

How to Let Your Conscience Guide You to a Godly Life

When I first met my husband, Dave, I was an emotional mess—hurt and angry because of the physical, emotional and sexual abuse I endured growing up. I was miserable and hard to get along with back then. Also, because that abuse mostly came from my father, I was determined that no man would tell me what to do ever again.

You can imagine what it must have been like for Dave to have to deal with me on a daily basis with that attitude. But the one thing he did that ultimately made me want to change was remain stable in his attitude and emotions.

As long as I've known him, Dave has always been consistently happy, regardless of what was going on. And in the early stage of our marriage, he never let my negative outlook or behavior change his. He was a joyful, godly example of unconditional love in spite of a difficult situation.

He consistently exhibited the peace that I desperately wanted in my life. And eventually, my conscience started to bother me about the way I acted.

Examine Your Conscience

The conscience can be a strong guide in life if it's influenced by the Holy Spirit. Some people go to church regularly, know the Bible from front to back and still behave in ways that are not so godly. But when our conscience becomes enlightened by the Holy Spirit, it acts as a signpost or guideline that we can follow with confidence and peace as we're learning better behavior.

The function of the conscience is to correct us or make us feel uneasy when we do something displeasing to God. The

Vine's Greek Dictionary describes the conscience as "a knowing ... the faculty by which we apprehend the will of God ... that designed to govern a life or that distinguishes the morally good or bad, prompting one to do good rather than bad."

As we become more sensitive to the Holy Spirit, it becomes easier for our conscience to guide us on a regular basis.

Follow His Still, Small Voice

When we accept Christ as our Savior, the Holy Spirit comes to live in our spirit, and He speaks to our hearts. We hear Him when our conscience begins to nudge us for whatever reason; it may be an uneasiness about something we've done or we're about to do.

That's when we should prayerfully consider whether we're offending God with our actions. If we choose to disregard that uneasy feeling, we'll override our conscience, because the Holy Spirit will never force us to obey Him.

On the other hand, an overactive conscience isn't good either. If you feel guilty about every little thing, it's not the Holy Spirit speaking to you. God does not want us to live with guilt and condemnation.

It's also possible to have a seared, or hardened, conscience, which is dangerous because we're likely to do or say things that really should bother us, but don't. And many times, those things cause pain for others around us.

Why Me and Not You?

The thing about the Holy Spirit's guidance, or our conscience, is it's personal. That's why some people can do things that may bother others. For instance, Romans 14 talks about how one person's faith allowed them to eat certain foods that others felt a conviction about eating. Or some observed special days that others paid no attention to.

Today, we might talk about things like smoking, drinking or going to movies. For example, there are certain types of movies I won't watch, but I know others who can watch them and not be bothered at all. I also smoked for many years and even taught a Bible study before I broke that habit.

Some people judge these things as terribly sinful, and yet they overeat and gossip about others and see nothing wrong with that behavior. But God sees our heart right where we are and He deals with us individually. That's exactly why we shouldn't be judgmental of one another.

Let Peace Be Your Guide

Yes, there are specific instructions that everyone should follow, such as don't lie, steal, murder, commit adultery and so on. But as we cultivate a close, personal relationship with Jesus, He will lead us according to His purpose for our lives.

We will become more sensitive when the Holy Spirit nudges our conscience and says, "I don't know about that," or, "That's a good idea ... do it." And we'll be confident that we can safely trust our conscience to be our guide.

Colossians 3:15a (NIV) says, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts." Peace will always lead us to do what's right in God's eyes.

I encourage you to pray for personal guidance from the Holy Spirit. Learn to recognize His voice, that nudge in your heart—it's your conscience. And let others do the same without judgment. You'll be more like Jesus as your godly conscience grows.