

## Introduction

For most of my life I never thought about conscience. Even as a young Christian I never heard any messages about it, or gave it much thought. Twenty-two years ago, I was doing a seven-message series on 1 Timothy 1:5 called the goal is love. Paul wrote, “The goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart, and a good conscience, and a sincere faith. The study that I did gave me an understanding of what our conscience is, and opened my eyes to the importance of a good conscience. I have preached on conscience twice since then, and both of the messages have been helpful to people. One of those messages was out of Acts 23, where Paul was defending himself and said, “Brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day.” In my earlier years as a Christian I wondered how Paul, who had persecuted and put to death many Christians, could say that he had lived his life with a perfectly good conscience. This morning I hope that you leave with a good understanding of what our conscience is, and the importance of a good conscience. The application is that we leave with a commitment to submit to governing authorities for conscience sake.

(1 Tim 1:5) “But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.”

(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.”

Our message today is Part 2 of Romans 13:1-7, which is why everyone should submit to authority. Paul gave three reasons why everyone submit to governing authorities First, we are submit to authorities because they have been established by God. Second, we should submit to authorities because they are God’s agents of righteousness. They commend those who do what is right and bring wrath to wrongdoers. Third, we should submit to governing authorities for conscience’ sake, which we will cover today. We will look at the definition of conscience. Next, we will look at the ways we can violate our conscience. Finally, we will look at why it is important to submit for conscience sake.

### 3. We Should Submit to Authorities for Conscience Sake – Part 2

- A. Defining conscience
- B. Ways that we violate our conscience
- C. The importance of submitting for conscience sake

(Rom 13:1-7) “Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. {2} Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. {3} For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; {4} for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil. **{5} Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake.** {6} For because of this you also pay taxes, for *rulers* are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. {7} Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax *is due*; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.”

## A. Defining conscience

The third reason that we should submit to governing authorities is for conscience sake. Paul said, “therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience’ sake.” The wrath was part of Paul’s second reason, that governing authorities are servants of God for good. Their role is to reward good behavior and bring wrath upon those who practice evil.

(Rom 13:3-5) “For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; {4} for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil. {5} **Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience’ sake.**”

What is our conscience? I believe we must understand what our conscience is so that we can understand why Paul tells us to be in subjection for conscience’ sake. Some have defined it as the internal voice that sits in judgment over your will. Still others have defined it as the internal moral witness found in all human beings. The Greek word for conscience is *suneidesis*, and it is used twenty-nine times. It means co-perception or moral consciousness. *Sun* means to join together or to unite. *Eido* means to see, perceive, or be aware of. Based on this, conscience is an awareness of a moral standard that we have established in our own lives. I believe a good conscience is when your actions and convictions agree with one another. A bad conscience is when your actions do not match what you believe to be right in your heart. When Paul said he had lived his life with a perfectly good conscience, he was saying that he had always done what he believed was right in his heart. We learn from that statement that our conscience is not always right, as Paul’s persecution of Christians was not right.

Conscience: G4893. *suneidesis*, from G4894; co-perception, i.e. moral consciousness:--conscience. [G4894. *suneido*, from G4862 and G1492; to see completely; used (like its prim.) only in two past tenses, respectively mean. to understand or become aware, and to be conscious or (clandestinely) informed of:--consider, know, be privy, be ware of.]

Ray Stedman is a well-known Bible scholar and teacher. I met Ray in Chicago when I was playing in the Western Open. He was invited to teach the PGA Tour Bible Study, and he gave an excellent teaching on shalom, or peace. When I was researching conscience, I came across one of Ray's teachings on conscience. Here is an explanation that he gives.

*"There is a very common myth that says conscience is the means by which we tell what is right and what is wrong. But conscience is never that. It is training that tells us what is right and wrong. But when we know what is right or wrong, it is our conscience that insists that we do what we think is right and avoid what we think is wrong. That distinction is very important and needs to be made clear. Conscience can be very mistaken; it is not a safe guide by itself. It accuses us when we violate whatever moral standard we have, but that moral standard may be quite wrong when viewed in the light of God's revelation. But conscience also gives approval whenever we fulfill whatever standard we have, though that standard is right or wrong. And conscience, we have all discovered, acts before and after the fact – it can either prod or punish."*

Our conscience is like an instrument gauge on an airline. If the instrument has been properly calibrated, it will help the pilot make right decisions. If the instrument is not giving true readings,

the pilot can make some critical errors. In 2009, there were two airline crashes due to instrument errors. In March 2009, there was a Turkish Air that crashed at Schiphol Airport in Amsterdam. The altimeter gave a false reading of the actual altitude of the airline. At 1,950 feet the altimeter said the plane was at ground level and the autopilot reduced the engine speed, resulting in a crash that killed about ten people and injured another eighty. Here is part of the finding by the investigation team.

"The Turkish airliner that crashed at Schiphol last week had a faulty altimeter. That's the conclusion of the preliminary findings of the investigation team that has been working to establish the cause of the accident. The altimeter wrongly indicated that the Boeing was already almost on the ground. Because the airplane was flying on automatic pilot, the thrust was reduced according to the faulty reading. The pilots realised the problem, but had insufficient time to correct it."

In June 2009, an Air France going from Brazil to France crashed in the Atlantic Ocean. At 38,000 feet, the air speed gauge said they were flying too fast, and the auto-pilot slowed the engine down. It continued reading that it was flying too fast, and the engine slowed down until it stalled. The pilots were slow in recognizing the problem and taking corrective actions. Even though there was nothing wrong with the engines or the planes ability to fly, it crashed, killing all 228 people on board.

Our consciences are like the instruments on these planes. If the instrument is working correctly, it helps us make proper decisions. If the instrument is not working or is not calibrated, we may take incorrect actions that can cause our lives to crash. Our conscience, by itself, is not a good moral compass. If it is trained properly, if the instrument is working properly, it is a good instrument. If our consciences are not properly calibrated to God's word and His standards, then our consciences will not be an accurate instrument to base our actions on.

In Acts 23, Paul did not tell the Sanhedrin Council that he had not sinned, only that he had lived his life with a perfectly good conscience. In 1 Timothy 1:15, Paul said he was the foremost of sinners. So, our consciences need to be properly calibrated in order it to help us to do what is right. Paul's conscience had to be re-calibrated when he became a believer.

(1 Tim 1:15) "It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost *of all*."

In the movie Pinnochio, there is a character named Cricket who sings a song to Pinnochio. He says that all you have to do is listen to your conscience. There is a problem with that statement. The problem with that song is our consciences give us readings according to their calibration. If the conscience is not calibrated according to God's word, it will give erroneous readings. If we applied Cricket's theology to Paul, we could say it was okay to murder one another because of religious preference? Paul's conscience was not upset over it. (Start video at 19 seconds and stop at 2:34. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DOZzNOkcEgM>)

As we look at Paul and his statement that he has lived with his life with a perfectly good conscience, his belief and value system was the Law. He zealously defended the Law and how the Pharisees interpreted the matters of the Law. In killing Stephen, he did not violate his conscience. In persecuting Christians, he did not violate his conscience. A correct understanding of the word of God must be our ultimate guide, not our consciences. Sound doctrine is essential in our lives. Our beliefs and value systems must be based on the word of God. Then, our

consciences help us do what is right. Our consciences insist that we do what we believe is right and avoid what we believe is wrong. If we do not listen to our conscience that is telling us what is right and wrong, we can develop a bad conscience. Paul tells us that if we reject a good conscience, we can suffer shipwreck in regard to our faith. It is important to listen to and follow our consciences.

(1 Tim 1:19) “keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith.”

Look at another example. This example comes from a quote in an article by Chuck Colbert, who was on the board of directors of the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association. The article was entitled, Gay Catholics Conscience.

“How then does a person deal with the teachings of the church and stay faithful to the teaching?” the bishop asked. Every person has to come to a point of personal growth where we fully integrate sexuality into our whole lives -- not repress it. Each person, struggling to be a whole person, must deal with this very serious question of conscience...For an increasing number of us, it's the church's very own teaching -- a carefully informed conscience as the ultimate guide in every moral decision -- that empowers us to remain good, faithful gay Catholics and be sexually active, in spite of hurtful pronouncements from the Vatican. Primacy of conscience is the gay Catholic's way through the double standard in church teaching about homosexuality. Following one's conscience is also a good practice for anyone.”

How can these people be following their conscience and live such a perverted lifestyle that is in direct contradiction to the explicit word of God. Their instrument has been improperly calibrated. Their instrumentation is telling them it is okay, when in reality, they are about to crash. The word of God says in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 that homosexuals shall not inherit the kingdom of God.”

(1 Cor 6:9-10) "Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, {10} nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God."

## **B. Ways that we violate our conscience**

There are two different categories of violating our conscience. We can defile our conscience and we can sear our conscience. Both defiling and searing have serious consequences to our lives. I want to take a few minutes to look at each of these.

### **1. Defiled Conscience**

In Corinthians 8:7, Paul said that some men who have a weak conscience can defile it. That tells us that our consciences can be weak or strong. If we maintain a strong conscience, we are less apt to defile it.

(1 Cor 8:7) "However not all men have this knowledge; but some, being accustomed to the idol until now, eat food as if it were sacrificed to an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled (moluno)."

There are two Greek words that are used and translated into our one English word defiled. The first word for defiled is moluno (Strong's G3435), which is the Greek word used in 1 Corinthians 8:7, and it means to soil. It comes from the root word melas which means black. Our consciences can be soiled or dirtied.

The second Greek word for defiled is found in Titus 1:15. Paul wrote to the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their consciences are defiled. The Greek word used here is miaino (Strong's G3392), which means to sully or taint, or to contaminate.

(Tit 1:15) "To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled."

Many years ago, Karen and I lived on a small farm in Acworth, Georgia. There was a well on the property and I ran an electric line to it, and put a new pump in the well. I intended to use it for drinking water. We found that when it rained, the water coming out would be reddish brown. The filter would also get clogged up. Apparently, there was an underground stream that fed into the well and it became muddied. It became soiled or moluno. If for some reason, lead, arsenic or another toxic chemical or material got into my well water, I would say that it was contaminated. There is a difference in soiled and contaminated. Neither one is good for drinking, but there is a difference. Our consciences can be dirtied up and they can be contaminated.

How do you know if your conscience has been defiled? How do you know if it has been contaminated? What are the signs that Scripture gives? In Titus 1:10-16, Paul gives four characteristics of a person with a defiled conscience.

(Tit 1:10-11, 15-16) "For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, {11} who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach, for the sake of sordid gain.... {15} To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled. {16} They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient, and worthless for any good deed."

- a. Nothing is pure to them. – They will constantly be suspicious of others. They will have unbelief. (Suspicious, Unbelief)
- b. Hypocritical. They profess to know God, but their deeds deny him. They will be living a lifestyle of hypocrisy. They will have some of the following types of deeds evident in their life. Paul gives several descriptions of these people with defiled consciences: empty talkers, deceivers, legalistic (of the circumcision), rebellious, and worthless for any good deed.
- c. Controversial. They upset people by their teaching and words. Their teachings cause controversy and upset people.
- d. Have impure motives. (Sordid Gain) They will have wrong motives for doing things. God wants our hearts to be pure and things to be done out of love. A defiled person is looking for unreasonable, unlawful or corrupt gain.

## 2. Seared Conscience

In 1 Timothy 4:1-3, Paul wrote that our consciences can be seared, as with a branding iron. The Greek word for seared is *kauteriazō* (Strong's G2743), which means to render insensitive. We get our English word cauterize from it.

(1 Tim 4:1-3) "But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, {2} by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, {3} men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods, which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth."

What are the characteristics of a person with a seared conscience. Paul says their consciences are seared as with a branding iron, which leaves a scar or brandmark.

- a. Fall away from the faith. (1 Tim 4:1) These are people that at one time were walking with the Lord and now, they have totally left the faith. They know the truth, but have left the Lord because of a seared conscience.
- b. Pay attention to deceitful spirits. (1 Tim 4:1) A deceitful spirit is one that deceives you. A person with a seared conscience opens himself up to deceitful spirits. There are many people living immoral lifestyles who believe that they are okay. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 6:9 that we are not to be deceived, that fornicators, adulterers, drunkards, idolaters, etc., shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

(1 Cor 6:9-10) "Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, {10} nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God."

- c. Pay attention to doctrines of demons. Paul goes on to say that a person with a seared conscience opens himself up to the doctrine of demons. This is why it is so important for teachers to have clean consciences. We need pure instruction from the Word of God. We need good discernment about what is good instruction and what is not. We need to make sure that leaders in the church have a clean conscience.

(1 Tim 4:1) "But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons,"

Paul gives some examples of doctrines of demons. Some people were forbidding marriages. There are some churches that forbid their leaders to marry. God was the one that instituted marriage and he said that it was not good for man to be alone. Some people advocate abstaining from certain foods. I believe that all foods are lawful to eat, but not all foods are profitable.

When Paul speaks of the goal of his instruction being love from a pure heart and a good conscience, we now understand why. For the purpose of purity in our doctrine, we must have a good conscience.

### **C. The importance of submitting for conscience sake**

Our passage today exhorts us to submit for conscience sake. We have defined conscience as a tool that God gives us to help us live righteous lives. That tool needs to be calibrated properly with the Word of God. That tool needs to be kept clean, as it can get defiled and seared. Now, I want to look at the importance of submitting for conscience sake.

#### **1. Prevent a shipwrecked faith**

In 1 Timothy 1:19, Paul wrote that some have rejected a good conscience and because of that have suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith. You and I need to submit to governing authorities so that we do not suffer shipwreck in our faith.

(1 Tim 1:19) "keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith."

I want to look for a few minutes at a famous shipwreck. Some of you may have seen a movie about it. The Titanic was the newest and greatest ship, and it was considered unsinkable. The first few lifeboats that were released were half empty. The passengers were not taking it seriously. Many people do not take their consciences seriously. The passengers were down below partying. Today, many people are more concerned about having a good time, partying, seeking the pleasures of life than keeping a clean conscience. But the Titanic did sink. Paul says that we will suffer shipwreck if we reject a good conscience.

Some people think that the Titanic sank because of massive tears. The Titanic did not have massive tears. It had a few tears along the side where the iceberg had opened it up. We think that it is the big things that are going to sear our conscience. Yet, it was a few little holes that sunk the unsinkable Titanic. The small things that we allow into our lives can sink our boat. We will suffer shipwreck in regard to our faith if we don't pay attention to the small tears in our conscience. We need to watch out for the compromises that we make in seemingly small things. When I ministered at the prison, there were lots of people there that never intended to do the things they did. It always started out as little things. Most drug addicts did not start out on the hard stuff. They started out with little things. The little holes will sink your Titanic.

Another fact about the Titanic's sinking was that they received six warnings about the icebergs from other ships that were in the area. Most of the time, there are advance warnings. We need to take heed to the warnings that God gives us. How does our conscience get seared? It gets seared because we do not pay attention to the warnings that we get. We violate it over and over and over and it becomes seared. If you don't pay attention to the still small voice and take heed, your Titanic could sink. Where do we get most of these warnings? We receive them in many ways, but the primary way is in the word of God. The word of God warns us so that we don't get ourselves in trouble. Look what Psalms 19 says.

(Psa 19:11-13) "Moreover, by them Thy servant is warned; In keeping them there is great reward. {12} Who can discern his errors? Acquit me of hidden faults. {13} Also keep back Thy servant from presumptuous sins; Let them not rule over me; Then I shall be blameless, And I shall be acquitted of great transgression."

We must avail ourselves to the word of God in order to receive these warnings. If you are not spending time daily in His word, you might as well be on the Titanic. Do you know that the

Titanic did not even receive the 6th and last warning that the other ships sent her? The radio man was at a cocktail party down below and was not at his post. Are you at your post? Are you watching on the ramparts to see what the Lord will say? Are you spending time with the Lord every day? If you are not, your conscience could be getting defiled without you even knowing it. You may be heading for an iceberg that could shipwreck your faith.

## **2. Deceived**

We saw that those with defiled consciences could be deceived by deceitful demons and could be deceived by the doctrine of demons. God has given us a conscience to help prevent us from being deceived. I don't like to be deceived. I get upset with people that try to deceive others. Submitting to governing authorities is just one of the things that we can do to increase our discernment and to prevent us from being deceived.

Recently, I had my annual physical. The doctor said the best thing that we can do to protect ourselves from the COVID virus is to boost our immune system. He recommended daily doses of Vitamin C, Vitamin A, Vitamin D, Quercetin, and elderberry because all of these boost our immune system and prevent us from being seriously impacted by COVID. In the same way, submitting to governing authorities keeps our conscience healthy and strong, and prevents us from being deceived and suffering shipwreck in our faith.

## **3. Hypocrisy**

The third reason it is important for us to submit to governing authorities is for a sincere faith. Our conscience helps guard against hypocrisy in our lives. If we are going to have an effective ministry to those around us, we must live what we preach. Shortly after I became a Christian, the Lord spoke to me out of Ezra 7:10, and there are three things that Ezra did. First, Ezra studied the law of the Lord. Second, Ezra put into practice the things he was learning. Third, he taught God's principles to others. I knew that I had to apply the things to my own life before teaching others. Otherwise, I would be a hypocrite, like the Pharisees that taught one thing and did another. Submitting to governing authorities keeps our conscience strong, which protects us from hypocrisy.

## **4. Callousness**

A fourth reason it is important to keep our conscience in good shape is to keep from becoming callous towards sin. Someone with a seared conscience gets less and less troubled when he does something wrong. Pretty soon, doing wrong things do not bother them at all. They can lie, steal, cheat, and kill with no remorse or contrition. You might wonder how someone could live with themselves when they act a certain way. The answer is that their conscience has been seared and it no longer bothers them.

## **Conclusion and Applications**

We have defined conscience as the God-given instrument that insists that we do what we think is right and avoid what we think is wrong. It has to be calibrated with the word of God or it will not be effective against sin. Why should we submit to governing authorities for conscience sake? Just as there are consequences from governing authorities when we disobey, there are even more serious consequences when we violate our conscience. The shipwrecking of our faith, being



deceived by false teaching, and becoming a hypocrite have far more eternal consequences than the punishment that a governing authority can give.

Our consciences can be defiled or seared, and the results can be devastating to our lives and ministries. God wants our consciences to be in good working order. In the aviation industry, they have strict maintenance programs to prevent problems and crashes. In Acts 24:16, Paul said, "I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men. Paul had a maintenance program, and he did his very best to keep his conscience in perfect condition.

(Acts 24:16) ""In view of this, I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men."

This morning, I encourage everyone to make that same commitment before God. I invite you to pray with me.

Father God, thank You for giving us a conscience. Father, we want to maintain a blameless conscience before you. We make a commitment before You this morning to do our best to maintain that blameless conscience. I ask You to cleanse my conscience and recalibrate it so that when I obey it, I know that I will be doing the right things. Help me to have the discipline and ongoing commitment to maintain that blameless conscience. Amen.

There may be some today that are listening or reading this message and you have a defiled conscience. In 1 Peter 3:21, God tells us that baptism is not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience. When we place our faith in Jesus Christ and His resurrection from the dead, and are baptized, God gives us a new and fresh start. He cleanses our conscience. It is like doing a factory reboot on a computer; it resets our conscience to the way God originally gave it to us. If you would like to make an appeal to God for a clean conscience this morning, pray with me.

(1 Pet 3:21) "And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you-- not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience-- through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,"

Jesus, I believe that You are the Son of God and that You came to earth, died for my sins, and that the Father raised You from the dead. I ask You to come into my life and forgive me of my sins. I confess You as my Lord and Savior today. I appeal to You today for a clean conscience. Help me to do my best to properly calibrate my conscience and maintain a perfectly good conscience. I ask this is in Jesus' name. Amen.

## Q & A

- What was missing from Cricket's song on conscience to Pinocchio? (Always let your conscience be your guide.) The Word of God is our standard, and our conscience must be trained to God's standards.
- What was right about Cricket's song to Pinocchio? (We should always follow our conscience.)

- Has anyone ever lived near train tracks? After a while you don't even hear the trains. How does that compare with a seared conscience?
- Why does rejecting a good conscience lead to a shipwreck in our faith?
- How do believers cleanse their consciences? Do they get re-baptized? (1 John 1:9) "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."
- Paul said that some had a weak conscience and might defile it. How do we build a strong conscience?

**Introduction** (1 Tim 1:5, Acts 23:1, Rom 13:1-7)

**A. Defining conscience** (Rom 13:3-5, 1 Tim 1:15, 1 Tim 1:19, 1 Cor 6:9-10)

**B. Ways that we violate our conscience**

1. **Defiled Conscience** (1 Cor 8:7, Tit 1:10-11, 15-16)

- Characteristics of a defiled conscience
  - a. Nothing is pure to them
  - b. Hypocritical
  - c. Controversial
  - d. Have impure motives

2. **Seared Conscience** (1 Tim 4:1-3)

- Characteristics of a person with a seared conscience (1 Tim 4:1)
  - a. Fall away from the faith.
  - b. Pay attention to deceitful spirits. (1 Cor 6:9-10)
  - c. Pay attention to doctrines of demons.

**C. The importance of submitting for conscience sake**

1. **Shipwrecked faith** (1 Tim 1:19, Psa 19:11-13)

2. **Deceived**

3. **Hypocrisy**

**Conclusion and Applications** (Acts 24:16, Pet 3:21-22)