



ISSUE

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# Faithful Sayings

BULLETIN  
OF THE  
OLSEN PARK  
CHURCH OF  
CHRIST

## Services

Sunday: 9:00 AM

9:30 AM

10:30 AM

Wednesday: 7:00 PM

## Elders:

Patrick Ledbetter

Brady McAlister

Jeff Nunn

## Deacons:

Ben Hight

Blake McAlister

Walker McNear

Sam Nunn

Lance Purcell

Justin Smiley

Trevor Yontz

## Evangelist:

Kyle Pope

## Conscience without Offense

By Kyle Pope

On one occasion when Paul was accused by his Jewish countrymen, he was allowed to answer before the Roman governor Felix (Acts 24:10-16). In his defense he declared that he strove always to have “a conscience” without offense toward God or man (Acts 24:16). The world has many different notions about the “conscience” from a soft voice that speaks in one’s head, to a cute cherub that appears on the shoulder. What does Scripture teach about this part of the inner man that is called the conscience?

### Meaning of the Word “Conscience”

The word “conscience” is actually a Greek concept that comes into the Bible record when Greek became the language of the ancient world. Most translations don’t use the word conscience in the Old Testament because the Hebrew text speaks in terms of the “heart” and not the “conscience.” The term “conscience” was born from the Greek word *sunoida* which literally means “to know-with” something. It first was applied to a witness in court who had personal knowledge of something, then came to have a reflexive sense of knowing one’s self (see Gerhard Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 7, p. 898). It is interesting how often this judicial sense is retained in Scripture. Paul spoke of the “testimony” of the “conscience” (2 Cor. 1:12). He described the conscience “bearing witness” within one’s self so that the thoughts of a person “accuse” or “excuse” him (Rom. 2:15). Properly, the conscience is not something distinct from

the inner man, but it is the knowledge we have regarding our own thoughts, attitudes, and behavior.

The New Testament word *suneidesis* (translated “**conscience**”) literally means “knowledge-with [one’s self].” It carries the same conceptual sense as our English word “conscience” which comes from the Latin *conscientia* meaning “knowledge-with [one’s self].” While the Old Testament does not properly use the idea of the conscience the same concept is expressed in terms of the “heart.” It is the soul with a “**pure heart**” that can approach God in worship (Ps. 24:3-4). After his sin with Bathsheba, David prays to God “**create in me a clean heart**” (Ps. 51:10). The heart can be “**troubled**” when one feels that he has done wrong (1 Sam. 24:4-5—the NASB uses the word “conscience” here, but the word is literally “heart”). The soul willing to do what he knows (or believes) to be wrong is described as having “**stiffened his neck and hardened his heart against turning to the**

**Lord**” (2 Chron. 36:13). The New Testament uses both concepts in juxtaposition. Paul acts from a “**pure heart**” and a “**good conscience**” (1 Tim. 1:3-7). This makes it clear that the heart and the conscience are simply two different ways of describing the conviction of the soul.

### **Conviction and Defilement of the Conscience**

The New Testament teaches that one may be “**convicted**” by the conscience (John 8:7-9). This is what Acts 2:37 calls being “**cut to the heart.**” Those who heard Peter preach understood that they were not right with God, and they sought to remedy this problem. Simply following the conscience does not make one right with God. One can be condemned in what he approves (Rom. 14:22). Paul lived in “**good conscience**” even when he was persecuting the church (Acts 23:1). While Paul was not right with God in that situation, Scripture teaches that it is always sin to go against one’s conscience.

Violating one’s conscience leads to a conscience that is “**defiled**” (Titus 1:15). It leads to a conscience that is “**seared with a hot iron**” (1 Tim. 4:2). In such a condition, our faith may suffer “**shipwreck**” (1 Tim. 1:19). Instead, Christians must maintain a “**pure conscience**” (1 Tim. 3:9; 2 Tim. 1:3). Our understanding of God’s word may be insufficient causing us to be mistaken in our convictions, but we must never act against what we believe to be right.

### **Romans and First Corinthians on the Conscience**

Paul’s epistles to the Romans and his first letter to the Corinthians, both teach a number of important principles about the conscience. The book of Romans was addressed to Christians in Rome, most of whom had come to Christ out of a Jewish background, as seen in many places in the book. In chapter fourteen Paul addresses two issues that would have been struggles for Jewish brethren who wrestled with their responsibility to the Old Law now that they had come to Christ: foods and observance of Mosaic holy days (Rom. 14:1-7). *What must the Jewish Christian do?* Should he follow Mosaic dietary laws? Should he keep Mosaic holy days? In Christ Paul told the Colossians these things were

no longer obligations (Col. 2:16-17). He echoed the same thing in Romans 14:14a, declaring, **“I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself.”** That was the Divine revelation on the matter—but what must be the reaction towards those who don’t fully understand this?

First, we must note that Paul is not talking about matters of human imagination (e.g. someone thinking its acceptable to fornicate or murder). Paul is talking about matters of indifference before God. The divine revelation was that it was not sin to eat, but neither was it sin to refrain from eating. May the Christian who understands this compel the one who does not to violate his conscience and eat? No. Paul explains this in Romans 14:11-22. He declares, **“To him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean”** (Rom. 14:14). The conscience is a precious thing which must be kept tender. It is what convicts us when we do wrong. It can be misinformed but acting to violate the convictions of the heart is always wrong because it destroys that part of our inner man which draws man back to obedience to God. We may teach, persuade, and strive to come to a different understanding with a brother, but we want to bring a person to be **“fully convinced in his own mind”** (Rom. 14:5). Before God it was acceptable to eat all meats but if one **“doubts”** and eats such a person **“is condemned”** (Rom. 14:23). *Does that mean that the truth is determined by each person’s conscience?* No, it means God expects us at all times to do what we understand His word to teach. The soul who would believe something and act contrary to it—or compel someone else to act contrary to it is a rebel before God. To do so is not acting from faithful obedience and is sin!

First Corinthians is addressed to a church that was largely made up of Gentiles. For them, the problem was not one of following Mosaic dietary restrictions, but a history of eating meat sacrificed to idols as an act of pagan-worship (1 Cor. 8:4-10). If the Christian who understood

that eating meat was not necessarily an act of worship to an idol disregarded the influence he might have on new converts he might **“wound their weak conscience, and sin against Christ”** (1 Cor. 8:12). Christians must show respect even for the conscience of others (1 Cor.10:24-33). Why? Because only when the conscience is preserved can one be acceptable to God. The soul with a defiled, seared, or hardened conscience will not be moved by the word of God.

### The Conscience and Obedience to the Gospel

Obedience to the Gospel allows one to be able to have a **“good conscience”** (Heb. 10:19-22). The Hebrew writer speaks of Christians having their, **“Hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience”** (10: 22a). This is probably comparing the Mosaic practice of “sprinkling” the blood of various sacrifices on the priests and on the altar with what happens to the heart in the gospel. The blood of Christ can **“cleanse”** the conscience from **“dead works”** (Heb. 9:13-14). We feel guilt because of sin. We regret past deeds. Christ’s blood can **“cleanse”** the conscience. The



Hebrew writer goes further to say Christians have had their, **“bodies washed with pure water”** (10:22b). In Christ, the only “water” that is ever said to “wash” the body is baptism. The Bible tells us baptism is an **“appeal to God for a good conscience”** (1 Pet. 3:18-22, NASB). Having been forgiven of sins, and striving to live obedient to Christ, Christians should always live with a **“good conscience”** (Heb. 13:17-18). It is interesting that the Hebrew writer speaks of obedience to the eldership yet then goes on to speak of

maintaining a **“good conscience.”** If these responsibilities ever conflict, we must obey God rather than man (Acts 5:26-29). It is commendable before God to suffer wrongfully **“because of conscience toward God”** (1 Pet. 2:18-23). When we maintain a **“good conscience”** and yet suffer for it, those who persecute us will be caused to be ashamed on the Day of Judgment (1 Pet. 3:15-17).

It is probably in this sense that Paul speaks to the Corinthians of **“commending”** himself **“to every man’s conscience in the sight of God”** (2 Cor. 4:2). Think about this for a moment—how much would you respect someone who claimed to believe something but then willingly went against that in the face of pressure? Would you trust that person? In the same way, when we hold our ground, and stick to our convictions, people may disagree with us, but they will never be able to claim that we were not sincere. This is the point we noted in the beginning. We, as Paul must strive to have **“a conscience without offense towards God and man”** (Acts 24:16).



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