



The Heart: God's Warning Device

1 John 3

Small Group Plan

My good friend Ken Durham tells of a personal experience that highlights a spiritual lesson and exposes the misunderstanding of a powerful spiritual gift from God.

There I was, stuck on a long flight, finished with my honey-roasted peanuts and trying to keep my mind off the fact that my knees were much too near my chin. So in desperation I picked up the glossy gift catalogue from the seat pocket and began to marvel not only at prices that matched our cruising altitude but also at the vast array of indispensable products: Monogrammed golf balls, imported soap-on-a-rope.

Then I saw it. The ultimate in space-age techno-morality: "The Battery-Powered Conscience." A plastic gizmo that hangs on your refrigerator door, and whenever you open the door it screams electronic admonitions at you: "Are you eating again?!" "No wonder you look the way you do!"

And you can be the object of all this helpful abuse for only \$19.95 (postage and handling not included).

Is this the way a conscience is supposed to work? Badgering us away from bad habits? Insulting us into behaving ourselves? Or, is our conscience meant to be a heart shaped by God, leading us to all that is excellent and life giving?

OPEN IT / INTRODUCE IT ...

- How can our conscience be God's guilt-producing warning device?

1 John 3:19-22

¹⁹ This is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence: ²⁰ If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. ²¹ Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God ²² and receive from him anything we ask, because we keep his commands and do what pleases him.

- How is a “condemning heart” like an “accusing conscience” ?
- How is our conscience dependent on the belief system that informs it?
- What happens when my heart (conscience) is not informed and shaped by God's belief system?

LOOK AT IT / STUDY IT ...

- Scripture says that the conscience can be in one of several conditions. Think through these 5 conditions:

— THE WEAK CONSCIENCE —

1 Corinthians 8:10-12

*If anyone with a **weak conscience** sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol's temple, won't he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols? so this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. when you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their **weak conscience**, you sin against Christ.*

- How is a weak conscience vulnerable?
- How can a weak conscience be strengthened?

— THE CORRUPTED CONSCIENCE —

Titus 1:15

*To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are **corrupted** and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and **consciences are corrupted**.*

- What does a corrupt conscience believe?
- How does it reason and think?

— THE SEARED CONSCIENCE —

1 Timothy 4:2

*Such teachings come through hypocritical liars,
whose **consciences have been seared** as with a hot iron.*

- What does “seared” mean?
- How well does a seared conscience function in relationship and in decision making?

— THE GUILTY CONSCIENCE —

Hebrews 10:22

*Let us draw near to God
with a sincere **heart** in full assurance of faith,
having our **hearts** sprinkled
to cleanse us from a **guilty conscience**
and having our bodies washed with pure water.*

- How would you describe the connection between “heart” and “conscience”?
- How is a guilty conscience “cleansed”?

— THE CLEAR CONSCIENCE —

Acts 24:16

Paul speaks of himself
*I **strive** always to keep my **conscience clear** before god and man.*

- What can Paul (and we) do (“strive”) to protect a clear conscience?

USE IT / APPLY IT ...

- If God desires to shape my heart creating a “warning device: conscience” how can I cooperate with him?
- What spiritual practices will put my heart more fully into God’s hands?
- Close by asking God to shape our hearts into followers who walk with God and care for people.