

Many feel that America has reached the point where individuals are free to “express themselves” when displaying or teaching any form of perversion, but at the same time, are restricted from upholding Biblical teachings and values. The conscience of this great nation is being corrupted — the barbs are being gradually worn down. Our children are being instructed to remove many of the sharp points from the steel ball of their conscience under the guise of being “politically correct.” While they are denied the opportunity to pray or read the Bible at their school, “alternative lifestyles” are being encouraged and pre-marital sex is considered to be the norm. Coaches are being prevented from asking God to spare their team any serious injuries during the game. Over 1.3 million children are denied the right to be born *every year* because of abortion. Political correctness has replaced the Bible and Christian values. And “*are they ashamed of their loathsome conduct? No, they have no shame at all; they do not even know how to blush.*” How very sad it would be to see this great country reach that level of depravity. As Christians, we can not stand quietly by and watch society “nurse” wickedness. We can not let sinful behavior flourish unchallenged until we ourselves reach the point where our own personal sins no longer bother us. The barbs on our conscience must stay sharp and trained according to the Word of God. The standard we set must be God’s standard — it can not be corrupted by society, by our own desires or by our fear to confront sin for what it is.

When asked what is the greatest problem that faces mankind today, we might be tempted to respond that it is war, violence, or AIDS. We may also be tempted to answer, that it’s divorce, broken homes, homosexuality, poverty, hunger, crime or any number of other things that seem so devastating to this country as well as others. All of these things are truly horrible maladies. But the real problem that is the *cause* of most of these maladies is — sin — transgression of God’s Word and disobedience of that Word. These other things are symptoms of that one great problem. And that one great problem will never be solved in a society that has a loss of conscious-ness.

“‘Are they ashamed of their loathsome conduct? No, they have no shame at all; they do not even know how to blush. So they will fall among the fallen; they will be brought down when I punish them,’ says the Lord. This is what the Lord says: ‘Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls. But you said, ‘We will not walk in it.’”
(Jeremiah 6:15-16 NIV)

What does *your* conscience tell *you* to say? — As a christian? — As an American?

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DILIGENCE

“We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure.” — Hebrews 6:11

A ministry of Dennis and Sherri Owens

Volume 4

February 1, 2006

Issue 21

A Spiritual Emergency — Loss Of Conscience-ness

How many of us have ever heard or used the phrase “let your conscience be your guide?” Is that good advice or is it bad advice? The answer to that question has to be “that depends.” Conscience is that portion of our thinking that may or may not keep us on the right path by telling us what is right and what is wrong. Our conscience acts as a protective device that should warn us when we’re about to do wrong and cause us to feel guilt when we *do*. Paul refers to this in Romans.

“For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them,” (Romans 2:14-15 NASB)

So *this* sounds like it might be *good* advice to “let your conscience be your guide.”

But let’s read what Paul has to say in the letter he wrote to Titus about the conscience of some people.

“To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted. They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good.”
(Titus 1:15-16 NIV)

Paul is saying that those people are detestable to God even though they *claim* to know Him. How can that be? He says it’s because their minds and consciences are corrupted. So this would certainly indicate that it may *not* be a good idea to “let your conscience be your guide.”

We would have to conclude from these verses then, that the conscience *may* or may *not* be a good guide for us to follow since it can become corrupted or faulty.

One very familiar person in the Scriptures definitely had a faulty or corrupted conscience during the early part of his life.

“Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.”(Acts 9:1-2 NIV)

Saul was so evil and so well known for his persecution of Christians that when the Lord told Ananias to go to him, Ananias responded:

“...Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name. (Acts 9:13-14 KJV)

Since most of us are very familiar with the story of exactly how Saul became Paul (one of God’s most dedicated servants) we won’t take the space here to discuss it. What we *do* want to look at is a statement that Paul made later in Acts chapter 23. Paul’s preaching of the Gospel had caused him many problems and in this particular instance, he was being brought before the chief priests and the Sanhedrin. The verse on which we want to focus for purposes of this particular subject is verse 1. Remember now, Paul had spent much of his earlier life aggressively persecuting Christians. Yet, we read these words in Acts 23:1.

“Paul, looking intently at the Council, said, ‘Brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day.’” (NASB)

What’s that, Paul? You lived your life *“with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day”*? Did he say his conscience never told him that killing and stoning Christians to death was wrong? Yes, that’s exactly what he said. His conscience was corrupted. He felt absolutely no guilt for his actions because his conscience was operating from the wrong training. Our conscience must be fed with the proper information in order to make the right decisions. II Timothy 2:15 states:

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.” (NASB)

The information that trains our conscience must come from a diligent study of God’s Word. Otherwise, we are likely to not feel the guilt that we should when we do something that is wrong.

Speaking of guilt — there are a number of different ways our conscience might react in a faulty manner, and one of those ways involves guilt. For example, a faulty trained conscience might cause us to feel guilt when we *shouldn’t*. The Scriptures are very clear that we are washed free from our sins by the blood of Christ in the watery grave of baptism. The cleansing power of Jesus’ blood continues to cleanse us as long as we remain a child of His (II Cor. 5:21; Rom. 6:14). Certainly, we shouldn’t go on sinning so that grace may abound (Rom. 6:1), but it is often very difficult for us to forgive ourselves of certain sins even though we know that God has forgiven us. In such a circumstance as this, it is important that we accept God’s forgiveness and not continue to allow our faulty trained conscience to make us feel guilt for sins of which God has forgiven us.

Perhaps we should note here that this same concept applies not only to ourselves but to the way we treat another who has clearly repented of a sin of which we are aware. We should not attempt to inflict a feeling of guilt on the one who has repented of his or her sin. Paul addressed this situation in 2 Cor. 2:6 and 7,

when he tells the church to forgive and comfort one from whom they had withdrawn, so that he might not be *“overwhelmed by excessive sorrow” (NASB)*.

Then there is the matter of a conscience that has been “worn down” or re-trained in an inappropriate way. To better understand this faulty conscience, let’s think of it as a steel ball that has spikes protruding from it all the way around. Those spikes are the barbs that “hurt” or “poke” at us when we start to do something that is wrong. After years of constant wear by the same sin over and over, one or more of those spikes might become so worn that it just doesn’t seem wrong any longer. Maybe we’ve lied so many times just to keep from offending others that we no longer see those lies as sins. Or perhaps we’ve convinced ourselves that a secret sin is ok as long as we don’t get caught. Our conscience is still there — it just has some of the barbs worn off of it. Certain spikes no longer are sharp enough to tell us that what we are doing is wrong. We must never let our conscience tell us that God’s standard has changed simply because *we* have worn certain barbs off our conscience. God will *still* hold us accountable for our sins.

Finally, there is the most extreme spiritual emergency. That is a complete loss of conscience-ness. Constant and continuous ignoring of the spikes or barbs on our conscience will eventually leave us with nothing more than a smooth steel ball that no longer sends up a “red flag” when we sin.

“The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron.” (I Timothy 4:1-2 NASB)

Notice in these verses, Paul writes that those responsible for such teachings would be *“hypocritical liars”* and that their own conscience would be *“seared as with a hot iron.”* Paul’s use of the term *hypocritical liars* in connection with his description of their conscience as being *seared with a hot iron* indicates that these individuals were proficient at seducing others into believing *“things taught by demons”* even though they themselves *knew* the teachings were wrong. In other words, we could say that *all* of the barbs had been removed from the steel ball of their conscience. They had a complete loss of conscience-ness.

There are some who would say that the current status of America is moving closer and closer to a spiritual emergency or a complete loss of conscience-ness. We need only look around us and we see every form of perversion constantly before us. We (as well as our children) are told that we must accept many displays of sinful behavior or we are being “intolerant” and “politically incorrect.” There is no longer shame attached to sinful behavior. We are quickly approaching a society where virtually no form of perversion is scorned. There was a time in ancient Israel that seemed to have that same problem Jeremiah lamented —

“Are they ashamed of their loathsome conduct? No, they have no shame at all; they do not even know how to blush.” (Jeremiah 6:15 NIV)