

Fight the Good Fight for Freedom

Let me expose one of the enemy's most devious and effective strategies to drain the power from our lives. After causing us to look back in regret, he then partners with our own consciences to condemn us. In this way he uses our God-given internal compasses against us. Our consciences are designed to keep us in God's will, but the enemy twists the signals they are sending and interprets them as condemning us.

His Perfect Design and Purpose

God graciously endowed every human being with an internal guidance system called the conscience. It's an internal security system that sounds the alarm whenever we step out of the love walk and harbor deadly emotions such as bitterness, lust, envy, anger and any other sinful attitude or behavior. Our consciences blare at us to quit the offending behavior and jump back into the river of God's love. As John the apostle put it, "our heart condemns us" (1 John 3:20). If we don't repent of the wrong we are doing, we begin to feel shame, blame and guilt instead of love, peace, joy and so on. Our hearts condemn us because our consciences are trying to rescue us from the tormentors. Love and condemnation do not work together. One has to go; the other will reign supreme.

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This is why Paul wrote so often about the conscience. One time he was giving his testimony, and "looking earnestly at the council, [he] said, 'Men and brethren, I have lived in *all good conscience* before God until this day'" (Acts 23:1, emphasis added). On another occasion he said, "I myself always strive to have a *conscience without offense* toward God and

men" (Acts 24:16, emphasis added). In his letter to the Romans, he said even people who have not yet heard the gospel have experienced a level of God-given awareness of the principles of righteousness, "*their conscience* also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them" (Rom. 2:15, emphasis added).

He wrote about being subject to ruling authorities "for conscience' sake" and about brothers and sisters in the Lord who have a "weak conscience" (Rom. 13:5, 1 Cor. 8:12). He wrote of having a "good conscience," a "pure conscience" (1 Tim. 1:5, 3:9), and even said, "But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to *every man's conscience* in the sight of God" (2 Cor. 4:2, emphasis added). It is possible to "sear" our consciences and to "cleanse" them (1 Tim. 4:2, Heb. 9:14). It is possible to have an "evil" conscience—that is, one made accustomed to wrongdoing (Heb. 10:22). Peter wrote of the nobility of believers suffering unjustly, "For this is commendable, if *because of conscience* toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully" (1 Pet. 2:19, emphasis added).



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The work of our consciences is good, but when the enemy is able to warp what our consciences are telling us, turning them from a righteous warning to a merciless judgment, he employs God's own weapon against our minds and bodies. This quickly turns to self-hatred, which erodes the health of even committed Christians.

A study in "Psychological Reports" looked at the effect of self-directed compassion on the relationship between bitterness and depression. More than 300 participants completed a questionnaire that assessed their forgiveness, the level of grace and love they held toward themselves and their levels of depressive symptoms. Results showed that the more compassion and forgiveness we hold toward ourselves, the less depression we experience and the easier we find it to forgive others.

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