

Dr. Gary Meadors, Knowing the Will of God, Session 11, The Role of Conscience Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Meadors, Knowing the Will of God, Session 11, The Role of Conscience, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Gary Meadors' lecture explores the biblical concept of conscience, arguing it's not a guide but a God-given capacity for self-reflection that acts as a witness to one's worldview and values. He emphasizes that decisions should be based on a biblically informed worldview rather than solely on inner feelings or voices attributed to conscience. The lecture distinguishes conscience from the Holy Spirit, noting their similar role as witnesses, and highlights that conscience must be educated and aligned with scripture for proper discernment. Meadors uses scripture, particularly from Paul's letters, and addresses common misunderstandings about conscience, such as it being a direct line to God or a reliable moral compass on its own. The provided database of biblical occurrences of "conscience" is intended to aid personal study and confirm this understanding. Ultimately, the session stresses the importance of a transformed mind, rooted in scripture, as the foundation for sound decision-making, with conscience serving to monitor adherence to those established values.

**2. 14 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of
Dr. Meadors, Knowing the Will of God, Session 11 – Double
click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the
Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link
there (Theology → Knowing the Will of God).**



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3. Briefing Document: Meadors, Knowing the Will of God, Session 11, The Role of Conscience

Briefing Document: The Role of Conscience in Discerning God's Will (Dr. Gary Meadors, Session 11)

Overview:

This briefing document summarizes the key themes and arguments presented by Dr. Gary Meadors in Session 11 of his "Knowing God's Will" lecture series, focusing on the biblical understanding of conscience and its role in decision-making. Meadors argues against the common misconception that conscience is a direct line to God's personal will or an infallible guide. Instead, he posits that conscience is a God-given capacity for self-reflection and a witness to one's existing worldview and values, which themselves must be critically evaluated and informed by Scripture.

Main Themes and Important Ideas:

1. Context of Discernment:

- Meadors situates the discussion of conscience within a broader framework of discerning God's will, which he previously established as rooted in Scripture (God's moral will) rather than a search for a specific "personal will."
- Decision-making typically involves relating issues to scriptural teachings, looking for direct texts or implications, and sometimes engaging in "creative constructs" where diversity of interpretation exists.
- This session moves into understanding and addressing "subjective issues" in discernment, challenging the idea that internal feelings or voices directly equate to God's guidance.

1. Deconstructing Stereotypes of Conscience:

- Meadors refutes the notion that conscience is an "internal audience room for the direct communication of other beings, perhaps God" or even the devil. He emphasizes that internal voices are "yourself talking to yourself."
- He clarifies that conscience is a "God-given capacity created in God's image for self-reflection," an "internal values speech," where data is processed through one's worldview and values.

- The idea that "Let conscience be your guide" is deemed false. Meadors asserts that "Worldview and values are your guide. But conscience is a God-given internal complex that reminds you about the worldview and values."

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

- The central argument is that conscience is primarily a **witness** to the worldview and values that an individual recognizes and applies. He highlights that the Greek term for conscience relates to "knowing yourself" and self-reflection.
- Meadors emphasizes that "Conscience can only witness what exists. Conscience is not a lawgiver, but it is a witness to the law that you recognize and apply."
- He draws a parallel between conscience and the Holy Spirit, both being described in the Bible under the concept of witness.

1. **The Primacy of Worldview and Values:**

- Decisions are fundamentally based on one's worldview and values, not directly on conscience. "Our worldview and values are the basis of our decisions, not our conscience."
- Conscience acts as an "arbitrator to the worldview and values," checking if actions and thoughts align with this internal framework.
- If one's worldview and values are incorrect or skewed, the conscience will still function as a witness to that flawed system, potentially leading to a false sense of peace or justification for wrong actions. As Meadors notes, "Conscience goes as the values go. If you are living according to your worldview and values, you'll feel good... The problem is that we've got to be vigilant so that our worldview and values are correct."

1. **The Need for a Transformed Mind and Educated Conscience:**

- Drawing on Romans 12:1-2, Meadors underscores the importance of a "transformed mind" that aligns with biblical truth.
- Conscience "must be educated and programmed in relation to a critically developed world and life view. Your conscience is educated in the sense that your worldview and values are educated."
- The Christian's worldview and values should be rooted in "special revelation, the Bible."

1. Biblical Word Study of Conscience:

- Meadors points out that the word "conscience" (sunetesis) is predominantly a New Testament term and almost exclusively found in Pauline literature. It comes from the Greek verb "to know."
- He cautions against building a theology solely on a single word, noting that the concept of internal moral awareness exists in the Old Testament, often associated with the "heart" (understood as the mind).
- He emphasizes that "Usage determines meaning," and the context of biblical passages is crucial for understanding the role of conscience.

1. Examination of Key New Testament Passages:

- **1 Corinthians 4:4:** Paul states, "I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me." Meadors highlights that even when one's "conscience is clear" (as translated by the NIV, using the noun form of the verb), it does not guarantee righteousness. God's judgment is ultimate. This demonstrates that conscience's assessment is limited to one's own internal understanding and may not align with divine standards.
- **Romans 2:14-15:** Discussing Gentiles who do not have the law but "by nature do what the law requires," Paul notes, "They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts. Their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them..." This passage illustrates conscience as a witness to inherent moral understanding, even in the absence of explicit law. However, Meadors implies this doesn't negate the need for revealed truth.
- **1 Corinthians 10:25-30 (specifically verse 29):** Paul advises to "Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the grounds of conscience." Meadors argues that questions about right and wrong should be based on worldview and values informed by Scripture, not solely on personal conscience, especially when dealing with matters of Christian liberty and the potential stumbling of weaker believers. "You don't ask questions on the basis of conscience. You ask questions on the basis of your worldview and values because conscience is merely convicting you that you need to ask those questions."

1. Practical Implications for Decision-Making:

- When faced with decisions, individuals should engage with their worldview and values, constantly adjusting and educating them through Scripture.

- While internal voices and conscience should be acknowledged as a God-given capacity for self-critique, they are not the ultimate guide.
- In dealing with others who have differing consciences, especially those newer in their faith, tenderness and patience are required. However, persistent refusal to learn and align with biblical truth indicates a shift from weakness to belligerence.

Quotes:

- "The personal will is our relationship to Scripture, our relationship to God's teaching, and that's very personal for us, but it's not something we have to find. It's something we are to do..."
- "Many times, people think that conscience is some sort of an internal audience room for the direct communication of other beings, perhaps God."
- "Let conscience be your guide is false. Conscience is not your guide. Your worldview and your values are your guide."
- "Conscience is merely a self-reflective capacity. Conscience can only witness..."
- "Conscience is a critical inner awareness, a witness in reference to norms and values that we recognize and apply. It does not create norms and values but merely responds to our existing software..."
- "Conscience has to be educated and programmed in relation to a critically developed world and life view. This development for the Christian is rooted in special revelation, the Bible."
- "Conscience is a witness, not a judge."
- "Usage determines meaning."
- "Conscience is a God-given capacity for self-critique. It's an aspect of being in the image of God. It gives us the capacity for self-reflection."
- "My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent." (referring to 1 Corinthians 4:4)
- "...conscience also bears witness..." (Romans 2:15)
- "Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the grounds of conscience." (1 Corinthians 10:25, ESV)

- "You don't ask questions on the basis of conscience. You ask questions on the basis of worldview and values because conscience is merely convicting you that you need to ask those questions."

Conclusion:

Dr. Meadors provides a nuanced and biblically grounded understanding of conscience. He effectively dismantles common misconceptions and establishes conscience as a vital but subordinate function in Christian discernment. The emphasis on the priority of a Scripture-informed worldview and values framework offers a more robust and reliable basis for making decisions that align with God's will. The lecture encourages critical self-reflection, ongoing learning, and a commitment to aligning one's internal belief system with the teachings of the Bible.

4. Study Guide: Meadors, Knowing the Will of God, Session 11, The Role of Conscience

Understanding the Role of Conscience in Knowing God's Will

Study Guide

I. Foundations of Discerning God's Will

- Review the initial lectures on Biblical Theology for Knowing God's Will, including the orientation, the role of Scripture, and the Western Church's approach (Wesleyan Quadrilateral).
- Understand the distinction between God's sovereign will, God's moral will, and the concept of a personal, hidden will for each individual. Emphasize that our "personal will" is found in our obedience to Scripture and God's teachings.
- Grasp the process of discernment as relating issues to Scripture, considering direct texts, implications of teaching, and creative constructs, noting the increasing diversity at the level of creative constructs.

II. Addressing Subjective Issues in Discernment

- Recognize the challenge of subjective experiences and the common misconception that inner voices or feelings directly equate to God's communication.
- Understand that the pursuit of feelings like peace should not be the primary method for discerning God's will.

III. The Biblical Understanding of Conscience

- **Definition:** Conscience is a God-given critical inner awareness that acts as a witness in reference to the norms and values that we recognize and apply. It does not create these norms and values but responds to our existing worldview and values.
- **Key Function: Witness, Not Judge:** The primary role of conscience is to witness to our internal worldview and values. It does not function as a lawgiver or a judge of right and wrong in itself.
- **Conscience and Self-Reflection:** Conscience is an internal aspect of our capacity for self-reflection, allowing us to engage in an "internal values speech" based on our worldview.

- **Conscience vs. Inner Voices:** Differentiate between conscience as a self-reflective capacity and the misconception of inner voices being direct communication from God or other beings. Scripture is the ultimate authority.
- **Conscience and Worldview/Values:** Understand the interconnectedness: data is processed through our worldview and values, and conscience checks this process, acting as an arbitrator by witnessing to these established beliefs.
- **The Educated Conscience:** Recognize that conscience is "programmed" by our worldview and values. A poorly formed worldview will result in a conscience that does not accurately reflect God's will. Transformation of the mind (Romans 12:1-2) is crucial for educating the conscience through Scripture.
- **Biblical Word Study:** Note that the term "conscience" (*syneidésis*) is predominantly a New Testament term, particularly in Pauline epistles. The Old Testament uses the concept of the "heart" (mind) in related ways. Usage within context is crucial for understanding the meaning of conscience.
- **Conscience in 1 Corinthians 4:4:** Understand Paul's statement, "I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted," illustrating that a clear conscience does not guarantee righteousness; God is the ultimate judge.
- **Conscience in Romans 2:14-15:** Understand how Gentiles, without the Mosaic Law, demonstrate the work of the law written on their hearts, with their conscience bearing witness, either accusing or excusing them based on their internal norms.

IV. Characteristics of Conscience in Christian Decision-Making

- **God-Given Capacity for Self-Critique:** Conscience is a divine gift enabling self-reflection and evaluation in light of our beliefs.
- **Witness to Worldview and Values:** Reinforce the understanding that conscience monitors our thinking and actions in relation to the worldview and values we hold.
- **Monitor of Thinking:** Conscience acts like a "red and green light," indicating alignment or conflict with our established worldview and values in the process of decision-making.
- **Implications for "Let Your Conscience Be Your Guide":** This statement is flawed because conscience merely reflects our existing (potentially incorrect) worldview and values. Our guide should be a biblically informed worldview.

- **1 Corinthians 10 and Meat Offered to Idols:** Understand Paul's guidance not to ask questions based on conscience in this specific context. The issue was the weaker brothers' potentially untransformed worldview. Decisions should be based on a biblically sound worldview, and conscience will follow.
- **Dealing with Differing Conscience:** Exercise tenderness with those whose consciences differ due to varying levels of transformation. However, persistent refusal to learn and align with Scripture indicates belligerence, requiring a different approach than gentle guidance.

V. Conscience and Decision-Making

- In all decisions, from personal to significant ethical issues, prioritize understanding and aligning with a biblically informed worldview and values rather than solely relying on inner feelings or a sense of peace stemming from the conscience.
- Continuously educate and adjust your worldview and values through Scripture to inform your conscience accurately.

Quiz: The Role of Conscience

Answer the following questions in 2-3 sentences each.

1. According to Dr. Meadors, where is our "personal will" found, and what are the verbs associated with it in the Bible?
2. What is the fundamental role of conscience in relation to our worldview and values, according to the lecture?
3. Explain why the statement "Let conscience be your guide" is considered false based on the presented material.
4. In 1 Corinthians 4:4, what does Paul's statement about his awareness (or lack thereof) reveal about the limitations of conscience?
5. How does Romans 2:14-15 illustrate the function of conscience in individuals who do not have the Mosaic Law?
6. What does it mean for the conscience to be a "witness," and what is it witnessing to?
7. Why is it important to have a "transformed mind" (Romans 12:1-2) in relation to the proper functioning of conscience?

8. In the context of 1 Corinthians 10 and eating meat offered to idols, why does Paul advise against raising questions "on the grounds of conscience"?
9. How does Dr. Meadors describe the conscience's role as a "monitor" in decision-making?
10. What should ultimately guide our decisions, according to the lecture, and why is this more reliable than conscience alone?

Answer Key

1. Our "personal will" is found in our relationship to Scripture and God's teaching. The verbs associated with it in the Bible are "to do," not "to find," emphasizing obedience and action.
2. The fundamental role of conscience is to act as a witness to our internal worldview and values. It reflects whether our thoughts and actions align with the norms and values we have adopted.
3. "Let conscience be your guide" is false because conscience is not a lawgiver or judge but merely a witness to our existing worldview and values, which may be incorrect or poorly formed.
4. Paul's statement shows that while his conscience was clear, this did not automatically make him innocent; God is the ultimate judge, highlighting that conscience's assessment is limited to our own awareness.
5. Romans 2:14-15 shows that Gentiles, guided by their internal understanding of right and wrong, demonstrate the work of the law, with their conscience serving as a witness that either accuses or excuses their actions.
6. For the conscience to be a "witness" means it observes and attests to the alignment or misalignment of our thoughts and actions with the worldview and values we recognize and apply.
7. A "transformed mind" is crucial because it involves renewing our worldview and values according to Scripture. This education of our beliefs then shapes our conscience to be a more accurate witness to God's will.
8. Paul advises against raising questions based on conscience in this context because the issue stemmed from a potentially untransformed worldview. The focus should be on understanding the truth (idols are nothing) through a correct worldview, and conscience will eventually align.

9. Dr. Meadors describes conscience as a monitor of our thinking, acting like a "red and green light" that signals whether our decisions align with our established worldview and values, without providing the reasons for the decisions themselves.
10. Our biblically informed worldview and values should ultimately guide our decisions because they are the foundation upon which our understanding of right and wrong is built, whereas conscience merely reflects this foundation, regardless of its accuracy.

Essay Format Questions

1. Discuss the biblical concept of conscience as presented by Dr. Meadors, emphasizing its function as a witness rather than a judge. How does this understanding challenge common perceptions of conscience?
2. Explain the relationship between worldview, values, and conscience in the process of Christian decision-making. How does a transformed mind (Romans 12:1-2) impact this relationship and the ability to discern God's will?
3. Analyze the implications of Dr. Meadors' interpretation of 1 Corinthians 10 regarding the role of conscience in situations where believers have differing convictions. How should Christians navigate such situations while upholding biblical truth?
4. Critically evaluate the statement "Let your conscience be your guide" in light of the lecture material. What are the dangers of solely relying on conscience for moral and spiritual direction, and what should be the primary guide instead?
5. Explore the significance of the New Testament emphasis on conscience, particularly in Pauline literature. How does this concept relate to the Old Testament understanding of the "heart," and what does this reveal about God's design for human moral awareness?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Conscience (Syneidésis):** A God-given critical inner awareness that acts as a witness in reference to the norms and values that we recognize and apply. It is primarily a New Testament concept.
- **Worldview:** A fundamental set of beliefs and assumptions about reality, shaping how we perceive and interpret the world around us.
- **Values:** Principles or standards that guide our behavior and decision-making, reflecting what we consider important or right.
- **Witness:** The primary function of conscience, to observe and attest to the alignment or misalignment of our thoughts and actions with our worldview and values.
- **Discernment:** The process of making wise judgments and decisions, particularly in understanding and following God's will. It involves relating issues to Scripture and applying biblical principles.
- **Transformed Mind (Renewal of the Mind):** A process described in Romans 12:2, where our thinking is radically changed and aligned with God's will through the influence of the Holy Spirit and the study of Scripture.
- **Wesleyan Quadrilateral:** A method of theological reflection that uses four sources: Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience.
- **Subjective Issues:** Personal feelings, inner voices, and individual interpretations that can influence our understanding of God's will. The lecture emphasizes the need to evaluate these in light of objective truth in Scripture.
- **Moral Will of God:** God's revealed commands and principles for righteous living, found in Scripture.
- **Sovereign Will of God:** God's ultimate plan and control over all things. The lecture distinguishes this from the idea of finding a specific, hidden "personal will."

5. FAQs on Meadors, Knowing the Will of God, Session 11, The Role of Conscience, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions: Understanding the Role of Conscience in Knowing God's Will

1. According to the lecture, what is the primary basis for discerning God's will in our lives?

The primary basis for discerning God's will is Scripture and our relationship to God's teaching. It's not about finding a specific "personal will" but rather about actively living in accordance with biblical principles. Our worldview and values, shaped by Scripture, serve as the guide for our decisions.

2. What are some common misconceptions about conscience that Dr. Meadors addresses?

Common misconceptions include the idea that conscience is a direct line of communication from God (or even the devil), an internal audience room for other beings, or the ultimate guide for our actions. People often mistakenly believe that a feeling of peace or a clear conscience automatically validates a decision.

3. How does Dr. Meadors define conscience from a biblical perspective?

Dr. Meadors defines conscience as a critical inner awareness, a witness in reference to the norms and values that we recognize and apply. It's a God-given capacity for self-reflection, our internal voice reasoning with ourselves based on our worldview and values. It does not create norms or values but merely responds to our existing "software" – our established beliefs and principles.

4. Dr. Meadors states, "Let conscience be your guide" is false. Why does he say this, and what should be our guide instead?

He states this is false because conscience is not a lawgiver or a judge but a witness to our existing worldview and values. If our worldview and values are incorrect, our conscience may still be clear even when we are wrong, as seen in Paul's example before his conversion. Our guide should be our worldview and values, which themselves must be continually evaluated and corrected by Scripture.

5. What is the key role of conscience according to the lecture, and how does it function in relation to our worldview and values?

The key role of conscience is to act as a witness to our worldview and values. It monitors our thinking and alerts us when there is a conflict between our actions or thoughts and the principles we have internalized. It's like a red or green light, indicating whether we are aligning with the worldview and values we recognize and apply.

6. How does Dr. Meadors explain the passage in 1 Corinthians 4:4 regarding Paul's statement about his conscience being clear?

Dr. Meadors highlights that while Paul says, "I am not aware of anything against myself," he immediately follows it with "but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me." This illustrates that a clear conscience doesn't automatically equate to being right in God's eyes. Our conscience only reflects our self-assessment based on our current understanding and values, which may still be flawed.

7. What is the significance of 1 Corinthians 10:25 regarding eating meat sold in the market in relation to conscience?

This passage illustrates that we should not base our questioning of practices (like eating meat potentially offered to idols) solely on the grounds of conscience, especially when our understanding is immature or overly scrupulous. The issue lies in the underlying worldview and values regarding idols and the nature of food. Conscience might raise a concern, prompting us to examine our worldview and values through Scripture.

8. How should a Christian approach decision-making, considering the role of conscience as explained in the lecture?

Christians should approach decision-making by first examining and aligning their worldview and values with Scripture. While paying attention to the inner witness of conscience, they should recognize that it is not the ultimate authority. Instead, they should use Scripture to educate and transform their minds, allowing their biblically informed worldview and values to guide their decisions. This ongoing process of learning and transformation is essential for aligning with God's will.