



***PURSuing A BIBLICAL
CONSCIENCE***



Pursuing a Biblical Conscience

Text: Selected Scripture

Purpose Statement: I want God's people to develop a Biblical Conscience.

Introduction

Have you ever caught yourself asking this question—*Am I guilty? Was my comment, action or thought sinfully offensive to God and/or others?*

The follow-up question must be—how did you answer the first question? In other words, upon what basis and for what reasons did you establish your guilt or innocence? And if guilty, *what do I do now?*

Maybe you have asked yourself this question—why do I *feel guilty*—I can't think of anything I have violated or done wrong? *I feel troubled but don't know why.*

Maybe you have even thought this way—*I've tried doing this or that but can't seem to get any relief from my "guilty" conscience?*

These are bothersome questions—yet important ones to consider because they bring us to an overarching issue every believer must deal with.

Though you may not consider it in these terms, every believer must determine the standard or belief system to which he submits his conscience. That will be your trigger mechanism, the thing that sets off the alarm in your conscience.

The place you want to be is in *a state* (though *growing* because of progressive sanctification) in which your thoughts and actions are continually being judged by the highest possible standard—the Word of God. You should and must choose to pursue a biblically informed conscience.

It shouldn't be based on an ever changing, vacillating, accommodating standard of human ideas/opinions, relativity or continuum thinking.

Nor should it be governed by the legalistic yard stick or measuring cup of man's rules, regulations, handbooks, traditions, and/or contemporary religious leader's preferences for conformity to external standards (while often ignoring the inner man—the real you).

Nor should it be governed by the often misused and sometimes abused *Christian liberty*. Those who promote that brand of the Christian liberty have essentially concluded that anything goes if it is not specifically (chapter and verse) forbidden by a direct prohibition in the Bible.

Your conscience cannot be dictated by the culture's standard. It must not be formed by Hollywood's standard. Nor by professional athletes, famous talk show hosts, etc.

As a believer, your goal must be to have a conscience that is informed, activated and triggered by scripture. The alarm system of the soul needs to be fine tuned to the standard God intends to judge you by—His Word!

Let's begin our discussion of the conscience by asking a basic and foundational question.

I. What is the conscience of man?

A. The word conscience is translated from the Greek word *suneidesis* (4893).

It means to be conscious of...to be one's own witness, one's conscience coming forward as witness. It is self-awareness. It comes from *suneido* (4894) and carries the idea of co-perception, i.e. moral consciousness. It is the soul's ability to distinguish between what is morally good and bad, prompting one to do the former and shun the latter—commending one and condemning the other.

The following texts use this word.

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

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

Romans 2:15 *Which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their **conscience** also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;*

Romans 9:1 *I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my **conscience** also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost.*

Romans 13:5 *Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for **conscience** sake.*

1 Corinthians 8:7, 10, 12 *Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge: for some with **conscience** of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and their **conscience** being weak is defiled. (10) For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the **conscience** of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols; (12) But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak **conscience**, ye sin against Christ.*

1 Corinthians 10:25, 27-29 *Whatsoever is sold in the shambles, that eat, asking no question for **conscience** sake: (27) If any of them that believe not bid you to a feast, and ye be disposed to go; whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no question for **conscience** sake. (28) But if any man say unto you, This is offered in sacrifice unto idols, eat not for his sake that showed it, and for **conscience** sake: for the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof: (29) **Conscience**, I say, not thine own, but of the other: for why is my liberty judged of another man's **conscience**?*

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

2 Corinthians 4:2 *But have 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.*

1 Timothy 1:5, 19 *Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good **conscience**, and of faith unfeigned: (19) Holding faith, and a good **conscience**; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck:*

1 Timothy 3:9 *Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure **conscience**.*

2 Timothy 1:3 *I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure **conscience**, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day;*

Each of these verses uses the exact same Greek word—suneidesis (4893).

Let me expand the **Romans 2:15** text a bit.

Bearing Witness – (4828) comes from two words...

Syn – (4862)-a preposition denoting union, with or together.

Martyreo – (3140)-to be a witness; i.e. testify

So, the idea is to testify jointly i.e. to corroborate by (concurrent) evidence. Your conscience considers and evaluates words, actions or thoughts and concludes—right/wrong, good/bad.

Accusing – (2723) to be a plaintiff i.e. to charge someone with an offense-to accuse.

Excusing – (626) to give an account of oneself-to make a defense, speaking for self.

The conscience either *approves* or *disapproves* one's own acts or those of another: the conscience either *acquits* or *condemns*.

Information that enters your conscience, resulting from actions, thoughts, or something seen or heard—if it is of a moral nature—sets off the soul's warning system. The conscience is the soul reflecting on and reacting to its own condition (i.e. what you did or saw someone else do, what you thought, read, said or heard someone else say) in light of the established standard (i.e. what you have been taught, what you have concluded is right/wrong—the standard your conscience uses to accuse or excuse...the standard or belief system to which you have submitted your conscience). This is what distinguishes you from animals.

You want a conscience that is properly informed and quickly and appropriately *set off* when violated. In other words, you and I want an alarm system, which we accurately recognize and to which we quickly respond so that short accounts may be kept with God and others.

Now, from a redemptive perspective, our conscience was sprinkled clean by the blood of Christ (Hebrews 10:22). That enlivened conscience brought us screaming to the cross—*guilty, guilty, and guilty!* It was a merciless and condemning accusation of a guilt-ridden conscience.

B. The conscience you bring into your Christian life.

Now one of the problems is you bring into the Christian life a conscience that has been informed at conversion regarding your *positional guilt*...but still needs to be educated and trained with regard to *all that follows*—which, summarily stated, is *progressive sanctification*. In other words, your conscience is clean in the redemptive sense (no more judicial guilt) but it is still untaught in the spiritual growth or sanctification sense.

We face many voices that educate, indoctrinate, teach, train, influence, unnecessarily aggravate, de-sensitize, overly sensitize, etc. These may come in the form of tradition, culture, old habits, misapplied scriptures, etc.

For example, some of these voices might say *if you feel no guilt by what you do and it's not causing you problems—keep it up.*

The problem here is that putting the emphasis on *feeling* gives a very incomplete definition of guilt—and an incomplete definition results in an incomplete and inadequate solution. You end up merely trying to change the feelings rather than the standard to which your thoughts, words or actions were submitted...which caused the feelings.

II. What is Guilt?

A. It is being in a state of liability which means legally obligated, bound and under obligation.

B. It is being in a state of culpability, which means responsibility for wrong done to God and/or man.

Guilt is the state (not feeling) of being blameworthy and responsible.

The cross work of Christ totally takes care of the redemptive component of guilt. Judicially, as a believer, you are totally forgiven and free. The guilt is gone. Your conscience is clear.

Since we are predestined to Christ-like perfection by way of progressive sanctification we still have adjustments to make. One of them is the standard by which we evaluate and judge ourselves in the journey of sanctification toward becoming like Jesus.

Guilt is established, then, by the soul being pronounced guilty (and thereby responsible for wrong done) by a conscience based on a moral standard.

The scriptures discuss different types of consciences. Words such as weak, seared and defiled are used. What do they mean, imply or indicate regarding the conscience?

Let's examine the scriptures and get a clear perspective on this important subject.

III. The Unbeliever's Unenlightened, Darkened or Unable Conscience—Ephesians 1:18; 4:18; 1 Corinthians 2:14

A. The Unbeliever's conscience defined

The term to note in Ephesians 1:18 & 4:18 is *understanding*. The reason for citing these is their close approximation to the very issue we are discussing...conscience.

Understanding...Ephesians 1:18...(1271—Dianoia) means intellect, intellectual faculty, mind; an operation of the understanding, thought, imagination; to think. Zod. N.T. page 903

In his Dictionary of Theological terms on page 421, Alan Cairns says:

“Understanding is the cognitive faculty of the soul” (Shedd). It is comprised of intellect and conscience. The intellect is the perceptive faculty and the conscience the preceptive faculty in the understanding. The Biblical usage of the word indicates that understanding denotes more than a mere mental apprehension of facts. It is a wise perception and reception of the significance of those facts as laid down by God. Thus, the understanding of the ungodly is said to be “darkened” (Eph. 4:18), for “the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom. 8:7). It needs to be “enlightened” (Eph. 1:18) and until it is, it will remain in the condition described in I Cor. 2:14.

Enlightened...Ephesians 1:18...(5461—Photizo) this word means to give light to in a spiritual sense. It means to instruct, to make to see or understand, to bring to light. This is what the unbeliever needs but does not have—an enlightened understanding or conscience.

Darkened...Ephesians 4:18...(4654—Skotizo) this word means darkness, to darken, to deprive of light. It is used figuratively of moral darkness or ignorance. This is the condition of the unbeliever's understanding/conscience.

Know...1 Corinthians 2:14...(1097—Ginosko) this word means to know or to perceive, to be conscious of, to discern or to distinguish. It means to acknowledge with approbation.

This knowing is obviously a good thing. The problem is the unbeliever **cannot** know. He is *unable* to know. It is not that he was *disabled*...it is that he *was never able*. It is not that he *will not*...it is that he *cannot*. The word *dunamai* is in the I Corinthians 2:14 text...*neither can he know*.

Can...1 Corinthians 2:14...(1410—Dunamai) this word means to be able, have power, by virtue of one's own ability and resources. The unbeliever has no ability or capacity to know and/or understand truth (*there is none that understands*—Romans 3:11) ...therefore no ability to activate his own conscience rightly. So, any *standard contrived in his conscience/understanding* is not and cannot be based on any rightly understood biblical truth.

B. The unbeliever's conscience described

He is simply unable to possess a conscience that is triggered by truth because he cannot know, comprehend or perceive truth. He has neither the capacity nor desire for truth.

C. The unbeliever's conscience developed

In this case, there is nothing the unbeliever did to arrive at this condition...he was born this way. It is the curse of the fall. It is the depravity of sin. So, in the unbeliever's situation, it was not developed...it was what he was born with...a darkened, unenlightened & unable conscience. Any *development* is simply a product of his depravity and is therefore non-meritorious, non-salvific, and non-spiritual in any Godward leaning way. It is a conscience free from grace and biblical restraint exploring its options and *developing and establishing a standard* based on whatever appeals to it at the time.

D. The unbeliever's conscience diagnosed

He probably has guilt feelings for all kinds of reasons. He probably tries to eliminate that guilt in many creative ways. He probably even attempts to rename it...cast it in psychological terms.

The issue is: his guilt is culpability or liability to wrath and punishment. But he has no organ to perceive this accurately...he is dead to God, to spiritual issues, etc. He...and obviously, his conscience and understanding, is estranged from God.

E. The unbeliever's conscience reversed, rejuvenated or revived

It is simple...the unbeliever needs to be regenerated. His conscience needs enlightening. His eyes need to be opened. *Regenerative quickening* is the solution for the unbeliever (Ephesians 2:1).

IV. The Unbeliever's Seared/Defiled Conscience – 1 Timothy 4:2; Titus 1:15; Romans 1:21ff

A. The Seared/defiled Conscience defined

Seared...1 Timothy 4:2...(2743—kauteriazō) means a red-hot iron, which is from (2545—kaio), to burn, to cauterize, to brand with a hot iron.

Defiled...Titus 1:15...(3392—miainō) it means to stain, to dye with another color, to pollute or contaminate.

This word, *defiled*, is used twice in the same verse (Titus 1:15) to describe the contaminated conscience of an unbeliever.

NOTE: Seared and **defiled** are both used to describe this conscience, not necessarily because of the *similarity in etymology* of the words but because of the *similarity in condition* of the conscience they both describe. They both describe the conscience of an unbeliever...contaminated and cauterized.

NOTE: It is also important to note that these two passages not only identify the condition of an unbelieving conscience but it is the condition essentially of an apostate's conscience. This particularized focus is necessary because not all unbelievers are apostates (but all apostates are unbelievers) ...therefore cannot be described with these two terms. So, again, this is a particular group of unbelievers.

Following are some various translations of phrases containing these two words...first from 1 Timothy 4:2...then from Titus 1:15 (first and second use).

1 Timothy 4:2

- *whose consciences are seared (cauterized)*—Amplified
- *of men having their own consciences seared with a brand*—Henry Alford
- *whose own consciences are seared as with a branding iron*—Berkley
- *whose conscience is hardened as if by a searing iron*—Ronald Knox
- *whose consciences are as dead as seared flesh*—J. B. Phillips
- *branded in their own conscience as with a hot iron*—American Standard Version

Titus 1:15—first use

- *but unto the polluted and faithless*—J.B. Rotherham
- *but to the evil-minded and unbelieving*—Edgar J. Goodspeed
- *but to the contaminated and the faithless*—Helen Bartlett Montgomery
- *but nothing is wholesome to those who are themselves unwholesome and who have no faith in God*—J. B. Phillips
- *but nothing is pure to the tainted minds of disbelievers*—NEB

Titus 1:15—second use

- *but both their understanding and their conscience is polluted*—W. J. Conybeare
- *nay, their very minds and consciences are tainted*—Helen Bartlett Montgomery
- *defilement has entered their very thought, their very conscience*—Ronald Knox
- *for his dirty mind and rebellious heart color all he sees and hears*—Kenneth N. Taylor

B. The Seared/defiled Conscience described

This conscience has never been, cannot and probably never will be activated by biblical criteria.

C. The Seared/defiled Conscience digressing, deteriorating and devolving

The more you say *shut up* to a disturbed, aggravated conscience (*the truth of God is suppressed-Romans 1:18*) the less sensitive it becomes. Each time you ignore or say no, the duller and duller it grows...it becomes more and more desensitized. The utter rejection of God (*they refused to honor God-Romans 1:21*) and the arrogant exaltation of self (*professing themselves to be wise-Romans 1:22a*) send them on a rapid digression away from God (*they became fools-Romans 1:22b*).

This process is seen in Romans 1:21ff for *unbelievers*. God's revelation (Romans 1:18-21a) is rejected. Their willful rejection of that revelation turned those who rejected it

to a path of continual decline—a path that led to a more corrupt, insensitive, seared and defiled conscience. This was a conscience that was offered truth but flatly and high-handedly rejected it. The consequence was complete insensitivity, contamination and defilement.

D. The Seared/defiled Conscience diagnosed

There is total guilt but no guilt feelings...at least for the right reasons and based on the right standard. The warning system is completely out of order—it is crashed. It has been calloused over...the spiritual nerve endings have been cauterized.

E. The Seared/defiled Conscience reversed

The only hope is the mercy and grace of God (which is always the case...but here, the condition is not merely dark, unenlightened or unable...it is apostatized).

No one knows who has and has not come to this condition (from which there is no return). It is not for believers to know. This is God's business alone.

V. The Believer's Untrained Conscience

A. The Untrained Conscience defined

The untrained conscience is one that is simply without training by the biblical standard.

B. The Untrained Conscience described

It is a conscience without the necessary information in order to think about life's situations...what one has seen, done, said, thought, etc. It has not been properly informed or equipped for discernment. Its triggering system is without a standard. It may react to whatever seems right or wrong at any given time.

It is not necessarily willfully ignorant. But because, as Christians, we grow and develop progressively and incrementally, it can't know everything all at once.

C. The Untrained Conscience developed

It is remaining in a state of ignorance or lethargy. This *remaining* does not imply *continual remaining*. In other words, no believer *remains* in a state of *total ignorance*...that is theologically impossible. The issue is that certain areas of needed development have not been exposed to, challenged and changed by the particular truths necessary to accomplish that. The theological assumption is that your conscience must be educated...Ephesians 4:23. The longer you stay ignorant of scripture (i.e. the standard or belief system to which you must submit your conscience), the longer your conscience will remain untrained and triggered by biblical truth.

D. The Untrained Conscience diagnosed

There is essentially no guilt feeling because there is nothing there to trigger the alarm...at least for the right reasons. There is a basic insensitivity because this

conscience is not educated with biblical truth. There is, for all intents and purposes, little to no biblical standard established, at least in regard to certain areas.

E. An Interesting Theological Dynamic

Leviticus 4:13 *When the nation of Israel disobeys me **without meaning to**, the whole nation is still guilty* Contemporary English Version

Leviticus 4:13 *If the whole congregation of Israel sins **unintentionally** and the thing is hidden from the eyes of the assembly, and they do one of the things that by the Lord's commandments ought not to be done, and they realize their guilt* English Standard Version

Leviticus 4:13 *If it is the whole community of Israel that sins and becomes guilty of breaking one of the Lord's commands **without intending to**...* Good News Translation

Leviticus 4:13 *And if the whole congregation **sin through ignorance**, and the thing be hid from the eyes of the assembly, and they have done somewhat against any of the commandments of the Lord concerning things which should not be done, and are guilty* King James 1611

Leviticus 4:14-15, 22-24, 27-29 – this is **unintentional sin**...still guilty but provision was made for “sins of ignorance”

Guilt is not measured by how much you know—if so, there would be a high motivation to remain ignorant!

Provision was made...grace, as it were, was extended.

There are some attitudes and perspectives that should be developed in light of this:

- I acknowledge and confess my sinfulness.
- Psalm 139:23, 24—*search me O God and know my heart...*
- Psalm 19:12—*cleanse me from secret faults*
- These attitudes and expressions demonstrate humility, subordination and a desire to truly be clean.
- Psalm 19:12—*none of us know our faults...forgive me when I sin without knowing it...*Contemporary English Version

F. The Untrained Conscience trained

Acknowledge ignorance

Cry with the Psalmist—teach me!!

Get involved in the scripture

Go after truth—Proverbs 2:1-5

VI. The Believer's Weak Conscience—Romans 14:1, 2, 14, 22, 23

A. The Weak Conscience defined

The weak conscience is one that has been misinformed.

B. The Weak Conscience described

It is a conscience that is activated, triggered, *set off* by non-biblical criteria. It is active but the alarm goes off unnecessarily or for the wrong reasons.

C. The Weak Conscience developed

It is from being exposed to and buying into standards that are not inherently biblical.

It is embracing an *unnecessary set of rules*—the code of the Christian community, Bible college handbook, influential people, etc.—but not using biblical truth as the standard.

Many, whose background is *traditional fundamentalism*, live this way and struggle. They have been told what to do, how to live, how to dress, look, talk, etc. They have been told which *life standards* are non-negotiable...but, often, there is no foundation of biblical truth laid...merely, personal opinion.

In Romans 14:2b, this person concludes (for non-biblical reasons) there are things he may not do.

In Romans 14:2a, obviously, the issue considered is not inherently sinful. But he has considered it sinful (14:14)

D. The Weak Conscience diagnosed

The conscience produces guilt for the wrong reasons. Make no mistake, when one goes against this conscience, it is sin because you are not proceeding by faith—Romans 14:22, 23

There is no excuse...

E. The Weak Conscience reestablished/retrained

This conscience needs to be retrained with biblical truth. It needs to be sensitized and triggered for the right reasons. It needs to be activated by the right signals.

There is a caution here. Don't train the weaker brother to violate his conscience even if it is legalistic. Don't teach him to be insensitive to his conscience.

Show him *how to retrain* it so he doesn't stay weak.

This is a two-edged sword...1) don't encourage him to violate his conscience and 2) don't let him remain in bondage to an un-biblical conscience...and don't think you must submit to and live by his weak untrained conscience. You don't want to intentionally cause him to stumble with the freedom you clearly have neither do you want to bind your conscience with the bondage he remains under. The solution here is to teach him, train him, show him, equip him, and inform him, with biblical truth. Give him what he needs to have a conscience triggered by proper biblical criteria. And be patient as you train.

Romans 14:1, 2 *As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. (2) One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables* English Standard Version

Romans 14:23 *But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin* English Standard Version

VII. The Believer's Biblical Conscience – 1 Timothy 1:5; Acts 23:1; 24:16; 2 Corinthians 1:12

A. The Biblical Conscience defined

The biblical conscience is one that is informed with biblical data...and functions accordingly.

B. The Biblical Conscience described

It is a conscience that is triggered, *set off*, or activated by biblical criteria. The alarm system sounds for the right reason. It produces guilt feelings for the right reasons. It is a conscience operating accurately. It is *well oiled* and *finely tuned*.

C. The Biblical Conscience developed

It develops and grows through consistent and continual exposure to the properly exegeted, rightly divided, clearly and accurately expounded and properly used Word of God.

D. The Biblical Conscience diagnosed

It is, again, through consistent exposure to truth, keeping short accounts of the exposed sin dealt with quickly. The biblical conscience is regularly and willingly exposed to truth therefore it can stay functioning smoothly.

Humility is part of this regular habit of dealing with sin.

E. The Biblical Conscience refined

Continue to educate it with biblical truth so it continues to *alarm* for the right reasons.

1. Acknowledge sin—Proverbs 28:13; 1 John 1:7-10; Psalm 51:1-4
2. Confess sin—agree with God's opinion about what you said, thought or did.

If unsaved—confess the sin-bearer – 2 Corinthians 5:21...Judicial

If saved—confess the sin— 1 John 1:9...Parental

3. Confess to the appropriate people—Matthew 5:23-26; James 5:16; Matthew 18:15; Luke 17:3, 4
4. Confession is to be followed by change

1 Corinthians 6:9-11—redemptive change

Ephesians 4:22-24—sanctification change

Conclusion

What type of conscience do you have?

Is your conscience simply *untrained*? You hold no rebellious, volitional resistance—you are just ignorant or uneducated in some key Christian life areas. You are guilty of some things but have been unaware of those areas. You have assumed *I can't be held accountable for what I don't know*—so you have sort of coasted; thinking that with little knowledge comes little responsibility. What are you to do?

Is your conscience *weak*? Have you been plagued by a conscience that *alarms* for the wrong reason—a legalistic, *non-biblical* standard? Have you labored under unnecessary guilt? Have you tried to erase those guilt feelings by external efforts, not realizing you were just making your weak conscience weaker? What are you to do?

Do you have a conscience that, though not perfect, is activated for the right reasons? It is functioning biblically. It *alarms for the right reasons*. Your system for judging yourself is working well. What are you to do?

Through the glasses of progressive sanctification, can you say you have a *biblical conscience*? And if not, what do you need to do today to move in that direction?

Overview & Summary

Unenlightened, Darkened & Unable Conscience (Unbeliever)

Scripture: Ephesians 1:18; 4:18; I Corinthians 2:14

Dilemma: Conscience has never been quickened/activated by biblical truth.

Condition: Depravity

Symptoms: No guilt feelings (note: there may be general moral spasms for moral wrong doing but the guilt feelings are not, nor can be, based on rightly understood biblical criteria)

Solution: Regeneration (Ephesians 2:1,5,6)

Seared/defiled Conscience (Unbeliever)

Scripture: I Timothy 4:2; Titus 1:15; Romans 1:21ff

Dilemma: Conscience cannot be quickened/activated by biblical truth.

Condition: Apostasy

Symptoms: No responsive sensitivity to truth

Solution: None

Untrained Conscience (Believer)

Scripture: Leviticus 4:14, 15, 22-24, 27-29

Dilemma: Conscience is “selectively” or inconsistently activated by biblical truth.

Condition: Ignorance or Uninformed

Symptoms: No increased guilt feelings based on growing, developing biblical criteria.

Solution: Acknowledge ignorance, aggressively pursue truth.

Weak Conscience (Believer)

Scripture: Romans 14:1,2, 14, 22-23

Dilemma: Conscience is activated by non-biblical Criteria

Condition: Misinformed

Symptoms: Produces guilt feelings for wrong, non-biblical reasons.

Solution: Put off unbiblical thinking. Unbind wrongly bound conscience by renewing and reconstructing the mind with accurately interpreted and applied scripture, strengthen sensitivity to biblical truth and train to consistently think, discern & function biblically.

Biblical Conscience (Believer)

Scripture: I Timothy 1:5; Acts 23:1, 24:16; II Corinthians 1:12

Dilemma: Conscience is rightly activated by biblical Criteria

Condition: Biblically informed and growing

Symptoms: Produces guilt feelings for the right Biblical reasons

Solution: Press on!

Darkened Conscience

Theology

Ephesians 1:18; 4:18; Romans 3:11a; I Corinthians 2:14

Dilemma

Has never been activated by Biblical Truth

Condition

Depravity

Symptoms

No guilt feelings for Biblical reasons

Solution

Regeneration (Ephesians 2:1)

Defiled Conscience

Theology

I Timothy 4:2; Titus 1:15; Romans 1:21ff

Dilemma

Cannot be activated by Biblical Truth

Condition

Apostasy

Symptoms

No guilt feelings for Biblical reasons

Solution

None; only condemnation

Biblical Conscience

Theology

I Timothy 1:5; Acts 23:1; 24:16; II Corinthians 1:12

Dilemma

Activated by Biblical Truth

Condition

Biblically Informed

Symptoms

Produces guilt feelings for the right, Biblical reasons

Solution

Press on!

Untrained Conscience

Theology

Leviticus 4:14,15, 22-24, 27-29

Dilemma

“Selectively” activated by Biblical Truth

Condition

Ignorance, uninformed

Symptoms

No increased guilt feelings based on growth in Biblical truth

Solution

Acknowledge ignorance; pursue truth

Weak Conscience

Theology

Romans 14:1-2, 14, 22-23

Dilemma

Activated by non-biblical criteria

Condition

Misinformed

Symptoms

Produces guilt feelings for the wrong, non-biblical reasons

Solutions

Put off unbiblical thinking, renew and reconstruct mind with Biblical Truth

The Conscience of Man

Conscience—The English word comes from the Greek word *Suneidesis* (4893).

It means to be one's own witness. It is self-awareness. It comes from *Suneido* (4894) and carries the idea of co-perception. It *works together with* the information and/or standard given it.

The conscience is the soul reflecting on and reacting to its own condition in light of an established standard. The conscience either *approves or disapproves* one's own acts or those of another: the conscience either *acquits or condemns*.

Following are some of the verses that use the term conscience: Acts 23:1; 24:16; Romans 2:15; 9:1; 13:5; 1 Corinthians 8:7,10,12; 10:25; 2 Corinthians 1:12; 4:2; 1 Timothy 1:5,9; 3:9; 2 Timothy 1:3.

At conversion your conscience is awakened, convicted and sent screaming to the cross crying *guilty, guilty, guilty*. Enlightenment and quickening by the gospel brought the merciless accusation of a condemned and guilt-ridden conscience. That caused you to flee to the only place of hope and rescue.

The conscience you bring into the Christian life has been judicially awakened by redemptive truth but uneducated by sanctification truth. Your conscience is clean (sprinkled by the blood of Christ-Hebrews 10:22) and you are justified but you are still untaught in *the things that pertain to life and godliness*.

One of the problems of Christian growth (which includes properly understanding and handling guilt) is putting the emphasis on *feelings*. That results in a very inadequate, incomplete and inaccurate view of guilt.

What is Guilt?

First, guilt is a state of liability—legally bound and under obligation.

Second, guilt is a state of culpability—responsible for wrong done to God and/or man.

Guilt is the state (not feeling) of being blameworthy and responsible.

As a child of God, you are *forgiven* and *set free* from *judicial guilt*. You are no longer legally bound to pay that penalty. Because of the cross work of Christ, the guilt is lifted, your conscience is clear.

However, as a child of God, you still incur *parental guilt*...guilt, as a child, against your heavenly Father.

The source and nature of this parental guilt is determined by the standard you expose your conscience to. For that reason, there is much confusion about *guilt after redemption*.

Questions must be asked and answered. Questions such as:

- ...What exactly is parental guilt?
- ...Should feelings determine whether or not someone is truly guilty?
- ...If not, what is the correct standard for determining *guilt after redemption*?
- ...What part do feelings play in the whole guilt issue?
- ...What can be done to assure both guilt and the accompanying feelings are understood and dealt with biblically?
- ...How do the subjects of conscience and guilt fit together?
- ...If I am forgiven and free from judicial guilt, why do I still feel guilty as a child of God?

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