

Christian Perspectives: Conscience

By Norm Copeland

Bethel Bible Chapel

The conscience. We all have one. Though we all have one, it is like a fingerprint, unique to each of us. But what is it really? I recently read a great book all about the conscience - a subject I hadn't given much thought to.

I'd like to share some of what I learned in reading it.

If you look up the word conscience in Google images you'll see many pictures of the shoulder angel and devil. You know, those little characters from the cartoons that sit on your shoulders, one tempting you to do all manner of evil and the other appealing to some part of you that wants to do good.

Have you ever wondered what God says the conscience is and what it is for? So how do we define it? Well, your conscience is your awareness of what is right and wrong. Your conscience is a gift, a tool that God has given us to help us navigate through life.

Like the sense of touch, it helps us know when something is amiss like a hand recoiling from a hot pan out of the oven.

The Bible tells us that upon becoming a child of God by trusting in Christ's sacrifice on the cross for our sins, our consciences were cleansed.

Hebrews 9:14 says, "Just think how much more the blood of Christ will purify our consciences from sinful deeds so that we can worship the living God. For by the power of the eternal Spirit, Christ offered himself to God as a perfect sacrifice for our sins."

Many new Christians though are surprised to find that their consciences are not silent, in fact, it may be telling them more than ever. This is because our awareness of God's Holiness and sin in our life grows through the Holy Spirit that lives in us.

This shouldn't depress us; on the contrary, it should encourage us as we understand all the more God's Grace. An ever increasing trust of Christ's work on the cross can keep us from despair and move us in the direction of sanctification.

While we live here on earth, our consciences are not perfect.

As mentioned, they are unique to each of us. My conscience and your conscience may overlap in many areas, but they do not match exactly. Our goal needs to be working towards aligning our consciences with God's Word. If it does not, we risk passing judgement on others based on mere opinion.

It's important to understand that the conscience is not the same as the Holy Spirit.

It can be hard at times to discern the difference. If your conscience does not line up with scripture, then it is not the Holy Spirit, but, if it does, the Holy Spirit is working through your conscience to lead and to guide you.

As we work, live and worship with other believers, our conscience plays a huge role in how we relate to each other. Some of us have strong consciences that understand the liberties we have in Christ, while others have weak consciences that are easily triggered by things that are not expressly forbidden in God's Word.

These two groups of Christians can easily become judgmental of each other; the strong Christian looking down on those with strict

and silly rules while those with weak consciences judging those who do things they believe to be wrong.

Romans 15:1-7 gives us the solution - Love. The first few verses say, "We who are strong must be considerate of those who are sensitive about things like this. We must not just please ourselves. We should help others do what is right and build them up in the Lord."

There are many matters in life that are disputable, that is, they are grey issues not clearly defined in scripture. The goal is to be flexible in those issues in order to build up and edify each other, as well as advance the Gospel.

We need to welcome those with stronger consciences and not look down on those that are weak.

Romans 14:3,4 says, "Those who feel free to eat anything must not look down on those who don't. And those who don't eat certain foods must not condemn those who do, for God has accepted them. Who are you to condemn someone else's servants? Their own master will judge whether they stand or fall. And with the Lord's help, they will stand and receive his approval."

It's clear that God allows believers to hold different opinions on certain matters. Should we really force everyone to hold our opinion? We do however need to be united on issues clearly laid out in Scripture. Our ultimate goal is to become more like Jesus who was willing to give up his rights and unbelievable home in heaven to come down to earth for our sake.

"Therefore, accept each other just as Christ has accepted you so that God will be given glory." Romans 15:7

Learn more about the conscience by reading *Conscience: What It Is, How to Train It, and Loving Those Who Differ* by Andrew Naselli and J.D. Crowley.