

Oak Mountain Informer

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Two Problems Concerning The Conscience

Our conscience is that part of us that possesses “the ability to recognize right and wrong regarding one’s own behavior.” There are people who suggest that one’s conscience is a safe guide when deciding what to do. Though we should listen to what our conscience tells us, it is a safe guide only if it has been educated correctly. The conscience can only guide us as we have informed it. It cannot tell us a thing is wrong if all our lives we have taught it that that thing is right. There are at least two dangers which Christians face regarding the conscience.

The first is that we might become so hardened that our conscience is no longer sensitive when we sin. Paul speaks of those who “fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron” (1 Timothy 4:1-2).

Most of us have watched enough cowboy movies to know something about the result of branding cattle, even if we have never been around it. The flesh seared by the red-hot branding iron is no longer sensitive. All feeling in that area has died. So it is with Christians who give themselves over to sin. If at first their conscience bothers them, it is soon past feeling through continual practice.

A similar idea is found in Ephesians 4:17-19. Paul speaks of the Gentiles who “having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.” We know people whose conscience has been covered over by a tough callous and is no longer capable of being touched by feelings of guilt. In fact, some may go so far as to defend their sinful actions as right.

Any number of applications would illustrate the point. When a Christian begins to absent himself from the assembly, his conscience may tell him that he is wrong for it. But the more he misses, the less his conscience bothers him. And perhaps in the end he convinces himself that he doesn’t need to sit in a pew to worship God, and besides, churches are full of hypocrites. His conscience becomes seared and calloused, and he goes merrily along on his way.

Christians - beware of this defect of conscience.

A second problem with our conscience is equally dangerous, though opposite in some ways. In this case a Christian’s conscience is so sensitive to his sin that he begins to doubt his salvation. We do not mean to suggest that we should not be sensitive to sin or that we should trivialize it, but if a person is so guilt-ridden over his sin that he cannot accept the forgiveness found in Christ, he has a problem with his conscience.

We must realize that God’s forgiveness is real. When we truly repent and have the blood of Jesus applied to us in baptism (Romans 6:3-4), the blood of Christ washes away our sins thoroughly and completely. If we doubt it, we doubt God’s word. Though we commit terrible sins, we must learn to accept the forgiveness God gives in His Son. This is the very reason Christ came into the world - to save sinners (1 Timothy 1:15).

Paul knew what it is like to struggle with a guilt-ridden conscience. He said, “For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very

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thing I do not want” (Romans 7:19). He continues, “...but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members...” And then he cries, “Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?” (vv. 23-25). Paul was a man who struggled with the guilt of his own sinful past. However, he learned to accept the forgiveness found in Jesus. He concludes, “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (v. 25).

All have sinned. Some of us may have done some terrible things. But God will forgive them all (1

John 1:9). God’s love is deep enough, His grace is rich enough, and Christ’s blood is strong enough to utterly remove our sin. Though from time to time we may feel the sting of our past, we cannot ever allow ourselves to become so despondent that we doubt God’s work and word. If we doubt God’s forgiveness, we will eventually leave him altogether. God has forgiven us - rejoice!

It is certainly a blessing to have a sensitive conscience. If we inform it correctly, listening to it will keep us from a great deal of trouble. Know, however, that we must guard it diligently lest it become insensitive to sin, or overly sensitive. Either

The Judgment of God

We only need to watch the nightly news to realize that there are people in the world who do exceedingly terrible things. We hear stories of thieves, murderers, rapists, and drug dealers, among others. People will break into an elderly person’s home and rob them. They will abuse children in unspeakable ways. There are men who torture and murder women. There are fathers who get drunk and beat their children. And the list could go on and on.

We have no problem thinking that God will condemn these kinds of people in the Judgment Day. If anyone deserves it, they do. But it seems unfair in light of these serious and horrendous acts that God will punish those who commit smaller, perhaps even harmless sins. It’s easy for us to believe that Adolf Hitler, Al Capone, John Wayne Gacy, or Ted Bundy will spend eternity in hell. It’s hard to think that those who commit the common, day to day “sins” will be so punished.

Notice, however, what the prophet Amos says. In the two chapters that open his book Amos speaks of the nations that surround Israel. Each one of them is condemned for their crimes against others - sometimes very violent crimes. Notice, “Thus says the Lord, ‘For three transgressions of Damascus and for four I will not revoke its punishment, because they threshed Gilead with implements of sharp iron. So I will send fire upon the house of Hazael’” (Amos 1:3-4). The army of

Syria, whose capital was Damascus, had dealt with their enemies as a farmer might thresh his wheat. So God intended to destroy them.

Gaza (v. 6-8) and Tyre (v. 9-10) deported entire groups of people (perhaps engaging in slave trade). Ammon ripped open pregnant women to increase their borders (v. 13). All these nations would feel the wrath of God for their sins. It’s easy to see the justice of such judgment.

However, Judah would be judged because they rejected the Law of the Lord (2:4). Nothing is said about their violent conduct. Nothing about burning the bones of an enemy king or mistreating pregnant women. Just that they did not keep God’s statutes. Their punishment would be the same as the others.

We must be careful not to think that because our sins are not as bad as those of others that they are insignificant to God. No sin is insignificant to Him. All sin is rebellion and deserves the God’s judgment. May we cease doing evil, learn to do good, and seek God’s forgiveness.

May 16, 2004

Attendance
AM Worship:
PM Worship:

Wednesday Evening:

Our Goal:
Every member
at every
service!