


A PRELUDE TO *BIBLICAL* EVANGELISM



A large, ancient tree with thick, gnarled roots growing over stone ruins. The tree's trunk is massive and textured, with roots spreading out across the ground and over the stone structures. The background shows more stone ruins and lush green foliage. The scene is set in a natural, outdoor environment.

THE FRUIT OF
THE RIGHTEOUS IS A
TREE OF LIFE,
AND HE WHO IS WISE
WINS SOULS.

PROVERBS 11:30 NASB

PRINCIPLES FOR BIBLICAL *EVANGELISM* FOUND IN JOHN 4, “THE WOMAN AT THE WELL.”

TAKE

- TAKE THE INITIATIVE! JN. 4:6-9

OFFER

- OFFER GOD’S MERCY! JN. 4:10-14

IDENTIFY

- IDENTIFY SPIRITUAL NEEDS! JN. 4:9-10

CONFRONT

- CONFRONT SIN JN! 4:16-18

REJECT

- REJECT FALSE WORSHIP! JN. 4:19-24

REVEAL

- REVEAL CHRIST! JN. 4:25-26

A WORKING CONSCIENCE

- **A working conscience** is one that's free from the burden of **unchecked sin** and **unaddressed guilt**. It's not weighed down by impurity or dulled by neglect. In a word, **IT'S CLEAR**.
- But how can we keep our consciences clear? How do we properly respond to guilt feelings in a way that keeps our consciences soft, sharp, and strong? Here are some simple, practical principles to keep in mind.
- **CONFESS AND FORSAKE KNOWN SIN**. Examine your guilt feelings in light of Scripture. Deal with the sin God's Word reveals. **(Prov. 28:13)** says, **"He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion."**

STRENGTHEN YOUR CONSCIENCE

- **THE SMOKE DETECTORS** in your home or office are there to make you aware of a specific, imminent threat to your safety. But what good is a fire alarm that constantly misfires, sending you false warnings of nonexistent danger? A malfunctioning warning system can be as bad as having no alarms at all—worse if you get in the habit of ignoring it altogether.
- In the same way, a weak conscience can do more harm than good.
- A **WEAK CONSCIENCE** is not the same as a **SEARED CONSCIENCE**. A **SEARED CONSCIENCE BECOMES INACTIVE, SILENT, RARELY ACCUSING, AND INSENSITIVE TO SIN**. By comparison, the **WEAK CONSCIENCE IS HYPERSENSITIVE AND OVERACTIVE**.

SHARPEN YOUR CONSCIENCE

- Just like any other *emergency warning system*, your conscience needs to be properly programmed and calibrated in order to function correctly. An uninformed, untrained conscience will be unstable and unreliable, consistently misfiring and misleading, or even *altogether useless*.
- But just as dangerous as an *untrained conscience* is the conscience that's tied to the *wrong standard*.
- The conscience is informed by *tradition* as well as by *truth*, so the **STANDARDS** it holds us to are not necessarily **biblical** ones (**1 Cor. 8:6-9**). It can be needlessly condemning in areas where there is no biblical issue. In fact, it can try to hold us to the very thing the Lord is trying to release us from (**Rom. 14:14, 20-23**).

Notice (Rom. 14:20-23). *“Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and gives offense. 21, It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles. 22, The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. 23, But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin.”*

- The **CONSCIENCE**, to operate fully and in accord with *true holiness*, it must be informed by the Word of God. **SO EVEN WHEN GUILT FEELINGS DON'T HAVE A BIBLICAL BASIS, THEY ARE IMPORTANT SPIRITUAL DISTRESS SIGNALS.**
- The conscience reacts to *the convictions of the mind* and therefore **CAN BE ENCOURAGED AND SHARPENED IN ACCORDANCE WITH GOD'S WORD.**



A REGULAR DIET OF SCRIPTURE WILL STRENGTHEN A WEAK CONSCIENCE OR RESTRAIN AN OVERACTIVE ONE. Conversely, error, human wisdom, and wrong moral influences filling the mind will corrupt or cripple the conscience.

In other words, the conscience functions like a **SKYLIGHT**, not a **LAMP**. It lets light into the soul; it does not produce its own. **ITS EFFECTIVENESS IS DETERMINED BY THE AMOUNT OF PURE LIGHT WE EXPOSE IT TO AND BY HOW CLEAN WE KEEP IT.**

COVER IT OR PUT IT IN TOTAL DARKNESS AND IT CEASES TO FUNCTION. That's why the apostle Paul spoke of the importance of a **CLEAR CONSCIENCE (1 Tim. 3:9)** and warned against anything that would *defile* or *muddy* the conscience (**1 Cor. 8:7; Titus 1:15**).

Put simply, a *weak* or *overactive* conscience **needs to be taught**—it **needs to be educated** beyond spiritual dullness and made useful through the sanctifying work of God's Spirit. It **needs to be sharpened** against the rock of **SCRIPTURE.**

- That *sharpening* and *education* starts with fixing the focus of your conscience on the *right object—divinely revealed truth*. If the conscience looks only to your personal feelings, it can accuse you wrongfully. You are certainly not to order your life according to your feelings. **A conscience fixed on feelings—** which are inconsistent at best and deceptive at worst—**CANNOT BE TRUSTED.**
- It's especially dangerous for people subject to *depression* and *melancholy* to allow their consciences to be informed by *their feelings*. **Despondent** feelings will provoke unnecessary *doubts* and *fears* in the soul when not kept in check by a well-advised conscience. **THE CONSCIENCE MUST BE PERSUADED AND GUIDED BY GOD'S WORD, NOT SUBJECT TO THE INCONSISTENT WHIMS OF OUR FEELINGS.**
- Furthermore, conscience **errs** when the mind *focuses* wholly on our *faltering in sin* and *ignores* the **TRIUMPHS OF GOD'S GRACE IN US. TRUE CHRISTIANS EXPERIENCE BOTH REALITIES.**

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- **Conscience** must be allowed to weigh the *fruit of the Spirit* in our lives as well as the *remnants of our sinful flesh*. It must see our **FAITH** as well as our **FAILINGS**. Otherwise, the conscience will become overly accusing, prone to unwholesome doubts about our standing before God.
 - We must subject our conscience to the truth of God and the teaching of Scripture. As we do that, the conscience will be more clearly focused and better able to give us reliable feedback. A *dull conscience* is a hindrance—a spiritual millstone. **A SHARP, TRUSTWORTHY CONSCIENCE BECOMES A POWERFUL AID TO SPIRITUAL GROWTH AND STABILITY.**
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SOFTEN YOUR CONSCIENCE

- **YOUR CONSCIENCE** is like the nerve endings in your fingertips. Its sensitivity to external stimuli can be damaged by the buildup of callouses or even wounded so badly that it loses feeling altogether. **PAUL** wrote repeatedly about the grave dangers of a **CALLOUSED CONSCIENCE** (1 Cor. 8:10), a **WOUNDED CONSCIENCE** (1 Cor. 8:12), and a **SEARED CONSCIENCE** (1 Tim. 4:2).
- **Psychopaths, serial killers, pathological liars**, and other people who seem to lack any moral sense are extreme examples of people who have ruined or desensitized their consciences. But can such people really sin without remorse or scruples? If so, it's only because they have **RAVAGED** their own consciences through **IMMORALITY** and **LAWLESSNESS**. **THEY CERTAINLY WEREN'T BORN DEVOID OF ANY CONSCIENCE.**

- **THE CONSCIENCE** is an inextricable part of the human soul. Though it may be hardened, cauterized, or numbed into apparent dormancy, **the conscience continues to store up evidence that will one day be used as testimony to condemn the guilty soul.**
- **RICHARD SIBBES** pictured the conscience as a court in the council of the human heart. In Sibbes's imagery, the conscience itself assumes every role in the courtroom drama. It's **a register** to record what we have done in exact detail (**Jer. 17:1**). It's **the accuser** that lodges a complaint against us when we are guilty, and **a defender** to side with us in our innocence (**Rom. 2:15**). It acts as **a witness**, giving testimony for or against us (**2 Cor. 1:12**). It's **the judge**, condemning or vindicating us (**1 Jn. 3:20-21**). And it is **the executioner**, smiting us with grief when our guilt is discovered (**1 Sam. 24:5**). Sibbes compared the **chastisement** of a violated conscience to **"A FLASH OF HELL."**

- **THE CONSCIENCE** is privy to all our secret thoughts and motives. It is therefore a more accurate and more formidable **witness** in the soul's courtroom than any external observer. Those who gloss over an accusing conscience in favor of a human counselor's reassurances are playing a deadly game. Ill thoughts and motives may escape the eye of a human counselor, **but they cannot escape the eye of conscience. Nor will they escape the eye of an ALL-KNOWING GOD.** WHEN SUCH PEOPLE ARE SUMMONED TO FINAL JUDGMENT, **THEIR OWN CONSCIENCE** WILL BE FULLY AWARE OF **EVERY VIOLATION AND WILL STEP FORWARD AS A WITNESS AGAINST THEM.**
- **Rampant, unchecked sin** can temporarily numb and quiet the witness of your guilt. **BUT ONLY TRUE, BIBLICAL JUSTIFICATION CAN PERMANENTLY QUIET THE CONDEMNATION OF YOUR CONSCIENCE.**

- **CHRIST'S ATONEMENT** fully satisfied the demands of God's righteousness, so **forgiveness** and **mercy** are guaranteed to those who receive Christ in humble, **repentant faith**. We accept the responsibility for our sin and believe that in the death of Christ our sin is forgiven.
- But we continue to **confess our sin** so that the Lord can cleanse our conscience and give us joy. That is how ***"the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse[s] your conscience from dead works to serve the living God"*** (Heb. 9:14). In other words, **OUR FAITH COMMUNICATES TO OUR CONSCIENCE THAT WE ARE PARDONED THROUGH THE PRECIOUS BLOOD OF CHRIST.**

- A **SOUND CONSCIENCE** therefore goes hand in hand with **ASSURANCE OF SALVATION** (Heb. 10:22). The steadfast believer must maintain the proper focus of faith in order to have a conscience that is perpetually being cleansed from guilt: *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1:9).
- **WHAT A GIFT IT IS TO BE CLEANSED FROM A DEFILED CONSCIENCE! IN THE SAME WAY THAT A GRIEVED CONSCIENCE IS A FLASH OF HELL, SO A PURE CONSCIENCE IS A FORETASTE OF GLORY.**
- It’s the Christian’s high and holy duty to guard the purity of his regenerated conscience. **DON’T** let unchecked sin silence, stifle, or desensitize your conscience. **KEEP IT SOFT AND EFFECTIVE THROUGH FAITHFUL CONFESSION AND CAREFUL SELF-EXAMINATION.**