TITLE: Conscience

TEXT: 1 Sam. 24:1-7; 2 Sam. 11:1-5; Is. 5:20;

1 Tim. 4:1-2; 2 Sam. 12:1-3; Job 27:6; Acts 24:16

INTRODUCTION: This morning I want to talk about conscience. Does everyone here have one this morning?

 Well, the fact is we all have a conscience. Conscience is a part of Gods creative design of mankind.

Conscience is one of the things that separates us and places us on a plain above all the rest of God’s creation. One thing that you will never see is a dog, cat or any other animal in God’s creation do is blush.

 Only human beings have that capability and what gives us that capability is a conscience.

In New Testament Scripture the word we translate as conscience is:

**soon-i'-day-sis:**

***co-perception*, that is, moral *consciousness:*—**

**con·science (k¼n“sh…ns) *n.* 1.a. The awareness of a moral or ethical aspect to one's conduct together with the urge to prefer right over wrong: *Let your conscience be your guide.* b. A source of moral or ethical judgment or pronouncement.**

 Conscience has both an upside and a downside doesn’t it?

Conscience can make us feel extremely good or extremely bad depending on the everyday individual choices that we make.

 I think all of us like the good feeling of conscience when we do well, and dislike the bad feeling of conscience when we don’t.

 --James S. Hewett

*It's easy enough to have a clear conscience--all it takes is a fuzzy memory.*

 A man consulted a psychiatrist. He complained, "I've been misbehaving, Doc, and my conscience is troubling me." The doctor asked, "And you want me to give you something that will strengthen your willpower?" The man replied, "Well, no, I was thinking of your giving me something that would weaken my conscience."

 Many times when we find our conscience is giving us trouble because of our actions or thoughts we approach the situation this way…

 Instead of praying for resolve to strengthen our conscience and allow it to lead our life in a right or righteous direction, often it seems, we look for ways to weaken or subdue our conscience so that we can continue in our wrong behavior and still feel good about it, or at the least, not let our conscience become something that may keep us from doing the things that we want to do.

 A great Scriptural example of conscience, both good and bad, is found within the same person in Scripture and that is King David.

 It is an example that I think all of us can identify with.

 The first example I want to use is when David was young and Saul was still King of Israel.

 After killing the giant Goliath and winning a great victory for King Saul and the Army of Israel, David is kind of adopted by the King. Saul asks David’s father Jesse if David could come and live in his household.

 As time progresses, David gains great popularity among the army and among the people, especially the young maidens of the kingdom.

 One time when David is coming back from battle the young ladies cry out: Saul has killed his thousands while David his tens of thousands! Saul heard this and became more and more jealous of this young man David and finally starts to plot to have David killed. David then flees from Saul and ends up hiding out in the desert with a small band of men.

**1 Samuel 24:1 - 7 (NIV)**

**1After Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, he was told, “David is in the Desert of En Gedi.” 2So Saul took three thousand chosen men from all Israel and set out to look for David and his men near the Crags of the Wild Goats.**

**3He came to the sheep pens along the way; a cave was there, and Saul went in to relieve himself. David and his men were far back in the cave.****4The men said, “This is the day the LORD spoke of when he said to you, ‘I will give your enemy into your hands for you to deal with as you wish.’” Then David crept up unnoticed and cut off a corner of Saul’s robe.**

**5Afterward, David was conscience-stricken for having cut off a corner of his robe.****6He said to his men, “The LORD forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the LORD’S anointed, or lift my hand against him; for he is the anointed of the LORD.”****7With these words David rebuked his men and did not allow them to attack Saul. And Saul left the cave and went his way.**

You got to love this! King Saul is out chasing after David to kill him. Along the way Saul has to go to the bathroom. Since they didn’t have any rest stops or gas stations or connivance stores in those days with bathroom facilities Saul comes across a cave and goes in for some private time to relieve himself.

 Totally un-known to Saul, David and some of his men are in the back of the cave. So as Saul is sitting there (or standing) doing his business David sneaks up with his knife and cuts a corner off of Saul’s robe.

Keep in mind that if David could get that close to Saul with a knife in his hand without Saul knowing it, he had it within his power to kill the one who was trying to kill him.

 But he didn’t! He just cut a corner off of the Kings robe and let the King finish his business and go.

But what I want to focus upon is what happened next..

**5Afterward, David was conscience-stricken for having cut off a corner of his robe. 6He said to his men, “The LORD forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the LORD’S anointed, or lift my hand against him; for he is the anointed of the LORD.” 7With these words David rebuked his men and did not allow them to attack Saul.**

Why was David so conscience stricken here?

I mean, Saul was out to kill him for no good reason!

 If David would have killed Saul it would have been seen as an act of self-defense.

David could easily have justified doing it by the standards of the world in which he lived.

 David could easily have surmised that God had delivered Saul into his hands for that very purpose.

What reason does David give for not harming Saul?

His conscience! Saul was the Lords anointed King of Israel. Saul had seriously disobeyed God and the Lord had already removed his anointing from Saul but he was still the King.

 David’s conscience was so tender and sensitive to the Lord at this time in his life that just the fact that the Lord’s anointing had once been upon this man David would not raise up his hand against him.

**6He said to his men, “The LORD forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the LORD’S anointed, or lift my hand against him; for he is** (or in this case once had been) **the anointed of the LORD.”**

In fact, David’s conscience was so tender, so sensitive to the Lord at this time in his life that his conscience was stricken for just cutting off a corner of the king’s robe when he had the opportunity to kill him.

**David was conscience-stricken for having cut off a corner of his robe.**

Folks, this is what made David a man after Gods own heart. The sensitivity, the tenderness of his conscience..

 Let’s move down the road a few years in the life of David.

David has a couple more opportunities to kill King Saul as Saul continues to seek to destroy David for no reason other than his own jealously, but David’s conscience always forbids him to do it.

 Then Saul and His Sons are stricken down and killed in battle with the Philistines on Mount Gilboah.

The Lord’s new anointed King of Israel is David. A man that has proven that he is a man after Gods own heart. A man sensitive to conscience, sensitive to Gods guidance and direction.

David prospers as King and God delivers all of David’s enemies into his hands.

And then later in David’s reign as king of Israel we have this account of Scripture….

**2 Samuel 11:1 - 5 (NIV) 1In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king’s men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem.**

**2One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful, 3and David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, “Isn’t this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite?” 4Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her. Then she went back home. 5The woman conceived and sent word to David, saying, “I am pregnant.”**

Let me ask a question…What happened to David’s conscience?

He should have went out with his army but choose to sit back at home…

 He sees a beautiful women bathing and doesn’t turn the other way…he asks an attendant who this woman is and finds out that she is a married woman-- the wife of one of his junior officers. Even after finding this out David sends for her anyway….he commits the act of adultery with her… When he finds out that he has gotten her pregnant he then tries to cover it up by sending for her husband to come home from the battle and tries to get him to go home and sleep with his wife so that Uriah will think that the child is his…

 Uriah is more honorable then David and refuses to go home and take pleasure with his wife while his men are in danger and sleeping out in the open fields…

 So David gives the order that Uriah be killed so that his own adulterous behavior can remain hidden….

What happened to the conscience of David?

A conscience that was so tender at one time that he was guilt stricken for just cutting off the corner of the king’s robe!

Now he lusts, commits adultery, even is complicit in a murder and his conscience doesn’t even seem to be troubled.

How could David go from one end of the spectrum of conscience to the totally opposite end of the spectrum of conscience?

 I don’t know exactly what happened to David’s conscience but what I do know is that it didn’t get to where it was overnight…

 David’s conscience was weakened; it was compromised over a period of time.

 Conscience is compromised when we start to not listen to it, not be guided by it.

 David didn’t go from being guilt stricken for just cutting off the corner of the king’s robe, to lust, adultery & murder, seemingly without guilt, overnight!

 There was a period of several years in-between the two examples that I have used this morning in David’s life.

 And it was what happened in the day to day life of David in those in-between years that resulted in a weakened conscience that led to his great acts of sin.

Daily compromising on small things of conscience… A little compromise here---a little there---probably a little more each day or each week until there became a progression of compromise as his conscience became weaker and weaker.

Our conscience is a lot like a mussel. The more we exercise it the stronger it becomes…the more that we ignore it the weaker it will become.

We know that this is the way it works don’t we?

 As a 11-12 year old I can remember going to see a movie in downtown Des Moines. It was when there were 3 movies theaters downtown, the Des Moines, the Paramount and the Galaxy Theater. All within about 3 blocks of each other. Anyway, mom & dad would drop me off sometimes on a Saturday afternoon and I would go to one or even two movies and would be picked up at a certain time later that day.

 One of the theaters was playing the movie Butterfield 8. It was a movie that I knew that I probably shouldn’t see at that age but I went to it anyway.

 I can remember feeling pretty guilty for doing it. For that day it was a pretty steamy movie. My conscience bothered me for seeing it.

 Today that particular movie would probably not bother anyone here this morning’s conscience.

 Television shows that we may watch today on a regular basis with no objection of conscience, would have made our grandparents blush and bothered their conscience greatly.

 We didn’t go from Leave it to Beaver and Ozzie and Harriet to Will and Grace and two and a Half Men overnight! Conscience would not have allowed that!

 Before most of today’s television shows could ever find their way on the airwaves there had to be a time period whereby conscience could be weakened.

 And that was done very subtlety-- A little bit at a time.

 “Three’s Company” was the first TV show that I can remember that even mentioned the subject of homosexuality on a television sit-com, and it was offensive to the conscience of a lot of people for that reason when it first aired…Now there seems to be more sitcoms that are about homosexual behavior then are not….

 How did it happen? The public, you and I, started to compromise and ignore our conscience and as a result our consciences started to become weaker and weaker…

I will guess that most of us here this morning can watch things on TV with no guilt of conscience that 40 years ago we would have felt pretty guilty for watching..

 Well a lot of things in our society have become necessary evils haven’t they?

Sydney J. Harris

*Once we diminish our conscience by calling something a "necessary evil," it begins to look more and more necessary and less and less evil.*

**Isaiah 5:20 (NIV)**

**20Woe to those who call evil good and good evil,**

**who put darkness for light and light for darkness,**

**who put bitter for sweet  and sweet for bitter.**

-- Thomas Carlyle

*The deadliest sin is the consciousness of no sin.*

There is a deadly weakening of conscience that has happened in America today.

 We have come to embrace and except many things as necessary evils in America today and as we have done so they have seemed to become more and more necessary and less and less evil in our minds.

 Abortion is legal in America! Think about that for a moment? Abortion, the killing of our unborn children is legal in America! We actually have laws granting a woman the constitutional right to kill her own unborn child!

 My question is what has happened to our conscience? Individually and collectively as a nation?

You may say well I am not for abortion. You may even say that you are adamantly against it. GOOD! THAT’S GREAT!

 But that is not what I am talking about!

 I am talking about conscience!

 How does your conscience respond to abortion?

 When you hear the statistics, that there are over 1.2 million non-therapeutic abortions performed in the United States of America, the home of the free and the land of the brave—each and every year, year end and year out, how does your conscience respond to those statistics?

Indignant, how could people do such an evil thing?

Semi-passive, well, that’s too bad, I wish that there was something I could do?

Or does it give you a literal sick feeling in the pit of your stomach and make you quake with fear that God is not going to ignore such barbaric behavior forever for a people who would condone such a wicked and evil practice…

WWJD? I can tell you this He would not take the current position of most within the Church and do absolutely nothing!

If Jesus got upset enough to turn over tables and clear out the temple because people where dishonoring Gods house by their disrespectful actions would He do less when innocent children are being treated so disrespectfully?

 God may very well be talking about the prevalent conscience of the American people when He says in:

 **1 Timothy 4:1- 2 (NIV) 1The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.****2Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron.**

 In those days if you got wounded in battle the way that they would fix the wound would often be to try to cauterize it. They didn’t use stitches or sutures but they would use a hot iron to sear or cauterize the wound. The red hot iron would seal the wound…

 Scripture here talks about a time when the human conscience will be seared, closed as with a hot iron.

 Burned shut so that it loses all sensitivity.

And it says that this will affect some even within the Church!

**1The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.**

 If legalized abortion is not a deceptive spirit taught by demons then I don’t know what would qualify!

 Legalized abortion, same sex marriage, removing any reference of God from our public institutions….all have come about through a weakened conscience within our nation.

 David’s conscience was once so tender that David felt bad for just cutting off the corner of the robe of a man who was trying to kill him….Over time his conscience was weakened to the place that he could commit sexual sin and even murder without it seeming to bother his conscience at all…or at least bother him enough to keep him from doing what he did.

The searing of conscience I believe talks about a conscience that has passed the point of no return.

 I pray that isn’t where we are within America…

A Godly man confronted David about his sin and it is encouraging how David responded.

 **2 Samuel 12:1-13 (NIV)**

**1The LORD sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said, “There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. 2The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, 3but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him.**

**4“Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him.”**

**5David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, “As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this deserves to die! 6He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity.”**(conscience)

**7Then Nathan said to David, “You are the man! This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul.****8I gave your master’s house to you, and your master’s wives into your arms. I gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more.****9Why did you despise the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in his eyes?** **…..13Then David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the LORD.”**

David’s conscience was restored and he now saw his actions as the grievous sins that they were and it brought him to a place of repentance and restoration with his God.

As we read through the Psalms, many of which David wrote after this time, we see the conscience of David being brought back to that place that it once was. A conscience that once again became sensitive and tender before the Lord.

Through legalized abortion, promoting giving civil rights to sexual perversions, removing more and more of God from our public domain, have we despised the word of the Lord by doing what is evil in His eyes?

 And if so what are we, what can we, do about it?

The same thing that David did! Repent of our sin or our apathy toward sin and ask God to renew our conscience to a tender state that is sensitive to His will.

And then allow our conscience to guide our actions!

Start exercising our conscience to make it grow stronger instead of ignoring it and seeing it grow weaker…

Job had a good understanding of the importance of a good conscience….

**Job 27:6 (NIV) I will maintain my righteousness and never let go of it; my conscience will not reproach me as long as I live.**

So did the Apostle Paul…

**Acts 24:16 (NIV)** **16So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.**

 In two days we all will have an opportunity to exercise our conscience.

 As we vote for our leadership in government as a Christian we need to vote our conscience. To look at where the candidates stand on moral issues, abortion, same sex marriage, restoring God and godly values within our nation, and then just let our conscience be our guide. (voter guide)

 After the election is over we need to not allow our conscience to go to sleep for another 2-4 years until the next election but we need to daily let our conscience be our guide. A conscience that is sensitive and tender to God…

As Martin Luther King, Jr. once said:

 *The church must be reminded that it is not the master or the servant of the state, but rather the conscience of the state.*

 We need to be letting our president and congressman and representatives know how we feel on these important moral issues…

How can we do that? How can we exercise conscience in this area of our life?

How about this… on issues such as ending abortion on demand within America and protecting the sanctity of marriage and the family why not write or e-mail your elected representatives in Congress and the President of our nation, the policy makers of America, whoever they may be after next Tuesday stating your views about these things and do it on a regular basis until we start to see things change…

 Keep the issues of morality at the forefront of our and their conscience.

You may say, well I may have to do that for years before it may have an impact-- It may never have an impact in my lifetime…

That is certainly possible but at least we will be doing something and maybe that something will eventually have an impact.

 It has been my experience that the offices of most congressmen and even the president answer every letter or email they receive. Maybe as we collectively start to run them out of stamps they will start to hear what we are saying.

Is this the only thing that we can do? Certainly not!

 It is just one thing. We just need to start to let our conscience be our guide in whatever we do.

How would you describe your conscience this morning?

Is it as tender and sensitive to the Lord as it once was or is it in a state of something less than that?

 If injustices don’t bother us as they once did or we find that we can do more and more bad and feel less and less guilt or shame for the bad that we do then could it be because we have allowed our very conscience to become weak and in danger of being forever seared?

God is in the business of restoration! Restoration of heart, mind, body and soul…He can even restore a weakened conscience so that it can once again be tender and sensitive to His will….

Will you allow Him to restore your conscience to what He has for it to be?

Can you say with Job… **I will maintain my righteousness and never let go of it; my conscience will not reproach me as long as I live.**