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Conscience: courtroom of the soul - JCI #856 May 15, 2010

Just Checking In #86 Conscience: Courtroom of the Soul

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Psalm 39:12 "Hear my prayer, O Lord... for I am a 'pilgrim' with You..."

Rebuke: God's truth shining on my sin bringing guilt and shame to the conscience

Do you remember the first time you felt guilt and shame for doing something wrong? That's the work of the conscience. When an accepted moral standard has been violated, the "courtroom of the soul" brings in a guilty verdict saying "That was wrong!" Sin brings both guilt and shame to the conscience. Guilt is the awareness of a broken law and brings with it the fear of punishment. Shame is the awareness of a broken relationship and brings with it the fear of rejection. The Bible has a good bit to say about the initiation, universality, operation and insufficiency of the conscience. It also speaks of a *pure* conscience, a *good* conscience, a *scarred* conscience and a *healthy* conscience.

Three Realities about the Conscience

- **The initiation of conscience:** Genesis 2:25; 3:7-11 Before sin there was no shame or guilt since there was no broken law or broken relationships. It was when Adam and Eve broke God's commandment regarding the forbidden fruit that conscience was initiated and brought shame and fear to their souls. They listened to the deceptive voice of the serpent and having violated God's standard were immediately aware of conscience's guilty verdict.
- **The universality of conscience:** Romans 2:12-16 God has given to every human being a conscience. Conscience, like a courtroom, operates on the basis of an accepted moral standard, either approving or condemning actions either contemplated or carried through. That standard may or may not be Biblical, but the fact that conscience is operative at all brings restraint of evil and a proof of God's moral law written on the hearts of all mankind.
- **The Insufficiency of conscience:** One aspect of the insufficiency of the human conscience is that it only operates on the basis of a presently held moral standard and that standard may be completely faulty. Judges 17:6 Another is that the conscience, through repeated rejection of its voice, can be scarred and eventually silenced. 1 Tim 4:2 Conscience is but a *District Court of the soul*, not the *Supreme Court of heaven*! Paul

made it clear in 1 Cor 4:4 that a clean conscience was no guarantee of God's approval, since God and God alone is the Supreme Court that will make the final verdict on every hidden thing. The believer's goal is for the *District Court of conscience* to hold and apply the same standards as the *Supreme Court of God Himself*.

Four Kinds of Consciences

- **The Naturally-Sensitized Conscience:** Romans 2:12-16 Operating on societal morays uninformed by scripture, but as part of the image of God in the soul and the law of God operating in common grace, the naturally sensitized conscience still hinders evil and promotes order in the world.
- **The De-Sensitized Conscience:** Romans 1:21-32 Due to repeated rejection of moral truth, the desensitized conscience is scarred and hardened so that it is incapable of discerning right from wrong and deaf to the voice of guilt and shame. Judges 17:6; 1 Tim 4:2 "I don't feel it's wrong" is often the confession of a de-sensitized conscience, spoken as though the matter of ethics were settled as long as guilt feelings do not arise.
- **The Super-Sensitized Conscience:** Acts 10:9-15, Romans 14:14 This conscience knows the scripture and is sensitive to guilt feelings. But it moves beyond scripture and places the morays of men on an equal or even superior level of authority than scripture itself. This easily moves into legalism and leads to improperly judging the conduct of others as less obedient to God or the individuals as being less spiritual when not conforming to the conscientious objections of such a sensitive conscience. We must beware lest we allow our conscience to be our guide when that conscience is not in submission to clear scriptural teaching. We must not be content with conscience until it is fully informed by scripture and operating on the basis of biblical truth.
- **The Scripture Sensitized Conscience:** Ps 19; 1 Tim 1:18; 1 Tim 3:9 When the conscience easily correctable and humbly teachable, is well taught in the Word of God and activated by the Holy Spirit, it quickly responds to God's rebuke leading to repentance and correction of thought, motive, word and deed. It serves to bring all its judgements captive to the word of Christ. 2 Cor 10:5 The conscience operates on the intellectual, emotional, and physical aspects of man, as seen in Psalm 32, David's testimony regarding his struggle after his sin with Bathsheba. Psalm 51 gives the verbal response of David as his conscience bore witness with the Spirit to the righteous judgments of God. When conscience operates effectively, it brings about complete repentance.

Self Check:

1. What kind of conscience do you have?
2. What are some examples of "super-sensitized" consciences in the Bible? In church life today?
3. What are some examples of "de-sensitized" consciences in the Bible? In society today?
4. Tell a story about how your conscience was activated by scripture to bring about repentance and correction in your own life.

For further study:

- 1 Samuel 24 David and Saul

- 1 Samuel 11-12 David and Bathsheba Psalm 32, Psalm 51
- Proverbs 29:18
- Proverbs 19:27
- Psalm 19 The voice of creation, the voice of scripture, the voice of conscience

"Lord, You know the hearts of all men. You know my heart. Teach me, search me, show me my own heart. I want to know Your will, follow Your commands, obey Your laws, and glorify Your Name with a clean conscience. Deliver me from the darkness of these days when Your Words are despised and Your laws ignored. Let me not be led astray by the error of the wicked. Deliver me also from the pestilence of pharisaism, that places the demands of men above Your holy word. I want a clean conscience that is fully illuminated and fully submissive to Your Word, giving me a hatred of sin and a hunger and thirst after righteousness, so that when I stand before Your throne you may be pleased and I shall not be ashamed. In Christ Jesus, my Advocate's Name I pray, Amen."

Remember, you are very special to us and we pray for you.

Living with leaving in view.... Jn 9:4 Ron & Val

Seeing The Invisible, embracing The Unapproachable, declaring The Unexplainable, changed by The Immutable, running after The Irresistible with inexhaustible joy in our inexpressible sorrows, spending our time on eternity, owning nothing yet possessing everything that matters and lasts. We are Pilgrims in Paradox. Welcome to THE JOURNEY.

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