

The Christian's Attitude Toward Conscience



Discovering God's Word
Bible Study Series

The Christian's Attitude Toward Conscience

Learn how God wants His people to view and treat their own consciences and the consciences of others

Watch the free video or listen to the audio of this study @ www.godsaidso.com/dgw167

Discovering God's Word Bible Study Series

Study Number: DGW167

Written by Eric Krieg

About the author: My name is Eric Krieg. I am a disciple of Jesus, a Bible student, a truth seeker, and an evangelist. My interest is in using the Bible as my only guide in my faith. My desire is to help others understand the message of the Bible and pursue true, New Testament Christianity.

Copyright: Copyright © 2018 GodSaidSo Press. Please use this material to God's glory and honor. Feel free to copy and distribute this material in any way that will bring God glory and help souls to be saved. However, you may not take any of the material out of context or change the material in any way. Please provide the author with the proper credit for the material.

Scripture quotations: Unless otherwise indicated, all scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

My plea: It is my hope and prayer that you are searching for the truth that is contained in God's word, the Bible. My desire is to help you understand and obey these truths God has revealed in the pages of His word. It is to that end that I write this material. Please observe all of the Scripture references and evaluate whether the conclusions I have drawn are in harmony with God's word. If they are, I ask that you make honest application of those truths to your life and obey God's instructions.

**FIND MORE FROM THE DISCOVERING GOD'S WORD BIBLE STUDY SERIES @
WWW.GODSAIDSO.COM**

The Christian's Attitude Conscience

What is your attitude toward your own conscience and the consciences of others? That is, what is your mindset toward these two areas of conscience? Do you view the conscience as an authoritative element of your being? Or, do you treat it only as something that will help you live for the Lord when it is trained correctly? Do you view the consciences of others as being significant in the decisions that you make? Or, do you treat them as insignificant and only base decisions on your own conscience?

The “conscience” refers to the element in mankind that provides a sense of whether something is right or wrong. It is a kind of moral “compass” that attempts to help you go in the direction it believes to be the “right” direction. Therefore, it produces feelings of guilt whenever we act in ways that are contrary to our consciences. And, it produces feelings of joy whenever we act in ways that are in agreement with our consciences. Therefore, whenever we are faced with choices, our consciences are beneficial in helping to sway us to choose what it believes to be the “right” thing.

Now, this all sounds extremely beneficial as we seek to live in a way that is “right” and avoid the ways of evil. However, we do need to consider how the conscience is formed. How is something determined to be “right” or “wrong” by the conscience? First, understand that the conscience is not divinely inspired. That is, we are not born with

complete and perfect knowledge of “right” and “wrong” things.

Second, our consciences are shaped through training. This training can come from many different elements. In fact, we can allow this training to come from any element that we view as being authoritative. Commonly, parents are influential in shaping the consciences of their children. Other common factors that work to shape an individual's conscience are: Family members, friends, environments/cultures, traditions, teaching/instruction that has been received (both secular and spiritual instruction), media, etc.

Hopefully, given these wide range of factors that work to influence and train an individual's conscience, you are beginning to appreciate the need for a study that focuses on the Christian's conscience. Just consider a few examples to illustrate what has been said. One individual may be brought up in a Muslim family and community that teaches individuals to live according to Islamic law, gets his/her moral standard by the Koran, and has been trained to view all other ways of life as inappropriate. Another individual may come from a single parent home in which promiscuous sexual activity, drugs, and alcohol were commonplace, has been taught to hate God (if there even is a God), and gets his/her moral standard from the media (i.e. television, music). Another has been trained to love God, yet he/she has been trained to view his/her priest as the authoritative standard to know what God wants from him/her. Yet another has always been trained to view the Bible as being the only perfect and complete authoritative standard to use in determining right and wrong.

While these are only a few basic examples, I believe you can see that the consciences of these individuals will not always agree on what is “right” and what is “wrong.” In fact, I believe you can see that some of these individuals will be doing things in “good” conscience that God would absolutely disapprove. And, there would even be times when some of these individuals would be conscientiously opposed to doing some of the things God would want them to be doing.

Does God approve of an individual just because he/she acts in a way that agrees with his/her conscience? Then, there are even other questions to consider concerning the conscience. How does God view our decisions to violate our own consciences? How does He view our responses to the consciences of others? The purpose of this study is to consider these questions and consider how the Bible (the only true and perfect standard of right and wrong) views the conscience.

The Christian's Attitude Toward His Own Conscience

To begin understanding how God views the Christian's responsibility toward conscience, let's focus on the Christian's attitude toward his/her own conscience. You need to learn to view your conscience in the way God wants you to view your conscience. Therefore, let's consider some fundamental points the Bible helps us to understand about our own consciences.

Recognize that the conscience is not the ultimate guide in life

Many people would repeat the popular line: "Always let your conscience be your guide." No matter the subject under consideration, it is commonly believed that you should simply make your decision on the basis of what you "feel" is the right thing. This, of course, would depend on how your conscience has been trained in the past.

However, take some time to consider if the individuals I described at the beginning of this lesson each used their consciences as their ultimate guides in life. One individual would likely conclude that it is "right" to be dedicated to following the teachings of the Koran, live according to Islamic law, and may even consider it to be "right" to kill the "infidels" who do not follow the Koran. Another individual may feel that it is "right" to engage in sexual activity outside of marriage, consume intoxicating beverages, and engage in drug use. Another individual may feel that it is "right" to "baptize"

infant children by sprinkling water on their heads. Does God approve of all these actions just because each one of those individuals "feel" that the things they are doing are "right" (in their consciences)?

Not at all! Though there are some conclusions I think we can naturally reach that are in harmony with God's law (i.e. we should not murder, we should not steal, etc.), we do not have a complete or perfect knowledge of what God approves or disapproves bred into us. We have an absolute need for an objective standard of right and wrong. Fortunately, God has given us that standard in the word He has revealed – the Bible! In John 17:17, Jesus said that God's word "is truth." Earlier, in John 8:32, Jesus said that "you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

God's word says that we could not know "the truth" by ourselves. Isaiah 55:8-9 says that God's thoughts are not the same as our thoughts and His ways are not the same as our ways – because His thoughts and ways are much higher than ours. Jeremiah 10:23 says that "the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps." It is simply not possible for mankind to perfectly know the ways of God without God revealing His will to mankind.

Therefore, Proverbs 14:12 says, "There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death." Take a moment to absorb the full impact of this verse – as it relates to our subject in this lesson. There is a way mankind often *feels* to be the right way. It is often the way his/her conscience says is right. However, the result is death – not life. The way that *seemed* to be the "right" way was clearly not right with God!

Today, the only way we can know "the truth" that sets us free from sin is by listening to the words He has given us to live by. These are the words of truth written by the Divinely inspired apostles and prophets. This is the only way we can know the thoughts and ways that are contained within the mind of the All-Knowing God!

Listen to 1 Corinthians 2:9-16. "But as it is written: 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.' But God has

revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. For 'who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him?' But we have the mind of Christ."

The Bible is the book that contains the complete revelation of God's will to mankind. The writers of the books in the Bible wrote by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, who (as 1 Corinthians 2 describes) revealed the mind of God to mankind. Therefore, it is whenever we read the things written by these inspired writers that we can understand what the will of the Lord is (Ephesians 3:3-5; Ephesians 5:17). 2 Timothy 3:14-17, then, takes it even another step further, saying that the inspired writings of the Holy Scriptures will make us wise for salvation and equip us in accomplishing every good work God wants us to be doing.

"But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."

Now, as you recognize that your conscience is *not* the ultimate guide in life in determining right and wrong, I invite you to consider the example of Saul (who later became known as the apostle Paul). In Acts 23:1, Paul said, "Men and brethren, I have

lived in all good conscience before God until this day." Yet, prior to becoming a Christian, you should observe that the Bible condemns Saul for persecuting Christians. Still, even as Saul was imprisoning and killing Christians, he was doing so in "all good conscience." As a devout Jew, he truly felt that it was "right" to be involved in such wicked activities. Consider what he said about his conduct in Acts 26:9-11. "Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities."

The Bible is clear: Just living according to the direction of your own conscience does *not* make a thing right or wrong. If it does, then Saul was right with God whenever he was killing and imprisoning Christians! Your conscience is *not* the ultimate standard and guide in life. God's word that reveals His perfect will to mankind is the only reliable guide in life. Only when you follow it will you be able to *always* make the "right" decisions. Going against anything that it says will make you "wrong."

Recognize that there are different types of consciences

As individuals suggest that you should just allow your conscience to guide you throughout your earthly life, they fail to recognize the truth that the conscience cannot be used as the proper guide in life (to determine right and wrong). But, this is not the only thing they fail to properly understand. They also fail to understand that there are different types of consciences. Some are approved of God and others are not. Let's consider some passages which clearly demonstrate some different types of consciences.

First, let's consider some kinds of consciences that do not have God's approval. Hebrews 10:22 speaks of those who are Christians needing to "draw near [to God] with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water." Hebrews 9:14 speaks of the blood of

Christ cleansing “your conscience from dead works to serve the living God.” We have already seen that Acts 23:1 references the conscience a man considered to be “good” that permitted him to be involved in wicked things. Titus 1:15-16 says, “To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled. They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work.” And, 1 Timothy 4:2 speaks concerning some who would speak “lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron.”

Does God approve of all of these individuals who conduct their lives according to their consciences? Does the holy God (who is separated from everything that is evil, see 1 John 1:5 and Revelation 4:8) approve of man’s wickedness that stems from the “evil” conscience? Does He approve of the individual who has had a conscience involved in “dead works”? Does He approve of the sinful actions resulting from a “defiled” conscience? Or, does He overlook the lies promoted by those whose consciences are “seared with a hot iron” so as to no longer live according to what is right?

Second, let’s consider some kinds of consciences that have God’s approval. 1 Peter 3:21 speaks of a “good conscience” that chooses to do whatever God desires an individual to do (specifically in reference to being baptized). As mentioned in the last section, Hebrews 9:14 speaks of a conscience that is “cleansed” from dead works (thus, one that was focused on doing things God did not approve that is now cleansed from sin and is focused on what is right). 2 Timothy 1:3 indicates Paul’s service to God from a “pure conscience.” And, in Acts 24:16, Paul said that he always strove “to have a conscience without offense [clear] toward God and men.”

Do you suppose that God views individuals who act from these types of consciences in a more favorable way than the previous list? The first list would undoubtedly produce actions that were contrary to God’s word (even though they may have felt “right” in doing evil). However, this second list will produce actions that are in harmony with God’s standard of right (and they will feel right at the same

time). Certainly, not all of these are the same in God’s sight! Then, as you reflect on these Biblical truths, you should evaluate: What kind of conscience do you have?

Recognize the need to properly train the conscience

As you determine the answer to this question, it is important to recognize the need to train your conscience properly. Once again, the conscience is a product of the training it has received. Your conscience will help you live according to whatever standard of “right” and “wrong” you have trained it to recognize.

We have already seen that you must *not* train your conscience according to some human standard of “right” and “wrong.” These human standards all fail in some respect. Remember, there is a way which “seems right” to man that leads to death (Proverbs 14:12)! This is because God’s ways are much higher and greater than man’s ways (Isaiah 55:8-9).

Look at 2 Timothy 3:16-17 again. “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” The Scriptures come from God – and we know that His word is truth. His word of truth will set you free from your sin (John 8:32). Everything else will keep you enslaved to your sin. It is only God’s word that is capable of providing you with the right doctrine (teaching) you need to train your conscience with, providing you with the right points of correction, providing you with the sufficient evidence, and providing you complete training in God’s ways of righteousness.

Therefore, if you want your conscience to be trained accurately on every subject that is relevant to God so that you can live in a way that is right with Him, you must study God’s perfect word. The Psalmist clearly understood this. Listen to some of his statements in Psalm 119. Verses 10-11 say, “With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from your commandments! Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You.” In verse 104, he says, “Through Your precepts

I get understanding; Therefore I hate every false way.” Verse 105 says, “Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path.”

Consider the connection between the Psalmist’s righteousness and training his conscience properly. Though the conscience is not directly stated, I believe that it is at least partially implied in these verses. Whenever an individual hides the teachings of God’s word in his/her heart, that individual can use a properly trained conscience to make right decisions whenever temptations are presented. His/her conscience will be influencing him/her to walk in the paths of God’s righteousness – helping to illuminate the right paths in life by making the right applications of God’s word to the situations he/she encounters. Then, this individual will develop a hatred of evil things because he/she has been properly trained to value and love the right things!

In the same way, whenever you train your conscience appropriately, it will be a great asset in helping you live your life in a way God approves. If you truly desire to follow God in every area, this will prove to be immensely valuable in your quest to seek God throughout your life. Consider a few examples.

You should train your conscience properly concerning your words. Spend some time learning about God’s standard of what He approves and disapproves concerning the words you speak. For instance, as you study God’s inspired word, you learn that He condemns lying, deceit, gossip, backbiting, corrupt speech, filthy speech, foolish talking, coarse jesting, etc. Then, you learn that He approves of thankfulness, sincerity, truth, speaking with grace and love, and speech that edifies those who hear. Then, whenever you have trained yourself to recognize God’s standard for speech, your conscience will be able to help you “red flag” situations involving gossip, filthy jokes, profanity, etc. you should avoid. And, it will help you use opportunities to speak to and encourage someone to follow the Lord.

You should train your conscience properly concerning your clothing. Spend time learning about God’s standard of what He approves and disapproves concerning the clothing you wear. For instance, as

you study God’s inspired word, you learn that the consistent approval God gives for clothing is clothing that reaches (minimally) from the neck to the knee (covering the thigh). His standard of clothing is clothing that is modest, that demonstrates self-restraint, that shows bashfulness, and that professes godliness with good works. Then, whenever you have trained yourself to recognize God’s standard for clothing, your conscience will be able to help you feel uncomfortable whenever you are wearing a bathing suit that reveals what God has told you to cover, when you wear shorts/skirts that reveal any part of the thigh, when you wear tight/form-fitting clothing, etc. And, your conscience will be clear whenever you wear clothing that comfortably covers everything God wants you to cover and clearly demonstrates that you are doing your best to live for God!

You should also train your conscience properly concerning your entertainment choices. Spend some time learning about the principles in God’s word that are applicable to your entertainment. For instance, as you study God’s inspired word, you learn that God does not want you to willingly put anything that is impure into your mind, He does not approve of you having any association with sinful things, and He requires you to put Him first in everything (even above entertainment). Then, whenever you have trained yourself in this way, you will feel bad whenever you have spent too much time on your own entertainment. You will feel guilty whenever you forsake the assembling together of the local church in order to engage in recreational activities. You will feel ashamed whenever you watch television programs or listen to music that is unholy.

While these are only a few examples, they demonstrate how your properly trained conscience will be able to help you stay on the narrow path that leads to everlasting life in Heaven! Therefore, the conscience is a wonderful God-given asset that will help you overcome temptation and live in a way that has God’s approval. Please, recognize this great opportunity and dedicate yourself to training your conscience in such a way that pleases God!

Recognize that the violation of the conscience is sin

In addition to the points that have already been made, there is another way that your conscience will impact whether or not you please God. Particularly, this section focuses on the situation in which an individual decides to violate his/her conscience in an area God has not given any law (an area of liberty).

Romans chapter 14 discusses this situation. Though we'll explore Romans 14 in greater detail later in this study, consider a few points for now. First, the main discussion in Romans 14 is about Christian liberties. These are areas in which God has neither commanded a thing to be done or instructed a thing not be done. Specifically, one of the main points of discussion in the chapter is the eating of meats. At one time, these meats were not approved by God under the Law of Moses. However, under the new covenant, God had no law regarding whether these meats should or should not be eaten. It is left up to a matter of personal choice. The same thing was true concerning the observance of many of the Jewish feasts.

Yet, Paul demonstrates that it is still possible to sin – even though God has not given instruction in either direction. Consider verses 5 and 6. “One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks.” Then, consider verse 23. “But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.”

God says that there is a problem whenever a Christian decides to do something that violates his/her conscience. No, it is not because God approves of one decision over another. Instead, it is because that individual cannot do the thing in full confidence that it is pleasing to God. And, if an individual believes that he/she is sinning against God by doing a certain thing, he/she must not do it!

There is a threshold that must be met in these matters of Christian liberty – or else it is identified as “sin.” That threshold is full conviction! You must not have any doubt that what you are doing is right. If you have a shred of doubt about whether God would approve of the thing you are doing, you must not do it!

Consider what this looked like for the Jewish Christian Paul was partially addressing in Romans 14. As someone who was from a Jewish background, he/she would have been taught that certain types of meat were sinful to eat. Imagine being taught this your whole life – and never eating those meats. Now, after you obeyed the gospel of Jesus Christ, you are taught that God has permitted these meats to be eaten. Do you suppose that it would have been difficult to eat those meats with a clear conscience? Absolutely! That's a large part of why Paul addressed the subject in Romans 14. Still, even when God permitted these meats to be eaten, those Jewish Christians would be guilty of sin if they violated their consciences in order to eat of them – because the eating would not be done in faith and to please God!

Today, this same principle continues to apply. There are areas in the Christian's life where God has given liberty either to do a thing or not do a thing. And, in these areas, every Christian must recognize the value of the conscience and refuse to violate the conscience. Therefore, because there will be a resurrection of the dead (both of the just and the unjust), the apostle made it perfectly clear that his desire had always been to “strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men” (Acts 24:16). We should be diligent in doing the same.

Is this your attitude toward your own conscience?

How do you view your own conscience? Do you view it as the ultimate guide in your life to determine what is right and what is wrong? If so, I hope I have adequately demonstrated why that is inappropriate. Do you recognize the value and importance of training your conscience by the all-sufficient and inspired word of God? If so, I hope you will put in the proper effort so that your conscience can help you live in a way that pleases God. Finally,

do you recognize that God does care whether you violate your conscience? If so, I hope that you will determine to do everything within your ability to live with a clear conscience before God and men.

The Christian's Attitude Toward The Consciences Of Others

Although the Christian's attitude toward his/her own conscience has been given the most amount of attention in this lesson, the Bible also reveals some things concerning what the Christian's attitude should be toward the consciences of others. In fact, this should not be a surprising thing to you. The Scriptures give the Christian a number of different responsibilities toward other people. This includes both Christians and non-Christians. The same is true concerning the consciences of others. As the Christian lives his/her life, he/she she is required to consider the consciences of those around him/her.

Help others recognize that their consciences are not the ultimate guides in life

This first point is a necessary inference based on the fact that the Bible clearly teaches that the conscience is *not* the ultimate guide in life. However, many people are living like it *is*. Therefore, this is not just an important point for you to understand and apply. It is essential for everyone to understand and apply.

Certainly, one of the tools the devil has used to deceive other people is to convince them to recognize false standards of authority. And, the conscience is an easy one to convince people about. "If it *feels* right it must *be* right" – the devil will tell us. Therefore, both Christians and non-Christians have been entrapped in sin because they have listened to this lie that is perpetuated by Satan and his allies.

This has resulted in many people who believe they are living in a way that is approved of God, who

actually are not! Romans 10:1-3 describes a similar situation many Jews were in at that time. "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God." They wanted to serve God. But, they were trying to serve Him in the ways *they* wanted to serve Him – rather than serving Him in the ways He had instructed.

Some have never become true Christians because they are living according to the directions of their own consciences. Some feel that they are true Christians because they have been told that faith only is sufficient for salvation. Some feel that they are right with God because they live overall morally good lives (not engaging in any sin that man would view as "too reprehensible").

Although there are many ways this is manifested in people's lives, the bottom line is that they have been entrapped by Satan and need someone (you) to teach them the truth of the gospel – and tell them that the conscience is *not* the ultimate guide in life! Consider 2 Timothy 2:24-26. "And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will."

Then, there are even many who have become Christians who feel that they can just live according to their own consciences. So, if they don't feel like they need to attend all the assemblies they are able to attend, they don't. If they don't feel like revealing the thigh is sinful, they clothe themselves in shorts and bathing suits that do. If they don't feel like they need to teach others the gospel of Christ, they won't. If they don't feel like watching a television program/movie that shows immodest dress will negatively impact their relationships with God, they'll go ahead and watch it.

Although there are many ways this is manifested in people's lives, the bottom line is that

you need to love your brethren enough to be a constant encouragement to them and point them to Jesus Christ (who has the words of eternal life)! James 5:19-20 says, “Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.”

Refuse to violate the consciences of others in matters of liberty

There is still another way in which you must develop the proper attitude toward conscience. Just as you have a responsibility toward your own conscience in matters of Christian liberties, you have a responsibility toward the consciences of others in matters of Christian liberties. Once again, I want to consider this point both toward the one who is a Christian and toward the one who is not.

First, let’s consider the matter of conscience and liberty with regard to the one who is not a Christian. Does God expect you to even to care about the conscience of an individual who is not a Christian (and is clearly not living in a way that He approves)? The apostle Paul believed that it made a difference. He did whatever he could to keep from putting unnecessary obstacles in front of others that would hinder them from obeying the gospel.

Listen to what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23. “For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with you.”

Paul became “all things to all men.” Certainly this cannot and does not mean that Paul engaged in any kind of sinful activity in order to influence sinners. God would not approve of such activity. And, Paul also condemned any fellowship with the

“unfruitful works of darkness” (Ephesians 5:11). So, this *must* have reference to areas involving liberties (things Paul could choose either to do or not to do – and be right with God in either choice).

Notice what Paul’s motivation was in these situations. His focus was on saving as many people as he possibly could through the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ! The inference, then, is that Paul would make sacrifices of himself so as not to impede the progress of the gospel in any way.

A good example of this is the example of Timothy and circumcision. In Acts 15, Paul was involved in standing for the truth that God does not require anyone to be physically circumcised under the new covenant (the gospel). Anyone who attempted to bind circumcision as part of the new law was sinning. Yet, in chapter 16, Paul came into contact with a young Christian man named Timothy. The text said that Paul wanted Timothy to go with him on his preaching journey. Then, verse 3 continues and says, “And he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in that region, for they all knew that his father was Greek.” And, verse 4 says they went throughout all the cities declaring the truths that had been presented in chapter 15 about circumcision.

Now, why did Paul have Timothy circumcised – after boldly opposing those who attempted to bind it on others? It was *not* because Paul had changed his mind about the place of circumcision in the life of a Christian. Instead, it was simply because Paul knew that they would be spending some time among the Jews – and Timothy was known to only be half-Jewish. So, having Timothy circumcised would present one less obstacle for them in preaching the gospel to the Jewish people.

Second, let’s consider the matter of conscience and liberty with regard to those who are Christians. And, once again, let’s focus in Romans 14 (and into chapter 15). The context, again, is concerning Christian liberties. Not only does Paul emphasize the importance of the individual’s conscience in these matters, but his larger point is that Christians should not be willing to offend their Christian brethren or cause them to stumble in these

areas either! Consider a few passages from Romans 14-15 to see this point.

Romans 14:1-3: “Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things. For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables. Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him.”

Romans 14:14-15: “I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died.”

Romans 14:19-21: “Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another. Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense. It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak.”

Romans 15:1-2: “We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification.

God gives you the responsibility to consider and act in the best interest of your brother or sister’s conscience. Even if your conscience is unoffended by a thing, God requires that you consider whether your participation in a thing is going to put a stumbling block in the path of your brother or sister who is trying to serve God! Paul clearly does not want you to destroy your brother/sister’s faith over a matter of Christian liberty! If you do, as Paul demonstrates in Romans 14:10-13, you will stand in danger on the Day of Judgment!

Is this your attitude toward the consciences of others?

How do you view the consciences of others? Do you watch people around you allow their consciences to serve as their guides in life, without

pointing them to Jesus Christ? If so, you are silently allowing them to lose their souls. Do you consider the consciences of others when you make decisions about matters of liberty? If not, you may be seriously hindering the gospel of Jesus Christ – and you will be held personally accountable for your failure to demonstrate love toward others.

Conclusion

Has this lesson described your attitude toward conscience – both toward your own conscience and toward the consciences of others? You must refuse to recognize your conscience as the ultimate guide in your life – and must warn others about the same. Then, like Paul, you must “always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men” (Acts 24:16) by applying God’s truths about conscience!

Study Questions

What is the conscience?

How is the conscience formed?

1. The Christian’s Attitude Toward His Own Conscience

Is the conscience the ultimate guide in life? Why or why not?

List some different types of consciences identified in the Bible.

Why do you need to properly train your conscience?
How do you accurately train your conscience?

What does God call the violation of an individual's conscience?

Is this your attitude toward your own conscience?
Why or why not?

2. The Christian's Attitude Toward The Consciences Of Others

How and why should you help others recognize that their consciences are not the ultimate guides in their lives?

How should you treat the consciences of others in matters of liberty?

Is this your attitude toward the consciences of others?