

# A Mighty Redwood / Paul – Listening to Your Heart

Lesson 10

## SENSITIVITY to YOUR OWN CONSCIENCE

11/22/15

**A Mighty Redwood responds to nature's prompting** and grows "with a growth that is from God" (Col. 2:19).

**Principle:** *"Your conscience needs to be protected, nurtured and heeded. As the moral rudder of your life, it will either steer you into disaster or away from it."* - Fran Sciacca

*"The best safeguard against a calloused conscience is daily lubrication by the Holy Spirit."*  
– DMK

**Bible Character: PAUL**

**Background:** God used Paul to write nearly 25% of the New Testament. He was obviously a man of clear focus, with a passion for ministry. But did you know that Paul had a very special personal conviction about hearing and heeding the prompting of his conscience? This quality of his life has tremendous implications and applications for us as we live in our world today.

When you think of Paul's past it may be easy to understand his sensitivity to the consequences of ignoring or stifling God's quiet voice (1 Kings 19:12), since he was the aggressor in persecuting the early Church. Perhaps this is why nearly all of the thirty times the word "conscience" appears in our New Testament are from the heart of Paul. (Taken from *To Stand and Not Be Moved* by Fran Sciacca.)

**Scripture:** Acts 7:54-8:3; Acts 9:1-19; Acts 26:13-15 (NIV, selected verses)

7:59 While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

60 Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep.

8:1 And Saul was there, giving approval to his death. On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.

3 But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.

9:3 As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.  
4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"  
5 "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied.  
6 "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

26:14 We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'

15 "Then I asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' the Lord replied."

**Examination:** Paul had resisted and fought God's prompting – big time! Maybe our struggle is no less than his, even if our resistance is better camouflaged. A Christian's conscience is linked to his heart via the Holy Spirit. Honing this sensitivity will therefore draw us closer to God. Isaiah 30:21 refers to a Spirit-controlled conscious, saying, *"Your ears will hear a word behind you, 'This is the way, walk in it,' whenever you turn to the right or to the left."*

### General Discussion

#### 1. Why kick so hard?

Acts 26:14 says, *"...Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads."* The word "kick" means to continually kick *backwards* with the heel. It is a Greek proverb for useless resistance. A "goad" was an iron piker used to make oxen move. The ox succeeds only in hurting itself.

► What do you think the "goad" was that Jesus was referring to? *Are you sensitive to God's Spirit?*

2. **What would it take?**

Oxen needed the goad to get moving in the right direction. Saul was blinded and forced to “see”. Bible teacher Bill Gothard said, *“If you want to know what God wants you to do, think of what you would do and do the opposite!”* Isn’t that true! Our human nature resists God’s voice. We tend to “kick backwards” instead of being quick to follow His Spirit. As we mature in the Lord we resist less and follow more.

▶ *What has God used in your life in the past to prompt you? Were they trials?*

3. **Something to strive for**

*“So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.”* (Acts. 24:16) “Strive” here means to continually use every effort and skill, and the word used to describe Paul’s own conscience means *“not causing one to stumble on the path”*. What do you think Paul meant when he said he “strived” to have this kind of conscience?

▶ *“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my rock and my Redeemer.”* (Ps. 19:14)

**Small Group Questions**

1. Paul used several different words to describe various states of the conscience. In the following passages discuss what kind of conscience he mentions, what you think it means, and how it may have gotten that way.

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Titus 1:15      *To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled.*

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1 Cor. 8:9-12      *<sup>9</sup>But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. <sup>10</sup>For if someone sees you, who have knowledge, dining in an idol’s temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be strengthened to eat things sacrificed to idols? <sup>11</sup>For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died. <sup>12</sup>And so, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.*

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2. **Study Hebrews 5:11-14 (NIV) and discuss the questions below:**

- 11 We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn.  
12 In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God’s word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!  
13 Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness.  
14 But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

- a. What is the source of a healthy conscience, and how is it developed?  
b. What does a healthy conscience exhibit?  
c. By inference, what does an unhealthy conscience signify?

3. **How does Paul’s humility and sensitivity to God’s Spirit show up in the 1 Cor. 2 verses below?**

- 1 And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God.  
2 For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.  
3 And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling.  
4 And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,  
5 that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.

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**Next Time:** Jonathon – Friends Forever / *Friendship with God At the Center*