

You and Your Conscience

by Fred Zaspel

The decline of morals in our society is deplorable, but what is most alarming is that this decline is increasingly evident in the church. Professing Christians and genuine believers are falling into terrible sins. It is becoming increasingly *the* problem godly pastors and elders are forced to deal with today.

There are no doubt many factors that contribute to this decline, such as the “gospel” so widely preached today that lacks any call to genuine repentance and surrender to Christ. But we would be blind not to see that the moral decline within the church is evidence of a vanishing conscience. The decay in society has had a dulling effect on the Christian conscience such that we now approve things that just a generation ago we would have deplored. The Christian church is clearly losing its conscience.



What is the conscience? The word simply means “with knowledge.” Conscience is that part of the human mind or soul that makes moral judgments — what is right and what is wrong. It has an intellectual side — what we think and know — and can be informed or misinformed accordingly. Some have referred to conscience as the shadow of God’s judgment. It is the mental and moral faculty that gives approval and disapproval of our actions and assigns them “good” or “evil.” Romans 2:15 refers to the conscience as both “accusing” and “excusing” us in various circumstances.

Much of the knowledge our conscience possesses is intuitive or instinctive. Created in God’s image there is within us a reflection of the divine law. Even the most savage heathen knows it is wrong to take someone else’s wife, to steal, to lie and so on. This moral knowledge is intuitive. And of course, our conscience is informed by instruction also. This is one function of the Scriptures and parents and so on. These are given us to train us, to inform our conscience, and to apply God’s law to our life.

Now, even in those of us who have been born again there are the remains of sin. We still feel the pull of the flesh and the world. Our bent, now, in grace, is toward God. But the struggle with sin remains, and it results in a mental and moral inconsistency and instability. And this moral inconsistency on our part increases or decreases in direct relation to the health of our conscience. For example, if we allow our minds to unguardedly take in TV advertisements they can become hidden persuaders convincing us that we really must have these things to be happy. And I suspect that this may be the reason why many Christians are in such debt. The same is true in listening to the liberal news media. They can unconsciously erode our beliefs and standards of right and wrong, so that sin is not really that sinful anymore. Similarly, when the inundation of sexual innuendo goes unchecked our moral sensitivity weakens, and we find ourselves now unalarmed or even approving of what before would have been unthinkable. Our conscience has become dulled.

Martin Luther once warned that to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. To ignore this shadow of divine judgment within us will lead us away from God and to our own ruin. And with our society bombarding us continuously with its “lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” (1 John 2:16) we must be more alert to our conscience than ever. This will determine everything about us. “As a man thinks in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7). “Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life” (Proverbs 4:23). “Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable — if anything is excellent or praiseworthy — think about such things” (Phil. 4:8).

Be very careful not to allow this world to dull your sensitivity to God’s law. Guard your mind. Use it for Christ. Bring every thought into the captivity of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5).

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