

How do we know the difference between right and wrong?

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# THE INDIVIDUAL CONSCIENCE

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What is a conscience?

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### **Romans 2:13-16**

All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in god's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous. (indeed, when gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.) This will take place on the day when god will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.

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### **Romans 7:7-12**

What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "do not covet." But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from law, sin is dead. Once I was alive apart from law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death. So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good.

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### **Acts 9:1-2**

Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

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### **Acts 22:30-23:1**

The next day, since the commander wanted to find out exactly why Paul was being accused by the Jews, he released him and ordered the chief priests and all the Sanhedrin to assemble. Then he brought Paul and had him stand before them. Paul looked straight at the Sanhedrin and said, "My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day."

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### **Acts 23:2-5**

At this the high priest Ananias ordered those standing near Paul to strike him on the mouth. Then Paul said to him, "God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! You sit there to judge me according to the law, yet you yourself violate the law by commanding that I be struck!"

Those who were standing near Paul said, "You dare to insult God's high priest?"

Paul replied, "Brothers, I did not realize that he was the high priest; for it is written: 'Do not speak evil about the ruler of your people.'"

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Paul's example:

- **Acts 20:26-27** – ... I am **innocent** of the blood of all men
- **Acts 24:16** – ... I strive always to keep **my conscience clear** before God and man
- **2 Corinthians 1:12** – ... **our conscience** testifies that we have conducted ourselves ... in the holiness and sincerity that are from God
- **2 Timothy 1:3** – I thank God, whom I serve ... with a **clear conscience**
- **1 Corinthians 4:4** – **My conscience is clear**, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me.

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Paul's teaching:

- **1 Timothy 3:9** – They (i.e., the deacons) must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a **clear conscience** ...
- **2 Corinthians 7:11** – See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves **to be innocent** in this matter.
- **Romans 14:5** – each person must be **fully convinced in his own mind**

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Paul's teaching:

- **Romans 14:22-23** – So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself **by what he approves**. But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.
- **James 4:17** – Whoever **knows the good they ought to do** and doesn't do it, for him it is sin.
- **1 Timothy 1:5** – The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a **good conscience** and a sincere faith

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## **2 Timothy 3:16-17**

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

**In training character we have a two-fold purpose:**

1. helping someone do the good they already know they should do and
2. teaching their conscience to be in more perfect agreement with the will of God

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## **Hebrews 4:12-13**

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

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**The Bible refers to this process as the “renewing of our minds”**

- 1. Colossians 3, Ephesians 4** – something must be put to death (old habits and ways of thinking)
- 2. Romans 12** – something must be sacrificed (egoism and worldly thinking)

This renewal is rooted in the grace of God –

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## **Hebrews 9:11-14**

When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, **cleanse our consciences** from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!

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## **Titus 3:3-8**

At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and **renewal by the Holy Spirit**, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that **those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good**. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.

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