

1Tim 24-05-05b

We're ready to continue our examination of conscience. Everyone should examine his conscience. We're examining what the word of God has to say about the conscience.

And we are looking at each instance of this. Some of them will be quicker than others because they make the same point, but we have seen the passages in Acts chapter 23, verse one, 24, verse 16, Romans chapter two, verse 15. And we're ready now to move forward to Romans chapter nine, verse one.

What have we observed so far? What do we know about the conscience so far? First of all, you can't trust its testimony without scrutiny because it will tell us we're right when we're not. Paul said, my conscience was good when I persecuted Christians. So the thing can't be trusted in and of itself.

We know that Paul has to strive, has to train, discipline, practice with his conscience for it to be reliable and for it to be good and clear. We know that there is a default conscience that is imprinted in our heart at birth. Gentiles have it, Jews have it, and even Gentiles who have not been exposed to the standards of the law have those standards written in their heart by default.

Thus, people can be held accountable for sin even if they've never read a Bible because God has given them an awareness of sin. What is the function of the law? What does Paul say in this same book of Romans? By the law comes the knowledge of sin. And our conscience either accuses us or excuses us according to Romans chapter two.

The problem is if you've got a warped conscience, a broken conscience, an untrained conscience, an ignorant conscience, your conscience can excuse you and tell you you're doing right when you're not. But there is a default basic sense of right and wrong that is written into the human heart by God. And this makes us accountable because in order to run roughshod over one's conscience, you have to overwrite or remove or suppress the innate knowledge of right and wrong with which we are born.

And it's easily done. We can reason our way out of it. We can be persuaded out of it.

We can be seduced and deceived by doctrines of demons and so on. Romans chapter nine, verse one. Paul alludes to his conscience as he begins to talk about his brethren.

I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying. My conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart, wishing myself a curse from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen, according to the flesh. Romans nine is a study in itself.

Entire books have been written. Dead seas of ink have been spilled. What we're interested in is the detail given to us in verse one here.

I tell the truth, how? How do I tell the truth? In Christ. I tell the truth in Christ. This is not a doctrine of demons.

This is not a rationalization. It's not a deception. This is truth in Christ.

Jesus in John 14 tells his disciples in the upper room, I am the way, I am the truth. So Paul can affirm the truth of his claims about his affinity for the Jews and his sorrow over their current status in Christ. This is a truth in Christ.

This is a different conscience than was operating in his days of persecution of the church. I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying. My conscience is bearing me witness, how? In the Holy Spirit.

Remember the gospel that Paul reveals, the unique sevenfold revelation of gospel by Paul. One of those points was the indwelling of Christ. And in that context, we saw that we start with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and we cultivate the filling of the Spirit.

And if we have the words of the Lord Jesus and keep them, he will come to us and make his home with us. Revelation 3.20, he stands at the door and knocks. If we hear the sound and open the door, which is a choice, he will come in and fellowship, commune, communicate with us.

Notice that in this verse related to conscience, you have two of the three members of the Trinity mentioned. It's a truth in Christ. It is a conscience operating in the Holy Spirit.

So as a part of this training, part of this conditioning, as a part of building reflexes in the conscience, we cultivate the presence of Christ, the truth of Christ, and the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. We have a bunch of related truths to this. We know that if I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.

The Holy Spirit can't speak to me except to convict me of sin. He's down to a single note song. When I am, they used to call this being out of fellowship.

That is only one of a multitude of problems when we are no longer walking by means of the Spirit, when we are no longer walking in the not light, we're no longer on the narrow road, aiming at the straight gate. Fellowship is one loss, but not the only one. Another loss is dysfunctional conscience.

I long ago abandoned the notion of in fellowship, out of fellowship as a descriptor for our spiritual problem. When we go our own way, we are not asking and seeking and knocking. We are not prayerfully pursuing.

We are not cultivating the presence and power of God in our lives. Fellowship is only one brick in a large wall that operationally and functionally separates us from God and from his purpose and from his blessing. It's not just fellowship.

And one of the primary effects of no longer being in the light and no longer having the beneficial guidance and ministry of the Holy Spirit is a dysfunctional conscience. We no longer have a valid, Spirit-filled, truth-guided conscience. And that thing will tell us we're right when we're not.

And it'll tell us other people are wrong when they're not. Conscience applies to more than just me, myself, and I. I also apply my right and wrong detector to other people. And I can look at someone and say, well, that's just wrong.

He's wrong. She's wrong. They are wrong.

That viewpoint is wrong. That position is wrong. That perspective is wrong.

That understanding. We have a wonderful Bible study, an extended one every Saturday. And one of the terms that came up was theopolitical misunderstandings that your theology as it applies to politics.

And this is a function of conscience. When somebody says, we're going to adopt this policy, we're going to put in this piece of legislation, we're gonna execute this executive order. Do I agree or do I disagree? This is a function of conscience.

Without an environment of truth and without the presence, light, and power of the Holy Spirit, those are not trustworthy judgments. So when Paul looks at his fellow Jews, when he looks at the Pharisees, the elite group of Jews, of which he has been a part for so many years, he has to ensure that his conscience doesn't induce him to lie and to misrepresent and to falsely judge, falsely accuse, falsely evaluate. I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying.

What is the fundamental nature in 1 Timothy 4, one and two? Deception, falsehood, speaking lies, deceiving, that which is not truth. Speak the truth in Christ, not lying. Conscience bearing me witness in, by, with, by means of the Holy Spirit.

I can trust my conscience when I have checked that it is securely founded on truth, the truth of the word of God, not the word of man, and it is enabled and empowered and guided, illuminated and energized by the Holy Spirit. How do I know that's taking place? What am I seeking? What am I asking for? Am I operating in humility? Am I prayerfully appealing to the throne of grace for rebuke and correction and instruction in righteousness? Am I reflecting on the word of God on a daily basis and several times in a day? Am I going to the Lord in prayer evening and morning and at noon? If I can't say those things about myself, guess what? I can't trust my conscience. I can't trust it.

It'll tell me I'm right when I'm not. It'll tell me other people are right when they're not. And it'll tell me right people are wrong.

I will end up speaking evil if someone else is good because I am deceived. I am fooled. I

tell the truth in Christ.

I am not lying. My conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit. And sometimes that conscience looking at others leads to sorrow.

What does Paul see when he looks at his fellow Israelites? I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. This doesn't mean that Paul has lost the fruit of the spirit of joy and peace, but when he visits that topic, it is a sorrowful topic. When he thinks about that situation and that condition, the response is sorrow.

And this is sorrow stemming from his conscience because he knows what's right and he knows what's wrong. And when he looks at his fellow Israelites, they are children of Abraham, but they're not. They are physically connected, but not spiritually connected.

And this is how he introduces his argument in Romans chapter nine. But we're interested here in the testimony of conscience. Flip a few pages over now.

What else do we now know about the conscience? It's got to be grounded in truth and guided and energized by the Holy Spirit. So if I want to be sure I'm not misled by my conscience, not only do I need to exercise it and train it, I need to think about the fact that I have a conscience and that in and of itself, it can't be trusted, but what properly conditions it and what properly enables it to function is the spirit of God and the word of God. Unsurprising, that's the power of God overcoming the limitations of human conscience.

Romans chapter 13, verse five. Paul says, talking about rulers, this is our third sphere of love. Those who are outside, those who are at a distance, those who affect us, but we don't have personal contact with them.

This includes policymakers, governmental authorities, rulers and such. In verse three, rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil ones. Do you want to be unafraid of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same.

Do what is good, Romans 13 three. Well, how do I know what's good? It's my conscience that either accuses or excuses me about what is good. So it isn't necessarily what government says is good, it's what I know to be good.

What my conscience tells me is good. So rulers are God's minister to you for good. If you do evil, be afraid.

He does not bear the sword in vain. He is God's minister. Twice in verse four, governmental authority is ordained by God, is God's proxy, God's hand on the earth, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.

There are people who say God never punishes, God never enacts actual judgment. All he

does is when people disobey, he lets the natural consequences of evil and disobedience come back to bite them. But God never actively punishes or actively judges or sends judgment.

And I don't know what they do with verses like this, because God uses human government as an avenger to execute wrath. God authorizes government to punish and even to execute, to bear the sword on him who practices evil. Notice, practices evil.

Bad actors, this isn't a slip. This isn't a one-time crime of passion kind of thing necessarily. Those who practice evil, who are habituated in it.

Therefore, verse five, you must be subject not only because of wrath, not only because you want to avoid this righteous judgment of God enacted and perpetrated by human government, but also for conscience sake. This is one of the ways we exercise and train our conscience is looking at our living under human law and human government. And however silly and however unjustified we may think laws and ordinances from human government are, we are enjoined not only out of fear of punishment, but also for conscience sake to be obedient.

If they enact confiscatory tax rates, you can't say, well, I don't like that. I'm not going to pay it. If they put a 45 mile an hour speed limit where you think it ought to be 75, you're on your own if you decide to break the speed limit and violate the law.

And any number of other conditions and enactments of human government, our conscience, and here's the thing. Why does Paul say this? Why is this the word and the will of God? I was thinking about this the other day. Every once in a while, I find something cool inside a piano.

And I found this down inside a church piano. You don't know who put what in this piano, how long it's been there. This is a 1912 upright that used to be a player, but you find little things in there.

Well, there's a quarter down in there. There's a little video adapter that you plug into an iPhone. And now you've got HDMI.

You can plug your iPhone directly into a TV. And I was looking at those things and the thought crossed my mind, wow, it would be cool to take that home and try it. And it's a quarter, nobody knows it's there.

I can, and I immediately thought, you know, this is what happens. You think, what's the harm? Nobody knows, nobody cares. This stuff has been there for months, years.

I can use it. If I leave it here for the church, they'll probably throw it away. It's not about the object.

It's not about who knows or who cares. It is about the fact that if I take a quarter out of a piano and stick it in my pocket, what have I done? I have violated my own conscience because taking something that belongs to me is theft. Say it's a quarter, who cares? It's a number two pencil.

It's a this, it's a that. It isn't the value of the object and it isn't the value of the law. It isn't the effect of the law.

It isn't the worthwhile nature of it. Is it beneficial? Is it harmful? Do I like it? Do I hate it? What does it make me if I violate it? What does it make me if I'm willing to compromise or fudge on small things? He that is faithful in that which is least will be faithful also in that which is much. The reverse is not necessarily true.

There are people who would never violate the law on big things, but they'll cut corners and hedge and compromise and be blurry and inconsistent on small things. Small things matter. Paying attention to human government matters, not because God needs you to obey that particular law.

It may be a heinous, unfair, and largely morally unlawful law. We're gonna let women do things with regard to pregnancy and childbirth. And it can be a horrific law in our own view.

But what matters? What do I do in my family? They've passed a law that lets other people do other things and that's on the government. The government will answer to God in terms of the exercise of their delegated authority. What do I do? And the only time I violate the laws of human government is when there is a higher law that directly and clearly supersedes a human government law.

So when human government told the apostles, don't preach Jesus, they flouted that, they ignored it because that is not a law that God sanctioned. That is a direct contravention of their divine commission. Jesus Christ personally told them, bear witness, make disciples, teach them.

Well, if human government says, shut up and don't teach Christ, it would be silly to say, well, I'm gonna, you know, the word of God says, obey human government. This is where priorities function. What is the higher priority? But as long as I am not compromising or violating my spiritual responsibilities, I will abide by the laws of human government.

My disagreement with them doesn't matter. It makes me a violator of God's commandment if I violate human government commands without good cause. And it's rare to have good cause.

There are times, but it's relatively rare. So it isn't, well, but it's a stupid law. It's a silly law.

It doesn't matter if I break it. It's not the effect on the world. It is, what does it make me? When I stand before the judgment and God says, you remember that thing about obey the laws of human government, they do not bear the sword in vain, not only to avoid punishment, but also for conscience sake.

If you start suppressing conscience and saying, oh, that's okay because it's insignificant. It doesn't matter. Pocket the quarter, take the adapter home and see if it works, so to speak.

I have worn down a necessary conscience corner. You can fire a gun so much that the sear gets worn down and it starts having a hair trigger and going off when you don't want it to. You can wear down your conscience by habitual suppression and the thing now doesn't work right.

It's no longer grounded in truth and it's no longer illuminated and energized by the Holy Spirit. The word says, don't compromise in even the small things. Be faithful in that which is least and you will be faithful in that which is great.

Slough and get lazy and careless in that which is least. Small things add up and you damage conscience. The thing won't work right when you need it to.

For conscience sake, that's Romans 13, five. First Corinthians chapter eight, verse seven. First Corinthians chapter eight, verse seven.

For us, there is one God, the Father from whom all things came and for whom we exist. This is the threshold. This is the runway for Paul's point.

Talking about food sacrificed to idols in Corinth. Which was ubiquitous, it was everywhere. Everybody, it was a commonplace.

Everybody was familiar with it. And so these people believe in many gods and there's temples to these gods and there's food that is offered as a sacrifice. It sits there for an hour and then they collect it and put it in the marketplace.

For us, there's one God, the Father from whom all things came and for whom we exist. We exist for God. That's our purpose.

There is but one Lord, Jesus Christ through whom all things came and through whom we exist. This is our spiritual identity. But not everyone has this knowledge.

We have this knowledge and we know that if somebody lays a piece of meat in front of a rock for an hour, the rock is just a rock. The image is just an image. The notion that there's some God is just silly.

This is a perfectly good piece of meat. You lay it there for a while, take it out to the market. There's nothing wrong with that meat.

Who cares that somebody thought it was important to lay it in a particular place for a particular time for a particular purpose? There's no other God that values this thing. It's not somehow inhabited by a demon because it was down at this temple. Not everyone has the knowledge we have that there's only one God who created everything.

He created this meat. It's his creation. It belongs to him first and foremost.

He made the animals from which this food comes. And there's one Lord Jesus Christ through whom all things came and through whom we exist. We are dedicated to God.

We belong to him. All things belong to him. What God has sanctified, let no man call common.

God sanctifies it when we take it with thanksgiving. Not everyone has this knowledge. Some people are still, this is a Berean Standard Bible translation.

Some people are still so accustomed to idols that they eat such food as if it were sacrificed to an idol. And since their conscience, their sense is weak, it is defiled. Their right and wrong detector is corrupted because they look at this food differently than someone who has knowledge.

You've got knowledge they don't have. You understand God and your relationship to God as a believer, they don't. They don't have this knowledge.

And their cultural conditioning, their background, their experience, they are accustomed to idols. And when they look at this food, if they come over to your house and you say, well, I got this down at the meat market where they resell the food that comes from the Athenian temple, they believe they are doing wrong and yet they eat it anyway. They think that this is an affront to God and that it is somehow spiritually significant to eat this food in a negative way.

Their conscience is weak. It's not trained. It's not conditioned.

It's not robust. It isn't clear enough to give them confidence and assurance in what they're doing. And they wind up defiling their conscience.

They break their conscience. They damage it. They're hurt.

Paul says, here's the knowledge. Food does not bring us closer to God. We're not worse if we don't eat and we're not better if we do.

We understand this. Be careful, however, that your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak. Our actions can damage someone else's conscience so that they have an even harder time knowing what is right and knowing what is wrong.

This is a part of our one another love is to be sensitive to where someone else's

conscience is and don't strain it. Don't test it. Meat offered to idols was a big issue in Corinth.

You can think about partaking of alcoholic beverages, I think is a good parallel in the modern day. We know that there is nothing evil in lightly alcoholic beverage, beer and wine. I think there's a separate discussion about hard liquor.

Beer and wine have been with us for millennia. Distilled hard alcohol, pretty much the only reason to partake of that is you're looking to get inebriated. It's strong enough that a little will go a long ways towards inebriation.

Beer and wine can be partaken of without approaching inebriation. They complement food. You can take a little for your stomach's sake if you're Timothy.

They're moderate. And yet there are believers who come from a rigorous background, let's say, a legalistic denomination or whatever. There are those who believe in their heart of hearts that Jesus never turned water into wine.

He turned it into really good grape juice and that all alcohol is intrinsically evil. If these people are at my house and I go grab a bottle of wine and glug, glug, glug into a glass and knock it back, I am being insensitive to the conscience of someone who doesn't understand that it was real wine at Cana. It was real wine in the cup of the new covenant in Jesus' blood.

This was not new wine. It's real wine. And there's nothing intrinsically wrong with it.

This is why the Bible doesn't say drink not wine, but be filled with the spirit. It says, be not drunk with wine wherein is excess. You have to drink an excessive amount of wine to get inebriated, not so with hard liquor.

Beer and wine, you know, you got to wipe out a six pack. You got to have several glasses before you start losing the proper function of your mind and body. But it is a good idea to be sensitive to the presence and to the understanding of fellow believers if you are going to partake of something that other people think is problematic.

Better to not make an issue. Don't have a big refrigerator with several 12 packs of Coors and tell somebody, oh yeah, go get yourself some ice out of my refrigerator and the thing's half full of beer. Be sensitive, be careful.

You don't have to be deceptive. You don't have to be furtive, but make a reasonable effort to not violate the conscience of someone. And they say, well, this believer I admire participates in this kind of debate or this kind of language or this kind of behavior, this kind of diet or this kind of beverage intake.

So it must be okay, but they are not convinced in their own mind on the foundation of

biblical truth and the influence of God's Holy Spirit. They're doing it because they're looking at you. And well, I don't understand, but it must be okay because so-and-so is doing it.

You are wounding their conscience. You are putting a stumbling block in front of the weak. One another love, neighbor love, and love for those who are outside says, don't let your good be spoken of as evil.

Don't create problems that are a distraction and wound the suna idesis, the conscience. Your conscience needs to be on alert to not damage the conscience of someone else and cause it to malfunction, to distract and deflect and even deceive them. That's 1 Corinthians chapter eight.

And it continues. It's mentioned in verse seven. It is again in verse 10 and verse 12.

You can read those. We've made that point. 1 Corinthians 10, 25, if you skip down a bit.

When you are invited and you are the person what do you do? Let no one seek his own in verse 24, but each one the other's wellbeing. This is talking about own good, own benefit, own ease of conscience. Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's wellbeing.

Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, asking no questions for conscience sake. Here is the knowledge that the weak or the less experienced, less knowledgeable don't have. There is no problem eating meat from the marketplace because the earth is the Lord's in all of its fullness.

If any of those who are faithless invite you to dinner and you desire to go, eat whatever is set before you, asking no question for conscience sake. Again in verse 27. It's not a violation of your conscience.

However, verse 28, if someone says to you, well, this was offered to idols, then do not eat it for the sake of the one who told you for conscience sake. Now there is a fresh issue. They are making a moral point.

Isn't it immoral to eat this? It was put in front of an idol. You're not a pagan God worshiper. So how could you eat this sacrifice? Verse 29, conscience I say not your own, but that of the other.

So we have to be aware, not only of the function of our own conscience, but our effect on the conscience of others, their ability to understand what is morally right and morally wrong, what is pleasing and honorable in God's sight and what is not. The conscience of the other. Why is my liberty judged by another man's conscience? Why is my liberty judged? I know that there is freedom, but I don't wanna trigger a judgment mode in someone else's conscience, meaning they judge me to be doing wrong.

Now we're talking about food or we're talking about wine and we're not talking about the Lord Jesus. We're not talking about the fruit of the spirit. We're not talking about faith and hope and love.

We're talking about practice in the home or practice at the meal table. And that's a distraction. I don't want to create a situation unnecessarily where someone else's conscience goes into judgment mode.

Therefore, verse 31, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. The focus should be on God and his glory, not me and what I eat or what I drink. And if that's gonna become an issue, then avoid it in the presence of those people.

And don't gain a reputation as one much given to wine. I endeavor to please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many that they may be saved. And this is saved in the sense of delivered, not just salvation from the lake of fire, but delivered out of this present evil age, delivered on a daily basis, delivered into the gracious hands of God with his presence and his power.

And not to be a stumbling block, but to be an aid and an encouragement, to be upbuilding, not detrimental, to enhance conscience and not defile and disrupt not only my own conscience, but the conscience of others. Such an important point. As you look at the news, as you see people who are so convinced that they're right, that they're willing to commit violence, they're willing to be arrested, they're willing to embrace things that if they thought about it, you have people supporting the cause of overseas groups, who if they lived in the vicinity of those overseas groups, they would be hanging from a nearby football goal.

They would be stoned to death. They would have their life taken from them by these very people that they are fervently marching in support of because their conscience tells them this is good. And they are driven by this self-righteous, social justice fervor.

Their conscience is broken, but they don't know it. They can't tell it. They don't wake up in the morning and say, you know, there's just something wrong here.

I can't figure it out. They can't wait to go out there and wrap themselves in certain kinds of clothes and wave certain kinds of flags and create certain kinds of signs and try to perpetrate their will on other people. And they feel totally and utterly right.

When you see that on your TV, again, you can look at the cause and say, oh, cause bad, don't they know? More importantly, be afraid because this is the human conscience that has been seared with an iron that can no longer detect genuine good and genuine evil. And pray God that in some corner of my life that isn't happening, that I'm comfortable and feeling good about myself in my policy or my practice. And I don't know that I'm doing wrong and that I am not reflecting the glory of God because in that area and on

that issue and in that circumstance, my conscience is not functioning as it should.

We have to constantly go to the source. It is God who created us and in whom we live and move. It is the Lord Jesus to whom we belong.

And what counts most is that we are the kind of people, whether it is a big issue on the world stage or whether it is a small issue about what belongs to me and what belongs to somebody else, that we exercise and train our conscience to detect what is good and to follow the good, to detect what is evil and eschew that evil and separate from it. Cultivating a clear and a cleansed and a well-functioning conscience is essential. You cannot live the life of faith without it.

Well, we're about halfway through our biblical guidance on the conscience and we will pick it up this coming Wednesday when we regather. But let's close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for giving us the freedom to choose and to determine our way.

Thank you for the opportunity to choose your way and to be enabled and empowered by your spirit, be guided by the light of your word, to be saved and to represent the Lord Jesus Christ. We ask that as we reflect on these truths, that in our own lives, in our particular circumstances, in the situations and the relationships that we are inevitably functioning within, that the light of your word will shine clearly, the Holy Spirit will be able to speak to us in such a way that we can improve the moral sense of our conscience. We can cling to what is good and we can separate from what is evil.

We can be a godly influence in the periphery of others and not be a stumbling block to their conscience so that when the resurrection takes place and we stand at the judgment, we will be approved, we will be vindicated by your grace and through your provision. We ask these things in Jesus' name, amen.