

CONSCIENCE

I was reading in Romans about how mankind is without excuse because God has revealed what may be known about Him in creation (Rom. 1:19-20). The created order is enough to convince those who will see, that God exists and is obviously much greater and wholly different from mankind. Paul's point is that people willfully suppress the truth they see in nature and the cosmos because they don't want to believe.

Later, in the next chapter, Paul notes that those who do not have the Law, or some further revelation of God's precepts, show that God has written His requirements in their hearts because their consciences witness it, as their thoughts either accuse or defend themselves (2:14-15). We know inherently what is good and what is evil. So those who reject God choose unbelief contrary to both the witness of creation and the witness of conscience. Truly we are without excuse.

As I mulled these things over, I began to wonder: Did Adam and Eve have no conscience before the fall? They were innocent, which is defined as uncorrupted by evil, malice, or wrongdoing; or sinless. It can also be defined as not exposed to or familiar with something specific; unaware or ignorant. They were not only sinless, but also ignorant of sin and unaware of the possibility of deception.

God had created humans with the faculty of free will. Adam exercised his free will as he chose names for all the animals. This, as morally neutral, did not require a conscience. But God is moral; He is good, indeed perfect, and cannot tolerate sin. If mankind was to be in His image, he would need to be able to make moral choices. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and Satan's deception of our first parents were the vehicles God used to generate what we call the conscience. Adam's choice to eat of that tree was the first human moral choice ever made.

In the first chapters of Job we see that God is in total control of what Satan can do to mankind. He set definite parameters on just how far Job could be tested. And though it is not stated, I am confident that he knew Job would pass the test. I believe God allowed, indeed planned the test of Adam and Eve, knowing full well what the outcome would be. The fall of mankind, therefore, was not just a human misstep with cosmic consequences, but part of the predetermined plan and will of God.

Having a conscience is a good thing. Knowing the difference between good and evil keeps us from doing wrong. But those who suppress the truth of God's existence and character harden their consciences. We speak of those who commit heinous crimes as having no conscience, but in reality they have suppressed the truth of God and their consciences are insensitive to good. Only the knowledge of evil remains.

Thank God the blood of Christ cleanses our consciences, and God has removed the heart of stone from us and replaced it with a heart of flesh. May we always draw near to God so our hearts may be sprinkled clean from an evil conscience (Heb. 10:22).