

A Good Conscience (part 1)

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Preacher: Jon Hueni

[0:00] Well, we're studying the conscience, that faculty in man, in all men, and we saw that when we define conscience, we said it's an inner courtroom that God has set up in the hearts of all men, and in that courtroom are law books that are the dictates of conscience defining right and wrong. There is a witness in this courtroom because conscience bears witness as to what is right and wrong, but also as to our behavior, what we did, what we thought. Conscience bears witness. And then there's a judge because conscience weighs all the evidence and brings out a verdict. Guilty, condemned, or innocent, approved, not guilty. And then we studied the different conditions of conscience. Conscience was in a perfect state when God created Adam, but it didn't last for long. Adam fell, and with his fall, all of his faculties, mind, affections, will, conscience, became defiled. And they don't work right. Instead of our affections running up to God, they now run to self and sin. Instead of our wills choosing the way of God, we choose our own way and so on. And so with conscience, it was defiled. And the law books don't just have God's law in them.

Yes, it has something of God's law upon it, but there's also man's traditions and man's thoughts, and there's pages and chapters of God's law missing. And so we found that conscience can be in various conditions. It may be erroneous. That means it could send false messages. It could say you're innocent when really you're as guilty as sin. And it could do the opposite. And that we would call a weak conscience or an oversensitive conscience where it condemns you when it ought to commend you. It may be insensitive.

It may not condemn you when it should. It may be silent, dull, and callous, drowsy, seared. And it grows insensitive by continually violating conscience and stuffing its voice and drowning out its voice until God gives men over to a seared conscience to do things that ought not to be done. And they do it without a peep from their conscience. Well, the different conditions of conscience then brings us to the last kind of conscience, and it's the good conscience. We've been heading this way and perhaps seen glimpses of it as we've defined these various states of conscience. But we come today to begin, and we won't finish today, but to study a good conscience. And in a general sense, a good conscience is a conscience that is in good working order. In other words, it accuses when it should, when we violate the laws of God. It commends us when it should, when we have done what is right, what is our duty. It warns us when it should warn us, and it does not warn us when it shouldn't.

So that's a good conscience. But there is a more specific sense in which the conscience is said to be made good in the scriptures. The Bible speaks of a clear conscience. And a good conscience is to be a clear conscience. Clear in the sense of being free from accusation.

[3:49] Free from condemning and blame. Not nagging you, but commending you. And rightly so. Not because you don't have the right law books in mind. No. Commending you in the light of God's law.

In the light of your duty. Conscience is that is clear is an approving conscience. Now the getting and keeping of a good and clear conscience then is no small thing for the Christian.

Turn to 1 Timothy chapter 1. I'd like you to see that according to the Apostle Paul, the getting and keeping of a clear conscience belongs to the most basic summary of what the Christian life is about. First Timothy chapter 1 and verse 5. And here we read the goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

This love that we are to have is the goal and it comes from these sources, a pure heart, a good conscience and a sincere faith. Look at verse 19.

Holding on to faith and a good conscience. Some have rejected these and so have shipwrecked their faith. Those were men who who morally fell into sin and turned away from the true faith to beliefs and to religion that allows for their sins. And this isn't just hypothetical. It's they have names

on them.

[5:42] Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I've handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme. So we're to hold on to faith and a good conscience. It's almost as a summary of how to live the Christian life. You'll need faith and you'll need a good conscience. And if you let go of a good conscience, you will shipwreck your faith. And that's a fitting metaphor. Calvin says, if we wish to reach the port with our faith intact, we should make a good conscience, the pilot of our course or otherwise there is danger of shipwreck. Faith may be sunk by a bad conscience as much as by a whirlpool in any stormy sea. So a good conscience is not an option. If you hope to arrive in the port of heaven, it's one of those absolutely necessary items. Notice in chapter three in verse nine, the qualifications for a deacon are here listed. And in verse nine, we're told they must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. It's not enough that they have the truths of the faith in their minds. They are to keep hold of these truths with a clear conscience, a conscience that does not condemn them for the violation of those truths. The ethical demands of truth must be held without their consciences condemning them. That was not true of Hymenaeus and Philetus. They are Alexander and

Hymenaeus. They they would teach. But then their consciences condemned them because they didn't practice what they preached. And over in chapter second, Timothy, chapter one in verse three, Paul says, I thank God whom I serve as my forefathers did with a clear conscience. That's a summary of his Christian life. He serves the Lord and he does so with a clear conscience, a conscience that is not condemning him. And that's not so clearly for Paul. Maintaining a clear conscience is of the utmost importance to the Christian. We see it just in these little letters to Timothy. And that's not only true of Paul. Turn over to first Timothy or first Peter, chapter three, where we see Peter weigh on, weigh in on this same issue. And first Peter three, 16. First Peter three, 16, were commanded keeping a clear conscience so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. So people are accusing you. But if you keep a clear conscience, they'll be ashamed of trying to cast blame upon you. Keeping a clear conscience of most importance to the Christian. Turn to Acts, chapter 24, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts. 24 and verse 16. Paul's on trial. He's the one being tried. And he's telling Felix. The governor who what he believes in. And it's all in agreement with what the law and the prophets say. And he says in in verse 15, I have the same hope in God as these men that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. I do believe that that when we die, it's not the end that there is a day of resurrection, when both the righteous and the wicked will be resurrected to the judgment and to a life that never ends. I believe that. Therefore.

Therefore, so in light of that fact that to die is to come to an afterlife. Verse 16. So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man. Do you see how Paul uses that almost as a summary of how to live the Christian life to keep your conscience clear?

Holding to these truths, I believe in the resurrection and the life to come, but to hold them with a clear conscience. Paul practiced what he preached. Notice that keeping a clear conscience is both difficult work and continuous work. First, it's difficult work. Paul says, I strive.

I strive. I make it my constant business at all times. Or excuse me, the word here for strive is to exercise, to discipline, to drill, to take pains, to labor, to endeavor. It's a word of great energy being put forth. I strive.

[11:02] Like a runner strives to reach the finish line. So then we're put on notice that maintaining a clear conscience is going to cost you some effort.

Don't think that this thing is something easy. Not at all. It's difficult work. I strive. Then it's secondly, continuous work. I strive always. This is not a hobby on the side with me. It's not something I do if I don't have anything else to think about or to do. No, this is something that is front and center with me. If you would know who Paul is, you must know that I am one who is always striving for something. Always making it my business. Not just when it's coming time to keep to have the Lord's supper. And so I examine myself and strive to have a clear conscience with God and men. Not just then all the time. Not just when I come to die and on my deathbed, I want to make sure that I have a clear conscience between God and men. No, I live that way. I'm always striving.

So this was right at the very top of Paul's list of things to do each day. Whatever else does or doesn't get done today. This must be done. I want to have a conscience clear, not condemning me from God or from men. Now. That tells us then that a clear conscience is not only something we must gain, it's something we must maintain. There are very few things in life that are truly

maintenance free.

And a clear conscience is not one of them. Like a car, a house, a body in good shape, a garden. So a conscience, a clear conscience needs to be tended to keep it in that condition.

So I have to ask you, what role does a clear conscience have in your daily life? Is it one of those key things about you? Is it a summary of your life? Is it a goal you consciously pursue to live in a way that keeps conscience clear of accusation? Are you taking any pains to achieve it each day, even at the cost of denying yourself? Say no to a host of other things that would take it from you? Well, that's what we're at now. We're coming to ask, how do we get and maintain this clear conscience? Well, we need to know what it is that we're wanting to remain clear of. Well, it's clear of sin, clear of guilt, clear of condemnation. We're not wanting to give conscience a reason to say, guilty, guilty. You broke this commandment. You neglected this duty. That's our aim.

[13 : 58] So as we set out to get and maintain a clear conscience right at the threshold, we must be clear. Gaining a clear conscience, if we would gain a clear conscience, we must first of all trust in the blood of Christ. Trust in the blood of Christ's atonement. Now you say, what does the blood that flowed from the center cross at Calvary have to do with me having a conscience that does not condemn me?

Well, it has everything to do, doesn't it? Hebrews chapter 9, turn there and let's see how the book of Hebrews speaks about the conscience and what can clear the conscience. We're going to see perhaps a half a dozen things, but if we miss this one, none of the other ones will have any good effect upon us.

The blood of Jesus must cleanse the conscience if it's to be clear. And this is what makes the new covenant better than the old covenant. In the old covenant of the Jews under the covenant with Moses.

Who was it that could go into the most holy place? Who could go into that little cubicle at the very front of the temple where God's presence was? Who could go in there?

The high priest. Not just any priest. Only the highest priest. How often could he go in there? Once a year. And what did he have to have with him? Blood. Blood. Okay? So that was the old covenant showing to us that the way into the presence of God was not yet opened up. Look at it from verse 8.

[15 : 55] The Holy Spirit. This is Hebrews 9 and verse 8. The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the most holy place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was standing.

This is an illustration for the present time indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper. What was the problem with all those blood sacrifices in the old covenant? They were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper. They couldn't scrub the conscience free to where conscience no longer accused. They couldn't do that. Though verse 10 says those they were only external regulations. They were only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings, external rules or regulations applying until the time of the new order. There's a new order coming where it won't just be ceremonial external shadows, types, figures, metaphors, but it will be the real blood that cleanses the conscience. Under the old covenant it was pictures and types and shadows.

Notice now the contrast with the blood of Christ. Verse 11. When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made. That is to say not a part of this creation.

He's talking about the very presence of God in heaven. He entered into the most holy place of heaven. And verse 12 says he did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves like the earthly priest did, but he entered the most holy place once for all, not just once a year, once for all. And by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption, the blood of goats and bulls and ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean, sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. So sin would keep you from being able to go into the temple, even the outer courts.

[18 : 19] You were you were made ceremonially unclean by sin. But if you would be sprinkled with the blood of animals that would ceremonially outwardly make you clean so you could go into the temple and worship. And if that was true, verse 14 says, how much more? It's an argument from the lesser to the greater. How much more than will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death so that we may serve the living God? In other words, the blood of Jesus doesn't just cleanse us outwardly

and ceremonially and just get us into the outer courts of worship. No, the blood of Jesus actually cleanses us inwardly and washes our conscience.

From acts that lead to death, sin, the wages of which is death, so that we may serve the living God. So to be made good, our conscience must be sprinkled with the blood of Christ.

Now in the old covenant, that was literal. They took the blood and they sprinkled it on the people. Maybe you remember too, at the day of Passover, they splattered it over the door. Real blood of animals splattered, sprinkled to cover us. It was a picture. But now our conscience must be sprinkled with the blood of Christ. What does that mean? We don't have any blood of Jesus, physical blood of Jesus around to sprinkle our conscience. Even if we did, how could we sprinkle our conscience? It would hit our flesh. No, he's talking about an inward trust in that blood to cleanse us. You see, if the Israelite who had the slain lamb would go and sprinkle and splatter that blood on the doorpost, he is trusting that God's promise will come true, that this blood will cause the destroying angel to pass over me and save me from the destroying wrath of God. And it was by faith that he would splatter the blood.

It was by faith that they would be sprinkled with the blood of the sacrifice. And so we are not looking for physical blood to do something with our physical bodies.

No, we are looking to apply that blood that was once shed on Calvary's cross to our consciences and to believe by faith that that blood cleanses me from all sin and guilt.

[21 : 15] Notice it in chapter 10. Again, the same point being made. The law talking about the old covenant, the old covenant law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming, not the realities themselves.

The reality is Christ. The shadow cast back from Christ is the blood sacrifices. For this reason, it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. If it could, if those blood sacrifices could make the sacrifice perfect, well then, would they not have stopped being offered?

For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. Do you see that? No longer felt guilty. That's the condemning conscience.

You're a sinner. You're a sinner. You're guilty before God. Well, if those sacrifices cleansed their hearts, well then, they wouldn't have felt guilty. And they wouldn't have needed to offer any more sacrifices. Verse 3.

But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins. So far from removing sins, they actually remind you of your sins. Because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin.

[22 : 36] That's what's wrong with the old covenant. It was only temporary. It was only provisional. It was never meant to actually cleanse the conscience and heart from sin. It was meant to portray and picture and point us to the one coming lamb who could once for all cleanse our consciences.

A real sacrifice is needed to cleanse from real guilt. Now, why is the blood of Christ able to cleanse our conscience of guilty feelings?

Can someone explain that in your own words? Why does the blood of Jesus enable us not to feel guilt before God?

The blood of Jesus washes away our sin, cleanses us from sin. Mark? So if sin is gone and guilt is gone, there's no more guilty feelings for sin.

No more reason to feel guilt. The blood of Jesus does take away our sin. So we're no longer guilty on the court of heaven. Heaven says now that man, that woman is now righteous.

[23 : 59] She has the righteousness of Jesus put to her account. And so when I look on the law, when God looks on the law books, he sees not our sin, but he sees the righteous obedience of the son of God.

His blood that cleansed our sins. And we're pronounced righteous, not guilty before that God. And when that happens in the court of heaven, there's an echo of it in the court of conscience that says it is true.

It is true. William Gurnall said peace of conscience is nothing but the echo of pardoning mercy. So when the blood of Christ, our pardoning God says, when by the blood of Christ, our pardoning God says, I am satisfied.

Our own conscience echoes back. I am satisfied. There's no more accusation. God has received the full payment of Jesus on our behalf.

And so he's satisfied. And if he's satisfied, our consciences say, I too am satisfied. Isaac Watson is him says, Jesus, my great high priest offered his blood and died.

[25 : 12] My guilty conscience seeks no sacrifice beside his powerful blood did once atone. And now it pleads before the throne. I don't need any other sacrifice.

I don't need any other blood. And so my guilty conscience can rest. Let us wonder grace and justice point and join and point to mercy store when through grace in Christ.

Our trust is justice. That's God in the court of heaven. Justice smiles and ask no more. And if justice is smiling in heaven, then there's an echo of that smile in my own conscience.

Yes, Mark. Amen. Remember that passage in Hebrews 12, 24, the blood of Christ speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

Cain slew his brother Abel and the blood from the ground cried vengeance. The blood of Jesus Christ. Forgive.

[26 : 17] Forgive. So when the blood of Jesus is crying forgiven. Conscience echoes that cry of forgiveness. So there is when there's peace with God in the court of heaven.

There's peace with God in the in the court of conscience. But conscience will only find rest when sins are really and fully and finally paid for.

Nothing less will satisfy and awaken conscience. John Owen says nothing can give perfect peace of conscience with God. But what can make atonement for sin?

And whoever attempts it in any other way will never attain it in this world nor hereafter. Turn to Hebrews 10.

And verses 19 through 22. Another passage that shows. That speaks of a.

[27 : 20] Of a. Of a conscience that's cleansed. Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence.

Verse 19. Have confidence to enter the most holy place by the blood of Jesus.

What gives confidence to to go right into the court of heaven? And you do that whenever you pray, whether here or driving down the road, wherever you are.

You enter into the holy place. What gives you confidence? One thing. The blood of Jesus. So having since we have this confidence to enter the most holy place by the blood of Jesus.

By a new and living way open for us through the curtain. That is his body. And since we have a high priest over the house of God. Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith. Having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience. And having our bodies washed with pure water. Do you remember what happened the moment that Jesus died on the cross?

[28 : 29] Somewhere inside. He died outside the city gates of Jerusalem. Inside the city gates in the temple. Something happened.

What was it? The curtain was torn in two. So as long as the old covenant was in place. There was this curtain that kept everyone out of the most holy place.

Only the high priest once a year and with blood. But the moment that our great high priest Jesus offered not just annually. But once for all his blood.

And not in some earthly temple. But in the temple of God in heaven. In his very presence. Once he presented the sacrifice of his blood before God.

The earthly temple was over with. You don't need it anymore. And so the veil that separated man from God was torn asunder.

[29 : 27] And now the way into God is opened up. Right through his torn flesh. It was through Jesus being torn open. That we have entrance into the presence of God.

And so we can come. Boldly. Confidently. Not that he's going to damn us. And say depart from me. I never knew you. But trusting in his blood.

We can come with confidence. Knowing he will receive us. He loves us. He will answer our prayers. Because Jesus was damned in our place. And his blood cleanses the heart.

From a guilty conscience. Confident. So that affects. You see. We're talking about something as often as every time we bow to pray. Isn't it?

That's not a. That's a lot in our lives. That this clear conscience. Gives us that bold access to God in prayer.

[30 : 26] When conscience is clouded. We find it hard to pray. When guilt comes in upon our conscience. We find trouble. Don't we? Finding confidence in God's presence.

In worship. In reading his word. In praying to him. And so. A Christian conscience. Is to be.

Made good. By the blood of Jesus. Now let me read. What John Brown said. And I'm. I think it was. It's a helpful. Word for us.

In this way alone then. Through the blood of Jesus. Can the conscience of man be made good. Or kept good. By bringing it.

And keeping it under the pacifying. Purifying power. Of the blood of atonement. A Christian's conscience. Is kept good.

[31 : 21] In the same way that it's made good. It was made good. By bringing it. Under the pacifying. Purifying. Conscious. Blood. Of Christ. And your conscience is kept good.

By keeping it. Under the pacifying. Purifying. Blood of Christ. So here's a question for you. Should a Christian. Should a Christian's conscience.

Bother him. When he sins. Steve. If it doesn't. Something's wrong with his conscience. It's not. It's not making a clear judgment. Of what's on the law books. It's not making a clear witness. And judgment. A good conscience. In good working order.

Yes. Should bother the Christian. When he sins. If it doesn't. Something serious. Is wrong with him. His heart is calloused.

[32 : 25] And he is well nigh to shipwrecking. His own soul. For eternity. You see a good conscience. Allows no peace of mind. When any known duty. Is neglected.

While any known sin. Is indulged. And not confessed. And repented of. And you see that in David. When he would not confess.

And own his sin. He speaks of the heavy hand. Of the Lord upon him. Speaks of his guilt. On his conscience. Read Psalm 32. And you see that. God means for the Christian's conscience.

To smart. When we sin. It is the spirit of God. Who works. Through our conscience. And does convince us. And convict us. Of our sin.

Listen to this quote. By a man named William Mason. All the floods of sin. Can never extinguish. God's love. To his people. All the floods of sin.

[33 : 22] Can never extinguish. God's love. To his people. But one single drop. Of sin. Upon the believer's conscience. Will extinguish. His peace. Not put out God's love.

But it will put out. That peace. That rest. That it is well. Between. My soul. And my God. Sin does not stop.

God's love. But it will interrupt. His peace. How many. Times. Has. My peace. Been interrupted. By sin. My. Confidence.

In prayer. Interrupted. Because as David says. The Lord. Will not hear me. If I cherish. Sin in my heart. If I don't vomit it out. If I hold it to myself.

I know the Lord. Will not hear me. That's true of the Christian. As well. In the new covenant. First John. Chapter three. Whenever our conscience.

[34 : 19] Contracts. Fresh guilt. By sinning. We need to go. We need to go right back. To square one. How did we get a good conscience. In the first place. We went to that fountain. Open for sin. And unclean.

And unclean. And unclean. There's a fountain. Filled with Jesus blood. And we jumped in. And we cleansed. Our conscience. In the blood of Jesus. And so whenever. Our conscience. Contracts. Fresh guilt. We run back. To that same fountain. We. We confess. Our sin again. And we wash. And we trust. In the blood of Jesus. And conscience. Is thereby.

Put to peace. And to rest. In the blood of Christ. Just as in the. Written word. And in writing. We never get past. The ABC's.

You learn the ABC's. Early in life. But you have never. Got beyond them. In whatever communication. However refined. And serious. And educated.

[35 : 12] You still use. A, B, and C. And it's the same thing. With. The cross. The blood of Jesus. We learned it. Very early on. In the Christian life. It was. It was where we first.

Saw the light. It was where we first. Had our hearts. Unburdened from sin. And our conscience. Was cleansed. But we never. Get beyond that. We keep coming back. To Christ crucified.

To wash our sins. To cleanse our conscience. From acts. Of death. And why? Hebrews 9.

14. Why? Do you see it? Why? So that. We may serve. The living God. Did you know. That God. Wants you to serve him. With a conscience.

That is clean. From guilt. You've come to church today. You're going to. You're going to worship God. You're going to serve the Lord. With. With singing. And hearing his word.

[36 : 08] And praying. Do you know that God. Wants you to do that. With a clear conscience. Do you realize that Jesus. Shed his blood.

And suffered. The full wrath of God. Upon him. So that you could come here. This morning. With a conscience. That is clear. Of condemnation. And serve the Lord.

With gladness. He doesn't want us coming. And serving him. Out of guilt. Oh I was guilty. This week. Of this and that. And the other thing. So I've got to go to church. And put some money in the box.

And pray. And read the Bible. And sit and listen. To a sermon. God doesn't want that. He sent his son. To cleanse our consciences.

From sin. So that. We may serve. The living God. So part of our preparation. For worship. Is to get our consciences. Cleansed again. In the blood of Jesus.

[37 : 04] That as we. Start with the first hymn. We're ready. To serve the Lord. With gladness. From hearts. And consciences. Made clean. By the blood. Of the lamb.

And so. With my burden. I begin. Bunions. Or Newton says. With my burden. I begin. Lord remove. This load of sin. Let thy blood.

For sinners spilt. Set my conscience. Free from guilt. There's not one time. That's. Newton. Over and over again. Burden.

Guilty conscience. Let thy blood. For sinners spilt. Cleanse my conscience. From guilt. Well. May the Lord help us then. Today. To serve him.

With a clear conscience. We'll look. In two weeks. At other ways. That we. Maintain. A clear conscience. Before the Lord. We're dismissed.