

The Conscience

The conscience is an ability to make ethical judgments based on inner moral laws.

We should always follow our conscience, and we should continually evaluate our conscience (Acts 23:1; 24:16; 1 Corinthians 10:25-29; 2 Corinthians 1:12; 1 Timothy 1:19; 3:9; 2 Timothy 1:3). Biblically, conscience is our primary inner tool for making moral decisions. It's how we draw and shoot morally. It's how we make on-the-spot ethical decisions or even those we have some time to think about but not enough time to exhaustively research. For example, one cannot responsibly answer the question "What would Jesus do?" with a worldly conscience. Mature people are those ... *who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil* (Hebrews 5:14).

- Salvation through the blood of Christ cleanses our conscience positionally (2 Corinthians 5:11; Hebrews 9:9, 14; 1 Peter 3:21).
- Believers should follow their conscience because it reflects the input of the Holy Spirit. Paul wrote, *my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit* (Romans 9:1). That does not mean our conscience is perfect because we can resist the work of the Spirit (Ephesians 4:30; 1 Thessalonians 5:19). Nonetheless, it's our best "shot" at making the right moral decision.
- Our conscience is better than our circumstances in determining God's will. 1 Samuel 24:5 says that David's conscience bothered him because he had cut off the edge of Saul's robe. But he cut it off because he took advantage of his circumstances, which his friends told him was an opportunity from God.
- Our conscience makes moral decisions based on inner laws. First of all, humans have a moral code (or "natural law") written on their hearts by God (Romans 1:18-32; 2:15). We call this "general revelation." In addition, we believers learn "special revelation" in the Scripture. For example, natural law would not dictate ark building for Noah, Sabbath keeping for Israel, or disciple-making for the church. Finally, we also learn moral laws from our culture, which may or may not be true ["things I learned from my mother's knee and other joints ..."]. If we allow it, false cultural teaching can become the majority of our knowledge.

When we place faith in moral laws from any of these three sources, they become [what I called] inner laws. If our inner laws (or moral compass) come from false cultural knowledge, then our conscience will be "evil" or "defiled" (Hebrews 10:22; Titus 1:15).

For more information see *The Function of Our Conscience* study paper at relationalconcepts.org P.O. Box 141456 • Grand Rapids, MI 49514