

Treat Your Conscience with Tender, Loving Care

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It's hard to believe that Passover is nine weeks and five days away. Time flies as they say. At this time, in the church of God, it is our tradition based on scripture that we should begin examining ourselves. With that in mind, let's go to 1 Corinthians 11:27. This is an area of Paul's Epistle, in his letter, where he is addressing Passover. I'm going to read this out of the New International Version.

1 Corinthians 11:27 *So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner [meaning carelessly, without discernment of what they're doing] will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. 28) Everyone ought to [this is where it pertains to us today] examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. (NIV)*

Verse 29 out of the King James Version.

29) For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily [meaning not discerning the body and the blood of Jesus Christ], eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. (KJV)

We are to examine ourselves. Let's ask the question, what if we could develop a mechanism—some kind of device—that would help us examine ourselves? Particularly at this time of year, but also in general? What if there was some device or mechanism that would aid us in looking at ourselves as Paul has instructed us? Some way to help us identify when we have sinned and to help us repent after we acknowledge our sin? Or, to even prevent us from sinning in the first place. What if we had a mechanism like that? The good news is, we do, we already have it. Let me give you a hint as to what it is. This mechanism speaks to us daily and unlike our children, if not listened to, it will be quiet. If broken, it can never be repaired. So, what is this mechanism, which we have already that helps us deal with sin? I think most of you understand, it's our conscience. The fact is, our conscience is one of our most vital possessions. It is a gift from God, as we are going to see. Therefore, it deserves special treatment, being valuable and being a gift from our Father. Which leads to our title today.

Treat Your Conscience with Tender, Loving Care

We're going to have three points today.

1. What does modern psychology say about the conscience?

We want to see what the world says about the conscience. I have looked at several dictionaries and I'm putting together a composite of all the various definitions that are out there. The general definition of conscience says this:

Conscience is the sense of moral goodness or blameworthiness of one's own conduct.

That's a good definition. Modern psychology is correct when they teach that a guilty conscience not dealt with, causes all kinds of mental problems and mental difficulties. It's true when they say that unresolved guilt makes people crazy. That's a truism. But the key is unresolved guilt. Guilt that is not dealt with; that will make people crazy over time or send them certainly in a wrong direction, as we're going to see.

The problem is, modern psychology's solution to this—it's an erroneous solution—is to reduce standards. If you reduce standards, then you reduce guilt. If you reduce guilt, then you reduce mental illness. So, their solution is to bring the standards down to an acceptable level. A good example of that occurred in about 2005 or 2006 in the state of Washington in the education system. There was a High School graduation examination called the WASL. It means Washington Assessment of Student Learning and it was instituted in 2006. The problem is, about half the tenth graders failed the math test and it created quite a stir among the parents, among the teachers and among the students. They rose up protesting against the WASL because the standard was too high and too many failed. They claimed it was unreasonable to expect their children or the teachers to teach up to this standard. On top of that, it made the children feel bad about themselves and made the teachers feel bad about themselves. So, two years later, our governor at the time, basically effectively tossed out the math section of the WASL largely due to the fact that not many were passing it. Man's solution is:

Let's just reduce our standards down to a comfortable level. We'll have less guilt about failure, therefore less mental stress, less problems and people will feel good about themselves.

The problem is, that this approach leads to far worse problems. In this case, the WASL, instead of the students learning to work extra hard to improve, let's just lower the standards and thereby everybody can be successful and feel good about themselves. So, we can succeed without working too hard. Succeed without straining ourselves too much and avoid guilt over failure. That way, everybody succeeds and it avoids guilt or shame for not doing well or for failing.

The reduction in standards is also manifested in schools—I've heard numerous reports, it's been in the paper and on the national news, that the trend of giving first, second and third place awards for achievements in school has gone by the wayside. Instead of doing that, they give all the children a participating award; that they showed up and participated. So now you get a trophy or a plaque or certificate or something like that. This works because then there is no guilt about not attaining number one or number two or number three and everybody feels good, no stress, no guilt—that is man's solution. The problem is, and it's a gigantic problem, the reduction or elimination of standards is not our Father's way of doing business. It's not His way of dealing with mankind. So that leads us not to the second point.

2. What does God's Word say about our conscience and dealing with our conscience?

If you like to outline, point A, we're going to have four.

2A. Let's look first at the biblical definition of conscience, which is not that far away from the dictionary definition today.

Let's go to Romans 9:1 where Paul talks about the conscience. This is out of the NIV. Conscience is mentioned quite frequently in God's Word, both in the Old Testament and the New Testament.

Romans 9:1 I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying, my conscience confirms it through the Holy Spirit— (NIV)

He says my conscience confirms that I'm not lying. The Greek word for *conscience* is Strong's #4893 and the root of it is #4894, just one digit away. But #4893 means "moral consciousness and root", #4894 means "to understand or become aware of moral consciousness". Thayer's Greek Lexicon says of this word, #4893, "distinguishing between what is morally good or bad, prompting to do the former—what's good—and shun the later—what's bad".

Of course, that being the definition then, the foundation of our conscience has to be based on knowing and understanding what is good and what is bad. That occurs by being taught by God's Word and hopefully being taught by parents and grandparents and friends and brethren in the church. But the basis of a conscience is being taught and understanding, right from wrong—very important. We see this concept in Isaiah 7:14. This is a prophecy about Jesus Christ. We're breaking into Isaiah talking to King Ahaz of Judah. This is out of the New Living Translation.

Isaiah 7:14 All right then, the Lord himself will give you the sign. Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel (which means 'God is with us'). (NLT)

Notice verse 15.

15) He will be eating curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right ... (NIV)

Think about that—that's a prophecy for Jesus Christ. By the time He can eat solid food, He will know enough to choose right from wrong. How does this occur? Christ, as we know, was taught by His Father. Let's go to John 8:28 as a reinforcement of that. There are a lot of questions that I have about how the Holy Spirit came upon a human to create Jesus Christ and how the Father communicated in these early days with Jesus Christ. You would love to be, as a they say, a fly on the wall when that occurred and how that happened.

John 8:28 *Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things. (KJV)*

Christ was taught right from wrong, beginning at a very early age, by His Father. You put these two scriptures together and there is no other conclusion you can come to. That is hopefully a pattern for us, in the sense that our parents taught us from an early age, basic differences between right and wrong. Our conscience provides the feeling or the awareness that we are either clean or dirty, depending on what we've done. Let me give you my first remembrance of conscience bothering me in my life. I must have been about seven or six years old and my dad took my younger brother and I to the first 3D movie that came to El Paso, Texas. It was a horror movie and when you walked in, they passed you eyeglasses with paper frames and colored lenses and you looked at them and didn't know what that was about. We were told to put them on and we started the movie and all of a sudden, if a hand came out this way it was coming right at your face and people were shrieking and backing up and it was a dazzling experience in that regard. As kids we were dually horrified and enjoyed the movie. As we were leaving, there was a big bowl by the exit—there was one way in and one way out—and you were told to put your glasses in that bowl. So as we walk up to the bowl, my dad looked at both of us and said, "Stick your glasses in your pocket". If you knew my dad, you didn't question my father. So, we dutifully stuck our glasses in our pocket and then I remember distinctly having a knot in my stomach because I knew I was doing something wrong. It bothered me all the way home and when we got home, I don't know what dad did but I was there with mom and told her had what happened. She shook her head and said, "You shouldn't have done that". She said, "I'll talk to your dad about it, but you shouldn't have done that". I remember that guilt knot in the stomach and feeling that "I'm dirty, I'm not clean".

Our prime objective should be to teach our children, our grandchildren, teach ourselves, right from wrong, based on our Father's Word, thereby building a strong conscience. That leads to the next point. Let's see what happens after a conscience is built.

So point B is:

2B. The fact is the Bible tells us that our conscience speaks to us and triggers guilt when we sin.

Let's go to 2 Corinthians 1 and read one verse, verse 12. Paul is giving us the knowledge that the conscience does indeed speak to us. This out of the NIV.

2 Corinthians 1:12 *Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, with integrity and godly sincerity. We have done so, relying not on worldly wisdom but on God's grace. (NIV)*

Paul is saying, “My conscience tells me that” and then he goes on to speak. Paul is confirming the idea, and we all know it, that our conscience does indeed—that little voice—speaks to us. Now let’s look at a couple of examples. Let’s look at the first two human beings, Genesis 3, Adam and Eve and let’s see that they had a conscience. It was a gift from God. Breaking into the story, Satan had already spoken to them and through subtlety and subterfuge, was leading them down a wrong path.

Genesis 3:6 *And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.*

7) *And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked [how did they know?]; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons. (KJV)*

Or clothing. Verse 8.

8) *And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves [why did they do that?] from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden. (KJV)*

Why did they make clothing when they had never even given it a thought before? Why did they hide from God Almighty when He was the one talking to them and they talked, as you would from their perspective, to an acquaintance—a Creator? There was no hiding before this moment.

9) *And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?*

10) *And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.*

11) *And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat? (KJV)*

We see that, after violating God Almighty’s command, after eating the fruit that was forbidden to them, something inside them told them that things were not right. This was the first human example, the first human feeling of guilt. They were the first humans to ever use their conscience. This tells us that the Father built in to human beings, a conscience. He has built it into all human beings. We’re going to see that some human beings don’t have a conscience and we’ll see why in a little bit.

Now let’s to go to David and his example. Go to 1 Samuel 24 and where we are breaking into David being on the run from Saul—Saul is trying to kill him, and he and his band of men are hiding out. This is out of the New King James.

1 Samuel 24:1 *Now it happened, when Saul had returned from following the Philistines, that it was told him, saying, “Take note! David is in the Wilderness of En Gedi.”*

2) *Then Saul took three thousand chosen men from all Israel, and went to seek David and his men on the Rocks of the Wild Goats. (NKJV)*

It's interesting, because right near Mount Rainier, we have a jagged ridge of rocks called Goat Rocks, where the wild goats crawl up and down those rocks. So this is similar, probably not quite as high, but similar to the Middle East.

3) *So he came to the sheepfolds by the road, where there was a cave; and Saul went in to attend to his needs. (David and his men were staying in the recesses of the cave.)*

4) *Then the men of David said to him, "This is the day of which the LORD said to you, 'Behold, I will deliver your enemy into your hand, that you may do to him as it seems good to you.'" And David arose and secretly cut off a corner of Saul's robe.*

5) *Now it happened afterward that David's heart troubled [King James says 'smote him'] him because he had cut Saul's robe.*

6) *And he said to his men, "The LORD forbid that I should do this thing to my master, the LORD's anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the LORD." (NKJV)*

So, we see that David's heart troubled him. The Hebrew word for *heart* is Strong's #3820 and it means "the feelings or the center of anything." So, in this reference it's not talking about your physical heart, it's talking about your inner most being and the feelings of your inner most being. The Hebrew word for *troubled* is Strong's #5221 and it can mean "to strike or to beat—to hit somebody". We can see that because of what David did, afterwards his heart struck him because of his conscience—his conscience bothered him by what he had done.

With that in mind let's go to Psalm 40:12, just this one verse. David is amplifying this concept. This is a Psalm of David. He's writing to us.

Psalm 40:12 *For innumerable evils have compassed me; [notice this second part] mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of mine head: therefore my heart faileth me. (KJV)*

We can see that David's conscience was yelling at him because of his sins, because of his iniquities, because of what he has done. His conscience is making him aware of the depth of his sins and it tore him up as we would say today. We see clearly in this point B that the Father has designed a system in all human beings to trigger guilt.

Now point C, the third of what we learn in the Bible about the conscience.

2C. By listening to our conscience, we acknowledge our sin and repent.

If we listen to our conscience, then we can acknowledge our sins and repent. Let's go back, we were in Psalm 40, let's go to Psalm 32:3. David's writing more about this

subject. This is out of the New Living Translation. Notice what happened to David when he was in a position of not confessing his sins. We know with Bathsheba, it was about a year.

Psalm 32:3 *When I refused to confess my sin, my body wasted away, and I groaned all day long. (NLT)*

Why? Because of his guilt, because of his conscience.

4) *Day and night your [referring to Yehovah's] hand of discipline was heavy on me. My strength evaporated like water in the summer heat. Interlude*

5) *Finally, I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide my guilt I said to myself, "I will confess my rebellion to the Lord." And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone. Interlude*

6) *Therefore, let all the godly pray to you while there is still time [we're going to see time is important regarding the conscience], that they may not drown in the floodwaters of judgment. (NLT)*

I marvel at David's ability to be poetic, where he says that they "may not drown in the floodwaters of judgment"; how poetic is that and how illustrative. We see that guilt caused David to acknowledge his sins, repent of them and then his conscience was cleansed. He didn't carry this load of guilt around. Let's go to the New Testament, in Acts 2:36. We know most of Acts 2 by heart, we've done a lot of study there in the last few years. Peter is recounting Christ's death to the Jews around.

Acts 2:36 *Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.
37) Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart ... (KJV)*

These are people without God's Holy Spirit. They heard the noise, the commotion that was going on, they heard Peter's words and now they were pricked in their hearts. What caused that? Their conscience was speaking to them.

37 continued) ... and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? (KJV)

"How do we alleviate these feelings of guilt?"

38) Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (KJV)

We see, a promise from God, that repentance removes feelings of guilt but without reducing standards. Here's the key. If we repent, if we acknowledge our sin as our conscience speaks to us, we are aware of our sin, we acknowledge our sin and repent of our sin, then the guilt can go away and there's no reduction of standards. The

standards remain firm; God's law never changes. Let's go to Hebrews 9:14 and see how this works. The standards aren't reduced, but the conscience is the mechanism whereby we are told that we have committed sin; we have not lived up to our Father's standards.

Hebrews 9:14 *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? (KJV)*

Here we see that the blood of Christ is what purges us from guilt and wipes it away because our sins are now forgiven. We are now back in a right standing with God; we're not just wracked with guilt and feeling horrible and unacceptable to God Almighty. Because, when we go through this process, the slate is wiped clean. What a blessing! We see that over time, as we study more of God's Word, as we know more about living life God's way, our conscience becomes fine-tuned to God's way, revealing more and more of when we fall short. Over time, as we get older and older in the faith and the truth, it alerts us to sins that previously we would overlook or we were unaware of. Sins that we either were blind to or sins we just blew off. Now all of a sudden, over time, our conscience becomes more finely-tuned to God's way.

That leads us to the fourth point, point D about what God's Word says about our conscience.

2D. If we do not listen to our conscience, it will eventually die.

First it diminishes, then it dies. As we go through these scriptures, notice the progression of all that can happen to our conscience if it is neglected and not listened to. Notice what happens, because we don't want to walk down this scary road. Let's go to Matthew 27:1. We're breaking into the account where the religious leaders of Christ's day are counseling together as to how to put Him to death.

Matthew 27:1 *When the morning was come, all the chief priests and elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death: (KJV)*

They were plotting. Satan was behind it all of course.

2) *And when they had bound him, they led him away, and delivered him to Pontius Pilate the governor.*

3) *Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he [referring to Christ] was condemned, repented himself ... (KJV)*

The Greek word for *repented* can also mean "regret". Looking back on what he had been doing now for the past months, he regretted what he had done when he saw Christ being taken away.

3 continued) ... and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders ... (KJV)

We have to ask the question, “What caused Judas to be regretful? What was the thing that hit him right in the stomach when he saw this happen?” Obviously, his conscience was not bothering him.

4) Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. [Notice their callous attitude] And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that. (KJV)

“That’s your problem now fella.”

5) And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself. (KJV)

What we see is Judas couldn’t “unring that bell”; the deed was done and he had guilt that he could not resolve. He didn’t have the capacity at that time to resolve that guilt, so what did he do? He went out and hanged himself. The point is, we cannot indefinitely live two different lives. A Godly life and a worldly life—we can’t do that indefinitely because as you know, a choice has to be made. Let’s go to Matthew 6:24 and remember what Christ said in this regard. A very familiar scripture, out of the New Living Translation.

Matthew 6:24 *“No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and be enslaved to money. (NLT)*

We won’t turn there but two verses in the book of James tell us about a “*double-minded*” man. James 1:8, you can use that as a reference, we’re told

A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.

Then in James 4:8, James says,

Draw near to God, He will draw near to you, cleanse your hands you sinners and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

You either purify your heart or you go crazy over time. Or you walk away from God over time, which is going crazy. These verses tell us that a choice has to be made; eventually it will be made. If we don’t listen to our conscience, over time it will disappear and then we, by our neglect, will have killed this very, very valuable possession. Let’s go to 1 Timothy 4:1, Paul’s writing to this young Elder Timothy, who compared to Paul is relatively inexperienced. Paul is educating him, writing to him. This is out of the Philips Translation.

1 Timothy 4:1 *God's spirit specifically tells us that in the latter days where men abandon the true faith and allow themselves to be spiritually seduced by teachings of demons,*

2) teachings given by men who are lying hypocrites [notice this last part of this verse] whose conscience are as dead as seared flesh. (PT)

For any of you who have had a severe burn, you know that that burn will sear the nerve endings, kill all the nerve endings and there is a spot on my arm where I burned it on the exhaust of my motorcycle once and I can poke myself on that arm and I don't feel a thing—it's just dead. That's exactly what Paul is referring to here; their conscience becomes completely dead—no feeling at all. I remember a number of years ago on 60 Minutes—I don't remember the interviewer—it was a segment on the Mafia. They interviewed a Mafia hit man, he was hidden as they do, no light on the man, all you could hear was his voice. But they asked him, how many people he had killed. He was a hitman and he said, I lost track at over 100. The interviewer said,

"How do you live with yourself? Mob style as you walk up and shoot them in the back of the head."

He replied—I wrote it down—*"I don't let myself think about it"*. Why? Because if he did, his conscience would bother him and by not thinking about it, he is killing his conscience; by not involving his conscience, he is killing it. He of course doesn't understand to this very day that there is a day of reckoning. We understand that, he did not. We cannot, not think about it. If we don't think about it, if we ignore our conscience, it will begin to decline and weaken and eventually die. In Titus 1:15 Paul is writing to Titus, giving instruction.

Titus 1:15 *Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled [I might add by not listening to their conscience, they haven't repented] and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled. (KJV)*

Their conscience is polluted.

16) They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate. (KJV)

Because they are not listening to their conscience, thereby it is being defied and in the process of going away. It will disappear if we do not listen to it. Then if there is no conscience, there is no guilt. With that mob hitman, there is no guilt because he doesn't listen to his conscience. The only problem is, from our perspective, once being called, there is no repentance either and that is the death nail for us. Let's go to Jeremiah 6:13; we're breaking into a condemnation of Judah by Yehovah Notice the point to which Judah got, through their disobedience.

Jeremiah 6:13 *For from the least of them even unto the greatest of them every one is given to covetousness; and from the prophet even unto the priest every one deals falsely. (KJV)*

Look at verse 15.

15) Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, [why would they not be ashamed? Because they have no conscience] neither could they blush: therefore, they shall fall among them that fall: at the time that I visit them they shall be cast down, saith the LORD. (KJV)

They were not ashamed because they had no conscience and, because they had no conscience, they had no guilt. They kept doing what they were doing, walking down a very evil path. Let's go to Romans 1 and we'll see that in the New Testament, this understanding—this theme—about our conscience, is carried forward. Paul is talking about the conditions then and as we're going to see, it's exactly the same today.

Romans 1:19 *Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them.*

20) For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made ... (KJV)

As we talked about before, this new web telescope, I hope and pray that that will amplify it even more so that mankind is without excuse.

20 continued) ... even his eternal power and Godhead; (KJV)

That was inserted by trinitarian translators. The Greek word is *theotase* and all it means is "God's divinity". Reading it that way:

20 continued) ... so that they are without excuse:

21) Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. (KJV)

That includes their conscience, being darkened.

22) Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools,

23) And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things. (KJV)

Turning to idolatry.

24) Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves: (KJV)

They rejected God, turned to idolatry and notice the continuance, verse 25.

25) Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

26) For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature:

27) And likewise, also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet. (KJV)

Or “suitable”, the King James says.

28) And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, [this tells us that, at one point they knew God but they didn't want to retain God in their knowledge and in the process, they walked away from their conscience] God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; (KJV)

Not “suitable”.

29) Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers,

30) Backbiters, haters of God, spiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents,

31) Without understanding, covenant breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful:

32) Who knowing the judgment of God, [they knew the judgement of God] that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them. (KJV)

This, in a short scripture, tells us the end of those who defile their conscience, who don't listen to their conscience, who walk away from their conscience—this is the result.

That's why we have to be very careful about our conscience. Once killed, our conscience cannot be revived. If we get into the habit of ignoring our conscience, saying “no” to that voice that speaks to us, we are starting down a very slippery slope indeed.

Hebrews 6:4 *For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift [the Holy Spirit], and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit,*

5) And have tasted the good word of God, [which we all have] and the powers of the world to come, [looking forward to the Kingdom]

6) If they shall fall away, [fall away from listening to their conscience] to renew them again unto repentance; [their conscience dies, it stops speaking to them, they don't acknowledge their sin and if they don't acknowledge their sin, they can't repent, if they don't repent, their sins will never be cleansed] seeing they

crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.
(KJV)

We can't repent if there's no conscience; if our conscience is dead, it's impossible to repent. Let me give you a perfect example of that. It happened during World War II. Those who have studied WWII, you might remember the name of Reinhardt Heydrich. He was a chief Lieutenant of Heinrich Himmler and Himmler was the Head of the SS—the elite Nazi guard that turned into a small army. Reinhardt Heydrich was his Lieutenant. Later, Heydrich became head of the Gestapo which was the secret police; he rose up through the ranks very quickly. Herman Goering who was head of the Luftwaffe and number two to Hitler, put Heydrich in charge of the “final solution”—the Holocaust—that resulted in the latest figures. (The Washington Post ran a new tally and their view of the latest figures and upped the casualty rate, the death rate) from 6 million to 9 million. Heydrich was put in charge of the “final solution” and he was the one who engineered the whole death camp. He put in place the railroads, the railheads, the transportation of the Jews, rounding them up and all of that—the gas chambers and everything—he was in charge of all of that.

I've read some history from that time, even quoting from the Nazi leaders of the day and the highest-ranking Nazi leaders were scared to death of Heydrich. His superiors were scared to death of him and for one reason, because he had no conscience. Human life did not mean a thing to him. It would be the same as if we saw an ant on the sidewalk and we stepped on it and kept walking. He viewed human life exactly that way. So, the suffering that he was causing the Jews didn't mean a thing. Somewhere in his life, his conscience was killed; we don't know how or enough about his life to know that, but his conscience was gone. In that situation, where there is no conscience, there is no warning. There is nothing to warn us, there is nothing to bother us, there is nothing to cause us guilt. In that situation, we become exactly like Satan, because Satan has no conscience—he has no guilt. He would just love to kill all of us and he wouldn't give it a second thought other than having glee in doing so. If we allow our conscience to disappear, we become just like Satan.

So this last fourth point about what God's Word says about the conscience, is that we can diminish our conscience and we can damage our conscience through neglect. A damaged conscience is not a dead conscience; there is a difference. A damaged conscience is damaged but it's not dead, it can be repaired. Over the years a number of people have come to me around Passover time, wondering if they have committed the unpardonable sin or wondering if God is not forgiving them or if they are condemned to the lake of fire. My response is:

“If that was the case you wouldn't be here, you wouldn't be asking the question. If your conscience was dead, you wouldn't be asking the question in the first place.”

Let's understand that yes, we can over time—we've all done it—damage our conscience by neglect, by walking down a wrong path. But if it is not destroyed, it can be rebuilt. That is one reason why our Father encourages us to examine ourselves

always, but especially at this time of year because if we have drifted, we can come back.

The third and final point is:

3. What can we do to develop a healthy conscience?

You know the answer, it's very simple.

3A. We need to study, meditate and pray about right and wrong and the difference between right and wrong.

We have to study the difference between right and wrong. We won't turn there, but what did David say in Psalm 119:105? He said,

"Your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path."

So by studying we can discern what is right, what is wrong and what happens when you do right and what happens when you do wrong. Remember the foundation of our conscience is knowing right from wrong and our Father's Word defines that. We had better spend time doing that. Let's go to Hebrews 5:12 out of the New Living Translation.

Hebrews 5:12 *You have been believers so long now that you ought to be teaching others. Instead, you need someone to teach you again the basic things about God's word. You are like babies who need milk and cannot eat solid food.*

13) For someone who lives on milk is still an infant and doesn't know how to do what is right.

14) Solid food is for those who are mature, who through training have the skill to recognize the difference between right and wrong. (NLT)

Study helps us recognize right from wrong and we see the path to doing what is right. Studying our Father's Word is key. The second thing is to meditate. I find it very helpful to meditate on the moral dilemmas that we face in our daily lives. By meditating we determine in advance how we would behave if we meet a certain circumstance. We all have strengths and weaknesses, pick a weakness where you are likely to be tempted and then meditate on having that weakness come to us and what does God would want us to do? We walk through that. Look at Psalm 119:48. Gordon mentioned this in his sermonette. I'll read out of the New Living Translation.

Psalm 119:48 *I honor and love your commands. I meditate on your decrees. (NLT)*

The King James says *statutes* but they are *principles*. David says, I meditate on the *principles* involved in your law. In other words, meditate in advance on what we would do if we were tempted with a certain evil. We visualize rejecting the temptation and

doing what is right, thereby strengthening our conscience. It's a psychological principle that particularly applies to quarterbacks in the NFL; Tom Brady does it, others do it, Russel Wilson does it. They spend time visualizing every play to a success. The drop back, reading of the receivers, the passing of the ball, the accuracy of the pass—they go over it and over it in their minds to a success and it helps them. For us, what we want to do is visualize overcoming sin. Visualize doing it God's way rather than Satan's way. That means when it comes to us, we've already scripted it, we've already done it in our heads to a successful outcome. Visualize rejecting sin and temptation, thereby strengthening our conscience.

The third thing we mentioned was prayer. Remember what Christ said in Luke 11—we won't turn there—He said,

“If we ask it shall be given, if you seek you will find it, if you knock the door will open”.

In our prayer we need to ask our Father to strengthen our consciences. To help us to know right from wrong and to give us the strength to do the right thing when we are presented with a dilemma or a choice. Our conscience will speak the way it's been trained. An athlete will perform the way he's been trained. A fighter pilot will perform the way he's been trained. We as Christians will perform according to how our consciences have been trained. That's the first point—point A—of how we can develop a strong conscience.

3B. Never, ever go against your conscience.

If we are all honest with ourselves, we've all done it haven't we? There are times when our conscience speaks and we turn our shoulder, turn our head, close our ears and do what we're going to do. We have all violated it to our harm. We've all felt guilty for doing so. The key is, do we learn from it or not? In 1 Timothy 1:5, Paul is talking to this young Elder and giving him instruction. Paul is talking about the purpose of God's law.

1 Timothy 1:5 *Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good [the New Living Translations says clear] conscience, and from sincere faith ... (NKJV)*

Now go to verse 19, out of the New Living Translation.

19) *Cling to your faith in Christ, and keep your conscience clear. For some people have deliberately violated their consciences; as a result, their faith has been shipwrecked. (NLT)*

We don't want to go there. Paul is telling us, never go against your conscience, listen to your conscience, stop, take heed, analyze, realize what you are doing and then choose the right. We must always listen to our conscience, obey our conscience, because when you think about it, one of the biggest ways our Father speaks to us is through our

conscience. If we ignore our conscience, we're ignoring the Father and we're ignoring His words to us. We've all been there—don't do that. Turn your mind away from that. Turn and walk away or whatever it is; listen to the conscience because our Father speaks. Let's go to Romans 14:21 for a final scripture about never going against our conscience. Something to always remember. Eating flesh that was sacrificed to idols was a big problem in their day, it's not a problem to us today but the principle still exists.

Romans 14:21 *It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.*

22) Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth.

23) And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: [here is the key] for whatsoever is not of faith is sin. (KJV)

The conscience will tell us,

“You're not walking down the path of faith, you're not walking down the path that Jesus Christ laid out for us, you're walking off the track. You know better, don't do it!”

When we violate our conscience, we sin because our action doesn't come from the faith, the belief, the understanding, that we have developed.

The message here is never ever, go against what your conscience tells you. Never let peer pressure cause you to go along with the crowd that is doing something wrong. Particularly true the younger we are. Don't submit to peer pressure. We need to work daily to develop a healthy conscience.

Let's summarize now. We've seen what modern psychology says about our conscience. They are right, unresolved guilt leads to all kinds of mental turmoil and problems but the world's response is in error. It's to reduce standards and that's not the right response. We've seen what God's Word says about our conscience. We've learned that our conscience speaks to us, causing us to feel guilty when we sin. We've learned that listening to our conscience causes us to recognize our sin, acknowledge our sin, repent of our sin and then our conscience can be cleansed. But if we don't listen to our conscience, it will be destroyed. We have seen that through the basics of study, meditation and prayer, that we can develop and grow our conscience. We can then see that we have a continual habit pattern of listening to that conscience and it gets stronger and stronger the more we grow it and the more we allow our Father and Son to grow it in us.

As Passover approaches, let's determine to take very good care of our conscience, treat it tenderly, be aware of it and then take the time and the energy to build and develop our conscience. It is one of our most valuable possessions, so let's treat it with tender, loving care and always remember to let our conscience be our guide.