

1Tim 24-05-12a

Good morning. Welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace and Truth Bible Church on this Mother's Day 2024. This is May the 12th. We're continuing our study out of First Timothy chapter 4. We have been looking at the concept found in verse 2 of conscience.

What a tragic thing to have a conscience that is dysfunctional, in this case seared with a hot iron. So what does the Bible have to say about our conscience? How can we ensure that we have a good one? We have covered seven of 16 points, which is every New Testament passage that mentions the conscience. Let's ask God's blessing on our fellowship and study, and we'll resume.

Father, we are grateful for the blessings that have come to us through Your provision, through the way You have structured human life, the human family, our authority structures, the training that we receive, the nurture that we gain. We thank You for our mothers and their ministry. We thank You for ministering of Your grace to us as children and on through adulthood.

We're grateful for this opportunity to spend time together in fellowship and in the study of Your Word. And we ask Your blessing on us as we endeavor to understand it in a way that results in fruitful application, that enables us to more fully and properly represent the Lord Jesus as His body on this earth, to prepare ourselves for service and function now and in the ages to come, and to reflect Your glory so that others will be drawn to You through Christ. We pray that You will bless to our hearts the content of Your Word through the ministry of Your Holy Spirit.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Our central passage is First Timothy chapter 4, verse 1 and 2. The Spirit expressly says that in latter times, some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons.

The target of this deception and the operating sphere of these false doctrines is the conscience. And people will be deceived and will follow doctrines of demons, thinking that they are right because of damaged conscience. And they will end up speaking and repeating these lies.

It is inherently hypocritical to be a believer and yet be an advocate and a protagonist for the demonic agenda, the satanic agenda. "Speaking lies in hypocrisy," verse 2, "having their own conscience seared with a hot iron." This makes it impossible to repent because you don't realize—you don't have a consciousness of being in the wrong, being an enemy of the cross, having been cut off from Christ, fallen from grace, as Paul says over in Galatians.

And the result of this is to follow in verses 3 and 4 and 5. But we've paused to take a look at this conscience very quickly. What we have seen so far: first, Acts 23:1, a good conscience before God can still do bad things. We think our conscience is good; God has a quite different opinion. Paul, in good conscience, persecuted the church.

Secondly—and by the way, that tells us that we need some sort of external diagnostic on our conscience. Simply asking ourselves, "Is my conscience good?" is not good enough. It has to be diagnosed and repaired from the outside.

Secondly, in Acts 24:16, it takes effort. Paul says, "I strive to maintain a good conscience before God and man." The third point from Romans 2:15: everyone has a conscience, whether inside church, outside church, in Israel, as a Gentile. Everyone that has normal mental function has an inbuilt sort of a pattern conscience with a set of default moral and ethical values that have been placed there by God.

There are those who will say that this is part of the image or likeness of God, this echo of His righteousness and His frowning at sin and that which is corruption. The fourth point from Romans 9:1: it is possible for our conscience to be a reliable witness. There's a lot of news today about court trials and what is the credibility of the witness. Can you impugn the witness? Is someone a good witness or an incredible or untrustworthy witness? Our conscience can be either one. It can give false testimony to us and tell us we're right when we're wrong. It can also be a reliable witness, but this requires a rehabilitated, a conscience that is blessed by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

We're going to see how that happens, what the specifics are of ensuring that we have a good conscience as we go forward. The fifth point from Romans 13:5: good conscience, a properly oriented and properly functioning conscience, will guide us to respect God-ordained authority, whether it's authority in the home, parents, between husband and wife, governmental authority. These things are ordained by God, as we are told in several places, and a good conscience will recognize the structure that God has placed into society, into what is morally and ethically right, and we will respond by being obedient and submissive to that authority, unless and until the commands of God override and supersede human government.

The sixth point is from 1 Corinthians 8:7-13 and 1 Corinthians 10:23-33, and this looks outward. We have been looking at the possession of a conscience and its function within us. Now you have the sensitivity to the conscience of others, and being insensitive, uncaring, indifferent, can lead us to wound and weaken the conscience of others who are maybe younger in the faith, haven't learned the specific things that we have learned through the Word of God and by experience, and we are enjoined, we are commanded, we are exhorted to be sensitive to the conscience of others as we choose how to behave before them and before the world.

The seventh point is from 2 Corinthians 4:2. This is where we left off last time, and this is the complicated one. This is the one where you need to really read the verse to get all of the facets. It's a complex statement, but avoiding personal sin, specifically sins that are deceitful, commands us to the conscience of others before God and qualifies us to speak the truth in a way that will be effective.

God can use us to speak the truth to others, to represent the truth to others as we are sensitive to their conscience, and we don't try to give a good message from a bad source. There is some overemphasis on having a quote-unquote good witness, where you've got to live a squeaky clean life in order to be a good witness, because our whole function and purpose is to be witnesses. This is evangelical Christianity.

I personally don't advertise myself or identify myself as evangelical. It's an easy descriptor for people who generally have a high view of Scripture and love God and love the Lord Jesus and understand the ministry of the Holy Spirit in many ways, but the problem with the evangelical label is this specifically says my purpose and function is to evangelize others. That is the primary mission. Everything else is subordinate to that. So I need to live a good life so that I can evangelize. I need to avoid sin. I need to model good behavior. All of this is outward-looking.

This is a legitimate function for us. It is a wonderful opportunity for us. It is a tremendous privilege for us to be involved in evangelism, but it is not the primary goal. The primary goal is to grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, have the power of God functional in our life. How does the power of God come into the life of the believer? We cultivate the presence, the power, the influence of the Holy Spirit, and we learn the Word of God. We find good presentation of that Word. We take it on board. We endeavor to live in its light.

We're going to see the relationship of those two features as they pertain to the conscience in the next few points. But to say that the primary mission of being a believer in this age is to witness and to evangelize is to take one mission and make it the primary mission when it isn't.

The difficulty being there, there are many of us that God does not guide and use in that way because He is preparing us and using us for other functions that are equally glory-reflecting, equally necessary, equally a blessing to those inside and outside the fellowship. And to make someone feel somehow inadequate, inferior, dysfunctional, not really a good Christian because you haven't had the privilege of sharing the saving grace of God through Christ with somebody lately.

Famously, this is one of the first questions I was asked and required to respond in writing when I applied to go to seminary in Dallas. "When's the last time you led someone to the Lord?" Well, why don't you ask other questions? When's the last time you prayed? When's the last time you had the opportunity to be blessed in the fellowship of another believer? When's the last time? I mean, there are many, many functions. That is only one. And to take it and make it the bona fide that if you're not doing this, you're not a good Christian is error through misemphasis.

Evangelism is a wonderful privilege. The problem being that people who have evangelism as a gift in some cases think everyone ought to do what I do. Everyone ought to feel the way I feel. Everyone ought to cultivate the opportunities and the functions that I exercise. Not understanding that other people with different gifts, God is equipping and blessing and guiding and providing opportunities and insight and undergirding from the Holy

Spirit to do their particular function, and to distract them by saying, “But why aren't you doing what my gift has me doing?” is trying to make the whole body an eye or an ear or a mouth or a kneecap.

We have different functions, and it doesn't matter. And this would probably get me kicked out of many, many fellowships and circles. It doesn't matter if you ever lead someone to the Lord verbally. What matters is that you have a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith, as we saw in chapter one of this book, this letter to Timothy. If you have a pure heart, a good conscience, which we are now studying, and a sincere faith, God the Holy Spirit will use prepared people for works of service in a wide variety of contexts. Many of these will both directly and indirectly lead to testimony.

Jesus didn't say, “Go forth and tell everyone about the good works of God so that they will be drawn to Him. Go tell everyone about the grace of God in Christ so that they will be drawn to Him.” What did He say? “Let your light so shine before men.” Don't put your light under a bushel. Don't hide your faith. Don't pretend you're not a believer. Don't fail to confess Him before men. But we are a lamp. The lamp sits on a lampstand and shines.

Some of us have the wonderful God-given privilege of actual leading of people to Christ. It's terrific. All of us, in some way, shape, or form, were given the gospel and responded to it, and that's great. But you've heard me say many times, the Marine Corps isn't given the primary mission of recruiting. Recruiting is essential. Recruiting is vital. All of us came into the service some way, heard about it, saw some advertising, talked to a recruiter, knew a Marine, were descended from a Marine. But there are a variety of ways by which we come into the service of God through Christ, but our whole mission is not, “Well, now we've got to go find a bunch of other people and get them all into the service as well.” It is an essential, but it is not central.

And it hurts people's feelings sometimes if you tell them evangelism is not the central mission of being a believer. But look at the Word of God. However, having said that, we don't want to diminish or underappreciate the importance of how we live as a part of that light shining before men.

And believers are one of the biggest obstacles to Christian faith there is, because people look and say, “Well, you're hypocrites, you're holier than thou. As you go in, you've got a good old boys club, but you're insensitive to the needs of the community. You're insensitive to the needs of people within your own fellowship. Look at the way you live. You claim to honor Christ and He's your Savior, and I don't see any difference in the way you live and the way I live. And so why should I embrace this faith?” And it's a valid criticism.

Believers are often the biggest obstacle to those who are interested but say, “Well, I don't want to be in that group. Look at them.” So that's this point: avoiding a life that is detrimental, that is confusing, that is an outright deception, a hypocrisy, if you will, is essential to commending us as messengers of Christ, as representatives of Christ. You don't want a discredited witness, even if that witness is telling the truth. It's hard to believe someone who has a history of deception, prevarication, misdirection, underhanded plotting and scheming, statements they have said elsewhere. Again, you can look at current events for examples of this.

So that is our sixth point, 1 Corinthians 8:7 through 13 and 10:23 through 33. We need to be aware of the effect we have on others so that the truth of Christ, the truth of Christian faith, isn't obscured. We don't distract people. They need to get past us and come to God the Father through Christ. And we should not be a stumbling block, whether at the initial point of saving faith or those who are in the earlier stages of Christian growth. Don't cause the weaker brother to stumble. That was the sixth and seventh point together. 1 Corinthians 8:7 through 13 and 10:23 through 33 were the sixth point. The sort of complex one is point seven. We pick up now at point eight.

Point eight comes from 2 Corinthians 5:11. Isn't it interesting how much detail there is about the function of our conscience and how to ensure we have a good one in the Scriptures. The Apostle Paul, beginning in verse 9, says, “We make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well-pleasing to Him.” Whatever you do, do it heartily, as unto the Lord, not unto men. “We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body.”

Notice, it isn't just, “I had a good heart. I was in general a good person.” We will be judged by the visible activities in which we engage, the deeds that we perform. At the judgment seat of Christ, it's not a judgment of your theology. It's not a judgment of your affirmations. There are a lot of people today who want to affirm a cause. “I support this group. I commend this cause. I want to fight for this right or this opportunity or this provision for others.” And they believe that by supporting this, they have somehow accrued to themselves righteousness.

It isn't what you say. It isn't what you think. And it isn't what you believe that will be judged at the judgment seat of Christ. It is what we do. "We make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well-pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things in the body, according to what he has done." Actions reflect intentions. Actions reflect values and goals and priorities. They come out in what we do.

This can be very convicting when you start thinking about, well, if I take a typical day and map it out, where did I spend my time? What did I do with the talent or the mina of time? I had, let's say you're a good American with great health habits and you get eight hours of sleep. That leaves you 16 waking hours in the day. How did I invest those talents, those minas, those hours? And we will tell ourselves one thing, but if you journal it, if you write it down, if you map it out, where was my time spent? This is what we do with the body.

In my mind—remember Paul in Romans 7—"with my mind, I serve the law of God, but my body is all dedicated to sin." So we will receive—there is going to be recompense. Read Romans chapter 2 for the nature of this judgment. It is not just the reward seat of Christ. It is the judgment seat of Christ. And we will receive what has been done in the body.

This is not just what happens at the end of your high school year. You go to the auditorium and they parade people across and you get a little pin for this and you get a letter for that sport. Then you get a certificate for the who's who and the honor society and the best in this and the brightest in that. This is a judgment seat. And some of what is received—in fact, I suspect most of what will be received at the judgment seat—is going to be tribulation, wrath, and anguish on every soul of man who does evil, who practices, whose conscience fools them. "Lord, Lord, in Your name, did we not do?" "I never knew you. Depart from me." Darkness, which is outside, weeping, wailing, gnashing of teeth.

If this does not motivate us, I don't know what will. We need to evaluate ourselves. If we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. This is the great escape clause. We want to judge ourselves now. Get our conscience checked now. Make sure we are doing what we're supposed to do now so that we are not judged later. We will receive the things of the body according to what we have done, whether good or bad.

Verse 11. This is our passage. "Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord." Do you notice the terror of the Lord is associated with the judgment seat of Christ? We think, "Oh, well, you know, the fire is going to come. Gold, silver, precious stones will remain. Wood, hay, and stubble, it'll just vaporize." Have you ever burnt a brush pile? Everybody that I'm looking at has. When you've got a big brush pile and you get that thing lit, how close can you stand to it? I've had the girls get folding chairs and marshmallows and sticks and, well, we're burning a brush pile, we'll roast weenies, we'll put in marshmallows. You can't get within 20 feet of the thing when it's at its height—20, 25, 30 feet sometimes. The heat is intense.

If most of the produce of our life is wood, hay, and stubble, we will be driven from the throne by the heat of that combustion. "Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord." Please circle judgment seat of Christ in verse 10 and terror of the Lord in verse 11. Paul doesn't say, "Knowing, therefore, the opportunity we have to be approved and praised and sitting on Jesus' lap and being warmly embraced and presented to the Father and given a wonderful mansion in heaven on the streets of gold and the pearly gates and so on." Thinking about the judgment seat of Christ, Paul says, "You know what motivates me? I know I will be judged for what I do in light of my gift and my commission and my calling, and I know the terror of the Lord."

And knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men. Paul has the apostolic office, the apostolic calling, the apostolic gift. He is an evangelist. He is one who calls others both to saving faith and to living faith. How much of Paul's writing preserved for us over the last 2,000 years, how much of it is dedicated to evangelism? How much of it is a tract to give to unbelievers to get them saved?

People say, "Well, you know, Romans, the Roman road." We've done Romans, verse by verse, word by word, all 16 chapters. And you know, as I do, that while the principles are applicable, that all have sinned and come short and that the wages of sin is death, these principles are true. But in their context, Paul is not talking to unbelievers when he makes those points. Who is he talking to? Read the first part of chapter 1. "I'm not ashamed of the gospel of Christ" in verse 16. Go up to the first couple of verses and see to whom he is speaking. It is the saints. Romans is written to believers, and Paul writes his letters to believers.

Paul does not have a—wouldn't it be great? People write gospel tracts all the time. Why didn't Paul write a gospel tract? Why don't we have, you know, First Thyatirans or Second Laodiceans or something that is nothing

but Paul to the mass of you who have not yet come to saving faith in Christ? “Let me explain to you the problem of sin, your need for a Savior, the grace of God in Christ, the work of redemption, reconciliation, and propitiation that is available to you to claim without works of any kind.” Paul describes our salvation, but he doesn't pitch it as an evangelistic sermon anywhere in our writings. Why? He did it in person. We know he went to the synagogue and convinced men from the Old Testament Scriptures who were Jews or had familiarization.

Why don't we have a gospel tract in the New Testament? You are the tract. I am the tract. It is a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith in us that makes us credible witnesses to Christ. It is our life. A good man of my intimate acquaintance put this in a hymn lyric: “Your life will be your witness.”

So this is our point eight from 2 Corinthians 5:11. We persuade men, but we are well known to God. Why? I trust we are well known in your conscience, that when you look at us, you don't find the kind of things we talked about in point six and point seven that weaken others, that distract others, that deflect others, that prevent others from accepting the message. We are not a stumbling block, Paul says. We commend ourselves to your conscience.

When we are in the business of persuading people to come to faith in Christ, when we are in the business of persuading men about Christian faith, Christian life, Christian purpose, Christian mission, availing ourselves of the power of God through the Spirit and through the Word, we are well known to God and we trust that we are commended to your conscience. You do not find some reason to look at us and say, “I don't think that message is valid.” You can see the connection between our sixth, seventh, and eighth point. That's a very happy progress there. First of all, to not be tripping each other up. Secondly, to not be confusing and off-putting to the world. And then Paul's own example here.

So, aspiring to please God, aspiring to be known to God in a positive way, motivates concern for others. This is an appeal to conscience. This is also the exhortation we find in 2 Timothy.

Our ninth point comes from 1 Timothy 1, verse 5, something we have already seen. The purpose, the goal of our instruction, the purpose of the commandment, as we have seen so emphatically this morning. Paul says in verse 4, we don't want people giving heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification, which is in faith. We don't want to be a distraction. We don't want to make issues out of things that aren't central and aren't important. And even if they are legitimate, genealogies may be real, they may be true. “All things are lawful, but not all things are edifying,” he says in another place.

The purpose of this commandment—you charge some to teach no other doctrine. Other doctrines are not coming from God; they're coming from demons. They are deceptive, they are deflecting, they are distracting. The purpose of this commandment, to focus on the faith and focus on what is important and central, is love from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith.

We've covered this in great detail in the past. I'm not going to belabor that point. But notice that a good conscience is in the center of, is bracketed by. If you had a three-part chiasm, your good conscience is right in the middle. You've got to start with a pure conscience, and you've got to have genuine faith. You have to believe there is a coming judgment seat of Christ that we should be terrified of arriving at and flunking. Paul doesn't say, “I'm kind of concerned about the judgment seat.” He says, “I'm terrified of getting there and falling short.”

So along with a good conscience, how can we ensure we have a pure heart? This is identifying, confessing, and abandoning sin and patterns of sin. Genuine faith: you've got to know the Word to believe the Word. That's why we have regular Bible class, and we endeavor to let the Scriptures give witness to the full counsel of God. Pure heart, good conscience, sincere faith—that is a tripod on which our Christian life should rest. Any one of those is missing, you're going to fall over. Two out of three is not good enough. Sixty-six percent is a failing grade. You've got to have all three.

So that's our ninth point. The Word of God should produce love. Notice the measure. Love is the measure. If I am having difficulty loving, if I find people more annoying than blessing, if I find fault rather than appreciation, something's wrong with my love. Well, how do I fix that? I can't just squinch my eyes shut and clench my fists and say, “I'm going to love. I'm just going to have love.” Where does it come from? I need to look at my heart. Is my heart pure? Have I got unconfessed sin? Have I got wrong priorities, wrong goals, wrong values in my heart? I need to start by purifying myself. Instead of finding fault with somebody else, look at myself. What does my heart look like? Maybe I better start there, get the broom out and do some sweeping.

A pure heart, a good conscience. Is my evaluation of what is good and what is bad, what is important and what is unimportant, what is ethical and what is unethical, what is moral and what is immoral—is that healthy? Is it based on the Word of God in the power and guidance of the Spirit of God? And is my faith genuine? Do I have a genuine anticipation of the judgment seat of Christ and the evaluation of my life and what I do?

Have you ever noticed little kids get really good at this sometimes if you let them, and adults famously will do this? If you point out that there is a failure, there's a shortcoming, the first thing they want to do is say, "Well, but you fill in the blank here. You know, how can you tell me that I shouldn't stay out late with my boyfriend when you do this or you do that or you do the other? You say I can't drive, but look at you." And teenagers learn the skill of deflecting criticism by using the little U-shaped tube you see on Warner Brothers cartoons. You're shooting at somebody and they grab a U-shaped tube and the bullets just curve around and come right back at the shooter.

This is a famous, well-known, longstanding defense mechanism, is to deflect and accuse either the accuser or someone else. We've got to stop that. Genuine faith says, "I want to be well-known to God in a positive way. I want to be presentable before His throne by the Lord Jesus at His return. I need to look at myself and not busy myself finding fault with others. Who are you to judge another man's servant? Everyone will give an account of himself before the master."

And God is not going to countenance—the Lord Jesus is going to stop your mouth with a cork as soon as you say, "But he, but she, but they." We will give an account of ourselves and ourselves only. You can't say, "It's not my fault. This person—you know, the woman gave to me and I did eat, the snake beguiled me and I did eat." It's not going to work.

So we need to cultivate a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith. We know how to do this in the power of God. And we know the measure. The measure is love. How flexible am I? How understanding am I? How forgiving am I? How supportive and positive and upbuilding am I? That's love. Read the love chapter. Love suffers long. Love is patient. Love is kind. Love doesn't vaunt itself up. It's not puffed up, and so on. If those things aren't happening, if I read the love chapter and I don't match it, what do I do? I can't just say, "Well, I've got to address the symptoms." Go to the cause. Love comes from the pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith. And we know how to get these because the power of God gives us all three: the Word of God and the Spirit of God. That's where to get the answer.

Well, that's a very important point. We're going to pause here and take our break. We're going to pick up—we're going to still be in First Timothy, but we've got three more books to look at, and that is Titus, Hebrews, and First Peter. That'll be our second session that will complete our study of conscience. And hopefully, in the light of the clear guidance of the Word of God, we can cultivate a good conscience along with these other essentials to live our lives in a way that pleases God.

Let's pause here and take our break.