

**Sanctification: Transformed into
The Image of Christ
Lesson 16**

I. Immaterial Man: Conscience Defined

- a. A sixth word used in describing the Biblical anthropology of man is the word “*suneidesis*” **CONSCIENCE**. Literally the word means sun, "with," oida, "to know". Thus a “co-knowledge” which follows action.
- b. Conscience in the inner man is triggered by a decision with **moral** implications. No sooner is a decision formed than there follows a judgment which either supports or condemns it, a judgment of guilty or virtuous.
- c. This is the **innate** ability of man to objectively observe his own thoughts, words and deeds and to pass judgment as to the ethical implications or the morality involved with each decision.
- d. The conscience has often been compared to a court of law, in which there are culprit, judge, witnesses and jury; but these are all within the subject's own inner being, and are in fact himself; reflecting on his own **knowledge** of right and wrong.
- e. We may fail to obey, giving way to passion or being won over by the allurements of temptation; but we know that we **ought** to obey; it is our duty; this is the conscience in operation
- f. The operation of the conscience is **punitive** in that immediately following the assessment of a guilty judgment, a feeling of remorse, shame and sometimes fear immediately surface in ones consciousness. Matt 27:4-5 *Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that. 5 And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself. KJV*
- g. What conscience commands may be against our **interests**, and it may be completely contrary to our inclinations; it may be opposed to the advice of friends or to the urging of companions.
- h. It may contradict the decrees of principalities and powers or the voices of the multitude; yet conscience in no way withdraws or **modifies** its claim. Martin Luther
- i. The history of mankind has been marked with numerous instances in which confessors of the faith and martyrs, standing on the ground of moral conviction wrought by their conscience, have faced **death** rather than contravene the dictates of its authority.
- j. Some have suggested that the word conscience implied, in its very structure (with knowledge), a reference to God, meaning literally, "knowledge along with another," the other being **God**.
- k. Although the term conscience does not occur in the OT, the **concept** is certainly demonstrated:
 1. **Adam and Eve** Gen 3:9-10 *And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? 10 And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself. KJV*
 2. **David** 2 Sam 24:10 *And David's heart smote him after that he had numbered the people. And David said unto the Lord, I have sinned greatly in that I have done: and now, I beseech thee, O Lord, take away the iniquity of thy servant; for I have done very foolishly. KJV*

II Universality and Power of the Conscience

- a. It is generally accepted that the possession of the conscience is **universal** among all people in all cultures and all times. The Bible certainly makes that claim. Rom 2:15 *"That law is written in your hearts."*
- b. This presupposes that God has placed within the inner being of all men a sense of **ultimate** right and wrong, good and evil in a general sense. Bible expositors refer to this as “the light of nature”. This the Gentiles have, and by this they shall be judged: Rom 2:12-14 *For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law; 13 (For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified. 14 For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: KJV*
- c. That is, unbelieving Gentiles do not possess the written Law but they possess the **work of** the law. Paul does not mean that work which the law commands, as if they could produce a perfect obedience; but that work which the law does.
- d. The work of the law is the work of the conscience, directing us what to do, and examining what we have done. Virtually every known **civilization** has had a sense of justice and equity, honor and taught obedience to parents, forbade murder, stealing, lying, etc. Rom 2:14 *For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves KJV*
- e. Because we all have a law written in our **inner being**, we commonly hear statements like, "that is not fair." "You must not do that." Or as President's have declared certain political regimes are evil in their policies and actions.
- f. The moral law is simply too deep in our being to **attribute** it to culture or evolutionary development or even training. As C.S. Lewis argues, making that law into a series of suggestions or personal preferences leads to the abolition of man himself.
- g. If there is this moral law etched into the fabric of every man then by logical extension there must be some transcendent moral **judge** who is behind this law that everyone acknowledges. This the Bible also affirms. Rom 1:20-21 *For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: 21 Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. KJV*
- h. Since that law is universally evident cross culturally, it carries with it a generalized more or less universal acceptance of the existence of a time of **judgment** or afterlife. Acts 24:25 *And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come Felix trembled, KJV*

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- i. Thus, philosophers refer to conscience as being universally **predictive**. This merely acknowledges the belief that one of the deepest instincts within the soul of man is the anticipation of judgment after death.
- j. This is one of the primary reasons why death is considered such a solemn experience in most cultures; we instinctively know that we are going to our day of **reckoning**.
- k. Paul himself provides a basis for believing that each man's conscience will be used as a character **witness** in the final judgment. Rom 2:15-16 *since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.) 16 This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares. NIV*

III Limitations of the Conscience

- a. While the sensitized conscience is thought to be able to discern God's judgment against sin, not all persons remain **sensitized** to their innate conscience. Rom 1:28-29 *Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. 29 They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. NIV*
- b. Repeated, deliberate and continuous action against one's conscience is said to produce a conscience which may be **seared** or hardened. The metaphor points to the practice of branding slaves which produced hardened scar tissue where the skin was branded. 1 Tim 4:2 *2 Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; KJV*
- c. Another limitation of the innate conscience is that one may develop a **pseudo-conscience** which is the adoption of someone else's sense of right or wrong so that one no longer listens to one's own conscience.
- d. This often manifests as a sense of guilt for imagined wrong doing for behaviors which are not in fact morally wrong. Such a person generally will **feel guilty** over any supposed transgression no matter how small.
- e. For these reasons the conscience is **not** the ultimate standard of moral goodness. Rather it is the Lord Himself who is the absolute judge of the intents of the heart and the actions of the body. 1 Cor 4:3-5 *I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. 4 My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. 5 Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God. NIV*

IV. Protecting The Conscience

- a. While the conscience of the believer ought to be sensitized to righteousness in every decision, it has been cleansed by the work of Jesus Christ and it **no longer** accuses and condemns for past sin. Heb 9:14 *How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! NIV*
- b. In the event that a believer is **plagued** by a guilty conscience it should be assumed one of two conditions exist:
 - 1. He has not **admitted** or confessed a past sinful behavior for which he knows he is guilty. Ps 32:1-4 *Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. 2 Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile. 3 When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. 4 For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Selah. KJV*
 - 2. He has not fully apprehended the fullness and **thoroughness** of the work of Christ on the cross in his behalf with regard to past sins. 1 John 1:7-9 *But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. 8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. KJV*
- c. Believers are to **work** to maintain pure consciences by taking heed of every thing that fouls the conscience, and draws us away from God. This sensitivity to Christ-likeness will preserve the believer from departing from the faith he has received. 1 Tim 3:9 *Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. KJV*
- d. Believers must also be careful not to encourage others to act **against** their consciences. This is so because to act contrary to the urging of one's conscience is wrong. Actions that go against the conscience cannot arise out of faith Rom 14:21-23 *It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak. 22 Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth. 23 And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin. KJV*

V. Application

- a. Conscience is the voice of justice speaking within the soul of man. One may develop sensitivity to conscience or one may harden to its demands.
- b. How would you describe your own sensitivity to the demands of conscience in your day to day thoughts and choices?
- c. How can you develop greater sensitivity to your conscience?