

## THE CONCIENCE

Date: November 13, 2011

Scripture: Genesis 3:1-7

INTRO: A pastor sent me a one liner this week. It says, "While people may not be a great deal wiser after my sermon, they are always a great deal older."

I want to deal with an important matter this morning with regards to one of those areas in man that gives us considerable problems. I had not intended to speak on this subject. I was preparing to speak on the sins of envy and jealousy. But I kept running into this subject and eventually thought I would take it first. It is the subject of the conscience.

Many times we quote the verse of Scripture that says, "I will praise You, for I am fearfully *and* wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, And *that* my soul knows very well" (Ps. 139:14). Through modern technology and modern science we have learned much about the body and when we came to such discoveries as the cell, or the DNA we simply stood amazed at the complexity of man's physical makeup. It is so incredible that we simply shake our heads in awed wonder.

Carl Shuster, in an article published on the internet says in a chapter on the discovery and basic structure of the cell, "In 1655, the English scientist **Robert Hooke** made an observation that would change basic biological **theory** and research forever. While examining a dried section of cork tree with a crude **light** microscope, he observed small chambers and named them cells. Within a decade, researchers had determined that cells were not empty but instead were filled with a watery substance called **cytoplasm**" end quote. So those who study the cell are called cytologists.

And so, in the last century, when scientists discovered the cell, they thought it was a simple thing. Deryl R. Corbit writes in the Adventist Review, "In the nineteenth century scientists thought of the cell as primitive. The term *simple cell* was coined by Ernst Haeckel, a German scientist and a strong supporter of Charles Darwin. The theory of evolution led Haeckel to believe that the cell was 'a simple little lump of aluminous combination of carbon.' To Haeckel it seemed that such simple life, with no internal organs, could easily be produced from inanimate material."

Well, I could read for you what scientists have discovered about the cell from those days until now and when we hear of these incredible discoveries our little computers spin out. They loop with information overload. The cell, in itself, is an incredible little universe all on its own. And we are made up of trillions of those!

But I want to draw our attention to something else. If our bodies are fearfully and wonderfully made, what do you think our soul and spirit are like? Do you think we have a simple soul, or a simple spirit? Let us go for a moment to the book of Hebrews (read 4:12). Now I used to think that this verse meant that the Word of God was so sharp it could slice the soul from the spirit. That is, divide between them. But this verse would more accurately translated literally, "...even to the division of the soul and of the spirit, and of the joints and of the marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and of the intents of the heart." You see, the Word of God can divide the soul into its parts and the spirit into its parts. If our bodies are not simply parts, neither are our soul and spirit. The soul and the spirit are complex.

In my understanding, one of the larger parts of the soul is what the Bible calls the heart. Neither the OT Hebrew nor the NT Greek has a word equal to our English word 'mind'. When the Bible talks about the heart, it is talking about the vital center of the soul, and that is the mind. And the heart, or the mind, has various parts to it. In my understanding, one major part of the heart is the *phreen*. That is a NT word in Greek. From it come numerous words. As I understand it, it is the data processor of the soul. Then there is the *nous*. Numerous NT words come from this root as well. That is the hard drive, in computer language. There every bit of data the five senses have ever experienced is stored. Then there is the memory. The word in the original NT is *mneeme*. It is just like the memory on a computer. But there is another area of the heart that we call the conscience. And that is the part of our soul we want to look at in these next two messages.

Now these brief message are by no way meant to be a comprehensive study of the conscience. Let me recommend to you especially John MacArthur's book, from which I will be quoting numerous times called, "The Vanishing Conscience." I am giving these messages as a kind of preparation for the

subjects of envy and jealousy that I want to speak on after this.

## I. WHERE THE CONSCIENCE ORIGINATED

So, let us begin by considering the point of where the conscience originated. Was man created with the conscience? Or where did it originate? It may come as a bit of a surprise that, as I see it, God did not create man with a conscience. It came along later.

So, let us go to Genesis 2, right back to the beginning (read 2:7-9 then 16-17, then 3:1-7). Some years ago I did some messages on Genesis 1-3. Let me quote a section from those message. I said, "Though I can quote no theologians who take the same view, and because I can quote no theologians who present a good view, I dare to present what I believe happened. There are various entities (or parts) within the realm of man's mind. There is a data processor. There is a place where information is stored. There is memory. This entire area is called in the OT the heart. Interestingly, the OT does not give us the various parts of the mind but the NT does so with breathtaking accuracy. There is one amazing entity (part) of the mind which is not named precisely in the OT but it is named and explained in the NT. We have a word in English that does full justice to this entity. It is this part of the mind that I think is spoken of when the Bible says their eyes were opened and they knew that they were naked. It is the conscience."

We read Genesis 2:16-17 earlier where Adam was instructed not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. We also read Genesis 3:1-, and how they did eat from the forbidden tree. So Adam and Eve had disobeyed the express command of God. So Genesis 3:7 then goes on to say this, "Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings." When it says their eyes were opened, it is not talking about their physical eyes. They could see well enough. They had seen that the tree was good for food. They had seen how pleasant it was to the eyes. The devil said that God had warned them not to eat from this tree because He knew that

if they did, their eyes would be opened. He was not talking about their physical sight either for he then said that they would be like God, knowing good and evil.

And it happened that as soon as they ate from this tree, that their eyes were opened. And when their eyes were opened they could not see more physically. They could see more spiritually. The eyes of the knowledge of good and evil had been opened, and they knew they were naked. God did not tell them they were naked. The devil did not tell them they were naked. They knew they were naked. How did they know they were naked if nobody told them? Question: And why should that be of concern to them? Answer: The conscience had been formed in them or at least it had then been awakened. This, as I see it, is the origin of the conscience. Before sin, there was no need for the conscience. After sin it became as important as the nerves are to the body.

## II. WHAT THE CONSCIENCE IS

So, let us consider what this conscience is. There is a vital center in the non physical part of man, called in the OT the 'heart'. In this vital center man does all his mental thinking, planning etc... For example, Psalm 53:1 says, "The fool has said in his heart, There is no God." Thoughts happen in that area called the 'heart'. Proverbs 23:7 says, "For as he thinks in his heart, so is he..." Again, thinking happens in the heart.

But the OT also speaks of the conscience being part of the heart. It does not name the conscience but says this in 1 Samuel 24:5, "Now it happened afterward that David's heart troubled him because he had cut Saul's robe." The KJV says his heart smote him. Then again in verse 10 it says, "And David's heart condemned him after he had numbered the people. So David said to the LORD, 'I have sinned greatly in what I have done; but now, I pray, O LORD, take away the iniquity of Your servant, for I have done very foolishly.'" It is quite clear that the conscience is at work here. However, the OT has no express word for that which we call the conscience.

But, the NT speaks in much greater detail of that area the OT calls the heart. And one of those parts of the heart, as I see it, is the conscience. And we can learn a great deal from the NT about the conscience. We meet this word first in John 8 (read 2-9). Now it says they were convicted by their *conscience*. There is our word. In OT language, their hearts smote them. Now this word that is translated 'conscience' is most interesting. It is the Greek word 'suneideisis.' It is the word 'sun' + 'oida'. *Sun* means *with*, and *oida* is knowledge. It is a 'with knowledge' or as we might say it, 'a co-knowledge'. It is a knowledge alongside our knowledge. It is a provided knowledge.

Now it is instructive that in the Greek language, two main words are used for 'to know'. One is *ginosko*. The other is *oida*. Vine's dictionary says, "ginosko frequently suggests inception or progress of 'knowledge,' while oida suggests fullness of knowledge..." He then points out John 8:55. Let us turn to it (read 8:54-55). Jesus says here, "Yet you have not known (*ginosko*) Him..." Vine suggests that they have not yet begun to know Him. Then Jesus says, "...but I do know (*oida*) Him..." In other words, if Vine is right, He is saying, "...you have not even begun to know (*ginosko*) Him, but I fully know (*oida*) Him." The word, *suneideisis* is the preposition *with* + the word *oida*. This conscience is a very extensive knowledge.

So, what happened in the Garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve's eyes were opened is that they had a co-knowledge born within them, and it was placed alongside their own knowledge. And when they had eaten of the forbidden tree something inside said, "Shame on you. You are naked." So they covered themselves with leaves. In John 8, those who judged the woman were convicted by their own conscience, and they dropped their case and left. They were just as guilty. Their co-knowledge said so.

So, what is the conscience? It is that special co-knowledge regarding good and evil that all mankind possesses. I believe it entered man or was awakened in man after he ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

### III. WHAT THE CONSCIENCE DOES

#### A. It Produces Conviction

So having seen where the conscience originated and what it is, let us explore what its function is. What does it do? The first thing I want to point out with regard to what the conscience does is that it produces conviction. The word, *to convict*, in the NT is *elegko*. It basically means to expose wrong to a person, or reveal wrong to a person. In earlier uses of this word it was connected to shame. Exposure of wrongdoing brings shame to a person who is sensitive to the conscience. One of the things the conscience does is expose wrongdoing to a person and this may bring feelings of shame, remorse etc..

This word occurs 17 times and is translated to *reprove* 6 times, *rebuke* 5 times, *to convince* 4 times, and *to tell (one's) fault* one time. It is worth looking at some of these references. Jesus said in John 16:8, "And when He (i.e. the Holy Spirit) has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment." Jesus is talking about the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a Spirit of holiness. And when He comes on the scene, He produces conviction. He exposes wrong. Anything unholy in His presence produces shame or remorse or repentance. It causes one to want to hide.

Ephesians 5:6-13 is an instructive passage here. It says, "Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them. For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit *is* in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light."

When it says we are to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them,

the word to expose is the word translated to convict elsewhere. It is to bring truth to bear in the matter and the Holy Spirit will bring about conviction, and it will happen through the conscience. In John 8:9, when these men had accused the woman of sin, Jesus exposed sin to them, I think, when He wrote on the ground, and they were convicted by their conscience.

Now let me insert a thought here. Paul said all who will live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. You see, a godly life exposes wrongdoing, and this exposure brings conviction and this conviction brings either repentance or persecution. I recently found a very interesting verse in this light. Turn to John 7 (read verse 7). When you do not expose wrong, the world will not hate you. You see, Jesus said, "But the world hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil." May I ask you, can the world hate you? How about the religious world, the ones to whom Jesus was speaking here, namely His unbelieving brothers.

So, let us go on with passages using this word 'to convict'. Ephesians 5:13 then says, "But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light." We are not to have fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but we are rather to expose them. We do not like to reprove people. To reprove them is simply to tell them what it is they are doing. And Paul then says that all things that are exposed (convicted) are made manifest by the light. The light of truth and the Holy Spirit makes manifest, apparent, visible, the wrongdoing. That is the very thing we all fight to the uttermost. We hate exposure. We like to hide in the dark when we have sin in our hearts. But only exposure brings about that which it should.

I spoke with a man who said that it is not our business to convict people. That, he said, is the job of the Holy Spirit. But, the Holy Spirit convicts through anyone or anything that sheds light on one's wrongdoing. That is the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit especially seeks to use pastors for this work.

Let me give several verses from the pastoral epistles. Paul, writing to Timothy as pastor, says in 2 Timothy 4:2 "Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching." The word 'convince' is our word for conviction. The pastor is to bring conviction to bear. That is done by the Word of God and the truth which exposes the wrong in the heart. This is an unpleasant business, but it does much good.

In 1 Timothy 5:20 he writes, "Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear." The word 'rebuke' is our word again. Sin is to be exposed. When sin is rebuked in the presence of all, the rest learn a healthy fear of God. When pastors are not willing to bring about conviction, wrongdoing quickly sets in, even in Christians.

In Titus 1:9 Paul exhorts Titus that a pastor should be, "...holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict." In Titus 1:13 he says, "This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke (or convict) them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith..." Again, in Titus 2:15 he says, "Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke (or convict) with all authority."

So, conviction is produced in the conscience, that co-knowledge of matters pertaining to right and wrong. And this conviction, that very uncomfortable feeling, is there to seek to bring about repentance and a change of behavior. What we want to do is get out from under that which produces that feeling. So, if we can get away from a person who is the vehicle God is using to produce conviction in us, we do so as quick as we can. And by doing this, we do the opposite of what God is seeking to do.

The conscience is that thing in us through which the Holy Spirit convicts us. Now let me add this, that when conviction is produced in man, man either transforms and thus quiets the voice of the conscience, which is its purpose, or man persecutes or seeks to do away with those who produce conviction. We hate exposure. And when we are

exposed, we either do truth, or we do away with the truth. We read John 7:7 earlier which explains why sinners persecute the righteous. There are many Christians, or so called Christians, whom the world cannot hate. There is no reason to hate them. And why did the world hate Christ? Because He testified of its evil works.

Go with me to John 3 (read 14-21). From verse 19 we learn that mankind loves darkness rather than light. Why? Because their deeds are evil. Cain killed Abel. Why? Because his own deeds were evil (1 John 3:12). From verse 20 we learn that when we do wrong, we hate the light. And we do not come to the light. And why not? Because our deeds would be exposed! But from verse 21 we learn that those who do the TRUTH come to the light, that their deeds may be clearly seen that they have been done in God! Oh, the conscience! It plays such an important role in our lives, and conviction is one of them.

Now let me say one more thing about the conscience and conviction. If we think ourselves to be a Christian, and we have never truly been convicted of our own sinfulness and we have not come to a point of recognizing our own sinfulness and our own lostness and we have never truly repented, then we are no Christian at all. Before we can be saved, we must be lost, and we must recognize we are lost. And conviction of sin must have set in and repentance must have taken place. The quote from William Booth I read earlier said this: "The chief danger of the 20th century will be religion without the Holy Spirit, Christianity without Christ, forgiveness without repentance, salvation without regeneration...". Let every one of us make our calling and election sure. You see, religion without the HOLY Spirit leads to Christianity without Christ and forgiveness without repentance and salvation without regeneration.

The conscience is our internal warning system on right and wrong. It screens every thought word or action, and when those are wrong, it sounds the alarm. John MacArthur has written a book called, "The Vanishing Conscience". On page 43 he writes, "In 1984 an Avianca Airlines jet crashed in Spain. Investigators studying the accident made an eerie

discovery. The 'Black box' cockpit recorders revealed that several minutes before impact a shrill, computer-synthesized voice from the plane's automatic warning system told the crew repeatedly in English, 'Pull up! Pull up!' The pilot, evidently thinking the system was malfunctioning, snapped, 'Shut up Gringo!' and switched the system off" (JM pg. 43). Oh, how we too like to silence that shrill whistle of the conscience. But it is best to heed it!

#### B. It Produces Guilt

Second, the conscience produces guilt. So, just what is guilt? The word for guilt in the NT is *enochos*. It literally means "to have in or hold in." It comes from *en* meaning *in* and *echo* to *have*. It occurs in numerous places in the NT. James uses this word in 2:10. He says, "For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty (*enochos*) of all." It only takes one sin to condemn us. And this one sin will hold us in. And this prison that holds us in, I believe, is our conscience. The result is guilt.

Now there are two kinds of guilt. One is the fact and the other the feeling. One may be guilty without feeling any type of guilt. We had a neighbor who told his son, "Son, it is not a sin to steal, but it surely is a sin to get caught." Such a person may be put in jail because of the fact of stealing, but it may produce no feelings of guilt. So Funk and Wagnall's dictionary defines guilt first as the fact or condition of having committed an offense, especially a willful violation of a legal or moral code. And then second, as a feeling of remorse arising from a real or imagined commission of an offense. This brings about a feeling of guilt or condemnation. Now one may be guilty without feeling guilty. Or one may be guilty and feel very guilty. Or, in some cases, people feel guilty when they are not in the least bit guilty. Guilt is something the devil can use to his own advantage. Many times when a couple divorces, the children feel guilty. That feeling of guilt comes from the destroyer.

Now real guilt is most graphically pictured for us in Matthew 18 (read 21-35). When Jesus says in verse 35,

"So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses", He means the forgiveness that is due after repentance. The context of this passage is that of forgiveness as we read in 21-22. So let me first explain what an unforgiving spirit is. This is not talking about unconditional forgiveness, which general William Booth cited in the quote earlier said would be one of the chief dangers of the 20th century. An unforgiving spirit is when someone has wronged us and he repents and we do not forgive. Forgiveness in the Bible is conditioned upon repentance (Luke 17:3-4).

Jesus is saying in this passage that if we are unforgiving, His heavenly Father will deliver us to the tormentors until we become willing to forgive. I do not know of much that can torment more than the conscience. The US State Department has a conscience fund. When people's conscience has tormented them enough, they can pay the taxes they cheated the government out of through that fund.

Now let me just say that there are people who have, what I would call a weak conscience. Look at 1 John (read 3:20). There are some folk, when somebody unintentionally looks cross at them, they cannot sleep because they feel somehow they have offended the person.

Let me also mention that it is possible to sear the conscience. 1 Timothy 4:2 says, "Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron..." Continual sinful living when my conscience convicts me may erase the voice of the conscience and then reprobation sets in (Rom. 1). Such people God gives over to a reprobate mind. This mind has no discernment between right and wrong. It is a most horrendous state. I would call this leprosy of the soul. Leprosy of the body kills the nerves. Leprosy of the soul kills the senses of the soul, the conscience.

Now let me mention one more thing here with regard to guilt. There is such a thing as false guilt. For

example, very many times when parents divorce, the children, though they may be very young, somehow feel guilty. This is false guilt. It is the devil's work. One must be ever so careful to distinguish between false and real guilt.

One of the reasons why revival tarries is the fact the guilt of conviction plays such a little part in our teaching, preaching and life. When the conscience is truly quickened, men can be brought to writhe on the floor in agony of conviction and they can be brought to beg God for mercy, if the work of the Holy Spirit can only be brought to bear enough on the conscience.

CONCL: So, let us ask in conclusion, where did the conscience originate? I believe it originated as soon as Adam and Eve ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It was then that they knew they were naked. The more we kill the conscience in our day, the more naked we are becoming, and that without shame. And second, what is the conscience? It is an inbuilt co-knowledge. That thing knows more about our inward being than anybody or anything else except God Himself. It is a very complete knowledge on matters of right and wrong.

And third, we considered what the conscience does, its function. Just like the nerves in our body tell us when there is something wrong in any part of our bodies, so the conscience tells us when there is something wrong with our thoughts, words or actions. It can tell you that you did not pay tax, and then send you regular reminders. It can tell you that you are speeding down the highway. It is well nigh omniscient. So, it produces conviction. Then it produces guilt and holds us in. And we can fight and kick and scream, but it still hangs on. When the red light goes on and the conscience blows the whistle on you, you can argue every direction you want and it will out-know and out-argue you every time. And if you resist it too much, eventually it will get quieter and quieter. This co-knowledge is incredible!

Now, one of the pastor's greatest privileges is that he gets to share the good news. That is the Gospel. And here is the good news, we can silence that shrill whistle of the conscience. We can turn off those flashing lights of warning. Here is how: clean up the wrong. 1 John 1:9 says,

"If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." When we do the hard thing, the Lord forgives, and then He lovingly turns off that horrible siren and those flashing lights. And the soul rests quietly within once more.