

“Let Your Conscience Be Your Guide?”—1 John 3:19-21

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Let Your Conscience Be Your Guide?”, is 1 John 3:19-21 → *By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before Him; for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and He knows everything. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

In the popular animated movie Pinocchio, a puppet maker is granted his wish and one of his puppets comes to life. However, along with this new life comes a conscience in a very strange form—a cricket, appropriately called Jiminy Cricket. His job is to keep Pinocchio out of trouble and do the right things in his life. He constantly reminds Pinocchio to let his conscience be his guide, something which Pinocchio finds very difficult and ends up in a heap of trouble much of the time.

“Let your conscience be your guide.” This axiom is meant to protect us from getting ourselves into trouble. Some understand it to mean that you should not go against your better judgment when you find yourself in a situation where you may regret your decision in the

end. Something in your being or gut just doesn't make it feel right. Conscience is that part of us that reveals what's right and wrong with our thoughts, words and actions in life. Our text refers to it as your heart.

“Let your conscience be your guide.” In some respects there's truth in that statement. However, we must be very cautious about letting our conscience be our guide because our consciences may not always lead us in the right direction, even though it is generally thought the conscience is always good. Scripture states that your conscience can be desensitized, *seared* as with a branding iron (cf. 1 Timothy 4:1-2). Can you count on your conscience to keep you on the right track in life?

Since your conscience is corrupted with your sinful human nature, upon what do you depend in order for it to properly guide you so that your heart does not condemn you in the presence of God, to which our text refers? For many, when considering the conscience guiding one spiritually, they may only think of the conscience producing guilt in a negative way. Actually, it is only a conscience that is informed by some outside truth which produces guilt, feeling the burden of not having met up to an established standard. For the Christian that standard is God's *commandments*, His Law written in the Scriptures.

People are constantly trying to use the conscience to get

acceptable behavior out of others, however “acceptable” is defined in their mind. The purpose of rebuke is seen by many people to bring about regret for doing something wrong, hopefully producing proper behavior. The struggle with such motivating techniques is it tends to drive one further into guilt because the standard can never be met **perfectly**. Have you ever known anyone for whom it was never good enough? Guilt as a behavior motivator may produce a desired behavior. Unfortunately it will not produce a *heart which does not condemn us, and by which we can have confidence before God* (verse 21).

The one action which guilt is intended to produce is repentance of sins before God. It is an action to which God calls all people and it deals primarily with your heart. In verses 19-20 of our text it talks about knowing *that we are of the truth and can reassure our heart before Him; for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and He knows everything. As He Himself says in Scripture: the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart* (cf. 1 Samuel 16:7).

A person who is *of the truth* can reassure his heart before Yahweh because he experiences a *godly* instead of *worldly grief* over his sins. Instead of feeling guilt because he got caught in his sin or is bothered because he hurt someone by his actions, he actually confesses that

he has sinned by disobeying God's commandment. The outcome will be different because *godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death* (cf. 2 Corinthians 7:10). Dealing with your guilty conscience guided by a trust in *God Who is greater than our heart, and . . . knows everything*, brings release from the burden of sin for eternity instead of simply relief from the feelings of guilt for awhile.

In the midst of such *godly grief which produces . . . repentance*, God brings you *to salvation without regret* in the Person & Work of Jesus Christ. The reason there is no regret is stated in verse 21 of our text: *Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God*. The condemning power of God's Law upon your sin has been completely taken on by Jesus in His perfect sacrificial suffering and death for you and His resurrection from the dead to defeat the power of sin, death and the devil in your life once and for all.

In Deuteronomy 32:39 Yahweh says this: *See now that I, even I, am He, and there is no god beside Me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of My hand*. God is always at work in people's lives striving to make them *alive* and *heal* them of their sin-sick hearts and lives. Because of the seriousness of sin in our lives unfortunately He has to reveal your sin to you by the convicting conscience. Fortunately He took drastic measures to deal

with your sin by killing His Son and raising Him to life again so you can live eternally *before Him* (i.e. in His presence)!

Such new life with a cleansed conscience before God displays itself by loving *one another* not just *in word or talk* (e.g. “Talk is cheap”) *but in deed and in truth* (cf. 1 John 3:18,23); by keeping *His commandments and doing what pleases Him*; by continually coming to Him in prayer, confident that He hears and acts (cf. 1 John 3:22); by believing *in the name of His Son Jesus Christ and loving one another, just as He has commanded us* (cf. 1 John 3:24). When we experience the unconditional forgiveness and love of God through faith in Jesus Christ it will show in our actions with others.

Let your conscience be your guide? This is a good axiom when your conscience is governed by Holy Spirit working through the written Word of God. We are too unstable in and of ourselves to find rest in our consciences. When you stand *before God* (i.e. in His presence) in the Person and the Work of Jesus Christ, Who dwells in your heart by faith (cf. Ephesians 3:17), then you *have confidence before God*. Hearts focused on God’s greatest act of forgiveness in Christ are hearts fully set at peace. They are hearts set at peace and reassured for the purpose of doing God’s will in the daily vocations of our lives. In other words, you’re not given a clear conscience by God’s grace just so you can go on with life having “peace of mind”

from the relief of your burden. It's not to simply make you feel better but make your life new in the presence of God and others.

Should you let your conscience be your guide? If your conscience is constantly defending your wrong actions and then trying to excuse them away (cf. Romans 2:15), no. If your conscience drives you to the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins then, yes! In that case, *the Spirit Whom Jesus has given you* sanctifies your conscience, constantly informing it on the basis of Yahweh's written Word and Will in Christ Jesus. Such a guide gives you the assurance that you can *with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that you may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need* (cf. Hebrews 4:16). Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,  
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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