

God's Word – and The conscience (#12)

Text : **Hebrews 9: 8-15 - cf - I Peter 3: 18-22**

INTRODUCTION :

A. Two lessons ago we discussed Christian maturity and observed that :

1. God requires for all Christians to mature toward the likeness of Christ.
2. Maturity doesn't just happen; it must be developed over time with effort.
3. Maturity is not permanent; as soon as it stops growing, it begins to atrophy.
4. Spiritual maturity produces tangible results in one's life :
 - a. It produces a deeper love for God and for His word so one studies.
 - b. It changes one's value system resulting in an increasingly sanctified life.
 - c. It causes one to share what he has learned about God and His Son, Jesus.

B. Our last lesson examined spiritual discernment.

1. We defined spiritual discernment as the ability to recognize and understand God's will for man as revealed His inspired word and apply it to one's life.
2. Discernment comes only as a fruit of bible knowledge and understanding.
 - a. Like maturity, knowledge does not automatically produce discernment.
 - b. A certain level of spiritual maturity is required to enable one to develop it.
 - c. The spiritual person studies seeking discernment. (*He's a seeker with a goal.*)
3. Training and practice are required to develop spiritual discernment.
 - a. **Heb. 5: 14- But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.**
 - b. The process starts with milk and with exercise grows into solid food.
 - c. It requires disciplined effort (*i.e., training*) and practice. (*overcoming defects*)
4. **95%** of the things we face in daily life are not directly legislated in the scriptures so it is essential that the Christian learn to discern God's will in all things.

C. This lesson will consider a related subject, the conscience.

1. We've all been taught the old adage, "***Let your conscience be your guide.***"
2. However, we have also learned that the conscience is not always a safe guide.
 - a. Paul told the Jews court that he had always had a clear conscience. **Acts 23:1**
 - b. During that time Paul had been persecuting and killing Christians. **Acts 7-9**
 - c. This same Paul also declared himself to be the foremost of sinners. **I Tim. 1:15**

With This Lesson We Will Seek To Answer Five Questions :

- 1- What is this thing we call our conscience ?**
- 2- Where did it come from ?**
- 3- Why do we have it ?**
- 4- When is it not reliable ?**
- 5- How can we insure that it remains reliable ?**

I. What is this thing we call our conscience ?

A. Webster defines conscience as :

The inner sense of what is right or wrong in one's conduct or motives, impelling one toward right action.

B. W.E. Vine's Expository Dictionary of N.T. Words defines conscience as :

“**Suneidesis**” lit., "a knowing with" (sun, "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;

C. Conscience gives a person the ability to calibrate his character.

1. It is that by which we measure ourselves. (*Determines self-image*)
2. Though all around condemned Job, his conscience declared his integrity.
- * *A man of integrity is a man who consistently does what he believes to be right.*
3. You alone know what you are when you are alone in the dark. *Conscience tells you.*

D. Thus, the conscience is a built in warning devise.

1. **ILL. -** In 1984 an Aviance Airlines plane crashed into the side of a mountain killing all on board. When the cockpit voice recorder was recovered, the built-in alarm system could be heard shrieking “PULL UP !” “PULL UP !” In response the pilot inexplicably responded in anger, “Shut up gringo !” and turned off the crash alarm system. Seconds later the plane hit the mountain killing all on board.

* *This is an accurate parable of the function of one's conscience.*

2. Our conscience is an inner alarm system which informs us when we are running afoul of our value system. (*To ignore the alarm is sin. ... Rom. 14:23*)

II. Where did conscience come from ?

A. The first record of man having a conscience was in the garden of Eden.

1. Before Adam ate of the forbidden fruit he didn't know what conscience was.
 - a. Where there is no sin there is no guilt.
 - b. Baby girl runs around naked and feels no shame. (*Later learns to do it in public.*)
 2. Once man sinned, before God said a word about it, his conscience convicted him.
 - a. He covered himself. (*He felt guilt for the very first time.*)
 - b. He hid from God. (*Like a child hides when he knows he's done wrong.*)
 - c. He tried to assign his guilt to other. (*He originated the blame game.*)
 3. People still respond to guilt in the same ways today.
 - a. We redefine sin and try to make it socially acceptable. (*Twist scriptures*)
 - b. We try to hide our sin, but our conscience won't let us hide it from ourselves.
- * ILL- "The Telltale Heart" by Edgar Allen Poe**
- c. We try explaining that it is really not our fault. (*Parents, peer pressure*)

B. Everyone is born with a conscience.

1. **Rom. 2: 14-15** For 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, ¹⁵ 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,
2. The conscience is programmed into the human DNA.
 - a. All people instinctively know it is good to be loyal to the family, tribe, etc.
 - b. People instinctively know it is wrong to injure, to kill or to steal from others.

C. All people start off equal :

1. Everyone is born with a perfectly clear conscience. (*Babies feel not guilt.*)
2. All through life we are adding and altering the programming of our conscience.

III. Why do we have a conscience ?

(*.. Because that mountain is there.*)

A. We need a conscience to restrain us from evil and to keep us on course.

1. Conscience notifies a man when he has fallen short of his own standard.
2. There is no limit to the evil man can contrive. (cf - **Jer. 17: 9**, **Gen. 6:5, 11:6**)
Gen. 8: 21- ... the LORD said to Himself, "I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth; ..."

B. Therefore, conscience is always associated with guilt.

1. A healthy conscience will produce sufficient guilt to cause discomfort.
 - a. No one likes to feel guilt, but we all need it to act as a barrier to sin.
 - b. The unpleasantness of guilt should cause one to alter his actions.
2. Guilt is like physical pain, no one likes it but we all need it.
 - a. Man with an HSAN disease suffered many injuries because he felt no pain.
 - b. Masking the pain does not make the disease go away. (*sports injuries compounded*)
3. The pilot turned off the alarm, but doing so did not make the mountain go away.

C. The exercise of conscience can never draw on closer to God.

1. It warns one that he is straying from God, but cannot draw one to Him.
2. One must have a heart for God before he will heed the warning of his heart.

IV. When is our conscience not a reliable guide ?**A. Our conscience is only reliable if we program it properly. (*garbage in, ...*)**

1. We all start with a clean slate. (*New hard-drive with only an operating system*)
 - a. We quickly add programming.
 - b. Family values are the first to be added.
 - c. Then comes the culture ... ethnic and social values are added.
2. Our conscience is like the skylight in a room.
 - a. It generates no light.
 - b. It can only let in the ambient light from outside.
 - c. Thus, the Muslim will have a different conscience than a Hindu or a Christian.

*** Therefore, it is vital that a Christian's conscience be programmed by God's word.**

3. *Bible knowledge and discernment is required to make one's conscience a safe guide.*

B. One's conscience is not a reliable guide if it is defiled.

1. **Titus 1: 15-16** To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled. ¹⁶ They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed.
 - a. Terrorists can kill without guilt because they have defiled their conscience.
 - b. **Isa. 5.20-** Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who substitute ...
2. The defiled conscience **cannot** recognize evil as being evil. (*corrupted program*)

C. One's conscience is not a reliable guide when it has been desensitized.

1. **I Tim. 4: 1-3** But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, **2** by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, **3** men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth.

2. Repeated sin has cauterized their conscience.

a. The more we ignore the pain of our guilt, the less it benefits us.

*** ILL- When I worked with hot metal, the skin thickened to protect my hands.**

b. Repeated sin desensitizes the conscience to protect us from the pain it causes.

D. We live in a society (a culture) which constantly seeks to silence one's conscience.

1. A violated conscience produces : shame, guilt, disgrace, regret, fear, sorrow, etc.

2. What do people do when they feel this way ? They go to a counselor.

a. The counselor tells them, "It's not your fault. You shouldn't feel that way."

b. He tells them it is their parent's fault, society's fault, religion's fault, others.

3. *** ILL- Women are rebuffed for feeling shame when over exposed :**

a. They tell them they have body issues.

b. They are urged to overcome their God-given virtue of "shamefacedness."

4. Our culture tells us to switch off the alarm instead of pulling up the plane.

V. How can we insure that our conscience remains a reliable guide ?

A. Make sure our conscience is correctly informed.

1. How did the plane's alarm know the mountain was there ? **Radar**

2. ONLY God's word provides safe guidance information. **Internalize it.**

B. Do not allow your warning system to become just a noise in the background.

1. Listen to it and heed it. "*Never do anything against conscience ...*" Albert Einstein

2. Change your course. (*Pull up because the mountain won't move.* ... God IS.)

C. Do not allow your conscience to become defiled.

1. The flesh is weak so that's where Satan attacks. (**James 1: 12-15**)

2. Satan and His minions will tell you that the wrong is right. (*Remember Adam*)

3. There is pleasure in sin, but only for a while. (**Heb. 11: 25**) **Hell is eternal.**

CONCLUSION :

- A. In our lessons we are seeing the progression of the Christian character :**
1. Seeking to know and conform to the will of God leads to spiritual maturity.
 2. Spiritual maturity causes one to seek to know God and discern His will from scripture.
 3. Knowing God and desiring to conform to His desires will train one's conscience.
- B. A well-trained conscience will keep one walking in the path which discernment directs and as maturity demands.**
- C. True joy can only abide in the heart of one whose conscience is clear.**
1. The conscience can only be clear in Christ Jesus.
 2. **Heb. 9: 14 - cf - I Pet. 3: 21**
- D. Your conscience can be a blessing or a curse ? Which will you let it be ?**

INVITATION :

Lesson Texts :

Hebrews 9: 8-14

8 The Holy Spirit *is* signifying this, that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed while the outer tabernacle is still standing, **9** which *is* a symbol for the present time. Accordingly both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience, **10** since they *relate* only to food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until a time of reformation. **11** But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, *He entered* through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; **12** and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. **13** For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, **14** how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

I Pet. 3: 18-22

18 For Christ also died for sins once for all, *the* just for *the* unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; **19** in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits *now* in prison, **20** who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through *the* water. **21** Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, **22** who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him.

For various descriptions of "conscience" see Acts 23:1; 24:16; 1 Cor. 8:7; 1 Tim. 1:5,19; 3:9; 4:2; 2 Tim. 1:3; Titus 1:15; Heb. 9:14; 10:22; 13:18; 1 Pet. 3:16,21.