

Acts 24:15-16 (NIV)

15 and I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. 16 So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.

44-24-01-God's Gift of Conscience

conscience, acceptance, shame, guilt, affirmation, guidance

Acts 24:15-16

Our spiritual health is kept by maintaining a healthy conscience.

INTRODUCTION: (read **text**)

–In his defense before the governor Felix, Paul made a *conscientious appeal to the universal language of conscience* [lit., knowledge with;

Easton's Bible Dictionary– “that faculty of the mind, or inborn sense of right and wrong, common to all men, by which we judge of the moral character of human conduct. Yet, like all our other faculties, it has been perverted by the Fall.”]

–Some cultures don't have a word for “**conscience**,” making it the work of missionaries to create an understanding of **God's gift of conscience**. (In modern society we need that understanding re-created!)

–Why is conscience a divine gift? It's God's watch-dog; His smoke alarm system; it's the engine light on the dashboard of life, flashing red when something's gone wrong under the hood, in the soul– **HOM.idea**.

I. In the Beginning We See the Beginning of Conscience

A. Conscience awoke as innocence died– Ge 3:9-10, But the LORD God called to the man, “Where are you?” He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.” (God made man naked as a “very good” thing, but by an independent ability to know right from wrong apart from God, man fell into faulty moral thinking: being naked wasn't *wrong*; openly naked confession was the solution!)

1. In **PLAN A**: God already had a *personal relationship with man*.
 - a. But God warned that “the knowledge of good and evil” was **lethal**; only God can give a *divine understanding of “do's and don'ts”*
 - b. God's built-in alarm system kicked in with sin: “*You just sinned!*”
2. **PLAN A** had to be *abandoned*: “when you eat of it you will surely die” (*Law* took up the place in the *inner sanctum* of the human soul which was meant for God Himself.) [see **Romans 7** for details!]

B. God's **PLAN B** was to *keep communication channels open* with our *conscience*: [The Man in the Glass] - When you get what you want in your struggle for self \ And the world makes you king for a day, \ Just go to a mirror and look at yourself, \ And see what THAT man has to say. \ For it isn't your father or mother or wife \ Who judgment upon you must pass; \ The fellow whose verdict counts most in your life \ Is the one staring back from the glass. \ Some people may think you a straight-shootin' chum \ And call you a

wonderful guy, \ But the man in the glass says you're only a bum \ If you can't look him straight in the eye. \ He's the fellow to please, never mind all the rest \ For he's with you clear up to the end, \ And you've passed your most dangerous, difficult test \ If the man in the glass is your friend. \ You may fool the whole world down the pathway of years \ And get pats on the back as you pass, \ But your final reward will be heartaches and tears \ If you've cheated the man in the glass.]

1. When we fail to listen to God's personal voice, He can use *our conscience* (Madam de Staël, "The voice of conscience is so delicate that it is easy to stifle it; but it is also so clear that it is impossible to mistake it.")
 - a. *Guilt and shame* are the notes conscience plays in response to sin: our dance to that sour tune is "hiding."
 - b. *Nakedness is like conscience*: it shows us our true identity, our utterly bare person (*naked we came, naked we leave*; just *US!*)
 - c. *Clothing* was man's first cover-up, used to hide his true naked self "before God and man" (1st fig leaves; 2nd bushes; 3rd excuses).
2. God deals with us where we're at to get us to where He wants us:
 - a. Since we chose law, God established a *legal system: the Law*.
 - b. Animals died that "day" to atone for [cover up] man's sin— Ge 3:21. The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. (The Law continued this *divine cover-up* [atonement in the OT] until God's Lamb could "take away the sins of the world.")
 - c. There's death in PLAN B— Ge 3:22. And the LORD God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever." (Because of the *hope of resurrection*, physical death brought *safety* from an *eternal separation* from **true life**.)

TRANS: Innocence was the original plan with *conscience* as a built-in counterpoint system for making melodious moral harmony. **BUT now**, God lets *conscience be the guide*, using His law in our hearts to keep us *morally safe*. **Our spiritual health is kept by maintaining a healthy conscience**, a "*conscience without offense toward God and men.*" (NKJV)

II. There Is Hope for the Conscience Damaged by Human Sin

- A. The Fall damaged the *human conscience* [Dropped pianos get out-of-tune, and need a tuner] (**The Divine Piano Tuner** is the *Holy Spirit*):
 1. a **weak conscience** (faith)— Rom 14:2. One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. (If

troubled by what God isn't concerned about, we are weak in our faith. Conscience is strengthened by understanding God's Word.)

2. a **guilty conscience** (not "*evil*" [KJV], but *working well* to send the sinner "*painful*" feelings)— Heb.10:22, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.
 3. a **corrupted conscience** (one steeped in certain areas of moral failure— Tit.1:15, To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted. They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good. [Corrupted files on a *computer* keep the *program* from *running* properly!])
 4. a **seared conscience**— 1Ti.4:1. The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. [lit., "*cauterized*"] [a sure BTL: "cut 'em, tie 'em, burn 'em."] (a **seared conscience** is Satan's scheme to damn an *individual*, a *nation*, a *world!*— Eph.4:19. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.)
- B. **How can we let a godly conscience be our guide?**
1. Get a right perspective on ultimates— v.15, *there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked* (In *resurrection*, ultimately nothing can be hidden: all will be *naked* in terms of *guilty* or *not guilty*.)
 2. Realize our responsibility— v.16, *I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man*
 - a. *conscience* implies *God's grace* allowing us to make a free-will choice ["*strive*" = "*my own earnest endeavour*"--Weymouth trans.]
 - b. "*strive*" ["exercise" (KJV); Gk.= root for *ascetic*: the monks saw themselves as "*athletes of the Spirit*")]

CONCLUSION:

—[Samuel Zwemer, a godly missionary: "*The prayerful education of one's conscience by exercise and by the study of Christ's character, is the only road to piety.*"]

—Praise God for His *internal warning system* of conscience! It can keep us from spiritual shipwreck! **Our spiritual health is kept by maintaining a healthy conscience**. But to keep the system healthy, we need to keep on prayerfully feeding our mind on God's precious Word.