

Should Our Conscience Be Our Guide?

Should the decisions we make in our physical and spiritual life be subject to our conscience?

The Greek word translated “*conscience*” in the New Testament is “*sunēidēsis*” [soon-i-day-sis], the literal meaning is “*a knowing with...*”. The process of thought which distinguishes what it considered to be morally good or bad.

The quality of our conscience depends on what our knowing or understanding it is linked with.

2 Corinthians 1:12 [NIV] “*Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from God. We have done so not according to worldly wisdom but according to God's grace.*”

The actions and teaching that Paul and his fellow ministers were witness to was that their consciences were linked to the holiness and sincerity of the God they worshipped.

Their lives testified that their conscience was “*knowing with God*” the Holy Spirit.

We need to ensure that our conscience is linked with the right source of information.

Non-Christians who have a conscience that has been educated in such a way that they judge their own actions against what they see as good and just in society.

The in-built love that we have for our brothers and sisters or the love that a parent has for a child can educate our conscience to extend this love to other human beings.

How can people do evil things to other people and **not** be bothered by their conscience?

Their conscience is “*now accusing them, now even defending them.*”

Hence all their thoughts and actions come from a selfish basis.

Such people can lie, cheat, even murder other human beings and **not** feel guilty.

1 Timothy 4:1-2 [NIV] “*The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron.*”

“*seared*” – branded as with a hot iron – literally cauterized to the extent that their moral judgements are now radically impaired.

It could also carry the image of being “*branded*” by Satan as belonging to his herd or flock.

Whatever their “*Christian*” profession, they have in effect abandoned their faith.

These deluded people may **not** be deliberate liars but were peddling untruth because of mistaken knowledge.

In Gnostic fashion, they believed that they had discovered “*the real hidden truth*”, a special kind of spiritual enlightenment. Knowledge **not** accessible to the uninitiated.

All cult and sect leaders educate the conscience of their followers in this way.

1 Timothy 4:3 [NIV] *“They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth.”*

This teaching is that of the Gnostics who regarded the body and all of its functions as polluted, aspects of a lower nature which truly “*spiritual*” people must learn to overcome.

Other translations of this scripture reveal very clearly the false education of these people’s conscience.

“Branded with the devil’s sign” [New English Bible]

“These liars have lied so well and for so long that they have lost their capacity for truth” [Message Bible]

“Tell lies with straight faces and do it so often that their conscience won’t bother them any more” [Living Bible]

1 Corinthians 8:7, 10, 12 [NIV] *“But not everyone knows this. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat such food they think of it as having been sacrificed to an idol, **and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled.**” ... “For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol’s temple, won’t he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols?” ... **“When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.”***

A weak conscience due to past incorrect “*knowing with ...*”

We as Christians are commanded to avoid harming the present conscience of these weaker brethren.

How do we avoid a deluded or a weak conscience?

Hebrews 9:11-14 [NIV] *“When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. **The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!**”*

The subject addressed in this scripture is cleansing our conscience.

The fact that our conscience needs cleansing tells us that without such cleansing it is unacceptable to God.

The cleansing power of the Old Testament statutes and sacrifices was only outward, **not** reaching the heart [mind] and spirit in human beings.

These Old Covenant rituals exposed the need for cleansing but did **not** accomplish it completely.

The real inner cleansing of our conscience comes with the acceptance of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ as the **only** way to cleanse our conscience.

Only then will our conscience function as God desires it to work for our good.

This is a humbling experience of our own inability to have thoughts that are in harmony with that of our Creator God.

Isaiah 55:8-9 [NIV] *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”*

A statement of fact we have to accept.

John 15:5 [NIV] *“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; **apart from me you can do nothing.**”*

Anything we seek to accomplish with our own strength and thoughts will come to nothing of lasting value.

Also mentioned in this cleansing process is the Holy Spirit Who empowered Jesus Christ the Son of Man in human flesh to be totally free of any sin and the guilt that is expressed in our conscience.

John 14:26-27 [NIV] *“But the Counsellor, **the Holy Spirit**, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; **my peace I give you.** I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”*

The peace of mind that can only come from a cleansed conscience is the product of our intimate relationship with the Holy Spirit.

John 14:15-18 [NIV] *“If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you for ever, the **Spirit of truth**. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and **will be in you.** I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.”*

The Holy Spirit being “in us” shows how intimate the relationship with Him should be, if the cleansing power of Jesus Christ’s sacrifice is to be effective.

Hebrews 9:15 [NIV] *“For this reason **Christ is the mediator of a new covenant**, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.”*

This cleansing of our conscience is linked directly to the New Covenant that was ratified by the sacrificial blood of Jesus Christ our Saviour.

Hebrews 10:19-22 [NIV] *“Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the **Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus**, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, **let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.**”*

A new way of life is opened up to us by Christ’s sacrifice. Access to the presence of God that was **not** available to ordinary people under the Old Covenant.

“**hearts**” Greek “*kardia*” referring to our central thoughts and feelings.

The conscience which is a major directing part of our thoughts and feeling being cleansed and made acceptable to God.

“**bodies**” Greek “*sōma*” referring to every aspect of our existence.

“**pure**” Greek “*katharōs*” clean unadulterated.

“**water**” is used symbolically in scripture as God’s blessing and of spiritual refreshment.

Ephesians 5:25-26 [NIV] *“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, **cleansing her by the washing with water through the word,**”*

It is God’s Word that Jesus Christ is using to cleanse us in preparation for our becoming His bride.

John 14:25-26 [NIV] *“All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Counsellor, **the Holy Spirit**, whom the Father will send in my name, **will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.**”*

The Holy Spirit in us will use Christ’s words to continue this cleansing of our conscience on a daily basis.

Hebrews 9:14 [NIV] *“How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, **so that we may serve the living God!**”*

All this cleansing is done so that we can be servants of God to fulfil His commission given to us to enlarge His kingdom in our generation.

Hebrews 10:23-24 [NIV] *“Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may **spur one another on towards love and good deeds.**”*

Cleansed to hold on to the hope we have in Jesus Christ and to encourage one another to be the “light” to this sin darkened world by the way we conduct ourselves in our day-to-day life.

As with everything that God seeks to do with us, it is others who should benefit by what God is doing in us and through us.

Romans 12:2 [NIV] *“**Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.** Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is, his good, pleasing and perfect will.”*

Our conscience can be our guide in life, once we have allowed God to cleanse it but **not** before this transformation.