

1 Timothy 1:5

2 Timothy 1:3

Acts 23:1; 24:16

**INTRO:** Perhaps few individuals can state with Paul of having a “**clear conscience**” even as a sinner. His conscience did not offend him as a Christian, but it is interesting to note it did not offend him before becoming a Christian either. Conscience is defined by some to be “**THAT JUDGMENT WHICH THE RATIONAL SOUL PASSES ON ALL HER ACTIONS**” and has been called a faculty of the soul itself, and consequently natural to it. Others have stated it is a “ray of Divine light”. Milton calls it “God’s Umpire” and Dr. Young calls it a “god in man.” Adam Clarke defines it as “**NO OTHER THAN A FACULTY CAPABLE OF RECEIVING LIGHT AND CONVICTION FROM THE SPIRIT OF GOD; AND ANSWERS THE END IN SPIRITUAL MATTERS TO THE SOUL, AS THE EYE DOES TO THE BODY IN THE PROCESS OF VISION. THE EYE IS NOT LIGHT IN ITSELF, NOR IS IT CAPABLE OF DISCERNING ANY OBJECT, BY THE INSTRUMENTALITY OF SOLAR OR ARTIFICIAL LIGHT, BUT IT HAS ORGANS PROPERLY ADAPTED TO THE RECEPTION OF THE RAYS OF LIGHT, AND THE VARIOUS IMAGES OF THE OBJECTS WHICH THEY EXHIBIT. WHEN THESE ARE PRESENT TO AN EYE THE ORGANS OF WHICH ARE PERFECT, THEN THERE IS A DISCERNMENT OF THOSE OBJECTS WHICH ARE WITHIN THE SPHERE OF VISION, BUT WHEN THE LIGHT IS ABSENT, THERE IS NO PERCEPTION OF THE SHAPE, DIMENSIONS, SIZE, OR COLOR OF ANY OBJECT, HOWSOEVER ENTIRE OR PERFECT THE OPTIC NERVE AND THE DIFFERENT HUMOURS MAY BE. IN THE SAME MANNER (COMPARING SPIRITUAL THINGS WITH NATURAL) THE SPIRIT OF GOD ENLIGHTENS THAT EYE OF THE SOUL WHICH WE CALL CONSCIENCE; IT PENETRATES IT WITH ITS EFFULGENCE; AND (SPEAKING AS HUMAN LANGUAGE WILL PERMIT ON THE SUBJECT) IT HAS POWERS PROPERLY ADAPTED TO THE RECEPTION OF THE SPIRIT’S EMANATIONS, WHICH, WHEN RECEIVED, EXHIBIT A REAL VIEW OF THE SITUATION, STATE, ETC., OF THE SOUL, AS IT STANDS IN REFERENCE TO GOD AND ETERNITY. THUS THE SCRIPTURE SAYS, “THE SPIRIT ITSELF BEARS WITNESS WITH OUR SPIRIT,” ETC., I.E. IT SHINES INTO THE CONSCIENCE, AND REFLECTS THROUGHOUT THE SOUL A CONVICTION, PROPORTIONED TO THE DEGREE OF LIGHT COMMUNICATED, OF CONDEMNATION OR ACQUITTANCE, ACCORDING TO THE END OF ITS COMING.** Charles Finney defined it a little more simply, “**THE SENSE OR CONSCIOUSNESS OR MORAL PRAISEWORTHINESS OR BLAME-WORTHINESS; THE FACULTY OF RECOGNIZING THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN RIGHT AND WRONG CONDUCT; CONFORMING TO ONE’S OWN SENSE OF RIGHT CONDUCT.**”

- A.** But even though God has placed within us this “conscience” of determining the moral rightness or wrongness of an action, this can be manipulated and affected by constant bombardment of wrong thinking to such a point that it becomes an inaccurate gauge of moral conditions. I would dare say that each of us begins life with a conscience that is sensitive to right and wrong and is a pretty good judge in those matters, but over time, if we are careless, we can corrupt even that “inner voice” that tells us a particular action is wrong.
- a. Apparently Paul did his best, even while in sin, to live according to his conscience that had been “trained” and even in those days that he was persecuting the church, there was no remorse of conscience cause he thought (according to his conscience) he was doing what was right. But it needs to be noted, though he was pleasing his conscience at that point in his life, he would have never made it into heaven without his subsequent conversion. So a conscience that has been corrupted is not a good or accurate measure of morality.
  - b. However, when his conscience was instructed correctly according to the Word of God, it lined up with those instructions and became a more accurate measure of the moral rightness of an action. Once the conscience of mankind becomes attuned to God’s Word, then it can become a fairly reliable source of moral clarity, but we must always remember the final choice is always made by our intellect – the individual always decides what he is going to do and in those choices, he could choose to go against his conscience, if he so desired. Generally that conscience will bother a person that intentionally goes against what he knows to be right and will continue to condemn that person unless he finally, after many choices, continues to contradict his conscience, then it becomes less reliable as a guide.
  - c. But writing to Timothy, Paul is thankful that his conscience does not bother him because he is living not only according to the dictates of a clean conscience, but he is well aware that his conscience is in accordance with the commandments of God Himself and he does not go against the will of God.
- B.** Let us understand something else about our conscience. We use that often to discern between right and wrong, both in general and in particular, but it is impossible to do correctly without the assistance of the Spirit of God, otherwise, selfishness and other unnatural passions would take upon such a nature as man would not correctly recognize his choices. Therefore, we should be able to see the importance of the Word of God from which our conscience will take its direction. Another reason why knowing and memorizing the Word of God is of such

importance, for it will help to guide correctly our conscience when we must make moral choices. A correctly trained conscience will always be guided by and conformed to the rules and regulations of God's Divine Word and when it has thus been trained, it can become a reliable and valuable source of guidance for the decisions we must make every day. If we leave God out of the equation and His influence upon our lives, then our conscience is of very little, if any, value.

- a. Let me give you an example of this from the works of Adam Clarke. Apart from God, epitaphs such as a good, bad, tender, seared, etc., conscience makes little sense but these terms make sense when taken in by the correct context of God's Word. E.g. **"A GOOD CONSCIENCE" IS ONE TO WHICH THE SPIRIT OF GOD HAS BROUGHT INTELLIGENCE OF THE PARDON OF ALL THE SINS OF THE SOUL, AND ITS RECONCILIATION TO GOD THROUGH THE BLOOD OF CHRIST; AND THIS GOOD CONSCIENCE RETAINED, IMPLIES GOD'S CONTINUED APPROBATION OF SUCH A PERSON'S CONDUCT; SEE ACTS 23:1; 1 TIMOTHY 1:5, 19; AND HERE, HEBREWS 13:18. "A BAD OR EVIL CONSCIENCE" SUPPOSES A CHARGE OF GUILT BROUGHT AGAINST THE SOUL BY THE HOLY SPIRIT, FOR THE BREACH OF THE DIVINE LAWS; AND WHICH HE MAKES KNOWN TO IT BY CONSCIENCE, AS A MEDIUM OF CONVEYING HIS OWN LIGHT TO THE MIND; SEE HEBREWS 10:22; 1 TIMOTHY 4:2; TITUS 1:3. "A TENDER CONSCIENCE" IMPLIES ONE FULLY IRRADIATED BY THE LIGHT OF THE HOLY GHOST, WHICH ENABLES THE SOUL TO VIEW THE GOOD AS GOOD, AND THE EVIL AS EVIL, IN EVERY IMPORTANT RESPECT; WHICH LEADS IT TO ABOMINATE THE LATTER, AND CLEAVE TO THE FORMER; AND, IF AT ANY TIME IT ACT IN THE SMALLEST MEASURE OPPOSITE TO THESE VIEWS, IT IS SEVERE IN ITS REPREHENSIONS, AND BITTER IN ITS REGRET. "A DARKENED OR HARDENED CONSCIENCE" MEANS ONE THAT HAS LITTLE OR NONE OF THIS DIVINE LIGHT; CONSEQUENTLY, THE SOUL FEELS LITTLE OR NO SELF-REPREHENSION FOR ACTS OF TRANSGRESSION, BUT RUNS ON IN SIN, AND IS NOT AWARE OF THE DESTRUCTION THAT AWAITS IT, HEEDLESS OF COUNSEL, AND REGARDLESS OF REPROOF. THIS STATE OF THE SOUL ST. PAUL CALLS BY THE NAME OF A "SEARED CONSCIENCE," OR ONE CAUTERIZED BY REPEATED APPLICATIONS OF SIN, AND RESISTING OF THE HOLY GHOST; SO THAT, BEING GRIEVED AND QUENCHED, HE HAS WITHDRAWN HIS LIGHT AND INFLUENCE FROM IT.**
- b. But we must also realize that as in the case of all the gifts of God, we can abuse them and we can abuse our conscience to a point to where it is of little, if any, benefit to our spiritual and morally right life. But one that has not accepted Christ as their Savior and have not turned their life around to make glorifying God their ultimate goal, will not always find that conscience a good guide for spiritual decisions. Paul could say he was of a clear conscience for his conscience, that had been "trained" by the Divine Word of God and a dedication unto the service of God was attuned to the direction of God and Paul knew he did not make choices that were in conflict with his godly conscience, therefore, his conscience did not condemn his choices.
- c. In many instances, the conscience of man becomes so revolted with the lifestyle of an individual that has been living in rebellion ensues, that they become under conviction as knowledge of their rebellion is brought to bear upon their situation, and it drives an individual to the point of wanting to correct that condemnation and eventually salvation. But if one continually goes against that prompting of the Holy Spirit and continually goes against the condemnation of their own conscience because of their wicked living, that conscience may become so seared and corrupted as to be of no use any more. Søren Kierkegaard wrote **"A MAN COULD NOT HAVE ANYTHING UPON HIS CONSCIENCE IF GOD DID NOT EXIST, FOR THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE INDIVIDUAL AND GOD, THE GOD-RELATIONSHIP, IS THE CONSCIENCE, AND THAT IS WHY IT IS SO TERRIBLE TO HAVE EVEN THE LEAST THING UPON ONE'S CONSCIENCE, BECAUSE ONE IS IMMEDIATELY CONSCIOUS OF THE INFINITE WEIGHT OF GOD."** Conscience is a three-pointed thing in your heart that turns around when we do something wrong, and the points hurt a lot. But if we keep doing bad, the points eventually wear off, and then it does not hurt any more.

**CONCLUSION:** A calm conscience is a blessing from God if it is correctly instructed by God's Word. Even Eddie Cantor (a comedian from years past) once said, **"A SLEEPING PILL WILL NEVER TAKE THE PLACE OF A CLEAR CONSCIENCE."** Paul Valery wrote that **"CONSCIENCE REIGNS, BUT IT DOES NOT GOVERN"**, in other words, we can override even a good conscience. Oswald Chambers wrote, **"IT IS NOT SUFFICIENT FOR A CHRISTIAN TO WALK IN THE LIGHT OF HIS CONSCIENCE; HE MUST WALK IN A STERNER LIGHT, IN THE LIGHT OF THE LORD."** And Billy Graham stated, **"MOST OF US FOLLOW OUR CONSCIENCE AS WE FOLLOW A WHEELBARROW. WE PUSH IT IN FRONT OF US IN THE DIRECTION WE WANT TO GO."** I want us all to understand that a godly conscience can be a great asset in our walk with God, but it must be trained according to the Word of God and the final authority is always the Word of God. Let us learn to live in such a manner that our conscience does not condemn us because we are living in the light of His Divine Word.