

The Conscience

The conscience is a feeling or voice inside a person that acts as a guide to appropriate behavior. It is shaped by several things, including our parents' influence, the things that happen in our life, and behaviors we observe among people around us. Over time, the conscience begins to learn what is appropriate behavior. Unfortunately, not everything the conscience learns is true. Since our conscience is trained by imperfect surroundings, we cannot rely on it alone to determine what is right and wrong.

If someone were to offer irrefutable proof that the way we had always lived our life needed to be changed, it would be very hard to retrain our conscience to allow for that. The early Christians' consciences were programmed to trust in the Jewish culture. The apostles had to work very hard, even among themselves, to retrain their consciences to accept the new teachings of Jesus. Because they had faith that Jesus was the Son of God, they became willing to reorient their consciences to make it easier to serve God without unnecessary guilt.

The conscience is a valuable tool, but it is not infallible. In fact, each conscience will most likely have some things that it does not judge correctly. For this reason, we will need to be keen to the Holy Spirit to teach us the mind of Christ more accurately.

The Holy Spirit makes no mistakes. He is faithful and authoritative. When He speaks, we can always trust Him to have our best interest and the interests of God at heart. However, his voice can sometimes be hard to hear over the clamor of our conscience. It is unfortunate, but the conscience can sometimes work against us and make life more difficult. It is the goal and challenge of the Christian to make both the Spirit and the conscience work together for the good of the soul.

No matter what our own conscience is like, it will need to be humbly given over to God so He can reorient it in the areas where our standards are not helpful or pure. Our unique experiences and training make us into the person we are. God understands our makeup and graciously makes room for each of us to be who we are as a person and still be a Christian.

Questions

1. An overly keen conscience can have a crippling effect on a person. How can a person learn to distinguish between the cry of a fearful conscience versus the hopeful voice of the Spirit of God?
2. What is the contrast between how the Spirit deals with mistakes versus the way a conscience addresses mistakes in our life?
3. If we feel the need to confess or repent excessively, it may be due to a conscience that was formed by fear or shame. How can we find a proper balance in this without feeling guilty or afraid?
4. Why is the conscience often louder than the voice of the Spirit?
5. A loving, nurturing environment will usually help us form a conscience that has similar attributes. Conversely, being raised in a self-righteous, ungodly, or harsh environment

can make a conscience that is sharp and relentless. How can the conscience be softened in an appropriate way?

6. Despite its imperfections, the conscience is very valuable. In what ways is it invaluable for the Christian?

7. Is sanctification how the Holy Spirit works with the Christian's conscience?

8. Are those who struggle with doubts and fears victims of an overactive conscience, or is it a different spirit?

9. A very weak conscience is destructive. What is meant by a seared conscience, and is there a remedy for this?

10. Shame is an often-destructive emotion that may or may not be warranted. Shame tends to incapacitate a person from moving forward in a redemptive way. Guilt is the appropriate response to having committed a sin or crime. Guilt is based on facts. Proper feelings of guilt have a redemptive, positive quality to them. How can we learn to know the difference between the two?

11. What is getting in our way if we do not enjoy the fruits of love, joy, and peace (Gal. 5:22-23) in daily Christian life?

12. Why do we sometimes feel ashamed if we accept a compliment or accolade without saying something self-deprecating in response?

Scriptures for Meditation

Romans 8:26 Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

Galatians 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,

23 Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

2 Timothy 1:7 For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.

Hebrews 10:22 Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.