

The Vincennes Voice

“...The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight...” (Matt. 3:3)

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IS THE CONSCIENCE A SAFE GUIDE?

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It is hard to select a doctrine more prevalent and damaging than “Let Your Conscience Be Your Guide.” This seems to be the cry of the day in the religious world, and has led to unnumbered actions which have brought about disastrous results, of both the physical and spiritual sort.

What Is a Conscience?

Literally, “conscience” means “with knowledge.” It is the inaudible voice-in-the-head that one hears when he is determining a path upon which to travel, or when he is deciding if something is right or wrong, or he should undertake a particular action.

Who Has a

Conscience? Everyone. There is not a single person living who does not possess one. Each individual’s conscience belongs to him, and him alone. The apostle Paul wrote, “*Conscience, I say, not thine own, but of the other: for why is my liberty judged of another man’s conscience*” (I Cor. 10:29). In other words, my conscience belongs to me, and yours to you.

How Is a Conscience Formed? Since “conscience” signifies “with knowledge,” it stands to reason many factors help shape it. Parents often have the largest role in forming a conscience, but so does extended family. Friends, good or bad, of all walks of life chip in to help produce a conscience. Members of God’s body frequently aid in the development of a conscience. Movies, music, magazines and social media likewise take part in creating a conscience. All these work together to establish a conscience, a system that regulates an individual’s code of ethics and morals.

What Different Consciences Are Mentioned in the Bible? God’s Word displays many different and varied consciences. A passing thought on each of these will help in resolving the question of this article.

A Good Conscience. Paul referenced this in I Timothy 1:5,19. This is a conscience which has been trained properly in the ways of God.

A Defiled Conscience. The apostle spoke of this in I Corinthians 8:7. This conscience

is one which has been produced when someone takes an action that violates his internal system of morals.

A Wounded Conscience. Paul chided the Corinthians about this in I Corinthians 8:12. This sort of conscience occurs when an individual, through the actions of others, is made to disturb his own conscience. This is both harmful and sinful.

A Pure Conscience. Timothy was reminded by Paul about this on two occasions (I Tim. 3:9; II Tim. 1:3). This conscience belongs to one who understands that he has sinned against God and others but has undertaken the necessary actions to make those wrongs right.

A Seared Conscience. Paul alerted his readers concerning this in I Timothy 4:2. This conscience is one which no longer feels the sting of sin. This individual has lived a life of sin for so long without repentance, he is no longer capable of feeling remorse.

A Purged Conscience. The Hebrew writer offered information about this in Hebrews

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9:14. This conscience is one which has been made clean. This indicates very clearly that consciences are moldable.

An Evil Conscience.

Once again, the Hebrew writer mentions this in Hebrews 10:22. This conscience is one which has not been properly educated in the ways of God. Though this often occurs, change is possible and necessary.

Does the Conscience Play a Role in Man's Salvation? Yes, it most certainly does. It should be recalled, after Jesus had spoken to the scribes and Pharisees concerning the woman taken in adultery, *"they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last"* (Jn. 8:9). Speaking of baptism, Peter authored these words: *"The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ"* (I Pet. 3:21). Routinely, a good, soft and receptive conscience, when met with the truth of God's Word, will obey. The longer one puts off obedience, the louder the conscience will become.

Is the Conscience a Sufficient Guide? This is the same as asking, "Should I allow my conscience to determine what is right and wrong, and should I permit my conscience to decide what God's plan is for saving man?" The answer is simple: "No!" This piece of writing has already verified there are many different consciences, which often change over time. Many in history have committed wrongdoing with a clean conscience. Consider the apostle Paul. His statement to the council was, *"Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day"* (Acts 23:1). Later, he added in speaking to the governor, *"And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men"* (Acts 24:16). Also, to Agrippa, he declared, *"I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth"* (Acts 26:9).

If these statements of Paul are true and to be believed, then we know when Paul was *"consenting"* to the death of Stephen (Acts 8:1), and while he was making *"havoc"* of the church (Acts 8:3), and while he was *"breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord"* and looking to arrest

other Christians (Acts 9:1-2), he was doing so with a completely clear and clean conscience. He thought that what he was doing was altogether right, godly, and proper. Was it? Absolutely not, even though his conscience said these things were good things to do!

We are well served to recall the warnings of the wise man. He wrote, *"There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death"* (Prov. 14:12; 16:25). The simple lesson? Just because something *"seems right"* does not make it right.

Even if a wrong action we take does not *"bother our conscience,"* it is still wrong. While we pray for and train ourselves and our loved ones to have a properly guided and well-educated conscience, we must turn to the Word of God to answer life's most important question: *"What must we do to be saved"* (Acts 2:37; 16:30)?

Have you answered God's call? If not, why not?

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MEETING TIMES (EST)

SUNDAY

Bible Study – 10:00 am

Worship – 11:00 am & 3:00 pm

WEDNESDAY

Bible Study – 7:00 pm