

LIVING ABOVE CONSCIENCE

Rom 2:14 for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves,

Rom 2:15 who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them)

I am going to make a shocking statement and then back it up by the Word of God. God did not give us our conscience. Our conscience is a by-product of the fall. Man living merely by a conscience of right and wrong was never God's best. Let's see what God intended for man.

Gen 2:9 And out of the ground the Lord God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life *was* also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Gen 2:15 Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it.

Gen 2:16 And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat;

Gen 2:17 but of the **tree of the knowledge of good and evil** you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

God made trees out of the ground but two trees already existed. The tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil already existed. The tree of life represented the life of God through Jesus Christ. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil represented the Law and the nature of the flesh. The tree represents the Law because God told Adam he could freely eat from all of the trees of the Garden but He gave him a commandment to not eat from the tree or he would die. Law is a commandment with promise if it is kept and a punishment if not kept. In the garden were two types of approaches to God- grace and law- seen in the two trees. God told the man to stay away from the Law. He told him that this tree [law] kills. Paul says the same thing in 2 Cor. 3:6- ...the letter [Law] kills... Satan knew that if he could get man to partake of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil he could get man to sin, fall, and he could rule over them. Satan will rule over those under Law.

Gen 3:5 For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

Satan knew that once they partook of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil then that tree would get in them and they would know good and evil themselves. He painted a picture that this was more desirable than their current state. See Adam and Eve previous to this time did not know good or evil. They just knew the Good One who gave them guidance in what to do and what to avoid. They simply believed the Lord and they were blessed. Satan promised them that if they ate of the forbidden tree they could know for themselves what was good and bad and could lead their own lives. They bought this lie hook, line, and sinker and ate us out of house and home! They partook of the tree and the tree sure enough got into them!

Gen 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.

Their eyes were suddenly opened and they found something new in them. They found they had a conscience. They became self-consciousness. They knew in themselves they had done evil and that they were now evil. Their evil conscience caused them to hide from God. Before they partook of the tree they were God-conscious and did not realize they were naked. Some say they were covered in glory before this. The Bible does not say that. God even said to Adam- "Who told you that you were naked?" This means they were naked and did not have self-consciousness that this was their state. They had no self-consciousness. They simply lived by their faith in what guidance God gave them. When Adam and Eve partook of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil which represented the Law then the work of the Law entered their heart.

Rom 2:15 who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves *their* thoughts accusing or else excusing *them*)

The conscience is the work of the Law in the heart telling us when we do right and when we do wrong. It came from eating from the tree of the

knowledge of good and evil. Most people say, "Isn't that a good thing! Is it not advantageous to know when you have done right and when you have done wrong?" I agree that there are advantages to this but it is not God's best. **Conscience is very limited and limiting**. First conscience is only a guide to tell you if something is good or evil. It cannot tell you the best choice among good choices. Your conscience reports to you if what you are about to do or have done is good or bad, it does not lead you into the right path God has for your life. It can only tell you if you are going down the wrong path. Another very significant thing that makes our conscience very limiting is that conscience only has the ability to tell us if we are right or wrong, it has **NO ability to empower you to do that right thing or avoid the wrong thing!** The Law could only tell you what was right and what was wrong, but it could not help you do what was right. It was up to you to find the power to do right and avoid wrong! Those under the Law did not have the power in themselves to consistently do right in God's sight and avoid wrong. It is the same today with those who live only by their conscience. Their conscience tells them what they are about to do is wrong but gives them absolutely no power to avoid it. There is not a single human being who has not experienced this in their life. They **KNEW** what they were about to do was wrong. Their conscience was screaming at them NO! But, they could not find the strength to say NO, and they did it anyway! This is the limitation of living merely by conscience. Another limitation of conscience is that it can become defiled [Titus 1:15], evil [Heb. 10:22], and even seared [1 Tim. 4:2]. The conscience can be overcome by our human reasoning and excuses.

(AMP) They show that the essential requirements of the Law are written in their hearts and are operating there, with which their consciences (sense of right and wrong) also bear witness; and their [*moral*] decisions (their arguments of reason, their condemning or approving thoughts) will accuse or perhaps defend and excuse [*them*]

We have a keen ability as humans to justify any action we are doing to soothe our consciences. When we justify our actions to soothe our conscience we damage our conscience and it becomes an unsafe guide for us. Many people have damaged their conscience to the point that very little they do bothers their conscience anymore so they think they are alright when they are not! Another limitation of our conscience is

that is only as good as the knowledge we possess. Our conscience is our balance between what we KNOW- the knowledge of good and evil we have- and our actions that line up with what we know. **Our conscience cannot guide us beyond what we know.** Often if you are not taught something is wrong like it is wrong to speed in your car, then your conscience would not tell you that you did wrong. Once you are taught then the conscience kicks in.

God has a better plan, a higher plan than living merely by conscience. This is not a new plan though. This plan existed in the garden. This plan was set right beside the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This plan was the TREE OF LIFE. The tree of life represents the life of God. It is the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus! If Adam would have eaten this tree [I wonder why he did not- I personally believe it was because it was the least attractive of all the trees] he would have received eternal life within himself. This tree is offered to humanity today in the gospel of Jesus Christ. When someone accepts Jesus as their Lord and Savior they partake of the Tree of Life and the Tree of Life gets in them. When we accept Jesus the Spirit of God comes to live in us. The Spirit of God not only gives us new life but He also takes the role of being our **Paraklete**. The Greek word **paraklete** has various meanings. It is a multi-meaning work like the Greek word sozo is and the Hebrew word shalom. The Amplified version gives the fulness of the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Joh 14:16 And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Comforter [Gr. Paraklete] (**Counselor, Helper, Intercessor, Advocate, Strengthener, and Standby**), that He may remain with you forever--

God has sent the Holy Spirit in our hearts. He is higher than our conscience. He is more powerful than our conscience.

(1Jn 3:20) For if our heart condemn us, **God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.**

He not only gives us new life but becomes our guide, helper, and strengthener to follow His leading. Our conscience is a witness to us of right and wrong. The Holy Spirit also brings a witness.

Rom 8:16 The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,

The Holy Spirit will bring an inner witness to us to God's ultimate truth and His path for our lives. What our conscience can't provide the Spirit of God does. The Spirit's witness will lead us to the best path for us even if several good looking paths are before us. The Spirit of God knows everything, so the witness of the Spirit will warn you about going down the wrong path even if you think it is good. You will receive a "check"- the stop signal in your spirit and you do not know why! You need to trust in the witness of the Spirit and stop! The leading of the Holy Spirit goes beyond your own limited knowledge! **Also, the Spirit will let you know if you are about to say or do something wrong but He also provides the power of His grace to help you avoid doing evil. The Spirit of God can let you know the right thing to do and then empower you to do it if you trust Him!** [Phil 2:13] Another thing about the witness of the Holy Spirit is that you cannot override the witness by your reasoning. No matter what reasoning you try to use the witness of the Spirit will not change His decision on the inside of you! The Holy Spirit cannot be corrupted or changed by your reasoning. You can choose not to listen to the Spirit but His witness will not change for you. Have you ever tried to reason with God to change what you know He is telling you on the inside? How did that work? Thought so... The Spirit of God is the Tree of Life in you that will be your guide. Instead of resting on your limited knowledge you can turn to the All Knowing God within you and be led and guided by Him in all the affairs of life. If you do not know what to do in a certain situation seek the Lord. Spending time praying in the Spirit will cause you to be sensitive to the leading of the Spirit. Be sensitive for checks or the inner peace in your spirit. Usually the Spirit's witness of peace or "check" -the no signal from God- can be detected in your belly region. [Prov. 20:27, John 7:38-39] If you have grieved the Spirit you will have a sick feeling in the pit of your stomach.

Now that I have laid out why just living by our conscience is not God's best I want to make sure to share that I am not saying we should not listen to our conscience. If our conscience bothers us we must realize we have violated what we know is right or wrong. Paul said this about his conscience.

Act 24:16 And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and *toward* men.

Paul always made it a practice to keep a good conscience. He just did not depend alone on his conscience. He knew he had something higher and better than just his conscience. He had the witness of the Spirit of God. Paul made sure his conscience was in line with the witness of the Spirit. The witness of the Spirit will always be in line with the Word of God and its principles.

Rom 9:1 I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, **my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit,**

Paul made sure his conscience was in line with the witness of the Holy Spirit. The leaders in the early church did the same. We see this in what James said at a church council gathered to decide the issue if Gentiles had to keep the Law once they got saved.

Act 15:28 For it **seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us,** to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things;

James said here that it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us. The phrase “seemed good” speaks of the inner witness of the conscience and of the Spirit of God. They not only had a supernatural witness of the Spirit but their conscience also was telling them that this was the right course to take. They just knew it was right by the leading of the Spirit in their spirit, but James also knew it from his personal knowledge of the Old Testament scriptures that he had just quoted to the council. As long as we are in this fallen world and live in a fallen body we will have our natural conscience we inherited from the fall. We carry the work of the Law within us until we die. We are to listen to it and follow it, but as Christians we must realize that we have something higher and better than our conscience to live by. It is the witness of the Spirit of God. As we spend time with God in the Word and prayer we will become attuned to this witness and it will even make our conscience a better guide than ever before. Live a life above conscience and enjoy the tree of life!