


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

CLEARING YOUR CONSCIENCE

- It can be easy to forget how destructive **SIN** is—not just in terms of eternity, but in our everyday lives. We’ve seen plenty of examples of how unaddressed sin routinely **destroys families, friendships, and careers**. But it also has devastating internal results, like robbing you of your joy and assurance, stifling your spiritual growth, and distancing you from the fellowship of God’s people. **IT ALSO POLLUTES AND RUINS YOUR CONSCIENCE.**
- It is possible to virtually nullify the conscience through repeated abuse. **PAUL** spoke of people whose consciences were so convoluted and corrupted that their **“glory is in their shame”** (Phil. 3:19; cf. Rom. 1:32). Both the **MIND** and the **CONSCIENCE** can become so defiled that they cease making distinctions between what is **PURE** and what is **IMPURE** (Titus 1:15).

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."**

- **FIRST JOHN 1** speaks of **confession of sin** as an ongoing characteristic of the Christian life: ***“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).
- We should certainly confess to those we have wronged: ***“Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed”*** (Jam. 5:16). But above all, we should confess to the One whom sin offends most. As **DAVID** wrote, ***“I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I did not hide; I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord’; and You forgave the guilt of my sin”*** (Psa. 32:5).
- **ASK FORGIVENESS** and be reconciled to anyone you have wronged. Jesus instructed us, ***“Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering”*** (Matt. 5:23-24).

- *“If you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions”* (Matt. 6:14-15).

- **MAKE RESTITUTION.** God told Moses: *“Speak to the sons of Israel, ‘When a man or woman commits any of the sins of mankind, acting unfaithfully against the Lord, and that person is guilty, then he shall confess his sins which he has committed, and he shall make restitution in full for his wrong, and add to it one-fifth of it, and give it to him whom he has wronged’”* (Num. 5:6-7).

The principle behind this law is binding on believers living in the New Testament era as well (cf. Philemon 19; Luke 19:8).

- **EDUCATE YOUR CONSCIENCE.** As we’ve discussed previously, a weak, easily grieved conscience results from a lack of *spiritual knowledge* (1 Cor. 8:7).

- If your conscience is too easily wounded, again don't violate it; to do so is sin **(1 Cor. 8:12)**. Instead, immerse it in God's Word so it can begin to function with reliable data.
- ***DON'T TOLERATE A GRIEVED CONSCIENCE.*** Paul said he did his best ***“to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men”*** **(Acts 24:16)**. Some people put off dealing with their guilt, thinking their conscience will clear itself in time. It won't. Procrastination allows the guilt feelings to fester. That in turn generates ***depression, anxiety***, and other emotional problems.
- Guilt feelings may persist long after the offense is forgotten, often spilling over to other areas of our lives. That's one reason people often feel guilty and are not sure why. ***SUCH CONFUSED GUILT MAY BE A SYMPTOM THAT SOMETHING IS TERRIBLY WRONG SPIRITUALLY.***

- Paul may have had that in mind when he wrote, *“To those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled”* (Titus 1:15).
- DEAL WITH A **WOUNDED CONSCIENCE** IMMEDIATELY BY **HEART-SEARCHING PRAYER** BEFORE GOD IS THE ONLY WAY TO KEEP IT **CLEAR AND SENSITIVE**. PUTTING OFF DEALING WITH GUILT INEVITABLY **COMPOUNDS THE PROBLEMS**.
- Lingering, unaddressed sin is cancer to the believer. It cripples your spiritual growth and stifles your usefulness. Once your conscience has identified sin in your life, you need to move quickly to deal with it biblically and thoroughly. That’s where we’ll pick it up next time.

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**.


- Ironically, a **weak conscience** is more likely to accuse than a **strong conscience**. Scripture calls this a weak conscience because it is **too easily wounded**. People with weak consciences tend to **fret** about things that should **not** provoke guilt in a mature Christian.
- A **weak conscience** results from an **IMMATURE** or **FRAGILE FAITH NOT YET WEANED FROM WORLDLY INFLUENCES AND NOT YET SATURATED IN THE WORD OF GOD**.
- **WEAK BELIEVERS** are to be accepted with love and not judged because their consciences are too tender. Paul instructed the Romans, **“Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions. One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only”** (Rom. 14:1-2).

- **PAUL** makes it clear that the **weak believer** is likely to be overscrupulous, legalistic, troubled by his conscience in an **unhealthy** way. In fact, **A WEAK CONSCIENCE IS OFTEN THE COMPANION OF LEGALISM**.
- **PAUL** repeatedly admonished the early church that those with **strong consciences** were not to be judgmental (**Rom. 14:3**), and above all they must **not encourage** those who are **weak** to violate their consciences.
- **WEAK BELIEVERS** must **not** learn to **overrule** their consciences. If that becomes a habit—if they condition themselves to reject all the promptings of conscience—**THEY WILL THUS FORFEIT ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT MEANS OF SANCTIFICATION**.
- In fact, **PAUL** instructed those who were **strong** to defer whenever possible to the qualms of the **weaker** brother's conscience.

- To encourage an ***immature believer*** to wound his own conscience is to lead him into sin: ***“He who doubts [on account of a weak conscience] is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin”*** (Rom. 14:23).
- **PAUL** devoted several chapters of **1 Corinthians** to dealing with issues of **Christian liberty**—in particular, the problem of eating meat that had been offered to idols. Christians in the early church were saved out of various forms of idolatry, and their consciences were sensitive—even hypersensitive—to any behavior that reminded them of their former sinful practices.
- While the **mature believers** in the **Corinthian church** knew there was no spiritual harm in eating meat offered to idols, **PAUL** urged them to abstain for the sake of their **weaker, less mature** brothers and sisters.

- His point was simple: If your faith is strong and your conscience healthy, you may enjoy your own freedom in Christ without making any effort to arouse more intense scrutiny from your own conscience: ***“Eat anything that is sold in the meat market, without asking questions for conscience’ sake”*** (1 Cor. 10:25). But if you have reason to think that someone watching you might be wounded in conscience by your exercise of freedom, **ABSTAIN. GUARD THE OTHER PERSON’S TENDER CONSCIENCE.**
- The church today ought to pay more attention to Paul’s exhortation. Rather than exercising—and parading—all our freedoms, we should be **MINDFUL** of how the example of our life impacts others. Whether in word or deed, we can’t afford to put **stumbling blocks** or **occasions to fall** in someone else's way (Rom. 14:13). **AFTER ALL, A WEAK AND CONSTANTLY ACCUSING CONSCIENCE IS A SPIRITUAL LIABILITY, NOT A STRENGTH.**

- Many people with especially *tender consciences* tend to display their overscrupulousness as if it were proof of *deep spirituality*. It is precisely the opposite. Those with *weak consciences* tend to be too easily offended and stumble frequently (cf. 1 Cor. 8:13).
- They are often *overly critical* of others (Rom. 14:3-4). They are too susceptible to the *lure of legalism* (Rom. 14:20; cf. Gal. 3:2-5). **THEIR THOUGHTS AND HEARTS ARE SOON DEFILED (TITUS 1:15).**
- Throughout *PAUL'S* discussion of those with *weak consciences* (Rom. 14; 1 Cor. 8-10), he treats the condition as a state of *spiritual immaturity*—**A LACK OF KNOWLEDGE (1 COR. 8:7) AND A LACK OF FAITH (ROM. 14:1, 23).**
- *PAUL* clearly expected that those with *weak consciences* would grow out of that immature state, like children inevitably outgrow their fear of the dark.



- Those who choose instead to live in such a state—particularly those who point to a too-*tender conscience* as something to boast about—have a **WARPED SENSE OF WHAT IT MEANS TO BE MATURE IN THE FAITH.**

- **TRUE SPIRITUAL GROWTH ENLIGHTENS THE MIND AND STRENGTHENS THE HEART IN FAITH. IT IS ULTIMATELY THE ONLY WAY TO OVERCOME A WEAK CONSCIENCE.**

