

Dr. Gary Meadors, 1 Corinthians, Session 24, Response to Food Sacrificed to Idols, 1 Cor. 10, Conscience

Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Meadors, 1 Corinthians, Session 24, Response to Food Sacrificed to Idols, 1 Cor. 10, Conscience, Biblicalelearning.org

Dr. Gary Meadors' lecture on 1 Corinthians explores the concept of conscience, particularly in response to the issue of food sacrificed to idols. He argues that conscience is not a lawgiver or an independent voice, but rather a God-given capacity for self-critique that acts as a witness to one's worldview and values. Meadors emphasizes that a clear conscience does not necessarily equate to righteousness, as it is ultimately one's biblically informed worldview and values that should guide decisions. He highlights that conscience must be educated and aligned with scripture, and a weak conscience often stems from a lack of knowledge. Ultimately, the lecture underscores the importance of developing a sound, biblical worldview and value system to properly inform the conscience and guide Christian living.

2. 19 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Meadors, 1 Corinthians, Session 24 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (New Testament → Pauline Epistles → 1 Corinthians).



Meadors_1Cor_Session24.mp3

3. Briefing Document: Meadors, 1 Corinthians, Session 24, Response to Food Sacrificed to Idols, 1 Cor. 10, Conscience

Briefing Document: Dr. Gary Meadors on Conscience in 1 Corinthians

Overview: This lecture by Dr. Gary Meadors focuses on the biblical understanding of conscience, particularly as it arises in Paul's discussion of food sacrificed to idols in 1 Corinthians 8-10. Meadors argues against the common misconception of conscience as an independent guide or the voice of God. Instead, he posits that conscience is a God-given capacity for self-critique, functioning as a witness to our established worldview and value system. He emphasizes the crucial role of a biblically informed and transformed mind in shaping a healthy conscience.

Main Themes and Important Ideas:

1. Defining Conscience Biblically:

- Meadors focuses exclusively on the New Testament use of the Greek word *syneidesis*, noting its virtual absence in the Old Testament.
- He critiques vague and psychological understandings of conscience, emphasizing a biblical data-driven approach.
- **Thesis:** "My thesis is that the value system, which is the worldview and value system, is our guide as the only database that can be objectively analyzed. The conscience is a God-given function of our self-awareness, our self-consciousness, and our self-reflection. It witnesses to the dictates of our worldview and value system." (p. 2)
- **Key Definition:** "Conscience is a critical inner awareness, a witness in reference to the norms and values that we recognize and apply. It does not create norms and values but merely responds to our existing software. In other words, it's a witness." (p. 10)

1. Conscience as a Witness, Not a Lawgiver or Judge:

- Meadors emphatically states, "**Conscience is not a lawgiver.** Say that again. Conscience is not a lawgiver. **It is a witness.** Underline the word witness." (p. 3)
- He clarifies that conscience doesn't create moral principles but reflects and responds to the pre-existing worldview and values we hold.

- Analogy: Conscience is like software that operates based on the "programming" of our worldview and values.
- He distinguishes conscience from an independent entity or a direct line to divine or demonic voices. **"Conscience is not just an audience room for the voice of God or for the voice of the devil."** (p. 4)

1. The Role of Worldview and Values:

- Meadors stresses that our worldview (epistemology) and values (axiology) are the foundational framework that conscience operates within.
- He uses the analogy of a "grid" in our minds through which data (information) is processed and assigned meaning based on our worldview and values.
- Transformation (renewing of the mind - Romans 12:1-2) involves adjusting this grid to align with biblical truth.
- A misinformed or unbiblical worldview will lead to a faulty conscience. **"If our worldview is faulty, then our conscience is also faulty, and our lives are not what they're supposed to be or should be."** (p. 19)

1. Conscience and Self-Critique:

- Conscience is a God-given capacity for self-reflection and self-critique. It monitors whether our actions and thoughts align with our recognized worldview and values.
- The "pain" or discomfort we feel when we violate our values is what we describe as conscience.
- Meadors uses Paul's pre-conversion actions to illustrate how conscience can be aligned with a flawed worldview, leading to actions that are later recognized as wrong after transformation.

1. Examining Biblical Texts:

- **1 Corinthians 4:4:** Paul's statement "I am not aware of anything against myself" (NRSV) / "My conscience is clear" (NIV) highlights conscience as self-assessment. However, Paul immediately adds, "but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me," emphasizing that a clear conscience does not equate to ultimate righteousness. **"Do you ever use the fact that your conscience doesn't bother you as a reason for an action? Oh, I can do this. My conscience doesn't bother**

me. Do you realize how precarious that is? Because your conscience isn't the last word. Your worldview and your values are the last word." (p. 9)

- **Romans 2:14-15:** This passage illustrates that even Gentiles without the Mosaic Law have an internal "law" based on their cultural norms and values, and their conscience acts as a witness, "their conscience also bearing witness and their thoughts sometimes accusing them or at other times even defending them." (Romans 2:15, NIV quoted in lecture). This demonstrates the universal function of conscience as a monitor of recognized values.
- **1 Corinthians 8 & 10:** In the context of food sacrificed to idols, Paul's instruction to "raise no questions for conscience's sake" (implied, see p. 19) does not elevate conscience as the determining factor. Instead, the focus should be on worldview and values, particularly considering the weaker brother's understanding and potential stumbling.

1. **Educating and Programming Conscience:**

- A healthy conscience must be "educated, educated, and programmed in relation to a critically developed world and life view." (p. 10)
- For Christians, this development is rooted in special revelation in the Bible. Our worldview and value system should be built from Scripture, not from subjective feelings or cultural trends.
- Ministry leaders have a crucial responsibility to teach and mentor people in the transformation of their minds based on biblical truth, enabling them to develop a well-functioning conscience.

1. **Dangers of Misunderstanding Conscience:**

- Appealing solely to a "clear conscience" as justification for actions is precarious if that conscience is not informed by a correct worldview and values.
- Deifying one's own opinions and equating them with the voice of God through conscience can lead to conflict and division within the church.
- Ignoring rigorous biblical study and relying on subjective feelings undermines the very foundation for a sound conscience. **"The Bible is the only way you can know Jesus."** (p. 20)

Key Quotes:

- "It's neither right nor safe to go against one's conscience." (Quoting Martin Luther, p. 1) - Meadors uses this to introduce the complexity of the concept.
- "Conscience is not a lawgiver. It is a witness." (p. 3) - This is a central tenet of Meadors' argument.
- "The spirit witnesses to Christ. The conscience witnesses to the word. The spirit witnesses to the word." (p. 5) - Highlighting the parallel but distinct roles.
- "My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me." (NIV translation of 1 Corinthians 4:4 quoted, p. 9) - Underscoring the limitations of conscience as the ultimate standard.
- "Conscience is a critical inner awareness, a witness in reference to the norms and values that we recognize and apply. It does not create norms and values but merely responds to our existing software." (p. 10) - Meadors' concise definition.

Implications for Understanding 1 Corinthians 8-10:

Meadors' excursus on conscience provides a framework for understanding Paul's nuanced discussion about food sacrificed to idols. The issue is not primarily about individual conscience but about the worldview and values that inform that conscience. Those with stronger knowledge understand that idols are nothing, and therefore the food is neutral. However, those with a weaker conscience, influenced by their past association with idolatry, may view eating such food as participation in pagan worship. Paul's concern is for the spiritual well-being of the weaker believers and the avoidance of causing them to stumble, which relates to love and edification, principles grounded in a correct biblical worldview.

Recommended Further Reading (from Bibliography):

- Pierce, C.A. *Conscience in the New Testament*.
- Gooch, "Conscience in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10."
- Ramm, Bernard. *The Witness of the Spirit*. (Meadors highly recommends this book, though he couldn't immediately recall the author's name during the lecture).

Conclusion:

Dr. Meadors offers a valuable biblical perspective on conscience, moving beyond simplistic notions and emphasizing its role as a witness to our underlying worldview and values. He underscores the critical importance of a biblically transformed mind as the foundation for a healthy and reliable conscience. This understanding is crucial for interpreting Paul's instructions in 1 Corinthians and for navigating ethical decision-making in Christian life. The lecture calls for rigorous biblical study and a commitment to developing a worldview rooted in Scripture, rather than relying solely on subjective feelings or an uneducated conscience.

4. Study Guide: Meadors, 1 Corinthians, Session 24, Response to Food Sacrificed to Idols, 1 Cor. 10, Conscience

Study Guide: The Biblical Understanding of Conscience (1 Corinthians 8-11:1)

Key Concepts:

- **Conscience as Witness:** The primary function of conscience in the New Testament is not to be a lawgiver or an independent guide, but rather a witness to the worldview and values that an individual recognizes and applies.
- **Worldview and Values:** These form the "database" or "software" to which the conscience responds. They are the framework through which individuals interpret data and make judgments. For Christians, these should be rooted in Scripture.
- **Self-Critique:** Conscience is a God-given capacity for self-reflection and critical evaluation of one's thoughts and actions in relation to their established worldview and values.
- **Educated Conscience:** The conscience is not inherently perfect or infallible. It needs to be educated and informed by a biblically sound worldview and value system to function correctly.
- **Weak Conscience:** A conscience that lacks sufficient knowledge or a properly formed worldview and values, leading to uncertainty or incorrect judgments.
- **Clear Conscience:** A state where one's actions and thoughts align with their recognized worldview and values. However, a clear conscience does not automatically equate to being objectively right or innocent before God.
- **Influence of the Holy Spirit:** While the lecture focuses on the biblical concept of conscience itself, it acknowledges that the Holy Spirit also acts as a witness and can influence individuals, though this is a separate topic.
- **Danger of Subjectivity:** Relying solely on feelings or internal voices as guides without grounding them in Scripture and a sound worldview can be dangerous.

Quiz:

1. According to Dr. Meadors, what is the primary function of conscience as presented in the New Testament?
2. Explain the relationship between an individual's worldview and values and their conscience. Use an analogy if helpful.

3. How does Dr. Meadors define a "weak conscience," and what is the underlying cause of it?
4. What does it mean to have a "clear conscience," and what important qualification does Dr. Meadors make about this state?
5. In the context of Romans 2:14-15, what does Paul suggest about the conscience of Gentiles who do not have the Mosaic Law?
6. Explain why Dr. Meadors cautions against treating conscience as an independent "voice" like the voice of God or the devil.
7. According to the lecture, how can a Christian develop a well-functioning and reliable conscience?
8. In 1 Corinthians 8, why does Paul suggest not raising questions "for conscience's sake" in certain situations regarding food sacrificed to idols?
9. What does Dr. Meadors emphasize as the foundational priority for ministry leaders in guiding their congregations?
10. How does the example of Paul in 1 Corinthians 4:4 illustrate the limitations of relying solely on a clear conscience?

Answer Key:

1. Dr. Meadors states that the primary function of conscience in the New Testament is to be a witness to the worldview and values that an individual recognizes and applies, not to be a lawgiver or an independent guide. It monitors how we relate to our existing value system.
2. An individual's worldview and values act as the "software" or "database" that programs the conscience. The conscience then functions as a witness or monitor, alerting the individual when their thoughts or actions deviate from these established beliefs and principles.
3. A "weak conscience," according to Dr. Meadors, is one that lacks sufficient knowledge upon which conviction can be built. This often stems from a faulty or inadequately informed worldview, making it difficult for the conscience to function correctly.
4. Having a "clear conscience" means that an individual's self-reflection does not reveal any conflict between their actions and their recognized worldview and values. However, Dr. Meadors emphasizes that a clear conscience does not

automatically make one objectively right or innocent in God's eyes, as the underlying worldview itself could be flawed.

5. Paul suggests that even Gentiles, who do not have the Mosaic Law, demonstrate that the requirements of the law are, in a sense, "written on their hearts" through their conscience bearing witness to their own internal standards and their thoughts either accusing or defending them. This shows a universal capacity for moral awareness linked to their own value systems.
6. Dr. Meadors warns against personifying conscience as an independent voice because the New Testament portrays it as an aspect of our self-reflective capacity that is tied to our worldview and values. Attributing independent authority to it can lead to subjective and potentially harmful interpretations, as even those with flawed worldviews may claim their conscience is guiding them.
7. A Christian can develop a well-functioning and reliable conscience by diligently studying Scripture and working to build a biblically sound worldview and value system. This process of transformation and renewing the mind will then educate the conscience to align with God's revealed truth.
8. In the context of food sacrificed to idols, Paul suggests not raising questions for conscience's sake in some situations because the issue is not inherently a matter of right or wrong but depends on knowledge and understanding of idols' lack of real existence. Appealing to a weak or misinformed conscience in such cases can cause unnecessary division and judgment.
9. Dr. Meadors emphasizes that the foundational priority for ministry leaders is to focus on teaching and mentoring people in the development of a biblical worldview and values. This provides the necessary foundation for individuals to think correctly and for their consciences to operate effectively.
10. Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 4:4, "My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent," illustrates that while his self-assessment found no fault according to his understanding and values, ultimate judgment rests with the Lord. This highlights that a clear conscience is not the final arbiter of righteousness.

Essay Format Questions:

1. Discuss the implications of understanding conscience primarily as a "witness" rather than a "guide" for Christian ethical decision-making.
2. Analyze the role of worldview and values in shaping the function and reliability of an individual's conscience. How can Christians ensure their worldview and values are properly formed?
3. Explore the concept of a "weak conscience" as described in the lecture. What are the potential dangers of operating with a weak conscience, and how can it be strengthened?
4. Critically evaluate the statement "Let your conscience be your guide" in light of Dr. Meadors's explanation of conscience. What are the strengths and weaknesses of this approach to moral decision-making?
5. Considering the interconnectedness of conscience, worldview, and values, discuss the challenges and responsibilities of Christian leaders in helping others develop well-informed and sensitive consciences.

Glossary of Key Terms:

- **Conscience (Sunetesis):** In the New Testament context, the God-given capacity for self-awareness, self-consciousness, and self-reflection that witnesses to the dictates of an individual's worldview and value system.
- **Worldview:** A fundamental set of beliefs and assumptions about reality, existence, and knowledge that shapes how an individual perceives and interprets the world.
- **Values:** Principles or standards that an individual or group considers important or desirable, influencing their judgments and actions.
- **Self-Critique:** The capacity for internal evaluation and judgment of one's own thoughts, actions, and motives in relation to one's established worldview and values.
- **Witness:** In the context of conscience, the function of testifying to the alignment or misalignment of one's behavior with their recognized worldview and values, without independently establishing those values.
- **Epistemology:** The branch of philosophy concerned with the nature and scope of knowledge, its justification, and the reliability of claims to knowledge. In the lecture, it relates to how we know God's will and truth.
- **Axiology:** The branch of philosophy concerned with the study of values, including moral and aesthetic principles. In the lecture, it is presented as a result of one's worldview and epistemology.
- **Special Revelation:** God's communication of himself and his will through specific means, primarily the Bible.
- **General Revelation:** God's communication of himself and his attributes through nature and human reason.
- **Transformation (Renewing of the Mind):** The process of being changed and conformed to God's will and character through the influence of the Holy Spirit and the study of Scripture, leading to a revised worldview and value system.

5. FAQs on Meadors, 1 Corinthians, Session 24, Response to Food Sacrificed to Idols, 1 Cor. 10, Conscience

Frequently Asked Questions on Conscience Based on Dr. Meadors' Lecture

1. What is the biblical understanding of conscience, particularly in the New Testament?

According to Dr. Meadors, the biblical understanding of conscience, primarily drawn from the New Testament (as it's virtually absent in the Old Testament), is not that of a lawgiver or an independent entity. Instead, conscience (Greek: *syneidesis*) is a God-given capacity for self-awareness, self-consciousness, and self-reflection. It functions as an internal witness to the worldview and value system that an individual recognizes and applies. It's not an external voice of God or the devil, but rather our own self-reflective critique in light of our held beliefs.

2. Dr. Meadors emphasizes that "conscience is not a lawgiver, it is a witness." What does this distinction mean?

This crucial distinction means that conscience does not create or dictate what is right or wrong. Instead, it acts as an internal monitor that alerts us when our thoughts or actions are inconsistent with the values and principles we already hold. Like a witness in a courtroom, it testifies to the alignment or misalignment with pre-existing "laws" or standards derived from our worldview. It doesn't initiate judgment but responds to the judgments already present within our belief system.

3. How does our worldview and value system relate to our conscience?

Our worldview and value system serve as the database or "software" to which our conscience refers. These are the frameworks through which we interpret data and assign meaning. Our conscience is "captive" to these frameworks; it can only witness and respond to the values we have internalized. If our worldview and values are not properly formed or are inaccurate (e.g., Paul's before his conversion), our conscience will still function, but its witness will be based on a flawed foundation, potentially leading us to believe wrong actions are right.

4. Can a "clear conscience" always be trusted as a guide for action? Why or why not?

No, a clear conscience cannot always be trusted as the ultimate guide. While a clear conscience indicates that our actions align with our current worldview and values, it doesn't guarantee that those values are correct according to God's standards. As Paul himself noted in 1 Corinthians 4:4, even though his conscience was clear, that did not make him innocent; ultimately, the Lord is the judge. Therefore, it's essential to critically evaluate and align our worldview and values with biblical truth, rather than solely relying on the feeling of a clear conscience.

5. How does Dr. Meadors explain Romans 2:14-15 concerning Gentiles who do not have the law?

Dr. Meadors interprets Romans 2:14-15 as illustrating that even Gentiles, without the Mosaic Law, possess an innate self-critical capacity or "conscience" that witnesses to their own culturally developed laws and values. This demonstrates that the function of law (establishing standards and internal critique for violations) is a universal aspect of humanity created in God's image. Their conscience bears witness to their internal standards, accusing or defending their actions, highlighting that this self-regulatory mechanism is not exclusive to those with explicit divine law.

6. What does it mean to have a "weak conscience" according to the lecture, particularly in the context of 1 Corinthians 8?

A "weak conscience," as discussed in relation to 1 Corinthians 8, is a conscience that lacks sufficient knowledge or understanding, particularly regarding biblical truth. In the context of eating food sacrificed to idols, those with a weak conscience were wrongly convinced that eating such food was inherently sinful because of its association with idols. Their lack of knowledge prevented their conscience from functioning correctly, leading to unnecessary guilt and judgment of others. A weak conscience is not necessarily a defiled conscience, but an uninformed one.

7. How should Christians approach and cultivate their conscience?

Christians should actively educate and "program" their conscience by developing a critically informed worldview and value system rooted in special revelation, the Bible. This involves diligent study of scripture to understand God's standards for right and wrong. The goal is to transform our minds (Romans 12:1-2) so that our conscience, as a faithful witness, aligns with biblical truth. We should not rely on subjective feelings or emotions alone but on the objective truth of God's Word to shape our understanding and guide our conscience.

8. What are the implications of Dr. Meadors' teaching on conscience for Christian leadership and the church?

For Christian leaders, the understanding of conscience presented by Dr. Meadors underscores the critical importance of teaching and mentoring believers in developing a sound biblical worldview and value system. Leaders must prioritize in-depth study of scripture and theology to accurately discern truth and guide the congregation. When conflicts arise based on differing "consciences," the focus should be on critically evaluating the underlying worldviews and values rather than simply appealing to individual conscience as the final authority. The health and unity of the church depend on its members having minds transformed by the Word of God, which in turn will lead to well-informed and reliable consciences.