

SPIRITUAL GROWTH – Lesson #1: Paying attention to the conscience and dealing with sins.

- Our Christian life begins when we are “born again” and the Holy Spirit gives new life to our human spirit (Jn. 3:1-8). Any life should develop over time into maturity, and so it is with our new life in Christ. In four lessons we will cover some basics on how our spiritual life can grow. The goal of our growth is to become conformed to Christ’s image (full maturity). To grow is to live increasingly like Him in our lives (Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18; Gal. 4:19; Eph. 4:15; Col. 3:10; 1 Pet. 2:1-3; 2 Pet. 1:5-9; 3:18).
- The conscience is a God-given function of our human spirit. It is operative, on a greatly diminished level, even in unbelievers (Rom. 2:14-15). When a person is born again, his spirit is enlivened, and thus the sensitivity of his conscience is dramatically enhanced (Eph. 4:17-19; Rom. 6:21; Rom. 8:10). The conscience of man functions to monitor his thoughts, words, motives and actions in light of what the person understands to be good and evil. The conscience testifies to a person whether one is upholding or violating the moral standards he acknowledges as true. If we violate our accepted standards of morality, then we feel uneasiness and guilt. “And it came about afterward that David’s conscience [lit., heart] bothered him because he had cut off the edge of Saul’s robe” (1 Sam 24:5; see also 2 Sam. 24:10). If we live according to our accepted moral code, then we feel affirmed within as being correct. “I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 9:1). See also 2 Cor. 1:12. To the believer, then, the conscience is his inward advisor as to whether he is sinning or obeying God.
- *Maintaining a blameless conscience.* Paul, even as an unbeliever trying to live righteously before God, paid much attention to his conscience (Acts 23:1). He stated that “I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men” (Acts 24:16). He lived by the dictates on his conscience, seeking to do right and taking steps to clear up any offense that violated his conscience. The way we clear up offenses that condemn us in our conscience is to confess our sins to God (1 Jn. 1:9). To confess means to “agree with” God (that we have sinned) as He points out sins in our lives through the working of the Holy Spirit and our conscience. If we do this, then God forgives us of our sins and our fellowship with Him is restored and maintained (1 Jn. 1:9; Prov. 28:13). Our conscience is like a window which must be cleaned in order to allow God’s light to enter our spirit and give us unhindered communion with Him. If we respond in confession to God’s condemnation of our wrongdoings, then this window of our conscience becomes clean, allowing for future light and even greater light. On the other hand, if we do not confess our sins, our conscience becomes damaged and the window becomes cloudy. Therefore, we can see less of God’s light and His voice becomes more hushed. If this pattern continues, it is possible for a genuine believer to sin without any feeling of being wrong. The believer is then on a dangerous path of living further and further away from God, His truth and His righteousness.
- *The dangers of a violated conscience.* This command I entrust to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may 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 passage shows that our faith and a good conscience go together. However, if we reject a good conscience (by not maintaining a blameless conscience), our faith may leak out, eventually causing us to doubt even the fundamental doctrines of “the faith.” This is what happened to Hymenaeus and Alexander (1 Tim. 1:19-20).
- *The fruitfulness of a good conscience.* The Bible upholds the clear, or good conscience, as being of great value in God’s plan for the believer. “But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and **a good conscience** and a sincere faith” (1 Tim. 1:5). In this verse we see that a good conscience is needed in order for love to flow from us. Those chosen to be deacons are to have a clear conscience (1 Tim. 3:9-10). Paul was an example of one who served with a clear conscience (2 Tim. 1:3).
- *Knowledge.* Each believer’s conscience is shaped by Scriptural and spiritual knowledge and develops over time (1 Cor. 8; Rom. 14; 2 Pet. 3:18).