

Romans (14:14-18)

An Unclean Conscience

Part 82 - September 17, 2006

GUILTY CONSCIENCE



Paul is talking to weaker seekers and stronger believers.

Q: What kinds of things have made you feel guilty lately?

Q: Did you eat something unhealthy?



Q: Did you watch something unwholesome?

Q: Did you say something untruthful?



Q: Did you buy something unaffordable?

Today, Paul is talking about guilty consciences:



- A. The fact that they are fragile.
- B. The fact that they're fallible.
- C. The fact that they're flexible.

As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean. If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died. Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men. - *Romans 14:14-18 NIV*

I'm going to project three word fragments onto the screen, and some of their letters will be missing. I want you to *mentally* fill in the blank spaces and complete the words. There are no right or wrong answers.

Now, no speaking; keep your answers to yourself.

1st Word: W _ _ H

2nd Word: SH _ _ ER

3rd Word: S _ _ P

Remember your three words for later.

CONSCIENCE CLEANSING

Q: Remember in verse five, when Paul said that believers should be “fully convinced” of their positions on disputable matters?

Well, he practices what he preaches:

As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced (14:14)

Q: And what is he convinced of?

A: “That No food is unclean”

We have a tendency to believe that inanimate objects can be evil or immoral ... like donuts (“They’re calling to me!”) ... or money, or the internet, or alcohol.

- You might say, “But they can be used with immoral intent”.
- This is why Paul adds that no food is unclean, “in itself”.

For instance, money (in and of itself) is *not* evil, but:

The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. - 1 Tim 6:10

Jesus shocked the Jewish mindset when He declared that there was no such thing as “unclean” foods:

Nothing outside a man can make him ‘unclean’ by going into him. ... For it doesn’t go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body. - Mark 7:15a;18b-19 NIV

In itself, a chunk of meat is just neutral; as is alcohol, and the internet, and money, and yes, even donuts!

However Paul says, your conscience may not be convinced:

But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean (14:14)

- Uncleaness is in the conscience, not the cuisine.

If we allow ourselves to be pressured or tempted into doing something we *believe* to be impure, then for us it *is* impure.

Our conscience was created to “keep us clean”.

A university study was published last week (9/8/06) in "Science" magazine, titled: "Washing Away Your Sins: Threatened Morality and Physical Cleansing" Subjects read a short story about a lawyer who finds a legal document that can help his colleague.



- In one version, he *saves* his partner's case.
- In a second version, he *shreds* the document!

After the story, the subjects were offered a free gift – a pencil or an antiseptic cleansing wipe.

- 2/3 of those who read the 1st one took a pencil.
- 2/3 of those who read the 2nd story took a wipe.

In another experiment, some subjects were asked to describe an unethical deed from their own life. They were then asked to complete: three word fragments

Q: Do you remember your three words?

59% more cleansing words (like wash instead of wish; shower instead of shiver; and soap instead of shop, soup, or stop) were created by the folks who recalled their unethical deeds.



Q: What kinds of things have made you feel guilty lately?

Q: How many of you thought of: "Wash"?

Q: How many of you thought of: "Shower"?

Q: How many of you thought of: "Soap"?

They conducted four experiments; and their findings suggest: Unethical behavior tends to bring cleansing to mind.

Why does secular society use words like *dirty*, *filthy*, and *soiled* to describe acts that violate a conscience? Each conscience was created to keep its owner pure, and to drive them to the only One who can cleanse us, heart, soul, and mind.

So, we have to be very careful with each other's conscience:

If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died (14:15)

Q: What does Paul mean by: "distressed" and "destroy"?

It obviously means more than to simply "offend" someone.

- A. A conscience is *distressed* when it is tempted or pressured to compromise what it perceives to be clean and pure.
- B. A conscience is *destroyed* when it is repeatedly ignored, disregarded, and violated.

It can seem so innocent: “Come on, just go to the movie with us; it’s not *that* bad. *We’re* Christians too ... c’mon, it’ll be fun.”



The moment my “disputable matter” causes someone to violate their conscience, it becomes indisputably wrong! Because, acts against the conscience nurture hardness of heart.

The “meat” or the “movie” might be no big deal, but enticing someone to defy the early-warning-system God gave ‘em is “evil”.

Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil (14:16)

[The term “Spoken of” means “viewed” or “considered”.]

It’s not just a matter of *me* deciding if something is okay for *me* to do ... but how it’ll affect the people I’m influencing. The question isn’t simply: Can *I* eat this? Or, can *I* drink that? But, am I distressing or destroying a fellow believer?

For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (14:17)

- I should emphasize the *eternal* instead of the *external*

Not because I *have* to, or because I *ought* to ... but because I *want* to.

But, if we are going to focus on righteousness, peace, and joy “in the Holy Spirit”, we’ll have to reeducate our conscience.

- My conscience is *not* the Holy Spirit any more than I’m God!
- It can guide you only according to how it has been trained.

Remember, Paul has previously described these Roman believers who regard meat as “unclean” as being “weak” in their faith. We need to honor our conscience, but we also need to subject it to God’s truth, wisdom, and sanctification.

- Then it’ll *grow* with our faith and align to God’s Word.
- And it will bless rather than distress those around it.

Because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men (14:18)