

A BLAMELESS CONSCIENCE

I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men (Acts 24:16).

Folklore advises, "Let your conscience be your guide." This has serious limitations since our conscience is a function of our mind. The first problem arising from depending solely on our conscience is that our conscience can be wrongly programmed by our experiences and the values of the people around us. Also, until we come to Christ, the standard is the world system in which we were raised.

Many people are falsely guided by a guilty conscience-- not a true guilt, but a psychological guilt usually developed in early childhood. We receive false messages as we try to please parents and other care givers, develop relationships with children and teachers at school, compare our circumstances with others, and begin to interpret our world according to what happens to us. Since we live in a broken and hurting world with people who carry all sorts of baggage, we are receiving mixed and twisted information about what is good and right and God's plan for us. Our conscience is guided by this misinformation.

Some people become perfectionists who labor under condemnation, even though the Bible says *there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus* (Romans 8:1). They aren't led; they are driven. They constantly look for affirmation. They have a tendency to be people-pleasers. Paul said, *"If I were still trying to please men and women, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ"* (Galatians 1:10). If you are striving to please others to gain a sense of personal value, of whom are you a servant? God created us to live for Him and for a specific plan which others will sometimes agree with and other times disagree with. There's an old saying, "You can't please everyone all of the time." When our conscience is shaped by a wounded spirit, we will find we are unconsciously reacting out of a people pleasing rather than God pleasing motive. We need to find God's will and plan for us and follow that, regardless of the opinions of others. We need time and information to reshape our conscience around God's healing and truth.

Another area where we need to examine the "truthfulness" of our conscience is the effects of our culture's values and messages to us. Since our minds are conformed to these messages, (see Romans 12) we need to renew them in such a way that what we believe is actually in accordance with truth. Paul says, *"The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves."* (Romans 14:22). This suggests to us that the convictions we hold in our heart and that inform our conscience need to always be checked with what God says is right and good.

Our culture holds many values and morals that go against what God has said. God defines sin: *When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, your lives will produce these evil results: sexual immorality, impure thoughts, eagerness for lustful pleasure, idolatry, participation in demonic activities, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, divisions, the feeling that everyone is wrong except those in your own little group, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other kinds of sin.* (Galatians 5) So, from God's view sex outside of marriage is wrong even though our culture leaves that decision to personal choice. Pornography (impure thoughts) is wrong even though courts allow the possession of child pornography 'literature.' Anger and rage are wrong to hold onto even though we find all sorts of reasons to be angry at the injustices of others. Any kind of wild partying is wrong even though it's fun and we tell ourselves we need to "let loose" once in a while. Many people are consulting psychics and mediums and having fortunes told, tarot cards read, etc. God says that kind of information will harm us and we need to avoid it. Our conscience needs to be informed by surrender to God's way of doing things and made new by following God's principles.

The Holy Spirit does work through our consciences as He seeks to renew our minds. But, we must continue to surrender our thinking to the new information of God's word. We have to keep changing our mind based on God's thoughts. We have to give up our ways of understanding life and take on new plans that God tells us are His will. Then, and only then, can our conscience be a safe and helpful guide to our decisions.

Thank You, Lord, that my mind and conscience can be renewed daily through the power of Your Word.

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