in the sin of gossip and I remember hearing the still small voice of the Holy Spirit saying, that's gossip; that is sin. And almost immediately from me came a whole host of excuses. No, no, no, Lord, I'm simply, I'm stating a prayer concern, I'm speaking the truth. This person really needed to know this. You know, according to Romans 1 gossip is not just a sin, it's a terrible sin. It's the mark of a depraved mind. Here's where the rubber begins to meet the road. When the Holy Spirit says, "Tom, this is gossip; it is sin." Well, that's what conviction is. But it's external, it's still out there; it stands as an accusation rather than an acknowledged fact that it actually is. And you see it's only when I agree with the Holy Spirit about that fact does conviction become internal and begin the cycle of confession and repentance. I mean it's a real simple process.

It's just the laying down of arms and surrendering. You know the Holy Spirit says, "Tom, that was gossip." Tom says, "God, I confess, I surrender; I agree that was gossip." As soon as I confess, God is now free to forgive me and to give me the grace to repent, but first I must confess. *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* So once I've internalized conviction, I no longer deny the sin I'm being convicted of, I confess, I repent, I grow.

I should point out right here though that there's a huge difference between the conviction of the Holy Spirit and the counterfeit attempts at it by the devil. You see, he attempts to use guilt and shame to steal our joy and ruin our lives, and if you notice, the conviction of the Holy Spirit is very, very specific. Tell them what you said last week at that time in that situation, that was gossip. You need to confess it, forsake it, and make it right. That's how God convicts me of the sin of gossip. Now the devil works in a very similar but very dishonest and counterfeit way, because his accusations, they lack specificity. They center on how rotten you are without giving you any means of addressing it. Instead of laying out the particulars of the sin of gossip, the devil greatly prefers to just repeatedly tell me that you are a miserable gossip. You're beneath contempt. How can God possibly love someone like you with all of your gossip? I mean do you see

the difference? One is very specific, one is pointed, one has a means of resolving it; the other is generic with no means of resolution. One is God-honoring and life bringing; the other is literally from the pit. We defeat sin by refusing to deny it but we have to recognize the difference between real and counterfeit conviction.

Second way we avoid conviction is by defending ourselves. And here's where the horizontal view prevails, I mean, it's agreeing there's sin in my life but compared to that guy, that group, those people, that practice, that's practically nothing compared to that. It's Sammy the Bull's defense. You know at one point in my life the Holy Spirit told me that stretching the truth was actually telling a lie. But I had an ace in the hole. You see, everyone that I knew, Christians included, routinely stretched the truth anyway, I mean, they did so about their taxes, about their incomes, their jobs, their friends. I mean we, all of us, we never lied outright. I would just say we stretched the truth just a little bit. Compared to everyone else, I'd say we were downright honest. Again, the Holy Spirit steps in and he steps in in the middle of the stretch and he says, "Tom, that is a lie and no one else but you is going to answer for it. It doesn't matter what anyone else does." You see, either you internalize the conviction of the Holy Spirit or you don't. We can defend ourselves endlessly and I

guarantee we can find all kind of excuses or we can simply agree with the Holy Spirit that a lie is a lie. The problem is the more practice we become at defending ourselves, the duller our sense of our own conscience grows. If you don't believe me, just ask Sammy the Bull who I believe by now is actually, he's willing to apologize for the unfortunate demise of nineteen people. You see, just like Sammy, we can't help but defend ourselves.

I mean I've counseled quite a few folks over the years. I have to admit it is quite, quite rare to meet someone with the opposite condition, that is some who's suffering from overactive conscience. I mean I admit, I've seen a few of those folks over the years but lately I've been wishing I'd seen more. I feel like telling folks, go right ahead, get down on yourself, feel the awful weight of your sin because that means you're ready to truly experience the grace of God. The more you feel the weight of your sin, the greater you're going to feel the grace of God. You see, the more I attempt to own my own wickedness, the more I appreciate the love of God. And a person crushed under the weight of an overactive conscience has a wonderful correction in store for him. *Psalm 51* tells us: *The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*

On the other hand, a person who's glibly figuring that he can just

go to church, say a sinner's prayer and go forward at a meeting and be squared away for the rest of his life may in fact be heading for a truly horrifying correction. Jesus once said: *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'"* See Jesus's words were to people who were convinced that their standing with God was topnotch. I mean these were folks who were so used to defending themselves that they no longer heard the voice of God's Spirit. Jesus warned us that denying the Holy Spirit's voice would cause us to not only lose the ability to hear but it would also cause us to lose whatever hearing ability we previously had. In *Matthew 25* he says: *"For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away."*

You see, we hear, we hear because God's Spirit actually speaks to you and me every single day as believers. Jesus told us that. He said so, I mean, he said as much in *John 10*, he said: *"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me."* Every single day the Holy Spirit is about the business of sanctifying his

saints. He's shaping and molding us uniquely into the image of Jesus Christ and because of that he will never stop bubbling out our sin as he convicts us, but you have to internalize that conviction. You have to agree with God that sin is sin and that it's got to go, and we can't deny sin and we can't defend sin.

And the third way we keep conviction at bay is we simply defy the Holy Spirit. We accept the first two premises and then we dare God to do something about it. Premise number one: Yeah, it's sin; premise number two, it's sin but it's not so bad; and premise number three, no, God, I may change eventually but certainly not now. I can relate to that process. I'll tell you how that process worked in my life with the process of me giving up tobacco. And again, I just need to say my feelings about tobacco is that if I could have an occasional cigarette and cigar and not be addicted, I would go right ahead. I can't. There's no way that I could. I know for a fact that smoking was an addiction to me to nicotine. But for the first few years, I didn't even think I had a problem. I'm from a family of smokers. I went to a church where we used to hang out the steps of the sanctuary and have a cigarette. Smoking to me was completely normal. But you know, after a while, after a while the Holy Spirit began to convict me. I heard this distant voice saying, "You're wrecking my temple," and then a hacking cough that I developed helped me see that as well. And this is the

process that I went through of denying, defending and defying before I finally wound up agreeing with God by confessing to me of the sin of smoking. I first began to deny that smoking was a problem at all, I mean, it was simply a habit that I had acquired over the years. I next began to defend myself from the Spirit's conviction. I mean, lots of good people smoke, I mean, even godly people smoke, Spurgeon used to love a cigar. Can't do better than that. But after the Holy Spirit convinced me that I was addicted to smoking, I began to defy him. I argued to myself it was really the Holy Spirit's fault in the first place because if he really wanted me to stop smoking, he'd remove my desire to smoke; and I still have that desire, so the fault is clearly his and not mine. This is where many of us find ourselves today. A little bad theology, a little willful defiance and I can basically do what I want. I mean our God, after all, is a God of grace. I sin and God forgives; the more I sin, the more God forgives. But think about what Paul said in *Romans 6:1*. He said: *What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?*

See, here's where you truly -- you have to understand that to be born again means that you are a new creature who has the new Spirit of God who lives not in buildings -- God used to live in buildings in the Old Testament, now he lives inside humans. Peter says that

we are living stones building a temple. We are the stones that the Spirit of God lives inside. If you truly died to sin then you can truly, you cannot live any longer in it because your flesh and the Holy Spirit who is now living inside you are completely incompatible. The Holy Spirit never stopped putting pressure on me to internalize his conviction to stop smoking and to recognize for me smoking was a sin. He was quite willing to forgive as soon as I recognized it as sin, and one day I simply acknowledged, I gave up, I said, "Okay, Lord, smoking for me now officially is a sin." I was hesitant at first to use smoking as an example because it's not a clearcut sin like stealing or lying or murder, it's a sin of conscience and if smoking has control over you, then it is clearly sinful. If it doesn't, well, that's your business, that's your choice. I just know that in my case there was no question that I was highly addicted to nicotine; and for you, it may not be. For me it was sin and it stood between me and God and it had to go. But understand, it took years before I let the Holy Spirit's conviction go from external to internal. But once I did, there was no going back. And at that point the pain of the Holy Spirit's conviction had grown greater than any pleasure I got from smoking, because God was in the process of transforming me in this one tiny area and my sanctification with regard to smoking went through all three of those pathways that I've mentioned before. I denied it as sin and then I defended it as not so bad, and finally I defied

God's conviction until I was willing to see it as sin and confess it.

I mean, just to go back to a smoking analogy, you know, I go back to when I first had my very first cigarette. I was 15, tried my first cigarette, my body reacted naturally to it with a hacking cough and a reaction like it was poison, which of course it is. Well, I thought it was cool, I thought it was adult, you know, and so I worked myself right through that natural reaction until it became an addiction. But think of how that applies to the Holy Spirit's reaction to sin, how it mirrors on the spiritual side what my body's physical reaction to smoke was like. See, the Spirit and sin are absolutely and completely incompatible. And we, too, have to plow through the Spirit's spiritual reaction to sin until our conscience is seared enough so that it no longer bothers us.

I was talking with someone recently about -- we just happened to talk about watching R-rated movies. I said there's no way that I would get within a mile of a movie that had sexual images in it. And this person said, oh, they don't bother me at all. I said you think that's a good thing? That's not a good thing. That's a bad thing. Do you know what that means? That means that your conscience has been seared. I mean, now, smoking may not be nearly the sin as lust but it was sin for me nonetheless and God told me

he wanted it out of my life. And that's how conviction works in our lives. I mean if we are believers, we're all in the process of being convicted of sin by the Holy Spirit and it's this ongoing process that never stops.

So how do we know if we're on track, I mean, how do we know if we're not the product of an overactive or underactive conscience? Well, I think it all comes down to a very subjective question and I'm sorry it is subjective, I wish it was objective but it's not. The question is: Are you hungry for God? See, it's not enough to simply want to improve your conduct because it's a good thing to not gossip or lie or be addicted to tobacco or alcohol or sex or whatever it is, I mean, that may be true but there's plenty of people outside the kingdom of God who live lives far more honorable than mine who are still utterly lost without God. The difference between a self-improved and a transformed life lies primarily in the hunger you have for God. That hunger, that appetite is the direct result of the Holy Spirit taking up residence inside you. And when that happens, an appetite for God becomes your new normal and you find yourself following hard after God not because you have to but because now you want to. And now the role that the church plays in your life is a direct function of that hunger. See, that hunger grows in community and it shrivels in isolation. And by necessity isolation has become for many of us the new normal. I

mean we've been living in an unprecedented time but that time is now coming to an end. The pandemic is shutting down and people are beginning to return to the old normal. I think Zoom and I think You Tube has been a huge blessing but they can also serve as a huge hindrance to actually physically meeting together, which God says is crucial. In *Hebrews 10:24* he says: *And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.* You see, if the church is just a place that you go to on Sundays, then going to church makes little sense. If the church is a means of entering into a relationship with a community of believers who are all hungry for God, a community with a common goal of bringing honor and glory to God by bearing the fruit of his Spirit, then the first thing that community should be interested in is paying attention to the convicting work of the Holy Spirit individually in me as just a -- as a sheep, collectively as a member of a flock and corporately as a member of the international body of Christ. I mean conviction is literally just a matter of listening to the Holy Spirit's voice. It's refusing to deny our sin, to defend our conduct or defy the Holy Spirit especially when he tells us now is the time for us to begin to get together again. A transformed life is not business as usual and the Helper is here for us to make it real. Jesus said: *And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and*

righteousness and judgment. That's what conviction is.

So this morning I want to ask us all a very personal question about conviction, and the question is this: When was the last time that you went to confession? Now, see, I was raised Catholic. I have very serious problems with the Catholic church on a whole host of issues, obviously, but I can't help but wonder if protestants somehow miss the boat here in not formally setting time aside for both corporate and individual confession of sin. In fact what you see Fred doing up here in the morning is one of our corporate decisions that we need to collectively start working on the collective confession of sin, but we also need to do it individually. We all know that we can keep it external, we can keep conviction outside us, but there is a price to pay. See, our excuses get multiplied as our hearts begin to grow colder. And we forget that God left heaven itself and came to earth to live this perfect life that we were supposed to live, and that he died the death that we all deserved so that we by faith could claim his righteousness as our own. And because of that, there's no part of our lives that he's not entitled to. I mean, ask yourself: How important is my relationship with Jesus Christ? If it's not number one, then something is seriously wrong. I mean Jesus made it crystal clear that above all of our needs and concerns for food and clothing and shelter, security, above all of those is the

kingdom and it's that desire that orders all the other desires properly. Jesus said: *"But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."*

So what I'm saying this morning is that it's time to surrender, it's time to put down your arms figuratively and literally and agree with God's convicting Spirit that sin is sin because God is in the process of making something wonderful out of you and me. You see, he's shaping us into the very image of his Son. We are his artwork, we are his trophy, we are the billboards of his grace. And his grace won't stop transforming us as long as we're here on planet earth.

So again I ask the question: When is the last time you examined your conscience? When's the last time you prayed like David prayed in *Psalm 139: 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.* I'd like to do that right now with us. I'd like us to bow our heads and ask God to convict us of sin. Just to show us the sins that we're playing games with; show us the sins that we're denying, defending or defying.

Father, let me just get before you this morning corporately and say we want the convicting power of your Holy Spirit. Lord, we don't

want to play games with our sin any more. Lord, we want the grace to be able to lay down those arms and agree with you when you take our conviction from external to internal, when you bring our sins before us and say are you really, are you ready, are you ready to lay down your arms, are you ready to admit, are you ready to say yes, this is sin. Are you ready to repent? I pray, Lord, for each of us individually as we kind of go through our lives and ask ourselves those questions about our own lives. I would ask God to search us and to see if there be any wicked way in us. Lord, I pray that you would give us a Spirit that says, yes, Lord, I'm willing to admit when your Spirit convicts me specifically, not the devil's way, not that way of generically saying I'm miserable, but your specific way, Lord, the way that you tell us exactly what you want of us and how you want us to repent. Give us that grace, give us that heart, give us that insight, give us that desire, I pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.