

Church of God

Sunday School

WHAT IS MY CONSCIENCE?

DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** There are different kinds of conscience (1 Timothy 1:5; Hebrews 10:22; 1 Corinthians 8:12).
- ❑ **Tuesday:** The conscience works to convict (John 8:1-11).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** A conscience must be exercised, or educated (Acts 24:16; Hebrews 5:14; Hebrews 12:11).
- ❑ **Thursday:** What is the opposite of an educated conscience? (Judges 21:25; Jeremiah 17:9).
- ❑ **Friday:** A conscience that is ignored can become "seared" (1 Timothy 4:1-4).
- ❑ **Saturday:** It is important to live with a "good conscience" (Acts 23:1; Hebrews 13:18; 1 Timothy 1:18-19).

MEMORY VERSE: *"And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men."*
—Acts 24:16

Questions to Consider

Have you ever heard the saying, "Let your conscience be your guide"? These words have been used in popular songs and Hollywood movies, but are they in the Bible? Can your conscience be trusted? Some artists have depicted the conscience as an angel, whispering into one's ear to counter the advice being given by the devil who is whispering into the opposite ear. Is this an accurate picture?



What is your conscience? How does it work? Does everyone have a conscience? The Bible speaks of having a "good conscience" (1 Timothy 1:5) and a "pure conscience" (1 Timothy 3:9), but it also speaks of an "evil conscience" (Hebrews 10:22). Why might some people have a good conscience or even a tender conscience while others have an evil conscience or seemingly have no conscience? Sometimes when one has done wrong, you might hear the words, "He acted in good conscience." What does that mean? These are good questions, and we can find the answers in God's Word.

Biblical Examples

The first time the word *conscience* is found in the Bible is in John, Chapter 8. The scribes and Pharisees brought a woman "taken in adultery" to Jesus, trying to tempt (or test) Jesus to say something they could use against Him.



Jesus "with his finger wrote on the ground." Then He said, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." After Jesus wrote on the ground a second time, verse 9 tells us, "And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one . . ." Something in Jesus' words or perhaps what He wrote on the ground pricked their conscience (or made them feel guilty). Here we see conscience working to convict people of their own wrongdoing.

The second time we find the word *conscience* in the Bible is found in Acts 23:1. There Paul said, "I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day." Yet, before his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, Paul had "persecuted the church of God, and wasted it" (Galatians 1:13). In Acts 26:9 Paul said that he "was [once] persuaded that it was my duty to do many things contrary to and in defiance of the name of Jesus of Nazareth" (Amplified Bible). How could Paul say this was done in "good conscience"?

From this we see that the conscience can be wrong.

What determines if our conscience is working as God wants it to? Hebrews 5:14 and Hebrews 12:11 both tell us the secret to having a pure or good conscience. The conscience must be "exercised." In other words, it must be educated and trained. How does one train his or her conscience? We read that Paul exercised himself "to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men" (Acts 24:16). Acts 24:14 tells us how he did this: "believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets." For Paul to believe "all things" in the Old Testament, he had to KNOW what those things were. Paul had a "good conscience" because he had educated his conscience in the Word of God.

The Bible must be the standard used in determining whether something is right or wrong. In the days of the judges, we read that "every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25). The Israelites rejected God's standard and determined right or wrong based on their own feelings. However, we cannot trust our feelings or our heart to guide us, because Jeremiah 17:9 says that "The heart is deceitful above all things." This emphasizes the great need of letting the Bible be our standard for good and evil. Bible reading and Bible study are vital if you are going to have a good and pure conscience.

An Uninformed Conscience

One definition of *conscience* is "an internal compass that gives moral guidance when properly educated in Biblical truth." An untrained or uninformed conscience can cause people to say they have a "clear conscience." In other words, they do not feel bad for what they are doing. Their conscience is uneducated and insensitive. Will God hold people accountable for their actions if they do not feel those actions are wrong? Does not knowing that you were speeding while driving your car on the highway spare you from a speeding ticket? Just as getting your driver's license requires you to know the laws of the highway, God has a manual that He expects you to read as well. God will be patient with you, but you must put forth the effort to read His Word and know what it says.

Another result that is often seen from an uninformed conscience is an overly-sensitive conscience. For instance, some young people who have made the decision to be saved and live for God continually feel condemned over the smallest things. They often feel like they have done something wrong when they have not. The Bible describes this as a "weak conscience" (1 Corinthians 8:12). A tender-hearted person is usually more likely to experience this. One of the best ways to overcome a physical weakness is to exercise. So it is spiritually. The best way to strengthen your conscience is to educate it in God's Word.

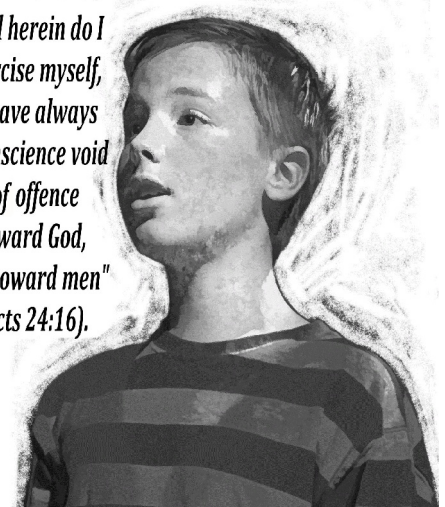
What Kind of Conscience Do You Have?

When writing to the young pastor Timothy, Paul warned about people who would "depart from the faith . . . having their conscience seared with a hot iron" (1 Timothy 4:1-2). It is believed that Paul was referring to the practice of branding criminals on the forehead. Another word for "seared" is *cauterized*, and the definition is "to make insensible, or unaware of something." How does someone sear their conscience? By refusing to obey what God has shown them to do, by ignoring their conscience. Each time it becomes easier and easier until a spiritual callus forms. Right and wrong will become a matter of opinion instead of what God says.

There is another type of conscience spoken of in the Bible. Paul wrote to the saints in the city of Corinth of having a "conscience [which] testifies that we have conducted ourselves . . . not in fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God" (2 Corinthians 1:12 Amplified Bible). When you continually exercise your conscience by hearing, reading, and obeying God's Word, it will testify to others of your walk with God.

What are you doing with your conscience? Are you exercising it as you should? Are you listening to it when it "pricks" you? Or do you ignore it and override it? Do you have a good conscience or has it become hardened?

"And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men" (Acts 24:16).





1. Using a concordance, find the Scriptures that describe:

a good conscience _____

a pure conscience _____

a weak conscience _____

a seared conscience _____

a defiled conscience _____

2. What does it mean when something "pricks your conscience"?

3. What is the secret to having a pure or good conscience? _____

4. What does Acts 24:14-16 tell us about why Paul had a good conscience? _____

5. What should be the standard when determining if something is right or wrong? _____

6. Why can we not trust our own feelings to guide us? _____

7. What is a definition of *conscience*? _____

8. How can someone who does wrong have a "clear conscience"? _____

9. What is the best way to strengthen a "weak conscience"? _____

10. What does the word *cauterized* mean? _____

11. How can one's conscience become "seared"? _____

WANTED

"Labor to keep alive in your breast that little spark of celestial fire called conscience" (George Washington).

Alphonse De Lamartine (a famous French writer and politician) once said,
"A conscience without God is like a court without a judge."

Martin Luther educated his conscience with God's Word. When he was accused of listening to his conscience instead of the Catholic Church, he replied: "My conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand. I can do no other, so help me God."

"The person that loses their conscience has nothing left worth keeping"
(Izaak Walton).

In Pilgrim's Progress, Mr. Honest arranged for Good-conscience to meet him at the Jordan to help him over to "the other side."

"If we neglect conscience, most evils are possible" (Edward Counsel).

"Disobedience to conscience makes conscience blind" (C. S. Lewis).

"It actually takes even more discipline, sacrifice, and wisdom to develop an educated conscience than it does to become a great sculptor, golfer, surgeon, Braille reader, or concert pianist" (Steven Covey).

A GOOD CONSCIENCE