

Sharpen Your Conscience

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 8:6–9; Titus 1:15

Code: B120717

Just like any other emergency warning system, your conscience needs to be properly programmed and calibrated in order to function correctly. An uninformed, untrained conscience will be unstable and unreliable, consistently misfiring and misleading, or even altogether useless.

But just as dangerous as an untrained conscience is the conscience that's tied to the *wrong standard*. The conscience is informed by tradition as well as by truth, so the standards it holds us to are not necessarily biblical ones (1 Corinthians 8:6-9). It can be needlessly condemning in areas where there is no biblical issue. In fact, it can try to hold us to the very thing the Lord is trying to release us from (Romans 14:14, 20-23).

The conscience, to operate fully and in accord with true holiness, must be informed by the Word of God. So even when guilt feelings don't have a biblical basis, they are important spiritual distress signals.

The conscience reacts to the convictions of the mind and therefore can be encouraged and sharpened in accordance with God's Word. A regular diet of Scripture will strengthen a weak conscience or restrain an overactive one. Conversely, error, human wisdom, and wrong moral influences filling the mind will corrupt or cripple the conscience.

In other words, the conscience functions like a skylight, not a lamp. It lets light into the soul; it does not produce its own. Its effectiveness is determined by the amount of pure light we expose it to and by how clean we keep it. Cover it or put it in total darkness and it ceases to function. That's why the apostle Paul spoke of the importance of a clear conscience (1 Timothy 3:9) and warned against anything that would defile or muddy the conscience (1 Corinthians 8:7; Titus 1:15).

Put simply, a weak or overactive conscience needs to be taught—it needs to be educated beyond spiritual dullness and made useful through the sanctifying work of God's Spirit. It needs to be sharpened against the rock of Scripture.

That sharpening and education starts with fixing the focus of your conscience on the right object—divinely revealed truth. If the conscience looks only to your personal feelings, it can accuse you wrongfully. You are *certainly not* to order your life according to your feelings. A conscience fixed on feelings—which are inconsistent at best and deceptive at worst—cannot be trusted.

It's especially dangerous for people subject to depression and melancholy to allow their consciences to be informed by their feelings. Despondent feelings will provoke unnecessary doubts and fears in the soul when not kept in check by a welladvised conscience. The conscience must be persuaded and guided by God's Word, not subject to the inconsistent whims of our feelings.

Furthermore, conscience errs when the mind focuses wholly on our faltering in sin and ignores the triumphs of God's grace in us. True Christians experience *both* realities. Conscience must be allowed to weigh the fruit of the Spirit in our lives as well as the remnants of our sinful flesh. It must see our faith as well as our failings. Otherwise the conscience will become overly accusing, prone to unwholesome doubts about our standing before God.

We must subject our conscience to the truth of God and the teaching of Scripture. As we do that, the conscience will be more clearly focused and better able to give us reliable feedback. A dull conscience is a hindrance—a spiritual millstone. A sharp, trustworthy conscience becomes a powerful aid to spiritual growth and stability.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Mark". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "M".

(Adapted from [The Vanishing Conscience](#).)

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