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Living With Your Conscience



Individual Topics - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg emphasizes the importance of a clean conscience, as it is necessary for spiritual blessings and joy. Conscience is a spiritual organ that aligns our moral consciousness with God's definition of good and evil. A person with a perverted conscience is in great spiritual danger as they reject the truth and cannot repent, and a defiled conscience can lead to feelings of guilt and a loss of joy in life. To maintain a clean conscience, it is crucial to avoid sin and adopt patterns of living that avoid further violations, listen to conscience checks, and submit to authorities.

Transcript

I'm going to be talking about how to live with your conscience. And a lot of Christians don't know very much about this subject. And the reason I know that is because I was a Christian for a long time without really calling any special attention to the function of my conscience or how to live with it.

I think a lot of people, well certainly in the world, people who don't know Christ, but even among Christians have just learned to live with a sort of a low-grade irritation in the conscience and have become somewhat numbed to the fact that it's there. And as a result have been robbed of a lot of spiritual blessing and a lot of answered prayer, a lot of joy. And many things that the Bible teaches are the result of having a clean conscience.

And it's necessary for us to become aware of our conscience, to become sensitive to what our conscience is saying, and to respond to what the conscience would say to us. Now, the conscience is not always absolutely correct because the Bible indicates that there is such a thing as a perverted or seared or cauterized conscience that is not in touch with moral reality. But everybody has a conscience.

I think psychologists describe a certain type of person called sociopaths, which allegedly have no conscience. But I have my doubts. I think they just have a twisted conscience, perhaps.

I've known people who seem to have no conscience. And it's an awesome thing, really,

when you see somebody who in their life seems to have absolutely no fear of God and absolutely no conscience about sin. And it's a fearful thing because, of course, once a person has become so hardened and so deaf and so numb to the voice of his conscience, it's hard to imagine that there could be any hope for such a person to ever repent or to ever be saved.

I think, and perhaps I shouldn't begin the study with such a controversial assumption because it's not even in my notes, but I just thought of this. When men will never have forgiveness in this life or in the next, you remember the situation in which Jesus spoke of that? Some people call it the unpardonable sin, though that expression is not found in the Bible. It was in the case where Jesus had just cast demons out of a man and his adversaries, the Pharisees, were somehow trying to explain that fact away.

Because when people saw Jesus cast out demons, it meant, of course, that he had power and that there were men out trying to discredit the ministry of Jesus, we well know. Now, what do they say in the face of an obvious demonstration of such power over the demonic forces? Well, what they ended up saying was he cast out demons by the power of Beelzebub, the prince of demons, and that he cast out Satan by Satan. And you remember that Jesus responded to that, that that was absolutely an illogical argument.

He said that Satan can't cast out Satan or won't cast out Satan. A house divided against itself shall not stand. He said, if I'm casting out demons by Satan, then who are your sons cast them out by? And he gave them all kinds of reasons to disregard their argument.

But then he said he that he said all manner of sin and blasphemy will be forgiven man. But the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit shall not be forgiven. Neither in this life or in the next.

And he said it says in the Gospels this, he said, because they said he cast out demons by Beelzebub. Now, I don't want to enter into a lengthy discussion of what he meant about the sin that men will never be forgiven of because people have different opinions about it and probably mine is different than yours, since everyone has a different opinion or there are a few standard opinions in different camps. But I really believe this.

I don't believe that there's any particular sin that in itself defies the power of the blood of Christ to cleanse. The Bible says in first John one, nine, that if we confess our sins, he is faithful just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. And first John one, seven, it says, if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another and the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin.

That certainly doesn't indicate that there's some one sin that the blood of Jesus just it doesn't avail for. But if there isn't, then why did Jesus say that men who do this have no forgiveness? I don't believe it's because of the nature of a particular sin that stands out

above all other sins, but because of the nature of the heart of a person who can look at the power of God knowingly and say, that's the devil. That takes a certain hardness of heart, a certain numbness to spiritual reality, a certain willingness to look at God and say, you're the devil.

And that's just what the Pharisees were doing. They were seeing obviously the works of God being done through Jesus. And although they must have known that was the work of God, because Jesus showed the absolute absurdity of any other suggestion.

Yet out of desperation to disprove him and to put their point forward, they would be willing to say of God or of the Holy Spirit, that's the devil. And in so doing, they blaspheme the Holy Spirit by calling him the devil. But again, it's not so much the gravity of that particular sin, in my opinion, that made Jesus say they can't be forgiven.

I believe the only sin that can't be forgiven is a sin that is not repented of. And there are sins that people will never repent of. And that is due to hardness of heart or numbness of conscience.

And I believe that the Pharisees had hardened their hearts so much that Jesus could well predict that if they were hardened enough to do that, to blaspheme the Holy Spirit like that, that their hearts were beyond the point of sensitivity to conviction and therefore would never repent and therefore would never have forgiveness. That's my own opinion about that passage. And you can take it or leave it.

But that shows at least the story of the Pharisees clearly shows how badly scarred and twisted the conscience of man can become who is rejecting truth. We remember another story in John's gospel in chapter 11, how that the Pharisees, when they heard that Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead, sought to even put Lazarus to death as well as Jesus to destroy the evidence. Rather than submitting to the evidence themselves and saying, wow, he raised a man from the dead, we must have been all wrong about this guy.

Instead, they sought to suppress the evidence. And it says concerning such people in Romans chapter one, I think it's verse 18 of Romans chapter one, it says, for the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness. And it goes on to say for what was available to them to know about God, they chose not to know.

They did not seek to retain the knowledge of God in their memory, and they changed the glory of the incorruptible God into the image of corruptible man and so forth. And then it goes on to say, therefore, God gave them up. Eventually he gave them up, it says, to a reprobate mind.

That's Romans one twenty eight. The reprobate mind is a mind that is devoid of moral judgment. When a person is subjected to truth and they seek truth and they're forced to

make a decision about truth and they recognize it as truth, but they don't want to recognize it as truth.

They suppress the truth and unrighteousness. It says there, I think it's Romans one eighteen. And if they wish to suppress the truth and choose a lie to believe a lie rather than the truth, God will give them a state of heart that thereafter is unable to discern the truth.

Remember Second Thessalonians chapter two about the man of sin when he will be revealed, it says, because they did not receive the love of the truth, God will send them strong delusion. He'll totally remove all moral perception. From them.

Well, moral perception is what we call the conscience. The word conscience. Actually, the word conscience in English means exactly the same thing that it means in the biblical language of Greek in the New Testament, both in English and Greek.

The word for conscience etymologically tracebacks traces back to two roots. Con means with, together with. And science, science actually means knowledge.

And so literally the word conscience in English, and it's the same in the Greek, it means with or with knowledge, meaning really knowledge with and agreeing with God is what it really gets down to. The reason the word was chosen for the concept is because a person's conscience ideally agrees with God about moral things. The conscience is like a spiritual organ, a spiritual sense.

You know, people have said you have five senses and you could probably name them for me. I believe we have a lot more senses than that. Some of them, however, are not, you know, attached to one particular physical organ, like sight is a sense it's centered in the eyes and so forth.

But there are other senses people have. How many of you have a sense of direction or a sense of time? We have such senses. Those are senses, too.

They're just not attached to any particular organ that we can identify. There's another sense that all men have, and that is a sense of morality or a sense of right and wrong. Now, that sense can be twisted so that people begin to call good evil and evil good.

And the Bible says in Isaiah, woe to those who do, because such people have their conscience, which is given to them as a safeguard. A general moral safeguard is given to them. They've got it all flip flop so that it becomes their own destruction.

Sin, of course, we know is self-destructive behavior. That's not the that's not the definition of sin. But but sin really actually is that to sin is the violation of God's laws.

But God's laws are for our good. And when we violate his laws, it's self-destructive. We're

hurting ourselves.

And so a person who has no consciousness of sin or what sin is or has his whole idea reversed about what's good and what's evil, that person obviously is in great danger because the things he chooses to do, which he approves of, will be the things that are destructive to his own life. And so you can see the importance of having a right conscience. Now, I would simply identify consciously if we're going to give it a simple definition.

It is moral consciousness. That's what it is. It's moral consciousness.

The consciousness of moral reality that is of good and evil. The importance of the reality of this is impossible to estimate. C.S. Lewis in his book, *Mere Christianity*, actually began his whole argument for the existence of God from the presence of moral consciousness.

How many of you have read that book? It's one of his more popular books. But he begins by arguing, you know, he's going he's working from zero to to a belief in God. He's seeking to teach truths to an unbeliever.

And he starts with the fact that he says it's interesting to hear people quarrel. He says, if you listen to what they say, it'll tell you a lot about people. He says, if you listen to people quarrel, they're saying like they say things like, I was in that seat first or I gave you a piece of my orange.

You should give me a piece of your orange. Or, you know, you owe me such and such a bit of money. And he says that all the things people quarrel about indicate that they have they both share a sense of what's right and wrong.

They sense that there's something wrong about taking the seat from someone who had it first or that there's something wrong about not reciprocating with someone who shared with you. All those things, everything people quarrel about can only be quarreled about because both parties have an agreed standard of right and wrong. And he starts with that.

And then he argues from that there must be some absolute standard which we all basically acquiesce to and acknowledge to be true. And then, of course, he argues from that to the existence of God. I don't need to do that with you.

We're all Christians here. But it's an important thing, the presence of the conscience. And it's something that we all need to learn to live with.

And if we don't learn to live with it properly, our whole spiritual life will be out of kilter and our fellowship with God will be destroyed. And our joy and our blessing and the answers to our prayers will be forfeited. So there can be no exaggerating the importance

of this subject.

Where did the conscience come from anyway? Did God make that in Adam when Adam was created? We don't have reason to believe so. In fact, we have reason in the creation story to indicate that he didn't. Because you remember, there was a particular tree and the people in the dream know this very well, that was forbidden for Adam and Eve to eat.

And that tree was called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Well, what is the knowledge of good and evil but the conscience? And God said in the day you eat of that, you'll die. That's an interesting thing.

You would think that a conscience, the knowledge of good and evil would be very valuable, would be something God would want them to have. Why does he say you'll die when you eat of it? I think this goes deeper than even any of my thoughts have. It's a deep subject.

But I believe this. I believe that before Adam and Eve violated God's law, before they ate of that tree, they had no need of a conscience. They had no need of an innate sense of right and wrong.

They had something better. They had God. They walked with him in the cool of the day in the garden.

They were in fellowship with him. And ideally, I think our Christian walk should come to that point, too, that we're that we're really guided moment by moment by the spirit of God, so that the issue of whether this particular course of action fits a set of ethics or not is not is not the way we look at it. But we do what the spirit leads.

But it will happen that the spirit will never lead against the moral law of God. I mean, it's very obvious if we think the spirit is leading us and what he's leading us to do is something that's morally wrong, then it's not the spirit we're seeing. But Adam and Eve had this kind of communion with God that provided for them all the moral awareness they needed.

They didn't need an innate sense. That was something God alone needed. And he had.

And you remember when Satan tempted them to eat of this tree. He says, you know, when you eat that tree, the reason God doesn't want you to eat it is because you'll be like him knowing good and evil. Was that a lie of the devil? No, it wasn't.

It wasn't a lie, because in Genesis chapter three, after they ate of the tree, God said, look, this man that we have created has become like one of us knowing good and evil. That part of what Satan said was true. What was the lie was that Satan said that this is why God doesn't want you to eat it.

That was not why God didn't want them to eat it. He didn't want them to eat it because he knew that once they become intrinsically aware of good and evil, they immediately become responsible to do the good. And if they do evil and in fact, the very act of the tree was the first evil act.

And they became immediately aware of it. They were naked and they were ashamed and they sought to cover their nakedness. They were immediately aware of the evil they'd done.

But now they had to keep it. The righteous man to avoid the evil. Those who are absolutely innocent and naive and know nothing about good and evil, like a newborn baby, for instance, such people are not accountable for their deeds.

When a little child who's just a few months old resists his mother when she's trying to change the diaper or something like that, that child is not responsible before God. He has no sense immediately at that point of right and wrong. There comes a time when children do reach what is usually called the age of accountability.

And Adam and Eve, before they ate of that tree, were not accountable to live up to a certain set of standards, only to do what God led them to do. And only one thing he had led them to not do was to eat of that tree. And when they ate of it, they fell.

And we know that that fall put a barrier between them and God, which was alienation. In the book of Isaiah, it says God's ear is not heavy, that it cannot hear his hand is not shortened, that it cannot say. But your sins have separated between you and your God.

And since this fellowship with God was broken through sin, Adam and Eve needed to have an intrinsic knowledge of good and evil in a sense they wouldn't need it if they hadn't sinned. But I believe that in giving them a conscience, this was God's concession that he made to their fallen state. God does make such concessions.

He also cut them off from the tree of life, lest they should live forever in their fallen condition. That would be disastrous if fallen man would live forever. Imagine if Adolf Hitler had lived forever or Attila the Hun.

But God made concession to man's fallen state. And God knew that though man now knew good and evil, he had no internal power as God had to do always what's good. And that is why he said, you'll die when you do that, because you'll suddenly be accountable to do things that you have no power to do.

And that knowledge of good and evil will only condemn you to death. And that has been man's downfall ever since, of course. Now, I do believe that every person who was born since Adam and Eve has had a moral awareness, not necessarily at the moment they were born, but they reach a certain age where they do know.

And I don't know what that age is. There's a lot of theories, but it doesn't matter really. At this point, we've all reached it.

And so for our practical purposes, we don't need to determine what time that age is. We just need to be concerned about ourselves at this point. But the Bible does indicate, I believe, that the conscience is a universal reality.

And even the most corrupt people, even the most unenlightened people, even the people who've never heard the name of God or of Jesus or never seen one of his laws written or preached, that they intrinsically know that certain things they do are wrong, that there is an absolute moral standard to which their conduct is intended to conform, and that if they do not conform to it, that there is something called guilt. And guilt is, of course, man's big problem. And yet all men are guilty because all have this moral consciousness.

Let me show you some scriptures that indicate this universality of the conscience. This is from Romans 2, verses 14 and 15. Romans 2, 14 and 15.

Paul said, For when the Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these having not the law are a law unto themselves, which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts, the meanwhile, either accusing or else excusing themselves or one another. Now, it says that even Gentiles who've never been exposed to the law of God have an intrinsic awareness that some things are right and some are wrong. And it says their conscience bears witness to this.

This is actually the law of God written in their hearts. This is the mercy of God. That since man was cut off from fellowship with God, that man at least was given the ability to sense that certain things are wrong.

And while he cannot avoid all those things he knows are wrong, he can avoid some of them. For instance, the average moral unbeliever probably will not commit murder. Now, he'll do a lot of other things he knows are wrong, and those things will be enough to condemn him, for which he'll need the cleansing of the blood of Christ.

But there are some things that he will be refrained from doing because he knows they are so bad. The average unbeliever probably, though you might not think so today, it might not be true today like it would have been a few decades ago, but probably won't commit adultery. If he's married, he probably won't sleep with someone else's wife.

Many do. Many are refrained from doing so, though they don't necessarily pay acknowledgment to God's law. They just intrinsically know that they could not live with themselves.

They'd be cheating. Otherwise, there's just some moral code built in there that most

unbelievers will acknowledge. And while they cannot live perfectly after what they know is good, their conscience at least refrains them from some of the grosser acts, which if everyone went around doing those gross acts, society would be destroyed very quickly.

And so it's the mercy of God that he puts such a consciousness in man. And yet, it's that very consciousness that also gives us trouble because we suddenly become accountable for the fact that we know to do right and we don't do it. Remember, James, what he said, wherefore to him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin.

It becomes sin when we know what's right and don't do it. And which of us have always done what we know to be right? Some people, when you talk to them about religion, of course, I use that word in parentheses, they would call it religion. We call it life in Jesus.

But some people, when you talk to them about religious matters, they say, well, I just believe if a person does the best he can, the best he knows to do, then God will accept that. The next question you have to ask is, well, have you always done the best you knew to do? The answer has to be no. In which case, the person is condemned by his own homemade religion.

He makes a religion that he thinks will be easy on him, and yet the same religion he's created condemns him because he says that you have to do the best you can and he hasn't done it because no one has. And so it's very obvious that we need some other solution because every man has this moral awareness. You know, even the fallen man has a conscience that can help him to find the truth about God if he will respond to that conscience.

Now, I don't want to rule out the Holy Spirit's activity, and we're going to talk about that too. Obviously, the Holy Spirit has to draw us to Christ, but the part of us that the Holy Spirit appeals to is our conscience. That's that's the sensitivity to which the Holy Spirit speaks and draws us.

Look what Paul said in Second Corinthians four and verse two, Second Corinthians four and verse two, Paul said that we have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. Now, I find this really interesting because what Paul is saying is when he's trying to appeal to people with the gospel and even about the rightness of his chosen way of life, he appeals to their conscience. He commends himself to their conscience and to every man's conscience.

And that would insinuate that even the worst people have enough conscience to recognize that what he's doing is right. You know, many times the people who attack Christians the most vehemently are absolutely secretly convinced that they know the Christians, what they're doing is right. In fact, someone said if you throw a rock into a

pack of dogs, the one that yelps is the one that got hit.

And when you're witnessing to someone, or when you're even just living a Christian life in an unchristian environment, and someone lashes out at you, you know, their conscience has been touched. They've been injured in their conscience. And you haven't even had to say a word in some cases, because they know you're right.

And that's what hurts them. That's what hurts them so much. And that's why they lash out.

Sometimes the people you'd think are the most unconscious, I don't know how to end that word, the most conscienceless. Those people often are the ones whose consciences are afflicting them the most. And Paul was able to commend his ministry and his gospel to every man's conscience with confidence that those men were in many cases, corrupt men, yet they had enough conscience to see that what he was saying was true.

I don't know how many times when I've been witnessing, I've come to a stalemate in my discussion or debate or argument with people. And all I've been able to fall back on is saying, you know that what I'm saying is true. Because the Holy Spirit is bearing witness to your conscience that this is true.

I've never had an unbeliever say you're wrong. I've never had to say, what are you talking about? They do know it's true. And many times the only thing they can say is, well, you know, it's good for you.

It's not good for me or something like that. But but they know you can commend your gospel and your lifestyle to every man's conscience, because even unbelievers have one. In John 8, 9, in the story of how the Pharisees brought the woman who was taken in adultery to Jesus.

You remember how Jesus, they asked whether they should stone her to death or not, like the law of Moses prescribed that should happen. And he didn't say she shouldn't be stoned, but he said, well, let the man who's never sinned cast her stone. And you know what it says? It says, and they which heard it being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest.

The oldest understood most about his own sins and left first, but their own conscience convicted. And yet these were wicked men. But their conscience was at least aware that they were sinners when Jesus spoke to them.

Now, every man has a conscience. The question is. In what state is your conscience? Is it being maintained in good repair? The conscience is a sensitive organ.

It's not a physical organ, but I believe it's a spiritual organ. And it can be injured and it can be exercised, the Bible indicates in Hebrews, and we'll look at a scripture about that

later. But it is it is an organ of the spirit.

It's a spiritual sense. Never in Hebrews 5:14, where it talks about the man who has his senses exercised to discern good and evil. What's he talking about? Senses exercise.

You don't use your your feeling, your sight, your ears to discern good and evil. It's a spiritual sense he's talking about. And spiritual organs can be injured, too, or irritated, at least.

And even like you can cauterize a wound, you can cauterize your conscience. There's a lot of images in the scripture to which the conscience is compared to something organic. But of course, we know it's not an organ.

It's the spirit. It's a spiritual thing, but it is something that needs to be cultivated, needs to be protected, needs to be nourished, needs to be followed, needs to be maintained. And our conscience has to be kept clear not only before God, but also before man.

The Apostle Paul made an important statement in Acts, chapter 24, in verse 16. He said, and herein do I exercise myself or I discipline myself in this toward this goal to have always a conscience void of offense that is lacking in any stumbling block toward God and toward men. That's what Acts 24, 16.

He says, I discipline myself for this goal to maintain a conscience that is free from any offenses toward God or toward man. Now, you know, a lot of times we think our conscience is clear before God, but because things are wrong between us and another person, our conscience isn't clean before God, because God requires that we have things settled between us and our brother before he settles matters between us and him. It's very clear.

Jesus said at the end of the Lord's Prayer, as it's sometimes called in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew, chapter six. He said, for if you forgive your brother your trespasses, then God will forgive your trespasses. I might have said that wrong.

I don't remember how I just said that. But if you don't forgive your brother his trespasses, neither will my father forgive you yours. Notice, you don't work it out between your brother.

God's not going to work it out with you. Remember, in the same sermon, Jesus said, if you come to the altar to offer your gift toward God, in other words, as an act of worship to God, and you there remember that your brother has something against you, you leave your gift right there. Don't you dare offer it to God till you go and make peace with your brother.

Then you can offer your sacrifice to God. What's he saying? God will not accept your worship. God will not accept your sacrifices.

He will not reinstate a proper relationship with you until you have done all you know to do to reconcile with your brothers who you've offended. You need to have a clear conscience before God and before men. And we're talking about those things tonight.

How do we do that? I want to say this. I'm very sad to say that the Christian church is not necessarily what it ought to be. And I don't mean that as a cynic or a critic of the church.

I'm not what I ought to be either. You know, I don't I'm sad that I'm not I'm sad that the church isn't. But what the church is supposed to be, among other things, is a conscience to society.

Jesus said you're the salt of the earth and salt that's thrown onto a wounded bit of flesh stings, but it also heals. And the presence of the church in the world should be a conscience that stings and in some cases brings healing to the society around it. In a sense, we could say it's the conscience of society.

John the Baptist certainly was the conscience to Herod. And the church has very often been just that, but more often it hasn't been. And one of the reasons the church has not served as the conscience of society that it's supposed to be is that the church has not been a clean conscience community.

That's a term I think I made up. I might have heard it somewhere. I don't think so.

But what I mean by that is a community of people who stand out from other people in this world. In this respect, they are people who maintain a clear conscience before God and man. And sadly, this has not been a distinction in the church.

Relationships in the church are sometimes worse than relationships out of the church. How many of you have heard someone say, I had better friends in the world than I have in the church? I had more people in the church stab me in the back than when I was a believer. I can't argue with them.

Because the church, of course, attracts the worst kinds of people. That's the way it's supposed to be. In fact, Jesus said, I didn't come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

Shouldn't be so surprising to find so many sinners in the church. But those sinners are supposed to be repenting. He calls sinners, not just to salvation, he calls sinners to repentance.

And when sinners come into the church, they're supposed to be undergoing a change. And one of those first changes is supposed to be learning how to live with a clear conscience before God and before man. As Paul said, he always endeavored to do.

And as such, the church is called to be a clean conscience community, a community of

believers who maintain right relationships between God and between themselves and God and between themselves and other men. And therefore, their conscience is always clear before God and man. And if they were, then they could be, I should say, if we were, we could be that conscience to the world that we're supposed to be.

Now, I can't over overstate, and I know I've kind of tried to get this across a lot of ways, how important the clean conscience is. I want to share with you some of the vital areas of your life that are affected by your conscience, by the state of your conscience, whether it's in a good state or bad state will affect these areas. Anyone know what the most important thing is in a Christian life? I know a lot of things could be said, and all of them would probably be right in some sense.

But let's think about 1 Corinthians 13 to give you a hint. Now, abide, faith, hope and love. The greatest is which? Love.

Love is the most important thing. Jesus said, this is my commandment. That you love one another, that your joy may be full.

Did you know that your love you cannot love as Jesus requires if you do not have a clean conscience? Look with me at 1 Timothy 1 5. 1 Timothy 1 5 says, now the end of the commandment. I'm sorry for the King James here. Let me paraphrase.

Because this, I like the King James, but this is one verse where it kind of obscures the meaning rather than brings it out. I'll paraphrase it the way that a new translation would ordinarily do it, more or less. Now, the goal of our instruction is love out of a pure heart which springs from, I'm sorry, love which springs from a pure heart and a good conscience and of faith unfeigned.

And unfeigned means unpretended or unhypocritical faith. Now, what it's saying there is the goal of all of his instruction is that people might love and that that love might arise out of, he said, a pure heart and a good conscience, which suggests that if you don't have a good conscience, such love can't arise. You can't have this kind of love out of your heart if your conscience is defiled before God.

So your love, which is the most important thing in your Christian life, is hindered, is destroyed, is polluted if your conscience is not clean. What could be more important than that? Further, your faith is, and I suppose faith is the next most important. I don't know that any place in the Bible says so, but we know how prominent faith, how prominent a role faith plays in our lives.

And it says a little later in the same chapter, 1 Timothy 1 and verse 19, Paul is telling Timothy to hold faith and a good conscience, which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck. And it gives the example of a couple of men who had done so. He says that some have put away a good conscience and in putting away their good

conscience, they have made their own faith shipwreck.

Their faith has been destroyed by putting away a good conscience. Now, what's the wonderful news of the gospel is you can put away a bad conscience. And if your conscience is irritated, it means that you've done something wrong.

And when your conscience is irritated, it's needful to clean it, to heal it, to go through the biblical process of removing guilt. And when that is done, then it is possible to maintain faith. But if you neglect this procedure, if you neglect to clear up your conscience, when it is irritated, when it is telling you something you've done is wrong, then you cannot maintain your faith.

And if you continue to let it go on, then your faith will be overthrown eventually. Your love and your faith are both very much dependent on the state of your conscience. Also, your confidence toward God, I suppose this is, I'm not sure which we could say is most important of all these things, but confidence toward God is so absolutely important.

The Bible teaches that we need to be able to come before God boldly. Remember Hebrews 4, 16, wherefore let us come boldly before the throne of grace that we might find mercy and grace to help in time of need. It's needful that we can come boldly before God, because if we don't, then we won't.

If we can't come before God boldly, we won't come at all. When your conscience is smiting you, you will avoid coming before God, unless you're coming to get it cleaned. But if you're letting your conscience remain impure, it will break right into your fellowship with God, right into your prayer life.

And let's show you a scripture about that in 1 John chapter 3. 1 John 3, verses 21 and 22. He's talking about the value of a clean conscience here. 1 John 3, 21 and 22.

He says, Beloved, if our heart condemns us not, in other words, if we have a clean conscience, then we have confidence toward God. And whatsoever we ask, we receive from him because we keep his commandments and do those things that are pleasing in his sight. Now, if we keep our hearts clean, which involves keeping his commandments and doing those things pleasing in his sight, if we keep our conscience clean and our conscience does not condemn us, then we have confidence toward God and we get what we ask for.

Our prayers are answered. But if our conscience is not clear, then we have no confidence toward God and we do not get what we ask for. So you can see how much that would weaken your Christian life.

If your prayer life is destroyed, you have no confidence toward God if your conscience is... Now, you might have a false confidence. But see, the thing is, false confidence doesn't get you anything from God anyway. We're talking about a faith unfeigned, not a

pretended faith, not a phony boldness, but a true confidence that's built on awareness that there is absolutely nothing that God could hold against you.

And you can come before his throne without any fear that he's going to pin any fault on you because your conscience is clean. That is available to us, but many Christians don't walk in that. I think you probably know.

Not only is your confidence toward God destroyed by a defiled conscience, but your confidence before men. The Bible says in Proverbs 28, 1, the wicked flee when no man pursue it, but the righteous are bold as a lion. The wicked flee when no one's even chasing them because they think they are.

They're running from their own shadow. They're paranoid, in other words. But the righteous man who's got a clear conscience, he's not self-condemned.

He's bold as a lion. He's not afraid to stand up to man, to confront. He's not afraid of anything because he's clear.

His conscience is clear before God. He knows he's right for one thing. And therefore, he doesn't have to be he doesn't have to fearfully draw back from a confrontation, even with an unbeliever who might be hostile.

Look at what it says about that in First Peter, chapter three and verses 15 and 16. First Peter three verses 15 and 16. It says, but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.

And this fear here is reverence toward God. It's not a matter of fear of man, obviously. It says in verse 16, having a good conscience that whereas they speak evil of you as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good behavior in Christ.

Now, if you have your if your behavior in Christ is good and if every accusation that's brought against you is a false, they falsely accuse your good behavior, then you've got a clean conscience and you can stand up and give an answer to every man that asks you. Anyone who challenges you, anyone who confronts you, you can stand boldly because you have a clean conscience and you know that they may accuse you, but they're only falsely accusing you and you don't care about false accusations. But if your conscience is not clean, then when they accuse you, you just melt because you know they aren't falsely accusing.

It's true. You ever heard of stories where a preacher was trying to cast out a demon and the demon spoke out of the person says, how dare you try to cast me out when you know you were doing this and that the other night? You know, I've never heard a story like that. There are cases like that.

I've read testimonies from the mission field of that. And what can the guy do? He's got no confidence. He can't stand before a demonic resistance when he's got absolutely no confidence because his conscience isn't clear.

He's he's hiding sin in his heart. God won't hear you if you hide sin in your heart. David said, if I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord won't hear me.

If God doesn't hear you, the demons sure aren't going to. And your confidence toward man is totally lost if your conscience is not clean. Furthermore, another very important matter that the conscience affects is your spiritual authority.

Now, I just mentioned casting out demons, but that's not what I mean by spiritual authority in this sense. I mean spiritual authority in the sense of being able to take authority over people that you are supposed to take authority over, for instance, like parents over children. I know for sure that when my conscience is clean, I've got no trouble disciplining my children when they do wrong.

But when I'm feeling sort of a low grade irritation in my conscience, because I know I've done something that wasn't quite right, and then my child says, I can't bring myself to discipline as I should. I can't take authority because I think, what a hypocrite. How can I discipline him for disobedience when I'm hiding disobedience in my own heart? And if I don't even reason it out quite that logically, it's still the same result, because my conscience isn't clear.

I can't move in authority. I can't confidently take authority in the situation. We see this principle stated in 1 Timothy chapter 3, where Paul's giving the qualifications for elders in the church, which obviously have to exercise a certain amount of authority over individuals, a rightful authority that God gives them.

But it says in 1 Timothy 3.9, one of the requirements for an elder is that he holds the mystery of faith in a pure conscience. A man who's going to have authority has got to keep his conscience clean, because he cannot take authority in a situation. I'll tell you, there's many times when I realize that there's been some kind of an unsettled matter between me and another person, or even between me and God, and I've suddenly been called upon to move into a position of authority in the community here, or whatever.

And it's just so hard. It's impossible with integrity to take authority over a person who's in the wrong, when you know you're in the wrong too. You've got to keep a clean conscience, or else you cannot be a spiritual leader.

It will destroy your spiritual authority to have a conscience that's in poor repair. Finally, this may not be final, but it's all I've come up with in my meditation on this subject. The conscience, and I don't mean we're at the end of the study, we're at the end of point two.

Another thing that is affected by your conscience, whether good or bad, is the softness of your heart before God. We sang tonight from David, Psalm 51.10, creating me a clean heart, O God, and renew a ripe spirit within me. A clean heart obviously means a clean conscience.

Later in the same psalm, because he's repenting, in that psalm he's repenting of the sin of committing adultery with Bathsheba and murdering her husband Uriah the Hittite. And that psalm was written at a point where he was repenting of that sin. And later in that same psalm he says, Lord, cleanse me from blood guiltiness.

He had guilt that he sensed, and he wanted to be cleansed. His conscience was not clean, and he said, create a clean heart, which in that context means a clean conscience, and renew a ripe spirit. Now a ripe spirit is one that is soft toward God, one that is teachable, one that just is very tender toward God, sensitive to the Holy Spirit.

Hardness of heart is one of the most terrible things that can set in to a person. If your heart is hard, like I said to the Pharisees earlier, their hearts were hard, you get to the point where you're beyond repentance simply because you're beyond feeling conviction. You've got a reprobate mind, and your heart is no longer soft toward the truth, though it might have been at one time.

Probably any of you who spent time as a sinner before you became a Christian. I became a Christian when I was very young. I was in a Christian home, and I didn't do some of the things that my peers did, but a lot of you probably ran the whole gamut of worldly ways before you became Christians.

You might remember how that the first time you violated your moral purity, or the first time you got drunk or used drugs, that there was a certain sense in your heart that there was something wrong about that. In fact, in some cases, you might have been really intensely smitten in your conscience about such things. Some people more than others.

But if you continued to ignore that tinge of conscience, and you continued in those ways that your conscience was warning you against, that conscience was ultimately silenced, at least nearly. Because the more you resist the voice of the conscience, the more you callous your heart to the voice of God, the more hard your heart becomes, of course, and you become incapable of really sensing that something is wrong, that you used to know was wrong. And you know, Christians even fall into this stage.

Maybe not with as many of the grosser sins, because Christians know that that's not acceptable in the Christian community. But there are other things like gossip, like evil thoughts that are tempered, things like that, which prevail in the church many times. And apparently, the persons who are violators feel no conscience about it at all.

Which is the scary thing, because if they don't feel any conscience about it, then their

heart is hardened to it. And we need a softness toward God so that we can very quickly be aware when something we've done is wrong. And if we don't sense it ourselves, and someone comes up and tells us what you're is wrong, a soft heart will quickly receive that correction.

The Bible says, correction will enter more into a wise man than a hundred stripes into a fool, which means that a man who's wise and whose heart is right with God will receive correction quickly, whereas a fool whose heart is not soft toward God will need to be beaten a hundred stripes. And we don't beat people in the church, fortunately. But in the days when that was written, there were slaves, and slaves were beaten for their crimes, and sometimes they were even killed for them.

But the point here was that a wise servant would obey quickly. A foolish servant would need to be disciplined many times. Children that way too.

So are Christians, only not in the sense of physical discipline. God has to chasten us a lot sometimes when our hearts are hardened. But the state of our conscience, of course, affects the softness of our heart.

And we need to be very careful to maintain a soft heart toward God. There are two opposite and equally, well, I don't know if they're equally bad ailments, they're both bad, but they both are states of conscience which are to be avoided. One is, and they're just the opposite of each other.

One is what the Bible speaks of as a cauterized conscience. In the Old English, King James, it used the word seared. This is found in 1 Timothy 4.2. 1 Timothy 4.2 speaks of certain evil people whose consciences are seared as with a hot iron.

The word in the Greek actually means cauterized. You know what cauterizing is? When you've got a running sore and you apply something extremely hot, either chemical or physically hot, and it just kind of burns and instantly scars the tissue. And it immediately resolves the problem.

It immediately removes all sensitivity to pain. But that's the next blessing. You can no longer feel pain, but you also have no other kind of feeling either.

And there are people whose consciences are irritated by the way they're living, but they just keep living that way. And it's like sandpaper up against their conscience all the time until their conscience is just burned or irritated, scarred to the point where it's not sensitive at all. And we've talked about that quite a bit already tonight.

That is one problem. In Titus 1.15, Paul spoke of the similar condition. He talked about people whose consciences are defiled.

And so if you continue in sinful activity when you know it's wrong, and maybe you don't

know it's wrong anymore because you've continued too long already in it, but you once knew it was wrong, but you didn't stop doing it, your conscience will become cauterized. And that's why you can't always trust your conscience, but you can't ignore it either. We're going to talk about the cure to this problem, but one of the problems is a cauterized or desensitized conscience.

The other problem is just the opposite. It's a conscience that's too sensitive. Paul spoke of that as a weak conscience.

We would probably in our modern vernacular say a tender conscience. You've probably heard that expression. It's a very tender conscience, which means they're very sensitive.

They do the slightest little thing, and most people would just let it slide, but they just have to come back and confess to you that they did it. And sometimes it's almost irritating when you're around people whose conscience is so tender. There's some people that have come to me again and again and say, I'm so sorry I did such and such.

I never even noticed they did it. And sometimes you don't know what to do. You know you're supposed to say, I forgive you, but how can you forgive someone for something you never held against them? It's an awkward situation, but the real problem is not to me, but to the person who has the tender conscience, because that person is very subject to experiencing condemnation about things that aren't even wrong.

Paul speaks of this phenomenon in two of his epistles. In Romans, chapter 14, it's mostly the whole chapter about a tender conscience, or what he calls a weak conscience. He says there are some believers who know that it's right to eat anything, but others who are weak, meaning their consciences are weak, they eat only vegetables, he says, because they have some kind of a conscience against eating meat.

Well, Paul said, I know there's nothing wrong with eating meat, but if it hurts my brother's conscience to eat meat, I won't eat meat, because some have a weaker or more tender or more sensitive conscience than they need to, but I'm not going to trample upon it. And the other passage, besides Romans 14, where Paul talks about it, we'll look at it a little later, is three chapters long in 1 Corinthians, chapters 8, 9, and 10 of 1 Corinthians. He talks about this also, about persons who have a weak conscience, and in both places, Romans and 1 Corinthians, Paul is talking primarily to the person who doesn't have a weak conscience about people who do, and how to avoid trampling upon their tender conscience.

But besides addressing people who don't have a weak conscience, on how we should relate to those who do, we need to say something to those who do have a weak conscience. The fact that it's weak indicates that it's not strong, and there's something quite wrong. It's an ill conscience.

It's a conscience that is too easily reactive to things that it needn't be. It is the basis of legalism. Legalism springs from a conscience that is too weak, or too tender.

The Bible says that women should wear modest apparel, but some groups, to them, their conscience is not clear unless they wear dresses down to the floor. Their conscience is very tender about that. If their shins show, they feel like they're nude or something, and so their conscience is bothering them.

Now, I frankly think that's a little overdoing it. I think that's... I don't... Now, some Christians go the other way, because their conscience is cauterized, and I've seen women, Christian women, do things that ought not be done, as far as the way they dress, but you can go too far, and when you have too sensitive a conscience, it'll result in legalism, which also has as its by-product condemnation. When you add restrictions to your life that God has not restricted you in, you are becoming a legalist.

When the Bible says, don't be drunk with wine, and you say, therefore, no Christian should ever touch wine, that's legalism. Now, I personally don't drink, because there are people whose consciences would be wounded, and I can live without it very easily. I have no need to drink.

I've never been a drinker, but there have been times on occasions in the past where I did have something to drink, you know, a glass of wine or a beer with pizza or something like that, and I was a Christian at the time, and I felt no conscience about it, and the only reason I stopped was because I knew some people do have conscience about it. Smoking, drinking, chewing gum, going to movies, listening to Christian rock music or any other kind of rock music, these are things that the Bible doesn't have any specific reference to, and which therefore cannot be laid in a blanket fashion upon Christians, say, you absolutely cannot do these things that you're necessarily sinning. But, even though the Bible doesn't specifically name these things, it's very clear that some person's conscience smite them, even if they do not violate the law of God, but because, maybe culturally, they've been programmed to see certain things as wrong.

And, like, for women to wear pants, for instance, there are Christians who are scandalized by women wearing pants. Now, most of you obviously have no conviction against it, and I don't either, but there are some who do. And, you know, there's something very important about a right attitude.

If your conscience is tender and you have a right attitude, you won't go into legalism and condemnation. You'll simply say, this is something I feel personal conviction about for myself, but I'm not going to impose it on others. And, in that case, you don't become a legalist.

You can wear your dresses down to the floor, you can wear your hair in a bun, you can do all, you know, you can put yourself under as strict measures as you want to, as long

as you know in your own heart you're doing what your conscience tells you to do, but someone else may not have the same restriction in their conscience. And that is the epitome, in my mind, of maturity. When a person has come to a concept of holiness that has made them feel uncomfortable with any compromise in any area, and yet they're able to graciously accept that Christians in general don't have to do what they're doing.

A. W. Tozer, in one of his books about how to make spiritual progress, said, he said, remember this saying, others may, but you cannot. If that's your attitude, when God says, listen, you know, maybe it's time to give up this or that, you know, maybe you should give up television, you know, maybe you should kind of dress differently, you know, wear more inexpensive clothing, drive a less expensive car, you know, the Lord begins to speak to you about something like that. That's your business, between you and God, but it's not for you to impose that on others.

And the thing about legalism, and most people who have a weak conscience, is as soon as God tells them that they should do something, they're quite convinced that that's the word of the Lord for everyone else. And that's where legalistic groups get started and where condemnation falls, because when you add restrictions to your life that the Bible doesn't add, you are moving into an area where God has not promised you any grace in the matter. You see, God will give you the grace to obey what he has commanded.

He would never command you to do something and not give you the grace to do it. But when you begin to add things that God never commanded, he hasn't committed himself to give you any grace to perform those things, in which case you begin to, in your mind, blur the difference between what God has said and what man has said. That was the Pharisees' problem.

They had the traditions of the elders, they had the law of Moses, and they'd lost sight of where the line was drawn between them. And Paul says, or not Paul, but Jesus said to them, you're teaching for doctrines the traditions of men, and you're nullifying the word of God in doing so. Because human traditions of the Pharisees, and in some cases of Christians, can become so canonized in our thinking that we forget that they're not in the Bible, that they're not the word of God.

And we don't draw the proper lines, and so we end up, because God doesn't give us grace to do the man-made things, the man-made traditions, God doesn't give us grace, we end up violating them. And when we do that, of course, we feel condemned, because we don't know, we just feel like we've broken God's law, because we've lost sight of the difference. And a conscience that's too sensitive can lead to moral problems, too.

A lot of times it can just lead you to backsliding, because you just lose hope. Christian life just seems too rigid. The Christian life just seems too unreasonable, too unjoyful, because these heavy restrictions that one places on themselves because of their conscience just removes all the joy of their life.

And while that's just the opposite condition, to have a conscience that's too insensitive, it's just bad, too. And both are bad, to have a conscience that's too sensitive, or a conscience that's not sensitive enough. Of course, the solution is to have a conscience that's in agreement with the word of God.

So the healing of these ailments must be found in a spirit-led study of the word. And I recommend that Christians bathe their minds with the word of God. Paul said that we need to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, and the renewing of our minds involves, among other things, the reprogramming of our conscience.

Because there's certain things that the world tells us are not wrong, but they are. But when we become Christians, we don't immediately perceive that they're not wrong, because our conscience has already been programmed to agree with the world. And we need to reprogram it by the word of God.

Jesus said, you are now clean by the word that I've spoken unto you. Wherewithal, the psalmist said, shall a young man cleanse his ways by taking heed thereto according to thy word. And so, as I study the word of God, I become aware of what God's standards are.

Now, intrinsically, I have a basic understanding of some things are right, some are wrong. But because of the cauterization of my conscience in certain areas, my conscience cannot be fully trusted in every sense. Because there might be some things that are wrong that I'm not sensitive about anymore, and I might do them not knowing they're wrong.

And though my conscience doesn't condemn me in a way that I can discern, it nonetheless is defiled. And a defiled conscience has all the problems that we've talked about. So it's necessary for my conscience to come into line with truth, with reality, so that I approve the things that God approves, and I disapprove the things that God disapproves.

And I don't disapprove of things that God doesn't disapprove of. And I don't approve of things that God doesn't approve of. That my approval, my moral awareness comes into exact sync with where God's is.

And that can only be done by the restructuring of our thinking, the reprogramming and renewing of our minds through the Word of God. And it's absolutely essential that the Holy Spirit be allowed to take the Word of God. And if our heart is soft enough to reshape our thinking on many things, many things.

There are things that every Christian we've ever known have done without any tinge of conscience, but which when you read the Bible, you find out that's wrong. But you never knew it was wrong because Christians all did it. Have you ever looked at denominational

Christians that did a lot of things that you know are wrong, but they don't seem to know they're wrong? I know people who, when they see that phenomenon in another group of people other than their own, they say, well, that's Babylon.

You know, that group is, you know, that's the false church or whatever. That's not always the case. They're not always the false church.

A lot of times it's just people who have a wrong standard that's not conditioned by the Bible. They're doing what they think is right, but their approval has been twisted because they have a whole cultural system of approval and disapproval that is characteristic of their group. And those who are converted in their group and raised up in that group, they're born with this wrong conditioning.

And their hearts might be as right with God as they know to be, but the trouble is they don't know enough. All they know is their cultural norms in their denomination of their group. And I believe that God will look at their intention of their heart and whether they really love the Lord more than anything else.

But it still remains that if their conscience is not in sync with God's, then they are depriving themselves, as we well know, as we look upon them, they're depriving themselves of much of the spiritual benefits of being a Christian. And we can be doing that too. And perhaps we are more than we know in some areas.

And that's why we need the word of God to remedy the excesses of either too insensitive or too sensitive a conscience. I want to talk about how to deal with a conscience that's been defiled. And I want to say that a defiled conscience results in condemnation.

Now, all of you perhaps know what condemnation is. And we know also very well that the devil is the one who brings condemnation upon us. And we also know because we've heard we're well catechized in the Christian faith that the Holy Spirit brings conviction upon us.

But most of us have a hard time knowing sometimes whether it's the Holy Spirit bringing conviction or the devil bringing condemnation. If you were honest with me, I think you'd probably say there have been times when you've wondered, is that just the condemnation from the devil? Is the Holy Spirit really convicting me? And the reason there's a problem there is because both the devil and the Holy Spirit both address themselves to our conscience. And if our conscience is not well trained in the word of God, and of course, if it hasn't yet been cleansed of a certain defilement that's come upon it because of a wrongdoing on our part, then it's very hard to discern whether it's the Holy Spirit convicting us or whether it's the devil condemning us.

One teacher said, and I suppose it's a pretty good rule of thumb in this matter, is the first time you feel the tinge of conscience, it's the Holy Spirit. The second time, it's the devil. I

should say the second time, it's condemnation.

When you first realize that something you've done is wrong, it's conviction and God's giving you a chance to repent. If you feel it again because you haven't repented, then it's condemnation because you're supposed to have repented. You're supposed to have responded.

If you don't respond to conviction, then certainly you'll experience condemnation. The interesting thing is, though, that even if you do respond to conviction and you do repent, that sometimes the devil will seek to put a false condemnation on you. You might wonder, why would the devil do that? Once I've really got things straightened between me and God, there's not really anything wrong between me and God.

Why would the devil want me to still feel condemned? Because of what we read in 1 John 3. If our heart condemns us, we don't have confidence with God. And that's what the devil wants most as far as not to have confidence with God, because what's the natural result? What sort of things we ask, we don't receive them because we don't come with faith and confidence toward God. If my conscience is not clear, whatever the reason, if I feel condemnation, then I won't come confidently before God and I won't receive the answers to my prayers.

And that is, of course, means the devil wins that round. So he doesn't really care whether you've really sinned or not, as long as he can convince you that you're condemned. If you've really sinned and he makes you feel condemned about that, that's all the better.

But if you don't sin, he still wants to make you feel condemned, because the result's the same in either case. The condemnation keeps you out of fellowship with God and destroys your confidence before God. So we need to know how to deal with condemnation and conviction.

I would say this. The first, and it agrees with what I quoted a moment ago from someone else, the first time you become aware that something you've done is wrong, it is conviction. If you repent and you still feel conviction or sensitivity in your conscience about something, there are some other things that might be required.

But more likely than not, it's just condemnation. I'm going to give you a series of things the Bible teaches about cleaning up your conscience once it's been hurt. Once you've done something wrong, there are principles that the conscience clean.

And if you do those things and you still feel condemned, then it's obviously the devil, because you're feeling condemned when you aren't really. God has really forgiven you, but your feelings are against that. And so once you apply the principles of the cleansing of the conscience, if there's still a feeling of guilt, then it's of the devil.

But until you've done these things, you might as well accept it as conviction from the Holy Spirit. He's still striving with you. His spirit will not always strive with man, he said, but he's still striving with you, trying to bring you to the point of repentance in such a case as that.

I would say something else, just as a rule of thumb, and this gets us a little off the subject, but it's partly related. In knowing the difference between condemnation and conviction, this is a little like sort of side point, but conviction will always be specific. Condemnation will always be very general, so that you can't really pin anything specific.

You just feel kind of guilty, but you're not really sure what for. You think about anything you've done, you can't think of anything specifically, you just feel dirty, you just feel bad. If the Holy Spirit's convicting you, he'll tell you what he's convicting you of.

And you will know what it is you've done. At least if you've prayed and asked him to, he will tell you what it is. If you felt kind of guilty, kind of besmirched, filthy in your conscience, and you say, God, you know, what is it? What have I done? If he doesn't tell you anything specific, then you haven't done anything.

And it's just condemnation. The devil wants to keep it real vague, because you can't repent if you don't know what it is. You can't confess, you can't clear it up if it's just a vague feeling of guilt.

And so that's another way. I know that a lot of times when people come to me with a criticism, I can easily recognize whether it's the Holy Spirit or the devil trying to condemn me by whether there's some specific thing I've done, or whether they just say, oh, you're just insensitive or something like that, which, of course, no one ever says that to me. Something like that, you know, would be, or you're just proud, or you're just this or that.

Well, if they can say, well, you know, your pride was evident in this particular action, or your insensitivity really, you know, was manifest in this, I know, you know, there's something specific. The Holy Spirit is trying to correct me, get me to repent of something I've done. But if it's just kind of a vague thing, oh, you're so proud, you're so this or that, or the other thing, and there's nothing specific, it's just like, how can you fight with that, you know? How can you fight with what you are, you know? But if it's something you've done, then you can repent of it, and you can get it cleaned up right away.

And condemnation will always be vague, or in most cases it will be. But I should say conviction will always be specific. Okay, what do you do about condemnation? What do you do when you've got a defiled conscience? Well, first of all, how do you know if you've got one? Since I said your conscience can be desensitized, so you can't really always feel that something's wrong even when it is, because you've cauterized your conscience, it's necessary to have other ways of knowing that your conscience is defiled, besides just feeling bad about something.

Because allegedly Charles Manson didn't feel bad at all about all the people he killed, but that doesn't mean it wasn't wrong. There are other ways of knowing that his conscience was smitten. Some of them are quite objective, like comparing his actions with what the scriptures say.

But there's many, many things. One of those things is loss of joy. You might not feel convicted about a particular thing in your life, because your conscience is desensitized to it.

You've just become accustomed to doing it, and it doesn't make you feel guilty anymore. But your joy has mysteriously disappeared. Remember David in that same Psalm 51, when he was repenting of his sin and praying for a clean conscience, he said, restore to me the joy of thy salvation.

He'd lost it. He'd lost it. In 2 Corinthians, Paul said, our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our clean conscience.

We're able to rejoice, he said, because we have a clean conscience. I think that's in the first chapter of 2 Corinthians, I don't know the first number. But joy will depart.

At least a clean, pure, real kind of joy will. There might still be sort of a giddy kind of entertained sort of a happiness that's pumped up by being in entertaining situations, but real, pure joy of the Lord is gone. Your conscience is defiled.

Even if you don't feel particularly that you've done anything wrong, you should begin to wonder if your joy disappears. Another sign that a person has their defiled conscience is that they withdraw from light. It says in John chapter 3, in verses 19 through 21, that this is the condemnation that comes upon the world, that light has come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

It says, for everyone that doeth righteousness comes to the light, so that their deeds might be exposed, that they are rotting God, but he that does evil withdraws from the light. He hates the light, because he doesn't want his deeds to be exposed. That's John 3, 19 through 21.

Where do you find the light? Well, among other places in the scripture, also in fellowship with other Christians. When you're with Christians, you are under scrutiny. And when people withdraw from fellowship, many times people withdraw from fellowship and don't go to church anymore, because, as they say, the churches are all bad, they're full of hypocrites, everyone's just playing a game, or something like that, and they have all kinds of excuses for withdrawing from fellowship.

And usually, they have convinced themselves that they have withdrawn from fellowship, because they are superior to all the other Christians that they used to fellowship with, and therefore they can't lower themselves to fellowship with them anymore. But in fact,

it's a clear sign that a person has a defiled conscience. For one thing, they're not loving their brethren, and that's something that their conscience would be afflicting them about if they were sensitive to it.

They have sin on their conscience. They may not know it, but they do. And the fact that they withdraw from the light proves it.

Or that they don't read the scriptures anymore, or they don't expose themselves to light in the various ways that Christians do. Walking in the light, of course, means to make yourself transparent and exposed to the brethren. And if you find yourself wanting to conceal things in your life, even if you haven't come to a place where you don't read the Bible or don't go to fellowship anymore, but you still find yourself trying to withhold certain gray areas of your life, you know that your conscience is bothering you.

Withdrawing from the light is a clear indication that the conscience has been defiled. Another thing we've already alluded to is fear or paranoia. I'm convinced that a person never fears unless his conscience is bothering him.

I really don't believe anyone fears unless their conscience bothers them. I can't prove that, but it does say, as I mentioned in Proverbs, that the wicked flee when no man persists, but the righteous as bold as a lion. I believe if your heart is clear, your conscience is clean, you're righteous, then you're going to be bold.

If you're afraid, it's because somehow you know that you're not ready to go see God, and that's because your conscience is bothering you about something, though you might not have even been aware of it in recent times. Think of this case here in Matthew 14, verses 1 through 4. Matthew 14, 1 through 4, says, At that time Herod the Tetrarch heard of the fame of Jesus, and he said unto his servants, This is John the Baptist. He is risen from the dead, and therefore mighty works do show forth themselves in him.

For Herod had laid hold of John and bound him and put him in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife. And for John had said unto him, It is not lawful for you to have her. Now, John had convicted the conscience of Herod.

Instead of repenting, Herod had actually added sin to sin by imprisoning and then eventually killing John the Baptist. And he was so paranoid after that, that the first thing that happened as soon as he heard there was someone out doing miracles, he said, It's John the Baptist. He's back to haunt me.

He's more powerful than ever. You see, this irrational paranoia. Why? Because his conscience was bugging him.

That's exactly what it says. Because he had done that, he had this reaction. And I believe that, you know, if you used to use drugs, you know, when you had drugs in the car, you'd always be looking at the rearview mirror to make sure there wasn't a police car behind

you and everything, you know.

That paranoia that people sense when they're into drugs shouldn't be there after you're converted and you've put away your drugs. If you don't have any, if you're not holding anything in the car, you're not bothered to be stopped by the police and have them searched. In fact, you exult in it because you know that you're right and that the more they discover, the more it'll show that you're right.

And you won't be afraid of the light and you won't be afraid of anything. You won't be paranoid at all. All fear and paranoia will be gone because it just, there's nothing for the devil to hang it on because you're clean before God.

Another evidence that a person's got trouble with their conscience is that they're rationalizing their behavior a lot. Now, I was trying to think of how to describe the difference between rationalizing and just plain defending yourself. Because I think there are times when you can defend your behavior and you're not necessarily rationalizing.

And I'm not sure that I can give a good, clear definition of the difference because I've never read anything on it. I'm just trying to think about this myself. But I could say there's, there's definitely a spirit, a spiritual dynamic about rationalizing that is discernible.

That a person is somewhat nervous, nervously, constantly trying to explain why their behavior is okay. And in such cases, me thinks about protest is too much. If someone's always trying to tell me that they, that what they did is all right because of this and because of this, I know that they're not feeling very good about what they did.

If I don't do something that injures my conscience, I don't feel a necessity to go around defending myself about what I did. But if I'm always trying to defend myself, it's because I'm defending myself against my own conscience that's convicting me. And a nervous kind of tendency to always say, well, I was right because of this and this and this.

Always be thinking like a lawyer of how to defend your case. I know people like that. They're always, their mind is always like a lawyer's mind, always trying to think of why what they did is right and how they can defend what they did.

There's something wrong with the conscience of a person who's doing that. You're not always thinking about defending yourself and rationalizing your behavior unless your conscience is smitten. You know, your, a bad conscience can also be seen many times in a person's health.

A person whose conscience is defiled and they're doing nothing to improve that condition will begin to pine away, will begin to inwardly rot. And they'll actually become sick in many cases. We see this in David's case again, in Psalm 32, which is another Psalm he wrote at the same time and in the same circumstances, he wrote Psalm 51.

Those two Psalms 32 and 51 were written by David when he was repenting for his sin with Bathsheba. And here in Psalm 32, he's had the breakthrough. In Psalm 51, he's praying for the breakthrough.

Lord, restore to me the joy of my salvation. Well, once we read Psalm 32, it really follows the other one, though it's earlier in the Psalm, Psalm 3, but Psalm 32 is after he's had the breakthrough and the joy of his salvation is restored. He says, blessed are how happy is the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity in whose spirit there is no guile. Then he reminds himself of what it was like before he confessed his sin and before he cleared his conscience. He says, when I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long for day and night.

Thy hand was heavy upon me. My moisture was turned into drought of summer. Then it says, I acknowledge my sin unto thee and mine iniquity have I not hid.

I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord and thou forgave us the iniquity of my sin. And that's why you can now say, how happy is the man whose sin is forgiven. When I was keeping silent, that is when I was refraining from really confessing my sin to God, my bones were aching.

My moisture was drying up. I was getting, I was pining away in my guilt and it was affecting my actual physical health, as in many cases will be the case. These are various ways that we can know if we have a defiled conscience.

A lot of times we don't need to know whether someone else does. In fact, we don't need to be told how to tell someone else does very often. It's very obvious to us that someone else does, but it's not obvious to them that they do, or it's not obvious to us that we do.

And these are some rather objective tests. How fearful, how paranoid am I? How much do I tend to rationalize my behavior? Is there some pining away inside some physical groaning that's taking place because I just, because something's not right between me and God and I'm actually experiencing physical sickness. Where's my joy of the Lord? Do I find myself trying to conceal myself from people and not walk in the light? These are all strong evidences that the conscience is defiled, even if in other ways you haven't discerned that you've done something wrong.

And when you have these symptoms, you definitely need to pray and ask God to show you what is wrong. Search me and know my heart. Try me and see if there's any wicked way in me or God.

Well, how do you clean your conscience up? The shortest answer to that is not necessarily fully complete, but it's a good one in most cases. And it's not in 1 John 1.9. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from

all unrighteousness. It's a matter of justice with God to forgive our sins when we confess because they've been paid for by Jesus, by the blood of Christ.

And since he bore our sins, there's no just reason that we should bear them also. But we will unless we come and confess them and lay them before him and let them be his. You see, Jesus took our sins as his own, so they needn't be our own anymore, but we can still hold them.

We can still conceal them. We can still keep them to ourselves, in which case, although Jesus has died for our sins, we still bear them ourselves. But if we confess them, we're releasing them to him.

We're offering them to him. And so if we confess our sins, there's a cleansing of the conscience that takes place, and that's a necessary thing for us to do. A second thing to do, and it goes beyond confession, is repentance.

Some people don't know the difference between confession and repentance, but repentance is actually changing. If you've done something that's convicted your conscience, then it's necessary for you to stop doing it. It says in Proverbs again, and this is chapter 28, verse 13, He that covers his sins shall not prosper, but whoso confesses and forsakes them shall find mercy.

Not only confesses, but also forsakes them. That means you leave them behind, you repent of them, you cease to do them. You need to stop sinning.

Now, I realize that it's easier to say stop sinning than it is to stop sinning. And I don't believe God waits to forgive till he sees whether you're going to do it again. I believe he forgives as soon as you truly repent.

But true repentance is an honest determination to stop. Now, you may sin again just out of weakness, but you will no longer sin in that same way out of choice, I should say. When you've repented, it means that you have turned your back on that sin, you've forsaken it as a pattern of living.

And while the weakness of your nature might draw you into it again from time to time, at the time you're drawn into it, you will recognize it for the wicked thing it is, and you'll quickly repent and go back to the right path. You see, the difference between a person who's repented and one who's not, is not that one sins and the other doesn't. People who have repented, I'm sorry to say, I wish it were otherwise, but they still sometimes sin, but they feel differently about their sin than the person who hasn't repented.

A person who sins and has not repented feel the same grief over his sin. He may know it's wrong, but he won't necessarily grieve over its wrongs. True repentance stems from the fact that I now realize that my behavior has offended the holiness of God.

That a God who has done nothing but good to me has received nothing from me except spit in the face. And that God who deserves all my love and all my respect and all my reverence has gotten rebellion out of me and very little else. And that my sins have so offended the holiness of God, makes me feel differently toward them than before I realized that.

When I thought my sins were just hurting me or just hurting someone else, there seemed some good reason to avoid them, but I didn't feel too convicted. But when I realized they were hurting God, then there's a certain grief that comes in. It's a godly sorrow that leads to repentance, Paul said in 2 Corinthians 7. And a person who's repented will forever grieve over that sin.

Now, that doesn't mean he lives in grief, because he doesn't live in that sin. But when he sins, it will grieve him. And that's a sign that you have repented.

Now, God, like I said, he's not going to wait, you know, after you repent and say, well, let's see if you do it again, then I'll decide if I'm going to forgive you. He'll look at the intent of your heart. If your heart is, God, I am grieved about this sin, I never want to commit this again, I'm determined, you know, by your grace to avoid this sin.

That is true repentance. And he's not going to wait and see if you do it again. He knows whether you're going to do it again anyway.

But the point is, he sees the condition of your heart, and that's repentance. It's more than just confessing it. You can confess it just to go through a legal technicality to remove guilt.

But if it's not true repentance, it doesn't do any good. Whosoever confesses and forsakes his sins will find mercy, Proverbs 28, 13 says. There is a purging of the conscience that comes through the blood of Jesus Christ.

And this is perhaps the greatest benefit Christians have that non-Christians don't, because it is the defiled conscience and the guilt that we carry in our conscience that separates us from God. And the blood of Christ purges us from an evil conscience, it says in Hebrews 9. And I'd just like to read that verse to you. You can turn there if you'd like.

Hebrews 9 and verse 14, it says, How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? The blood of Jesus Christ, who offered himself up for us, purges, that blood purges. The word purge is a technical term in Jewish religion, which speaks of rendering something kosher. If a person touched a dead body in the Jewish religion, he'd be unclean for a period of time, after which he'd have to have a ceremonial washing and a change of clothes, and then he'd be clean again.

He would be purged. Now, when he was unclean, it didn't mean he was going to go to

hell because he touched a dead body, but he was ceremonially unclean and he was not able to go into the congregation and worship God there. He was separated from society and from God for a period of time because he was not kosher.

He was not clean. If he ate an animal that died of itself or ate blood or slept with his wife when she was on her period, those were all things that would defile a man in ceremonial ways and make him unclean. Purging referred to the removal of that uncleanness, which usually took place with the washing and so forth, and sometimes a sacrifice being offered.

Purging meant to declare someone clean again after they'd been unclean. It says here that the blood of Jesus will purge our conscience. Our conscience, many times, is made unclean by sin, but the blood of Jesus declares it clean, removes the uncleanness, purges it from these dead works to serve the living God.

It's a sprinkling of the blood of Christ, spoken of in 1 Peter 1.2, that purges our conscience. 1 Peter 1.2 says we've been elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father through sanctification of the spirit unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. The sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ ceremonially cleans the bad conscience.

Now, psychologists today who don't know God, and in many cases are making a strong effort not to find him, agree that guilt, that a guilty conscience, is a tremendous bane to humanity, and that even many physical problems arise out of a defiled conscience. Secular psychologists agree about this. They would call diseases that arise out of a bad conscience psychosomatic diseases.

They're not organic, they're not caused by germs, they're caused by the state of a person's soul, psyche. And therefore, a humanistic psychologist, very often, at least certain schools of them would, seek to deal with a patient who's suffering from a guilt complex by seeking to remove their guilt feelings. And the best way to do that in some schools of psychology is thought to be to convince the person that they're not really guilty of anything.

That they feel guilty because they did things that they were conditioned to think were wrong. They were raised in a religious home. They were raised with certain hangups.

Their society told them certain things were wrong. But really there's no moral absolutes because there's no God and so forth. Therefore, what you did couldn't really be actually wrong.

You just feel bad about it because of your conditioning. Now, what you have to do is recondition yourself to know that that wasn't wrong. Now, in so doing, the psychologists are trying to remove the feeling of guilt, the sense of guilt.

But they can't change the fact that guilt is a reality. The worst thing you can do if you're guilty is to remove the feeling of guilt. My grandfather would never take an aspirin if he had a headache.

It's not because he believed in divine healing, but it's because he said, if I have a headache, there's something wrong in there and that headache is telling me that. If I take an aspirin and numb it, I won't know there's something wrong. So that headache is a warning to me that something is wrong and I need rest or I need something and if I take an aspirin, I'll conceal that from myself.

I'll just remove the sensitivity of it. You need to avoid taking an aspirin for your conscience. Rationalize and say, well, I feel guilty, but probably what I did wasn't really wrong because I can justify it in these various ways and therefore I don't feel bad about it anymore.

The guilt's still there. There's a reality called guilt and the only thing that removes it is the blood of Jesus Christ that purges your guilty conscience and that is applied through confession and repentance of your sins. And that is how we cleanse the conscience.

In some cases, once you've repented, there will still be something left to do. Not in every case, but there is a thing called restitution. We see this in the case of Zacchaeus, for instance.

When Zacchaeus, the tax collector, was converted, he made a vow that he would give half of his goods to the poor and then he said if he had stolen from anyone, which apparently he had, he said he would repay them fourfold. That is, he'd pay them back four times as much as he'd taken from them. That's not just generosity.

That was required by the law of Moses. Thieves, when they were caught, had to restore fourfold, in some cases, and fivefold in some cases, what they'd stolen. That's called restitution.

There are some sins for which restitution needs to be made. It's not enough to say, well, I'm sorry I did it. It's all over.

The fact is, if you stole a car and you repent, you can't keep driving the car. You've got to give it back. If you lied to someone and you repent, you can't live in that lie.

You've got to go back and tell them you told the lie and tell them what the truth is. There's a certain thing called restitution. That means making it right again.

Now, there are some sins that you can't make restitution for. For instance, if you commit adultery, you can't undo that. Going and confessing to the world won't change the fact that you did it.

You can't make it right. There are certain sins for which restitution cannot be made by you, in which you just have to assume that God forgives you, though you're sincere in your repentance, but there's nothing you can do to change what happened. But there are some things you can do to make it right.

There are some sins which have violated people in tangible ways that can be reversed, and you can make it right. I had a friend who was a burglar before he was a Christian, and after he became a Christian, he just felt in his heart to make restitution, so he made up a list of all the people he could remember that he'd ever burglarized. And the value of all the things he'd stolen from them, and he went to them individually and asked them, first of all, to forgive him, and vowed to repay them back.

And then he went and he lived with his mother for a year and got a job working at a gas station, whereas he'd been a drug dealer for a living before. And he went to work, did an honest job, and he lived with his mother until he paid off everyone that he'd burglarized. And I'll tell you, he had a clean conscience after that.

But if there's restitution to be made and you haven't made it, you can't have a clean conscience even though you've confessed and repented. There's sometimes some unfinished business that God will bring to your mind. An example of this, on a very different plane, was that Moses sinned against God by not circumcising his son.

It's in Exodus chapter 4, you read about it, but God had told the Jews through Abraham and ever after that they had to circumcise their male children on the eighth day of their lives. Well, Moses apparently had a conflict with his wife, who was a Gentile about it, and didn't circumcise him. She didn't want to do it, so he submitted to her.

And when God called him to go to Egypt and to deliver the people, Moses started. But the Bible says in a very confusing, to some people, confusing passage, it says that God found Moses in the inn and sought to kill him. And his wife took her son and cut off his foreskin and threw it at Moses' feet and said, surely you are a bloody husband to me, and the Lord stopped trying to kill Moses then.

What's all that about? That passage has confused so many people, but I'll just tell you what it's all about. God had called Moses to serve him and to be his prophet, but there was still some unfinished business that had to be taken care of. And Moses could have said, well, I repent of not circumcising my son, but that wouldn't change anything.

He still hadn't circumcised him. Restitution meant doing what he should have done in the first place. And when restitution was made, then God ceased resisting it.

And a lot of times we will take an easy road of repentance, which leaves out restitution, when restitution really is possible and necessary. And we think we've repented, but in fact our conscience is still not clean because there is dirty laundry still to be cleaned up

in making restitution for wrongs that we've done to people. Another principle, and this is absolutely necessary for cleaning the conscience, is to forgive others.

I already quoted what Jesus said in Matthew 6, 14 and 15, where he said, if you forgive your brother his trespasses, your father will forgive you yours. But if you don't, he won't. And there's a very frightening parable that Jesus told in Matthew 18 about forgiveness, about a servant who was forgiven a great debt.

And then he went out and found a fellow servant who owed him very little, but he wouldn't forgive him of that lesser debt. And when the man to whom he owed the original debt heard of it, he took him by the throat, and it says Jesus said, he delivered him to the tormentors until he should pay all that he owed. This is Matthew 18, 34 and 35.

It says he delivered this man to the tormentors because he would not forgive his brother. And then Jesus says, so shall my heavenly father do unto you, if you from your heart do not forgive every man his brother. Whew, that's kind of heavy.

This man took a man and threw him to the tormentors until he should pay his whole debt. And Jesus said, that's what my father will do to you if you don't forgive your brother. You've been forgiven an enormous debt, you are now required to forgive your brother of anything.

And if you, you know, who are these tormentors? Possibly demons, it's a possibility. I believe it would be theologically fitting to say so. Another possibility is it's the conscience.

There's nothing more tormenting than a conscience that has not been properly maintained before God. People can't sleep because of a guilty conscience, many times. People get sick because of a guilty conscience.

People's relationships, their marriages fall apart because of a guilty conscience. There's all kinds of torments that come on a person because of a guilty conscience. And God will sometimes deliver us over to such torments until we clear that conscience up.

And that may require forgiving someone. I know many times people have done everything else right in coming to the Lord and getting things straightened, but there's still been some bitterness they've held toward their father or toward somebody who ripped them off, to an ex-spouse or to someone like that, who they think they were cheated by. And they need to forgive.

There's no cleanness of conscience available if we're not willing to forgive. Because if we won't forgive, God won't forgive. And we can't have a clean conscience unless he forgives us.

So forgiveness of our brothers is an absolute biblical necessity for obtaining a clean conscience. So these are some of the things. Confession, repentance, restitution, and forgiveness of others are points that the Bible teaches are absolutely necessary for obtaining a clean conscience.

And the final thing I want to talk about tonight, you might think I should have reached it a long time ago. The reason is my watch fell off and the band finally broke. But I want to talk about how to live with a clean conscience, because that's really where it's at.

I think any Christian who's tried to do so has found it very obnoxious to try to live the Christian life just sinning and confessing and then sinning again and confessing and living just as much in sin as they did before they were Christian. The only difference being they confess afterwards, but their life is unchanged. And some people actually give us the impression that that's the way it's supposed to be.

Some people have no room in their theology for sanctification, for a process of being made into holy people. And yet it's absolutely biblical and necessary that we experience sanctification, that is a progress into holiness of character. And to walk in a new way, and to be a people zealous for good works instead of zealous for evil works.

And to have a clean conscience as a habit, rather than just continuing to sin and get forgiven and sin and get forgiven and sin and get forgiven over and over again. In other words, constantly irritating our conscience with sin and constantly getting it cleaned again. Why not just walk with a clean conscience? Why not just keep a clean conscience and live in cleanness of conscience? That of course is what's normative.

The prodigal son wasn't always returning. He returned home and stayed there. He didn't have to return every day several times.

He was away, he came to himself, he repented, he came home and he stopped living in the pig pen. And so we are supposed to be the same way. When we repent of our sins, we're supposed to stop living in the pig pen.

Once we get our conscience clean, we shouldn't have to clean it again. Although we probably will, because of failures. And it's good for us to remember what God requires to get it clean.

But we can adopt patterns of living which will avoid further violations of our conscience. And let me give you some biblical things right here that should be very obvious. First of all, the best way to avoid defiling your conscience is to avoid sin.

Now that might sound just too basic to some, and to others it may just sound too impossible. And obviously I'm not saying that you can necessarily live the rest of your life without ever falling into any kind of sin. Theoretically it is possible, since the Bible says that there's no temptation taken you.

But such as is common to man, and God is faithful. And with the temptation will provide a way of escape so that you can endure it. Theoretically you never have to sin, because there's always a way to escape.

But we don't live theoretically, we live in the real world. And the fact of the matter is we are bent towards sin to a certain degree. And even though there are escape routes that God provides, we don't always take them.

And so we do sin, and I'm not sure we'll ever reach a point in our maturity before the Lord comes where we don't ever sin anymore. And I don't teach that. But I do teach that there should be some improvement.

I do teach that we don't have to sin as much this year as we did last year. I do believe there is such a thing as victory over some kinds of sins. And we might not get the full victory over all areas of sin in one day.

Although I know some denominations teach that kind of a crisis sanctification. I don't necessarily think that's in the Bible. But I do believe there is sanctification, and that it is a matter of getting victory after victory.

From glory to glory into that same image. There should be progress, and we should be living less in sin than we did yesterday, or at least last year. And so I just want to state this, though it might seem too basic.

But it obviously is the first point that has to be made to keep a clean conscience. The best way is to avoid sin. Given a certain temptation, realize that if you submit to that temptation, you'll have to deal with a defiled conscience.

But if you resist it, you won't. And since God has provided a way of resistance, a way of escape from temptation, you might as well choose to avoid it. Avoid the sin.

Also, walk in the light. That means remain transparent. Stay in fellowship with Christians.

If you start to stray a little bit, they'll be quick, hopefully, to point it out to you. And you keep short accounts with God in that way, by walking in the light. It says that in 1 John 1.7. If we walk in the light, we have fellowship with God.

Fellowship one with another. And the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin. So we'll keep clean that way, walking in the light.

Another thing is don't ignore those checks in your conscience. Now, the Bible nowhere uses the word a check in the spirit. But most Christians have heard that expression.

Or at least they've experienced the phenomenon that we call a check in the spirit. It means when you're considering a course of action and just there's this little tiny thing, a little tiny buzzer goes off, very faintly or maybe very loudly in your mind. It says, I don't

think that's right.

And many times it's so faint that you can suppress it. You can ignore it. You can rationalize it away.

But don't. Don't ignore those things. See, that's commonly in the modern Christian vernacular called a check in the spirit.

I feel a check about that. I don't know why that term came to be used, but it's a much more useful language today. The fact is, it's a warning from the conscience and it might be ever so faint, but you need to learn to listen to it and don't ignore it, because it will cost you more than you really will wish you had to pay if you don't submit to those checks.

Another thing is submit to authorities. Submit to authorities. There are some things that God doesn't forbid to do, but the authorities that are over us do, like drive 55 miles an hour.

God doesn't say you have to drive 55 miles an hour, but he says you have to submit to authorities. And since they say drive 55 miles an hour, it becomes a moral issue whether you do or not. And that's why Paul says in Romans chapter 13 that it's necessary to avoid condemnation that we submit to the authorities.

I'll read a short passage of five verses from the beginning of Romans 13. Let every soul be subject unto the higher authorities, for there is no authority but of God, and the authorities that are are in fact ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resists those authorities resists the ordinance of God, and they that resist shall receive unto themselves condemnation.

For rulers are not a terror to good works but to evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of that authority? Do that which is good, and thou shalt have the praise of the same. For he is a minister of God unto thee for good.

But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid, for he bears not the sword in vain, for he is a minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore you must needs be subject not only for wrath but also for conscience sake. You need to be subject to authorities not only because there's punishment like going to jail for not doing it, but also he says for your conscience sake.

You better watch your conscience. And it says in Proverbs 4, 23, keep your heart with all diligence for out of it are the issues of life. How do you keep your heart? Well, one of the most important parts of keeping your heart is keeping your conscience clean, because we saw how many issues of life emanate from a bad conscience.

How much our love and our faith and our confidence toward God and toward man and

our softness of heart are all affected. So keep your heart. Be concerned about your conscience.

He says we need to be subject to authorities for conscience sake, for the sake of our conscience. You know, we have some rules around here that our students are supposed to keep. Like some of them might seem a bit arbitrary, but there's always reasons whenever there's rules.

But one of the rules we have is that people should eat three pieces of bread and no more at lunchtime. There's a lot of people walk around here with defiled consciences over that. Not because it's a sin to eat four pieces of bread, but because they know they're violating authority.

And there's a defilement of conscience. By the way, of course, it's stealing. So it is a sin.

If the people who own the bread say you can have three pieces and you take four, you're stealing one. But I'm not upset about the bread. I don't even eat bread, so I don't care how much we have or eat.

But the point is that happens. We say one piece of fruit, people sneak out another one in their coat. They think no one's looking, but we know about it.

So come to class on time or sign into clipboard. They sneak in and don't sign the clipboard. Are those moral issues? Yes and no.

In a sense, if no one had made a rule about it, God couldn't care less. But as soon as there's an authority that makes a rule of it, it becomes a moral issue. And a person cannot violate authority that God has ordained without smiting of the conscience.

There's a need to submit for conscience sake to authorities. You know, some people don't know very much about the way we're organized here, but we're not associated with any particular denomination here. We're kind of an independent Bible school, but we're not really independent.

We make ourselves answerable to the ministers in this town. And we've made that clear to them when we first came here, that we don't have a translocal authority that we answer to, but we want to be accountable. We want to be our lives an open book to the ministers in this town.

Since they're the ones who have a chance to scrutinize us, it makes more sense for them to be our covering than for someone 600 miles away who never sees us to be our covering. And so we made ourselves accountable to them. Well, a few months ago, we started having a Sunday morning service.

And we had pretty much determined we'd never do that, but we just felt the Lord was

leading us to do it. Well, it turns out some of the ministers in town were a little offended by that because our people go to their churches. And then they were afraid that, you know, if people came to our service, they wouldn't go to their churches.

They began to see it as competition. And so the ministerial association sent a couple of representatives to us saying we don't feel good about this. And so we prayed about it.

We felt the Lord just led us to submit to them in that situation. And even though we don't feel there's anything wrong with us having a Sunday morning service, we just felt that that was something where God would have us submit to the authorities. We said we're answerable to the ministers.

We might as well prove it by our deeds. And you know what? We have such a clean conscience about it. As it turns out, some of the ministers now don't because there's some ministers who are kind of complaining that they were intruding into our lives where they shouldn't have.

But that's none of our problem. We've got a clean conscience, and it really feels good to do so. We gave up our rights, in a sense.

In order to maintain the God-ordained authority structure and to submit to those that we made ourselves accountable to. And we feel good. And it doesn't matter to us now what they do about it because, I mean, they approve.

I mean, they feel good about us doing that. But the best thing is that we feel good. Now, there were all kinds of ways we could have rationalized.

They don't have any right to tell us that, you know, it's right, we need this, or whatever. But we decided to submit. And there's a clearness of conscience that comes with doing that that we would never have felt if we just rationalized our behavior and ignored their request.

And they couldn't have stopped us from having something to eat, and we could have just gotten away with it. But it would have just not been right. There would have been a friction.

There would have been a break in the relationship. There would have been an uncleanness of conscience. So submission to authorities is an absolute necessity to live with a clean conscience, and it should be a habit.

Also, avoid questionable behavior. Now, questionable means things that you don't really know if they're right or wrong. People sometimes come to me and say, well, is it okay for a Christian to go to PG movies? Is it okay for a Christian to listen to rock and roll sometimes? Is it okay for Christians to date or to kiss when they're not engaged? Or is it right for Christians to wear this kind of thing or to do this? All I can say is, if you don't

feel totally right about it, don't do it.

If it's questionable, then don't do it. Because the Bible says, whatever you can't do in faith, it is sin for you, even if it isn't sin in itself. The very fact that it's questionable means that you're not sure it's right.

And if you go ahead and do something that you're not sure is right before God, it shows that you're willing to do something that might be wrong. In which case, your choice is a sinful choice, even if it's not really wrong. And Paul gave the example of people who eat meat and people who don't eat meat.

Some people think it's wrong to eat meat. Paul said there's nothing wrong with eating meat. But if they think it's wrong to eat meat, they'd better not do it.

Because they'll hurt their conscience, he said. And that would be very bad for them. And he also said that we shouldn't hurt their conscience.

We need to avoid trampling upon their sensitivities. And if something we're doing hurts the conscience of someone else, though our conscience is stronger and we're not offended by doing it, yet we should not, as Paul said, not destroy another brother by trampling upon his sensitivities. Well, I've actually gone quite a bit longer than I planned to.

So I'm going to just summarize these last several points I made real quickly and then close. To live with a clean conscience, it's necessary that we avoid sin as much as possible. Do not ignore those checks in our conscience, those checks of the Spirit that we are given.

Even if they're very faint, be sensitive to them and obey them. We need to walk in the light. That means keep our lives open and exposed to the brethren, because they'll keep us from going too far wrong.

You need to submit to authorities, whether they're government authorities or church authorities or whatever. Family authorities, submit to your parents. A lot of you are unmarried young people.

Submission to your parents is still an issue in your lives. And even though, you know, I'll tell you something. When I was a teenager, you probably know I'm going to get done quick, when I was a teenager, I had hair down to the middle of my back.

Well, not when I was, yeah, when I was in my early 20s. When I was a teenager, I wanted to, but my father wouldn't let me. I grew it as long as I could get away with, and we'd argue about it, we'd fight about it.

And see, I was in a Christian rock and roll band at the time, so I could justify it. You know,

rock and roll bands have to have long hair. If you don't have long hair, no one's going to believe you're really a rock and roll player.

So you have to have your hair long. My father wasn't convinced, but I could convince myself it was right to have my hair long. And I said, it's for Jesus, you know, and so forth.

You know, I've got to obey God and not men. And, you know, I didn't have a clean conscience that whole time at all. And one day, the Lord just convicted me about it.

I went out and got it cut off. I felt ridiculous, short hair, I looked like a nerd, which I did. But I had a clean conscience.

I just felt like a great burden had been lifted off me. It was greater than the actual weight of my hair that I cut off. And later, my father said he didn't care if I grew my hair out when I moved out of the house.

When I moved out of the house, I grew it out for three years and never cut it. And it was quite long. And again, it was for the sake of the music ministry and relating with the street people and all the things I was doing in those days.

This is some 10 years or more ago. But eventually, the Lord convicted me about it again to cut it. Now, I'm not saying long hair is bad, but in this case, it was a problem to some people.

And the Lord told me to cut it. And when I cut it, I just couldn't believe the release. I thought just because I submitted to my parents, just because I submitted to other people's wishes and gave up my rights, really.

There's a real cleanness of heart that comes when you give up your rights for someone else. Because that's love. And that's, of course, what the end of our conversation is supposed to be.

We need to avoid questionable behavior. Anything that you're not sure if it's right. You know, there's something neat about questionable things.

None of them are necessary. Have you ever wondered about... Notice that. Is it wrong for a Christian to smoke? I don't know.

Is it necessary? No. Well, great. If you're not sure it's right, then don't do it.

You don't have to, do you? Is it wrong to watch television? Well, is it necessary? Well, no. Well, great. Stop doing it if you wonder if it's okay.

Everything that's questionable is also unnecessary. Imagine if you weren't sure whether it was right to breathe. You'd be in big trouble, because that's necessary.

But nothing that is questionable is necessary. And therefore, anything that's questionable behavior, you wonder if it's okay to do it, just stop. Easy as that.

You don't need it. You don't have to do it. Just quit it.

And you'll keep your conscience clean that way. So avoid those questionable things. Well, we're going to quit here.

Bye.