

Sermon Mark S. Aites
MATTERS OF THE CONSCIENCE

TEXT: ACTS 23:1

INTRODUCTION:

1. Used 31 times in N.T. > 21 times by Paul.
2. Defined: "The consciousness or awareness of anything."
 - 1) The awareness of sins: *For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins (Heb. 10:2).*
 - 2) The awareness of God: *Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully (1 Pet. 2:19).*
3. It has a moral quality: distinguishes between what is morally right or wrong.
4. Thus it makes you aware of your thoughts, intentions, and conduct.
5. On the one hand it commends; the other it condemns.
6. Each of us (of the age of accountability) possesses some understanding of what is right and wrong.
 - 1) Age of accountability -- is established by the realization of what is right and wrong; by the knowledge of sin.
 - 2) *For 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 show 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 (Rom. 2:14-15).*
7. The conscience then can disapprove, approve, but as the text indicates; it is not infallible.

DISCUSSION:

I. THE CONSCIENCE DISAPPROVES.

- A. The Hebrew writer refers to an *evil conscience (Heb. 10:22)*.
 1. Not that the conscience itself is evil with the knowledge we've done wrong.
 2. *Our transgressions are multiplied before thee, and our sins testify against us: for our transgressions are with us; and as for our iniquities, we know them (Isa. 59:12).*
- B. Biblical examples:
 1. Adam and Eve (**Gen. 3:7ff**); naked, afraid; blamed someone else.
 2. Jacob defrauded Esau: yrs. later knew he was approaching; sent presents, bowed 7 times (**Gen. 32, 33**).
 3. Joseph's brothers: *We are very guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us (Gen. 42:21).*
 4. Micah stole 1100 shekels of silver from his mother; confessed (**Judg. 17:1-3**).
 5. Herod, after beheading John said Jesus was John resurrected (**Matt. 14:2**).
 6. Accusers -- woman caught in adultery: "convicted by their own conscience" (**John 8:9**).
 7. Peter denied Christ -- wept bitterly (**Matt. 26:75**)
 8. Judas betrayed Christ; returned 30 pcs of silver; hanged himself (**Matt. 27:3-5**).
- C. Our conscience then can be regarded as a blessing

from God, for it helps us to be more aware of our sins and shortcomings.

II. THE CONSCIENCE APPROVES.

- A. For example: When becoming a Christian...
1. We purge our conscience: The Hebrew writer talks of animal sacrifices: *How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God (Heb. 9:14).*
 2. Baptism--conscience approves (**1 Pet. 3:20-21**).
 3. Under Jewish law animal sacrifices couldn't give clear conscience; but baptism does!
Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water (Heb. 10:22).
 4. Old things are passed away (**2 Cor. 5:17**).
 5. *Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord (Acts 3:19).*
 6. "Slate" wiped clean (**Heb. 8:12**).
 7. Hearts--purified by faith (**Acts 15:9**).
- B. Consider Christian living.
1. Your conscience knows if you are telling the truth: *I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost (Rom. 9:1).*
 2. Civil authority and laws of the land: *Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake (Rom. 13:5).*
 3. Live honest lives: *Pray for us: for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly (Heb 13:18).*
 4. Essence of Christianity: *Now the end of the commandment is love out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned (1 Tim. 1:5).*
 5. Important--good conscience toward them that are not Christians: *Having a good conscience, that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ (1 Pet. 3:16).*
- C. In hope of eternal life.
1. *And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more. Where I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God (Acts 20:25-27)*
 2. *I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: 4:8 Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing. (2 Tim. 4:7-8).*
- D. The conscience then can also approve our actions, with the knowledge that we are doing right.

III. THE CONSCIENCE CAN BE WRONG.

- A. Saul thought he was doing right.
1. *And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in*

all good conscience before God until this day (Acts 23:1).

2. *I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. and I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities (Acts 26:9-11).*
3. *For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jew's religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it (Gal. 1:13).*
4. Way may seem right (**Prov. 14:12; 16:25**).
5. "How can it be wrong, when it feels so right." (Debbie Boone)
- B. The conscience can be "seared."
 1. *Having their conscience seared with a hot iron (1 Tim. 4:2).*
 2. This implies rendering your conscience insensitive.
 3. *Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush (Jer. 6:15).*
 4. *Such is the way of an adulterous woman, she eateth and wipeth her mouth, and said, I have done no wickedness (Prov. 30:20).*
 5. Paul says of such: *Even their mind and conscience is defiled (Tit. 1:15).*
 6. He further says of such people that they are "past feeling" (**Eph. 4:19**).
- C. I express concern for those who reject the invitation of Christ to become a Christian.
 1. **Illus.** Invitation (song): At first hearing the truth they grip the pew to keep from responding, then with each passing time they hear it, it gets easier and easier to reject it.
 2. This is one of the tragedies of the conscience, that going against it will eventually take away the benefit of having a conscience.
 3. Consider how frightening that can be: that sin would no longer bother you; that you no longer would see the need to become a Christian.
- D. The Bible does refer to those who are Christians, who turn from God and sear their conscience so that they never return to God.
 1. *For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and of the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame (Heb. 6:4-6).*
 2. It is not impossible on God's part.
- E. Each of us needs to exercise caution that we do not violate our conscience!

IV. THE CONSCIENCE MUST BE TRAINED.

- A. ...that is, it needs to be trained in those things that are good and righteous.
- B. You might wonder, is it possible to train the conscience? Yes! Just as one can train his conscience to accept evil; one can train his conscience in matters of truth and righteousness.
- C. For the conscience to approve of what we do, it must be taught.
 1. We cannot know what is true and right for our conscience to approve of if we do

not accept the teaching of scripture.

2. **1 Pet. 4:11; Acts 17:11; 2 Tim. 2:15.**

3. *Continue in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of (2 Tim. 3:14).*

4. *Preach the word (2 Tim. 4:2).*

D. The conscience also needs to be trained to be governed by love.

1. Strong--weak brother: *If meat make by brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend (1 Cor. 8:13).*

2. *But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died . . . Let us therefore follow after things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another (Rom. 14:15,19).*

3. Our consciences then need to be trained that we would treat one another properly so that if we do not treat one another properly, we would be greatly bothered.

4. Reminds me of a brother's prayer concerning sin, in which he prayed that our consciences would bother us so that we would not be guilty of committing those sins any more.

CONCLUSION:

1. Dear friends, the conscience is one of the greatest blessings ever bestowed upon man. (**Jas. 1:17**)
2. It is invaluable as it keeps us from wrong, and approves of that which is right.
3. We have learned that the conscience can be fooled; and that we must study and learn of that which is right.
4. As marvelous as the conscience is, we must all remember that we can ruin that wonderful gift from God by violating our conscience.
5. It may be that someone present is not yet a Christian, and your conscience is telling you, "Obeying the Gospel is the right thing to do."
6. Peter tells us that baptism is the answer to a good conscience.