

Maintaining a Clear Conscience

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Date: 30 September 2012

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[0:00] Today, Lord willing, will be the last of our eight lessons on the conscience, that faculty that God has put into the heart of every human being.

And we've been studying for seven weeks, and just by way of quick review and perhaps help for those who are with us for the first time from Arizona, we're looking at conscience as the inner courtroom of the heart.

And we notice that in this courtroom there are three things. What are they, Grace Fellowship? What's one thing? The law books. The dictates of conscience.

Stating what is right. And what is wrong. Not necessarily perfect, because conscience has fallen along with all the rest of our faculties.

But there is still something on the law books of conscience that reminds us of God's voice of what's right and wrong. What else is in this room, this inner courtroom? A witness.

[1:02] A witness to what we've done. What the law has said. What we're considering doing. And then what else is in the courtroom?

A judge. Making moral judgments upon our behavior, our thoughts, our motives, and all that we do. That's the conscience.

Then we looked at different cases of conscience. Conscience can be in an erroneous state. And it can make errors and send wrong messages. It can say guilty when we're really not guilty.

Or not guilty when we really are guilty. Especially if the law books are missing pages and chapters and have man's traditions in them.

Then we get an erroneous conscience. The Bible talks about a weak conscience. About an insensitive, calloused conscience.

[1:58] It talks about an overly sensitive conscience. And then it talks about a good and a clear conscience. And that's what we've been on the last couple of weeks.

How do we gain and maintain a clear conscience that is void of offense? It's something that the Apostle Paul constantly labored at.

And our taking off point has been Acts 24 and verse 16. Where Paul says, I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.

That's the clear conscience. Not condemning us, but approving us. Not accusing, but excusing us. Based upon the light that it has. So what is involved? What kind of striving? What kind of work is involved? How do we get a clear conscience?

[2:55] And how do we keep it clear? Well, we said first, by trusting in the blood of the Atonement. It's the only thing that can cleanse a conscience from sin. The book of Hebrews has much to say about that.

Secondly, carefully avoiding sin and the occasions to sin. Lest I give it a reason to accuse me.

Third, keeping it well informed with scripture.

And sensitive to the word of God. Then faithfully attending preaching. Where your conscience is addressed from the Bible. Heeding its first warnings.

Being frequent in the self-examination of your heart and life. Keeping short accounts with conscience. So that when it condemns, we run immediately back to the blood of the Atonement.

By confessing our sins and being cleansed from all iniquity. Well, that's just a running review. Those are not easy things. In fact, they're things that we find very difficult.

[4:00] And we only take pains for something we regard as valuable and worth doing. And so this is where I'd like for us to end our study on the conscience.

What motivations do we have? To always be striving to keep our consciences clear before God and man. What can urge us on and encourage us in this duty regarding our conscience?

So some concluding motivations today. Number one, our persevering to the end depends upon this. I want you to turn to 1 Timothy chapter 1. 1 Timothy 1.

And as you do, imagine that you were living 200 years ago or 2,000 years ago in the time that Timothy was being addressed by Paul.

A year when people crossed the oceans on sailboats. Maybe you've seen replicas of the Mayflower, a boat such as that.

[5:08] And you're in your little ship. And you're heading out to cross the ocean. And as you're sailing out of the harbor, you notice the tide bringing in the wreckage of other ships.

And there's splintered boards, broken masts, torn pieces of sail, waterlogged cargo washing up on shore. Wouldn't your mind be filled with apprehension and questions?

Not long ago, these were nice looking ships. Sailing out of this same harbor. What happened? Well, look what Timothy says. 1 Timothy 1:18.

Timothy, my son, I give you this instruction in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by following them you may fight the good fight, holding on to faith and a good conscience. Some have shipwrecked these, and so have shipwrecked, or some have rejected these, and so have shipwrecked their faith. Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme.

[6:20] So here's Timothy. He's a relatively young man in the faith and in the ministry. He's no novice. He's not a recent convert, or Paul would not have thrust him into the ministry.

But he is young, as this letter shows. And so Timothy is setting out to sea. Now, without Paul. He's always been going with Paul.

Now he's without Paul. And this aged veteran sailor wants Timothy to view the wreckage around him. Even Hymenaeus and Alexander, to name two.

And he's saying to Timothy, why did these ships go down? Why didn't they make it on the high seas of life and ministry? And Paul says it's because they rejected, they neglected, they pushed aside faith and a good conscience.

And that's why they're spiritual shipwrecks. And if you don't do differently, you too will shipwreck your faith. You must hold on to faith and a good conscience, Timothy.

[7:25] And is this not what we witness going on all around us? The shoreline of Christianity is littered with the wreckage of people who once professed to follow Jesus Christ.

And they are nowhere near Jesus Christ today. They have turned their backs on him and gone away from him. Maybe not even darkening the door of a church again.

Or praying or having any kind of relationship with Christ through the scriptures. It didn't happen overnight, but rather little by little, they failed to heed the warnings of conscience.

They neglected its accusations. They rationalized with it. They suppressed the truth. They stuffed the voice of conscience. They quit reading their Bible. They quit praying for God to search their hearts.

To cleanse them of sin. They quit coming to Christ for the blood of atoning to wash them afresh. And finally, they fell completely away from Christ.

[8:32] Not holding on to a clear conscience is the sure way to apostasy. And if you want to arrive safely in the harbor of heaven, you must maintain the rudder of a clear conscience.

Paul is saying. It's not safe to sail without it. Now that gets my attention. What's going to move me to constantly strive to keep a clear conscience?

This one is one motivation. A spur to spur me on. And it gets my attention because this can happen to preachers more easily than you realize.

Why are these fearful warnings in the Bible?

Well, they're God's kind motivations to keep us diligent about this matter of a clear conscience.

They're the means by which he preserves us safely into the harbor of heaven.

[9:32] I get nervous when people say, well, God preserves us. And they will have nothing to do with the commands to watch yourself, guard your heart, persevere to the end.

And what we find in scripture is that God's preserving us to the end is found side by side with the commands for us to persevere to the end.

And this is one of the means by which God enables his children to make it all the way home to heaven. He warns us about the danger of letting go of a clear conscience.

So what a blessing to have God's voice within. Under the power of the Holy Spirit, warning us of danger, recalling us when we fall and when we sin.

Aren't you thankful that conscience bugs you until you repent and until you turn back to the Lord and confess and plead the blood of Christ?

[10:33] How far would we go if God did not awaken our conscience? Remember what it was that awakened Peter's conscience? It was the crow, wasn't it? The crowing of the cock.

And that was the instrument that God used to awaken his conscience to bring him to repentance.

And that's the way God blesses his people and keeps them safe to the end.

So that's one motivation. A second one is that a clear conscience gives us great confidence and joy before God. And is there any higher joy than a clear conscience?

Knowing that there is nothing between me and my Savior. That I can look into his face and know there's no controversy here.

Don't you find it hard to look into the eye of someone that you've wronged and haven't made right?

It's the same way with our God. When we have a controversy and we've turned away from his commandment in some area of our life and we're refusing to deal with it.

[11:36] We have a hard time coming in face to face, open, honest communion with him. But when we have a clear conscience, this is what's opened up to us. This wonderful fellowship with the Lord Jesus.

The joy and confidence of coming before him, knowing all is well. It is well with my soul. We can sing that and rejoice before him. Augustine called this the paradise of delight.

Heaven begun already on earth. But there is no sweet fellowship with God without a clear conscience. Turn to Hebrews 10.

Notice how a clear conscience gives us great confidence in worship. Hebrews 10 and verses 19 through 22.

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence, and that's the motivation here, that a clear conscience gives us confidence.

[12:39] Since we have 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.

That's confidence again, isn't it? Full assurance. Having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience. And having our bodies washed with pure water.

So, as we come to Christ and we're washed in his blood, our consciences are cleansed from guilt. It gives us great confidence in coming before God.

Wonderful blessing of a clear conscience. It gives us great confidence in prayer. Turn to 1 John 3.

The apostle talks about our hearts not condemning us.

[13:43] That's the language of a clear conscience, isn't it? When the conscience does not condemn us. But rather commends. 1 John 3. 21 and 22.

Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us. We have confidence before God. And we receive from him anything we ask. Because we obey his commands.

And do what pleases him. This is not removing the ground of how is it that I can appear before God in prayer.

It's only through the merits and the mediation of Jesus Christ. But when I don't bring my sins to Jesus Christ. I lose that confidence in prayer.

And that's what John's talking about. If our hearts don't condemn us. We have confidence before God. So that we know that we will receive from him anything that we ask.

[14:42] Because we obey his commands and do what pleases him. But when you have a controversy with God and disobey his commands. You don't have confidence in coming before him in prayer.

It's shattered. You have a hard time looking God in the eye. And asking with expectation. Sin has come between you and God. As Isaiah says in Isaiah 59, 1 and 2.

Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save. Nor is ear too dull to hear. But what was the problem? It's not in God. But your iniquities have separated you from your God.

Your sins have hidden his face from you. So that he will not hear you. There is great confidence in a clear conscience. That enables us to come before God boldly.

And ask with great expectation. David's conscience was attuned to this reality. You remember in Psalm 66. David says, If I had cherished sin in my heart.

[15 : 47] The Lord would not have listened. He wouldn't have listened. If I would have hugged my sin. And failed to give it up. But God has surely listened. He says. And heard my voice in prayer.

Praise be to God who has not rejected my prayer. Or withheld his love from me. So a conscience that is not condemning us. Of cherished sin in the heart.

Has confidence that God for Jesus sake. Will hear and answer. And that's why a clear conscience is indeed. A paradise of delight. As we're enabled to enjoy.

Face to face fellowship with God. In prayer and worship throughout our day. What a gift from God is conscience. An accusing conscience serves to drive us to Christ.

To be washed afresh. And a clear conscience enables us to walk with Christ. In joy and peace and confidence. Thomas Brooks says.

[16 : 48] A good conscience and a good confidence go together. Good conscience. Good confidence. So that's the second encouragement. To keeping our conscience clear.

It gives us great confidence before God. But it also gives us great confidence before men. In bearing witness. And in ministry to them.

In Romans 9.1. Paul says. I speak the truth in Christ. I'm not lying. My conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit. So Paul is able to speak with boldness about these things.

Because he knows that his conscience confirms it. In the Holy Spirit. There's boldness of speech when we can appeal to our own conscience.

As co-witness that what we're saying is true. If my conscience says. John you're lying and you know it. I'll have a hard time preaching or speaking.

[17 : 48] And witnessing with confidence and boldness. But when we have the co-witness of conscience. That what we're saying is true.

It gives us boldness. We've looked up that passage in 1 Peter 2. Where we see that even when others are maliciously accusing us.

When your conscience is clear. And testifies of a good behavior in Christ. You can stand and boldly proclaim the truth. Because you know that though they are accusing.

Conscience is not accusing. Turn to Acts 23. Where Paul is on trial before the Sanhedrin. The high court of the Jews. And he too is being falsely accused.

And he looks straight at the Sanhedrin. And said. In Acts 23. 1. And again. Let's just pause there. What enables a man to look.

[18 : 47] Straight into the eyes of his accusers. I say there's something here. Of. Of. A clear conscience. This man is not. Bothered by a guilty conscience. And he's able to look right in their eyes.

And say this. My brothers. I have fulfilled my duty to God. In all good conscience. To this day. As he stood before the high court.

He's saying in essence. The courtroom of my heart. God. Has cleared me. However you may accuse me. And judge me. And find me. My conscience does not accuse me.

But witnesses in my defense. That I have. Lived my life. In all good conscience. Fulfilling my duty to God. God. And a bold testimony.

Because his conscience. Was approving. Is what follows. Joel Beeky says. A clear conscience. Strengthens the moral backbone.

[19 : 43] And makes him. As bold as a lion. Isn't that what we see in Paul? He is bold as a lion. And no small part of that boldness. Is this clear conscience.

It's a note that is struck. Over and over. It's the next page over. In Acts 24. That we're taking our. Our theme verse.

In verse 16. So I strive always. To keep my conscience clear. Before God and man. He's not preaching that. To a congregation in church. He's. He's talking. To his accusers. And speaking. Of a clear conscience. As he stands on trial. Before Felix. And you can see. Down in. Verse. 25. That he's preaching. On righteousness.

Self-control. And the judgment. To come. And he's doing so. With great boldness. And confidence. Nathaniel. Vincent. The Puritan of old.

[20 : 38] Says this. About this passage. Of. Of Paul. Before Felix. He says. A good conscience. Steals a man's heart. With courage. And makes him fearless. Before his enemies.

Paul earnestly. Beheld this counsel. He was not afraid. To face them. Because his conscience. Was clear. Nay. We read. That Felix. The judge.

Trembled. While Paul. The prisoner. Was confident. The reason. Was. Because the judge. Had a bad conscience. But the prisoner. Being acquitted.

By a good conscience. Did not tremble. But rejoice. At the thoughts. Of judgment. To come. So with boldness. He could preach about. There's a coming judgment.

And the. There's a need for righteousness. Before that judge. And Felix. The judge. Trembles. And Paul. With clear conscience.

[21 : 31] Boldly. Bears witness. It gives us confidence. Before men. In our witness.

In our declaration. Of the truth. In our ministry. To them. We looked last week. At 2nd Corinthians. 1. 12. Where Paul says. Now this is our boast. Our conscience.

Testifies. That we have conducted. Ourselves. In the world. And especially. In our relations. With you. In the holiness. And sincerity. That are from God. We have done so. Not according to worldly wisdom.

But according to God's grace. Here was a cause of. Joy. And boasting. And glory. And Paul. That he was able to say. To these accusers. These super apostles.

At Corinth. Who kept. Trying to undermine. His ministry. By accusing him falsely. He says. This is my joy. That our consciences. Testify.

[22 : 26] That we have conducted. Ourselves. In the holiness. And sincerity. That are from Christ. Gave him confidence. To deal with the Corinthians. And all their errors. And their problems. Confidence.

He would never have. If his own conscience. Was nagging him. He says. In 2nd Timothy 1. 3. I serve God. With a clear conscience. No one serves God. Well.

Except with. A clear conscience. Washed in the blood. Of Christ. Even deacons. Are told. In 1st Timothy 3. 9. That they must. Keep hold. Of the deep. Truths of the faith. With a clear conscience. Even their ministry. Will suffer. If there is not. A clear conscience. Before God. And men. So that's another. Encouragement. Why should I go to the trouble.

Of keeping short accounts. With conscience. Well. Because it gives us. Confidence. Before God. And confidence. Before men. And then it.

[23 : 22] Gives comfort. And joy. In affliction. Number four. Comfort. And joy. And affliction. Turn to Job. Chapter 27. Job is the.

Old Testament. Model. Saint. And that's not. My opinion of him. That's God's opinion of him. As. He introduces.

Him. In the book of Job. He says of Job. There is no one on earth. Like him. He is blameless. And upright. A man who fears God.

And shuns evil. And so you remember the story of Job. And how he's. Stripped of everything that he has. In his possessions. His.

Health. Or first his possessions. And wealth. And. And his children. And then even his health itself. And his three friends.

[24 : 17] Eliphaz. Bildad. And Zophar. Have all weighed in. They've come. And they've all accused him. They. They understand why this great affliction. Has fallen on Job. He's covered with boils.

From head to foot. He says. You're obviously guilty. Of doing some great evil. And that's why God. Has brought this great. Suffering upon you. So they had it figured out.

Now sometimes that's true. Isn't it? Sometimes affliction in our life. Sickness. Is sent as a. Spanking for sin. You can read 1 Corinthians 11.

And. Those folk were not. Loving each other at the Lord's table. And God says. That's the reason some of you are sick. And even some of you are dead. So. It can be.

That sickness. Is. A discipline of the Lord. Because of sin. And when that's true. We don't find a lot of comfort.

[25 : 13] And joy. In our affliction. Until we deal with it. But. That wasn't the case. With Job. It's a great source. Of comfort.

In our affliction. To know that is not. The cause. Look what Job says. In verses 5. And 6. Of. Chapter 27. He says to these accusers.

I will never admit. You are in the right. Till I die. I will not deny. My integrity. I will maintain. My righteousness. And never let go of it.

My conscience. Will not reproach me. As long as I live. Now. Some of us might stumble. Over those words.

What in the world is. Paul. What is Job saying. I will. Maintain. My righteousness. We must not. Pour this passage.

[26:09] Into Romans. Chapter 4. Romans 10. As if. Job is. Saying. I am righteous. Enough. To. Please God. And enter heaven. That's not the issue.

Here. At all. He's not clinging. To his own righteousness. To make him right. With God. He is saying. In the things. You have. Accused me of. I am righteous.

I'm in the right. In the sight of God. And all your grim accusations. Will not. Get me. To let go. Of that claim. My conscience.

Will not. Reproach me. As long as I live. You see. The role of conscience. In giving. Job. Comfort. That. His great.

Suffering. Is not. Because. Of some. Great. Sin. That he's. Harboring. In his heart. And refusing. To vomit up. No. And he's not.

[27:03] Saying. That his conscience. Never did. Bother him. Or never. Would. Bother him. Just in this case. In this. Point. Of accusation. Because indeed. Before the book ends.

His conscience. Will tell him. To shut his mouth. Won't it. And to repent. In the dust. But not in this. Matter. Of which. They are accusing him. It did not reproach him.

And never would. Because. His conscience. Said. It isn't so. What a wonderful thing. Do you see the blessing. Of a clear conscience. In our trials. In our sicknesses.

Our afflictions. The Puritan. Richard Sibb says. We can do nothing well. Without joy. And a good conscience. And a good conscience.

Is the ground. Of our joy. We're joyful. Because we know. There's nothing. Between my Lord. And me. And that. Is what enables us.

[27:58] To find. Comfort. In affliction. It's a reason to. Strive always. To keep conscience clear. And then. Fifthly.

Conscience motivates us. To do many distasteful. And difficult duties. And I need some help. On distasteful. And difficult duties. Things that my flesh.

Would rather die. Than do. I need some extra motivation. This whole matter. Of a good conscience. Helps us. To do many.

Distasteful. Or difficult duties. Like paying your taxes. How does conscience. Make April the 15th. A better day for you. See if you can find. The answer to that. In Romans chapter 13. Turn there.

And I'll read it. And while I read it. You see if you can.

[28:52] Discover. This. Motivation. To. Make it less painful. Yes. Even.

Something that we do. With delight. Pay our taxes. I'm going to read. The first seven verses.

Of Romans 13. Everyone must submit himself. To the governing authorities. For there is no authority. Except that. Which God. Has established. The authorities.

That exist. Have been established. By God. Consequently. He who rebels. Against the authority. Is rebelling against. What God. Has instituted. And those who do so.

Will bring judgment. On themselves. For rulers. Hold no terror. For those who do right. But for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free. From fear.

[29:46] Of the one in authority. Then do what is right. And he will commend you. For he is God's servant. To do you good. But if you do wrong.

Be afraid. For he does not bear the sword. For nothing. He is God's servant. An agent of wrath. To bring punishment. On the wrongdoer. Therefore.

It is necessary. To submit to the authorities. Not only because of possible punishment. But also. Because of conscience. This is also.

Why you pay taxes. For the authorities. Are God's servants. Who give their full time. To governing. Give everyone. What you owe him. If you owe taxes. Pay taxes. If revenue. Then revenue.

If respect. Then respect. If honor. Then honor. What are the two. Motivating reasons. That you should pay your taxes. Given in verse five.

[30:40] Anyone. See one of the motivations. Submit to authorities. But why. I'm saying. Why. Avoid. Avoid punishment.

God's wrath. Through the state. The IRS. Knocking at your door. There's consequences. That are painful. If you don't. That is one. Motivation. Given in the text. For why we ought to pay our taxes.

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