

THE IMPORTANCE OF SOUND DOCTRINE PART 4:

GOOD CONSCIENCE

Text: 1 Timothy 1:5, 18-19

Two times in the scriptures we read, Paul points out the importance of having a good conscience. It is one of the three goals for every Christian in verse 5 and it will help Timothy avoid shipwreck in verse 19. Our conscience is a God-given internal alarm system to help us determine between right and wrong. It acts in accordance with our emotions to help guide us into moral uprightness. When Adam and Eve sinned for the very first time in the garden, their conscience was activated. They felt guilt, shame and fear, that's why they made aprons of fig leaves and hid amongst the trees.

Our consciences work in a three-fold capacity:

- **A witness** – our conscience acts as an internal observer that “knows with” you. It is privy to our most private thoughts and motives, making it a witness that cannot be deceived.
- **A judge** – our conscience has authority to pass a verdict of guilty or innocent. It doesn't just witness but it assesses the morality of our behavior resulting in feelings of remorse (guilty) or peace (clear).
- **A compass** – our conscience is a tool for navigation and future decision-making. “Let your conscience be your guide” It points to a moral north and helps you stay on the right path through life.

The word “conscience” is not found in the Old Testament. But the concept is spoken of by the term “reins” which literally means kidneys and is a metaphor for the deepest seat of emotions, desires, and moral discernment. In modern language it refers to the long leather straps used to guide or control a horse. Which is also a fitting definition for its function in our lives. **Psalm 16:7** I will bless the LORD, who hath given me counsel: my reins also instruct me in the night seasons.

Our conscience acts as a restrainer to keep us from doing as bad as we might do but it can be sinned against so much so that it numbs its ability to function: Genesis 6:5 And GOD saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.*

The Bible says that the LORD “tries the reins and the heart” meaning that he tests us so that our motives and desires are put on display so that we get a better understanding of who we really are. Peter vehemently argued with Jesus concerning his future denials, yet the test revealed that was really in him. Balaam the prophet, was known of the Lord yet the testing of the king of Moab proved his heart’s motive was for riches and self-exaltation.

The New Testament speaks about different kinds of conditions our consciences can get in:

- **Purged conscience - Hebrews 9:13-14** For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the 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? *The forgiveness and grace of God thoroughly washes our consciences clean of the guilt, shame and humiliation of sin!*
- **Weak conscience** – A weak conscience is oversensitive because it lacks a full understanding of Christian freedom. It stems from an incomplete understanding of what God truly forbids versus what is culturally or personally traditional. Some things in life are morally neutral, meaning that they are neither good nor bad. Romans 14 explains that in the body of Christ, different people have differing conscience feelings concerning holy days, whether to eat meat etc. Paul said that we are not to judge one another based on our acts guided by conscience. A weaker conscience is an uninformed conscience.
- **Defiled conscience** – For a person with a defiled conscience, nothing is pure (Titus 1:5) Because their inner self is corrupted, they see impurity and evil in everything around them, including things that are good or morally neutral. They feel guilt or shame for things that aren’t sins often because they were deceived or pressured.
- **Seared conscience** – A conscience that has been cauterized by persistent sin and hypocrisy. Just as a hot iron on skin destroys nerve endings and makes the area feel numb, a seared conscience no longer stings when an individual does something wrong. A person with a seared conscience is in a dangerous place because they have lost what God has given to govern them!

Several times in Paul’s writings he points out that he strived to have a good conscience: 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. **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;

What constitutes a good conscience:

- **Purged** – one that has been cleansed by the blood of Christ from dead works. The guilt and shame of our past have been washed away. **Romans 8:1** *There is* therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.
- **Programmed** – one that has been well informed by the word of God and not set by cultural or religious traditions. **Psalms 119:11** Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.
- **Pure** – one that is clear of offense towards God and man. The best way to have a pure conscience is to keep “short accounts”. When we sin, we don’t need to justify it or cover it up but confess it. If our conscience activates over actions or feelings toward another person, we need to address it quickly and in the spirit of meekness. The Bible is clear that we aren’t right with God if we’re not right with each other.

Matthew 5:23-24 Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.