

1Tim 24-05-08b

We're going to resume our investigation of conscience because we want to have a good one. We want our conscience to be reliable. We want it to be a faithful witness to truth and to the right, what is pleasing in God's sight because we will be judged at the judgment seat, not only for our adherence to right and wrong and truth versus error, but also to whether we violated our own conscience.

So by having a good conscience, those things will overlap. We've seen the first five points. Our sixth point moving directly onward is from 1 Corinthians 8, 7-13.

This, as you remember from 1 Corinthians is going to have to do with dealings with others. We focus on our own conscience, but it is possible for us to wound or weaken or otherwise cause stumbling in the conscience of other people. So if it wasn't enough that we need to cultivate a good conscience and be sure that ours is working correctly, we have to be sensitive.

We have to be aware that other people are trying to do the same thing. We always like to put ourselves in the position of the strong believer and well, here's a weakling over here and I need to do the better thing. So there, suppose I am the weaker brother, suppose that I am trying to grow, but there's someone that I look up to who maybe is a figure in my family or somebody in the church that you would view as an elder or even a pastor or and they say something or they adopt a practice in their own life and they may or may not talk about it publicly, but it's observable and it causes me to question my own assumptions.

I can think of a time in a local church where people within the church decided that a particular kind of activity was okay and they even had it inside the church in the fellowship hall. There was a goings on there that I didn't think was right, but the pastor had approved it. The elders had approved it.

A large chunk of the congregation came and participated in this event and it made me question my conscience. What's the matter with me that these people who seem to know what they're talking about are approving something that my conscience disapproves? I found it very parallel to Paul talking about those who question when they see other believers eating meat offered to idols and it's something they would never do and they believe they are honoring God by avoiding anything that has the taint of idolatry, going all the way back to the first and greatest commandment in the table of the law, have no other gods before me. Here's how would I want to have any contact with that whatsoever or represent that any part of that is okay to bring into my house? And for them, it's a right thing to eschew all contact with anything having to do with idolatry.

I can remember missionaries coming back from the darker parts of South America and

Africa where there was still active idolatry that was demonically connected and very credible, non-hilarious missionaries told me that people who had come along on a mission trip and had collected some of these statues and brought them back and set them in their house suddenly had all kinds of weird supernatural bad things happening, stuff flying against the wall and smashing and hearing voices in the night and having creepy experiences. And this is not sensational. This is not people.

These are pilots and down to earth people. This particular missionary, some of you may remember him, Bruce Porterfield was with Jungle Missions and he was a pilot. And you want to talk about a non-sense down to earth, not easily convinced of weird stuff, told us these stories that there is actual demonic involvement in, or was at that time, this has been 40 years ago, but to avoid all contact with that kind of thing is not a bad idea.

Others who are strong in the faith and say, I can have whatever kind of rock I have in my house. Any demons try to come in here, I'm going to tell them to be gone in Jesus name and they'll flee. I'm not worried.

I wouldn't say either one of those positions is absolutely right or absolutely wrong. It is when they are juxtaposed, when people who have one view are in fellowship with people that have the other view and questions begin to arise. That's what Paul is talking about in 1 Corinthians chapter 8. And if you begin in that top of that chapter, it's food sacrifice to idols.

We have all knowledge, knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. The one who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. If you're leading with your knowledge and not leading with love, you don't know as much as you ought to know.

If you say, well, I've got the hot scoop here. I know what the correct doctrine is, and I'm going to go with that. Paul says, the one who thinks he knows something, that's your leading thought.

I know what's right. Instead of being sensitive and looking out, not only for our own interests, but also for the interests of others. Philippians chapter 2. The one who loves God is known by God.

Anytime you start relying on your knowledge, the shift in attitude, as soon as I start thinking, well, you know, look how many years I've been studying the word of God. I've had good teachers. I've got notes.

I've got a great study Bible. I've got notebooks. I've got epinoses.

I'm in super grace. What we should do is calm down and focus on, am I known by God? I think I know God and I know his word and I know his will. And I know the correct interpretation of all of these different difficult passages.

What I really ought to concentrate on is, am I known by God? That's how this chapter opens. This immediately cultivates humility. Can you imagine a worse thing than arriving at the door of the kingdom and the Lord Jesus is sitting down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and thousands that have come from the Northeast, South and West.

They're all sitting down for fellowship and function and beneficial service with the Lord Jesus. And you come up and say, Hey, what about me? And remember what Jesus says when they come to the door and say, Lord, in your name, did we not do these things that we knew were right? What does he say? I never knew you depart from me. You workers of iniquity, Lord, in your name, we did righteousness.

If they think it's righteousness and Jesus labels it iniquity, what is their problem? Broken conscience. Their conscience is not telling him that what they are doing is actually hypocritical, self-seeking, self-gratifying, and just sticking Jesus name on it like a tag doesn't make it right. And Lord, in your name, I never knew you.

So Paul emphasizes that here. The one who loves God is known by God. If love for God comes first, not love for self, not love for impact on others, love for God, the one who has my words and keeps them.

He is that loves me. I and my father will come to him. So it isn't what you know.

It's what God knows. So about eating food, sacrifice to idols. This is verse four, first Corinthians eight.

We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world. And there's no God, but one, even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth, as there are many so-called gods and Lords. Yet for us, there is but one God, the father from whom all things came and for whom we exist.

And there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ through whom all things came and through whom we exist. But not everyone has this knowledge. Some people are still so accustomed to idols, that they eat such food as if it were sacrificed to an idol.

What's happening? Their conscience is accusing them. I think this is wrong. And they don't have a conscience that has been corrected by this knowledge Paul has just described.

The Holy Spirit is not habituated to guide them and to shine light on their path because they're young in the faith. They're early in their walk with the Lord. And so their conscience, they have just come out of idolatry and have this very same food come on their table and to try to look at it in a different way is very hard for them.

Understandably so. A believer ought to be able to anticipate if you invite somebody that is a new convert to Jesus Christ, freshly out of idolatry, that to serve food from the

temple, which they will recognize right away, is going to give them qualms. Wait a minute.

I thought I had given out with the false gods and I'm a follower of Jesus Christ. Here you are making out with this food that came from the temple I just left. Not everyone has this knowledge.

Some people are so accustomed to idols, they eat such food as if it were sacrifice to an idol. And since their conscience is weak, their conscience is defiled. You telling them it's okay when the testimony of their conscience is, I don't think this is okay.

And they go ahead and eat. Guess what you have just made them do for them. It is sin to violate your conscience is sin.

This is why Jesus talks to the one talent guy to the, to the one minor guy and says, if you thought I was a hard man and this was your belief, your conscience actually was telling you that I'm a bad guy. Then why didn't you live in the light of your conscience? Why didn't you do something with this minor to where I wouldn't be able to gather where I have not scattered and I wouldn't be able to reap where I have not sown. If you put it on deposit with a banker, the banker is going to determine the return and I'm not going to take any unfair advantage.

So if that's really what you thought, why didn't you act in the light of your conscience? One minor guy, one talent guy. The point of that is that's, that was an excuse, but he didn't even live in the light of that excuse because it's false. That's not really what he thought.

He's just trying to shift focus and people do this all the time. I will, I want to redirect attention. The parent tries to discipline a child and say, I gave instructions and you violated them.

We have a policy and you violated it. And the child says, well, you did this and you did that. And you're unkind and you're not like other parents.

It's a classic shift to the blame, redirect the focus of attention to someone else. It's a classic defense. Let's not talk about me.

Let's talk about you. Right. And it's illegitimate.

So since their conscience is weak, it is defiled. And guess what? You are implicated in being the cause of the defiling of someone else's conscience. What does this tell us? Be careful.

Verse nine, that your freedom, which comes through the truth that you know, Jesus said, you will know the truth. The truth will set you free. We know the truth and it does set us

free and we can make no qualms for conscience sake, because we know that an idol is nothing.

But if my freedom becomes a stumbling block to the weak, I am sinning against that person's conscience. My example is creating an occasion for stumbling for another believer. And in any context and in any case, I need to avoid that situation.

Now, if I am a parent and I'm disciplining a child and the child's conscience is traumatized, that's too bad because there is a higher law than, well, I shouldn't discipline my child because it might mess up their conscience. They think something is right and I'm telling them it's wrong. I'd better not tell them it's wrong.

The responsibility to train up a child in a way that they should go and to discipline them and to be accountable and responsible for their training and upbringing, that supersedes and overcomes any objections based on what about their little conscience. I am training their conscience. I am telling them what is right and what is wrong.

And I have the authority to do so. This situation is manifestly in a non-authority association. This isn't a pastor preaching or teaching the congregation and saying, here's what you need to know about meat offered to idols.

Paul doesn't say, if you're a pastor, don't preach to them about meat because it might traumatize their conscience. This is practice. This is horizontal believer to believer in a non-authority, non-teaching context.

What is your witness? Your witness should be love and consideration. There's a similar thing in 1 Corinthians talking about the quote unquote Lord's table when they have a fellowship meal after the spiritual meal, elbowing people out of the way and being insensitive to the poor is sinful. Being insensitive to people's conscience when you could easily avoid that conflict.

You're not the one to teach them that it's okay to eat meat. That needs to come from the word of God. It needs to come from the pastor.

It needs to come under the pitching and catching that is superintended by the Holy Spirit. It's not something to teach by example. That's what Paul says here.

If someone with a weak conscience, this is verse 10, 1 Corinthians 8. Someone with a weak conscience sees you who are well-informed eating in an idol's temple. You're not just bringing this meat home and serving it at your table. You're going to the temple restaurant.

They had a restaurant because they had so much of this meat and they could then sell it after it laid in front of the statue of some Roman or Greek God. So you're eating in an idol temple restaurant. You say, wow, I'm super free.

This is all nothing. Will he not be encouraged to eat food sacrificed to idols? This weak brother for whom Christ died is destroyed by your knowledge. Defiling someone's conscience, Paul says, he describes this as destroying them.

You've made it impossible for them to judge right and wrong. This is akin to sex education for kindergartners, right? It's not the kind of knowledge they are ready for at their stage. Concentrate on what they need at their stage.

I don't need to know everything all the time. I need to know what I need to know, where I am now. This is true for all of us, but we need to be sensitive to those who are early in the faith, who don't know everything we know, haven't been exposed to the teaching of the Word of God, haven't had the blessing of good solid meat from the Word of God for a long time.

Be sensitive and don't launch into, well, did you know that this and that and the other and just blow their mind and freak them out instead of, isn't it a wonderful thing that we have the gift of the Holy Spirit? Isn't it a great thing that we have the Word of God? This is how the power of God comes into our life. And leave it there. You don't have to go out.

How many angels can dance on a pin? So we need to be sensitive and be aware. Notice in order to know that someone is a weak brother, what do you have to do? Oh, I could never judge whether somebody is weak or somebody is strong. It's not judging, it is discerning.

But in order to put this into practice, I have to identify that there are people who are early, young, weak in the faith and not strain their faith and defile their conscience with my superior knowledge. What I talk about, what I do in my home, what I do in my social life, you're going to see me out at the liquor store buying a case of whiskey or go to the Indian smoke shop and buy in a case of cigars or whatever else it might be. I'm grasping for examples, but something that would traumatize someone's conscience.

See you going into the casino to gamble. Does scripture say anything about gambling, pro or con? You have to make some inferences. You have to say, well, is it good stewardship? Is God going to bless the dice or bless the spinning roulette wheel? Or is this really something a believer ought to be doing? But you say, well, I'm free and I've got mad money here and I'm just going to put it out there and see what happens.

And your conscience doesn't accuse you, but somebody else sees you going into a casino. Well, they might leave the church. I refuse to go somewhere where they think that's okay.

Do you know what happens with that gambling money? Do you know what happens with alcohol? Do you know what happens with tobacco and cancer and so on? Pick your own example. But the principle is love for one another means sensitivity to where we are.

And you have to be able to discern.

This is not judging. It is discerning that someone is not going to understand. And it's not my place to explain it to him and give him a two hour Bible class on why this is okay.

They have not grown. They don't have the foundation under which a good conscience about that subject could sit. Make sense? That's what Paul's talking about here.

By sinning, this is verse 12, 1 Corinthians 8, by sinning against your brothers in this way and wounding their weak conscience, guess what you do? You sin against Christ. This is a much bigger thing. You're not just sinning against your brother.

You're sinning against Christ. And now the Lord Jesus is going to speak and say, woe to the one who causes one of these little ones to stumble. It will be better for him if a millstone were put around his neck and he were cast into the sea.

What you do to the least of these, my brethren, you do to me. Now we've got deeper, more fundamental cracks in our relationship with God and man by being insensitive and indifferent to the effect we have on others. You could call this our testimony to fellow believers.

Now Jesus has a bone to pick with us, and he's the one that is going to sit at the judgment seat of Christ. Judgment has been given to him by the father. He is going to judge, and he's going to say, do you see what you did there? You and I have a problem.

You have sinned against me. Therefore, verse 13, if what I eat causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again. I'll go vegan if meat causes my brother to stumble.

I do not want to cause him to stumble. This is the practical application of love, and we have to be aware of our effect on the conscience of others. What is their conscience? What is their sunesis? It is their ability to understand and discern what is right, what is wrong, what is true, and what is false.

We want to be a benefit. We want to be a support for a good conscience. We can speak the truth in love, hoping to reinforce a good conscience, but not by indifference and insensitivity cause a brother to stumble.

That is our sixth point. You also find this in 1 Corinthians 10 verses 23 through 33. You can tell that this was a problem in Corinth.

1 Corinthians 10 verses 23 through 33. It's important to see this on the pages of your Bible so that you can find it again. Everything is permissible, Paul says, but not everything is beneficial.

That is a quote from, you know, all things are lawful. Everything is permissible. The law doesn't forbid, but not everything is beneficial.

Everything is permissible, but not everything is edifying. We don't say, well, scripture doesn't say I can't, so I'm going to, and say, I'm good to go. What is beneficial to myself and others? What is edifying to myself and to others? Does this build up, does this create a greater surface for reflecting the glory of Jesus Christ or not? No one should seek his own good, but the good of others.

Doesn't this really sum up everything we saw in chapter eight? I'm wanting to look out for the other guy. Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience. The earth is the Lord and the fullness thereof.

Notice here is the apostle with his authority teaching principles of truth. If I have a respect and understanding, if I am growing in grace and knowledge, I'm going to take the words of the apostle to the bank, and I'm going to incorporate that into my conscience. Paul, the apostle with the authority of the Holy Spirit and the Lord Jesus Christ who commissioned him says, eat what's sold in the meat market and don't worry about a question of conscience.

It's okay. Why? Here's the principle. The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof.

This is a principle of scripture from Psalm 24 verse one. If an unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, remember unbeliever is someone lacking faith. And this is a pretty broad term.

They can be someone who hasn't come to faith in Christ. It can also be someone who isn't in the faith of the faith, walking by faith. They are, they are very new, very early.

Someone without faith. And in almost every place, I mentally substitute this. When you're reading your new King James and you see unbeliever put one without faith, it's a pitea, someone lacking faith.

It makes much more sense that way. So if someone liking faith invites you to a meal and you want to go eat anything set before you without raising questions of conscience. But if someone tells you this food was offered to idols, then do not eat it for the sake of the one who told you.

And for the sake of soon, I DASIS for the sake of conscience. Now my conscience has some different variables. The situation is new.

Someone is putting you to the test. So you're okay with idolatry. You, you must think that that any God is a good God, right? And you say, no, I don't believe that these gods are gods.

And I think that worshiping them is evil. And since you're associating this directly and on purpose with them, now I'm going to abstain. Do not eat it for the sake of the one who told you they're telling you this.

Hey, do you know that was offered to idols? Oh, I'm sorry. Let's find something else to eat. You're trying to, to preserve their sensitivity to meat offered to idols.

Oh, okay. You don't try to teach them a Bible class and Oh, take eat. You're like the snake and the tree.

So for the sake of conscience, the other one's conscience, I mean, not your own, don't break their conscience. Their conscience needs to develop from the word of God, not from your example. By the way, there is a corollary principle here.

We develop our sense of right and wrong, our conscience from the word of God and the spirit of God. And it grows and develops over time. I don't develop it from other people saying it's okay.

Trust me on this. I have to have confidence from the word of God. And my conscience will operate on that basis.

If I don't yet have a conscience informed by the word of God, I can't go by this guy's conscience over here. And there is a trend in the church today where godly men are writing books and making videos and streaming online and posting on social media and saying, well, don't you know, this, this is the way we should be. And this is the way we should act.

I can't take that guy's word for it. If I don't see it in the word of God, if the holy spirit doesn't lead me in that direction, this guy strutting and fretting his hour on the stage, sound and fury is actually signifying nothing. I don't care how godly he is.

I don't care how many letters he's got after his name. I can't go do or support or wave a flag or engage in behavior based on what some Christian leader says. Look at the word of God right here.

You are wrong to try to influence somebody else to do something on your word, on your behest with your example. People need to do what they do because they see it in the word of God and are led by the spirit of God themselves. There is a line of relationship that goes from a human soul through the holy spirit and the word of God through the Lord Jesus Christ to God, the father.

That's the chain of command. If you start listening to some other guy, he's not in the chain. A fellow believer is not in that chain.

And if I do what he says because he says it, or if I do what he does because he does it, I'm violating my chain of command. The issue is not was it right or wrong for me to eat the meat. The question now is I made somebody break the chain of command.

I've diverted somebody from paying attention to Jesus Christ and the holy spirit and the

word of God. Now they're paying attention to me and they're looking to me for guidance. This is the problem with discipling and mentoring other people.

You can do it, but you've got to be so careful to never let somebody unconsciously or consciously ambiguate you into the chain because we are not there. The pastor is not even there. The chain for a believer goes believer, soul, holy spirit, word of God, Lord Jesus Christ, God, the father.

There are no people in there, no pastors, no missionaries, no friends, no elders. People can be an example. They can speak truth, but you're not in the chain.

And anybody that starts doing something because someone else exhorts or someone else encourages, unless and until they see it in the word of God and the holy spirit confirms it and they do it as unto the Lord and not unto men. What you do, do heartily. This is the verse my dad gave me when I graduated high school, wrote it in front of my Bible.

Whatever you do, do it heartily as unto the Lord, not unto men. That's the only way. And if we inadvertently start influencing someone to do what we do and remember when everybody had a Billy Graham accent, those of you that were old enough, guys that wanted to evangelize, you started hearing Billy Graham accents and Billy Graham mannerisms everywhere.

It was really kind of comical doing what they do because they saw others. So that's first Corinthians chapter 10. In our seventh point, that was point six, avoid, it's inevitably, it is self-centeredness.

Well, I'm not going to change what I do because I know it's okay. And I end up wounding or weakening my brother's conscience. I cause him to stumble.

So that was first Corinthians eight, seven through 13 and 10, 23 through 33.7 avoiding personal sin, avoiding being deceptive, avoiding doing secret shameful things, commends us to the conscience of others so that we can speak truth and they can focus on the truth and not on us. That's a complicated point, but I've tried to boil these down. This one is hard to boil down.

Turn with me to second Corinthians chapter four, verse two. You'll see this and you just have to put second Corinthians four, two, and just underline it three or four times. You got to read the verse to get the point.

There's just no way around it. Second Corinthians chapter four, verse two. What does Paul say here? We have renounced secret and shameful ways.

We avoid them. We've identified them. Notice to renounce a thing, you have to have formerly been involved in it.

You can't renounce a thing you never did. Renounce is to leave and to move away. It's kind of the opposite of fetch.

You're going to get something and bring it back to yourself. Renounce is to have a thing and you say, I'm throwing this away and I'm never going to go get it again. I renounce my former view.

I renounce my former practice. We have renounced secret and shameful ways. Shameful, secretive behavior makes us hypocrites.

We look holy and righteous and obedient and faithful on the outside, but in secret, we're doing shameful things. We're having shameful thoughts. We're engaging in shameful practices.

Paul says, God in his mercy has given us a ministry and we don't lose heart. That's first one. Instead, we have renounced secret and shameful ways.

We do not practice deceit, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by open proclamation of the truth, we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. We can commend ourselves to man's innate sense of what is right and what is wrong because there's no distractions.

If I'm trying to preach the truth, but there's something wrong in my life, something visibly wrong, people sense that there's something shameful, that I'm somehow hypocritical. I'm putting up a false front. This is what has happened with many ministry leaders across the past decades where they're out there with TV ministries and selling books and recording albums and putting out tapes and getting online and the rest of it.

Then it comes out that they've been consorting with harlots and running off with people in the church. One thing and another, what happens to their... They might have been doing a wonderful job of presenting the truth, but their life undermines that message when it comes to people's conscience. How can I listen to this guy when he's a rascal? If he's a rascal in his private life, why should I listen to what he says in public? This is why you have in both Timothy and Titus, our pastoral epistles under study right now, we have the exhortation that those who preach, those who serve as elders, have to have a sterling personal life so that the church as a fellowship and the teaching of the truth can commend itself to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

You can boil this point down any way you want, but we have got to avoid duplicity, avoid shameful behavior, even if it's in private. We have to commend ourselves as believers so that when we represent the truth, when we live the truth, when we speak the truth, it will commend itself to a conscience that is seeking God. And we do this before God, in the sight of God.

We dedicate it to God and ask him to bless the witness of our life and the words of truth

that we speak to others, that God can bless it and that it will appeal to the conscience of those who are seeking truth and seeking goodness. And that we don't complicate the message with a hypocritical, duplicitous and shameful personal life. That's the seventh point.

And with that, we will close for tonight. We'll pick up. We still have five more points to cover as we look at this.

But how important is it for us to cultivate a good conscience and be sensitive to the conscience of others? Scripture is emphatic that this is one of our top priorities. Ignoring this will defeat us. And remember, when we get to Timothy, one of our upcoming verses, points versus first Timothy chapter one, verse five.

Remember, when we started first Timothy, a pure heart, a good conscience and an unhypocritical faith, sandwiched between a pure heart and an unhypocritical faith, good conscience. That's where we're headed next time. We'll close here in a word of prayer.

Father, thank you for the truth of your word. Thank you for how clearly, how effectively and how beautifully it shines light on our hearts, on our lives, on the path that we should walk. We pray that in the light of what we have seen tonight, the Holy Spirit will lead us and guide us so that we can be blessed and be a blessing to those in our periphery as we cultivate a good conscience and respect the conscience of those around us.

We ask it in Jesus name. Amen.