



## **A Clear Conscience – Part 1**

### **Knowing Our Absolute Standard**

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Well, you may not think about it very often, but you are very unique to be here in this world as a human being and not a tree or a rock or a cat. You were the pinnacle of God's creation, a day-six craftsmanship. It's the only thing the triune God said about his material creation that you're created in his image, which, of course, he's spirit. This is not about your physical features, it's about your ontological features, who you are as a being. And that's a big deal, because if you were a tree all you'd do all day is just by impulse let those biomechanical functions fire away based on the coding of your DNA that God created. And you'd be shoving those roots into the ground and they would be in search of water. It's called hydrotropism, which you wouldn't know because you don't think, you don't reason, you're just a tree. But your roots would be searching, especially as they got bigger, to support your life. They would be searching for minerals. They would twist and turn in search of potassium and nitrogen and all the things they need to nourish the wood of your tree. You would need all of that going below ground and then above ground you would have your branches going out and they would be, of course, reaching out to try and convert this light energy into chemical energy and something called photosynthesis, which, of course, you wouldn't know that word either. It would just be a thoughtless process of your leaves sprouting and trying to grab as much sunlight and carbon dioxide as possible to convert it to glucose so it might feed you and produce oxygen for the rest of the ecosystem. That's what you would do. And it would be what you wanted to do, because that's how you're programmed.

And actually, you'd be living by the old 1960s and 70s adage of "if it feels good, do it." That's all you would do. It would feel good and you would do it. That's what trees do. They just do whatever they're programmed to do and that's how they live. That's how you'd live every day, every hour for the rest of your life until you as a tree died. But you're not a tree and you're a human being. And you can reflexively think and reason and make decisions. And a lot of people in the 60s and 70s made the decision that we should all live by that mantra, "if it feels good, do it." But I hope you realize that everyone who said that never lived by that. I mean, they did things that traditional Christians and others who were moral that said you shouldn't do but they didn't do whatever they felt like doing. Take, for instance, standing in the modern era behind a big construction worker at an ATM machine who pulls out a bunch of hundreds, lays them there on that little, tiny counter in front of the screen and you would want to have a few extra hundred dollars in your pocket. That would be nice. But you wouldn't take them for fear, I trust if you're a rational being that you might get beat up by a big 220-pound construction worker. You would leave the money right where it's at. You'd want to do it but you'd think, no, rationally that's not smart. I don't want to do this because there are consequences.

Well, there's a part of who we are that we don't think about as often as we should. I'd like to think about it for the next five weeks. It's something that doesn't weigh 220 pounds. It's weightless. It's invisible, but it's built into who you are as a person made in the image of God as someone that God has designed who has a kind of distinction from the rest of creation that



can tell you not to do something. And if you do it, it can give you a beating, a great beating, such a beating that in literature it's talked about all the time as King Claudius is convicted by the guilt from his conscience as Hamlet, as you might remember, creating the play to convict his uncle of what he had done. And of course, he trembles in fear because, of course, he's guilty. Or better yet, maybe Lady Macbeth who was involved in murder, a kind of the Jezebel of Shakespeare's literature. And of course, she is so guilty that she starts sleepwalking at night trying to wash her hands from the blood guilt of killing. And she just can't get past the fact that her conscience is beating her up.

Or maybe speaking of literature, that short story you had to read by Edgar Allan Poe. Do you remember that one? Telltale Heart, where, you know, here is the unnamed narrator who's getting berated and beaten by this conscience of his because though he's gotten away with this murder, of course, he really hasn't because his conscience is doing a number on him. You might not know literature as well as others, but you don't need to read to know that you've had your own battles with your own conscience. Perhaps even this week, your conscience has beat you up for something you've done. And certainly, as I think about the totality of your life, you don't have to be very old to look back at your life and know that your conscience has probably beaten you pretty hard over something you did, maybe something that no one else even knows about. The conscience, that's something trees don't have. Dogs don't have it, right? I mean, the created world doesn't have it. But you are unique as a rational, reflexive, intelligent person made in the image of God. He's given you this thing that stands there as an alarm system for doing what you do.

I'd like to think about this from a biblical perspective. Look at the limitations, some of the faults and some of the important things that we ought to do in relation to your conscience, how to live with your conscience. And I think this great section of Second Corinthians will help us in this. All the rest of Chapter 1 verses 12 to the end of the chapter and even into Chapter 2 as we look at Paul explaining a little bit of his change of plans. If you have your Bibles, I want you to turn to this because it can teach us a lot about how you should live with your conscience. And you need to think about this because even as Paul here is writing a letter having to defend himself from his critics, he's writing to an audience that has had a lot of people saying to them the Apostle Paul should not be listened to, this is a bad guy and you shouldn't trust him. And of course, it didn't help that his plans had been changed about a visit that he had planned. And so a lot of the translators have put above this paragraph, starting in verse 12 of Chapter 1, Paul's change of plans or he explains his change of plans or whatever it might be. He's about to get into all of that.

But he makes an interesting statement here in verse 12 that I want to use as just the top theme of all that we're going to deal with as he kind of works through the misunderstandings and all the other things that happen in this section of Scripture. But I think we need to think a little more systematically about what the Bible would say regarding the conscience. Now, maybe if you dig deep into people critiquing the Bible, you might have heard that Paul is just adopting a lot of the philosophy of the Hellenists at this particular time. He's incorporating a lot of things about the conscience that really aren't biblical but that couldn't be further from the truth. Matter of fact, though the word you're not going to find as ubiquitous in the Old



Testament as we see Paul using it in his letters this isn't because he's introducing something new. This has all been under the heading of something in the Old Testament called the heart. And the idea of the heart and the rational features of the heart, having the heart respond to your volitional decisions is all that Paul is doing and taking the word of that particular era that survived our day. Of course, the translation of it that we use is the word "conscience." And, you know, it's a good way for us to categorize that aspect of your life of all that's going on in your heart when you make decisions or when you stop from making a decision or maybe when you are willing to do what Paul is doing here and that is to justify a decision that you've made because your conscience is testifying within your own heart.

So let's look at this as we think about the internal thoughts that we have, the control center of your mind, the way you think, the ontology of being a human being, a rational human being, a reflexive human being, someone who can think about decisions and make decisions. We, I hope most of you at least, sit here this morning as Christians and you'd like to make good decisions because that's what God has called you to do. As a child of God to make good decisions in this world where your conscience has a very important role to play in this. And I want to just begin our five-week series on the conscience and using Paul's life as an example for us. I want to just start this morning with just verse 12. So let's study that this morning. I'll read it from the English Standard Version. You follow along here in Second Corinthians Chapter 1 verse 12. Paul says, "For our boast is this." Now remember this is Paul and Timothy here. That's at least the identified speakers in this. That's why it's first-person plural. "Our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience." There's the word.

You get into the etymology of the word. I don't think that's super helpful at this particular point. But the idea of a word that gives us some kind of integrated harmony between what I've decided and what I think is right and what my conscience is saying is right. This internal part, this barometer, this temperature gauge, this alarm system telling me that what I've done is right. This is "the testimony of my conscience." I'm happy that this is the case. I'm proud. I can boast about this. My conscience alarms were not going off, here it comes, "That we behaved in the world with simplicity and godly sincerity," simplicity and godly sincerity, "not by earthly wisdom." So whatever it was that he means by simplicity and godly sincerity is not like how the rest of the world functions. But he says that's the way it has worked in my mind, in my conscience, in my behavior. So the decisions that I made, my behavior, my conscience is saying is the right behavior. And I know it because he uses this adverb here, "godly." It's something that has been done properly.

And it may be that you're reading a translation, by the way, that doesn't have the word simplicity or you're reading the English Standard Version and you look at the footnote there and you see that it says some manuscripts say holiness. Now, usually these are easy to decide between. But this is a very difficult one because these two words, "simplicity" and "holiness," they sound a lot alike and they're easy to mistake if you were a copyist in the early church and they're just two letters apart. And this word "holiness" that many translations translate from the manuscript evidence of the early Church is certainly something that would fit the context. But "sincerity" is a word that Paul uses a lot in Second Corinthians and so many people would choose that this is really what Paul wrote. Usually I don't even bring up



these textual variants but in this case it's a hard one to decide between this word "holiness," at least the way it's used here, the form of it Paul's never used. So some people say, well, I don't think it's that. That's why the English Standard Version translation is a very recent translation to say it's the word "simplicity." Either way, it's all governed by this genitive form of God, of God or godliness, which means that whatever this is, if it's simplicity a word he does use later that he's trying to get them to have this simplistic or this sincere or this unified devotion to God. I want to think about this being united in motive and behavior and thought and decision. All of this is what Paul is arguing for. So either word fits the context. But I can say whatever the variant should be in this case, it's something that fits the biblical model. It is godly. It is right. It is biblical. And it's "not by earthly wisdom."

Now, how does Paul credit this? Well, it's not just because he's saying he's a great person and I always have a clear conscience and my conscience is always in sync with my behavior. But he says it's "by the grace of God." It's by the grace of God that I'm not doing it like the world's doing it, which we should always remember. And what is just amazing that he says here about the Corinthians is he's getting a lot of grief from the critics, he says, and "supremely so toward you." I mean, I've done this in keeping with a clear conscience and supremely toward you. So there is a little bit of a lean-in into his defense. I was going to come there. I didn't come there when I said I was going to come there and you think it was because, my critics are saying, I'm a flake and I don't really mean what I say. But that's not true. There's a biblical reason for me not coming to you and my change of plans I'm going to explain it. We'll get into all of that. But today, let's just think about this, he's saying I'm going to appeal not only to the fact that this was godly and right, but my conscience is clear. My motive was right. My behavior was right. This is a good thing. And my conscience attests to this.

And all I'm saying as a Christian, if you're a Christian and you have a claim to godliness and you're trying to live a sanctified Christian life, you want your conscience to be like the Apostle Paul's conscience and say I have a good conscience. At the end of the day when you lay your head down on a pillow it would be good for you to say my conscience is clear, it is not condemning me, there's no duplicity in my life, I have this thing that we often call integrity. We have a sense that my conscience is clear, that I'm doing things the way God said I should, both in action and motive and Paul says I have this.

So before we dive into this and will become the predicate for all of our series here in five weeks, I just want to start with something more of a systematic heading here. Number one, I'd like just for you to "Understand Your Conscience." So we're going to have to dip outside of Second Corinthians Chapter 1. But I'd like to think about what does Paul say. What does the Bible say about our conscience? And once you write that down, turn with me to Romans Chapter 2 because that's a good place for us to start. And it may be saying, well, I don't need this. It's pretty simple. I know what a conscience is. But let's at least think of it this way. Even as you turn to Romans 2, I'll read it here for you in a second. But let's write this down because here's what we're going to learn in this passage. Your conscience, which is something you have, something you possess, your heart, your spirit, who you are, has got this alarm system here that has been, here's what I'll say, Letter "A" if you will, it has been encoded, it has been programmed. Initially, it's been programmed by God to comport with his moral law.



Now, if I had thought of this ahead of time, I would have made that much more succinct. But you know what I'm trying to say. God has programmed your conscience to be something that will harmonize with what he says in the moral law. Now, Paul here in Romans Chapter 2 is talking to the Jews who have the law, and they always look down their long nose at the Gentiles who don't have the law, and they think look at these guys, they're losers. Right? And Paul is about to say to them, not only in the first 13 verses, you don't even keep all the laws that you say you should keep. You have the law but you don't always keep the law. And now he turns in verse 14 to the Gentiles. So let's look at this to understand something about conscience. "For when the Gentiles, who do not have the law," that's the writing of the Old Testament, particularly the law of Moses, "by nature do what the law requires."

Now, understand that has to be a subset of the law, because there's a lot of the law that's all about what foods you can eat, what foods you can't eat, what day you can work, what day you can't work, when the new moon festivals are, what kinds of ceremonies and feast days you should have, that there's a place called a tabernacle and later a temple and there's a bunch of people from a particular tribe, they're going to lead that. And there are sacrifices you have to bring and the ironic priest that has to wear certain stuff. There's a breastplate for the high priest and a turban on his head and an ephod and all the stuff we just read about in our Daily Bible Reading. Well, they wouldn't know any of that. But it says here, "by nature they do what the law requires." We're not talking about the ceremonies of the Old Testament law. We're talking about the moral law. They're not sleeping with their neighbor's wife at times. They're not stealing from their neighbor at times. I mean, there's always the exceptions. But in those exceptions, they all say, well, we know we're not supposed to do that. Even in the tribal lands of little, tiny hamlets somewhere, there are still people who are adjudicating wrong in their tribes because they're saying that's not right. You shouldn't do that. You shouldn't embezzle. You shouldn't extort. You shouldn't lie, cheat or steal.

So they do "by nature what the law requires," not perfectly, of course but "they are a law unto themselves," they can write their own moral law code, "even though they don't have the law." Now, of course, they could never dream up the ceremonial laws, but they can certainly see the moral law. Well, how do they do that? Verse 15, "They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts." If you want a one-line explanation of what your conscience is here is what it initially is. It is written by God on your heart the moral rules of God. God has said inside of you that you have this alarm system where all of the rules of God are. You should not take the construction worker's money, even if he turned his back and he would never see you and you can get away with it and you're never going to get beat up by the construction worker. Your conscience should say, I'm going to beat you up and you shouldn't do that. That's the moral law of God written on your heart.

Now he gives the word that was certainly in vogue in the first century in Paul's readings and teachings and training, "while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts, accuse or even excuse them." That's a good line there of what your conscience does when you know you've done the right thing with the right motive. It can when people say you've done wrong, it can sit there and give you an excuse. It excuses you. Paul is in the





process in Second Corinthians Chapter 1 of giving an excuse, which is not the way we use excuses. Why it's just an excuse. No, this is a rational refutation of people saying you've done the wrong thing. He's going to say, no, no, no, no, I've done the right thing. And my conscience is going to attest to the fact that I've done the right thing. So it bears witness. Sometimes it accuses you. You shouldn't have done that. And sometimes it excuses you. Listen, I don't care what people think. This is the right thing. "On the day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus."

Now, that last line may be confusing and seem like an interpolation or some kind of just how did that line fly in there? Well, you got to get the larger context. Paul has said repeatedly in Chapter 1 that when people sin and they're judged, they do so in sinning and they get judged without any excuses. And he starts with natural theology. God teaches a lot just about his own attributes by nature itself. This is a reprise of that on a whole different level. In other words, if someone says, no, I didn't know it was wrong for me to lie, cheat or steal. Right? At the day that God brings out all of this evidence and he judges people, the secrets, and here is where your conscience works. It works in the secret places of your own internal operational system, the headquarters of your heart, your volitional center. There is something secret there that no one else can see called your conscience. And God will say your conscience told you that you were wrong. I don't care if you're the Aborigine in the outback of Australia or some person in Indra Jaya and you've never seen a church. You've never heard about the gospel. You never read the Bible. If you stand before God and you say, I shouldn't be punished because I've been good. God's going to judge the secrets of your heart. And he'll say, what about this thing I gave you, this alarm system I gave you? You knew it was wrong. Before you reached out and grabbed that stack of hundreds at the ATM, so to speak, you knew it was wrong. And I coded this part of your life, this accusation of your life or this exoneration of your life, this thing called a conscience. I've programmed it. And so I'll bring all that to the surface to speak against you. I will call in as a witness your very own conscience. So you're without excuse.

Well, OK, so he's dealing with two different things here in the passage. The immediate issue of the Pharisees and then the larger context of everyone is a sinner which, you know, reaches its fever pitch in Chapter 3. Conscience. What is it? God has put the law. What kind of law? The moral law of God on your conscience. He's originally programmed it that way. OK, that's why you can see this even evident in toddler's lives. You start to see this conscience. OK, here's the problem. Go to First Corinthians Chapter 4. Paul had written this in the first book to the Corinthians talking about stewardship here and I got to be faithful, verse 2, you know, and I know that you guys might stand in judgment of me and I might even be called before the Roman courts. But you know what? It's not the end all. He's going to get to the last line of verse 4. "It is the Lord who judges me." At the end of time he's going to say it's all about what does God think. And that's where we try to get, you know, in the largest sense and largest scheme at the end of every sermon, what does God think of your life?

OK, but look at verse 4, "I'm not aware of anything against myself." Now, here's something that should inform you. Your conscience. What do you mean? Your conscience doesn't tell you've done anything wrong? No, my conscience is clear. I can't think of anything I've done



wrong here. Right? "But I am not thereby acquitted." Here's the problem with the conscience. It is originally programmed by God. But there's so much that can happen to your conscience that can give you a pass where you say, I think it is OK. And I think it's OK so I'm no longer guilty. See, I'm exonerated. And it could be that even those who might say, well, you know what? I got so used to doing it this way that I no longer feel bad about it. So if I didn't feel bad about it well, then, of course, I'm not guilty. I'm acquitted. He says, no, no, "the Lord's going to judge me." And all I'm trying to say, there's something connected between the Lord and the conscience. And here we see a gap. Do you see the gap in this? I don't think I've done anything wrong but well it doesn't mean I'm acquitted because if God says I've done something wrong, I've done something wrong. Well, don't you want those two to be aligned? Well, that would be ideal. But there can be a gap in between these. And that's why you can't live by your conscience alone because something happens between the original programming of your conscience and the kind of nasty little viruses, so to speak, to use software language, that can mess this up to where it's not always catching all of the problems.

So we've got to know that these two, one is immovable. One is immutable. One is the Isaiah 40 Word of God that never changes and there it is, as Schaeffer said, the propositional objective truth of God, the "true truth" of God. And your conscience can move from that. Now, God programmed it. But here's the problem, right? There can be a gap between the two. Now, I can't possibly get into all the issues related to this, but I think that is definitely a provocative topic. So on the back of your worksheet I've given you a couple of things, and I'm going to highlight a few resources on the list of sermons and books. Let me just highlight one of each. Andy Naselli, he's written a book. It's not that old, fairly recent. It's a helpful book on the conscience. And he co-authors this with a missionary and tries to talk about the fact that how is it that your conscience can be conditioned in a particular place where you're thinking something's wrong when God's Word says it's not wrong. In other words, God is not going to condemn you for it but your conscience condemns you. So your conscience gets skewed. And so let's talk about that. And he does a good job in this book trying to think through the concept of conscience, dealing with every reference of it in the New Testament. And it's a helpful little book. We're probably sold out of it by now. I preached this sermon twice already this weekend but get it online or whatever. Or maybe they got a whole stack of them there. I don't know. Or get it digitally.

Secondly is the series and this brings up questions that you might have about my conscience condemning me about something that's not biblical or my conscience not condemning me and it is unbiblical. This whole series I did called "The Black and White On Gray Areas," my attempt at being cute in my titles, is trying to show you what God's Word says about areas that some people might have a conditioned conscience where God's Word is either silent or speaks clearly in one way or another. So that kind of drifting of my conscience away from the absolute bulwark, propositional, objective truth of God we need to make sure that we know the gap can exist. And when it does, how do we live with each other? Which really, Naselli and my series are trying to deal with. OK, so that's further discussion. But just know the gap can exist. And for a lot of reasons it can get really way out there. And we'll talk about that.



But let's lead to the next thing that needs to happen in the second part of verse 12. Go back and we'll get our second point here. That's just a basic definition of what your conscience is. Now go to verse 12, middle of the verse. Why is the testimony of your conscience something you're happy about? Well, because "we behaved in the world with simplicity/holiness and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom." Earthly wisdom is one thing. Right? But I know my behavior was connected to what is of God, "godly sincerity and simplicity," like holiness, what is right. I know that. And so I'm happy because I didn't live like the world does. The world's got a different whole take on this. So wait a minute. You're saying non-Christians have a conscience and I have a conscience. Well, why is there a greater distance between earthly wisdom and what they approve and what my conscience should approve? Well, the goal is to close the gap. The goal is to try to get my conscience to say what God's Word says. Think about what Peter says about the prophets being carried along by the Holy Spirit. Well, the Holy Spirit encoded your conscience. Well, it can drift around because of experience and all kinds of things, influences. But the Word of God is unchanging. So I want the Word of God, the same author of my conscience is the author of a book and the book and my conscience, I should try to align those.

Let's put it that way. Number two, "Align Your Conscience with God's Word," because if you don't align it with God's Word, you'll align it with earthly wisdom. And that's what Paul says, I didn't live by that. And I don't want you to live by that either. Your conscience cannot be conditioned or cannot follow the pattern of earthly wisdom. Now, that word "earthly" here, some of you have your computers or your devices which I encourage and want you to have. Soon we'll have outlets at every chair. It'll be like an airplane. As long as you don't watch football. Well, whatever. If the sermon is bad I guess I deserve that. (audience laughing) But if the sermon is good I want you paying attention to the sermon. But if you have your laptops or whatever, you can click on that word "earthly" there. When you think of the word "earth" or "worldly," you've used the word "world" earlier in this verse. We think of the Greek word "Cosmos," a common word. There's another word, too. But that's not the word here. Earthly wisdom is literally the word that comes from the word "flesh," the Greek word "Sarki," the fleshly wisdom. And that's helpful because it's really about how the world works and earthly is not a bad way to think about it, but it really comes down to how individuals work.

And now let's get into the details of the flesh and my conscience. And I got to think about how the world functions as it relates to their flesh and their conscience. Right? Nike's little condensed version if it feels good do it, just do it. Impulse, do it, just do it. And I know it's about, you know, being an amazing track star or football player or whatever. But the idea of if you're feeling it, go for it. You certainly would recognize that in the world there's been a huge movement to try and in 21st-century Western culture here in America, in particular, Southern California, let's just do what we want to do. Let people love who they want to love. Let them do what they want to do, let them be what they want to be. And it always gets down to this fleshly impulse. Now, what happens with the conscience here?

Let's go back to Romans, Romans Chapter 1 this time, here's how this works. What does the conscience do when the flesh is dominating, which is my impulse of doing in my fallen state whatever I want? If it feels good, do it. Well, I'm going to have to deal with my conscience and





I'm going to have to do something to it. Let's look at the beginning of this. This is a very familiar section of Romans. Start in verse 18. My emphasis is on the end of the verse but let's look at the beginning. "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." In other words the wrath of God is coming. It's left the station. It's on its way. It's as sure as every prophet of the Old Testament, it's coming. And that judgment of God, the anger, the righteous indignation of God is coming but it says here against some particular things, if it's ungodly and unrighteous. How do we know if it's ungodly and unrighteous? Well, Chapter 2 is going to say you should have that encoded on your conscience and it should be yelling at you, accusing you when you do something unrighteous or ungodly. Do you follow me on this?

But how do they maintain it? How do you do that and do it again and again and again? Here's how, "Who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth." Now, I know the words are not here but that's a great opposition of flesh and conscience. Even as a non-Christian, you have to now take the joy of the flesh. I would love to have five hundred extra dollars. And there it is sitting on the counter. I would want to focus on the satisfaction of my fleshly desires. And then I'm going to have to overpower the truth that is embedded in my conscience. So I'm going to suppress it. Now, that's a great verb. Suppress it. Now, how does the world work? Hey, if you want to do it, you just going to have to contend with that conscience thing. Just tell your conscience to chill out. Just tell your conscience to relax. Tell your conscience not to be such a prude. Tell your conscience it's OK. And if your conscience thinks this is bad or let's use another phrase I've used a lot through the years, if the "ick factor" exists in your conscience, tell your conscience to stop thinking this is so icky because your flesh, if you just explore this it would be great.

So you need to keep doing what is wrong even though I'm going to say it's not wrong, it's right. Check the first 5 chapters of Isaiah. That's the culture we live in. When wrong is said to be right. The world says, now, I know that your Bible says it's wrong, but we need to free ourselves from the shackles of the Bible. We need not be bound by the fetters of all your rules from this ancient book from this God in Mount Sinai. And what you need to do is what you feel like doing. And if you want to reach out for that fruit on that tree, you just do it. You just do that. If you want it, if it's good for you, it's good for looking at, it's good for food, it's good to bring you knowledge. Take it. Now, take that part of you that's screaming at you, Eve, don't do it, don't do it, God says, don't do it. And just suppress it. The conscience is going to tell you no. Your flesh is going to say shut up conscience. That's how this works. So the world's wisdom is when you hear your conscience squeaking, just throw, you know, throw something in its mouth and tape it shut. Just tell it to be quiet.

OK, that's the pattern in the Bible. Even if your conscience is culturally conditioned, Paul wants you to go what did you say? What? He wants you to be sensitive to the voice of your conscience. Now, I need to evaluate it because I might be trying to force my conscience on other people in a cultural context. Just like Peter when he was told to arise, kill and eat. Just before he was sent to a Roman to share the gospel, the Jewish gospel, the Jewish Messiah to a Roman centurion in Caesarea. There he is in Joppa getting this menu in this daytime vision that he has about eat some pork, have a ham and cheese sandwich, Peter. And Peter



goes, no, no, no, no. Well, God had already said I declare all foods clean. The tearing of the temple veil was certainly the key that all the ceremonial laws were now defunct. And he said my conscience still gives me a problem. That's what Romans 14 is all about. A lot of the food diet restrictions, sure, what day we worship on. If you're still conditioned in your conscience to say this is bad, certainly don't push that on other people. And here's the reality, though, of my heart in the fight of my life, telling my conscience to be quiet. But I should always listen to my conscience. That's the godly thing. I want it to be aligned with God's Word, of course. But I need to listen to it because a lot of times it is going to speak in concert and in harmony with God's Word. So what is the relativism of fleshliness, of earthliness, of earthly wisdom? If you want to do it, do it and tell your conscience to be quiet. Suppression is the key verb here.

Now, go to the bottom of this chapter, verse 32. Now, between verse 18 and verse 32 is a lot of repeats of this. God gave them over. God gave them over. God gave them over. Right? If I said to you men, hey, men, out of shape, overweight, middle-aged men, dress up in women's clothing, put makeup on, go to the library, gather kids around, shake your butt around and act like a woman and read stories to them. Most of you would say no. Ick. Now, there are people in our society who are given over to that. Matter of fact, they call you a bigot if you tell them you shouldn't do that. Right? Now, you can quote a Bible verse to them, which you could. And you can also say don't you see that's icky? Well, they've lost the ick-factor because God gave them over to this. So the rebellion of suppressing the truth and unrighteousness, they've successfully shut their conscience up to where it's gagged with duct tape in the closet of their life. OK? That's what the Bible calls a seared conscience. Right? First Timothy Chapter 4. It's a conscience that's been calloused. You can't feel it. It's barely trying to speak in the closet of their life. Now, they're out proud living large. Right? But you still have the ick-factor.

Now, here's what happens. Verse 32, "Though they know," now you put that in quotes because it's barely squeaking from the closet with duct tape and a rag in its mouth. "They know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die." This is the thing. It may be there, but they had to work through it by suppressing their conscience and now it's gagged in the corner. But they knew it. They knew it. Matter of fact, this Chapter 2 will say even if you'd never heard the Bible verse, God will say you knew when you started down this path that your conscience was screaming that you shouldn't do this. But now they've been given over, given over, given over. They know that, they know that such things deserve death. They know that. But "they not only do them", underline this now, "they give approval to those who practice them." That's why I'm not opposed if I was on the translation committee of taking the word "sarki" here, "flesh," and turning it into the word "earthly," because that's true. It's fleshly wisdom. What does that mean? It's the way the world works. And how does the world work? Once they go headlong into something beyond the Word of God and beyond their conscience, and they're not in church anyway, so they're not even listening to the Word. But they're conscious, they got past that. They got it gagged and muzzled in the closet.

Now, if you take a step in their direction guess what you're going to get. You're going to get the applause of the world. That's why the adolescents of this culture are so attracted to being deviant in their sexual behavior. Let me use a biblical word, to be perverse and abhorrent in their sexual behavior, because they know what they're going to get. And they won't get this if



they just say, well, I just want to be like my mom and dad and have four kids and live with them. They're not going to get applause for that, but they'll get a lot of applause from the culture that's been given over to sin if they will be deviant in their behavior. And you've got to look at that so much of why so many people are cheered into perversion. Get rid of the ick-factor and come join us. That's just one facet of sin. There are all kinds of sin. You could look at this in a gang and some gang in Southern California that makes extortion or murder or stealing a part of their daily events. Either way, they would love to applaud you for joining them in their misbehavior, even though they know they've had to work through the screaming of their conscience. But they've got that under control now.

So what's the goal? I don't ever want my conscience to be quiet. I don't want to shove my conscience in your life if it's an unbiblical issue. Do you follow me on that? That's what the whole "Black and White On Gray Area" series is about. You should listen to it if you haven't heard it. But when it comes to my conscience, I want to make sure my conscience is informed or as Naselli puts it, calibrated by God's Word. I want to align it with God's Word. I'd like my conscience and God's Word to be saying the same. I want the voice of my conscience to echo the voice of the Scripture. Same Spirit wrote it, right? Wrote my conscience and wrote the Word. And I want to make sure those align. Now, here's the problem with saying that to you in the 21st century, where we watch, you know, two-minute Instagram reels, right? To sit down and read the library of God's thinking takes some work. To roll up our sleeves, actually pull out a pencil or a computer and actually dig into it and think about it abstractly and reason our way through, that's hard. Feeling is easy. Most people, and I've said this a million times from this platform, we like to feel our way through the Christian life. But God would have us think our way through the Christian life. And yet I'm preaching a series about this feeling called our conscience that's going to either excuse or accuse us. And I do want us to pay much attention to our feelings as it relates to a conscience.

But I've got to make sure my feelings and my conscience are aligned with the truth of God's Word. And that takes work. And I'm saying to all of you, we must think through what the Word of God says. It's the objective, unchangeable, immutable truth. That's the voice that is only heard when you open up the pages of Scripture every day and read it. And what I want is so conditioning of my conscience that every day my conscience is informed by the voice of God's objective Word. So I want those two to align. And that's the goal. That makes for a strong conscience, a conscience that's overlapping perfectly with God's Word, which is hard to do. And it isn't going to happen if you spend three days where you don't pick up your Bible, you don't look at God's Word, you don't think about God's Word, you don't meditate on God's Word, you don't memorize God's Word, I guarantee you, your conscience will start to drift. These are concentric, right? You want them to be like an eclipse. That's what you want. And unfortunately, without time in the Word where my mind rationally is informing everything about who I am and now my conscience gets informed, it gets pulled in line with that.

See, this is the old line. You've got to be in God's Word. And what does this do as it relates to conscience? It keeps informing your conscience. And guess what? There's a great connection there because the things that God's Word says deserve death and are abhorrent to God, they're written in the Word. And your conscience is programmed to think that way and feel



that way and to accuse you when you step outside of the bounds of that. But the world's going to say, no, can you bind and gag it, throw it in the closet, put a mattress over it, don't listen to it, and then come with us. And if you do anything, you come one step in our direction. Yay! Not only do we have our parades and we'll put our websites together, we're going to castigate everyone who says differently. But if everyone says something that's in concert with us, great. This isn't about doing private stuff in our bedroom. That's how this whole thing started, right? Just let us do what we want to in the privacy of our own home. This is about open campaigning in the streets of middle America. And all of that is to try and make sure your ick-factor goes completely away. And the ick-factor in part, if you want to use the vocabulary that I'm using in this conversation, it's all about the conscience. The conscience is going that's wrong. And the conscience feels. But it feels, I hope, because you're informing it and bolstering it and strengthening it and you're not letting it wither on the vine because you're not reading the book that the Holy Spirit wrote, because he also programmed your conscience. The world, the fleshiness wants to suppress it. They want to enculturate it, and they ultimately want to callous it. That's what First Timothy 4 verses 1 and 2 are all about. Yeah.

Let's really, really quick before I leave the second point. Can I look at First Peter? Sure, I can. I'm not going to ask you that. (audience laughing) I'm going to look at First Peter 3 verses 15 and 16. If you don't want to then you could leave at this point, I guess. But I prefer you stick around and listen to me read First Peter Chapter 3 verses 15 and 16. You know this verse because it's always the one quoted when we talk about apologetics because the word "apologetics" is a transliteration of the word here, "defense". "Apología." Apologia. Apologetics. That's where we get the word from. It says, "In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy," set apart in a category by himself, "always prepared to make a defense," apologetics, "to anyone who asks for a reason for the hope that is in you." And sometimes they do that with a raised eyebrow. Sometimes you do that with a wagging finger. "Yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience," it should be informed by God's Word, calibrated by God's Word, aligned with God's Word, "so that when you are slandered," this is the hard part, because they will slander you if you don't get in line, if you don't applaud the guy reading to your kid in the library with a dress on, they're going to slander you and "revile your good behavior," God says it's good, "in Christ may be put to shame." And they will be put to shame, obviously, on the day God exposes the secrets of people's hearts, because there's nobody's going to be condemned for something. Well, I didn't know that was wrong. Everyone knows it's wrong. But in the end they may have silenced the voice of reason, in this case, the voice of conscience. And all I'm saying is you've got to keep a good conscience by doing what is right because you've set Christ apart as Lord in your hearts.

The book of First Peter is a great book for the suffering of living a Christian life in a non-Christian world. And if you, unless you work for a Christian organization or work out of your house or whatever, you're surrounded by non-Christians. And in that, you may be focused on your discipline or your activity at work, but you're surrounded by people who share a bunch of moral concepts that are informed by the culture. Their consciences are inculturated to some degree. And you're sitting here trying to keep your conscience aligned with God's Word.



That's going to take everyday commitment and spiritual discipline to stay in God's truth. All right. That's real brief. That hopefully gives you a taste to get back into First Peter.

Second Corinthians Chapter 1 verse 12. "This is our boast, the testimony of our conscience, that we behaved in the world with simplicity and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom," not fleshly wisdom, "but by the grace of God," this didn't happen without God's grace, "and supremely so toward you." We excelled toward you. Well, that's great. I want you to excel. And now let me bring the word into this discussion that's more of a modern word but certainly speaks to the etymology of what we mean when we say the word "conscience." Conscience has to do with me knowing what's going on and all of this is aligned. It's not only aligned with God's Word but it's aligned with my behavior. Right? This is the modern word and we're going to use it throughout the series. So let's employ it here. And I use the word "pray" here to start the third point because if it is an act of grace, if it's God's grace at work within me, grace means God's giving this, he's gifting this, then it's not inherent in you. Say so you need to pray for it. Let's pray, just like Paul, we'd like to do this supremely.

Number three, "Pray to Excel at Integrity." Pray to excel at integrity. We're going to talk about your conscience being clean. Another way to say I want you to be an integrist person. Even that word is an adjective, it is a new word. It's recognized, I think, in most dictionaries these days. But integrity, to be integrist, to live in keeping with a good conscience that's aligned by God's Word. If we speak in the context of Christianity, I want to have excellence. I want to excel. I want to be really integrist to use that word. I would like integrity to excel. I want to be like Paul and be able to say to the people I interact with, Paul interacted with the Corinthians and he said, "by the grace of God, not by earthly wisdom, and it was supremely so toward you." The grace of God. If it's the grace of God, and I quote this often, but Romans Chapter 11 verse 36, "All things are from him and through him and to him." I would like to offer to God a good heart, a good conscience. I'd like to, in my sanctification, have my behavior reflect a good conscience that does not accuse me because it's informed by God's Word. Great. Do you want to give that to God? Well, all things are from him and through him. And so you need to say, God, I need this. I need you to bring this into my life. And I just say, if you don't pray every day on your prayer list for integrity, for a clean conscience, well, then how can we expect to have it? I know we think about effort, but effort really, even as Paul says in First Corinthians, is based on God's grace at work within us, God's gift. So let's start praying. Let's ask God if it's grace, then it's a gift. If it's a gift, you need to ask for it.

I thought to myself pastorally, OK, great. This is a very short verse and turning into a long sermon, like, what am I going to do here with this? Well, how do I help us excel in this grace of a clean conscience, of a good conscience, of a conscience that doesn't accuse us, of integrity, to use the shorthand of modern vocabulary? Well, I want to follow Paul's pattern. So I thought of three things that I see throughout Paul's writing. We just came out of one. Second Corinthians Chapter 1 verses 8 through 11. Remember this? We just finished this last week and we saw in Paul's life, starting in verse 8, something that you would not expect. I said this, did I not last week? I said, if you are trying to defend your apostleship because you're standing for the truth and a lot of people are trying to disparage you. You don't want to start the book with, you know, you need to know when I was in Asia I felt like killing myself. That's





not, I mean, chatGPT is not going to recommend for your letter, if you're trying to defend your position before these Christians, you start with confessing that you were despairing even of life itself. But Paul does that because that is Paul's pattern.

I put it this way, if I'm going to try to have this gift of grace expanding in my life of integrity and clean conscience, I need to be honest like the Apostle Paul is. He's honest with himself and he's honest with others. And it is a weakness, is it not? It seems like it to say, hey, I felt like Job, I felt like Moses and at their worst, I felt like I couldn't even live. But why? All of that we learned last week was to put his trust in God who can raise the dead. It's a lessening of him to use the line from John the Baptist. It's less of Paul and trusting in him. It's more in trusting in God. Paul, by the way, uses these kinds of phrases all the time. First Timothy Chapter 1 verse 15, "Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost." Do you think he's just playing around here? Do you think he's just bloviating? That's how he feels, he knows himself. He's honest about his sin. And I guess closely related to honesty is something he said in First Corinthians 15. If you're close to it, turn there. First Corinthians 15. Scroll down to that verse. Of course, the context is the resurrection. But he says this in verse 9. Right? Again, he's going to have to in this next canonical letter, he's going to have to defend his apostleship. But here he says, "I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle." Again, if you're going to have to defend yourself to these people don't say stuff like that, Paul. Just don't say it. And yet he said, "I'm the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle because I persecuted the church. But by the grace of God I am what I am," and then he says, "and the grace of God," this gift for me, "was not in vain." Right? God didn't waste it on me. "On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them." Oh, man, you sound like you're... "though it's not I, but the grace of God that is with me."

Think about this. He sees intertwined throughout this whole thing here, this statement, is a great sense of humility. If I'm going to break this down, I'm going to say if you want integrity you better be honest with yourself, honest with other people, and you ought to be humble. Paul was truly humble. Even as he goes on to tell them about his chronic illness by the end of Second Corinthians. I mean, think about what he's saying. In essence, God has given me such a position of power, the revelation that God knows my penchant to be prideful, so I'm sick because God's having to keep me humble so I wouldn't be prideful. All of that does not help if you think in fleshly wisdom about pulling off some kind of defense. But he is an honest and a humble man. Do you want integrity? You better have those things going on in your life. You're in your small groups this week let's talk about those things. Even though I didn't articulate much of that in the discussion questions, I want to aim at that. This is like what it takes to maintain integrity, a clean conscience, honesty and humility.

And there's one more. We touched on this earlier in First Corinthians 4:4. But let me turn you to First Timothy 1 real quick. It's the same concept. At the end of verse 4 he's talking about these people, by the way. First Timothy Chapter 1 verse 4. I mean, starts in verse 3. "I urge you when I was going through Macedonia," Timothy, he says, "remain at Ephesus." Right? That's where he is. He's pastoring in Ephesus. "So that you may charge certain person not to teach a different doctrine, nor devote themselves to myths and endless genealogy promotes speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith." Even the concept here of



the order of how things ought to be. That's what the stewardship concept is all about. "The aim of our charge is love," we want to build people up, "that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith." Well, that's what I want. Right? I would like a pure heart, good conscience, sincere faith, all that coming together, congealing together. And it all comes on the heels of the concept of this is the way things ought to be, the stewardship.

Again, in First Corinthians Chapter 4, when he talks about I'm not exonerated because I don't feel anything bad about myself, but I'm a steward, and by a steward, I should be found faithful. Stewardship is this sense of obligation. Paul uses a different word in Romans 6 about the obligation just to be obedient. And I think that's what we need to have. You cannot think about a man with a clear conscience or a man with integrity as extra credit Christianity. It's not varsity Christianity. It's normative Christianity because it is a stewardship. And by stewardship it is expected. Every believer in this room who names the name of Christ it is expected of you to be a man or a woman of integrity. And therefore, you need to feel the obligation of it. You have an obligation, not to the flesh, but an obligation to the Spirit. And in this case, the Spirit has written your conscience. He's written his book that you're supposed to keep calibrating your conscience with. And you should feel the obligation. I'm not a tree doing whatever feels good. I'm a person. Now that I am a Christian I have an obligation, a stewardship to be a man of integrity. That is how we ought to sense... Do you want to excel in this? Paul says, I've done it "supremely toward you." Well, then you need those keys.

All right. Now, usually it's, you know, it's 15 minutes past at this point, but it's early. But don't applaud because I'm not done. (audience laughing) The reason I purposely made this sermon shorter is because of the problem of Lady Macbeth. The ultimate issue when she says in her sleepwalking monolog, she says as she goes to wash her hands of the blood of murder, and she says, you know, if I wash my hands in the ocean, I can't find enough water, it would turn to blood. And here's her famous line in that part of Shakespeare. She says, "What has been done cannot be undone." See that's the problem. That is what Paul calls in the book of Romans, the Law of Sin and Death. And I can't talk about you trying to live this week with a clear conscience because all of you bring in here to this auditorium a bad conscience. You bring in a conscience or at least if you think about it, you should bring in a conscience that you're thinking, well, wait a minute, I have done wrong. And like Macbeth says, what's been done cannot be undone. Even when I said at the opening of this, you might think of something that no one else knows of that your conscience has condemned you. And if in that sense of accusation, you think, well, how can it be undone? Right? Well, then therein is the problem.

I said there's a big difference between sanctification and justification. This whole sermon has been about sanctification, but I cannot talk about the conscience without talking about the need for justification. And so I have to speak to this quickly. And I want to do that at the end of this message from Hebrews Chapter 9. Please go to Hebrews 9 and it really leads into Chapter 10 because the concept, I mean, really, we should have a really long Chapter 9 because it goes into Chapter 10. But let's look at Chapter 9 of Hebrews. If you look at the first nine verses, we're talking about the earthly tabernacle that becomes the temple. And all of that, all the stuff in it, it's just all of these things that are representing the realities but they're not the realities. As it's going to say in Chapter 10 verse 1, they were a shadow of the things



that were to come but the substance is in Christ. And so everything about the Old Testament, it's all about looking forward to the reality.

Now, it says in verse 9, "which is symbolic for the present age." Well, what was? "The Holy Spirit indicates," verse 8, "that the way into the holy places was not yet open as long as the first section is still standing." So we need the real access to the real God, not just access through a high priest into a room in Jerusalem. So what are we taught? What present age? Well, everything the prophets talk about, the New Covenant Age. We need that, "According to this arrangement," the Old Testament, "gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper." If you focus on these things, I brought the right sacrifice, I redeemed my firstborn with this, and I brought the pigeon here and the bull here and the goat here. And I did all the stuff. Well, OK, that's great. But it can't change the conscience. Macbeth says it well, right? Shakespeare said, "I can't undo what's been done." I'm still guilty. The Law of Sin and Death is still there. "But it only deals with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation," which is not the 16th century Reformation. We're talking about the reformation of the New Covenant Age with the coming of Christ. When Christ comes, all these things look forward to this.

As I often say about the ceremonial law, it's like the tuxedo and the cummerbund and the bow tie and the shiny shoes and the veil and the dress and all that stuff. This is ceremony looking to marriage. The ceremony was there, always looking forward to the reality. Christ has come and solved the problem. As Paul puts it in Romans, the Law of Sin and Death. You're guilty. You should die for that. You should be punished for that has been reversed by the Law of the Spirit and Life. Freedom through something called the Spirit has fixed the problem. Keep reading verse 11. "But when Christ appeared as a high priest," I mean, that's the analogy on the table, "of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent," not a tabernacle that Moses talked about that we've been reading about in our Daily Bible Reading. No, "He entered once for all into the holy places," the real ones into God's presence, I mean, on his coattails were a bunch of people, the people that God had granted him, "not by the means of the blood of goats and calves but by the means of his own death," his own blood, "thus securing an eternal redemption."

That word redemption is so good. It means to buy you out of the problem. It's going to take you and extract you out of the problem. What's the problem? I'm in the camp of sin and death. You touch the tree, you die. You sin, you die. You covet, you die. Adultery, you die. You steal, you die. You lie, you die. There's punishment. What's been done can't be undone. Well, you're right. That's the problem before the eternal tribunal. But I need an eternal redemption. And I get that not by the blood of all the stuff, all the ceremony, but by Christ and the only sanctioned human sacrifice ever done. The humanity bound up in Christ, just like the divinity bound up in Christ, eternal redemption. "For if the blood," verse 13, "of bulls and goats and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh," if on the outside you go, well, I did it, "how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit," the eternal redemption, the Spirit going to have to do this, "offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience," that phrase right there, those three



words, purify our conscience. "Purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God."

Now, what are the dead works? Hey, I brought the bull. I brought the lamb. I brought the goat. I did what I was supposed to do. I came and I said to the priest, here it is, out of my flock. Here's the guilt offering. Remove my guilt. I'm trusting in the bull. Well, if you trust in the bull, it's a dead work. By the way, let me offend a few of you. Nothing could be more akin to the phrase "dead works" as he speaks of a worshiper in the Old Covenant trusting in the washings and the ceremonies and sprinkling of the hyssop blood on the site. Nothing could be more akin to that than creating something under the banner of Christianity and calling it confession and penance and telling someone, now that you've done wrong, do this and we'll absolve you from the guilt. That's a dead work. You're trying to say, I'm going to trust that if I do good, it's like the old adage when the wife comes home from shopping or work and she sees her husband out there slaving by cutting the lawn and she pulls up, rolls down the window and says, now what did you do? Right? Like, you clearly are doing this because this is penance, right? You're trying to admit, what did you do wrong? What are you trying to say you're sorry for? Because this is how we work. I want to work off the wrong that I've done. And the Bible says that's nothing but dead works.

This is why all of the ceremonies of the Old Testament were supposed to be seen for what they were. These were things pointing to the reality of it all. And all of this, like the ceremony, it does not make you married to put on a dress and to have your guy in a tuxedo. Right? You got to look to the reality beyond all of that. And the reality of all of this was not trusting in the act of the symbol or in our case of trying to tell people, well, if you really want to clean your conscience, go work it off, go work it off, go work it off. And then you want a doubly damnable heresy, just start talking about the fact that after you die, you go to the eternal car wash of Purgatory that's going to last a millennia or so depending on how bad you were. This is dead works. Your suffering, your penance, your self-flagellation, whatever you do to try and say this work will clean my conscience, you can learn from Shakespeare in this sense. What's been done cannot be undone unless it's somehow paid for. There has to be the Law of the Spirit and Life that takes away the Law of Sin and Death. And the conscience, it grieves over the fact, I've done wrong. I deserve death. I deserve God's punishment.

Well, the only way to have that taken care of is through the eternal Spirit offering up blood, the human blood of the human Son of God, think about this now, taking away your sin. This is the bizarre thing. If you want to clean your shirt don't wash it in blood, right? But that's exactly how this puts it out. God's punishment, blood being shed, the punishment of God makes the sinner now clean. Go back in your mind to Isaiah Chapter 1. Hey, "Come let us reason together: though your sins be as scarlet, they'll be as white as snow; though they're red like crimson, they'll be white like wool." How do you get the conscience clean? What's been done cannot be undone, but it was undone. Keep reading. This is great for purifying our conscience, to serve the living God. Now, Chapter 10 verse 1, "Since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true forms of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw



near." I want a perfect conscience. I want a clean conscience. I can't get that just by trying to tiptoe around the mud puddles this week.

Drop down to the punchline. Chapter 10 verse 19, "Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places." You see why this could be one chapter because this is still the image of this temple. Right? Let's enter into the holy place, the holy place and the Holy of Holies where God is. How do we get there? By being washed clean "by the blood of Jesus." This weird, contradictory concept of being washed in the blood. That doesn't work. No, it does work, "By the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain that is," not the curtain, "through his flesh." I often talk about Josephus talking about the six-inch-thick veil in the temple. And he talked about it where you could hook ropes to it and put two horses and have them charge in different directions. You could not rip the veil in the temple. And yet the day Christ died, it says it was torn from the top to the bottom. And here was a picture of God saying, you know, people getting into the holy place before God, all of this symbolism, now it's real because blood was spilt on this cross just outside the gates of the city, and now people can usher in on the coattails of this great high priest by the blood of Jesus, "the new and living way open through the curtain, that is, through his flesh," was ripped and torn. "And since we have a great priest over the house of God," this whole place, he's the chief, he's the lord of this place, "Let us draw near," here it is, "with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience," that's what you may have brought in today, "and our bodies washed with pure water."

That may be symbolized maybe in your mind. You might think about baptism. This is not because you were baptized in water. This is because everything about the new covenant was about cleansing you. And the image of the prophets was you being washed with water, being cleaned by water. Now, of course, we're not water. We're only cleaned by the blood of Christ, which is not even the blood blood. We're just talking about God's punishment that "the wages of sin is death." He dies so that because of his death your guilty conscience can now be free. And you can say it is undone. My sin is undone because the cross has absorbed the penalty. This is the picture of your conscience getting fixed. No longer is my conscience condemning me. No longer am I saying, look what I've done. We're now saying God has taken this all upon himself. This is the cleansing of redemption, eternal redemption that you got, I trust if you're a Christian here, the moment of your repentance and faith. That's justification. You were declared righteous, even though like me you're a sinner.

That picture of the imputation of Christ's righteousness and you having your sins imputed to his life is the exchange that takes your conscience and cleans it where you can stand up and sing a worship song, whether you're a five-time murderer or just a typical gossiping housewife of Orange County, present company notwithstanding. (audience laughing) You know what I'm saying. It doesn't matter the extent of your sin. I'm just saying to you, this is how we all are cleaned by God. Now, so much symbolism. What Jesus did in the Upper Room takes a basin, girds himself like a servant, starts washing feet. Peter stands up and says you're not going to wash my feet. You blame him for this, but I hope you'll be thinking the same thing. I'm not going to let the Son of God clean my feet. This is what servants do. And Jesus retorts, and you remember, "If I don't wash your feet, you have no share with me." Well what? You can't





have fellowship with me if your feet are dirty. Well, what are you talking about? Well, if that's the case, Peter said, well, wash my whole body. Wash everything. And Jesus rolls his eyes. It's not in the text but clearly he rolls his eyes. And he says, Peter, because of the word I spoke to you, you're already clean. You're already clean. I only need to wash your feet.

It's a great picture. I talked about you trying to avoid the mud puddles. And I'd like your conscience to direct your feet not to do anything that is not in keeping with a clean conscience. But here's the deal. Every time we deal with our sin every day, your conscience is going to get soiled this week. Praise God, I hope, that many of you can look back to your justification by repenting of your sins. It's not about penance, it's not about Purgatory. It's about you trusting in Jesus Christ and having your conscience clean. Now, this week, you can get it soiled. Please, please, let's work on our sanctification. But we come to him and we say, even today, you may need to say, you're right, I need to think more about my conscience, I need to think about my conscience informed by God's Word, I need to make sure that I don't sin, and when I do, I'm going to confess my sin. "And he is faithful and righteous to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." That's a great line. And today, whatever the state of your conscience, let's trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, maybe for some of you the first time ever, and have that declaration and the imputation of Christ's righteousness. And then let's try to avoid the mud puddles. And let's try and finish each day with your head on the pillow with a clean conscience. Let's excel in integrity.

Let's pray. God, help us all in this world. It's filled with temptation with a world that's just reviling us. As Peter said to his audience, just reviling us for our good behavior. We're doing what's right and they revile us. They want to applaud for any step in their direction. And yet, God, we need to stand firm. It's the reason "we need to assemble and all the more, as we see the Day drawing near," your words clear. It's going to get worse before it gets better, before the return of Christ. That's why now this place, this campus needs to be lit up every night of the week with activities, with people getting together because we need each other. We need to be "spurred on to love and good deeds," starting with our own daily confession of sin. So help us, God. Let our conscience be just lifted to the top and the surface. Let us understand. Let us listen to it. Let us not bind it and gag it and stick it in the closet of our lives. Let us inform it and nurture it and bolster it with the word every single day. Thank you, God, that when we violate it, your forgiveness has all been paid for on the cross that you grant us.

In Jesus' name, Amen.