

# Self-Condemning Profession

*Book of Joshua*

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Let's look in our Bibles together to Joshua 24. I want to pick up from verse 19 and read for us down to verse 27 and talk to you about a self-condemning profession. We have an example of it here and we have an example of it actually in much of religion today where people will easily stand and, with their mouth, testify their allegiance to Jesus Christ and done in such a way and, what I would say, with such arrogance that they never presume themselves to be anything but the Lord's. That's their profession even though all of Scripture and the law stands against them. They've never seen, bottom line, that they've been lost.

We have an example of this here as Joshua is reiterating to this people, knowing their propensity to wander, knowing their idolatry. Here they've just come through – this is the second generation – they've come through 40 years in the desert, they've seen their parents, they've seen that generation perish that came out of Egypt and yet, for some reason, since they've come into the Promised Land and the Lord has given them that land as he promised, you see, he's faithful, yet we see that certain arrogance here as we begin in verse 19 of Joshua 24. This is this self-condemning profession.

“And Joshua said unto the people, Ye cannot serve the LORD: for he is an holy God; he is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins.” In other words, if you believe that you can come in any way based on your will or your works, you are yet in your sins. That's what he's saying here. You cannot be justified before God either to gain or to maintain your salvation.

“If ye forsake the LORD, and serve strange gods, then he will turn and do you hurt, and consume you, after that he hath done you good.” Here is the self-professing condemnation right here in verse 21.

“And the people said unto Joshua, Nay.” In other words, let it never be, “but we will serve the LORD.” In other words, it's kind of like looking around and saying, “Who is he talking about?”

“And Joshua said unto the people,” notice, this is strong language here, “Ye are witnesses against yourselves that ye have chosen you the LORD, to serve him. And they said, We

are witnesses.” What Joshua is saying there, “Ye are witnesses against yourselves that ye have chosen you the LORD, to serve him,” some might look at that and think, “Well, isn’t that a good thing? To choose the Lord, to service?” I would liken this or compare this to somebody that stands up and says, “God is my witness.” How many times have you heard somebody say that? All the while, they’re lying. “As God is my witness.” Well, here’s the answer of Scripture that your witness is against yourself. Don’t call God to witness, to cover your lie. Don’t think that you can come to him and profess him as Lord based upon your works and still call him to witness, to approve you. That’s what Christ said to the Pharisees, “Many shall say in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not...” They were calling God to witness, to defend their works. “Have we not prophesied in your name? Have we not cast out devils in your name? Have we not done many mighty work in your name? Have we not...Have we not...Have we not?” And the Lord will say, “I never knew you.” That’s the Lord’s answer to anybody that approaches in that manner. And so he says, “Alright. You say that you have chosen to serve the Lord,” then verse 23,

“Now therefore put away, said he, the strange gods which are among you, and incline your heart unto the LORD God of Israel.” Isn’t that amazing that verse 23 already stands as a testimony against them because all the while they are professing that they were going to serve the Lord, Joshua is pointing out that you already have strange gods among you. Not just physical gods, but notice “and incline your heart unto the LORD God of Israel.” If you profess to be able to serve him and come in that way, then there cannot be any idolatry in your heart. Renounce it all.

It’s like that rich young ruler that came to Christ and said, “What must I do to inherit the Kingdom of God?” That’s the word he used and the Lord said, “What does the law say?” If a person comes thinking what must I do to obtain salvation, what does the law require? Absolute perfection and “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, mind and strength and love your neighbor as yourself.” That condemns any one of us but that rich young ruler, just like these, profess the self-condemning confession. He said, “These things I’ve done from my youth. What else do I lack? And that’s when the Lord said, “Go. Sell all your goods and give them to the poor. And he went away sorrowful.” What was the Lord doing? Pointing out covetousness in his heart. It’s not that you haven’t killed anybody or physically stolen from anybody but if you want to take that law to witness on your behalf to give you favor before God, then it shines a light not just on what men do but what they think. And that’s what Joshua said, “Then remove that idolatry from your heart.” He was telling them to do something that was impossible but, nonetheless, pointing out their sin.

And here again, in verse 24, the arrogance. They didn’t even see what it was that Joshua was pointing out. “And the people said unto Joshua, The LORD our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey. So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and set them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem. And Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God, and took a great stone, and set it up there under an oak, that was by the sanctuary of the LORD. And Joshua said unto all the people, Behold, this stone shall be a witness unto us; for it hath heard all the words of the LORD which he spake unto us: it shall be therefore a witness unto you, lest ye deny your God.”

This stone that was set up here, you think of what a stone is. It's not an altar; there's no reference here at all to a sacrifice being made. This was not an altar stone; this was a stone that was set up as a witness against the hardness of their heart. That's what a stone is. It's hard. It's cold. And Joshua put it there, notice, "by the sanctuary of the Lord." They were not looking to the sanctuary of the Lord this particular time, they were looking at their own ability and at the law, thinking themselves somewhat to be able to serve the Lord.

And so, this stone that was put here was not a stone of mercy but a stone of condemnation and when you think about what Paul wrote to the Corinthians about that ministry of condemnation which is represented by the Old Testament, written on tablets of stone. The law has no ability to give life. It has no ability to help a poor sinner. It's just a condemnation against that sinner and if a sinner violates that law in any way, that's what we see here. It wasn't just the stone. Notice in verse 26, "Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God, and took a great stone, and set it up there under an oak."

This stone represents condemnation. It stands against. It represents the hardness of men's hearts. So, contrary to what many believe today, the law was never given as a means of salvation. I know people are shocked when you tell them that. They think, "Well, I'm making a good shot at it. I'm making an effort." Joshua here is laying out the law of that Old Testament covenant once again before this people with truth and clarity and holds back nothing even in the face of the profession of these people unlike modern-day preachers that as soon as someone professes the Lord, "O praise God!" gets everybody going, whooped up. "Come on down here. Let's get you in front of the people."

They loved men's testimonies but we know even our Lord, when the crowds followed him and it says they believed on him there in John 2:20-21. It says, "The Lord did not commend himself unto them because he knew their heart." He knew what man is. He did not have need that men should testify of him. That goes contrary to all these testimonial meetings today.

So, here's three things that I want to leave with you from this particular portion of Scripture with regard to this self-condemnation, this self-professed condemnation. Number one is here in verse 19 and this is the truth, this is why men condemn themselves who look at the law and feel that somehow they can obey the law. This is the first premise of that self-condemnation and that is that the law condemns anything less than perfection. We're not talking about 99.99999% holiness. Unless there is a righteousness, unless there is a holiness that is absolutely equal to God himself, any that profess to come before the Lord on any other holiness less than that, condemns themselves in that profession. And that's why Joshua said that in verse 19, "Ye cannot serve the Lord for he is a holy God."

When I consider back as the Lord began a good work in my heart, again, in spite of my profession, I lived under a delusion for years. I lived under this self-condemning profession for years, having made a profession when I was a young age and someone

feeling like if I just read the Scriptures enough, prayed enough, witnessed enough. And I would have told you at that time, “Oh yeah, it’s all by grace.” But when it pleased God to reveal Christ to me, when the light of Christ opened this heart and caused me to see that even my attempts at holiness were one of the most blasphemous activities I could ever be involved with, every bit as criminal as someone killing somebody because it’s robbing God of his glory. When God says that all of his glory is in his Son and what his Son came and accomplished and I’m saying, “Ok, yes, but I still think that somehow what I do contributes to God’s favor,” then I condemn myself.

That’s the first premise here of self-condemnation, of a profession that condemns is that the law requires absolute perfection and we see that over in Romans 3. Just look with me at a couple of Scriptures here. Romans 3. Why was the law given if it wasn’t as a means of salvation? Why was it given? Well, here in Romans 3, we have a very clear answer. It says in verses 19 and 20, “Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law,” what? “that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.” You see the difference here of the law being revealed in the heart of the sinner and that sinner then standing condemned before God and his mouth stopped versus what we’re reading here in Joshua 24 when Joshua said, “You cannot serve the Lord for he is holy,” what did they say? “Nay, but we will serve the Lord.” That would tell you right there this is a lost generation talking because if the Lord ever had done a work of grace in their heart even as he had in Joshua, for Joshua to point them to the Lord and their need of the Lord and that he did, yet for them to say, “Nay, but we will serve the Lord.” It shows right there that they had not seen the solemnity of the holiness of the law of God, had not become guilty before God. Verse 20 says, “Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.” So, this is what condemns those who profess otherwise, this self-condemning profession.

I read for you just a little while ago in Galatians 3 but I would have you look back there just at one particular verse in Galatians 3. Again, the function of the law. Again, this is another reason the law was given, to show the sinfulness of sin and that it does. To reveal the holy character of God would be the second thing I’d say about it even as we read there in Joshua, “He is holy.” Thirdly, it is to cause the sinner to despair of himself or herself and look to Christ alone and that’s what we read here in Galatians 3:21, “Is the law then against the promises of God?” Didn’t he promise to save sinners? So, does the law stand in the way of him saving sinners then because no one can obey it? “God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life,” that right there states that there is no law that can give life; that’s the conclusion, “verily righteousness should have been by the law.” And just the way that it’s written there shows there’s no hope in it. Even if you drew a line today and said, “From this point forward I think I’m going to try to obey the law perfectly to find acceptance with God,” you’re already condemned because the trial was over in Adam. When Adam fell, we fell in our representative. That’s it.

“But,” it says, “the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith,” notice, “of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.” That promise that is

summed up in the faith which is in connection with Jesus Christ and his death, might be given to them that believe.

“But before faith came,” before Christ came, “we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith,” or Christ in his death, “which should afterwards be revealed.” So, you can see the reason why men condemn themselves if they profess or think that they can come, no matter how great the resolutions. People, preachers especially, like to get people together and get them whooped up and making resolutions, “Let’s all resolve tonight that we’re gonna serve the Lord.” What they’re doing is making liars out of people. They are making Pharisees out of people. How they raise their children, “Promise me that you’re going to read your Bible every day. Promise me that you’re going to pray every day.” How many times have you heard parents say that to their kids? They’re just making liars out of them, therefore, self-condemning.

If you look over in Ecclesiastes 5. Psalms, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. This, again, goes contrary to how men are taught in religion today. They are taught to be ready to stand up and testify before the Lord and tell him all the great things they’ve done for him. Well, in Ecclesiastes 5 it says, “Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God,” verse 1, “and be more ready to,” what? “hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil.” That’s what was happening with Israel; they considered not that they were doing evil. When they said, “Nay, but we will serve the Lord,” some of their ilk would be saying, “God be praised! Praise God!”

But here it says they consider not that they do evil. Why? “Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God.” This is why even in our times of worship we’re very limited in who’s speaking: one person leading the singing; another prayerfully reading the Scriptures; another that stands here and opens the word and preaches it. This is a solemn thing before the Lord. God is a witness where we gather and meet. He’s present.

“Therefore let thy words be few.” For God is in heaven, it says here in verse 2, “and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few.” It’s not who’s going to pray the longest prayer or the more eloquent prayer. None of this has its place in worship.

“For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a fool's voice is known by multitude of words. When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it.” That’s what Joshua said, “Ok, you’ve made this profession today, but this stone will stand against you.”

“For he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldest not vow.” You see, this is the answer to people that come to me and say, “Well, this preacher says that we oughta renew our vows before the Lord and we oughta commend ourselves again to him. Let’s have a recommitment service, a rededication.” You’ve heard all that nonsense. People walking down an aisle and, “Ok, let’s start over.”

It is better that thou shouldest not vow “than that thou shouldest vow and not pay. Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel,” or the messenger, “that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands? For in the multitude of dreams,” and there it’s talking about men’s ideas. I cringe every time we get somebody new coming in and they pull you aside and say, “Have you ever thought about doing this?” or “Have you ever thought about maybe doing that? This is the way we have done it and with some great effect in other congregations.” They try to pull you off of the way that the Lord has directed us to worship which is in simplicity and in truth and looking to Christ alone as needy sinners.

“For in the multitude of dreams,” of men’s vain thinking and thoughts, “and many words there are also divers vanities: but fear thou God.” So, why is such a profession a self-condemning profession is because if you go down that path to say, “Yes, we will serve the Lord,” and vow it, it requires absolute perfection.

The second reason to beware of any self-condemning profession is the blindness of our heart. Do you really want to trust your heart? Especially when the Scripture says that “the heart is deceitful above all things, who can know it?” Have you ever wondered why even after reading some Scripture, the Lord gives some light to it and your heart rejoices and you thank him? That’s his grace and you say to yourself, “I’m gonna hold onto this.” Even that saying, “I’m going to hold onto it,” unless the Lord keep the heart, that thought or that blessing, that moment of light that he gave you, will be gone before you can even turn around. I know it’s so because all of us have spoken of that. I know as the Lord first began to do a work in my heart and I think about that whole period of time where he showed me I was lost and I was looking to him, I dare not even go back to that experience and try to keep it somehow. I need today as much that work of grace in my heart as I ever have because my “heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, who can know it?”

But blindness, like we see here in Joshua 24, is not to see the nature of the heart. It is to ignore what this heart is and we see that blindness. Again, there was a day, perhaps before the Lord showed me my need, that I would have sided with these. The children of Israel said, “Yes, this is a good thing.” But that blindness is especially manifest there in verse 24 when they said, “The Lord our God will we serve and his voice will we obey.” Not “God give us the grace to serve. God give us the Spirit to hear and obey,” which would be the cry of the needy sinner but this is arrogance. “The Lord our God will we serve and his voice will we obey.” And, therefore, they stand condemned. It’s due to the blindness of the heart.

Look with me at a verse over here in 1 John. How many times have you heard someone say, “Well, I truly believe I’m sinning less now than I have before, that over the years I’ve learned to sin less”? Have you heard that? I remember a fellow that I worked with back when I was in high school at a hardware store and he went to a congregation that was called Free Will Baptist. He flaunted it and even though I was lost at the time, I had enough knowledge to know that what he believed was not so. But many times when we would drive this Chevy pickup truck and be delivering appliances, he would engage me

in a conversation and when I would start asking him questions back and questioning, especially this, he was of a mindset that he had grown to such a point where he was not sinning anymore. That was literally what he thought of himself. And, again, it was a blindness.

Before the Lord began to open my heart and show me my sin and draw me to Christ, I was of that mindset. I didn't believe you could ever get to a state of perfection but I believed that so long as you did certain things or looked to the Lord, that somehow that sin nature, some call it progressive sanctification, you were being sanctified more and more the longer you lived, that I was under that delusion. So, mine was no better than this one that I was arguing with. But I remember in the truck one day, him really getting mad at me, angry. I said, "John, what is that? Isn't that not anger?" He said, "It's not anger. I'm not angry." That was his way of responding.

Here in 1 John it says very plainly in verse 10, "If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar and his Word is not in us." Now, most people when they see that, they think of all the mortal sins, they think of all the grievous sins, but if we say that we have not sinned even in our supposed righteousness, we make him a liar and his Word is not in us.

So, this self-condemning profession here of these children of Israel is aggravated, again, before the Lord because, in essence, the law was saying, "You cannot serve me." That's why the law was given, that every mouth might be stopped and you're saying, "Nay, but we will serve the Lord." So what? You're making God a liar. We've said that before to our children. When you tell them something and they come back at you, "So, you're making me a liar now?" How many times have we said that as a parent, or thought it? You're pointing out what is obvious and they're denying it. So, that's one thing with men but another before God.

That's the second point here with regard to this self-condemning profession: it's to deny, to make such a profession is really to deny what we are before the Lord, and that's object sinners. They should have been flat on their face before the Lord but here they were standing and saying, "We'll serve the Lord."

The third and final point that I would bring out here is, in coming back here to Joshua 24, what the stone represents. Any such profession as we find here is self-condemning because of the hardness of the heart, the blindness of the heart, but the hardness of the heart. And, as I mentioned already, there is no sacrifice with this stone. This is a large stone that was brought and it should already have been something of concern because it says in verse 26 that it was "by the sanctuary of the Lord." They didn't realize it but Joshua was giving them a visual aid of here's the sanctuary of the Lord. Why is the sanctuary of the Lord there? That's where the sacrifices were offered. That's where the priesthood was.

That's the mediator and now here's this stone set up over against it. What could that stone represent? It couldn't have been another altar, that would have been wrong. It was a

visual aid of that hardness of the heart just like Christ said of the Pharisees that he is that stone which the builders rejected. What did they do? They went after another stone and even here we see this as being a representation of that hardness of the heart. Don't give an inch of hope to somebody that professes to know the Lord and serve the Lord apart from through the exclusive single solitary sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ alone and coming as a sinner before God. Any other profession is just a manifestation of a hardness, not of a heart of life but the hardness of the heart and, therefore, a stone of condemnation.

He calls them here in verse 22 as a witness against themselves. "You are witnesses that you have chosen the Lord." It's one thing for man to say, "I've chosen the Lord," and it's another thing for the Lord to say, "I've chosen you." It's one thing for a man to profess Christ and it's another thing for Christ to confess that man. The Lord only confesses those that the Father has given him and on whom God has placed his love from eternity and for whom Christ died. Those are the ones the Lord confesses and who did he die to save? Not the righteous but sinners Jesus came to save.

So, this is a very solemn thing and not only that, it caused them to witness against themselves. Secondly, he takes, verse 26, "the words of the book of the law of God." Again, a reminder: he wrote it in the book of the law. But I will tell you that book of the law that's described here, that was outside of the mercy seat, again, was only a condemnation. This is like Christ kneeling down and writing in the sand. A lot of people say, "I wonder what he has written?" He may have been writing the Ten Commandments, the very law that those Pharisees prided themselves in keeping, with his finger. You look in Scripture, any time the finger of God is mentioned it is always in condemnation. There in Babylon against the wicked king and the finger of God wrote, Mene, Mene Tekel Upharsin. Today you've been found weighed in the balances and found wanting. God took his finger and wrote the initial tables of the law, commandment against men.

So we see the same thing here. This was a condemnation and then, of course, the stone which represents their hardness. History records how men even with their best intentions, have done nothing but condemn themselves further in any attempts to obey God. You say, "What's the answer?" Certainly it's not more resolve. That's not the direction. The answer is in a mediator. The answer is in one who was able to come and obey that law in every jot and tittle and thereby satisfy it on behalf of a people. And that's the work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Look in 2 Corinthians, this is the last portion that we'll look to here because our time is gone. 2 Corinthians 3. Paul makes this comparison. Look in verse 7. If you could just take a piece of paper and draw down the middle and put on one side "The Ministry of Death or Condemnation" and on the other side put down "The Ministry of Grace or Glory, of Righteousness." Which side would you rather be on? Look at it, "But if the ministration of death," notice, "written and engraven in stones." That's telltale right there because that's what Joshua did. "Was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away: How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious? For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness



exceed in glory.” What’s he talking about? Ministration of righteousness? He’s talking about that righteousness that the Lord Jesus Christ came and earned. It had to be an earned righteousness. He established it, not just in letter but in the Spirit and God, thereby, imputing it.

“For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth. For if that which is done away was glorious,” and that right there tells you it was done away, the law, all that pertained to Israel, done away, “much more that which remaineth is glorious. Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech: And not as Moses, which put a vail over his face, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished: But their minds were blinded.” There it is. That’s why men insist on this self-condemning profession. “Their minds were blinded for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which vail is done away in Christ. But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the vail is upon their heart. Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the vail shall be taken away. Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.” That word “liberty” really is the word “justification.” If the Spirit so shows you Christ it means that when he died your sin was completely put away. I’ll tell you what, when the Lord shows you your sin was completely put away, you’ll stop striving and you’ll stop trying to earn God’s favor, you’ll stop thinking that his favor depends on how you feel and think right now. It doesn’t. It doesn’t change one whit because Christ has paid the debt.

“But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” That’s what we want. We want to see him. We want the Spirit to show us of him and our hearts drawn to him otherwise any other type of profession is nothing but a self-condemning profession.