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## Can Your Conscience Guide You?

### Acts 22:30 -23:1

#### Introduction

1. All of us here today have something which guides the direction of our life and the decisions we make throughout life.
2. Perhaps we have all heard the admonition to "*follow your heart.*"
  - a. This statement encourages us to pursue our passions, to trust our feelings and let our emotional compass guide us.
  - b. When we follow our heart, we make life decisions based upon our inner desires, our intuition, our emotions.
  - c. Those who encourage this method of guiding our lives say that we are staying true to ourselves.
3. Another such statement, close akin to this one, that many of us used to hear is "*Let your conscience be your guide.*"
  - a. This teaches us to rely upon our own internal sense of morality and ethics when working to distinguish right from wrong in our decision making.
  - b. We listen to that "still, small voice" within us so that our actions are proper.
4. The problem with following your heart is that it isn't always a sound guide.

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5. God's Word teaches us again and again to
  - a. "love God with all your heart" (Deuteronomy 6:5; 30:6; Matthew 22:37; Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27)
  - b. "trust Him with all your heart" (Proverbs 3:5)
  - c. "seek God with all your heart" (Deuteronomy 4:29; Jeremiah 29:13)
  - d. "serve Him with all your heart" (Deuteronomy 10:12; Joshua 22:5; 1 Samuel 12:20, 24)

- e. “obey Him with all your heart” (Deuteronomy 30:2)  
 . . . but you can read through the Bible and find this was often not the case.

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- 6. In the days of Noah, prior to the global flood, we find that mankind had become so wicked that “every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5).
- 7. Toward the end of King Solomon’s life, we learn that his many wives turned his heart toward the false gods they served so that his heart was no longer “wholly devoted to the Lord His God” (1 Kings 11:4).

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- 8. David wrote in Psalm 36:1 that “Transgression speaks to the ungodly within his heart; there is no fear of God before his eyes.”
- 9. The prophet Jeremiah said “The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9).
- 10. Only when we treasure God’s word in our hearts (Psalm 119:11) are we more likely to choose the right paths in life.
- 11. The same can be said of our conscience — it can only serve as a dependable guide when it is a good conscience.
- 12. This morning, in our reading, we find the apostle Paul back in Jerusalem following his third missionary journey.
- 13. Because of false statements made against Paul in the temple, a mob tried to kill him.
- 14. The commander of the Roman battalion stationed there in Jerusalem took Paul from them in order to stop the violence.
- 15. He ordered Paul to be scourged, but upon finding out that Paul was a Roman citizen he immediately released him.
- 16. On the next day, this commander ordered the “the chief priests and all the Council to assemble, and brought Paul down and set him before them” (Acts 22:30).

17. The first words out of Paul's mouth were, "Brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day" (Acts 23:1).
18. Someone once said, "There is only one way to achieve happiness on this terrestrial ball, and that is to have either a clear conscience or none at all." (Warren Wiersbe)
7. This morning, I would like for us to consider our own consciences:
  - a. The nature of our conscience.
  - b. The conscience we want to avoid.
  - c. The conscience we should seek to have.

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## **I. The Nature Of Our Conscience**

### **A. WHAT IS OUR CONSCIENCE?**

1. Our conscience is the awareness we have of a standard and our relation to that standard.
2. It is that inner voice which speaks to us concerning our choices and actions.

### **B. WHAT DOES OUR CONSCIENCE DO?**

1. It tells us whether or not we conform to that standard.
2. It accuses us when we do something we believe to be wrong and commends us when we do what we believe to be right.
3. A feeling of approval or disapproval results.

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## **II. The Conscience We Want To Avoid**

### **A. A DEFILED CONSCIENCE**

"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." (**Titus 1:15, NASB95**)

1. A defiled conscience begins with a weak conscience (1 Corinthians 8:7) which continues to lose its sense of direction.
2. Things which used to bother us don't bother us anymore because our conscience has become defiled.
3. There is a traditional Navajo teaching which describes the conscience as a triangle which spins inside a person's heart.
4. When a person does wrong, the triangle's corners prick the heart, but over time, continual wrongdoing wears the corners down to the point that our conscience becomes desensitized to the wrong we do.

**Slide 7****B. AN EVIL CONSCIENCE**

“Let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.” (Hebrews 10:22, NASB95)

1. An evil conscience is one which functions exactly the opposite of a good conscience.
2. Instead of condemning us when we do wrong, an evil conscience will commend us.
3. Instead of approving us when we do what is right, an evil conscience will accuse us.
4. An evil conscience begins with a defiled conscience.

**Slide 8****C. A SEARED CONSCIENCE**

“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, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron,” (1 Timothy 4:1–2, NASB95)

1. A seared conscience is one that is covered with scar tissue.
2. Perhaps you or someone you know has had surgery on a particular part of the body or been burned so severely that the nerve endings are damaged to the point that there is no longer any feeling in that location.

3. When that happens to our conscience, the poking and proding of God's truth no longer has any effect.
4. In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus spoke of "the eye being the lamp of the body" and then added, "if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body is full of darkness" (Matthew 6:22,23).
5. I don't believe that any of us want to reach the point in our lives where God's Word no longer affects us for good.
6. What must we do to keep this from happening?

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### **III. The Conscience We Should Seek To Have**

#### **A. A GOOD CONSCIENCE**

"But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith." (1 Timothy 1:5, NASB95)

1. This is what Paul said of himself before the Sanhedrin, "I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day" (Acts 23:1, NASB95).
2. Saul, later Paul, had faithfully lived his life according to the truth he possessed in the moment.
3. The only conscience that can be our guide is "a good conscience."
4. As Paul wrote to Timothy, the goal of his instruction to his young protégé was love.
5. It wasn't just any kind of love, but love which came from a "pure heart," "a good conscience and a sincere faith."
6. If we have a good conscience, it accuses us when we do wrong, and it commends us when we do right.
7. A good conscience doesn't prevent us from occasionally doing something that is wrong because we can sin against our conscience.
8. However, when we do wrong, a good conscience makes us feel so

miserable that we want to correct what we did.

9. You may remember that when Peter denied knowing the Lord three times on the night prior to Jesus crucifixion, he went out and wept bitterly (Matthew 26:75; Luke 22:62).
10. Why? His good conscience convicted him.
11. When David attempted to cover up his adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband, Uriah, his conscience would not let him alone.

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12. In Psalm 32, he tells us what it was like:

“When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away  
Through my groaning all day long.  
For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me;  
My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer.”

(Psalm 32:3–4, NASB95)

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### B. A CLEAR CONSCIENCE

“I thank God, whom I serve with a clear conscience the way my forefathers did, as I constantly remember you in my prayers night and day,” (2 Timothy 1:3, NASB95)

1. In his defense before the governor Felix in Caesarea, Paul said, “In view of this” — the fact “that there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked” (v. 15) — “I also do my best to maintain always a blameless [clear] conscience both before God and before men.” (Acts 24:16, NASB95)
2. In Paul’s first letter to the saints in Corinth, he wrote, “For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord” (1 Corinthians 4:4).
  - a. When Paul looked back at the year and a half he had spent in Corinth preaching and teaching the gospel, he was not aware of any wrongdoing.

- b. In other words, his conscience was clear.
- c. However, he also pointed out that his own assessment of his actions would not be the last word on the matter.
- d. Christ would be the one who ultimately evaluated him.
- e. The same is true for each of us.

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- 3. At the beginning of his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul wrote “our proud confidence is this: the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you.” (2 Corinthians 1:12, NASB95)
  - a. Paul was saying to the Corinthians that his conscience was clear concerning the way he had conducted himself toward the brethren in Corinth.
  - b. He had acted out of “holiness and godly sincerity.”
- 4. To have a clear conscience means that when it comes to the way we have lived our lives and treated others we can hold ourselves up to the light of God’s Word and truthfully say that everything we have said and done to those around us was done in a way that truly sought to honor God.

## Conclusion

- 1. If you would like a worthy goal with which to finish your life, make it the goal of living your life “with a perfectly good conscience before God” until the day of your passing or of the Lord’s coming.

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- 2. Our consciences are only as good as the things with which we have filled our minds (cf. Matthew 12:34b; Philippians 4:8-9).

“For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart” (Matthew 12:34b)

“Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right,

whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.” (Philippians 4:8–9, NASB95)

3. God’s peace is with us because we fill our hearts and minds with that which pleases Him, and we practice the good things which we “have learned and received and heard and seen” in our Christian brothers and sisters.
4. Is all well with your soul this morning, or does your conscience pain you with guilt?
5. If you would like a good conscience, one which is not constantly bearing the guilt of your sin, why not come to Jesus Christ today, and let Him save you?