

Sermon Notes

Practical Lessons for Understanding the Word of God



Is Your Conscience Your Protector?

KEY PASSAGE: 1 Timothy 1:18-20 | SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES: Romans 1:21-24 | 1 Corinthians 8:7-12

1 Timothy 4:2 | Titus 1:15

SUMMARY

When confronted with questionable situations or opportunities, can you trust your conscience to guide you to make right choices?

We often hear people say, “Let your conscience be your guide,” but this may not be the best option. It all depends on the condition of the conscience. If we have repeatedly rejected or ignored it, our conscience is no longer a reliable guide because we’ve silenced its signals.

SERMON POINTS

God has given every person a conscience to guard and guide them.

This is not the same as the Holy Spirit because He only dwells in those who have believed in Jesus Christ for salvation. However, once we’re saved, the Spirit then works through the conscience to remind us that some attitudes, thoughts, words, and actions don’t fit our new identity in Christ. The more committed we are to Him, the louder our conscience will be.

When Paul wrote to Timothy, who was the pastor of the church in Ephesus, he told him to “fight the good fight, keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith” (1 Tim. 1:18-19). This is a warning to us that spiritual shipwreck eventually comes to those who feel the conviction of their conscience and reject its signals. God gave us the conscience for our protection, but when we plow on through without obeying its counsel, eventually it is of no use to us.

The conscience is a universal gift of God.

- Our conscience distinguishes between the morally right and wrong.
- Our conscience urges us to do that which we recognize to be right.
- Our conscience restrains us from doing what we recognize to be wrong.
- Our conscience passes judgment on our acts and executes that judgment within our souls.

Although we’ve all been given a conscience, what we do with it will either sharpen or dull it. The more we heed its signals, the more sensitive it will become and the better we’ll be able to distinguish between right and wrong. But if we repeatedly ignore the warnings, it will become calloused and then useless. At this point we can live in absolute disobedience to God and feel no conviction at all because our conscience has been damaged and is unable to judge accurately.

How does the conscience work?

- It judges a man’s soul in three areas—attitude, conduct, and behavior.
- It’s like spiritual radar sending out signals that danger is near.
- It acts like a grid system that sends a stop signal whenever something wrong hits it.

The conscience is designed to protect us from temptations and sin, and we must be careful not to violate it by taking that first step in the wrong direction. To do so is like driving through a red traffic light. We’re eventually headed for disaster. At the first internal warning, we must make a choice to abide by its direction because we cannot violate our conscience and walk in God’s will or enjoy His blessings.

The conscience is an awesome thing that God put within us to help us live a holy and righteous life. It, along with the Holy Spirit, identifies whatever is wrong and should be avoided. Knowing that God loves us, is always working on our behalf, and has our best interests at heart should motivate us to listen and obey the promptings of our conscience. We may not always understand why the Lord is forbidding us to go a certain direction, but we can trust Him and His Word as the final authority for our lives because He is always right about every situation we encounter.

The Bible mentions several different types of consciences.

- **A good conscience** (1 Tim. 1:19). It is very sensitive and provides sound direction.
- **A struggling conscience** (1 Cor. 8:7-12). This one is weak and may easily yield to temptation.
- **A soiled conscience** (Titus 1:15). When we do what we know is wrong, our conscience becomes defiled by sin and cannot judge rightly.
- **A seared conscience** (1 Tim. 4:2). This is the worst state possible because the conscience has become so hardened that it no longer works. It's the result of repeated disobedience to God. A seared conscience allows people to live a completely immoral lifestyle without feeling like it's wrong. According to Romans 1:21-24, when people refuse to honor God, their thinking becomes futile and foolish, and the Lord will eventually give them over to the lusts of their hearts.

When can we trust our conscience to be our guide?

Since the conscience can be damaged and is not always reliable, we need to understand under what conditions we can be sure that it is working properly and sending us the right information.

- **We can trust it when we've accepted the Word of God as the basis for our conduct.** If we take seriously the Ten Commandments as well as the instructions in the New Testament for proper living, we can be sure that our conscience will guide us toward the right decisions.

- **We can trust it if we have programmed our conscience with the teaching of Scripture.** As the Holy Spirit puts God's Word into our hearts, we come to understand how He thinks, works, and moves in our lives.
- **We can trust our conscience when we have a strong desire to obey the Lord.** This means that no matter the cost, we are going to trust Him and do what He says.
- **We can trust it if we prayerfully consider the decisions we must make.** When we ask the Lord for guidance, our conscience becomes more sensitive to His leading.
- **We can trust our conscience when it immediately sounds an alarm when we're considering a wrong direction in our thoughts or actions.** If we're consistently abiding by God's Word, will, and way, our conscience won't wait until the end of the day to send us a signal. The moment a temptation or questionable situation arises, it will warn us of danger and prompt us to reject that direction.
- **We can trust it when we feel guilty immediately upon disobedience.** A spiritually sensitive conscience is alert to everything going on inside and around us. The moment we sin, it will go into action so that we can quickly return to the Lord in confession and repentance.

RESPONSE

- The conscience is informed by what we know and have learned. How readily do you respond to your conscience? Who has influenced your conscience? What ideas and teachings have shaped your perceptions of right and wrong? How reliable do you think your conscience is?
- Now consider what a conscience informed by God's Word would be like. How much more reliable do you think it would be?
- What practical steps can you take to develop a trustworthy, protective, faithful conscience?

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