

CONSCIENCE

1. We all have a conscience.

- a. Conscience is a witness within us that has been negatively affected by the fall but which still acts as a moral guide for both believer and unbeliever.¹
- b. The work of God's law is written on our hearts.
 - (1) **Ro 2:14-15** 14 When Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. 15 They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also testifies, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them.
- c. We pass judgment on others all the time, based on some objective standard of good.
 - (1) **Ro 2:1** 1 You have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things.
- d. We cannot escape our conscience. It is with us wherever we go. It constantly testifies to us about our own thoughts, words, and actions and the thoughts, words, and actions of others.
 - (1) **Ro 2:15** 15 They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also testifies, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them....
 - (2) **Ro 9:1** 1 I am speaking the truth in Messiah. I am not lying. My conscience testifies for me in the Holy Spirit.
 - (3) **2 Co 1:12** 12 Our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience, that we behaved in the world with simplicity and godly sincerity....
- e. When we do what we hate, it proves we have a conscience.
 - (1) **Ro 7:15-23** 15 I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. 16 Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. ...For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. 19 For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. ...21 So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. 22 For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, 23 but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.
 - (2) Have you ever been internally frustrated at your own actions?
- f. Our conscience is a primary aspect of our being that separates us from animals. We are morally responsible creatures, made in the image of God. Animals are not.
 - (1) **Ge 1:26** 26 God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.
 - (2) It was to the first man and woman God gave a moral command. He didn't give this command to the animals.
 - (a) **Ge 2:16-17** 16 Yahweh God commanded the man saying, You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, 17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.
 - (3) Eve wrestled with her conscience before she ate the forbidden fruit.

¹ C. C. Ryrie, *A Survey of Bible Doctrine*, 106.

- (a) **Ge 3:2-3** 2 The woman said to the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden. 3 But God said, You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.
- (b) **Ge 3:6** 6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate.

2. The fact we all have a conscience proves the existence of God.

- a. The existence of the conscience is one of the greatest proofs of theism and the Christian faith.
 - (1) See *Classic Arguments for God's Existence*.
- b. God is the only possible source of our conscience.
- c. The theory of Darwinian evolution cannot explain the existence of the conscience.
- d. No matter how hard we try, we cannot rid ourselves of our conscience.
 - (1) "It must be confessed by all, that there is a law of nature writ upon the hearts of men, which will direct them to commendable actions, if they will attend to the writing in their own consciences. This law cannot be considered without the notice of a Lawgiver. For it is but a natural and obvious conclusion, that some superior hand engrafted those principles in man, since he finds something in him twitching him upon the pursuit of uncomely actions, though his heart be mightily inclined to them; man knows he never planted this principle of reluctancy in his own soul; he can never be the cause of that which he cannot be friends with. If he were the cause of it, why doth he not rid himself of it? No man would endure a thing that doth frequently molest and disquiet him, if he could cashier it. It is therefore sown in man by some hand more powerful than man, which riseth so high, and is rooted so strong, that all the force that man can use cannot pull it up."²
- e. Conscience is not an invention of man or a social product.
 - (1) "Conscience, of course, is a social product, not an innate endowment or divine gift" (B. Spinoza, paraphrased in W. Durant, *The Age of Louis XIV*, 646).
- f. See C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*.

3. Our conscience informs us there must be a final judgment of our lives.

- a. We all know there is a final judgment.
 - (1) **Ro 2:2-3** 2 We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such [unrighteous] things. 3 Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God?
- b. God will judge our secrets. He will hold us accountable.
 - (1) **Ro 2:15-16** 15 [The Gentiles] show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also testifies, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them 16 on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Messiah Jesus.
- c. We all know unrighteousness deserves punishment.

² S. Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, Kindle Location 630.

(1) **Ro 1:32** 32 Though [unrighteous men] know [in their conscience] God's righteous decree that those who practice such [acts of unrighteousness] deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them [in violation of their conscience].

d. Even pagans know ultimate justice exists.

(1) **Ac 28:4** 4 When the native people saw the creature hanging from [Paul's] hand, they said to one another, No doubt this man is a murderer. Though he has escaped from the sea, Justice has not allowed him to live.

4. Our conscience keeps our sin natures in check so we don't destroy ourselves.

a. Without conscience, human society would be totally impossible.

(1) We are to do right not only to avoid punishment but because it is right to do right.

b. Civil government reinforces the conscience, but it can never replace the conscience.

(1) **Ro 13:4-5** 4 [A ruler] is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not carry the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. 5 Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience.

c. Believers are to obey civil government for the sake of conscience.

(1) **Ro 13:5** 5 One must be in subjection [to rulers], not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience.

d. To the extent a nation's laws correspond to every man's God-given conscience, they are good laws.

e. Political correctness, public shaming, and virtue signalling all have to do with our individual and corporate conscience.

(1) Every work of art sends a moral message that impacts our conscience.

5. Satan is an expert at defiling/dirtying/dulling our conscience.

a. Our conscience dirties/dulls a little bit more every time we violate it.

(1) **Is 5:20** 20 Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!

(2) This explains the downward spiral of sexual sin, alcohol, drugs, and violence.

b. When the collective conscience of a nation dirties/dulls, great evil is on the horizon.

(1) Chattel slavery in the American South took place because of dirty consciences.

(2) WWII and the Holocaust became possible because the conscience of the German people had become defiled.

(a) Consider F. Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*.

(b) "Conscience is a Jewish invention. Like circumcision, it mutilates a man."³

c. Things are allowed in the West today that would have never been allowed 100 years ago. We have lost our collective innocence. Our collective conscience has become defiled.

(1) **Ti 1:15** 15 To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their minds and their consciences are defiled.

d. In the end times, many will depart from the Christian faith through the insincere teaching of liars whose consciences are seared.

³ A. Hitler (d. 1945).

(1) **1 Ti 4:1-2** 1 The Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, 2 through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared.

6. Our dirty consciences are purified through faith in Jesus.

a. **He 9:14** 14 ...How much more will the blood of Messiah...purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

b. Religious rituals cannot purify our conscience.

(1) **He 9:9-10** 9 According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered [in the first section of the temple] that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper, 10 but deal only with food, drink, and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation.

7. Our dull consciences are sharpened through intake of biblical truth.

8. We are responsible to God to act according to our Spirit-sharpened conscience.

a. Like Paul, we are to take pains to have a clear conscience before God and man.

(1) **Ac 24:16** 16 I [Paul] always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man.

(2) **Ac 23:1** 1 Looking intently at the council, Paul said, Brothers, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day.

(3) **2 Co 1:12** 12 Our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience, that we behaved in the world with simplicity and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God, and supremely so toward you.

(4) **1 Th 2:3-4** 3 Our appeal does not spring from error, impurity, or any attempt to deceive, 4 but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts.

(5) **2 Ti 1:3** 3 I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day.

b. We are to hold sound doctrine with a clear conscience.

(1) **1 Ti 3:9** 9 [Deacons] must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.

c. Our aim is love that issues from a good conscience.

(1) **1 Ti 1:5** 5 The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith.

d. We must hold a good conscience as we wage the good warfare.

(1) **1 Ti 1:18-19** 18 This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, ...that by [sound doctrine] you may wage the good warfare, 19 holding faith and a good conscience.

e. Quotes.

(1) "My Conscience is captive to the word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen."⁴

⁴ Martin Luther.

(2) “[I resolved n]ever do anything which I should be afraid to do if it were the last hour of my life.”⁵

9. We are to respect the conscience of believers and unbelievers.

- a. Our conscience is to lead us in right relationships to our government (Ro 13:5), our employer (1 Pe 2:19), and our fellow believers (1 Co 8:7,10,12).⁶
- b. Believers.
 - (1) We will develop personal convictions based on our areas of weakness, our experience, and our understanding of Scripture. We won’t always come to the same conclusions. That’s okay!
 - (a) **Ro 14:5** 5 One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.
 - (2) We must not wound the conscience of our weak brothers and sisters.
 - (a) **1 Co 8:7-13** 7 Not all [believers] possess this knowledge [that idols have no real existence]. But some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. 8 Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. 9 But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. 10 For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol’s temple, will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols? 11 And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Messiah died. 12 Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Messiah. 13 Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.
 - (3) Church leaders are to appeal the conscience of believers under their care.
 - (a) **2 Co 5:11** 11 What we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience.
 - (4) We must never ask a believer to do something against his or her own conscience.
- c. Unbelievers.
 - (1) We are to commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God.
 - (a) **2 Co 4:2** 2 We have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God’s word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God.
 - (2) We are to defend the Christian faith with a good conscience, backing up our arguments with good behaviour.
 - (a) **1 Pe 3:15-16** 15 In your hearts honour Messiah the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you. Yet do it with gentleness and respect, 16 having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behaviour in Messiah may be put to shame.
- d. Everyone.

⁵ Jonathan Edwards.

⁶ C. C. Ryrie, *A Survey of Bible Doctrine*, 106.

- (1) We are to try to please the conscience of everyone in everything we do.
 - (a) **1 Co 10:25-33** 25 Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience. 26 For the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof. 27 If one of the unbelievers invites you to dinner and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience. 28 But if someone says to you, This has been offered in sacrifice, then do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience— 29 I do not mean your conscience, but his. For why should my liberty be determined by someone else's conscience? 30 If I partake with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of that for which I give thanks? 31 So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. 32 Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, 33 just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved.
- (2) We are to act honourably in all things.
 - (a) **He 13:18** 18 Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honourably in all things.

10. It is a blessing to serve God with a clear conscience.

- a. **Ro 14:22-23** 22 Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves. 23 But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.
- b. Jacob Arminius's motto was *Bona conscientia paradisus*, meaning, "A good conscience is a paradise."⁷

⁷ J. Arminius.

Bibliography

Charnock, Stephen. *The Existence and Attributes of God*. Kindle ed. Robert Carter and Bros., 1874.