Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Soul's Warning System
Scripture: 2 Corinthians 1:12
Code: 47-5

As we come now to the study of God's Word, you know we are in a study of 2 Corinthians, and I want you to look at chapter 1 and verse 12. We have finished the section from verse 3 through 11 and we come to verse 12. And as often is the case in my study, I started in to the next section which is verses 12 through 14 and I got stuck on one word. And you will notice in verse 12 Paul says, "For our proud confidence is this, the testimony of our conscience." And I stopped there.

The testimony of our conscience...what is that? What is the conscience? And how does the conscience function? And so this morning I want to talk to you on that one thought and give you what really is a topical study of the conscience, the soul's warning system.

In 1984 an Avianca jet crashed in Spain. Investigators studying the accident made an eerie discovery. The Black Box in the cockpit where they record the dialogue of the pilots and the controllers revealed that several minutes before the fatal impact, a shrill computerized synthesized voice from the plane's automatic warning system told the crew repeatedly in English, "Pull up, pull up, pull up." The pilot inexplicably snapped back, "Shut up, Gringo," and switched the system off. Minutes later the plane smashed into the side of a mountain and everyone died.

That's a perfect parable of the way modern people treat the warning messages of their conscience. The conscience is there by God's designed, built into the fabric of every human being as a warning system. The wisdom of our age says that guilt feelings are nearly always erroneous, nearly always harmful, and we really need to switch them off.

Is that good advice? We need to find that out. The question is, what is the conscience and how does it operate? Well, as I said, it is the warning system that is inside of us. How are we to respond to it? What role does it play in the life of a Christian? Far from being a defect, far from being some kind of disorder that we are to turn off, it is a tremendous gift from God. It is the automatic warning system that tell us, "Pull up, pull up, pull up before you crash and burn." God designed the conscience into the very framework of the human soul. The conscience is the ability to sense in your own heart if there is sin there, if there is something wrong there, if there is guilt and shame. That is a great gift from God. Like the gift of pain which warns you that you are hurting your body so you don't kill yourself, the gift of conscience warns you that you are killing your soul. The conscience is the soul reflecting on itself...both the Greek term, suneidesis and the English one "conscience," have the idea of knowing yourself, having an internal sense about the reality of your spiritual condition.

In Romans chapter 2, let me show you two verses, verses 14 and 15, "For when the Gentiles who do not have the law...that is the written law of God, the pagans without the written law of God...do instinctively the things of the law, these not having the law are a law to themselves." The point is, they may not have the written law but they have innately built into them a sense of right and wrong and a sense of morality and instinctively there is a soul warning system that produces guilt when there is sin and iniquity. In fact, verse 15 says, "Their conscience bears witness and it either accuses them or defends them." Conscience either affirms that you're doing right, or it accuses and warns that you're doing wrong. Conscience is at the very core of what distinguishes human beings.

People, unlike animals, can contemplate, they have self-awareness. They can contemplate their motives, they can contemplate their actions, they can make moral self-evaluations and self-judgments. They can get in touch with the right or wrong in their life. Conscience is a tremendous gift.

We live in a culture today that is systematically endeavoring to silence conscience. To eliminate guilt, to eliminate shame, and to tell you your problem isn't sin, and your problem isn't guilt, and your problem isn't shame, your problem is somebody did something to you for which you're not responsible, you're really not to blame at all. Or, you just have a lack of self-esteem.

Colin Kruse wrote, "The conscience is not to be equated with the voice of God, or even the moral law of God, rather it is a human faculty which adjudicates upon human action...listen to this...by the light of the highest standard a person perceives." It will hold you to the highest standard that you know. He goes on to say, "Seeing that all of human nature has been affection by sin, both a person's perception of the standard of action required and the function of the conscience itself are also affected by sin. For this reason conscience can never be accorded the position of ultimate judge of one's behavior. It is possible that the conscience may excuse one for that which God will not excuse, and conversely it is equally possible that conscience may condemn a person for that which God allows."

All of that to say it is not infallible, it is not the voice of God and it is not the moral law of God. It will hold you to your highest perceived standard. Therefore if you want to get the most out of your conscience, you have to inform your conscience at the highest level, and that means you submit yourself to the Word of God. And as you fill your life with the Word of God, the standard keeps going up and up and up. Whatever moral law you know innately by virtue of your humanity is only a start as you take in the Word of God and you learn more about the Scripture and more about the Word of God, your knowledge begins to give a higher standard and a higher standard and a higher standard and your conscience will hold you to that high standard. To reject the voice of conscience is to court spiritual disaster. You cannot reject the voice of conscience with impunity, it's a sad and tragic thing when a whole society of people endeavor to do that.

When as a Christian your mind becomes fully enlightened by the truth of God's Word, conscience will then hold you. It will call you to live at that highest standard. And I've said that to you through the years. As you grow in your understanding of God and His glory and majesty, as we heard sung so magnificently today, as you grow in your understanding of Christ, as you grow in your understanding of the Scripture, the standard just keeps getting elevated and the conscience will hold you to that standard. When you violate that, conscience will warn you. When you violate the standard, it will condemn you. It will trigger feelings of shame, anguish regret, consternation, anxiety, and even disgrace. Sometimes it will make you weep, make you fall on your face and plead with God for forgiveness. And that's as it should be. That's a fully functioning conscience reacting to the full knowledge of God's truth.

On the other hand, when we know God's truth and we obey it, conscience will commend us, conscience will bring us joy. It will affirm us. It will grant us peace and gladness and contentment.

But sadly, most people in our society respond to their consciences by attempting them to silence them. Like that pilot, they say, "Shut up, Gringo." They conclude that guilt and shame is not legitimate, they shouldn't feel it, it's not good for your self-esteem. You've got to put the real blame on your parents or on society or on causes beyond your control and beyond your responsibility. And they may succeed in convincing themselves that sin and guilt is some kind of a medical problem, some kind of a psychological problem and not a moral and spiritual one at all. They redefine their drunkenness or they redefine their sexual immorality or they redefine their anger, or they redefine any other deviant kind of behavior as some kind of syndrome, or some kind of anxiety produced because of a lack of self-esteem. Tantamount to saying, "Shut up, Gringo."

And if you do that to your conscience and you can find a myriad of counselors who will help you in the process of silencing your counsel...your conscience, if you do that you will nullify the conscience through that kind of abuse. And you will twist your life, in some cases so that it can't be made straight again. Paul spoke of people, for example, whose consciences were to convoluted that their glory was in their shame. They got so perverted that they were rejoicing in the thing for which they should be ashamed, Philippians 3:19. Both the mind and the conscience can be so defiled as to make no distinction between what is pure and what is impure. Titus 1:15 talks about that.

And after constant violation of a conscience, the conscience finally falls silent, you throw the switch, and you're left flying blind, you'll crash and burn. The annoying warning signals may be gone, but the danger is certainly not gone.

Now remember that the conscience again is not infallible. Sometimes conscience can...can hold you to some law in your own mind that is not a biblical principle. We know there are people who get bound up in legalistic systems and their conscience is very sensitive to something they've been trained to believe is a standard. Conscience is not infallible. But it does respond to what you believe

to be the highest moral standard, and that's why you have to get yourself in your Christian development to the place where your standard is biblical. It isn't made up of non-biblical issues that you shouldn't feel shame about, and it isn't eliminating certain biblical issues that you should feel shame about. So very, very important.

And, beloved, you have to know that your Christian life is going to move ahead in large measure depending on your conscience. That is the voice in you that calls to you, "Pull up, pull up, pull up." To know the Word of God, to confine your Christianity and your beliefs to what is truly biblical, nothing less and nothing more, informs your conscience at the highest level and guarantees that it's going to speak to you in the way that it ought to speak. A regular diet of Scripture will strengthen a weak conscience. And a regular diet of moral evil will corrupt the conscience.

To give you an illustration, the conscience functions like a skylight, not a lamp. It doesn't produce its own light. It just lets light in. Its effectiveness is determined by the amount of pure light we expose to it and how clean we keep it. You keep yourself under the pure light, keep the conscience clean, the pure light shines through. That's why the Apostle Paul speaks in 1 Timothy 3:9 about a clear conscience, the skylight through which the light of truth can pass. And he warned in 1 Corinthians 8:7, again in Titus 1:15 that you should never allow anything to defile or muddy your conscience.

To look at it another way, the conscience is like the nerves on the end of your fingertips. Its sensitivity to external stimuli can be damaged by the buildup of callouses and so wounded for so long that it's virtually impoverished to any feeling. Paul wrote of the dangers of that in 1 Corinthians 8:10, the calloused conscience. He wrote about the wounded conscience. And then in writing to Timothy, 1 Timothy 4:2, the seared conscience...covered over with scar tissue and without any feeling.

Learning the Word, meditating on the Word day and night is the beginning. And then listen to your conscience...you can trust it. It's there as a gift from God. And if it's properly informed as to truth, it will give you the right information. Don't yell at it and switch it off or you'll crash.

You know, one of the things that you can thank the Lord for in your life, if you've been in this church for any length of time, or you can thank the Lord for if you're a student at the Master's College, or you've been brought up in a very strong biblical environment somewhere is that you have an adequately and appropriately trained mind. You know the truth. And the truth then is passing through that skylight of conscience to give you the right influence. Tremendously important.

The Puritan writer, Richard Sibbes who has written a number of very helpful things, pictured the conscience as a court in the counsel of the human heart. The conscience kind of holds court and rules and hits its gavel on the desk and says, "Guilty," "Not Guilty." In fact, in Sibbes imagery the conscience itself assumes every role in the courtroom drama. It is a register to record what we have done in exact detail. It is the accuser that lodges a complaint against us when we are guilty. It is a

defender to side with us when we are innocent. It acts as a witness giving testimony for or against us. It is the judge condemning or vindicating us. It is the executioner smiting us with grief when our guilt is discovered. Richard Sibbes said, the chastisement of a violated conscience is like a flash of hell. And those who try to silence their conscience, their accusing conscience, are playing a deadly game like that foolish pilot.

As I said earlier, some are being aided and abetted, many are being are being aided and abetted in silencing their conscience by contemporary human counselors. The truth may escape the counselor but it doesn't escape the conscience.

Sibbes also wrote that it ought to discourage us, the conscience, from secret sins. We should not sin in hope of concealment...he says...listen to this..."What if thou concealeth from all others? Canst thou conceal it from thy own conscience. As one saith well, what good is it for thee that none knows what is done when thou knowest it thyself? What profit is it for him who hath a conscience that will accuse him that he hath no man to accuse him but himself? Conscience is a thousand witnesses. Conscience is not a private witness. It is a thousand witnesses. Therefore never sin and hope to have it concealed. It were better that all men should know it than that thyself should know it. All will be one day written in thy forehead and conscience will be a blab." Better that everybody should know about your sin than your own conscience know it cause everybody's not always around to accuse you but your conscience is. We have the witness in us. As Isaiah said, "Our sins witness against us. It is in vain to look for secrecy, conscience will uncover everything." We get very good at ignoring our conscience, don't we?

Now, I'm going to give you a little deeper thought about conscience. Everybody has a conscience, everybody. They function, as I said, in response to what ever belief system is the highest standard. We have a culture of people today who have a very low standard, so their conscience functions on a very low level. We say they do things that are unconscionable, right? Everybody has a conscience.

But when you became a Christian, something happened to your conscience. At the point of salvation God did something absolutely marvelous for you. You know what He did? Hebrews 10:22, you need to write this down, when you were saved the writer of Hebrews says, this is an absolutely marvelous point, "Your heart was sprinkled clean from an evil conscience." Wow.

You know what happened before you were a Christian? Your conscience was accusing you all the time...all the time. From the time you were a child, you have bad memories, all kinds of guilt, all kinds of shame, all kinds of self-contempt your conscience threw in your face. And as you lived your life you accumulated more shame and more guilt and more remorse and more self-contempt and more despair and more dishonor and that's why the longer people live with an accumulating conscience that just assaults them, the less happy they are, the less fulfilled they are. But when you became a Christian, Hebrews 9:14 says, "The blood of Christ cleansed your conscience." Wow. The blood of

Christ washed your conscience.

Your conscience had every right to condemn you, every right to shame you, every right to fill your heart with despair and sorrow and sadness. Your conscience had every right to take the accumulated sin and mercilessly hammer you with it. But at the point of your salvation, one of the things that happened was, the blood of Christ washed your conscience. Did you ever hear someone say when they become a Christian, "I feel...what's the next word?...forgiven." "I feel like a huge...what?...burden was just lifted off my back." That's the burden of an accusing conscience because it was washed, it was cleansed at the point of salvation. And so we don't have to go around carrying the accumulated guilt of a life prior to salvation, right? It's washed. Your conscience when you're saved becomes sanctified. Faith tells the conscience...He's forgiven...She's forgiven...It doesn't matter. To borrow the words of God Himself, "I've removed your sins as far as the east is from the west, buried them in the depths of the sea, and remember them no more." The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses the conscience so that it no longer accuses, but it tells us we're pardoned, we're forgiven. That's a marvelous gift.

Now, as a Christian I start with a clean slate. When I was in the hospital some months ago, I had the privilege of leading a guy dying with AIDS, leading him to Christ. Through many tears and agony as he prayed and I prayed with him and he poured out his heart pleading for the Lord to forgive him after twenty-six years of being in the homosexual community, very involved with hundreds and hundreds of other homosexuals and raised in a Christian family and trained in a Christian college. And he poured out his repentance before the Lord, I'll never forget it, he was just squeezing my hand so tightly the whole time he was praying and pleading with God to forgive him. And after the prayer was over, this peace came across his face that was really remarkable and there was a quiet and a calm in his heart. He just stared at the wall. And I said, "What are you looking at, David?"

And he said, "Well, I'm looking at the calendar."

And I said, "Why?"

He said, "I want to always remember the day of my new beginning." In that moment his conscience had been cleared of twenty-six years of accumulated onslaught for the kind of life that he lived. And in one moment his conscience was purged. And instead of his conscience accusing him, his conscience told him, "You're forgiven."

Now that you start out with a cleansed conscience, it becomes the Christian high and wholly duty to guard the purity of that regenerated conscience. It has no right to accuse you from the past, that's all cleansed. But it does have a right to accuse you in the present and let you know when you need to pull up, pull up, pull up. And so we're back to what I said earlier. As you learn the Word and as you imbibe the Word and you fill your life with the Word, your conscience keeps pulling you to the highest standard. I've said that through the years. I spend so much time in the Scripture and have done it for

so many years, if I get very near to sin, all kinds of things go off in me...all the bells and whistles because I have such an intensely informed conscience. Does that upset me? No, I thank God for that, wouldn't you? You think I want to crash and burn?

What do you think about all those pastors who crash and burn? What do you think about all those pastors who default with some woman who is not their wife? Do you think conscience said anything to them? You better believe it.

Somebody asked me yesterday, concerning a certain pastor, "How in the world could he teach what he taught and do what he did?" Because he said to his conscience, "Shut up, Gringo." Threw the switch and crashed. Your conscience is a gift. Listen to it.

This tragic sad legacy that we have today in contemporary Christian counseling that is trying to silence conscience is deadly. The Apostle Paul spoke so very often of conscience. Looking intently at the Council in Acts 23:1 he said, "Brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day." Wow. He was very sensitive to his conscience, to that voice within him. In Acts 24:16 he says, "In view of this, I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience, both before God and before men." Writing to Timothy in 1 Timothy 1:5 Paul said, "The goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith." He really was concerned about the conscience. Second Timothy 1:3, Paul says, "I serve God with a clear conscience." Then he adds, "The way my forefathers did." First Timothy 1:18 and 19 he says, "Fight the good fight keeping faith and a good conscience." He told Timothy again in 1 Timothy 3:9, "Holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience." I'm telling you, this is a major thing...conscience.

A pure conscience, a clear conscience, a good conscience, a blameless conscience, that's the heart of a strong testimony for Christ, that's the heart of an effective life. You listen to your conscience. When it shames you, when it speaks of guilt, when it says pull up, you pull up.

Writing later on in this epistle, 2 Corinthians chapter 4 verse 2 he says, "We have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the Word of God but by the manifestation of truth...he says...commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." Peter said, "Keep a good conscience...keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you're slandered those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame." Keep your conscience good. What does that mean? Don't violate it. No believer has a right to violate the conscience. And I'll tell you there is a damaging, destructive, deadly force in the church today in this self-esteem stuff that is endeavoring to silence conscience and eliminate guilt and eliminate shame. And people are going to continue to crash and burn from the highest points to the lowest, from the pulpit to the pew. No believer has a right to violate the conscience.

And Paul, remember this, 1 Corinthians 8 and 9 and Romans 14 says not only do you have no right to violate your own conscience but you don't have a right to violate...what?...somebody else's conscience. Be sensitive to those things which would offend others. I wish we had time to develop that, that's a whole point in itself.

Well, I think maybe you understand what conscience does. Let's look now at our text. Second Corinthians 1 verse 12, "For our proud confidence is this, the testimony of our conscience that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world and especially toward you for we write nothing else to you than what you read and understand and I hope you will understand until the end, just as you also partially did understand us that we are your reason to be proud are you also are ours in the day of our Lord Jesus."

Do you remember the background here? Paul is writing this epistle to defend himself against the assault of some false apostles. These false apostles had come to Corinth, his beloved Corinth. They were tearing his church up. These lying false apostles were trying to turn the church against Paul. They really wanted to teach satanic doctrine and so they had to undermine Paul who was the paragon of truth. They had to destroy the Corinthians trust in Paul so they began to attack his virtuous character, his integrity, his credibility, tried to undermine his authority then take his place and replace the truth of God with their satanic error.

The whole epistle, actually the last of four letters that he wrote to Corinth, two of them in the Scripture, two of them are not, but the whole letter is really written to give a defense of his integrity against this outrageous attack. And as I've told you, they were accusing him of embezzling money, doing what he did for sexual favors from women, lying about his statistics and his ministry effectiveness, teaching error, you name it. And throughout this letter of 2 Corinthians he will deal with the various elements of their attack, their assault. Among the charges made against him, as I said in the general sense, was that he had no integrity, he was not honest, he was not sincere in dealing with the Corinthians. He was a manipulator, he had a personal agenda, he was involved in self-interest, he wanted to get what he wanted for his own self-gain, his motives were corrupt. His deeds were to gain whatever it was that he had to aggrandize himself, his love was fake. They accused him of insincerity and deception. They said he was covert, he was shrewd. He was really hiding what he was after.

They probably picked on a few little things, you know. Back in 1 Corinthians 16:5 when he wrote them that letter he said I'm going to come and visit you. Didn't work out. So they accused him of being fickle and untrustworthy because he said he would come and he didn't. So they were just really lambasting him on all of these fronts. All of these charges are behind this text.

How does he defend himself? Amazing way. How does he defend himself? Where does he go for his defense? Does he try to give them some long historical summary of what he did? Does he reiterate to them his theology? Does he quote supporting dignitaries from Jerusalem who will uphold his

integrity? No. Where does he go to support his integrity?

Look at verse 12. "Our proud confidence is this, the testimony of...what?...the conscience." Conscience. Verse 11 he encouraged them to pray for him, you remember. Pray for us. And here he's saying we're really worthy of your prayers, not your criticism, we're worthy of your intercession, not your abuse. Why? Because our conscience is clear.

What do you mean our proud confidence? That sounds a little much, doesn't it? Kauchesis in the Greek, a very much used word by Paul. It's used about 60 times, a little less than 60 times, maybe 55 or so times in the New Testament. Twenty-nine of those here in 2 Corinthians and it means boasting. It means proud confidence. It means glorying. But it can be negative or positive. If it's used negatively, it refers to an unwarranted boast, an unwarranted confidence, a boast in one's own achievements and merits. If on the other hand it is used positively it refers to a legitimate confidence in what God has done through one's life. There's nothing wrong with that, is there? There's nothing wrong with a proud confidence not in what I've done but what in He's done...in what He's done.

It reminds me of Jeremiah chapter 9, I'll just read you a couple of verses. Jeremiah 9:23, "Thus says the Lord, Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich an boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and...what?...knows Me that I am the Lord who exercises loving kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for I delight in these things, declares the Lord." It isn't wrong to boast in the Lord. He delights in that. It's right to do that.

First Corinthians 1:31, "Just as it is written, let him who boasts boast in the Lord." In our epistle, 2 Corinthians, if you go all the way over to chapter 10 verse 17, you see that same quote from Jeremiah repeated, "He who boasts, let him boast in the Lord." You find it in Romans chapter 15, the same kind of thing. He says, "I will not presume to speak of anything...verse 18...except what Christ has accomplished through me." That's all. First Corinthians 15:10 he said, "I am what I am by...what?...by the grace of God." And he says, "Look, all this accusation, all this onslaught, all this attack on my character, I just want you to know that my proud confidence is this, that I have a clear conscience before God."

That's the ultimate defense. He could take a lot from the outside. Remember what I quoted you earlier from Richard Sibbes, "Better that everybody on the outside is accusing you than your conscience." Charles Wesley wrote this hymn about the conscience: "I want a principle within
Of watchful, godly fear;
A sensibility of sin,
A pain to feel it near.
Help me the first approach to feel
Of pride or wrong desire;

To catch the wandering of my will,
And quench the kindling fire.

From Thee that I no more may stray,
No more Thy goodness grieve,
Grant me the filial awe, I pray,
The tender conscience give.
Quick is the apple of an eye,
O God, my conscience make!
Awake my soul when sin is nigh,
And keep it still awake."

That hymn to my knowledge is never sung today. The church is eager to ignore the spiritual importance of a sound conscience. And I believe it is the reason that so many Christians are being devastated in their life with sin. They're not responding properly to their conscience. They're blaming circumstances. They're irresponsible. They're reclassifying sin in psychological terms. And that is tragic.

Paul says, please notice collectively here, probably referring to he and Timothy who was with him, as we remember, back in verse 1 of chapter 1. "The testimony of our conscience." He and Timothy could boast of what God had done through them. It wasn't bragging. But the legitimate testimony of the Lord's power in their life and they had a clear conscience. The testimony of our conscience.

The word "testimony" means witness. It means evidence. The basis, the ground, the witness, the reason, the evidence for my confidence is my conscience. Boy, that's putting a lot of stock in the conscience. I have a clear conscience. It gives me peace, gives me comfort, gives me joy no matter what the accusation. I thank God for that. I thank God for the warnings of conscience, and I also thank God for the affirmation. You know, when I'm criticized, the first thing I want to do is listen to what my conscience says. And my conscience knows the standard and my conscience can be trusted to tell me what I need to know. And when you can examine your own heart, no matter what the accusation, and say I have a clear conscience before God no matter what might be being said about you, there's peace in your heart. Their conscience, that is that of Paul and Timothy, was perfectly enlightened because they knew the Word of God, the whole counsel of God. And so their conscience was affirming them.

I just really feel that if we don't deal with this issue of conscience properly, in the next few years the church is going to sink deeper and deeper into the muck of iniquity. And what is happening today is only going to increase the tragedy of Christians falling into more and more and more sin as they try to divest themselves of shame and guilt and the bearing of their responsibility for sin.

First Timothy 1:19 says people who do this make shipwreck of their faith. Just like the pilot who turned off the warning switch.

Just some final thoughts. Psychology, as I said, works very hard to devise schemes to shut up the conscience. Sadly the church is sucked in to this whole thing. People are replete with sin. Their lives are filled with iniquity and vice. Their conscience is crying out about shame. And they're doing everything they can to silence the conscience. It's really unthinkable...it's absolutely unthinkable. And it shows up in one very, very tragic area and that is in how we present the gospel.

And let me just close with this, more could be said but I'll just close with this. We're so concerned to silence our own conscience and feel comfortable about ourselves and have this good self-esteem that we want to make sure anybody we try to reach with the gospel feels good about themselves, too. So we want to preach this shallow sort of self-esteem kind of gospel. If you listen to gospel presentations today you would think that Christ was a Savior from trouble. Wouldn't you? That Jesus came to save you from your sadness, that He came to save you from your meaninglessness, that He came to save you from your sorrow, He came to save you from your failure. He came to save you from your loneliness. The Bible says He came to save you from your sin. The issue is not sadness, meaninglessness, sorrow, failure, loneliness, the issue is sin...sin. And we must not permit the message we proclaim to become infected with worldly notions that minimize guilt and seek only to make people feel good about themselves. One of the fundamental truths of the gospel is that all of us are contemptible and damned sinners and the only way to find real forgiveness and freedom is to recognize that sin and through humble, contrite repentance fall on your face before God.

Jesus said two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax gatherer. And the Pharisee stood and was praying thus to himself...God, I thank Thee that I am not like other people, swindlers, unjust adulterers, or even like this tax gatherer. I fast twice a week, I pay tithes of all that I get. He did a great job at silencing his conscience, hadn't he? The tax gatherer, on the other hand, the Publican standing some distance away was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, was beating his breast saying, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner." And Jesus said, "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other."

Jesus came to save us from sin. And that's got to be our message. And if people don't listen to conscience...listen to this...don't listen to conscience in time, they will listen to it in eternity. No one's conscience will be silent in hell. In fact, I would go so far as to say the single greatest torment in hell will be from conscience. In hell the sinner's conscience will turn on him with fury and remind him that he alone is responsible for the agonies that he is suffering eternally.

John Blanchard in his new book What Ever Happened to Hell? writes this, "Things will be very different in hell for those who have numbed their consciences here on earth. Their consciences will

be their worst tormentors, nor will there be any way in which they can be stifled or silenced. As John Flaval(?) wrote in the seventeenth century, `Conscience which should have been the sinner's curb here on earth becomes the whip that must lash his soul in hell.' Neither is there any faculty or power belonging to the soul of man so fit and able to do it as his own conscience. That which was the seat and center of all guilt now becomes the seat and center of all torment. Conscience will make the sinner acutely aware that he deliberately, freely and gladly chose the life style that led him to hell, that he is there because of his willfulness and obstinacy. In addition, conscience will force him to admit the truth of every charge it brings and the justice of every pain he suffers so that in Flaval's words, `In all this misery there is not one drop of injury or wrong.'" In other words, conscience accuses him rightly and justly.

As if this were not horrifying enough, the castigation of conscience will be uninterrupted. The sinner will have, according to Revelation 14, no rest day or night, as never before he will discover the truth of God's Word, there is no peace for the wicked. How frightening.

Non-Christian and Christian alike, listen to your conscience. You say, "How can I do that?" I'll tell you next time.

Father, we thank You this morning for this wonderful time that we've shared thinking about this most important gift that You've given us, the gift of conscience. We thank You for Your kindness and Your mercy toward us in giving us an internal warning system that alternately accuses or affirms with the intent of leading us to the proper understanding of our own sin so that we can deal with it in the way in which You've provided. We thank You that at salvation You cleansed our conscience and now as we grow in the knowledge of the Word our conscience keeps holding us to the highest standard and consequently we can live in obedience to Your Word and know the fullness of blessing. Thank You for the joy that conscience gives us in obedience. Thank You for the remorse and the pain that conscience gives us in sin. And may we hear the voice when it says "pull up, pull up, pull up," may we not silence it. Lord, may we live like Paul lived so that no matter what we would be accused of we could say...well our proud confidence is the testimony of our conscience. And may we know the joy of a clear conscience. And, Father, I pray for those who do not know Christ, whose conscience is assaulting them of sin, may there not be any way they can get off that hook, no way in which they can turn the switch off, lest they have to listen to the unmitigated, unending cries of conscience forever and ever and ever. And, Lord, we commend all who are here in divine presence to You to work Your work in every life, in Christ's name. Amen.

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