

1Tim 24-05-05a

Good morning. Welcome to the Sunday morning services here at Grace & Truth Bible Church. I say services because we have many services that go on during our fellowship.

We have service in music, we have service in the Word, we have service in fellowship and in encouragement, prayer, and mutual upbuilding of many different kinds. So it is a privilege to be with you this and to continue our study in 1 Timothy. We are now in chapter 4 and we are going to be looking this morning at something that is extremely pertinent, extremely essential for us to understand and that is the conscience, our conscience.

So if you want to put a title at the top of your notes or be watching for space in the margin of your Bible here beside 1 Timothy 4, that is going to be our subject. It is so important. You see outworkings of it all around us.

Let's ask God's blessing on our fellowship and study and we'll begin. Father, we thank you for another opportunity to restore and refresh our souls at the oasis of your Word, to receive the immediate and effective ministry of your Holy Spirit, to implant the Word in our souls and make it available for fruitful reflection and application. We pray that our time together will be a blessing to each one who joins us now or in the future, that your Holy Spirit will bring these principles and truths to our minds when it counts so that we can redeem the time, reflect the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ as we represent Him on this earth and live our lives in a way that is pleasing in your sight.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Our passage is ripped from the headlines, as they like to say.

The Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons. We know that rather than describing the world at large, you could talk about the imagination of men's hearts being only evil all the day in the lead up to the flood, Noah's generation. This is not that.

What group does this description pertain to? If one is departing from the faith, he has to start out in the faith. If he is heeding deceiving spirits and doctrines or teachings of demons, this is didaskalia. Didaskalos, when you say pastor and teacher, poimankai didaskalos.

This is the teaching side. So these are presentations that purport to be truth. I'm going to teach you how it is.

This is going to be helpful to you. But the source of these teachings is demonic. It is from the rulers of the darkness of this age.

It is satanic ultimately. And yet they are heeding, being seduced and deceived by the

fallen one and his minions. What a scary thing.

Now let me just ask you, we're believers in the Lord Jesus. We rub elbows with dozens, if not hundreds of other people who claim Christian faith, go to church, have Bibles on the tables and verses on the walls, right? Hymnals on the piano. If you went to any believer, casual or intimate relationship, and said, so do you heed seducing spirits and doctrines of demons? You kind of get up in the morning looking for that.

How many of them would say, oh yes, I love these deceptions. They just sound so much better than reality. In other words, how many believers realize or feel that or believe in any sense that they are deceived and that their faith practice is sponsored by, encouraged by and in line with demonic influence? How many? Out of a hundred, how many would there be? You know the answer to this.

Zero. Nobody claiming any kind of Christian faith whatsoever that ever cracks a Bible, that ever quotes a verse, that ever sends up a prayer, thinks that they are living their life in the light of seduction, deception and perversion. Nobody thinks that.

Yet Paul says in latter times, there's going to be great hordes of believers who will so do. And that time is now. There are swaths, there are ship loads of believers who are deceived, who have been seduced, who believe something to be true and it's not.

How does this happen? Am I one of them? How can I check? How can I avoid this tragic outcome to depart from the faith and not even know I've left? Because the result of this deception and departure is you wind up parroting and communicating and repeating the lies that caused you to leave in the first place. Speaking lies, verse two, in hypocrisy. It is hypocritical.

You remember the source of that word, hupokrites? This is to speak from behind a mask. There is one thing by way of appearance, an outward show, and there's something else going on in the heart. Speaking lies in hypocrisy.

Now you can be a hypocrite and not be aware that you're a hypocrite. It's one thing to put on a show for people and you know in your heart that that's not how you feel. That's not what you think.

It's not the proper way to behave. But there are others who are unconscious hypocrites and that's what's being spoken of here. These people don't know how hypocritical they are.

Look at your news over the last few days and weeks at people who are supporting causes in rank, blatant, obvious hypocrisy and they're unaware. They don't wake up in the morning, look in the mirror and say, I wonder if I can push my hypocrisy a little bit further today. I wonder if I can be a bit more blatant and a little bit more two-faced in this.

They're unconscious and unaware of the hypocrisy that their life and their words represent. Speaking lies in hypocrisy. Why is this? This comes to our topic for the morning.

Having their own conscience seared. This is the idea you get from an aorist participle. Conscience having been.

This is a condition that precedes the main activity. Before they departed from the faith, before they gave heed to seducing spirits, before they embraced doctrines of demons, before they started speaking lies in hypocrisy, having had their conscience. This is a pre-existing condition and this is what led to all of these other things.

Conscience seared with a hot iron. Conscience seared. What does the word of God have to say about conscience? I'll give you a quick Greek word here.

The word translated conscience throughout the New Testament is suneidasis. S-U-N-E-I-D-E-S-I-S. Suneidasis.

You recognize that prefix sune means with. It comes across in English. They change the U to a Y. And so you have sympathy to feel with.

Pathos is sympathy feeling, sympathy, feel with. You have symphony to make sounds together with other instruments. But the idesis part is to think.

So this is what you think with. Well, what is the testimony of the word of God with regard to the conscience? The suneidasis. Eido, the second part of this means to know or to see.

So this is what you know with. This is what you see with. This is how you come to think that something is right or wrong.

Moral conscience. Our good and bad detector, our truth and lie detector. So eido, E-I-D-O, to know or to see and sune, with.

So this is your right detector. This is the Bible's name for it in Greek. Well, let's just trace what the word of God has to say, because there are some 30 occurrences of this in the New Testament.

And we're going to quickly summarize them. The first of them occurs in Acts chapter 23 verse 1, to which please turn. Acts 23 verse 1. We're going to see two or three references right in this vicinity.

But the first one is here in Acts 23. Paul is looking earnestly at the council. What is the council? You know this.

This is the Sanhedrin. This is the council of Jewish elders that decides as a group. They're sort of a national conscience, right? They adjudicate.

They weigh evidence and take testimony and draw conclusions and render judgments. That's what our conscience does. So the council is the conscience of Israel.

Paul, looking earnestly at the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience, before God until this day. Does this not just rock you back on your heels? Does it smack your hat in the creek? Look at what Paul just said. Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.

Let me read you a couple of quick passages. Acts chapter 8 verse 1. Saul was consenting to Stephen's death. Remember that in chapter 7, the martyrdom of Stephen? Saul was consenting to his death.

At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem. They were scattered throughout the region of Judea and Samaria, except for the apostles. Acts 8.3, as for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.

Acts chapter 9 verses 1 and 2. Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. 1 Corinthians 15 verse 9. I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. Philippians 3, 5 and 6. I am a Hebrew of the Hebrews, circumcised the eighth day, stock of Israel, tribe of Benjamin, concerning the law of Pharisee, concerning zeal, persecuting the church, concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

Acts 22 verses 3 and 4, the preceding chapter to this. I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our father's law, zealous toward God as you all are today. I persecuted this way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women.

Acts 26 verses 9 through 11. I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests.

And when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme. And being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities.

All of this took place before Paul is talking to the council in Acts chapter 23 verse 1. Paul, looking earnestly, intently at the Sanhedrin, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day. What do you think? Paul said, I have lived in the light of what my conscience tells me is good until this day. What's the problem?

Paul's good conscience told him that Jesus of Nazareth was a heretic, and his followers were blasphemers, and needed to be persecuted, oppressed, forced to blaspheme, locked up in prison, and sentenced to death.

And he voted in favor of capital punishment for them for the crime of believing in the Lord Jesus. But Paul says, Men and brethren, I have obeyed a good conscience. I have done what my conscience told me was good right up until today.

Everything I have done, I have done according to a good conscience. So, what do you think? Did Paul believe in his heart of hearts that he was right, consenting to Stephen's stoning? All of these other acts that we have just detailed as a zealous Pharisee, did he believe he was right? Did he believe he was serving God? Was he committed to the point of being willing to travel to far off cities and find and root out this cancer in Judaism and extinguish it? How right do you think Paul felt he was? Can you think of any greater sense of righteousness than this? He exerted himself, he spent himself in this cause, he put himself out. This wasn't an easy support for some random issue.

He was committed, wasn't he? I mean, he's invested, he's pouring his energy into it. So, what's the first thing we can say about conscience? Conscience can tell you that you are right, and that you are serving God, and you are defending the faith, and you are representing God on this earth, and you can be completely and entirely and utterly in the service of evil. As a believer, claiming that what you are doing is in the name of God for the benefit of God's people, and be impossibly wrong.

Paul says, all that stuff I've done right up to this day, I did it in a good conscience. This should scare the socks off of all of us, because what does it tell us? You can't trust that your feeling of rightness, your sense of rightness means that you are in the right. Anybody that's had an argument with a spouse or another loved one, and the stress level starts rising, there's heat, there's unkindness on each side, the thing accelerates, and there starts being more heat than light, and afterward, when you think back, why did I say that? Why did I go down that road? Why did I let that go as far as it did? Feelings have been hurt, things have been said.

If I could go back and blot out that conversation and all memory of it, I would do it in a heartbeat. But think about how you felt in the moment. Why did you say what you said? Why did you defend the point that you defended? Why did you push? Why did you have a hard edge and insensitivity to the other person? Why? In that moment, I'm right, and this right cause needs defending, and I'll say what I have to say, I'll push where I have to push, I'll insult where I have to insult, because I'm right, and this other person doesn't get the rightness of my point of view.

So whatever I have to do to get this across, that's what I'm going to do. And in the moment, our right detector is pegged on 100. I can't believe the injustice.

I can't believe you don't see how right I am and how wrong you are. We should be constantly suspicious, constantly questioning. Anytime this thing starts giving us a sense of righteous indignation, well, doesn't the Bible say, be angry and sin not? Right, it's the sin not part that's the problem.

Being angry is easy, and righteous indignation is dangerous if it's self-righteous, if it's relative righteousness, if it's hypocritical righteousness. Paul, in his commitment living in the light of a good conscience right up until this day, has imprisoned and killed believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, and it is a wound that he never gets over. Look at how many times he refers to it in later life.

I am the least. I am unworthy to be called an apostle. I persecuted the church, but he didn't do it twisting the corners of his mustache and trying to figure out what evil he could perpetrate in the day.

He did it with a good conscience. Your conscience saying you're right is not enough. We need a conscience that is plugged into absolute standards of righteousness, not my sense of righteousness.

So, we need to find out how the Word of God tells us to fix this problem. Turn the page over to Acts chapter 24, verse 16. Acts 24 16.

This is Paul before Felix. He has talked about his conscience in front of Sanhedrin. Now he is before Felix, the governor.

So, the governor nods to him up in verse 10. Paul says, Inasmuch as I know you have been for many years a judge of this nation, I do cheerfully answer for myself, so that you may ascertain that it is no more than twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem to worship, and they neither found me in the temple disputing with anyone, nor inciting the crowd, either in the synagogues or in the city. This is the charge that was brought earlier in the chapter.

This man is inciting violence and disruption and confusion. He says, I didn't do it at the temple. I didn't incite the crowd in the synagogues or in the city.

Verse 13. Nor can they prove the things of which they now accuse me. But this I confess to you, that according to the way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets.

I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both the righteous and the wicked, the just and the unjust. I hope in God, my hope is the resurrection, that there will be judgment on the wicked, and there will be reward and opportunity and blessing for the righteous. This being so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men.

A soon ideasis in the light of this hope of the resurrection, in the light of my confident expectation that God is going to raise the righteous and the wicked, and with that, of course, implicit in it is a judgment. I myself always strive to have a non-offensive conscience, a blameless conscience. So what's our second point? First is you can't trust your conscience in and of itself.

The second point is to have a blameless conscience requires effort. It is not a default. It's not automatic.

It doesn't happen reflexively. Paul says, I myself always work. I strive for this conscience.

Such an interesting turn of phrase. When Paul says this, this word for striving is asko, which is to train and to practice, to exercise. So this isn't agonizami, I just knock myself out.

This is I practice. I check the thing. I work at it.

I train my conscience. I exercise my conscience. So in order to have a conscience that does not offend, it takes attention.

If you want to be able to run well, you've got to do some running. If you want to be able to sew well, you've got to do some sewing. If you want to participate in a sport, it takes practice.

Anything worth doing, playing a musical instrument, takes practice. This is what asko means. To practice, to train, to refine your skill.

This is the apostle Paul, and this is what it takes for him to have an inoffensive conscience. The word without offense is operoskupon, which means not causing harm without fault, free from hurt, free from harm. It isn't deficient.

It doesn't lack. If your conscience is hurt, if your conscience is wounded, what happens if you want to run and you've turned your ankle? What happens if you want to play golf and you've torn your rotator cuff? If you're not fully capable, you can't take advantage of your training and do well. I train, I strive so that I don't hurt myself or others or offend God in the exercise of my conscience.

Well, the word of God is also going to tell us how this is done. It's one thing to say it. It's something else to do it.

Famously, and we've visited this passage many times, flip over a few pages to Romans chapter 2. We're looking at verse 15 of Romans 2. You remember Romans chapter 1, the problem of people who suppress the truth of God in unrighteousness. And Paul says in verse 5, in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart, you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of

God. This is the resurrection of the just and the unjust that Paul spoke of in Acts.

So what is an impediment to having a good conscience, a non-hurtful, non-hypocritical good conscience? Well, you can't have a hard and impenitent heart. Impenitent means unapologetic. I don't repent.

I don't realize that I've made mistakes and I'm not interested in doing better. Repentance is recognition of fault and availing ourselves of the means of doing better. Your hardness and impenitent heart, you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God who will render to each one according to his deeds.

Our deeds are curated. They are determined by our conscience. When our conscience says don't do a thing, we typically don't do it.

When our conscience says this is the right thing, that's what we endeavor to do. Render to each one according to his deeds. To those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life.

But to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth but obey unrighteousness. Now, why would somebody obey unrighteousness? They wake up and say, I don't want to do the righteous thing. I want to do the unrighteous thing.

I want to find a way to be evil and unkind and I want to displease God. I don't want to please him. How would you end up being self-seeking, not obeying the truth and obeying unrighteousness? It's because your conscience is busted.

Your conscience tells you, oh, this is a good choice. This is what I want to do. The underlying cause of this syndrome, those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, is their conscience is not plugged into the truth.

Their conscience is resting on faulty assumptions. What does Paul say in our passage, seducing spirits and doctrines of demons. I will read a different narrative into my conscience and my conscience will guide me according to this false and deceptive and seductive view, perspective, standard.

And as a result, I will be self-seeking. What is the essence of neighbor love, the essence of the law? Love the Lord your God, love your neighbor. Do unto others as you would have others do unto you.

This is not seeking your self-interest. 1 Corinthians 13, love does not seek its own, is not puffed up, isn't self-centered, self-gratifying. To those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, their conscience tells them they're doing great and they're not, just like Paul.

And what is going to be the result of the judgment, indignation, wrath, tribulation, and anguish on every soul of man who does evil of the Jew first and also of the Greek. There will be glory, honor, peace to everyone who works what is good to the Jew first and also to the Greek. But in order to do what is good and to patiently continue in well-doing, you have to have a conscience that rightly identifies what is good and what is evil.

Paul's was broken. He said, I lived in the light of a conscience which told me I was good when I persecuted the church. Verse 12, as many as have sinned outside the law will perish outside the law.

As many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law. For it is not the hearers of the law that are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified. It is not enough to hear and agree with the law.

It has to condition the conscience. Doing, you know, hearers of the word is not enough. Hearers of the law, hearers of the word, James repeats this point, be doers of the word, doers of the law and not hearers only.

The Gentiles who do not have the law by nature do the things in the law. These, although they do not have the law, are a law to themselves who show the work of the law written in their hearts. The standards of the law, the righteousness of the law, the neighbor love and respect for God in the law, their conscience bears them witness.

There's soon ideas in verse 15. The standards of the law are in their heart and their thoughts either accuse or excuse them. And then Paul returns.

There is coming a day when the objective judgment of God will be applied. The day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel, Paul's gospel, as we have seen over these past many weeks. So in order to have a faulty conscience, one has to override the law written in his heart.

In our heart, we start with, and this is what Paul talks about. They show the work of the law written in their hearts. These Gentiles who do not have the law, there is a built-in conscience.

Even secular, unreligious, unbelieving people have a sense that it's wrong to take the life of someone else for selfish purposes. It is wrong to be intentionally cruel, to take what doesn't belong to you. And people have to crush that innate conscience to pursue self-gratification, not obeying the truth.

So all of this has to do with conscience. But to assume that the law written in my heart is always going to prevail and that I'm never going to extinguish that light. I'm never going to overrule that inbuilt sense, that law written in my heart.

The evidence of human history is clear that this is one of the first things people do. If you

are interested in pleasing yourself, you crush your conscience. You set it aside.

You push it away. Well, we have much more to see on this subject, but it is obvious to us that to cultivate a pure conscience, an unbroken conscience, a conscience that will reliably guide us into truth and into light, into righteousness, is essential. And just consulting it and having it return like the magic eight ball, yes, go ahead and do this, is the path to destruction.

The thing cannot be trusted unless it has been properly cleansed and conditioned and trained. Paul says, I work to train my conscience. And that's what we'll do.

We'll see the word of God telling us how to do this when we come back from the break.