

Growing a Right Conscience



What is the conscience?

The Conscience is a human faculty that judges our actions and thoughts by the highest standard we perceive. Everyone is born with a conscience built into their inner being (Romans 2:15).

When we violate our conscience, it condemns us, triggering feelings of shame, anguish, regret, anxiety, disgrace and even fear. When we follow our conscience, it commends us, bringing joy, serenity, self-respect, well-being and gladness.

Read the following passages and list what part of the body the Old Testament ascribes the conscience to?

Exodus 8:15 _____

1 Samuel 24:5 _____

2 Chronicles 36:13 _____

Job 27:6 _____

Psalms 32:11 _____

Our conscience can be informed by our cultural environment, tradition and conventional social etiquette in addition to truth. This means that the standards society holds us to may not necessarily be God's standards. For example, in Romans 14:14 Paul says:

'As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean.'

This is not because God says it is unclean, but because [his misinformed conscience](#) tells him it is unclean (see also 1 Corinthians 8:4-7).

Because our consciences can be easily directed by the world's views, it is crucial to have a conscience that is informed by the truth of God's Word. Error, tradition, human wisdom, philosophy and wrong moral influences will corrupt and hinder the conscience (Colossians 2:6-8, 20-23).

How efficiently the conscience functions is determined by the amount of truth we take in and by the degree to which we keep our conscience unstained by evil (1 Timothy 3:9).

It is possible for our consciences to become so insensitive, crippled and seared that we are totally ruled by hypocrisy and desensitised to the ugliness of sin (1 Timothy 4:1-2; Titus 1:15). This occurs through a life being constantly dominated by sin.

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- Jeremiah 17:1 The conscience REMEMBERS what we have done in exact detail.
- Romans 2:15 It ACCUSES us when we are guilty and DEFENDS us when we are innocent.
- 2 Corinthians 1:12 It is a WITNESS, testifying either for us or against us.
- 1 John 3:19-21 It is a JUDGE, condemning or vindicating us.
- 1 Samuel 24:5 It is the MEMORY, inflicting grief when our guilt is discovered.

Explain the role of the conscience and the standard by which it functions:

Society's Weak Views Can Infect the Conscience

Society has completely desensitised it's God given conscience (Romans 2:14-15; Psalms 36:1-2). However, as believers in Jesus Christ, when our conscience triggers sorrow within us for a wrong we have done, the correct response to this guilt is repentance and a seeking for forgiveness. Expose it for what it really is - SIN (Ephesians 5:11).

Instead of godly sorrow, many today are like those in 2 Corinthians 7:10 whose sorrow is worldly and superficial. Worldly sorrow does not lead to repentance, but rather, it leads to denial and justification of the wrong done. Therefore the conscience is never cleansed (Proverbs 28:13; Mark 2:17).

We need to guard against allowing an indifferent attitude toward the conscience. Some deny the conscience and seek treatment for the guilt rather than repenting of their sin. Instead of confession, repentance, reconciliation and forgiveness, they turn to denial, self-justification, blame shifting, self-forgiveness and anything else that can silence the conscience. Anything, other than submission to the Lord Jesus Christ.

This practice flows from the idea that mankind is inherently good regardless of his 'occasional' wrong. Many deny they are sinful because they see only the 'big crimes' as sin.

The world today does not allow the word 'sin' to enter into their vocabulary or thinking. Instead, they replace it with words such as 'error', 'mistake', 'superstition' and 'delusion'.

People guilty of doing wrong are often regarded as 'victims' of some past or current dilemma that justifies their wrongdoing because they are only living out the inevitable response of being wronged themselves.

What is God's response to such a view? (Psalm 25:3; John 15:22)

Why are these excuses not acceptable?

Simply excusing sin away as a disease fails to deal with the seriousness of what the conscience is warning of. We see this in the labelling of those who indulge in heavy alcohol and drug use as merely 'chemically dependent'. While not denying the reality of physical addiction, it is always a deliberate, conscious choice to participate in drugs and alcohol to excess. It takes time to build an addiction. However, once the dependency is in full-swing, we often see a real lack of desire to deal with the resulting addiction.

Similar indifferent attitudes also exist in relation to various 'eating disorders' commonly known as anorexia and bulimia. Gluttony too, is no longer a lack of self-control, it has become an 'over-eating disorder'. Habitual pornography and prostitution involvement is called an 'addiction to sex'. Rebellious youth are labelled with various medical or psychological disorders. However, the majority of these 'disorders' and 'dependencies' are all day to day deliberate choices to act upon the heart's desire and is therefore a conscious decision NOT to find a way to resist or avoid that particular destructive behaviour.

Deny the reality of sin, and you also deny accountability to your Creator.

God's response to this is:

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| 1 Samuel 5:20 | <i>'Woe to those who call evil good and good evil...'</i> |
| 1 John 1:10 | <i>'If we claim we have not sinned, we make Him out to be a liar and His Word has no place in our lives.'</i> |
| Romans 3:10 | <i>...There is no one righteous, not even one</i> |
| Romans 14:12 | <i>...each of us will give an account of himself to God.</i> |
| Hebrews 9:27 | <i>Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment</i> |
| 2 Peter 3:9 | <i>The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.</i> |

Sin's Effect on the Unbelievers Conscience

The world is full of people who deny God's existence and subsequently their own sinfulness. If people can't or won't see the depravity of their own sinfulness, they will not be able to apply the only remedy God has provided (Mark 2:17).

Romans 1:20 and Psalm 19:1-6 tell us that God has made His existence plainly evident to everyone so that mankind is without excuse. When people choose to ignore their inherent knowledge/conscience of God by refusing to give Him glory or thanks, God allows their thinking to become foolish and futile (Romans 1:21-22; Psalm 14:1).

Notice in Romans 1:18-32 how God's judgement works in the lives of people who refuse to listen to the truth God put in their hearts/conscience and how God's judgment appears in three progressively worsening stages. The damage a person does against his own conscience is God's immediate judgement against them.

1. In :23-24 because they worshipped idols, God gives them over to sexually immoral relationships.
2. In :25-27 because they continued in sexual immorality while under the pretence of man-made religion, God gives them over to shameful lusts, that is, homosexuality.
3. Finally, in :28-32 God gives them over to a totally depraved mind. They are now totally controlled and filled with the sin they love so much. God's judgement is on them - their condemnation is already at the door.

Read Ecclesiastes 11:9 and James 1:14-15. List below the consequences of simply doing what you want?

Cleansing the Conscience

When we believe and acknowledge God, and the work He has done through Jesus Christ, we are accepting His salvation. Consequently, our hearts are 'sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience' (Hebrews 10:19-22). The sprinkling spoken of there is the spiritual cleansing by the blood of Christ - that is - His death (Hebrews 9:14).

The Old Testament animal sacrifices could not take away the worshippers guilty conscience (Hebrews 9:9-10, 10:1-4). The sacrifices were designed to remind the people of their sinfulness and to feed their consciences the knowledge needed to work correctly (Romans 3:19-20).

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Now, under the New Covenant, through faith in the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ on the cross He cleanses our consciences perfectly through His forgiveness of our sins since **He** paid the death penalty **we** deserved (Colossians 1:19-22; 1 Peter 2:24).

Not only do we get our sins forgiven, but we are implanted (imputed) with His righteousness when we believe (Romans 4:22-24; Philippians 3:9). Because of this, God declares us not guilty and receives us as righteous (Romans 8:33-34). This is our position in Christ: washed and righteous.

As Christians, we need to strive at making our practice match our position in Christ. It is important to keep our conscience clean and clear in our daily practical living. This does not mean we should try to overcome our feelings of guilt through denial, but rather, we should be dealing with the sin that causes the guilty conscience.

When we, as believers, sin, we have one who speaks to the father in our defence - Jesus Christ, the Righteous One (1 John 2:1-2; Hebrews 7:23-25). This does not mean that Christians can continue in sin while maintaining a clear conscience (Romans 6:1-2, 15-18; Psalm 32:1-5). We are new creations, the old is gone, the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:15, 17). Don't procrastinate in clearing your guilty conscience (Act 24:16).

Sin must be dealt with quickly, otherwise your conscience will become hardened (Hebrews 3:13). Denied sin dulls the conscience. It leads to us falling under the slavery of sin more and more, worse and worse, until the conscience becomes desensitised and corrupt.

Examine yourself regularly and hold no grudges against others as this affects your relationship with God (Matthew 6:14-15, 5:23-24). Full reconciliation and restitution with that person must be made (Numbers 5:6-7; Proverbs 6:30-31; Luke 19:8; Philemon :18-19).

To sum it up, only scripture can rightly educate our conscience. Scripture is the foundation from which we gain absolute truth in every aspect of life (1 John 17:17; 2 Timothy 3:16-17). Make your choice to cultivate your conscience.