

How to Cultivate a Healthy Conscience

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

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Turn in your Bible to 2 Corinthians chapter 1...2 Corinthians chapter 1. I want to read one verse and then I want to sort of bounce off of that verse and set the stage for some things that are really important about the conscience. Verse 12, 2 Corinthians chapter 1 verse 12, "Paul says, 'For our boasting, do you have that? Or our confidence is this, the testimony of our...what?...conscience,'" and stop right there.

Let me tell you what's going on here, okay? This is a letter to the Corinthians. This is at least the third letter to the Corinthians, not the second, but only the first and second were inspired by God. It could be the fourth letter because there's plenty of evidence that between 1 and 2 Corinthians he wrote another letter and there's some evidence that even before the first letter he wrote a prior letter.

Now First and Second Corinthians total 29 chapters, that makes it the longest...the longest series of chapters written to any one group or by any...in any single book. Matthew only has 28 chapters, Luke only has 24, Acts only has 28. This is a lot of stuff to write to one group. But you remember that the Corinthian church was a messed up church. The place was in utter chaos. This is such a heartbreaking thing for Paul so he sits down and he writes 1 Corinthians and trying to correct all that stuff.

Well before he even hears how they're going to respond to all that correction, he gets another message. You know what the message this time is? Some false apostles have come to town and they probably claimed to represent Peter, so that made them real popular with the Peter party, you know, the people who were Peter followers, whatever that was. And they came into town and they said, "We're going to teach you the truth, and Paul is not teaching you the truth." And you want to know the sad part of it? Some of the Corinthians...guess what?...were buying it. They were buying in to the whole deal, and it just broke Paul's heart.

Paul decided to make a brief visit. He went there on a brief visit. I'm just giving you the historical background. He went there on a brief visit and when he got there, somebody in the Corinthian church, a member of the church who had been deceived by these false apostles face-to-face publicly shamed and assaulted the Apostle Paul to his face. And the best we can tell historically, he was devastated by that and he left. It was really a visit that didn't accomplish anything, and he went away. And that is

what is in his heart when he writes this letter.

After he went away from that short visit, he wrote them another letter. He refers to it in chapter 2 verse 3 when he says, "This very thing I wrote you," that's not 1 Corinthians, that's what...you could call it the severe letter. And you know what that second letter said, the letter that is not in the Bible? It told them to obey the first letter, to get rid of the false apostles...and we can put this all together by going through 2 Corinthians. It told them to get rid of those false apostles, not to be deceived and duped by them. Thirdly, it told them to discipline that man that did that because it's a very serious offense, you understand?, to dishonor and defame and assault the Apostle of Christ. You know why that's serious? Because there was no Bible. So the only source of truth was the Apostles. You can assault John MacArthur all you want today, and people can still...well I can crash and I can be out of the picture because my reputation has been destroyed, but you still have to deal with the Bible. But in those days, if you destroyed the Apostle, there wasn't any Bible. So it was a very serious thing and Paul says you must discipline that man, you must get rid of those false Apostles and you must respond to everything I said in the first letter.

And to check on how they were doing, he sent...one of his favorite guys, Titus. And that's what's behind this letter, a broken-hearted Apostle whose people have turned on him, created a mutiny against him and are about to follow some false Apostles. He sent 1 Corinthians, he sent that severe letter, and now he's waiting for Titus to come back. Titus comes back and guess what Titus reported to him? Look at chapter 7, verse 6, "But God, who comforts the depressed," guess who that is? You think pastors get depressed? Paul did. The Corinthian church is enough to depress anybody. "But God who comforts the depressed, comforted us by the coming of...whom?..." When Titus got there, the news was good. You know why it was good? Verse 9, "I rejoice that you were made sorrowful by my letters but that you were made sorrowful unto...what?...repentance." Isn't that good news? They sorrowed unto repentance. You were made sorrowful in a godly sorrow and the sorrow that produces repentance without regret, leads to salvation.

So verse 13, skipping down, "For this reason we've been...what?...comforted." And then in verse 16, "I rejoice that in everything I can boast about."

So he got good news and for the first time in a long, long time, his heart was at rest because they had repented. They had taken the first letter right. They had taken the second letter right. But he also knew something else. He also knew that the majority repented but there was always going to be a minority, a group of people who are still deceived. And so he writes this epistle and what it is, is a defense of his integrity. From the first chapter to the thirteenth, he is defending his integrity as a person and his ministry. It's a marvelous epistle.

Now listen to this. This is the defense of the integrity of Paul, just in case anybody is still questioning, this is the last word on it. And verse 12 of chapter 1 is the heart of it. "Our boasting," or, if you will,

“Our confidence is this, the testimony of our...what?...conscience.” You know what he could have said? He could have said, “Look, you’ve got to trust me, I’m a good man, I’m a godly man, I don’t have ill motives. I don’t want your money. I don’t want anything out of you. I’m not trying to manipulate you. I’m not trying to use you or abuse you for personal gain. I’m not in this for prominence and prestige, and power. I’m genuine and I’m honest and I’m real and just to prove it, I’m going to send you ten letters of recommendation from ten guys that know me really well. And those ten guys are going to write these letters and they’re going to say, you know, like when you want references for a job, you get your ten closest relatives who are obligated to say good things about you, and write these letters, you know. And I could...he could get these guys and send all these letters. He doesn’t do that. Or he could have said, “You know, I’ve appointed a committee with representatives from all the churches I’ve ever been a part of, and that committee has been doing a three-month study of my life and ministry and they’ve sent me all kinds of papers and I filled out all these questionnaires and they put me in a room and turned on the hot light and they’ve grilled me like the police do, you know, the criminal. And they’ve gotten everything they could get out of me and they’re putting together a forty-page report and you’re going to get that report from the committee on Paul. And the committee on Paul is going to tell you I’m a good guy.

But you know something? As noble as ten friends might be, and as noble as a committee might be, there’s an even higher court on the earth to go to. You know what it is? It’s the court of conscience because your conscience knows about you what nobody knows, not even your closest friend. Your conscience knows not what you do, but what you are, right? Nobody knows you better than you. In 1 Corinthians chapter 2 he said to the Corinthians, “Who knows what is in man but the spirit of the man?” What you really are. You ready for this? What you really are is what your conscience tells you you are. You’re not what you really are here, you’re what you really are alone in the dark. That’s what you really are. No more.

Paul says, “Now that I’m on trial, I’m going to go to the highest human court. God is a divine court. Of course, He’s the highest court of all cause He’s divine. But on the human level,” he says, “I’ll go to the highest court and I will say to you, ‘My conscience tells me, look at verse 12 again, that in holiness and godly sincerity, that in holiness and godliness, not in fleshly wisdom, but in the grace of God, we have behaved ourselves in the world and especially before you. My conscience is clear.’ Isn’t that great?

You know, that’s the proof of this man. His conscience was telling him he was holy and godly. Is your conscience telling you that? Is that what you know to be true about you on the inside? That’s pretty serious, isn’t it? Your friends don’t even know that. Your wife, your husband may not even know that.

The conscience can be your greatest friend when it tells you that, right? It can also be your greatest...what?...yeah, because it can be screaming blue murder down there.

In 1984, Avianca Airlines, Spanish airline, had a crash, 707, hit a mountain. They went into the rubble, everybody's dead, the plane is all over the place, went right straight into the thing, and they're looking for the little black box, right? They find the little black box which has the cockpit recorder on it so they can get the dialogue that's going on in the cockpit just before the crash so they can reconstruct what happened.

They get the tape out of the little black box, they play the tape and it is frightening, and shocking, an eerie discovery they make when they listened to the tape. The cockpit recorder indicates that just before the crash, a shrill computer synthesized voice from the plane's automatic warning system starts saying, "Pull up, pull up, pull up, pull up, pull up," in English. Inexplicably the pilot shouts back, "Shut up, Gringo," flips off the switch. Within seconds, the plane hits the mountain and everybody is dead.

What a parable of the way conscience is intended to work and how dangerous it is not to listen to it. Do you ever ask yourself why people can appear to be going along fine, flying through the air, sailing along in their little Christian life and all of a sudden, Ka-blam, they crash and burn? Isn't something inside of them saying, 'Pull up, pull up, pull up,' right? And what are they saying? "Shut up, Gringo." You better not be saying that to your conscience.

Conscience, let me talk about conscience. Conscience is a...conscience is a human faculty, okay? It's not supernatural, it's not divine. It's like...it's like pain, that's a good analogy. Pain is not a divine faculty, it's human, isn't it? Everybody's got it. Why do you have pain? Is pain a good thing or a bad thing? Good, wonderful, it's a wonderful thing. You say, "Why is it so wonderful?" Because it warns you you've got a physical problem, and if you didn't have pain you wouldn't know you had a problem and you'd die.

Well when you lose the ability to feel pain, that's very deadly. You feel pain somewhere, you say, "Hey, something isn't right." That's a gift from God, right? To tell you you've got a physical problem, a physical need, something isn't right in your physical body. Well guilt...conscience is the same thing. What conscience does is tell you something is wrong in your spiritual life. That's a parallel.

Look at Romans 2 for a moment. Romans 2:14 and 15, this is a very important concept. Romans 2:14 and 15 says, "When pagans," Gentiles, means pagans, people who are outside the Jewish people. Now look at this, "For when pagans who do not have the Law." Okay, they don't have the written Law, they don't have the Scripture, they don't have the Old Testament, "But they do instinctively the things of the Law, these not having the Law, are a law to themselves."

Now what's that mean? What it means is this, very simple. Even pagan people have built into them an understanding of right and wrong. That's what it means. They have a Law. Romans 1 says, "They

have enough knowledge so that they're without...what?...excuse." Okay? So it's just a part of being human. It's just a part of being human like sniffing and tasting and seeing and hearing and anything that human beings do. It is a capacity that God gives to the immaterial part of man to know the difference between right and wrong. You see, that's essential because if man doesn't know that, he's not going to seek a Savior, right? Because if he doesn't know he's lost, he's not going to try to be found. If he doesn't know he's a sinner, he's not going to look for forgiveness. So God has built into every man the knowledge of right and wrong. And so instinctively they know what is right and wrong. They have a moral law..

Now what that moral law does is inform, all this, that moral law informs their conscience. Conscience is not the voice of God, it's a human faculty. It is not the Word of God, it's a human faculty. Conscience isn't a body of information, conscience is simply a warning device. It's just a shrill computer voice that says, "Pull up, pull up, pull up, pull up, hold it, stop, don't do that, stop that, you're headed for a crash, stop here," that's what conscience does. But conscience, follow this, has to be informed to do that.

Let's go back to the airplane. Why did that little computer start saying, "Pull up, pull up, pull up, pull up," how did it...how did it know to say that? Radar. Radar was sending out a beam in front of that airplane and it told that little voice in that electronic system how close the plane was to the mountain, right? So you had a fully informed little voice and the little voice said, "Pull up, pull up, pull up, pull up," because it knew, follow this, the reality of the condition of the plane, because it was properly informed. The pilot was stupid, "Shut up, Gringo," means, "I don't care what the little voice says, and I don't care how well informed it is, I'm going to ignore it." You say, "That's tragic because he lost his life." What's more tragic is when people do that and lose their soul."

Now there are two things God has given you, this conscience, there are two things that make it function. One, it has to be properly informed like the radar. It has to be properly informed and secondly, it has to be made very sensitive so that it tells you the right message at the right time. Hey, you ought to be thankful for that, right? Do you want to crash and burn? Not if you're a Christian because if you're a Christian, you love Christ, you want to glorify Him, right? So you cherish your conscience and you want to inform it accurately, absolutely accurately. You don't want your conscience to be wrongly informed, or it isn't going to have the capability to tell you the right things. You understand that? The conscience is a device that in and of itself doesn't hold any truth, it only reacts to whatever you believe. The conscience responds to your highest system of morality. So if you have a low sort of gutter, sewer level belief system, conscience will react to that. If you have a conscience that is overly informed, and it's Pharisaical and legalistic and it's telling you all kinds of stuff that are way beyond what God expects, your conscience is going to react to that, too. And Paul dealt with that, didn't he?, in Romans 14:15 when he said, "Look, there are some people who believe they shouldn't do this on the Sabbath, and they should only eat vegetables, and they should never eat food offered to idols and all of that, and their conscience tells them that, don't...just leave them

alone, let them do what their conscience says. Eventually they'll grow to understand their freedom but don't teach them to violate their conscience or they'll train themselves not to listen and when their conscience finally gets properly informed, they will have learned not to listen to it.

So, you want to make sure your conscience is properly informed and the way you inform your conscience is...what?...the Word of God. That's a fully informed conscience. Then when your conscience says something, you listen. It's a tremendous gift from God, absolutely tremendous.

Look at verse 15 now in Romans 2. Here's what the conscience does, middle of the verse, "The conscience bears...what?...witness." Now what does it mean? It gives, it speaks, it gives testimony and it either accuses or excuses. It either says, "Good, wonderful, you're doing well." Or it says, "Hold it, stop, pull up, pull up, pull up." What a wonderful gift from God is the conscience. There's nothing more wonderful in the Christian life than to have a clear conscience. I mean, joy is when you have a clear conscience. I mean, real joy...you can go to a party and have a lot of fun with folks, but if you go home and your conscience is hammering and hammering and hammering, that's no fun. There's no joy. Real peace, real joy, real contentment, real calm comes when you have a clear conscience. And your conscience is excusing, affirming, defending and not accusing, condemning, indicting.

Now the problem...you've got two problems today in our world. Let's take problem number one related to this. Problem number one, here's conventional wisdom, politically correct, what you ought to...you know, what the culture's telling you. Don't feel guilty for anything, right? "I don't feel guilty for anything," so they're training people to ignore...what? Conscience, training them to ignore their conscience. What does conscience do when it's violated? Produces these kind of feelings; shame, guilt, regret, fear, anxiety, disgrace, anguish, sorrow, despair, depression. And what do all these people in this culture do when they get that? They run off to some counselor and what does he tell them? "Oh, you shouldn't feel that way, you need to boost your self-esteem. You're not to blame. It's your parents' fault, or you're co-dependent, somebody fed you too many Twinkies or you're having a reaction to being abused." There's always a psychological way to get you off the hook, and so you learn that your conscience...you're trained literally not to believe your conscience. And you know what you're doing? You're saying to your conscience, "Shut up, Gringo," and I promise you, you will crash and burn.

It's a deadly thing to do. But you've got a whole culture doing it...a whole culture being trained that we should never feel guilt, you should never feel remorse, you should never feel pain, shame, fear, doubt. You're really wonderful, you're great, you're terrific, you're marvelous. And somebody else did something to you and that's why you're doing the way you're doing. It couldn't be your fault because you are so basically good and wonderful. Therefore your conscience is a big liar. Don't you listen to it.

Now, folks, I can only tell you, I am frightened of living in a generation of people who refuse to listen to their conscience. What in the world is going to stop them from doing anything? Absolutely anything.

If you think crime is bad, just project fifteen years, twenty years, or five years. What in the world is going to be happening? Because people are systematically being told as psychologists redefine human behavior, don't pay any attention to your conscience. It's a liar. Guilt is bad. Feel good about yourself. You have a culture where the conscience is defiled, where the conscience is seared, like leprosy, the nerves are dead. They can't feel anything and nobody listens to it, it is slammed into silence. And then you've got people who do unconscionable things, more and more unbelievable, bizarre crimes, more and more mass crimes, more and more immorality because people are being trained now to pay no attention to conscience.

You know what the problem is? Conscience is telling you, you are a wicked sinner and psychology is telling you, you are a wonderful person who ought to have self-esteem and you've been victimized by all this lies about your person that your conscience is telling you and you're fallenness is going to believe who? It's going to believe the lie. I don't know how they're going to control the next generation.

The second problem, conscience, in order to function, you have to listen to it, secondly, it has to be rightly informed, right? It has to be rightly informed or it can't function. Take away the radar from the plane, what's the little box going to say? Nothing, it doesn't have any information. If there's no radar, it doesn't know to say anything. So in order for your conscience to function, you not only have to listen to it, keep it sensitive, but you've got to give it the right information. Now if you're...let's assume you are raised in a Muslim culture. Your conscience is going to react to the faith of Islam, right? Because that's the belief system that you have in your mind. If you're a...and that's...that's true in any system. See, conscience functions like a skylight. The skylight doesn't have any light, does it? Just lets light in. It's the light beyond the skylight that comes through the skylight. Conscience is a skylight, it doesn't generate its own light. It can only let you...it can only shine on you what's in that belief system. I'm frightened because our generation of people is silencing their conscience and I'm equally frightened because their conscience is so ill-informed. They're told homosexuality is fine, immorality is fine, do whatever you want, it doesn't really matter what you do, it's why you do it. And if you have good reason to do it to maintain your self-esteem and your personal dignity, go ahead and do it.

So you've got a generation of young people growing up who think this is the standard of morality. It's going to come right down from Washington, as they make laws that are going to accommodate this kind of thing. It's going to be taught in the public schools, it's already taught there. So we're going to have a generation of young people who don't listen to the faint conscience that's still there, and if they did listen to it, it hasn't got any information to keep it from crashing because it's not properly informed. It's saying, "All is well, all is well," or to borrow the prophet's words, it's saying, "Peace, peace, peace, peace," and what it ought to be saying is, "Pull up, pull up, pull up," but it doesn't have that information.

So what have we got? A generation of people who are silencing their conscience on the one hand and giving it bad information on the other. You think this is a frightening day? Boy, I look at my little grandchildren and I want to grab them up and take them to heaven. But at the same time, as this desperation level rises, who knows, maybe God is going to break through and do some incredible things.

May I just say to those people who might wonder if you can really, permanently silence conscience? The answer is, in this life you can. You can so ill-inform it that it doesn't function and you can so ignore it that it's finally silenced. But there's coming a day when you can't silence your conscience. Do you remember reading about hell? That the experience of an individual in hell will involve weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. What does that mean? Let me tell you why. Why is that going to happen? You say, "Because it's going to be hot down there."

Well, that's true. But I'll tell you something. The heat's not going to be only on the outside, the heat is going to be on the inside because in hell, every individual will have a fully informed and relentless conscience, accusing them forever and ever, and ever, and ever, and ever without relief. That's what hell is. And that's why there's weeping and wailing, and gnashing of teeth. And every sinner will know that every pain they feel, they deserve. And they will know that they deliberately and freely and gladly chose the lifestyle that led them to hell. And every charge against them and every indictment, and every pain they suffer is absolutely right and absolutely just and there will never be any relief. That is a frightening reality.

You know, I have a very well-informed conscience. I grew up in a Christian family. I listened to my father preach, then I've been preaching for 25 years, I've been studying the Bible for 25...I can't get one-half step into a good sin without all the bells and whistles and horns blowing. I'm happy about that. You ought to thank God if you have a well-informed conscience. Keep it sensitive. And even if it kind of makes you feel guilty for stuff you shouldn't feel guilty about, that's okay. Don't overrule your conscience because you'll...in time you'll grow to understand your freedoms and your conscience will get better informed, just keep sitting under the Word. You don't want an over-informed conscience, you don't want an under-informed conscience, you don't want a wrongly-informed conscience. Now do you understand how wonderful it is for Paul to be able to say, "I can stand before you and my proud confidence is this, the testimony of my conscience. I search my heart and my conscience is affirming me." That's real peace, isn't it?

But the question we want to ask in closing, and I just want to kind of take you through this a little bit. How can I have a clear conscience? How can I avoid, you remember 1 Timothy 1:18 to 20, Paul says, "There are some who have rejected conscience and they've made shipwreck of the faith?" In those days, ships were the deal. If he was living today and writing, he would say they made train wreck of the faith. If you don't resist, you're going to crash and burn, and we've all seen it happen, haven't we? So how can I really have a clear conscience? How can I have a fully informed conscience? By sitting

under the Word? How can I really respond to my conscience? By hearing its first initial pangs and listening and responding. And that means, here's the key, you have to deal with sin where it starts. Where does it start? In the mind. James says, "Lust when it conceives brings forth sin."

You have to deal with sin in your mind. That's where you have to deal with it. Don't kid yourself that if you're not doing on the outside, you're okay. It's not the issue. There may be constraining reasons why you're not doing it on the outside, and you may be ten-thousand times worse on the inside than you are on the outside. And you know it and God knows it. You've got to deal with sin there or sooner or later, I'll promise you, it will get out. Be sure your sin will find you out.

Now no sin is more destructive than the sin of the mind. It's the most destructive sin there is. You know why? Because it only has...it only has the conscience to fight it. We always say, "You know, it's really important if you're going to grow in Christ to have accountability." Your pastor ever say that to you? To have a friend, somebody who disciples you, somebody you're close to, you can be accountable to for your spiritual life so that you don't live in isolation. You know, it's important to be in the fellowship and in the church and have accountability. It's true, it's absolutely true.

But you want to know something? There are people who are close to you and they know the way you behave, and they know the way you talk, and haven't got a clue the way you think. And they might think, you ought to step in to the next vacancy in the Trinity, you're that good. But the truth is, inside you're full of every foul bird.

See the conscience is all alone in there slugging it out. At least on the outside you've got your friends to help you. And if you're married, you're not about to do that stuff that you think to do because it really would mess up your marriage and it would just destroy your kids, right? If they...I mean, if you lived out all your mental sins? Whoo.

So you're...when you sin in the mind, and you cultivate sins in the mind, you just assault your poor conscience all the time cause it's in there battling all alone. You want to know something about sins of the mind? They're so deadly because they don't wait for special opportunity, they can happen anytime, even on Wednesday night at church. And it's relatively easy to confess and forsake the sins of the outside, but it's awfully hard to get rid of the ones on the inside. That's where you've got to start. You've got to really start before God to deal with what's going on in your thought life.

Now your mind will sin three ways...past, future, present. Let me tell you what I mean. The first way your mind will sin is by remembering past iniquity. All of us have got sin the past, right? Have you noticed how your mind will drag you back through it? And you know what happens when you do that? You've sinned it again. You sinned it again because in God's eyes what's going on in the inside is sin, just as much as the out, right?

I had a young man that I married, he was a professional athlete, tremendous guy. Came to know Christ, loved Christ, devoted to Christ. His life is a model of Christian virtue. It still is. He married this beautiful Christian girl, virgin girl, lovely girl. Came to me a little bit after their marriage and said, "I can't handle this marriage. I can't deal with it. I can't cope with it." He said, "Here I am with my lovely, beautiful wife and in our most cherished moments together, my mind is flooded with the vile sins of my past." And he said, "It just corrupts the purity of our relationship because I keep tracking back through that."

Had a guy who was...lived a homosexual life style, he came to Christ. I was discipling the guy and he came into me, he was in tears just a few weeks after he was saved and I said, "What happened? Did you fall into this sin again?" He says, "No, but I just keep thinking about those occasions in the past." Your mind can do that. And, young people, I warn you, just keep your life pure or may have to spend most of your life reliving your sins. It isn't just once. The enemy will drag you back through it again and again. Sins of remembering.

You know, remember when David said, I think it's Psalm 25, he said, "Remember not the sins of my youth," you know what he was asking God to do? Forget what he couldn't forget. God, I hope You can't remember what I did when I was young. I sure can't forget it." You want to hear some good news? You may remember it, God doesn't. The Bible says, "He remembers your sins no more." But every time you remember them and cycle back through them, you commit them again. That's what the mind does. If you wonder...if you ever wonder whether you're a fallen creature, you may look at your life and say, "Well I don't do any outward sins," your mind will remind you how fallen you are.

Secondly, the mind sins not only by going back but by going forward. Over and over again in the Psalms and the Proverbs, and I won't beg this point, but over and over again in the Psalms and the Proverbs, we read things like, "They were devising evil plans...devising evil plans." Psalm 64, Proverbs 12, Proverbs 14, Proverbs 15, Proverbs 6, Proverbs 24, Isaiah 32, lots of places. They were devising wickedness. Remember Psalm 36, "He devises wickedness on his bed, he lays there and he dreams and schemes how he's going to cheat his boss, how he's going to steal money out of the till, how he's going to step on a guy's neck and get where he wants to get. How he's going to say what he's going to say to that neighbor, and when that neighbor hears it, he's going to give it to him. She's finally going to get her chance with that lady, and she's going to let it fly and I'm going to say this, and I'm going to say that. And when I see her I'm going to..." We've all had that kind of thing. And that's scheming and even though you haven't done the sin outwardly, you've committed the sin already in the mind.

Sins of remembering and sins of scheming, scheming to vent your anger or your hatred, your lust, your greed, your envy, your covetousness, your discontent, your selfishness, your pride, and then the third category, we went back, we went forward, is in the present. That's sins of fantasy or imagination

where your mind is sinning in the present tense. David...David knew that's where the struggle was. David sinned with Bathsheba but the sin on the outside was only an expression of the inside, right? So what did David pray? Create in me a clean life, O God? What did he say? Start with the inside...start with the inside.

How do you do that? Ask God to reveal your sins on the inside, name them, confess them. Be honest with God and do it daily. Whenever an evil thought comes into your mind, remember Philippians 4:8, "Whatever's pure, whatever's lovely, whatever's excellent, whatever's of good report, think on these things." Colossians 3, "Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth." You know, what's one of the best things about learning music, you know what I often do when one of those thought comes into my mind? Start to sing a song. Do you know the Psalmist...the Psalms are songs? It's a Hebrew song book. And why are there 150 of them? Because those people needed all those songs because what would happen? They were just like us, right? They need a lot of those deals. And you start to sing a song. Another thing is to feed on the Word. "Thy Word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin." As I told you, I can't get half way into a good sin without thinking of fourteen Bible verses.

Let me tell you another one. Avoid evil attractions. It doesn't do any good to try to deal with sin on the outside, if you're exposing yourself to what generates it. That's why Job said in Job 31:1, "I made a covenant with my eyes. There's some things I don't look at."

And lastly, cultivate loving God. Let me tell you how really bizarre it is. We wouldn't think of doing something on the outside that somebody we care about would see. But we'll do it on the inside where God can see it. That's a sad commentary on who's important to us, isn't it? If you're going to deal with sin on the inside...confess it, name it, forsake it, refuse to give place to evil thoughts and think on holy things, feed on the Word, avoid the things that stimulate those kind of thoughts and just cultivate loving God. Just ask God all the time, "Give me the grace to love You with all my heart, soul, mind and strength. Make it so that I would rather offend everybody in the world than to offend you.

My prayer for you, my desire longing for you is that you would be able to say, "The testimony of my conscience is that in holiness and godly sincerity I have conducted myself in the world."

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