

Dartmouth Bible Notes

Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church
North Dartmouth, Massachusetts

RIGHT WRONG

A short series, exploring the significance of the conscience,
with particular burden for its development among our young people.

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A short series, exploring the significance of the conscience, with particular burden for its development among our young people.

Series: The Conscience (Lesson 1)

Scripture: Romans 2:14-16

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: April 5th, 2007

The Sense of Right and Wrong

Romans 2:9-16 (NASB)

There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, ¹⁰ but glory and honor and peace to every man who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹¹ For there is no partiality with God. ¹² For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law; and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law; ¹³ for not the hearers of the Law are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified. ¹⁴ For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, ¹⁵ in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness, and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them, ¹⁶ on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.

Romans 2:14-16 (Greek NT)

¹⁴ ὅταν γὰρ ἔθνη τὰ μὴ νόμον ἔχοντα φύσει τὰ τοῦ νόμου ποιῶσιν, οὗτοι νόμον μὴ ἔχοντες ἑαυτοῖς εἰσὶν νόμος· ¹⁵ οἵτινες ἐνδείκνυνται τὸ ἔργον τοῦ νόμου γραπτὸν ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις αὐτῶν, συμμαρτυροῦσης αὐτῶν τῆς συνειδήσεως καὶ μεταξὺ ἀλλήλων τῶν λογισμῶν κατηγορούντων ἢ καὶ ἀπολογουμένων, ¹⁶ ἐν ἡμέρᾳ ὅτε κρίνει ὁ θεὸς τὰ κρυπτὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων κατὰ τὸ εὐαγγέλιον μου διὰ Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ.

Introduction Have you ever felt right about doing something, even though you couldn't quite say why? Or, have you ever felt wrong about something you did or were thinking of doing, and it was a quiet caution in your head? Those are the actions of the human conscience.

- 1) A Fox News item this week reported, "Unknown miscreants had a good time two weekends ago when they posted hundreds of flashing animated images onto discussion boards hosted by the Landover, Md.-based Epilepsy Foundation. Flashing lights or bold moving patterns can trigger often violent seizures among 3 percent of the estimated 50 million epileptics worldwide." Conscience did not kick in with those hackers.
- 2) On April 11th, 1945 American soldiers accidentally came upon a camp of sorts outside Weimar, Germany. It was eerily quiet and the soldiers had their weapons ready. As their tanks rolled through several levels of barbed wire fences, they were greeted by a group of wary, gaunt looking men, in tattered clothing with vertical stripes. This was Buchenwald concentration camp, and my Dad was one of the liberators. Just over 43,000 prisoners were killed in that camp, some by unspeakable atrocities. Conscience was completely absent in that camp between the years 1937 and 1945.
- 3) A young woman goes out with a young man, and they fall in love. Soon, their bodies are telling them to escalate their intimacy. Something inside their heads tells them to wait. What is that? Conscience was active.
- 4) A Christian goes on a missions trip and sees a mission field that invites further work. As the Christian learns, he or she feels compelled to get involved more. Why is that? Conscience is active.
- 5) Twenty five years ago last month, a woman was raped on a pool table by several men in a bar in New Bedford while on-lookers cheered. It made national news. No one did anything to stop the crime. As the trial unfolded the next year, there were demonstrations with large numbers of people claiming that the trial was an anti-Portuguese effort. The four rapists were given sentences of nine to twelve years, and two others were acquitted. (My wife and I candidated in this church the next month.) Why didn't anyone come to her aid? Conscience was defeated.

Conscience is defined as "a sense of consciousness or self-awareness of the moral goodness or blameworthiness of one's own conduct, intentions or character together with a feeling of obligation to do right or be good."¹

THE PROBLEM: I believe that our culture's biggest challenge is the loss of conscience. News and educational sources tell us we have economic injustice, racial misunderstanding and ignorance, guns which are too available, jobs and job training are not available enough, illegal aliens are allowed in and too easily accommodated, or not accommodated enough, teachers expect too much from underprivileged children, "big oil" as the problem, casinos will fix things, casinos will ruin us. We are told we are animals, who need to be cared for or penned in

¹ Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 2003.

with more laws so that we won't do injury. But we all have one big resource that is being largely ignored. It was given to us by God. It is the conscience.

We can all recount experiences we had as children when we began to feel our consciences going active, like an internal sonar. We were presented with a choice, and we could feel a "law" at work, a voice which told us either to go one way, or the other.

I remember being in the grocery store with my mother at about 8 years old. I was looking at a display of toys and she moved down the aisle with our cart. I saw a toy pistol in plastic that I liked. It occurred to me, "I could slip this into my coat and no one would see." I didn't labor over it. I did it. And I managed to pull the caper off, until my mom found the toy pistol in my possession that afternoon. She asked, "Where did you get that?" I said, "Um, I think I found it." (Idiot.) She said, "Wait until your father gets home." I knew I was in for it. I also knew from the moment I considered taking the toy that it was wrong. I don't remember ever sitting through a Sunday School lecture on the Eighth Commandment—I wasn't drawing on knowledge—I just *knew* it was wrong. But I didn't listen to my conscience, I listened to a baser voice, which said, "We wants it." When my Dad got home he came up to my room and said to me, "Do you know what you did was wrong?" I said, "I guess so." He said, "This is going to hurt me more than it will you," and took off his belt and gave me probably about ten lashes, which made me cry at both the pain and the humiliation. I remember he had tears in his eyes as he punished me. I never stole again.

Since then my conscience has engaged me many times. I have listened, or I have ignored it. Sometimes it grows louder as an issue comes closer. You and I have a choice to listen to it, or not. This is what this series is going to be about. Right and wrong. What we hear inside of us. How we can help our young people develop their conscience, or avoid its cauterization.

The apostle Paul wrote about the conscience in Romans 2 which is an interesting place to read about it. Having demonstrated the sinfulness of the immoral pagan (1:18-32), Paul presents his case against the religious moralist—Jew or Gentile—by cataloging 6 principles that govern God's judgment: 1) knowledge (v. 1); 2) truth (vv. 2, 3); 3) guilt (vv. 4, 5); 4) deeds (vv. 6-10); 5) impartiality (vv. 11-15); and 6) motive (v. 16).² Whether we grew up in Christian homes or not, in the church or not, God will evaluate people fairly and completely. Some people just know what's right by their internal conscience, whether they have been taught the law of God or not. I like the way *The Message* puts the end of this passage

²John Jr MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible*, electronic ed., Ro 2:1 (Nashville: Word Pub., c.1997).

Romans 2:14-16 (The Message)

¹⁴ When outsiders who have never heard of God's law follow it more or less by instinct, they confirm its truth by their obedience. ¹⁵ They show that God's law is not something alien, imposed on us from without, but woven into the very fabric of our creation. There is something deep within them that echoes God's yes and no, right and wrong. ¹⁶ Their response to God's yes and no will become public knowledge on the day God makes his final decision about every man and woman. The Message from God that I proclaim through Jesus Christ takes into account all these differences.

If you were most in the woods, you would wish you had a light. Someone might hand you a small candle, or perhaps little tiny flashlight. With it you would be able to see a couple of feet in front of you but you would still have to take the right steps with the little bit of light you have. You might STILL choose to go the wrong way though you can only see a couple of feet at a time. If someone gave you a huge set of lights, like stadium lighting and you could see the whole way home, you would still have to be the one who chose to go the right way. You're accountable for more knowledge with more light. This is what Paul is saying in verses 14-16. Some people have little light and they will be judged on what they have. Others have lots more knowledge and they will be all the more accountable because they had much greater light. But the conscience is the candle at least. For the well-instructed Christian it is the stadium lighting.

Many times, God the Holy Spirit USES our consciences to speak to us. He utilizes that very thing which He placed inside of us when we were created. It is a thing which distinguishes us from the animals, who do not have neither consciousness nor a conscience. But God uses our conscience to guide us, to warn us, to confirm what we *think* is the right decision.

In 1962 Pastor Ray Stedman wrote this:

Let me tell you part of the secrets of my own heart, if I may. I catch myself, every now and then (and I have for years), trying to figure out a way to perform a certain sin (which is particularly alluring to me) without paying the consequences. Don't look so shocked, because you do the same thing! I have worked out many ingenious ways by which I can make it "look good" to men, so nobody will blame me if I do this. It is amazing, the variety of ways that a matter can be approached to make it look acceptable to others. But the thing that stops me dead in my tracks is that, though I know I can make it look good to others, God knows my evil heart. And, someday, the thing that I can make look good to men will be seen in all its filth and depravity in his sight, and I will have to acknowledge that this is what it was all the time. Because I know that God knows the secrets of my heart, I am continually checked on this thing.³

³ Title: The Secrets of Men By: Ray C. Stedman Scripture: Romans 2:1-16 Date: May 13, 1962 Series: Romans (Series #1) Message No: 3 Catalog No: 7 <http://www.raystedman.org/romans1/pdf/0007.pdf>

We're going to look at this some more, Lordwilling, in the next few weeks. Do you have the Holy Spirit inside of you? If you are a genuine Christian, then you do. And you can hear the Lord's voice, if you listen for it. We can squelch out His voice by letting other voices have the microphone. But if we listen, we can hear Him telling us how to live, how to make decisions, how to get to Him.

RIGHT WRONG

Series: The Conscience (Lesson 2)

Scripture: Psalm 51; 2nd Samuel 12:1-15

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: April 12th, 2007

The Song of the Stricken

Psalm 51 (NIV)

For the director of music. A psalm of David. When the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba. **H**ave mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. ²Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. ³For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. ⁴Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge. ⁵Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. ⁶Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place. ⁷Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. ⁸Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. ⁹Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. ¹⁰Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. ¹¹Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. ¹²Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. ¹³Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will turn back to you. ¹⁴Save me from bloodguilt, O God, the God who saves me, and my tongue will sing of your righteousness. ¹⁵O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. ¹⁶You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. ¹⁷The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. ¹⁸In your good pleasure make Zion prosper; build up the walls of Jerusalem. ¹⁹Then there will be righteous sacrifices, whole burnt offerings to delight you; then bulls will be offered on your altar.

Introduction Have you ever done something really bad? Some of us would say, "No," and would quickly add, "and I *wouldn't*, either." But a few of us might say, "Well..." And a few of us would admit, "Yes." It is our conscience ultimately, that informs us if we've done anything bad. Your parents, your teachers or the cops, might also inform you but inside of you, it is your conscience that says, "Yo, not good."

Last week we gave the dictionary definition of a “conscience.”⁴ Let’s shorten it this week to read: “a self-awareness of the moral goodness or badness of one’s own conduct, intentions or character...”

- The Catholic Catechism defines it as “a law which he has not laid upon himself but which he must obey. Its voice ever calling him to love and do that which is good and to avoid evil, sounds in his heart at the right moment... For man has in his heart a law inscribed by God...His conscience is man’s most secret core...”⁵
- *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* calls it an innate faculty which is a gift from God, by which one distinguishes between the right and the wrong, which urges one to do that which he recognizes to be right and restrains him from doing that which he knows to be wrong, and which passes judgment within his soul.⁶ This work identifies several aspects of our consciences: We might possess
 - A good conscience, which is what we have when we listen to it and do what it tells us to do;
 - A misinformed conscience, where the basis on which a person’s conscience acts is in error;
 - An out-of-balance conscience, which is narrow, fanatic or bigoted;
 - A pathological (sick) conscience, driven by some psychological disorder or phobia or obsession or compulsion;
 - A doubting conscience, which acts in uncertainty and which Romans 14:23 says is sinful;
 - A dulled conscience, which has ceased to function much because of a repeated disregard of its warning voice, and which is perhaps what Paul is talking about in 1st Tim.4:2;
 - A social conscience, which is what a group of people might feel together in unity on the same subject and hopefully acting as a guardian of morality, justice and decency in the world;
 - Freedom of conscience, which is talking about when someone enjoys the freedom to believe, practice and propagate any religion or even none at all.
- The torture of a bad conscience is the hell of a living soul. (John Calvin)
- Through pride we are ever deceiving ourselves. But deep down below the surface of the average conscience a still, small voice says to us, 'Something is out of tune. (Carl Jung)

⁴ Conscience is defined as “a sense of consciousness or self-awareness of the moral goodness or blameworthiness of one’s own conduct, intentions or character together with a feeling of obligation to do right or be good. *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, 2003.

⁵ *The Roman Catholic Catechism*, p. 438.

⁶ A.M. Rehwinkel, *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, p. 267.

One of the most dramatic biblical examples of the LACK of conscience and then when it forcefully “kicks in” is found in the story of King’s David’s affair with Bathsheba. The story is recorded in 2nd Samuel 11 and 12, and the song David wrote about in Psalm 51. If you are unfamiliar with the details of the story itself, taking place about three thousand years ago, I commend you to a reading of those chapters in 2nd Samuel. (You will not be bored with the tale, I assure you. I remember first reading this story and thinking to myself, “Yow, that kind of reality is IN the Bible?” And indeed it is!) David was called a man **after God’s own heart** (1st Sam.13:14) and yet most of his life is filled with trouble of one kind or another. He loved the Lord most of the time, loved to praise God and fought valiantly with the enemies of God’s people. He made a point of fighting the good fight and trying hard to despise evil. But David fell into a web of sin. It begins with **idleness**—not having enough to do. It moves to “Whoa” (the temptation, when his conscience undoubtedly was screaming.) It spread to “Hmmm” as he tells his conscious to take a hike. It spread further to “Ah Ha” as he is completely deaf to his conscience now. And it bottomed out with his callous statement, *Well, the sword devours one as well as another* (2nd Sam.11:25) What began with a temptation, snow-balled into adultery, a cover-up, murder, pregnancy, and finally a giving of cause to Israel’s enemies to laugh--not to mention the fate of the baby born to Bathsheba. For the period of maybe a year that David’s sin was uncalled, we have little indication that his conscience bothered him. Somehow, he seems to manage to evade it, smother it, ignore it, deny it, rationalize it, distract it, pretend it away. Eventually though, it is Nathan the prophet whom God uses to get to David. And after telling the outrageous story of the poor man’s little lamb to David—a story which in itself inflamed David’s conscience--and seeing David’s outrage in response, Nathan looks at him and says, “ha-tachk ha-ish,” **you are the man.**

What follows, and this is very interesting, is an immediate—according to the text—repentance and sorrow. Now David’s conscience comes fully alive. But first let’s consider some words from what we call “the penitential” or REPENTING PSALMS, written by David at some point in his life (taking *The Message* paraphrase):

WORDS FROM OTHER PENITENTIAL PSALMS

PSALM 6:6,7

I’m tired of all this—so tired. My bed has been floating forty days and nights On the flood of my tears. My mattress is soaked, soggy with tears. ⁷
The sockets of my eyes are black holes; nearly blind, I squint and grope.

PSALM 32:3-4

When I kept it all inside, my bones turned to powder, my words became

daylong groans. ⁴ The pressure never let up; all the juices of my life dried up.

PSALM 38:1-8

Take a deep breath, GOD; calm down— don't be so hasty with your punishing rod. ² Your sharp-pointed arrows of rebuke draw blood; my backside smarts from your caning. ³ I've lost twenty pounds in two months because of your accusation. My bones are brittle as dry sticks because of my sin. ⁴ I'm swamped by my bad behavior, collapsed under gunnysacks of guilt. ⁵ The cuts in my flesh stink and grow maggots because I've lived so badly. ⁶ And now I'm flat on my face feeling sorry for myself morning to night. ⁷ All my insides are on fire, my body is a wreck. ⁸ I'm on my last legs; I've had it— my life is a vomit of groans... ¹⁷ I'm on the edge of losing it— the pain in my gut keeps burning. ¹⁸ I'm ready to tell my story of failure, I'm no longer smug in my sin.

But David's conscience finally caught up with him, once the prophet nailed him. He stands accused not just by the prophet, but from deep within his own heart, and somehow by means of the Holy Spirit, too. And he responds... From a song he wrote not long after this, Psalm 51, so famous that millions of people around the world sing it every week in church, as part of their worship:

PSALM 51:1-4 (NIV)

For the director of music. A psalm of David. When the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba.

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. ² Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. ³ For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. ⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge.

We need to understand that we cannot escape this thing inside of us. As Christians God intends to use the conscience in our Christian walk and in our growth and maturity. Notice that at this point what we can see is going on within his conscience:

1. David **acknowledges** his sin. He doesn't try any more to deny it, to underestimate it.
2. He views it as a **filth**—a thing to be cleaned from.
3. He also sees that ultimately and even though his sins were destructive to others, **it was GOD** who is mainly offended.
4. He also sees **evil** as an equivalent word for "sin." And he admits that God is just is what He says about the things David had done.

Are you interested in growing? Or are you content to just stay at whatever level you are now? If you're interested in growing and maturing, and continually becoming more like Christ then you will be INTRIGUED at this thing, the conscience. It will at the same time confirm that you're making good decisions, warn you off of sinful or stupid ones, or accuse you if you choose to sin. David felt all of these things as he begins His recovery from that dark time in his life.

But ultimately, he finds mercy and compassion in His God. As dark as his own sin had become, he can ask (again, Psalm 51), ***Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. ¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.***

The apostle Paul wrote these words to the Romans:

...²³ but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind, and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. ²⁴ Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin. ¹ THERE is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Romans 7:23-8:1 (NASB)

RIGHT WRONG

Series: The Conscience (Lesson 3)

Scripture: Romans 14

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: April 20th, 2007

The "Build Up" Voice Inside

Romans 14 (NASB)

¹ Now accept the one who is weak in faith, *but* not for *the purpose of* passing judgment on his opinions. ² One man has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables *only*. ³ Let not him who eats regard with contempt him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats, for God has accepted him. ⁴ Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and stand he will, for the Lord is able to make him

stand. ⁵ One man regards one day above another, another regards every day *alike*. Let each man be fully convinced in his own mind. ⁶ He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God. ⁷ For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; ⁸ for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. ⁹ For to this end Christ died and lived *again*, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. ¹⁰ But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God. ¹¹ For it is written, "AS I LIVE, SAYS THE LORD, EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW TO ME, AND EVERY TONGUE SHALL GIVE PRAISE TO GOD." ¹² So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God. ¹³ Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this—not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way. ¹⁴ I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. ¹⁵ For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died. ¹⁶ Therefore do not let what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil; ¹⁷ for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸ For he who in this *way* serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. ¹⁹ So then let us pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another. ²⁰ Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and gives offense. ²¹ It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or *to do anything* by which your brother stumbles. ²² The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. ²³ But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because *his eating* is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin.

Introduction We like to think of ourselves as independent, autonomous, free of any entanglements. We enjoy the idea of having our own schedule, no obligations to other people, freedom to come and go as we please, sometimes we like to "beat feet" for the door. I say, we enjoy the IDEA... But that is pretty much a fantasy, I think. We are inevitably CONNECTED TO other people. The things we do affect other people, even if we keep our mouths shut, keep to ourselves, don't make eye contact. You still probably end up with a spouse, more than likely kids, and sooner or later in our church someone will tackle you and say, "Yo, who are you?" You really can't get away from people.

We defined "conscience" as the SELF-AWARENESS of the moral goodness or badness of one's conduct, intentions or character." It's like a voice inside of you that speaks to you and tells you what is morally right or wrong. Today I would like to prick your conscience—not BE your conscience but prick it—about

one aspect of how we affect each other. We're defining "conscience" as a SELF-AWARENESS OF THE MORAL GOODNESS OR BADNESS OF ONE'S OWN CONDUCT, INTENTIONS OR CHARACTER... I want to poke at your conscience a little bit about how we can **avoid impeding** each other's spiritual growth. I want to think about **NOT hindering** each other's spiritual growth. You might say, "That's negative. Why not phrase it in the positive, as in 'How to Help/Advance/Assist Each Other's Spiritual Growth?'" The answer is, that is not what I want to talk about. I want to think about how we can **evade** and **steer clear of** and **prevent harming** each other, spiritually.

Again, you might say, "we *can't* hurt each other spiritually." Or, "No one can hurt ME! I've taken every precaution to make sure I don't get close to anyone such that I may be vulnerable to damage by them." But the New Testament has placed in front of us, this unavoidable IDEAL of "**one another**:"

- We are members of one another (Rom. 12:5)
- Fervently love one another (1 Pet. 4:8; Jn. 3:23; Rom.13:8)
- Be devoted to one another (Rom. 12:10)
- Encourage and build up one another (1 Thess. 5:11; Heb. 3:13; Rom. 14:19)
- Pray for one another (James 5:16)
- Suffer with one another (1 Cor. 12:26)
- Bear the burdens of one another (Col. 3:13)
- Tolerate one another (Eph. 4:2)
- Be kind to one another (Eph. 4:32)
- Sing with one another (Eph 5:19)
- Teach one another (Col. 3:16)
- Confess sins to one another (Jam. 5:16)
- Serve one another (1 Pet.4:10)

I would suggest this morning, that if you and I listen to our consciences we will hear "the build up" voice inside of us. It is precisely BECAUSE we can't really insulate ourselves from others that we ARE susceptible to damage, spiritually, by other people and even other Christians. So, today I want to consider ways to avoid hindering each other's spiritual growth. This may be within your own family, in the church body, within small groups, between two Christian friends or maybe in other ways too.

But first of all, **WHAT IS SPIRITUAL GROWTH?** Once you ARE a believer in Jesus Christ then you want to GROW as a Christian and by "spiritual growth" I mean THE PROCESS of a Christian **moving towards God more and more**; it involves **hearing His voice** and **desiring His will** more and more. Spiritual growth is to *progressively become more like Jesus*. The Bible teacher A.W. Pink defined spiritual growth as the confluence or, the coming together of five things, (much like five brooks or creeks, coming together into one river.)

1. an increase in spiritual knowledge,

2. a deeper delight in spiritual things,
3. a greater love for God,
4. the strengthening and enlarging of your faith, and
5. advancing in personal godliness.⁷

Now, to really grow spiritually, you first must be a Christian. I am sorry if that doesn't sound very politically correct, but we believe it is absolutely so. You have to truly HAVE A SAVING KNOWLEDGE of the Lord Jesus Christ, be GENUINELY REDEEMED, *know* that He is YOUR SAVIOR—because you came to the place where you realized you need a savior from your sins—and you have authentically received the new birth. Then you are a Christian and only then are you really eligible for “spiritual growth.” Before that, you may experience enlightenment, growth in knowledge, you may feel kind of bad when you do bad things, you may regret the decay of the world but until you place yourself, by faith, beneath the cross of Jesus and receive HIS payment for your sins, you cannot begin the process of growing spiritual.

There are many other definitions of what spiritual growth is, or entails but let's use these FIVE symptoms of the spiritual life, to consider how we MAY hinder in each other from growing. And so, using Pink's definition of what spiritual growth is, to AVOID hindering each other's spiritual growth, we need to avoid those activities, choices, motions which would diminish each other's spiritual knowledge, or each other's delight in spiritual things, or each other's love for God, or the strength of each other's basic faith or each other's godliness.

I am suggesting the core of what is in Romans 14:13, ***determine this—not to put an obstacle or stumbling block***. The term “stumbling block” is also used by Paul to the Corinthians, in talking about Christian liberty, when he wrote, ***But take care lest this liberty of yours somehow become a stumbling block to the weak***. (1 Corinthians 8:9) Simply, a “stumbling block” is anything we might do that causes another to fall into sin. Spiritual growth is touchy. It is a sensitive thing. We are not isolated from each other and we DO affect each other. We need to love, by being sensitive in our lifestyles so that we do not hinder each other in our striving to become mature, spiritually. So in

NOT HINDERING EACH OTHER,

- Don't confuse him by incorrect information. This is one reason why it is so important to become grounded, theologically and biblically. We need to have the RIGHT information about God, about how to serve Him and even about the very Gospel that we share.

⁷ A.W. Pink, *Spiritual Growth*, Baker Book House, 1970, pp.44-55.

- Don't diminish his delight in spiritual things. This is a real pitfall because the amusements of the world are so seductive and fun. We can become distracted by so many things today, and just skip out on being devoted to spiritual things. Sports, video games, movies, even reading novels can lessen a young Christian's delight in the Lord and the things of the Lord. You can see someone growing in their faith as they develop more and more love FOR spiritual things, but if we throw things in the path of getting joy out of spiritual things, we are hindering each other.
- Avoid introducing anything to her which will challenge her love for God. Jesus said ***No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.*** Matthew 6:24 Anything which we might do, which will have the effect of saying to that other person, "Don't get too serious about the Lord," or "Don't become really devoted to seeking Him," could get in the way of his or her spiritual growth.
- Decide not to be a voice of doubt or an influence that would lessen reliance on God. Walking by faith is really what the Christian walk comes down to. Its not just about going from church service to church service or hanging with clean-living people. It is about WALKING BY FAITH, and entrusting more and more of your decisions and choices, your daily life to Him. And trusting Him to provide, lead and show you His purpose for your life. If we do anything which would introduce doubt, or encourage that person to walk BY SIGHT more, and NOT to trust God, we are hindering spiritual growth.
- Refuse to get in the way of her becoming more godly. If your friend or spouse or child wants to go to some Christian activity, wants to read God's word, wants to pray, wants to fellowship with another Christian, don't get in the way of that. If they want to go to a conference, or join a small group, so that they can grow more in their faith, let them do that! Ultimately, anything which helps each other develop more personal godliness, we should promote, not hinder.

I hope you will give some prayerful thought to how we can build each other up. Our goal is to be a blessing to each other and NEVER hinder each other from growing spiritually. This has application to parents, spouses, your fellow church members on teams and committees and in leading ministries here. May the Lord help us to help each other and avoid anything that would get in the way of sensing the Lord Jesus working in our hearts.

RIGHT WRONG

Series: The Conscience (Lesson 4)

Scripture: Hebrews 4:12-16

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: April 27th, 2007

The Tools of Conscience

Hebrews 4:12-16 (NASB)

For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. ¹³ And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. ¹⁴ Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as *we are*, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need.

Introduction As Christians we still must wrestle with sin. Probably not all sin, all the time, but I can think of no sin that we have become immune to: greed, revenge, coveting, blasphemy, lust, pride, theft, lying, arrogance, critical spirit, carousing, promiscuity, drunkenness, idolatry, fornication, abandonment, unbelief, adultery, gluttony, sloth, rebellion, disunity, robbing God, neglect, meanness, disobedience to parents, heresy, unworthiness of the Lord's table, denial of knowing the Lord Jesus, selfishness, diminishment of God's glory, gossip, homosexuality, duplicity, slander, stinginess, false testimony, murder, striking, disrespect... and there are others too. We invest ourselves in a life-long struggle with remaining sin, even though the Christian knows that he or she is completely forgiven from all sin because of what Jesus accomplished on the cross. We rejoice in that, over and over, and we struggle with sin, sometimes over and over. And in the midst of our struggle with the flesh, people say all the time, "I don't know what to do. I'm confused." Our consciences can become clouded up by sin, and confused.

In this, a basic piece of equipment that we possess is OUR CONSCIENCES. We have had it since birth, really, I think. And it is that self-awareness inside our hearts and minds which informs us whether we have been are being, or are thinking about being good or bad. Our conscience speaks to our actions, our intentions and our character.

What kind of character do you have? Are you proud of whom you are, or do you slink behind the post, not making eye-contact, seeking the shadows? Your conscience probably affects a little bit how you are in public. A person with a clear conscience generally, can interact with the conviction that they're done nothing wrong and that their choices are generally worthy and honorable.

In Hebrews 4, jumping into a discussion about something called "the believer's rest," the writer has been using Psalm 95 to illustrate the URGENCY that we press on towards that state of finishing our work for Christ. I wanted you to see just a section of this chapter, to show how there are things which work alongside or in conjunction with our consciences... **Young people--check this out:**

The concluding third part of the exposition of Ps. 95:7-11 emphasizes the accountability which comes to those who have heard the Word of God. Scripture records the examples of those in the wilderness with Moses, those who entered Canaan with Joshua, and those who received the same opportunity in David's day. It is the Word which must be believed and obeyed and the Word which will judge the disobedient (cf. 1 Cor. 10:5-13).⁸

After we die or experience the Rapture, God will do a spiritual postmortem on us at the judgment seat of Christ (Rom. 14:10-12; 2 Cor. 5:10). He will examine our innermost attitudes and motives. The "scalpel" He will use is His Word. The Word of God is "living" because it is the word of the living God (3:12), and it is "active" (energetic, powerful). The sword in view (Gr. *machairan*) was a small one like a boning knife that cooks used to cut up meat. In its double edged form it was a symbol of judges and magistrates in the Roman world. It illustrated the power of those officials to turn both ways to get to the bottom of a case. The Word of God can express and distinguish what is "soulish" (natural) and what is spiritual in our motivation and actions. It can do so even when those elements are as close to each other as our joints and marrow. It is even able to expose our thoughts and attitudes (cf. 1 Cor. 4:5). "What the author is saying is that God's Word can reach to the innermost recesses of our being. We must not think that we can bluff our way out of anything, for there are no secrets hidden from God. We cannot keep our thoughts to ourselves."¹³⁸ Many Christians use this verse to show that God will judge unbelievers with His piercing Word, but in the context it refers to God judging believers to determine rewards (1 Cor. 3:11-15).⁹

The point is, there is something here which "exposes our thoughts and attitudes" OTHER than Dad or Mom's voice. It is the word of God. It does a dissection of our hearts and lays open where we're REALLY at. Let's consider a list of things that I believe, are TOOLS of the conscience. We're going to suggest

⁸John Jr MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible*, electronic ed., Heb 4:11 (Nashville: Word Pub., c1997).
¹³⁸ 138. Morris, p. 44.

⁹Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible*, Heb 4:12 (Galaxie Software, 2003).

seven although you may be able to think of more. Backing up a bit, first of all a Christian has:

The Holy Spirit

Every true Christian, a person who has really become born-again, who genuinely knows and trusts the Lord, HAS the Holy Spirit inside of Him (Eph.1:13.) The Spirit indwells our hearts and minds and cannot be evicted, IF we are truly saved. The Spirit works alongside the conscience and IN the conscience. This is how God designed the process of sanctification. I think this is a major function of the Spirit in us, to speak to us the voice of the Lord. And it will always, always be in accordance with the written word.

Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, "TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, do not harden your hearts..." Hebrews 3:7

The Bible

As Hebrews 4 indicates, the Word of God is a real tool of the conscience. If you don't know any of the Word, the Spirit won't just magically inject it into your thinking. That's why we need to be Bible-readers and even memorizers. The conscience feeds off the Word implanted, as James hints at

Therefore putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.
James 1:21

Will your conscience ever suggest you act in a way or make a decision which is clearly contrary to God's revealed will in Scripture? Never. But the conscience can wonderfully USE the word which we have learned to help us make decisions, know His will and help others.

Wisdom and experience

As we grow, we gain more and more experience. From our experiences, hopefully we accumulate wisdom. The whole Book of Proverbs illustrates this: Consider this: Proverbs 25:8-10 (The Message)

Don't jump to conclusions—there may be a perfectly good explanation for what you just saw. ⁹ In the heat of an argument, don't betray confidences; ¹⁰ Word is sure to get around, and no one will trust you.

The conscience draws freely from our experiences and the wisdom we have. A person does not have to be old to be wise. I have known quite a few younger people who are wise in behavior. Their consciences have not been seared or become calloused and sometimes they possess more wisdom about decision-making than older people whose hearts have become cluttered or cynical.

Example of others

A fourth TOOL that our conscience can use is the example of others around us. It might be good or bad. And we have to factor in WHOM we place around us. Consider 1st Corinthians 15:33 : **Do not be deceived: “Bad company corrupts good morals.”** This quotation, contained in a comedy by Menander titled *Thais*, but perhaps dating back to Euripides, had become proverbial. The Greeks generally recognized it as encapsulating a wise thought. Therefore Paul used it to warn his readers that if they kept company with people who denied the resurrection their character would eventually suffer.¹⁰

I think the default settings for how young people pick friends, is coolness. Left to ourselves, we will hang out with whomever we decide is cool. I understand that. But we need to realize that we are AFFECTED by the example of other people. A simple illustration is smoking. Very, very few people decide to take up cigarette smoking on their own. It is a counter-intuitive practice, and must be stimulated by perceived coolness!

Good examples can also have a wonderful impact and our consciences will confirm that seeing good examples by people, in unlimited ways, is a good thing.

Exhortation

Fifth, sometimes our consciences need a little help from an outside source. That's when we need the input of a little **exhortation**. This is actually one of the spiritual gifts which some Christians have been equipped with, to serve the body of Christ. “Exhortation” is an announcement about something that must be done. It isn't necessarily a rebuke, just a clear statement, “We need to do this,” or “You need to do that, or NOT do that.” Our consciences need that word sometimes. **...or he who exhorts, in his exhortation...** Romans 12:8a Our PRIDE might resist this a bit, but then our pride is working against our conscience. Also, Hebrews 12:5 **and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, “MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM;**

Encouragement

Another tool that our consciences can use, is encouragement. The older I get the more important I see that this is. YOU need encouragement. Encouragement is not an unintelligent pumping of sunshine. It is real focus that “Hey, you can do this!” or “Hey, this is really a good decision you're thinking about.” Or “Hey, the Lord can really BLESS this thing you're considering.” Our consciences are TELLING us to do something, but we're afraid or insecure feeling. Then someone comes along with the right word at the right time, and we go, “Okay, I think I'll do that.” It might be some need of ministry that you see, and suspect you could help with. And someone says, “You can sooo do that.” I've just finished my

¹⁰Tom Constable, *Ibid.*

doctoral dissertation. It was something of a project. Took me a while. At the beginning, I wasn't sure if I could do it. But a few key people around me encouraged me. My conscience said, "Okay, let's go after it!" Other voices said to me, "No, you can't do it. No, that won't benefit us. No, you're too stupid." But a voice of encouragement said, "Go get it, man."

A good example is Colossians 4:11, at least a mention of encouragement: ***and also Jesus who is called Justus; these are the only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are from the circumcision; and they have proved to be an encouragement to me.***

Having a deliberate and individual prayer time

Finally, a really important tool, an irreplaceable tool, is taking time on a regular basis to talk to the Lord. Prayer groups and meetings are good. But they do not substitute for your own, private time when you talk with God. You need a deliberate and intentional prayer time. In that time, your conscience is at its best, I think. You are in the presence of the Lord and you hear Him if you listen carefully, with your Bible open. Your conscience hears the Lord and He confirms His will toward us. ***And in the early morning, while it was still dark, He arose and went out and departed to a lonely place, and was praying there.*** Mark 1:35 .

Now, imagine if you had **ALL OF THESE THINGS WORKING FOR YOU?** I think the Lord intends us to utilize ALL the tools of conscience, NOT in order to make us feel guilty or to make us feel bad. But ultimately, in order to set us up for the happiest possible lifestyle.

Young people, I ask you, LEARN TO LISTEN TO YOUR CONSCIENCES. Do not allow the noise of this world to drown them out. Your conscience is a gift from God that is intended to help you often. Hear it, and let's all use all the tools of conscience that God with which God intends to give us an abundant life here.

RIGHT WRONG

Series: The Conscience (Lesson 5)

Scripture: 1st Timothy 3:1-13

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: May 4th, 2008

Voting Your Conscience

1st Timothy 3:1-13 (NASB)

It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires *to do*. ² An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³ not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, uncontentious, free from the love of money. ⁴ *He must be* one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity ⁵ (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?); ⁶ *and* not a new convert, lest he become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. ⁷ And he must have a good reputation with those outside *the church*, so that he may not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. ⁸ Deacons likewise *must be* men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, ⁹ *but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience*. ¹⁰ And let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach. ¹¹ Women *must* likewise *be* dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things. ¹² Let deacons be husbands of *only* one wife, *and* good managers of *their* children and their own households. ¹³ For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

Introduction We are spending some time thinking about the conscience, this thing which each of us has inside of us which we either listen to, or we suppress or both. The word "conscience" is used in the Bible 28 times, once in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (which is known as the Septuagint) and 27 times in the New Testament. The single Old Testament usage is an interesting one. It is in the incident where David is hiding in a cave, and he has the chance to kill Saul. He doesn't. But he does cut off a piece of Saul's garment, so close was he to him in the cave, unknown to Saul. He had vowed he would never touch anyone who was God's anointed. But he *did* cut off a piece of his robe. And felt bad about it. His conscience troubled him...

In the New Testament Luke, Paul, Peter and the writer to the Hebrews mention the conscience. It is clear from those verses that the conscience is an

important idea among the apostles. One place of interest is in 1st Timothy 3 where we have a list of standards and qualities that should characterize three groups of Christian leaders: overseers, deacons and probably their wives. It is always good to go over those qualities from time to time:

- Overseers (ἐπισκοπιῆς) *episkopês*
 - A good work to aspire to, must be above reproach, 1 wife-men, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, gentle, uncontentious, free from the love of money, one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity, not a new convert, good reputation with those outside the church
- Wives (γυναῖκας) *gunaikas* (probably deacons' wives)
 - dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things
- Deacons (Διακόνους) *deacons*
 - men of dignity, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not fond of sordid gain, holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience, 1 wife-men, good managers of their children and their own households, probationary period of testing; Then, worthy of high standing, good confidence in the faith

The single phrase I want you to see, is that for deacons, they are (in Paul's mind) to be, instead of being clever/shifty talkers or drinkers, or money-grubbers—notice these are the *opposites* of what they're supposed to be—they are to **hold to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience**. CONSCIENCE – συνειδήσει *sunédésé*. Moral awareness. The thing inside of us that informs us, signals us, alerts us to what is right and what is wrong. A moral compass. For me who serve, Paul told Timothy, it is important that THOSE men hold to the mystery of the faith with a clean sense of right and wrong. These are NOT men who waver about what's right and wrong from one day to the next. These are NOT men who act like they understand everything about the faith and they have it all locked down, or say so publicly but privately are whispering, "I don't have a clue."

I want to take this phrase that Paul specifies as a quality that should be true for anyone who wants to serve, help others, in the body of Christ. Servants and helpers should be sure about the faith, focused on it, they should understand that in one sense it is a great and wonderful mystery—and remember that WE have been clued in, given light, made partakers of what to the world looks like a puzzle. The mystery of the faith" is the body of doctrine that God has given us by special revelation.¹¹ To us the word implies knowledge concealed from others but in the New Testament, **mystery** is about what has

¹¹Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible*, 1 Ti 3:8 (Galaxie Software, 2003).

been revealed. This describes a man of conviction who behaves in harmony with his belief.¹² Thus, he has a clear conscience.

I want to bring application of this quality to an expression that is sometime heard, usually around November: "voting your conscience." If Christians, at least Christian leaders, at least Christian deacons, are to be clear thinking about life in general, holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience, what does that imply about the subject of voting?

The phrase "vote your conscience" is used by every political party. As near as I can tell, the phrase seems to have originated with the Catholic church which urges its members to "vote their consciences," meaning, "vote according to church teaching." That's what I want to think about today.

First of all, does every one vote? The answer to that is, "No." Some people do not vote in elections because they don't know they CAN vote. Some people do not vote because they believe that one vote makes no difference. Some people do not vote because they can't get to a poll or they don't know how to do an absentee ballot. And some people don't vote because they don't care enough to do so—it is too much trouble.

Voting is a thing, I believe, that all citizens should do. And we should do it every year. Our system is based on the idea that the people have the main right to decide things. They have the primary point of input. That privilege does not belong to one person, or to one group of people. Decision-making belongs to all the people.

This is why it is a good thing each election, when there might be ballot questions that you don't know much about, and candidates that you don't know much about. You LEARN about the questions, and the candidates and you go and vote. We should do this faithfully, because we CAN. Many millions of people in the world do not have this privilege.

Young people should learn how to think through issues, and how to think through candidates. They should see their parents deliberating over questions, learning about issues, and making decisions.

Now what does this have to do with the Christian life? Why would I take a message and talk about "voting your conscience," (especially since I am theorizing that that is a Roman Catholic expression anyway?)

¹² Ibid, Constable.

I go all the way back to Paul's words to Timothy. I think Christian servants were called to **hold to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience**. We are to know what we believe, and live in harmony with those beliefs.

Two sociologists and a mathematician recently conducted an experiment that provides an intriguing window into the presidential candidate selection that begins this week. Matthew Salganik, Duncan Watts and Peter Sheridan Dodds had a large group of people rate 48 songs. Based on these ratings, the researchers produced a list of the best songs.

They then had eight other large groups of people evaluate the same songs, with one difference: In each of these "parallel universes," people knew how others in their group were evaluating the music. Did the eight groups come up with the same list of the best songs? No. When people knew how others thought, this changed how *they* thought.¹³

Are we that way? Do we change our preferences according to some wind of public opinion? Do we waver on issues because my next door neighbor or my brother-in-law said that was the way he wanted to go.

I would suggest to you this morning that we have a Christian world-view. It isn't so arrogant that we have all answers to all questions at our finger tips. We are supposed to be humble, and we concede certain mysteries. We say, "I'm still learning, and growing." But in general, we have a Christian world view and we DO IN FACT VOTE OUR CONSCIENCES.

If my conscience tells me, informed by my Christian world view, that the way to believe on a certain issue is clear, then I need to live according to that belief. And I will vote according to that belief. If that belief isn't what my next door neighbor or my brother-in-law thinks, well, so be it. I need to vote my conscience.

If there isn't any candidate who generally supports a Christian world-view, then I have to make a decision. I do one of two things. I wait until the next election when there IS such a candidate, and I work hard to contribute something so that might happen. OR, I decide which candidate represents the closest overall world-view to a Christian world view and I vote for that person. What I do NOT do is just forfeit my Christian world view, my love for **the mystery of the faith**, throw it down and forget about. I do NOT do that because I like the way some candidate comes across, or because I have always had a loyalty for a particular party. To do that, is not to live with a clear conscience. It is to DENY my conscience.

¹³ Shankar Vedantam, in the *Washington Post*, Monday, December 31, 2007; Page A03

Voting your conscience also means that your conscience is informed by the tools of conscience. You vote based on what you know about the Word of God, about what GOD has said is important. You vote based on prayer and the Holy Spirit leading you, who will NEVER lead you contrary to the Scripture, the already-revealed will of God.

Voting your conscience means that you vote, and that you do so faithfully, and that you do so according to that voice inside of you always calling you towards the kingdom of God.

Remember these words: Romans 12:1-2 ***I URGE you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.***

Sometimes I think as Christians we compartmentalize our lives, and we divorce our political thinking from our spiritual beliefs. We need to bring the two things together. Our decision-making in the voting booth should be as informed by a Christian world view as our choices for entertainment on a Saturday night.

May God give us clear thinking through our consciences, which He has already given to us. May the Spirit of God burden us to always desire more than anything the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ in our lives, even in the voting booth. Or especially in the voting booth.

RIGHT WRONG

Series: The Conscience (Lesson 6 of 6)

Scripture: Various

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M., D.Min.

Date: May 25th, 2008

Developing the Conscience

1 Samuel 3 (NASB) 1120 B.C.

¹ Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD before Eli. And word from the LORD was rare in those days, visions were infrequent. ² And it happened at that time as Eli was lying down in his place (now his eyesight had begun to grow dim *and* he could not see well), ³ and the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD where the ark of God *was*, ⁴ that the LORD called Samuel; and he said, "Here I am." ⁵ Then he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, lie down again." So he went

and lay down. ⁶ And the LORD called yet again, "Samuel!" So Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he answered, "I did not call, my son, lie down again." ⁷ Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, nor had the word of the LORD yet been revealed to him. ⁸ So the LORD called Samuel again for the third time. And he arose and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli discerned that the LORD was calling the boy. ⁹ And Eli said to Samuel, "Go lie down, and it shall be if He calls you, that you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for Thy servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. ¹⁰ Then the LORD came and stood and called as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for Thy servant is listening." ¹¹ And the LORD said to Samuel, "Behold, I am about to do a thing in Israel at which both ears of everyone who hears it will tingle. ¹² "In that day I will carry out against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. ¹³ "For I have told him that I am about to judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knew, because his sons brought a curse on themselves and he did not rebuke them. ¹⁴ "And therefore I have sworn to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever." ¹⁵ So Samuel lay down until morning. Then he opened the doors of the house of the LORD. But Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli. ¹⁶ Then Eli called Samuel and said, "Samuel, my son." And he said, "Here I am." ¹⁷ And he said, "What is the word that He spoke to you? Please do not hide it from me. May God do so to you, and more also, if you hide anything from me of all the words that He spoke to you." ¹⁸ So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him. And he said, "It is the LORD; let Him do what seems good to Him." ¹⁹ Thus Samuel grew and the LORD was with him and let none of his words fail. ²⁰ And all Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was confirmed as a prophet of the LORD. ²¹ And the LORD appeared again at Shiloh, because the LORD revealed Himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the LORD.

Psalm 139:13-16 (NASB) 950 B.C

¹³ For Thou didst form my inward parts; Thou didst weave me in my mother's womb. ¹⁴ I will give thanks to Thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Thy works, And my soul knows it very well. ¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from Thee, When I was made in secret, And skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth. ¹⁶ Thine eyes have seen my unformed substance; And in Thy book they were all written, The days that were ordained *for me*, When as yet there was not one of them.

Jeremiah 1:4-8 (NASB) 627 B.C.

⁴ Now the word of the LORD came to me saying, ⁵ "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, And before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations." ⁶ Then I said, "Alas, Lord GOD! Behold, I do not know how to speak, Because I am a youth." ⁷ But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am a youth,' Because everywhere I send you, you shall go, And all that I command you, you shall speak. ⁸ "Do not be afraid of them, For I am with you to deliver you," declares the LORD.

Colossians 3:21 (NASB) 61 A.D.

²¹ Fathers, do not exasperate your children, that they may not lose heart.

Introduction Sometimes people wonder, "Is there anything in the Old Testament for me? Those people lived so long ago, and their culture was so different." It is an honest question. Samuel, in the Old Testament, is a very interesting person to study about. He lived about a hundred years, dying in about the year 1,021 B.C. He was a man with a clean conscience, as he indicates in 1st Samuel 12:2-4:

"And now, here is the king walking before you, but I am old and gray, and behold my sons are with you. And I have walked before you from my youth even to this day. ³ Here I am; bear witness against me before the LORD and His anointed.

Whose ox have I taken, or whose donkey have I taken, or whom have I defrauded? Whom have I oppressed, or from whose hand have I taken a bribe to blind my eyes with it? I will restore it to you.”⁴ And they said, “You have not defrauded us, or oppressed us, or taken anything from any man’s hand.”

Samuel heard the voice and call of God very early in his life. He is not typical of young men and his life was not ordinary. But from his earliest days, Samuel clearly had a developed *conscience*. His own spirit, deep inside, sensed the voice of the Lord. It came from living close to the Lord from an early age. Interestingly, Eli the priest—who really raised Samuel--his sons provided little help. They were partiers. So it’s not just being in the right environment. It is nurturing a sense of the Lord’s presence that lays down a good conscience.

Around 950 B.C. King David wrote about a deep awareness he had that God had made Him, had formed him even when in the womb and he wrote **and my soul knows it very well** (Ps. 139:14). As a young man, David could hear the Lord in his conscience. He also ends up writing these words:

⁹ **How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Thy word.**

¹⁰ **With all my heart I have sought Thee; Do not let me wander from Thy commandments.** ¹¹ **Thy word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against Thee.** ¹² **Blessed art Thou, O Lord; Teach me Thy statutes.** ¹³ **With my lips I have told of All the ordinances of Thy mouth.** ¹⁴ **I have rejoiced in the way of Thy testimonies, As much as in all riches.** ¹⁵ **I will meditate on Thy precepts, And regard Thy ways.** ¹⁶ **I shall delight in Thy statutes; I shall not forget Thy word.**

Psalm 119:9-16

Even though it is three thousand years ago, and the other side of the planet, David was confronted with many of the same challenges to his faith that we are. Then, as well as now, there were **the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the boastful pride of life** (1st John 2:15). But even though he had so little of the word of God—compared to later believers—he saw that his own conscience would be aided by as much of the word as he could access. He didn’t have the Gospel of John or the Letter to the Philippians or the Book of Revelation. Those lay a thousand years in the future. But he talked about the **commandments, statutes, ordinances, testimonies, precepts** all of which He called **Thy word**. He saw that the word of God will temper, refine and strengthen his conscience. Without knowing he was actually WRITING God’s word so often when he picked up the pen, He was breathing it, living it, feeling it.

In about the year 627 B.C. we read the extraordinary words from God Himself to Jeremiah, that **Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you...And before you were born I consecrated you. I have appointed you a prophet to the nations** (Jeremiah 1:5). That woke him up! And I cannot imagine Jeremiah responding with, “Well, what about free will?” Jeremiah DID have a problem

though, and that was with his own youth (vs.6). He replied, **Then I said, "Alas, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, Because I am a youth."** To which God replied, **"Do not say, 'I am a youth,' Because everywhere I send you, you shall go, And all that I command you, you shall speak. "Do not be afraid of them, For I am with you to deliver you," declares the LORD.** (vss.7,8) This man's consciousness, and I am sure his conscience was, from Day One, dominated by God's calling upon him as to what his vocation would be. So deep was this calling, that it was there even before Jeremiah was conceived. God had plans for this man, and unveils it to him while he is still young. Jeremiah's whole calling and ministry were foreordained by God from even before Jeremiah's birth. He would surely be equipped with a first-rate conscience.

In Samuel, the **PRESENCE OF THE LORD** contributed to the development of his conscience. In David, the **WORD OF GOD** contributed to how it developed. In Jeremiah, **THE CALLING AND PURPOSE OF GOD DEFINED** his conscience—and if you know anything about Jeremiah you know he didn't have a particularly pleasant and cheerful life.

And then we jump all the way up to about 61 A.D. as Paul writes to the Christian assembly in the Asian city of Colossae. To the Christian fathers there he marks them out as having special potential to mess up their kids! This might be in part because of what is called "the Colossian heresy," a big problem that had cropped up in that church. But to Dads, Paul warns them **NOT to exasperate** their kids, lest the kids **lose heart**. The implication is that Dads can short-circuit the normal role of the conscience with too much rule-making and "Don't Do This!!!" You might think the opposite would be true—that with more and more rules to follow, the kid's basic "programming" (his conscience) will become saturated with an awareness of what NOT to do. That's the problem. Intuitively, Paul knew that the job of Christian parents is not to "code" GUILT into a kid, it is to teach the word of God and let the conscience naturally absorb the word. There should be, the **OPPOSITE** of **exasperation**. What would that be? The word for **exasperate** is the Greek word ERETHIZETE (ἐρεθίζετε), which also means "to provoke, cause resentment, stir up embitterment." What would be the **OPPOSITE** of that? If the Christian Dad has the fruit of peace about him, I think the kids benefit. I think it is to have a certain atmosphere of relaxation, of trial and error, allowing the kids to make a few mistakes rather than to hover over them and constantly hound them. Somehow, Dads in particular (at least in Colossae) have the chance to create a good atmosphere for the kid to develop his conscience.

So last today, I am suggesting that the conscience is aided in growing by **THE PEACE OF GOD**. This isn't usually thought of as one of the applications of the

fruit of the Spirit, but I think the more we nurture the fruit of the Spirit in our own lives, the more it affects other people—especially the young people around us! And with those who are still developing their consciences, a generally peaceful environment is a good thing. Obviously, many are not given this advantage and they still develop their consciences anyway. But blessing our children, Dads, is a major part of our job description.

We are all given a conscience from Day One. It is basic equipment. Its basic function is to protect us, not condemn us. Anything we can do, on any front, to assist our young people to hear God's will for their lives and to discover God's plan and purpose, is worth doing.

This is the final message in a short series on a subject that is deep. We probably have hardly begun it. But I hope you have heard a few ideas that will help you listen to the voice of the Lord. That is our main task—to hear His calling and voice each step of the way—as teenagers, 20somethings, 30somethings, 80somethings.

If you are here with us today and you didn't KNOW God has a plan for your life, you can know it. Call out to Him and trust in the completed work of His Son, Jesus Christ, to be your Savior. Invite Him to show you His plan for your life. It is a good plan, because the Lord is good. All the time.

<<Completion of series>>