

The Conscience Coach, An Introduction

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Howdy there.

This is the Providence Podcast. My name is Chris Oswald. Senior pastor at Providence Community Church. I mentioned in a previous episode that I've been working on a little booklet called The Conscience Coach.

And it's really a series of booklets just aimed at giving people sort of clarity on particular subjects that may be subjects where their consciences are not especially well formed.

And I wrote, I finished the initial draft to what I hope to be the introduction to the series. So this will probably be, well, my vision is that this will be in every booklet as the introduction.

[1 : 3 8] And I thought, well, I think it's good enough to pass on and then maybe also in addition to reading it to you, I'll think of some additional things to say.

Because I really do a better job thinking when I'm talking, believe it or not. And so I'm going to read what I've prepared so far for the introduction to these books, these booklets called The Conscience Coach.

Okay, starts off with the title, The Conscience and the King's Cubit. In the mid-1800s, the same man who authored Strong's Concordance began a momentous work entitled Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature.

This 12-volume behemoth served as a kind of clearinghouse of past and present Christian thought. While largely neglected today, the series provides, amongst many other things, some absolute gems on the subject of the conscience.

There we see the conscience described as a kind of God-given instrument present in every person that serves as a kind of internal judge, adjudicating the rightness or wrongness of one's thoughts or actions.

[3 : 0 0] And here's a quote from that source. This law, they refer to the conscience as another kind of law. Their comments on the conscience appear within a larger section dealing with the various forms of law that God has delivered to mankind, and they include the conscience in that.

This law is that generally designated by the term conscience, which is in strictness a capacity of being affected by the moral relations of actions.

In other words, merely a sense of right and wrong. It is the judgment which intellectually determines the moral quality of an act. And this always by comparison with some assumed standard.

So that's how they define the conscience. They define it as a kind of law that evaluates the rightness and wrongness of our actions, and not just our actions, but our thoughts and our attitudes. And yet we would say that it's... To say that it is a law is not perhaps perfect description, because in some sense, as this article teaches, the conscience requires an assumed standard by which to compare...

[4 : 2 5] And that standard being typically, you know, somewhat external anyway. The conscience requires a thing to measure it against.

And so what I have been using for years to talk about this is a properly calibrated conscience. In my introduction to this series, I write, that last phrase is key.

The conscience is always calibrated against some kind of assumed standard that is used to determine the moral quality of thoughts, actions, and attitudes. And then I continue.

Throughout history, as a civilization's architectural and economic complexity increased, it became more important for people to use standardized weights and measures. A proper city could not be built without some uniform standard.

Likewise, trade could not be reliably conducted without some uniform standard of weight. Thus, various rulers took it upon themselves to declare by fiat exactly how long a foot was and how much a pound weighed.

[5 : 30] Many of you know this kind of stuff. Architects and builders were issued specialized rulers directly from the king's court. Marketplace vendors were issued standardized weights to use on their scales.

Loosely speaking, we might refer to this development as the king's cubit, a term that stems from the ancient pharaohs who kept a rod in their palace, used to set the standard for all the builders of Egypt.

The conscience is meant to work in the same way. It does no good to have a thousand different moral measuring sticks floating around a civilization, let alone a church. Under such conditions, cultural chaos is sure to ensue.

Thus, we conclude that the conscience was always reliant on the revealed word of God. Only when God's word serves as the king's cubit can we be sure our consciences are properly calibrated.

So, in my lifetime of attending church and pastoring churches, I will say that it is a recipe for chaos and conflict and disunity if you have a couple hundred people engaged in local church activities as one congregation, but their consciences are all calibrated individually.

[6 : 50] That's really going to lead to a lot of issues. The Bible accommodates for this as a sort of early-term reality.

Paul is dealing with this a lot. I'll get to that in a minute. But one of the reasons why I'm writing these booklets is because if we can all calibrate our conscience against the king's cubit, which is the word of God, it's the royal standard, then we can actually do more things together and we can actually enjoy less friction in how we interact with one another if our consciences are all uniquely, or all not uniquely, but all uniformly calibrated against the word of God.

You know, like growing up in churches that did not emphasize discipleship, you know, it was, I just grew up in churches that emphasized evangelism.

And you know, what you get, you get. What you emphasize, you get. I mean, these churches were leading lots of people to Jesus. But what would happen is, is that because we weren't, like, continuing to teach people, and this is when I was mostly a kid, people's consciences, not just their preferences, that's kind of the way that, like, people make fun of dysfunctional churches as they imagine that everybody's just fighting over their preferences.

It's a little deeper than that. I've seen it firsthand for a very long time. It is not just preference. It is in part, but it's deeper than that.

[8 : 27] These people really do have a conscience issue with, say, alcohol or drums in a worship service or the introduction of a projector or the way that leaders are, you know, established and so forth.

And so what will happen in these local churches is that if a pastor's not doing some work to constantly calibrate people's consciences against the word of God, then you've just got so many people with different convictions, and they will wind up kind of pressing against each other.

There will be some friction there. So this is why the word of God is so essential, and it's why this King's Cubit concept is so important.

You need a uniform standard if you're going to build anything. And so what we see is that the Bible is that uniform standard, as I've mentioned in a previous podcast.

Only the Bible has not been polluted by sin. 2 Timothy 3, 16-17, All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

[9 : 41] A number of those words, like training and teaching, reproof and correction, these words have a lot to do with uniform standards of measurement. When you do the Greek work on these words, you'll see that a lot of it has to do with there's an existing standard, and we're aligning ourselves with it.

So how do we help people all have the properly calibrated consciences? Not only for the sake of unity in the church, but also for the sake of joy, because one of the other things going on with miscalibrated consciences, you'll have scruples where you don't need them, amongst many other issues.

So the Bible is supposed to be our external measurement that we use to properly calibrate our conscience.

This is not mere theology for Paul. His whole life, it's really stunning when you think about it, his whole life in one way or another involves conscience recalibration.

That work began with his own conversion prior to placing his faith in Christ. Paul's conscience was calibrated by Pharisaical interpretations of the law, not the law itself, not the word itself, but oral traditions coming down through rabbinical tradition.

[11:06] You know, Galatians 1, 15 through 18 says that Paul spent three years in Arabia in preparation for his public ministry. And one of the things you can just kind of easily imagine him doing in that time was just reexamining the standards by which his conscience was calibrated.

In a sense, Paul had to un-Pharisee himself by recalibrating his conscience to the Word of God in its central figure, Jesus Christ. And then as we look, so that's him personally.

His conscience had to get calibrated properly. And then as we examine his ministry, we see that he relied heavily on his own conscience throughout the course of his ministry. He refers to his conscience actually a lot.

It's still a big part of his way of sorting out things and a way of understanding whether he's doing the right thing or thinking the right thing or feeling the right thing and so forth.

And then you get to his actual ministry work, you know, where in evangelism he is constantly recalibrating people's conscience, lost people's conscience.

[12:13] And it's a big part of his pastoral care because a lot of the issues in the local churches that he's caring for are conscience issues. And then, you know, when he's talking to young pastoral leaders like Timothy, he brings up the issue of the conscience.

So what we could say is that, you know, the conscience was actually a very big part of Paul's ministry. And it was a big, like, calibrating, helping his own conscience and the consciences of others be calibrated properly against the Word of God, against the king's cubit.

Like, that was a really big deal. First it had to happen for himself. And then, you know, in his evangelism it was a constant issue. And then even whenever people were converted, there was still a big issue with this.

Now, this brings up one issue I think is important to discuss. One of Paul's hardest churches was the Corinthian church. And in 1 Corinthians 4, 6, he warns them not to go beyond what is written. Not to go beyond what is written. What's happening there is that he is telling these Corinthians that they are engaged in that all-too-human habit of adding to the Word of God, adding specificities, application, and holding those things up as equal to the Word of God.

[13:42] As if, you know, for instance, here's a good example of this. Nowhere does the Bible tell you to read God's Word every day. Is that the best approach?

Yes, it absolutely is. But nowhere is that a command in the sense of a command. But it's pretty easy for us to say, well, because it's wise and it's the right approach, therefore, if you love God, you'll read your Bible every day.

Well, hold on a second. Hold on. Back up. What we're doing, just even with the best intentions, is we're trying to give somebody kind of a plan, and we're trying to tell them that this plan is important. That's all fine. But slowly but surely, we start to erect this particular application as the same as the Word of God.

That's Phariseeism. That's what Paul's warning them not to do, is not to go beyond what is written. And then, you know, you see the same thing with the Galatians. They're starting to entertain the possibility that, well, maybe circumcision is necessary.

[14:48] And he is essentially saying, you guys, your conscience is getting all screwed up again. You've got to recalibrate it. What does the Bible actually say? What is the true nature of the gospel? And so forth.

So this was all like a big act of love for Paul. And that's kind of what's going on with me and attempting to write these. I first began to notice this with pastors.

I began to notice that there were a lot more scruples than were needed. That they were, a lot of modern-day pastors are more shy and worried about doing certain things or not doing certain things.

And it just was like, wait, there's a lot of joy being stolen because your conscience isn't, is going beyond what is written. It's not calibrated against the King's Cupid. But then it began to be clear to

me that, well, no, this is really much bigger than a local, than a pastor.

I mean, it's kind of like, it's kind of a problem for local churches. And so that's really what, what I'm attempting to do with this series is to help people tune their consciences to the King's Cupid, the Word of God.

[16:01] And if, if we don't do that, I think that, you know, we're really going to just see a lot of issues. Strong Cyclopedia, the thing that I quoted earlier, says in, in the article in The Conscience, history is full of the miseries and mischiefs occasioned by a misguided moral.

And so, you know, going all the way back to the early church, there were all these disagreements related to days of observance, or do we eat certain foods and so forth.

And Paul blames weak consciences as the primary source of this. And when Paul, when some Christians drift away into immorality, Paul blames the problem on seared consciences.

So, I think it's good to have a conscience coach. I think it would be helpful to people, and that's kind of what's going on with, with my plan with these booklets. I continue to write, this series of pamphlets is aimed at calibrating the Christian conscience against the king's cubit, which is the word of God.

We see in Hebrews that consciences can be trained, 514, perfected, 9-9, and purified, 9-14. And we see in 1 Corinthians 8, they must be strengthened.

[17:13] All of that work, in one way or another, calls for a coach. A coach helps an athlete develop his body and his movements according to an objective, time-tested standard.

Non-athletes might be surprised to find that within the realm of athletics, very little is left up to personal preference. Rather, there is, by and large, a uniform and standard way of running, jumping, and developing one's physiology for the performance of particular activities.

The coach's job is to help the athlete deprogram various learned habits that do not serve his endeavors while teaching him to move and think and reprogram himself according to the time-tested standards proven within his particular sport.

This is something that I think gets overlooked in athletics, and I just got a glimpse into this world because of my journey with Wes. You know, you would think that there would be more margin for kind of personal style and so forth in athletic motions, but in reality, it's just physics.

It's just a mechanical engineering problem, really, and we can really clearly identify what the most efficient way of movement is, and then really what you're doing at a certain level is you're taking a kid that has a lot of talent but has all these quirks according to his own individuality, and you're just like teaching him to move beyond those things and learn how to do these things in a more efficient motion.

[18:47] Very true of pitching, of course. Very true of hitting, but also true of running. Like running's another great example of this. There's really an ideal way to run, and you can let people have some individuality within that, but ideally, you'd just get everybody to run exactly the same way, and it would ideally, if everybody's physiology was exactly the same, you'd have the optimal running.

Well, in conscience coaching and helping Christians, like we really do need to say, you can have your tastes and preferences so long as you understand their tastes and preferences, but there's something going on in the fallenness of mankind where our tastes and preferences become more than that, and they become convictional, and this becomes a problem.

So conscience coach is helping people have clarity about the objective word of God and calibrating the way that they evaluate morality against simply the word of God.

The coach's job is to help the athlete deprogram various learned habits that do not serve as endeavors while teaching him to move, think, and act according to the time-tested standards proven within his particular sport.

That's exactly what this series of booklets is attempting to do. For the sake of your personal joy, the unity and effectiveness of the local church, and the glory of God and want to coach your conscience on particular topics so that it becomes properly calibrated against the word of God.

[20:22] This particular booklet is aimed at recalibrating the Christian conscience around the issue of generosity and tithing. It is probably obvious to you why such a work is necessary.

As we look out on the wide variety of teachings on the topic, we can observe the same problem those early civilizations faced. Namely, there are too many subjective and contradictory standards out there.

To put it simply, people are confused. Many believers lack a clear understanding of what the Bible really teaches on the subject, and their thoughts are polluted by various false standards and formed more by human wisdom than by God's.

My goal on this topic is to tell you exactly what the Bible teaches and no more. I want to coach your conscience so that it is freed from much disinformation and recalibrated in direct accordance with the biblical king's cubit.

So that's kind of the aim of this conscience coaching. I continue by talking about kind of the approach that I'll take, especially with this issue with money, and that is to identify themes that exist throughout Scripture, not just in one particular place, and be careful to always make mention of, like, well, what's cultural and what's not cultural, and so on and so forth.

[21 : 43] But anyway, so that's more or less the introduction to this series. I'll do one on giving. I'll do one on sexuality. I'll do one on, probably one on contentment, and, you know, so on and so forth.

All right, well, hope that was interesting to you. Have a wonderful weekend. I'm recording this on Friday. I'll post it here in about 30 minutes or so. Have a wonderful weekend. Thank you so much. Bye-bye. The Army Blues!

Woo! Woo! Woo!