

God's Word – and The Conscience - b (#13)

Text : **Rom 14 – cf – I Cor. 8**

INTRODUCTION :

A. In our last lesson we :

1. We defined conscience as *“That faculty by which we apprehend the will of God as that which is designed to govern our lives.”*
 - a. A properly programmed conscience is an inner warning system to prevent straying.
 - b. We illustrated it by the Aviance Airline pilot who turned off the crash warning.
2. We saw that man's conscience is wired into our DNA ; it's instinctive.
 - a. Adam's conscience made him feel so guilty he hid from God.
 - b. All people start off with a pure conscience, but as they journey through life, each person programs his conscience differently.
3. We saw that the conscience performs a vital role for both one's life and his eternity.
 - a. Man's heart is wicked so there are no bounds to the evil he might do w/o restraint.
 - b. Conscience is always associated with guilt.
 - c. Guilt is a blessing because it can motivate one to correct a destructive course.
4. The conscience is not always a reliable guide.
 - a. The Apostle Paul killed Christians with a clear conscience. (**modern terrorist**)
 - b. We saw from **Titus 1** that the conscience can be so defiled as to be useless.
 - c. Today as in **Isaiah**'s time people are calling evil good and good evil. (**5:20**)
 - d. Society presses the Christian to overcome and to suppress his conscience.
5. It is possible to make our consciences reliable and to keep them that way.
 - a. Like a computer, one's conscience cannot function better than it's programming.
 - b. To be reliable the conscience must be programmed by the word of God.
 - c. To be reliable the conscience must be kept tender. (**Never ignore conscience.**)
 - d. To be reliable the conscience must be kept undefiled. (**Guard it from culture.**)

B. With this lesson we want to look at dealing with conflicts of conscience.

1. Though Christians are free from laws (*grace*), we are not free from commands.
 - a. God has a will about everything in our lives and Christians must seek it.

- b. Every person formulates a system of laws within his heart called a conscience.
- c. The Christian bases his internal law (*conscience*) on what he perceives to be God's will.

* **The objective of every Christian's life is to please God in all that he does.**

2. Each Christian's internal law will be different from every other Christian's law.
 - a. Christians come from varying life experiences, different cultures, etc.
 - b. Each has a different level of faith, of commitment and of diligence of study.
 - c. As well, everyone has different levels of ability.
3. No Christian's personal, internal law can override God's law.
 - a. One can cause something that is NOT wrong to become sin.
 - b. Something does not become right because it does not violate one's conscience.
4. No Christian can enforce his conscience on any other Christian.
 - a. Love demands that others be valued above one's self.
 - b. To cause another to sin is to commit sin.
 - c. To be a spiritual bully is both unloving and sinful.

C. Our texts record one principle being presented to two widely varying cultures.

1. The congregations at Rome and Corinth were dealing with different problems.
 - a. The Roman church was dealing with advocates of adherence to the Law of Moses.
 - b. The Corinthian church was dealing with the transition from paganism.
2. The same principle was applied to resolve both issues.

D. We will observe that the transformation of the Christian is an unending process.

1. **Rom 12: 2- And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.**
2. Notice the transition is one which affects one's heart and his thinking.
3. Also notice the end result of the transformation is discernment of God's will.

I. Though Christians are free from all forms of legalism, we must still obey commands.

A. The central message of the book of Romans is that Christians are free from law.

1. Jews converted to Christianity were trying to impose the Law on the church.
 - a. Some viewed Christianity as a sect of the Jews. *This was spiritual weakness.*

- b. Some were confused by the fact that Christians in Judea still had to obey the Law as the civil code. (**The Jews claimed to practice a “theocracy.”**)
- 2. Justification can occur because Christ set man free from law.
 - a. **Rom. 8: 1-2** Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. **2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.**
 - b. By its very nature law can only condemn and prescribe punishment.

B. Legalism is defined : (3 sources)

- 1. “Strict conformity to the letter of the law rather than its spirit.” (*Jews*)
- 2. “Strict, literal adherence to the law or to a particular code, as of religion ...”
- 3. “Theological : the doctrine of salvation by good works.” (*And law keeping*)

C. No one has ever stood justified before God on the basis of his deeds or compliance.

- 1. **Isaiah 64: 6** ... Man’s righteous deeds don’t impress God more than dirty clothes.
- 2. **Luke 17: 10** ... Jesus : When one keeps every command he has just done his duty.

D. Our relationship with God (*with Christ*) depends upon our obedience.

- 1. The characteristic of those who love God is that they obey Him.
 - a. **John 14: 15-** If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.
 - b. **I John 5: 2-4** By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. **3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome. 4 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.**
- 2. The ambition of everyone who loves God is to please God. (*thought, word & deed*)
 - a. **II Cor. 5: 9-** Therefore we also have as our ambition, ... , to be pleasing to Him.
 - b. When pleasing God is one’s goal in life, that goal alters his life.
II Cor. 5: 14- “For the love of Christ controls us, ...”

E. Thus, being free from a legal system :

- 1. Frees the Christians from the fear of condemnation which results from violation.
- 2. Frees the Christians to seek the principles behind the commands of God.
- 3. Frees the Christian’s conscience to discern the will of God in all circumstances.

II. Every Christian’s internal law (*his conscience*) will be different from every other.

A. Every Christians should have the same goal :

1. **II Cor. 7:1**- ... let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.
2. **Eph. 5:8, 10-11** Therefore do not be partakers with them; ⁸ for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light ⁹ (...) ¹⁰ trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹ Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; ...

B. Every Christian is at a different point on his journey toward that one goal.

1. Not everyone has had the same opportunities to make progress.
 - a. Some have been in the kingdom longer than others.
 - b. Some have been exposed to better teaching than others.
 - c. Consequently, some have stronger faith and commitment than others.
2. Christians come from widely varying backgrounds.
 - a. Each one has a different set of life experiences.
 - b. Many come from different cultures. (*National, Regional, Ethnic*)
 - c. In this country religious backgrounds, training and experience vary widely.
3. Not everyone has the same level of ability.

C. Therefore, Christians must learn to deal with brethren who differ from them.

III. No one's conscience (*internal law*) can override God's law.

A. The individual's conscience can cause a good thing to become sinful for him.

1. **Rom. 14: 22-23** The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. ²² But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin.
2. In our text, those who thought it a sin to violate the food restrictions of the Law would sin if they violated them, **BUT** in reality, the Law was not in effect.
3. Any time a person thinks he is committing sin, **he is.** (*If he is unsure ?*)

B. Conversely, something does not right become just because we believe it's right.

1. Some people use grace and liberty as an excuse to just do whatever they want.
I Pet. 2: 16- Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God. (cf- **Rom. 6: 1-2**)
2. When one decides to sin he cannot just convince himself it's okay. **Prov. 21: 2** (**A woman cannot trade her husband for a new one .. God gave him to me.**)
3. The Apostle Paul (*Saul*) killed Christians with a clear conscience.

- a. **Acts 23: 1 - cf - Acts 7-9 , Acts 26: 9**
- b. **THUS, we see that believing a thing to be right does not make it right.**

IV. No Christian has the right to enforce his conscience upon anyone else.

A. Let us be clear, we are talking about matters of conscience, NOT doctrine.

- 1. That which is clearly stated as the will of God is non-negotiable. (*blk & wht*)
- 2. When cultural values change, God's will remains the same. (*Never murder*)
- 3. The scriptures tell us where the boundary markers and fence lines are located.

B. Though most daily life issues are not directly dealt with in scriptures, there are principles in the bible to cover most every situation in life.

- 1. The so called "Gray Area" is an invention of the devil.
 - a. We do not serve a disinterested God; He has a will about everything.
 - b. Everything man does is either in God's will or out of it.
- 2. Because God communicated in principles rather than a list of commands, man can find (*discern*) the will of God for most things he does in life.
 - a. Where laws will not always transfer across cultures, principles are universal.
 - b. As technology progresses laws become obsolete, but principles are eternal.
- 3. The more one comes to know God the easier it is to discern His will.

There is a vast difference between knowing God's words and knowing God !

C. To cause another to violate his conscience is to cause both him and you to sin.

- 1. Those who do not understand their liberty will seek the security of rules.
 - a. Clear rules make compliance easy. (*Jews set an exact number of steps on Sabbath.*)
 - b. The weak tend to be very restrictive. (**Correct principle is in : Acts 15: 28**)
- 2. We may not ridicule a brother because his conscience will not allow him liberty.
- 3. We may not exercise our liberty in a way that causes a weak brother to sin. **Lk. 17:1-4**

ILL. - Psa. 101: 3- I will set no worthless thing before my eyes; (KJV = Wicked)

- a. *Many apply this to TV and movies. ("Satan's tutor teaching worldliness.")*
- b. *Some ban TV altogether while others limit programs or channels.*
- c. **Therefore, you cannot turn on the game while an objector is in your house.**

D. On the other hand ... weak Christians cannot use their weakness to bully others.

- 1. Some are weak by choice. (**These often view themselves as mature.**)
 - a. *They make no effort to grow, to mature and to better understand.* (**arrived**)

- b. When such brethren impose their opinion on others, they are unloving.
 - c. They have become spiritual bullies.
2. Each and every Christian has the responsibility to grow and to mature.
 - a. However, in this era, it is common for Christians to fossilize.
 - b. They do not continually seek to know God better so as to understand Him.
 - c. They are content to feast upon the milk and honey which flows in our land.
 3. Weak bullies cannot be permitted to destroy the work of the church.
 - a. They cannot be allowed to cause the work of the church to lose credibility.
 - b. **Rom. 12:17- Respect what is right in the sight of all men. (Unnecessarily isolated)**
 - c. Paul drew the line when it could cause others to stumble or when doctrinal.
 - 1) He circumcised Timothy, but refused to circumcise Titus. (**Act 16:3** cf **Gal 2:3**)
 - 2) He opposed Peter to his face. (**Gal. 2:11**)

CONCLUSION :

- A. **So we have seen that conscience is such an important law that it must be :**
 1. Continually trained with the word of God and upgraded. (*ongoing process*)
 2. It must never be violated or defiled with corrupt data. (*Question everything*)
- B. **We have seen that we are responsible for the conscience of others as our own.**
 1. We must draw close enough so as to know the conscience of each other.
 2. As Christians we must live watchful to protect the conscience of others.
- C. **We must learn to live at peace with those who disagree with us.**
 1. Love demands respect for the conscience of others even when they are wrong.
 2. It also demands that we patiently help others to mature, **not condemn**.
- D. **Maturity of conscience helps us to enjoy our liberty, but it does not give license for sin.**

INVITATION :