

1Tim 24-05-08a

Good evening, welcome to Wednesday night Bible class at Grace & Truth Bible Church. We're grateful to have you all with us. We're gonna continue tonight our study of conscience.

It is quite fascinating to see how specific the word of God is about how to develop and maintain our conscience and how important it is to the function of our faith, our hope, and our love. Let's ask God's blessing on our study and our time of fellowship will begin. Father, we are so grateful for this time to be encouraged to receive the blessings that come from fellowship of like-minded believers who share an enthusiasm for the Lord Jesus Christ and for redeeming our time and endeavoring to represent Him effectively and reflect His glory on this earth so that others will see it and be drawn to you.

We pray that our study tonight will contribute to that goal and purpose, that we can find ourselves thinking about these truths through the day and with the enablement of your Holy Spirit and the light on our path from your word, live in a way that is pleasing in your sight and glorifies the Lord Jesus. We ask it in His name, amen. We began this study last time.

Our word occurs in 1 Timothy 4, verse two, where the Spirit emphatically, expressly, clearly says that in latter times, people are gonna depart from the faith. This is an in-house problem in the fellowship, in the church. We have an internal problem among believers in the latter days, and these are the latter days, make no mistake, and in keeping with that, this description is extremely pertinent.

The Spirit expressly says that in our times, some will depart from the faith, and they're gonna be prominent. They're gonna have a voice. They're gonna publish books and have blogs and videos and be all over the shelves of the Christian bookstore, all over Christian television.

They are gonna be influential. They are gonna sway young people, the few young people that bother to come to church, will be lured there with the promise of these false doctrines from deceiving spirits. Speaking lies in hypocrisy.

Nobody sets out, they don't get up and put their clothes on to go to church on Sunday morning and say, I think I'll go down there and speak some lies in hypocrisy. This is done in self-deception. These are deluded people who are speaking their delusions for truth.

How can that possibly happen? How can you be a messenger of deceit and doctrines of demons and not know it? Well, Paul tells us in the next verse, their conscience has already been seared. Their conscience having been seared with a hot iron. Their conscience is broken.

This is the truth and lie detector. This is the good and bad detector, and it has been baked. I got a brand new little device for making battery packs, and I had taken this battery pack apart to fix it.

It's impossible to get. They haven't made this battery pack in 10 years. I had one battery.

I was gonna take out the old cells inside it, put new little cells that look like AA cells into it, and tack them together and make myself a battery pack because they are impossible to buy. So I had the old battery apart and sitting there, and there's some loose wires there, and I moved something on my desk, and two of the wires touched, and it fried the little control circuit board inside the battery that tells the charger, okay, stop charging, I have enough, and it has that smell, that baked circuit board smell. You get it close to you, and it has that acrid, those of you that work on computers, maybe you work on them better than me, and you never smell that smell.

I've smelled it several times. And it's very depressing because now I cannot rebuild this battery. There are no other batteries like it.

I've even looked for junk laptops that might include an old battery. I don't care if the battery is completely dead. I just need the shell and that little circuit board, but it has been seared.

It has been fried. It will never work again. And what if that little chip is your conscience, and you bake that thing, you fry that, and it can no longer detect the difference between truth and error, between what is pleasing in God's sight and what is a doctrine of demons.

That's what has happened to people who in good conscience get up and preach, well, this is what the Bible really says in this book or in this episode or in this part of Matthew or in this area in Revelation. This is what it means, and this is how it should be understood and applied by believers. They are totally sincere.

They're doing it with a clear conscience, and their conscience is wrong. So as we began our study of conscience last time, we started with Acts 23.1, where Paul tells us that men and brethren standing before the Pharisees as an apostle standing before the Sanhedrin, he says, I affirm, I swear, I have lived in all good conscience before man and God until this day. And when he says this, this is years after he persecuted the church, hailed people into prison and killed them and so on, stood by and held the coats while they stoned Stephen and was consenting to his death, recommended that others be executed for heresy by believing in the Lord Jesus.

And yet he says, my conscience, I have lived in the light of my conscience until this day. So how could he consent to Stephen's death, persecute the church of Jesus Christ and

say he has a good conscience? Your conscience can be telling you that you are doing righteousness, that you are serving God, that your every effort and endeavor is in the cause of God and his word, and you can be completely wrong. This should scare us to death because I cannot trust my conscience unless certain conditions are met.

So that was point one, Acts 23.1, the first place, the word sunedesis, S-U-N-E-I-D-E-S-I-S, sunedesis is the word translated conscience, Acts 23.1. Paul says, I've had a good conscience before God. So point one, a quote, good conscience can do bad things. People are not intentionally deceiving and defrauding and working evil and perpetrating doctrines of demons intentionally in every case.

In many cases, if not most cases, they are sincere and they are sincerely wrong. You can be sincere and you are sincerely wrong. You can be convinced in your mind and heart that you are in the center of the straight narrow path and be wrong.

That's Acts 23.1. A good conscience before God can do bad things, horrific things, and sleep like a baby at night. So conscience is not reliable in and of itself. Point two that we saw last time, Acts 24.16, it takes work to maintain a good conscience before God and men.

And Paul says this, I strive to maintain a good conscience. I work at it and ensure that it is blameless before God and blameless before men. But he has to strive.

And we saw this word strive last time. That is point two. So this problem in Acts 23.1 of having a conscience that can tell you, you are doing wonderful works of righteousness and you are doing heinous evil.

It takes work to avoid that status. We have to endeavor. We have to work.

We have to be aware that we have a conscience that can mislead and ensure that that thing is working properly. So that was point two. Point three last time was from Romans 2.15. Everyone has a conscience that either accuses or excuses them, the Jews and the Gentiles.

The Gentiles outside the law still had a conscience that guided them in the basic precepts of the law. The 10 words, the 10 commandments. Don't cheat with somebody else's spouse.

Don't covet their stuff. Don't steal. Don't lie.

Don't murder. Don't dishonor the creator God in heaven and lift your hand and blaspheme him and insult him and give out with words like some of these atheists have done, Richard Dawkins and others. Making God out with all of these horrific negative adjectives.

There is a conscience that says even people that don't believe in God have a conscience that says you should be respectful of God just because there are other people who hold him in high esteem. And you are demeaning and denigrating people who believe in God when you demean and denigrate the God they believe in. And we are never called to insult and mock and deride other people even when they're completely wrong.

It doesn't do any good. There's no positive purpose in this kind of negative behavior. And it very quickly drags you down into the swamp of sin.

Avoid negative commentary. If you need to engage in it and point something out, caution is in order because our mind functions like a well rope that's got a bucket on each end and a pulley at the top of the well. And every time we reach out, we're in one bucket, the other guy's in the other bucket.

We reach out, grab his rope, and we start pushing him down, trying to raise ourselves up. And this is building your happiness on someone else's unhappiness. There are people who are just hysterical with glee every time a political target that they don't like suffers a setback.

And this is on your news channels on both sides. If somebody stumbles, if somebody has a legal setback of some kind, they just cannot contain their hilarity. They smile, they look at each other.

And the Old Testament, we've seen it in Proverbs where these people who wink with the eye and get untold amounts of pleasure from someone else's trouble, run. Never let that attitude develop inside. If you see someone with a setback and they're on the wrong side of your political view, the wrong side of your social view or your moral view, do not let that take hold because it is a sickness.

It is a virus. It will spread to areas of your mind you never knew about. Be cautious.

And when you see someone that has a setback, you know what's healthy? Pray that this setback can be used by God to appeal to their inbuilt conscience, to draw them to him. What is the only way somebody who we think is really in the wrong, how can they be rehabilitated? How can they be fixed? How can they see the light? How can the scales fall from their eyes? It's the power of God. Don't dance on the grave of somebody who suffers a setback and you get what you deserve.

What goes around comes around and you're getting what's coming to you. We should be concerned as God is with people's eternal soul, their eternal destiny for their soul. And pray that God will use adversity, will use hardship, will use setbacks and difficulties to revive a sense of need in them and that they will turn to God as so many have.

Whether or not they're famous, whether or not they're successful, whether or not they're rich or poor, people will hit a hard wall and many times when they are smashed against

it and they're looking around trying to find meaning in life, they will turn to God and the Holy Spirit can reach them. This should be our goal. It's a cheap thrill that any unbeliever can experience to dance around when somebody you don't like has problems.

It's ungodly. You never see the Lord Jesus Christ do that. You don't see the Apostle John or the Apostle Paul or the Apostle Peter, even with their enemies, even with the hypocrites, the Pharisees, Jesus pronouncing the woes on them.

When he looks out over the city of Jerusalem, he doesn't laugh in mockery and say, you hypocritical Pharisees, I can hardly wait for the day when you get yours. Jesus wept over Jerusalem. How often I would have taken you under my wings, comforted you, nurtured you, brought you into a place of growth and productivity and you would have none of me.

He grieved over that. He didn't celebrate their setbacks. Do you think the Lord Jesus in 70 AD from his seat beside the father in heaven was gleeful when Jerusalem was destroyed by the legions of Titus? Not at all.

God does not delight in judgment. God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. That's a passage of scripture.

And we should not take pleasure even when we think people have brought their difficulties on themselves. So this notion of having a good conscience before God and men, this is something we have to work at as our second point. Everyone has a conscience and therefore man is without excuse.

This is Romans 1 and 2, 2.15 especially in Romans. We saw that last time. The fourth point is it is possible for our conscience to be a reliable witness to truth.

We saw in Acts 23.1 that Paul's conscience didn't prevent him from hounding Christians to their death, but it can be a reliable witness when the conscience is properly oriented, properly supported, properly aligned and calibrated by God's power. Conscience can be a reliable guide to truth and to good. We find this in Romans 9.1. Romans 9.1. This is Paul getting ready to go into the most difficult chapters in the New Testament in the view of many.

Paul says, I speak the truth in Christ. I am not lying as confirmed by my conscience in the Holy Spirit, my conscience bearing witness through the Holy Spirit. This is the difference between Paul's conscience in Acts 23.1 and his conscience in Romans 9.1. The Holy Spirit is there.

This is the power into which the conscience is plugged. This is what aligns it and calibrates it and enables and empowers it and points it at good and evil from God's perspective in the Holy Spirit. He doesn't even need to mention his conscience.

Why does he mention it here? He is about to embark on a discussion of the Jews relative to the inception of the church age and his brethren, according to the flesh, they're the stewards of God's Old Testament truth. To them belong the testimonies and the covenant and the rest of it. But he begins, he prefaces all of this.

Vessels of wrath, vessels of honor, all of this is prefaced by I speak the truth. And notice two of the three members of the Trinity are present here. I speak the truth in Christ.

My conscience is confirmed in and by the Holy Spirit. So we shouldn't disregard our conscience. We are going to work, point two, we are going to endeavor to make sure that our conscience is good and reliable.

And we do that by being in Christ and in the Holy Spirit. This is what reforms and corrects and sanctifies our conscience and makes it reliable as a witness. So that's Romans 9, verse one.

Our next point, the fifth point is Romans 13, five. Romans 13, five. Here, we discover that our conscience will, when it's functioning properly, guide us to submit to God-ordained authority.

How do you know if you're in the late 1700s and people in America are wanting to break away from King George and Great Britain, and some people are Tories and other people are patriots and minute men and whatnot, which side do you choose? You can make an argument either way. You can say, this is a heinously oppressive government. It's unfair, it's unjust, it's taxation without representation.

On the other hand, you can read the word of God where Paul says, pray for the king, submit to authority, render to Caesar and so on from the Lord Jesus. So which side do I take? How do I know? Well, I can't go back and render judgment for any individuals back during the days of the Revolutionary War. What I can say is what Paul says here in Romans chapter 13 and verse five, and that is that it is necessary to be subject to the authorities, not only to avoid punishment, not only to avoid wrath, but on account of conscience, a rightly guided conscience.

The Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit will tell our conscience when we are habituated, when our conscience has been exercised to discern good and evil through the Holy Spirit and through the presence of Christ. How do we get the presence of Christ? We spent several weeks studying this. How does the indwelling of Christ come? We have his words and we treasure them.

We value them. We live in their light. The one and others, these things I have spoken unto you, that your joy may be full and so on.

So knowing and keeping the words of Christ brings the presence of Christ, the indwelling of Christ. It's not automatic. This is part of the effort that we expend.

This is part of the endeavor that Paul talked about in our Acts 24, 16, I strive to have a good conscience. Well, do I just grit my teeth and clench my fists and say, good conscience, good conscience, good conscience? What does that striving entail? I cultivate the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. I cultivate the presence and the power of the Lord Jesus Christ abiding with me.

And in the mouth of two or three witnesses, a thing is established. And if I need to make a decision, there are many things in the word of God I don't have to make a decision about. I was having a lively discussion about what was the extent of the flood? Was it local? Was it global? For my walk before the Lord today and tomorrow and the next day, I don't have to know that.

I know that it killed every living human being because scripture says so. I know that everything under the heavens that had the breath of life was killed except what was in the ark. But I also know that you can go to the word of God and depending on context, everything under heaven means everything I can see out to the circumference of the horizon.

That's what is under heaven from my point of view. So it can be an open question. There's science that says, it isn't 6,000 years.

It isn't a worldwide flood. Was there a Pangaea? Were there separate continents when the flood took place? There's a lot of things we don't know. And guess what? For determining how to interact with people in my periphery, how to do my job, how to make my living, how to study and teach the word of God, I don't have to know how far the water went.

I believe the clear statements of the word of God I know that no humans survived the flood. I know that nothing within sight of any of those humans survived in terms of animal life. Were there dinosaurs on the other side of the planet? I don't know and I don't need to know.

Were the Tories correct in the Revolutionary War or the Patriots? Should that never have been fought? Should we still be part of Great Britain? I don't know and I don't need to know. Sometimes we get invested in wanting to know something and it is actually a distraction because we don't need to know. John says, John the Baptist says to Jesus at the Jordan, why should I baptize you? You should be baptizing me.

And Jesus said, suffer it to be so now. I don't have time to explain why you need to do this. Just trust me, you need to do this.

And John did. Faith is operating when we don't have the substance of what is hoped for. And we don't have evidence from things that we can't see.

I trust that what I need to know, God the Holy Spirit through the word and especially with

the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ and God the Father, for those of us who have his words and keep them, that is going to inform me of everything I need to know. Many things I don't know. We don't need to know the day and the hour of the Lord's return.

We don't need to know the identity of the antichrist. We don't need to know so many things. But what we need to know, God will ensure that we do know if we are striving to have a good conscience, a pure heart and a sincere faith.

So again, point one, just consulting my conscience and getting the go ahead is unsafe. That's point one. Acts 23, one, Paul consulted his conscience.

Persecuting and killing these Christians is a great idea. And he was wrong, but his conscience was clear. Point two, we must strive to have a good conscience before God and man.

We have to pay attention. We've got to take steps. We have to be proactive.

If we just let the default conscience run away with us, look at the world. Everybody thinks they're right. And no two people can agree on everything.

Point three, everyone has a conscience. Therefore, everyone is accountable. We are accountable to God for what our conscience accuses us for or excuses us for.

That was Romans 2.15. This point, Romans 9.1, it is possible for our conscience to be a reliable witness to the truth. You also find this in 2 Corinthians 1.12. I'll read that to you right quick. 2 Corinthians 1.12, our boasting is this, the testimony of our conscience that we conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God and more abundantly toward you.

Paul says our boasting is this, we're confident to the point of telling you. He's calling this boasting. I will speak of that which some people would think I should not.

But our boasting is this, it's the testimony of our conscience. And the testimony of our conscience is we conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity, we weren't devious, we weren't underhanded. What you see is what you get.

And godly sincerity. We did what we did as unto the Lord and not unto men. We didn't try to hide anything, didn't try to shade anything, didn't try to fool you, didn't try to take advantage of you, not with fleshly wisdom.

Might've been advisors saying, you really ought to soft pedal some of these truths and emphasize these others, you'll go over better. You won't offend, you won't disgust, you won't drive people away if you'll do it this particular way. Not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God.

We relied on the grace of God. We were simple and straightforward, called it as we see

it. And we were abundant in our ministry toward you.

That's the testimony of conscience. So this same conscience that betrayed Paul in the old days before he met Christ on the Damascus road, before he was filled with the Holy Spirit, before he got with the program as an apostle, this same conscience has been rehabilitated. This is what I want, don't you? We're born with a broken conscience.

It's got some basic things in it, but we trample it all the time. We know what we're doing is wrong and we do it anyway. Paul talks about this in Romans, I think it's seven.

What I don't wanna do is what I do. What I wanna do, I don't do. And to do what I know is right is not present with me.

Who will deliver me from the body of this death? And he's describing life before the Holy Spirit. And he knows about this, he's lived that life. So what is our point five? Submit to authority.

Submit to authority in Romans 13, five. So we've covered five out of 12 points that we have on the conscience. Submitting to authority is a pretty clear case.

This is gonna be a function of conscience. There are times to submit to authority and times not to. Right? The authorities told the apostles, stop preaching in this name.

Well, they did not obey the authorities, why? Their conscience informed by the Holy Spirit said, the reason the Lord Jesus has commissioned you as apostles is to preach this word. And if the authorities give you contradictory commands, there is a higher law at work. So normally we submit to authorities unless we have a good, clear reason not to.

And God will inform our conscience at that point. If someone says, grace and truth Bible church, stop broadcasting Bible class. I am not gonna submit to that authority because that is the purpose for which God gifted and trained me.

The reason he gifted and brought you into this fellowship is so that we could together bless and be blessed in our fellowship. And any authority that tells us to stop doing that is gonna have to answer to God. But my conscience in the Holy Spirit is clear.

We will meet as long as we are able and any authority that tells us not to is gonna have to go jump in the pond. So this is a function of conscience. And it's important that we have a healthy, well-trained Holy Spirit guided conscience so that we know instinctively what is right and what is wrong.

Otherwise we will consult our conscience and it's like a compass that's too close to a magnet. It won't tell us the truth. Only the Holy Spirit can clear the decks and enable our God given conscience to function correctly and tell us truth from error, tell us right from wrong.

Well, that's the first five points we're going to pick up with the outward view of conscience. What is our view toward the conscience that other people have when we come back from the break?