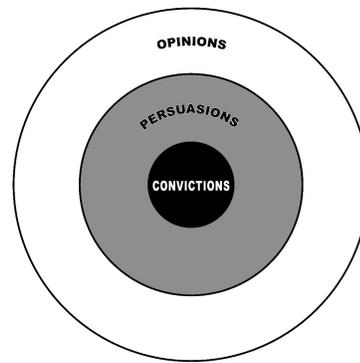


Not everything we believe needs to be— or should be—held with the same forcefulness. The NT writers themselves held more than one category of belief. Some were non-negotiable, others were matters of individual conscience.



Convictions:

- Example: Galatians 2:1-5; 11-21
- Paul considered some issues so critical that he was willing to break fellowship over them.
- Convictions are matters in which gospel itself is at stake. In these matters, Paul was *intolerant*.
- We should have very few convictions, but we should be willing to die for them.
- Convictions should be issues we've studied ourselves; second-hand convictions are dangerous.
- Convictions should be restricted to issues which are clearly taught in many passages.
- Convictions should be confirmed by church history with a general, if not perfect, consensus.

Persuasions:

- Example: Romans 14 v. 5 “Let each man be fully persuaded in his own mind.”
- Paul is *not* insisting on uniformity of views between “fully persuaded” believers.
- Each believer can have his own belief, yet remain in unity with others who disagree.
- “persuaded” (*plerophoreo*) is a strong term meaning “having a filled-in, settled belief”.
- Although a strong term, it is less than a conviction since differing persuasions are not grounds for dividing fellowship, or even for thinking badly of others (v. 10 “regarding with contempt”).
- There are many issues on which a mature believer will have a settled, full persuasion and yet not be justified in judging his brother who differs with him. We *should* have firm beliefs—yet accept others who differ from us.
- The dividing line between a “conviction” and a “persuasion” is essentiality to salvation.
- The number of issues on which we have full persuasions increases as we study.
- Persuasions are not issues which make up the main themes of Scripture, but must be issues upon which Scripture speaks (otherwise, we must hold them at the lowest level, “opinions”).
- We can argue our persuasions, but we must respect and cooperate with those who disagree.

Opinions:

- Example: 1 Corinthians 7
 - v. 6-7 “this I say by way of concession, not of command, yet I *wish* that all men were as I...”
 - Paul clearly does not think that this is God’s will for everyone (v. 6-8)
 - (*thelo*) = “desire” or “wish”. (also see: v. 32 “I *want* you to be free from concern”; v. 36 “...let him do what he *wishes*, he does not sin”; v. 39 “...she is free to be married to whom she *wishes*—but only in the Lord” note the lack of total freedom! There’s some command here.)
- Opinion is the realm of individual desire and personal preference (see v. 40). Note that in v. 12 & 17 there is *no* room for individual conscience, but in v. 25 & 40 there is.
- Opinions are beliefs, desires, or even wishes which may not be clearly taught in Scripture or which may legitimately differ for various believers. Opinions may even be “pet theories”.
- We will have many opinions, and they will change fairly frequently.
- Opinions may be on subjects with either we have not personally studied or on which the Bible is silent or ambiguous.

What does **not** distinguish these categories is **how strongly one holds** the belief:

- People can (wrongly) be extremely passionate about mere opinions.
- People can (wrongly) be wishy-washy about issues upon which heaven and hell depend.
- One may (rightly) feel very strongly about an issue and still choose, based on biblical and theological criteria, to class his view as a persuasion or opinion rather than a conviction. (Eg. That every true believer is indwelt by the Holy Spirit at the moment of justification.)
- Convictions are central beliefs, essential to salvation, over which we should be willing to denounce someone in serious disagreement and, if there is no repentance, eventually to divide fellowship.
- Persuasions are beliefs about which we are personally certain, but are not crucial to salvation. We must accept those with different persuasions as members of God's family (they may be out of fellowship with God, and that should be addressed, but that's a different issue than declaring them to be outside the Christian family).
- Opinions are beliefs about subjects on which either (1) we have a preference, but acknowledge that others may also be right in holding a different view, or (2) we are not yet confident that we know the truth of the matter.
- The issue of confidence **does not play any role** in distinguishing between persuasions and convictions. A persuasion is not a conviction about which I'm less confident. I should be equally certain about the truth of my persuasions as I am about my convictions. Here is a test: "If I remove this belief from my theological system, would I still leave the essential claims of the gospel message intact?"

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- Creeds and statements of faith are "boundary documents"—but boundaries distinguishing what from what? Believers from non-believers? Who may serve as a pastor at your church?
 - It is totally acceptable to have boundary documents which include persuasions (rather than only convictions), but the following dangers must be avoided:
 - (1) Disdain for those who do not hold our persuasions
 - (2) Confusion between convictions and persuasions

Confusion between convictions and persuasions:

- When we hold all beliefs with equal force (eg. deity of Christ and preferred translation of Bible) we are setting ourselves up for a fall. We expend too much mental and emotional energy trying to hold vast numbers of questionable ideas at the highest level of conviction. It then takes very little to rattle our system and bring the whole thing crashing down—because it's "all or nothing".
- One of the best ways to protect our faith is to learn to take some of our views less seriously. We must have some way to sort out what is crucial to our Christian faith, and what is helpful but secondary—or even optional or questionable.

From: *Enjoying God: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, by Alan Scholes