

Bad Conscience, Good Conscience

1Samuel 24:1-7

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 9-25-2011

Introduction

This past week I read an article quoting the president who encouraged citizens to get in the Christmas spirit and give voluntary donations to reduce the debt. I was skeptical that there were very enablers in America who would be interested in doing so, but when I went to the department of the treasury website, I was shocked to find that people have been contributing millions of dollars. I guess there are a lot of enablers who will not say “No!” to our drunken federal system. I think the biggest single contribution over the past few years has been 3.5 million dollars. But I actually found that there are three funds for donations. There is a fund for general undesignated gifts, a fund called, “Gifts for the Reduction of the Public Debt” that has received 2.5 million so far this year, and there is even a conscience fund. I dug a little bit deeper into that and found that the conscience fund was established back in 1811, and the whole purpose of it was to receive money from people who felt guilty for not paying their taxes. You can understand why most of the donations to the conscience fund have been anonymous. The lowest contribution was 9¢ from a person in Massachusetts who had reused a 3¢ stamp and he felt terribly guilty about it, and the largest contribution was \$40,000. So apparently the government hasn’t found people’s consciences to be a very lucrative source of income. It has only taken in 5.7 million dollars since 1811. But consciences can be odd things. They can be tyrants that will not let you rest. But they can be inconsistent. Sometimes a person’s conscience will not give the slightest bit of conviction over a horrendous crime that he has committed and yet it will bother that same person over tiny little things. I think of the Sadducees of Israel who felt no twinge of conscience in killing Jesus, but their conscience bothered them too much to take Judas’ blood money into the temple. Very strange.

Well, today I want to look at the difference between a bad conscience and a good conscience. And I thought of an illustration this past week that might help. A conscience is like the rear sight on your rifle’s iron sights. The Bible is the front sight. If your rear sight (your conscience) is not lined up with the front site of the Bible, you’ve got a bad conscience. It doesn’t matter if your conscience is bothering you like crazy or is not bothering you at all. If those two sights are not lined up, it’s a bad conscience. Of course,

© Copyright 2011 by Phillip G. Kayser. Permission is granted to all readers to download, print, and distribute on paper or electronically any Sermons, provided that each reprint bear this copyright notice, current address, and telephone number, and provided that all such reproductions are distributed to the public without charge. They may not be sold or issued in book form, CD-ROM form, or microfiche without prior permission.

Phillip G. Kayser • Dominion Covenant Church • 307.N 41st Ave. Omaha, NE 68131 • 402.934.3300

some people don't have the Scriptures on the front of their guns at all, do they? And their consciences do weird strange things. And I want to look at the lives of Saul and David to illustrate that. We are going to first of all do a very brief survey of the whole passage, and then try to apply it to our own lives.

I. The bad conscience of Saul – it was hardened (vv. 1-3)

A. He continued to think of himself as the Lord's servant (v. 1a with 23:21)

Take a look at chapter 23:21. “**And Saul said, ‘Blessed are you of the LORD, for you have compassion on me.’**” There are a number of Scriptures like this that indicate that Saul thought he was serving God, even though God had rejected Saul from being king. Some (like this one) could be mere pretense, while others seem like Saul really thought he was serving God. In verse 1 Saul maintains his position as king at the very time that he is fighting against God's anointed.

B. Yet his conscience was almost entirely self-centered (v. 1b with 23:21 and 24:16-22)

Let's read chapter 24:16-22. We will look at these verses again in the future in connection with another theme. But look at how Saul's conscience is working.

1Samuel 24:16 So it was, when David had finished speaking these words to Saul, that Saul said, “*Is this your voice, my son David?*” And Saul lifted up his voice and wept.

He is heart-stricken over what he has almost done. He feels guilty. The pain of his conscience brings him to tears. That is the executive function of the conscience. Verse 17:

1Samuel 24:17 Then he said to David: “*You are more righteous than I; for you have rewarded me with good, whereas I have rewarded you with evil.*”

He finally realizes what he has done is wrong. That's the legislative function of the conscience that gives him some sense of right and wrong. He goes on...

1Samuel 24:18 And you have shown this day how you have dealt well with me; for when the LORD delivered me into your hand, you did not kill me.

1Samuel 24:19 For if a man finds his enemy, will he let him get away safely? Therefore may the LORD reward you with good for what you have done to me this day.

His conscience has shown him the incongruity of his behavior as over against David's. This is the judicial function. He is judging himself as guilty and judging David as innocent. Verse 20:

1Samuel 24:20 And now I know indeed that you shall surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand.

1Samuel 24:21 Therefore swear now to me by the LORD that you will not cut off my descendants after me, and that you will not destroy my name from my father's house."

Unfortunately this is not a God-oriented conscience. It's self-preservation. His hand was caught in the cookie jar, and he is embarrassed. But notice that though he admits his obvious guilt (he is after all caught red-handed), he doesn't ask for forgiveness. He doesn't promise restitution. He doesn't step down from the throne. In fact, his only concern at this point is not getting in trouble with anyone who is looking on. And the best way to do that is to get David to say, "It's OK. I won't take it out on you." His conscience needs relief from the sense that he deserves punishment. And shortly we will be looking at the legislative, judicial, and executive functions in more detail. Verse 22:

1Samuel 24:22 So David swore to Saul. And Saul went home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold.

David knew that this temporary swing of Saul's conscience would not last forever. There has been no repentance, so he is probably going to be putting his hand into the cookie jar again. And he was right. Saul came after David again in chapter 26. But Saul is a complex mix of feeling guilty at times, and yet not having any guilt at other times. He has a very unreliable conscience.

C. And he could go for long periods of sin with his conscience not bothering him (vv. 2-3) – This is the goal of Freudian therapy

Despite the fact that he knows God has rejected him from the throne; despite the fact that he knows he is violating Scripture; despite the rebukes from his son (which temporarily helped), Saul can go long periods without having his conscience bother him at all. Let's read verses 1-3

1Samuel 24:1 Now it happened, when Saul had returned from following the Philistines, that it was told him, saying, "Take note! David is in the Wilderness of En Gedi."

1Samuel 24:2 Then Saul took three thousand chosen men from all Israel, and went to seek David and his men on the Rocks of the Wild Goats.

1Samuel 24:3 So he came to the sheepfolds by the road, where there was a cave; and Saul went in to attend to his needs. (David and his men were staying in the recesses of the cave.)

Though his conscience will be awakened later in this chapter, it apparently is not keeping him from tracking David down in these first two verses and planning to kill him. That's the bad conscience of a man at war with God.

II. The misinformed conscience of David's men (v. 4)

Let's look at the misinformed conscience of *David's* men. These are believers, but even believers can have messed up consciences. Verse 4 says, **“Then the men of David said to him, ‘This is the day of which the LORD said to you, ‘Behold I will deliver your enemy into your hand, that you may do to him as it seems good to you.’”** [And commentators point out that that's not exactly what God had said, but this is their interpretation of His providence. The verse goes on...] **“And David arose and secretly cut off a corner of Saul's robe.”**

I can certainly understand the *logic* of David's men. This was self-defense. Surely, the killing of Saul would be perfectly justified. But though their gun sights were fairly accurate, they weren't fine-tuned. David rejects their advice, even though they too think that their advice is serving God. So Saul's conscience seems fine about killing *David* because his conscience was informed more by current practices of pagan kings who wouldn't have hesitated to kill a competitor. In human terms of that day what Saul was doing was just fine. David's *men's* conscience seems fine with killing *Saul* because they are allowing providential opportunity to trump clear Biblical command. But whether it is the opinions of man that are the front sight or pragmatism, your aim will be off.

III. The good conscience of David (vv. 5-7)

A. It recognized the limits of God's law (v. 4)

And finally we get to David's conscience. In verse 4 David did not follow through on their advice. David knew something in God's law that they did not. David's conscience would not permit him to do this because of the theology we looked at a few weeks ago. He recognized that no matter how pressing the situation might be, his conscience must be captive to God's Word alone. Pragmatism did not drive him; his men's opinion did not drive him; expediency did not drive him; danger did not drive him; the fact that he could get away with it did not drive him. David was a man whose conscience was held captive to God's Word. This is the only thing that will keep us from either having a dead conscience or an overly sensitive conscience.

Think of Martin Luther. He was almost in the same situation that David was in. He felt the enormous pressure to compromise so that he wouldn't be killed. His friends encouraged him to compromise, believing that having him alive was more important than maintaining his integrity. Out of fear he almost caved in. But the next day before all the august assembly of the emperor, Luther said, "My conscience is captive to the Word of God. I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither honest nor safe. Here I stand, I can do no other. God help me. Amen." In his prayers and meditations through the night he got his conscience lined up with the Word of God.

B. It troubled him over even small deviations from God's law (v. 5)

Secondly, David was troubled over even small deviations from God's law. He didn't take the attitude that because the issue was a small commandment that it didn't matter. He knew that even small deviations will keep you from hitting your elk, right? And that's what Jesus said in Matthew 5: "**Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven.**" You are going to be a lousy shot. That's why we practice and practice until we have that gun sighted just like Lee does. Well, that's the way we should treat our consciences. We want them fine-tuned. And you don't adjust the Scriptures. That front sight does not move. You adjust your conscience.

Look at verse 5: "**Now it happened afterward that David's heart troubled him because he had cut Saul's robe.**" You might think that David was being a little bit legalistic here. After all, Saul wants to kill David. What's a piece of robe in the big scheme of things? Come on David! Quit being so legalistic. But he was not being legalistic. As Robert Gordon points out in his commentary, in that day any tearing of a garment was highly symbolic, and to cut off a portion of Saul's robe was tantamount to seizing the throne – at least symbolically. Since the robe was the symbol of Saul's kingship, David suddenly realizes that he was symbolically seizing the throne before God and the people had given the throne to him. Revolution was not the way to the throne. Only the proper channels of the people voting him into office would be sufficient. So he realizes that he is running ahead of the Lord in even doing this. And his immediate speech in verse 6 confirms that. He's not changing the subject. He is explaining why even cutting off that piece of robe was wrong. We've dealt in the past with whether self-defense here was legitimate or not legitimate. I won't deal with

that. We dealt with that at length. But it is clear to me that David's conscience is working properly.

And I want to briefly comment on the strong term that is used in verse 5 - "**David's heart troubled him.**" Several translations give the more literal rendering that his conscience "smote him" or "struck him" It's a warfare word that means to be struck with a weapon, or injured, or pierced, or wounded. It's almost like an inward pain. And we will look at that function of the conscience in just a bit. But a conscience can be incredibly troubling over even the slightest of offenses. We call this the executive office of the conscience. The conscience bears a sword and inflicts pain upon us.

C. It was able to clearly articulate why it was troubled (v. 6)

In verse 6 we see that David was able to clearly articulate *why* he was troubled in conscience. This was not just a generalized uneasiness that people sometimes have. This is very specific. He realizes that this was a violation of jurisdiction. "**And he said to his men, 'The LORD forbid that I should do this thing to my master, the LORD's anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the LORD.'**" Like we saw a few weeks ago, David did not have the right to take the throne for himself or to kill Saul except under two circumstances – when he was working for a lawfully ordained magistrate or when he himself was a lawfully ordained magistrate. Otherwise, killing Saul would be murder and revolution. Even cutting the robe would be a form of attacking the office. So he explains why his conscience issues were legitimate issues, and were not legalistic. He is readjusting the rear sights to line up with the Word of God.

D. His conscience helped to restrain the bad behavior of others (v. 7)

And then finally, his conscience helped him to restrain the bad behavior of others. Verse 7 says, "**So David restrained his servants with these words, and did not allow them to rise against Saul. And Saul got up from the cave and went on his way.**" And of course, Romans 1-2 indicates that seeing each other's consciences at work is one of three ways in which God restrains social evils. There is a social dimension to the conscience.

IV. Applications

A. *The maxim, “Let conscience be your guide” is not enough*

So that is a very brief overview of what was happening in the passage. I’ve tried to dig up the raw data that I now want to apply. What difference does this make? I would say first of all that it illustrates why it is not enough to have your conscience as your guide. It’s quite popular for people to say, “Let your conscience be your guide.” But there are people in this church who don’t have any conscience issues over things that are clearly unscriptural. There are others who are tormented by a conscience that is overly sensitive; troubled over things that the Bible gives liberty on. It’s almost like they are in the Garden of Eden feeling guilty that they are enjoying fruit from so many trees. This is so good that there must be something bad about it. They aren’t eating from the forbidden tree. But they are still troubled that they are enjoying so many things. Consciences are strange things. They are certainly not the voice of God speaking. The Spirit will convict us through the conscience, but the conscience itself is only as reliable as we have adjusted it to the Word of God. And unlike some gun sights, we have to constantly keep adjusting it. Consciences are useful if they have been regenerated, trained, sanctified by the Spirit, and fine-tuned to the front sights of the Scripture. But by themselves they are not a reliable guide. To say, “Let your conscience guide you” is like saying “let your rear sight alone guide you.” It won’t work. Your conscience needs to be trained by the Word. By itself it is utterly unreliable. Have I repeated myself enough times? The Etoro tribe of Papua New Guinea considered heterosexuality to be a detestable act that is forbidden 260 days out of the year, and is completely forbidden in the house or anywhere near the gardens. That culture mandated homosexuality and people felt terribly guilty if they violated those norms. This shows that the conscience is not the voice of God speaking.

If Saul had trained his conscience to God’s Word, he would have resigned his office chapter 13 as soon as he heard the revelation from Samuel that God had rejected him. He would have turned over the kingdom to David as soon as he heard the inspired revelation that David was to be the next king. He would have tuned his heart to the limitations on kings found in the Pentateuch. He had a conscience, and it even worked somewhat correctly in this chapter and in chapter 26. But even broken clocks strike the right hour once in a while. So if you are one of those people who deflects the rebuke’s of Scripture with the phrase, “Well, I don’t feel convicted about

that,” you are trusting your conscience over the Word of God. You are acting no differently than Saul. My response will be, “Well, you should be convicted. Get your rear sights lined up with the Word of God or you are rarely going to hit what God wants you to hit. So that’s the first application.

B. When your conscience is mainly a “social conscience,” it will likely let you down.

Second application: when your conscience is mainly a “social conscience,” it will likely let you down. What do I mean by a social conscience? I mean that it is a conscience that feels bad when it disappoints *people*, but not so much when it disappoints *God*. The Papua New Guinea situation illustrates that, doesn’t it? There are evidences that Saul felt bad in this chapter and in chapter 26, not because of what *God* thought of his bad actions, but because of what *the people who were around him* thought of his bad actions. He adjusted his behavior to keep their approval. And so it had become a man-approving conscience, not a God-approved conscience. And David could have done the same thing. If David had gone along with the suggestions of his buddies, he would have had their total approval. So if his conscience had been tuned to what they thought, he would have failed at this critical juncture. And so there is a sense in which I am hitting the same point from different angles. That front sight has got to be the Word of God.

In my growing up years I had a conscience that was half and half. It was troubled over things that were perfectly OK. I knew God did not disapprove, but because my peers disapproved, I felt guilty. That’s not a healthy conscience. And you need to memorize Galatians 1:10 and think through the implications of that verse. But this brings us to the next application that we must train all three sides of our conscience.

C. All three elements of conscience should be instructed from the word

1. The three elements: legislative, judicial, and executive (with the prophetic affecting each)

And let me describe what those three are: There are the legislative, judicial, and executive branches of our conscience. The legislative part of the conscience obviously deals with law. Even unbelievers have the work of the law written on their hearts. And both Saul and David recognized certain things as being wrong.

The second essential element of a conscience is what is called the judicial element. This is the ability of man to pass judgments on his own

actions. If he does right he passes the judgment of not guilty; if he does wrong, or at least perceives that he has done wrong, his conscience passes the judgment of guilty. Now we might argue with our conscience and try to convince it that we are not guilty, but our conscience acts as a judge. And it is sometimes a pretty mean judge, just like the picture in your outlines. Judges are not automatically good judges and consciences are not automatically good consciences. So we have the legislative branch that knows some kind of law, the judicial branch that judges actions.

The third essential element is called the executive function. Some people call it the punitive function because it carries out or executes a punishment of pain. This is why Saul wept. This is why David's conscience smote him or struck him. So you have the law, you have the judge and you have an executioner. But executioner is only half the story because the conscience also gives the person a sense of satisfaction and peace if he does good. The negative side condemns sin by giving an inner disturbance of shame, remorse, distress, and conviction. The positive side gives approval, satisfaction, peace for actions that are in conformity with a man's convictions. Romans 2:15 speaks of the conscience either accusing or excusing; condemning or approving of a person's action. That's the executive function.

So there is the law, the judge, and the executioner. And some people have added a fourth element, the predictive or prophetic element; an anticipation of what the judgment of God or of others will be. Others have lumped that predictive aspect in with each of these three elements. So you can write down three or four as you wish. But each of those needs to be retrained.

2. Retraining the legislative function

How do you retrain the legislative function? And why would it even need to be retrained? Hasn't God written the law on our hearts? Well, (to change the illustration from iron sights to a scope) the reason it needs to be retrained is because sin fogs up the scope and makes it difficult for us to see the crosshairs. The sights are there, but we have a hard time seeing them. It needs to be retrained because we are not always discerning as to what is man's law and what is God's law. Secondly, it needs retraining because Romans 1 says that our flesh has a tendency to suppress the truth in unrighteousness. We don't like the legislative branch telling us that what we are doing is wrong. And thirdly, it needs retraining because our conscience has a tendency to become the conscience for others and legislate for others rather than letting God be their judge. If you are somebody who imposes

your weak conscience on other people (even people within your family) then you need to retrain your conscience.

How are you training your children's conscience? Is it with God's laws, or yours? If it's only your commandments that you have trained them to be guilty over, you are training them to be little humanists. Your discipline must always be directed Godward. It's His laws we want them to obey. It's his holiness we want them to pursue.

Everyone's conscience will succumb to some law. If it isn't God's perfect law of liberty, automatically it's going to make you shoot toward legalism or license. Just last week I had someone tell me some philosophical reasons why jazz, rock, and anything except for classical and sacred was wrong. It was a fascinating five-point philosophy. But I just kept gently pointing the person back to the law of God. What does God's Word say? And he kept pointing back to the five point system. Where is the five point system in the Bible? And is it wisdom or is it law? You see, I may have my own prejudices against certain styles of music, but I can't impose those on my kids as moral guides if they are not in the Bible. If I just call them preferences, that is fine; there is nothing wrong with that. But the moment we put a new law that is not Biblical law, it's like gluing a new piece onto the front sight. It raises the front sight so that your shot is continually skewed. Only God's law is the perfect law of liberty. Saul had succumbed to man's law. So had David's friends.

3. Retraining the judicial function

The second thing we need to retrain is our inner judge. If your conscience keeps looking at you like the judge in your outlines, it's got some retraining to do. And we need to evaluate whom the judge is working for? Is he working for the mafia? Is he exclusively working for your peers? Who pays the salary of this judge? Our conscience must care more about what God thinks of our behavior than what the world thinks. Where do you go to get your sense of approval or disapproval? Well, you tend to go to the ones that you have the strongest relationship with. If you don't have a relationship with God, then sensing the loss of that relationship is not going to be as important. Listen to Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 4:1-5:

1Corinthians 4:1 Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.

He's telling them whom he is accountable to. He is a steward to God. A steward is a slave who is owned by and works for the master. The master is his primary relationship. Verse 2 says,

1Corinthians 4:2 Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.

1Corinthians 4:3 But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself.

Paul had learned how to retune this judicial side of his conscience to God alone. The opinions of the churches, of the courts, and even his tendency to condemn himself was put aside, and he trained the judge side of his conscience to only listen to God. And I find that last phrase very interesting: Paul said, “In fact, I do not even judge myself.” We tend to be beat up on ourselves don’t we? We doubt our salvation, and rather than instantly clinging to the cross and making the hymn “Trust and Obey” our theme, we go down a spiral of doubts, self-flagellation, and discouragement. Don’t let anyone be your judge but God’s Word alone. So let me repeat that verse:

[“**But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself.**”]

1Corinthians 4:4 For I know of nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord.

1Corinthians 4:5 Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one’s praise will come from God.

He had trained the legislative function of his conscience to align itself to the Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible. He had trained his judicial branch of conscience to not judge anything except what God judged in the Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible.

4. Retraining the executive function

And what was he looking forward to? It was God’s “well done,” not man’s “well done.” He had trained the executive function to respond properly too. You see, our conscience has a sense of satisfaction or pain that comes as a result of the approval or disapproval of others. That’s the executioner. If we don’t have the fear of God, it is guaranteed that we will start living in terms of the fear of man. The conscience is built to have fear. It’s of its very nature to fear something. Now fear of man can take many turns. When we think we are better than others it may take on an arrogance, pride and assertiveness because we know that others think we are better than them. It may take on over-confidence or loss of confidence; self-esteem or loss of self-esteem; security or insecurities; seeking the limelight or fearing the limelight (depending on our perception of ourselves). And so, to align the conscience aright, we must make sure that the fear of man is cleansed away and replaced with the fear of God. And one tool to help you do that is the book, *When People are Big and God is Small* by Ed Welch.

D. Allowing your conscience to become hardened is extremely dangerous.

There is a lot more that could be said about the conscience. But there is one last application that I want to make this morning. Don't allow your conscience to become hardened. Some people think they have a good conscience because it never bothers them. Well, Saul's conscience rarely bothered him. Elton Trueblood once said, "The good conscience is an invention of the Devil."¹ Now you could take that in a wrong way, but I think what he meant by that is that is that a conscience that doesn't trouble you day after day is what Scripture calls a seared conscience that is insensitive to the Holy Spirit's promptings because it is so used to ignoring the Holy Spirit's convictions that it doesn't work anymore. Our conscience must become razor sharp by being tuned to God and to Scripture, and the moment it is violated, quickly confessing the sin, turning from it, and being cleansed by the blood of Christ.

Proverbs 30:20 says, "**This is the way of an adulterous woman: she eats and wipes her mouth, and says, 'I have done no wickedness.'**" Because her sin had become a lifestyle for her, she finally came to the place where she had absolutely no sense of shame or wrong. Isn't that king Saul? And as I read the news today I read of people coming out of the closet who now take pride in what once was an abomination in America. They have lost the blessing of the executioner bringing pain into their lives.

And you might think, "How is pain a blessing?" It's an incredible blessing. If you didn't have pain you would be constantly damaging your body irreparably and not knowing it. This is what happens to lepers. They have no pain, and they destroy parts of their body. For example, one doctor related how a leper that he knew took a key and opened a stiff lock, but didn't realize that he tore the flesh and part of the bone off of his fingers. He had no feeling, so he did stupid things. And without a finely tuned conscience, it is an indication that we are spiritually lepers. You don't want to have a conscience that has no feeling. When your spiritual finger touches a spiritually hot stove, you want it to instantly react. You want a conscience to instantly react and to bring you to repentance and back to the blessing of God. Sigmund Freud held to the opposite opinion. He considered the conscience to be your enemy. So psychiatrists will often have people go through exercises to deaden and harden the conscience. I have met several

¹ Elton Trueblood, *Foundation For Reconstruction* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1946), pp. 67-69.

² Augustine, in *The Encyclopedia of Religious Quotes*, ed. Frank Spencer (Old Tappan,

people over the past few years who have shown me the homework that the psychiatrist has given them, and I was shocked. The psychiatrist was giving them exercises designed to harden the conscience. But that is to turn people into spiritual lepers who have no feeling.

Conclusion

I want to conclude by talking about the blessing of a conscience. Certainly a sensitive conscience will cause pain (just like it smote David), but when we instantly humble ourselves and repent of sin and receive the cleansing of Christ's blood, even when others still oppose us, we are ushered into incredible joy. And to walk in the joy of the Lord as David did – with a free conscience, gives us strength to do the hardest things. This is why Paul said, **“I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men.”** He worked at it. And it takes work to have a good conscience like David did. But the work is worth it.

That same conscience will fill us with a sense of peace, approval, and satisfaction. Saint Augustine said, “A good conscience is the palace of Christ; the temple of the Holy Ghost; the paradise of delight; the standing Sabbath of the saints.”² In other words, it is intended to be our blessing. Don't treat your conscience as your enemy. The iron sights on your gun may need adjusting to the word of God (to the front sight), but those sights are a blessing indeed. Let me read that quote from Saint Augustine again, and we can pray that this description of a good conscience would become true of yours: “A good conscience is the palace of Christ; the temple of the Holy Ghost; the paradise of delight; the standing Sabbath of the saints.” May it be so of us. Amen.

² Augustine, in *The Encyclopedia of Religious Quotes*, ed. Frank Spencer (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1965), p. 84.

Bad Conscience, Good Conscience

1Samuel 24:1-7

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 9-25-2011

Introduction

- I. The bad conscience of Saul – it was hardened (vv. 1-3)
 - A. He continued to think of himself as the Lord’s servant (v. 1a with 23:21)
 - B. Yet his conscience was almost entirely self-centered (v. 1b with 23:21 and 24:16-22)
 - C. And he could go for long periods of sin with his conscience not bothering him (vv. 2-3) – This is the goal of Freudian therapy
- II. The misinformed conscience of David’s men (v. 4)
- III. The good conscience of David (vv. 5-7)
 - A. It recognized the limits of God’s law (v. 4)
 - B. It troubled him over even small deviations from God’s law (v. 5)
 - C. It was able to clearly articulate why it was troubled (v. 6)
 - D. His conscience helped to restrain the bad behavior of others (v. 7)
- IV. Applications
 - A. The maxim, “Let conscience be your guide” is not enough
 - B. When your conscience is mainly a “social conscience,” it will likely let you down.
 - C. All three elements of conscience should be instructed from the word
 1. The three elements: legislative, judicial, and executive (with the prophetic affecting each)
 2. Retraining the legislative function
 3. Retraining the judicial function
 4. Retraining the executive function
 - D. Allowing your conscience to become hardened is extremely dangerous.

Conclusion

