

Let Your Conscience Be Your Guid by Jeff Strite

Mark 15:8-15:16

OPEN: This is the final week of our series: "Stupid things even Christians believe. This week we're focusing on an old piece of advice:

"Let your conscience be your guide."

Have you ever heard that said?

Of course, we all have.

At the core of this proverb is the idea that our consciences will never be wrong.

The problem is – that's not always so.

To help illustrate me lay the groundwork for this sermon, I'd like to play a clip from Mark Lowry describing a movie he saw about Jesus when he was four.

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pPYX8SQAicY>

Begin at 3:08 "when you're 4 that screen goes on for days"

And play till you get to 7:24 "he was scared to death that I might")

Today is Palm Sunday.

Many churches acknowledge this as a special Sunday because this was the day that Jesus came riding into Jerusalem on donkey and began His final week of ministry.

When He entered the city, the crowds went wild.

Here came the hope of Israel... the future King of Israel.

The man who'd fed 1000s with a little boy's lunch.

The man who'd healed the sick, the lame, the leprous and the blind.

The man who'd raised the dead.

With Him as King... no power on earth could stand against Israel.

He was the KING of Israel, the POWER of God, the LEADER who would deliver them from Rome. And to honor Him, the people spread Palm branches before Him.

John 12:13 tells us they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him, shouting: "Hosanna! 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD!' The King of Israel!"

Hosanna... Hosanna... Hosanna.

Hosanna meant "Lord, save us."

The people believed that Jesus was sent by God to be their deliverer and for a few days they thanked God and sang His praises. Because they truly believed this man was their deliverance.

(PAUSE)

But by the end of the week, things had changed.

The same crowd that shouted Hosanna on Sunday, by Friday was calling for His death.

They gathered and watched as the Sanhedrin had arrested Him and delivered Him to the Romans to be crucified.

The crowds that once cried "Hosanna! 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!' The King of Israel!" (Now) cried out, "Away with Him, away with Him! Crucify Him!"

Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?"

The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar!" John 19:15

How could these people praise Him on one day, and curse Him just few days later?
How could they do something so evil as to call for the death of a man who'd done no wrong?
Why hadn't their conscience convicted them of the wickedness of what they were doing?
Why hadn't their conscience GUIDED them?

Well... it had.

Their conscience WAS guiding them.

Their conscience was telling them that...

A REAL king of Israel would never allow Himself to be arrested by the Romans.

A REAL King of Israel would never be condemned by the Sanhedrin.

That's what their "conscience" was telling them.

And if the Sanhedrin and the Priests believed He was to be crucified well, so be it.

That's what their conscience said to them.

And their conscience was wrong.

You see, our conscience is not a mystical force.

It's just a part of the soul that God created within us to help us make decisions.

AND everybody has one.

Romans 2:14-15 tells us "when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while THEIR CONSCIENCE ALSO BEARS WITNESS..." (ESV)

God created the conscience to be our inner voice.

And everybody's got one.

Even those who are pagans, who don't believe in God, have a conscience.

Everybody is guided by a force within them that helps decide right and wrong.

Everybody has that voice inside them that convicts them of guilt and shame when they've done things they shouldn't.

It's like an inner GPS.

It helps you know where you are AND where you should be going.

But like GPS units, your conscience can be fed the wrong information and you can end up going places you really don't want to go.

You do realize that GPS can give you the wrong information don't you?

ILLUS: A year or so ago, a 67-year old Belgian woman, followed her GPS directions and

ended up going 800 miles in the wrong direction!

It happens! GPS units are dependent on the source of information they get.

And it also happens with our conscience.

Your conscience feeds on what you give to it.

It's possible to program your conscience to accept things that you shouldn't.

It's possible to program your conscience to steal and cheat and hurt and kill.

The Bible talks about this as "searing your conscience".

And that happened on a large scale in the last century.

It happened with Nazi Germany.

Hitler said: "I freed Germany from the stupid and degrading fallacies of conscience and morality. ...We will train young people before whom the world will tremble. I want young people capable of violence – imperious, relentless and cruel."

(Can Man Live Without God by Ravi Zacharias, p. 23)

That's one of the reasons Hitler worked so hard to undermine and destroy the church in Germany. As long as preachers preached Godly morals, the conscience of the people might be awakened, and the people turn against Hitler, undermining his evil.

The point is: Your conscience can be seared.

It can be warped.

It can be bent out of shape.

It all depends on who you listen to.

That's why the very first Psalm in the book of Psalms says this:

"Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers." Psalm 1:1

That verse is saying that we shouldn't hang around the wicked, the sinners, and the mockers.

Why? Because those kind of people can warp you.

They'll bend your conscience out of shape.

You'll begin to think like they do.

You'll begin to talk like they do.

You'll begin to act like they do.

And you'll end up just as lost as they are.

All you have to do is watch those people long enough and you'll see they're off course
You just have to pay attention to how these people live their lives and how their choices affect their lives. If you pay attention long enough, you'll see the results of their thinking.
You just have to pay attention.

Remember that woman from Belgium I mentioned earlier?

Her GPS led 800 miles off course in Europe.

Now, how could she not notice she was lost?
Well, she wasn't paying any attention

When asked how she could have gone the wrong way for two days
Traveling OVER 800 miles
Through 5 different countries
She said: (and I quote) "I was distracted."

YOU THINK!?

She listened to the wrong authority and ended up WAYYY off course.
And God tells us the same thing.
Be careful who you listen to because the wrong people will take your life off course.

Pay attention to where these folks are going and ask yourself the question "Do I really want to end up where they're going? Do I really want my life to turn out like theirs?"

Now, you'd think religious people would be the best folks to hang around.
You'd think church folks would help me shape my conscience.
I mean, that's why we come to church isn't it?
So, you'd think religious people would be the best influences?

But, it was the religious folk who whipped the crowd into calling for Jesus' crucifixion.
It was the Pharisees and the priests and the Sanhedrin who were the ruling religious leaders of the day.

And Jesus never had much good to say about those people.
At one point, Jesus addressed them and said
"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! ..." Matthew 23:13

These men were self-righteous, arrogant and proud and generally had no love for people.
But they did love money, and power and prestige.
Jesus warned His disciples not to be like them.

Those were not the kind of people a Christian would find much wisdom around.

When Paul wrote Timothy, he warned him about "religious people"
He said some of those "religious people" had consciences that were seared.
"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. They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth." I Timothy 4:1-3

In other words, there are religious teachers out there whose consciences are seared.
They were warped people.

ONE of the ways you could tell who they are was that they taught things that aren't in Scripture.

In this case, these teachers were teaching that a person could be more holy if they decided not marry or if they avoided certain foods.

Those are people Paul said we ought not to hang around with... even if they look religious.

So where do you go to fine tune your conscience?

If you can't depend upon certain "friends" and "acquaintances or relatives, or even on certain "religious" people – to help mold your conscience, where and with whom could you possibly spend your time to make sure your conscience will do what your conscience is supposed to do?

Paul said: "I have lived my life BEFORE GOD in all good conscience up to this day." Acts 23:1

And in Romans he wrote: "my conscience bears me witness IN THE HOLY SPIRIT..." Romans 9:1

What was Paul saying?

He was saying that He spent most of His time with God.

He spent it in prayer and Bible study.

Now, think about this: if you want to shape and mold your conscience so you can trust it then doesn't it make sense to let the One who made your conscience... influence it?

Of course it does.

David said it this way: Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long. Your commands are always with me and make me wiser than my enemies. I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes. I have more understanding than the elders, for I obey your precepts.

I have kept my feet from every evil path so that I might obey your word. I have not departed from your laws, for YOU YOURSELF HAVE TAUGHT ME." Psalm 119:97-102

What's David saying?

He's was saying, that studying God's word made him wiser than his enemies.

It gave him more understanding than his elders.

And it kept him from every evil path.

In other words: it molded his conscience.

It made it so that he could trust his "instincts" on what was right and wrong.

It made it so that he would become a man after God's own heart.

David was basically saying... it's all in who you listen to.

And you can't get ANYBODY who's as good to listen to as God Himself.

Now, that's not to say that you shouldn't go to church, and listen to the sermon, and take communion, sing songs of praise, etc. etc.

What it is saying is this: if you're not listening to God... all that's worthless.

If you're not listening to God, paying attention to God, focusing on God, looking for God... then church can become an empty exercise.

I've been in churches where people just put in their time.

They go through religious exercises.

They pray, they sing, they listen... and they go home no different than when they came.

Or you'll encounter people who come to church and say they "weren't being fed." Or imply that their needs weren't met. Or it's obvious they weren't entertained.

But church is meant to be a place where WE feed each other, and where WE meet each other's needs. And God forbid we show up to be entertained. Until you listen to God's leading, you'll fall prey to those kinds of traps.

You gotta start with God, or you're not going to understand what God's will is.

ILLUS: Years ago, when the telegraph was the main form of communication, a local telegraph office advertised for helpers. A number of young men came into the office and they were all told the same thing: Sit down and fill out this form... and wait to be summoned into the office.

After a fairly long period of time, one of the young men got up and went into the office.

The other boys were confused.

The employer hadn't come out to ask this man, or any other to come into his office.

They were even more confused when the boss came out and said the job had been taken.

One of them spoke up saying, "Wait a minute, I don't understand. He was the last to come in, and we never even got a chance to be interviewed. Yet he got the job. That's not fair."

And the boss responded: "the last several minutes while you have been sitting here the telegraph has been ticking out the following messages in Morse Code:

'If you understand this message, then come right in. The job is yours.'

None of you heard it or understood it. He did. The job is his."

You have to listen to God.

You have to pay attention to God.

You have to focus on His message to you.

And what is that message?

Cleanse your conscience.

And how do you do that?

Hebrews says it this way: "the BLOOD OF CHRIST, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, (will) Cleanse Our Consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!" Hebrews 9:14

And just how do we have the blood of Christ cleanse our consciences?

I Peter 3:21 tells us it's when we're buried in the waters of baptism.

"Baptism, which corresponds to (Noah's flood), now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as AN APPEAL to God FOR A GOOD CONSCIENCE, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ..."

It's when we believe that Jesus was the Son of God and that He came to die for our sins. And when we decide to repent of our sins and confess Jesus as our Lord and Savior. And when we allow ourselves to be buried in the waters of Christian baptism... it's then that our appeal for a good conscience is answered by God. It's then that our sins are buried and we come before Him with our consciences cleansed of the acts that led to death.

CLOSE: A good conscience is a good thing. But a conscience that isn't influenced by God's reasonings and thinkings can still fall short. Unless you and I are Christians, and unless we allow God's thinking to affect our consciences, there will always be something missing.

Do you remember the video clip with Mark Lowry at the beginning of the sermon?
Do you remember how he mentioned how irritating it was when the crowd in the movie cried louder and louder and louder for Christ's execution?
And do you remember how he responded to that part of the movie?

He cried out "NOOOOOOOOOOOO"

And that's what good men should have done.
That's what moral people should have done.
That's what people with a "good conscience" should have done.
That's how we are tempted to think that scene should have been played out.

But if there had been good, moral men there with a good conscience, and they succeeded in stopping the crucifixion of Christ – you and I would be condemned to hell.
God's thinking at the cross was different than what decent moral men would have thought.
Because Jesus had been sent by God to die in our place.
And it's that offer from God that we present to you this day.