

Anthropology and Hamartiology 10 The Conscience and the Handling of Sin

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Introduction

The Holy Spirit has a ministry towards believers in this dispensation. Christ gave the disciples an idea of what was going to change after Pentecost regarding this ministry. Christ told the disciples that the Father would send another Comforter. This Comforter would abide with them “into the age”. He dwelt with them at that time, but would dwell in them after Pentecost.¹ Christ also told them that the Holy Spirit would teach them all things and bring all things into remembrance for them.² He also told them about the Holy Spirit’s ministry to the unbelieving world. The Holy Spirit convicts or convinces the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgement.³ The scriptures never tell us that the Holy Spirit convicts the believer of his sin. The feeling that the believer gets when he sins is often from the conscience. The scriptures tell us a lot about the conscience. It is a device that God placed inside mankind to act as a signpost warning him of something that is not quite right.

The Definition of Conscience

The conscience is a connection between the knowledge of an individual and the actions. When the two are in conflict, the conscience is troubled. When they are in concert, the conscience is calm. After the fall, God demonstrated to mankind that conscience is not an adequate guide to keep man from sin. The time from Cain to Noah was the Dispensation of Conscience. God set up sacrifice as the way to approach God for his blessings. It was not a means for salvation. God gave man a conscience to guide him. It is the balance of one’s knowledge with his or another’s conduct. The conscience is like a set of scales. As long as the behavior is in line with the knowledge of the individual, the scales are balanced, if there is a conflict, it can be the result of a disconnect between these things or a bad conscience. This dispensation ended with disaster as man’s conscience was inadequate to keep man from corruption and rebellion.

Types of Conscience

There are several things that can create a bad conscience. Our conscience is shaped by our community since the day we are born. Parents, friends, media, etc all shape the knowledge of behavior that is acceptable. A study of Sociology or a glance through National Geographic will tell us that this varies greatly in differing cultures. The absence of Illumination of the Spirit or teaching from the Word of God can warp a conscience. Contradicting information from differing sources can warp a conscience, causing it to become a bad conscience. We see these issues played out with how things once frowned upon by society are now deemed acceptable or even desirable. It is possible to have a good, pure, or bad conscience (Acts 23:1, 24:15, Rom 2:15, Titus 1:5). A good or pure conscience is one that is aligned with God’s desirous will.

¹ John 14:16-17

² John 14:26

³ John 16: 8-11

Conscience can accuse or excuse behavior. Rom 2:15. The law written in man's hearts is not inborn moral principle, this would contradict what Scriptures teach us about man's fallen state. If someone is bound by the need to provide for his family, his conscience may lead him to steal to meet that need. Sometimes another's behavior is unbalanced compared to your knowledge, this causes your conscience to accuse that behavior. It is possible to have a strong, weak, or seared conscience (1 Cor 8:7,10,12; 1 Tim 4:2). A strong conscience would be one that is keeping someone from doing something that would be dangerous for them or could stumble another believer. A weak conscience might accuse a believer of behavior that is not forbidden by God. This weak conscience does not hold sway over the person, who is basing their behavior perhaps on the strong personality of another individual who is stumbling them. A seared conscience would be sending signals that are not being received because the connection is severed. The behavior is no longer connected with a knowledge of right and wrong. The good conscience is having the knowledge in accordance with the utterances of God, the conscience is purged (Heb 9:14).

Conscience or Holy Spirit?

When the conscience is troubled it sends signals to the individual. Many will confuse this with Holy Spirit conviction. Scripture tells us that the Spirit convinces the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgement (John 16:8-11). The Spirit will teach the believer (John 14:26). The Spirit will also illuminate the believer, causing the believer to understand truth that would normally be unable to be understood.⁴ The believer should not be bound by conscience but walk by the Spirit. The believer should be filled by the Spirit (Eph 5:18). The believer should walk by the Spirit (Rom 8:4, Gal. 5:15, 25). The believer should not quench the Spirit (1 Thess 5:19). The believer should be led by the Spirit and keep in step with the spirit (Rom 8:12-14).

Conscience did not make a good guide, it still does not. We should be concerned with having a good conscience, but it should not be our guide for it cannot be trusted. Rom 9:1, 2 Cor 1:12, 1 Tim 1:19-20 lead us to believe that we should not allow a socially- oriented conscience to guide us. Even with some revelation to guide it.

The Handling of Sin

God has taken care of sin with the crosswork of Christ. The Penalty for sin has been paid for with His redemptive work.⁵ Sin has consequences in this life, however. The wages of sin is death according to Rom 6:23. The believer should avoid sin and live out the eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Paul deals with this topic in detail in Romans chapter 6. The believer should not continue in the sin [nature] in order for God's grace to abound. Sin separates man from God. God has always been the one to determine what was sin and what was not.

⁴ 1 Cor 2:10-15

⁵ Rom 3:25, ! Cor 15:3

Before the law was given, sin was not charged to men's accounts there being no law, Rom. 5:13b. (Men acted lawlessly, i.e. sinned, and though God saw it as sin, He didn't impute or charge it to their account. What they did was unrighteous but not charged to their account as sin, cf. Gal. 3:19. The Gentiles were allowed to walk in their own ways and God winked (squinted so that it could not be seen) at their sin.⁶ Because of these transgressions God added the law.⁷

The Work of Christ Christ is very well described through scripture. Christ died for our sins, I Cor. 15:3. Made to be sin for us, II Cor. 5:21. Gave Himself for our sins, Gal. 1:4. Purged our sins, Heb. 1:3. 5. The propitiation for our sins, Heb. 2:17. 23 Put away sin, Heb. 9:26. Bore the sins of many, Heb. 9:28. Bore our sins, I Pet. 2:24. Suffered for sins, I Pet. 3:18. The Propitiation (place of satisfaction) for our sins and the world's, I Jn. 2:2; 4:10. Washed us from our sins, Rev. 1:5. This work was complete and binding. It was done for all but only applied to those who believe. 1 Ti 4:10.

Under law

Under the law, each man bore the responsibility for his own sin and the sin of his household.⁸ Each sin needed a sacrifice (sin offering) so that it could be atoned for (covered). These sins were forgiven or cast behind God's back.⁹ Israel repeated the process thousands of times or more through the centuries so that they could see the death that was caused by their sinful actions. The "blood of bulls and goats" was insufficient to take away their sin.¹⁰ It was the sacrifice of the sinless lamb that removed these sins forever.¹¹

Under Grace

The believer is not under any form of law, Christ was the end of the law unto righteousness for anyone who believes.¹² If a believer seeks to live by law he is not living under grace and the "here and now" benefits of Christ's crosswork are rendered inoperative.¹³ The grace believer cannot repeat Adam's sin in the garden, nor can he repeat the sins of Israel under law, for he is not under any kind of law. Sin is acting as if God has no requirements or restrictions, I Jn. 3:4. But there is only one law laid down for the grace believer, i.e. that "you love one another as I have loved you," Jn. 13:34, etc. We sin when we live as though God doesn't care what we do. Today one man may do something in doubt and not taking God's will into account and sin, while another man may do the same thing in faith and taking God's will into consideration and not sin.

⁶ Acts 14:16, 17:30

⁷ Gal 3:19

⁸ Lev. 19:17; 20:20; 24:15; Num. 9:13; 18:22

⁹ Psa. 32:5; Jer. 36:3; Isaiah 38:17

¹⁰ Heb 10:4

¹¹ Heb 10:10

¹² Rom. 6:14, 15; Gal. 5:18; Rom 10:4

¹³ Gal 5:4

Judgement of the Believer's sin

Even though the believer is under no condemnation (Rom 8:1), it is possible for him to be judged in the familial sense with chastisement.¹⁴ This child training is so that the believer is not condemned with the world.¹⁵ The sin of the believer can cause consequences of even death if not dealt with properly through confession and forsaking.¹⁶

What a believer should do when he sins

1 John 1:9 tells the believer that he should confess (say the same thing) his sins to God. Forgiveness is his present possession and restoration to familial fellowship is possible because of God's faithfulness and quality of justice. Colossians 1:14 states the judicial state of forgiveness for the believer, but the loss and restoration of fellowship happens many times over the believer's lifetime.

Conclusion

Adam's sin brought both physical and spiritual death. God's gift of His Son provided a way where man could be made alive again. Sin is an ongoing problem for the believer because of the sin nature. When he sins, the believer has a responsibility to handle sin properly to restore fellowship with the Father. Many believers are living a life that is less than what it could be because of sin.

¹⁴ Heb 12:6-11

¹⁵ 1 Cor 11:32

¹⁶ 1 John 5:16, 1 Cor 11:30