

What Is A Defective Conscience?

In 1984 an Aviance Airline jet crashed in Spain. Investigators studying the accident made an eerie discovery. The black box cockpit recorder reveals that several minutes before impact a shrill, computer-synthesized voice from the plane's automatic warning system told the crew repeatedly in English, **PULL UP, PULL UP!**

The pilot, evidently thinking the system was malfunctioning, snapped, SHUT UP, GRINGO! and switch the system off. Minutes later the plane plowed into the side of the mountain. Everyone on board died.

This tragic news story is a perfect parable of the way modern people treat the warning messages of their consciences. The wisdom of our age says that guilt feelings are nearly always erroneous or hurtful; therefore we should switch them off. But is this truth, is it good advice? What, after all is the conscience-- this sense of guilt we all seem to feel? How much heed should we pay to the pangs of a grieved conscience? the conscience is not infallible, is it: So why listen to it? How do we know whether the guilt we feel is legitimate or whether we are simply burdened with an excess of guilty feelings?

I. What Is the Conscience?

The world sees the conscience as a defect that robs people of their self-esteem. But far from being a defect or a disorder, the ability to sense our guilt is a tremendous gift from God. He designed the conscience into the framework of the human soul. It is the automatic warning system that tells us to PULL UP, PULL UP, before we crash and burn, or in other words before we get into sin and bring destructive results in our lives and in others.

1. ***Conscience is at the heart of what distinguishes us as human.*** People, unlike animals, can contemplate their own actions, reflect upon their doings, and make moral self-evaluations. This is the function of the conscience. The conscience is an innate ability to sense right and wrong. Even the unsaved have a conscience... which is a law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness, bringing accusation or else defending them. (Look at Romans 2:14-15) The conscience entreats us to do what we believe is right and restrains us from doing what is wrong. It is not to be equated with the voice of God or the law of God. It is a human faculty that judges our actions and thoughts by the light of the highest standard we perceive. It acts upon the truth we have accepted as right or wrong. *It can only judge properly as we have our hearts saturated with truth-- the Word of God.*

2. ***The conscience functions like a skylight, not a light bulb.*** It lets light into the soul for it does not produce its own light. Its effectiveness is determined by the pure light we expose to it, and by how clean we keep it. Cover it or put it in total darkness and it ceases to function. This is why the Word of God teaches us the need of having a pure conscience (I Tim. 3:9) and warns us against anything that would defile or muddy the conscience. (I Cor. 8:7; Titus 1:15)

3. ***The word conscience is a combination of the Latin words scire (to know)***

and con (together). The Greek word for *conscience* is found more than thirty times in the New Testament and it is *suneidesis*, which literally means *co-knowledge*. Conscience is knowledge within oneself. . . that is the conscience knows our inner motives and our true thoughts. So then conscience is above reason and beyond intellect. We may rationalize, trying to justify ourselves in our own minds, but a violated conscience will not be easily convinced.

II. Consider These Verses About the Conscience.

Acts 23:1 “*And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all **good conscience** before God until this day.*”

Acts 24:16 “*And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a **conscience void of offense** toward God, and toward men.*”

II Cor. 1:12 “*For our rejoicing is this, the **testimony of our conscience**, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward.*”

I Tim. 1:5 “*Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a **good conscience**, and of faith unfeigned.*”

I Tim. 1:19 “*... Holding faith and a **good conscience**; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck.*”

I Tim. 4:2 “*Speaking lies in hypocrisy: having their **consciences seared** with a hot iron.*”

II Tim. 1:3 “*I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with **pure conscience**, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day.*”

Heb. 9:14 “*How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God; **purge your conscience** from dead works to serve the living God.*”

III. What Is the Problem In Many Lives Today?

The problem is that multitudes today respond to their conscience by attempting to suppress it, overrule it, or silence it.

1. ***Many churches today offer Christ as a Savior*** from meaninglessness, as a means to personal fulfillment, as a solution to self-image problems, or an answer to emotional needs. The gospel they extend to unbelievers makes no appeal to the conscience, no mention to sin. It is therefore an impotent and spurious message.

2. ***Also many conclude that the real blame for their wrong behavior lies*** -- in some childhood trauma, the way their parents raised them, societal pressures, or some other cause considered beyond their control. Or they convince themselves that their

sin is a clinical problem-not a moral one--and therefore they define their vice as some kind of disease. Both the mind and the conscience can be so defiled that a person ceases to make a distinction between what is pure and what is impure. (Tit. 1:15)

3. ***In the Hebrew text the word for conscience is leb, and is usually translated heart.*** The Old Testament did not draw a distinction between the conscience and the heart or the rest of the inner person. When Pharaoh ***hardened his heart*** (Exod 8:15), he was steeling his conscience against God's will. When the Scripture speaks of a ***tender heart*** (consider II Chron. 34:27) it refers to someone having a sensitive conscience. If we are upright in heart (Psa. 7:10) we are a person with a pure conscience. When David prayed, "*Create in me a clean heart, O God*" (Psa. 51:10), he was seeking to have his life and his conscience cleansed. *But today many, even Christians, resist the conviction that is brought by their conscience and in so doing they experience continued sin, failure and defeat in their daily lives.*

4. ***We need the discipline that comes from a healthy conscience that can be used by the Holy Spirit to bring conviction in our lives.***

IV. The Scripture says Christ came to save people from SIN. The popular gospel of our generation usually leaves the impression that Jesus is a Savior from trouble, sadness, loneliness, despair, pain, and suffering.

1. One of the fundamental truths of the gospel is that all of us are contemptible sinners (Rom. 3:9-23).

2. The only way to find real forgiveness and freedom from our sin is through humble, contrite repentance. Yes, we must "*pull up, pull up.*"

3. We can't escape guilt by telling ourselves we are really not that bad.

4. We must come face to face with the exceeding sinfulness of our sin. (Consider Luke 18:10-14)