

#209 “The Testimony of Our Conscience”
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The conscience is certainly not given the credence that it once was. Even the secular world used to appreciate the value of a clean and clear conscience as evidenced by the storybook character *Pinocchio* who was advised to always let his conscience be his guide. There was a clear dichotomy between right and wrong, and the dangers of going the wrong way were emphasized. Yet, today, as consciences become increasingly defiled, right and wrong become increasingly muddled, and people’s sensitivity to sin becomes dulled. This is evidenced by all kinds of things, one of which is the propensity for younger generations to become increasingly supportive of homosexual relationships and their right to “marry.” Titus 1:15 says, “To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled.” Even what is good and created of God becomes twisted into perversities and evil. Innocence is lost, and guilt is hardly even felt. Those who follow false teaching are described as having “the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron” (1 Timothy 4:1-2). The conscience can be totally twisted and perverted by sin and the evil one such that a person comes to enjoy evil and hate good.

Romans 2:15 mentions that even those who do not know God still have a conscience, “their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them.” The fact that God gave mankind a conscience, His Word, His Son, and abundant evidence of His creative genius makes mankind culpable and responsible for how they behave and for the choices that they make. Thus, being desensitized to an awareness of right and wrong should be of great concern, and this can even happen to believers. Once we compromise and go against our conscience, we will find it easier to compromise in that area a second time, then a third, and so on. We would do best to listen to the Spirit the first time, and, if something doesn’t feel quite right, we need to be cautious and see what God’s Word has to say regarding the matter, the person, the relationship, the decision, etc. Our conscience is a valuable tool for making wise decisions and navigating the challenges of this life.

The conscience of the unbeliever should lead him or her to conviction about sin and righteousness according to the gospel of Jesus Christ, but most ignore the call of the Holy Spirit on their hearts. The conscience of the believer is regularly pricked by the Holy Spirit to remind us of what is right and wrong according to God’s Word (Romans 9:1). Keeping it clean before God is essential to living the abundant life and to having an effective ministry. As Paul said in Acts 24:16, “In view of this, I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men.” Indeed, the goal of his ministry was that those whom he taught would also have a clear conscience before God. 1 Timothy 1:5 says, “But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.” Key to walking steadfastly in righteousness is keeping a clear conscience before God. This means that when we sin that we need to confess it and repent and move forward. Those who hide sin in their

hearts tend to cover it up and go deeper into sin and delusion, desensitizing their conscience and becoming nearly immune to the truth of Scripture.

Being cleansed from an evil and dirty conscience is the joy of being born again into Christ. Hebrews 10:22 says, "Let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water." Only those who have clean hearts before God can experience fullness of joy in this life and in the life to come. Central to saving faith is this matter of cleansing the conscience. 1 Peter 3:21 says, "Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you-- not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience-- through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." Peter's message is that baptism of water doesn't save, but what does is an appeal to God for a clean conscience through the work of Christ on the cross and through overcoming sin and death. The sinner must be convicted of his error and lawlessness and brought to the redemptive love of Christ Who paid the price for his sin. This is the message we hold dear and which we are called to preach.

1 Timothy 1:18-19 gives a dire warning to believers, saying, "This command I entrust to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you fight the good fight, keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith." Ignoring the conviction of the Spirit and what we know to be right is a slippery slope that will lead us to making shipwreck of our faith. Nothing can remove us from God's eternal embrace, but we can sure create a mess out of this life and lose out on many eternal rewards in the life to come.

1 Corinthians 1:12 says, "For our proud confidence is this: the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you." May God work in each of our hearts such that we can rejoice with Paul and have as our proud confidence the fact that we have a clean conscience, having walked in love, holiness, and according to the wisdom and grace of God. What is the testimony of your conscience?