

Sermon 39: The Christian and His Conscience: 1 Corinthians 8:1-13

Text: 1 Corinthians 8:1-13 "Now as touching things offered unto idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth. And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know. But if any man love God, the same is known of him. As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one. For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,) But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him. Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge: for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled. But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse. But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak. For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols; And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ. Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend..."

Introduction:

- **The primary issues we have addressed:**
 - Unity in the church
 - A healthy view of the ministry
 - Addressing unrepentant sin in the church
 - Contentment in our marital or single status.
- **This week: The Christian and his conscience.**
 - **8:1** "We all have knowledge. Knowledge puffeth up..."
 - **8:7** "There is not in every man that knowledge..."
 - **8:7** "Their conscience being weak is defiled..."
 - **8:8** "Meat commendeth us not to God..."
 - **8:9** "Take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak..."
 - **8:13** "I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend..."
- **Some questions to address:**
 - What is the conscience?
 - How does the conscience work?

- Is my conscience infallible?
- How can I have a healthy conscience?

Question 1: What is the conscience?

- **Romans 1:19-21** "That which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened..."
 - **"Manifest in them..."**
 - **"God hath showed it unto them..."**
 - **"Clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse..."**
- **Roman 1:18-29**
 - **They "hold the truth in unrighteousness..."**
 - **They "became vain in their imaginations..."**
 - **Their "foolish heart was darkened..."**
 - **They "changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man..."**
 - **They "changed the truth of God into a lie..."**
 - **They "did not like to retain God in their knowledge..."**
 - **"God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; Being filled with all unrighteousness..."**
- **Romans 2:14-15** "When the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another..."
 - **"These, having not the law, are a law unto themselves..."**
 - **"Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts..."**
 - **"Their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another..."**
- **Definition:** The conscience is our internal moral sense that is a part of who we are because we are created in God's image. It accuses us and disrupts our internal peace when we have acted against what we believe to be morally right.
- **Expansion:** As corrupted as our heart is by the fall, we still have a moral sense, and this moral sense is something that we cannot escape

without severely damaging this sense by repeated suppression of the truth:

Question 2: How does the conscience work? Romans 8:1-9 "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you..."

- **The inner man is made up of three interconnected principles:**

- **Our thinking:** What we believe.
- **Our emotions:** How we feel.
- **Our will:** What we want.
 - **In our natural state:** Our thinking and affections are led by our fallen nature:
 - **8:5** "They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit."
 - **8:7** "The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God..."
 - **As a new creature in Christ:** Our thinking can be renewed and our affections can flow from one of two sources:
 - **8:1** "Them which are in Christ Jesus...walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit..."
 - **8:2** "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death..."
 - **8:3-4** "God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: ⁴ That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit..."
 - **8:6-7** "To be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace..."

- **8:9** "Ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you..."

- **Summary:**

- We all have a moral sense.
- When the choices we make are consistent with this moral sense, we experience internal peace.
- When our desires conflict with this moral sense, we experience internal conflict.
- When we walk in contradiction to this moral sense, we experience internal conflict both mentally and emotionally.
- The Holy Spirit works on the conscience by pressing the truths of scripture into our minds and awakening us to the significance and weight of these truths.
- Our affections will flow from one of two sources: the old nature or the new man being energized by the indwelling Spirit.

Question 3: Is my conscience infallible? Romans 2:11-16 "When the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another..."

- **Some Clarifications:**

- Our conscience is an ever-present testimony to the nature of what we are as image bearers, but it is also not an infallible guide.
- It also reminds us we must contend with that reality.
- We all have a moral sense, and this moral sense is something that we cannot escape.
- Just like our bodies are affected by the fall, so are our minds, emotions, and will.
- This means that we need to consider the health of our conscience.

- **There are different types of consciences mentioned in scripture:**

- **The unbeliever conscience:**

- **Acts 28:27** "The heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.
- **1 Timothy 4:2** "Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron..."

- **Titus 1:15** "Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled..."
- **The immature Christian's conscience: Romans 14:1-4** "Him that is weak in the faith receive...one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs..."
- **The complacent Christian's conscience: Hebrews 5:11** "Ye are dull of hearing..."
- **The conscientious Christian's conscience: Hebrews 13:18** "Pray for us: for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly..."
- **The realistic conscience: 1 Corinthians 4:1-5** "I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord..."
- **Summary:**
 - Realize that only genuine Christians have a healthy conscience.
 - Realize your conscience is not infallible, so allow it to be directed by the scriptures.
 - Be careful not to abuse it by your choices.
 - Realize you need a renewed mind.

Question 4: How can I have a healthy conscience? Romans 12:2 "Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind..."

- **We need repentance which is the root of a renewed mind:**
 - **2 Timothy 2:24-26** "The servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will..."
 - **John 8:32** "The truth shall make you free..."
 - The Spirit takes the word and confronts our wrong thinking.
 - His convinces us by opening our understanding to the significance of the truth.
 - He stirs us awakening the desire to be changed.
 - The ultimate end of this work is transformation and the opposite of conformity to the world.
- **We need to be careful not to violate our conscience, even if it is still weak: Romans 14:21-23** "It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak. Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he

alloweth. And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin..."

- **We need to process our sin in the light of our position in Christ and the gospel: 1 John 1:6-10** "If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us..."
 - **Sinless perfection is not attainable on this side of glory:** "If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us..."
 - **Sinless perfection is not a prerequisite for communion with God:** (positional righteousness is)
 - "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us..."
 - "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin..."
 - **Presumptuous sin breaks communion with God:** "If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth..."
 - **Part of having a renewed mind is allowing this scripture to speak for itself into our situations.**

Conclusion:

- We desperately need a conscience that is healthy.
- It needs to be Biblically shaped and related to in wisdom.
- We need to recognize that sin is not only destructive to the people around us, but it is also destructive to us.
- Its natural consequences can be deeply destructive.
- The toll it can take on our minds, emotions, and ultimately our affections can be devastating.
- Let's be people who understand the blessings of being made in the image of God with a sense of what is morally right and wrong.
- Let's be people who understand how our conscience works and live wisely considering these truths.