

HOW IS YOUR CONSCIENCE?

Your Conscience and the Holy Spirit!

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Introduction:

- I don't hear much said these days about the conscience.
- As a child, I was told to *let my conscience be my guide*. Now, however, we are often warned not to trust the conscience, So, which is it?
- I know of only one book ever written about the conscience. And I have never heard a whole sermon brought on the subject, at least in my memory.

Facts:

1. Our conscience is a constant companion.
 2. Every person has a conscience, that is God given.
 3. The conscience has something to say about every decision, invitation, thought, word, and deed of any significance at all.
 4. So how should I respond? What should I believe about the conscience?
 5. As a Christian, how seriously should I take the ***promptings, warnings, and accusations of my conscience?***
 6. The conscience has been condemned by many as an untrustworthy source of information, an uninformed guide not to be trusted.
Nothing could be further from the truth -- *for the Holy Spirit uses the conscience as a primary avenue of communication with the believer. (But there are facts which we need to understand.)*
 7. ***The term conscience appears 30 times in the New Testament, and almost in every instance it is spoken of in a positive light.***
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Quotes:

What is conscience? "*It is grandma,*" said a little girl.

The Readers Digest (Nov. 1960) says, "*Conscience is a thinking man's filter.*"

The Oxford dictionary says, "*It is an inward knowledge or consciousness; the faculty that passes judgment on the moral quality of actions or of individuals.*"

The Winston Dictionary says "*The moral sense or consciousness within oneself that determines whether an action is right or wrong, good or bad.*"

I. THE CONSCIENCE IS AN INNER GOD-GIVEN CAPACITY

A. It's Within Every Person to Discern Right from Wrong, Wise and Unwise:

1. Everyone has a conscience, but it is not the voice of God. (Rom. 2:14-15)
2. We all have been given an inner sense of right and wrong but even that can only operate based on the person's knowledge. (II Cor. 4:2)
3. God has placed in each person's heart a moral barometer that is constantly ***accusing*** or ***defending*** our motives and actions.

4. The word conscience is not found in the Old Testament, but instead the word **heart** is substituted (I Sam. 24:5) "*David's heart (conscience) smote him.*"
5. It is an internal judge, expressing itself before, during, and after the act.

B. For some this inner judge operates on a very primitive or uninformed level.

1. But it still operates.
2. Others suffer from what the Bible calls a **seared** conscience (See I Tim. 4:2).
3. A seared or calloused conscience is one that has been ignored so long that it cannot be felt. It is there, but has been rendered ineffective through long neglect.

II. THE CONSCIENCE AND THE HOLY SPIRIT (Rom. 9:1-2)

A. When a person is saved, the conscience takes on a new significance.

1. It **can** now function as a divine tool.
2. Now it can be like a megaphone in the hands of the Holy Spirit.
3. It becomes the means through which the Holy Spirit assures of the will of God to the mind of the saved person, via the Scriptures.

Consider an illustration: Romans 9:1-2. Paul makes a radical statement. He was so burdened over the lost condition of Israel that he was willing to forfeit his salvation for their sake.

1. Paul was willing to trade places with the lost nation of Israel,
2. This was an extreme statement that some could have challenged.
3. To remove any doubt of his sincerity, he states the claim as given in Romans 9:1-2. "*I say the truth in Christ, **I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost.***" (v. 1) What did that mean?
4. He had a clear conscience as far as this extravagant claim was concerned.
5. And he believed his conscience was tuned in to the Holy Spirit in such a fashion that his clear conscience was an indication of the Holy Spirit's approval.
6. It was like saying, "***I am not lying, if I was, the Holy Spirit would be displeased and would convict my conscience that I am lying.***"

B. The conscience functions like a computer.

1. It must be programmed to respond in specific ways to specific incoming information. (It must be programmed by the Word of God.)

2. It responds to incoming information based on the commands it has been programmed to follow.
3. As computers are responders, so the conscience is a responder.
It responds to certain input the way it has been instructed to do so.

C. God has programmed every man and woman's conscience to respond
in particular ways to certain data. Paul put it this way.

Romans 2:14-15 (NKJV)

1. God has written, or programmed His moral code into the heart of every man and woman. We were born with it.
2. When a person's actions or thoughts are contrary to that code, the conscience (if it has correct info, and is not seared) responds by sending a message to the brain, saying NO.) If we respond properly to the code -- then our conscience responds accordingly.

We experience the conscience in our lives every day. At times it comes as an inner hesitation, at other times it is just plain guilt we feel. Then at other times the opportunity to do good comes our way, and we are urged to follow through. This voice within is usually the conscience. Paul says our thoughts sometimes **defend** or point out the legitimacy of certain actions. (Rom. 2:14-15).

III. THE FALLEN CONSCIENCE WE WERE BORN WITH

A. Facts:

1. Not all consciences are good -- in fact, because of the fall (Gen. 3), they were depraved, and conscience was and is defiled. (Titus 1:15)
2. The conscience of man suffered terribly in the Fall in the Garden of Eden.
3. Eph. 4:18 described the unsaved man as *having the understanding darkened because of the blindness of their heart. (heart or conscience).*
4. Rom. 1:18-32, is a sad commentary of what happened when, *"their foolish heart was darkened,"* (vs. 21) *sin had clouded the pure Adamic conscience of mankind.*
5. I Tim. 4:2 warns us of the last days when men have *"their conscience seared with a hot iron;"* they are almost without a conscience, it is seared and warped.

B. Need: Let us pray the prayer of Hebrews 10:22 *"Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience."*

IV. THE SAVED OFTEN HAVE A WEAK CONSCIENCE, Especially When First Saved.

A. It may be weak because -- (Heb. 5:13-14) It may be too weak to rely upon.

B. It may be defiled and needs renewal. (I Cor. 8:7; 8:10)

C. Conversion brings the recreation of conscience which has been long silenced.

D. This weakness can be overcome by prayer, Bible study, and constant obedience.

E. Often converts blame their problems of failure (sinning) on:

1. their environment
2. education,
3. their friends, etc.

Remember: The Lord desires to strengthen and build up the weak conscience.

V. AT SALVATION, THE CONSCIENCE MUST BE REPROGRAMMED!

A. Facts:

1. When you became a Christian, a change began to occur in your conscience.
2. The basic moral code that everybody is born with was overhauled or reconditioned by the indwelling Holy Spirit.
3. The Spirit of Truth took up residency in your heart. He is there to bring a change in your responses.
4. He immediately set about to complete the programming of your conscience based on your having His indwelling, a new nature in Christ, a new life with new desires, goals, aspirations, values, etc. (II Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:10)

B. Purposes:

1. While you may have had a general sense of right and wrong, now the Holy Spirit began to renew your mind to more specific and complete truths that you might walk in truth. (Jh. 8:31-34; II Jh. 4 III Jh. 3-4; Jh 15:26)
2. You participate in this **renewal process** every time you read your Bible, attend worship, memorize the Word, or pray.
3. The Holy Spirit uses all this input to **reprogram** the **data base** through which your conscience evaluates --
 - a. every opportunity,
 - b. thought,
 - c. invitation,
 - d. word, and deed.
4. As this process continues the conscience tunes in with the moral code of the Holy Spirit (He uses the Word to convict and guide), a code that reflects the moral and ethical standards of God as given in the Word of God.
5. We become much more sensitive to God's will for us. The life of the new convert may change drastically as this process takes place.

VI. THE HOLY SPIRIT USES THE CONSCIENCE TO DO THREE THINGS IN PARTICULAR:

A. The Holy Spirit Uses the Conscience as an Instant Warning Device.

Men, do you have a bad habit?

1. The Holy Spirit uses the conscience to warn us of moral and physical danger.
2. The Holy Spirit was warning Paul (Acts 20:22-23) in every city that prison and hardships were facing him if he went on to Rome.
3. The Holy Spirit knows what we don't; He has a divine perspective on our lives and He can see trouble coming into our lives. (I believe He uses the conscience to make us aware, if we are attuned, walking in the Spirit. (See Gal. 5:16-17, 24.)

B. In Many Events of Life the Holy Spirit Warns Us of:

1. The potential of going to wrong places;
2. The potential of being with wrong people; making wrong decisions.
3. Having uneasiness about the friendships of our children; a *holy sense a foreboding of what is taking place, given by the Holy Spirit.* (Prov. 22:3) *"Whatsoever is not of faith is sin..."* (Rom. 14:22-23)
4. The Spirit-filled parent has extra help. . .*The Holy Spirit's inner direction, if the parent is discerning,* aware of His leadership through the Word of God as the foundation of His work of convicting our spirit.

C. The Holy Spirit Energizes the Conscience to Function as an Accurate Evaluator and Discerner: (Rom. 2:14-15)

1. The conscience, once it is empowered by the Holy Spirit, and taught by the Word of God, can correctly discern or evaluate what is and what is not of God.
2. In the apostle Paul's second letter to the believers in Corinth, it is apparent that he was not sure of their confidence in his ministry.
 - a. He was sure that God approved of what he was doing.
 - b. He really wanted the Corinthians to trust him as well. (II Cor. 5:11)
 - The word **manifest** means "*clear, obvious, apparent, or self-evident.*"
 - Paul was concerned, "*It is clear to God what I am up to. I hope your consciences will make it equally clear to you.*"

Paul was asking them to evaluate his ministry based on the message they received from their consciences. He believed their consciences would line up with the truth... as an accurate discernor/evaluator! (See II Cor. 4:2)

D. The Holy Spirit Energizes the Conscience to Function as a Judge and Jury!

1. This third way in which the Holy Spirit works through the conscience is the one with which we are most familiar -- the Holy Spirit uses the conscience to convict us of sin.
2. Jh 16: 8-11 -- When He comes, he will convict the world of sin... righteousness, and of judgment; convincing men about sin.

3. I Pet. 3:15-16 -- The need to have a **good conscience** is always there.

- a. Here Peter views the conscience as a trustworthy indicator of the presence or absence of sin.
- b. A good or clear conscience suggests no sin.
- c. II Cor. 1:12 -- Here Paul communicated the same idea. *“Our boasting is this: **the testimony of our conscience** that we conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God, and more abundantly toward you.”*
(II Cor. 1:12) NKJV
- c. Acts 24:16 -- Here Paul wrote about having a conscience void of offense toward God and toward man.

Applications:

- Peter and Paul view conscience (enlightened) trained by the Word of God, (energized by the Holy Spirit) as a trustworthy source of information regarding the presence of sin.
- Peter and Paul looked to the conscience for evidence of ones conviction.
- The conscience is the realm in which the Holy Spirit carries out His convicting work.
- When the conscience is stirred, chances are, the Holy Spirit has spoken.
- **Do you hear from the Holy Spirit?** Likely you do, in fact **you do** when He, indwelling you, convicts about sin as the Word of God becomes the standard of righteousness for your life. (Many Christians wonder if the Holy Spirit ever speaks to them... indeed He does.)
- Just how practical is the Spirit-filled life? For you?
- This is not a subject for some elite Christians; the Spirit-filled life is not reserved for a few super-saints.
- The Spirit-filled life is not reserved for some who are more **in tune** with the **deeper things** of God. . . it is for every saint of God.
SO . . .
 - a. The conscience is to be taken seriously.
 - b. It is one of the primary tools the Holy Spirit uses to guide the life of the saint of God.
 - c. Don't ignore the warnings and promptings of the conscience.
 - d. Join with the apostle Paul in striving to keep a conscience clear before God.

***A clear conscience is evidence of a life in harmony with the Holy Spirit.
and that is what the wonderful Spirit-filled life is all about!***

Note these verses: (What do you have?)

Convicted Conscience -- Rom. 2:15;

Purged Conscience - Heb. 9:14;

Pure Conscience -- I Tim. 3:9; II Tim. 1:3;

Weak Conscience -- Heb. 5:13-14; I Cor. 8:7; I Cor. 8:10;

Good Conscience -- I Tim. 5:6; 1:19-20; 3:16; 4:1-2