

# HUMAN CONSCIENCE

All Scripture verses quoted in part or in their entirety are quoted from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.

## SECTION 1

### **Definitions:**

There are many good definitions of human conscience. The most commonly accepted definitions identify conscience as an inner moral sense or ability to discern both good and evil. We are able to detect good and evil even before committing our actions to either. We also know when our actions have been good or evil. Conscience is a knowledge within us that compares our morality with our conduct. If our recognition of moral good is not matched by good conduct, our conscience is said to bother us

W.E. Vine, noted scholar of Hebrew and Greek words and who lived between 1873 and 1949, defined conscience as: "...that process of thought which distinguishes what it considers morally good or bad, commending the good, condemning the bad, and so prompting to do the former, and avoid the latter..." (From The New Strong's Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, 2001, Greek Dictionary, page 241, G4893.)

In recent times, conscience is sometimes referred to as a moral compass for both individuals and the collective conscience of an entire nation. References to conscience as a moral compass will be cited later in this study.

### **Origin:**

Adam and Eve gained a knowledge of good and evil when they disobeyed God's command against eating of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. (Genesis 3:5-6) Their knowledge of good and evil was actually acquired through bringing evil into the world. If the fruit of that tree had yielded only a knowledge of evil, humanity might have been destroyed immediately because its conscience would have known only evil. Man's knowledge to do only evil would have brought about an early visitation of world-wide destruction because of evil as in the days of Noah. But God knew what Adam and Eve would do and made advance preparations, making sure the tree in question bore fruit that would yield a knowledge of both good and evil. God wanted, above all, to give mankind a choice between good and evil.

After eating of the forbidden fruit, their eyes of moral consciousness were opened and they instantly knew they were naked. (Genesis 3:7) They had both been naked since their respective creations, and that without shame (Genesis 2:25). But with the onset of moral consciousness they suddenly felt shame about their nakedness. To diminish their new-found shame, they; "Sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings." (Genesis 3:7)

Adam and Eve were so full of guilt for their sin and the new self awareness it gave them that they hid from God when they heard Him walking in the garden. When God called out to Adam, asking him "Where are you?", Adam confessed his fear of seeing God – "I heard your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself." (Genesis 3:8-10)

God knew everything that they had done, but nonetheless asked them who told them they were naked, since they could not have known nakedness on their own. He also asked them if they had eaten the fruit He had forbidden them to eat. These questions brought both confessions of guilt and enough blame to accuse everyone involved in their sin. (Genesis 3:12-13)

It would appear that just as the first sin has been carried forward to all people of all generations in the form of the inbred sinful nature, so perhaps has the first knowledge of good and evil been passed on to all people since then in the form of conscience.

## SECTION 2

In this section, we will look at Scriptural statements about conscience ranging from consciences that are good, pure and void of offense all the way to those that are weak, defiled or wounded, evil and seared.

### **Good Conscience:**

The Apostle Paul speaks of a good conscience (one that does not condemn us of sin) as an integral part of helping us to fulfill the purpose of the commandment. “Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith.” (1 Timothy 1:5) Paul also told the council in Jerusalem, saying: “I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.” (Acts 23:1) He even appeared before Felix, a governor in Caesarea, testifying that there is a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. Therefore he said to Felix, “This being so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men.” (Acts 24:16) It was Paul’s way of saying that there is a necessity for good conscience if we want to have a good resurrection.

Paul reported that the Gentiles, though not included under the Law, “By nature do the things in the Law.” (Romans 2:14) They “show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them)” (Romans 2:15) Paul spoke to Timothy, Bishop of the church in Ephesus, about the standards for deacons in the church as “holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience.” (1 Timothy 3:9) and later declared in 2 Timothy 1:3 that he thanks God, “whom I serve with a pure conscience...” Paul also spoke to Timothy (his son in the faith) about the need for “having faith and a good conscience” (1 Timothy 1:19) in order to benefit by the prophecies spoken over him “that by them you may wage the good warfare...” (1 Timothy 1:18) Then, in speaking to Hebrew believers, Paul (the assumed writer of the letter to the Hebrews) asks them the following: “Pray for us; for we are confident that we have a good conscience, in all things desiring to live honorably.” (Hebrews 13:18)

The Apostle Peter also spoke of good conscience. “For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully.” (1 Peter 2:19) He continues by saying this: “But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God.” (1 Peter 2:20) Why is this reaction (“because of conscience”) commendable to God? Read on: “For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: ‘Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth;’ who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness – by whose stripes you were healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.” (1 Peter 2:21-25) None of the above, suffering

wrongfully as Jesus did, is possible without conscience toward God that is resolute even in the face of certain grief. (See also Matthew 5:10 – Persecution for righteousness' sake) Peter also encourages believers about what can happen even when they speak boldly of righteousness: “But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed. And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled.” But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed.” (1 Peter 3:14-16) Finally, Peter refers to water baptism as being effective on our behalf: (“not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 3:21) There is much more to water baptism than getting wet.

## WEAK CONSCIENCE

A weak conscience is not necessarily a bad conscience but is one that can be more easily defiled or wounded. We will see that God very clearly wants those whose consciences are strong to be considerate and sacrificial toward those whose consciences are weak. But in turn, the one with a weak conscience is not to judge or criticize the one with a strong conscience and the personal liberty that accompanies his strong conscience.

### 1 Corinthians 8

The person of weak conscience is best described in 1 Corinthians 8, a chapter concerned with eating things offered to idols. First, the one with a strong conscience has a firm conviction in his conscience that idols are “nothing in the world” (verse 4) and God is over all things. Therefore, food offered to idols is food offered to nothing, and is the same as all other food. The one with a weak conscience does not operate in that same knowledge and regards the idol, being unable to eat food offered to the idol without defiling his conscience. But when the person of weak conscience observes the liberty of the one with a strong conscience that allows him to eat foods offered to idols, it may cause the one who is weak to stumble by a false confidence that he may eat even though his conscience does not permit him to do so. When this happens, the conscience of the one who is weak is wounded.

Paul addresses this situation by saying this: “But when you (who are strong) thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.” (1 Corinthians 8:12-13) Paul then said this a little later: ““But if anyone says to you, ‘this was offered to idols,’ do not eat it for the sake of the one who told you, and for conscience sake; for “the earth is the Lord’s, and all its fullness.’ Conscience, I say, not your own, but that of the other.” (1 Corinthians 10:28-29) This is the kind of consideration and sacrifice God intended for the strong to help the weak brethren from stumbling or perishing. (See also Romans 14) To conclude this commentary about weak conscience, this quote from The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary, page 253, is very much in order: “Paul lays down the law that a man should follow his own conscience, even though it be weak; otherwise moral personality would be destroyed.”

Personal Comment: The above is to say that those with weak consciences also have an important part to play in the body of Christ. Theirs is to temper (balance) the exuberant liberty of those with strong consciences. Truly, “a man should follow his own conscience.”

## BAD CONSCIENCE

A defiled conscience, on the other hand, was also previously identified as a wounded conscience in 1 Corinthians 8. It is usually a person of weak conscience whose conscience has been wounded or defiled when that person does something that his conscience does not permit him to do. The defilement occurs because his actions in such a case would not be of faith. (Romans 14:23) Paul speaks of this defilement and unbelief as follows: “To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled.” (Titus 1:15)

Paul writes in Hebrews 10:22, that it is possible to draw near to God (1) with a true heart (2) in full assurance of faith (3) having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience (4) and our bodies washed with pure water. The cleansing of our naturally evil conscience is an absolute necessity to live with a pure conscience. More about the cleansing of our conscience will be mentioned in section 4 – “The Cleansing of our Conscience from Dead Works.”

But perhaps the conscience of most danger to anyone is the seared conscience. This is the conscience that has been disconnected from the faith of Christ and listening (with natural and “spiritual” ears) only to “deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared (disconnected) with a hot iron.” (1 Timothy 4:1-2) The person with a seared conscience does not have the checks and balances of an inner moral consciousness monitoring his conduct. To say it another way, there are no restraints on the conduct of a person with a seared conscience, which is effectively no conscience. This absence of godly restraints in the life-style of all those without conscience is described by Paul in addressing the church at Ephesus: “This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.” (Ephesians 4:17-19)

A seared conscience is the result of repeatedly choosing a life-style that is opposed to good conscience. By degrees of conscience defilement with no intermediate attempt at remedy, we will arrive at a seared conscience.

### SECTION 3

#### WHEN CONSCIENCE IS TROUBLED

The conscience of an unbeliever is often troubled by the conviction of guilt. Long after Joseph’s brothers mistreated Joseph by selling him to Ishmaelite traders to get rid of him, these same brothers confessed their guilt: “Then they said to one another ‘We are truly guilty concerning our brother, for we saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we would not hear; Therefore this distress has come upon us.” (Genesis 42:21)

Belshazzar, son of Nebuchadnezzar and king of Babylon following his father, saw the hand that wrote upon the wall of the king’s palace, spelling out the end of his kingdom. Belshazzar’s reaction was as follows: “Then the king’s countenance changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his hips were loosened and his knees knocked against each other.” (Daniel 5:6)

Before David became king of Israel, he had to run from the sitting king. King Saul was so jealous of David's success in battle that he wanted to kill David. On one occasion, while David and his men hid from Saul and his men in a cave, King Saul happened into the same cave "to attend to his needs." (1 Samuel 24:3) While Saul was in the cave, it is assumed that he removed his robe. Then "David arose and secretly cut off a corner of Saul's robe. Now it happened afterward that David's heart troubled him because he had cut Saul's robe." (1 Samuel 24:4-5) David obviously had pangs of conscience for what he did even though he did no harm to King Saul. That is compelling evidence of David's very tender conscience as well as profound respect for authority – even when that authority sought his life. Finally, David displayed to King Saul the piece of the king's robe that David had removed. David said: "For in that I cut off the corner of your robe, and did not kill you, know and see that there is neither evil nor rebellion in my hand, and I have not sinned against you. Yet you hunt my life to take it." (1 Samuel 24:11) David's conscience in the matter was clear – Saul's was evil.

When Jesus was asked what should be done with a woman who was caught in the act of adultery, He wrote on the ground with His finger and then said to them: "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first." (John 8:7) "And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. Then those who heard it, being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst." (John 8:8-9)

Finally, when the Apostle Paul was being tried before Felix, the governor whose residence was in Caesarea, Paul's defense was his denial of wrongdoing in the Temple twelve days before and his belief in the resurrection of the dead. When Felix later gave Paul a private audience with him concerning faith in Christ, the following took place: "Now as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, 'Go away for now, when I have a convenient time I will call for you.'" (Acts 24:25) Good preaching of the gospel can cause consciences to be fearful – even unto salvation!

## SECTION 4

### THE CLEANSING OF OUR CONSCIENCE FROM DEAD WORKS

#### **Dead Works – Hebrews 9:6-10**

The cleansing of our conscience is not possible by the priestly service and the various foods, drinks, washings and fleshly ordinances imposed under Tabernacle/Temple law. All of these rituals and ordinances were dead works, unable to cleanse anyone's conscience. Hebrews 9:9 says the following of those dead works: "It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience –"

#### **Blood of Christ – Hebrews 9:11-14**

However, it is with His own blood that Christ "entered the most holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (Hebrews 9:12-14)

## SECTION 5

### PRACTICAL EXAMPLES OF INDIVIDUAL OR MARITAL CONSCIENCE AS A MORAL COMPASS

Married couples should know that it is more likely that you will offend your spouse than anyone else. Presumably, spouses spend more time with each other than with anyone else making the likelihood of offense very great. It is also true that a marriage partner may demand that his or her spouse participate in an activity that would bring about defilement of conscience in the other. **Example:** A wife who wants to spend a weekend at a casino and participate in various forms of gambling may insist that her husband participate with her, even though she knows that her husband's conscience has never permitted him to do so. But because of her persistence, she persuades him to do as she wants without any consideration of violating his conscience. When the weekend is over, he feels totally defeated for consenting to the weekend trip and the senseless loss of money.

Husbands can be equally inconsiderate of the consciences of their wives in the demands made on them. A husband might insist that his wife watch a movie with him that he knows will violate her conscience. When she finally watches the movie with him, as it concludes, she expresses her deep regrets for having watched the movie by saying: "I feel dirty inside."

A government official charged with the strict enforcement of specific codes and regulations for the safe manufacture of drugs and medicines is offered special favors from a manufacturer in return for the agent's willingness to compromise certain costly but essential manufacturing procedures. If the agent is a person of good conscience, he (or she) will refuse all special favors (bribes) and steadfastly continue the strict enforcement of all procedures that he has been asked to compromise. He may also report the attempted bribery to his superiors to remove all appearance of impropriety or guilt. But if that same agent is a product of situation ethics, looking for personal advantage with no regard for his conscience, the result would be quite different. Once the agent has been discovered to have accepted the offered bribery at the expense of public safety, the outcome of the situation would possibly culminate in his loss of job, banishment from all employment in his field of expertise and possible criminal charges brought against him. Such can be the consequence of ignoring one's conscience.

The preparation of federal or state taxes presents a unique test of our conscience. Quite often we discover or otherwise learn of tax abatement that is available, but only to those who meet certain requirements. The person of good conscience will use that tax reduction only if he clearly qualifies for it, while others who do not qualify will file for the abatement anyway, hoping no one will discover their fraudulent entry.

The sale of used (pre-owned) automobiles is perhaps one of the greatest tests in America of an honest conscience – a test of anyone, dealer or private owner. No one wants a malfunctioning automobile but perhaps most sellers of those same automobiles are quite willing to represent and sell them as very sound, desirable vehicles.

We must, especially as believers on the Lord Jesus Christ, make our actions conform to the cleansed conscience that He has bought for us by entering the Holy of Holies on our behalf with His blood. Our actions must conform to a clear conscience even when no one else knows of our inner moral decisions. And even when we seem to be (or actually are) placing ourselves at

a disadvantage by doing as our conscience dictates. By all of this we will be known in heaven as a people who truly appreciate the fact that Christ redeemed us – with a very great price!

All of the preceding fictional representations of plausible challenges to human conscience are compiled for one purpose – to remind us of the need to guard our consciences continually. The enemy is a crafty deceiver, but our careful attention to clear conscience and the leadership of the Holy Spirit will keep us from falling.

## SECTION 6

### NATIONAL CONSCIENCE – THE MORAL COMPASS

This section is devoted to the need for healthy collective national conscience, for a functioning moral compass that gives accurate direction to the establishment of Godly behavior in the leaders and people of any nation. When the morality of a nation is in terrible decline away from Godly standards, the national moral compass of that nation is said to be defective. It cannot find the moral “true north” and as a result no longer has any ability to chart a course that will be pleasing to God. The first priority of any nation is to return whole heartedly to the God Who authorized its existence. Some Scriptural examples of the importance of Godly national conscience (morality) will be seen in this section.

#### **Israel Under Jeroboam**

#### **1 Kings 12 -13- 14 2 Kings 17**

When Jeroboam became king of Israel (10 tribes of Israel's northern kingdom), he had two golden calves made and positioned strategically in his kingdom so the people would not make the journey to Jerusalem (not part of his kingdom) to worship the true God. His fear was that his people would become loyal to the king of the two tribes of Judah, King Rehoboam, thus eroding the strength and influence of his own kingdom.

His leadership became the benchmark of an evil reign in Israel or Judah. His evil practices, totally without conscience, brought Israel to captivity and exile. The idols in Bethel and Dan which he erected for selfish reasons forced the people to worship false gods. He also ordained feasts to his false gods and made priests to those gods out of people who would not be permitted to serve as priests under God's law. It is not at all surprising that God said of Jeroboam: “And this thing was the sin of the house of Jeroboam, so as to exterminate it from the face of the earth.” (1 Kings 13:34) Furthermore, God said of Jeroboam's evil reign these words: “...you have done more evil than all who were before you, for you have gone and made for yourself other gods and molded images to provoke Me to anger, and have cast Me behind your back – “

But the most condemning word of the Lord concerning the evil reign of Jeroboam's sin along with his blatant encouragement of his people to sin was found in 1 Kings 14:15-16: “For the Lord will strike Israel, as a reed is shaken in the water. He will uproot Israel from this good land which He gave to their fathers, and will scatter them beyond the River, because they have made their wooden images, provoking the Lord to anger. And He will give Israel up because of the sins of Jeroboam, who sinned and who made Israel sin.” This prophesy was fulfilled after Jeroboam's death and was reported as fulfilled in 2 Kings 17:20-23. When the king causes his people to sin, the national conscience has been severely defiled at the hands of its leadership.

## The Repatriates From Babylon

### Ezra 9-10

This is an account of a serious violation of godly national conscience among the Jews in the first group of repatriates from Babylon to Jerusalem. Their defilement of conscience was the intermarriage of the men of Judah with the daughters of the various nations surrounding them “so that the holy seed is mixed with the people of those lands.” (Ezra 9:2) This simply was not permitted under God’s law at that time because it always caused God’s people to embrace the false gods and the abominable practices of the heathen nations. In addition to that, any children born of such marriages would be of mixed lineage, not of purely Jewish lineage. This was very important to God under the Old Covenant.

Today, the best comparison to the mixed marriage as portrayed here would be to understand the true meaning behind 2 Corinthians 6:14 – “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness?” It is no longer a matter of ethnic or racial separation in marriage but of both marriage partners being true believers on the Lord Jesus Christ, and both spouses living together with sensitivity toward the conscience of the other.

When Ezra, the leader of the second group of repatriates from Babylon to Jerusalem, was informed of the moral malaise that had been created by the numerous mixed marriages, some even involving leaders and rulers, he was crushed. He reacted as Godly men of the Old Testament often reacted when faced with an overwhelming situation involving national unrighteousness in God’s people: he tore his garment and robe, fasted, even plucked out some of the hair of his head and beard, and prayed on his knees, spreading out his hands to God. (Ezra 9:3-5) The words of his prayer also reflected the shame and humiliation he felt because of the mass disobedience of the people even after God had mercifully brought them back home from slavery. (Ezra 9:6-9) They had been guilty of participating in the uncleanness of the heathen nations that lived in Judah and defiled it during the seventy year absence of the Israelites and Ezra cried out: “Should we again break Your commandments, and join in marriage with the people committing these abominations?” (Ezra 9:14)

As Ezra prayed, with confession of national sin and weeping, as well as bowing before the house of God, many others joined him with bitter weeping. (Ezra 10:1) Ezra was a keen student of the law but even he did not know what to do to regain God’s favor toward the returned Israelites in Jerusalem and Judah. Then it happened! A man named Shecheniah suddenly told Ezra that despite the large-scale trespass, there was still hope in Israel. (Ezra 10:2) The solution that God apparently gave him to tell Ezra was as follows: “Now therefore, let us make a covenant with our God to put away all these wives and those who have been born to them, according to the advice of my master and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law.” (Ezra 10:3) (The Law cited by Shecheniah was Deuteronomy 24:1-4)

So the plan to conduct a mass divorce of all pagan wives from the men that had been married to them was explained to all Israelites of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. Ezra also said to the assembly: “Now therefore, make confession to the Lord God of your fathers, and do His will; separate yourselves from the peoples of the land, and from the pagan wives.” The assembly agreed to this plan, asking only to be judged by appointment. (Ezra 10:11-14)

There were many men listed as having married pagan wives, even men who were the sons of priests, Levites, singers and gate keepers. (Ezra 10:18-24) The sons of a very conspicuous

priestly family, that of Joshua (Jeshua) the high priest, were just some of the men who were guilty of breaking the Law by taking pagan wives to themselves. (Ezra 10:18) Joshua, their father, was the same high priest mentioned also in the book of Haggai and the third chapter of the book of Zechariah.

It is difficult to imagine the number of cases that had to be heard before the “divorce court” that was organized by Ezra at the urging of Shecheniah. But it took from the first day of the tenth month until the first day of the first month (88 days minus 12 Sabbath days = 76 working days) to examine and judge each case that came before the judges. (Ezra 10:16-17) The closing statement after all divorces were completed was this: “All these had taken pagan wives, and some of them had wives by whom they had children.” (Ezra 10:44)

Apparently this effort to separate the Israelites from the heathen nations, thus restoring the clear conscience of the nation of Israel, was successful. But if not for the strong intercession of Ezra and others, the trespass would have continued unchecked and brought even greater harm to the conscience of the Israelites in Judah and Benjamin.

### **BUILDING A NATIONAL CONSCIENCE**

Every nation has seasons when its leadership is morally good and other times when its leadership is quite immoral and evil. What are Christians scripturally advised to do when their king (president, prime minister) and his authorities (administration) are immoral, evil, and even eager to persecute Christians? In such a situation should Christians secretly band together to plot the forcible overthrow of their government?

Both the Apostles Paul and Peter have godly insight on what we, who are called by the name of Christ, should do:

(1) Paul: “I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone – for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.” (1 Timothy 2:1-2 NIV)

(2) Peter: “Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God’s will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God. Show proper respect to everyone: love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king.” (1 Peter 2:13-17 NIV)

**Note:** It should be mentioned that King Herod (Agrippa I) had Peter arrested with the full intention of trying him publicly and then putting him to death as he had already done to James (the brother of John). (Acts 12:1-4 NIV) Even though an angel miraculously delivered Peter from a king who no doubt would have persecuted Peter unto death, Peter still wrote the above to believers: that they should submit to every authority that God has established – the king and all others in authority under him. He punctuated his admonition by writing - “Honor the king.” (1 Peter 2:17 NIV)

(3) Paul: (Romans 13:1-2, 5 NIV)

Verse 1: “Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.

Verse 2: “Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.”

Verse 5: “Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience.”

It should be obvious that God commands His people to live under the authority of their respective governments, praying for those in all positions of authority and conducting themselves in compliance of the laws at each level of their governing authority. Only when a government mandates that Christians commit direct violations of God’s Word and Law does God insist that His people disobey civil authorities.

### **CONCLUSION**

Finally, human conscience is an endowment of God that sets mankind apart from the rest of creation. When we listen to and obey our conscience it provides necessary restraints on our conduct for our protection. It helps both individuals and nations to chart the right moral course. It is reliable unless we sear it.

When people who love God also conduct themselves in accordance with good conscience, their example of Godly morality will exert an influence for righteousness that cannot be hidden. It is exactly as Jesus said to His disciples: “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:14-16) Consistent obedience to God and careful conscience before God is how we do it!