

**LET'S CONSIDER THE CONSCIENCE**  
**ACTS 23.1-11**

We have three weeks left in our series on Acts.  
I love to talk about the history of the early church  
but I got stuck on the word conscience.

So today, **LET'S CONSIDER THE CONSCIENCE.**

Paul talks about his conscience.  
He continues to be on the hot seat.  
Actually he has moved from the hot seat, to the frying pan, and into the fire  
as he appears before the Sanhedrin.

Acts 23.1, **"Paul looked straight at the Sanhedrin and said,  
My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day."**

How can Paul say, **"I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day."**

Paul was the guy who giggled with glee when Stephen was being killed.  
He was the guy who wrote the guidelines for the Jewish Gestapo.

He was the guy who terrorized the early Christians.  
He banged on doors, roused people out of their beds at night, tore babies out of their mother's arms,  
and sultan like signed the orders to kill, torture, and terrorize the people of faith.

How is that a good conscience?

For one thing God has changed Paul and Paul's conscience.  
Another might just be as Warren Wiersbe says, "he used the light he had."

Pricilla Schrier in Discovering the Voice of God explains that;  
The problem with following your conscience is that  
every person's conscience is developed or shaped  
by the truth or lies they've been taught and what they've experienced.

So basically the conscience's program is set in a relative and subjective way  
That is why it is so important for us as parents and grandparents  
to teach our children to be sensitive to what God wants,  
to teach right and wrong, and model honest behavior.

Last week I gave a friend a piece of candy.  
She ate the candy, thanked me, and said it tasted great.  
And then she said, "The best part is I don't feel guilty.  
I have a clear conscience. I just got done with exercise class.

Oh, I had a great time thinking about her age old struggle at her expense.

When she told me that, I pictured a fallen angel,  
 a little devil on one shoulder seductively whispering  
 "go ahead, eat it, it's just an itsy bitsy piece and it'll be good, really, really good.  
 Besides, you deserve it, you've just finished exercise class.

And on the other shoulder sits a different angel,  
 not whispering, probably begging, "no, don't eat it, it's not good for you.  
 And besides you deserve better, you worked hard in class."

Well, in this story her conscience was quieted and the candy eaten.  
 That's all well and good, it's only an itsy bitsy piece of candy,  
 but as you think about it, we've become pretty good at placating our consciences  
 on the more major and important things in our lives.

The world (the culture's values),  
 the flesh (our selfishness, our lust for convenience and comfort),  
 and the devil (the presence of evil)  
 have made it all too easy to tone down, tune out, and turn off our consciences.

And predictably, the consequences have been and will continue to be tragic.

In 1984 there was a jet crashed in Spain.  
 A study of the black box determined that the plane crashed  
 because the pilot turned off the plane's warning system.

When the computer voice from the plane's warning system  
 repeatedly said, "pull up, pull up, pull up, pull up,"  
 the pilot became irritated, snapped back "shut up gringo!" and flipped off the switch.

So, a few minutes later, predictably, the plane smashed into the mountain  
 and everybody on board was instantly killed.

The plane's radar was programmed to warn the pilot that something was wrong,  
 and it did, but the pilot silenced the warning, silenced the plane's conscience.

We have been programmed with God's law.  
 Hebrews 8.10 tells us, "**...I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts.**"

And God has given us a tool to warn us when we violate that law, that is our conscience.  
 The conscience-relative and subjective; God's law-absolute and objective.

Know that this God-given conscience isn't there  
 to take the fun out of life or make life more miserable.

God uses it to help protect and preserve life,  
 God uses it to tell us we're going in the wrong direction and that we need to change directions.

Remember our conscience doesn't in itself create the program or value system, it doesn't make  
 something good or bad, right or wrong. The conscience is not the voice of God, but can be used by God.

We hear that in Romans 2.15,(MSG)

**“They show that God’s law is not something that is alien,  
imposed on us from without, but woven into the very fabric of our creation.  
There is something deep within that echoes God’s yes and no, right and wrong.**

The NIV’s word for echoes is **“the conscience that bears witness.**

Now, another way we can think of our conscience is as a window and God’s law being the light.  
The cleaner the window, the more light that is let in.

But you know it’s difficult to keep windows clean, isn’t it.  
You ladies understand that and will do what you need to do to keep them clean.

In I Timothy 3.9, Paul says this about church leaders,  
**“They must keep hold of deep truths of faith with a clear conscience.”**

Titus 1.15-16 tells us how we know a conscience is defiled;

**“...both their minds and consciences are corrupted.  
“They claim to know God, but their actions deny him.”**

And I Corinthians 8.7 gives us a hint as to why a conscience can become unclean or defiled;  
**“Some people are so accustom to idols that when they eat such food,  
they think of it as having been sacrificed to an idol, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled.”**

Here is how it works.

When someone does something wrong and violate the indwelling divine law,  
If their conscience is programmed right, it should bother them, they should feel some guilt.

They might confess the sin but if they overrule their conscience again and again,  
their conscience wears down, wears out, gives up the battle, and gets burned out.

.At that point, Paul would say you have a seared or calloused conscience, I Timothy 4.2,  
**...having their conscience seared with a hot iron.”**

It’s like branding.

When you brand something, you put a hot iron to it, sear it,  
and the result-dead nerve endings- no pain.

Ah, no pain-that’s great? NO It Isn’t!!!  
Remember the conscience is suppose produce pain.  
And that pain should invite us to do something different.

It also makes us aware we need God.

That pain should prod us to the foot of the cross and push us into the outstretched arms of Jesus.

But what do we do with the pain most of the time?

Like Adam and Eve we might try to hide it, cover it, or even blame someone else.  
We could try to talk ourselves out of it, ignore it, shut it off, or medicate it.

Remember our pilot? He shut it off didn't he?

He didn't want the pain of listening to the "pull up, pull up, pull up."  
As a result He didn't have to experience much more pain,  
But then again he didn't experience much of anything a few minutes later.

Ananias is a good example of a seared conscience.  
He is the high priest and leader of the temple.  
Theoretically he is the model of morality  
but realistically the farthest thing from it.

He was brutal, he ruled the temple like the godfather ruled the mafia.  
He extorted from the temple businesses, extracted money from his priests  
and enforced the laws simply to suit himself.

Acts 23.2 tells us that after Paul spoke,  
**"At this the high priest Ananias ordered those near Paul to strike him on the mouth."**  
It was illegal to have a person hit in such a trial setting.  
His order was totally out of order.

Today we know that a lot of consciences are out of order.  
We hear and see the evidence of that daily;  
as we read about gossip, greed, and graft,  
as we feel the pain of those struggling with drugs, gambling, or pornography,  
as we see the lack of concern for life of the unborn,  
the hungry and children sold into sexual slavery,  
as we hear about the abuse and misuse of family and friends,  
and as we've come to accept violence as a norm.

There are days we might even wonder if our culture has a conscience.  
A man named Neale D. Walsch has written a couple of books,  
Conversations With God, and Conversations with God for teens.

They sound innocent enough but please do not buy them.  
Walsch answers questions anyone might ask of God  
and answers them supposedly with the "voice of God."

Here are a couple of entries;  
A young adult writes, "I am living with my boyfriend.  
My parents say I should marry him because I am living in sin.  
Should I marry him?"

The answer, "Who are you sinning against? Not me, because you have done nothing wrong."

Another question asks about God's forgiveness of sin.  
The reply, "I do not forgive anyone because there is nothing to forgive...  
There is no such thing as right and wrong,  
and that is what I have been trying to tell everyone, do not judge people.

The rule is 'judge not, lest ye be judged.'  
 No right and wrong?  
 I must have missed that in my Bible.  
 Is it in yours?

Hey, no right or wrong-no need to be bothered by your conscience right?  
 And if you feel guilty about anything,  
 just throw out the guilt, it's obsolete and counterproductive anyway,  
 just throw it out, even though we're drowning in guilt today.  
 Just pull the plug on guilt and plug in a new set of values, like "if it feels good, just do it."

I'm being fascias.  
 None of those things would be good to do, would they?

What would be good is, **LET'S ASK FOR A CLEAN CONSCIENCE, A CLEAN CONSCIENCE IN CHRIST.**  
 If you're struggling with your conscience today, commit or recommit your life to Christ.

Hebrews 9.14, "**how much more then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our conscience from acts that lead to death, so that we can serve the living God.**"

Isn't that a wonderful verse. Charles Wesley said it this way; a principal within modified.  
 "I want a principle within, a watchful principal with Godly fear  
 A sensibility to sin, and the pain to feel it near.

Help me to feel it at the first approach of pride or wrong desire  
 And catch the wandering of my will, and quench the kindling fire

From you that I no more may stray, but for you, I for more goodness live,  
 Lord to me I pray the tender conscience give.

Then what, let's do as Paul, **LET'S STRIVE TO KEEP A CLEAR CONSCIENCE.**  
 Acts 24.16, "**I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.**"

Discerning the Voice of God lists five L and M's as to how to strive to keep a clear conscience;

- 1-**LABOR** FOR THE **MESSAGE** OF THE SPIRIT.  
 In other words, look inward, struggle, and ask, is this God's will or my own time taught conscience.
- 2- **LIVE** IN THE **MODE** OF PRAYER.  
 In other words, don't spend time worrying, spend time giving the issue to God.
- 3-**LEAN** INTO THE **MODEL** OF SCRIPTURE  
 In other words, find out where you are in the stories and seek the wisdom of those words.
- 4-**LEARN** FROM THE **MINISTRY** OF ELI  
 In other words, as Samuel sought council from Eli, seek council from the mature and wise
- 5-**LOOK** FOR THE **MERCY** OF CONFIRMATION  
 In other words, when doing the right thing look for the blessing of confirmation in the Word, in another's words, or in a change in the circumstances.

LET'S STIVE TO KEEP A CLEAR CONSCIENCE and let us pray.