



September 17, 2023  
“A Healthy Conscience”  
Acts 21-23  
Pastor Gary Hamrick

We all have an “internal moral compass” called a conscience, implanted by God in the soul of every human being. Since God is the standard for right and wrong, and since we are created in the image and likeness of God, we all have the capacity to choose right over wrong. A conscience allows us to feel pleasure when we do what is right and conviction when we do what is wrong. When the apostle Paul defended himself against unjustly imprisonment, he opened his remarks with, “I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day” (Acts 23:1). Should not we all want to say that? In this study, we will define “conscience” and discuss the different kinds of consciences in the Bible.

1. [Acts 21:30-34a, 22:30-23:1](#) - *“And all the city was disturbed; and the people ran together, seized Paul, and dragged him out of the temple; and immediately the doors were shut. Now as they were seeking to kill him, news came to the commander of the garrison that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. He immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down to them. And when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. Then the commander came near and took him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains; and he asked who he was and what he had done. And some among the multitude cried one thing and some another. ... The next day, because he wanted to know for certain why he was accused by the Jews, he released him from his bonds, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down and set him before them. Then Paul, looking earnestly at the council, said, ‘Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.’”*
2. A violent mob attacked the apostle Paul
  - a. Paul traveled to Jerusalem at the conclusion of his third and final missionary journey
  - b. The Lord prepared Paul for the tribulation he would face
    - i. [Acts 20:22-23](#) - *“And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the*

*Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me.”*

- c. The Jews viewed Paul as a traitor because he preached that Jesus was the Messiah and that salvation was a gift given through Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross rather than a reward for obedience to the law
  - i. They attacked him and wanted to kill him
  - ii. A Roman military unit intervened
  - iii. The Romans realized it was a religious dispute and took Paul to the Sanhedrin—the Jewish ruling council—to defend himself
  - iv. Paul boldly gave his defense
    - 1. One of the reasons he could defend himself confidently was that he possessed a good conscience

3. What is a conscience?

- a. Both the Biblical and secular view define conscience as “our moral compass”
- b. Conscience is mentioned twenty-nine times in the New Testament
- c. Conscience in the Greek is **suneidesis**: **sun**, meaning “with,” and **oida**, meaning “to know”
  - i. Vines defines conscience as “a co-knowledge with oneself and God”
- d. Conscience is the inner judge or witness that approves when we do right and disapproves when we do wrong

4. We inherit conscience from God

- a. **Genesis 1:26-27** - “*Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”*”
  - i. We are made in the image and likeness of God, with His essential nature and pattern
    - 1. Part of what we inherit from God is the “moral compass” of conscience
      - a. **Genesis 3:7** - “*Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings.”*”
      - b. No one taught Adam and Eve to feel shame; their consciences were already implanted and they therefore felt conviction immediately upon sinning against God
        - i. They felt vulnerable and exposed
      - c. **Romans 2:15b** - “*...their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them.”*”

- i. The existence of conscience testifies to the existence of God

## 5. Types of conscience in Scripture

### a. Good conscience

- i. **Hebrews 13:18** – *“Pray for us; for we are confident that we have a good conscience, in all things desiring to live honorably.”*
- ii. When we heed the still small voice of the Holy Spirit, a good conscience results

### b. Weak conscience

- i. **1 Corinthians 8:10-13** – *“For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol’s temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.”*
  - 1. Even if we may have freedom in an area (not speaking of sins addressed in Scripture), we should not impose our freedoms at the cost of another’s convictions

### c. Evil conscience

- i. **Hebrews 10:22** – *“Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.”*
  - 1. Before knowing Jesus as Savior, our consciences are continually guilty

### d. Pure (clear) conscience

- i. **2 Timothy 1:3** – *“I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience, as my forefathers did, as without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day.”*

### e. Seared conscience

- i. **1 Timothy 4:1-2** – *“Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron.”*
  - 1. When we ignore the Holy Spirit’s conviction over and over, we can eventually become dead to conviction in that area
    - a. A seared conscience is extremely dangerous
    - b. Be grateful for conviction because it reveals that God loves you and your conscience is still functioning

## 6. Takeaways

- a. Thank God that you have been delivered from an evil conscience

- b. Honor God by maintaining a good, pure, and clear conscience
- c. Repent to God early and often to avoid a seared conscience

### Discussion Questions

1. Read [Acts 21:30-34a and 22:30-23:1](#) to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. What is a conscience? (See #3 above)
3. Read [Genesis 1:26-27](#) and [Genesis 3:7](#). Where does conscience originate? (See #4 above)
4. Read [Romans 2:15b](#). How does the presence of the conscience testify to the existence of God? When have you experienced this principle in your life? (See #4a-i-1-c-i above)
5. Read [Hebrews 13:18](#). What is a “good conscience”? What must we do to have a good conscience? Discuss a time where you either submitted or did not submit to the still small voice of God and the resulting effects on your conscience. (See #5a above)
6. Read [1 Corinthians 8:10-13](#). Discuss the concept of a “weak conscience.” How should we respond when our conscience differs from another Believer in relation to behaviors not explicitly addressed in Scripture? (See #5b above)
7. Read [Hebrews 10:22](#). What does it mean to have an “evil conscience”? How can a person overcome an evil conscience? (See #5c above)
8. Read [2 Timothy 1:3](#). Discuss the benefits of a pure conscience. (See #5d above)
9. [1 Timothy 4:1-2](#). Why is a “seared conscience” dangerous? How can we avoid searing our consciences? (See #5e above)
10. What are practical things we can do to protect our consciences? (See #6 above)
11. Close your meeting by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

\* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)