

P. O. Box 7
Hillsboro, Kansas 67063

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Dear Collegian,

Finding Your True Conviction

By the time you arrive at college, you probably have established some pretty strong convictions. But as you get to know your classmates, you soon discover that a significant number of them hold to convictions that are quite different from your own. Amazingly, they may be just as devoted to their “obviously inferior” opinions as you are to yours. And so begins the process of questioning, challenging, and (almost without fail) changing some of the viewpoints you were *so certain* you would always hold dear!

The first time you run into an argument that you cannot easily refute or in good conscience bury in denial, it can be disconcerting... if not downright frightening. Does this mean that you can no longer trust *any* of your former preconceptions? And *if you are* forced to concede one of the ideas that had shaped your view of life, does it mean that all of your convictions are suspect? Is it time to throw up your hands, crumble up the paper that was the “sacred constitution” of your very being, and start from scratch to build... and inevitably rebuild again later... a new and hopefully more bullet-proof understanding of life?

Many convictions are at the same time precious and fleeting things. I’m sure you’ve heard people begin a sentence by saying, “I have a growing conviction that...” and then, sat in awe as they began to unfold for your benefit some new and enlightening viewpoint. Don’t be afraid of such experiences. They can be a vehicle of discovery in your life that delivers precious treasures of knowledge at your feet.

At the same time, never allow yourself to become one of the “clueless acceptors” who sits with mouth agape, swallowing every new line that comes your way with hook and sinker intact. The road to discovery is legitimately paved with questioning and challenging virtually every new idea that comes your way.

The Bible says that, when considering new religious ideas, we are to test every

doctrine and try every spirit, to see if it is right in the eyes of God and consistent with the teaching of Holy Scripture. That's really a good piece of advice to apply to all our areas of learning. Some new ideas are so valuable and precious that they will enrich every aspect of our lives until we die. Others are such vile and deceitful misrepresentations that, once recognized for what they are, they should be flushed from our minds into the sewer from which they came.

So how should we go about the process of finding our true convictions without falling prey to the lure of seductive yet destructive lies? Ah, that's what the process of higher education is all about. The greatest benefit of our college or university experience is not in simply accepting and digesting the flood of information that is thrown at us. It is in learning to distinguish the difference between the real and the counterfeit... the bright new truth or the light-extinguishing heresy.

You see, in today's world of instant and unlimited information, there's nothing particularly special about accessing information. Anyone can do that. What's special, and what we really want to gain from our "higher education," is an unflinching skill for intellectual discernment. We are here to learn how to access information, process that information, separate the precious jewels of truth from the sludge around them, and ultimately turn them into treasures that will enrich our lives.

I'll never forget a fellow I met my first year at the university, who approached me with unflinching conviction and the zeal of an evangelist, and said, "I'm a Baptist born and bred. And when I die, I'll be a Baptist dead." It certainly was clever, and through knowing him I came to appreciate and respect many wonderful and committed Baptists (as well as their love for really digging into the Word of God).

But I have to tell you that, because of his enthusiasm and obvious hunger for knowledge, even he slowly changed... added to... even perfected some of the convictions he had entered college with. Oh, don't get me wrong. He never lost his faith, and I'm sure he's still proud to be a Baptist born and bred. He simply continued to discover wonderful things about the truths he had taken for granted. He added to the richness of his convictions. And in some cases, he chose to look at things in a different, more productive way... under a brighter light than ever before.

We have just experienced one of the most emotional and contradictory elections in any of our lifetimes. I'm sure, if you stepped back from the fray for even a moment, you wondered as did I, how people could see things so differently, believe in their opposing positions so passionately, and be willing to commit to such drastically different plans of action.

In most cases, they all had at least an element of truth that was the basis for their convictions. And I must admit that on some level, I could empathize with many of the

reasons that led them to come to the conclusions that they did. But obviously both viewpoints could not be right at the same time. Someone had to be right, and someone had to be “somewhat less right!”

If noble-sounding reasons *by themselves* are not enough to assure that you will develop correct opinions, then what is it that will guide you to actual truth? What will help you develop convictions that are solid and defensible... convictions that can be trusted to produce a clear-eyed understanding of life?

The key lies in the process you use to help you arrive at valid conclusions in your life. And in the end, the effectiveness of that process depends on what you choose to believe as the foundation of truth upon which your convictions will be built.

More than anything else, your college years are intended to help you *discover the process* that leads to understanding, and to help you make that process yours. This year holds tremendous opportunities for you! I pray that as you move forward in this great adventure of discovery, God will be especially near to you, brighten your path and enlighten your mind in a special way, as you face the exciting challenge of finding and refining your true convictions.

by Dave Weeden

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