

When Does Your Conscience Cease to Be Your Guide?

I John 3:11-22

¹ You've heard the expression, "Let your conscience be your guide". It's generally a good rule, but sometimes you may need to make an exception to it. ²

So, when is it time to let your conscience be your guide and when should it not be your guide?

First John, chapter 3, verses 11 through 22, may give us some help in understanding this. ³

This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous. ¹ ⁴

Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed from death to life because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates his brother

¹ | John 3:11-12.

is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him.² ₅

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? ³ ₆

Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.⁴ ₇

Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him

² | John 3:13-15.

³ | John 3:16-17.

⁴ | John 3:18-20.

anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him.⁵ 8

I. When Should Your Conscience Be Your Guide?

When should your conscience be your guide? 9

When it reminds you to do God's will! First Timothy tells us about this. 10

In chapter 1, verse 5, it says, **The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.** 11

Again, in chapter 3, verse 9, we read, **They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience.** 12

When it produces sorrow for your sin. This sorrow should lead you to repentance and a returning back to God.

⁵ | John 3:21-22.

In talking about sorrow, the Living Bible paraphrases Second Corinthians, chapter 7, verse 9, very well. It says, **Now I am glad I sent it, not because it hurt you, but because the pain turned you to God. It was a good kind of sorrow God wants His people to have . . .** ¹³ **So . . .**

II. When Should Your Conscience Not Be Your Guide?

When should your conscience not be your guide? ¹⁴

When you rely on conscience alone to determine your relationship with God.

Here's where verses 18 through 22 become important.

¹⁵

First let's review our scripture from the New International Version translation. Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence whenever our hearts condemn us. For God

is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.
Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we
have confidence before God and receive from him
anything we ask, because we obey his commands and
do what pleases him. ¹⁶

Now, let me retranslate these verses with the same
phrases underlined. ⁶ My translation is not a better
one, it is just a way to make this message clearer.

“My children, Express love not just by words, but by
actions & sincerity; for then we will know that we are
of the truth & can have our confidence before Him
even when our conscience gives us doubts; for God
overrules our conscience because He knows
everything. Now loved ones, if our conscience is clear
we can have confidence before God when we pray. We

⁶ verses 18 - 22 - τεκνία μου μη αγαπωμεν λογω μηδε γλωσση αλλ εργω
και αληθεια και εν τουτω γινωσκομεν οτι εκ της αληθειας εσμεν και
εμπροσθεν αυτου πεισομεν τας καρδιας ημων οτι εαν καταγινωσκη ημων
η καρδια οτι μειζων εστιν ο θεος της καρδιας ημων και γινωσκει παντα
αγαπητοι εαν η καρδια ημων μη καταγινωσκη ημων παρρησιαν εχομεν
προς τον θεον και ο εαν αιτωμεν λαμβανομεν παρ αυτου οτι τας εντολας
αυτου τηρουμεν και τα αρεστα ενωπιον αυτου ποιουμεν.

will get the ready answers because we obey His commands & do the things which please Him.”¹⁷

Some of us allow our emotions to rule us. We feel bad physically or down emotionally, so we wonder if God still cares about us. Where is God when you need Him?¹⁸

After all, some scriptures make us look pretty bad! For instance, earlier in this chapter we read, **No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him . . .**⁷¹⁹ **He who does what is sinful is of the devil . . .**⁸²⁰ **No one who is born of God will continue to sin . . .**⁹²¹ Then, in Romans, chapter 3, verse 23, **. . . for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.**²²

The verbs in all of these passages, in the original language, are in the present, or continuous tense. So, this is the sin habit, the sin orientation, or the sin

⁷ | John 3:6.

⁸ | John 3:8.

⁹ | John 3:9.

lifestyle. It is the rebellious attitude towards God and His way that brings about these results! ²³

Your conscience is like a computer. It puts out only what you program into it. Your conscience is taught! The hardened criminal or the psychopathic killer has been taught or conditioned to be that way. ²⁴

God, Who sees not only what you do but knows the thoughts and intentions of your heart, can be a better judge of your character than your conscience can! ²⁵

Another reason your conscience should not be your guide is **when you believe you must do enough good things for the Lord to accept you. ²⁶ Don't ignore or minimize God's grace!**

The righteous lifestyle comes as a result of being God's child, not a reason for it! Ephesians, chapter 2, verses 8 through 10, **For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship,**

created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. 27

So, when you commit yourself to the Lord, His Holy Spirit gives you the power to live victorious Christian lives after you become His child!

This scripture has shown when your conscience should be your guide and when your conscience should not be your guide. So . . . 28

III. How Can You Know the Difference?

How can you know the difference? 29

When love becomes the main expression of your life!

Verse 14, We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death . . . 30

Now, notice verse 16 and 17, This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his

brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? ³¹

Love's example is the cross! The Lord said, **The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.** ¹⁰ ³² Then, He went to the cross! ¹¹ ³³

Love's expression: **give of yourself to meet the needs of others!** If you have enough material possessions to meet your own needs, you have enough to share! ³⁴

The result: love produces eternal life! Verse 14 says, We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. ³⁵

The absence of this love is hate! ³⁶

First John is full of contrasts! There is no middle ground in First John. ³⁷ Notice verses 14 and 15, **We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love**

¹⁰ John 10:11.

¹¹ John 3:16 - For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

remains in death. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him. God is saying here in verses 14 and 15 that the lack of love is hate. Refusing to help is hating!

You and I usually think in terms of neutrality, don't we? "I don't care for the guy, so I'll just ignore him. If he stays out of my way, I will stay out of his. I don't hate the guy. I just don't want to associate with him."

But doesn't **does not love** in verse 14 and **hate** in verse 15 both result in death? In verse 15, hate is the same as murder! ³⁸

In Matthew, chapter 5, verses 21 through 28, the Lord said the attitude of your heart is the same as the crime! ¹² It is often the seed that produces the act! ³⁹

¹² Matthew 5:21-28 - "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell. "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift. "Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you

Notice the example he gives of Cain. ⁴⁰

Hebrews, chapter 11, verse 4 ¹³ says Abel's offering was of faith which made him righteous. ⁴¹

Abel's deeds were righteous, and Cain's were evil! Notice verse 12 here, **Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous. ⁴²**

The ultimate expression of hate is murder! Murder came as a result of Cain's attitude. ⁴³

This is why the world hates Christians. Verse 13 says, **Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates**

are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny. "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

¹³ Hebrews 11:4 - By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead.

you. ⁴⁴ Our deeds show them up ¹⁴ ⁴⁵ because the Lord chose us to do good works. ¹⁵ ⁴⁶

How is this hate expressed? By refusing to help your brother when you have the ability to do so. Verse 17 says, **If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?** ⁴⁷

What does the lack of love do to your faith? James, chapter 2, verses 14 through 16, explain, **What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?** Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,” but **does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?** When you ignore your brother’s need your faith becomes invalid and love is not in you! ⁴⁸

¹⁴ John 3:20 - **Everyone who does evil** hates the light, and **will not come into the light** for fear that **his deeds will be exposed**.

¹⁵ Ephesians 2:10 - For we are God’s workmanship, **created in Christ Jesus to do good works** . . .

So, if your conscience accuses you even when you are expressing love, God says you are righteous.

Confess your doubt of God's grace and clear up your conscience!

<http://biblelifemessages.org/>