

Types of Conscience

Sermon by Andy Sochor

Text: 1 Timothy 1:5

The goal of our preaching is a “good conscience.” Our conscience is designed to help guide us to do what is right. Whether or not it does this depends on how it is trained. To accomplish this goal, we need to understand more about the conscience. There are at least six different types of conscience addressed in the New Testament. We will consider them here.

Good Conscience

- Free from guilt – we are doing what we believe to be right; yet it is possible to have a “good conscience” and do what is wrong
- Those who do right are to have a good conscience (1 Timothy 1:5), then work to keep it (1 Timothy 1:19) – if we follow God, we can have confidence, not fear (1 John 2:28-29)
- However, it is possible to do wrong and have a good conscience (Acts 23:1) – Paul believed he was right (Acts 24:16), but did many things against Christ (Acts 26:9-11)
- Many have a good conscience because they do what “seems right” (Proverbs 14:12) – this is not enough

Defiled Conscience

- Causes one to feel guilt for doing what is either right or innocent – right is something required by God (2 Timothy 3:16-17); innocent is not right or wrong (Romans 14:2-3)
- In Corinth, some had a defiled conscience (1 Corinthians 8:7) – much of the meat sold in the markets had been used in idol worship; Paul explained that buying and eating the meat did not mean they were participating in idolatry (1 Corinthians 8:4-6); but those who were “accustomed to the idol” could not separate the worship from the eating (1 Corinthians 8:7); for them, to eat would violate their conscience and embolden them to sin (1 Corinthians 8:10-11)
- Those with a defiled conscience need to be patiently taught the truth (Romans 14:1)

Seared Conscience

- No longer feels guilt for sin (regardless of whether they followed the right or wrong standard) – their conscience was violated so many times it no longer works
- The Spirit warned of those who would fall away due to a seared conscience (1 Timothy 4:1-2) – when one sins, godly sorrow leads him to repentance (2 Corinthians 7:10); but when sin becomes persistent and habitual, guilt is no longer there (Jeremiah 6:15); we prevent this by laying aside sin (Hebrews 12:1), rather than continuing in it
- For those with a seared conscience, little can be done until they have a change of heart (Hebrews 6:4-6)

Weak Conscience

- Simply has not been trained in what is right – lacks knowledge of the right standard
- In Corinth, a weak conscience led to a defiled conscience (1 Corinthians 8:7) – lacked knowledge; also, one can have a weak conscience (untrained) and a good conscience (without guilt)
- Those with a weak conscience need to be trained in the word of God (Hebrews 5:14)

Evil Conscience

- One that has not been forgiven of sin (Hebrews 10:22) – all have this at some point (Romans 3:23)
- Forgiveness is found in Christ (Hebrews 9:14) – His blood cleanses the evil conscience

Clear (Pure) Conscience

- One that has been forgiven (1 Timothy 3:9) – cleansed by Christ; it is the good conscience of one who is doing right
- We cannot purify our conscience on our own – we must appeal to God for it (1 Peter 3:21); God cleanses us when we obey the gospel (Romans 6:3-4); this continues as we obey Him (1 John 1:7)

Conclusion

- The goal of our instruction is a “good conscience” (by God’s standard, not man’s) – it is not enough to think we are right; we must be right; this involves knowledge, obedience, and forgiveness
- We can have “our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience” (Hebrews 10:22) – this is done in baptism when we appeal for a good conscience (1 Peter 3:21) and receive forgiveness (Acts 22:16)

Adapted from an article written by Harry E. Ozment – Types of Conscience