

The Holy Spirit is Not Your Conscience

It was that great theologian Jiminy Cricket who first sang those words that drive much of society's behavior:

Take the straight and narrow path
And if you start to slide,
Give a little whistle!
And always let your conscience be your guide!¹

Unfortunately, those lyrics have entered the church. I am not opposed to listening to one's conscience, but listening to God's Word and the convicting work of the Holy Spirit must take precedence. I mention this because, years ago, I was in a Bible study where one woman said, "The Holy Spirit is my conscience."

No, He's not.

First of all, everyone has a conscience, whether they follow Christ or not. God instills a conscience in each one of us, that part of us that is morally aware. It's that part of us that gives us a sense of right or wrong. Paul said this about unbelievers:

"They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts. Their consciences confirm this. Their competing thoughts either accuse or even excuse them" Rom. 2:15).

Second, a conscience can be unreliable. Paul described those "whose consciences are seared" (1 Tim. 4:2). A seared conscience is the reason society and culture have really strayed.

- People like their particular sin, and each time they sin, they find it little easier to ignore their conscience, that "voice" that initially told them it was wrong.
- People write off those "pangs" in their conscience as a false sense of guilt laid on them by parents, the church, or societal norms.
- For 50+ years now (since the 60s' cultural revolution), people have let "If it feels good, do it" drive their decisions and behavior. *How can something that feels so good be wrong?*

We are living in a country now that resembles the darkest days of the Israelites, the days of the judges when "everyone did whatever seemed right to him" (Judg. 21:25). It's a mess.

But there is another element at play: God Himself. God's Holy Spirit seeks to draw us back to Him and He does so through His convicting work.

"When he comes, he will convict the world about sin, righteousness, and judgment: About sin, because they do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will no longer see me; and about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged" (John 16:8-11).

- **Conviction about sin.** The Holy Spirit convicts us of the evil in our own hearts. Jesus tied our sin to rejecting the truth of Jesus.
- **Conviction about righteousness.** Jesus was referring to His own righteousness. His return to the Father's right hand proves that He is completely righteous. Jesus is so perfectly righteous that our lives are measured against His righteousness—and we are convicted of our own lack of righteousness.
- **Conviction about judgment.** When we see our sin in contrast to the righteousness of Christ, it is clear that we deserve judgment. The Holy Spirit convicts us of having the same spirit of rebellion as the devil.

The Holy Spirit convicts us to see that we are sinners, but Jesus is not. We are convicted to see the truth about the judgment that awaits us and what Jesus did on the cross to remove our sin and judgment. When we respond to His convicting work with repentance, He transform our hearts, lives, and conscience!

"Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed in pure water" (Heb. 10:22).

God gave you a conscience, so listen to it—but don't rely solely on it. Bring your conscience under the authority of God's Word. Ask God to keep you sensitive to His Spirit's leadership. By doing so, you can say along with Paul:

"The testimony of our conscience is that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you, with godly sincerity and purity, not by human wisdom but by God's grace" (2 Cor. 1:12).

¹ Music and Lyrics by Leigh Harline and Ned Washington