

# Spiritual Growth Lessons from Christian Ambassadors

## Lesson 39

### *Conviction, Not Condemnation*

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Jesus tells us in **Luke 19:10 (KJV)**, “*For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.*” (See also: **Matthew 18:11**) Jesus came to forgive, not to destroy; to *convict* the world of sin, not to bring condemnation. All so we might have and enjoy a personal relationship with Him. Jesus, on an amazing mission of love, came to *convict* or *expose* sin for what it is (rebellion against God); while at the same time delivering man from the horrible guilt that comes with sin. Though it is impossible to change the past, there is nothing sweeter than having the *guilt* of sin removed from the life of a sinner. With the guilt removed, the forgiven sinner is no longer stuck in the mindset of condemnation, as the anonymous author who wrote these words indicated:

*How I wish that there was some wonderful place  
Called the Land of Beginning Again.  
Where all our mistakes and all our heartaches  
And all our poor selfish grief,  
Could be dropped like a shabby old coat at the door,  
And never put on again.*

Oh, but there is such a place where one can begin again! There is a spiritual place, where one can drop the shabby old coat of sin and replace it with a new one of righteousness. In Isaiah’s day God invited the people to come to such a place, and admit they were wrong in their way of thinking and acting.

**Isaiah 1:18 (KJV)** - *Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.*

The word “*reason*” (yākah) in this scripture is a law term used to argue, convince, or decide a case in court. The people were to be *convinced* that God was right and that they were wrong about their spiritual condition. If the people acknowledged their sins, that their iniquities were like blood-colored stains on their souls (scarlet, a red dye made from a worm, and crimson, red-colored cloth), then God in His grace would cleanse them, making them spiritually white like snow or wool.

Though God had every reason to punish His people for their sins, in His grace and mercy He offered

them pardon. But there was something they needed to do first. They needed to cleanse themselves by repenting and turning from sin, toward God.

**Isaiah 1:16-17a (KJV)** - *Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; Learn to do well;*

One has to be *convinced* of their sinful condition before they can turn to God for cleansing. God’s pardoning mercy will remove the stain of sin from the truly repentant. Whereas, judgment comes on those who continue to reject Him. There is a beautiful example in John 8:1-11 of Jesus bringing conviction, not condemnation.

**John 8:1-11 (KJV)** - *Jesus went unto the Mount of Olives. And early in the morning he came again into the temple, and all the people came unto him; and he sat down, and taught them. And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, they say unto him, “Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou?” This they said, tempting him that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not. So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, “He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.” And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. And they which heard it, being **convicted** by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, “Woman, where are those thine accusers? Hath no man condemned thee?” She said, “No man, Lord.” And Jesus said unto her, “Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.”*

As we meditate upon these verses of scripture there are some key issues that need to be considered. The Scribes and Pharisees were experts in the law. But, when they had a question, it was natural for them to

take it to a Rabbi for a decision. According to Jewish law, adultery was punishable by death. So, when the Scribes and Pharisees brought the adulterous woman to Jesus, it never occurred to them to reclaim the wrongdoer, to restore her to the community, or to bring healing through forgiveness. They were only using the woman as a pawn, hoping to catch Jesus in a trap so they might discredit Him.

The scribes and Pharisees were not looking at this woman as a person at all. They only saw her as a thing – a case of shameless adultery, with their right to condemn and punish her. Rather than show sympathy for her mistakes, they were gloating [rejoicing] over her failures. God hates it when people gloat, because it suggests a superior attitude toward others.

*Proverbs 24:17-18 (NIV) - Do not gloat when your enemy falls; when he stumbles, do not let your heart rejoice, or the LORD will see and disapprove and turn his wrath away from him.*

Jesus spotted the superior attitude of the Scribes and Pharisees who continued to press Jesus for an answer. Should the woman be stoned according to the Law of Moses or not? Jesus took his time answering them by pausing to write in the sand. Then with unmistakable clarity Jesus gave them the righteous answer,

*John 8:7b (KJV) - "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her."*

There was silence. This was not the answer they were expecting. This required some thought. Jesus again stooped down to write on the ground, giving them time to carefully think about their response.

*John 8:9 (KJV) - And they which heard it, **being convicted by their own conscience**, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. [bold emphasis mine]*

Because Jesus handled this dispute in the *Spirit of the Law*, which gives life (*See: II Corinthians 3:6*), He didn't have to judge the Scribes and Pharisees. By showing them their sins, they were *convicted* by their own conscience. Looking to themselves, they became in effect, their own judges.

*I Corinthians 11:31 (KJV) - For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged.*

With their own faults fresh on their minds, one by one the accusers drifted away, out of sight of the

woman. With no one left to condemn the woman, Jesus told her He was not going to condemn her either. But that didn't mean she was off the hook. He told her instead, "*go, and sin no more.*" What Jesus really did, was to *defer* her sentence. There was no need for Jesus to pass a final judgment on her at that time, because her life wasn't over yet. He didn't see her as a hopeless creature. He had faith in her potential, in the person she could become. He was offering her the chance to go and prove she could live a righteous life. To accomplish that, she would need to repent and turn away from her sinful life.

**In summary:** Jesus, on an amazing mission of love, came into the world to forgive, not to destroy; to *convict* the world of sin, not to bring condemnation. There is nothing sweeter than having the *guilt* of sin removed from the life of a sinner. With the guilt removed, he is no longer stuck in the mindset of condemnation. The repentant sinner is now free to live out his days in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Praise God!

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#### Questions for personal or group study:

- 1) Though it is impossible to go back and change the past, what process does God use to remove the *guilt* of sin from the life of a sinner? **See: Isaiah 1:18; Revelation 3:19; John 16:8; I John 1:9**
- 2) Isaiah told his people there was something they needed to be *convinced* of before God's grace would cleanse them spiritually white like snow. What was it? **See: Isaiah 1:16, 17a**
- 3) According to Jewish law in Jesus' day, what was the punishment for a woman caught in adultery?
- 4) Why does God hate it when people gloat [rejoice] over someone's failures? What does it suggest?
- 5) Rather than condemnation, what should be the righteous response of the believing community when someone wanders from the truth? **See: James 5:19-20**
- 6) In **John 8:1-11**, Jesus gave a perfect example of how to handle disputes in the Spirit of the Law. Why is it so important? **See: II Corinthians 3:6, 16-17**