

Three Major Periods of the Bible

<u>Patriarchal</u>	<u>Mosaic</u>	<u>Christian</u>
About 2500 yrs	About 1500 yrs	2000 yrs so far
Gen 1-Ex 19	Ex 20-Acts 2	Acts 2 - Rev
God spoke direct	Thru Moses/prophets	Thru Son
Family religion	National religion	World religion
No written law	Law of Moses	Law of Christ
Animal blood	Animal blood	Blood of Christ
Father priest	Levitical priesthood	Christ/saints
No set day	Sabbath/holidays	1 st day of week
No set place	Altar/Temple	No set place
Member by birth	By physical birth	Spiritual birth

This graphic compares and contrasts the three major divisions of the Bible, what some might call "dispensations" in that these are the different ways in which God has dispensed His grace to man. The forgiveness of sins was administered to mankind in these different ways in the Bible, beginning with the Patriarchal when a father-ruler also acted as that tribe's priest and offered sacrifices to God for sins (Noah, Genesis 9, Job 1, etc.). Under the Law of Moses the priesthood was changed to a high priest and his brethren who were the priests. In the present age, Christ is our High Priest forever, and we who are His brethren are all priests in His kingdom (Rev. 1.6).

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Is Conscience a Safe Guide?



of death." There are many today who think that it does not matter what one believes or does in religion just so he/she follows his/her conscience and does the best that he/she knows. Yet, the Bible, God's inspired Book, declares that a person may follow a way that seems right; that feels right; and yet in reality, be wrong. This is true in everyday affairs of life as well as it is in religion.

It is not safe to just follow one's conscience in secular matters. After considering the question from this viewpoint, maybe we can better understand it from the religious side. We certainly should strive to be as safe with our souls, in fact more so, as we are with the daily affairs of life.

I am sure that almost all of us have had the experience of honestly taking the wrong road in traveling, and going several miles some times, feeling all the time that we were on the right road. However, our feeling so did not make it right. Our sincere honesty did not cause us to be on the right road. We just did not check the road map closely enough, or failed to read the signs. Maybe we did not understand the directions that we received.

In Proverbs 16:25, the inspired writer states, "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways

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Bible Class for all ages ___ 9:00 AM
Morning Worship Service ___ 10:00 AM
Evening Worship Service ___ 6:00 PM

Wednesday

Bible Class for all ages ___ 7:00 PM

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Anyway, when we found that we were on the wrong road, we just turned around and proceeded to find the right road and started traveling it. No, it did not make us angry at the person who informed us that we were going in the wrong direction. Why is it that all persons cannot be as reasonable and appreciative in religion? Why does a person think that one is "running him down" if he points out to him that he is on the wrong road religiously? He would not think so if he were taking an earthly trip. Why should he not have the same appreciation for the friend who is trying to help him get on the right road that leads to eternal bliss? Are we more interested in visiting earthly friends than in gaining a heavenly home? Maybe not, we certainly should be more interested in going to heaven than any other place; but our conscience is not a safe guide in traveling here upon the earth. Why then, should one think that it is a safe guide in going to heaven?

Doctors sometimes conscientiously treat for the wrong disease until it is too late to save the patient. Their being honest and sincere does not change the facts. Sometimes it is the honest mistake of the patient. although he followed his conscience, he just went to the wrong doctor. Suppose a person by mistake takes poison. Will his honesty save him? In taking medicine, is it safe to just follow one's conscience? Is it not best to read the label and follow the written instructions?

In religion, why not read the Bible and follow the written instructions of the Lord! Yet, many disregard the written commands and instructions of the Lord and just

follow their feelings and conscience. Sincerity does not change the physical laws of nature in matters of health. Neither are God's other laws in the physical realm changed by being conscientious. If a person by accident takes hold of a powerful live electric wire, it will kill him regardless of his conscience in the matter. Neither can a linesman tell which wires are safe and which are not by merely following his conscience. The spiritual laws of God are not changed by honesty and sincerity any more than his physical laws. Merely following one's conscience does not save from spiritual death and damnation. Both the physical and spiritual laws of God must be respected and obeyed.

Many business enterprises have been failures although they were entered into with all good conscience. Maybe the investment was made without investigating. Sincerity does not keep banks from going broke, or the stock market from collapsing.

Many have gone to the marriage altar and there exchanged their solemn vows in all good conscience later to learn that they had been tragically disappointed. The broken hearts, broken homes, and broken hopes attest this fact. All stand as living evidence that conscience is not a safe guide in marriage.

If we cannot safely follow our conscience in all these affairs of every day life: travel, health, business, and marriage, why should it be thought safe to just follow one's conscience in religion?

Conscience is the exercise of one's judgment or power of feel-

ing that enables him to know when he is doing what he has been taught to be right. The conscience either excuses or accuses one for his conduct. It bears witness. It is that part of the mind that enables us to know when we go contrary to what we have been taught to be right. The conscience is similar to a court of law. The court does not make the law. The court decides if actions or conduct has been in accord with the established law. When one is doing what he has been taught to be right his conscience is referred to as "good." (Acts 23:1). Or, as "pure," (2 Timothy 1:3). Or, as "void of offense," (Acts 24:16). If one violates the warnings of the conscience, he "defiles it," (Titus 1:15). Or, one may eventually "sear it," (1 Timothy 4:2). The conscience should not be violated. We should never do that which we know or think is wrong. However, to think a thing is right does not make it right. If we doubt the safety of a bridge, the proper thing is to stay off of it until we find out and know it is safe. The same principle applies in moral and religious questions.

Conscience is formed by teaching. Although there may be some inherent perception of right and wrong concerning questions of morals, yet religious convictions are only formed by teaching. Those who practice sprinkling of a candidate as a religious practice do so because they have been taught that it is right. Those who conscientiously try to keep the seventh day Sabbath today do so because they have been taught that is right. Those who live with several wives also argue that they do it conscientiously. This does not make it right. Be-

cause a person does a thing with a good conscience does not prove it is right, neither does it prove that one is right with God.

Instead of conscience being a safe guide, it must be safely guided. It must be formed by the right teaching of God's Word. Hence, we are commanded to teach. Only the truth can make one free. Jesus states in John 8:32, "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

The practices of heathens prove that conscience is not a safe guide. Having been left to themselves, their practices are far from being in harmony with the truth of God's Word. If conscience were a safe guide, it would guide the heathens safely. There would be no need for mission work, and no need for teaching.

When Paul went to Athens, he found a city filled with idols and idol worship. They were very religious, but very wrong. They did not know the true God nor how to worship Him. Read Acts 17:22-31. Their conscience had not guided them correctly. They needed the truth of God's word to guide their conscience.

Before his conversion, Paul was a violent persecutor of the church. Listen to him in Acts 26:9, 10, "I verily thought with myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth, And this I also did in Jerusalem: and I both shut up many saints in prison, having received authority from the chief priests, and when they were put to death I gave my vote against them." Paul thought that

he was right. Did that make him right? He acted with all good conscience. Look at Acts 23:1, "And Paul, looking steadfastly on the council said, Brethren, I have lived before God in all good conscience until this day." This was spoken by Paul after he became a Christian and looked back over his life. While he was persecuting the church with all good conscience, he did so because he did not know the truth, or else did not believe it. His conscience did not guide him correctly. While his teaching was wrong, his conscience was not a safe guide. By living up to his teaching he was living up to his conscience; but he was still wrong.

So, one may live in accord with false doctrine and have a good conscience. No, it is not sufficient just to live according to the dictates of one's conscience. When Paul's understanding was changed, his conscience was changed, and his life was changed accordingly. He repented of his sins, confessed Christ, and was baptized in order to have the guilt of his past life removed. Although he had prayed and fasted, he could not have his sins removed and become a child of God until he did what the Lord commanded: "And now why tarriest thou, arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16).

Today, Christ has all authority in religion. He makes this very clear in Matthew 28:18, when He states, "All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth." His written word, as guided by the Holy Spirit through the inspired writers of the New Testament, is our guide. We are

to be guided and governed by the inspired word, the Bible, in life; and we shall be judged by it in the last day. Hear Christ, "He that rejected me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day" (John 12:48). We are not going to be judged by how we think or feel, but by the revealed Word of God. ~

Editor's note: The above is from a radio address given by Jack Thompson over KSHN in Liberty, Texas. It is not dated, but the message is true regardless of the time.

