

(Basics) 5. the Function of Conscience

by Zac Poonen

Zac Poonen emphasizes the critical role of conscience in recognizing sin and the necessity of confession for spiritual health.

Duration: 12:37

Scripture: Genesis 3:6-7, Proverbs 20:9, Matthew 9:12-13, Romans 3:23, 1 Timothy 1:15, 1 Peter 2:24, 1 John 1:9

Topics: "Human Nature", "Sinfulness"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of conscience as God's greatest gift to humanity. He explains that conscience serves as a warning signal, much like pain in our physical bodies, indicating when we fall short of God's standards. The speaker highlights how children naturally exhibit selfish tendencies and a propensity for wrongdoing, which stems from the sinful nature inherited from Adam and Eve. He also points out that even religious individuals can possess selfishness masked by external displays of goodness. Ultimately, the sermon teaches that our selfishness is the root cause of all our problems and that we must strive to align ourselves with God's standards.

Transcript

God's greatest gift to all men in their own beings and personalities, something that we don't think about often and because we ignore it, it brings a lot of suffering in our life. All of us have been born from that first couple Adam and Eve and the sinful nature, that poison that entered into their system when they disobeyed God is something that Adam and Eve have passed on to all their descendants. Today we are all born with this tendency towards evil.

We see that in children. We don't have to teach children to be evil. We don't have to teach children to tell lies.

We don't have to teach children to do anything wrong. You know as parents that what we have to teach children is to do the good. They are born with a tendency towards evil.

And that is because of that nature which they've inherited from the parents and ultimately from Adam and Eve that sinned. We see, for example, children basically wanting their own way. Sin is not just external actions.

It's far more deep-rooted than that. It's an attitude of rebellion against God where I want my own way in life. I want to please myself.

And it doesn't matter if other people get hurt in the process. And it doesn't matter, really, even what God thinks about it, so long as I please myself. And we see that attitude very clearly in little children.

Little children will grab and fight and take things from one another. They're not bothered about other children. They just want to be happy themselves.

This wanting one's own way, this stubbornness, is something that is in a child's nature from birth. And as he grows up, he doesn't get rid of that. In fact, as we grow to manhood, we don't really change.

We're still the same, except that we seek our own in more refined and cultured ways. We just become cleverer and change our methods by which we seek to grab for ourselves. So the 50-year-old man and the 1-year-old child are basically the same in wanting to seek their own, except they seek it in different methods.

The barbarian in the jungle and the cultured, civilized man, they're both basically the same. Their selfishness of the cultured person and his covetousness and his lust may be covered up with culture and civilization, but he hasn't changed within. And very often, religious people too are often the same.

The same. Selfish within, with an external veneer of graciousness and goodness, but basically wanting to have their own way. And what the Bible teaches is that this is the cause of all of our problems.

What is that which God has placed within us, which we could say is God's greatest gift to man? It is our conscience. Conscience points out to us where we come short of God's standards. It's not a perfect guide, but it is an initial guide that shows us where we come short.

When we're seeking to please ourselves, when we're harming another, our conscience warns us. And particularly the conscience of little children is very tender. It's not easy for a child to tell a lie with a straight face.

When a little child tells a lie, you can see it on its face that he's telling a lie. But as we grow older, we kill that voice of conscience so much that a time can come in our life where we can tell a lie with a straight face. And then we can say, our conscience has become almost dead.

Now that's a serious thing, because conscience is like a warning signal. It's like pain. Some of us don't realize what a great blessing pain is in our body.

It's pain that tells you that something is wrong. If you get a nail in your foot, for example, you feel the pain. And that's what tells you something is wrong.

And you sit down and pull out that nail. Otherwise your foot would get infected. If something is wrong inside your stomach or in your kidneys or somewhere, the indication is always pain.

Pain is one of the greatest blessings in our physical body. It's because of that that we are saved from death many times, from infections. We are immediately aware that something is wrong.

Now the equivalent of pain in our spirit is our conscience that troubles us when we do something wrong. Now those who get the disease of leprosy, what happens to them? Leprosy kills the nerves and destroys

sensation in the skin. And a person who has leprosy in his foot can have a nail through his foot and he won't even know it because he doesn't have the blessing of pain.

His foot will get infected and he still won't know it because he doesn't feel the pain. In fact, I've heard stories of people with leprosy whose toes are bitten off by rats in the middle of the night when they're asleep. And they don't feel a thing.

When they get up in the morning, they find their toes are missing and there's blood all around and they didn't feel it. Is that a good state to be in where you don't feel pain? I hope you realize what a tremendous blessing it is to have pain. Pain is what saves us from losing our toes or our foot or our fingers or anything.

It's through pain that we know something is wrong. Conscience is like pain. It warns us when we have violated God's laws.

And what happens if you ignore its warnings? Like many people do. You tell a lie and your conscience tells you it's wrong and you just suppress that voice. It doesn't die immediately.

But over a period of time, if you keep doing that, finally, your conscience won't trouble you anymore when you tell a lie. And it could go on to other things. What happens is then we get spiritual leprosy.

And the day will come when you won't feel any sensitivity to sin anymore. Now that's not a good state to be in. It means you're spiritually dead.

We would then become like animals that have no conscience. For a person who has killed his conscience descends to the level of an animal who has no conscience. And that's the reason why some human beings sometimes behave much worse than animals.

So I hope you realize now that one of the greatest blessings or greatest gifts that God has given to man in his spirit is the gift of conscience. It tells us that we are spiritually sick, just like pain in our body. It tells us that we're physically sick or something is wrong and we do something about it to get rid of it.

We don't try and ignore the pain. We do something to heal that sickness. In the same way, when conscience tells us something is wrong, it's God's voice within us telling us, you're responsible for what you did.

What you did was wrong. You need to set it right. Jesus once used an illustration.

He said that we should keep our conscience like we keep our eyes. You know how carefully we keep our eyes? It's the one part of our body that is bathed many times without our realizing it. Every time our eyelids close, our eyes are being cleaned with tears.

And that happens thousands of times in a day. All the dust is being wiped out. Now we can afford to have dust in our body, all over our body, and live for many days.

It won't destroy us. It won't destroy our bodies. But if you get even a one speck of dust in your eyes, it can damage your eyes very soon if you don't do anything about it.

A small speck of dust is enough. And that's why God has made the human body in such a way that the eyes are washed all the time. And Jesus said, keep your conscience like you keep your eyes.

In the Gospel of Luke, chapter 11, verse 34 to 36, he likened the conscience to the eye. And he says, if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. In other words, if you keep your conscience clear, that means clean, that means that when we have done something wrong, we acknowledge it, we set the matter right.

If you hurt somebody, you go and ask his forgiveness. If you have sinned against God, you confess your sin to God. It's the first step to physical, to spiritual health.

Just like setting our bodies right whenever we discover pain somewhere is the first step to physical health. In the same way, conscience is the indication of sin in your body. It's only those who recognize that they are sick that will go to a doctor.

Jesus once said to certain religious people in his time that he couldn't help them, he didn't really come for them because they were not aware that they were sick. They were so convinced that because they were religious, they were accepted by God. But they were sick as anything.

How is it they were not aware of it? Because they have killed their conscience for so many years that they were not even aware then of how distant they were from God. A lot of religious people try to appease God and to please Him by going to places of worship, by giving money to the poor and various means. But none of these things can cleanse our conscience from sin.

The most important thing for us to recognize is that it is sin that has separated us from God. And any amount of good works or money given to the poor or any type of activity like that can never bring us back to God. If we recognize that we are sick and that we need to be cleansed and that sin is destroying our soul, we will come to God, we will come to Jesus Christ who came to earth to forgive us our sins.

The Bible says, if we confess our sins, that means you acknowledge you are a sinner and tell the Lord what you have done, He will forgive you because He came to earth to die for our sins.

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