

WHY BAPTISTS BELIEVE WHAT BAPTISTS BELIEVE, PART 15

THE CONSCIENCE VS THE HOLY SPIRIT

A question was asked during the course of teaching this study: *“Is the Holy Spirit the same as our conscience?”* The short answer, of course is “No, they are different.” We have already established that the Holy Spirit is a Person. He is God. He is the One who convicts the world of sin, righteousness and judgment. He indwells believers. He exalts Jesus. He guides us in the truth. He is the Person of God Himself residing in those of us who have made Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior.

But the conscience is NOT God. It is a part of you, your mind. So then, what is the conscience? What role does it play in people? To answer that question, you really need to go to the Bible back in Genesis. Genesis 1:27 tells us that we humans were made “in the image of God.”

In an article entitled “Man - Made in the Image of God” (Oct 2009 issue of SBC Life, Journal of the Southern Baptist Convention), Don Dunavant states: “We are moral beings. God is holy. He created humanity with a moral compass, a conscience that gives each of us an inner sense of the difference between right and wrong. The conscience may be deadened or seared by sin, but it remains hardwired in man. The hardest question for both atheists and evolutionists is how to explain the moral nature in the human race, in every culture, in every people group, and even in every religion. Moreover, man's moral capacity makes him accountable to God for his actions.”

One thing you need to understand is that even unbelievers have a conscience. Let me give you an example from the Bible. King Darius, who was not a follower of God, had a guilty conscience after he had ordered Daniel to be placed into the lion's den and he couldn't sleep all night because of it (Daniel

6:18). So, everyone – believer or not – has a conscience. The problem is that sin dulls or perverts people’s consciences. First Timothy 4:2 describe sinful people who have been “seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron.”

The human conscience is fickle and elastic, stretching to adapt itself to the circumstances around it. So that’s the problem with the conscience. Yes, God placed it there but sin and our fallen nature tends to corrupt it. For example, the conscience of a Nazi SS officer told him that killing Jews was OK. “I’m just following orders!” There’s one extreme. Then you have the conscience of a Buddhist monk in Tibet brings mental agony and remorse over even killing a fly. That’s the other end of the spectrum. So then, it depends on your circumstances, how you were raised and your environment. But sin ultimately is what perverts the conscience.

What does the conscience do? It bears witness to the fact that we are living in a moral universe and that we are ultimately accountable to a higher power (to God). We humans are not merely animals controlled by our instincts. Inside each of us is a moral “voice” that either accuses us or defends us. Mr. Dunavant calls it a “moral compass.”

Romans Chapters 1 and 2 talk a lot about the conscience. In Romans Chapter 1 Paul is making his case that even the godless heathens are without excuse. They are aware of God. He says, “But God shows His anger from heaven against all sinful, wicked people who suppress the truth by their wickedness. They know the truth about God because He has made it obvious to them.” (Romans 1:18-19 NLT) How has God revealed Himself to mankind? Creation is one way. But Paul also says that God reveals Himself through their conscience.

In Romans Chapter 2 Paul talks about the godly, moral, religious person. They also have a conscience. Paul says, “They

demonstrate that God's law is written in their hearts, for their own conscience and thoughts either accuse them or tell them they are doing right” (Romans 2:15 NLT). So, what Paul is saying is that God makes Himself known in every human heart through their conscience that He God has placed there. Everyone has a conscience.

There’s an old saying: “Let your conscience be your guide!” But that is NOT a good idea and here’s why. I have already mentioned that the conscience is fickle and can be dulled by sin. Paul gives an example of this from his own life. In Acts 23:1 Paul is addressing the Sanhedrin after his arrest in Jerusalem: “Gazing intently at the high council, Paul began: ‘Brothers, I have always lived before God with a clear conscience!’” He goes on to tell them what happened to him. Paul claims that everything he had done earlier in his life, which included persecuting the church and giving the “thumbs up” to killing many of the Christians. He thought at the time that he was doing God’s will. He did what he did with a clear conscience out of ignorance. Well, clearly persecuting the church was NOT God’s will. So, what happened? What changed? Paul met Christ on the Damascus Road and he became convicted that what he was doing was wrong. His whole life went from persecuting the church to being one of the stalwarts of the church.

Just look at church history. If you read the history of Christianity, you have this whole period of time where church-going people, even the leaders of the church, with a clear conscience, believing they were purging the land of heretics, martyred many great saints. Like Paul, they thought that they were doing God’s will even though they were not.

The conscience has its place and its purpose. Romans Chapter 7 tells us that it through our conscience (mind) that God convicts of us sin by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit exalts Jesus. He reminds us of Christ’s teachings. He convicts us of sin. He

quicken our consciences. He influences our motives, our desires. He gives us a desire to obey God.

When guided by the conviction of the Holy Spirit and by the principles of God's holy word, the conscience functions well. But without the Holy Spirit, the conscience can lead people to do all kinds of awful things with a clear conscience. You need the Holy Spirit to guide you!

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE SPIRIT-FILLED

We won't spend a lot of time on this because we covered similar material back when we talked about a "Christ-controlled life" and what that looks like.

[Question 15] "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18). This is a play on words. Don't be filled with "spirits," but be filled with the Holy Spirit. It is a contrast.

Based on this passage, being filled with the Spirit is what? **A command**. It is in the imperative. "Be filled!"

Here's what I want you to understand. Even though being Christ-controlled and Spirit-filled are phrased differently, they mean the same thing. Other thoughts/ phrases in scripture include: Christ-centered, pleasing God, living by faith, exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit, abiding in Christ, walking by the Spirit, fullness of Christ, and being spiritually mature. It means that we are doing what God wants us to do. We are living like Christ. He's our model. Remember that the Holy Spirit exalts Christ. He points the way to Jesus. He reminds us of all the things that Jesus did and what He said. He convicts us of sin when we are falling short. The Holy Spirit works together with Jesus and with the Father to radically transform our lives.

Consider what the Baptist Faith and Message says under the heading of “God the Holy Spirit”: “His presence in the Christian is the guarantee that God will bring the believer into the fullness of the stature of Christ.” Then under the heading of “God the Son” it says: “He [Jesus] now dwells in all believers as the living and ever-present Lord.”

So, if I am a brand-new Christian or a seeker of the truth and I’m reading the Bible, I might become confused. Who is it that dwells in us? Is it the Holy Spirit or is it Jesus? WHO exactly is it that dwells, that lives in us? Well, we know for sure the Holy Spirit indwells us. We’ve seen that in several passages. Then you have passages like Colossians 1:27 which declare, “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” So apparently Jesus is living in us as well. And then you have these amazing words of Jesus Himself in John 14:23: “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My words, and My Father will love him, and WE will come to him and make our home with him.” So, we know the Holy Spirit is in the believer. We know God the Son (Jesus) is in the believer. And now Jesus states that, if you’re obedient, the Father is in you as well. He is ONE GOD who works and dwells in believers. The three Persons of the holy Trinity are intertwined, working together in the lives of believers. You can’t really separate them. What a deep thought!

“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do” (Galatians 5:16-17).

[Question 16] According to the Galatians passage we just read, “Why are there so many unhappy Christians?” They are not controlled by the Holy Spirit. They are not living to please Jesus Christ. Their priorities, their focuses are on the things of this world, what Paul calls the “desires of the flesh,” which often run contrary to the “desires of the Spirit.” Simply stated, **they’re not**

doing what God wants them to. Let's be honest with ourselves. We may be doing OK, but we are not where we ought to be. There is always room for improvement.

Here is a follow-up question... [*Question 17*] What would you say are the reasons why so few Christians are controlled by the Spirit, why they fail to reach their full potential in Christ? Look at the list. Every one of those things listed could be a factor. So, **check them all.**

Let me close by reminding you of something practical we've talked about before in this study. If we are going to be Spirit-filled, Christ-like, mature Christians then this is what we will need to be practicing on a regular basis as a spiritual discipline...

- Confess your sins and then turn from them.
- Read and study the Word of God. It is helpful to have a good study Bible with lots of reference notes.
- Meditate on the glorious truths God is revealing to you. Dwell on them. Think about them. Comprehend them. There is so many gold nuggets of truth in the Bible such as Romans 6:11, Colossians 2:9-10, Philippians 4:13, John 15:10, among others.
- Spend time every day in prayer – for yourself and for others.
- Be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Living the Christian life is not easy. The truth is that we cannot live it in a way that pleases God in our own strength. We need God's help. The Holy Spirit of God who lives in us wants to fill us with Himself!