

Hold onto your Conscience in a Sinful World

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Has it happened to you that when you come in early to a Christian meeting you look around and see a stranger enter through a side door and sit himself or herself at the back.

What do you do?

Do you look down at your books and pretend that you have not seen them because you are shy?

Do you wait to see if other members of the congregation go over and invite them?

Or do you go over and welcome them?

What is the result of the above outcomes?

In the first you may feel bad, perhaps a sense of remorse; but in the second - you will feel great and happy that you have helped someone feel welcome. This conscience has come from God to assist us in this world of sin.

We shall examine these four aspects:-

1. What conscience involves.
2. The danger of world influences on our conscience.
3. How to obtain a good conscience.
4. The results of having a good conscience in a sinful world.

1. What Conscience involves.

The word "conscience" appears in the Bible 28 times and only located within the New Testament. It comes from the Greek word 'syneidesis'; 'syn' together with and 'eidesis' means "knowledge".

Hence conscience means looking at ourselves and others 'with knowledge'. Hence we render judgement about ourselves or others 'with knowledge'.

It has been said:-

Always let your conscience be your guide.

Is this good or bad advice?

The conscience is part of the human brain, it has the ability to think, calculate, reason and also worship Yahweh our Creator. So to obtain a conscience, we have to learn and then reason to form a belief that then gives the true believer a solid faith.

To learn things, we have to associate with other people to obtain the necessary experience required to educate ourselves.

Rom. 2v14-15 For when the Gentiles, who do not have the law (*God's*), do by nature the things contained in the(*ir*) law (*Satan's*), these not having the law (*God's*), are a law to themselves. Which shows the work of the law (*Satan's*) written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between their own thoughts, they are being accused or even excused.

Rom. 2v18-19 And know His will (*God's*), and approves of the things that are more excellent, because you are being instructed out of the Law, and are confident that you are a guide for the blind, a light to them who are in darkness.

The experience of all of can and will vary, so how can we build our conscience?

Satan from the start has always suggested we should go and 'do our own thing' and in the 20th Century this attitude has really taken off! It is very difficult nowadays to know what is right and wrong because standards are so mixed.

2. The danger of world influences on our conscience.

The true Christian congregation love righteousness and hate wickedness. The problem that true Christians face is maintaining Christian Standards while the rest of the world's fall. How do I know if I have been influenced; - then ask ourselves these questions:-

2.1 Do I find the World's influence of eroding standards have effected my views of Christian Standards?

2.2 Do I wish to drop my standards to fit in with other people - my friends for example?

2.3 Am I doing things now that I would not have done ten years ago, conversely, not doing things now that I would have done ten years ago?

It started in the 1960's with the introduction "The Contraceptive Pill" - it gave the freedom for women/men to do 'what comes naturally' without the fear of being 'cursed' with children. In the 1990's we see where this philosophy has led us - but that is a whole issue in its own rights (AIDS, illegitimate children, estates filled with one parent families, etc). Seductive dancing, erotic films, magazines and other technical media, Compact Discs, etc all add to this malaise of reduced standards. The Pill was introduced as 'The Last Resort for accidents', but now in 2007, just one clinic in

London is carrying out 4000 abortions a month (and a significant proportion are 2nd timers!) - it seems to me that it is now the 1st port of call even with all the contraceptives that are now available – together with all the sex education supposedly to help avoid unwanted pregnancies, has made the situation much worse in numbers than could have ever been dreamed of 40 years earlier!

This is just only one example out of many to show how moral standards have deteriorated within society.

Paul said in his letters that these last days would be very difficult - critical times for Christians.

2Tim. 3v1-5,13 Also know this, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, no self control, fierce, despisers of those who are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God. Having the form of godliness, but denying the power thereof, from such turn away. But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.

The problem is that their attitudes become the 'norm' hence when we are tested, we may not follow God's requirements.

We must remember that God's standards do not change, but ours will do if we allow them to drift with the world's floating standards for convenience and self indulgence!

Mala. 3v6 For I am the Lord, I do not change;

1Cor. 6v9-10 Do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men kept for unnatural purposes, nor men who lie with other men, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners shall inherit the kingdom of God.

God's standards say that you should not do these things if you wish to be part of God's kingdom.

1John 2v15-17 Do not love the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man loves the world, then the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father but of this world.

The desire starts in the heart and quickly conquers the mind = our conscience.

It is up to the mind and our Christian trained conscience to master and thus control these earthly desires.

3. How to obtain a good conscience.

What does God require of us?

1Pet. 3v16 Having a good conscience; that whereas they speak evil of you, as of evil-doers, they may be ashamed that they falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ.

These are various different types of Conscience:-

3.1 Bad or defiled.

3.2 Weak.

3.3 Good.

3.1. A conscience which is regularly abused will become defiled. When defiled it can no longer sound the alarm that we must rely upon. Similar example would be, someone burning their finger. At the first burn the nerves would immediately tell us 'move your finger!' However if a finger was repeatedly burnt then scar tissue would form, the nerves would no longer feel the pain and could sound no alarm - the body would not be warned!

Paul warns about our conscience being seared.

3.2. A conscience that has not been fully trained would be termed weak. A person with a weak conscience may not be able to suppress reacting to people. They could easily take offence when really there wasn't one intended by the other person.

The Bible has example of this.

Lets explain this a bit further. A person new in the Truth may see a fellow Christian do something that they feel is wrong but is actually acceptable by Yahweh.

What is right and what is wrong?

The answer is that if it does not contravene God's Direct Laws then you may do it because you recognise that it does not contravene God's Laws. However if you feel the same scenario as being wrong, and you still do it, then God shall judge you upon what you consider as right and wrong! That is to say: "your hypocrisy" which Jesus often spoke about as a trait of The Religious Leaders of the world.

Rom. 14v14 I know, and I am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him that considers any thing to be unclean, then to him it is unclean.

It tells us that a person may be wrong in considering things unclean. But they will be judged on them thinking that it is unclean.

3.3. Enlightened Conscience is trained, it has moral excellence producing the good spiritual fruits of mercy, kindness, self-control, etc.

Acts 15 This chapter mentions sacrifices to idols.

In those times idolatrous people would have offered meat to their idols. Some of this meat would go to the idol, some may have been eaten at the temple, or at home and some may have been offered for sale at the market place. These idolaters would have eaten this meat to experience the reverence to their god during the consumption of it.

Clearly the early Christians were exposed to this, and had different levels of rejection or conscience to it.

What Paul tried to say is that when the meat had been offered to an idol, because an idol is nothing, then it would not have changed the meat. However if you feel that it is still wrong to take it, then do not eat it because you would be going against your conscience - for which you will be judged.

Rom. 14v23 And he that doubts is damned if he eat, because he eats not in faith; for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.

1Cor. 10v27-29 If any unbelievers invite you to a feast, and you decide to go; whatever is set before you then eat, do not ask any questions for the sake of your conscience. But if any man says to you: This food is offered in sacrifice to idols, then out of consideration for the man who informed you, and for conscience' sake - I mean his conscience, not yours - do not eat it. For why should my liberty be determined by another man's scruples?

Paul is trying to explain here:

Do not let the person with a weak conscience stumble by your actions. Paul knew precisely what was right and wrong, but he would not put himself into a position to confuse a person who did not understand correctly.

Thus while Paul knew all meat was wholesome to eat and not contaminated if part of it had been used to idols, then he should still not eat it, if this action of eating would offend the conscience of the person next to him.

1Cor. 8v12-13 But when you sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. So if meat will offend my brother, then I will not eat any meat while the world stands, if this offends my brother.

A modern day example may be this:-

A television series on the history of a nation.

You watch it every week and you find it very interesting, and you wish to watch it this week as well even though the subject matter is about war. However you have friends around that evening who you know are pacifists.

Would you still watch it?

Paul would suggest **no**, because they may be offended and so not be able to understand why YOU as a Christian would wish to watch something about war.

A generally good conscience can be defiled if part of it is untrained and allowed to do what it wishes. For example you cannot apply God's standards just at work, and then ignore them during your entertainment!

The conscience must be good at doing and applying God's rules and standards in every thing within this world.

Apply these tests to your actions.

1. If a situation arises: Do we carry out the bad actions and then feel unhappy about it later?
2. We should listen to our conscience, if it says: Do not do it first, and so then we do not do it and feel better later about the correct course of action taken – having no guilt but just reinforced our guiding conscience.

Joseph did the correct thing with Potifer's wife.

But David did not when he wanted to carry out a census of the Israelites (perhaps for self-importance as a ruler over the great nation of Israel).

2Sam. 24v10 And David's heart smote him after he had numbered the people. Then David said to the Lord, I have sinned greatly in what I have done; and now I beseech thee, O Yahweh, take away the iniquity of your servant; for I have behaved very foolishly.

We see here how David tried to repent to God; but remember under Mosaic Law humans could not have their mistakes totally blotted out - it is like a written mistake in a letter, it can only be crossed out; however it is still visible as a mistake. But under The Christian Law, we as humans have the opportunity through the love and actions of Jesus Christ to have our mistakes totally blotted out - like using the white ink 'snowpaint' in our writing metaphor above.

But normally this should only be applied to mistakes, rather than 'learning' to become iniquitous and thus searing your conscience – you shall not be forgiven but judged harshly for deliberate sinning and testing Yahweh.

However having a good working conscience then **we** know that we have done wrong; and if someone hurts us through their mistakes, the same standard should equally apply to them: We should be in the position to blot out their mistake before us.

Before we carry out actions that we may be uncertain about then we should go through the following questioning routine:-

1. What does the Bible say?
2. How would it effect other people?

3. How will effect me?

Carrying out the above question on a subject like your employment one may ask these questions?

1. What is involved?
2. Is this work condemned in the Bible?
3. What would be accomplished?
4. Is it a human service that directly assists others who are not practising what the Bible says?

Remember, Matt. 5v45 says that God causes the sun to rise on the good and bad of this world. Consequently being a postman and delivering post to a brothel would be acceptable. A chauffeur to a gangster would not!

5. Do I have authority over the work that I do?
6. Who pays my wages?
7. How is it going to affect other people?
8. How is it going to affect me mentally and physically?

4. The results of having a good conscience in a sinful world.

Gal. 5v6-10 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail, but faith working through love. You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth? This persuasion is not from him who called you. A little leaven leavens the whole lump. I have the confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view than mine; and he who is troubling you will bear his judgement, whosoever he is.

We should carry our own load and not pass it onto others.

What are Jesus' standards?

Our conscience should not be operating in a negative sense, but flourishing in a positive sense. We should be aiming for the moral excellence of mercy and loving kindness. The Samaritan in Jesus' parable subjected himself to possible attack on that road, followed by financial expense - he showed this moral excellence.

In other matters such as drinking and driving.

The English law says that a little drink is acceptable, but the moral excellence would suggest that you would not put someone else's conscience to the test by drinking anything alcoholic - because we can all take different amounts and hence puts us into a compromising position.

Rom. 14v13,21 Therefore let us not judge one another any more; but rather judge this:- No man must put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in a brother's way. It is good, not to eat flesh nor drink wine or anything that would make your brother stumble, or offend or make their faith weak.

Does this person think that they have a good conscience because they do not drink?

Do they think that they are better because they have exceeded the limit that they have set on other people.

We should be careful if we start thinking like this, is there an upper limit to love and mercy?

So what have we learnt about conscience?

1. A conscience is given to us in its completeness, it is moulded and taught by good and bad influences that we experience in our life.
2. Our conscience can be taught to be good or to be defiled! However if we wish it, then it can be saved from defilement and so used to protect us with future events that may need instant reactions.
3. If we allow The World to defile our conscience then it becomes fallible and not to be trusted.
4. Must aim for a good conscience, but it is a challenge in this world.
5. To gain a good conscience, we must enlighten our conscience by studying and meditating upon God's Word which is The Bible given to us for our instruction.
6. Learn to apply your good conscience to your actions.
7. A good conscience does not cause your brother to stumble, nor does it to us!

A good conscience will bring us much closer to Yahweh.

Hence if it can be trained to operate along and within The Desire of God then we shall be able to hold onto a good conscience in a sinful world.