

THE CONSCIENCE - ITS IMPORTANCE IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

We contact God and know the Holy Spirit's work within us by our human spirit.

- The Holy Spirit gives spiritual life to our human spirit (Jn. 3:6; Rom. 8:10)
- The human spirit is where we have direct contact with God and things of the spiritual realm (Jn. 4:24; 1 Cor. 6:17; Gal. 6:18).
- The Holy Spirit can testify with our human spirits concerning spiritual realities (Rom. 8:16).
- The spirit of man is where God's enlightenment originates within us, and His light shines upon the inner parts of our being to give us awareness of His spiritual working (Prov. 20:27). Some commentators even equate the spirit in Prov. 20:27 with the conscience, but I am not sure that this is the sole function of the spirit intended by this Scripture.

The faculties of the human spirit.

- The human spirit is distinguished from the soul and the body (1 Thess. 5:23; Heb. 4:12).
- Some Bible teachers point out three faculties of the human spirit: 1) Conscience; 2) Intuition or leading; 3) Fellowship. Although these functions may be distinguished, they are usually very close in operation, working together and affecting each other. The conscience is the most critical since if it is damaged our knowing His leading and our fellowship are greatly hindered.

The function of the conscience

- All men have a conscience as a faculty of their human spirit. The basic function of the conscience is to convey the moral will of God to man (Rom. 2:14-15).
- In the fall man's spirit, with the function of the conscience, was deadened, so that the conscience functions on a greatly diminished level in unbelievers (Eph. 2:1; Eph. 4:17-19). Through regeneration the believer's spirit is made alive, thus markedly enhancing the sensitivity of his conscience (Rom. 6:21; 8:10).
- The believer's conscience is his inner monitor as to whether he is sinning or obeying God. It testifies to the person whether he is upholding or violating the code of moral conduct which he accepts as true. It tells us when we are right with God or wrong with God because of our thoughts, attitudes, speech or actions. It convicts us of wrong after we sin, but it often acts to warn us ahead of time when we are about to sin. (1 Sem. 24:5; Rom. 9:1; 13:5; 1 Pet. 2:19)

The conscience and knowledge

- The activity of each believer's conscience is shaped by his knowledge of right and wrong. Since believers can have differing knowledge, their consciences can act differently (Rom. 14:2-8, 22-23). The conscience responds to *the present light* we have of God's standards. As we grow in our knowledge of Christ and His word, our conscience develops. A believer who is more mature will learn that the conscience is sensitive not only to moral right and wrong, but to what is of God and what is not. 2 Cor. 1:12

Maintaining a blameless conscience

- “This being so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men.” (Acts 24:26, NKJV). Paul is a good model for us. He lived by the dictates of his conscience. If his conscience forbade something, he avoided it. If it approved something, then he proceeded. If Paul sinned towards God or man, then he took immediate steps to clear up the offense so as to make his conscience “void of offense” (Acts 24:16, KJV).
- To clear up our offenses toward God, we need to confess our sins, which includes an attitude of forsaking them (Prov. 28:13; 1 Jn. 1:19). If we do not intend to forsake a certain sin, but only mouth a confession of it, then our confession is a sham. If we agree that something is really a sin then we must take an attitude of changing our way. To clear up offenses toward man we should be sensitive to the Lord’s working within. The Holy Spirit may be working within us to humble ourselves to ask the forgiveness of others. Matt. 5:22-24
- Our fellowship with God is hindered when we do not sincerely confess our sin. Watchman Nee uses this illustration: The conscience is like a window which must be cleaned in order to allow God’s light to shine in us and give us unhindered communion with God. God’s light must shine through our conscience to show us where we are wrong. If we respond in confession to God’s conviction of our wrongdoings, then the window of the conscience becomes clean, allowing for more light to enter. But, if we do not confess our sins, the function of the conscience is damaged and the window becomes cloudy. Thus we can see less of God’s light and the voice of God in our conscience becomes more muted. If this pattern continues, it is possible for a genuine believer to sin without any feeling of being wrong. This leads the believer on a dangerous path further and further away from God, His truth and His righteousness. Not only will our fellowship suffer, but our understanding of God’s leading will be affected. When the conscience is not clear then the other functions of the human spirit are affected. When the conscience is not clear, then we possess what the Bible terms an “evil conscience.” Contrast a “good conscience” – Acts 23:1; Tim. 1:5, 19; Heb. 13:18; 1 Pet. 3:16, 21.
- A believer may try to cut off the voice of conscience by reasoning that his way or actions are justified. We must guard against this by being humbled before God and being honest with the voice of conscience. A believer may also try to avoid amending his way according to the conviction of conscience by doing some “good works” for God instead.
- The dangers of a violated conscience. 1 Tim. 1:5-7 – lack of love and ambition. 1 Tim. 4:1-3 – falling away from the faith and false teaching. 1 Tim. 1:18-19 – a shipwrecked faith, and damage to the church (2 Tim. 2:17-18).
- The fruitfulness of a good conscience. Love – 1 Tim. 1:5. Proper service from a proper character and walk with God (1 Tim. 3:9-10; 2 Tim. 1:3).

Three important exercises to strengthen our walk and the work of the conscience: 1) Consecrating ourselves daily to live unto God and His will (Rom. 12:1-2); 2) Spending time daily in God’s word with an open heart to hear and learn (don’t neglect any portion of the NT); 3) Taking immediate steps to clear up any conviction of wrong signaled to our conscience.

(Acknowledgement is given that some of the ideas taught in this lesson are taken from Watchman Nee’s book, *The Spiritual Man*.)