

LESSON 25

GREAT BIBLE THEMES

A PERSONAL NOTE: I feel that my understanding of these Great Bible Themes has been deepened by the study of these themes. It has been a pleasure to send them to you and I trust that you have found them helpful. I cannot escape the conclusion that the greatest inspiration to nobler living comes from the time we use in a sincere study of the Word of God. I am hopeful, too, that each one of you has acquired the habit of regular Bible study that you will continue throughout life.

CONSCIENCE AS A GUIDE

Conscience is a term that is difficult to define, but one that we all recognize applies to that moral sense of what is right and what is wrong. It may be defined as: Consciousness of the moral goodness or badness of one's own conduct or motives, together with a feeling of obligation to do right or be good. Some refer to it as the voice of the soul that points an accusing finger at us when we do something we feel we ought not to do, or it commends us for doing what we feel we ought to do. This leads us to the questions for our study today.

1. Is it wrong to do things contrary to our consciences?
2. Give examples of individuals in whose lives conscience was more powerful than human laws.
3. Is it correct to think of conscience as the voice of God speaking to our souls?

4. Can it be depended upon as our guide in our religious faith and practice? Is it our supreme law or guide?
5. Discuss the errors involved in the attitude that just so long as a person is sincere he is all right in God's sight.

LET US LOOK TO THE BIBLE FOR OUR ANSWERS

There are many passages that admonish us to keep our consciences pure and clean. Let us notice some of them. Timothy was the most faithful co-worker Paul ever had. He served with him for many years. Let us notice the emphasis Paul gives to having a pure conscience in his letter to Timothy. In the beginning of his first letter he concludes with an admonition to Timothy by saying: (1:5) "Now the end of the commandment is _____ out of a _____, and of a _____, and of _____." In the third chapter Paul gives the qualifications of the elders and deacons in the church. Notice verses eight and nine. "Likewise must the _____ be grave, not double tongued, not given to much wine, nor greedy of filthy lucre: holding the mystery of the faith in a _____." Thus, there is abundant evidence that God wants His people to have consciences that are pure and good.

We are taught to respect the consciences of others. Notice Romans 14:21 in this connection. "It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor _____ whereby thy _____, or is _____, or is _____." Paul was discussing the eating of meats which caused some to

stumble. Notice also 1 Corinthians 8:13, "Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend (That is eating meats that have been offered as a sacrifice to idols) I will not eat flesh while the world standeth, _____."

Does Paul mean that we should respect the consciences of others and be very cautious about doing anything that would cause a brother in Christ to stumble?

Read the following verses from Romans 14:22-23, then try to state the teaching in your own words. You will need to read this a number of times. "Happy is he that _____ in that thing _____. And he that _____ is damned if he eat, because _____: for whatsoever is _____."

Dr. Goodspeed translates these verses as follows: "He is a happy man who has no fault to find with himself in following the course that he approves, but the man who has misgivings about eating, and then eats, is thereby condemned, for he is not following his convictions, for anything that does not rest on conviction is wrong." Do these verses teach that it is sinful for an individual to do something he thinks to be wrong? Is it wrong then to go contrary to our conscience? This, however, leads us to the next question for discussion. If we should live according to our consciences or convictions, can we say that it is our final guide in all things, or is there a higher law than the law of conscience which we must follow to meet the approval of God?

As we approach a study of this question let us notice first that the law of conscience is higher than human law. To illustrate the meaning of this statement look in the Old Testament to the book

Judas did not break any of the laws of his nation by identifying Jesus for the multitude. But there is a higher law than any human law that condemned him. He knew that he was a betrayer of the Son of God and that law of conscience was much stronger than any law that could have been written upon the statute books of any nation. Matthew 27:3-5 says, "Then Judas, which had betrayed Him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, _____

_____. And they said, "What is that to us? See thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and _____, and _____
_____."

For additional illustrations you might read **John 8:1-11, Jesus went unto the mount of Olives. And early in the morning he came again into the temple, and all the people came unto him; and he sat down, and taught them. And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, they say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou? This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not. So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. And they which heard it, being**

convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more. (AKJV) with this question in mind. The law said she should be stoned, but they did not stone her. Was there a more powerful law operating in the lives of the accusers than the law which said to stone her? Or read **Matthew 26:69-75, Now Peter sat without in the palace: and a damsel came unto him, saying, Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee. But he denied before them all, saying, I know not what thou sayest. And when he was gone out into the porch, another maid saw him, and said unto them that were there, This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth. And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man. And after a while came unto him they that stood by, and said to Peter, Surely thou also art one of them; for thy speech bewrayeth thee. Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man. And immediately the cock crew. And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly. (AKJV)** with this question in mind. Did Peter violate any law when he denied that he knew Jesus? Why did he weep bitterly?

It is evident that conscience is superior to human law, but are we to conclude from this that conscience is the highest possible law for man to follow? Let us first notice that people may have consciences that are not good and pure. Notice Titus 1:15 in this

respect. "Unto the _____ all things are pure; but unto them that are _____ and _____ is nothing _____; but even their _____." Could we say that the defiled conscience of man is the best guide he can have? Notice also 1 Timothy 4:1-2, "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some _____ giving heed to _____, and _____; speaking _____ in _____; having _____." A place that is seared over is a place that is almost if not altogether past feeling. Since it is possible for this to happen, would it not seem unreasonable to think that conscience is the best guide man can have? The person whose conscience has been seared over would have no guide. How then could he be expected to live a life that God would approve? Surely, then, there is a way of life superior to merely following our consciences.

Before we develop this last idea further we want to consider one other important idea. That idea is that conscience is a creature of education. Stated in other words, we conscientiously do what we have been taught that is right to do, and cannot do with a clear conscience the things we have been taught to think of as being wrong. This is true regardless of the source from which we received our teaching. This is true if our teaching has come from the Bible or if it has come from ugly vulgar sources. Since this is true, could conscience be an infallible guide? Is conscience the voice of God speaking to our souls, or is it the voice of our training and teaching?

We could illustrate this from many different activities of life. Some people rejoice over the fact that a baby in its mother's arms has been sprinkled. Others could not conscientiously do so. Both may be doing what they believe to be right. Why the difference? Is it not because some have been taught that infants should be sprinkled, while others have been taught that only the penitent believer may be baptized? Other individuals could live for many years and never attend church services and yet their consciences would not bother them, while those who have been taught differently could not conscientiously miss one Lord's day service.

In the light of the above discussion, could you possibly justify the idea that just so an individual is sincere, that is all that matters after all? Does the fact that some sincerely practice sprinkling make sprinkling right before God? Does the fact that others are sincere in believing in immersion as the only scriptural baptism make is a scriptural baptism? It is evident that we must go elsewhere to determine what is right in God's sight. My sincerity does not make anything right, neither does your sincerity, but both will be right in matters of religion only if we are following God's positive law that has been given to us by inspiration.

The life of Paul the apostle gives us an illustration of one who was sincere, but who was wrong nevertheless. You recall that he was a persecutor of Christians at first. Notice Acts 9:1, "And Saul (who was later called Paul), yet breathing out _____ and _____ against _____ of the Lord." This shows the zeal and determination to crush Christianity that he had. Many years later, after he had been a preacher of the gospel in many places, he declared to a Jewish audience in Jerusalem, Acts 23:1, "Men and brethren, I have lived _____

_____.” Paul was sincere in persecuting Christians but did this make it right? Notice how Paul thought about this. 1 Timothy 1:13, “Who (Paul) was before a _____, and a _____, and _____, but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.” Notice also the faithful saying in verse 15. “Christ Jesus came into the world to _____; _____.” Do you suppose the devil is happy when people say, “It doesn’t make any difference about religious matters just so long as you are sincere?”

Would you agree with the following conclusions? We should do only those things that we may conscientiously do. To obey your conscience is superior to merely obeying human laws. Conscience is a creature of education; therefore, it cannot be a final guide. The spiritual laws revealed in God’s Word are the only ultimate and final source of authority.

Notice the rejoicing that a good conscience brings. 2 Corinthians 1:12, “For our rejoicing is this, the _____, that in _____ and _____, not with _____, but by the _____, we have our conversation in the world.”

TEST

1. God (does, does not) care whether or not we have a good and pure conscience. _____

2. Peter and John were moved by an excellent attitude which should be in every Christian's life. Which was it? (a) To hearken to the demands of men when those demands are contrary to God's Word, (b) to refrain from speaking those things men did not want taught, (c) to quit in the face of opposition, (d) to hearken unto God and speak that which they knew to be right even in the fact of opposition. _____

3. Is it possible to have our conscience defiled? (Yes or No)

4. Those who had "their consciences seared with a hot iron" were: (a) those who departed from the faith by giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils, (b) those who had never believed in Christ, (c) the faithful Christians, (d) men like Judas who betrayed Christ.

5. Saul, who later became the apostle Paul, said that he persecuted the Christians because: (a) he enjoyed hurting people, (b) he did it ignorantly, not realizing he was acting contrary to God's will, (c) was acting by the command of the army, (d) Christianity was harmful to the lives of the Jews.

6. Saul, who persecuted the early Christians, (had, had not) done so with a clear conscience. _____

7. Daniel demonstrated the fact that when one knows God's will one cannot disregard God's law in order to obey human law without violating one's conscience. (True or false)

8. Paul taught in Romans 14 that whatever was not of faith (see Romans 10:17 also): (a) is permissible, (b) must be ruled right or wrong by human wisdom, (c) is sin, (d) may be right

9. Is it correct to say that our conscience is the voice of God directing our lives. (Yes or No) _____

10. Must Christians always maintain carefulness lest he cause his weaker brother to stumble (Yes or No) _____

Score: 10 points for each correct answer _____

Correct answers to questions in lesson 24:

1. (b)
2. (did)
3. (c)
4. (No)
5. (a)
6. (b)
7. (b)
8. (d)
9. (No)
10. (a)

Correct answers to questions on lesson 25:

1. does
2. (d)
3. Yes
4. (a)
5. (b)
6. had
7. True
8. (c)
9. No
10. Yes

List below others who might be interested in taking this course.