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"Let Your Conscience Be Your Guide"
The Problem with Jiminy Cricket Ethics

By Tal Davis

*When you get in trouble and you don't know right
from wrong,
Give a little whistle!
Give a little whistle!
When you meet temptation and the urge is very
strong,
Give a little whistle!
Give a little whistle!
Not just a little squeak,
Pucker up and blow.
And if your whistle's weak, yell "Jiminy Cricket!"
Take the straight and narrow path
And if you start to slide,
Give a little whistle!
Give a little whistle!
And always let your conscience be your guide!
And always let your conscience be your guide!*
Songwriters: Ned Washington / Leigh Harline

Know that song? Sure you do. It is titled "Give a Little Whistle!" It's the tune Jiminy Cricket taught Pinocchio in Walt Disney's classic animated movie of that name. Jiminy sat on Pinocchio's shoulder the way the beautiful Blue Fairy told him to do. So, when the wooden marionette boy faced a temptation to do wrong the umbrella carrying cricket would whisper in his ear, tell him to whistle, and to "always let your conscience be your guide!" (hear it here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DOZzNOKcEgM>)

That sounds like pretty good advice. I am sure that Disney and the writers of the 1940 movie wanted to use it as an opportunity to teach their

young viewers a valuable moral lesson. Remember, when Pinocchio did not do what his conscience (Jiminy Cricket) said, he began to turn into a donkey. It was not until he started obeying that he turned into a "real boy."

Even today, most people rely on their consciences to help them determine the right or wrong in a given situation. The main presupposition is that we can determine what is good or bad by relying on our feelings. That ethical system, which I call "Jiminy Cricket Ethics," is strongly advocated by modern naturalistic and postmodern ethicists. It basically asserts that we can and should do whatever our feelings say is right.

With all due respect to the Blue Fairy, Jiminy Cricket, and Walt Disney, from a Christian Worldview perspective, that ethical system has at least two major flaws.

First, as history and psychology have clearly shown, people's consciences are easily manipulated and altered. Yes, the Apostle Paul did tell the Romans that everyone has an ingrained consciousness of God and possesses some kind of conscience:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of people who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, that is, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, being understood by what has been made, so that they are without excuse. (Romans 1:18-20 NASB).

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...In that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience testifying and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them. (Romans 2:15 NASB)

However Paul reminded them that peoples' inward moral compasses can decay and be seared by false concepts about God and His will.

For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their reasonings, and their senseless hearts (consciences) were darkened (Romans 1:21 NASB).

But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron (1 Timothy 4:1-2 NASB).

He likewise told Titus,

To the pure, everything is pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; in fact, both their mind and conscience are defiled (Titus 1:15 NASB).

Recent world history provided ample evidence for this fact. Nazis in Germany, communists in the USSR and in China, and other murderous despots in the 20th century, had no qualms about killing literally tens of millions of innocent lives. The most recent examples are Russia (in Ukraine), North Korea, and modern China. The leaders of those nations, and their brainwashed followers, have their consciences seared by repeated evil actions or have convinced themselves that whatever they do in the name of their ideologies is always right. For them, the ends justify the means.

The point is, people's consciences are not reliable bases for deciding what is right or wrong. In fact, some people, sociopaths and psychopaths, have no consciences at all. They only do what they want to do or can get away with. They simply have no cricket sitting on their shoulders to listen to.

The other problem with this "conscience navigated" morality is that it has no absolute basis for knowing right and wrong. It is based only on what one feels or what societal mores are dominant at any certain time and place. This ethical perspective is relative and is constantly changing with the consensus in the society. Thus, people's consciences change with the times. What they believe is wrong now will be different in the future.

One modern illustration in America is the issue of same-sex marriage. In 2004 only 31% of American adults favored legalizing same-sex marriages. However, on June 26, 2015, the Supreme Court of the United States, in a 5-4 ruling in the *Obergefell v. Hodges* case, declared any and all laws not recognizing same-sex marriage, passed at any governmental level, are unconstitutional. Consequently, by 2017, the percentage in favor of same-sex marriages had doubled to 62%. In 2022 it rose to over 70%. This is a perfect example of how peoples' moral attitudes can be quickly changed by the influences of the mass media and the malleable standards of the civil law.

So we must ask, what is the right basis for our moral decisions? The Christian worldview maintains that ethical determinations are grounded in the character of God Himself. They must be founded on the unchanging divine principles revealed by Him in the Word of God – the Bible. The Scriptures provide clear and absolute precepts for what is right and wrong, regardless of the situation or the mores and laws of the secular society. The Law of Moses, the Ten Commandments, and

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the moral writings of the New Testament apostles (Paul, Peter, John, etc.) are, for the believer in Christ, the bases for all ethical choices.

Of course, the ultimate guide for moral practices is the Lord Jesus Himself. His teachings, such as the Sermon on the Mount, the Beatitudes, His parables, and His various messages to His disciples, are the immutable words of God Himself. Jesus' prime directive is that God's love is the key to right behavior. Remember what He said are the two greatest commandments:

"YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.' This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' Upon these two commandments hang the whole Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22:36-40 NASB)

Finally, we must not forget that our ability to do what is right and good is impossible on our own. We must rely on the power of the Holy Spirit living in us to empower us to avoid sin and to do good.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness (Galatians 5:22 NASB).

All that being said, we know we cannot live a perfectly moral and ethical life. We are sinners. That is why we must trust in the

grace of God for maintaining our relationship with Him. When we fail to live up to God's standards we should admit it to Him and to ourselves and seek His forgiveness. As the Apostle John states:

If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous, so that He will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us (1 John 1:8-10 NASB).

So, in summary, no one has a Jiminy Cricket sitting on his or her shoulder to whistle up when they need moral guidance. And our conscience is not really adequate. Only God, His Word, and His Holy Spirit can truly provide our righteous ethical and moral compass.

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