

The
CONSCIENCE
Within Man!

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Lesson One

***"The
Conscience Defined"***

One of man's most distinctive and impressive characteristics is his "Conscience!" He seems to automatically possess the ability to evaluate his own actions. **Kant**, the philosopher, observed: *"Nothing is more awe-inspiring than the starry heavens above and the moral Law within (man)."* Another distinctive characteristic of man is his power of choice! This is closely tied in with the conscience of man. Man has not only been given the power of choice, but the ability to discern between right and wrong. He is not a mechanistic robot programmed by his surroundings; but he can think, evaluate, and choose the right and reject the wrong. Both society and God holds man responsible for his choice. In this lesson, we want to look at what the Bible says about our conscience and the part it can play in our growing spiritually.

What is Conscience?

Our term "conscience" comes from the Greek words: **Sun** (with) and **Oida** (know). It carries with it the idea of "to know with," "to know with oneself." It is the process of distinguishing what we consider morally good or bad—commending the good and condemning the bad. Conscience is a gift from God that has been placed in each human being. The story of Adam and Eve's sin in the garden indicates this. They were told not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. When they ate, they were knowledgeable of good and evil. They also suffered the consequences of their wrong choice.

As a child grows, it seems that his conscience also develops to the point where God holds him accountable for his actions. There is a need to make a clarification here! God's Law can be divided into two major concepts: Moral and Positive Laws. Man seems to be able to know and understand the moral concepts without a divine revelation. But the positive concepts have to be revealed to man. To illustrate:

1. Baptism is a positive command of God.
2. God had to reveal it for man to know it is required by God.
3. When man learns that this is required by God, then his conscience comes into play.
4. If he obeys, then his conscience is clear.
5. If he disobeys, then his conscience accuses him.
6. 1 Peter. 3:21—***"The like figure whereunto even baptism does 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."

The condemnation of the Gentile world in Romans, chapter 1, shows the work of conscience in their lives. God held them accountable for their actions even though they did not have a revelation from God as the Jews did.

The Function of Conscience

The following quotes should help to indicate the function of Conscience:

"Conscience is a silent voice in man that judges his very being."

"With this faculty, man is able to recognize right from wrong."

"That which causes man to act upon the right and restrain himself from the wrong."

"To pass judgment upon one's acts and bring about atonement and restitution through producing guilt!"

"It is a built-in device for spot-checking right from wrong."

"God created man to be a moral being. Thus, He endowed him with the faculty to be moral."

"Without conscience, the human race would have bogged down in a hazardous course, and no kind of civilization would have been possible."

The Conscience:

1. **Produces a sense of ought!** It makes a decision on what is the right or wrong actions and then produces a sense of what one ought to do—the right. And it also produces a sense of restraining from doing wrong.
2. **Produces a sense of well-being or guilt!** If one does right—a sense of well-being. If one does wrong—a sense of guilt. It makes and passes judgment upon one's acts.
3. **Produces a sense of a need for punishment for wrong-doing.** When one has gone against his conscience, he naturally feels guilt, shame, disquiet, distress, remorse, etc. His conscience not only accuses him, but calls for punishment for his wrong doings. The accusations of an aggrieved conscience are often detected in one's facial expressions. And as well, the approval of one's conscience can be seen in his face. *"The wicked flee when no man pursues; but the righteous are bold as a lion."* (Prov. 28:1).
4. **Produces an instinctive anticipation of punishment after death!** It is obvious from the ancient writings of man. The very concept seems to be built into man's consciousness. This is the reason why the threat of punishment after death is so easily understood when preached. However, that does not mean that men want to accept such or experience such.

5. **Produces a social judgment upon others' actions as well.** The effect of society's judgment is often great, but it can be a help to encourage one to do right.

From Where did the Conscience Come?

How does man get a conscience? Does every man have one? We can see from the early writings of humanity that man had a concept of conscience.

The Babylonians—They identified the concept of conscience with the "heart" of man. Their writings indicate a deep sense of guilt and wrong doing that bothered them in their hearts.

The Egyptians—They had a definite sense of right and wrong in their writings. They depicted their consciousness of their moral obligations and failures. These writings ante-date the Law of Moses. Such writings give a sense of moral responsibility similar to what is found in the Ten Commandments.

The Greeks & Romans—At first they seem to have had no special word for conscience. They personified it's concept with the fierce demons within. Later, the Greek Stoics (Philosophers) used the Greek word—Suneidesis (translated into English is Conscience).

The Old Testament Concept—The word "conscience" is not found in the Old Testament. The word that comes the closer to identifying with conscience is the word "heart." (Ps. 32:1-5; 51:1-10).

The New Testament writers—They picked up the word from the later Greek writers.

Concluding Thoughts

While it may be easy to define the Greek word, Suneidesis (to know with), it is not quite as easy to really explain what Conscience is, where it originated, and what its proper function is. These six lessons are trying to expose you to some of the thoughts that have been presented in connection with the conscience—especially from the Word of God. The Greek word appears some 30 times in the New Testament. We will try to make use of all of these to properly explain the function of the Conscience.

Questions for Discussion

True or False

- _____ 1. Man seems to have the ability to evaluate his own actions.
- _____ 2. "Power of Choice" and "Conscience" are both closely connected together in mankind.
- _____ 3. Paying proper attention to one's conscience makes a big difference in that person's spiritual growth.
- _____ 4. Conscience can be defined as the ability to determine right from wrong.
- _____ 5. Man did not have a conscience until he sinned in the Garden of Eden.
- _____ 6. The concept of Law can be divided into two concepts: Moral and Positive Laws.
- _____ 7. God's condemnation of the Gentile world in the days of Noah shows clearly that man had a consciousness of right and wrong morally.
- _____ 8. Only Egyptian writings indicate the concept of a conscience among them.
- _____ 9. The New Testament uses the Greek word "suneidesis" some 30 times.
- _____ 10. Human Beings have always known right from wrong from the very beginning of time.

Lesson Two

**"Is Conscience a
Safe Guide?"**

Before dealing directly with the question of whether the conscience is a safe guide or not, it may be helpful to look at the different kinds of descriptions of the conscience.

1. A Conscience that errs. A person goes by his conscience, but later finds out that he made the wrong decision.

2. A morbid, perverted, or narrow conscience. It is out of balance, too narrow, on the verge of fanaticism, or bigoted.

3. Pathological and neurotic conscience. The person has a psychic disorder, or neurosis related to phobias, obsessions, fixed ideas, and compulsions.

4. A Doubting conscience. The person acts in uncertainty, not being sure of how to act or react to a situation.

5. A dulled, calloused, or dead conscience. The conscience ceases to function because of repeated disregard of its warning voice.

6. A good conscience. The person acts in accord with his convictions.

7. A social conscience. The individual moral consciousness is merged into the consciousness of a group of people.

There may be other terms that you can think of that describes the kind of conscience that a person may have. If the above descriptions are anywhere close to being accurate; then, it should be obvious that we have to be careful in saying that one's conscience is an accurate or safe guide for our lives.

**Is the Conscience the result of
early social Training?**

Such is advocated by secular psychologists. And, it would seem obvious that our early training would have some effect upon our conscience. However, there is far more to our conscience than social training. In the first place such does not explain the origin of the conscience nor its innate content. Since God is a "moral" being, it would stand to reason that His creation would also be a

"moral" being—for we are made in His image. In fact, man's moral nature cannot be explained apart from a moral Creator! From whence comes the concept of morality? The following Scriptures are critical to this issue:

Rom. 2:14-15

God's moral Law is written in our hearts. Man comes equipped with this basic information. However, social conditioning can alter this understanding over a period of time.

John 8:7-9

Even though they had done things contrary to their conscience, it was still able to convict them of their wrong!

1 Cor. 10:24-29

To a person properly taught God's truth, his conscience would not convict him if he ate meat that had been offered to an idol. But to one not properly taught, it would be to go against his "misguided" conscience.

2 Cor. 1:12

The Apostle Paul, as a Christian, conducted himself in such a way that his conscience approved. Also, before he became a Christian, he could say the same thing—his conscience was clear! (Acts 23:1). However, he later realized that he had grievously sinned in persecuting Christians (1 Tim. 1:12-15). We can therefore draw the conclusion that our conscience can be negatively affected by our social training or exposures to what other people think and say. This quote states it very well: *"Conscience is not the product of environment, training, habit, race impressions, or education, but it can be influenced by all of these. It is rather the perversion and confusion of conscience that is of social origin."*

We believe that the conscience is a wonderful gift of God. It is a guardian of morality, justice, and decency in the world. It is an irrefutable testimony to the existence of the God who gave it to mankind.

The fully developed Conscience

It seems to be evident that a child is basically governed by externals at first. The approval or disapproval of parents serves as a guide for the child. The fear of punishment or the approval of parents serves as a guide for the growing child. But as the child develops, his own conscience becomes more evident. It emerges or unfolds with age and becomes more of an internal restraint, approval, judgment, or a sense of guilt for the youth. His God-given conscience more and more takes the place of the early externals of parents. (1 Cor. 13:11). And....as the child's conscience becomes more functional, he is held more accountable by God. The following quote seems to have merit: *"Conscience is not the voice of God in man, but man's own voice. It is the voice of moral man speaking to himself. This voice was placed there by God in the beginning and man cannot rid himself of it."*

Concluding Thoughts

That which man thinks is God speaking to him is, in reality, his own conscience trying to do it's God-given work. Our challenge is:

1. To let our conscience do its designed work.
2. When properly taught or corrected, it will keep us living and doing right.
3. When we will not listen, we are asking for our own destruction.

The primary helper for our conscience is certainly the Word of God!

Questions for Discussion

True or False

- _____ 1. There are evidently different conditions of a person's conscience.
- _____ 2. Man's conscience is the sole results of early social training.
- _____ 3. Man's moral nature can be explained apart from a Creator.
- _____ 4. Man alone has invented the concept of "morality!"
- _____ 5. The Gentile world, apart from having a written Law from God, was able to know right from wrong.
- _____ 6. Even people who do immoral things can still have a conscience that can convict them of their wrong.
- _____ 7. The Apostle Paul stated that a person could eat meat, which had been offered to an idol, without their conscience convicting them.
- _____ 8. A conscience that is clear of guilt is not necessarily a conscience that is acting correctly.
- _____ 9. A person's conscience is fully developed by the age of 21.
- _____ 10. The voice of conscience is the voice of God at work within man.

Lesson Three

"Conscience and Guilt"

"Guilt" is a concept of which we are all aware, but may have problems explaining the processes at work. And there are many misunderstandings about "Guilt" that has caused much human tragedy. It is the intent of this lesson to try to define Guilt; to clarify the kinds of Guilt; to see the ways men have tried to deal with their Guilt; and offer God's solution to our problems with Guilt!

WHAT IS GUILT?

It is a feeling within our soul. It is a feeling of anxiety, pain, displeasure, depression, conflict, and/or remorse. It can be strong feelings of sinfulness, evil, or wickedness. The words, "Guilty," "Guiltless," and "Guiltiness" appear some 30 times in the Bible (mostly in the Old Testament). These terms help to explain why we feel guilty. It shows that our CONSCIENCE is at work.

Gen. 42:21-22

Their guilt indicated they had done something wrong—they had wronged their brother. They even recognized the justness of the punishment for their wrongdoing. We feel guilt when we go against our conscience. We feel guilt when we go against the Law of God or man. We feel guilt because we have violated some internalized set of values. Also accompanying this feeling of guilt is:

1. A feeling of blame for our actions;
2. An understanding of deserving punishment.
3. Or, a need for reconciliation & forgiveness.

This feeling of guilt can be in the midst of other desirable emotions that are felt. To Illustrate:

1. A young couple love each other.
2. They get too intimate and commit fornication.
3. Even though they love each other & enjoyed the sexual experience they also felt guilt...because of going against what was right.
4. The tendency is to justify the wrong-doing by saying, "It was not wrong, since we loved each other."

It seems obvious that it is possible for someone to do wrong and not feel guilty. It is accomplished by what we call rationalization. But it can also be because we are not aware of the action being wrong. Lev. 5:17—***"If a soul sin, and commit any of these things which are forbidden to be done by the commandments of the Lord; though he know it not, yet is he guilty, and shall bear his iniquity."***

This person was guilty of breaking God's Law, but was not aware of it. In the sight of God, he was guilty....But he did not feel guilt. Guilty feelings would come when he realized he had broken God's commands. These were ritual Laws being dealt with, not moral laws. When we learn that we have broken God's Laws, we then should experience guilt feelings.

COMMON SYMPTOMS OF GUILT FEELINGS:

- 1. Exemplary behavior.** The person acts docile & well-behaved....unusual for him. This may be to cover his true inner feelings of guilt.
- 2. Bodily Complaints.** Emotional problems caused by harboring guilt feelings. Results into physical ailments such as fatigue, headaches, etc.
- 3. Depression.** A person who may feel guilty continually. Sees no hope for themselves.
- 4. Further indulgence in disobedience.** He is not dealing properly with his guilt feelings. He feels defeated. This brings on additional feelings of guilt. *"What's the use, go on and do what you want to do! I'm lost anyway"*
- 5. Self-condemnation.** One who does not properly deal with guilt. He continually blames himself for his wrong doing.
- 6. Self-punishment.** He deserves to be punished. Thus, he may deprive himself of food or other physical necessities. Some actually inflict bodily pain to atone for their sinfulness. Judas Iscariot...hung himself! (Great Guilt).
- 7. Expectation of disapproval.** He expects that others consider him worthless.
- 8. Projection and undue Criticism.** He projects his guilt upon others. He finds faults with others, blaming them for the faults he finds in himself.
- 9. Hostility.** He is hostile to others without reason. Takes it out on them. Reason...because of his own guilt feelings.
- 10. Compensation.** He tries to ease his conscience by doing good deeds. He may join a charitable organization. He may give to charity.....trying to deal with his guilt feelings.

HOW MEN DEAL WITH THEIR GUILT FEELINGS.

- 1. By trying to deny personal responsibility.** They may express the following

feelings-- "*To cause someone to feel guilty is wrong.*" Or, "*It makes a person feel abnormal.*" Men from the beginning have recognized the feelings of guilt. But they have also tried to unload their responsibility for their wrong actions that brought on the guilty feelings. Adam & Eve well illustrate the attempt:

- 1—Adam blamed Eve.
- 2—Eve blamed the Serpent
- 3—I guess Satan blamed God.

Adolph Hitler blamed the Jews for his actions. We often refer to this as Rationalization. We try to give reasons for the way we have acted to justify our actions. We try to rationalize away our guilt.

2. We minimize our sin by excuses, as Cain did. I have often asked myself, "*Are you trying to convince others, or yourself?*" There can be grave consequences to this approach of denying personal sin & guilt, or responsibility for our actions. If we deny sin, there is nothing to be forgiven. But why do we have guilt feelings if there is no wrong-doing? If not dealt with properly, they can come back to haunt us.

3. Some Turn to Cultic groups to deal with their uneasy feelings within.

4. Others turn to the habit of drink or drugs.

Despair eventually will come to the person who does not correctly deal with his feelings of guilt. Look what David said about his unresolved guilt feelings.

Psa. 32:3-5

Isa. 57:20-21—"*But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, says my God, to the wicked.*"

Even when such try over the years:

1. To soothe their conscience;
2. To avoid facing reality of their sinfulness;
3. To occupy time with all kinds of activities;
4. They still realize their sinful condition.

Even hardened criminals and sociopathic personalities are frequently touched with their sinful state & need of forgiveness.

CONCLUSION

How do you and I deal with our Guilt feelings? Correctly or incorrectly. In God's way or in our own way. King David acknowledged his sin and confessed his transgressions; received the forgiveness of God; and was Blessed! Do we need to acknowledge our sinfulness before God...and come humbly and obediently to receive His forgiveness? Do we want our conscience to be at rest?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

True or False

- _____ 1. Guilt is shown by having a feeling of pain or discouragement.
- _____ 2. A feeling of guilt always indicates that something is wrong.
- _____ 3. A person should feel guilty when he goes against his conscience.
- _____ 4. Blame, punishment, and forgiveness are logical outcomes of guilt.
- _____ 5. A person can do something wrong and not feel guilty.
- _____ 6. Guilt feelings bring on common symptoms.
- _____ 7. Self-punishment is a symptom of deep guilt.
- _____ 8. Adam and Eve illustrate how people often handle the feeling of guilt.
- _____ 9. Despair can come to the person who does not deal properly with his guilt.
- _____ 10. Our conscience can only be at rest when we properly deal with our guilt.

Lesson Four

"A Good Conscience"

Man is a being of conscience! He is therefore a responsible person. How he deals with his conscience becomes critical to his physical, mental, social, and spiritual well-being! Also, how he deals with his conscience determines the "kind" of conscience that he will have. All have a conscience, but how we deal with it determines whether we call it "good," "bad," or otherwise.

In the heart of every person is a conscience that sits in judgment of our decisions and actions. It either approves or disapproves of each decision or action. We either feel guilty or not guilty. And, we either fear punishment or enjoy life on the basis of the decree of our conscience. When we talk about having to live with our decisions, we are speaking about having to live with our conscience that either approves or disapproves of our decisions.

What is a "Good" Conscience?

When we speak about a person having a "good" conscience what do we mean? If you stop to think about it, all consciences are "good" in a general sense because they have been designed by God to do their work in our lives. That is "good!" So, when we describe a person's conscience by various terms, we are in reality describing how we react to our conscience. If our reaction is proper, right, according to God's Will; then, it is a "good" conscience. Are there different "kinds" of consciences? We use terms like this that seem to be indicating there are different "kinds" of consciences. But, is this correct? Maybe such terms are more accommodating than accurate.

What we are looking at is how one "treats" his conscience. If he treats it correctly; then, we say he has a "good" conscience; but this seems to be accommodative language. Should we say that the conscience is always "good," but it is often ignored, denied, or corrupted? Or, is it possible that our "good" conscience can be so damaged by our wrong treatment that these terms are actually pointing out the true condition of our conscience? With these thoughts as a backlog, let's look at some Scriptures that use the term "good."

Scriptures on "Good" Conscience

Acts 23:1—The Apostle Paul could say a long time after his conversion that he had lived in all good conscience before God until this day. What a statement for a person to make! It would seem to be indicating that Paul (formerly Saul) had not gone contrary to his conscience up to that time. Yet, before his conversion,

He persecuted Christians, gave consent to their death, and made havoc of the Church (Acts 8:1-3). How could he say such a thing and do the terrible things to Christians? Look at the following Scriptures:

1 Pet. 3:16 _____

1 Pet. 3:21 _____

Rom. 13:5 _____

The prompting of our conscience is to do the right thing, the just thing, or to obey God. When we do what we believe is right, just, or obedient to God; then, we have a "good" conscience. Saul of Tarsus could have a "good" conscience because what he did he strongly believed to be right. That did not make it right, but he did not go against the prompting of his conscience!

Acts 24:15-16 _____

The Apostle is saying that he strove not to go against the prompting of his conscience. It is to be true to his inner self and not deny his conscience out of weakness or special advantage.

Rom. 9:1 _____

Paul made it clear that he was telling the truth about his concern for his fellow-Jews. His conscience was clear in this matter. He even went as far as to say that he could wish himself accursed from Christ if it would help them to be saved.

2 Cor. 4:2 _____

Paul's sincerity and integrity is being stressed. He spoke the truth and his conscience is bearing witness to such. He was hopeful that this same truth would be commended by their conscience as well.

1 Tim. 1:5 _____

Notice how the Apostle ties three things together: "pure heart," "good conscience," and a "sincere faith." What a great example such a person would be

Before his fellow-man! But it is evident that not all who claim to be a child of God have these three things to guide their lives (1 Tim. 1:6-11).

1 Tim. 1:19

Some in the church had gone against the faith, rejected it, and had made shipwreck of it. Notice that he ties "faith" and a "good conscience" together. They had compromised the faith that they once professed.

Rom. 14:22-23

This example is dealing with meat offered to idols. If one believes that an idol is nothing and that meat that has been offered to an idol is still just meat, that is fine! But don't try to force someone to eat against his conscience. A man is blessed if his conscience approves of what he does. But the man who has reservations about eating such meat is self-condemned if he eats. What we do, needs to be based on our believing that it is right. Actions that are not of faith (believing that such is right) are sinful and should be avoided.

Concluding Thoughts

It would seem to be obvious that what the Scriptures refer to as a "good" conscience is when a person acts in conformity to his convictions of what is right. He may be wrong in his convictions, but he is right when he stays with his conscience. He needs to be willing to be taught and convinced of what is right in the sight of God and do that!

Questions for Discussion

True or False

- _____ 1. One's conscience sits in judgment upon our decisions.
- _____ 2. To speak about "kinds" of consciences is more accommodating than accurate.
- _____ 3. Our conscience is often denied, ignored, or corrupted.
- _____ 4. The Apostle Paul stated that he had a good conscience.
- _____ 5. People can do bad things and still have a "good" conscience.
- _____ 6. It is impossible to live up to our conscience.
- _____ 7. The Apostle Paul stated that his conscience bore witness to his sincerity.
- _____ 8. These three things should always go together: a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith.
- _____ 9. A man can compromise his faith and still have a good conscience.
- _____ 10. A man is blessed if he does what his conscience approves.

Lesson Five

"A Corrupted Conscience"

What is meant by the term, "corrupted conscience?" Can our conscience really be corrupted or is it trying to say to us that we have gone against our conscience in our decisions or actions? There is no question that people can and do go against their conscience. Does this destroy the effectiveness our one's conscience or is it still just as effective in approving or forbidding our decisions or actions? A person may fail to obey his conscience by giving in to passions or by being overwhelmed by the allurements of temptation. When we do so, our conscience lets us know what we should have done and not give in. If our consciences can be corrupted, how long does it take before it is corrupted? At what point can we point a finger and say that a certain person has corrupted his or her conscience? If it can be corrupted, is there a possibility that it can be changed back for the better? If so, what will it take to change it back?

These may be questions that we will have to struggle with. We also may have to struggle with these additional questions: *"Does the conscience ever make a mistake? Can it never err and does it not need any 'education?'* *Does the conscience ever need to have exposure to the character of God and to the Teachings of Christ?"* Some have even gone as far as to suggest that it is not the conscience that tells us what we should and shouldn't do, but it is God himself that speaks to our hearts through what is called our conscience.

Can My Conscience be Corrupted?

We now want to come back to our original topic of a "corrupted" Conscience. Is it possible that such can happen? Let's look at some Scriptures to see what insight they can give us.

Acts 23:1

The Apostle said that he had lived in all good conscience until the day that he spoke these words. He evidently did not go against his conscience! But was his conscience guiding him correctly in his efforts to persecute the Church and make havoc of it (Acts 8:1-4)? I think that all of us would say a loud "NO" to this question—his conscience was not guiding him correctly. However, his conscience probably was guiding him according to what he understood to be right—because what he did, he did in all good conscience! What other conclusion can we draw than that our consciences may need some educating in some instances!

Tit. 1:15

There is no question that a person can be unbelieving (in relationship to the Gospel of Christ) and his mind and conscience can be defiled (in some sense). The word "defiled" carries with it the idea of that which is "tainted," "tarnished," "corrupted," or "ruined." Thus, a person's conscience can be tarnished, corrupted, or ruined by our wrong actions or lack of proper actions.

1 Cor. 8:7

Here it speaks of a person whose conscience tells him that meat that has been offered to an idol should not be eaten. But because of pressure from others, he goes ahead and eats the meat and "defiles" his conscience. That is, he goes against what his conscience is telling him. Why does he do it? The verse says that he did it because his conscience was "weak!" The person was not fully convinced in this matter and went on and ate the meat in his uncertainty. The Apostle states that the person who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin! (Rom. 14:23). This evidently is warning of the dangers of corrupting our conscience by continually acting out of uncertainty. However, in spite of acting contrary to our conscience, the conscience does not disappear or go away. It may be "weak" but it is still there and can be changed for the better—or why else does the Apostle give, not only the warnings, but instructions about the matter so that the conscience can be useful again.

The lesson that we can learn from the above is that we need to remove as many tempting situations as possible until our conscience is stronger! We also should learn to forego immediate gratification of desires for those that are wholesome and enduring things. And.....we need to feel responsible for our decisions and actions. At the same time, we need to be considerate of the rights and wishes of others in our decision-making-process.

What is a Seared Conscience?

The Apostle Paul speaks about such in his first letter to Timothy. Let's examine closely what is indicated about the conscience that has been seared.

1 Tim. 4:1-2

How can some who have become Christians "depart from the faith, give need to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons, and speak lies in hypocrisy?" The Apostle Peter describes such people as "a dog that returns to its vomit." (2 Pet. 2:20-22). The Apostle Paul gives us the answer—their conscience had become

seared with a hot iron! When flesh is seared, it loses its feeling. The Apostle is indicating the insensibility of such people.

Prov. 30:20 _____

The person continues to go against their conscience over a period of time that causes them to be insensible to the prompting of conscience.

Jere. 6:15 _____

Notice the description that the Apostle gives in Eph. 4:17-19:

1. Walk in the futility of their mind;
2. Their understanding is darkened;
3. They are alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance in them and the blindness of their heart;
4. Being past feeling.

The outcome—They give themselves over to lewdness and work all uncleanness with greediness. Could you say they have a defiled or corrupted conscience?

What about an Over-Righteous Outlook?

Can a person's conscience be corrupted by an over-righteous or an overly strict outlook? Some people go to extremes and cause not only heartache to themselves but others as well. Such extremes can affect the Cause of Christ in the eyes of others. Jesus gives a long list of things that the Scribes and Pharisees were guilty of that could be classified as extremes. Read (Matt. 23:1-33). But there is one passage in the book of Ecclesiastes that might help to illustrate this idea.

Eccl. 7:16 _____

This could be an indication of a "corrupted" conscience that is encouraging a person to go to such extremes.

Concluding Thoughts

There is an indication that the working of our conscience can be affected by how we decide or treat it; as well as, how we conduct ourselves. What God has placed inside of us needs to be constantly guarded and improved by listening to the teachings of God's Word.

Questions for Discussion

True or False

- _____ 1. A person can go against his conscience, which in turn can affect his conscience.
- _____ 2. A person's conscience, once affected, cannot be changed back for the better.
- _____ 3. My conscience never makes a mistake, but it can be improved upon.
- _____ 4. The Apostle Paul's conscience did not guide him correctly in his early life, but it did guide it correctly according to his convictions.
- _____ 5. A person's conscience can be ruined by his continued actions.
- _____ 6. A person defiles his conscience by eating meat offered to idols.
- _____ 7. The Scripture teaches that if we do not act in faith, we sin.
- _____ 8. A seared conscience is one that has lost its feeling.
- _____ 9. A person who goes against his conscience over a period of time will cause him to be insensitive to the prompting of Conscience.
- _____ 10. An over-righteous outlook does not affect our conscience.

Lesson Six

"A Cleansed Conscience"

The history of mankind is a story of those who have gone against their conscience in their decisions and actions; while others who have been willing to suffer privation, trials, and even death instead of going against that authority that is within. For almost 300 years, off and on, Christians were faced with a life or death situation—whether to live up to their convictions or give in and go along with their persecutors. In order to be at peace with their conscience they had to make some very hard and drastic decisions. But in a similar sense, this is still true today—maybe not to the extent of facing death, but whether to compromise our conscience or conform to the world. Our challenge is to make decisions like:

1. One that goes against what we would like to do;
2. One that is opposed to the advice of friends or family;
3. One that may contradict the laws of the people in power;
4. Or, to go against the voices of the multitude.

Hopefully, our conscience will not relent, nor modify its demands. When it speaks to us, we need to listen and take heed. We may give in at times to passion or allurements; but, we can know that we ought to obey—it is our duty!

What is a "Cleansed" Conscience?

In this last lesson in this series, we want to look at the expression "a cleansed conscience." The very expression infers that we have treated our conscience in a bad way and things need to be corrected. However, there seems to be a difference between the person who strives to live the best he can and one that does not seem to care about living right. Let's look at the Patriarch Job. He was said to be a perfect and upright man in all his ways! He feared God and turned away from evil. (Job 2:3). I would doubt that Job could be considered a sinless man, but he was a blameless man. Common sense would suggest this; but so does Job 1:5 where it states that he continually offered sacrifices to God. Sacrifices were for the cleansing of sin from a person's soul.

Job 27:6

While Job was called righteous and blameless, he was not sinless. His heart (conscience) did not reproach him because he dealt with any wrongful act in his life. We could also say that he had that continual cleansing of his soul so that his conscience did not reproach him. We can say the same thing because we have the promise of the continual cleansing by the blood of Jesus as long as we walk in the light (1 Jn. 1:7-9). This does not mean that we are sinless, but we are

blameless, like Job! And if we are blameless, then we have a clear conscience or a cleansed conscience.

Heb. 9:14

The consciousness of wrong doing has been forgiven. Our soul has been cleansed from the wrong doing by the blood of Christ. Therefore, we no longer have to feel guilty, but thankful!

A Cleansed Conscience is One that has been Forgiven!

In Acts chapter two, we have a wonderful example of this concept that illustrates a cleansed conscience. The Apostle Peter preached Jesus to the devout Jews that were gathered at the Temple on this important Day. Peter, by inspiration, describes their spiritual condition in the following way (Acts 2:22-38):

1. They had witnessed the teachings and miracles of Jesus, but rejected Him as the Messiah.
2. They were accused of crucifying Jesus (putting him to death).
3. Peter gave overwhelming evidence of Jesus' Messiahship that was very convincing to at least 3,000 on that day.
4. They were cut to the heart and wanted to know what to do (so they could be relieved of this terrible feeling of guilt).
5. They were told to repent and be baptized for the remission of their sins.

Upon their obedience to the Gospel, their consciences were cleansed by the blood of Jesus and they could live with their conscience.

Without remorse (sorrow for sin) and a decision to turn from disobedience to obedience, mankind cannot have a cleansed conscience. Without a cleansed conscience, we cannot have a good conscience or a pure conscience.(Heb. 9:14) The Apostle Peter points out that our proper baptism is our means of receiving or having a good conscience (1 Pet. 3:21). God said that we are to be baptized and we submit to it—thereby having a "clear" conscience on this matter.

How does our Conscience Guide Us?

We have looked at the concepts of Conscience, the value of Conscience, the prompting of Conscience; as well as, the need to have a pure Conscience, a good Conscience, or a cleansed Conscience. But we haven't looked into the question of "HOW" does our Conscience guide us? When we face a choice between two opposing things, how do we know which one that we should choose? If you say that it is our conscience that tells us; then, "HOW" does he tell us? Also, how do

we know which of the two is right and wrong? Why do some people feel that one thing is right while another feels that it is not necessarily right? Why the difference or why the conflict? Are we told how the conscience guides us or why there are some differences in the conscience's guidance? Or, is the conscience something that we just automatically know and accept without question?

I know of no place in the Scriptures that tell us the answers to some of the above questions. It seems that conscience is just something that everyone knows about and experiences the feeling of guilt or the feeling of relief when we are obedient to our conscience or disobedient. The one expression that probably comes the closest to an explanation is in Rom. 2:14-15—***"for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them).***

Concluding Thoughts

What kind of conscience do we have? Can we live with our conscience? Or, does our conscience convict us, bother us, or condemn us? Could we say with the Apostle Paul, ***"I have live in all good conscience unto this day."*** We can all have a good conscience that has been cleansed, if we turn to Jesus for the cleansing.

Questions for Discussion

True or False

- _____ 1. For almost 300 years from the beginning of the church, Christians have had to make a choice about being obedient to their conscience.
- _____ 2. A "cleansed" conscience indicates that we have gone against our conscience.
- _____ 3. There is an indication that Job never went against his conscience because he was said to be blameless.
- _____ 4. The Christian who walks in the light is free of sin.

- _____ 5. There is no difference between a "clear" conscience and a "cleansed" conscience.
- _____ 6. Remorse is a pre-requisite of a "cleansed" conscience.

- _____ 7. The person who has been correctly baptized has both a "clear" conscience and a "cleansed" conscience.
- _____ 8. We know that we have a conscience and it is to serve as a guide for us, but we don't really understand how the conscience does what it does.
- _____ 9. Conscience is something we automatically accept without question.

- _____ 10. Rom. 2:14-15 states that man's conscience is "written on his heart."

