

WHAT IS CONSCIENCE?

WHAT IS CONSCIENCE A BIBLICAL ANALYSIS

INTRODUCTION: **Conscience** has been succinctly described as the "soul distinguishing between what is morally good and bad, prompting to do the former and shun the latter." **Webster** defines **conscience** as the sense or consciousness of the moral goodness or blameworthiness of one's own conduct, intentions, or character together with a feeling of obligation to do right or be good. In addition to an innate awareness of God's law, men have a warning system that activates when they choose to ignore or disobey that law. It's that instinctive, built-in sense of right and wrong that activates guilt. All mankind has an innate inner sense of right and wrong which Scripture refers to as conscience. And so sociologists have encountered in all cultures a sense of sin and fear of judgment which leads that culture to make some attempt to appease whatever gods are feared and this built in "moral/ethical radar detector" (so to speak) is what Paul is alluding to in Romans 2.

*Conscience is like a sundial
When the truth of God shines on it,
It points in the right direction.*

Where is your "sundial" pointing today dear reader?

CONSCIENCE: DEFINITION OF SUNEIDESIS

Conscience (4893) (**suneidesis/syneidesis** is derived from **sun/syn** = with + **eido** = know) literally means a "knowing with", properly, joint-knowing, a co-knowledge with oneself or a being of one's own witness in the sense that one's own conscience "takes the stand" as the chief witness, testifying either to one's innocence or guilt. **Suneidesis** means knowledge shared with one's self. It describes the witness borne to one's conduct by that faculty by which we apprehend the will of God. Conscience equips all people with the God-given capacity to know right from wrong. Conscience serves as our "inner witness" in acting as a free moral agent (cf. Jn 1:4,7,9; Gen 1:26,27). Conscience however is only accurate as a person submits to God's word. "Conscience is an *innate* discernment, self-judging consciousness." (Abbott)

The Greek noun **suneidesis** is the exact counterpart of the Latin **con-science**, "a knowing with," a shared or joint knowledge. It is our awareness of ourselves in all the relationships of life, especially ethical relationships. We have ideas of right and wrong; and when we perceive their truth and claims on us, and will not obey, our souls are at war with themselves and with the law of God

Suneidesis is that process of thought which distinguishes what it considers morally good or bad, commending the good, condemning the bad, and so prompting to do the former and avoid the latter.

Conscience literally connects *physical* "knowing" (living "through the body") to *spiritual* (moral) knowing.

After regeneration, *syneidēsis* can be directly illuminated by faith. Before this, conscience leads someone in the right direction, but not into faith which is only experienced by believers and is the pure work of God (cf. Ro 12:3; Eph 2:8; 2Th 1:11). Salvation enables the conscience to experience faith, laying hold of God's preferred-will (cf. Calvin). Accordingly, faith and conscience are closely associated in the NT (2Co 5:7,11; 1Ti 1:4-6; 2Ti 1:3-5; Titus 1:13-15; Heb 10:22) Conscience is more and more reliable as it becomes *educated in the Word of God*. Obedience to God strengthens the *convictions* of conscience (its moral reliability), even as disobedience to God weakens the conscience.

Suneidesis - 30x in 29v in **NAS** - conscience(24), conscience'(4), consciences(1), consciousness(1). Acts 23:1; Acts 24:16; Rom. 2:15; Rom. 9:1; Rom. 13:5; 1 Co. 8:7; 1 Co. 8:10; 1 Co. 8:12; 1 Co. 10:25; 1 Co. 10:27; 1 Co. 10:28; 1 Co. 10:29; 2 Co. 1:12; 2 Co. 4:2; 2 Co. 5:11; 1 Tim. 1:5; 1 Tim. 1:19; 1 Tim. 3:9; 1 Tim. 4:2; 2 Tim. 1:3; Tit. 1:15; Heb. 9:9; Heb. 9:14; Heb. 10:2; Heb. 10:22; Heb. 13:18; 1 Pet. 2:19; 1 Pet. 3:16; 1

Only one use in the non-apocryphal Septuagint - Eccl 10:20NET+ Do not curse a king even in your thoughts (Lxx = sunedesis) - English of Septuagint = Even in thy conscience, curse not the king;

Gilbrant on sunedesis in Classical Greek - Formally a compound made up of sun (4713), "with, together," and eidēsis, "knowledge," sunēdēsis (cf. the parent verb sunōida [4774]) means "knowledge, communication, information." Sometimes the term occurs in legal contexts of witnesses who share testimony. In a second, reflexive sense, sunēdēsis signifies "consciousness" (in a neutral sense) and from that it means "inner consciousness," i.e., "conscience." "Conscience" particularly carries moral implications; it is a "knowledge" of right from wrong (Liddell-Scott; cf. Maurer, "sunēdēsis," Kittel, 7:898-902). Maurer concludes that sunēdēsis as "conscience" generally has a negative nuance, because self-examination usually results in condemnation (ibid., 7:900). This is especially true among pre-Christian Greek authors, although Roman writers might speak of a "good" or "clear" conscience (Hahn, "Conscience," Colin Brown, 1:348f.). ([Complete Biblical Library Greek-English Dictionary](#))

W E Vine -

lit., "a knowing with" (syn, "with," oida, "to know"), i.e., "a co-knowledge (with oneself), the witness borne to one's conduct by conscience, that faculty by which we apprehend the will of God, as that which is designed to govern our lives;" hence (a) the sense of guiltiness before God; Heb. 10:2; (b) that process of thought which distinguishes what it considers morally good or bad, commending the good, condemning the bad, and so prompting to do the former, and avoid the latter; Rom. 2:15 (bearing witness with God's law); Heb. 9:1; 2 Cor. 1:12; acting in a certain way because "conscience" requires it, Rom. 13:5; so as not to cause scruples of "conscience" in another, 1 Cor. 10:28, 29; not calling a thing in question unnecessarily, as if conscience demanded it, 1 Cor. 10:25, 27; "commending oneself to every man's conscience," 2 Cor. 4:2; cp. 2 Cor. 5:11. There may be a "conscience" not strong enough to distinguish clearly between the lawful and the unlawful, 1 Cor. 8:7, 10, 12 (some regard consciousness as the meaning here). The phrase "conscience toward God," in 1 Pet. 2:19, signifies a "conscience" (or perhaps here, a consciousness) so controlled by the apprehension of God's presence, that the person realizes that griefs are to be borne in accordance with His will. Heb. 9:9 teaches that sacrifices under the Law could not so perfect a person that he could regard himself as free from guilt. For various descriptions of "conscience" see Acts 23:1; Acts 24:16; 1 Cor. 8:7; 1 Tim. 1:5, 19; 1 Tim. 3:9; 1 Tim. 4:2; 2 Tim. 1:3; Titus 1:15; Heb. 9:14; Heb. 10:22; Heb. 13:18; 1 Pet. 3:16, 21. ([Vine's Expository Dictionary](#))

Colin Brown (Source: online resource [New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology page 348](#))

Conscience - συνείδησις G5287 (syneidēsis), consciousness, conscience; σύννοια G5323 (synōida), perf. with pres. meaning, be conscious of, have a conscience about.

CLASSIC LITERATURE: From Aesch. and Hdt. in classical Gk. the verbal form synōida is found with the following meanings: (a) to share the knowledge of, be privy to (e.g. as an accusing witness or as one who is able to clear someone); and (b) in the reflexive form synōida emautō, to be conscious of (cf. the famous statement of Socrates: "For I know that I have no wisdom, small or great," Plato, Apol., 21b).

From the 1st cent. B.C. syneidēsis and syneidos, the neut. participle used as a noun, are used synonymously in both pagan Gk. and hel. Jewish writings. syneidos is first found in Dem., meaning faculty of memory. syneidēsis first occurs in Democ., Frag. 297. According to context, it means consciousness, conscience and conscientiousness.

1. Originally syneidēsis appears to focus on knowledge: the capacity to relate to oneself, especially when one looks back at one's own past. This looking back did not stop short with ascertaining facts, but led to evaluations and judgments about the criterion of good and evil. Hence, the word gradually acquired the current moral meaning of conscience. This development began with the Seven Sages (Periander, Bias; according to Stobaeus), and is common in this sense from the 1st cent. B.C., occasionally in the historians Dio, Strabo and Plutarch. Depending on whether a man can justify himself when he looks back on his actions, writers speak of a good (agathē or orthē) or a bad (deinē or ponēra) conscience. The usual implication is that the good conscience is at peace, whereas the bad conscience makes itself painfully felt by relentlessly troubling its owner. An example of this is the tragedy of Orestes who is guilty of matricide, and sees conscience as a sickness that destroys him. The description hē synesis, hoti synōida dein' eirgasmenos sees conscience as

consciousness of evil deeds (Eur., Or., 396). In Gk. literature the Erinyes were a mythical embodiment of the afflictions of an evil conscience.

2. It is striking that pre-Christian Gk. literature speaks almost exclusively of a bad conscience, whereas the Romans often spoke of a *conscientia bona* (good conscience) and even of a *conscientia praeclara* (clear conscience) and a *conscientia optima* (best conscience), especially Cicero. *Conscientia* is a retrospective knowledge of failures and vices which frequently has an accusing, disconcerting character. "But in the ethically robust structure of the Roman officer and lawyer, who knows that his duties are clearly defined and can be discharged, there easily arises the sense of duty done" (C. Maurer, TDNT VII 907; cf. Caesar, *Bellum Civile*, 3, 60, 2).

Especially in the Later Stoa (Seneca) the retrospective character of conscience was toned down under the influence of the Pythagoreans. Conscience was seen as a watchman (*epitropos*; Lat. *testis*, witness), bestowed by God upon the individual. Its function was to guide him to live according to nature and to direct his moral progress. "In his conscience he has a reliable direction-sign for his conduct" (M. Pohlenz, *Die Stoa*, I, 1948, 320). Its task was still in the main that of a critical court of appeal in man that passed judgment on what had happened or at best on what was happening. Nevertheless, the ground was prepared for conscience to become a normative guide (cf. C. Maurer, TDNT, VII 907).

OLD TESTAMENT

1. The OT has no special word for the phenomenon of conscience. In the LXX *syneidēsis* occurs only in 3 late passages (Eccl. 10:20; Wis. 17:11; Sir. 42:18). This may be due to a different understanding of human nature from the Greeks'. For the Israelites of the old covenant the problem of man's attitude to himself was less significant than that of his attitude to God. He was more concerned with his accountability before God than with exploring his self-consciousness. Confession was made to God whose law man sought to fulfil in obedience. "Conscience is hearing in the sense of willing adherence" (C. Maurer, TDNT VII 908).

This does not mean that the OT knows nothing of the reality of a tormented conscience. But the voice of conscience possesses no intrinsic value. It is the voice of the divine judge, demanding from man an account of his dealings. The function of conscience is attributed to the → heart (Heb. *lēb*). Thus the heart of David smote him to remind him of his guilt (1 Sam. 24:6; 2 Sam. 24:10). It summoned him to penitence and regret. Ps. 51:10, which according to its title was a Psalm of David written after his adultery with Bathsheba, contains the plea: "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me" (51:10). The idea of a clean heart, which is more common in the LXX than in the Heb. Masoretic text of the OT, points forward to the notion of a good conscience in the NT.

2. Where *syneidēsis* occurs in the LXX, an assimilation to the Gk. idea of conscience may be ascertained. This is illustrated by Wis. 17:11 which speaks of a bad conscience in an ethical sense ("for wickedness condemned by its own witness is cowardly, and driven into a pass by conscience it always does what is worst"). Here conscience "takes on the function of the prosecutor and judge in one person" (C. Maurer, TDNT VII 909).

3. The correspondence between the OT notion of the heart and the Gk. concept of conscience is still more marked in Philo, who was "the first to think through theologically a doctrine of conscience" (C. Maurer, TDNT, 911). Philo heard "its voice just as loud as the Roman Seneca" (M. Pohlenz, op. cit., 377). For him conscience is no mere autonomous court of appeal, but a normative entity shaped by the law of God. Its task is to *elenchein* (convict, reprove, expose), i.e. to bring man consciousness of sin and penitence. "When it (the *elenchus* native to the soul) is once awakened, it comes forth as an accuser, indicts, charges, and shames; on the other hand it also instructs as a judge, giving correction, advising conversion, and when it persuades it is pleased and propitiated" (Decal., 87). Otherwise, it continues to trouble the sinner. Conscience performs all this in order to drive the sinner into the arms of a merciful God. This relationship with God provides the OT foundation for Philo's doctrine of conscience.

NEW TESTAMENT:

In the NT the vb. *synoida* occurs only twice. In 1 Cor. 4:4 it is reflexive: "I am not aware of anything against myself" (RSV); cf. however NEB "I have nothing on my conscience." Acts 5:2 suggests a shared knowledge: "and with his wife's knowledge he kept back ..." (RSV). On the other hand, the noun *syneidēsis* occurs some 30 times. In addition, it appears in some manuscripts of Jn. 8:9 in the pericope about the woman taken in adultery which is omitted from the best texts of Jn. Apart from this, it does not occur in the Gospels. Apart from two instances in Acts, the passages where it occurs are all in Paul, including the Pastoral Epistles, and in Heb.

and 1 Pet.

1. In Rom. 2:15 *syneidēsis* stands alongside *kardia* (→ heart) and *logismoi* (→ thoughts; cf. *dialogismoi*, opinions, Rom. 14:1) as critical organs. They enable the Gentiles to live a life that corresponds to that of the Jews according to the law. Conscience is assigned the role of awakening awareness of the law that is written on the heart. This is shown by the vb. *symmartyrein* (bear witness with; cf. Rom. 9:1 where Paul appeals to his conscience as a witness that he is not lying). Conscience appears—to put it graphically—as a court of appeal which is not able to promulgate any statutes (for only God himself can do this) but is able to deliver judgment on the cases before it. ([Ed.] Rom. 2:14ff., is often taken to apply to the hypothetical case of Gentiles keeping the law without having heard of the OT law or the gospel. Karl Barth has questioned whether this is Paul's meaning and suggests that Paul is thinking of Gentile converts to Christianity in whom the promise of the new covenant, that the law will be written on their hearts, is fulfilled [CD, I, 2, 304; II, 2, 242, 604; IV, 1, 33, 369, 395; cf. C. Brown, *Karl Barth and the Christian Message*, 1967, 96. But see also R. Atallah, "An Egyptian Parallel to Romans 2:15", *Themelios* 10, 3, 1974, 1–7].)

The thought of conscience as a court of appeal is clear in the passages in which Paul deals with the Corinthians' question of the propriety of eating meat that has been sacrificed to idols (1 Cor. 8:7ff.; 10:25ff.). Paul makes two points in this connection. On the one hand, he proclaims the Christian's freedom from regimentation by an alien conscience. He is concerned with what Barth calls "the conscience that is freed through the Word of God" (CD, I, 2, 788). On the other hand, he calls for regard to the more sensitive conscience of another person.

Paul rejoices in the testimony of his own conscience that has been informed by God (2 Cor. 1:12). Likewise, he hopes that the consciences of others which are open to the sight of God will recognize the sincerity of his missionary life and work (2 Cor. 4:2; 5:11). Thus not only is the avoidance of a bad, accusing conscience (as is mentioned in Jn. 8:9) worth aspiring after. It is even more important to have a good conscience which confirms the agreement of faith and life. Appealing to such a conscience which is in line with the will of God, Paul can also demand obedience to those in authority (Rom. 13:5). A similar thought occurs in 1 Pet. 2:19; 3:16, 21.

Accordingly, Acts 24:16 lays down what is virtually a rule of conduct: "I [Paul] always take pains to have a clear conscience toward God and towards men." Similarly, Paul began his appeal to the council of Jewish leaders: "Brethren, I have lived before God in all good conscience up to this day" (Acts 23:1).

2. The Pastoral Epistles lay great emphasis on a good conscience. They speak of the "corrupt and unbelieving" whose "minds and consciences are corrupted" (Tit. 1:15), and "liars whose consciences are seared" (1 Tim. 4:2). By contrast, Christians are to hold "faith and a good conscience [*agathēn syneidēsin*]" (1 Tim. 1:19; cf. 1 Pet. 3:16) and "to serve with a clear conscience [*en kathara syneidēsei*]" (2 Tim. 1:3). The good and the clear conscience thus become a characteristic of the Christian, as for him "the verdict of conscience and the verdict of faith coincide" (W. Schrage, *Die Konkreten Einzelgebote in der paulinischen Paränese*, 1961, 152). Alongside a "pure heart [*kathara kardia*]" and a "sincere faith [*pistis anhypokritos*]", 1 Tim. 1:5 names the conscience as the source of love in action. In short, the conscience can be regarded as the place where the "mystery of faith" is to be found (1 Tim. 3:9). That is why "the appeal to God for a clear conscience", which is the essence of baptism (1 Pet. 3:21), is so important. The same passage links it with "the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (→ Resurrection; → Faith).

3. Heb. also stresses the christological basis of the NT understanding of conscience, when it declares that "the blood of Christ" purifies the conscience "from dead works to serve the living God" (Heb. 9:14). Using the symbolism of the Day of Atonement ritual in which the high priest entered the sanctuary once a year, Heb. 10:22 urges believers to enter themselves, drawing near "with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water." Late Judaism knew of no complete release from consciousness of sin despite repeated cultic rites (cf. Heb. 9:9; 10:2). It is only because of the high priestly sacrifice of Christ that "we are sure that we have a clear conscience" (Heb. 13:18).

4. In this way the Christian understanding of conscience is transformed by faith in the forgiving power of Jesus Christ. The Greeks saw conscience as something bad operating retrospectively. Christians came to see conscience as being made clean through trust. Its purity lay in the believer's knowledge of his standing in Christ. The fact that it was directed by the Word of God gave the believer heart to serve God in love.

H-C. Hahn

The researches of C. A. Pierce, [Conscience in the New Testament \(BORROW\)](#), 1955, have shed further light on the background of the whole word-group and have led to a plausible suggestion as to how *syneidēsis*

came to feature in the NT epistles. His detailed analysis of the terms in secular Gk. has overthrown the widespread idea that it was a Stoic technical term. At best there are only 3 quotations that can be offered in evidence for the latter idea (op. cit., 13 ff.; see also the tabular analysis of the use of the entire word-group on pp. 132–147). There is little ground for thinking that Paul adopted it from the Stoics. Pierce contends that the term was an everyday Gk. word which in general had the morally bad negative sense of the pain that we feel when we do something wrong.

Pierce suggests that the term came into the NT via the Corinthian church, where conscience was used as a catchword (op. cit., 60 ff.). This explains the absence of the term in the OT and the gospels and its widespread use in the Corinthian correspondence and later epistles. The Corinthians were appealing to conscience to justify their attitudes in the various burning issues of the day, in particular the practice of eating meat that had been offered to idols. Because some claimed that they could do this with a clear conscience, they argued that the practice was permissible. Paul condemns the idea that conscience alone is an invariable and infallible guide. In 1 Cor. 4:4 he uses the verbal form *ouden gar emautō synoida* ("I have nothing on my conscience", NEB) to show that that by itself does not acquit him of any wrong that he may have done. A man may have a clear conscience because it is dead or inadequately educated. There are other factors in deciding the rightness and wrongness of actions. At best conscience is a check. Later on in the epistle Paul explains the limitations of conscience in the light of the burning issues at Corinth of the propriety for a Christian to eat meat sacrificed to idols. The weak brother may eat the meat, following the example of the strong brother who knows that idols are nothing. He is weak in the sense that he has no clear principles of conduct settled in his mind. He eats, and is then tormented by conscience (1 Cor. 8:7, 10, 12). The problem here is that of a sensitive conscience which at the same time is imperfectly educated. The way out of the dilemma is not to act out of "→ knowledge" (8:1ff.), or by copying the "strong" brother whose conscience does not pain him, but out of love. "Therefore, if food is a cause of my brother's falling, I will never eat meat lest I cause my brother to fall" (1Co 8:13).

In ch. 10 conscience is again given a subordinate role. Again the Christian's motive is to be love (1Co 10:23f.). Indeed, the Corinthians are to avoid referring the matter of conscience (1Co 10:27, 28, 29). The question is lifted to the higher plane of concern for the weaker man and his conscience. The believer may eat whatever is sold in the market. It is best to avoid asking questions about its origin, so as to avoid raising questions of conscience. But if the weaker brother says that a piece of meat has been offered to idols, it is best not to eat it. It is a case, not of defiling the eater's conscience or of weakening his spirituality by engaging in dubious practices, but of avoiding inflaming the sensitive man's conscience.

In other words, conscience can be a highly defective guide, if one relies solely on the absence of the pain that we call conscience as a guide to conduct. To function at all, it depends upon knowledge (1Co 10:25ff.). For conscience by itself could not tell where the meat had come from. And it only operates effectively in relation to moral principles outside itself. A clear conscience is no guarantee of being right (1Co 4:4). On the other hand, an over-sensitive conscience may lead to tormenting dilemmas that can only be resolved on the other grounds (chs. 8 and 10). The ultimate grounds for action are love and the glory of God (1Co 10:31ff.; cf. 1Co 13:1–14:1).

If Pierce is right, conscience came into the NT via the troubles at Corinth. Thereafter, Paul began to find a place for it in his own thinking. Subsequent treatment in the NT amplifies the role assigned to conscience in 1 Cor. The conscience may be seared by constant disregard, and therefore fail to fulfil its function in those who teach false doctrines and practices (1 Tim. 4:2; Tit. 1:15). Conversely, the story of Jephthah in Jdg. 11 appears to be that of a man with an over-sensitive conscience (although, of course, the word is not used). He had made a vow to God which involved the most ungodly consequences. Perhaps his conscience forced him to fulfil the vow, even though human sacrifice was against Heb. religion. To say this, however, does not mean that the NT writers urge that conscience should be ignored. Christ died to make the conscience clean (Heb. 9:14; 10:22; cf. 9:9; 10:2; 1 Pet. 3:21). But the conscience is only part of our moral make-up. Its work is largely negative. As the pain we feel when we do something wrong, it acts like a red warning light. It serves as a sort of moral double-check on our actions. It operates largely on the basis of experience. It needs to be educated and carefully tended. But as such, it is very important (Acts 23:1; 24:16; Rom. 2:15; 9:1; 13:5; 1 Tim. 1:5, 19; 3:9; 2 Tim. 1:3; 1 Pet. 2:19; 3:16; 2 Cor. 1:12).

When we speak of conscience in English, our meaning often seems to oscillate between conscience in the narrow sense as the pain, or the instrument which makes us feel pain, when we transgress the moral law, and the wider sense of moral consciousness. The latter involves the whole person, viewed as a responsible moral being. It is not just a pain which works retrospectively in the light of past actions and which by extension might

enable us to forecast what future actions might cause us pain. It includes the power of discernment and rational reflection which enables the mind to analyse situations and actions, to discern moral values and principles, the capacity to hear and apply the Word of God to our lives, and also conscience in the narrower sense. For the Christian, guidance belongs to the realm of moral consciousness in this wider sense which includes *syneidēsis* in the narrower sense, but is by no means confined to it. C. Brown

What is Conscience? ([These are the "bullet points" from the article by Joe Carter](#). See link for unpacking of each point)

1. Conscience is an internal rational capacity that bears witness to our value system.
 2. Conscience is a trustworthy guide only when it is informed and ruled by God.
 3. Conscience is to be subordinated to, and informed by, the revealed Word of God.
 4. To willfully act against conscience is always a sin.
 5. Conscience can be suppressed by sin.
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QUESTION - [What is the conscience? Gotquestions.org](#)

ANSWER - The conscience is defined as that part of the human psyche that induces mental anguish and feelings of guilt when we violate it and feelings of pleasure and well-being when our actions, thoughts and words are in conformity to our value systems. The Greek word translated “conscience” in all New Testament references is *suneidēsis*, meaning “moral awareness” or “moral consciousness.” The conscience reacts when one’s actions, thoughts, and words conform to, or are contrary to, a standard of right and wrong.

There is no Hebrew term in the Old Testament equivalent to *suneidēsis* in the New Testament. The lack of a Hebrew word for “conscience” may be due to the Jewish worldview, which was communal rather than individual. The Hebrew considered himself as a member of a covenant community that related corporately to God and His laws, rather than as an individual. In other words, the Hebrew was confident in his own position before God if the Hebrew nation as a whole was in good fellowship with Him.

The New Testament concept of conscience is more individual in nature and involves three major truths. First, conscience is a God-given capacity for human beings to exercise self-evaluation. Paul refers several times to his own conscience being “good” or “clear” (Acts 23:1; 24:16; 1 Corinthians 4:4). Paul examined his own words and deeds and found them to be in accordance with his morals and value system, which were, of course, based on God’s standards. His conscience verified the integrity of his heart.

Second, the New Testament portrays the conscience as a witness to something. Paul says the Gentiles have consciences that bear witness to the presence of the law of God written on their hearts, even though they did not have the Mosaic Law (Romans 2:14-15). He also appeals to his own conscience as a witness that he speaks the truth (Romans 9:1) and that he has conducted himself in holiness and sincerity in his dealings with men (2 Corinthians 1:12). He also says that his conscience tells him his actions are apparent to both God and the witness of other men’s consciences (2 Corinthians 5:11).

Third, the conscience is a servant of the individual’s value system. An immature or weak value system produces a weak conscience, while a fully informed value system produces a strong sense of right and wrong. In the Christian life, one’s conscience can be driven by an inadequate understanding of scriptural truths and can produce feelings of guilt and shame disproportionate to the issues at hand. Maturing in the faith strengthens the conscience.

This last function of the conscience is what Paul addresses in his instructions regarding eating food sacrificed to idols. He makes the case that, since idols are not real gods, it makes no difference if food has been sacrificed to them or not. But some in the Corinthian church were weak in their understanding and believed that such gods really existed. These immature believers were horrified at the thought of eating food sacrificed to the gods, because their consciences were informed by erroneous prejudices and superstitious views. Therefore, Paul encourages those more mature in their understanding not to exercise their freedom to eat if it would cause the consciences of their weaker brothers to condemn their actions. The lesson here is that, if our consciences are clear because of mature faith and understanding, we are not to cause those with weaker consciences to stumble by exercising the freedom that comes with a stronger conscience.

Another reference to conscience in the New Testament is to a conscience that is “seared” or rendered insensitive as though it had been cauterized with a hot iron (1 Timothy 4:1-2). Such a conscience is hardened and calloused, no longer feeling anything. A person with a seared conscience no longer listens to its promptings, and he can sin with abandon, delude himself into thinking all is well with his soul, and treat others insensitively and without compassion.

As Christians, we are to keep our consciences clear by obeying God and keeping our relationship with Him in good standing. We do

this by the application of His Word, renewing and softening our hearts continually. We consider those whose consciences are weak, treating them with Christian love and compassion.

QUESTION - [What does it mean to have a good conscience? GOTQUESTIONS](#)

ANSWER - In 1 Timothy 1:3–11, the apostle Paul instructs his protégé Timothy on how to deal with false teachers in the church. After giving a brief description of their false teachings (verses 3–4), Paul explains why he wants Timothy to stop these destructive and divisive ideas from spreading: “The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (1 Timothy 1:5).

The motivation behind Paul’s instruction to Timothy is love. Instead of demonstrating love for one another, the believers in Ephesus were wasting time in “endless discussion” and “meaningless speculations,” arguing about “myths and spiritual pedigrees” that did nothing to “help people live a life of faith in God” (1 Timothy 1:4, NLT). They were so caught up in controversy that they missed the higher calling—to love God first and then others (Matthew 22:35–40; 1 John 3:11; 4:7; 1 Corinthians 13:13).

As vital as it is to be doctrinally correct, it is equally important to have our heart attitudes and resulting behaviors right before God. Our mission is not to be right and show others they are wrong. Love is the true goal. The quality of love should define our lives and motivate our actions above all else. In 1 Timothy 1:5, Paul lists three foundational attributes necessary to cultivate love: a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith. These were virtues the false teachers had “turned away from” (1 Timothy 1:6NLT).

So, what does it mean to have a good conscience? The original Greek word [agathos](#)) that Paul uses in 1 Timothy 1:5, rendered as “good” in English, refers to moral excellence. The “conscience” ([suneidesis](#) in Greek) is the psychological faculty or internal capability that allows a person to distinguish between right and wrong. It is the inner judge written on the believer’s heart (see Jeremiah 31:33) that accuses and convicts when we do wrong and approves when we do right (see Romans 2:14–15).

A person with a good conscience lives and behaves according to a God-given moral code of excellence; he or she possesses upright inner convictions and is able to discern between right and wrong. Paul charges Timothy, “Cling to your faith in Christ, and keep your conscience clear. For some people have deliberately violated their consciences; as a result, their faith has been shipwrecked” (1 Timothy 1:19, NLT).

It is possible to have either a good conscience or a conscience that is “defiled” or “corrupted” through rebellion (Titus 1:15). When we receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, His blood purifies “our consciences from sinful deeds so that we can worship the living God” (Hebrews 9:14, NLT). Our guilty consciences “have been sprinkled with Christ’s blood to make us clean” (Hebrews 10:22, NLT).

[Warren Wiersbe](#) compares a good conscience, or a clean conscience, “to a window that lets in the light of God’s truth” ([SEE Bible Exposition Commentary](#) SEE PAGE 395 AND RELATED NOTE ON PAGE 913 “MAINTAIN A GOOD CONSCIENCE”). The more we study God’s Word, the more light we let in and the more sensitive we become to right and wrong. Paul informs Timothy that the [false teachers](#), those who “abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons,” have persisted in their sin and rebellion against God to the point of having their consciences “[seared](#) as with a hot iron” (1 Timothy 4:1–2). The light of God’s truth is shut out from such hearts.

The concept of having a good conscience had a somewhat different meaning for the believers in Ephesus: “For first-century people, conscience dealt with a person’s conduct within the chosen group. A good conscience meant living according to the standards and practices which the group (in this case the church) deemed proper and acceptable. It meant living without shame among one’s peers or companions” (Larson, K., [SEE Holman New Testament Commentary - 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2](#)).

Nowadays, we view having a good conscience and the ability to discern right from wrong mainly from an individual perspective. But in ancient times the word carried the weight of responsibility and answerability. The apostle Peter seems to have in mind this sense of accountability among peers when he instructs, “And if someone asks about your hope as a believer, always be ready to explain it. But do this in a gentle and respectful way. Keep your conscience clear. Then if people speak against you, they will be ashamed when they see what a good life you live because you belong to Christ” (1 Peter 3:15–16NLT).

QUESTION - [How can I get a clear conscience? | GotQuestions.org](#)

ANSWER - [Conscience](#) can be defined as “an inner feeling that acts as a guide to the rightness or wrongness of one’s behavior.” For those with a biblical worldview, the conscience is the part of the human soul that is most like God (Genesis 3:22). Those who disbelieve God have a difficult time explaining the existence of the human conscience. Evolution cannot account for this facet of the human spirit, which cannot be explained by a “survival of the fittest” mentality.

The conscience of man was awakened when Adam and Eve disobeyed God's command and ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 3:6). Before that, they had known only good. The word *knowing* in Genesis 3:5 is the same word used elsewhere to describe sexual intimacy (Genesis 4:17; 1 Samuel 1:19). When we choose to "know" evil by intimate experience, our consciences are violated and emotional discomfort takes over. Whether we acknowledge God or not, we were created to have fellowship with our Creator. When we do wrong, we sense that we are at odds with our created purpose, and that feeling is deeply disturbing.

It was God whom Adam and Eve had offended; yet God Himself provided the solution to their violated consciences. He slaughtered an innocent animal to cover their nakedness (Genesis 3:21). This was a foreshadowing of God's intended plan to cover the sin of all mankind.

Humans have tried a variety of things to clear their consciences, from charity work to self-mutilation. History is replete with examples of mankind's efforts to appease his conscience, but nothing works. So he often turns to other means of drowning out that inner voice that declares him guilty. Addictions, immorality, violence, and greed are often deeply rooted in the fertile soil of a guilty conscience.

However, since [all sin is ultimately a sin against God](#), only God can redeem a violated conscience. Just as He did in the Garden of Eden, God provides us a covering through the sacrifice of something perfect and blameless (Exodus 12:5; Leviticus 9:3; 1 Peter 1:18–19). God sent His own Son, Jesus, into the world for the purpose of being the final, perfect sacrifice for the sins of the whole world (John 3:16; 1 John 2:2). When Jesus went to the cross, He took upon Himself every sin we would ever commit. Every violated conscience, every sinful thought, and every evil act was placed upon Him (1 Peter 2:24). All the righteous wrath that God has for our sin was poured out on His own Son (Isaiah 53:6; John 3:36). Just as an innocent animal was sacrificed to cover Adam's sin, so the perfect Son was sacrificed to cover ours. God Himself chooses to make us right with Him and pronounce us forgiven.

We can have our consciences cleansed when we bring our sin, our failures, and our miserable attempts to appease God to the foot of the cross. The atonement of Christ forgives our sin and cleanses our conscience (Hebrews 10:22). We acknowledge our inability to cleanse our own hearts and ask Him to do it for us. We trust that Jesus' death and resurrection are sufficient to pay the price we owe God. When we accept Jesus' payment for our personal sin, God promises to cast our sins away from us "as far as the east is from the west" (Psalm 103:12; cf. Hebrews 8:12).

In Christ, we are freed from the stranglehold of sin. We are set free to pursue righteousness and purity and become the men and women God created us to be (Romans 6:18). As followers of Christ, we will still commit occasional sin. But, even then, God provides a way for us to have our consciences cleared. First John 1:9 says that, "if we confess our sin, he is faithful and just to forgive our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Often, with that confession comes the knowledge that we must make things right with the ones we have offended. We can take that step with the people we have hurt, knowing that God has already forgiven us.

Our consciences can remain clear as we continually confess our sin to God and trust that the blood of Jesus is sufficient to make us right with Him. We continue to "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Matthew 6:33). We trust that, in spite of our imperfections, God delights in us and in His transforming work in our lives (Philippians 2:13; Romans 8:29). Jesus said, "So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36). We live with a clear conscience by refusing to wallow in the failures that God has forgiven. We stand confident in His promise that, "if God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31).

Related Resources:

- [What does it mean to have a seared conscience? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- Baker Evangelical Dictionary [Conscience](#)
- Girdlestone's Lexicon - [Conscience](#)
- [Conscience](#) R A Torrey topic
- Nave Topical Bible [Conscience](#)
- Thompson Chain Reference [Guilty Conscience](#) [Conscience](#)
- More notes on conscience under Romans 2 Commentary
- Devotional on conscience by F B Meyer
- [Diverse Kinds of Conscience](#)
- [Conscience](#) by William Arnot in his discussion of Proverbs 28:1
- [Conscience: The Voice of God Within](#) by Timothy Lin
- American Tract Society [Conscience](#)
- Bridgeway Bible Dictionary [Conscience](#)
- Charles Buck Dictionary [Conscience](#)

- Easton's Bible Dictionary [Conscience](#)
- Holman Bible Dictionary [Conscience](#)
- Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible [Conscience](#)
- Hastings' Dictionary of the NT [Conscience](#)
- King James Dictionary [Conscience](#)
- Morrish Bible Dictionary [Conscience](#)
- Vines' Expository Dictionary [Conscience](#)
- Webster Dictionary [Conscience](#)
- Watson's Theological Dictionary [Conscience](#)
- 1911 Encyclopedia Britannica [Conscience](#)
- International Standard Bible Encyclopedia [Conscience](#)
- McClintock and Strong's Bible Encyclopedia [Conscience \(2\)](#) [Conscience](#)

A FEW SAYINGS REGARDING CONSCIENCE

Conscience is a trustworthy compass when God's Word is your true north.

A good conscience is one of the best friends you'll ever have.

To ignore your conscience is to invite trouble.

Conscience is a safe guide when guided by God's Word.

A clear conscience is a soft pillow.

If God's Word guides your conscience, let your conscience be your guide.

If you can't hear God speaking, check the volume control of your conscience.

F F Bruce writes "The word 'conscience' (syneidēsis) is not current in classical Greek. It belonged to the vernacular tongue and attained literary status only a short time before the beginning of the Christian era. It meant 'consciousness of right or wrong doing', but Paul uses it (and perhaps he was the first to do so) in the sense of an independent witness within, which examines and passes judgment on one's conduct. In Christians this examination and judgment should be specially accurate because their conscience is enlightened by the Holy Spirit (cf. Ro 9:1)." (See [The Letter of Paul to the Romans: An Introduction and Commentary](#))

ILLUSTRATION - **John MacArthur** recounts an illustration of the human conscience - It is reported that a tribe in Africa had an unusual but effective way to test the guilt of an accused person. A group of suspects would be lined up and the tongue of each would be touched with a hot knife. If saliva was on the tongue the blade would sizzle but cause little pain. But if the tongue was dry, the blade would stick and create a vicious, searing burn. The tribe knew that a sense of guilt tends to make a person's mouth dry, and a seared tongue therefore was taken as proof of guilt. The making of such a dry mouth is, of course, the work of the **conscience**. (See [Romans Commentary](#))

James Dobson says that "The conscience is an imperfect mental faculty. There are times when it condemns us for mistakes and human frailties that can't be avoided; at other times it will remain silent in the face of indescribable wickedness."

J. Rodman Williams, "*Conscience* is a righteous code written on every person's heart and has been so from the beginning of creation. Man as a human being, whether the first man or the thousandth or the millionth, has a God-given, innate sense of right and wrong (however much that sense may be blurred and distorted by sin). This bears witness to the fact that essential human nature is constituted in holiness and righteous" (*Renewal Theology* "God, the World & Redemption," 207).

Ray Pritchard offers a hypothetical illustration - This week I read an ancient tale about a court magician who wanted to give his king a very special gift. After much work, he designed a magic ring which had a very special property. Every time the king had an evil thought or an unworthy ambition, the ring began to shrink tightly around his finger, thus warning him of impending danger. The human conscience is like that. It is a ring around the heart, which tightens every time we begin to violate our own standards. It warns of impending danger. We disregard our conscience at our own peril. And, Paul says, every man has a conscience, a "ring around the heart." No one can say, "I've never done wrong," because every man has violated his conscience at least once, and most of us many times. That's why God can fairly judge the Gentiles. The law "written in their hearts" will be the standard by which they will be judged. Their guilty consciences will one day rise up to condemn them." ([Romans 2:1-16: Mr. I.M. Okay Meets His Maker](#))

Conscience is like an inner judge that accuses and condemns us when we have done wrong and approves and commends us when we have done right. The conscience varies in sensitivity, depending on the degree of one's knowledge of and feeling about right and wrong. The person who has considerable knowledge of God's Word will have a more sensitive conscience than someone who has never had opportunity to know Scripture. Furthermore, repeated sinning hardens the conscience so that it becomes

"seared" like scar tissue (1Ti 4:2). To continually reject God's truth causes the conscience to become progressively calloused, hardened and less sensitive to sin, as if covered with layers of unspiritual scar tissue. There is an interesting parallel in tropical medicine which has discovered that the gross disfigurement so commonly seen in individuals with leprosy is not due to the leprosy bacterium per se, but is secondary to the organism's destruction of the nerve fibers that convey a sense of pain and touch. Unprotected by the body's natural warning signals the leper repeatedly injures the extremity with cuts, burns, infections, etc, all without even realizing that he is injured! This is exactly the picture of the seared conscience which becomes insensitive to sin and may eventually cease sending warning signals. Thus, though God has His work within every man resulting in **conscience**, man can corrupt that work, so that the "sin sensitivity" rating of the conscience varies from person to person.

Socrates (4th century bc) erred by saying humans always do good – if they only knew what really was good. Augustine rightly counter-responded commenting that "even the virtues of the heathen are sin" – including when they say they are acting in good conscience!

To have a **"clear conscience"** does not mean that we have never sinned or do not commit acts of sin. Rather, it means that the underlying direction and motive of life is to obey and please God, so that acts of sin are habitually recognized as such and faced before God (1Jn 1:9, cp David's attitude Ps 139:23-24, cp Ps 19:13-note) Spurgeon commenting on these passages in Ps 139 says...

He (David) will have God Himself search him, and search him thoroughly, till every point of his being is known, and read, and understood; for he is sure that even by such an investigation there will be found in him no complicity with wicked men. He challenges the fullest investigation, the innermost search: he had need be a true man who can put himself deliberately into such a crucible. **Yet we may each one desire such searching; for it would be a terrible calamity to us for sin to remain in our hearts unknown and undiscovered.**

Try me, and know my thoughts. Exercise any and every test upon me. By fire and by water let me be examined. Read not alone the desires of my heart, but the fugitive thoughts of my head. Know with all penetrating knowledge all that is or has been in the chambers of my mind. What a mercy that there is one being who can know us to perfection! He is intimately at home with us. He is graciously inclined towards us, and is willing to bend His omniscience to serve the end of our sanctification. **Let us pray as David did, and let us be as honest as he. We cannot hide our sin: salvation lies the other way, in a plain discovery of evil, and an effectual severance from it.**

And see if there be any wicked way in me. See whether there be in my heart, or in my life, any evil habit unknown to myself (**Ed: cp a "clean conscience"**). If there be such an evil way, take me from it, take it from me. No matter how dear the wrong may have become, nor how deeply prejudiced I may have been in its favour, be pleased to deliver me therefrom altogether, effectually, and at once, that I may tolerate nothing which is contrary to thy mind. As I hate the wicked in their way, so would I hate every wicked way in myself.

And lead me in the way everlasting. If thou hast introduced me already to the good old way, be pleased to keep me in it, and conduct me further and further along it. It is a way which thou hast set up of old, it is based upon everlasting principles, and it is the way in which immortal spirits will gladly run for ever and ever. There will be no end to it world without end. It lasts for ever, and they who are in it last for ever. Conduct me into it, O Lord, and conduct me throughout the whole length of it. By thy providence, by thy word, by thy grace, and by thy Spirit, lead me evermore.

Think and be careful what thou art within,
For there is sin in the desire of sin:
Think and be thankful, in a different case,
For there is grace in the desire of grace.
--John Byron, 1691-1763.

Dwight Edwards explains that "A **"clear conscience"** consists in being able to say that there is no one (God or man) whom I have knowingly offended and not tried to make it right (either by asking forgiveness or restoration or both).). Acts 24:16. Christ spoke of this very issue in the Sermon on the Mount where He made it clear that our priestly service must be done with a clear conscience to be acceptable before God. "Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer your gift." Mt. 5:23-24-25-note. We are being told here that a clear conscience must precede priestly service. (2 Timothy Call to Completion)

Paul wanted Timothy to have no doubt that he endured his present physical afflictions, as he had countless others, because of his unswerving faithfulness to the Lord, not as a consequence of unfaithful, ungodly living. So as Paul neared his death, he could testify that his conscience did not accuse or condemn him. His guilt was forgiven, and his devotion was undivided. To continually reject

God's truth causes the conscience to become progressively less sensitive to sin, as if covered with layers of unspiritual scar tissue. Paul's conscience was clear, sensitive, & responsive to its convicting voice. Click on the books below to study the NT picture of conscience.

Thomas Oden, "Conscience is a faculty of human consciousness that is formed universally, yet may become transformed by converting grace (J. Wesley, *On Faith*, WJW VII, pp 195ff.; cf. VII, pp 231ff., WJWB, sermon 117, vol 4, pp 28ff.). 'Accordingly, the *capacity to have faith*, as the capacity to have love, belongs to men's nature; *but to have faith*, even as to have love, belongs to the grace of *believers*' (Augustine, *On the Predestination of the Saints* 5:10, NPNF 1 V, p 503, italics added)" (*Life in the Spirit*, 133-135).

Conscience is like a window that let's in the light. When the window becomes soiled, the light gradually becomes darkness. Once conscience is defiled (Titus 1:15-note), it gradually gets worse, and eventually it may be so "seared" that it has no sensitivity at all (1Ti 4:2). Then it becomes an "evil conscience" (He 10:22-note), one that functions just the opposite of a good conscience (1Pe 3:16-note).

J C Ryle in his comments on a woman caught in adultery (Jn 8:1-11) speaks of

The power of conscience. We read of the woman's accusers, that when they heard our Lord's appeal, "being convicted by their own conscience, they went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even into the last." Wicked and hardened as they were, they felt something within which made them cowards. Fallen as human nature is, God has taken care to leave within every man a witness that will be heard.

Conscience is a most important part of our inward man, and plays a most prominent part in our spiritual history. It cannot save us. It never yet led any one to Christ. It is blind, and liable to be misled. It is lame and powerless, and cannot guide us to heaven. Yet conscience is not to be despised. It is the minister's best friend, when he stands up to rebuke sin from the pulpit. It is the mother's best friend, when she tries to restrain her children from evil and quicken them to good. It is the teacher's best friend, when he presses home on boys and girls their moral duties. Happy is he who never stifles his conscience, but strives to keep it tender! Still happier is he who prays to have it enlightened by the Holy Spirit, and sprinkled with Christ's blood. ([John - chapter 8](#))

(Ryle in "Looking Unto Jesus") We need inward peace. So long as our **conscience** is asleep, deadened by indulged sin, or dulled and stupefied by incessant pursuit of the things of this world—so long can that man get on tolerably well without peace with God. But once let **conscience** open its eyes, and shake itself, and rise, and move—and it will make the stoutest child of Adam feel ill at ease. The irrepressible thought that this life is not all—that there is a God, and a judgment, and a something after death, an undiscovered destiny from which no traveler returns—that thought will come up at times in every man's mind, and make him long for inward peace.

It is easy to write brave words about "eternal hope," and strew the path to the grave with flowers. Such theology is naturally popular: the world loves to have it so. But after all, there is something deep down in the heart of hearts of most men, which must be satisfied. The strongest evidence of God's eternal truth, is the universal **conscience** of mankind. Who is there among us all, who can sit down and think over the days that are past—school days, and college days, and days of middle life, their countless things left undone that ought to have been done, and done that ought not to have been done—who, I say, can think over it all without shame, if indeed he does not turn from the review with disgust and terror, and refuse to think at all? We all need peace. ([Ryle Looking Unto Jesus!](#))

(Ryle in "Without Christ") Moreover, to be "without Christ" is to be without peace. Every man has a **conscience** within him, which must be satisfied before he can be truly happy. So long as this **conscience** is asleep or half dead, so long, no doubt, he gets along pretty well. But as soon as a man's conscience wakes up, and he begins to think of past sins and present failings and future judgment, at once he finds out that he needs something to give him inward rest. But what can do it? Repenting and praying and Bible reading, and church going, and sacrament receiving, and self-mortification may be tried, and tried in vain. They never yet took off the burden from anyone's **conscience**. And yet peace must be had!

There is only one thing can give peace to the **conscience**, and that is the blood of Jesus Christ sprinkled on it. A clear understanding that Christ's death was an actual payment of our debt to God, and that the merit of that death is made over to man when he believes, is the grand secret of inward peace. It meets every craving of conscience. It answers every accusation. It calms every fear. It is written "These things I have spoken unto you, that in Me you might have peace." "He is our peace." "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Jn 16:33; Eph 2:14; Ro 5:1). We have peace through the blood of His cross:

peace like a deep mine—peace like an ever-flowing stream. But "without Christ" we are without peace.
([Without Christ](#))

J C Philpot writes that there can be

there is a receiving of the gospel as the word of men into the **natural CONSCIENCE**; for there is a natural conscience as well as a **spiritual conscience**. This is very evident from the language of the apostle when speaking of the Gentiles—

"Who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their **conscience** also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or excusing one another." (Ro 2:15.)

And do we not read of those in the case of the woman taken in adultery, who were

"convicted by their own **conscience**, and went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even to the last." (Jn 8:9.)

The apostle also speaks of

"commending himself to every man's **conscience**, in the sight of God." (2Co 4:2.)

Now as he preached to thousands, he could not have done this unless there was a **conscience** in every man, as well as in every good man. Scarcely anything seems to approach the work of grace so nearly as this; and yet we see in the cases of Saul, Ahab, and Herod, that there may be the **deepest convictions of conscience** and yet no saving conversion to God. Thus there is a receiving the gospel into the **natural conscience**, producing moral convictions, and a work that seems at first sight to bear a striking similarity to the work of God upon the soul; and yet the whole may be a mere imitation of grace, a movement of nature floating upon the surface of the mind, and at times touching upon the domain of **conscience**, yet not springing out of the word of God as brought with a divine power into the heart. ([The Word of Men and the Word of God](#))

The Westminster Confession of Faith (6.109),

"God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in anything contrary to his Word, or beside it in matters of faith or worship. So that to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commandments out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience; and the requiring an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also."

Marvin Vincent, Greek expert, had a number of quotes on conscience...

"In Scripture we are to view conscience, as Dr. Ellicott remarks, not in its abstract nature, but in its practical manifestations. The conscience may be weak (1 Cor 8:7,12) – even "evil or defiled" (Heb 10:22; Tit 1:15). It may be "seared" (1 Tim 4:2) becoming hardened and insensible to good. "On the other hand, it may be 'pure' (2 Tim 1:3) unveiled, and giving honest and clear moral testimony. It may be 'void of offence' (Ac 24:16) unconscious of evil intent or act; 'good,' or 'honorable' (Heb 13:18)" (WS, 311,12).

Syneídēsis is the "consciousness which one has within himself . . . exercising a judicial function – determining what is right or wrong, approving or condemning, urging to performance or abstinence. Hence, it is not merely intellectual consciousness directed at conduct, but moral consciousness contemplating 'duty,' testifying to moral obligation, even where God is not known; and, where there is knowledge of God and acquaintance with him, inspired and directed by that fact.

"A man cannot be conscious of himself without knowing himself as a moral creature. Cremer accordingly defines the word as 'the consciousness man has of himself in his relation to God, manifesting itself in the form of a self-testimony . . . In conscience man stands face to face with himself.'"

"Conscience is 'a law' . . . the guide assigned us by the Author of our nature; . . . conscience . . . is a faculty. The mind may 'possess reason and distinguish between the true and the false, and yet be incapable of distinguishing between virtue and vice. We are entitled, therefore, to hold that the drawing of moral distinctions is not comprehended in the simple exercise of the reason. The conscience, in short, is a different faculty of the mind from the mere understanding.

"Conscience is a sentiment: i.e. it contains and implies conscious emotions which arise on the discernment of an object as good or bad. The judgment formed by conscience awakens sensibility" (WS, 311,312).

Archibald Alexander - Peace of **conscience** is a fruit of reconciliation with God. The blood which reconciles, when sprinkled on the

conscience, produces a sweet peace which can be obtained in no other way. If the atonement of Christ satisfies the law which condemned us, and we are assured that this atonement is accepted for us, **conscience**, which before condemned, as being the echo of the law, is now pacified. ([The Peace of God](#))

John Calvin - The torture of a bad conscience is the hell of a living soul... There is no greater torment than an evil conscience.

Timothy Lin - In the mid 1950's near Ashville, NC, an adult male walked into the police station and openly confessed to a murder he had committed 13 years earlier. He gave the deceased person's name and related to the authorities how he had murdered this person by shooting him in the back of the head with an arrow. The police reviewed his story from their files and found that the local coroner had ruled the deceased man's death to be from natural causes. However, when they dug up the dead man's remains, they found a hole in the base of his skull made by an arrow. The murderer was brought to justice, not by the police, but by his own conscience... At the Children's Hospital seven-year-old Jimmy was a constant troublemaker. One day a weekly visitor who knew him well said to him, "Jimmy, if you are a good boy for a week, I will give you a quarter when I come back." A week later she again stood by Jimmy's bed and said, "Jimmy, I am not going to ask the nurse how you have behaved. You must tell me yourself. Do you deserve to have the quarter?" There was a moment's silence. Then from under the sheets came a small voice saying, "Gimme a penny." This illustrates that conscience speaks very clearly even in small children, ([Conscience: The Voice of God Within - {I'm not sure I fully agree with all his points - Be a Berean}](#)) - Lin has more on conscience on page 50-54 in [Genesis - Biblical Theology](#))

Kenneth Osbeck writes that "The **conscience** has been described as the "rudder of the soul" or the believer's "principle within." One of the prime responsibilities of Christian living is to keep the conscience clear as to the things of God so that we might live worthy lives before our fellowmen. But the conscience must be continually enlightened and developed by an exposure to God's Word if it is to serve as a reliable guide for our lives. A conscience that is allowed to become hardened and insensitive to sin will ultimately lead to spiritual and moral disaster. We must allow God to develop our consciences and then our consciences are able to develop us. (Borrow [Amazing Grace: 366 Inspiring Hymn Stories for Daily Devotions](#) page 238)

I Want a Principle Within

by Charles Wesley

I want a principle within of watchful, Godly fear,
A sensibility of sin, a pain to feel it near.
Help me the first approach to feel of pride or wrong desire,
To catch the wand'ring of my will and quench the Spirit's fire.

From Thee that I no more may stray, no more Thy goodness grieve,
Grant me the filial awe, I pray, the tender conscience give.
Quick as the apple of an eye, O God, my conscience make!
Awake my soul when sin is nigh and keep it still awake.

Almighty God of truth and love, to me Thy pow'r impart;
The burden from my soul remove, the hardness from my heart.
O may the least omission pain my reawakened soul,
And drive me to that grace again which makes the wounded whole.

Conscience is the judgment which we pronounce on our own conduct by putting ourselves in the place of a bystander. (Adam Smith)

Here are a number of truisms regarding **conscience** from **anonymous** sources...

- A quiet conscience sleeps in thunder.
- Conscience warns us as a friend before it punishes us as a judge.
- The best tranquilizer is a clear conscience.
- When a man says he has a clear conscience it often means he has a bad memory.
- When a man won't listen to his conscience, it may be because he doesn't want advice from a total stranger.
- When you have only one thing on your conscience, it is probably a silencer.
- A guilty conscience is a hell on earth, and points to one beyond.
- A guilty conscience needs no accuser.
- Quite often when a man thinks his mind is getting broader it is only his conscience stretching.
- ([John Blanchard - Complete Gathered Gold: A Treasury of Quotations for Christians](#) - One of the best resources for Christian quotes which I have ever read)

For life's adventure, Lord, I ask
Courage and faith for every task;
A heart kept clean by high desire,
A conscience purged by holy fire.
—McDermand

John MacArthur tells a tragic story to illustrating the grave danger of suppressing our conscience:

In 1984 an Avianca Airlines jet crashed in Spain. Investigators studying the accident made an eerie discovery. The "black box" cockpit recorders revealed 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 switched the system off. Minutes later the plane plowed into the side of a mountain. Everyone on board died.

When I saw that tragic story on the news shortly after it happened, it struck me as a perfect parable of the way modern people treat guilt--the warning messages of their consciences.

The wisdom of our age says guilt feelings are nearly always erroneous or hurtful; therefore we should switch them off. But is that good advice? What, after all, is the conscience--this sense of guilt we all seem to feel?

The conscience is generally seen by the modern world as a defect that robs people of their self-esteem. Far from being a defect or a disorder, however, your ability to sense your own guilt is a tremendous gift from God. He designed the conscience into the very framework of the human soul. It is the automatic warning system that cries, "Pull up! Pull up!" before you crash and burn.

The conscience, Puritan Richard Sibbes wrote in the seventeenth century, is the soul reflecting upon itself. Conscience is at the heart of what distinguishes the human creature. People, unlike animals, can contemplate their own actions and make moral self-evaluations. That is the very function of conscience.

The conscience is an innate ability to sense right and wrong. Everyone, even the most unspiritual heathen, has a conscience: "When Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness, and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them" (Rom. 2:14–15, emphasis added).

The conscience entreats us to do what we believe is right and restrains us from doing what we believe is wrong. The conscience 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. When we violate our conscience, it condemns us, triggering feelings of shame, anguish, regret, consternation, anxiety, disgrace, and even fear. When we follow our conscience, it commends us, bringing joy, serenity, self-respect, well-being, and gladness.

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—suneidēsis, which also literally means "co-knowledge." Conscience is knowledge together with oneself; that is, conscience knows our inner motives and true thoughts. 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.

Multitudes today respond to their conscience by attempting to suppress it, overrule it, or silence it.

The Hebrew word for conscience is [leb](#), (see also [lebab](#)) usually translated "heart" in the Old Testament. The conscience is so much at the core of the human soul that the Hebrew mind did not draw a distinction between conscience and the rest of the inner person. Thus when Moses recorded that Pharaoh "hardened his heart" (Exod. 8:15), he was saying that Pharaoh had steeled his conscience against God's will. When Scripture speaks of a tender heart (cf. 2 Chr. 34:27), it refers to a sensitive conscience. The "upright in heart" (Ps. 7:10) are those with pure consciences. And when David prayed, "Create in me a clean heart, O God" (Ps. 51:10), he was seeking to have his life and his conscience cleansed....

Multitudes today respond to their conscience by attempting to suppress it, overrule it, or silence it They conclude that the real blame for their wrong behavior lies in some childhood trauma, the way their parents raised them, societal pressures, or other causes beyond their control. Or they convince themselves that their sin is a clinical problem, not a moral one—and therefore define their alcoholism, sexual perversion,

immorality, or other vices as “diseases.” To respond to the conscience with such arguments is tantamount to telling the conscience, “Shut up, Gringo!”

It is possible virtually to nullify the conscience through repeated abuse. Paul spoke of people whose consciences were so convoluted that their “glory is in their shame” (Phil. 3:19; cf. Rom. 1:32). Both the mind and the conscience can become so defiled that they cease making distinctions between what is pure and what is impure (cf. Tit. 1:15). After so much violation, the conscience finally falls silent. Morally, those with defiled consciences are left flying blind. The annoying warning signals may be gone, but the danger certainly is not; in fact, the danger is greater than ever.

Furthermore, even the most defiled conscience will not remain silent forever. When we stand in judgment, every person’s conscience will side with God, the righteous judge. The worst sin-hardened evildoer will discover before the throne of God that he has a conscience which testifies against him.

The conscience, however, is not infallible. Nor is it a source of revelation about right and wrong. Its role is not to teach us moral and ethical ideals, but to hold us accountable to the highest standards of right and wrong we know. The conscience is informed by tradition as well as by truth, so the standards it holds us to are not necessarily biblical ones (1 Cor. 8:6–9). The conscience can be needlessly condemning in areas where there is no biblical issue. In fact, it can try to hold us to the very thing the Lord is trying to release us from (Rom. 14:14, 20–23). The conscience, to operate fully and in accord with true holiness, must be informed by the Word of God. So even when guilt feelings don’t have a biblical basis, they are an important spiritual distress sign. If they’re only signaling a weak conscience, that should spur us to seek the spiritual growth that would bring our conscience more in harmony with God’s Word.

The conscience reacts to the convictions of the mind and therefore can be encouraged and sharpened in accordance with God’s Word. The wise Christian wants to master biblical truth so that the conscience is completely informed and judges right because it is responding to God’s Word. A regular diet of Scripture will strengthen a weak conscience or restrain an overactive one. Conversely, error, human wisdom, and wrong moral influences filling the mind will corrupt or cripple the conscience.

In other words, the conscience functions like a skylight, not a light bulb. It lets light into the soul; it does not produce its own. Its effectiveness is determined by the amount of pure light we expose it to, and by how clean we keep it. Cover it or put it in total darkness and it ceases to function. That’s why the apostle Paul spoke of the importance of a clear conscience (1 Tim. 3:9) and warned against anything that would defile or muddy the conscience (1 Cor. 8:7; Tit. 1:15).

Or, to switch metaphors, our conscience is like the nerve endings in our fingertips. Its sensitivity to external stimuli can be damaged by the buildup of callouses or even wounded so badly as to be virtually impervious to any feeling. Paul also wrote of the dangers of a calloused conscience (1 Cor. 8:10), a wounded conscience (v. 12), and a seared conscience (1 Tim. 4:2). (BORROW [The Vanishing Conscience - 2005](#) - one wonders what he would title it in 2025 - perhaps "Gone Conscience!")([See also John MacArthur's full article "The Conscience Revisited"](#))

Conscience is a dainty, delicate creature, a rare piece of workmanship of the Maker. Keep it whole without a crack, for if there be but one hole so that it break, it will with difficulty mend again. (S. Rutherford)

The Christian can never find a “more faithful adviser, a more active accuser, a severer witness, a more impartial judge, a sweeter comforter, or a more inexorable enemy.” (Bp. Sanderson.)

A gnawing **conscience** keeps the memory terribly alert. (W. E. Sangster)

Conscience in everything: — Trust that man in nothing who has not a conscience in everything. (Sterne)

Conscience is the still small voice that makes you feel still smaller. (James A. Sanaker)

Conscience makes cowards of us; but conscience makes saints and heroes too. (J. Lightfoot)

Conscience is a marvelous gift from God, the window that lets in the light of His truth. If we sin against Him deliberately, that window becomes dirty, and not as much truth can filter through. Eventually, the window becomes so dirty that it no longer lets in the light. The Bible calls this a defiled, seared conscience... Do you keep a clean conscience? It is a part of your inner being that responds to God’s truth. When you sin, the window of your conscience becomes dirty and filters out truth. Avoid sin in your life and live with a clean conscience. Every day feed yourself truth from the Word of God. (Wiersbe, W: Prayer, Praise and Promises: Ps 51:3-6)

- Hurt not your **conscience** with any known sin. - S. Rutherford
- **Conscience** is that faculty in me which attaches itself to the highest that I know, and tells me what the highest I know demands that I do.
- When there is any debate, quit. There is no debate possible when **conscience** speaks.
- Once we assuage our **conscience** by calling something a "necessary evil," it begins to look more and more necessary and less and less evil. - Sidney J. Harris
- **Conscience** is God's spy and man's overseer. -John Trapp
- A good **conscience** and a good confidence go together. -- Thomas Brooks
- **Conscience** is a small, still voice that makes minority reports. -- Franklin P. Jones
- **Conscience** is also what makes a boy tell his mother before his sister does.
- Pop used to say about the Presbyterians, 'It don't prevent them committing all the sins there are, but it keeps them from getting any fun but of it.' - **Christopher Morley**
- A good conscience is able to bear very much and is very cheerful in adversities. An evil conscience is always fearful and unquiet. Never rejoice except when you have done well. You shall rest sweetly if your heart does not accuse you.
- Sinners never have true joy or feel inward peace, because 'there is no peace for the wicked,' says the Lord (Isaiah 57:21).
- The glory of the good is in their consciences, and not in the tongues of others, The gladness of the just is of God, and in God; and their joy is of the truth.
- A person will easily be content and pacified whose conscience is pure. If you consider what you are within, you will not care what others say concerning you. People consider the deeds, but God weighs the intentions.
- "Conscience is that faculty in me which attaches itself to the highest that I know, and tells me what the highest I know demands that I do.
- (Conscience) is the eye of the soul which looks out either toward God or toward what it regards as the highest authority.
- If I am in the habit of steadily facing toward God, my conscience will always introduce God's perfect law and indicate what I should do.
- "The point is, will I obey? I have to make an effort to keep my conscience so sensitive that I walk without offense. I should be living in such perfect sympathy with God's Son that in every circumstance the spirit of my mind is renewed.
- "The one thing that keeps the conscience sensitive to Him is the habit of being open to God on the inside.
- When there is any debate, quit. There is no debate possible when conscience speaks.
- As someone else has said, "She won't listen to her conscience. She doesn't want to take advice from a total stranger." Bob Goddard,
- The antagonism between life and conscience may be removed in two ways: by a change of life or by a change of conscience. Leo Tolstoy
- Conscience tells us that we ought to do right, but it does not tell us what right is—that we are taught by God's word. H.C. Trumbull
- What is moral is what you feel good after and what is immoral is what you feel bad after. - Ernest Hemingway (WRONG!!!)

The late **General Omar Bradley** was more serious in commenting on conscience "The world has achieved brilliance without conscience," he conceded. "Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical infants."

Adrian Rogers - [The Characteristics of the Conscience](#)

First of all, I want to talk to you about the characteristics of the conscience. And, we're going to be studying in many passages of Scripture. And, if you're not nimble with your fingers to find these passages, then maybe you want to get just a pen and a piece of paper, and jot them down, because you're not going to be able to remember everything. And, you need to go back, and refer to these, and it'll be a good study for your family devotions this week—to study many of these scriptures. But, what is the conscience?

Like that warning system, the conscience is not an enemy. Your conscience is the very framework of your soul. God did not give animals a conscience. God gave human beings a conscience. As a matter of fact, animals cannot make moral judgments. Animals are candy right and smack wrong. An animal does good—you give him a little reward. If he does bad, you may chastise him. And, that's the way animals learn. But, human beings can make moral judgments. Somebody has said that, "Man is the only creature of God that can blush, and he's the only one that needs to."

Even the heathen have a conscience. Even those who don't know God have a conscience. Romans 2:14, and following—listen to what Paul said about the Gentiles—and when he says Gentiles, he's talking about the heathen: "For when the Gentiles, which have not the law"—that is, the law of God, the Ten Commandments—"do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness" (Romans 2:14-15). And

so, you have a conscience, and your conscience is that which is in you that judges your actions—that judges your thoughts—according to the highest standards you have.

And, if you violate your conscience, you're going to pay the price. There will be anguish. There will be regret. There will be fear. There will be disquietude. But, if you follow your conscience, you find joy, and serenity, and self-respect. In the Old Testament, the word conscience is often translated, "heart." Heart—that's the inner part of a man. When the Bible says that Pharaoh hardened his heart, it just simply means that he steeled his conscience (Exodus 8:15).

A little boy, when asked to describe conscience, said, "Well, conscience is that thing that feels bad when everything else feels good." Well, that's not the best definition of conscience, because it's too negative. Or, a mother, who was a homeschooler, was trying to teach her boy the difference between conscious and conscience—they sound alike. And, she was trying to get the boy to know the difference, and to spell the difference between conscious and conscience. And, she said, "Son, do you know the difference?" He said, "Yes, I do." He says, "Conscious is when you are aware of something, and conscience was when you wish you weren't." There is a difference, and I pray that you will have a consciousness of your conscience, and you will know that there is something that God put in you.

ILLUSTRATION - In 1984 an Avianca Airlines jet crashed in Spain. Investigators studying the accident made an eerie discovery. The "black box" cockpit recorders revealed 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 switched the system off. Minutes later the plane plowed into the side of a mountain. Everyone on board died. When I saw that tragic story on the news shortly after it happened, it struck me as a perfect parable of the way modern people treat **guilt** — the warning messages of their consciences. (John MacArthur)

Troubled Conscience - A man consulted a doctor, "I've been misbehaving, Doc, and my conscience is troubling me," he complained. "And you want something that will strengthen your willpower?" asked the doctor. "Well, no," said the fellow. "I was thinking of something that would weaken my conscience." Bits & Pieces, May 27, 1993, Page 21

The Highest - Conscience is that faculty in me which attaches itself to the highest that I know, and tells me what the highest I know demands that I do. It is the eye of the soul which looks out either toward God or toward what it regards as the highest authority. If I am in the habit of steadily facing toward God, my conscience will always introduce God's perfect law and indicate what I should do. The point is, will I obey? I have to make an effort to keep my conscience so sensitive that I walk without offense. I should be living in such perfect sympathy with God's Son that in every circumstance the spirit of my mind is renewed. The one thing that keeps the conscience sensitive to Him is the habit of being open to God on the inside. When there is any debate, quit. There is no debate possible when conscience speaks. - Oswald Chambers - Source unknown

Bruce Weinstein is known as "The Ethics Guy." His books and seminars challenge people to make choices based on principle rather than convenience or self-interest. In his business workshops, he often asks the participants, "Why should we be ethical?" He says that most responses center on the *benefits* of honesty and morality—avoiding punishment and having a clear conscience. While acknowledging that there are long-term benefits, Weinstein emphasizes doing the right thing because it's the right thing to do.

Your heart and conscience cannot safely guide,
For they are darkened by the sin inside;
But if you want to have a picture true,
The Word of God will mirror what is you.
—Hess

The Bible will tell you what is wrong before you have done it!
—D.L. Moody

Morally Handicapped - The haunting story of fourteen-year-old Rod Matthews serves as a warning to a culture gone adrift. Rod was not interested in the things that normally interest teenagers. Neither sports nor books were enough to quench his insatiable boredom. Only one thing excited him: death. He spent hours watching the video Faces of Death, a collection of film clips of people dying violently. Rod's curiosity about death led him to want to see death personally, not just on the television or movie screen. Eventually, he found a way to satisfy his curiosity. One winter afternoon he lured a friend out into the woods and proceeded to beat him to death with a baseball bat. During his trial for murder, the most telling remark was made by a child psychiatrist who was asked to give a clinical evaluation of Rod's condition. The doctor's assessment was that Rod was not insane in the conventional sense but that he simply didn't "know right from wrong. ... He [was] morally handicapped" (emphasis mine)" - Mark DeVries, Borrow [Family-based youth ministry : reaching the been-there, done-that generation](#), (Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press, 1994,

Only God has the right to define what's wrong.

Recently I read about a private investigator in the US who would knock on a door, show his badge to whoever answered, and say, "I guess we don't have to tell you why we're here." Many times, the person would look stunned and say, "How did you find out?" then go on to describe an undiscovered criminal act committed long ago. Writing in *Smithsonian* magazine, Ron Rosenbaum described the reaction as "an opening for the primal force of conscience, the telltale heart's internal monologue." - David C. McCasland

C S Lewis - God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.

Few things instill more courage than a good conscience toward God.

Thomas Brooks - Conscience is God's deputy, God's spy, God's notary, God's viceroy...Conscience is God's preacher in the bosom.

*The softest pillow one will ever know
is a clear conscience.*

Benjamin Whichcote (1609-1683), "We never do anything so secretly but that it is in the presence of two witnesses: God and our own conscience."

On the subject of conscience **Martin Luther** declared before the court of the Roman Empire at Worms in 1521 = "My conscience is captive to the Word of God... I am more afraid of my own heart than of the pope and all his cardinals. I have within me the great pope, Self."

When a person comes to faith in Christ, his **conscience** becomes acutely sensitive to sin. No longer as a Christian can he sin with impunity. The story is told about an old Indian chief who was converted. Later a missionary asked him:

"Chief, how are you doing spiritually? Are you experiencing victory over the devil?"

"It's like this," the chief replied. "I have two dogs inside me: a good dog and a bad dog. They are constantly fighting with each other."

"Which dog wins?" asked the puzzled missionary.

"Whichever one I feed the most," retorted the wise old man. His conscience was being shaped by the Scriptures.

Billy Graham set out the importance of a clear conscience - "To have a guilty conscience is a feeling. Psychologists may define it as a guilt complex, and may seek to rationalize away the sense of guilt, but once it has been awakened through the application of the law of God, no explanation will quiet the insistent voice of conscience."

The Friend Inside - Throughout his administration, Abraham Lincoln was a president under fire, especially during the scarring years of the Civil War. And though he knew he would make errors of office, he resolved never to compromise his integrity. So strong was this resolve that he once said, "I desire so to conduct the affairs of this administration that if at the end, when I come to lay down the reins of power, I have lost every other friend on earth, I shall at least have one friend left, and that friend shall be down inside of me." - Today In The Word, August, 1989, p. 21

A Necessary Evil - Once we assuage our conscience by calling something a "necessary evil," it begins to look more and more necessary and less and less evil. - Sidney J. Harris

Myself

I have to live with myself, and so
I want to be fit for myself to know,
I want to be able, as days go by,
Always to look myself straight in the eye;

I don't want to stand, with the setting sun,
And hate myself for the things I've done.
I don't want to keep on the closet shelf
A lot of secrets about myself,

And fool myself, as I come and go,
Into thinking that nobody else will know
The kind of a man I really am;
I don't want to dress up myself in sham.

I want to go out with my head erect,
I want to deserve all men's respect;
But here in the struggle for fame and pelf
I want to be able to like myself.

I don't want to look at myself and know
That I'm bluster and bluff and empty show.
I can never hide myself from me;
I see what others may never see;

I know what others may never know,
I never can fool myself, and so,
Whatever happens, I want to be
Self-respecting and conscience free.
-Anonymous

A W Tozer - Conscience singles you out as though nobody else existed. God has given us a faithful witness inside of our own being...It is able to single a man out and reveal his loneliness, the loneliness of a single soul in the universe going on to meet an angry God. That's the terror of the conscience. Conscience never deals with theories. Conscience always deals with right and wrong and the relation of the individual to that which is right or wrong. Remember the conscience is always on God's side! It judges conduct in the light of the moral law, and as the Scripture says, excuses or accuses."

C H Spurgeon spoke frequently about **conscience** as seen in the following quite pithy quotations... beloved if you are contemplating sinning as you read this or are caught in the web of some sin, may the Holy Spirit of the Living God convict you of sin, righteousness and the judgment to come, not only for your sake of your Christian life but even more so for the sake of His name...

Conscience may tell me that something is wrong, but how wrong it is conscience itself does not know. Did any man's conscience, unenlightened by the Spirit, ever tell him that his sins deserved damnation? Did it ever lead any man to feel an abhorrence of sin as sin? Did conscience ever bring a man to such self-renunciation that he totally abhorred himself and all his works and came to Christ?

A man sees his enemy before him. By the light of his candle, he marks the insidious approach. His enemy is seeking his life. The man puts out the candle and then exclaims, "I am now quite at peace." That is what you do. Conscience is the candle of the Lord. It shows you your enemy. You try to put it out by saying, "Peace, peace! Put the enemy out!" God give you grace to thrust sin out!

Conscience is like a magnetic needle, which, if once turned aside from its pole, will never cease trembling. You can never make it still until it is permitted to return to its proper place.

I recollect the time when I thought that if I had to live on bread and water all my life and be chained in a dungeon, I would cheerfully submit to that if I might but get rid of my sins. When sin haunted and burdened my spirit, I am sure I would have counted the martyr's death preferable to a life under the lash of a guilty conscience

O believe me, guilt upon the conscience is worse than the body on the rack. Even the flames of the stake may be cheerfully endured, but the burnings of a conscience tormented by God are beyond all measure unendurable.

This side of hell, what can be worse than the tortures of an awakened conscience?

He was a fool who killed the watchdog because it alarmed him when thieves were breaking into his house. If conscience upbraids you, feel its upbraiding and heed its rebuke. It is your best friend.

Give me into the power of a roaring lion, but never let me come under the power of an awakened, guilty conscience. Shut me up in a dark dungeon, among all manner of loathsome creatures—snakes and reptiles of all kinds—but, oh, give me not over to my own thoughts when I am consciously guilty before God!

Fire such as martyrs felt at the stake were but a plaything compared with the flames of a burning conscience. Thunderbolts and tornadoes are nothing in force compared with the charges of a guilty conscience.

When a swarm of bees gets about a man, they are above, beneath, around, everywhere stinging, every one stinging, until he seems to be stung in every part of his body. So, when conscience wakes up the whole hive of our sins, we find ourselves compassed about with innumerable evils: sins at the board and sins on the bed, sins at the task and sins in the pew, sins in the street and sins in the shop, sins on the land and sins at sea, sins of body, soul, and spirit, sins of eye, of lip, of hand, of foot, sins everywhere. It is a horrible discovery when it seems to a man as if sin had become as omnipresent with him as God is.

The conscience of man, when he is really quickened and awakened by the Holy Spirit, speaks the truth. It rings the great alarm bell. And if he turns over in his bed, that great alarm bell rings out again and again, "The wrath to come! The wrath to come! The wrath to come! "

Nothing can be more horrible, out of hell, than to have an awakened conscience but not a reconciled God—to see sin, yet not see the Savior—to behold the deadly disease in all its loathsomeness, but not trust the good Physician, and so to have no hope of ever being healed of our malady.

I would bear any affliction rather than be burdened with a guilty conscience.

It is a blessed thing to have a conscience that will shiver when the very ghost of a sin goes by—a conscience that is not like our great steamships at sea that do not yield to every wave, but, like a cork on the water, goes up and down with every ripple, sensitive in a moment to the very approach of sin. May God the Holy Spirit make us so! This sensitiveness the Christian endeavors to have, for he knows that if he has it not, he will never be purified from his sin.

There are thousands of people in this country who would be greatly troubled in their minds if they did not go to church twice on Sundays. And they get comfort in this because their conscience is dead. If their conscience were really awakened, they would understand that there is no connection between conscience and outward forms.

I sometimes get this question put to me, concerning certain worldly amusements, "May I do so-and-so?" I am very sorry whenever anyone asks me that question, because it shows that there is something wrong, or it would not be raised at all. If a person's conscience lets him say, "Well, I can go to A," he will very soon go on to B, C, D, E, and through all the letters of the alphabet... When Satan cannot catch us with a big sin, he will try a little one. It does not matter to him as long as he catches his fish, what bait he uses. Beware of the beginning of evil, for many, who bade fair to go right, have turned aside and perished amongst the dark mountains in the wide field of sin.

Ray Stedman has some interesting thoughts on **conscience** writing that...

We each have a conscience. We may not be able to analyze it, and we certainly cannot control it, but we know we all possess one. Conscience has been defined as "that still, small voice that makes you feel smaller still," or, as one little boy put it, "It is that which feels bad when everything else feels good." Conscience is that internal voice that sits in judgment over our will. There is a very common myth abroad that says that conscience is the means by which we tell what is right and what is wrong. But conscience is never that. It is training that tells us what is right or wrong. But when we know what is right or wrong, it is our conscience that insists that we do what we think is right and avoid what we think is wrong. That distinction is very important and needs to be made clear. Conscience can be very mistaken; it is not a safe guide by itself. It accuses us when we violate whatever moral standard we may have, but that moral standard may be quite wrong when viewed in the light of God's revelation. But conscience also gives approval whenever we fulfill whatever standard we have, though that standard is right or wrong. And conscience, we have all discovered, acts both before and after the fact -- it can either prod or punish. ([A Clear Conscience](#))

Barclay gives an interesting historical perspective on "**conscience**" referring to it as...

the instinctive knowledge of right and wrong. The Stoics said that in the universe there were certain laws operative which a man broke at his peril—the laws of health, the moral laws which govern life and living. The Stoics called these laws **phusis**, which means nature, and urged men to live **kata phusin**, "according to nature". It is Paul's argument that in the very nature of man there is an instinctive knowledge of what he ought to do. The Greeks would have agreed with that. Aristotle said: "The cultivated and free-minded man will so behave as being a **law to himself**." Plutarch asks: "Who shall govern the governor?" And he answers: "Law, the king of all mortals and immortals...which is not written on papyrus rolls or wooden tablets, but is his own reason within the soul, which perpetually dwells with him and guards him and never leaves his soul bereft of

Unless of course it becomes seared as did the "inner moral compass" of the Roman Emperor Nero, whose evil exploits are too despicable to even be reviewed in these notes.

C. S. Lewis says, "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is Job 32—33 858 His megaphone to rouse a deaf world." G

[Warren Wiersbe](#) quotes related to conscience...

The voice of conscience (Mt 14:1–2). When Herod heard of the marvelous works of Jesus, he was sure that John had been raised from the dead. His conscience was troubling him, and neither his wife nor his friends could console him. The voice of conscience is a powerful voice, and it can be the voice of God to those who will listen. Instead of heeding his conscience, Herod determined to kill Jesus just as he had killed John.

The new covenant in His blood would do what the old covenant sacrifices could not do— take away sin and cleanse the heart and conscience of the believer.

It is unfortunate that some Christians have the mistaken idea that the more obnoxious they are as citizens, the more they please God and witness for Christ. We must never violate our conscience, but we should seek to be peacemakers and not troublemakers. Daniel is an example to follow (Dan. 1).

Since believers are commanded to be baptized, it is important that we have a clean conscience by obeying (1 Peter 3:21), but we must not think that baptism is a part of salvation. If so, then nobody in Hebrews 11 was saved, because none of them was ever baptized.

Christians are at liberty to follow their own conscience so long as they do not judge others or cause others to stumble (Rom. 14:1—15:7).

Conscience" is one of Paul's favorite words; he used it twice in Acts (23:1; 24:16) and twenty-one times in his letters. The word means "to know with, to know together." Conscience is the inner "judge" or "witness" that approves when we do right and disapproves when we do wrong (Rom. 2:15). Conscience does not set the standard; it only applies it. The conscience of a thief would bother him if he told the truth about his fellow crooks just as much as a Christian's conscience would convict him if he told a lie about his friends. Conscience does not make the standards; it only applies the standards of the person, whether they are good or bad, right or wrong. Conscience may be compared to a window that lets in the light. God's law is the light, and the cleaner the window is, the more the light shines in. As the window gets dirty, the light gets dimmer, and finally the light becomes darkness. A good conscience, or pure conscience (1 Tim. 3:9), is one that lets in God's light so that we are properly convicted if we do wrong and encouraged if we do right. A defiled conscience (1 Cor. 8:7) is one that has been sinned against so much that it is no longer dependable. If a person continues to sin against his conscience, he may end up with an evil conscience (Heb. 10:22) or a seared conscience (1 Tim. 4:2). Then he would feel convicted if he did what was right rather than what was wrong! Paul had persecuted the church and had even caused innocent people to die, so how could he claim to have a good conscience? He had lived up to the light that he had, and that is all that a good conscience requires. After he became a Christian and the bright light of God's glory shone into his heart (2 Cor. 4:6), Paul then saw things differently and realized that he was "the chief of sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15).

Wherever you go, you find people with an inner sense of right and wrong, and this inner judge, the Bible calls "conscience." You find among all cultures a sense of sin, a fear of judgment, and an attempt to atone for sins and appease whatever gods are feared.

The United States Government maintains a "Conscience Fund" for people who want to pay their debts to the Government and yet remain anonymous. Some city governments have a similar fund. I read about a city that had investigated some tax frauds and announced that several citizens were going to be indicted. They did not release the names of the culprits. That week, a number of people visited the City Hall to "straighten out their taxes"—and many of them were not on the indictment list. When conscience begins to work, we cannot live with ourselves until we have made things right. Romans 13:7 commands us to pay what we owe: taxes, revenue, respect, honor. If we do not pay our taxes, we show disrespect to the law, the officials, and the Lord. And this cannot but affect the conscience of the believer. We may not agree with all that is done with the money we pay in taxes, but we dare not violate our conscience by refusing to pay.

Conscience is strengthened by knowledge. But knowledge must be balanced by love; otherwise it tears down

instead of building up. The truth that “all foods are clean” (Rom. 14:14, 20) will not of itself make a Christian grow. When this truth is taught in an atmosphere of love, then the younger Christian can grow and develop a strong conscience. Believers may hold different convictions about many matters, but they must hold them in love.

Sometimes we do not really know ourselves. There can be a fine line between a clear conscience and a self-righteous attitude, so we must beware.

*The more spiritual knowledge we know and act on,
the stronger the conscience will become.*

The word conscience simply means “to know with,” and it is used thirty-two times in the New Testament. Conscience is that 1 Corinthians 8 internal court where our actions are judged and are either approved or condemned (Rom. 2:14–15). Conscience is not the law; it bears witness to God’s moral law. But the important thing is this: conscience depends on knowledge. The more spiritual knowledge we know and act on, the stronger the conscience will become. Some Christians have **weak consciences** because they have been saved only a short time and have not had opportunity to grow. Like little babes in the home, they must be guarded carefully. Other saints have **weak consciences** because they will not grow. They ignore their Bibles and Christian fellowship and remain in a state of infancy (1 Cor. 3:1–4; Heb. 5:11–14). But some believers remain **weak** because they are afraid of freedom. They are like a child old enough to go to school, who is afraid to leave home and must be taken to school each day. **The conscience of a weak Christian is easily defiled (1 Cor. 8:7), wounded (1 Cor. 8:12), and offended (1 Cor. 8:13).** For this reason, the stronger saints must defer to the weaker saints and do nothing that would harm them. It might not harm the mature saint to share a feast in an idolatrous temple, but it might harm his weaker brother. First Corinthians 8:10 warns that the immature believer might decide to imitate his stronger brother and thus be led into sin. It is important to note that the stronger believer defers to the weaker believer in love only that he might help him to mature. He does not “pamper” him; he seeks to edify him, to help him grow. Otherwise, both will become weak. We are free in Christ, but we must take care that our spiritual knowledge is tempered by love, and that we do not tempt the weaker Christian to run ahead of his conscience. Where knowledge is balanced by love, the strong Christian will have a ministry to the weak Christian, and the weak Christian will grow and become strong.

We cannot glorify God by causing another Christian to stumble. To be sure, our own conscience may be strong enough for us to participate in some activity and not be harmed. But we dare not use our freedom in Christ in any way that will injure a fellow Christian.

Conscience is that inner faculty that “knows with” our spirit and approves when we do right, but accuses when we do wrong. Conscience is not the law of God, but it bears witness to that law. It is the window that lets in the light; and if the window gets dirty because we disobey, then the light becomes dimmer and dimmer (see Matt. 6:22–23; Rom. 2:14–16)....When a person has a good conscience, he has integrity, not duplicity; and he can be trusted.

When you have a clear conscience, you will live in the light of the return of Jesus Christ (2Co 1:14)....One of the blessings of a good conscience is that we are not afraid to face God or men, or to claim the promises God gives in His Word

You can prove anything by the Bible, provided you twist the Scriptures out of context and reject the witness of your own conscience.

Satan has several devices for attacking believers. He can burden the consciences of believers who have sinned (2 Cor. 2:10–11), blind the minds of unbelievers (2 Cor. 4:4) or beguile the minds of believers (2 Cor. 11:3), and even buffet the bodies of God’s ministers (2 Cor. 12:7).

It is evidence of a hard heart and a calloused conscience when a guilty person no longer feels shame.

A man of integrity, with a clear conscience, can face the enemy without fear

Sin always results in unrest (unless the conscience is seared), and purity ought to result in peace.

Even though they had not received a divine law, such as God gave to Israel, these Gentiles knew the truth about God through creation and conscience (Rom. 1:18ff.). They could not plead ignorance before the bar of God’s justice.

The greatest definition of worship I ever read was given by William Temple, a late Archbishop of Canterbury: “For to worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to

purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open up the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God.”

It is possible to sin against the conscience so that it becomes “defiled” (Titus 1:15). Repeated sinning hardens the conscience so that it becomes “seared” like scar tissue (1 Tim. 4:2)

He warned Timothy that the only way to succeed was to hold fast to “faith and a good conscience.” It is not enough to proclaim the faith with our lips; we must practice the faith in our daily lives. One man said of his hypocritical pastor, “He is such a good preacher, he should never get out of the pulpit, but he is such a poor Christian, he should never get into the pulpit!”

Conscience....“the inner voice which warns us that somebody may be looking”

A good conscience is important to a good warfare and a good ministry. The magazine editor H. L. Mencken defined conscience as “the inner voice which warns us that somebody may be looking.” But a man with a good conscience will do the will of God in spite of who is watching or what people may say. Like Martin Luther, he will say, “Here I stand; I can do no other, so help me God!” Professed Christians who “make shipwreck” of their faith do so by sinning against their consciences. Bad doctrine usually starts with bad conduct, and usually with secret sin.

The word seared means “cauterized.” Just as a person’s flesh can be “branded” so that it becomes hard and without feeling, so a person’s conscience can be deadened. Whenever we affirm with our lips something that we deny with our lives (whether people know it or not), we deaden our consciences just a little more. Jesus made it clear that it is not religious talk or even performing miracles that qualifies a person for heaven, but doing God’s will in everyday life (Matt. 7:21–29). An apostate is not just wrong doctrinally; he is wrong morally. His personal life became wrong before his doctrines were changed. In fact, it is likely that he changed his teachings so that he could continue his sinful living and pacify his conscience. Believing and behaving always go together.

“These teachers have defiled minds and consciences. Therefore, when they look at these innocent foods, they see sin, Titus 1 790 C.Silence false teachers—1:10–16 II. CHRISTIAN OBLIGATION (2—3) A.Older saints—2:1–4a because sin has defiled their vision. But those of us who have pure minds and consciences know that all foods are clean. It is not the foods that are defiling the teachers; it is the teachers who are defiling the foods!”

The blood of animals did not wash away sin or cleanse the guilty conscience; it only covered sin until that day when Jesus Christ died to take away the sin of the world (John 1:29).....Cleansing our consciences cannot be done by some external ceremony; it demands an internal power. Because Jesus Christ is “without spot [blemish]” He was able to offer the perfect sacrifice.

Sometimes a Christian employee may be wronged by an unbelieving coworker or supervisor. For conscience’ sake, he must “take it” even though he is not in the wrong.

It takes “exercise” to keep the conscience strong and pure

Our word “conscience” comes from two Latin words: con, meaning “with,” and scio, meaning “to know.” The conscience is that internal judge that witnesses to us, that enables us to “know with,” either approving our actions or accusing (see Rom. 2:14–15). Conscience may be compared to a window that lets in the light of God’s truth. If we persist in disobeying, the window gets dirtier and dirtier, until the light cannot enter. This leads to a “defiled conscience” (Titus 1:15). A “seared conscience” is one that has been so sinned against that it no longer is sensitive to what is right and wrong (1 Tim. 4:2). It is even possible for the conscience to be so poisoned that it approves things that are bad and accuses when the person does good! This the Bible calls “an evil conscience” (Heb. 10:22). A criminal feels guilty if he “squeals” on his friends, but happy if he succeeds in his crime! Conscience depends on knowledge, the “light” coming through the window. As a believer studies the Word, he better understands the will of God, and his conscience becomes more sensitive to right and wrong. A “good conscience” is one that accuses when we think or do wrong and approves when we do right. It takes “exercise” to keep the conscience strong and pure (Acts 24:16). If we do not grow in spiritual knowledge and obedience, we have a “weak conscience” that is upset very easily by trifles (1 Cor. 8)

If we are to maintain a good conscience, we must deal with sin in our lives and confess it immediately (1 John 1:9). We must “keep the window clean.” We must also spend time in the Word of God and “let in the light.” A

strong conscience is the result of obedience based on knowledge, and a strong conscience makes for a strong Christian witness to the lost. It also gives us strength in times of persecution and difficulty.

*If a believer is to have a good conscience,
he must obey God.*

As times of difficulty come to the church, we must cultivate Christian love, for we will need one another's help and encouragement as never before. We must also maintain a good conscience, because a good conscience makes for a strong backbone and a courageous witness. The secret is to practice the lordship of Jesus Christ. If we fear God, we need not fear men. "Shame arises from the fear of men," said Samuel Johnson. "Conscience, from the fear of God."

If a man has no conscience, the ministry is a good place to be lazy. Church members rarely ask what their pastor is doing with his time, and he can "borrow" sermons from other preachers and use them as his own. I met one pastor who spent most of his week on the golf course; then on Saturday he listened to tapes of other preachers and used their sermons on Sunday. He seems 1 Peter 5:24 to be getting away with it, but what will he say when he meets the Chief Shepherd?

Sin ought to make us ashamed of ourselves. God has given us an inner judge called "conscience" that accuses when we do wrong and approves when we do right (Rom. 2:12–16). A Native American Christian compared conscience to an arrowhead in his heart. *"If I do wrong, it turns and hurts me until I make it right. But if I keep on doing wrong, the arrowhead keeps turning and wears down the points, so it doesn't hurt anymore."* The Bible calls that a "seared conscience" (1 Tim. 4:2) or an "evil conscience" (Heb. 10:22) that no longer functions properly. When people are no longer ashamed of their sins, their character is just about gone. "Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No! They were not at all ashamed. Nor did they know how to blush" (Jer. 6:15; 8:12 nkjv).

Conscience has a way of digging up the past and arousing doubts and fears within us.

When Christians disobey the law because of conscience, their decisions must be based on the clear laws of God found in Scripture and not simply on personal prejudice.

The most important part of a Christian's life is the part that only God sees. If God is pleased by what He sees, and our conscience is clean before Him, then we don't have to worry about what people think or say about us (1 Cor. 4:1–5). He will accept our ministry and bless it.

Mordecai is not the only person in the Bible who for conscience' sake practiced "civil disobedience."

Martin Luther who challenged prelates and potentates with: "My conscience is captive to the Word of God. Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise!"

Guilt is to the conscience what pain is to the body: it tells us that something is wrong and must be made right, or things will get worse.

Christians with a weak conscience stumble easily and need to be built up, but stronger Christians are sometimes quick to criticize and look down on others. Both groups need love, patience, and the help of the Spirit.

Expired License When Sgt. Ray Baarz of the Midvale, Utah, police department opened his wallet the other day, he noticed his driver's license had expired. Embarrassed at having caught himself red-handed, he had no alternative. He calmly and deliberately pulled out his ticket book and wrote himself a citation. Then Baarz took the ticket to the city judge who fined him five dollars. "How could I give a ticket to anyone else for an expired license in the future if I didn't cite myself?" Baarz asked.

The trouble with the advice, "Follow your conscience" is that most people follow it like someone following a wheelbarrow—they direct it wherever they want it to go, and then follow behind. - Source unknown

This was how Susannah Wesley defined "sin" to her young son, John Wesley: "If you would judge of the lawfulness or the unlawfulness of pleasure, then take this simple rule: Whatever weakens your reason, impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your sense of God, and takes off the relish of spiritual things—that to you is sin."

Barclay quotes William Temple, the renowned archbishop of Canterbury, as defining worship as quickening the conscience by the holiness of God, feeding the mind with the truth of God, purging the imagination by the beauty of God, opening the heart to the love

of God, and devoting the will to the purpose of God

Conscience Fund - Did you know that ever since 1811 (when someone who had defrauded the government anonymously sent \$5 to Washington D.C.) the U.S. Treasury has operated a Conscience Fund? Since that time almost \$3.5 million has been received from guilt-ridden citizens. Swindoll, The Quest For Character

The Necessity of a Clear Conscience - Mark Hurlbut - A clear conscience is not a perfect conscience (with no presence of sin or struggle) but one that is always current with God. There are no dark closets with skeletons, no seared corners where sin has been entirely excused ... just a conscience that has cleared all things with God. A man with a clear conscience is not merely a person of integrity. Although integrity is important, a clear conscience belongs to one who has taken all things to God and let the Spirit and the Word deal with every detail and aspect of life. A clear conscience is far richer than mere integrity. It is intimacy with the holy Trinity in ongoing communion.....King David was a man after God's own heart because when his conscience was not clear, he sought the Lord, who wonderfully and mercifully cleared it for him. God can do the same for you. Let Him cleanse and clear your deepest needs and lay the necessary cornerstone of a clear conscience so you can not only finish well for Christ but flourish for Him!

CLEAR CONSCIENCE - A clear conscience is the ability to say, "There is no one alive that I have ever wronged, offended, or hurt in any way that I have not gone back to and made it right with God and with them."

How an Unclear Conscience Affects You

1. No power in witnessing (1 Peter 3:15-16)
2. Active at church, but neglecting other spiritual matters (Matthew 7:21-23)
3. Going through the role of religion, but lost the heart desire, love, and motivation (1 Samuel 15:22)
4. Nervousness (Proverbs 10:24)
5. Always on the defensive (Proverbs 21:2)
6. Anxiety, tension, guilt, and frustration (Matthew 18:34-35)
7. Inability to make wise decisions in light of ultimate goals (1 Timothy 1:5)
8. Fears (Proverbs 28:1)
9. Unable to concentrate (Psalm 38:14; James 1:8)
10. Small circle of friends (Proverbs 18:4)
11. Depression and fatigue (Proverbs 20:27; Psalm 32:1-4)
12. Judgmental attitudes (Romans 2:1-3; Matthew 7:1-5)
13. Self-condemnation (Proverbs 8:36; 11:9)
14. No joy (2 Corinthians 6:3-10)

How a Clear Conscience Affects You

1. Mark of maturity (Hebrews 5:13-14)
2. Spiritual exercise of the inner man (Acts 24:16)
3. Freedom to rejoice in everything (2 Corinthians 1:12)
4. Number one weapon next to faith for overcoming Satan and sin (1 Timothy 1:18-19)
5. Freedom to share faith with boldness (1 Peter 3:15-16)
6. Better health and physical appearance (Psalm 32:1)

Reasons to Have a Clear Conscience

1. God's Word commands it.
2. It brings release from bondage and conflict.
3. It is a channel through which love flows.

4. It brings about development and growth.
5. Without it, the ability to discern between right and wrong is gone.

Biblical Parameters for Confession

1. The scope of the confession should be as large, but only as large, as the transgression.
 - a. Private sins should be confessed privately.
 - b. Personal sins should be confessed personally.
 - c. Public sins should be confessed publicly.
2. Do not apologize or just say, "I'm sorry." Say, "Will you please forgive me?"
3. When obeying . . .
 - a. In person is usually best.
 - b. The phone is the next best option.
 - c. A letter is the last and least effective.
4. Do not reflect negatively on another person.
5. Put the hardest person on your list first.
6. Don't expect an overwhelmingly positive response.

Obstacles to Obtaining and Maintaining a Clear Conscience

1. "It happened a long time ago."
2. "They have moved away."
3. "It's such a small thing."
4. "Things have gotten better."
5. "It will cost me money."
6. "I'll do it later."
7. "The other person was mostly wrong."
8. "They're not Christians."
9. "I was right and they were wrong."
10. "It happened before I was saved."

Don't Cross that Line

There is a time, we know not when,
A place, we know not where;
Which marks the destiny of men
To glory or despair.

There is a line, by us unseen,
Which crosses every path,
Which marks the boundary between
God's mercy and his wrath.

To pass that limit is to die,
To die as if by stealth;
It does not dim the beaming eye,
Nor pale the glow of health.

The conscience may be still at ease,
The spirit light and gay;
And that which pleases still may please,

And care be thrust away.

But on that forehead God hath set
Indelibly a mark;
Unseen by man, for man as yet,
Is blind and in the dark.

He feels perchance that all is well
And every fear is calmed;
He lives, he dies, he walks in hell,
Not only doomed, but damned!

O, where is that mysterious line
That may by men be crossed,
Beyond which God himself hath sworn,
That he who goes is lost?

An answer from the skies repeats,
"Ye who from God depart,"
Today, O hear His voice,
Today repent and harden not your heart.
- Joseph Addison Alexander

Hudson Taylor - Years ago the communist government in China commissioned an author to write a biography of Hudson Taylor with the purpose of distorting the facts and presenting him in a bad light. They wanted to discredit the name of this consecrated missionary of the gospel. As the author was doing his research, he was increasingly impressed by Taylor's saintly character and godly life, and he found it extremely difficult to carry out his assigned task with a clear conscience. Eventually, at the risk of losing his life, he laid aside his pen, renounced his atheism, and received Jesus as his personal Savior. Whether we realize it or not, our example leaves an impression on others.

Once there was a man who was such a golf addict that he was neglecting his job. Frequently he would call in sick as an excuse to play.

One morning, after making his usual call to the office, an angel up above spotted him on the way to the golf course and decided to teach him a lesson. "If you play golf today, you will be punished," the angel whispered in his ear.

Thinking it was only his conscience, which he had successfully whipped in the past, the fellow just smiled. "No," he said, "I've been doing this for years. No one will ever know. I won't be punished."

The angel said no more and the fellow stepped up to the first tee where he promptly whacked the ball 300 yards straight down the middle of the fairway. Since he had never driven the ball more than 200 yards, he couldn't believe it. Yet, there it was. And his luck continued. Long drives on every hole, perfect putting. By the ninth hole he was six under par and was playing near-perfect golf. The fellow was walking on air.

He wound up with an amazing 61, about 30 strokes under his usual game. Wait until he got back to the office and told them about this! But, suddenly, his face fell. He couldn't tell them. He could never tell anyone.

The angel smiled.

Upright Character

In China's later Han era, there lived a politician called Yang Zhen, a man known for his upright character. After Yang Zhen was made a provincial governor, one of his earlier patrons, Wang Mi, paid him an unexpected visit. As they talked over old times, Wang Mi brought out a large gold cup and presented it to Yang Zhen. Yang Zhen refused to accept it, but Wang Mi persisted, saying, "There's no one here tonight but you and me, so no one will know."

"You say that no one will know," Yang Zhen replied, "but that is not true. Heaven will know, and you and I will know too."

Wang Mi was ashamed, and backed down. Subsequently Yang Zhen's integrity won increasing recognition, and he rose to a high post in the central government.

Human nature is weak, and we tend to yield to temptation when we think nobody can see us. In fact, if there was no police force, many people would not hesitate to steal. This is not to say that when we do something bad, we feel no compunction at all, just that man is weak and prone to yield to temptation.

But even if nobody witnesses our sins, and not a soul knows of them, we cannot hide the truth from the eyes of our conscience. In the end, what is important is not that other people know, but that we ourselves know. When Yang Zhen told Wang Mi that "Heaven

will know," he meant that the gods would know what he had done: in other words, his own conscience.

A person who sins neither in thought nor deed, and is fair and just, gains enormous courage and strength. As a leader, you need courage born of integrity in order to be capable of powerful leadership. To achieve this courage, you must search your heart, and make sure that your conscience is clear and your behavior is beyond reproach. Konosuke Matsushita,

Things that will destroy us

Politics without principle,
pleasure without conscience,
wealth without work,
knowledge without character,
business without morality,
science without humanity,
worship without sacrifice.
Mohandas K. Gandhi,

Stirring the Conscience

The great 19th century British statesman and prime minister, William Gladstone, once said, "One thing I have against the clergy both of the country and in the towns. I think they are not severe enough on congregations. They do not sufficiently lay upon the souls and consciences of their hearers their moral obligations, and probe their hearts and bring up their whole lives and actions to the bar of conscience.

"The class of sermons which I think are most needed, are of the class which once offended Lord Melbourne. He was seen coming from church in the country in a great fume. Finding a friend, he exclaimed, 'It is too bad I have always been a supporter of the church, and I have always upheld the clergy, but it is really too bad to have to listen to a sermon like that we have heard this morning. Why, the preacher actually insisted upon applying religion to a man's personal life!'"

Gladstone concluded,

"That is the kind of preaching I like best, the kind of preaching which men need most, but it is, also, the kind of which they get the least." Morning Glory

Ps. 51:3 Dirty Windows

Read Psalm 51:3-6

Sin is much more than a word in the dictionary. It is a powerful evil that damages our lives and our world. David describes a guilty conscience: "For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me" (Psalm 51:3). Conscience is a marvelous gift from God, the window that lets in the light of His truth. If we sin against Him deliberately, that window becomes dirty, and not as much truth can filter through. Eventually, the window becomes so dirty that it no longer lets in the light. The Bible calls this a defiled, seared conscience.

David covered his sin for about a year. He refused to be broken. He refused to humble himself before God. And what was his life like? "He who covers his sins will not prosper" (Prov. 28:13). Did David prosper? No. Wherever he looked he saw his sin.

Before he sinned, David saw God wherever he looked. His heart was pure. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8). Your heart affects your eyes; what you love in your heart, your eyes will seek.

God wants truth in our inner being. "Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom" (Psalm 51:6). David confessed because he wanted to see God again--in nature, in His Word and in the temple.

Do you keep a clean conscience? It is a part of your inner being that responds to God's truth. When you sin, the window of your conscience becomes dirty and filters out truth. Avoid sin in your life and live with a clean conscience. Every day feed yourself truth from the Word of God. - Warren Wiersbe - Prayer, Praises, and Promises

Restitution

I once heard the late Dr. F.E. Marsh tell that on one occasion he was preaching on this question and urging upon his hearers the importance of confession of sin and wherever possible of restitution for wrong done to others.

At the close a young man, a member of the church, came up to him with a troubled countenance. "Pastor," he explained, "you have put me in a sad fix. I have wronged another and I am ashamed to confess it or to try to put it right. You see, I am a boat builder and

the man I work for is an infidel. I have talked to him often about his need of Christ and urged him to come and hear you preach, but he scoffs and ridicules it all. Now, I have been guilty of something that, if I should acknowledge it to him, will ruin my testimony forever."

He then went on to say that sometime ago he started to build a boat for himself in his own yard. In this work copper nails are used because they do not rust in the water. These nails are quite expensive and the young man had been carrying home quantities of them to use on the job. He knew it was stealing, but he tried to salve his conscience by telling himself that the master had so many he would never miss them and besides he was not being paid all that he thought he deserved. But this sermon had brought him to face the fact that he was just a common thief, for whose dishonest actions there was no excuse.

"But," said he, "I cannot go to my boss and tell him what I have done or offer to pay for those I have used and return the rest. If I do he will think I am just a hypocrite. And yet those copper nails are digging into my conscience and I know I shall never have peace until I put this matter right."

For weeks the struggle went on. Then one night he came to Dr. Marsh and exclaimed, "Pastor, I've settled for the copper nails and my conscience is relieved at last."

"What happened when you confessed to your employer what you had done?" asked the pastor.

"Oh," he answered, "he looked queerly at me, then exclaimed, 'George, I always did think you were just a hypocrite, but now I begin to feel there's something in this Christianity after all. Any religion that would make a dishonest workman come back and confess that he had been stealing copper nails and offer to settle for them, must be worth having.'"

Dr. Marsh asked if he might use the story, and was granted permission.

Sometime afterwards, he told it in another city. The next day a lady came up and said, "Doctor, I have had 'copper nails' on my conscience too." "Why, surely, you are not a boat builder!" "No, but I am a book-lover and I have stolen a number of books from a friend of mine who gets far more than I could ever afford. I decided last night I must get rid of the 'copper nails,' so I took them all back to her today and confessed my sin. I can't tell you how relieved I am. She forgave me, and God has forgiven me. I am so thankful the 'copper nails' are not digging into my conscience any more."

I have told this story many times and almost invariably people have come to me afterwards telling of "copper nails" in one form or another that they had to get rid of. On one occasion, I told it at a High School chapel service. The next day the principal saw me and said, "As a result of that 'copper nails' story, ever so many stolen fountain pens and other things have been returned to their rightful owners."

Reformation and restitution do not save. But where one is truly repentant and has come to God in sincere confession, he will want to the best of his ability to put things right with others. Illustrations of Bible Truth by H.A. Ironside

False Testimony - The great attorney, orator, and statesman Daniel Webster was such an imposing figure in court that he once stared a witness out of the courtroom. Apparently Webster knew the man was there to deliver false testimony, so he fixed his "dark, beetle-browed" eyes on the man and searched him. According to the story, later in the trial "Webster looked around again to see if [the witness] was ready for the inquisition. The witness felt for his hat and edged toward the door. A third time Webster looked on him, and the witness could sit no longer. He seized his chance and fled from the court and was nowhere to be found." - Today in the Word,

In a number of languages it would be entirely misleading to speak of 'a guilty conscience,' for this would seem to imply that there is something sinful about the conscience itself. In reality, it is the conscience that says that a person is guilty, and therefore it may be necessary to translate [Heb10:22](#) as 'with hearts that have been purified from a condition in which their conscience has said that they are guilty.'

There is a treasure you can own
That's greater than a crown or throne;
This treasure is a conscience clear
That brings the sweetest peace and cheer. --Isenhour

See 1Pe 3:19 where Peter is encouraging the believers who are suffering (or will soon go thru a fiery trial) with the doctrinal truth that "baptism now saves you" and he equates this "baptism" not with water baptism of Christianity or ritual Jewish baptismal washing for "purification" but with the obtaining of a "good conscience". And in these verses in Hebrews we see the only way one can obtain a clean conscience is by having one's heart sprinkled (with the blood of Jesus) (1Pe1:2) representing the blood of the New Covenant in which the unregenerate person is born from above and receives a new heart (with a new conscience).

The 50-Year Desire -- Years ago I was standing by the deathbed of an old minister down in Alabama. The old man had been a preacher for fifty years. I saw his son, who also was a minister, kneel by his father's bed. "Father, you have preached for fifty years, and have done more good than any man I know." The old man, with feeble but distinct voice, said: "Don't tell me about that, son. Tell me about the blood of Jesus. Nothing but the blood of Jesus will do for a dying man." If a man who had preached for fifty years and

who had lived a pure, straight life, in his dying hour had to rely upon the blood of Jesus Christ, don't you ever think there is any hope for you aside from this atoning blood?

Board Room Policy - Few executives can afford the luxury of a conscience. A business that defined right and wrong in terms that would satisfy a well-developed contemporary conscience could not survive. When the directors and managers enter the board room to debate policy, they park their private consciences outside. If they didn't they would fail in their responsibility to the company that pays them. The crucial question in board rooms today is not, "Are we morally obligated to do it?" but rather "What will happen if we don't do it?" or "How will this affect the rate of return on our investment?" No company employs a vice president in charge of ethical standards, and sooner or later the conscientious executive is likely to come up against a stone wall of corporate indifference to private moral values. In the real world of today's business, he is almost surely a troubled man. - Dan Miller, Chicago

I recently saw the story of a high school values clarification class conducted by a teacher in Teneck, New Jersey. A girl in the class had found a purse containing \$1,000 and returned it to its owner. The teacher asked for the class's reaction. Every single one of her fellow students concluded the girl had been "foolish." Most of the students contended that if someone is careless, they should be punished. When the teacher was asked what he said to the students, he responded, "Well, of course, I didn't say anything. If I come from the position of what is right and what is wrong, then I'm not their counselor. I can't impose my views." It's no wonder that J. Allen Smith, considered a father of many modern education reforms, concluded in the end, "The trouble with us reformers is that we've made reform a crusade against all standards. Well, we've smashed them all, and now neither we nor anybody else have anything left." Senator Dan Coats

Conscience Free - "I desire so to conduct the affairs of this administration that if at the end, when I come to lay down the reins of power, I have lost every other friend on earth, I shall at least have one friend left, and that friend shall be down inside of me." — Abraham Lincoln

Your Conscience - Oh child of many prayers; Oh child of baptism and covenants; Oh child of the Sabbath-school and the early Church—if you are going from glory to glory, how joyful is your lot! **But if you are going on from insensibility to insensibility, if you sin more and feel less, if you are becoming harder and harder, if moral waste is more and more manifest in you, if death already begins to show itself in the supernal and superior part of your nature, if conscience ceases any more to speak and hope is gone, and faith is lost, and wreck and ruin have come upon the crystalline sphere of your being—then woe is you!** —Henry Ward Beecher

Never Go Against Conscience - In the primitive days of our American history a wealthy man came to a poor sadler on Saturday night, leaving a bridle with orders that it should be finished Monday. "That is not possible," said the proprietor of the shop. "What nonsense! There is all day tomorrow." "We do not work on Sunday, sir." "Then I shall go to those who do." "We can get it done by Tuesday." "That will not do, put it in the carriage." Not a moment did the sadler linger. Quietly he did as he was told. Hours afterward a neighbor came and said, banteringly, "I thought the least I could do was to come and thank you, and tell you I should be glad of as many more customers as you like to send." "I shall not send you those I can keep, but God helping me, I will never go against my conscience, not for any man, nor for any money." Weeks went by, weeks of trouble to this faithful sadler, and a military man came into his shop. "So you are the impudent fellow who will not work on Sunday." "I do not work on Sunday, but I hope I am not wanting in respect to my employers." "My friend said you refused to do his work, do you not call that impertinence?" "I had no choice, sir." "Yes you had, you were free to choose between serving God and pleasing man, and you made your choice, and because of that I am here today. I am General Downing. I have been looking for a man on whom I could rely, to execute a large government order. The moment I heard of you, I made up my mind you should have it, for I felt sure the man who would serve God fearlessly would serve his neighbor faithfully." The general gave him the order, and it laid the foundation of the sadler's prosperity.—Selected

Guilty Conscience - At a missionary conference in a southern church, Rev. Leon Cramer was leading the singing. Many of the poorer folk had no money to give to missions, but they laid aside a hen, pig, calf, or sheep and brought in the money when the animal was sold. One brother had promised a calf, but meat prices went a-soaring and said he to himself, I'll not give it. Even the rich won't give that much." Many came with their offerings but he still refused. One Sunday afternoon Mr. Cramer led in singing, "The Half Has Never Yet Been Told." This brother was coming up over the hill. He heard the singing and came running in onto the platform shouting, "Stop singing about it and I'll bring the money in for missions tomorrow." A guilty conscience needs no accuser. He thought they were singing, "The Calf Has Never Yet Been Sold." Perhaps some of us have "a calf" on hand that should be given to God. —W. Leon Tucker

Conscience Not Infallible: A Hindu said to a British administrator in India, "Our consciences tell us to burn our widows on the funeral pyres of their husbands!" The Englishman replied, "Our consciences tell us to hang you if you do!" —W. B. K.

Signal Lights

"It was well you stopped when the red light flashed,"
She said as we drove along.
"For an officer stood on the corner there,
In charge of the traffic throng."
And I smiled, and said to my daughter fair
As we waited on the spot:
"I always stop when the red light shows,
Be an officer there, or not."
Then she sat in thought as we drove along,
And suddenly she said:
"There ought to be lights for us all through life—
The amber, the green and the red
What a help 'twould be if a red light flashed
When danger and shame were near,
And we all might wait till the green light came
To show that the road is clear."
"My dear," said I, "We have tried to light
Life's road for your feet to fare,
And we pray you'll stop when the red light glows,
Though none of us may be there.
We have tried to teach you the signs of wrong,
And the way to a life serene,
So STOP, when your conscience-post shows red,
And GO when it flashes green."
—Edgar A. Guest

(Borrow [Knight's Master Book of New Illustrations](#) page 102)

Losing To Win - While James E. Rogan was a US Representative from a district in California, he was faced with a crucial decision. He had been elected by the slimmest of margins in an area that usually voted for the other party. An extremely important public issue with immense moral implications was being considered. If he followed his conscience, it would cost him re-election. If he followed political expediency, he could be certain of another term. The congressman went with his convictions and voted for what he knew in his heart to be right. He was not re-elected. Afterward, he said, "It hurt to lose. But I'll never regret my vote . . . It is easy for elected officials to succumb to the illusion that the greater good is served by their self-perpetuation in office. But something larger gets lost. . . . the ability to lead."

Our conscience is like a moral monitor. An important way we discern whether a spiritual communication has God as its source is to ask: Does the message agree with the Bible, God's written Word? If it does not align with God's previously revealed truth, then we cannot put our stamp of approval on it. - Amy Boucher Pye

Jesse Jacobs has created an apology hotline that makes it possible to apologize without actually talking to the person you've wronged. People who are unable or unwilling to unburden their conscience in person call the hotline and leave a message on an answering machine. Each week, 30 to 50 calls are logged, as people apologize for things from adultery to embezzlement. "The hotline offers participants a chance to alleviate their guilt and, to some degree, to own up to their misdeeds," said Jacobs. Are any of your relationships broken or estranged because of something you said or did? Take the initiative. Go now and do all you can to be reconciled.

A prisoner waiting on death row had a deep sense of guilt. He had killed a man in the presence of the victim's two children during a robbery attempt. The convict was bothered so much that he refused to allow his lawyer to appeal for a stay of execution. For him, departing this life was an escape from his nagging conscience and the reproach of an angry society. He said, "It's my way out of this living hell." How mistaken he was!

After bearing the burden of a guilty conscience for more than four decades, an elderly man decided he couldn't go on any longer

without confessing his crime. When he was brought to trial, he told the judge, "After living with this thing hanging over my head for 40 some years, it got heavier and heavier until I just couldn't stand it any longer." What a clear illustration that guilt is inescapable!

And the power of conscience!

If you can't hear God speaking, check the volume control of your conscience.

Researchers at the University of Toronto reported in 2006 that people who are suffering from a guilty conscience experience "a powerful urge to wash themselves." To study this effect, the researchers asked volunteers to recall past sins. They were then given an opportunity to wash their hands as a symbol of cleansing their conscience. Those who had recalled their sins washed their hands at "twice the rate of study subjects who had not imagined past transgressions." The Bible proposes the only effective way of dealing with sin—confession

A Clear Conscience

Read: Hebrews 3:7-15

Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. —Psalm 51:2

In 1971 he killed a man. Even though he was the prime suspect in the murder, no one could prove it and the case was abandoned. So, he got away with it. Or did he? Nearly three decades later, in failing health and living in a nursing home, he confessed to the crime. A detective who headed the original investigation said, "He was looking over his shoulder for the last 26 years, not only for the law, but for his Maker. I think he wants to clear his conscience before he meets his Maker--or try to at least."

How's your conscience today? Clear or clouded? What would it take to be ready to meet your Maker? How can you be made clean?

It may seem strange to speak of blood as a cleansing agent, but that's how the Bible connects the death of Jesus on the cross to our standing before God (Heb. 10:19). Christ shed His blood so that we might be forgiven and made clean inside. Because of what He has done, we can have a clear conscience and "draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith" (Heb 10:22).

No matter who you are or what you've done, Jesus Christ can give you a clear conscience. Why not confess your sin and make things right with your Maker today. -- [David C. McCasland](#)

Now in His mercy He waits to impart
Peace to the conscience and joy to the heart,
Waits to be gracious, to pardon and heal
All who their guilt and their sinfulness feel. --Anon.

A clear conscience is a soft pillow.

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See related devotional by Oswald Chambers - [The Habit of Keeping a Clear Conscience](#)

A Clear Conscience

Read: 1 John 1

I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men. —Acts 24:16

After Ffiona Campbell became famous as the first woman to walk around the world, her joy was short-lived. Despite the adulation she received, something troubled her. Guilt overtook her and pushed her to the brink of a nervous breakdown.

What was bothering her? "I shouldn't be remembered as the first woman to walk around the world," she finally admitted. "I cheated." During her worldwide trek, she broke the guidelines of the Guinness Book of World Records by riding in a truck part of the way. To clear her conscience, she called her sponsor and confessed her deception.

God has given each of us a conscience that brings guilt when we do wrong. In Romans, Paul describes our conscience as "accusing or else excusing [us]" (Ro 2:15+). For the obedient follower of Christ, care of the conscience is an important way of maintaining a moral compass despite moral imperfection. Confessing sin, turning from it, and making restitution should be a way of life (1 John 1:9+; Lev. 6:2-5+).

Paul modeled a well-maintained conscience, saying, "I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man" (Acts 24:16NIV+). Through confession and repentance, he kept short accounts with God. Is sin bothering you? Follow Paul's example. Strive for a clear conscience.

There is a treasure you can own
That's greater than a crown or throne:
This treasure is a conscience clear
That brings the sweetest peace and cheer.
—Isenhour

If God's Word guides your conscience,
let your conscience be your guide.

By Dennis Fisher 2011/01/08 ([For the full devotional including a beautiful related picture and a link at the bottom of the page to one of their excellent devotional booklets please click here to go to Our Daily Bread. Copyright RBC Ministries — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

The Pain Machine

Read: Acts 24:16; Ephesians 4:31-32

I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men. —Acts 24:16

Dr. Paul Brand, who served as a medical missionary in India, told about lepers who had terrible deformities because their nerve endings could not feel pain. It didn't hurt when they stepped in a fire or cut their finger with a knife, so they left their wounds untended. This led to infection and deformity.

Dr. Brand constructed a machine that would beep when it came in contact with fire or sharp objects. It signaled the warnings of injury in the absence of pain. Soon machines were attached to the patients' fingers and feet. That worked well until they wanted to play basketball. They took the machines off, and often became injured again without knowing it.

Like physical pain to our bodies, our conscience alerts us to spiritual harm. But habitual and unrepentant sin can numb the conscience (1 Tim. 4:1-3). To keep a clear conscience, we need to respond to the pain of appropriate guilt by confession (1 John 1:9), repentance (Acts 26:20), and restitution to others (Luke 19:8). Paul could say with confidence, "I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men" (Acts 24:16). Like him, we should not grow numb to God's painful reminder of sin but allow it to produce in us godly character.

My conscience must be well-informed
From God's own sacred Word,
For conscience may be much deformed
When standards pure are spurned.
—Fraser

A clear conscience is a soft pillow.

By Dennis Fisher - March 22, 2007 ([For the full devotional including a beautiful related picture and a link at the bottom of the page to one of their excellent devotional booklets please click here to go to Our Daily Bread. Copyright RBC Ministries — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

If Doubtful, Don't!

Read: Romans 14:14-23

He who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin. —Romans 14:23

In his book *Illustrations of Bible Truth*, H. A. Ironside tells about a man who was getting ready to attend a banquet. He wanted to put on a white shirt he had worn on a previous occasion, so he was inspecting it carefully to see if it was too dirty. His wife noticed what he was doing and called out, "Remember, dear, if it's doubtful, don't." The issue was settled. The man threw the shirt into the laundry hamper.

That wife's advice reminds me of the principle in today's text. It's a principle that can be applied to questionable matters of conscience. If doubtful, don't.

The doubtful things the apostle Paul wrote about in Romans 14 had to do with meat and wine considered to be “unclean” by some but not by others (Ro 14:14,21). He indicated that if we have doubts about whether an action is right or wrong and we do it anyway, our action is not from faith and is therefore a sin (Ro 14:23). He also pointed out that it is wrong to do anything by which a brother in Christ “stumbles or is offended or is made weak” (Ro 14:21). We must never give another Christian a reason to violate his or her conscience.

When faced with questionable practices and a troubled conscience, we would do well to make this our guideline: If it’s doubtful, don’t!

There is a treasure you can own
That’s greater than a crown or throne;
This treasure is a conscience clear
That brings the sweetest peace and cheer.
—Isenhour

One little word can spare us a lot of trouble. It’s NO.

By Richard DeHaan 9/20/2004 ([For the full devotional including a beautiful related picture and a link at the bottom of the page to one of their excellent devotional booklets please click here to go to Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

A Winning Combination

Read: 1 Timothy 1:18-20

. . . having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck. —1 Timothy 1:19

A new believer slipped into his old ways by attending a party and getting drunk. When he arrived home, his wife would not let him in. Instead, she called their pastor, who found the man sleeping in his car.

The pastor took him to a motel to sleep off his drunkenness. He knew him well and was confident that a strong rebuke would not be needed. Instead, he asked God to convict the man and bring him to repentance. In this case the pastor chose the right course. The young man later said that he had learned a valuable lesson through this experience and that the Lord had “taken all the fun out of sin.”

A “good conscience” will disturb us when we do something we know is wrong. We keep it “good” by heeding it and turning away from sin. Paul said the faith of Hymenaeus and Alexander “suffered shipwreck” because they rejected the voice of their good conscience (1 Timothy 1:19-20). By doing so, they had deadened their conscience and then apparently twisted the truth to justify their conduct.

True faith and a sensitive conscience will take all the fun out of sinning and remove the desire to twist the truth to justify what is wrong. Faith and a good conscience are a winning combination. Let’s keep them strong.

Our conscience is a gift from God,
It is a guiding light;
And when aligned with faith and truth,
It tells us wrong from right.
—Sper

Conscience is a safe guide when guided by God’s Word.

By Herbert Vander Lugt 2004/05/08/ ([For the full devotional including a beautiful related picture and a link at the bottom of the page to one of their excellent devotional booklets please click here to go to Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Be Safe—Not Sorry!

Read: Acts 5:1-11

Do not quench the Spirit. —1 Thessalonians 5:19

Two young women lost their lives in a fire that swept through their apartment as they slept. Their home was equipped with a smoke

detector that was in good working order, but it hadn't gone off. Why? Fire inspectors concluded that the device had been deactivated for a party the night before. The unit had been disconnected to keep it from sounding off because of the smoke from cooking and candles.

In Acts 5 we have another example of two people who apparently deactivated an alarm system that could have saved their lives. Ananias and Sapphira must have quenched the Holy Spirit by turning a deaf ear to their consciences, believing they had plenty of good reasons for doing what they did. But their action cost them their lives.

We need to realize that the Holy Spirit was not given to annoy us like a sensitive smoke detector. He doesn't sound false alarms. When He activates our conscience by bringing to mind a principle or warning from God's Word, it is really His love and wisdom in action.

By weighing the warnings of His love against the cost of our foolishness, we'll soon realize that it's always better to be safe than sorry. —MRD II

Our conscience is a gift from God,
It is a guiding light;
And when aligned with God's true Word,
It shows us what is right.

—Sper

To ignore your conscience is to invite trouble.

By [Mart DeHaan](#) 2002/07/22 ([For the full devotional including a beautiful related picture and a link at the bottom of the page to one of their excellent devotional booklets please click here to go to Our Daily Bread. Copyright RBC Ministries — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

A Good Conscience

Read: 1 Peter 3:8-17

Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, . . . having a good conscience. —1 Peter 3:15-16

What does it take to have a good conscience? Well, if we could go through life without ever breaking any of God's laws, we would have nothing to feel guilty about. But I don't know anyone with that kind of record. Only Jesus Christ could confidently ask, "Which of you convicts Me of sin?" and have no fear of being accused (Jn. 8:46).

Yet the apostle Peter told his readers to commit their hearts to the Lord God, "having a good conscience" (1 Pet. 3:15-16). And Paul encouraged Timothy to wage a good warfare, "having faith and a good conscience" (1 Tim. 1:19). On one occasion, when brought before some religious leaders who didn't like what he was saying, Paul even asserted, "I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day" (Acts 23:1).

How is it possible for you to have a good conscience? The New Testament book of Hebrews presents Jesus Christ and His sacrificial death as your only hope of achieving it. Through faith in Him your heart can be "sprinkled from an evil conscience" (Heb. 10:22). And His blood can "cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God" (Heb 9:14).

Do you know the joy of a good conscience?

There is a treasure you can own
That's greater than a crown or throne;
This treasure is a conscience clear
That brings the sweetest peace and cheer.
—Isenhour

A good conscience is one of the best friends you'll ever have.

By [Dennis J. DeHaan](#) 1998/05/22 ([For the full devotional including a beautiful related picture and a link at the bottom of the page to one of their excellent devotional booklets please click here to go to Our Daily Bread. Copyright RBC Ministries — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Adjust Your Conscience

Read: Acts 24:10-16

I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men. —Acts 24:16

Built into our nature is an internal judicial system, the conscience, that commends us when we do right and condemns us when we do wrong. But this vital monitor of morality does not say the same thing to everyone. In some cultures vengeful killing is seen as honorable. In others, a person is still considered good even when he betrays a friend.

A story from The Philadelphia Inquirer illustrates this problem. A 12-year-old boy was caught stealing a watch. He told police that previously he had shoplifted a gift for his mother, and he felt he had to do the same for his dad. Although troubled about slighting his father, he had no qualms about stealing.

Because of sin, conscience is unreliable and needs a continual adjustment. This begins with a right relationship to God through faith in Jesus Christ. He paid sin's penalty, and now our hearts are "sprinkled from an evil conscience" (Heb. 10:22). But this does not make conscience obsolete. As we study the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit puts our inner monitor on a frequency that brings us in tune with the words, deeds, and attitudes of the Lord Jesus.

"Let your conscience be your guide" is valid only if God's Word is guiding your conscience.

There is a treasure you can own
That's greater than a crown or throne:
A conscience good with which to live,
That only God Himself can give.
—Isenhour

Conscience is like a sundial: when the truth of God shines on it, it points in the right direction.

By Dennis J. DeHaan ([For the full devotional including a beautiful related picture and a link at the bottom of the page to one of their excellent devotional booklets please click here to go to Our Daily Bread. Copyright RBC Ministries — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

A Cleansed Conscience

Read: Romans 2:12-16

I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men. —Acts 24:16

The much-loved children's story Pinocchio is about a wooden puppet whose nose grows long when he tells a lie. His friend Jiminy Cricket chirps, "Let your conscience be your guide." Pinocchio follows his advice, repents, and returns to Geppetto his creator, where he is given a heart of flesh and is freed from his strings.

There's a principle in this story for God's children. If we don't listen to that voice deep down inside that tells us what we should and should not do, we live in bondage. But a cleansed conscience brings freedom.

Some people have no strong basis for making godly decisions. Their conscience is weak, and they can be easily swayed by the behavior of others. Then there are those whose conscience is defiled. The standard by which they measure good and evil is corrupted, polluted, and impure (Titus 1:15). But saddest of all are those who have a "seared" conscience (1 Timothy 4:2). They have resisted that inner voice for so long that they no longer hear what it has to say.

But you ask, "How can we have a cleansed conscience?" We must repent of our sin and return to our Creator. We must ask Him to conform our desires and behavior to His Word and then be careful to obey it.

There is a treasure you can own
That's greater than a crown or throne;
This treasure is a conscience clear
That brings the sweetest peace and cheer.
—Isenhour

Conscience is a trustworthy compass when God's Word is your true north.

By [David H. Roper](#) 2005/03/16 ([For the full devotional including a beautiful related picture and a link at the bottom of the page to one of their excellent devotional booklets please click here to go to Our Daily Bread. Copyright RBC Ministries — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Know Your Limits

Read: 1 Timothy 4:1-5

Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron. —1 Timothy 4:1-2

Dogs are intelligent, but Charles Medley of Rockford, Illinois, had some doubts about his dog Bullet. Whenever Bullet heard a squirrel, a rabbit, or a person, he would take off like a shot in the direction of that sound. It didn't matter that he was tied up. By the time he reached the end of his rope, he'd be traveling at maximum velocity, heading straight for his target. But in an instant, his strong rope would pull taut and jerk Bullet to a jarring, sprawling halt. That beagle never learned his limits.

God has built into us a moral tug on the soul whenever we go beyond what is good for us. It's called conscience. Unlike Bullet's rope, however, it doesn't stop us from going too far. Furthermore, conscience can be deadened when we violate it repeatedly, and it can be programmed with wrong information so that we may feel guilty when no real guilt exists, or we may be guilty and not feel it.

We must learn the moral limits God places on us for our own good and then choose to live within them. By reading God's Word and trusting His Spirit to teach us, our conscience becomes attuned to God's standard of right and wrong. This helps us to know our limits and to experience the freedom and joy that living within them brings.

My conscience must be well-informed
From God's own sacred Word;
For conscience may be much deformed
When standards pure are spurned.
—Fraser

Conscience can be our compass if the Word of God is our chart.

By [Dennis J. DeHaan](#) 2011/04/08 ([For the full original devotional including a beautiful picture and a link at the bottom of the page to one of their excellent devotional booklets please click here to go to Our Daily Bread. Copyright RBC Ministries — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved - DO NOT REPOST](#))

Conscience & Consequence

Read: Daniel 3:1-18

He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, . . . we do not serve your gods. —Daniel 3:17-18

Nearly every day we face questions of conscience. We must choose between doing what pleases God and what appeals to our own selfish desires.

Government officials may be tempted to accept bribes and to make unethical decisions. Employees are sometimes asked to rearrange numbers or file false reports. Students often face temptations such as cheating and plagiarism.

As Christians, we face situations in our daily lives that are conscience-testers. They help us to see whether we are serious about the integrity God expects of us. We know our choices will have good or bad consequences, but the real test comes when we must decide what to do.

What is the greatest protection against making the wrong decision? It is trusting God to take care of us as we choose to do what's right, regardless of the outcome.

In Daniel 3, Shadrach and his friends made a decision not to bow down to the gold image. They dared to disobey the king because they trusted God. They said that even if the Lord did not deliver them, they would still trust Him (vv.17-18).

When we face matters of conscience, we too can do the right thing—and leave the consequences with God.

Let the road be rough and dreary,
And its end far out of sight;
Foot it bravely, strong or weary—
Trust in God and do the right.
—MacLeod

If God's Word guides your conscience, let your conscience be your guide.

By [Dave Branon](#) 2000/01/10 ([For the full devotional including a beautiful picture and a link at the bottom of the page to one of their excellent devotional booklets please click here to go to Our Daily Bread. Copyright RBC Ministries — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved - DO NOT REPOST](#))

A Wrong Reading

Bible in a Year: 2 Samuel 3-5 Luke 14:25-35

Wage the good warfare, having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, . . . have suffered shipwreck. —1 Tim. 1:18-19

Today's Scripture: 1 Timothy 1:18-20

William Scoresby was a British seafaring explorer in the 19th century who responded to God's call to the ministry. An interest in the workings of navigational compasses stayed with him during his work as a clergyman. His research led to the discovery that all newly built iron ships had their own magnetic influence on compasses. This influence would change at sea for various reasons—leading crews to read the compass incorrectly. Often this led to disaster.

There is a striking parallel between the misread compass and false biblical teaching. In 1 Timothy 1, Paul warned against “fables and endless genealogies” (v.4)—man-made changes in the doctrines of God's Word. People who teach false doctrines “have suffered shipwreck,” Paul concludes (v.19). Two people who opposed the Word of God by placing false teaching in its place, and who thus faced spiritual shipwreck, were Alexander and Hymenaeus (v.20).

Biblical truth is being questioned and in some cases even replaced in the church today. Our opinions must never replace the truth of God's Word. The Bible, not man's erroneous opinions about it, is the ultimate guide for our conscience in navigating life's changing seas. Beware of wrong readings.

God's words of pure, eternal truth
Shall yet unshaken stay,
When all that man has thought or planned,
Like chaff has passed away.
—Anon.

The first point of wisdom is to know the truth; the second, to discern what is false.

By [Dennis Fisher](#) 2010/04/18 ([For the full devotional including a beautiful picture and a link at the bottom of the page to one of their excellent devotional booklets please click here to go to Our Daily Bread. Copyright RBC Ministries — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Do You Hear A Whistle?

Read: 1 Timothy 1:12-20

Wage the good warfare, having faith and a good conscience. —1 Timothy 1:18-19

My car has a wonderful feature. Whenever I forget to turn off the headlights, a shrill warning goes off the minute I open the door. I don't like its jarring sound, but I like what it saves me from—a dead battery.

Our conscience can work like that. When we sin or are tempted to, our conscience blows a whistle. It's a sign that the Holy Spirit is either convicting us of sin or warning us before we do. If we do wrong, the jarring feelings from our conscience are meant to lead us to repentance. When we confess and repent, God forgives and clears our conscience.

The apostle Paul knew what it was to have a bad conscience. In 1 Timothy 1:13, he wrote, “I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy.” He received the mercy of Christ's forgiveness, faith, and a good conscience. He charged young Timothy to fight the good fight and maintain his faith and good conscience. Paul said that some had rejected these, and spiritual shipwreck was the result (vv.18-19).

Be thankful if you have a good conscience. When it gives you a warning whistle, pay attention! Then fight to preserve your faith and keep your conscience clear. That jarring sound is there to help you stay in fellowship with Christ.

Our conscience is a gift from God,

It is a guiding light;
And when aligned with His sure Word,
It tells us wrong from right.
—Sper

A Good conscience is one of the best friends you'll ever have.

A burdened conscience is a heavy weight to carry.

By Joanie Yoder ([click here to go to Our Daily Bread](#). Copyright RBC Ministries — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved)

What Happened to Conscience?

The early morning crash of a Brink's armored truck on a Miami highway in January held up a mirror to our nation's cultural decline. While the driver and a fellow Brink's officer lay bruised and bleeding, a festive atmosphere broke loose outside the truck as thousands of dollars blew in the breeze.

Motorists stopped in rush hour traffic, then scooped up cash before resuming their commutes to the office. Thousands of crisp bills and shiny coins rained down an overpass onto a Miami neighborhood. Below, mothers with babies grabbed coins and piled them into strollers. An elderly woman filled a box. A young school girl dumped her book bag and loaded it with coins and bills.

Onlookers and participants had plenty of justifications and rationalizations.

"Which is more moral," asked one resident of the impoverished neighborhood, "to return the money and leave your children improvised-or maybe send them to college and enrich the family for generations?"

"We deserve a little something," said another.

"The Lord was willing for it to happen here," one man commented. "There's a lot of poverty. It was a miracle."

Police estimated that more than 100 people helped themselves to money during the melee. Middle class on their way to work made off with thousands.

Was this a shocking event? It shouldn't have been. What happened in Miami was born out of a cultural drift that has left us unsure of absolute right and wrong or at least unwilling to live by such a code. We reward rule-breakers and ridicule those who extol morality. Life's ultimate reward is money and having it is the end to our worries.

Ralph Reed said that the 1996 presidential election was about the character of the American people. Maybe the Miami incident says more about that character than we care to consider.

There were some heroes on that day in Miami. Several people came forward and turned money over to authorities.

"I have children, and I needed to set a good example," said Faye McFadden, a mother who earns \$5.00 an hour at a department store. "It was important for me to do what I felt was right."

Herbert Tarvin, 11, came forward after his teacher at St. Francis Xavier Elementary School lectured students about making the right decision. He went to police with 85 cents.

"I knew it was wrong for me to keep anything," Herbert told a television reporter, "and I knew if I kept it I would have been stealing."

Manny Rodriguez, a firefighter who recovered a bag containing \$330,000 in cash, summed things up pretty well.

"People were almost killed in that truck and people are calling it a blessing from God. That wasn't a blessing; it was a test. The rich, the poor, the middle class-everybody should have a conscience."

Example of conscience that cannot be cleansed: [Albert Speer](#) was once interviewed about his last book on ABC's "Good Morning, America." Speer was the Hitler confidant whose technological genius was credited with keeping Nazi factories humming throughout World War II. In another era he might have been one of the world's industrial giants. He was the only one of twenty-four war criminals tried in Nuremberg who admitted his guilt. Speer spent twenty years in [Spandau prison](#). The interviewer referred to a passage in one of Speer's earlier writings: "You have said the guilt can never be forgiven, or shouldn't be. Do you still feel that way?" The look of pathos on Speer's face was wrenching as he responded, "I served a sentence of twenty years, and I could say, 'I'm a free man, my conscience has been cleared by serving the whole time as punishment.' But I can't do that. I still carry the burden of what happened to millions of people during Hitler's lifetime, and I can't get rid of it. This new book is part of my atoning, of clearing my conscience." The interviewer pressed the point. "You really don't think you'll be able to clear it totally?" Speer shook his head. "I don't think it will be possible." For thirty-five years Speer had accepted complete responsibility for his crime. His writings were filled with contrition and warnings to others to avoid his moral sin. He desperately sought expiation. All to no avail.

Charles Simeon, one of the greatest preachers of the Church of England, explained his coming to Christ like this: As I was reading Bishop Wilson on the Lord's supper, I met with an expression to this effect—"That the Jews knew what they did, when they transferred their sin to the head of their offering." The thought came into my mind, "What, may I transfer all my guilt to another? Has God provided an Offering for me, that I may lay my sins on His head? Then, God willing, I will not bear them on my own soul one moment longer." Accordingly I sought to lay my sins upon the sacred head of Jesus.

[Nine Steps To Develop A Healthy Conscience by Paul Fritz on Sep 5, 2004](#)

Scripture: Hebrews 9:13-15

"How much more shall the blood of Christ, who by virtue of His eternal Spirit has offered Himself as an unblemished sacrifice to God, purify consciences from dead works and lifeless observances to serve the ever living God." (Heb 9:14)

Summary: Be thankful if you have a good conscience. When it gives you a warning whistle, pay attention! Then fight to preserve your faith and keep your conscience clear. That jarring sound is there to help you stay in fellowship with Christ

Illustration: Wage the good warfare, having faith and a good conscience. --1 Timothy 1:18-19

My car has a wonderful feature. Whenever I forget to turn off the headlights, a shrill warning goes off the minute I open the door. I don't like its jarring sound, but I like what it saves me from--a dead battery.

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Be thankful if you have a good conscience. When it gives you a warning whistle, pay attention! Then fight to preserve your faith and keep your conscience clear. That jarring sound is there to help you stay in fellowship with Christ. ([Our Daily Bread](#).)

A good conscience is one of the best friends you'll ever have.

1. The Holy Spirit helps us teach people how to develop a good conscience through Spirit led self-discipline. Paul wrote, "Therefore I always exercise and discipline myself (mortifying my body, deadening my carnal affections, bodily appetites and worldly desires, endeavoring in all respects to have a clear (unshaken, blameless) conscience, void of offense toward God and toward men." (Acts 24:16) Ask the Lord to help you follow the example of Paul's self-discipline in keeping your conscience pure toward God and people.

2. The Holy Spirit helps us teach people how to develop a sensitized conscience that hates what is evil and clings to what is good. Paul wrote, "Let your love be sincere (a real thing); hate what is evil (loathe all ungodliness, turn in horror from wickedness) but hold fast to that which is good." (Romans 12:9) Ask the Lord to help you to consciously hate what is evil:

- A). Lust and all sorts of selfish desires such as gluttony
- B). Pride
- C). Jealousy
- D). Envy
- E). Anger
- F). Slander
- G). Malice
- H). Idolatry
- I). Pharisaical thinking, attitudes and actions
- J). Greed and all forms of selfishness
- K). Fault finding
- L). Compromises with carnality - laziness, indiscipline, discord, factions, dissensions, impurity
- M). Complaining
- N). Gossiping

- O). Immorality
- P). Possessiveness and manipulation
- Q). Immature attitudes and actions
- R). Offensive language
- S). Judgmentalism
- T). Extremism
- U). Legalism
- V). Belligerence
- W). Deceit
- X). Lying
- Y). Fearful attitudes instead of living by faith, obedience, and trust in the Lord and in His word etc.

3. The Holy Spirit helps us teach people how to develop a good conscience by being holy and pure and above reproach examples. Peter wrote, "But as One Who called you is holy, you yourselves also be holy in all your conduct and manner of living." (1 Pet. 1:15) Ask the Lord to help you become more holy in all aspects of your personal life, your relationships and your ministries.

4. The Holy Spirit helps us teach people how to develop a good conscience by training ourselves in righteous ministries. The writer of Hebrews wrote, "But solid food is for full grown men, for those whose senses and mental faculties are trained by practicing to discriminate and distinguish between what is morally good and noble and what is evil and contrary either to divine or human law." (Heb. 5:14) Ask the Lord to help you mature through exercising Christ-likeness in all aspects of your personal, relational and ministry experiences.

5. The Holy Spirit helps us teach people how to develop a good conscience by making it a priority. Paul wrote, "Put absolute trust and confidence in God. Whereas the object and purpose of our instruction and charge is love, which springs from a pure heart and a good (clear) conscience and sincere (unfeigned) faith." (1 Tim. 1:4,5) Ask the Lord to help you keep a pure, holy and good conscience as priority goal.

6. The Holy Spirit helps us draw a sharp contrast between a Spirit filled Christian's conscience versus those who live according to their sinful natural desires. We know that those who are living by their sinful natural impulses have consciences that are defiled, polluted, corrupt and darkened to an understanding of the truth that is in Christ Jesus. Paul wrote, "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment." (1 Cor. 2:14,15) Ask the Lord to help you show people the disadvantages of an impure conscience and the tremendous advantages of living with a clean Spirit led perspective.

7. The Holy Spirit helps us teach people how to develop a good conscience through meditation and obedience to the scriptures. Paul wrote of the advantages that scripture has to a one's conscience, "It is profitable for teaching, correcting, rebuking and training in righteousness." (2 Tim. 3:16) Ask God to help you meditate and obey all of the scripture, allowing it to teach, cleanse, correct, rebuke & train your mind.

8. The Holy Spirit helps us teach people how to develop a good conscience through confessing and forsaking of our sins. John wrote, "If we freely admit that we have sinned and confess our sins, He is faithful and true and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (everything not in conformity to His will in purpose, thought and action)." (1 John 1:9 - Amplified) Ask God for the contriteness of heart, humility and sensitivity to the Spirit, to enable you to confess and forsake your sins of commission, omission, wrong disposition, and faulty assumptions.

9. The Holy Spirit helps us warn people of the destructive consequences and capacities of an impure conscience. Ask the Lord to help you learn to fear the Lord in helping you to cleanse your conscience from acts that lead to death so that we may serve the living God without hindrance.

Girdlestone's "Conscience"

We look in vain for the word conscience in the O.T., except in the margin of Ecclesiastes 10:20, where it represents part of the

word Yada', to know (Assyrian, idû) in the Apocryphal Books we meet with συνειδησις twice, viz in Sirach 10:20, where it is rendered 'wittingly;' and in Sap. 17:11, where it seems to point to the constraining power of a sense of right. The verb συνειδω is used of knowledge in Leviticus 5:1; also in Job 27:6, where the LXX reads ο γάρ σύνοιδα μου τοια πρῶξας, 'I am not conscious of having acted foolishly,' words which have no Hebrew text answering to them, but which find an echo in St. Paul's phrase, 'I know nothing against myself' (ο ὃν μου σύνοιδα), 1 Corinthians 4:4.

The verb συνειδω is also used to represent ordinary perception, without reference to the moral aspect of the thing perceived, in five passages in the Books of the Maccabees.

Conscience, then, so far as the O.T. throws any light on it, is to be taken not as a separate faculty which enables a man to distinguish right and wrong, but as the exercise of consciousness; and it will be seen, by noting the passages in the N.T. in which the word occurs, that this meaning is generally adhered to. Omitting John 8:9, the reading of which is doubtful, we do not meet with the word συνειδησις until we arrive at the end of the Acts. St. Paul, standing before the council, says, 'in all good conscience have I lived under the government of God unto this day' (Acts 23:1). These words are elucidated by the statement made before Felix, 'in this I exercise myself, having (or to have) a conscience void of offence towards God and towards man' (Acts 24:16). He evidently signified that he was not conscious of living or aiming to live in any course which was wrong in the sight of God or really offensive to man in exact accordance with these expressions, he writes to the Corinthians, 'I am not conscious of anything against myself, yet am I not here by justified, but he that judgeth me is the Lord' (1 Corinthians 4:4).

The same Apostle refers to his consciousness that what he said was spoken in sincerity, in Romans 9:1, 'My conscience also bearing witness.' Compare Romans 2:15; 2 Corinthians 4:2; 2 Corinthians 5:11 in 1 Corinthians 8:7, we read of those who are eating 'with conscience of the idol' - that is, with a conscious feeling that they are eating what is offered to idols; and their conscience, i.e. their moral sense, being weak and susceptible, is defiled. See also the tenth verse.

The moral sensibility or conscience is referred to in 1 Corinthians 10:25; 1 Corinthians 10:27-29, 'Asking no questions because of consciousness; not your own consciousness, but that of the weak brother who has not yet attained to that liberty and knowledge which enables you to disregard heathen superstitions.'

When St. Paul is describing the end or sum and substance of the charge which Christ lays up on men, he characterises it as 'love out of a pure heart and a good conscience and unfeigned faith' (1 Timothy 1:5); by these words he means that there should be nothing selfish or sensual in love, that there should be a conscious aim at that which is good in God's sight, and a faithfulness untainted by a particle of hypocrisy. Compare 1 Timothy 1:19, where faith and a good conscience are again joined together.

The passages in the Epistle to the Hebrews in which the word occurs are very interesting and important. From Hebrews 9:9, we gather that the offerings under the O.T. could not make men 'perfect as pertaining to the conscience,' i.e. could not take away the sense of sin which hinders man from oneness with God. They did not take away sin, as a matter of fact, and they could not, from the nature of things; for if the effect of the Levitical dispensation had been to make men perfect, i.e. at one with God (see chap. viii. § 2), the offerings would not have needed repetition. If the worshippers had been purged once for all, they would have had no more consciousness of sins (Hebrews 10:2). But 'the blood of Christ' cleanses a man's consciousness from dead works, and enables him to serve the living God (Hebrews 9:14); and the heart is thus 'sprinkled from an evil conscience' (10:22) in other words, the faithful acceptance of the sacrifice of Christ takes away that sense of sin which had been a bar between man and God, and enables a man to live no longer as a servant, but as a son.

St. Peter says, 'This is grace (A. V. thankworthy) if from conscience towards God (i.e. through consciousness of his duty and of his relationship to God in Christ) a man endure pains, suffering unjustly' (1 Peter 2:19). He urges that men should keep 'a good conscience' (3:16), and he reminds them that it is not the external cleansing, the putting away of the filth of the flesh, that now saves us, but the answer of a good conscience toward God, or, as we might render it, the seeking [Ἐπερωτήματα εἰς θεόν. this passage has awakened much discussion. I am inclined to be guided by the fact that ἐπερωτάω sometimes answers to the meaning of darash (דרש), to seek, in the O. T. The Vulgate confirms this view by reading interrogatio conscientiae bonae in Deum. Luther renders 'the contract (Bund) of a good conscience (Gewissen) with God.' De Sacy takes it as 'the engagement of the conscience to keep pure for God.'] unto God with a good conscience (1 Peter 3:21).

The verb συνειδέναι, to be conscious, is used in only three passages in the N.T., exclusive of that already mentioned in 1 Corinthians 4:4, viz in Acts 5:2; Acts 12:12; Acts 14:6.

Conscience was thus originally identical with consciousness, but while the latter word may be used by us with reference to external facts or to internal feelings, the former is now confined to the knowledge that a man has of the moral aspect of things. A good conscience, according to Scripture, is not only a sense of freedom from past guilt, but also a consciousness of purposing and doing that which is good in God's sight; it implies purity of motive and action; it is inconsistent with a deliberate course of sin, or with departure from the living God, and it is closely connected with faith in Christ.

Coming to the words which designate man's intellectual capacities, we may begin with the word wisdom. this word generally answers in the A. V. to the Hebrew Chacam (חכם). this is an important word in Scripture, and is used to represent the discernment of good and evil, prudence in secular matters, skill in arts, experience in Divine things, and even dexterity in magic in the reflexive form it signifies to be wise in one's own eyes, and hence to outwit another. The general rendering of the LXX is σοφία, which is used in the same largeness of sense in the N.T. See especially James 3:17. It is moral rather than intellectual; it is the adaptation of what we know to what we have to do in this sense the Lord Jesus grew in wisdom, i.e in its exercise.

The understanding is most generally represented by the word b in (בין), to perceive, to be intelligent. this word, again, is used with many shades of meaning, such as to consider, discern, feel, know, look, mark, perceive, view. The LXX usually represents this word by σύνεσις, but occasionally by πίστις and φρόνησις.

Sacal (שכל), to look, to be knowing, and hence to prosper, is used to represent a certain kind of wisdom in Genesis 3:6, and a good many other passages. The LXX renderings are generally the same as those last mentioned.

One word remains to be noticed, namely, tushiah (תושיה). The LXX renderings for this word are very variable. Some critics understand it as signifying essentia, or existent being. Hence it is rendered 'that which is' in Job 11:13; Job 26:3, and substance in Job 30:22. Compare the cognate yesh (יש) in Proverbs 8:21 in Isaiah 28:29, it is translated working, 'wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working.' in Job 5:12, we find the word enterprise adopted. The most general rendering, however, is wisdom, or sound wisdom. Thus we read in Job 6:13, 'is wisdom quite driven from me?' Proverbs 2:7, 'He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous;' 8:14, 'Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom;' Micah 6:9, 'The Lord's voice crieth unto the city, and (the man of) wisdom shall see thy name;' the margin has here, 'Thy name shall see that which is.'

A Clean Conscience

Adrian Rogers

Dr Adrian Rogers' related resources:

1. [How to Have a Clean Conscience](#) (36:47)
2. [A Clean Conscience: Jesus, Our Cleansing Agent](#) (36:26)
3. [How to Have a Good Conscience](#) - transcript

Main Scripture Text: Hebrews 9:11–15

“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?” HEBREWS 9:14

Introduction

- I. The Causes of an Unclean Conscience
 - A. The Deliberate Acts of Sin
 - B. The Defiling Associations of Sin
 - C. The Deceiving Accidents of Sin
- II. The Consequences of an Unclean Conscience
 - A. The Loss of Fellowship with Man
 - B. The Loss of Freedom with God
 - C. The Loss of Fruitfulness in Service
- III. The Cleansing of an Unclean Conscience
 - A. The Cleansing Agent Must Be Acceptable to God
 - B. The Cleansing Agent Must Be Accessible to Man
 - C. The Cleansing Agent Must Be Applicable by Faith

Conclusion

Introduction - Hebrews chapter 9 and beginning in verse 11: “But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle”—you might want to underscore that—“by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once [unto] the holy place”—now, you know what the holy place is. That’s the ... that’s the Holy of Holies. Jesus took His blood and went into the

Holy of Holies, that Holy of Holies in heaven—"having obtained eternal redemption for us. For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer"—and I especially want you to notice that phrase, "the ashes of an heifer"—"and [an] ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: 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? And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they [who] are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance." (Hebrews 9:11–15)

I want to speak to you tonight on a clean conscience. Now, we mentioned something about that Sunday morning when we talked about how you're going to face the trials of life, and we said that you could place ... face the trials of life if you had a good conscience, if you had a great hope and a gracious companion—and that's the way you're to face the trials of life. But, I want to think a little bit more, as we're studying about the tabernacle, of a good conscience, a clean conscience. Notice in verse 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?" (Hebrews 9:14)—a clean conscience as over against dead works.

Now, having read that, let's go back in the Old Testament to Numbers chapter 19 for one of the most blessed studies I've ever done in my life. And so, I just want you to get your fingers licked so you can go through the Bible. And, get your pens out to jot down some very wonderful truths, because you're going to learn a real lesson tonight about a clean conscience—about a clean conscience. You know, the worst pollution of all is the pollution of the soul. Now, pollution is bad, but the worst pollution is not the kind we breathe. "Ashes to ashes, dust to dust. If cigarettes don't get you, pollution must." And, it seems like we're just being polluted to death. But, may I tell you that the real ecology problem is that of Satan and of sin and the real pollution problem is that of sin?

Now, there is a wonderful object lesson found here in Numbers chapter 19, and it relates to Hebrews chapter 9. Now, Numbers 19 is a long chapter, and I don't want to just start out and read it, but I want to make some things clear to you. Before I read it, if I can, I want to spot out or point out the word unclean. I want you to notice in this chapter that the word unclean is used, if my count is correct, at least fifteen times. For example, in chapter 19, verse 7—the last part: "unclean until the even." (Numbers 19:7) Verse 8—the last part: "unclean until the even." (Numbers 19:8) Verse 10—the middle of that verse: "unclean until the even." (Numbers 19:10) Verse 11—the last part of that verse: "unclean seven days." (Numbers 19:11) Verse 13—the last part of that verse: "his uncleanness"—"uncleanness"—"is yet upon him." (Numbers 19:13) Verse 14—the last part: "unclean seven days." (Numbers 19:14) The last part of verse 15: "it, is unclean." (Numbers 19:15) The last part of verse 16: "shall be unclean seven days." (Numbers 19:16) The first part of verse 19: "And the clean person shall sprinkle upon the unclean on the third day." (Numbers 19:19) The first part of verse 20: "But the man [who] shall be unclean." (Numbers 19:20) The last part of verse 20: "he is unclean." (Numbers 19:20) The last part of verse 21: "shall be unclean until [the] even." (Numbers 19:21) Verses 20 ... verse 22: "the unclean person"—"the unclean ... and the soul that toucheth it shall be unclean until even." (Numbers 19:22) Now, this is, I suppose ... Well, I ... I can't say a dirty chapter; it's not that. All the Word of God is clean. But, it deals with dirt: unclean, unclean, unclean, unclean, unclean, unclean, unclean, unclean, unclean, unclean, unclean. This whole chapter is dealing with being unclean. But, He's not talking about microbes; He's not talking about dirt. He's talking about ceremonial uncleanness.

And then, the other word that is used over and over again in this chapter—and I won't take the trouble to point that out; you do that when you get home—is the word dead or death: dead, dead, death, death, dead, death, death, death. And, God is linking uncleanness with death. Now, uncleanness, or uncleanness, stands for a state of mind, and a state of soul, and a state of spirit that is not right with God, and it stands for sin. Sin makes us unclean. What is God saying in Numbers chapter 19? Now, it'll ... it'll clear up in a minute, so just hang with me. What is God saying in Numbers chapter 19? He's saying that death and sin, or death and uncleanness, are inseparably linked together—death and sin. You see, sin causes death, and death, therefore, is the visible sign of sin.

Now, we talked about some people tonight. We prayed for some people—the families of some people who died. And, sometimes we talk about people who die of sickness and then we talk about other people who die a natural death. May I tell you there is no such thing as a natural death? All death is unnatural. It's not what God planned for us. All death is the result of sin—not necessarily your personal sin. But, had there been no sin, there'd have been no death. There was no sin in the garden there. There was no death in the Garden of Eden until sin came. "The wages of sin is death." (Romans 6:23) "The soul that sinneth, it shall [surely] die." (Ezekiel 18:20) And, death and sin are inseparably linked together, and, therefore, death is the visible sign and the object lesson of sin. And, God uses death ceremonially in the Old Testament as an object lesson and a symbol of sin.

And, keeping that in mind, I want you to notice what God was saying here in Numbers chapter 19, when God is giving injunctions over and over again about not touching a dead body. When God is saying not to touch a dead body to these primitive people, He was trying to keep them from getting germs, trying to keep them from catching contagious diseases that might have caused the death, but He was doing more than that: He was teaching a theological and a ceremonial lesson. He was teaching that just as a person, for hygiene's sake, would stay away from that which is dead and that which corrupts, He's saying for moral and spiritual hygiene, we need to stay away from sin. And so, when God was saying, "Don't touch a dead body," He was doing more than giving

a lesson in hygiene; He was saying by that object lesson, “Don’t pollute your soul with sin.”

And so ... I know I’m still not clear. I know you’re not with me yet, but you will. In just a moment, you’ll understand. And, there’s a great lesson if you’ll just watch it. Remember that death symbolizes sin. Death and sin are inseparably linked together. And, if a person touched a dead body, he was unclean—not just physically unclean; he was morally, spiritually unclean, because God was trying to teach these people an object lesson. And so, as we think about soul pollution tonight, I want you to think with me along three lines. First of all, I want you to think with me about the causes of soul pollution, and then the consequences of soul pollution, and then I want you to think about the cleansing of soul pollution. Or, we might put it this way: the causes of an unclean conscience, and the consequences of an unclean conscience, and the purging, or the cleansing, of an unclean conscience.

I. The Causes of an Unclean Conscience

Now, what would cause a person back in this ancient time to become polluted?

A. The Deliberate Acts of Sin

Well, look in verse 11—verse 11: “He that toucheth the dead body of any man shall be unclean seven days.” (Numbers 19:11) Now, if a ... if a man walked into a sick room where someone had just died and reached out and touched that dead body—now, it’s back in the Old Testament times, back under the Levitical system, back when the tabernacle was set up and operating—if he just walked in and touched that body, that dead body, he would be unclean for seven days. Now, remember that the death represents sin. Sin and death are inseparably linked together in the Bible. And so, this pictures a man who deliberately sins, a person who just walks in and touches a dead body.

You see, there are those of us who are Christians and we handle the dead things of this world deliberately. We touch them. We touch the unclean thing. The Bible says in 2 Corinthians chapter 6, beginning in verse 14—don’t turn to it, but the Bible says, “Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing.” (2 Corinthians 6:17) Now, to those people who had a background in the Old Testament, they understood what God was talking about. He was talking about this chapter right here and chapters like it. A Christian is not to touch the unclean thing, represented by that dead body. Any time we willfully, deliberately sin, at that moment our soul, our conscience, becomes unclean. We’re unclean. We’re dirty. We’re defiled. We’re polluted. And so, there is the deliberate act of sin. A Christian can knowingly, deliberately sin. And, that’s the worst kind of sin, for the Bible calls that “presumptuous sin,” and it carries with it the most severe penalty for the child of God. That’s the reason the psalmist prayed, “Keep back thy servant ... from presumptuous sin.” (Psalms 19:13) That’s sin with your eyes wide open. A man just walks in—there’s a dead body, and he touches it when God said, “Don’t touch it.” He’ll be unclean seven days.

B. The Defiling Associations of Sin

All right. Now, the next thing I want you to notice is not only the deliberate acts of sin described in verse 11, but the defiling associations of sin. Notice in verses 14 and 15 of this same chapter: “This is the law, when a man dieth in a tent: all [who] come into the tent, and all that is in the tent, shall be unclean seven days. And every open vessel, which hath no covering bound upon it, is unclean.” (Numbers 19:14–15) Now, you medical doctors who are here tonight, you have to give Moses credit. He didn’t have any microscope, and he didn’t have ... he didn’t have all of the technology that you have to know about hygiene and all that. Of course, God taught him this by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. And, here’s a ... here’s a sanitary code that God has given to these to keep them from contagion. But, I want to remind you again that God is doing more than teaching hygiene. There’s a great moral lesson. You see, there are the deliberate acts of sin, where you just walk in and touch the unclean thing, but then there are the defiling associations of sin.

Here’s a man who just simply might walk into the tent. He doesn’t touch the dead body, but he just ... he’s just in there. He just walks around. He breathes the air. He’s in the atmosphere, and God also says, “He shall be unclean.” (Numbers 19:14) You see, there can still be defilement without actual contact. Did you know that you and I don’t have to deliberately sin to get defiled by this world? Did you know that as you just watch television and suggestive things come on, or you walk through the newsstand and there’s suggestive things, or people say things or they take the name of God in vain, and problems come and temptations and anxieties ... These are not deliberate sins that you practice, but I’ll tell you, this is a pretty dirty old world that we live in, isn’t it? I mean, it’s ... it’s hard. It’s hard to live without just ... just things just kind of in the air, just in the tent, as it were, where we are. And, we just find ourselves, just by our very associations—newspapers, books, advertisements, humor; all of this—they leave their mark upon us. And, that’s the reason that we need to get away and get with our Lord and say, “Lord, give me a bath. Lord, make me clean, for I’m unclean.” You see, there are the deliberate acts. Then, there are defiling associations.

C. The Deceiving Accidents of Sin

And then, I want you to notice there are the deceiving accidents of sin. Notice in verse 16: “And whosoever toucheth one [who] is slain [by] a sword in the open fields, or a dead body, or a bone of a man, or a grave, shall be unclean seven days.” (Numbers 19:16)

Now, this represents to me sins that we more or less stumble into, not presumptuous sin. Here's a man walking through a field after a battle, and he stumbles over a dead body. Or, maybe there's just a small bone there, and he touches that bone. Or maybe, almost unknown to him, or perhaps unknown to him, he walks over a grass-covered grave. And, he's unclean, too. The Bible calls him unclean. (Numbers 19:16)

Now, what's God speaking about here? He's speaking not about the acts or the associations, but the accidents, where we just ... we don't intend to sin. It's not sin with our eyes wide open, but it's just ... the first thing you know, we're ... we're lusting, or we're filled with pride, or we are using harsh language, or there's some sort of a covetous thought that comes into our mind—concealed sins that dull our spiritual perception. And, this is the reason when we pray, you know, we ought not to ... we ought not only to pray, “[Lord,] keep back thy servant ... from presumptuous sins,” (Psalms 19:13) but we also ought to pray, “Search me, O God ... And see if there be [some] wicked way in me.” (Psalms 139:23–24) I think it would surprise us to know how many times we've touched an unclean thing and not known it. I think it would surprise us to know how many graves we've walked over. I think it would surprise us to know how many bones we've fondled without knowing it. You see, just a person who happened to walk across a grave, and God says he's unclean—unclean.

Now, God here is talking about sin. He's not really talking about hygiene. He's talking about ceremonial uncleanness. He's talking about moral uncleanness. And, He's saying that we need to be very careful, lest this vile world pollute us. God wants us to be clean.

II. The Consequences of an Unclean Conscience

Now, I want you to notice not only the causes of soul pollution—remember, the deliberate acts, defiling associations, and the deceiving accidents of sin—but the second thing I want you to notice: the consequences. What happens—what happens—when we become unclean in the sight of God?

A. The Loss of Fellowship with Man

Well, first of all, there is the loss of fellowship with man. Look in verse 20: “But the man [who] shall be unclean, and shall not purify himself, that soul shall be cut off from among the congregation.” (Numbers 19:20) Now, what was one of the consequences of being unclean in this day? When a man became unclean and he didn't purify himself, he was cut off from the congregation; that is, there was a loss of fellowship with his brothers and sisters in Christ.

Now, we need to understand this: that it's only sin that separates the people of God. The sweetest thing that any church can ever have is its fellowship, amen? Don't you love the fellowship here at Bellevue? You know, one man was telling me a while back—he said, “I don't understand it.” He said, “My wife and I have been a member of Bellevue Church for nine months, and we haven't heard anybody say anything negative about any thing. We've never been in a church like this.” Well, he said, “We ... it's just amazing. We just haven't heard anybody just complain about anything. Everybody is so happy.” He said, “We've been going to church all our life. It's the biggest blessing of our life.” Now, we don't want to take that blessing for granted, friend. And, I believe where the Spirit of the Lord is there is this fellowship. It is sin that divides people. It is sin that cuts people off. And, when two people cannot get along, you mark it down: somebody has sinned. May I say that again? When any two people can't get along together, somebody has sinned. What are the consequences of an unclean conscience? Number one: There is the loss of fellowship with man.

B. The Loss of Freedom with God

But, number two: There is the loss of freedom with God—there's the loss of freedom with God. Look again in verse 20: “But the man [who] shall be unclean, and shall not purify himself, that soul shall be cut off from among the congregation, because he hath defiled the sanctuary of the LORD: the water of separation hath not been sprinkled upon him; he is unclean.” (Numbers 19:20) He defiles the sanctuary when he prays. When a man like this comes into the house of God, the sanctuary of God, which in this particular day was that Old Testament tabernacle, and he were to try to come and worship with sin in his heart, it would be an abomination to God. He had no freedom to worship. Not only was he cut off from man; he was separated from God. “The Lord's [arm] is not shortened, that [He] cannot save; neither [is] his ear heavy, that [He] cannot hear: But your [sins] have separated between you and your God, and your [iniquities] have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.” (Isaiah 59:1–2)

C. The Loss of Fruitfulness in Service

All right, the third consequence: There's the loss of fruitfulness in his service. Look in verse 22: “And whatsoever the unclean person toucheth shall be unclean.” (Numbers 19:22) Not only is he unclean, but he pollutes everything else he touches. “Whatsoever the unclean person toucheth shall be unclean”—he contaminates what he touches. Notice—“and the soul that toucheth it shall be unclean unto even.” (Numbers 19:22) You see, if a man's not right with God, rather than ministering life when he ministers, he'll minister death. Did you know I'd pay one hundred dollars to have a soloist not sing who's not right with God. I'd pay more than that to have a preacher not preach who's not right with God. I'd rather have no preaching than preaching that comes from unclean lips. I'd rather have no teaching than teaching that comes from unclean lips. The Bible says over and over again, talking about the

sanctuary service, talking, in the Old Testament, about the temple service and the tabernacle service, “Be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the LORD.” (Isaiah 52:11)

I’m not the smartest man in the world, and I don’t even rank among those who are smarter. But, I’ve got enough sense never to come to this platform with sin in my heart, and I hope to God I never do. I’d be afraid. I mean, I would be mortally afraid—afraid before God—to ever come up here, and open this book, and stand up here, and try and preach and know that I’d been handling unclean things, touching unclean things, had a defiled conscience, not a clean conscience, not a pure conscience. Boy, I tell you, you can ... you can ... you can bet it down, before I step out that door, friend—you mark it down—I’ve been saying, “O God, O God, I want to be right. I want to be clean. I want to be pure. Is there anything wrong, anything not right, between me and you?” because, you see, if I’m not right, I’ll minister death, not life. Everything I touch will be unclean because I’m unclean. And oh, how many people take holy things in unholy hands, and rather than ministering life, they minister death. They may preach theologically correct; they may sing perfectly, but there’s no blessing. Oh, the people may say, “Bravo! That’s good,” but God doesn’t work. Nobody’s blessed. Nobody’s saved. It is wood, hay, and stubble rather than gold, and silver, and precious stones. (1 Corinthians 3:12) You see, not only is there the loss of fellowship with man and not only is there the loss of freedom with God; there is the loss of fruitfulness in service. Everything the unclean man touches, he pollutes it—he pollutes it. Your preaching, your teaching, your singing are lifeless and cold, and this is what the Bible calls “dead works.”

Go back to Number chapter 9 for a—I mean Hebrews chapter 9—for just a moment, and I just ... I want to point this out. I was not intending to go back this soon for that verse, but let’s just go back again, because I want you to see it right now at this moment. You see, the Bible says, “How much more shall the blood of Christ”—verse 14—“who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Hebrews 9:14) Do you know why some churches never progress? Do you know why some Sunday School classes never grow and they’re not blessed? Do you know why some people never win souls? Do you know why some people’s prayers never get any higher than the light bulbs? They work, they work, they work, but it’s dead works because they’ve got a dirty conscience. They’re polluted. They don’t have a clean conscience with God. Paul told Timothy, “Two things you need in your warfare: unfeigned faith and a pure conscience—unfeigned faith and a pure conscience. Those are the two things you need to fight your warfare.” (1 Timothy 1:5) All right, there’s the loss of fruitfulness in work. Everything you touch—it has a deadening effect.

III. The Cleansing of an Unclean Conscience

All right. Now, thirdly and finally, go back and look in Numbers chapter 19, as we think about the cleansing—the cleansing—of an unclean conscience, the purging of a conscience.

A. The Cleansing Agent Must Be Acceptable to God

Notice in Number chapter 19, verses 1 through 5: “And the LORD [spoke] unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, This is the ordinance of the law which the LORD hath commanded, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring thee a red heifer”—now, remember I said to you over there in Hebrews 9 to underscore that word “the ashes of a heifer.” All right. Now look, a heifer, kids, boys and girls, is a female cow. Isn’t that right, those of you ...? Sometimes I get my animals mixed up. That’s right. Okay, I don’t want any of you farmers making fun of me—“Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring thee a red heifer without spot, wherein is no blemish, and upon which never came yoke: And ye shall give [it] unto Eleazar the priest, that he may bring [it] forth [outside] the camp, and one shall slay [it] before his face. And Eleazar the priest shall take of [its] blood with his finger, and sprinkle of [its] blood directly before the tabernacle of the congregation seven times. And [he] shall burn the heifer in his sight; [its] skin, and [its] flesh, and [its] blood, with [its] dung, shall he burn.” (Numbers 19:1–5)

Now, the cleansing agent was this heifer that was sacrificed. Now, this heifer represents the Lord Jesus Christ. It’s a picture of Christ. Verse 2 tells us that the heifer was to be without blemish; it was to be without spot. Verse 2 tells us that it could not be scarred by the yoke of sin. Verse 3 tells us that it would die outside the gate, outside the camp, as Jesus died. Verse 5 that tells how this heifer was to be burned speaks of Jesus Christ, who endured the fires of the wrath of God for us, for you, for me. And, verse 4 speaks of how this perfect sacrifice was offered. Notice: “Eleazar the priest shall take of [its] blood with his finger, and sprinkle of [its] blood directly before the tabernacle of the congregation seven times.” (Numbers 19:4) That speaks of the blood of Jesus Christ. This heifer—this red heifer in perfection, an animal without spot or blemish—was a picture of the perfect Savior and our sacrifice for sin. So, the first thing I want to say about the cleansing agent: the cleansing agent must be acceptable to God. That’s verses 1 through 5.

B. The Cleansing Agent Must Be Accessible to Man

But, the second thing I want to say about it: it must be accessible to man. Notice in verse 9: “And a man [who] is clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer, and lay them up [outside] the camp in a clean place, and it shall be kept for the congregation of the children of Israel for a water of separation: it is a purification for sin.” (Numbers 19:9) Now, God said, “You can be unclean, but you

need to be purified.” And so, God says, “You take the ashes of this red heifer that’s been burned, put them in a pot, have a man carry them out to a clean spot, and set them there in that very clean spot. And then, there’ll be a time when those ashes can be mixed with water and brought back and be used to make the unclean clean.”

Now, what does that represent? That represents the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ forever deposited in heaven, a clean place, for you and for me. And, those ashes were an evidence of the finished sacrifice, and they were perpetually preserved for removal of daily sin and its pollution. These ashes were not used for a person who had never been a Jew and never been a part of the congregation to get into the congregation. This is not talking about a person having his sins forgiven so he can be saved, but this is talking about a saved person who, by deliberate acts of sin or by defiling associations with sin or by deceiving accidents of sin, needs to be cleansed. God said, “I’ll make a provision.” And, this heifer represented the Lord Jesus Christ. Those ashes represented the finished work of Calvary and a perpetual monument to the work of Calvary, because the Bible says, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9)

C. The Cleansing Agent Must Be Applicable by Faith

Now, the third and final thing I want you to see about the cleansing of an unclean conscience: not only must a cleansing agent be acceptable to God (verses 1 through 5), not only must it be accessible to man (verse 9), but it is apply-able, or applicable, by faith. Notice verses 17 and 18 of this chapter; look at it: “And for an unclean person they shall take of the ashes of the burnt heifer of purification for sin, and running water shall be put thereto in a vessel: And a clean person shall take hyssop, and dip it in the water, and sprinkle it upon the tent, and upon all the vessels, and upon the persons [who] were there, and upon him that [toucheth] a bone, or one slain, or one dead, or a grave.” (Numbers 19:17–18)

Now, they took the ashes. Then, they took running water. They mixed them together. Then, they took the hyssop, which was a plant—just a little shrub. I’ve seen plenty of them in Israel. Those of us who are going to Israel soon will see some just growing out of the walls, the hyssop plant. They just take a handful of hyssop, and they put that hyssop down in this water of ashes and take it and sprinkle it upon that person—that person who had touched a dead thing, that person who was unclean. And, the Bible says, “And then he be clean.” (Numbers 19:19)

Now, what does the running water symbolize? Remember, the ashes symbolized the finished work of Calvary. That heifer is a picture of Christ. The running water symbolizes the Word of God. The Word of God is likened over and over again in the Bible to water—“the washing of water by the word.” (Ephesians 5:26) All right. And, the hyssop—that’s the most common shrub, or one of the most common—represents faith. It is the applying agent. You see, hyssop is a symbol of faith that applies the water and the blood. You just simply ... you just simply take faith, hyssop, and with that you take and apply the water and the blood—the ashes representing the blood—to any sin and you’ll be clean.

Conclusion Now, I don’t know whether I’ve blessed you or not, but friend, when I see such a book and I see such beautiful truths that are, in a sense, are there waiting to be dug out, it blesses my heart. Now, now, now, some person will say, “Now, Brother Rogers, people can read the Bible, and they see all kinds of strange things in it. Are you sure that’s what that means?” Yeah, I’m really sure. You say, “Well, why are you so sure?” Well, now, just go right back now to Hebrews, and look again. You know, the Bible is a wonderful book, isn’t it? I mean, it really is. And, the more I study it, I don’t find hidden flaws; I find hidden beauties. I find little gems of truth that are just written all over.

I can’t even find Hebrews. All right, let’s see. I think ... There it is. Okay, look again now in Hebrews chapter 9, beginning in verse 11, and see if it doesn’t ... see if this passage in Hebrews doesn’t just burst aflame in your hand right now. And, you never would have known it, you never would have gotten the full import, you never would have gotten all of the truth—this tabernacle truth—unless you had gone back and studied in the book of Numbers. But now, read it again: “But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building: Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place”—you see, His blood is a picture of the blood of that heifer that was sprinkled. The holy place is the clean place where those ashes were put—“having obtained [for] eternal redemption for us. For if the blood of bulls and goats, and the ashes of an heifer”—there it is—“sprinkling the unclean”—there it is—“sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ”—do you see how those ashes represent the blood of Christ?—“How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God”—remember, that heifer was without spot or blemish—“offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Hebrews 9:11–14)

You see, you can’t serve God if you don’t have a clean conscience, but it’s the blood of Jesus that makes your conscience clean. And, I thank God out yonder in the glory there is that perpetual sacrifice. I don’t have to go around with sin on my soul. I sin every day. I’m ... I just have to confess it to you. Man, I have to ask God over and over to forgive me. And sometimes—and oh, how my heart makes me ashamed—I have to ask God to forgive me for the same things over and over again. But, I thank God there’s a pot full of ashes. I thank God there’s a perpetual sacrifice. I thank God there’s the running water, and I thank God there is the hyssop,

the faith—so common, so available. “God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.” (Romans 12:3) I don’t have to go around with a load of guilt on me. I don’t have to go around saying, “Unclean, unclean, unclean, unclean.” I know every day I deliberately stumble into sin, and perhaps, sometimes ... I mean, I deliberately sin, and sometimes I get defiled by sin that I’m not aware of. I know sometimes I walk on some graves that I don’t even know are there. Sometimes I touch some bones I have no business touching. But, I’m glad the Bible says, “If we confess our sins, [he’s] faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9) Now, I’m just glad for a book like this that has such truth in it to bless our hearts.

Is America's Conscience Vanishing?

By John MacArthur, 2020

Borrow Dr MacArthur's book [The Vanishing Conscience](#)

How can we begin to explain the terrible, outrageous, unrelenting violence we have witnessed over the past months? It seems the more shocking and horrific this behavior becomes, the more passive and indifferent the "social justice" response. At best, the social justice solution seems to want more "dialogue" without any real answers, and doesn't ascribe feelings of guilt to genuine causes, just seeks to either assuage or indulge the feelings.

This kind of response misses the most fundamental question: What kind of person is actually capable of this level of indeterminate, ongoing death and destruction? Where is the conscience of those so disinterested in truth and order that their impulses toward violence are so entirely unrestrained? What is missing in this generation that seems to have been built-in and sufficiently present in prior generations?

Our society has intentionally, systematically deconstructed and removed all restraints to violence and destruction. And not just of cities and statues, but of ourselves. Where is our conscience? Losing our conscience was not a side-effect of the present chaos. We have intentionally repressed and denied our conscience, because we only want to have good feelings. Drugs, therapy, entertainment — they've all been used to silence our guilty conscience.

But the conscience is the key to true freedom.

In 1984 an Avianca Airlines jet crashed in Spain. Investigators studying the accident made an eerie discovery. The "black box" cockpit recorders revealed 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 switched the system off. Minutes later the plane plowed into the side of a mountain. Everyone on board died.

When I saw that tragic story on the news shortly after it happened, it struck me as a perfect parable of the way modern people treat **guilt** — the warning messages of their consciences.

The wisdom of our age says guilt feelings are nearly always erroneous or hurtful; therefore we should switch them off. But is that good advice? What, after all, is the conscience — this sense of guilt we all seem to feel?

The conscience is generally seen by the modern world as a defect that robs people of their self-esteem. Far from being a defect or a disorder, however, your ability to sense your own guilt is a tremendous gift from God. He designed the conscience into the very framework of the human soul. It is the automatic warning system that cries, "Pull up! Pull up!" before you crash and burn.

The conscience, Puritan Richard Sibbes wrote in the seventeenth century, is the soul reflecting upon itself. Conscience is at the heart of what distinguishes the human creature. People, unlike animals, can contemplate their own actions and make moral self-evaluations. That is the very function of conscience.

The conscience has an innate ability to sense right and wrong. Everyone, even the most unspiritual heathen, has a conscience.

The conscience entreats you to do what you believe is right and restrains you from doing what you believe is wrong. But don't equate the conscience with the voice of God or the law of God. It is a human faculty that judges your actions and thoughts by the light of the highest standard you perceive. When you violate your conscience, it condemns you, triggering feelings of shame, anguish, regret, consternation, anxiety, disgrace, and even fear.

Conversely, when you follow your conscience, it commends you, bringing joy, serenity, self-respect, well-being, and gladness.

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 — *suneidesis*, which also literally means "co-knowledge."

Conscience is knowledge together with oneself. That is to say, your conscience knows your inner motives and true thoughts. It is above reason and beyond intellect. You can rationalize, trying to justify yourself in your own mind, but a violated conscience will not be easily convinced.

The Hebrew word for conscience is *leb*, usually translated "heart" in the Old Testament. The conscience is so much at the core of the human soul that the Hebrew mind did not draw a distinction between conscience and the rest of the inner person.

When Scripture speaks of a tender heart (2 Chronicles 34:27), it refers to a sensitive conscience. The "upright in heart" (Psalm 7:10) are those with pure consciences. And when David prayed, "Create in me a clean heart, O God" (Psalm 51:10), he was seeking to have his life and his conscience cleansed.

Multitudes today respond to their conscience by attempting to suppress it, overrule it, or silence it. They conclude that the real blame for their wrong behavior lies in some childhood trauma, the way their parents raised them, societal pressures, or other causes beyond their control.

Sometimes people convince themselves that their sin is a clinical problem, not a moral one — and therefore define their drunkenness, sexual perversion, immorality, or other vices as "diseases" or "conditions." To respond to the conscience with such self-excusing arguments is tantamount to telling the conscience, "Shut up, Gringo!"

It is possible virtually to nullify the conscience through repeated abuse. Paul spoke of people whose consciences were so convoluted that their "glory is in their shame" (Philippians 3:19; cf. Romans 1:32). Both the mind and the conscience can become so defiled that they cease making distinctions between what is pure and what is impure (cf. Titus 1:15).

After so much violation, the conscience finally falls silent. Morally, those with defiled consciences are left flying blind. The annoying warning signals may be gone, but the danger certainly is not; in fact, the danger is greater than ever.

Furthermore, even the most defiled conscience will not remain silent forever. When standing at the Judgment, every person's conscience will side with God, the righteous judge. The worst sin-hardened evildoer will discover before the throne of God that he has a conscience that testifies against him.

The conscience, however, is not infallible. Nor is it a source of revelation about right and wrong. Its role is not to teach you moral and ethical ideals, but to hold you accountable to the highest standards of right and wrong you know.

Both tradition and truth inform the conscience, so the standards it holds you to are not necessarily biblical ones (1 Corinthians 8:6-9). The conscience can be needlessly condemning in areas where there is no biblical issue, like many of today's responses to social justice and corporate guilt. In fact, it can try to hold you to the very thing the Lord is trying to release you from (Romans 14:14, 20-23)!

The conscience, to operate fully and in accord with true holiness, must be informed by the Word of God. So even when guilt feelings don't have a biblical basis, they are an important spiritual distress sign. If your conscience is misfiring — sending out signals from a weak conscience — that should spur you to seek the spiritual growth that would bring your conscience more in harmony with God's Word.

Your conscience reacts to the convictions of your mind and therefore can be encouraged and sharpened in accordance with God's Word. The wise Christian wants to master biblical truth so that the conscience is completely informed and judges right because it is responding to God's Word. A regular intake of Scripture will strengthen a weak conscience or restrain an overactive one. Conversely, error, human wisdom, and wrong moral influences filling the mind will corrupt or cripple the conscience.

In other words, the conscience functions like a skylight, not a light bulb. It lets light into the soul; it does not produce its own. Its effectiveness is determined by the amount of pure light you expose it to, and by how clean you keep it. Cover it or put it in total darkness and it ceases to function. That's why the apostle Paul spoke of the importance of a clear conscience (1 Timothy 3:9) and warned against anything that would defile or muddy the conscience (1 Corinthians 8:7; Titus 1:15).

People we are witnessing today who seem to lack any moral sense are examples of people who have ruined or desensitized their consciences. Can such people really sin without remorse or scruples? If so, it is only because they have ravaged their own consciences through relentless immorality and lawlessness.

The conscience is an inextricable part of the human soul. Though it may be hardened, cauterized, or numbed into apparent dormancy, the conscience continues to store up evidence that will one day be used as a testimony to condemn the guilty soul. But for the Christian, the conscience is a tremendous asset of spiritual growth.

Take time each day to inform your conscience by reading God's Word. Never train yourself to ignore your conscience, but respond

quickly to its warnings. And then cleanse your conscience through consistent confession as you seek forgiveness from those you've sinned against — whether God or others. Those things will strengthen your conscience so that you can enjoy the freedom and blessings of a clear conscience before God and genuinely make a positive contribution to the world.

A Good Conscience

Arthur W. Pink, 1952

Not a little is said in the Bible about the conscience, even where it is not called by that particular name. In many places, the "heart" (1 John 3:20, etc.), the "spirit" (Romans 8:16; 1 Corinthians 2:11), the "thoughts" (Psalm 16:7), the "candle of the Lord" (Proverbs 20:27), and the "eye" (Luke 11:34-36) all signify the conscience. This inward monitor is one of the two eyes of the soul, the other one being the reason. Conscience is that faculty which . . .

perceives moral qualities, enables us to discern of conduct in reference to right and wrong, decides upon the lawfulness or unlawfulness of our desires and deeds, and discriminates between truth and error. It estimates and declares the ethical character of whatever is presented to the mind, and that according to the measure of light which it has from reason and from the Word. Thus, conscience has a threefold office to perform:

First, to discover sin to us and to reveal our duty, with the penalty of the one and the reward of the other.

Second, when it has passed the verdict, pronouncing an act to be good or bad, its next office is to bear witness that we have done the one or the other.

Thus, third, it performs the office of judge, acquitting or condemning the soul by the comforting or terrifying evidence which it testifies unto.

Twice we read of a "pure conscience" (1 Timothy 3:9; 2 Timothy 1:3), and no less than six times is a "good conscience" mentioned in the New Testament, Acts 23:1; 1 Timothy 1:19; Hebrews 13:18; 1 Peter 3:16, 21. What then is a good conscience?

Not the natural faculty itself, for that is defiled by sin, but rather one that has been made good, as it was . . .

awakened by the Spirit, renewed by grace, purged by the blood of Christ (Hebrews 9:14), purified by faith (Act 15:9), instructed by the Scriptures.

Conscience is an enlightened monitor which directs unto holy conduct. It is the monitor which sets God before it, moving its possessor to act as in His presence, seeking to please Him, and to avoid whatever displeases Him — as in the case of Joseph, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Gen 39:9).

For the same reason, it causes its possessor to weigh what he says and ponder before he acts, and though fallible, yet according to the best of his knowledge he honestly endeavors to abstain from that which is evil and to cleave unto that which is good. He does so impartially and universally, "I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day" (Acts 23:1). Thus, a "good conscience" is to have a heart that does not reproach, but testifies in my favor.

A good conscience is one that properly discharges its office. It does not deal deceitfully, wrongly informing or flattering me. Yet, we say again, that in order to act properly, the conscience must be well-informed, illumined by the lamp of God's Word — for as there is a religious zeal which is not according to knowledge (Romans 10:2), so there are both activities in God's service (John 16:2) and humanly devised austerities (Col 2:20-22), which issue from a mistaken or ignorant conscience.

A good conscience bears witness within that I am really sincere in desiring with all my heart to be done entirely with sin and to be as holy as God is holy — that my strivings to please Him in all things and my ardent longings for unbroken communion with Him are genuine. And that I am honest when I mourn over my oft-repeated failures.

It is one that is kept "pure" and clean, or clear from guilt, and that by keeping short accounts with God, promptly confessing every known sin unto Him, and washing daily in that fountain which has been opened for sin and for immorality (Zechariah 13:1).

Therefore are we exhorted, "Let us draw near unto God with a true heart in full assurance of faith [that is, in a firm belief in the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice and an exclusive dependence upon Him], having our hearts sprinkled [by the approbation of Christ's blood] from an evil conscience" (Heb 10:22).

The maintenance of a good conscience is an essential part of personal piety. Said the apostle, "And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and men" (Act 24:16). By which we understand him to mean that he observed a strict self-discipline, being careful that it might not justly accuse him of any offence. Paul took great pains to preserve peace within,

and labored hard to discharge faithfully every duty required of God, both toward Himself and toward His creatures — being ever on his guard against offending the One or laying a stumbling-block before the others. His, "I exercise myself," was the human-responsibility side, the discharge of his moral obligations.

Such too was Job's resolution. Said he, "My heart shall not reproach me so long as I live" (Job 27:6). He was determined so to conduct himself that his conscience would not accuse him for any action. We should be just as careful not to offend conscience as we are of avoiding anything that would displease our best friend.

A good conscience can only be maintained . . .

- by daily searching the Scriptures to discover our duty, "Understanding what the will of the Lord is" (Ephesians 5:17),
- by serious inquiry into the state of our heart and ways, "Commune with your own heart" (Psalm 4:4; Psalm 139:23-4), and
- by a uniform course of obedience, "Hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him" (1 John 3:19).

The testimony of a good conscience is priceless. "For our rejoicing is this: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from God. We have done so not according to worldly wisdom but according to God's grace." (2 Corinthians 1:12). The apostle was conscious both of the holiness of his life and the purity of his motives. He had an inward witness to the rectitude of his deeds, which approved of all and condemned for none. Though others ascribed his zealous service to unworthy incitements and ends, conscience testified to his integrity and piety. He acted "sincerity" or candor, for the word stands opposed to "double-dealing." He was actuated not by carnal prudence, but the grace of God. Asking himself not, "Is this good policy" or expedient — but "Is it right?" He knew that he was not directed by crookedness, that his spirit was without deceit, and the realization thereof was his "rejoicing."

Hence, he could say again that he had "renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God" (2 Corinthians 4:2). He dreaded histrionic devices, relied not on the force of rhetoric, but aimed — with an eye single to God's glory and the good of souls — to convict his hearers by the truth.

Those who labor to keep conscience free from guilt, receive rich dividends in return. It supplies comfortable relief when we are falsely accused and unjust aspersions are cast upon us. It did so with Job when he was so misunderstood by his friends, for he feared not to say, "Let me be weighed in an even balance, that God may know my heart" (Job 31:6).

Though Jeremiah was defamed by many, he was peacefully assured that his aims were upright. And therefore he hesitated not to expose his cause unto Him that "try the righteous and probes the heart and mind" (Jer 20:10-12).

So too David, "Judge me, O LORD; for I have walked in my integrity" (Psalm 26:1).

A clear conscience gives us assurance to approach unto God and freedom of utterance before him, "Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, then have we confidence toward God" (1 John 3:21). It is a real support under trouble, and in the approach of death. Thus, Hezekiah appealed to God, "Remember now, O LORD, how I have walked before you in truth and with a sincere heart" (Isa 38:3). In 1 Timothy 1:5 and 3:9, faith and a good conscience are linked together, for we cannot hold the one except in the other.

It is with the conscience that the Holy Spirit bears witness (Romans 8:16), shining upon His own work in the soul, assuring of our sincerity, giving us to see the genuineness of our profession by such evidences and fruits of the same.

Here are some of the qualities or characteristics of a good conscience:

- 1. Sincerity.** Alas, how little of this virtue now remains in the world today. What shams and hypocrisy abound on every hand. There is scarcely any fidelity or reality left. But where the fear of the Lord is, there is a genuine desire to please Him, "in all things willing to live honestly" (Heb 13:8).
- 2. Tenderness.** There is a wakefulness and sensitiveness, so that it smites for sin on all occasions. So far from being indifferent to God's claims, the heart is acutely sensible when they have been ignored. Even for what many regard as trifling matters, a good conscience chides and condemns.
- 3. Fidelity.** A constant judging of ourselves before God and a measuring of our ways by His Word. The favorable opinion of a person's friends, affords no satisfaction to an upright man unless his heart can assure him that his conduct is right in the sight of God. No matter what are the beliefs and customs of others, he will not knowingly offend his inward monitor.

Marked are the differences between the actings of the natural conscience — and those of a renewed and good conscience.

The natural conscience works mainly by means of slavish fear and the terror it impresses on the heart. It usually smites for total omissions or gross deeds — but not for the absence of spirituality or perfunctory performances. It works mainly when convictions are strongest, minding duty in time of distress, "in their affliction they will seek me early" (Hosea 5:15). But a renewed conscience moves us to perform duty out of love to God. If there were no binding precept — gratitude would prompt to the bringing of a thank-offering to Him!

God's Purpose for the Conscience

Matthew Mead, 1629-1699

"Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them." Romans 2:14-15

That it is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God, will appear, if you consider that all the proceedings of God in the great day of judgment shall be suited to every man's CONSCIENCE. It shall be such as a man's own conscience shall fall in with, and justify the proceedings of God in. I must speak to this gradually.

1. There is in every man, such a thing as conscience. It is essential to the rational nature, therefore essential to all mankind. Every man has a conscience. It is most plain in Scripture. You read of conscience above thirty times in the New Testament, though not in the Old Testament the actual word conscience, but you find that which signifies the same thing. For the Hebrews have no word which signifies conscience, but it is expressed in other words, sometimes by the heart and spirit. As it is said, "David's heart smote him when he had numbered the people," (2 Samuel 24:10), that is, his conscience accused him. It is the work of conscience to reflect on the actions done, and to check for the evil ones. "You know all the evil that your heart was privy to," Solomon says to Shimei. That is, his conscience. There is therefore in every man a conscience.

2. Conscience is a thing that is inseparably united to the soul, and is essential to it. In what part of the soul this conscience is seated, has caused various sentiments among the learned. Some place it in the understanding, some in the will, and the like. I think the proper place of conscience in the whole soul, is what the philosophers say of the soul in reference to the body—that it is wholly in the whole, and wholly in every part. That may be truly said of conscience in reference to the soul, that it is not only a part of the whole, but wholly in every part.

Conscience is in the understanding and acts there.

It is in the will and checks there.

It is in the affections and governs there.

It is in the memory and records there.

Conscience makes the understanding practical, and the will obedient, the affections spiritual, and the memory faithful. These are all the workhouse of conscience. Here it sits, here it acts, and from here it sends forth its influences into all the actions of a man's life. It extends itself over the whole man, and is concerned in every interest, and every motion, from first to last.

Conscience! We may call it a universal spiritual sense, like feeling in the body, which is not confined to any particular organ, as other senses are. Seeing is confined to the eye, and hearing to the ear, tasting to the mouth. But this is a sense that runs through all the organs and members of the body. Every part cannot see and hear, but every part can feel—and truly such a thing is conscience, it runs through all our duties and practices. Faith looks to the promises, fear looks to the threatenings, obedience looks to the commands, repentance looks to sins, but conscience looks to all.

3. The office of conscience is very great. It is the greatest officer under Heaven. It is the next and immediate officer under God himself. It rides, as Joseph did, in the second chariot. It has a very high and solemn power. It has some offices respecting God; some, respecting others; some, ourselves; some offices to be done in time; and some in eternity. While a man lives, conscience officiates. When he dies, conscience officiates. When he comes to be judged, conscience still officiates. When a man is in his eternal state, conscience officiates then. It is never out of action. As Christ says in another case, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working." John 5:17

(1). Conscience is God's repository, where the revealed will of God is kept and preserved. God wrote his law on tables of stone, and he writes it also on the fleshly tables of man's heart. This is the book of record. God never revealed more of his will, than he has written in conscience. The declaration of his will in the moral law, is no more than what was written on Adam's conscience. And the declaration of God's will in the covenant of grace, is no more than what is written in the believer's conscience. "I will write my Laws in their hearts," (Hebrews 8:10).

There is nothing in the Scripture to be believed or practiced, but it is impressed on the believer's conscience. He can say with David in the person of Christ, "Your law is within my heart." Conscience is a system of practical principles, written by the finger of God, for the furtherance and help of the soul in the ways of obedience. Yet how few men make it their work to look into their consciences. Many can read over great volumes written by other men, and yet never read one page in this book of conscience.

(2). Conscience is to directly inform us. Man has need of a guide, therefore God has appointed conscience to lead him. This is the reason of God's writing his law in the conscience, that a man might have a sure guide of his way. Solomon says, (Proverbs 20:27), "The spirit of a man is the candle of the Lord." And God lights this candle in us, that all his works may be done in the light. "The way of the wicked is darkness, they know not at what they stumble." And they do not know where it is, because they have extinguished the light of God in their souls. They have blown out God's candle by their sins. Therefore, no wonder if they walk in the dark and stumble and fall until at last they lie down in eternal sorrow!

What a happy world this would be, if man would act according to the guidance and direction of conscience. See what David says in Psalm 16:8, "I have set the Lord always before me," how so? "My thoughts instruct me in the night season. I will bless the Lord who has given me counsel." My thoughts instruct me, and I have set the Lord always before me. Conscience took counsel of God, and David took counsel of conscience, and that led him into the divine presence. The reason why men live without conscience in the world, is that they slight its guidance and leading. It is no wonder that they slight our ministry, when they slight the very ministry of conscience. How can we hope that they should hearken to us, when they will not hear the preacher within, the preacher God has set up in every man?

(3). Conscience has an impulsive and coercive power.

It has an impelling power to good. It does not only inform us what the will of God is, but it instigates to doing it. And the more holy and renewed a man's conscience is, the stronger are its instigations, that a man cannot but obey, "We cannot but speak the things that we have heard and seen," (Acts 4:20). As if they would say, God commands us, and conscience forces us, and who shall gainsay us? It is a blessed thing to have a conscience always prompting a man to good, stirring up the grace of God that is in him.

Conscience has a coercive power as to evil. It does not only inform us about it, show us what is evil—but cautions against it. It says to a man, as the angel to John, "See that you do not do it!" As Solomon to his son, "If sinners entice you, do not consent!" And wherever grace has made its entrance into the heart—the heart willingly comes under the constraint of conscience.

This made Joseph give that brave answer to his tempting mistress, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9). As if he should say, it is wickedness, and therefore God forbids it, and conscience restrains me—and therefore how can I do it?

Augustine tells of a woman, who being solicited by a lewd person to impurity, told him that he must then grant her one thing, to hold his hand in the fire one hour for her sake. He refused, saying that it was an unreasonable demand. She replied: Is it not more unreasonable that, to gratify your lust, I should burn soul and body in Hell forever?

O! the power and restraint of conscience where it reigns! Even the consciences of wicked men many times put forth a restraining force, unless man by sin has stifled, defiled, seared or hardened his conscience. Woe to him that dares sin against the authority of conscience, for he sins against the sovereignty of God. He who sins when conscience checks—he sins when God forbids him; therefore no bounds can hold that sinner who sins against the restraint of conscience.

4. Conscience takes notice of all a man's ways, and therefore one calls it, "God's residence in man's soul." There is nothing a man does in the world, but conscience takes notice of it! Every action, word and thought, is set down in the book of conscience. Wherever a man goes, he carries this with him. When he is in the dark, in secret—conscience observes him there. There is no sin any man does, but it is done in the sight of two witnesses, and they are, God and conscience.

We think when we sin in secret, that no eye sees us. But I tell you, God sees, he makes darkness light before him. And conscience sees, and writes down all. God knows the rottenness of a hypocrite, that his heart is not right in the sight of God. You who are a secret adulterer, and think that no eye sees you—does not conscience look on, and observe everything?

Therefore, take heed what you do. Do nothing now that you would not be willing to hear of again at the Day of Judgment—for most certainly you shall! It is said when Latimer was being examined for his life, and heard one behind him writing down all that he said—

it made him very cautious of what he said.

In the same way, conscience writes down all, and this book God will open at the last day!

5. Conscience is deputed as God's witness, and this is the reason why it takes such exact notice of a man's state and way. It is in order to witness-bearing, that it may give evidence for or against a man according to the merit of his cause. Every man has a witness within. (1 John 5:10). "He who believes on the Son of God, has the witness in himself;" conscience witnesses to the work of grace, to the truth of his faith. So I may say that he who does not believe on the Son of God has the witness in himself. Conscience witnesses against him for unbelief, for refusing Christ, for making God a liar—because he does not believe the record that God has given of his Son.

Conscience is as a thousand witnesses. If conscience witnesses against us—it will be no comfort whoever applauds us. And if conscience clears us, we have matter of rejoicing—whatever charge others may bring against us. Job 27:5-6, "I will never concede that you are right; I will defend my integrity until I die. I will maintain my innocence without wavering. My conscience is clear for as long as I live." That is my conscience, shall not reproach me as long as I live.

Men may reproach me, but my conscience never shall. I will behave myself so that my conscience may witness for me, though all the world witnesses against me. This is one of the great offices of conscience, and one great end why God placed it in man—to be a witness hereafter. And indeed there is none so fit to be a witness between God and us in the great day, as a man's own conscience! This will appear if you consider three things:

(1). Conscience is a witness of God's own appointing. God has ordained it, and set it up to give evidence both to saints and lost sinners. It is a faithful witness that will not lie.

(2). Conscience stands indifferent between God and man, and therefore more fit to be a witness. Self-interest leads to partiality, but he who is indifferent, is the more likely to be for the equity of the case. Conscience is a thing between both parties; it is not so of God, but it has something of man. Nor so of man, but it has something of God in it, and therefore the fittest to give evidence.

(3). None can know so much of a man, as his own conscience does. The devil knows much of us, he knows every overt act of sin that ever we did. Yet there is very much he does not know of a man. I may say, there are many secret sins, inward sins, latent sins, sins of thought and affection—which Satan is no way privy to, nor can he be while they are hidden there, and therefore he can give no evidence concerning them. There are many sins which a man is guilty of in the secrets of his soul, which the devil knows nothing of until they come into act.

But conscience within knows all! The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord searching all the inward parts. 1 Corinthians 2:11, "What man knows the things of a man save the spirit of a man that is in him?" This is his conscience.

So that you see there is no witness so proper and fit as conscience to give evidence for or against a man in the great day of judgment. Therefore, God has told us in his Word that he will proceed in judgment with every man in the great day, according to the testimony of his own conscience. Saints and lost sinners, believers and unbelievers—shall all stand or fall by the evidences of their own consciences!

The process of that day will be according to what is charged and infallibly proved. God is a righteous judge, and the judgment of that day will be a righteous judgment. It is called the day of the righteous judgment of God, because then he will judge upon clear evidence, and will manifest his righteousness. Now, there can be no clearer evidence than the witness of a man's own conscience. So shall it be in the great day. And this, I think, is made plainly out in Revelation 20:12 where it is said, speaking of the great judgment day, "The dead stood before God, and the books were opened, and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works." What books are those out of which men shall be judged? The book of God's Omniscience, and the book of a man's own conscience. God will have one book, and man another—and both shall agree to every least tittle.

And where it is said the books were opened, it is to be understood of a divine irradiation—by which God enlightens the conscience to do its office in that day.

Sin now has blinded the sinner's conscience, so that he does not see the Hell of sin which is in his heart and nature. He makes a mock of sin, laughs at it, and knows no evil in it. But in that day the case will be altered! God will then so wonderfully enlighten the conscience, that all his past sins shall come into his view, and shall be plain and open before him.

It is a solemn and fearful consideration—that every sin is written in the book of conscience, and that book must be opened in the great day of judgment, and God will set every sin before a man! Psalm 50:21, "These things have you done, (speaking of their adultery and other wickedness,) and I kept silence—and you thought I was altogether such a one as yourself, (as if I approved and liked your sin—because I did not presently punish it;) but (God says) I will reprove you, and set them in order before your eyes!"

There is not a sin ever committed, but God will bring it into remembrance, and the sinner shall have a full view of it! 1 Corinthians 4:5, "Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts." God will bring all our secret heart sins to light, and make them manifest.

This is that which men are to understand by opening the books. When God shall open conscience in that day, by letting in light—then the sinner shall see every sin, every lust, and every vile affection there!

The books shall be opened, and then it follows, the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. That is, they shall be judged by God's omniscience, and according to the witness of conscience so that every man at the great day shall stand and fall before God, by the evidence of his own conscience!

By this a man might know how it is likely to go with him in God's final judgment: if he would but look inward, and hold communion with his own conscience. If our hearts do not condemn us, the Apostle says, that is, our own consciences—if on due search they acquit us from hypocrisy and reigning sin, then have we confidence towards God. In this way we have liberty of access now, and boldness in the day of judgment hereafter.

A man may go to the bar of God with comfort, if his conscience speaks peace to him—if it does not condemn him. Again, he says, if our consciences condemn us, God is greater than our hearts and knows all things. If conscience condemns us, God is greater and knows more, and then it follows he will condemn us much more. The Apostle in this scripture, does plainly intimate this much to us, that the voice of conscience is the very voice of God. "What it binds on earth, is bound in Heaven; and what it looses on earth, is loosed in Heaven." Conscience acquits or condemns us in the name of God—therefore God will acquit or condemn. If conscience speaks to us peace in the blood of Jesus applied by faith—then God will speak peace to us. But if conscience condemns us—then God will ratify the sentence of conscience.

Therefore, as the consolations of conscience are most sweet—so its condemnations are very terrible and dreadful.

6. Conscience is an inseparable companion. It is with us whatever we do, and goes with us wherever we go. It can no more be separated from a man, than the shadow can from the body. It accompanies us while we live, and when we die. Conscience is then with us, and is more active and vigorous than ever.

And after death when the soul and body part—the soul and conscience do not part. Wherever the soul goes, the conscience goes. If to judgment, conscience goes with it. If to Heaven or Hell, conscience goes with it. Conscience will be every man's companion in the eternal world forever. O! how glad would the damned be, if they might but leave their consciences behind them, when they leave this world, and go into eternity! But it cannot be, for,

7. Conscience is the seat and center of the wrath of God in all the damned. For look, as the toad leaves a filth and slime behind it—so all the corruptions and filth of sins settle upon the conscience: "their mind and conscience are defiled," (Titus 1:15).

This is the great privilege of all believers—that their consciences are purged from the guilt and filth of sin by Christ's blood, (Hebrews 9:14). By this they are so purified that they become the region of light and peace.

But all the guilt of an unbeliever's whole life, fixes and settles on the conscience. Conscience is not only engaged to God as a judge, but is a principal guide and direction of the soul in its whole course. Conscience is the bridle of the soul to restrain it from sin. Conscience is the eye of the soul to direct its way. Therefore conscience is principally chargeable with all the evils of life; and if it is so, then what a storehouse of guilt must be heaped up on the unbeliever's conscience! (Romans 2:5). He speaks of, "sinners treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath;" that is, by increasing and adding more guilt, for guilt and wrath are stored up together. For as guilt increases, so wrath increases—until the measure is full, and then God calls for an accounting!

8. The sinner carries all the guilt that is on his conscience to the judgment bar of God. For as conscience follows the sinner wherever he goes, so guilt follows the conscience, yes to the very grave, and to judgment! "His bones are full of the sins of his youth," (Job. 20:11). That is, his conscience is as full of sin, as his bones are of marrow. And in the next words it follows, they shall lie down with him in the dust. The meaning is, that sin shall never leave the wicked man, whether he is alive or dead; neither in this world nor in the next.

The sins of believers die before them—and that is comfortable. But the sins of unbelievers go to the grave with them—and that is dreadful. Believe this: unless a man dies to sin while he lives—his sin shall live with him when he is dead! They go down into the grave with him, and to judgment, and to Hell with him! He and his sins shall never part. As the graces of a believer, so the sins of unbelievers follow the soul wherever it goes. Therefore as the Holy Spirit says, (Revelation 14:13). "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord, for they rest from their labors, and their works follow them," follow them to judgment, to Heaven, and eternal glory.

So I may say, cursed are the dead who do not die in the Lord—for their sins follow them, and they must necessarily keep them; for nothing but pardoning grace can remove guilt, and without faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, there can be no pardoning grace—

therefore their guilt remains. As Christ says, "Because you believe not—you shall die in your sins!" (John 8:23).

O! how glad would lost sinners be, if they might go to the grave—and sin not go with them! But you shall die in your sins! Christ says—that is, they shall never leave you, but shall follow you to judgment, and shall lie on your conscience to eternity! For though acts of sin pass—yet the guilt of it abides.

9. Conscience will be the sinner's tormentor in the next world. Guilt followed with wrath is tormenting. And conscience, which now is the center of guilt, shall then be the center of wrath—and being filled with the wrath of God, O! how will it torment the sinner. Therefore it is called, "a worm, a never-dying worm," (Mark 9:44)—to set out the greatness, and inwardness, and everlastingness of its gnawing torments. It is one of the greatest miseries in Hell.

The torments which a man bears in Hell from the charges of his own conscience, are the greatest misery of Hell. By this raging of conscience in this world, we have a hint of it. In the midst of all our sins and pleasures—a tormenting conscience is a very Hell on earth; as you see by the woeful examples of Cain and Judas. And if it is so, that conscience is such a dreadful thing, when it rages in a man here on earth—then what will it be when it shall be filled up with the wrath of God in Hell? Pangs of conscience here, are but as the first-fruits of Hell. It will then be very dreadful, especially in four things:

(1). By reflecting and looking back on what is past. This will heighten the punishment of loss:

When in this way the lost sinner considers the Heaven, the glory and happiness that he is forever deprived of, and that by his own folly.

When he shall consider, upon what fair terms salvation by the blood of Christ, was offered to him—how much time he had to work out his own salvation. What opportunities God put into his hands. What variety of means God afforded him. For what trifling matters, he lost his immortal soul.

And again, besides this punishment of loss, he shall find by sad experience, what before he would not believe—what a dreadful place Hell is, what a terrifying thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God!

How often he was warned to flee from the wrath to come, what offers were made to him in the name of Christ—yet none would prevail.

Again, when he shall consider that he himself was the cause of his own ruin—that he has destroyed himself by his own hands! He is now lashed by cords of his own twisting, and tormented by a fire of his own kindling.

And when to all he shall add this, that this Hell, and wrath, and misery, was through his own choice! God and his ministers set before him life and death, Heaven and Hell—and he refused Heaven and eternal life for the sake of his base lusts! Who can imagine what the terrors of such a reflection as this will be?

(2). All the charges and reflections of conscience shall then be so clear and self-evident, as shall leave the sinner destitute of all manner of excuse. For when conscience convinces and condemns—there is no standing before it.

Every sinner is now a self-destroyer, and in that day he shall be a self-condemner. When God condemns—then conscience will condemn too, and so it will justify the righteous judgment of God. Every mouth shall then be stopped—as the man that had not the wedding garment was speechless. He was convinced of the righteous judgment of God, and of his own sin.

(3). Conscience will be always upbraiding the sinner in Hell—with his own willfulness and obstinacy against Christ, and his madness in sinning, as the cause of all. This will be like a continual rubbing of a fresh wound with salt and vinegar. The upbraidings of conscience will make it a worm indeed!

(4). Lastly, add to all this, that conscience shall be still looking forward to all that is to come. And the dreadful expectation of wrath without end makes it a never-dying worm.

The guilt of past sins, and the sense of present torments, and the dread of their everlasting continuance which will then fill the soul—will make conscience a most insufferable tormentor!

The sinner shall in that day be his own executioner. As God inflicts punishment—so shall conscience. He shall be tormented by conscience, as by a worm that never dies. And this makes it evident, that it is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God, because the proceedings of God in the day of judgment with lost sinners shall be suited to the ministry of a man's own conscience; such as his own conscience shall fall in with, and justify all the proceedings of God.

CONSCIENCE

C H SPURGEON

ALL OF THE FOLLOWING QUOTES ARE FROM C H SPURGEON

CONSCIENCE—Hardening.

It is a very terrible thing to let conscience begin to grow hard, for it soon chills into northern iron and steel. It is like the freezing of a pond. The first film of ice is scarcely perceptible; keep the water stirring and you will prevent the frost from hardening it; but once let it film over and remain quiet, the glaze thickens over the surface, and it thickens still, and at last it is so firm that a waggon might be drawn over the solid ice. So with conscience, it films over gradually, until at last it becomes hard and unfeeling, and is not crushed even with ponderous loads of iniquity.

THE PRICK OF A PIN AND A HEAVY BLOW

"The prick of a pin maketh a man start, but a heavy blow stunneth him. David, when he cut off the lap of Saul's garment, his heart smote him; but when he fell into adultery and blood, he was like one in a swoon."

Thus it is that a slight departure from right will startle the unsophisticated conscience, while a gross sin may stun it into a horrible insensibility. Much serious thought is suggested by this most striking simile. Among other things it teaches us to dread a benumbed or swooning conscience, for it may have been brought into that condition by a terrible sin. Better far to be morbidly sensitive, and condemn one's self needlessly, than to be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. A quick and tender conscience is among the best gifts of grace; let those who have it guard its delicacy with jealous care.

Lord, let my conscience be as tender as the apple of my eye. As well-balanced scales are tremulous at the fall of a single grain of dust, so let the minutest sin set me on the move. Never, I beseech thee, permit me to become heavy with the intoxication caused by a deep draught of evil: "Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me."

What a volume Mr. Recorder Conscience has written already! (Charles Spurgeon, "[Illustrations and meditations: or, Flowers from a Puritan's garden](#)" 1883)

"If conscience speaks not, it writes. For it is not only a witness, but a register, and a book of record: 'The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron, and the point of a diamond!' Jeremiah 17:1. We know not what conscience writes, being occupied and taken up with carnal vanities — but we shall know hereafter, when the books are opened, Revelation 20:12. Conscience keeps a diary, and marks down everything! This book, though it is in the sinner's keeping — cannot be erased and blotted out. Well, then, a sleepy conscience will not always sleep; if we do not allow it to awaken here — it will awaken in Hell!"

Let those who forget their sins take note of this! There is a recorder within you taking notes, and he will publish all, where all will hear it. Never say, "Nobody will see me!" for you will see yourself, and your conscience will give infallible evidence against you.

What a volume Mr. Recorder Conscience has written already! How many 'blotted pages' he has in store, to be produced upon my final trial.

O You who alone can erase this dreadful handwriting, look on me in mercy, as I now look on You by faith.

"They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them." Romans 2:15

Conscience may tell me that something is wrong, but how wrong it is conscience itself does not know. Did any man's conscience, unenlightened by the Spirit, ever tell him that his sins deserved damnation? Did it ever lead any man to feel an abhorrence of sin as sin? Did conscience ever bring a man to such self-renunciation that he totally abhorred himself and all his works and came to Christ?

A man sees his enemy before him. By the light of his candle, he marks the insidious approach. His enemy is seeking his life. The man puts out the candle and then exclaims, "I am now quite at peace." That is what you do. Conscience is the candle of the Lord. It shows you your enemy. You try to put it out by saying, "Peace, peace! Put the enemy out!" God give you grace to thrust sin out!

Conscience is like a magnetic needle, which, if once turned aside from its pole, will never cease trembling. You can never make it still until it is permitted to return to its proper place.

I recollect the time when I thought that if I had to live on bread and water all my life and be chained in a dungeon, I would cheerfully

submit to that if I might but get rid of my sins. When sin haunted and burdened my spirit, I am sure I would have counted the martyr's death preferable to a life under the lash of a guilty conscience.

O believe me, guilt upon the conscience is worse than the body on the rack. Even the flames of the stake may be cheerfully endured, but the burnings of a conscience tormented by God are beyond all measure unendurable.

This side of hell, what can be worse than the tortures of an awakened conscience?

He was a fool who killed the watchdog because it alarmed him when thieves were breaking into his house. If conscience upbraids you, feel its upbraiding and heed its rebuke. It is your best friend.

Give me into the power of a roaring lion, but never let me come under the power of an awakened, guilty conscience. Shut me up in a dark dungeon, among all manner of loathsome creatures—snakes and reptiles of all kinds—but, oh, give me not over to my own thoughts when I am consciously guilty before God!

Fire such as martyrs felt at the stake were but a plaything compared with the flames of a burning conscience. Thunderbolts and tornadoes are nothing in force compared with the charges of a guilty conscience.

When a swarm of bees gets about a man, they are above, beneath, around, everywhere stinging, every one stinging, until he seems to be stung in every part of his body. So, when conscience wakes up the whole hive of our sins, we find ourselves compassed about with innumerable evils: sins at the board and sins on the bed, sins at the task and sins in the pew, sins in the street and sins in the shop, sins on the land and sins at sea, sins of body, soul, and spirit, sins of eye, of lip, of hand, of foot, sins everywhere. It is a horrible discovery when it seems to a man as if sin had become as omnipresent with him as God is.

The conscience of man, when he is really quickened and awakened by the Holy Spirit, speaks the truth. It rings the great alarm bell. And if he turns over in his bed, that great alarm bell rings out again and again, "The wrath to come! The wrath to come! The wrath to come!"

Nothing can be more horrible, out of hell, than to have an awakened conscience but not a reconciled God—to see sin, yet not see the Savior—to behold the deadly disease in all its loathsomeness, but not trust the good Physician, and so to have no hope of ever being healed of our malady.

I would bear any affliction rather than be burdened with a guilty conscience.

It is a blessed thing to have a conscience that will shiver when the very ghost of a sin goes by—a conscience that is not like our great steamships at sea that do not yield to every wave, but, like a cork on the water, goes up and down with every ripple, sensitive in a moment to the very approach of sin. May God the Holy Spirit make us so! This sensitiveness the Christian endeavors to have, for he knows that if he has it not, he will never be purified from his sin.

There are thousands of people in this country who would be greatly troubled in their minds if they did not go to church twice on Sundays. And they get comfort in this because their conscience is dead. If their conscience were really awakened, they would understand that there is no connection between conscience and outward forms

Conscientious Separation

"A conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men."—Acts 24:16.

"If the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him."—1 Kings 18:21.

The "Daily News" of May 8th, in an article on Lord Carnarvon's resignation, says:—"Mr. CARLYLE, wearied with much eighteenth century talk about virtue, somewhere requests the talker, with a strong adjuration, to 'be virtuous and have done with it.' Too much praise of what is after all but the carrying into statesmanship of the laudable but not marvellous practice of common honesty might lead the hearer to express a similarly petulant prayer. It is not at all desirable that a politician should be perpetually interrogating his conscience to see what its opinion may be as to this tax on tobacco and that alteration in the bankruptcy laws. Such a practice could only lead to very considerable public inconvenience, and in the case of the individual practising it, to something not very different from hypocrisy. But occasions may and do arise when a policy or an individual measure commends itself to the majority of a Ministry which seems morally wrong or politically unadvisable to some member thereof. When this is the case, ought he to put his convictions in his pocket, and salve his conscience with the theory of party allegiance, or ought he to go out from those respecting whom he feels that he is not of them? No one will in words profess the former doctrine, but many will act upon it. Lord Carnarvon has acted upon the latter doctrine, which everybody professes, but many set aside in practice. Of course it is important that the conscience appealed to should be a healthy conscience, not given to unnecessary questioning and quibbling."

Not only do we admire the consistency of Lord Carnarvon, but we wish we saw a little more of it among professing Christians. We

know some ministers who do not believe the doctrines of the church to which they belong, and yet for reasons best known to themselves they remain in that community, and undermine the very foundations of the faith which they profess to preach. How this can be made to be in accordance with morality we know not. Surely it would be more like common honesty if they would at once show their colours, and no longer pretend to be what they are not. Some Christians, too, who never enter a pulpit, are equally guilty, for they are recognised as members of churches against whose teaching they frequently protest. They support evil systems and know them to be evil. They dissent in their hearts, but yet consent by their actions: for fear of giving offence to men, they are constantly offending God and their own consciences. Whatever their excuses may be, are they not resolvable into doing evil that good may come? Of course it is not to be desired that men should be perpetually vexed with scruples upon minor points, and ready to quarrel about anything or nothing, because their conscience is morbidly sensitive; but surely it cannot be right for a truthful man to be a member of a church from whose confession he widely disagrees; his position is a protest against his own convictions, and his convictions make his profession a falsehood. We ought to be intensely anxious to be so clear in the whole of our religious standing that under the light of the day of judgment no glaring contradictions shall be discovered in our lives; otherwise we may not only be guilty of "something not very different from hypocrisy," but we may fall into hypocrisy itself. A little tampering with conscience is a very dangerous thing, it is very like the dropping of a stitch which may lead to the unravelling of all the work. We used to say in our childhood—

"He who steals a pin,
Will live to steal a bigger thing."

The rhyme was bad, but the doctrine was true. If we violate conscience, even upon the smallest matter, we may come at last to have no conscience at all.

Mr. Carlyle's advice is thoroughly sound, and his adjuration is none too strong, "Be virtuous and have done with it:" speak the truth and stand to it, profess the faith which is revealed in the Scriptures, and neither by word of mouth, nor by act, nor by association, nor even in thought, contradict the eternal verities of God. We have had too much of concession in order to win a hollow peace from philosophic nationalists on the one hand, and superstitious Rominizers on the other. The thing will not work, and if it would, it is wrong, and ought not to be attempted. Who gave us the right to yield an atom of truth? Are the doctrines of (God's word yours or mine to do as we like with, to give up this and modify that? Nay, verily: we are put in trust with the gospel, and it is at our peril that we dream of compromising the least of its teachings. A straightforward, decided line of testimony is the best, is most consistent with true charity, and in the end will most promote peace.

The trimming, hesitating policy of many reminds us of Luther's words to Erasmus: "You desire to walk upon eggs without crushing them, and among glasses without breaking them!" This is a difficult game to play at, and one which is more suitable for a clown at a theatre than a servant of Christ. "When you are attempting a compromise, you have to look around you and move as cautiously as a tight-rope dancer, for fear of offending on one side or the other. A little too much this way or that and over you go. A cat on hot cinders is in an enviable position. No true-hearted man will ever bear such wretched constraint for any length of time, or indeed at all. Think of being able to go no further than the aforementioned timorous, time-serving Erasmus, who said, "I will not be unfaithful to the cause of Christ; at least, so far as the age will permit me." Out upon such cowardice: life is too dear when bought at such a price.

"I cannot tell what you and other men
Think of this life; but for my single self,
I had as lief not be, as live to be
In awe of such a thing as I myself."

Conscience, Awakened, Terror of

Seeing that there had been no wars in Cain's day, and that the human heart had not been brutalised as it now is, so as to speak of war as we now do in such gentle terms, surely if he had had any conscience at all, it must have been a horrible thought to him that he had killed his brother. "I have killed a man, I have shed his blood." Surely it made him start in his sleep. How could he be quiet upon his lonely couch? That red-handed man! Guilt, a grim chamberlain, with fingers bloody red, would surely draw the curtains of his bed. Would not the spectacle all come up before his mind? The talk in the field, the sudden impulse, the blow, the blood, the look of his victim as he cried for pity as one cruel stroke succeeded another; and then the sight of the ghastly body and the streaming blood, and the crimson marks on the soddened earth. Oh, it must have been a remembrance clinging like a viper around the murderer whenever he might be! He might well build a city, as we are told he did, in order to quench these fiery remembrances. Then would the thought come upon him, "You slew him though he was your brother."

"Am I my brother's keeper?" said he, but men can talk more braggingly than their heart talks in secret. The horror of brother-killing must have haunted Cain: "I slew my brother, I, the first that was born of woman slew the second born." And then it would be suggested, "And wherefore did I slay him? What evil had he done me? What if he did offer a different sacrifice from mine, and what if God did accept him and not me, yet what hurt had he done me?" The innocence of his victim, if Cain had any conscience, must have

increased his uneasiness, for he would recollect how inoffensively he had kept those sheep of his, and had been like one among them, so lambl-like, that shepherd man, himself a true sheep of God's pasture. "Yet," would Cain say, "I slew him because I hated God, the God before whose bar I am soon to stand, the God who set this mark on me." Can you picture the man who had thus to be daily schooled and upbraided by a brother's blood? It needs a poet's mind to teach him. Think how you would feel if you had killed your own brother, how the guilt would hang over you like a black cloud, and drop horror into your very soul.

A quiet conscience is a little heaven.

Should it happen that, in the providence of God, you are a loser by conscience, you shall find that if the Lord pays you not back in the silver of earthly prosperity, He will discharge His promise in the gold of spiritual joy.

He who wraps a threadbare coat about a good conscience has gained a spiritual wealth far more desirable than any he has lost.

We ought never to do anything that we judge to be wrong, but we ought also to be willing to abstain from things which might not be wrong in themselves, but which might be an occasion of stumbling in others.

If a preacher never touches the conscience, what is the good of him?

One fool in a house is enough in all conscience.

Uneven conduct makes uneasy conscience.

When the Saviour shall witness against us, and our own conscience shall condemn us, how shall we escape?

See how certain people lash out when you touch on a point about which their conscience is tender. Touch me not on my sore heel. Do not remind me of an unpleasant fact.

When they rise in the conscience, or when they are talked of in the world, they bring the blush to the cheek.

It is all very fine to be pleading "conscience," but we are responsible for conscience, as well as responsible to it. If we keep conscience in the dark, or render it morbid, it will not excuse us in wrong-doing. If a captain falsifies his compass, and then steers by it, his shipwreck will be his own fault.

It is so on homoeopathic principles. That grace which burns us with conviction of sin taking the fire out of the burns of sin. We are judged in conscience that we may not be judged.

The wise man keeps on good terms with his wife, his conscience, and his stomach.

No whip cuts so sharply as the lash of conscience.

In the Word of God you have a search-warrant for the whole Bible: "Search the Scriptures." From the Court of Conscience let us issue a warrant for the sacred Scripture to search our inmost souls.

Shall he? He ought to do so, but possibly he may not. But prosperity is not the greatest thing to desire. The plain-dealer will, at least, have a quiet conscience, and that is a pearl of great price. Diogenes would still need his lantern to find a plain-dealer.

Persons think that they are being alluded to, and even insulted in a discourse, when they are not even thought of. They have a sore place, and so they are always being touched upon it. Conscience makes cowards of men.

If they die in their senses, conscience usually drives out their foolish indifference.

Money answers everything, Save a guilty conscience sting.

My kingdom is what I do, not what I have. A clear conscience is better than a golden crown.

Vain is it to administer religious consolation where the conscience never smarted under a sense of sin.

A quiet conscience is a good bedfellow. How many of our sleepless hours might be traced to our untrusting and disordered minds. They slumber sweetly whom faith rocks to sleep.

Custom in sin kills conscience of sin.

It is better to wear a shabby coat than lose a good conscience.

Regard the smallest action as being either right or wrong, and make a conscience of little things.

Guilt on the conscience puts grief on the countenance.

They have a sting in them, because conscience condemns.

Allow other people to be as free as you are. In the name of liberty of conscience much illiberality is displayed. We have quite enough to do if we use our own liberty well.

Whenever a rebuke comes home to the conscience, profit by it.

The reverse of the old advice—"Get money: get it honestly, if you can; but if not, get it—anyhow." Some money ought to smell badly. If the conscience had a nose, and the man had a conscience, he would not be able to live within ten miles of his money.

Plain truth suits not the man whose conscience it annoys. Those who live upon abuses are very savage against reformers.

He had better watch that fellow well, or he will be stabbing at his heart, or tampering with his conscience.

Comfort of the promises comes to those who make conscience of the precepts.

It was a saying of Napoleon's, "My dominion ends where that of conscience begins."

Conscience cannot speak peace till God speaks pardon.

Your conscience is not the rule of your duty, but God's Word is; and if God's Word commands it, whatever your conscience may say about it, you are sinning if you refuse to obey.

Thou hast quarrelled with thy conscience, and thy conscience with thee. It persists in speaking, and thou desirest it to be quiet. After dissipation, in the lull which comes after a storm of evil pleasure, a voice is heard saying, "Is this right? Is this safe? Will this last? What will the end of this be? Would it not be better to seek some better and nobler thing than this?" God speaks often to men through the still small voice of conscience. Open thine ear, then, and listen. Thy conscience can do thee no hurt; it may disturb thee, but it is well to be disturbed when peace leads on to death. He was a fool who killed the watch dog because it alarmed him when thieves were breaking into his house.

We want, in this century, a class of men who are endowed with a double portion of conscience to what is generally exhibited by professors; for there are many of them who have got enough conscience to make them miserable and disagreeable, but not enough to make them honestly quit their positions. They have enough conscience to make them feel uncomfortable, but not enough to force them to act bravely for what they believe. Who wants to have a conscience that will only be quiet by being drugged?

The conscience of men bids them distrust the word which tells them that there will be no difference between the righteous and the wicked. God has somehow written on the heart of man this judgment: "Sin must be punished. It cannot be the same with the godly and the ungodly at the last." 2235.641

Thank God for a tender conscience, and if you have one, never tamper with it.

A sincere Christian must maintain his conscience, even if he can scarcely maintain himself.

Some men cannot help preferring coin to conscience.

Worldlings may well be afraid, for they have an angry God above them, a guilty conscience within them, and a yawning hell beneath them; but we who rest in Jesus are saved from all these through rich mercy.

Lose all rather than lose your integrity, and when all else is gone, still hold fast a clear conscience as the rarest jewel which can adorn the bosom of a mortal.

Serve God with integrity, and if you achieve no success, at least no sin will lie upon your conscience.

The sins of others leave some kind of stain upon the conscience. I question whether you can read a newspaper and scan the story of a murder or a robbery, or survey with more distant glance in any book of history the sin of your fellow men, without being in a degree injured therewith.

A clear conscience gives sound sleep.

A clear conscience is a coat of mail. A clear conscience is a good pillow.

One said that he had a conscience which was as good as new, for he had never used it; and he is the representative of many. It would be a great blessing if some men were a little more troubled by conscience. At the same time, a conscience void of offence is a

quietus for fear: we are afraid of meeting neither God nor man when conscience is cleansed.

Better a bridle on the tongue than a lash upon the conscience.

If we are not careful what we say, we may have to smart in Conscience over evils which we cannot undo, which were wrought by our unbridled tongues.

Better suffer without cause than cause suffering. Better than star on the breast is a conscience at rest.

"Bless my stars and garters!" is a common exclamation but a quiet conscience is blest already.

Conscience troubled for sin may lead to repentance and salvation; but the results of sin are terrible.

Happy is the man who has a tender conscience, — whose heart is like the waves of the sea, which are easily moved by the breath of heaven; — so that, when God breathes upon him by his Holy Spirit, his soul is moved and controlled by that Spirit.

No man knows the blessedness of pardoned sin but the man who has felt the weight of guilt upon his conscience. If you have ever been burdened and crushed under a load of sin, it will be a joy worth more than ten thousand worlds for you to get the burden lifted from your shoulders: "Blessed" — blessed beyond description — "is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered."

Ps 51:16-17. For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit:

Bring these sacrifices, dearly beloved, bring them to God now. Bring your broken spirit, bring your troubled conscience, bring your bleeding heart, bring all your trembling on account of sin; bring it all to God's altar now.

Psa 16:7. My reins also instruct me in the night seasons.

"God makes my heart, my conscience, my inmost being, to give me instruction. What a blessing that must have been to David! A man who has no inward monitor, because he has stifled his conscience, so that it no longer holds him by the ear, and speaks with him, is poor indeed; but blessed is he who has his God and his conscience to counsel and instruct him.

TERROR—of Convicted Consciences.

In certain places on Alpine summits the way is peculiarly dangerous on account of the frequent falling of avalanches, and the traveller walks in dread of instant destruction. Samuel Rogers puts it thus:—"Then my guide

Lowering his voice addressed me: 'Through this gap On and say nothing; lest a word, a breath, Bring down the winter's snow, enough to overwhelm An army.'

Thus when alarmed by an awakened conscience men walk in fear from hour to hour, trembling lest a thought or word of sin should faring down upon them the impending wrath of God. Thrice happy is he who has traversed that awful gap of terror and now breathes freely because sin is pardoned, and therefore every apprehension is removed.

Adrian Rogers - [A Clean Conscience - 1 Timothy 1:18-19](#)

I. The Characteristics of the Conscience - [see above](#)

A. Kinds of Conscience

Now, listen. The Bible mentions various kinds of conscience.

1. A Good Conscience

First of all, a good conscience. Look at our text, again. The Bible says, here, having "a good conscience" (1 Timothy 1:19). A good conscience is a wonderful thing. A good conscience means that you know that you have made everything right. When Paul was being interrogated and persecuted for preaching the gospel, he could stand before the council, and he could say, in Acts 24:16: "And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void to offence toward God, and toward men" (Acts 24:16). Can you say that, right now? "God, as I stand here, there is no offense between Thyself and myself and any other human being." That, friend, is a good conscience.

Bill Gothard said this: "A good conscience is that inner freedom of spirit and assurance from knowing that you have a transparency toward everyone, that no one is able to point a finger at you, and accuse you of wrongs toward him that you've not made right." What a freedom that is! It gives such great liberty. Because, that doesn't mean that people are not going to accuse you. You're going

to get accused. And, the more you live for the Lord Jesus, and the more you're like the Lord Jesus, the more they're going to come down on you like a hammer. But, when they do, it's so important that you have a good conscience.

Now, listen to 1 Peter 3—and, by the way, turn to this one, and mark it. It's such a great one. He's talking about the trouble you're going to get into as a Christian. And, I've told you, many times, that Jesus Christ did not come to get you out of trouble; He came to get into trouble with you. Now, look, in 1 Peter 3:13—he asks this question: "And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?" Now, he doesn't say, "You won't suffer." He says, "You won't be harmed," because the next verse says, "But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye:"—"Did I read that right, Pastor? Suffer... happy, in the same sentence?" Yes, "but... if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled;"—but now, listen to this—"but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear:"—now, listen to this next part—"having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ" (1 Peter 3:13-16).

Do you know what that means in plain English? They're going to come against you. They cannot harm you, but you will suffer. But, if you suffer, be happy. Don't be afraid. Keep your eyes unto the Lord Jesus Christ, and make absolutely sure that everything they say about you is false; and, for His name's sake, have a good conscience. And, they will say some bad things, but make absolutely certain that you're void of offense toward man and toward God. And, that removes the fear. You cannot be terrified by your adversaries.

You see—it's a bad conscience that puts fear in your life. Adam and Eve were walking with God in the garden; and then, sin came in, and their conscience was defiled. And, they lost a good conscience. And, therefore, when God came into the Garden of Eden again, Adam and Eve hid themselves. And, Adam's first recorded words, after he sinned, were these: "I was afraid" (Genesis 3:10). Now, if your conscience is not right, you'll be afraid. "The wicked flee when no man pursueth" (Proverbs 28:1).

Do you know why some people won't come to church? The same reason that Adam hid in the garden: They don't want to see God. They don't want to face God. The reason that some people don't want to pray? Do you know why you have difficulty sometime having a quiet time? You don't want to look God in the face. Your conscience bothers you. Friend, when your conscience is clear, you long for fellowship; you want fellowship with God. But, it's the defiled conscience that brings that fear into your life.

You know, David said, in Psalm 51—after he'd sinned, and committed adultery with Bathsheba, he said, "My sin is ever before me" (Psalm 51:3). Night and day, the thing that David had done reverberated through his soul: "My sin is ever before me" (Psalm 51:3). He lived with fear. You know, every time he saw a couple of people whispering, he wondered, "I wonder, do they know?" Every time a messenger would come to the palace: "I wonder, have I been found out?" If they had telephones in that day, every time the telephone rang, David would have jumped: "My sin is ever before me" (Psalm 51:3). You see, friend, that conscience? That is a good conscience—just gives that great peace. A sleeping pill will never take the place of a good conscience. A good conscience is such a soft pillow.

Trust me no tortures which the poets feign
Can match the fierce unutterable pain
He feels, who night and day devoid of rest
Carries his own accuser in his breast. (Decimus Junius Juvenal)

Flattery cannot heal a bad conscience; and, friends, slander can't hurt one. You've got to have a good conscience.

2. A Defiled Conscience

Now, there's another kind of conscience—not only a good conscience, but you can have a defiled conscience. Put this scripture down: Titus 1:15: "Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled" (Titus 1:15). You cannot always let your conscience be your guide, unless God guides your conscience. You can have a defiled conscience.

Your conscience is like a sundial. It's no better than the light that shines upon it. Don't go out in the middle of the night, and look at your sundial with a flashlight, if you want to know what time it is. Your conscience is like that; it's no better than the light that shines upon it. Or, your conscience is like a thermostat. It registers wherever it's set.

So, the headhunter in the jungle sets his conscience, his thermostat, in one place. He doesn't feel bad when he lops off someone's head. He feels right good about it. Or, your conscience is like a skylight. I just put a skylight in my house to let some light in. Now, the skylight only operates if you keep it in the light, and if you keep it clean. And, that's the way your conscience is. If you put it in darkness, or in dirt, then it doesn't operate as it ought.

Now, that's the reason Paul told Timothy, in 1 Timothy 3:9, "You are to hold the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience" (1 Timothy 3:9)—a pure conscience. Because your conscience can be defiled, you've got to have a pure conscience. Now, sometimes, a man

will do wrong, and he'll say, "My conscience doesn't bother me." Well, that's not the last question. His conscience may be defiled; and, like a thermostat, it may be set at the wrong place.

3. A Seared Conscience

A good conscience; a defiled conscience—but it can get worse: You can have a seared conscience. First Timothy 4:2—Paul warned the young warrior about some that he would come up against. He talked about those people who would speak "lies in hypocrisy." And, why? "Having their conscience seared with a hot iron" (1 Timothy 4:2).

You know how the doctor, or the dentist, or the surgeon, can take an extremely hot tool, and burn flesh? He can cauterize flesh so as to stop bleeding. But, when he does, he damages the nerve endings there. And, some have cauterized their conscience; they have seared their conscience. They have taken the white-hot poker of willful disobedience, and have thrust it down deep into the soul; and, they have seared their conscience. So, not only is it defiled; it's just dead. They don't feel anything anymore.

4. An Evil Conscience

But, that's still not the lowest point that a man can get. He can go from a good conscience, to a defiled conscience, to a seared conscience. But, you know, the worst kind of a conscience to have is an evil conscience. Hebrews 10:22—Paul is talking about worshipping our Lord, and he says, "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience" (Hebrews 10:22).

An evil conscience—what is an evil conscience? This is the final state of depravity. Not only does a man have a defiled conscience, where he may not know exactly what is right or wrong, but he operates according to his high standards. Or, not only may a man have a seared conscience, where he ceases to feel even those high standards that he's set for himself, but he can drop so low that he actually gets an evil conscience. And, what is an evil conscience? An evil conscience is one that willfully declares, "What is good is bad, and what is bad is good." It approves evil, and disapproves right. Isaiah 5:20—listen to it: "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!" (Isaiah 5:20). That's the bottom rung.

II. The Corruption of the Conscience

Now, we talked about the conscience described, and I've given you various kinds. Let me talk to you about the conscience defiled, the conscience considered, and the conscience corrupted. How does your conscience get defiled?

Now, Paul told Timothy, "Timothy, keep a good conscience, because if you don't, you're going to have a shipwreck, son. Or, you're going to be like that abeyant pilot: you're going to plow into a mountain" (1 Timothy 1:19).

What happens to a man's conscience? Do you know what is wrong in America, today? We've corporately lost our national conscience. You know, sin, today, has never been more outrageous, and more overlooked. If you could back yourself out of this generation 20 years ago, and then just suddenly come into it, you would be shocked, and you would be outraged. But, you're not shocked and outraged anymore. We're like the frog slowly being boiled to death in the kettle. Drugs, prostitution, pornography, sexual perversion, crime—these things are epidemics. Gang violence—our streets are war zones. The criminals are becoming both younger and bolder—younger and bolder. And, our system—our prison system—is overcrowded. We don't have enough room to warehouse the criminals.

But, even the grossest sin is never described for what it is: a transgression against a righteous and a holy God. We're trying to look at it as some socioeconomic problem that can be solved with midnight basketball, bouncing a ball. Why is it that we never come to see what it is? What has happened to the old-fashioned word sin, which is against a supremely holy God?

In the book that I reference, *The Vanishing Conscience*, MacArthur tells about a Mr. Bob Vernon, who was an Assistant Police Chief in Los Angeles. And, he described some of the people that he has to deal with, and here's what he called them: moral flatliners. Do you know when the line goes flat, and the patient is dead, and that little line goes beep, beep, beep? He calls them moral flatliners. He talks about young people who have adopted crime as a career, and those heinous acts they can commit with no apparent remorse.

He gave an example—a youngster that he had arrested. He was a member of a gang, and he had adopted the name Cool Aid. And, what this boy had done—there was a school parade, and a float, and some homecoming people were on the float. This young man walks up with a gun, and begins to shoot at them, and to wound them, seriously wound them—one, critically wounded. He didn't try to hide it. They put the finger on him. They arrested him. They took him down to the station, and they interrogated Cool Aid. They said, "Why did you do that? What was your motive?" "Well," he said, "I needed to get arrested, because," he said, "I need to go to prison. Well," he said, "I need some medical treatment. I can get it there." He said, "I've got venereal disease." He said, "They can treat that there." He said, "Also, I need some dental work." He said, "So, they'll do that dental work, while I'm there." He said, "Also,"

he said, "you know, I need to get buffed up, buffed out. That is I want, too: I want to lift weights. I want to build myself up. And so," he said, "you know, when I go to prison, I can get into the gymnasium; and, I can do this. I can build up my body. But," he said, "before I went, I had to get a rep"—r-e-p—that's a reputation. "So, I got me a reputation, so, when I go to prison, I'll be known as the enforcer." He had it all figured out. He was a moral flatliner: had no remorse, no thought at all about taking a gun, and shooting people. That, friend, is an evil conscience—no conscience at all.

And, that's the kind of a world that we're living in today. I mean, we, today, are proud of our sin. At the checkout counter, look at the tabloids, the headlines: what do they scream? Perversion, adultery, gluttony, extravagancy, arrogance, selfishness, drunkenness, immorality, anger—all kinds of vice. These things are worn as badges of honor. The tee-shirts that people are wearing, with filth, and vulgarity, and profanity! I mean, they boast about it. What has happened to us? Corporately, we have lost our conscience.

A. Self-Determination

Turn to Romans 1. Let me show you what happens, if we ever live in a Romans 1 society. We're living in one. And, I want you to see how a man defiles his conscience, how a man corrupts his conscience, and how society corrupts a conscience. Romans 1—begin in verse 18: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;"—now, the word hold literally means, "who suppress, who repress, who smother the truth." Why is this? Why is God so angry with these people? Verse 19—"because..."—look at it—"because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them" (Romans 1:18-19 Anybody knows that God exists, and anybody knows that God is great. That's the reason why the Bible says, "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God" (Psalm 14:1). It "is manifest in them"—that's their conscience. "God hath shewed it unto them"—that's creation. Conscience and creation say God exists. Every man, every woman: "That which may be known of God is manifest in them... For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen,"—you don't have to be a rocket scientist—"being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse"—now, you have, here, mankind's self-determination. Man says, "No God for me. I don't want this God." And so, he just willfully turns his back on God.

B. Self-Deception

Now, that is self-determination, and it leads to self-deception. Look, in verse 21: "Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart"—that is, their conscience—"was darkened"—their foolish heart was darkened. Now, nature abhors a vacuum. And, if man doesn't believe what is right, he's going to believe what is wrong. And so, he becomes selfishly indifferent. He's not thankful. He doesn't value God. Then, he gets a sort of a sophisticated ignorance. Look, in verse 22: "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools." And then, he goes into shameful idolatry—verse 23 and following: "And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things" (Romans 1:18-23).

You say, "Well, we're past that." Oh no, we're not. We're in the middle of it. We're now worshipping Mother Earth rather than Father God. Listen, folks. This is not old-fashioned. This is not out-of-date. This is 20th-century.

C. Self-Destruction

So, what you have is mankind's, first of all, self-determination; then, his self-deception; and then, his self-destruction. Now, we're talking about the demise of the conscience.

1. Sexually Perverted

Look, if you will, in verse 26: "For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: and likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet" (Romans 1:26-27). They became sexually perverted, because their conscience has been kicked to death. This speaks of the unnatural, and vile, and filthy sins of Sodom. The Bible has so much to say about that.

2. Socially Perverted

But now, not only did they become sexually perverted—they become socially perverted. Look, if you will, in verse 28 and following—"And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful" (Romans 1:28-31). For further information, read this morning's newspaper, or any national newspaper.

3. Spiritually Perverted

Self-destruction: sexually perverted, socially perverted and spiritually perverted. Now, coming to verse 32: "Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them" (Romans 1:32). Where do we get our kicks? Where do we get our jollies in society today? Where does modern entertainment center? In sex, in perversion, in drunkenness, in debauchery—that's where we get our pleasure. Not only do we do these things, we have pleasure in those that do them, and we have smothered our conscience; we have kicked our conscience to death, individually and corporately.

III. The Cleansing of the Conscience

Now, here's the third and final thing. I have talked to you about the conscience—the characteristics of the conscience. I have talked to you about the corruption of the conscience: how a person can get a conscience that is either defiled, or deadened, or depraved. Now, let me talk to you about the cleansing of the conscience. It is so important—so important—that you have a good conscience, that you can say, "Hey, nothing between my soul and the Savior; nothing between me and my neighbor." How wonderful! How do you do that?

A. You Need to Get Saved

First of all, if you're not saved, you need to get saved. That's an old-fashioned word, isn't it? But, it's a good one. You need to get saved. Put this verse in your margin—Hebrews 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?" (Hebrews 9:14). Oh, it is the precious blood of Jesus Christ, who by the Holy Spirit died in agony and blood upon that cross. When you accept Him, when you receive Him, the blood of Jesus becomes a divine detergent to save me from wrath, and make me pure. And, the blood purges, cleanses, your conscience—the precious blood of Jesus! Christians are not just nice people—they're new creatures. Second Corinthians 5:17 says: "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

B. You Need Assurance of Your Salvation

And, when this happens, then you have assurance. We talk a lot about the assurance of salvation. And, some of you are saved, but you don't have any assurance. And, you know why you don't have any assurance? You don't deserve any assurance, because your conscience is defiled. Listen to Hebrews 10:22: "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience" (Hebrews 10:22). If a person says, "Well, yes, I have received Christ as my personal Savior and Lord; yes, I did that; yes, I trusted Him; but, I still have all these nagging doubts," you'd better go back and find out if you have that pure conscience.

Get saved.

C. You Need to Confess and Forsake Every Known Sin

Now, if you, as a Christian, have allowed your conscience as a Christian to become defiled, then you need to confess and forsake every known sin. God's Word says, in Proverbs 28:13: "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Proverbs 28:13). You cover them, and God will uncover them. You uncover them, and God will cover them. Hallelujah! "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Proverbs 28:13). Get saved, and God—the Holy Spirit of God—will purge your conscience. If you stumble, and fall, and fail, immediately uncover that. Confess it to the Lord.

I was in my study yesterday, and I was working on a deadline to get a book to the publisher. I had to put it Air Express. And, I'm sitting there, and Joyce says, "Adrian, come in here, please. I want to ask you something." And, she brought me in there. I said, "Da da da da da," and I was huffy with her—"Da da da da da da da da da"—went back, and sat down, working on a Christian book. And, God said, "Adrian, go tell her you're sorry. Go tell her you were rude, and ask her to forgive you." And, I had to do that. But, friend, the juices started to flow again. The joy was there again.

You see, when you try to cover it, or smother it, all you do is just harden your heart. You've got to keep your heart tender toward the Lord. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). And, you need to ask forgiveness—to have a clean conscience—to any one that you've wronged—not only to God, but to others. Matthew 5:23, 24: "Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee;"—not if you have anything against him; if he's got anything against you—"leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift" (Matthew 5:23-24).

Or, if there's somebody, on the other hand, that you need to get forgiveness from, or somebody that you need to give forgiveness to, our Lord says, in Matthew 6:14, 15: "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:14-15).

And, if possible, you need to make restitution. If you've done somebody wrong, and it's in your hand to make restitution, you need to do it. Listen to Numbers 5:6, 7: "Speak unto the children of Israel, when a man or woman shall commit any sin that men commit, to do a trespass against the LORD, and that person be guilty; then they shall confess their sin which they have done: and he shall recompense his trespass with the principle thereof, and add unto it the fifth part thereof, and give it unto him against whom he hath trespassed" (Numbers 5:6-7). Make restitution. That's why Zacchaeus said, "Lord, if I've defrauded any man, I'll restore to him fourfold" (Luke 19:8). Make restitution.

When I was a little boy, we had a roomer living with us—a woman. She was a roomer who rented a room in our house. I was a little fellow. I don't even think I'd started school yet. But, I went into her room. And there, on her dresser, I saw some Indianhead pennies, and I took them. When I got to be a grown man, I got saved. God, by His grace, saved me. I was a teenage boy, when I was saved, really. But, one day, I was praying, and, the Lord said, "You're a thief." "Well, God, you forgave me." "I know, but have you ever written to Vera, and told her that you stole from her, and asked her to forgive you, and to make restitution?" I realized I hadn't. It was the hardest and yet the sweetest thing I'd done in a long time—just to sit down, and say, "I went into your room, took something that was yours, and I'm sorry. Here's some money. I hope it's enough to cover the value of those antique coins. But, I'm so sorry." That was, in a way, embarrassing, but so sweet, so sweet—to have a conscience devoid of offense toward God, toward man.

And, when that happens, they can say anything they want about you, but you say, "It's all right. There is nothing between my soul and the Savior, nothing between my soul and my mate." And, friend, that is a powerful way to live. What joy, what strength! And, if, today, that warning system is saying to you, "Pull up! Pull up! Pull up!" don't switch it off. Listen to it. If you don't, you may make shipwreck.

Conclusion

Let's bow in prayer. We've sung, today, about God's amazing grace. It's so wonderful—glorious, marvelous grace that rescued me! And, God's grace wants to rescue you today, and you can be saved, saved, saved, for sure, and saved forever, if you will repent of your sin, and trust Christ as your personal Savior and Lord.

Pray a prayer like this: "O God, I know that You love me, and I know that You want to save me. And, I know, Lord, that You have my welfare in Your heart. Jesus, thank You that You love me so much that You took my sins and paid for them with Your blood." Thank our Lord Jesus. "I believe You're the Son of God. I, now, by faith, open my heart. I receive You into my life as my Lord and Savior. Forgive my sin; save me, Lord Jesus." Pray that from your heart: "Forgive my sin, and save me, Lord Jesus. Save me; purge my conscience. Save me, Lord Jesus." Did you ask Him? Then, pray this way: "Thank You for saving me. I receive it by faith. I don't look for a sign. I don't ask for a feeling. I stand on Your Word. I receive it by faith. You're my Lord and Savior, right now. And now, Lord Jesus, give me the courage and the strength to make this public.

Help me never to be ashamed of You. In Your name I pray. Am