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TEACHING MEMBERS THE POWER OF A CLEAR
CONSCIENCE AT TWIN CITY BIBLE CHURCH
IN WINSTON-SALEM, NORTH CAROLINA

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TEACHING MEMBERS THE POWER OF A CLEAR
CONSCIENCE AT TWIN CITY BIBLE CHURCH
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This project is dedicated to my God and Savior, Jesus Christ,
my wife, Amy, who has ministered
to me throughout the years,
our four children who have blessed
me with their study-hugs,
and the Church for the glory of Christ.

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PREFACE

In many ways, this project is the culmination of a lifelong concern about how to remedy a guilty conscience. On the day I was exposed to the gospel, my main concern in life that I articulated to the pastor was “How do I stop sinning?” As I repented of my sins and exercised faith in Christ for salvation, the burden of guilt and shame was alleviated. Then my struggle against sin began, and I fumbled to experience the joy, comfort, and contentment of salvation. As I sought to maintain a clear conscience, I discovered many other Christians who struggled to rest in Christ’s work of redemption. I pray this project will help many to keep a good, blameless, and clear conscience resting in Christ’s work of redemption and the sufficiency of his Word.

In the completion of this project, I must express special thanks to my wife, Amy, who has been the greatest helpmate I could ever imagine. She has allotted me the time to study and write while providing her prayers and constructive criticism during this endeavor. I am also thankful for my dear friend and co-laborer in Christ, Dr. Patrick Slyman, who encouraged me to pursue this degree and has stuck closer to me than a brother. I greatly appreciate Dr. Robert Burrelli and his long-lasting ministry in my life over the last twenty-seven years. He has been a continued example of scholastic excellence, providing pastoral encouragement, counsel, and friendship. I also offer my gratitude to The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and Dr. Matthew Haste for his instruction, patience, and kindness which motivated me in my studies.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The conscience is a gift from God that many in every generation neglect, misinform, or pervert. The biblical authors address this issue in both the Old and New Testaments. The New Testament uses the familiar term “conscience” in a variety of contexts while the Old Testament uses synonyms that convey the concept. Regrettably, many seem to assume that the conscience is simply a passing emotion or a guilty feeling experienced after practicing immoral behavior (Rom 1:32; 2:15). Others think that it only pertains to discerning which activities are permissive or forbidden to practice (1 Cor 8:7). Though the conscience can affect a person’s emotions and may respond to certain activities, erroneous thinking and perceptions can distort the conscience. The conscience, which is an aspect of the heart, acts as an internal influence within a person’s soul, convincing him that he has either passed or failed the moral standard he believes to be true. The conscience experiences needless alarm if the moral standard it lives by is influenced by anything other than God’s moral law ascertained from a correct interpretation of Scripture. As Christians have attained a clear conscience through faith in the redemption of Christ, the conscience must be maintained through an increased knowledge of Scripture and exemplified through obedience, resulting in spiritual power and maturity.

Context

To serve the members of Twin City Bible Church of Winston-Salem, North Carolina, I taught what it means to attain, maintain, and experience the characteristics of a clear conscience that leads to identifiable spiritual maturity. Twin City Bible Church is

one of at least seventy-five Protestant churches that meet in Forsyth County. It is a conservative, Baptist-style church having been in existence since 1956. The congregation's attendance, which includes members and non-members, is between 425 and 500 each Sunday. She is led by ten elders including the main teaching-pastor who has served her for nearly twenty years. The church's theologies and doctrines reflect orthodox Christian truth, the doctrines of grace, cessationism, dispensational eschatology, and expository preaching. She has over twenty deacons and hosts a satellite campus for The Expositors Seminary.

Outside the church, the societal structure has embraced a form of Christian traditionalism. This appears to have caused a type of cultural-Christianity which has blurred Christian spirituality and maturity with a superficial facade. Many fail to realize that a genuine Christian believes in Jesus Christ as Savior (Eph 5:23; Phil 3:20), submits to him as Lord (Rom 5:1; 10:9–10), and repents from sin (Luke 24:46–47; Acts 20:21).

Although cultural Christianity is predominant in our society, the members of Twin City Bible Church have provided an individual witness to their faith in Christ Jesus, been publicly baptized, and have affirmed the doctrinal statement of the church. Many have expressed their fondness for expository preaching and testified to their affection for God, his Word, and those within the church. The congregation has regularly voiced their appreciation that visitors, regular attendees, and faithful members are habitually exposed to and challenged by the message of Scripture. There is also a regular rotation of volunteers who pray, evangelize, and serve in various ministries.

Twin City Bible Church has been numerically growing since her inception. Some of her most recent members and attendees are new converts while others have gravitated to the church from different denominational and ecclesiastical backgrounds. Teaching on the conscience benefited the church since many have come from diverse doctrinal and theological understandings. The chart below models the numeric growth the church has experienced over the last eight years.

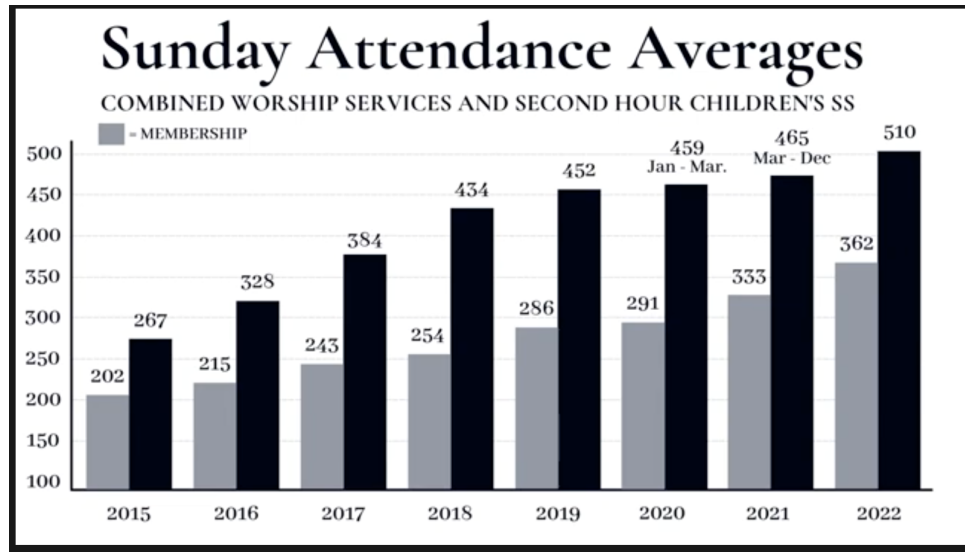


Figure 1. Twin City Bible Church growth chart

Although Twin City Bible Church is a Bible-teaching church—expressing spiritual vibrancy and numeric growth—the saints have benefited from a biblical study of the conscience. As they have learned about how the conscience functions, how it is cleansed, and how it is maintained, they have experienced a growing maturity in the faith. This was demonstrated by a comparison of the pre- and post-surveys, which showed a positive, statistically significant change. The saints also experienced spiritual encouragement as they exemplified the biblical characteristics of a clean conscience.

Rationale

The negative impact of sin has had a comprehensive effect on every aspect of life. It has corrupted human nature, demoralizing the heart, mind, and soul. This spiritual and moral devastation has also put the conscience in constant danger of being misinformed, defiled, or needlessly condemned (Rom 1:18–32; 2:14–15; 1 Cor 8:7; 1 John 3:20). The only sufficient remedy to cleanse the conscience is the redemption of Christ, appropriated by grace through faith (Heb 9:1–14; 10:1–22). The power of Christ’s salvation rescues the believer from the power of sin (Rom 6:14; 8:2) and its deceitful

influence on the conscience (Titus 1:15–16). Yet, followers of Christ must always be on the spiritual alert, guarding their hearts and minds and rightly informing their consciences (Acts 24:16; cf. 1 Tim 1:5; 1 Pet 3:16).

First, this project was motivated by the hope that God would use this study to deliver any unbeliever from spiritual deception. Men and women were encouraged to attain a clear conscience with the redemption the Lord provides by grace through faith in Christ's person and work. Although the conscience is present within all men and women, it functions according to its perceived moral standard (Rom 2:14–15). When that standard is violated, their consciences either accuse them of moral guilt or defend them, excusing the violation. The conscience that continues to disregard the instinctive moral standard or the biblical truth to which it has been exposed can become “seared” or cauterized, rendering it insensitive to that moral standard (1 Tim 4:1–3; cf. Titus 1:13–16). Therefore, one focus of this study was to inform the mind of God's moral standard so that unbelievers might experience the accusation of their conscience and thereby be motivated to repent and trust in Jesus for their salvation.

The second motivation for this project was to assist immature believers in growing towards spiritual maturity. When Christians hear about a clear conscience, they often consider it only in the context of Christian liberties or taboos (Rom 14; 1 Cor 8). This project focused on how Christians should inform and develop their consciences according to the scriptural standards for living, which was an imperative concern of the apostle Paul. He regularly prayed for believers to increase in the knowledge, wisdom, and understanding of God's revelation (Eph 1:15–21; Phil 1:9–11; Col 1:9–12;) while he made it his aim to assist them in that process (Col 1:28; cf. 1 Cor 8).

Finally, a third motivation for this project was to biblically illustrate the effects of a clear conscience on a Christian's life. This was articulated throughout the apostle Paul's testimony. While he was in the presence of the Sanhedrin Council in Acts 23, he testified to living his life “with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day”

(Acts 23:1). Likewise, as Paul stood trial before Felix in Acts 24, he stressed his priority of maintaining a “blameless” conscience in view of the resurrection (Acts 24:16). Before the church in Corinth, Paul also noted that his spiritual confidence stemmed from the positive testimony of his conscience (2 Cor 1:12). This was further echoed in 2 Cor 5:6–11, as he noted the “good courage” he had because of his God-fearing conscience. Even as he addressed Timothy, his protégé in the faith, he reminded him that church leaders are to exemplify “instruction . . . from . . . a good conscience” (1 Tim 1:5; cf. 1:19).

Practically, those who maintain a clear conscience will evidence that fact in biblically powerful ways. As this project demonstrated, it can lead to living a life of conviction, courage, compassion towards others, contriteness, constraint of sin, and concern for holiness while compelling others with the gospel and righteous character all for Christ’s glory. Though this project was conducted in a local church, its practical nature and application is useful within the global church.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to teach the members of Twin City Bible Church how to attain, maintain, and experience a clear conscience in the Christian life.

Goals

The following goals determined the success of each portion of this project and were progressive in nature. They assessed the participant’s spiritual state, determined if knowledge and understanding of biblical concepts were developing, and sought to identify the practical effects of applying what was studied. These goals included:

1. To create a two-part Likert scale survey that gathered demographic information and assessed the basic beliefs, knowledge, attitudes, and practices of participants pertaining to their consciences;
2. To develop and teach a six-week curriculum plan about the conscience;

3. To administer pre-surveys that gathered general demographic information and assessed the basic beliefs, knowledge, attitudes, and practices of participants pertaining to their consciences;
4. To administer identical post-surveys that assessed the basic beliefs, knowledge, attitudes, and practices of participants pertaining to their consciences to determine if the course curriculum made a positive, statistically significant change in the lives of the participants.

A specific research methodology was designed to measure the successful fulfillment of these goals. The methodology is described in the following section.

Research Methodology

The first goal was to create a two-part survey. The first part of the survey gathered general demographic data about the participants. The second part of the survey consisted of twenty-five statements derived from chapters 2 and 3 of this ministry project that assessed the basic beliefs, knowledge, attitudes, and practices of the participants pertaining to their consciences. Participants marked each statement according to a six-point Likert scale: (SD) strongly disagree, (D) disagree, (DS) disagree somewhat, (AS) agree somewhat, (A) agree, and (SA) strongly agree.¹ This goal was considered successfully met when the two-part survey was completed and approved by my supervisor and the Ethics Committee.

The second goal was to develop a six-week curriculum about the conscience. The curriculum covered five main biblical texts that referenced and described the universality of the conscience and how it functions within the lives of men and women. It also provided a historical analysis of counseling and the conscience in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This project had a three-fold aim: to increase the participants' knowledge about the conscience and how to attain a clear conscience through faith in

¹ All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

Christ's redemption, to modify the participants' attitudes regarding the importance of maintaining a clear conscience, and to equip the participants to examine their consciences and convictions through the teachings of Scripture. An expert panel of five persons determined the effectiveness of these goals by using a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, clarity, scope, and applicability of the curriculum.² This goal was considered successful when a minimum of 90 percent of all the rubric evaluation indicators met or exceeded the sufficiency level, and the curriculum was implemented. If the 90 percent benchmark had not been met initially, the material would have been revised until it met the standard.

The third goal was to administer pre-surveys that gathered general demographic information and assessed the basic beliefs, knowledge, attitudes, and practices of participants pertaining to their consciences.³ The aim was to evaluate at least twelve members of Twin City Bible Church who volunteered to participate in the study. This goal was considered successfully met when at least twelve members completed the pre-surveys and returned them.⁴

The fourth goal was to administer identical post-surveys that assessed the basic beliefs, knowledge, attitudes, and practices of participants pertaining to their consciences to determine if the course curriculum made a positive, statistically significant change in the lives of the participants.⁵ From these post-surveys, I hoped to have at least twelve participants who had also completed a pre-survey and attended or listened online to all the teaching sessions. This goal was considered successfully met when at least twelve of the participants listened to all the teaching sessions and completed and returned the post-

² See appendix 1.

³ See appendix 2.

⁴ See table A1 in appendix 3.

⁵ See table A2 in appendix 4.

surveys. This goal was further met when a t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive, statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-survey scores.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

Three terms that occur throughout this ministry research project are defined below to help the reader understand their usage.

Conscience. A gift from God that acts as an internal witness within a person's heart that makes him aware of some moral standard that is informed by the mind.⁶

Guilty conscience. This is a conscience that responds negatively when a person violates a perceived moral standard, pronouncing a judgment that accuses or excuses a particular belief or behavior.⁷

Clear conscience. This is a conscience that responds positively, being informed by the Scriptures and consequently affirming the mind and heart.⁸

There was one delimitation to this project. This project was limited to six weeks and included a self-evaluation pre-survey, the curriculum, a curriculum evaluation survey, and a self-evaluation post-survey. The purpose of this delimitation was to impart the curriculum in a concise period and receive the survey evaluations while the curriculum was fresh in the minds of the participants.

Conclusion

God's Word affirms that he provides all people with a conscience. The conscience is a gift of his grace that warns men and women that they have violated his standard of morality, accusing or excusing them of guilt. The conscience can be in error

⁶ Roy B. Zuck, "The Doctrine of the Conscience," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 126, no. 504 (Oct–Dec 1969): 331.

⁷ O. Hallesby, *Conscience* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1950), 19, 28–29.

⁸ Roger Douglass Congdon, "The Doctrine of Conscience," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 103, no. 412 (Oct–Dec 1946): 75.

due to a wrong belief inconsistent with the Scriptures. Faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ and trust in his Word are the only ways men and women can attain, maintain, and experience a clear conscience that will evidence itself within the Christian life. Within this research project, chapter 1 has explained the ministerial setting for its application. The second chapter defines the conscience while differentiating between the Christian and non-Christian conscience. It demonstrates the biblical and theological basis for attaining a clear conscience. Chapter 3 focuses on practical considerations for biblical teaching about the conscience. Chapter 4 examines the implementation of the project and its results. Chapter 5 concludes with an evaluation of the effectiveness of the project.

CHAPTER 2
BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS
FOR TEACHING MEMBERS THE POWER OF A
CLEAR CONSCIENCE

Introduction

What does the Bible teach about the conscience? This chapter will examine the biblical basis for the existence of the conscience (Rom 2:12–15), consider the means of attaining a clear conscience through faith in Christ (Heb 9:9–14), demonstrate how to maintain a clear conscience through obedience to God’s Word (1 Tim 3:9), and examine an illustration of a good conscience from the life of David (2 Sam 24:5–15). Four passages of Scripture will guide this study, three from the New Testament and one from the Old Testament.

**A Biblical Case for the Conscience
(Rom 2:12–15)**

In Romans 2:12–15, the apostle Paul explains that every unbeliever possesses a conscience. He demonstrates this every time he experiences the accusation of the conscience when sin is committed against God’s law or the defense of the conscience when a semblance of obedience to God’s law is acted out. Paul further explains the function of the conscience concerning the law of God and its insufficiency to save the unbeliever from God’s condemnation apart from faith in Jesus Christ.

**The Context for the Universality of
the Conscience (Rom 2:1–13)**

Romans 2 lays the foundation with the apostolic indictment upon the Jews for their rebellion and disbelief toward God and the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul repeatedly uses God’s revelation to appeal to the Jewish conscience calling them to recognize their sin,

acknowledge God’s coming judgment, and avoid his wrath by placing their faith in the gospel of Christ. He addresses their spiritual and practical hypocrisy as they condemn the Gentiles for sins which they themselves practice (Rom 2:1–3).

As Paul brings his argument to a head, he compares the conscience of non-Christian Jews with non-Christian Gentiles. Specifically, he compares the spiritual guilt of Gentiles as those “who have sinned without the Law” with that of the Jews “who have sinned under the Law” (Rom 2:12).¹ Noting the spiritual plight of the Gentiles “who perish without the Law,” he contrasts the Jews who “will be judged by the Law” (Rom 2:12). Paul then correlates the moral exposure Gentiles have as those who “show the work of the Law written in their hearts” (Rom 2:15) with the audible exposure Jews have as “hearers of the Law” (Rom 2:13). Furthermore, he contrasts the Gentiles and their possession of general revelation (Rom 2:15) from the Jews and their possession of special revelation (Rom 2:12).

The Conscience within Jewish Unbelievers (Rom 2:12–13)

The first group Paul formally addresses are non-Christian Jews. He identifies them as those “who have sinned under the Law” and those who “will be judged by the Law” (Rom 2:12). It is imperative to understand what Paul means by “the Law.” Does “the Law” pertain to the entirety of the Old Testament, the ceremonial laws, dietary laws, or something else? It has been said that the term νόμος could refer to a “‘principle,’ ‘norm,’ or ‘force.’”² Since Paul uses the term concerning Jews and Gentiles, and it is the “works of the Law” that are “written in” the “hearts” of Gentiles (Rom 2:15), it seems best to understand “the Law” to be referring to the moral law of the Ten

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Bible quotations come from the NASB.

² Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 145n7.

Commandments.³ Likewise, there is nothing in Scripture that alludes to the expectation that Gentiles who are “without the Law” (Rom 2:12, 14) would know the various and diverse laws within the Pentateuch. Moo agrees, stating, “The ‘law’ in question is the law of Moses, the body of commandments given by God through Moses to the people of Israel at Mt. Sinai.”⁴ Therefore, it is the Ten Commandments that Paul references when he says all Jews “will be judged by the Law” (Rom 2:12).

Paul repeatedly warns the Jews that though they are hearers of the Law, they are not “doers of the Law” (Rom 2:1–3, 6, 8, 9, 12–13) and are, therefore, guilty of breaking it. He argues that it is “the doers of the Law [who] will be justified” (Rom 2:13). Certainly, he was not advocating a works-based salvation. He had already stated in Romans 1:16–17, “The gospel . . . is the power of God for everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘But the righteous man shall live by faith.’” Rather, he is declaring that Sabbath listeners of the law who are habitually disobedient to the law demonstrate themselves to be guilty before the righteous judgment of God. This indictment is intensified as Paul highlights that the Gentile conscience demonstrates that it is at work even though they are without the law in their possession. How much keener ought the Jewish consciences to have been in response to the light from the law they possess!

Since Paul explains that “Gentiles who do not have the Law . . . show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them” (Rom 2:14–15), it is reasonable to understand the same is true of the Jewish “conscience” and “thoughts.” Being possessors of God’s special revelation and hearers of God’s Law, the Jews are aware of God’s

³ Jesus viewed the Ten Commandments as a summation of the entire Torah in Matthew 22:40 (cf. Matt 7:12; 12:5; Luke 10:26–28; John 10:34; 15:25).

⁴ Moo, *Romans*, 145–46.

directives and warnings and are rightly held accountable. Their “conscience” bears witness and their “thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them” (Rom 2:15).

Due to their internal and external exposure to the Law, Paul writes that the Jews “have no excuse” for disobeying God’s commands (Rom 2:1). Their judgmental attitude towards others who violate the law demonstrates that they are convinced in their conscience that the law is morally good and ought to be obeyed, even though they disobey it themselves (Rom 2:1). Paul also appealed to the common knowledge that “the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things” (Rom 2:2). Yet, the Jews display a conscience that justifies their guilt, causing them to think they “will escape the judgment of God” (Rom 2:3). Paul continues by reminding the Jews that God “will render to each person according to his deeds” (Rom 2:6) and that God repays “those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness,” with “wrath and indignation” (Rom 2:8). Since their consciences are not warning them of their wrongdoing, Paul cautions them that “tribulation and distress” awaits “every soul of man who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek” (Rom 2:9), in hopes that his readers will repent from their sins and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul exposes the erroneous disposition of the Jews and appeals to their conscience by reminding them that “all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law” (Rom 2:12). Paul warns the Jews that God’s law will be used to evaluate and condemn them for their sinful behavior. His incessant appeal to their conscience serves to alert the Jews that possession of the law was not enough to justify them before God. Paul faithfully evangelizes the Jews by confronting their consciences with God’s law in hopes that, upon seeing their guilt, they will experience God’s “kindness and tolerance and patience” which leads to repentance (Rom 2:4).

The Conscience within Gentile Unbelievers (Rom 2:14–15)

In Romans 2, Gentile unbelievers are described as those who have sinned “without the Law” (Rom 2:12). Paul identifies them as not possessing the Law, not having heard the Law, and habitually practicing “evil.” According to verse 12, they “will also perish without the Law.” Paul further states that the “Law,” as it was given to Moses on Mount Sinai, will not be that which is used to condemn those “without the Law.” Rather, God will judge them based upon “the work of the Law written in their hearts” (Rom 2:15) and their response to what has been revealed to them. This is the standard by which they will be judged. Morris agrees, explaining, “In this verse we see clearly that all will be judged according to their response to the revelation God has given them. The Gentiles have not been given the law. Therefore, they will not be judged by the law. They will be judged by the light they have, and, because they have not acted in accordance with that light (as Paul has shown in Ch. 1), this means that they will be condemned.”⁵

What is “the light” that is made known through general revelation to all unbelieving Gentiles without the Law? Romans 1 declares that all unbelievers know God exists, “for God made it evident to them” (Rom 1:19). This universal knowledge consists of “His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature . . . so that they are without excuse” (Rom 1:20). God has chosen to reveal his eternal omnipotence and divinity through creation. This self-disclosure is known to all, though it is limited and distorted by sin, as Paul notes, “they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened” (Rom 1:20–21). Through natural revelation, the unregenerate mind and conscience are aware of God’s worthiness to receive honor, thanks, and worship which they refuse to give (Rom 1:21, 25). They also know God’s universal, moral standard of behavior reflected in the Ten Commandments. Paul further notes that all

⁵ Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1988), 122, Logos Bible Software 8.

unbelievers know sinful behavior is contrary to “the ordinance of God,” and “that those who practice such things are worthy of death” (Rom 1:32). Morris points out that verse 32 returns to the universal knowledge expressed in verses 18–21 that “sinners do not act out of ignorance. Granted that no evildoer ever understands all the implications of the wrong he is doing, it still remains that he knows enough to know that he is doing wrong . . . namely that God has revealed enough of himself for people to know what is right and what is wrong.”⁶

Do unbelievers have enough “light” to know what behaviors are morally righteous? The γὰρ of Romans 2:14 provides the reason for God’s righteous judgment of unbelieving Gentiles.⁷ Gentiles do not “have the Law,” in that as a rule, they do not have direct access to God’s special revelation in the Scriptures. Paul explains that “whenever” they “do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves” (Rom 2:14). The temporal adverbial conjunction ὅταν, more literally translated, “whenever” or “as often as,” describes the periodic actions of Gentiles when they seem intuitively to conform to God’s Law. Though Gentiles are not “the hearers of the Law” (Rom 2:13) and “do not have the Law” (Rom 2:14), every time Gentiles exhibit a semblance of obedience to the Law, it is done φύσει, (instinctively or by nature).

Therefore, as often as Gentiles naturally comply to and perform the moral code of God’s Law, they act out “the things of the Law” (Rom 2:14); they demonstrate conformity to God’s moral standard in their works. Their actions conforming to “the Law” could be understood as general obedience to the general revelation of God. Dunn explains this understanding saying, “‘Doing the things of *the law*,’ even when the law itself is unknown, is possible only where ‘what is known/knowable of God’ (1:19, 21) is

⁶ Morris, *Romans*, 99.

⁷ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 119, Logos Bible Software 8.

the basis of conduct, rather than the rebellion that characterizes humankind as a whole (1:18–32), and only because in Paul’s mind there is an immediate connection between knowing God and doing what God wants (1:21a).”⁸

Paul now explains how this demonstrates that Gentiles “are a law unto themselves” (Rom 2:14). This is the focal point of the verse which emphasizes the universal, intuitive moral discernment of all non-Christians. The last phrase of verse 14 communicates that every time non-Christians demonstrate innate conformity to God’s moral standard, they show themselves able to recognize good from evil and are culpable for their sin before God. Morris explains, “The Gentile does not have the law revealed in the Old Testament, but his conduct shows that he knows right from wrong. God is at work in him. He knows enough of ‘law’ to be guilty when he sins, even though he may not know the God who prescribes right conduct.”⁹ In other words, God is at work in the unbeliever through the conscience he has given him that responds positively to the moral commands of God’s law or when he experiences the guilt of violating that standard.

The relative pronoun that begins verse 15, *οἵτινες* (in that), introduces a causal phrase. Paul informs his readers that the Gentiles “are a law to themselves” (Rom 2:14) because “they show the work of the Law written in the hearts” (Rom 2:15). Their periodic compliance to “the Law” demonstrates that they possess the instinctive, natural truth about God’s moral commands. Thomas Schreiner agrees, summarizing,

The “work of the law” is not love (Michel 1966: 82), neither is it “the effect of the law” (Barrett 1991: 50). It is best defined by the previous verse, which speaks of “the things of the law” (*τὰ τοῦ νόμου*) (Wilckens 1978: 134; Moo 1991: 148; Deidun 1981: 165–67). The “work of the law,” then, refers to the commands contained in the Mosaic law. Because Gentiles occasionally practice the commands of the law, they thereby reveal that the commands of the law are known by them to be obligatory. When Paul speaks of the “work of the law written in the heart,”

⁸ James D. G. Dunn. *Romans 1–8*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 38A (Dallas: Word, 1988), 98–99, Logos Bible Software 8.

⁹ Morris, *Romans*, 125.

therefore, he is merely pointing out that the Gentiles know the commands contained in the Mosaic law (Moo 1991: 148).¹⁰

The “work of the Law” (Rom 2:15) refers to the “things of the Law” in the previous verse. These would be those moral acts defined by the divine will of God and reflected in the Ten Commandments. Lenski argues, “Here we have what is left of the general image of God in the heart of man after the fall. It is the moral sense which is sadly distorted in many ways, is never otherwise than imperfect, is completely submerged in some . . . But what remains is highly significant.”¹¹ This “work of the Law” is manifested when Gentiles, at times, display what the law requires, although it is not performed out of faith or purposeful obedience.¹² Calvin explains that Paul is not referring to a comprehensive knowledge of God’s moral law, writing,

Here are only some seeds of what is right implanted in their nature, evidenced by such acts as these—All the Gentiles alike instituted religious rites, they made laws to punish adultery, and theft, and murder, they commended good faith in bargains and contracts. They have thus indeed proved, that God ought to be worshipped, that adultery, and theft, and murder are evils, that honesty is commendable.¹³

The apostle continues by noting the location in which Gentiles have “the work of the Law.” He says it is “written in their hearts” (Rom 2:15). The *καρδίαις* (hearts) of the Gentiles refers to the inner person that includes volition, mind, and affections.¹⁴ Dunn explains that the plural use of the noun contains “overtones of wholehearted, sincere, complete commitment stemming from the integrating center of man as a rational, emotional, volitional being.”¹⁵ Paul’s point argues that Gentiles have sufficient

¹⁰ Schreiner, *Romans*, 122.

¹¹ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans*, Commentary on the New Testament (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001), 165.

¹² Morris, *Romans*, 126.

¹³ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, trans. John Owen, Calvin’s Commentaries, vol. 19 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 98.

¹⁴ James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1997), s.v. *καρδία*.

¹⁵ Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 100.

knowledge of God’s law in order to practice it in part, to be held accountable to it, and to be condemned for their disobedience.

How does the conscience operate in those with “the work of the Law written in their hearts” (Rom 2:15)? Paul notes the *συνειδήσεως* (conscience) without defining the term, as if assuming his readers understood the concept. It is found 31 times in 30 verses throughout the New Testament. Paul is the first and primary author to use the term in the Scriptures, though it is found in the statements of Paul as recorded by Luke in Acts (Acts 23:1; 24:16), Peter’s first epistle (1 Pet 2:19; 3:12, 16) and by the writer of Hebrews (Heb 9:9, 14; 10:2; 13:8). As a verb, it is used one time in 1 Corinthians 4:4 when Paul refers to being *σύννοια* (conscious) of no unfaithfulness in his ministry to the Lord. The other twenty-one occurrences appear in noun form and are most often translated as “conscience.”¹⁶ Though the word “conscience” can have a variety of meanings,¹⁷ in Romans 2:15, Paul uses the word to explain “a reflective mechanism by which people can measure their conformity to a norm.”¹⁸ One lexicon explains the word as “the psychological faculty that distinguishes between right and wrong, i.e. moral sensitivity.”¹⁹ Since “the work of the Law” is the righteous standard for the norm of human behavior, it is the Gentile’s “conscience” that responds to that norm as its standard. Paul states that the “conscience” performs the action of *συμμαρτυρούσης* (bearing witness), which means to “testify in support, confirm, witness along with.”²⁰ The conscience, when faced with a moral option, positively or negatively “testifies” to the

¹⁶ Robert L. Thomas, *New American Standard Updated Edition Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Anaheim, CA: Foundation, 1988), s.v. “conscience,” Logos Bible Software 8.

¹⁷ Morris suggests “consciousness, as in consciousness of sin . . . or . . . moral consciousness or conscience . . . sometimes . . . conscientiousness,” Morris, *Romans*, 126.

¹⁸ Moo, *Romans*, 152.

¹⁹ Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages*, s.v. *συνείδησις*.

²⁰ Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages*, s.v. *συμμαρτυρέω*.

unbelieving mind that the opportunity is good or evil, helping the mind decide whether it should pursue or abandon it, embrace or reject it.

In verse 15, Paul mentions the effect the conscience has on the thoughts of unbelieving Gentiles. As one's conscience considers a moral dilemma, his or her thoughts have one of two responses: "alternately accusing them or else defending them" (Rom 2:15). In the first response, as men and women contemplate or exercise a moral option, their conscience evaluates it, and their thoughts accuse them when making a selection contrary to the work of the Law. The word *κατηγορούντων* (accusing) is a judicial term that means "to bring serious charges or accusations against someone."²¹ An accusing conscience produces guilt when "the work of the Law" is violated.

In the second response, as men's and women's consciences evaluate a moral option, their thoughts defend them when making a selection in accordance with the Law. The word *ἀπολογουμένων* (defending) means "to make a defense" or "to excuse" oneself.²² Therefore, their conscience, when it rightly responds to "the work of the Law," will defend the option they select as good and righteous. Moo summarizes these two responses saying, "Often they accuse him, sometimes they excuse him, but all the time they form a witness to right and wrong."²³ Though all unbelievers "show the work of the Law written in their hearts" with "their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them," it is important to note this does not guarantee their salvation (Rom 2:15). As those "who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law," all Gentiles need to come to faith in Jesus Christ in order to receive forgiveness and escape God's condemnation.

²¹ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, vol.1, 2nd ed., ed. Rondal B. Smith and Karen A. Munson (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), 436, Logos Bible Software 8.

²² James Strong, *Enhanced Strong's Lexicon* (Woodside Bible Fellowship, 1995), s.v. *ἀπολογέομαι*, Logos Bible Software 8.

²³ Morris, *Romans*, 128.

Attaining a Clear Conscience (Heb 9:9–14)

The Scriptures, having established the universality of the conscience, note that man's conscience bears witness against his sin. The questions then arise: What can cleanse the conscience, and who can attain a clear conscience? Since the beginning with the fall of man, sin necessitated sacrifice (Gen 1:23). God killed an animal to cover Adam and Eve. In the next generation, Cain and Abel brought their sacrifice in offering worship to God (Gen 4:3–4). Later, Noah exited the ark, built an altar to the Lord, and offered burnt offerings to him (Gen 8:20). Job is recorded as continuously consecrating his children through the burnt offerings which he performed for their sins (Job 1:5). Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are all recorded as erecting altars to the Lord (Gen 12:8; 26:25; 35:7). Through Moses, God provided his Law which included instruction for the sacrificial system of worship (Exod 29ff; Leviticus). Though the sacrificial system was God's prescribed order of worship during the era of the first covenant (Heb 8:7), the book of Hebrews repeatedly argues its inability to "make perfect" those who follow it (Heb 7:11, 19; 8:7; 9:9; 10:1). Hebrews 9:9–14 presents at least five reasons why the sacrificial system could not make the worshiper perfect in conscience and why Christ's redemptive work is superior.

The Limitations of the Old Covenant (Heb 9:1–10)

Hebrews 9:1–10 contrasts "the first covenant" and its "regulations of divine worship and the earthly sanctuary" (Heb 9:1) with Christ's work of redemption and its effect on the believer's conscience. Although "gifts and sacrifices . . . offered" in the sacrificial system of the Old Testament provided a measure of atonement, cleansing, and forgiveness (Exod 29:36; Lev 4:20; 6:7), it was unable to make the worshiper "perfect in conscience" (Heb 9:9). The first reason, stated in Hebrews 9:10 and echoed again in verse 13, noted that it pertained to external cleansing of the worshiper. The writer of Hebrews explains the limited nature of the sacrificial system in application and time. Both

passages limit the nature of those sacrifices to δικαιώματα σαρκός (regulations of the body) and σαρκός καθαρότητα (the cleansing of the flesh). The term σαρκός refers to that which is “of the flesh,” or external, that which pertains to the physical body.²⁴ Το καθαριεῖ (cleanse) conveys the meaning “to cleanse from ritual contamination or impurity.”²⁵ It expresses the idea to “ceremonially cleanse by washing.”²⁶ Rightly practiced, obedience to the sacrificial system of Judaism demonstrated the believer’s faith in God and was able to absolve sin externally, legally, and temporally. Adversely, it was unable to affect the believer internally, consciously, and eternally, making “the worshiper perfect in conscience” (9:9).

What does the writer of Hebrews mean by the word τελειόω (perfect)? *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* notes that, “The use of τελειόω in Hb. for the most part follows a special use of the verb in the LXX” which means “to bring to completeness, wholeness.”²⁷ Negatively, within the book of Hebrews, the verb τελειῶσαι (to make perfect) regularly refers to the inability of the sacrificial system to “permanently ‘qualify’”²⁸ a believer before God (Heb 7:11, 19, 28; 9:9, 11; 10:1, 14). Jeremiah prophesied that a more decisive purgation and expiation of sin would be provided in the “new covenant” as the Lord declared, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more” (Jer 31:31–34). During the first covenant, the sacrificial system was unable to decisively “qualify” the worshiper in conscience, thereby prohibiting him to approach God directly, personally, and regularly. An earthly mediator, animal sacrifice

²⁴ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 93.

²⁵ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 534.

²⁶ Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages*, s.v. καθαρίζω.

²⁷ Gerhard Delling, “Τελειόω,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 3, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–1976), 82, Logos Bible Software 8.

²⁸ Delling, “Τελειόω,” 83.

and specific location were continuously required. Though the Old Testament worshiper had his sins forgiven and atoned for—allowing him a measure of peace in his conscience—the limited nature of the sacrificial system left him conscious of his sins (Heb 10:2). The sacrifices were unable to purge sins decisively as they were only “temporarily expedient.”²⁹ Sin was not dealt with intrinsically, decisively, and eternally through the sacrificial system.

Positively, the writer of Hebrews explains the high-priestly work of Jesus declaring, “For by one offering He has τετελείωκεν (perfected) for all time those who are sanctified” (Heb 10:14). Christ’s redemptive work provides access to God that exceeds what the Old Testament sacrifices could accomplish. Again, the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* defines the term explaining, “Christ has once and for all ‘qualified’ those for whom He acts ‘to come directly before God’ (10:14; cf. 7:19) in the heavenly sanctuary as men whose sin is expiated. This goes far beyond what took place in the OT cultus, which allowed a direct approach to God in the inner temple only for the priest and not the whole people.”³⁰ Lane agrees, referring to the redemption of Christ, “His sacrifice achieved what the old cultus could not accomplish, namely, the decisive purgation of conscience and the effective removal of every impediment to the worship of God.”³¹ He elaborates on this explanation as he argues, “In 9:13–14 the writer concedes that the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a red heifer provided purgation from external defilement. He argues ‘how much more’ will the blood of Christ make clean the people of God and qualify them for the worship of God.”³² The effect of Christ’s redemption

²⁹ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, rev. ed., New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1990), 209n63.

³⁰ Delling, “Τελείωω,” 83.

³¹ William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 47B (Dallas: Word, 1991), 240, Logos Bible Software 8.

³² William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 47A (Dallas: Word, 1991), cxxi, Logos Bible Software 8.

upon the believer produces a clear conscience which liberates from *καθαρειῖ* (dead works) (Heb 9:14)³³ and the guilt that arises from a “consciousness of sin” (Heb 10:2).

Ellingworth denotes, “The reason why they would not have had any consciousness of sin is clearly that the impurity which causes guilt would itself have been removed.”³⁴ Jesus cleanses “once for all” (Heb 7:27; 9:12; 10:10) making the worshiper “perfect in conscience” decisively (Heb 9:9, 14).³⁵ Christ’s redemptive work provides the decisive purgation of sin that places the Christian in the spiritual position where the apostle Paul can declare, “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1; cf. 1 Cor 1:30; Eph 1:3; Col 2:10; 2 Pet 1:3–4). Yet, as the Christian continues to struggle against sin and periodically commits it, he must continue to confess his guilt to God, repent of those sins and pursue righteous obedience in order to enjoy his experiential access and fellowship with God (John 13:5–20; Rom 7:20–23; 2 Cor 7:1; Eph 4:22–24; 1 John 1:7–10).

³³ Friedrich Hauck and Rudolf Meyer, “Καθαρός, Καθαρίζω, Καθαίρω, Καθαρότης, Ἀκάθαρτος, Ἀκαθαρσία, Καθαρισμός, Ἐκκαθαίρω, Περικάθαγμα,” in Kittel, Friedrich, and Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 3:426.

³⁴ Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1993), 494, Logos Bible Software 8.

³⁵ Allan Ross offers his explanation writing, “Leviticus 22 was written to ensure that the Israelites brought acceptable offerings to the LORD. Because the LORD redeemed his people and sanctified them, they were duty bound to comply with his requirements for holy offerings. We could word the central point this way: Those who worship the redeeming, sanctifying LORD God must come into his presence with acceptable offerings.

This principle may be applied in a couple of ways today. If we look first at the typology, then we see that to be accepted by God one must come on the basis of the perfect sacrifice of Christ made for sinners once and for all. The New Testament uses the language of the sacrifices to describe Christ as perfect, without blemish; but the meaning transcends the cultic to portray the moral and spiritual significance of the suffering Messiah (Heb. 9:14; 1 Pet 1:19; 2:22). Jesus was the perfect sacrifice for our sins because he was sinless; and his death was intended to remove sin from us and to make us holy, to present us in heaven without blemish.” Allen P. Ross, *Holiness to the LORD: A Guide to the Exposition of the Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 394–95.

Christ's Sacrifice Perfects the Conscience (Heb 9:9)

The second reason why Christ's sacrifice is the only means of definitively cleansing the conscience making "perfect" the worshiper is also given in verse 9. Tabernacle worship and the sacrificial system described in verses 6–8 are identified as *παραβολή* (a symbol) (Heb 9:9). The term, in this context, refers to "a model or example which anticipates or precedes a later realization—'archetype, figure, foreshadow, symbol.'"³⁶ The writer of Hebrews explains that what the cultus system foreshadowed was accomplished through the atoning work of Christ. Elsewhere he asserts: "There is a setting aside of a former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness (for the Law made nothing perfect)" (Heb 7:18–19). And again, "For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near" (Heb 10:1; cf. 8:5; 9:23). The "symbol" was restrictive, temporal, and illustrative. Ellingworth concurs, explaining "symbol" is used in the "sense of a rhetorical figure of speech involving a comparison. . . . The underlying way of thinking is typological."³⁷ The cultic worship of Judaism typified all that Christ would provide (Heb 9:23; Col 2:16–17) yet it lacked the power to alleviate definitively the conscience of sin's guilt. Ellingworth continues, "the sacrifice of Christ is the reality of which the OT sacrifices are the shadow or anticipation."³⁸ Though tabernacle worship and the sacrificial system provided a real atonement and forgiveness, it was the archetype of the atonement and forgiveness Christ would decisively provide. Schreiner expounds, "Limited access to God via the sacrificial cultus functions as a 'symbol.' . . . As long as the earthly sanctuary remained valid, there

³⁶ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 592.

³⁷ Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 440.

³⁸ Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 440.

was no regular access to God in either the earthly or the heavenly sanctuary.”³⁹ Only Christ’s blood can ultimately, completely, and permanently “make the worshiper perfect in conscience” (Heb 9:9), providing unhindered access to God.

The Inability of the Sacrificial System to Perfect the Conscience (Heb 9:9–14)

Third, the sacrificial system was a constant reminder of sin and could not “make the worshiper perfect in conscience” because it was repetitive (Heb 9:9, 14; 10:3). The repetitive nature of the priestly activity included “continually entering the outer tabernacle” (Heb 9:6) where “gifts and sacrifices are offered” (Heb 9:9), which refers to the daily, weekly, and monthly service on behalf of the people. They were “performing the divine worship” (Heb 9:6), whereby the priests offered two one-year-old lambs daily on the altar, one in the morning and evening (Exod 29:38). These lambs were a “burnt offering” (Exod 29:42) “which means that they were sin offerings, intended to appeal for forgiveness on the part of the people to their God.”⁴⁰ While these offerings provided a measure of atonement and forgiveness for past sins (Exod 29:36; Lev 4:20; 6:7), they could not conclusively purge the believer’s sins—past, present, and future. The repetitive nature of the high priest’s service involved offering sacrifices “for himself and for the sins of the people” (Heb 9:7). This was a known and visible reminder that all Jewish people were “beset with weakness” being imperfect sinners (Heb 5:1–3; 7:27). Therefore, the priests and people were acutely aware of their recurring sin, “offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins” (Heb 10:11). These repeated sacrifices kept the presence and reality of sin at the forefront of the believer’s conscience, reminding him of the punishment he deserved.

³⁹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrews*, Biblical Theology for Christian Proclamation (Nashville: B & H, 2015), 263.

⁴⁰ Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, New American Commentary, vol. 2 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 629, Logos Bible Software 8.

Similarly, the Day of Atonement served as a reminder of sin and temporary forgiveness (Exod 30:10; Lev 16:14–16, 34). The high priest presented the blood offering “for himself and for the sins of the people committed in ignorance” (Heb 9:7). This was the annual hope of every believer as his conscience would be temporarily cleansed from the guilt of sin. Lane notes, “The formulation of Lev 16:16 is significant, because it describes sin as defilement and specifies that blood may act as the purging medium.”⁴¹ The ritual provided atonement for priest and people, “the ignorant and misguided,” affording forgiveness for all unknown sins committed throughout the year (Heb 5:2). The potential of committing unknown sins would have been a relentless reminder of the believer’s guilt and constant need for redemption. Concern for atonement would be carried within the conscience until it was temporarily alleviated and cleansed on this special day. Since the believer committed these sins unwittingly, he could not confess or repent from those transgressions. Lenski explains, “*Ἀγνοήματα* are sins of ignorance such as the people did not know about when they sinned and thus had not removed by sacrifices during the year as they did the sins which they knew about.”⁴² This would have hindered the believer’s conscience from being “perfect” as he waited each year for the Day of Atonement to receive forgiveness for unbeknownst sins. As Moffat notes, “There is no hint that people were not responsible for them, or that they were not serious; on the contrary, they had to be atoned for.”⁴³ The believer’s conscience, concerned with the possibility of sin, could not be made “perfect” until all sins were finally and fully removed.

⁴¹ Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, 222.

⁴² R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews and of the Epistle of James*, Commentary on the New Testament (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001), 281.

⁴³ James Moffatt, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark International, 1924), 117, Logos Bible Software 8.

The Sacrificial System as Restrictive in Nature (Heb 9:9, 14)

Fourth, the sacrificial system functioned as an incessant reminder of sin because it was restrictive in nature. The sacrificial system denied the worshiper direct access to God. As the worshiper brought his “gifts and sacrifices” to the temple (Heb 9:9), only the priest was allowed to present them to the Lord (Heb 5:5; 7:5, 27). Admittance before God was restricted because the Levitical priesthood could not bring “perfection” to the people (Heb 7:11, 19; 9:6, 9; 10:1–4, 11), reminding the Jewish conscience of the obstacle of sin (9:9, 14; 10:2). Lane notes that the desired goal for the priests and the people was to be “cleansed decisively from the defilement of sin. Defilement extends to the conscience as well as to the body and is inimical to the approach to the living God.”⁴⁴ The approach to God was limited through the priesthood.

The Sacrificial System as Transitive in Function (Heb 9:10)

The fifth and final reason why the sacrificial system could not make the worshiper perfect in conscience is that the sacrificial system functioned as an incessant reminder of sin since it was a transitive means of dealing with the transgressions of men and women. Hebrews 9:10 states the sacrificial system was to be implemented “until a time of reformation.” This *διόρθωσις* (time of reformation) refers to “the process of establishing a new order.”⁴⁵ It was during this transient time that the sacrificial system anticipated and proclaimed the future hope of Israel. Lane notes that the “Hebrews’ phrase could serve as a convenient summary of Je. 31:31–34” reiterated in Hebrews 8:8–12.⁴⁶ The Jewish saints were continuously awaiting the work of Christ for permanent deliverance (Isa 52:13–53:12). Bruce explains that “the time of reformation” refers to

⁴⁴ Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, 224.

⁴⁵ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English*, 612.

⁴⁶ Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, 444.

“the coming of Christ [which] involved a complete reshaping of the structure of Israel’s religion. The old covenant was now to give way to the new, the shadow to the substance, the outward and earthly copy to the inward and heavenly reality.”⁴⁷ Until this “time of reformation” was formalized and realized in the death and resurrection of Christ, the sacrificial system incessantly reminded Israel of her sin while providing hope that the redemptive plan of God would be fulfilled in Messiah (Gen 3:15; Exod 12; Num 21:9; Deut 18:18; Isa 9:6–7; Dan 9:25–26; Zech 12:10).

The Only Hope for Becoming Perfect in Conscience

How can a person attain a clear conscience through Jesus Christ? The book of Hebrews provides the answer. First, beginning with God (Heb 1:1), each person must recognize him for who he is. The worshiper must acknowledge God for his work in creation (1:10; 11:3), promise of judgment and condemnation for sin (9:27; 10:27, 30; 13:4), and provision of salvation from sin (2:3, 10; 5:9; 9:28). God, being a Triune being, reveals himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Since he reveals himself as a Trinity, he must be acknowledged and trusted in his self-existence. God the Father has planned his work of redemption and cleansing (1:1–2, 5; 2:4, 13). Jesus, the Son of God, has accomplished propitiation and eternal atonement for sin (1:2–3; 2:17; 4:14; 6:6; 10:29). God the Holy Spirit has provided illumination and applies salvation to all who would believe in the gospel message (3:7–8; 9:8; 10:15–18). Since attaining a clear conscience pertains to having one’s sins decisively purged, trust in the Triune God must be exercised since he is the only one who is able to “make the worshiper perfect in conscience” (9:9).

Second, the worshiper must be willing to recognize he has violated God’s Law. The writer of Hebrews repeatedly uses Israel’s disobedience and disbelief as an example and warning for his readers. He points out that “every transgression and disobedience

⁴⁷ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 211.

received a just penalty” (Heb 2:2), evidencing Israel’s sin and need for salvation. Three times he quotes Psalm 95:7–8, using Israel’s negative example while cautioning his readers not to “harden” their hearts in disbelief and sin (3:8, 15; 4:7). The threat of God’s condemnation and judgment towards disobedience and disbelief is stressed throughout the book. The author warns that those who persist in sin will incur God’s “wrath” and forfeit his “rest” (4:3, 5–6, 11; 10:26–31). Unless a person is willing and able to see that they have sinned against God and his Law, they will not seek to be reconciled to him through the means he provides in his Son. The writer aims to lead his readers to the only hope of forgiveness and cleansing (9:9–14; 10:19–22).

Third, for a person to attain a clear conscience, the worshiper must be willing to rely fully upon Jesus’s person and work. This begins with acknowledging Jesus as Creator (Heb 1:2), as God (1:3), and as the Son of God (1:5). Jesus must be trusted as the only one able to make “purification of sins” (1:3), providing acceptable aid for sinners (2:18). He alone provides eternal access to God the Father (4:14; 6:19–20; 9:15) and eternal salvation for every true believer (5:9; 7:24–25). All who would worship God must fully rely upon Jesus as the perfect substitute for sinners (2:9–10, 14, 18), having died a vicarious death in order to remove all sins from one’s spiritual account (9:11–12, 14, 26, 28; 10:10, 12, 19–20). The worshiper must be fully convinced that Jesus rose from the dead (9:28; 12:2; 13:20), ascended into heaven (4:14; 6:20; 9:11–12, 24) and is quickly returning for his own (9:28; 10:37). Steadfast hope in Christ’s perfect obedience (3:2; 4:15; 7:26–28) and salvation (2:3, 9–10, 18; 4:9, 11; 10:14) is the only means of acquiring a clear conscience.

Fourth, salvation that leads to a clear conscience must be understood to be a gracious, unmeritorious gift of God freely given to his worshipers, bestowed upon those who exercise faith in Christ (1:14; 2:11, 14–16, 18; 4:10, 16; 10:14, 20; 12:28). Those to whom God bestows his salvation must exercise faith in Christ (2:1; 3:1, 6; 4:14; 10:38; 11:6) and demonstrate this through repentance from sin (3:7–8, 12, 15; 4:1, 7, 11; 6:1–2)

and obedience to his Word (6:1, 12; 12:14, 28; 13:15). Knowing, with full conviction, that Christ has indeed purged sin from the worshiper's account will result in a persevering faith in Christ (4:14; 10:22, 38; 11:6; 12:2), a steadfast hope (3:6; 6:11, 18–19), and a clear conscience.

Maintaining a Clear Conscience (1 Timothy 3:9)

Having laid the foundation that all men have a conscience and that the only means of attaining a clean conscience is through faith in the death and resurrection of Christ, the Scriptures will now provide insight into how to maintain a clear conscience. First Timothy 3:8–13 lays out the qualifications for the diaconate and the influence of their example. Paul's instruction stresses the connection between belief and obedience to the gospel as the means for maintaining a clear conscience.

The Diaconate's Example of a Clear Conscience (1 Tim 3:9)

How are deacons to maintain a clear conscience and why should the church consider them as a model? Paul instructs the diaconate to maintain and exemplify the qualifications of the office, influencing others with their character, faith, and integrity as exemplary servants. He teaches that those who serve in the office of deacon are to be “holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience” (1 Tim 3:9). The ideas within these phrases are to function together to produce the proper result. Considering the latter phrase first, what does it mean to function *ἐν καθαρᾷ συνειδήσει* (with a clear conscience)? The preposition *ἐν* indicates the sphere in which the action, “holding to the mystery of the faith,” is to take place. The adjective *καθαρᾷ* (clear) refers to that which is clean, innocent, or pure.⁴⁸ The only other occurrence of this phrase is found in 2 Timothy 1:3 as Paul declares his work of service as having been done *ἐν καθαρᾷ συνειδήσει* (with a

⁴⁸ Robert L. Thomas, *New American Standard Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek Dictionaries: Updated Edition* (Anaheim, CA: Foundation, 1988), s.v. *καθαρός*, Logos Bible Software 8.

clear conscience). There, Paul highlights the moral innocence found within his conduct of ministry and, therefore, in his conscience. His conscience was “clean,” or “clear,” from all guilt due to immoral behavior. Knight explains that “Paul is saying that he is seeking to live according to God’s demands.”⁴⁹ Considering 1 Timothy 3:9, the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* states that this phrase identifies that which is “personal and moral by nature. It consists in full and unreserved self-offering to God which renews the heart and rules out any acceptance of what is against God.”⁵⁰ Deacons are to demonstrate a life of dedication to God’s Word which is free from moral violation and the alarming guilt of sin within the conscience.

Paul is instructing that personal dedication to God’s Word must begin within the conscience and be exemplified through behavior as he identifies this qualification for the diaconate. The *συνειδήσει* for the Christian is the self-consciousness that is morally informed and empowered by the Word of God, the salvation of Christ, and the illumination of the Holy Spirit.⁵¹ Deacons are to exemplify their allegiance to Christ through obedience to God’s Word as model saints for others to identify and imitate. Therefore, a “clear conscience” is the internal witness of a person who is ethically obedient and thereby undisturbed and confident in the faith. One commentator explains, it is “a conscience that is free from [moral] stain and self-reproach.”⁵² Deacons are to adhere to moral, Christian doctrine within their consciences, exemplifying this adherence externally through their manner of life.

What must Christians believe in and how are they to exercise their faith?

⁴⁹ George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1992), 367.

⁵⁰ Hauck and Meyer, “Καθαρός,” 425.

⁵¹ Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 169.

⁵² J. N. D. Kelly, *The Pastoral Epistles: 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus*, Black’s New Testament Commentary (London: A & C Black, 1986), 82, Logos Bible Software 8.

Considering the former phrase of 1 Timothy 3:9, Paul instructs that the church’s deacons are to be “holding to the mystery of the faith.” These servant-leaders of the church are to be ἔχοντας (holding), which refers to adhering to a particular view or giving regard to a certain opinion.⁵³ The present-tense participle indicates that the behavior is to be continuous and not merely a one-time event.

What are deacons to be “holding” as the content of their belief system? Paul identifies it to be “the mystery of the faith.” The phrase, τὸ μυστήριον (the mystery), is a word used to refer to various aspects of the gospel within the New Testament. Mounce provides a summary of Paul’s usage:

Sometimes μυστήριον refers to one particular aspect of God’s redemptive plan such as the hardening of the Jews (Rom 11:25), the inclusion of the Gentiles into the church along with the Jews (Eph 3:3, 4, 9; Col 1:26–27), the change to be experienced by believers at the *parousia* (1 Cor 15:51), the union of all things in Christ (Eph 1:9), the nature of Christ (Col 2:2; 4:3), the relationship between Christ and his church (Eph 5:32), and the mystery of lawlessness that will be revealed at the *parousia* (2 Thess 2:7–8).⁵⁴

The “mystery” is that which was hidden in the counsel of God but is now revealed through his divine revelation in Christ. It refers to God’s revealed grace proclaimed in the message of the gospel that teaches that God saves sinners through faith in the Lord Jesus. Mounce further notes that “in all but one occurrence of the term, the μυστήριον is the gospel.”⁵⁵ The following phrase, τῆς πίστεως (of the faith) could be interpreted in several ways. Again, Mounce provides a succinct suggestion, noting: “πίστις, ‘faith,’ could describe the deacon’s personal faith or the Christian faith in a creedal sense. . . . πίστεως, ‘of faith,’ could be a subjective (mystery produced by faith) or appositional (mystery, which is faith) genitive.”⁵⁶ Since “the mystery” refers to the gospel and “the faith” is

⁵³ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 364.

⁵⁴ William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 46 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 200, Logos Bible Software 8.

⁵⁵ Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 200.

⁵⁶ Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 200.

frequently used as shorthand for the body of Christian doctrine (e.g., 1 Cor 16:13; 2 Cor 13:5; Gal 1:23; Phil 1:27; Col 1:23; 1 Tim 4:1, 6; 6:10, 21; 2 Tim 3:8; 4:7), it seems best to understand that Paul is instructing the deacons to cling to the objective Christian doctrine that defines “the faith.” As Knight explains, “Since ἔχοντας has already expressed the subjective side of faith, and the phrase is not redundant, the objectivizing of the concept of ‘faith’ must be in view here.”⁵⁷ He further suggests, “The phrase (τὸ μυστήριον τῆς πίστεως) may thus be paraphrased as ‘the revealed truth of the Christian faith’ with πίστις referring here to that which is believed.”⁵⁸ Deacons are, therefore, required to believe habitually in orthodox, Christian doctrine while obeying it within their lives. Mounce adds, “It is not sufficient to have a grasp on the theological profession of the church; that knowledge must be accompanied with the appropriate behavior, in this case a conscience that is clear from any stain of sin.”⁵⁹ The practical connection between “holding to the mystery of the faith” and maintaining a clear conscience (1 Tim 3:9) is what elevates the diaconate example before the church and the world. Like New Testament elders, deacons are to exemplify themselves as model saints of a clear conscience since they “obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 3:13).

Imitating the Example of the Diaconate

How should others follow the example of the diaconate in “holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience” (1 Tim 3:9)? First, they must exercise faith in historic, Christian doctrine, particularly the doctrines pertaining to the gospel and the person of Christ. This would include believing in the following: the Trinity (1 Tim 1:1,

⁵⁷ Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 169.

⁵⁸ Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 169.

⁵⁹ Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 200.

17; 3:16); the grace, mercy, and peace the Father provides through Christ Jesus (1:2); the law of God that identifies our sin (1:10–11); the love of God for sinners exemplified through Christ (1:14–15); the humanity and mediating ministry of Christ (2:5); his vicarious death and payment for sin (2:6); and faith in the resurrection and ascension of Jesus (3:16). Second, they must live a lifestyle repenting from sin and pursuing righteous obedience to God’s Word. This would include: not elevating non-doctrinal matters to the status of gospel truth (1:4); pursuing love toward God and people (1:5); trusting in the goodness of the law and using it lawfully (1:8–11); performing good works (2:10); fixing one’s hope on the living God (4:10); being a righteous example in all aspects of life (4:12); paying close attention to one’s life and doctrine (4:16); agreeing with sound apostolic teaching and godliness (6:3–6); and fleeing the love of money (6:11). Third, a clear conscience must be maintained by avoiding anything that would cause the conscience to be alarmed by moral guilt. All deeds must be performed in faith and full conviction that whatever work is engaged is permissible by God (Rom 14:22–23; 1 Tim 1:5, 19).

**An Old Testament Illustration
of a Good Conscience
(1 Sam 24:5–15)**

In First Corinthians 10:11, the apostle Paul teaches the principle that the life experiences of the Old Testament saints “happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages have come.” An incident in the life of David provides an example of a good conscience responding to a guilty conscience and offers helpful principles for the New Testament Christian. How did a biblically informed conscience rightly function within the lives of Old Testament saints? What was the proper response to sin and how did the believer’s conscience benefit? First Samuel 24:5–15 records an episode in the life of David that illustrates a conscience that repents from sin and practices righteousness.

Within the broader context of 1 Samuel, David's wartime success and public notoriety had grown. Saul became increasingly envious and suspicious of him (1 Sam 18:8) and finally decided to murder him. Eventually, Saul "summoned all the people for war . . . to besiege David and his men" (1 Sam 23:8), pursuing him "in the wilderness of Engedi" (1 Sam 24:1). Passing by a certain cave, Saul "went in to relieve himself" (1 Sam 24:3). In the providence of God, this was the same cave in which David and his men were hiding (1 Sam 24:3). David's men encouraged him to kill Saul, viewing this situation as a sovereignly bestowed opportunity from God.⁶⁰ David secretly cut off the edge of Saul's robe (1 Sam 24:4), yet did not physically harm him. As a result of his action, "David's conscience bothered him" (1 Sam 24:5).

That which is said to have "bothered him" is what the *New American Standard Bible* translates only once in the Old Testament as "conscience" (1 Sam 24:5). Some have noted that there is no direct Hebrew word for "conscience" as the Greek word *συνείδησις*.⁶¹ Rather, the idea is expressed by the Hebrew word *לֵב* which is most commonly translated as "heart." The *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* notes that it can refer to "the inner man, mind, will and heart."⁶² Other nuances of meaning used in the Old Testament include the inner man in contrast to the outer, the mind as pertaining to knowledge or thinking, the source of one's emotions and passions, or the source of courage.⁶³ Yet, many agree that *לֵב* in 1 Samuel 24:5 clearly

⁶⁰ Ralph W. Klein, *1 Samuel*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 10 (Dallas: Word, 1983), 239, Logos Bible Software 8.

⁶¹ John Y. Clagett, *The Christian Conscience* (Schaumburg, IL: Regular Baptist Press, 1984), 21; O. Hallesby, *Conscience*, trans. C. J. Carlsen (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1950), 7; C. A. Pierce, *Conscience in the New Testament: A study of Syneidesis in the New Testament, in the light of its sources, and with particular reference to St. Paul, with some observations regarding its pastoral relevance today*, Studies in Biblical Theology 15 (London: SCM Press, 1955), 13.

⁶² Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 524, Logos Bible Software 8.

⁶³ Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Enhanced Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 525.

refers to “David’s conscience.”⁶⁴ It was not merely his thoughts or emotions that “bothered” David, but his conscience, that internal aspect of his soul that bore witness to and evaluated his behavior as moral or immoral (Rom 2:15). Bergen concurs stating, “David immediately recognized the powerful implications of his act and was conscience-stricken (v. 5; Hb. V. 6).”⁶⁵

Other instances where לֵב expresses the meaning of conscience include וְלִמְכָשׁוֹל לֵב (a troubled heart) (1 Sam 25:31; cf. 2 Sam 24:10), as when Abigail sought to keep David from avenging himself and killing Nabal, resulting in sin-inflicted guilt. Klein explains the phrase as referring to the “conscience pangs . . . due to unnecessary shedding of blood.”⁶⁶ Also, as Job asserted his conviction that his behavior had been righteous, he declared, לֹא-יִחַרְרֵי לִבִּי (my heart does not reproach me) (Job 27:6). This expressed his utmost confidence that his heart (i.e., his conscience) did not produce guilt within him. Delitzsch explains, “The heart is used here as the seat of the conscience, which is the knowledge possessed by the heart, by which it excuses or accuses a man.”⁶⁷

In other verses, though the word לֵב is not explicitly used, the concept of the conscience is implied. David exemplified it as he wrote, “When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long” (Ps 32:3). The guilt of sin and the postponement of repentance alarmed David’s conscience which was expressed

⁶⁴ See Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Enhanced Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 525; Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, vol. 2, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 640, Logos Bible Software 8; C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament, 10 Volumes*, vol. 2, *The Books of Samuel*, trans. James Martin (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 524; William Lee Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament Based upon the Lexical Work of Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 172, Logos Bible Software 8; Douglas Mangum, ed., *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014), s.v. לֵב, Logos Bible Software 8.

⁶⁵ Robert D. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, New American Commentary, vol. 7 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 239, Logos Bible Software 8.

⁶⁶ Klein, *1 Samuel*, 251.

⁶⁷ C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament, 10 Volumes*, vol. 4, *The Book of Job*, trans. Francis Bolton (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 528.

through his “groaning.”⁶⁸ Similarly, in Psalm 51:14–15, David prayed, “Deliver me from bloodguiltiness . . . O Lord, open my lips.” The “bloodguiltiness” David referenced was the sin-guilt that burdened him to remain quiet before others, moving him to pray to his God. Kidner explains David’s prayer as “the cry of one whose conscience has shamed him into silence.”⁶⁹ David exemplified that the only remedy to alleviate the burden of a guilty conscience was repentance from sin and forgiveness from God.

First Samuel 24 records that David’s conscience troubled him after he “cut off the edge of Saul’s robe” (1 Sam 24:4). Verse 5 preserves David’s response as one who sought to be cleared from sin’s guilt and shame. Though David did not experience the blessing of being “perfect in conscience” (Heb 9:9), having the atoning work of Christ to “cleanse” his conscience permanently (Heb 9:14), he still bore witness to the conscience’s existence and function as he trusted in God for cleansing and forgiveness to remove the burden of guilt. Immediately following the cutting of Saul’s robe, 1 Samuel 24:5 records that “David’s conscience bothered him.” The term נָכַח, “to bother” literally means “to smite” or “to strike.”⁷⁰ Some scholars suggest it seems best to understand the phrase to mean, “David’s conscience pricked him . . . reproached him”⁷¹ as he reflected upon his sinful action. Why did David’s conscience bother him? The second half of 1 Samuel 24:5 reveals the reason: “because he had cut off the edge of Saul’s robe.” Delitzsch renders the verse, “his conscience reproached him, because he regarded this as

⁶⁸ Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 19 (Dallas: Word, 1983), 267, Logos Bible Software 8.

⁶⁹ Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1–72*, Kidner Classic Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 211.

⁷⁰ Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Enhanced Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 645.

⁷¹ See Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 238; Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 2:524; David Erdmann, *1 & 2 Samuel*, Lange’s Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, vol. 9, trans. and ed. C. H. Toy and John A. Broadus (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008), 296.

an injury done to the king himself.”⁷² David knew that he had sinned against God and his own conscience. He felt an accusatory “strike” in his conscience and responded righteously.

In what ways did David do this? First, David modeled a conscience convicted by sin. His conscience was sensitive to sinning against God’s Word. David acknowledged that he committed a symbolic act of insurrection against God and his “anointed” king (1 Sam 24:6; cf. Exod 22:28; Deut 17:14–15; 1 Sam 9:17; 10:17–24; 15:1, 17). David had acted in disobedience and disrespect against God’s sovereign plans, purposes, and timing (Rom 13:1–5; Titus 3:1–2). This sinful deed has been explained as “aggression . . . symbolic in nature. . . . This act was far from meaningless because David’s confiscation of a portion of the royal robe signified the transfer of power from the house of Saul to the house of David.”⁷³ David’s conscience was convicted that his action of symbolically transferring the kingdom to himself was not a part of God’s prescribed plan. This conviction is further explained in 1 Samuel 24:6 as David exclaimed, “Far be it from me . . . that I should do this thing to my lord.” The idiomatic expression, הַלְלִי לַיהוָה, “Far be it from me,” strongly expresses “an exclamation of abhorrence.”⁷⁴ David was repulsed by his action of defiance and disrespect.

Second, David demonstrated a contrite attitude. Despite Saul’s evil conspiracy to kill him, David humbly addressed Saul with the loyal phrase “my lord,” and with personal reverence as he referred to Saul as “the king.” This humble verbalization of honor coincides with his physical posture as “David bowed with his face to the ground and prostrated himself” (1 Sam 24:8). David’s self-demeaning behavior expressed his

⁷² Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 2:524.

⁷³ Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 239.

⁷⁴ Wilhelm Gesenius, *Gesenius’ Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures*, trans. Samuel Prideaux Tregelles (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2003), 280.

attitude of humility, regret, and repentance from sin.

Third, David confessed his sin towards God. Although David's sin involved Saul, it was not a direct sin against him, but rather against the Lord. David did acknowledge "that the LORD had" (1 Sam 24:10) providentially provided an opportunity for David to kill Saul, but he had refrained. Conceding that Saul was "the LORD's anointed" (1 Sam 24:10), David admitted that the kingdom had not yet been transferred to him by the Lord. David demonstrated his repentance from his presumption.

Although David was guilty of not waiting upon the Lord's timing, he was not guilty of any insurrection against Saul. Displaying the edge of Saul's robe, David proclaimed his innocence before him admitting, "I cut off the edge of your robe and did not kill you, know and perceive that there is no evil or rebellion in my hands, and I have not sinned against you" (1 Sam 24:11). Furthermore, quoting a proverb of his day, David renounced any form of wickedness while assuring Saul, "my hand shall not be against you" (1 Sam 24:13). He referred to himself as "a dead dog" and "a single flea" (1 Sam 24:14). A "a dead dog" is harmless and "implies self-abasement before a king."⁷⁵ "A flea" symbolizes the insignificance of a single insect.⁷⁶ Delitzsch comments on both phrases writing, "By these similes, David meant to describe himself as a perfectly harmless and insignificant man, of whom Saul had no occasion to be afraid, and whom the king of Israel ought to think it beneath his dignity to pursue."⁷⁷ David's contrite attitude before his king and God, combined with his confession of sin, demonstrated his desire to deal righteously with his sin and have his conscience relieved from guilt.

Fourth, David expressed a good conscience through his incessant concern for

⁷⁵ Klein, *I Samuel*, 240.

⁷⁶ Roger L. Omanson and John E. Ellington, *A Handbook on the First Book of Samuel*, vol. 1, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 2001), 509, Logos Bible Software 8.

⁷⁷ Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 2:524–25.

righteousness. He confirmed his righteousness by displaying the edge of Saul’s robe (1 Sam 24:11), proving his trust in God’s vengeance, rather than exacting his own. He entreated Saul to *יָדַע וַיִּרְאֶה* (know and perceive) that he was innocent of any wrongdoing toward him. These emphatic imperatives are used to constrain Saul to concede “that there is no evil or rebellion in [David’s] hands” (1 Sam 24:11). This is further articulated as he directly stated, “I have not sinned against you” (1 Sam 24:11). As one commentator summarizes, “The skirt of the upper garment in David’s hand is to be at the same time ocular proof that David is innocent of the wicked accusations brought against him by the calumniators.”⁷⁸ David’s righteous innocence is then contrasted with Saul’s sinful motivation in “lying in wait for [his] life to take it” (1 Sam 24:11). David’s righteousness was also evident as he pled with the Lord to render his verdict upon his behavior. David trusted in the Lord’s righteous assessment of his actions saying, “The LORD judge between me and you” (1 Sam 24:12). Klein agrees, writing, “Convinced of his own innocence and of the guilt of the king, David was willing to let Yahweh decide the merits of the case and let him exercise his rule in deciding between the pair.”⁷⁹ Resting in his faultlessness before Saul and the grace of God, David expressed his desire, “May the LORD avenge me on you; but my hand shall not be against you” (1 Sam 24:12). Omanson and Ellington offer the following paraphrase, “The LORD will be the one who makes you pay for the wrong you did; I will not be the one.”⁸⁰ By exemplifying his hope in God’s righteous judgment, David encouraged Saul to abandon his sinful pursuit of him.⁸¹

⁷⁸ David Erdmann, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 297.

⁷⁹ Klein, *1 Samuel*, 240.

⁸⁰ Omanson and Ellington, *A Handbook on the First Book of Samuel*, 508.

⁸¹ A New Testament example of a good and blameless conscience is found within the life and testimony of the apostle Paul in Acts 23:1 and Acts 24:14–16. He exemplifies the principles found with the life of David as shown above.

David provides illustrative instruction for a good conscience that seeks to exemplify and experience relief from sin before the Lord. David's sensitivity towards God and his Word enabled him to worship God from the heart, repenting from sin, and practicing righteousness. Though David struggled with sin and his conscience experienced the sting of guilt, he responded with conviction to confess and repent as befits a worshiper of God.

Conclusion

This section considered four passages of Scripture that provided essential instructions on the conscience. First, Romans 2:12–15 explained that the conscience exists in every man and woman. It argued that the conscience is evident within each individual as it responds to moral decisions. The normative function of the conscience consists of bringing accusations against the individual when a violation of God's moral law is committed. Alternatively, when a man or woman demonstrates compliance to the moral law of God the conscience defends their moral decision. The passage also identified God's law as the moral standard to which the conscience responds, whether Jew or Gentile.

Second, Hebrews 9:9–14 revealed how a clear conscience is attained exclusively through the redemption of Christ. This section began by looking at the animal sacrifices of the patriarchs that served as a precursor for the establishment of the Levitical sacrificial system. The author of Hebrews provided five reasons that explained why the sacrificial system was insufficient to the superiority of Christ's redemption. First, the book revealed that the first covenant (i.e., the Old Covenant) was unable to permanently purge sins from the believer's account, leaving him or her conscious of sin-guilt. Second, the Levitical system of animal sacrifices served as a symbol, a temporal illustration of the greater, more comprehensive redemption of Christ. Third, the sacrificial system proved itself insufficient to redeem the believer since it had to be repeated, serving as a

continuous reminder of the believer's guilt. Fourth, the sacrificial system was restrictive in nature. The worshiper was denied direct access to God, requiring a priest and sacrifices to mediate on his behalf. Fifth, the sacrificial system of the Old Covenant was unable to cleanse the conscience because it was transitive in nature. The types and shadows of the sacrificial system were meant to direct Israel's attention toward the future Messiah who would provide permanent deliverance.

Third, 1 Timothy 3:9 provided instruction for New Testament deacons to present themselves as examples of doctrinal fidelity in faith and obedience. Their belief and behavior are to be performed with a "clear conscience" which maintains the moral purity of the conscience. This moral purity is evident in the lives of deacons as they believe in orthodox, Christian doctrines and demonstrate that faith through obedience. They are to influence the church with their character, faith, and integrity which exemplify and preserve a good and clear conscience. They provide an example of maintaining a clear conscience before the church and the unbelieving world.

Fourth, an Old Testament illustration from the life of David in 2 Samuel 24:5–15 was reviewed. When David cut Saul's robe, "David's conscience bothered him" (1 Sam 24:5) because he had sinned against God. David illustrated four righteous responses. First, David illustrated a conscience brought under conviction. Second, David illustrated a contrite attitude. Third, David's accusing conscience motivated him to confess his sin to God. Fourth, David expressed a good conscience being concerned for his personal righteousness while trusting in God's perfect righteousness. Noting he did not kill Saul when he had the opportunity, David proved his innocence before him, and he placed himself under the mercy of the Lord's righteous judgment for forgiveness and cleansing of his guilt.

CHAPTER 3
APPLICATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS RELATED TO
TEACHING THE CHURCH THE POWER OF
A CLEAR CONSCIENCE

Introduction

A troubled mind leads to a troubled conscience. Over many centuries, the Christian church has earned the reputation of being a viable source of counseling that offers help, hope, and healing for those troubles. This has been part of its ecclesiastical renown since it first received the Great Commission to proclaim God's message of grace, love, mercy, forgiveness, and redemption to all peoples (Luke 24:46–49; Col 2–4; 1 Pet 2–3). Jay Adams notes that the church has maintained this reputation within the Western world as he writes,

At one time counseling was considered to be an integral part of the work of Christ's church. . . . The church ministered to families and persons in every sort of human/human and human/divine relationship (note that this ministry covered a broader scope than modern competitive systems allow for), and the public recognized that it was the task of the church (in general) and of pastors (in particular) to attend to matters of belief, attitude, value, behavior, relationship, etc. Now psychotherapists attempt to usurp that role.¹

What happened? How did we get here?

Historical Considerations

In his book, *The System of Professions: An Essay on the Division of Expert Labor*, sociology professor Andrew Abbott examines the establishment of professional groups during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries within England, France, and America. He explains the evolution of professionals, including those who practiced

¹ Jay E. Adams, introduction to *A Theology of Christian Counseling: More Than Redemption* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), x.

psychotherapy, and how they established themselves and evaluated their own expertise. In his last chapter, he describes how neurology, psychiatry, and psychology negatively impacted the church's counseling ministry, particularly within Protestantism.

During the Industrial Revolution (1880–1920), Americans experienced an increase in personal pressures as society and industry changed. New work environments forced men and women to learn industrial skills as they abandoned their traditional vocations. The factories and the corporations behind them were marked by harsh working conditions, long hours, and low wages. As the daily pressures negatively affected the quality of life, many sought relief in sinful vices. Society experienced an increase in theft, drunkenness, sexual immorality, gambling, and other moral ills. Many people began to develop mental problems, identified as “nerves.” Abbott summarizes the diagnosis, “The evidence of the new personal problems was . . . the professionally defined epidemic of ‘nerves’ and nerve ailments.”² These evident “nerves” could not be linked to physiological causes though they had physical manifestations. Abbot notes that this epidemic of “nervous disease” had become a common American ailment in the early twentieth century. “By the 1920s . . . Americans were taking hypnotic medications at a rate exceeded only by cough, rheumatism, and stomach remedies.”³ Symptoms of the “nerves” included gastrointestinal issues, cardiac problems, headache, depression, anxiety, and insomnia.⁴ Could there be a link between the rise of sinful vices and the outbreak of “nerves”? Could some of these mysterious ailments have been the result of a guilty conscience? The Psalms record a direct correlation between unconfessed sin and physical ailments or emotional sufferings such as David experienced, writing, “For my

² Andrew Abbott, *The System of Professions: An Essay on the Division of Expert Labor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 284.

³ Abbott, *The System of Professions*, 284–85.

⁴ Abbott, *The System of Professions*, 289.

life is spent with sorrow and my years with sighing; my strength has failed because of my iniquity, and my body has wasted away” (Ps 31:10; cf. Pss 32:3, 4; 38:3).

The first responders to this “American nervousness” were the clergy and neurologists.⁵ As specialists for nervous system diseases like polio, Parkinson’s disease, and epilepsy, neurology gained the public’s trust and began to deal with “functional neuroses” like hysteria.⁶ Since the causes of mental “nerves” were unknown, neurologists attributed them to “race, climate, lifestyle, and general health.”⁷ Abbott asserts that the subjectivity of these diagnoses “made neurology as much a hermeneutic art as a natural science.”⁸ However, as neurology had no medical competitors, it maintained authority for a time.

Neurology attempted to earn its prestige by requiring elite academic education, apprenticeships within the institution, and scientific research. They inspected, tested, and evaluated patients, providing specific therapies, “giving themselves . . . the scientific legitimacy of observation and criticism.”⁹ Neurologists gained notoriety through publications and service in large cities like New York, Boston, and Philadelphia.¹⁰ As case literature grew, the main remedy for “nerves” became incarceration in lunatic asylums, later known as mental hospitals. Despite neurology’s medical ambiguity and lack of pathology, it had earned the public’s trust to observe, diagnose, treat, and attempt to cure “personal problems,” by implementing specific therapies like electrotherapy and psychotherapy.¹¹ Clergy began to lose society’s respect, being considered unprofessional

⁵ Abbott, *The System of Professions*, 285.

⁶ Abbott, *The System of Professions*, 287.

⁷ Abbott, *The System of Professions*, 288.

⁸ Abbott, *The System of Professions*, 288–89.

⁹ Abbott, *The System of Professions*, 290.

¹⁰ Abbott, *The System of Professions*, 292.

¹¹ Abbott, *The System of Professions*, 290.

as compared to the studies and practices of medical professionals and their supposed remedies. Yet, these therapies could never provide the biblical instruction necessary to produce spiritual thinking, holy motives for behavioral change, or sufficient cleansing of the conscience.

During the 1800s, the counseling aspect of pastoral ministry began to fade. Preachers became more academic than applicational, more cerebral rather than practical. Consequently, church attendance declined, especially amongst males, as many sermons focused on abstract, theological truth. Church historian E. Brooks Holifield notes in his book *A History of Pastoral Care in America*, “Ministers were not equipped with the interpersonal skills necessary to engage the new tasks,” including counseling.¹² Theological professors became concerned as they noticed counseling classes were absent from pastoral programs, and some ministers felt inadequate to shepherd effectively. Holifield records that “ministers complained that most seminaries had failed to teach them how to apply their theology, analyze the soul, understand their parishioners, or give counsel.”¹³ These deficiencies exasperated pastors and hindered them from effectively serving their congregants in a rapidly changing society.

As liberal theologians entered the church, they sought to soften academic preaching by putting pressure on clergy and seminaries to embrace “Protestant Progressivism.”¹⁴ They pushed for a “revolution” that sought to transform the church by incorporating social concerns and activities. The new focus was on the subjective experiences and emotions of congregants to make them feel better about life and church attendance. Pastoral empathy gave rise to the “social gospel” that sought to solve social

¹² E. Brooks Holifield, *A History of Pastoral Care in America: From Salvation to Self-Realization* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983), 176.

¹³ Holifield, *A History of Pastoral Care in America*, 176.

¹⁴ Holifield, *A History of Pastoral Care in America*, 173.

problems rather than apply biblical truth.¹⁵ These liberal ministers promoted “‘heart religion’ often identified [as] sentimental piety and pastoral tenderness with feminine virtues” by conservative clergy.¹⁶ Some pastors resisted these ideas, including the duty to counsel, believing it was effeminate work, robbing them of their studies. Home visitation and personal counseling were no longer considered “a fitting instrument for the cure of souls.”¹⁷ Rejecting the picture of the minister as sympathetic, indulgent father, they sought to portray the minister as powerful, fearless, and having good business sense. Conservative clergymen insisted that “ministerial manliness would attract businessmen back into the churches.”¹⁸

Many ministers lamented their inferiority before the “medical professionals.” They were concerned that they could not compete with neurology’s scientific standards. Neurology identified “a syndrome of general nervousness, with signs and symptoms, with causes and mechanisms,” all of which were identified as a scientific practice.¹⁹ It was defining new problems and providing new medical definitions. Progressive clergymen blamed personal problems on social issues like unemployment, poverty, and the drastic changes in society’s structure. But rather than teach their congregations how to deal with these issues biblically, they simply focused on social welfare, befriending congregants, and providing advice—all of which was unable to cleanse a guilty conscience.²⁰ In more difficult cases, clergy began referring men and women to “professionals” for treatment.

¹⁵ Abbott, *The System of Professions*, 285, 293.

¹⁶ Holifield, *A History of Pastoral Care in America*, 178.

¹⁷ Holifield, *A History of Pastoral Care in America*, 179.

¹⁸ Holifield, *A History of Pastoral Care in America*, 177.

¹⁹ Abbott, *The System of Professions*, 290.

²⁰ Abbott, *The System of Professions*, 293.

Psychiatry arose in the mid-1800s, growing in popularity as it merged with neurology.²¹ Like neurologists, psychiatrists endured vigorous schooling and elite academic training.²² Psychiatry promised definitive cures as it incorporated moral therapy, positive activities, and emotional stimulation.²³ By 1900, psychiatry's moral therapy had proved a failure amongst the insane, but as psychiatric schools increased with numerous graduates and expanded their hospitals, "psychiatrists retained control by default."²⁴ Clinical psychiatry continued to amass diagnostic literature that enabled it to present itself as a serious scientific discipline, providing academic leadership.²⁵

Psychiatry flourished under the policy of hospitalization for the insane, providing treatments and medications. Its popularity grew as psychiatrists began to emphasize *preventative treatments*. The public assumed personal problems were the cause of insanity, and the hope of preventative treatments anchored psychiatry's acceptance in society.²⁶ Abbot explains, "The psychiatric concept of prevention attributed nervous and mental disease to failure of adjustment between individual and society, and assumed successful adjustments would prevent disease."²⁷ Psychiatrists and neurologists worked together as nervous and "mental" diseases continued in society; eventually, they were joined by psychologists while eclipsing the clergy.

Psychology arose out of Europe during the late 1800s, primarily influenced by Sigmund Freud and psychotherapy. It sought to treat nervous and "mental" disorders from a psychological perspective, blaming the difficulties on one's environment. By the

²¹ Abbott, *The System of Professions*, 294.

²² Abbott *The System of Professions*, 296.

²³ Abbott, *The System of Professions*, 294.

²⁴ Abbott, *The System of Professions*, 294.

²⁵ Abbott, *The System of Professions*, 295.

²⁶ Abbott, *The System of Professions*, 296.

²⁷ Abbott, *The System of Professions*, 298.

1920s, psychological testing attributed nervous and mental disease to personal and work-related problems.²⁸ Measurable, psychoanalytical testing demonstrated that problems arose from the “maladjustment of individuals to jobs” and other life experiences.²⁹ Psychologists began counseling troubled employees in the industrial field.³⁰ Freudianism applied psychoanalytical standards in its diagnosis, analysis, and treatments. Psychotherapy had become so popular as a proper explanation and treatment of social ills that it assumed the status of a religion—with therapists as high priests. This “new religion” also had the effect of making those with a troubled conscience victims by removing personal guilt and responsibility for their attitudes and actions.

How was the church directed towards Christian counseling, Christian psychology, and Christian psychiatry? At the turn of the twentieth century, clergy continued to experience the influence of liberal theology and the pressure to compete with the professionalism of psychiatry and psychology. While psychiatry and psychology gained acceptance in American culture, liberal theology influenced clergy to accept the “psychology of religion,” (i.e., that Christianity is mainly an experientially and emotionally oriented religion). In the 1930s, the clergy tried to take back its role in pastoral counseling by amalgamating psychotherapy and religion, surrendering to these new schools of thought. By the 1950s, this surrender was evident as ministers were exposed to a rapid growth in psychologized religion presented in books, journals, articles, academic courses, ministerial institutes, and chaplaincy training.³¹ Holifield explains that colleges and seminaries had incorporated psychology into their programs: “over 80

²⁸ Abbott, *The System of Professions*, 302.

²⁹ Abbott, *The System of Professions*, 302.

³⁰ Abbott, *The System of Professions*, 302.

³¹ Holifield, *A History of Pastoral Care in America*, 274.

percent were offering courses in psychology, and 80 could list at least one psychologist on their faculty.”³²

A key personality who popularized Christian psychology during the late 1950s was Clyde Narramore. He promoted integrationism³³ through his books, conferences, magazine, and national radio program called *Psychology for Living*. In his book *Psychology of Counseling*, published in 1960, he is credited for the slogan: “If you have a body problem, see a physician; if you have a soul (psychological) problem, talk with a psychologist; if you have a spiritual problem, talk with a pastor.”³⁴ These distinctions helped to legitimize the integrationist position that accepted the trichotomy view of men and women. Today, integrationism dominates the counseling ministry within churches and Christian education.

Two contemporary examples of this drift are evident in the church and in higher Christian education. First, Lifeway Research conducted a phone survey of 1,000 Protestant senior pastors within the United States during September 2021. It discovered that sixty-eight percent maintain a list of professional mental health experts for which to refer people.³⁵ This suggests that 680 senior pastors do not think themselves qualified as “experts” of the soul to counsel troubled Christians under their care. Second,

³² Holifield, *A History of Pastoral Care in America*, 270–71.

³³ The integration of psychology and Christianity “...originates from a drive to construct a more adequate psychology by reconnecting the severed relationships with theology; the drive embodies a desire to adopt the best of science and faith. The goal is to integrate faith and reason by linking theology and science. The reassessment of biblical orthodoxy as the basis of one’s science is a reaction to modern psychology’s endorsement of the religion of secular humanism...The task of integration involves explicitly relating truth discovered through general or natural revelation to that disclosed in special or biblical revelation, of interrelating knowledge gained from the world and knowledge gained from the Word.” R. L. Timpe, “Christian Psychology,” in *Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology & Counseling*, 2nd ed. Baker Reference Library, ed. David G. Benner and Peter C. Hill, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), Logos Bible Software 8, 194.

³⁴ Clyde Narramore, quoted in Ed Welch, “The Death of Psychological and Human Duality,” The Table, Biola University Center for Christian Thought, September 5, 2016, <https://cct.biola.edu/death-psychological-and-human-duality/>.

³⁵ Aaron Earls, “How Pastors and Non-Christians See the Church’s Role,” Lifeway Research, last modified August 2, 2022, <https://research.lifeway.com/2022/08/02/pastors-have-congregational-and-for-some-personal-experience-with-mental-illness/>.

www.crosswalk.com provided an article entitled “The Best Colleges and Universities: Top 75 in 2023.” The list of schools demonstrated that 69 out of those 75 Christian colleges and universities within the United States provide degrees in Christian psychology, Christian psychiatry, or Christian counseling—all of which implement some form of integrationism.³⁶ Of the remaining six schools, three provide individual classes on psychology while the other three do not provide any classes in psychological studies. Although most accreditation agencies and state standards require general educational courses in social and behavioral sciences, they do not mandate which courses must be offered.³⁷ Each educational institution is free to choose which social and behavioral science courses it will provide, such as psychology, Christian counseling, or biblical counseling.³⁸ This should cause the church and biblical counselors to ask, why is psychology being taught in Christian colleges and universities if they have the option to select their courses? Would it not be better to offer counselling courses from a Christian worldview?

Since the 1970s, a slow drift from integrationism back to biblical counseling³⁹, which uses the Scriptures as its sole authority for life and godliness, began with Jay

³⁶ See table A4 in appendix 6.

³⁷ Jonathan Wlodarski and Danika Miller, “What is College Accreditation and How Does It Work?” Best Colleges, May 25, 2023, <https://www.bestcolleges.com/blog/accreditation/#:~:text=Accreditation%20ensures%20schools%20provide%20a,have%20their%20own%20programmatic%20accreditation.>

³⁸ “The Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement,” Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, 2024 edition, <https://sacscoc.org/app/uploads/2024/01/2024PrinciplesOfAccreditation.pdf>.

³⁹ The Association of Certified Biblical Counselors defines biblical counseling, writing, “Biblical counseling is the personal discipleship ministry of God’s people to others under the oversight of God’s church, dependent upon the authority and sufficiency of God’s Word through the work of the Holy Spirit. Biblical counseling seeks to reorient disordered desires, affections, and behaviors toward a God-designed anthropology in an effort to restore true worship of God and right fellowship with others. This is accomplished by speaking the truth in love and applying Scripture to the need of the moment by comforting the suffering and calling sinners to repentance thus working to make them mature as they abide in Jesus Christ.” Dale Johnson and Samuel Stephens, “The Nature of Biblical Counseling,” July 20, 2020, in *Truth in Love*, 267, produced by Association of Certified Biblical Counselors, podcast, 3:28, <https://biblicalcounseling.com/resource-library/podcast-episodes/the-nature-of-biblical-counseling/>.

Adams and his seminal work *Competent to Counsel*. By explaining the inadequacies of psychology and psychiatry and the insufficiency of integrationism, he started a resurgence towards biblical counseling. Adams upheld the sufficiency of Scripture to identify a counselee's problem, offer correction for erroneous thinking and behavior, and provide biblical instruction. His work has influenced church leaders such as Heath Lambert, John MacArthur, Wayne Mack, David Powlison, Stuart Scott, Jerry Wragg, and Lance Quinn. Also due to the influence of Adams, other ministries perpetuate a faithful commitment to Christ and the Scriptures such as the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors (ACBC) and the Mid-America Institute of Nouthetic Studies. Furthermore, colleges and seminaries such as Boyce College, Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, Reformation Bible College, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, The Master's University, and The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary are devoted to educating a new generation of students in biblical counseling.⁴⁰

Theoretical Considerations

Today, a desperate need still exists for the healing of the mind and conscience. As demonstrated by psychological surveys from across the nation, men and women, inside and outside of Christianity, struggle with their thoughts, emotions, or behaviors. In a 2022 public survey, Mental Health America found that nearly 50 million Americans had a mental illness in 2019; suicidal ideation has increased 4.58 percent, which is an additional 664,000 people since 2020; and over 27 million adults with mental illness are going untreated.⁴¹ These statistics are staggering. The evangelical church must purpose to

⁴⁰ For more information on the influence of Jay Adams in biblical counseling see Heath Lambert, *The Biblical Counseling Movement after Adams* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012).

⁴¹ "2022 State of Mental Health Report," Mental Health America, last modified October 19, 2021, <https://www.mhanational.org/research-reports/2022-state-mental-health-america-report>.

help and teach those it is able to influence with hope that the conscience can be cleansed and empowered through Christ's redemption.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention also note, "more than 50 percent of people within the United States will be diagnosed with a mental illness or disorder at some point in their lifetime;" "1 in 5 Americans will experience a mental illness in a given year;" and "1 in 25 Americans lives with a serious mental illness, such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, or major depression."⁴² These surveys demonstrate a large part of the American public needs the power of the gospel to affect their lives and cleanse their consciences. Many who participated in these surveys may be inclined to seek counseling from religious institutions. Church leaders and individual Christians must be prepared to counsel and minister the gospel to hurting people.

From November 5–19, 2020, Gallup Poll conducted a survey that demonstrated that 24 percent of Americans assess their mental health as "fair" or "poor."⁴³ This assessment is also noted as being "worse than it has been at any point in the last two decades."⁴⁴ The Gallup has surveyed Americans yearly since 2001 and claims to have found a nine-point decline from 2019 with only 76 percent of Americans rating their mental health as "positive" in 2020.⁴⁵ These survey percentages suggest that upwards of seventy-nine million Americans assess their mental health as "negative." They also demonstrate that the general American population is in massive need of the gospel's help, hope, and healing. It is the only divine source which can correct, convince,

⁴² "About Mental Health," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, June 8, 2021, <https://www.cdc.gov/mentalhealth/learn/index.htm>.

⁴³ Megan Brenan, "Americans' Mental Health Ratings Sink to New Low," Gallup, December 7, 2020, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/327311/americans-mental-health-ratings-sink-new-low.aspx>.

⁴⁴ Brenan, "Americans' Mental Health Ratings Sink to New Low."

⁴⁵ Brenan, "Americans' Mental Health Ratings Sink to New Low."

and comfort the heart, mind, and consciences of men and women who believe in Christ's person and work.

Lifeway Research conducts frequent surveys of the church and culture aiming to better inform, equip, and benefit the evangelical church to grow towards spiritual maturity and community effectiveness. In 2014, they published an article entitled, "A Study of Acute Mental Illness and the Christian Faith." The study surveyed self-professing Protestant adults of varying ages, regions, and ethnic groups who suffered from depression, bipolar, or schizophrenia. In the sample of 355 adults, 200 "have attended worship services at a Christian church once a month."⁴⁶ Another study indicated, "6 in 10 pastors have counseled someone who was eventually diagnosed with an acute mental illness."⁴⁷ Both surveys noted above demonstrate, at the very least, that there are confessing Protestants who experience spiritual, emotional, mental, relational, and behavioral problems that need to be remedied. The church must be equipped with biblical instruction and willing to help its people examine and evaluate their experiences through biblical truth, rather than sending them to secular psychiatrists, psychologists, and therapists. There are times when a biblical counselor should send the counselee to a primary care physician for a physical evaluation.⁴⁸ In addition, professing Christians who struggle with mental problems should feel comfortable and confident to seek counseling from church leaders and laymen.

⁴⁶ "Study of Acute Mental Illness and Christian Faith," Lifeway Research, September 2014, <http://research.lifeway.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Acute-Mental-Illness-and-Christian-Faith-Research-Report-1.pdf>.

⁴⁷ "Study of Acute Mental Illness and Christian Faith."

⁴⁸ This is not to suggest that biblical counselors should not work closely with medical doctors, specifically the counselee's primary care physician, who can help determine when the counselee's problems are the results of an organic, biological illness. It is my opinion that it is never necessary to send a counselee to either a psychiatrist or therapist unless he or she is also a biblical counselor.

Sociological Considerations

How has the church responded to these glaring needs? As we have seen, one response has been integrationism. Christians who practice this philosophy have sought to serve people, inside and outside the church, by amalgamating the ideologies and methodologies of secular psychological practices with their biblical counseling. This rationale has been implemented by Christians for nearly a century. As Johnson and Jones explain, “In [integrationism], the goal of the Christian psychologist is ‘to combine the special revelation of God’s word with the general revelation studied by the psychological sciences and professions’ . . . or to place psychology on a different foundation, one that is ‘consistent with and built upon the Bible’ in order to develop a ‘biblically based psychology.’ . . . the integration approach tends to be more willing to criticize psychology in its modern form and to ask whether its findings are genuinely compatible with Scripture.”⁴⁹

Conservative Christian counselors and Christian psychologists predominately avow the rejection of secular ideologies and methodologies that are contrary to biblical doctrines and principles, yet they subjectively incorporate others that they deem appropriate. They reason secular psychological findings are legitimately useful since they originate within God’s general revelation. Christian counselors and Christian psychologists blend them with Christian theology and doctrinal terminology and consider them a viable, authoritative means of diagnosis.

Christian counselor Gary Collins was a prominent proponent of the integrationist position throughout his academic career. He founded and taught the counseling program at Trinity International University (1965–1991), co-led the American Association of Christian Counselors (1991–1998), and promoted integrationism until he

⁴⁹ Eric L. Johnson and Stanton L. Jones, “A History of Christians in Psychology,” in *Psychology and Christianity*, ed. Eric L. Johnson and Stanton L. Jones (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 39.

died in 2021. His contribution to the book *Psychology and Christianity* in 2000 represents the integrationist position and its relationship to Christianity.

Collins surprisingly admits that integrationism is a nebulous term “shrouded in mystery,” humanly subjective, and not “a genuine scholarly achievement or a practical methodology.”⁵⁰ He notes that integrationists do not know what they are integrating as opinions on the topic are diverse and transitory.⁵¹ He provides a list of thought-provoking questions regarding integration: “Do we integrate psychology and theology, psychology and Christianity, psychology and the Bible, counseling and Christianity, faith and learning, faith and practice, or all of the above?”⁵² He concedes that the meaning of integrationism is “undefinable”⁵³ while suggesting the term “joining” is a more accurate description but offers no definition.⁵⁴ Such a dubious foundation calls into question the validity, purpose, and benefit of the integrationist’s methodology. If there are aspects of psychology that are conducive to biblical counseling, which ones and why? If some are not conducive, which ones and why? If there is no consensus among integrationists as to its practice, there can be no sure way to determine if it betters the lives and informs the consciences of hurting people. Therefore, integrationism offers no definitive source of hope that changes the mind, comforts the heart, and alleviates the conscience from sin’s guilt.

Collins, nevertheless, attempts to defend his position by providing three reasons for integrating (i.e., joining) Christianity and psychology. First, he notes that Christians are called to care for men and women. Christians ought to pursue helping

⁵⁰ Gary R. Collins, “An Integration View,” in *Psychology and Christianity*, ed. Eric L Johnson and Stanton L. Jones (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 105.

⁵¹ Collins, “An Integration View,” 105, 112–13.

⁵² Collins, “An Integration View,” 105.

⁵³ Collins, “An Integration View,” 112.

⁵⁴ Collins, “An Integration View,” 113.

Christians and non-Christians by leading them to hope and healing. Second, he argues that Christians have the means, through Scripture and all appropriate disciplines, to overcome every obstacle to knowing people. He writes, “Christians have the unique challenge of understanding the world, including its people.” and should use all that God has revealed of himself in “both his world and his Word.”⁵⁵ According to Collins, integrating psychology is paramount because, as he insists, “Psychology . . . more than any other discipline . . . is committed to understanding people.”⁵⁶ Third, Collins points out that a Christian’s commitment to Christ should permeate every facet of life. Since faith affects their thinking, morals, integrity, ethics, and relationships, it should also affect how they seek to understand and serve people. This reality causes Collins to assert that “Scripture is the foundation from which we integrate Christianity into psychology.”⁵⁷

While these reasons appear commendable, they pose a striking and insurmountable contradiction: if Scripture is the “foundation,” why join it with psychology? Since Scripture is sufficient in its teaching, authoritative in its truth, inerrant in its content, and infallible in its purpose, why add competing secular speculations? Integrationist Stanton L. Jones answers by writing, “Scripture does not provide us all that we need in order to understand human beings fully, and that there is a legitimate and strategic role for psychology as a science and as a profession in giving us intellectual and practical tools for understanding and improving the human condition.”⁵⁸ Jay Adams responds to this thinking, noting, “When compromisers talk about all truth as God’s truth . . . they mean by such use that God revealed truth through Rogers, Freud, Skinner, etc. . .

⁵⁵ Collins, “An Integration View,” 109.

⁵⁶ Collins, “An Integration View,” 110.

⁵⁷ Collins, “An Integration View,” 112.

⁵⁸ Stanton L. Jones, “An Integration View,” in *Psychology & Christianity: Five Views*, 2nd edition, ed. Eric L. Johnson, Spectrum Multiview Books (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), Logos Bible Software 8, 101–102.

. God does, of course, restrain sin, allow people to discover facts about His creation, etc. . . . but God never sets up rival systems competitive to the Bible. And God doesn't duplicate in general revelation (creation) what He gives us by special revelation (the Bible).”⁵⁹ Also, what is the foundation upon which psychology is built? The secular ideas of psychology are often at odds with the teachings of Scripture. Reliance upon such ideas is a minefield of conflicting views. Adams notes, “[God’s] common grace is not responsible for false teachings by Freud (man is not responsible for his sin), Rogers (man is essentially good and needs no outside help), or even Skinner (man is only an animal, without value, freedom or dignity).”⁶⁰ Furthermore, Adams argues, “It is improper to conceive of Freud, Rogers and scores of others like them as great benefactors of the church, near Christians, or persons from whom we can learn much. . . . Their views are not supplemental, but outright alternatives.”⁶¹

Despite Collin’s confessed ambiguity, he remains insistent on the importance of integration. Consequently, he distorts the doctrine of the sufficiency of Christ as the means by which all spiritual needs of the Christian are fulfilled. For example, he misinterprets 2 Peter 1:3 (“His divine power has granted us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him.”) by stating, on the one hand, “Christ followers believe that he is sufficient *to meet every human need in this world*” (emphasis added),⁶² but then on the other, attempting to justify his integrationist position, he suggests that God often uses secondary and tertiary means for his provisions, which includes “psychologists or counselors.” Yet, the apostle Peter is not referring to physical, tangible provisions. In the context of verses 4–11, Peter is clearly referring to the

⁵⁹ Jay Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling*, 8.

⁶⁰ Jay Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling*, 8.

⁶¹ Jay Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling*, 9.

⁶² Collins, “An Integration View,” 107.

knowledge of special revelation and apostolic truth that provides “precious and magnificent promises” (v. 4), allowing Christians to become “partakers of the divine nature.” This reality should motivate Christians to “apply all diligence” to appropriate these promises that result in “moral excellence” (v. 5). Particularly, this divine knowledge from Christ, when applied, leads to moral self-control that produces perseverance and godliness (v. 6) as well as brotherly kindness and love (v. 7). Such “qualities” (v. 8) enable the Christian to become truly useful and fruitful both morally and spiritually (v. 9). Christians should affirm that God sovereignly provides earthly needs, using secondary and tertiary means to do so, and for which Christians should always interpret through Scripture alone. The knowledge of Christ in the Scripture is sufficient to provide all the spiritual essentials the Christian needs for spiritual success and maturity.⁶³

Collins views the Bible, theology, and the Christian religion as being in a constant state of flux along with psychology. He writes, “Even as psychology is diverse and complex, so are definitions of Christianity, interpretations of the Bible, and Christian theologies. . . . Theology is always changing, as it always has. . . . New translations of Scripture, new archeological findings, and new perspectives on the biblical languages bring changes to our understanding of the Bible.”⁶⁴ Such views undermine the sufficiency, inerrancy, infallibility, authority, and perspicuity of Scripture. Despite such uncertainty, Collins does find the Bible helpful: “Joining psychology and theology or psychology and the Bible helps us understand human beings better, and we learn how to better help people who are in psychological-spiritual need.”⁶⁵ Collins elevates

⁶³ See also the warnings and admonishments within other key texts (Ps 1:1; 19:7–9; Col 2:8; 1 Tim 6:20–21).

⁶⁴ Collins, “An Integration View,” 112–13.

⁶⁵ Collins, “An Integration View,” 113.

psychology on par with Scripture, rather than recognizing that “the word of God [alone] is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Heb 4:12).

Collins acknowledges the importance of proper hermeneutical principles and warns that the interpreter’s presuppositions could negatively influence his interpretations. While these precautions are important and necessary, he overextends his argument by rejecting the viability of individual or ecclesiastical exegesis to produce the correct interpretation. He declares, “Even when we genuinely seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit, no human interpretation of God’s Word is infallible.”⁶⁶ Collins argues the subjectivity of the individual’s experiences, convictions, and influences affects one’s understanding of Scripture. He also recognizes the same subjectivity when interpreting psychological data. In discussing a counseling scenario, he writes,

We might have read the Bible together. But we also would have tried to understand the various causes of his problems and the best psychological, physiological, and theological ways to bring healing. My knowledge of special revelation—the Bible—would have been combined with my knowledge of general revelation—what God has taught me about his world through my study of psychology, physiology, counseling, rehabilitation, and other fields.⁶⁷

Collins expresses confidence in his own studies, yet he believes the interpretations and applications of Scripture are uncertain and subjective. One is left wondering why Collins considers using the Bible in counseling at all. If the counselor cannot be convinced in his mind and conscience of the meaning and application of biblical truth, how can he expect to educate or persuade the minds and consciences of others?

Moving to the spiritual condition of mankind, Collins recognizes the universality of sin, writing, “We all are people who have sinned against God and tried to

⁶⁶ Collins, “An Integration View,” 115–16.

⁶⁷ Collins, “An Integration View,” 117.

live according to our own efforts.”⁶⁸ He also affirms the inspiration and spiritual insight Scripture offers; “I take it for granted that the Bible, God’s special revelation, is an infallible source of information about human behavior, pathology, attitudes, spirituality, sin, guilt, and forgiveness.”⁶⁹ He identifies the source of all erroneous thinking, emotional tribulations, and behavior problems as human sin, writing, “I believe that all human problems result from the Fall. . . . Every problem is the result of that sin, and sometimes problems come from an individual’s direct disobedience.”⁷⁰ Although his affirmations of the sufficiency of Scripture and the biblical doctrine of hamartiology seem commendable, he neglects to apply this conviction to the mind and conscience in the following case study.

Collins describes a counseling case concerning a friend who, due to a bicycle accident, suffered a head injury that impaired his ability to walk. This led to his friend suffering “periods of depression, anxiety, frustration, and loneliness.”⁷¹ Collins rightly argues that his friend’s physical and spiritual problems were not the result of sin, yet he fails to acknowledge that his friend’s experience resulted in sinful responses. The attitudes and emotions Collins identifies are certainly understandable and experienced by Christians, but nonetheless, they are contrary to biblical instructions and promises. Christians are called and commanded to struggle against sinful thoughts and emotions by trusting in the Lord and hoping in his good providence as they strive for obedience to the glory of God (Rom 5:1–5; Phil 2:12–15; 4:5–8). This results in the experiential blessings of a conscience that is clear, blameless, and stable—free from doubt, guilt, or shame that spiritually stunts the Christian’s growth (1 Tim 1:18–19; 2 Tim 1:3).

⁶⁸ Collins, “An Integration View,” 107.

⁶⁹ Collins, “An Integration View,” 116.

⁷⁰ Collins, “An Integration View,” 116.

⁷¹ Collins, “An Integration View,” 117.

If Collins was his friend's counselor, he suggests he would seek to help him understand the reasons for his problems, noting it was "because we live in a fallen world where things like this happen."⁷² Collins makes this statement without qualifying that trials are not by chance but ordained by God's good and providential design (Exod 4:11; Isa 46:10; Ps 115:3; Matt 10:29–31; Rom 11:33). This is not surprising since he has a low view of exegesis. Collins's counseling methodology also would have included praying with his friend, adding, "We might have read the Bible together."⁷³ He would also seek "the best psychological, physiological, and theological ways to bring healing."⁷⁴

Collins does not specify the importance of the application of Scripture. His counseling example neglects to specifically identify sin; neither does he encourage the need to confess and repent from sin. He makes no mention of the magnitude of Christ's redemptive work that provides the cleansing from sin, alleviating the conscience. Furthermore, his approach treats the Scripture as a secondary help and prayer as a simplistic practice while he elevates man's psychological philosophies as remedies tantamount to Scripture. The application of psychology leads to consciences being misinformed, forfeiting the opportunity to display God's sanctifying work.

Collins elevates the empirical findings of psychological studies while minimalizing the role and effectiveness of Scripture alone to adequately identify issues and counsel people in their problems. Although there is much that can be learned about humans through observing behaviors, inquiring about patterns of thought, and studying biology, none are adequate in defining sin, offering spiritual correction, and leading people to faith in the redemption of Christ. Moreover, biblical counselors must be wise in discerning which ideologies from the medical and scientific world are useful for

⁷² Collins, "An Integration View," 117.

⁷³ Collins, "An Integration View," 117.

⁷⁴ Collins, "An Integration View," 117.

counselling and which set themselves up against the word of God and must be avoided (Pss 1:1–3; 5:9; 10:2–4; 36:1–3). Scripture warns not to be taken “captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the traditions of men, according to the elementary principles of the world” (Col 2:8; cf. Eph 5:6; 1 Tim 6:20).

Each generation of the church needs to be protected from and warned against these dangers. Those who receive and appropriate the amalgamated diagnoses and solutions of secular psychologies within Christian counseling put themselves in danger of merely experiencing superficial, humanistic, temporal relief from their sin-related problems. Worse still, counselees who fail to appropriate God’s Word forfeit the blessing, help, and promise of God that provides the comfort, assurance, and strength the conscience needs to experience victory over sin’s impact (Matt 7:24, 26; 12:50; Rom 12:2; 13:14; Eph 4:23–24; 1 John 5:4–5). Practically and spiritually, if the teachings of Scripture are marginalized so that the problems of counselees are not identified and corrected, the consciences of men and women will become confused and unassured of the power, extent, and sufficiency of Christ’s redemption.

Integrationist John W. Hilber, who served as a pastor for twenty years before teaching within higher education, wrote a *Bibliotheca Sacra* article entitled “Old Testament Wisdom and the Integration Debate in Christian Counseling,” in which he attempts to persuade his readers that Old Testament wisdom literature promotes integrationism through its instructions and illustrations. Like Collins, Hilber recognizes the debate between biblical counselors and integrationists and acknowledges no universally accepted definition for “integration.” He assumes the acceptance of psychology by integrationists, noting they all “share an openness to the contribution of modern psychotherapy.”⁷⁵ Hilber defends this position by claiming that general

⁷⁵ John W. Hilber, “Old Testament Wisdom and the Integration Debate in Christian Counseling,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155, no. 620 (Oct–Dec 1998): 411, Logos Bible Software 8.

revelation provides another source of truth which he refers to as wisdom. He personifies wisdom as “a voice of moral authority . . . that must be heard.”⁷⁶ Referencing Proverbs 1:1–7, he also asserts that wisdom is the result of “a life lived in the fear of the Lord” and offers his general definition: “Wisdom means living life with moral skill.”⁷⁷ Hilber notes that the Bible is necessary to define wisdom, provide moral boundaries, and guide ethical behavior; yet, he insists that wisdom literature mandates, exemplifies, and implies that wisdom should be pursued beyond Scripture.

If believers are to search for moral and authoritative wisdom outside of the biblical text, where are they to encounter it? Hilber alleges that the moral mandates of God are identified and located within general revelation throughout multiple “sources of authoritative knowledge.”⁷⁸ He does not substantiate this claim with exegetical evidence but asks, “What if biblical wisdom itself encourages individuals to search for truth beyond the canon of Scripture?”⁷⁹ He then insists that “wisdom” mandates we investigate “truth” outside of the text of the Bible; “if it is true that wisdom outside the Bible is a valid source, then Old Testament wisdom dictates that it be respected, evaluated, and incorporated into instruction for life.”⁸⁰ This line of reasoning contradicts Hilber’s fidelity to the sufficiency, authority, and perspicuity of Scripture. He presumes that moral and righteous standards for living are found beyond God’s written revelation.

To avoid overstating his position, Hilber identifies the superiority of Scripture as he writes, “This is not to suggest that extrabiblical wisdom is equal to Scripture in

12. ⁷⁶ Hilber, “Old Testament Wisdom and the Integration Debate in Christian Counseling,” 411–

12. ⁷⁷ Hilber, “Old Testament Wisdom and the Integration Debate in Christian Counseling,” 411–

13. ⁷⁸ Hilber, “Old Testament Wisdom and the Integration Debate in Christian Counseling,” 411–

⁷⁹ Hilber, “Old Testament Wisdom and the Integration Debate in Christian Counseling,” 413.

⁸⁰ Hilber, “Old Testament Wisdom and the Integration Debate in Christian Counseling,” 413.

authority or infallibility.” He also asserts the supremacy of Scripture, stating it is “divine inspiration” while conceding its extent being “the boundaries of the biblical canon.”⁸¹ Affirming the intellectual limitations of men and women to discern wisdom, he notes the need for “the sure authority of God’s Word and will.”⁸² Hilber also avows the primacy of Scripture in counseling as he declares that “wise counselors recognize that the Bible is the only perfect authority for guiding faith and practice.”⁸³ These affirmations of Scripture seem inconsistent with his promotion of other sources for moral knowledge. Since the Bible is the inspired, inerrant, and infallible revelation of God, why would counselors look elsewhere?

To substantiate his position, Hilber looks to wisdom literature. First, he claims that those in authority provide extra-biblical wisdom. Using Proverbs 4, he examines parental authority. Hilber argues, “Unless the parent is quoting Scripture, such wisdom originates from beyond the boundaries of the biblical canon; yet it bears a degree of authority.”⁸⁴ His attempt to apply the text is commendable. Regrettably, his argument is missing key components of sound exegesis. The “sound teaching” and “instruction” Solomon offers his son is based on the teachings of the Torah which influenced the interpretations of his experience; his experience was not the source of his “sound teaching” and “instruction.”

Hilber also considers government leaders and those with life experience as sources of authoritative knowledge. He asserts, “Proverbs endorses the wisdom of kings and older men (Prov 16:10; 20:29).”⁸⁵ Initially, his interpretation seems legitimate and

15. ⁸¹ Hilber, “Old Testament Wisdom and the Integration Debate in Christian Counseling,” 413–

⁸² Hilber, “Old Testament Wisdom and the Integration Debate in Christian Counseling,” 422.

⁸³ Hilber, “Old Testament Wisdom and the Integration Debate in Christian Counseling,” 422.

⁸⁴ Hilber, “Old Testament Wisdom and the Integration Debate in Christian Counseling,” 413.

⁸⁵ Hilber, “Old Testament Wisdom and the Integration Debate in Christian Counseling,” 413.

persuasive; however, he further ponders, “What if biblical wisdom itself encourages individuals to search for truth beyond the canon of Scripture?”⁸⁶ He proceeds to argue that truth is found outside of Scripture, such as in the wisdom of the aforementioned leaders, and should be “respected, evaluated, and incorporated into instruction for life.”⁸⁷ Solomon was providing a principle that expects mature men to model and give insight into applying divine truth to daily living. As many scholars have noted, it is the “ideal” king or elder who has been influenced by God’s Word that should be imitated.⁸⁸ Ultimately, Scripture alone provides inerrant wisdom, not social position or life experience.

Second, Hilber suggests that creation itself is a reservoir of wisdom. He views physical creation as a “source of truth” whereby wisdom “utilizes empirical observation of human behavior.”⁸⁹ He further argues that this observation of the natural world enables “individuals to grow in wisdom beyond the maxims included in the canon of Scripture.”⁹⁰ Hilber defends this idea by considering Solomon’s response to observing the folly of the sluggard. Solomon states, “I applied my heart to what I observed and learned a lesson from what I saw” (Prov 24:32, NIV). However, the lesson Solomon learned was not “beyond the maxim” of Scripture because a proper work ethic was already established in Genesis 2:15 (cf. Gen 3:17–19) and reiterated in Proverbs 6:4–15. Thus, it was the abandonment of Scripture’s mandate by the sluggard that caught Solomon’s attention and provided him with a visual opportunity to see wisdom neglected.

⁸⁶ Hilber, “Old Testament Wisdom and the Integration Debate in Christian Counseling,” 413.

⁸⁷ Hilber, “Old Testament Wisdom and the Integration Debate in Christian Counseling,” 413.

⁸⁸ Crawford Howell Toy, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Proverbs*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1899), 324, 397, Logos Bible Software 8; Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, New American Commentary, vol. 14 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 156, 179, Logos Bible Software 8; Roland E. Murphy, *Proverbs*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 22 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 121, 154, Logos Bible Software 8.

⁸⁹ Hilber, “Old Testament Wisdom and the Integration Debate in Christian Counseling,” 415.

⁹⁰ Hilber, “Old Testament Wisdom and the Integration Debate in Christian Counseling,” 415.

In Hilber's final analysis, he makes an explicit assertion that undermines the role of Scripture entirely. As he states, "The use of the Bible in counseling is not mandatory in order for the counseling to be 'biblical.'"⁹¹ Such an oxymoronic statement negates the necessity, sufficiency, or authority of the Bible for any purpose. Hilber further declares, "But if wisdom functions independently of the covenant code in the Old Testament, the implication is that wisdom can function without utilizing written imperatives in general (whether covenant Law code, canonical wisdom literature itself, or New Testament imperatives)."⁹² This declaration misconstrues the Word of God in meaning and application, rendering the Word of God useless for the heart, mind, soul, and conscience.

The apostle Paul declared the antithesis to Hilber's argument when he proclaimed, "For in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God" (1 Cor 1:21). Accordingly, it is impossible to find the gospel's wisdom communicated in nature. The necessary knowledge that leads men and women to fear the Lord, turn from sin, and find cleansing for the conscience is unknowable apart from God's Word. Without the truth of inspired Scripture, no one will ever discern God's moral will with certainty, ascertain wisdom to live by God's righteous standards, and maintain a clear conscience.

Practical Considerations

If integrationism leads to confusion at best and an unrelieved conscience at worst, where are hope and healing found? Proverbs 9:10 provides the answer, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding" (Prov 9:10). This declaration articulates the spiritual disposition and the

⁹¹ Hilber, "Old Testament Wisdom and the Integration Debate in Christian Counseling," 420.

⁹² Hilber, "Old Testament Wisdom and the Integration Debate in Christian Counseling," 421.

practical means necessary to provide the remedy for a guilty conscience. Cleansing from sin's effect must be attained through a holy, reverential fear of the sovereign God through faith in Christ's redemptive work.

This starting point is essential for the Christian epistemology. George R. Knight addresses this unique position as he writes, "For the Christian, the Bible is the foremost source of knowledge and the most essential epistemological authority. All other sources of knowledge must be tested and verified in the light of scripture."⁹³ He warns of using the secondary source of knowledge found in nature alone (i.e., general revelation) because of the negative effects of sin on all of creation and the inability of men and women rightly to interpret their findings apart from Scripture. He notes that "general revelation by itself [is] an insufficient source of knowledge concerning God and ultimate reality. The findings of science and the daily experiences of life must be interpreted in the light of the scripture revelation, which supplies the framework of epistemological interpretation."⁹⁴ The Christian must ascertain and administer biblical truth to the mind and recognize the sufficiency of special revelation to remedy, inform, and influence the conscience.

The regular exposition of the efficacy and the sufficiency of Christ's redemption is necessary to educate the mind and tune the conscience to biblical truth. The church must regularly minister to the conscience with God's Word for three main reasons. First, the clear exposition of the gospel is necessary to convict the conscience of personal guilt for sins committed toward God that his kindness might lead them to repentance (John 16:8–11; Rom 2:4). Charles H. Spurgeon noted, "We think the Word must be understood before it can really penetrate the *conscience* [emphasis added] and

⁹³ George R. Knight, *Philosophy and Education: An Introduction in Christian Perspective* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2006), 179.

⁹⁴ Knight, *Philosophy and Education*, 181.

the heart; and we would always be preaching such as men can understand, otherwise the poor will not ‘have the gospel preached to them.’”⁹⁵ To bring about this outcome, preachers must proclaim the gospel with accuracy and precision. Through the preaching and teaching of God’s Word, the efficacy of Christ’s redemption for all our spiritual, emotional, and psychological needs should encourage the mind and conscience to function properly and bring about right thinking and behavior. This is summarized in one “enduring principle: *the triune God has spoken to us through the Scripture . . . through biblical history, doctrine, law codes, poetry, and songs, God has revealed to us everything we NEED to know about Him, about ourselves and about the world around us* (2 Peter 1:3).”⁹⁶

Second, the practical goal of providing an accurate exposition of the Word of God should be to reach the conscience through the intellect, the emotions, and the will. As God’s Word educates Christians, their consciences should experience a growing awareness of residual sin. As the Holy Spirit works in their hearts, they would confess their sins to the Lord, live lifestyles of repentance from sin, and pursue holiness through obeying the Word of Christ. Writing on the importance of preaching as worship, Albert Mohler exhorts fellow preachers “to confront our congregations with nothing less than the living and active Word of God, and to pray that the Holy Spirit will thereby open eyes, *convict consciences* [emphasis added], and apply the Word to human hearts.”⁹⁷ Such a conscience, attuned to God’s Word, finds relief from the temporal, conscious burdens of guilt, shame, and remorse and will experience fellowship with God (2 Cor 7:10–11; 1 Pet 3:21; 2 Pet 1:8–9; 1 John 1:6–7). The Christian can then experience the

⁹⁵ C. H. Spurgeon, “Preaching for the Poor,” in *The New Park Street Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 3, ed. C. H. Spurgeon (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1857), 60, Logos Bible Software 8.

⁹⁶ Ed Welch, “What Is Biblical Counseling, Anyway?,” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 16, no. 1 (Fall 1997): 3.

⁹⁷ R. Albert Mohler, *He Is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World* (Chicago: Moody, 2008), 38.

blessings of a clear conscience that is spiritually satisfied and doctrinally fortified in the sufficiency of Christ's redemption.

Third, the church must regularly minister God's Word because many Christians struggle with a limited, shallow, or immature understanding of the power and effectiveness of Christ's redemption (2 Pet 1:9; cf. Rom 8:1) that can lead to a burdened conscience and feelings of discouragement or hopelessness (1 John 2:28; 3:19–20). They may fall into despair, convinced by their repeated failures that they cannot respond rightly during the difficult circumstances of life (Gal 3:3; 4:9). The believer needs to be reminded of Christ's redemption and the joy, comfort, and confidence of Christ's promises (John 15:11; Heb 10:22) through the work of the Holy Spirit (Heb 10:14–18).

In his article, "A Word to the Conscience," Carl Trueman explains the benefits of his ecclesiastical experience as he regularly listens to the exposition of Scripture:

The congregation goes from being reminded and convicted of their sin, to calling out to God for forgiveness, to being reminded that in Christ God has acted in a startling and decisive way to cast our sin as far away as the east is from the west. We are reminded of the entire gospel, from fall to redemption to consummation, in the space of just a few minutes . . . This moment in the church service has come to mean much to me. This is the point where, after a week of failure—of not living up to the standards I set myself, let alone those set for me by my Creator—I am reminded once again that all is well: Christ has dealt with my sin; my failings were placed on his shoulders on the cross; and my heavenly Father has annihilated them there. It is not, of course, that I do not know this Monday to Saturday; it is not that I do not read the gospel every day in my Bible; it is not that I do not confess my sins during the week and look then to Christ. But this is a word from outside, God's work spoken to me by another human being, which lifts my head once again and *assures my conscience* [emphasis added] that I am clean despite the filth I so often choose to wade in. So often I enter church weighted down with care; when I am once again reminded of God's rich forgiveness in Christ, the weight is wonderfully lifted from my shoulders.⁹⁸

While regularly attending a local church service where the Scriptures are read and clearly explained, all Christians should experience the hope and assurance expressed in this excerpt. The New Testament models this example as it instructs local churches on the

⁹⁸ Carl Trueman, "Minority Report: A Word to the Conscience," *Themelios* 36, no. 2 (July 2011): 183–84, Logos Bible Software 8.

centrality of the Scriptures to inform and comfort the Christian conscience (1 Cor 1:10, 18–19; Phil 3:1–3; Col 2:18–23; 2 Pet 1:16–21; 3:17–18).

Ecclesiastical Considerations

What must the church do to move away from the influences of integrationism? The church must start a reformation within its members. A rallying cry must be given to usher the church to a faithful adherence to Scripture, recognizing and submitting to it as “the voice of God.” Only God’s Word instructs the mind (Ps 19:7–9), saves the soul (Jas 1:21), moves the heart (Col 3:16), changes the will (Eph 5:26), sanctifies the Christian (John 17:17), and affects the conscience (Heb 4:12).

The church’s leadership must issue this call, specifically the elders and teachers. Those church leaders who know themselves to be inadequate in providing biblical counsel must humbly seek the theological training necessary to counsel faithfully, skillfully, and lovingly. The plethora of available resources removes all excuses for not pursuing this course.

This reformation will require at least three changes within the modern church: (1) that it adopt and embrace a biblical epistemology from Christians who are bound by conscience to the exclusivity of Scripture; (2) that its leaders stop outsourcing the “difficult” counseling cases and repent from refusing to counsel those under their care; and (3) that it return to the biblical mandate, method, and message of Scripture in hopes that all her members would be brought to spiritual maturity (Rom 15:14; Col 1:28; 1 Thess 5:14).

In 2 Timothy 3:16–17, the apostle Paul declares the nature and usefulness of Scripture: “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” With the phrase “All Scripture,” Paul identifies the scope

and extent of the Bible, viewing it as a complete whole.⁹⁹ He then references God as its source of authority, literally writing “God-breathed.” The source, nature, and authority of Scripture should give spiritual encouragement and confidence to all counselors, yet the apostle provides an added word of assurance noting that it is “profitable,” that is, doctrinally beneficial, spiritually useful, and valuable for living.

The apostle then provides four affirmations of this profitability that also detail a biblical process for definitive, measurable change. First, Paul affirms that “All Scripture is . . . profitable for instruction.” Primarily, instruction refers to all doctrine that is explicitly or implicitly taught by Scripture. In all that it references, the teachings of Scripture tell the church what to believe and how to behave. Scripture trains the conscience to affirm and rightly respond to its truths.

Second, just as Scripture is the sure source of doctrinal truth, it also discerns doctrinal error. The text affirms that “All Scripture is . . . profitable . . . for reproof.” This “reproof” refers to Scripture’s rebuke of error. It exposes our doctrinal and practical faults. Adams notes that Scripture is used to “rebuke erring Christians effectively so that the rebuke brings a conviction of wrong.”¹⁰⁰ He further explains writing, “[reproof] is a legal term meaning more than rebuke. . . . The Word of God not only informs the Christian’s conscience, but also becomes the Spirit’s sword to bring conviction by means of the conscience.”¹⁰¹

Third, the verse tells us that “All Scripture is . . . profitable . . . for correction.” This implies that our minds and consciences contain previous errors and need reform. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* defines “correction” as “to cause something

⁹⁹ William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 46 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 568, Logos Bible Software 8.

¹⁰⁰ Jay E. Adams, *The Christian Counselor’s Manual: The Practice of Nouthetic Counseling*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 94.

¹⁰¹ Jay Adams, *The Christian Counselor’s Manual*, 94n37.

to be or to become correct, with the implication of a previous condition of faults or failures.”¹⁰² God’s Word corrects our behaviors and beliefs, realigning the mind and heart to its holy standard. The *New American Commentary* notes, “The term ‘correcting’ . . . suggests that Scripture helps individuals to restore their doctrine or personal practice to a right state before God.”¹⁰³

Fourth, “All Scripture is . . . profitable . . . for training in righteousness.” The training Scripture provides is “in righteousness,” which produces Christian conduct and character. When Scripture’s standard of righteousness is upheld, the mind and conscience should experience spiritual comfort, joy, and satisfaction. If this standard is not upheld, the conscience should produce guilt, shame, and remorse.

Conclusion

This chapter considered how the church was led astray from teaching the power of a clear conscience to Christians and non-Christians through biblical counseling. To address this issue, five considerations were presented. First, a historical analysis demonstrated the negative influence of secular neurology, psychiatry, and psychology and its negative impact on the church’s counseling ministry. Second, theoretical considerations provided evidence of the decline of mental health within American society and those professing to be Christian. Third, sociological considerations examined, questioned, and challenged the integrationist position with that of biblical counseling. Fourth, practical considerations for biblical counseling that ministers to the conscience were provided. Fifth, an ecclesiastical consideration calling the church to a reformation that returns to the Scripture was presented.

¹⁰² Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, vol.1, 2nd ed., ed. Rondal B. Smith and Karen A. Munson (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), 673, Logos Bible Software 8.

¹⁰³ Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin Jr., *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, New American Commentary, vol. 34 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 237, Logos Bible Software 8.

CHAPTER 4

DETAILS AND DESCRIPTION OF TEACHING MEMBERS THE POWER OF A CLEAR CONSCIENCE

Introduction

This chapter will provide the chronological details of this ministry research project, describing how I sought permission to perform the project as well as the preparation, promotion, implementation, and evaluation of the project's results. The purpose of this project was to teach a group of members of Twin City Bible Church how to attain, maintain, and experience a clear conscience in the Christian life. The four main goals of this project were: (1) To create a two-part Likert scale survey that gathered demographic information and assessed the basic beliefs, knowledge, attitudes, and practices of participants pertaining to their consciences; (2) To develop and teach a six-week curriculum plan about the conscience; (3) To administer pre-surveys that gathered general demographic information and assessed the basic beliefs, knowledge, attitudes, and practices of participants pertaining to their consciences; (4) To administer identical post-surveys that assessed the basic beliefs, knowledge, attitudes, and practices of participants pertaining to their consciences to determine if the course curriculum made a positive, statistically significant change in the lives of the participants. Implementation of the project began on May 22, 2023, and concluded on December 17, 2023.

Permission for the Project

On May 22, 2023, a written request was presented to the elder board of Twin City Bible Church of Winston-Salem, North Carolina, for permission to implement this project. Allowance was granted on June 2, 2023, by email. The elders authorized the class to be taught during a regularly scheduled Sunday School class time. This time slot

was selected because of time limitations and a lack of classroom availability. The project was conducted during the earlier of two Sunday School sessions. The class would be available to any interested adults with the hope of having at least twelve participants. On June 16, 2023, the elders requested a specific start date and end date for the project in order to add it to the church's fall calendar. October 29, 2023, was provided as a definitive start date, and December 10, 2023, was given as a concluding date.

Preparation for Teaching the Project

Weeks 1–2

Preparation for the teaching sessions began during the weeks of September 10 and September 17, 2023. The course curriculum for classes 1 and 2 was formulated during these weeks. Chapters 2 and 3 of this ministry project were used to create the course curriculum. The sections dealing with Romans 2 and Hebrews 9 were summarized in outline format using a sermonic formula. This formula included a title, a summary explanation of the class, an introduction, a key biblical text, a thesis statement, an outline of points with cross-references, and specific elements of application.

Weeks 3–4

During the weeks of September 24 and October 1, 2023, the course curriculum outline for classes 3 and 4 was constructed. Also, the class announcement for the church was drafted and submitted by email for the elders' approval. It was during these weeks that the expert panel was approached individually and asked to review the curriculum outline. Each person on the panel was verbally informed of the requirements, apprised of their qualifications, and instructed as to when they would receive the class curriculum for their evaluations. They were also instructed to use the provided curriculum evaluation rubric to assess the biblical accuracy, teaching methodology, scope, and practicality of the proposed curriculum. The entire panel agreed to evaluate the curriculum.

Five people were selected as the expert panel based on their education,

ministerial experience, and diversity. At the recommendation of Dr. Matthew Haste, the expert panel consisted of three men and two women. The first four participants are members of Twin City Bible Church and the last serves as a pastor in another state. The first participant is a staff elder who has earned a Master of Divinity. He has over ten years of pastoral experience, serving in a variety of ministries. The second is a lay elder who also earned a Master of Divinity. He has pastored two churches and possesses over twenty years of ministerial experience. The third person attended a Christian university and has served in various church ministries for over twenty years including grief counseling, children's ministry, and youth ministry. She has been homeschooling her six children in grades two through twelve with a Christian curriculum. The fourth person has been a Christian for over twelve years, and she has served in children's ministries, women's discipleship, and seminary wives ministry. The fifth person serves as a lead pastor in another state and has earned the degrees of Master of Divinity and Doctor of Ministry. He has pastored two churches and possesses over twenty-five years of ministerial experience.

Promotion of the Project

Announcements for the class began five weeks in advance on October 1, 2023. Church-wide promotion included both written and verbal forms. The class announcement was made in each Sunday bulletin, in the church's weekly email, and displayed in the PowerPoint presentation of the church announcements before and after the two Sunday morning services and before and after the Wednesday evening service. Verbal announcements promoting the class took place before the first hour Sunday School class, during the Wednesday evening service announcements, and by personal invitation to various congregants. The bulletin and email announcements contained the title of the class, "The Extraordinary Power of a Clear Conscience," and were accompanied by a two-sentence description of the class: "Join us for a seven-week introductory class on the

doctrine of the conscience. We will study the Scriptures to discern the concept of the conscience, learn how to attain and maintain a clear conscience, and experience its blessings.” Also, a two-sentence explanation noted the class as a requirement of my degree program: “This class is a ministerial project conducted by Louis Faustino to fulfill the requirements for the Doctor of Educational Ministry program at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Participants will be asked to fill out an agreement form to take the class, as well as pre- and post-surveys.” The written announcements included a suggested book for the participants, *The Vanishing Conscience* by John F. MacArthur Jr.

Weeks 5–6

Preparation for the project continued during the weeks of October 8 and October 15, 2023. The course curriculum outline was constructed for classes 5 and 6. The pre- and post-surveys were created and edited to include twenty-five statements that would be used to evaluate the participants. The surveys were made up of two parts. Part 1 consisted of a questionnaire that sought to gather the participants’ demographic information that included their age group, gender, whether they considered themselves Christians, length of time as a Christian, length of time attending Twin City Bible Church, and membership status. Part 2 consisted of twenty-five survey statements that required participants to select responses from a six-point Likert scale: (SD) strongly disagree, (D) disagree, (DS) disagree somewhat, (AS) agree somewhat, (A) agree, and (SA) strongly agree.¹ During the week of October 15, 2023, the Research Profile which contained the participant survey and the curriculum outline was emailed for approval to my supervisor, Dr. Robert Burrelli.

Week 7

During the week of October 22, 2023, the Research Profile was approved by

¹ See appendix 2.

Dr. Burrelli, returned by email, and forwarded to the Professional Doctoral Studies department. It was received by Dr. Haste, reviewed by the Ethics Committee, received approval, and emailed back to me within twenty-four hours. Once I received notice of its approval, the survey and curriculum outline were forwarded to the expert panel for their review. The expert panel was asked to return the evaluation within the week in order to allow time for any needed modifications. They returned the evaluations that same week, giving an approval rating of 97.18 percent which exceeded the criteria of 90 percent approval for the project's implementation.

During week 7, the first lecture was prepared in a scripted format. A sermonic formula outlined the lectures while the details, cross-references, and illustrations were crafted in the teaching notes for each subsequent lesson. A PowerPoint presentation was also created to display the ministry research project title as well as the lecture title, thesis, outline, and points of application. Two recording devices were used. The first was a digital recorder used for uploading the class lecture to the church's website each Wednesday. The second was my cell phone which was used to record the lectures as a backup.

Implementation of the Project

Week 8: Session 1

The first class began on October 29, 2023, and was offered to all adult congregants without requiring registration. Forty pre-surveys were prepared for the class attendees with the hope that at least twelve would attend all the lectures. Just over sixty people attended the first class. The first forty attendees were asked to participate in the survey, and those who chose to refrain were asked to hand the surveys to a neighboring participant. The initial class opened with a verbal explanation of the project which included the participatory waiver and the pre-survey handout. Attendees were advised of their right to withdraw from the class and were assured of their anonymity in survey

participation. The class participants were instructed to fill out the surveys at the beginning of class and return them at the end of class by placing them in a briefcase located by the exit door. This was to ensure both the anonymity of all participants and that the surveys would be returned on that same day. All forty surveys were filled out and collected at the end of the class time.

During the initial class, participants in the survey were encouraged to create their own personal identification number. Each participant was instructed to choose a ten-digit number such as a past phone number that they were no longer associated with (e.g., a childhood phone number, previous employer's phone number, etc.). They were discouraged from using a sequential order of numbers, their social security numbers, or their current phone numbers to protect their privacy. The participants were instructed to fill out the project surveys at the beginning of the class for two reasons. First, it was hoped that their answers would be spontaneous and honest to their current beliefs and convictions. Second, completing the pre-surveys during class time ensured the surveys would be filled out and returned immediately. The surveys also served to provide an attendance record for those who participated. The class participants were encouraged to listen to the recorded messages online if they were unable to attend any of the lectures in person.

The first lecture laid the foundation for the rest of the classes. The lecture began with a PowerPoint presentation displaying a quote from the Protestant Reformer Martin Luther, as he noted it is neither safe nor sane to violate one's conscience. The text for the class was Romans 2:14–15. The title of the class was "A General Introduction to the Conscience." It was noted that the Scriptures do not provide a definition of the conscience but rather identify it through description. It was taught that the conscience is a gift from God given to all people which acts as an internal witness within a person's heart that makes him aware of some moral standard which is informed by the mind. As we considered the text in its context, we considered four aspects of the conscience: (1) the

universal nature of the conscience, (2) the conscience with exposure to special revelation, (3) the conscience with exposure to general revelation, and (4) the universal function of the conscience. This lesson explained and sought to convince the attendees that all men and women possess a conscience which needs to be informed by the Scriptures to function properly. The lesson filled the allotted time of one hour for the class due to initial prayer requests, the explanation of the project, survey implementation, and class content. During this week, the second lecture was prepared in a scripted format. A PowerPoint presentation was created to display the lecture title, thesis, outline, and points of application. Attendance for class participants was recorded in an Excel spreadsheet, and a new attendance sheet was prepared for the following class.

Week 9: Session 2

The second class began with participants recording their attendance on a clipboard by checking their personal identification number next to the date of the class. This method of recording attendance was used for all subsequent classes.

The second lecture was entitled, “How to Attain a Clear Conscience.” The introduction reviewed eight descriptions of the conscience found within the New Testament. The key text for the lecture was Hebrews 9:9–14 and the surrounding context. The thesis for the study considered five reasons why the Old Testament sacrificial system had to be replaced by the redemption of Christ: (1) it pertained to the external cleansing of the believer, (2) it was symbolic of Christ’s definitive sacrifice, (3) it was a constant reminder of sin, (4) it was restrictive in nature, and (5) it was transitive. The participants were encouraged to rejoice in and relish the extent of Christ’s redemption which provides full forgiveness for every sin, making “the worshiper perfect in conscience,” or spiritually qualified before God. Any non-Christians were encouraged to place their faith in Christ and repent of their sins. The lesson required more time than anticipated, and the applicational portion was postponed until the following class.

During week 9, the third lecture was prepared in a scripted format. A PowerPoint presentation was created to display the lecture title, thesis, outline, and points of application. The attendance record of class participants was updated in an Excel spreadsheet, and a new attendance sheet was prepared for the following class.

Week 10: Session 3

The third lecture elaborated on the application portion of the previous lesson. By this time, class attendance had increased to nearly one hundred. This lesson explained how a clear conscience is attained through faith in Christ. We reviewed the efficacy of Christ's redemption and considered what He accomplished on behalf of every Christian. This second part of the lecture explored the gospel according to the book of Hebrews. This study reviewed four pillars of the gospel message that must be believed to attain a clear conscience: (1) you must recognize God for who he defines himself to be, (2) you must recognize your personal violation of God's Law, (3) you must fully rely upon Christ's work of redemption, and (4) you must believe salvation is a gift of God's grace. The study examined God's person, nature, power, and standard of holiness as described in the book of Hebrews. It highlighted the negative example of Israel's sin and how they illustrated the rebellion in all sinners. The importance of Christ's divine nature and human nature was considered as we studied the perfection of his life, vicarious sacrifice, and redemption of sinners. We concluded by discussing the necessity of acknowledging and understanding God's divine grace toward sinners for salvation and how Christ's redemption cleanses the consciences of Christians.

During week 10, the fourth lecture was prepared in a scripted format. A PowerPoint presentation was created to display the lecture title, thesis, outline, and points of application. The attendance record of class participants was updated in an Excel spreadsheet, and a new attendance sheet was prepared for the following class.

Week 11: Session 4

The fourth lecture was entitled, “How to Maintain a Clear Conscience.” The lesson consisted of an exposition of 1 Timothy 3:8–14. The office of the New Testament deacon was examined and presented as an example of a clear conscience for the church to emulate. This study asked and sought to answer three questions: (1) what are deacons to do with a clear conscience, (2) how are deacons to maintain a clear conscience, and (3) why are deacons to maintain a clear conscience? Emphasis was added for church laymen to follow the example of the New Testament deacon as described in the passage. All Christians are to faithfully believe and apply the content of the faith to maintain a clear conscience. This process can only be accomplished as individuals believe and grow in their understanding of biblical doctrines and purpose to abide within God’s standard of righteousness found within Scripture.

During week 11, the fifth lecture was prepared in a scripted format. A PowerPoint presentation was created to display the lecture title, thesis, outline, and points of application. The attendance record of class participants was updated in an Excel spreadsheet, and a new attendance sheet was prepared for the following class.

Week 12: Session 5

The fifth lecture examined a scene within the life of David from 1 Samuel 24. It was entitled, “An Old Testament Illustration of a Good Conscience.” This study showcased David as a model of repentance and personal sorrow for sin. Attention was given to his conscience and the Old Testament synonyms and inferences that refer to the conscience and its function. This study noted four characteristics of a good conscience when it experiences the accusatory strike of sin: 1) conviction of sin, (2) a contrite attitude, (3) confession toward God, and (4) concern for righteousness. The class was encouraged to apply the text by keeping their consciences sensitive to sin as they purpose to avoid violating their convictions. They were also motivated to humble themselves before God when they sin and to confess their sin to God immediately. The lecture

concluded by explaining the responsibility of every Christian to strive to apply God's righteous standard of living.

During week 12, the sixth lecture was prepared in a scripted format. A PowerPoint presentation was created to display the lecture title, thesis, outline, and points of application. The attendance record of class participants was updated in an Excel spreadsheet, and a new attendance sheet was prepared for the following class.

Week 13: Session 6

The sixth lecture considered a New Testament example within the life of the apostle Paul from Acts 24:14–16. The study was entitled, “A New Testament Example of a Good Conscience.” The purpose was to demonstrate that a Christian who grows in the knowledge of God's Word and obeys it will maintain a good conscience, forming biblical convictions which manifest in godly character. This lecture argued that the apostle Paul exemplified three areas of Christian growth that must be pursued to produce a strong conscience. These areas consist of growth within: (1) biblical comprehension, (2) spiritual convictions, and (3) Christian character. The application focused on following the apostle's example of maintaining a blameless conscience through believing everything in Scripture and habitually obeying it. Faith in Scripture leads to a hope that purifies the believer, persuades him with the assurance of Christ's resurrection, and develops Christian convictions. These convictions result in establishing and manifesting Christian character and maintaining a good conscience.

During week 13, the seventh lecture was prepared in a scripted format. A PowerPoint presentation was created to display the lecture title, thesis, outline, and points of application. The attendance record of class participants was updated in an Excel spreadsheet, and a new attendance sheet was prepared for the following class.

Week 14: Session 7

The seventh lecture began by distributing post-surveys to the entire class.

Participants who completed the pre-survey were asked to complete the post-survey, using their personal identification numbers from the first class. These participants were instructed to fill out the surveys at the beginning of class and return them at the end of class by placing them in a briefcase located by the exit door. This was to ensure the anonymity of the participants and that the surveys would be collected immediately following the lecture. The post-survey also served as an attendance record for the participants.

The seventh lecture provided a historical analysis of counseling and the conscience in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This study also provided the historical background of the church's diminished role in counseling and the rise of humanistic solutions for problems pertaining to the conscience. The lecture was entitled, "Applicational Considerations Related to Teaching the Church the Power of a Clear Conscience." It acknowledged the resurgence of biblical counseling and sought to provide hope and direction for a much-needed reformation in the way the church counsels its members. The lecture's thesis noted five reasons why the church must be concerned with the consciences of men and women. The considerations are historical, theoretical, sociological, practical, and ecclesiastical. The lesson concluded with a brief exposition of 2 Timothy 3:16 that called the church to a reformation that recognizes the authority, sufficiency, and practicality of Scripture within the lives of Christians.

Week 15

The week of December 10, 2023, was spent cataloging the post-survey responses, calculating the attendance records in an Excel spreadsheet, and reviewing Dr. Joseph Harrod's YouTube video "T-test Webinar 2019" on how to conduct a t-test in an Excel spreadsheet. I was able to apply the t-test calculations and record the results. At this time, I discovered that thirty-three of forty participants had filled out the post-survey, yet only twenty-three of these participants had listened to all the lectures. The ten

participants with an incomplete attendance record were removed from the survey calculations. Also, several attendees who were unable to attend some of the classes noted on the attendance record that they had listened to the lectures online instead.

After the last lecture, three of the church elders who had attended the classes requested a follow-up Question-and-Answer session. This session took place on December 17, 2023. The elders joined me on the platform and asked me direct questions about my motivation for this ministry project, what I had learned through my studies, and what the pre- and post-surveys revealed about the class participants. Attendees were then permitted to inquire about the conscience and the biblical passages covered in the lectures. The questions included the spiritual nature of the devil's influence upon the minds and consciences of Christians, the practical means of encouraging ourselves and others in strengthening our consciences, and how weak and strong Christians are to live in harmony with one another according to biblically informed consciences.

Summation of Project Goals

There were four main goals to this ministry project: (1) To create a two-part Likert scale survey that gathered demographic information and assessed the basic beliefs, knowledge, attitudes, and practices of participants pertaining to their consciences; (2) To develop and teach a six-week curriculum plan about the conscience; (3) To administer pre-surveys that gathered general demographic information and assessed the basic beliefs, knowledge, attitudes, and practices of participants pertaining to their consciences; and (4) To administer identical post-surveys that assessed the basic beliefs, knowledge, attitudes, and practices of participants pertaining to their consciences to determine if the course curriculum made a positive, statistically significant change in the lives of the participants.

The first goal was to create a two-part Likert scale survey to collect both general demographic data and specific data regarding the participants' knowledge and

attitudes about the conscience and conscience-related issues. Participants marked statements derived from chapters 2 and 3 of this project according to a six-point Likert scale: (SD) strongly disagree, (D) disagree, (DS) disagree somewhat, (AS) agree somewhat, (A) agree, and (SA) strongly agree. This goal was considered successfully met when the two-part Likert scale survey was completed and approved by my supervisor and the Ethics Committee.

The second goal was to develop a six-week curriculum about the conscience. The curriculum covered five main biblical texts that referenced and described the universality of the conscience and how it functions within the lives of men and women. It also provided a historical analysis of counseling and the conscience in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The curriculum aimed to increase the participants' knowledge about the conscience and how to attain a clear conscience through faith in Christ's redemption. It also sought to modify the participants' attitudes in a biblical direction concerning the importance of maintaining a clear conscience. Last, the curriculum aimed to equip the participants to examine their own consciences and convictions through the teachings of Scripture. An expert panel of five participants helped to determine the effectiveness of the goals by using a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, clarity, scope, and applicability of the curriculum.² This goal was considered successful when a minimum of 90 percent of all the rubric evaluation indicators met or exceeded the sufficiency level, and the curriculum was implemented.

The third goal was to administer a pre-survey that assessed the participants' basic beliefs, knowledge, attitudes, and practices pertaining to their consciences.³ The aim was to evaluate at least twelve members of Twin City Bible Church who would volunteer to participate in the study. This goal was considered successfully met when at

² See appendix 1.

³ See appendix 2.

least twelve members completed the pre-surveys and returned them.⁴

The fourth goal was to administer an identical post-survey to at least twelve participants who had completed a pre-survey and attended or listened online to all the teaching sessions. The post-survey would assess any changes in their beliefs, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors.⁵ This goal was considered successfully met when at least twelve of these participants listened to all the teaching sessions and completed the post-surveys and when a t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive, statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-survey scores.

Evaluation of Project Goals

Goal 1 Results

The first goal was achieved during the week of October 15, 2023. The pre- and post-surveys were created and edited to include general demographic data and twenty-five statements measured by a Likert scale. During the week of October 22, 2023, Dr. Burrelli approved the Research Profile and forwarded it to the Professional Doctoral Studies department. Dr. Haste received it and submitted it to the Ethics Committee, who reviewed and approved it within twenty-four hours.

Goal 2 Results

The second goal was to develop a six-week curriculum that explained the biblical concept of the conscience and the effects of Christ's redemption for the Christian. The curriculum was developed by summarizing the content of chapters 2 and 3 from the ministry project and creating an outline. Each class was outlined with a sermonic formula which contained a title, introduction, a key biblical text, thesis statement, outline with

⁴ See table A1 in appendix 3.

⁵ See table A2 in appendix 4.

cross-references, and specific elements of application. This goal was achieved when the curriculum was written and successfully reviewed by the expert panel. The expert panel provided an approval rating of 97.18 percent which exceeded the criteria of 90 percent approval for the project's implementation.

Although the approval rating met the criteria, a few edits were suggested and implemented. The first suggestion noted that the application needed to be stronger, especially regarding the Hebrews study. In this study, the gospel message needed to be more central to the lesson and show how Christ makes the worshiper "perfect," or qualified in his conscience. Also, another panelist suggested that the third study showcasing the New Testament deacon needed a greater explanation for the application to lay persons. Third, though the study did not address the issues of a "weak" conscience and a "strong" conscience, the suggestion was made to identify and define the two. This last issue was covered in the bonus Question-and-Answer session.

Goal 3 Results

The third goal was to administer a pre-survey to at least twelve members of Twin City Bible Church who would volunteer to participate in the study. Forty pre-surveys were prepared for the class attendees with the hope that at least twelve would attend all the lectures. Just over sixty people attended the first class. The first forty attendees were asked to participate in the survey. The participants' responses expressed their personal assessment of their beliefs, knowledge, attitudes, and practices pertaining to their consciences. I was able to consider their answers and attain a general understanding of each participant as I entered their pre-survey scores into an Excel file. This provided the information I needed to determine what portions of the lectures ought to be stressed in each lesson.

Goal 4 Results

The fourth goal was to administer a post-survey to the class participants who

had completed the pre-survey. Thirty-three of forty participants filled out the post-survey. Only twenty-three of these participants had listened to all the lectures. The ten participants with incomplete attendance records were removed from the survey calculations. The goal to administer the post-survey to the class was met when these surveys were completed and a t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive, statistically significant difference between pre- and post-lecture survey scores of the class participants: $t_{(22)} = 4.899, p < .0001$.

Table 1. Result of t-test for dependent samples

	<i>Pre-Test Total</i>	<i>Post-Test Total</i>
Mean	134.6521739	141.6086957
Variance	73.14624506	45.15810277
Observations	23	23
Pearson Correlation	0.643677406	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	22	
t Stat	-5.011581307	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.00003	
t Critical one-tail	1.717144374	
P(T<=t) two-tail	5.12275E-05	
t Critical two-tail	2.073873068	

Conclusion

According to my assessment, all the ministry goals related to the implementation of this ministry project were achieved and deemed a success. The overarching goal of the project was to teach the members of Twin City Bible Church what it means to attain, maintain, and experience the characteristics of a clear conscience that leads to identifiable spiritual maturity. The above t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive, statistically significant difference between pre- and post-lecture survey scores. The four individual goals included: (1) To create a two-part Likert scale survey that gathered demographic information and assessed the basic beliefs, knowledge,

attitudes, and practices of participants pertaining to their consciences; (2) To develop and teach a six-week curriculum plan about the conscience; (3) To administer pre-surveys that gathered general demographic information and assessed the basic beliefs, knowledge, attitudes, and practices of participants pertaining to their consciences; and (4) To administer identical post-surveys that assessed the basic beliefs, knowledge, attitudes, and practices of participants pertaining to their consciences to determine if the course curriculum made a positive, statistically significant change in the lives of the participants.

CHAPTER 5
EVALUATION OF TEACHING MEMBERS THE
POWER OF A CLEAR CONSCIENCE

Introduction

This chapter will provide a personal evaluation concerning various elements of this ministry project. The evaluation will consider the purpose and goals as well as judge the strengths and weaknesses found within its content and implementation. It will also suggest thoughts and ideas describing what I would have done differently if provided the opportunity. Personal considerations will reflect on the theological truths that I have learned and applied throughout the duration of the project, as well as what I have learned about myself as a minister. A summary conclusion will finalize this project's evaluation.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

The purpose of this project was to teach a group of members from Twin City Bible Church, Winston-Salem, North Carolina, how to attain, maintain, and experience a clear conscience in the Christian life. This ministry project sought to reflect the teachings of the conscience in both the Old and New Testament Scripture and to demonstrate its importance, relevance, and primacy in the lives of believers. The apostle Paul identified the conscience within non-Christians and the need for it to be rightly informed by the truth of Scripture (Rom 2:12–15). The writer of Hebrews explained how every person with faith in Christ attains a clear conscience through Christ's work of redemption (Heb 9:9–14). The New Testament deacon provided a primary example for the church of one who maintains a clear conscience through faith in Christ and obedience to the Scripture (1 Tim 3:9). Last, David illustrated the power that results from possessing a good

conscience that is sensitive to sin, sincere in repentance, and strengthened unto obedience (1 Sam 24:5–15).

The doctrine of the conscience is a matter of importance, relevance, and primacy according to the Scriptures; therefore, understanding the conscience and its function must be a high priority for every believer. The twenty-first century church must be reminded of the extent and efficacy of Christ's redemption to experience its power, encouragement, and joy. In addition, this ministry project aimed to convince the members of Twin City Bible Church of these truths as they endure temptations from the world, the failures due to sin, and the spiritual discouragements that distract from Christ's redemption. The purpose of this project was achieved as a t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive, statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-survey scores. Many of the participants also offered kind words of appreciation for the class, sharing their spiritual encouragement and growth in their knowledge of the doctrine of the conscience.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

Like the purpose, the goals of this project proved to be sufficient, educational, and insightful. They provided perceptive knowledge about the participants and substantial information about the class topic. This ministry project contained four goals: (1) creating a Likert scale survey; (2) developing a six-week curriculum about the conscience, having it evaluated by an expert panel of five members, and then teaching it to participating members of Twin City Bible Church; (3) administering a pre-survey to assess the basic beliefs, knowledge, attitudes, and practices about topics related to the conscience; and (4) administering an identical post-survey to assess if the course curriculum made a positive, statistically significant change in the lives of the participants.

Goal 1: Likert Scale Survey

The Likert scale survey was derived from the content of chapters 2 and 3 of

this ministry project. The aim was to create a two-part survey that would collect general, demographic data and assess the spiritual and practical disposition of the participants concerning the conscience and conscience-related issues. The goal was to measure the participants' level of agreement with given statements and discern their subjective feelings on spiritual matters concerning personal beliefs, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors. The Likert scale survey incorporated a six-answer option to avoid the non-response answer and provide a greater nuanced response. This goal was met when the two-part survey was completed and approved by my supervisor and the Ethics Committee.

Goal 2: Develop and Teach a Six-Week Curriculum

The six-week curriculum about the conscience followed an outline created from chapters 2 and 3 of this ministry project. The extent of the curriculum provided a clear and helpful means of increasing the participants' knowledge about the conscience and the efficacy of Christ's redemption. The course content was thorough enough to assist the participants in their understanding of the conscience and how all Christians attain a clear conscience through faith in Christ's redemption. It also modified the participants' attitudes towards maintaining a clear conscience by increasing their zeal to persevere in the faith and obey the Scripture. The course instruction equipped the participants to examine their consciences and convictions through the teachings of Scripture. These conclusions were substantiated by a t-test for dependent samples that demonstrated a positive, statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-survey scores. Also, these findings were further substantiated by the positive feedback that the participants provided through informal conversations that took place before and after class time, by email correspondence during the week, and through personal phone calls.

The expert panel proved to be particularly helpful in their assessment and feedback concerning the course curriculum. Each of the five participants was asked, in

person, to evaluate the course outline and, once they agreed, were sent written instructions in an email. Each panel member received a copy of the curriculum outline and an evaluation rubric to assess the biblical faithfulness, clarity, scope, and applicability of the curriculum.¹ The rubric also provided the panel members with the opportunity to offer their suggestions, criticisms, and personal notes about the curriculum. This goal proved successful as the returned evaluations showed an approval rating of 97.18 percent, exceeding the minimum requirement of 90 percent.

This goal also included teaching the course curriculum in a Sunday School setting over six weeks.² As noted above in chapter 4, the second class session required more time than anticipated, and the applicational portion was postponed until the following class. In the ensuing class, I was able to elaborate on the applicational portion and have the participants consider the gospel according to the book of Hebrews. This allowed the opportunity to offer a deeper and more robust explanation of how a person attains a clear conscience through faith in Christ and what Christ's redemption accomplished in qualifying a believer in his conscience. This class provided a mutual blessing and encouragement to both the students and the teacher. As the teacher, I was able to reflect on Christ's work and how it applies to me personally. In addition, many of the class participants expressed their appreciation for the redemption of Christ and their gratitude for the class content.

The need for an additional class became a source of concern for me. I knew it would affect the overall class schedule. It had been noted that there would be no Sunday School class on December 24, 2023, which was quickly approaching. In God's providential kindness, the elders allotted the additional class time without complaint. This change provided the opportunity for the elders to request a follow-up Question-and-

¹ See appendix 1.

² See appendix 7.

Answer session on December 17, 2023. This gave the class participants a chance to voice their questions, concerns, and needs for clarity. It also gave the elders a public occasion to affirm, endorse, and publicly support the content of the project.

Goal 3: Administer a Pre-Survey

The third goal was to administer a pre-survey that assessed the participants' basic beliefs, knowledge, attitudes, and practices pertaining to their consciences. The aim was to evaluate at least twelve members of Twin City Bible Church who would volunteer to participate in the study. This goal was considered successful when forty members completed the pre-surveys and returned them. Forty pre-surveys were prepared for the class attendees with the hope that at least twelve would attend all the lectures.

Unbeknownst to me, just over sixty people decided to attend the first class. Since the actual sample size was larger than anticipated, I would have preferred to have brought enough surveys for all attendees.

The pre-surveys revealed some spiritual and doctrinal deficiencies within the beliefs, knowledge, attitudes, and practices of a few participants. I was confident that the class curriculum would address these concerns and provide the needed doctrinal and spiritual insight the participants needed to be educated and encouraged. The participants' formal and informal feedback confirmed that the class instruction proved beneficial.

Goal 4: Administer a Post-Survey

The fourth goal was to administer a post-survey to at least twelve participants who had completed a pre-survey and attended or listened online to all the teaching sessions. The post-survey assessed changes in their beliefs, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors. This goal was considered successfully met when twenty-three participants attended or listened online to all the teaching sessions and completed and returned the post-surveys. The fourth survey goal was affirmed when a t-test for dependent samples

demonstrated a positive, statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-survey scores.

Strengths of the Project

The expert panel and the class participants articulated three strengths of the project. First, each member of the expert panel praised the robust use of Scripture in developing each class. One elder noted, “The section ‘How to Attain a Clear Conscience’ was particularly well done and helpful.” He also commented on the section from 1 Samuel, saying, “Helpful insight into the conscience from Old Testament texts.” Another pastor highlighted that the lessons were biblically driven and not oriented around personal opinions or subjective experience. The panel also expressed enthusiastic approval for the clarity of the gospel message and the explanation of the benefits of Christ’s redemption for the Christian.

Second, the topic of the conscience proved both relevant and interesting to church members. Many noted that they had not heard or read much material about the conscience from a biblical perspective. It was particularly encouraging to learn that twelve participants listened to seventeen lectures online within the seven weeks. As I noted above, class attendance was considerably higher than initially anticipated. The class began with over sixty attendees and consistently reached more than eighty each consecutive week.

Third, the extent of interest in the topic moved beyond attending the class to personal interaction with many participants. Each week, numerous attendees shared their motivation to re-evaluate the convictions of their consciences with the knowledge of Scripture and to inform their beliefs. Others shared their joy and encouragement as they were reminded of and contemplated the sufficiency and efficacy of Christ’s redemption. Still others shared that they were experiencing peace and assurance in their conscience as they were being exposed to doctrinal truth and principles from Scripture. Many were

stimulated to study the topic further on their own and had purchased Christian books on the conscience.

Weaknesses of the Project

There were at least five weaknesses within the content and implementation of this project. First, four of the five members of the expert panel noted that each lesson needed a greater emphasis on application. I remedied this issue when I re-evaluated and edited each lesson. The exercise was personally helpful for me as I considered specific ways of appropriating the Scripture that corresponded with the lecture.

A second weakness was that the course content covered a large topic with much information in a short amount of time. This affected the delivery of the lectures. As a result, I was compelled to speak quickly during my weekly presentations. I also had to edit my lectures, removing content while I taught, due to time constraints. This proved to be a major distraction and source of concern for me and at least one participant, who gently criticized the speed at which I spoke. I became apprehensive about the level of impact the lectures were going to have in the lives of the participants.

A third issue I would label a weakness was that the survey statements could have been more probing, eliciting deeper, more decisive responses. After I began the class, I felt that many of my survey statements were too weak and geared toward newer, immature Christians. Once I reviewed the pre-surveys, I realized that thirty of the forty participants had been Christians and attended church services for over eleven years and many for over twenty years. It was then that I wished my survey had included more on conscience-related issues of older, more experienced Christians.

A fourth weakness I observed was having suggested reading rather than required reading for the class. I chose not to have required reading since the Sunday School class does not normally use book studies. I was concerned that having required reading would deter many from attending. However, in retrospect, required reading might

have stimulated the class participants further, providing them a greater perspective on the conscience and conscience-related issues.

Fifth, the total length of the study may have been too short. In hindsight, eight weeks to complete the study would have been preferable to six. Since there was a high volume of material to be covered each week, the shortened time did not allow for much class interaction. Some participants expressed their regret that the class time did not incorporate discussion or solicit questions from the attendees.

What I Would Do Differently

In addition to addressing the weakness noted above, I would alter two elements within this ministry project if I were to conduct it again. First, I would require participants to pre-register for the class. A pre-registration would have allowed me to be better prepared with enough pre-surveys. Also, pre-registration would have furnished advance knowledge about the basic demographics of each participant since I am familiar with many within this congregation. I would have been apprised of the number of years they have been a Christian and how long they have been attending Twin City Bible Church. This would have enabled me to produce a better-quality survey, more appropriate for the participants.

Second, I would change the length and method of conducting the surveys. I shortened my current survey because I was concerned about taxing the participants with an extensive survey and taking too much time to complete it during the initial class. The pre- and post-survey would contain an increased number of survey statements, soliciting more data for the evaluation. This would provide greater insight into both the participants and the lectures' impact. I would also use an online method of conducting the surveys. I initially chose not to do so because I was concerned that the surveys would not be filled out and returned in time for the first class. I also was concerned that online access would be cumbersome for many of the older participants.

Theological Reflections

Many of the theological and spiritual blessings of this ministry project came from the biblical studies of chapter 2. I have experienced greater insight as I studied and pondered the depth and breadth of Scripture's revelation about Christ and the efficacy of his redemption. I had hoped and prayed that God would sanctify me through this study, and I believe he answered my prayer. Before I became a Christian, I had habitually sought to silence my guilty conscience through worldly distractions. Since I became a Christian in 1996, I had sought to keep a blameless, good, and clean conscience, but I was not confident as to how to accomplish this except for avoiding sin. Through this study, I have grown in my knowledge of how Christ is able to cleanse my conscience, inform my conscience, and convince me in my conscience with his truth and justification. His sufficient work of redemption has fully paid for all my sin and freed me from positional guilt. I must habitually remind myself of his accomplished salvation through believing in his Word and demonstrating that belief through obedience and repentance from sin.

Also, the implementation of this project confirmed my concern that many in the church need a greater, more robust understanding of the redemption of Christ and the benefits of its application. In the life of a Christian, a misinformed conscience leads to a myriad of spiritual pitfalls, the greatest of which is a diminished view of Christ's redemption and all that he has accomplished. A shallow view of these truths will lead to needless judgmentalism, legalistic views of sanctification, and liberal perversions found within the church. As individual Christians grow in their knowledge and understanding of biblical doctrines which educate the mind and inform the conscience, these issues will be remedied. Christians will be empowered to live and respond in ways that reflect a conscience that is convinced by biblical truth and that manifests in love for Christ and others.

Another benefit of this study pertains to the office of the deacon. In my

ecclesiastical experience, the diaconate has had a very low, spiritually weak role. Too often deacons' duties pertain primarily to the building and grounds, and they have little to do with serving the spiritual needs of the saints. First Timothy teaches that the office of deacon is primarily concerned with ministering to the souls of the saints. The deacon should be a mature believer who has been personally examined by the leadership of the church and passed the scriptural character qualifications of 1 Timothy 3. By believing in and obeying the content of the faith with a clear conscience, he is to serve the body of the church according to its spiritual and practical needs. Deacons are to be examples for the church, modeling boldness and confidence in truth.³

Last, the historical findings of chapter 3 and the current spiritual state of many Christian universities and colleges are concerning. Pastors and churches must sound the alarm and warn parents and students of the dangers of integrating humanistic psychology and psychiatry with biblical counselling.⁴ Also, church leaders must prevent the philosophy of integrationism from entering the church and providing insufficient remedies for Christian consciences.

Personal Reflections

The minister's self-watch must be his most important concern.⁵ As I have reflected upon my personal growth, I am glad to affirm that this study has been a personal blessing to my soul and conscience. My conscience has been informed and strengthened as I have been able to reflect upon the sufficiency and efficacy of Christ's redemption to cleanse my conscience. I have steadily experienced the blessings and benefits of resting

³ See Alexander Strauch, *Paul's Vision for the Deacons: Assisting the Elders with the Care of God's Church* (Colorado Springs: Lewis and Roth, 2017).

⁴ See Jay E. Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling: More Than Redemption* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979); Robert D. Smith, *The Christian Counselor's Medical Desk Reference* (Stanley, NC: Timeless Texts, 2000); Paul David Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands: People in Need of Change Helping People in Need of Change* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2002).

⁵ See C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, bk. 1 (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim, 1990).

in the Lord's salvation, relishing in the satisfaction that God, in Christ, has removed his condemnation from me. Rehearsing the reality of my spiritual position has notably affected my progress in practical sanctification as sins have been put off and words, thoughts, and works of righteousness have been applied.

During this time of spiritual growth, I have spent many months in self-examination. When I began my program at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary during the summer of 2018, I was in full-time ministry. Fifteen months later, God providentially had me endure a forced resignation from a congregation that would not abide by Scripture and their by-laws. Implementing this ministry project provided me the opportunity to re-examine the convictions of my conscience and to discern if God is calling me back into the pastorate. I have considered my life before the pastoral qualifications of 1 Timothy 3 and have been assured in my conscience and by those closest to me that these qualifications are characteristic of my life. As I have implemented the teaching portion of this project, many of the class participants affirmed their belief in my ability to preach and teach God's Word and have encouraged me to pursue pastoral ministry once again. I strive to serve God with a clear and blameless conscience wherever he leads.

Conclusion

In my estimation, this ministry project on the conscience has proved beneficial and successful, both corporately and personally. Corporately, my goal was to expose the members of Twin City Bible Church of Winston-Salem, North Carolina, to the teaching of Scripture concerning the conscience, and the statistical analysis and individual responses from the participants demonstrated that this goal was accomplished. Personally, the Lord has used this project to help me better understand the means and importance of maintaining a good conscience. It has been an ongoing motivation to keep my conscience sensitive to sin, to be quick to repent, and to be purposeful in obedience to

God's commands. My continued prayer is that all who have been exposed to this ministry project will continue to increase in their knowledge of God's Word, keep their consciences informed by Scripture, and obey the Lord with the help of the Holy Spirit so that they will maintain consciences that are good, clear, and blameless.

APPENDIX 1

EXPERT PANEL CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC

The following instrument was used to evaluate the sufficiency of the curriculum. A pre-survey rubric was provided for the panel to evaluate the curriculum for biblical faithfulness, clarity, scope, and applicability.

Name of evaluator: _____

Date: _____

Conscience Curriculum Evaluation Tool					
1=insufficient 2=requires attention 3=sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Biblical Accuracy					
The lesson is clearly relevant to the issue of the conscience.					
The material was faithful to the Bible's teaching on the conscience.					
Teaching Methodology					
The material is theologically sound.					
The thesis of the lesson is clearly stated.					
Scope					
The points of the lesson clearly support the thesis.					
The lesson contains points of practical application.					
Practicality					
The lesson is sufficiently thorough in its coverage of the material.					
Overall, the lesson is clearly presented.					

APPENDIX 2
ASSESSMENT SURVEY

The Assessment Survey was implemented to measure the participants' dispositions in four areas: (1) their basic beliefs about attaining a clear conscience, (2) their knowledge of the gospel and the conscience, (3) their attitudes toward violating and maintaining a clear conscience, and (4) how equipped they are in their practices of pursuing holiness. This survey was administered before and after the project curriculum was taught and the scores were compared.

“The Extraordinary Power of a Clear Conscience”

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to expose the participants to the biblical teaching of the conscience. This research is being conducted by Louis Faustino at Twin City Bible Church in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry research project. In this research, you will answer survey questions before the project, and you will answer survey questions at the conclusion of the project. Any Information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary, and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.* By completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

Part 1

Participant’s 10-digit number (e.g., old phone number): _ _ - _ - _ - _ - _ - _ - _ - _ -

Directions: Answer the following multiple-choice questions by placing an ‘X’ next to your answer.

1. To what age group do you belong?
 A. 18–30
 B. 31–40
 C. 41–50
 D. 51–60
 E. 61+

2. What is your gender?
 A. Male
 B. Female

3. Do you consider yourself to be a Christian?
 A. Yes
 B. No
 C. Not sure

4. How long have you been a Christian?
 A. 1–5 years
 B. 6–10 years
 C. 11–20 years
 D. 21+ years

5. How long have you been attending Twin City Bible Church?

- A. 1–5 years
- B. 6–10 years
- C. 11–20 years
- D. 21+ years

6. Are you a member of Twin City Bible Church?

- A. Yes
- B. No

Part 2:

Participants 10-digit number: _____

Directions: These statements are requesting your opinion using the following scale:

- SD strongly disagree
- D disagree
- DS disagree somewhat
- AS agree somewhat
- A agree
- SA strongly agree

Please circle the appropriate answer in the chart below.							
1.	I believe I have a clear and robust understanding of the Gospel.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
2.	I believe Jesus died for my past, present, and future sins.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
3.	I regularly spend time reading God’s Word.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
4.	I regularly listen to biblical preaching and teaching.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
5.	My personal convictions are based on Scripture.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
6.	The sin I practice is my own fault.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
7.	I think there are times when it is appropriate to excuse sin in my life.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
8.	I cannot tolerate a vast amount of personal sin in my life.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
9.	Even when I repent of my sin, I still feel guilty before God.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
10.	I am familiar with the Old Testament sacrificial system and its function.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA

Please circle the appropriate answer in the chart below.							
11.	I understand why the Old Testament sacrificial system was insufficient and why Jesus needed to be the perfect sacrifice for my sins.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
12.	I view my church elders and deacons as godly examples.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
13.	I believe some people are born without a conscience.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
14.	I believe a person's conscience can change.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
15.	I am confident that I know what the Bible means by the term conscience.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
16.	I strive to keep my conscience clear.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
17.	I feel equipped to identify the characteristics of a clear conscience in my life.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
18.	I yearn to obey Scripture in my conscience.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
19.	The best way to deal with my guilty conscience is to distract it.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
20.	When my conscience is violated, I try to ignore it.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
21.	The best way to deal with a guilty conscience is to balance it with good works.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
22.	When my conscience feels guilty because of sins committed, I immediately repent and confess my sins to God.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
23.	My conscience rejoices when I am reminded of the message of the Gospel.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
24.	My conscience is comforted knowing that Jesus died for my sins.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
25.	I am confident that an informed, maturing conscience will always evidence itself in my behavior.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA

APPENDIX 3
PRE-SURVEY RESULTS

This appendix presents the detailed results of the pre-course surveys. The pre-survey assessed the participants' basic beliefs, knowledge, attitudes, and practices concerning their consciences.

Table A1. Pre-survey results: Questions 1–13

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Q11	Q12	Q13
P 1	5	6	5	6	5	6	6	5	2	5	6	6	6
P 2	6	6	6	6	5	6	6	5	3	4	5	6	6
P 3	6	6	6	6	5	6	6	6	3	5	6	5	6
P 4	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	2	6	6	6	6
P 5	5	6	5	5	6	5	6	6	2	5	6	6	5
P 6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	5	6	6	6	6
P 7	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	3	6	6	6	6
P 8	4	6	6	6	6	6	6	5	5	4	6	6	6
P 9	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	5
P 10	4	6	6	6	6	4	6	5	5	4	6	6	5
P 11	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	3	3	4	5	5	5
P 12	6	6	6	5	6	6	5	4	4	4	5	5	6
P 13	5	6	6	6	6	6	5	6	2	4	5	5	4
P 14	5	6	6	4	6	6	6	3	3	3	5	6	6
P 15	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	5	6	6	6	6
P 16	5	6	5	5	5	5	6	4	3	6	6	6	5
P 17	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	2	2	4	6	6	6
P 18	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	3	6	6	6	6
P 19	6	6	6	6	6	5	6	6	2	5	5	5	6
P 20	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
P 21	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	1	6	6	6	1
P 22	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	3	2	6	6	5	3
P 23	5	6	4	4	5	6	5	5	3	4	6	5	6

Note: P represents the participant and Q represents the survey question.

Table A2. Pre-survey results: Questions 14–25

	Q14	Q15	Q16	Q17	Q18	Q19	Q20	Q21	Q22	Q23	Q24	Q25	Total
P 1	6	5	5	5	5	6	5	5	5	5	6	6	133
P 2	5	4	5	4	5	6	5	5	4	6	6	5	130
P 3	5	4	6	4	6	6	6	5	6	6	6	6	138
P 4	6	6	6	4	6	6	6	6	6	5	6	6	143
P 5	5	5	5	5	5	6	6	6	6	5	5	5	132
P 6	6	5	6	4	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	146
P 7	6	6	6	4	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	145
P 8	6	4	5	4	5	5	6	6	5	6	6	6	136
P 9	6	5	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	148
P 10	6	4	5	4	6	6	5	6	5	6	6	6	134
P 11	5	4	4	4	5	6	6	5	6	5	5	4	126
P 12	5	5	5	5	6	5	3	6	4	5	6	5	128
P 13	5	3	5	3	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	122
P 14	6	4	4	4	6	6	5	6	5	6	6	5	128
P 15	5	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	148
P 16	5	4	4	2	6	6	3	6	3	5	4	5	120
P 17	5	3	5	4	6	4	5	4	4	5	6	5	124
P 18	6	5	6	4	6	6	3	5	5	6	6	6	139
P 19	5	3	5	4	6	6	5	6	5	6	5	5	131
P 20	2	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	146
P 21	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	140
P 22	6	4	6	4	6	6	5	5	6	6	6	6	133
P 23	4	4	5	4	5	6	6	6	6	6	6	5	127
Average													134.7

Note: P represents the participant and Q represents the survey question.

APPENDIX 4
POST-SURVEY RESULTS

This appendix presents the detailed results of the post-course surveys. The post-survey assessed any changes in these beliefs, knowledge, attitudes, or practices as a result of completing the project course.

Table A3. Post-survey results: Questions 1–13

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Q11	Q12	Q13
P 1	6	6	5	6	6	6	6	5	2	6	6	6	6
P 2	6	6	6	6	5	6	6	6	2	5	6	6	6
P 3	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
P 4	5	6	6	6	5	6	6	6	3	6	6	6	6
P 5	5	6	5	6	6	6	6	6	5	5	6	5	5
P 6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	5	6	6	6	6
P 7	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	4	6
P 8	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	5	5	5	6	6	6
P 9	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	3
P 10	5	6	6	6	6	5	6	6	2	5	6	6	6
P 11	5	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	4	5	5	5	5
P 12	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	5	3	4	4	5	6
P 13	6	6	6	6	5	6	5	5	3	5	6	5	6
P 14	6	6	5	6	6	6	6	5	3	5	6	6	6
P 15	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
P 16	6	6	5	5	5	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
P 17	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	3	5	6	6	6
P 18	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	3	6	6	6	6
P 19	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	2	2	5	5	5	6
P 20	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
P 21	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
P 22	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	5
P 23	5	6	4	4	5	6	6	5	3	5	5	5	6

Note: P represents the participant and Q represents the survey question.

Table A4. Post-survey results: Questions 14–25

	Q14	Q15	Q16	Q17	Q18	Q19	Q20	Q21	Q22	Q23	Q24	Q25	Total
P 1	6	6	5	5	6	6	6	6	5	6	6	6	141
P 2	6	6	5	6	6	6	6	6	4	6	6	6	141
P 3	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	150
P 4	6	5	5	6	6	6	6	6	6	5	5	6	141
P 5	5	5	5	5	6	6	6	6	5	6	5	5	137
P 6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	149
P 7	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	2	6	6	4	142
P 8	6	5	5	5	5	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	143
P 9	5	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	146
P 10	6	5	6	6	6	6	6	6	5	6	6	6	141
P 11	5	5	6	4	6	6	5	5	5	6	6	5	135
P 12	5	5	5	5	5	6	4	6	2	5	5	5	127
P 13	5	5	5	5	6	5	5	5	6	6	6	5	134
P 14	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	5	5	6	6	142
P 15	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	150
P 16	6	5	5	5	6	6	6	6	5	6	6	6	143
P 17	6	6	6	5	6	4	5	4	6	6	6	6	140
P 18	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	5	5	6	6	6	145
P 19	6	5	5	5	6	6	6	6	5	6	6	5	134
P 20	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	150
P 21	5	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	149
P 22	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	149
P 23	4	6	5	4	5	6	5	6	5	5	6	6	128
Average													141.6

Note: P represents the participant and Q represents the survey question.

APPENDIX 5
T-TEST RESULTS

This appendix reports the results of the t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive, statistically significant difference between pre- and post-lecture survey scores of the class participants

Table A5. Result of t-test for dependent samples

	<i>Pre-Test Total</i>	<i>Post-Test Total</i>
Mean	134.6521739	141.6086957
Variance	73.14624506	45.15810277
Observations	23	23
Pearson Correlation	0.643677406	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	22	
t Stat	-5.011581307	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.00003	
t Critical one-tail	1.717144374	
P(T<=t) two-tail	5.12275E-05	
t Critical two-tail	2.073873068	

APPENDIX 6
PSYCHOLOGY DEGREES/CLASSES OFFERED
AT TOP CHRISTIAN COLLEGES
AND UNIVERSITIES

This appendix lists the top seventy-five Christian colleges and universities, compiled by www.Crosswalk.com, and notes whether they offer psychology/integration degrees or classes.¹

¹ “Best Christian Colleges & Universities: Top 75 in 2023,” Crosswalk, last modified August 17, 2023, <https://www.crosswalk.com/special-coverage/college-higher-education/best-christian-colleges-universities.html>.

Table A6. Psychology offerings at Christian schools

SCHOOL NAME	DEGREE	CLASSES ONLY	NONE
Abilene Christian University	X		
Alaska Bible College			X
Anderson University	X		
Arizona Christian University	X		
Asbury University	X		
Azusa Pacific University	X		
Baylor University	X		
Belhaven University	X		
Belmont University	X		
Bethel University	X		
Biola University	X		
Birmingham Southern College	X		
Bryan College	X		
Calvin University	X		
Campbell University	X		
Cedarville University	X		
Central College	X		
Charleston Southern University	X		
College of the Ozarks	X		
Colorado Christian University	X		
Cornerstone University	X		
Covenant College	X		
Dordt College	X		
Eastern Mennonite University	X		
Emmaus Bible College	X		
Erskine College	X		
Friends University	X		
Geneva College	X		
George Fox University	X		
Gordon College	X		
Grand Canyon University	X		
Grove City College	X		
Hardin-Simmons University	X		
Hope College	X		
Houston Baptist University	X		
Indiana Wesleyan University	X		
John Brown University	X		
Kuyper College	X		

SCHOOL NAME	DEGREE	CLASSES ONLY	NONE
Lancaster Bible College	X		
Lee University	X		
LeTourneau University	X		
Liberty University	X		
Luther College	X		
Messiah College	X		
MidAmerica Nazarene University	X		
Mississippi College	X		
Moody Bible Institute	X		
Multnomah University	X		
North Park University	X		
Northwestern College	X		
Ohio Christian University	X		
Oklahoma Baptist University	X		
Oklahoma Wesleyan University	X		
Ouachita Baptist University	X		
Pepperdine University	X		
Point Loma Nazarene University	X		
Providence Christian College		X	
Reformation Bible College			X
Regent University	X		
Roanoke College	X		
Samford University	X		
San Diego Christian College	X		
Seattle Pacific University	X		
Taylor University	X		
The College at Southeastern University		X	
The King's College - New York City		X	
The Master's University			X
Toccoa Falls College	X		
Trinity Christian College	X		
Union University	X		
University of Dallas	X		
University of Northwestern St. Paul	X		
University of the Cumberlands	X		
Westmont College	X		
Wheaton College	X		

APPENDIX 7

CURRICULUM:

This appendix contains the six lessons that were used to teach participants about the extraordinary power of a clear conscience at Twin City Bible Church of Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

“The Extraordinary Power of a Clear Conscience” Curriculum

Context:

- Introduction to the conscience will be presented in an adult Sunday School class
- Participants are church members or regular attendees living in a Christianized culture while being challenged by a sinfully perverse society

Course Overview Description:

- A general introduction to the doctrine of the conscience and its intended use in the life of a Christian will be presented. This course will focus on:
 - a biblical definition of the conscience
 - how a clear conscience is attained
 - how a clear conscience is maintained
 - the extraordinary power Christians with a clear conscience experience
- The purpose of this study is to biblically identify the conscience, provide instruction on its intended use, motivate personal holiness, and acknowledge the positive results of a good conscience.
- Curriculum Evaluation Tool will help gather feedback from the expert panel who will review the curriculum.
- An “agreement to participate” statement will be handed out, signed, and collected.
- A pre-survey questionnaire will be given at the beginning of the first class.
- An identical post-survey questionnaire will be given at the end of the last class.
- ***Suggested Supplemental Reading:***
 - *The Vanishing Conscience* by John F. MacArthur, Jr.
 - *Conscience* by Andrew David Naselli & J.D. Crowley
 - *Discovering the Joy of a Clear Conscience* by Christopher Ash

Week One Lesson Plan: The Conscience - What is it and how does it work?

- **Thesis:** Week 1 will introduce a biblical concept of the conscience and how it affects the way people think, behave, and feel.
- **Learning Outcome:** Students should have a biblical understanding of the conscience and how it is informed by the Word and work of God's moral Law.
- **Suggested Supplemental Reading:** *The Vanishing Conscience* by John F. MacArthur Jr. Chapters 1–2

Outline:

I. General Introduction to the Conscience

- A. Cultural definitions of the conscience
- B. Caricatures of the conscience
- C. Biblical definition - Rom 2:15, “the psychological faculty that distinguishes between right and wrong, i.e. moral sensitivity (Swanson. *DBLSD #5287*).”

II. Key Text - Rom 2:12–15 “For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law, and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law; 13 for it is not the hearers of the Law who are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified. 14 For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, 15 in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them,”

III. Four Aspects of the Conscience:

- A. The Universal Nature of the Conscience
 - 1. Comparison and Contrast between Jews and Gentiles
 - 2. Universal accountability to God
 - 3. Universal possession of a conscience
- B. The Conscience with Exposure to Special Revelation:
What do Jewish non-Christians know? (Rom 2:12–13)
 - 1. Unbelieving Jews identified as sinners to be judged by the Law (Rom 2:12)
 - 2. Law equals Ten Commandments
 - 3. Hearers of the Law but not “doers of the Law” are pronounced guilty (Rom 2:1–3, 6, 8, 9, 12, 13)
 - 4. Only “the doers of the Law will be justified” (Rom 2:13)

5. Conscience bears witness and “thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them” (Rom 2:15)
 6. Jews are warned they have no excuse for violating the Law
- C. The Conscience with Exposure to General Revelation:
 What do Gentile non-Christians know? (Rom 2:14–15)
1. Gentile unbeliever “does evil” (Rom 2:9) and has sinned “without the Law” (Rom 2:12)
 2. “The light” of general revelation to all unbelieving Gentiles without the Law (See Rom 1:18–32)
 3. God’s standard of judgment for Gentile unbelievers
 - a) Paul’s rationale (Rom 2:14)
 - b) Instinctive semblance of obedience (Rom 2:14)
 - c) A “law to themselves” (Rom 2:14)
 4. “The work of the Law” (Rom 2:15)
 - a) The “things of the Law” (Rom 2:14); moral acts defined by the will of God and reflected in the Ten Commandments
 - b) “In their hearts” refers to the inner person that includes the will, the mind, and the affections (Rom 2:15)
 5. Working definition of the conscience: “the psychological faculty that distinguishes between right and wrong, i.e. moral sensitivity” (Swanson, *DBLSD* #5287)

D. The Universal Function of the Conscience

1. Various descriptions
 - a) *Good Conscience*: convinced or morally obedient to God’s Law (Acts 23:1; 1Tim 1:5, 19)
 - b) *Clean/Clear Conscience*: confident in righteousness or Christ’s redemption; positively affirming (Rom 9:1; 13:5; 1Cor 10:25, 27, 28; 2Cor 1:12; 4:2; 5:11; 1Tim 3:9; 2Tim 2:3; Heb 9:14; 1Pet 2:19)
 - c) *Blameless Conscience*: without accusation (Acts 24:16)
 - d) *Perfect in Conscience*: qualified; refers to the purgation and expiation of sin (Heb 9:9)
 - e) *Accusing or Defending Conscience*: condemns or affirms (Rom 2:15)
 - f) *Weak Conscience*: biblically uninformed; unsure; immature; weak in faith (1Cor 8:7, 10, 12 [3x])

- g) *Defiled Conscience*: sinned against conscious beliefs; morally stained; religiously unclean (1Cor 8:7; Titus 1:15)
- h) *Seared Conscience*: literally “cauterized;” unbelievers who twist God’s Word, distort biblical morality, are morally unresponsive (1Tim 4:2)
- i) *Evil Conscience*: unbelievers who are morally perverted or bad in conscience; condones and practices evil (Heb 10:22)

2. Conscience as spiritual nervous system (Rom 2:15)

- a) Negative response
- b) Positive response

IV. Application:

- A. How should you respond to your conscience when it accuses you of a moral/immoral decision?
- B. How should you respond to your conscience when it affirms you in a moral/immoral decision?
- C. Why do you experience the sting of accusation from your conscience for some moral decisions and feel affirmation from your conscience for other moral decisions?

Week Two Lesson Plan: How to Attain a Clear Conscience

- **Thesis:** Week 2 will define the meaning of a clear conscience and how it is attained through faith in Christ’s redemption. Attention will be given to the temporal use of the OT sacrificial system and its inability to make the believer “perfect in conscience” (Heb 9:9). It will be contrasted with the efficacy of Christ’s work of redemption to cleanse the conscience (Heb 9:14).
- **Learning Outcome:** Students should be able to differentiate between the temporal necessity of the Old Testament sacrificial system and the eternal sufficiency of Christ’s redemption and its ability to cleanse the conscience.
- **Suggested Supplemental Reading:** *The Vanishing Conscience* by John F. MacArthur Jr. Chapters 3–4

Outline

I. Introduction

- A. Old Testament examples of sacrificial atonement for sin
 1. Adam and Eve (Gen 1:23)
 2. Noah (Gen 8:20)
 3. Job (Job 1:5)
 4. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Gen 12:8; 26:25; 35:7)
 5. God’s Law (Exo 29ff; Lev; c.f. Lev 17:11; Heb 9:22)
- B. Old Covenant sacrificial systems
 1. Was God’s prescribed order of worship during the first covenant (Heb 8:7)
 2. Was unable to “make perfect” (Heb 7:18–19 cf. Heb 7:11; 8:7; 9:9; 10:1)
 3. Old Testament sacrificial system replaced with Christ’s redemption

II. Key Text: Heb 9:9–14 “which is a symbol for the present time. Accordingly both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience, 10 since they relate only to food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until a time of reformation. 11 But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; 12 and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. 13 For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, 14 how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered

Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”

III. Five reasons the OT sacrificial system had to be replaced by Christ's redemption

- A. OT system pertained to the external cleansing (Heb 9:9–10, 13)
 1. Limited in nature of application (Heb 9:10, 13)
 2. Limited in reach – could absolve sin externally, legally, and temporally yet unable to affect the believer internally, consciously, and eternally making “the worshiper perfect in conscience” (9:9)
 - a) “Perfect” means “...to bring to completeness, wholeness” (*TDNT*, 82).
 - b) “To make perfect” in Hebrews regularly refers to the inability of the sacrificial system to permanently “qualify” a believer before God (Heb 7:19; cf. Heb 9:9, 11; 10:1, 14)
 - (1) Jeremiah’s prophecy of a decisive purgation and expiation of sin in the “new covenant” (Jer 31:31–34)
 - (2) Need for an earthly mediator and a special location
 - (3) Repetitious nature of sacrifices (Heb 10:2)
 - (4) Sacrifices as “temporarily expedient” – sin not dealt with intrinsically, definitively, and eternally through the sacrificial system
 3. Contrast with the high-priestly work of Jesus (Heb 10:14)
 - a) Christ’s redemptive work provides full access to God
 - b) Christ’s “sacrifice achieved what the old cultus could not accomplish, namely, the decisive purgation of conscience and the effective removal of every impediment to the worship of God” (Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, 240)
 - c) “How much more” will the blood of Christ purge, cleanse and qualify the Christian; Jesus cleanses “once for all” (Heb 7:27; 9:12; 10:10) making the worshiper “perfect in conscience” decisively (Heb 9:9, 14)
- B. OT sacrificial system was symbolic of Christ’s definitive sacrifice
 1. Tabernacle worship and the sacrificial system of Heb 9:6–8 identified as “a symbol” (*parabolē*) (Heb 9:9)
 2. Symbol: a restrictive, temporal, and illustrative archetype of the atonement and forgiveness of Christ which is decisively, exclusively, and eternally efficacious; Christ’s atonement can

ultimately, completely, and permanently “make the worshiper perfect in conscience” (Heb 9:9), providing unhindered access to God

3. Old Testament sacrificial system foreshadowed what Christ accomplished in His atoning work
Heb 7:18–19 “There is a setting aside of a former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness (for the Law made nothing perfect),...”
Heb 10:1 “For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near” (cf. Heb 8:5; 9:23).
- C. OT sacrificial system was a constant reminder of sin (Heb 9:9, 14; 10:3)
 1. Repetitive nature of the priestly activity (Heb 9:6, 9)
 2. Could not conclusively purge the believer’s sins – past, present, and future (Heb 5:1–3; 7:27)
 3. Repetitive nature of sacrifices (Heb 10:3, 11)
- D. OT sacrificial system was restrictive in nature
 1. No direct access to God (Num 18:7)
 2. Priest must present sacrifices to the Lord (Heb 5:1; cf. Heb 7:27)
 3. Sacrificial system could not bring “perfection” to the people (Heb 7:11; 10:1–4, 11), reminding the Jewish conscience of the obstacle of sin (Heb 9:9, 14; 10:2)
- E. OT sacrificial system was transitive
 1. Temporary nature of sacrificial system (Heb 9:10)
 2. Future hope of Messiah (Gen 3:15; Exo 12; Num 21:9; Deut 18:18; Isa 9:6–7; Dan 9:25–26; Zec 12:10)

IV. How to attain a clear conscience

- A. Must recognize God for who He is (Heb 1:1).
 1. God must be acknowledged and trusted as Creator (1:10; 11:3), Judge (9:27; 10:27, 30; 13:4) and Savior (2:3, 10; 5:9; 9:28)
 2. God must be acknowledged and trusted in His self-existence and triune nature: God the Father has planned redemption and cleansing (1:1–2, 5; 2:4, 13); God the Son accomplished propitiation and eternal atonement for sin (1:2–3; 2:17–18; 4:14–16; 6:6; 10:29); God the Holy Spirit provided illumination and applied salvation (3:7–8; 9:8; 10:15–18).
- B. Must recognize personal violation of God’s Law
 1. Israel’s disobedience and disbelief as a warning (Heb 2:2–4)

2. Israel's negative example (Psalm 95:7–8; c.f. Heb 3:8, 15; 4:7)
 3. Warning against persisting in sin (4:3, 5–6, 11; 10:26–31)
- C. Must rely fully upon Jesus for redemption
1. Jesus must be trusted as the only one able to make “purification of sins” (1:3), providing acceptable help for sinners (2:18).
 2. All who would worship God must fully rely upon Jesus as the perfect substitute for sinners (2:9, 10, 14, 18), having died a vicarious death to remove all sins from one's spiritual account (9:11–12, 14, 26, 28; 10:10, 12, 19–20).
 3. The worshiper must be fully convinced that Jesus rose from the dead (9:28; 12:2; 13:20), ascended into heaven (4:14; 6:20; 9:11–12, 24) and is quickly returning for His own (9:28; 10:37).
- D. Must believe salvation to be a gracious gift of God freely given to those who believe (1:14; 2:11, 14–16, 18; 4:10; 10:14, 20; 12:28)
1. Exercise faith in Christ (2:1; 3:1, 6; 4:14; 10:38; 11:6) demonstrated through repentance (3:7–8, 12, 15; 4:1, 7, 11; 6:1–2) and obedience (6:1, 12; 12:14, 28; 13:15)
 2. Exercise full conviction in Christ's power to purge sin from the worshiper's account resulting in a persevering faith in Christ (4:14; 10:22, 38; 11:6; 12:2), a steadfast hope (3:6; 6:11, 18–19) and a clear conscience

Week Three Lesson Plan: How to Maintain a Clear Conscience

- **Thesis:** Week 3 will focus on how Christians are to maintain a biblically clear conscience. The office of deacon will be considered as the church's example for maintaining a clear conscience as they believe in the Faith and live holy lives.
- **Learning Outcome:** *By the end of this week, students should be able to identify biblical ways of keeping the conscience clear.*
- **Suggested Supplemental Reading:** *The Vanishing Conscience* by John F. MacArthur Jr. Chapters 5–6

Outline:

I. Introduction

- A. Biblical leadership expected to be good examples for God's people
 1. Jesus our ultimate example (John 13:15)
 2. God the Father our excellent example (Eph 5:1)
 3. Paul a positive example (1 Cor 11:1)
 4. Timothy called to be an example (1 Tim 4:12)
 5. Pastors and deacons - the church's example (Heb 13:7)
- B. Definitions
 1. *Example:* a model to be followed or a pattern to be emulated
 2. *Imitate:* “while the noun *mimētēs* and the verb *mimeomai* can indeed mean *imitator* or *to imitate*, these forms also convey a broader, less mechanical meaning, in the sense of *emulate*, *follow*, or *use as a model* (Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, NIGTC, 370–371)

- II. Key Text: 1 Tim 3:8–10, 12–13** “8 Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, 9 but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. 10 These men must also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach... 12 Deacons must be husbands of only one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households. 13 For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.”

III. Deacons as models of how to maintain a clear conscience

- A. Maintain and exemplify the qualifications of the office, influencing others with their character, faith, and integrity
- B. “Hold[ing] to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience” (1Tim 3:9)
 1. “With a clear conscience”

- a) “With” indicates the sphere in which the action, “holding to the mystery of the faith,” is to take place
 - b) “Clear” refers to that which is clean, innocent, or pure
 - c) *TDNT* states it refers to being “personal and moral by nature. It consists in full and unreserved self-offering to God which renews the heart and rules out any acceptance of what is against God (*TDNT*, p.42)
 - d) Demonstrate dedication to God’s Word free from moral violation and the alarming guilt of sin within the conscience
2. “The mystery of the faith”
- a) “The mystery” a word used to refer to various aspects of the Gospel within the New Testament.
 - (1) In 1 Tim 3:9, since “the mystery” refers to the Gospel and “the faith” is frequently used as shorthand for the body of Christian doctrine (e.g. 1 Cor 16:13; 2 Cor 13:5; Gal 1:23; Phil 1:27; Col 1:23; 1 Tim 4:1, 6; 6:10, 21; 2 Tim 3:8; 4:7), it seems best to understand that Paul is instructing the deacons to cling to the objective Christian doctrine that defines “the faith.”
 - (2) “The mystery of the faith” refers to God’s revealed grace proclaimed in the message of the Gospel that teaches God saves sinners through faith in Christ.
 - (3) Deacons are, therefore, required to believe in orthodox, Christian doctrine while habitually obeying it within their lives.
 - b) The practical connection between “holding to the mystery of the faith” and maintaining a clear conscience (1 Tim 3:9) is what elevates the diaconate example before the Church and the world “for those who have served well as deacons” (1 Tim 3:13).
- C. Demonstrate dedication to God’s Word in belief and behavior, a clear conscience and obedient practice
- D. Demonstrate a self-consciousness that is morally informed and empowered by the Word of God, the salvation of Christ, and the illumination of the Holy Spirit
- E. Following the example of the diaconate (1 Tim 3:9)
- 1. Exercise faith in historic, Christian doctrine, particularly the doctrines pertaining to the Gospel and the person of Christ

- a) The Trinity (1 Tim 1:1, 17; 3:16)
 - b) The grace, mercy, and peace the Father provides through Christ Jesus (1:2)
 - c) The Law of God that identifies our sin (1:10–11)
 - d) The love of God for sinners exemplified through Christ (1:14–15)
 - e) The humanity and mediating ministry of Christ (2:5)
 - f) The vicarious death of Jesus and His payment for sin (2:6)
 - g) Faith in the resurrection and ascension of Jesus (3:16)
2. Live a lifestyle repenting from sin and pursuing righteous obedience to God's Word
- a) Refusing to elevate non-doctrinal matters to the status of Gospel truth (1Tim 1:4)
 - b) Pursuing love toward God and people (1:5)
 - c) Trusting in the goodness of the Law and using it lawfully (1:8–11)
 - d) Performing good works (2:10)
 - e) Fixing one's hope on the living God (4:10)
 - f) Being a righteous example in all aspects of life (4:12)
 - g) Paying close attention to one's life and doctrine (4:16)
 - h) Agreeing with sound apostolic teaching and godliness (6:3–6)
 - i) Fleeing the love of money (6:11)
3. Maintain a clear conscience by avoiding anything that would cause the conscience to be alarmed. All beliefs and behaviors must be performed in faith and full conviction that whatever work is engaged in is permissible by God (1 Tim 1:5, 19; Rom 14:22–23).

Week Four Lesson Plan: An Old Testament Illustration of a Good Conscience

- **Thesis:** Week 4 will showcase a scene in David’s life that serves as a model of repentance and personal sorrow for sin. Attention will be given to his conscience and the Old Testament synonyms and inferences that refer to the conscience and its function.
- **Learning Outcome:** By the end of this week, students should be able to identify the characteristics of a conscience that repents from sin and practices righteousness.
- **Suggested Supplemental Reading:** *The Vanishing Conscience* by John F. MacArthur Jr. Chapters 7–8

Outline:

I. Introduction

- A. Old Testament saints as an example (1 Cor 10:11)
- B. How did a biblically informed conscience function within the lives of OT saints? How does the believer’s conscience benefit from the proper response to sin?

II. Key Text: 1 Sam 24:5–15 “It came about afterward that David’s conscience bothered him because he had cut off the edge of Saul’s robe. 6 So he said to his men, “Far be it from me because of the LORD that I should do this thing to my lord, the LORD’S anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, since he is the LORD’S anointed.” 7 David persuaded his men with these words and did not allow them to rise up against Saul. And Saul arose, left the cave, and went on his way. 8 Now afterward David arose and went out of the cave and called after Saul, saying, “My lord the king!” And when Saul looked behind him, David bowed with his face to the ground and prostrated himself. 9 David said to Saul, “Why do you listen to the words of men, saying, ‘Behold, David seeks to harm you’? 10 “Behold, this day your eyes have seen that the LORD had given you today into my hand in the cave, and some said to kill you, but my eye had pity on you; and I said, ‘I will not stretch out my hand against my lord, for he is the LORD’S anointed.’ 11 “Now, my father, see! Indeed, see the edge of your robe in my hand! For in that I cut off the edge of your robe and did not kill you, know and perceive that there is no evil or rebellion in my hands, and I have not sinned against you, though you are lying in wait for my life to take it. 12 “May the LORD judge between you and me, and may the LORD avenge me on you; but my hand shall not be against you. 13 “As the proverb of the ancients says, ‘Out of the wicked comes forth wickedness’; but my hand shall not be against you. 14 “After whom has the king of Israel come out? Whom are you pursuing? A dead dog, a single flea? 15 “The LORD therefore be judge and decide between you

and me; and may He see and plead my cause and deliver me from your hand.”

III. David: An Old Testament Example

A. Broader context

1. David’s success and Saul’s envy (1 Sam 18:8)
2. Saul’s murderous pursuit of David (1 Sam 23:8; 24:1)
3. The cave incident (1 Sam 24:3)
 - a) David’s men encouraged him to kill Saul, viewing this situation as a sovereignly bestowed opportunity from God.
 - b) David secretly cut off the edge of Saul’s robe yet did not physically harm him (1 Sam 24:4).

B. Result of his action: “David’s conscience bothered him…” (1 Sam 24:5).

1. That which is said to have “bothered him” is what the *New American Standard Bible* translates only once in the Old Testament as “conscience” (1 Sam 24:5).
 - a) Note: There is no Hebrew word for conscience.
 - b) The idea is expressed by the Hebrew word commonly translated “heart.” The *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* notes that it can refer to “the inner man, mind, will and heart” (p. 524).
 - c) Other nuances of meaning utilized in the Old Testament include: the inner man in contrast to the outer, the mind as pertaining to knowledge or thinking, the source of one’s emotions and passions or the source of courage (Brown, *Enhanced Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 525).
 - d) Many scholars agree that the Hebrew word in 1 Samuel 24:5 clearly refers to “David’s conscience (Brown, *Enhanced Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 525. Jenni and Westermann, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 640. Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 2, 524. Holladay and Köhler, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 172. Mangum, *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, “conscience.”
2. It was not merely his thoughts or emotions that “bothered” David, but his conscience, that internal aspect of his soul that bore witness to and evaluated his behavior as moral or immoral (Rom 2:15).
 - a) Other instances where heart expresses the meaning of conscience include “a troubled heart,” as when Abigail sought to keep David from avenging himself and killing

Nabal, resulting in sin-inflicted guilt (1 Sam 25:31; cf. 2 Sam 24:10).

- b) Also, as Job asserted his conviction that his behavior had been righteous, he declared “my heart does not reproach me” (Job 27:6).
- c) David wrote, “When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long” (Psa 32:3). The guilt of sin and the postponement of repentance burdened David’s conscience which was expressed through his “groaning.”
- d) Similarly, in Psalm 51:14–15, David prayed, “Deliver me from bloodguiltiness...O Lord, open my lips...” The “bloodguiltiness” David referenced was the sin-guilt that caused him to remain quiet before others, moving him to pray to his God. His burdened conscience shamed him into silence.
- e) David exemplified that the only remedy to alleviate a guilty conscience was repentance from sin and God’s forgiveness.

C. Reasons for David’s burdened conscience (1 Sam 24:5–15)

- 1. David’s conscience burned because he knew that he had sinned against God and his own conscience. He felt an accusatory strike in his conscience and responded righteously.
- 2. Though David did not experience the blessing of being “perfect in conscience” (Heb 9:9) or have the atoning work of Christ to “cleanse” his conscience permanently (Heb 9:14), he still bore witness to the conscience’s existence and function as he trusted in God for grace and forgiveness for sin.

III. Four characteristics of a conscience that repents from sin and practices righteousness

A. Conviction of sin

- 1. David acknowledged that he committed a symbolic act of insurrection against God and His anointed king for Israel (1 Sam 24:6; cf. 1 Sam 9:17; 10:17–24; 15:1, 17; 1 Sam 31:6; 2 Sam 1:14)
- 2. David had acted in disobedience and disrespect against God’s sovereign plans, purposes, and timing (Exo 22:28; cf. Deut 17:14–15)

3. David's conscience was convicted that his action of symbolically transferring the kingdom to himself was not a part of God's prescribed plan (1 Sam 15:27–28)
 4. David was repulsed by his action of defiance and disrespect.
- B. Contrite attitude
1. Despite Saul's evil conspiracy to kill him, David humbly addressed Saul with the loyal phrase "my lord," and with personal reverence as he referred to Saul as "the king."
 2. This humble verbalization of honor coincided with his physical posture as "David bowed with his face to the ground and prostrated himself" (1 Sam 24:8) demonstrating a contrite attitude.
 3. David's self-demeaning behavior expressed his attitude of humility, regret, and repentance from sin.
- C. Confession towards God
1. Although David's sin involved Saul, it was not a direct sin against him, but against the Lord.
 2. David recognized "that the LORD had" (1 Sam 24:10) providentially provided an opportunity for David to kill Saul. Yet, David had refrained because he had "pity" or compassion on Saul and was willing to acknowledge Saul's kingly position.
 3. Conceding that Saul was "the LORD's anointed" (1 Sam 24:6, 10), David admitted that the kingdom had not yet been transferred to him by the Lord.
 4. Although David was guilty of presuming upon the Lord's providential timing, he was not guilty of insurrection against Saul. David demonstrated his repentance from his sin of presumption.
 5. Displaying the edge of Saul's robe, David proclaimed his innocence before him admitting, "...I cut off the edge of your robe and did not kill you, know and perceive that there is no evil or rebellion in my hands, and I have not sinned against you..." (1 Sam 24:11)
- D. Concern for righteousness
1. David confirmed his righteousness by displaying the edge of Saul's robe (1 Sam 24:11), proving his trust in God's vengeance, rather than exacting his own.
 2. David's righteousness was also evident as he pled with the Lord to render his verdict upon his behavior. David trusted in the

Lord's righteous assessment of his actions saying, "the LORD judge between me and you..." (1 Sam 24:12),

3. By exemplifying his own hope in God's righteous judgment, David encouraged Saul to act righteously and abandon his own sinful, murderous pursuit.

IV. Application:

- A. When you sin, remember the conviction your conscience produces is good; guilt for sin should never be ignored or justified.
 1. Guard against the deceitfulness of sin.

Heb 3:12–14 "Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. 13 But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. 14 For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end."
 2. Guard against thoughts or activities you do not believe are permissible by God (i.e., God's will).

Rom 14:23 "But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin."
- B. When you sin, remember to cultivate a contrite attitude, knowing:
 1. God gives grace to the humble
Jam 4:6 "But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, 'GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.'"
 2. God will use your sin to humble you with His kindness
Rom 2:4 "Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?"
- C. When you sin, remember to respond to your conscience by immediately confessing your sin to God knowing,
 1. Every sin is an offense towards God.

Psa 51:4 "Against You, You only, I have sinned And done what is evil in Your sight, So that You are justified when You speak And blameless when You judge."
 2. Every sin can be forgiven.

1 John 1:9 "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."
- D. When you sin, remember to concern yourself with righteousness knowing:

1. God enables you to repent.
2 Cor 7:10–11 “For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death. 11 For behold what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow, has produced in you: what vindication of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what avenging of wrong! In everything you demonstrated yourselves to be innocent in the matter.”
2. God provides righteous works to replace sin.
Eph 4:24–25 “and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. 25 Therefore, laying aside falsehood, **SPEAK TRUTH EACH ONE of you WITH HIS NEIGHBOR**, for we are members of one another.”

Week Five Lesson Plan: Experiencing the Extraordinary Power of a Clear Conscience: Biblical knowledge leads to conviction which leads to character and a mature conscience.

- **Thesis:** Week 5 will focus on how a clear conscience becomes a strong conscience. The Christian who grows in the knowledge of God’s Word will form biblical convictions and evidence a godly character.
- **Learning Outcome:** *By the end of this week, students should be able to discern the power of a clear conscience that matures in knowledge, biblical convictions, and character.*
- **Suggested Supplemental Reading:** *The Vanishing Conscience* by John F. MacArthur Jr. Chapters 9–10

Outline:

I. Introduction:

- A. Faith in the redemption of Christ is able to “make the worshiper perfect in conscience” (Heb 9:9) and “cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God” (Heb 9:14). This is a settled reality as salvation is applied through the work of the Holy Spirit causing faith & repentance.
- B. While the conscience does not think for the mind, it is influenced by the mind – a person’s knowledge, understanding, beliefs, and thoughts. The conscience, being an aspect, or a subset of the heart, responds to the moral decisions of the mind with accusation or affirmation.
- C. The mind of men and women must grow in biblical knowledge to faithfully mature and rightly influence the conscience.

II. Key Text: Acts 24:14–16 “But this I admit to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect I do serve the God of our fathers, believing everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets; 15 having a hope in God, which these men cherish themselves, that there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. 16 “In view of this, I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men.”

III. Need for biblical comprehension

- A. The Apostle Paul models the comprehension of biblical knowledge (Acts 24:14–15)
 - 1. Paul knows the doctrines of The Way rooted in Scripture (v.14a)
 - 2. Paul knows the doctrines of God rooted in Scripture (v.14b)
 - 3. Paul knows the doctrines of the Law and the Prophets rooted in Scripture (v.14c)

4. Paul knows the doctrines of the resurrection rooted in Scripture (v.15)
- B. The Apostle Paul exemplifies the need for a foundation in biblical knowledge
1. Christian maturity in thinking
1 Cor 14:20 “Do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature” (e.g., use of spiritual gifts in the church).
 2. Christian maturity in discernment
2 Cor 10:3–5 “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, **4** for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. **5** We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ,”
 3. Christian maturity in mind renewal
Rom 12:2 “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”
 4. Christian maturity in mental focus
Col 3:1–3 “Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. **2** Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. **3** For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”
 5. One scholar writes, “True wisdom, which is rooted in the fear of God, is more than your knowledge or your erudition. Among other things, it entails discernment, prudence,...and sanctified common sense” (Köstenberger, *Excellence*, p.177).

IV. Spiritual Convictions

- A. The Apostle Paul exemplifies spiritual convictions based on knowledge of God’s Word (Acts 24:14–16)
1. Conviction - the state of being compelled or convinced of something truthful or erroneous
 2. Christians should be convinced and fully persuaded by the content of God’s Word.
 3. Christians should be driven by and devoted to the doctrines of God’s Truth - learning, living, and proclaiming them.

4. “Convictions are not merely beliefs we hold; they are those beliefs that hold us in their grasp (Dr. Albert Mohler, *The Conviction to Lead*, p. 21).
- B. Spiritual convictions are developed through faith. (Hebrews 11:1)
1. Faith is the subjective, experiential belief a Christian has in the objective content of Scripture. Faith is belief and trust in the orthodox doctrines of Christianity (i.e., the Triune God, person and work of Jesus, the Gospel, etc.)
 2. Faith knows and believes the Truth of God’s Word.
 3. Faith develops “...the assurance of things hoped for...” This is the reliance and confidence in the Truth God has revealed through special revelation. The “things hoped for” are those truths yet to be seen, fully revealed, and experienced:
 - a) Rom 5:2 “we exalt in hope the glory of God”
 - b) Rom 8:24 “For in hope we have been saved”
 - c) Rom 15:4 “For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”
 - d) Rom 15:13 “Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”
 - e) 2 Cor 3:12 “Therefore having such a hope, we use great boldness in our speech.”
 - f) Eph 1:18 “I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints”
 - g) Col 1:5 “Because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel”
 4. “...The conviction of things not seen.”- the certainty, persuasion of God’s promises yet revealed
- C. Spiritual convictions are cultivated.
1. Spiritual convictions are cultivated as a person is convinced in his mind by God’s truth.
Rom 14:22 “The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves.”

2. Spiritual convictions are cultivated as a person perseveres in hope.
 Heb 3:14 “For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end.”
 - a) Spiritual convictions must be expressed through trust and reliance in Christ’s person and work of redemption.
 - b) Genuine Christians who are joined with Christ will remain “firm until the end.”
3. Spiritual convictions are cultivated while resting in God’s power.
 2 Cor 3:4–5 “Such confidence we have through Christ toward God. 5 Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God.”
 - a) Spiritual convictions are rooted in the God of the Gospel.
 - b) Spiritual convictions are not rooted in ourselves.
4. Dr. John MacArthur in *The Book on Leadership*, writes, “When God has spoken, there can be no compromise...when it comes to matters of principle - moral and ethical foundations, biblical absolutes, the axioms of God’s Word, God’s clear commands, and the truthfulness of God Himself - it is never right to compromise” (p. 51).

V. Christian Character

- A. Acts 24:16 “In view of this, I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men.”
- B. A person’s “character” is defined by *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary* “as moral excellence and firmness.”
- C. In *Changed into His Image*, Jim Berg provides the Christian perspective writing, “When a [Christian] manifests these [Christian] characteristics on a consistent basis, even under pressure, we say he has Christian (Christlike) character” (p. 142).
- D. Two different Greek words translate the word “character” in the NASB:
 1. Rom 5:4 “And perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope”
 2. Heb 13:5 “Make sure that your character is free from the love of money...”
 3. One Greek lexicon says that “character” (*dokima*) in Rom 5:4 – means “to test, to examine, to try to determine the genuineness of, testing (Louw-Nida, 27.45.)” “character” (*tropos*) in Heb 13:5 refers to a person’s behavior, manner of life (Louw-Nida, 41.10)

4. To be a person of Christian character is to be tested and proven and found faithful and consistent.
- E. Beliefs and behaviors that would exemplify Christian character
1. Belief in the message of the Gospel
 - a) 1 Cor 15:1 “Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand”
 - b) Eph 1:13 “In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise”
 - c) Col 1:23 “If indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.”
 2. Love for one another
 - a) John 13:34 “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.
 - b) Rom 13:8 “Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law.”
 - c) 1 Pet 1:22 “Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart”
 3. Personal Holiness
 - a) 2 Cor 7:1 “Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”
 - b) 1 Thes 4:7 “For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification.”
 - c) 1 Pet 1:14–16 “As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, 15 but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; 16 because it is written, ‘YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY.’”
 - d) In *Disciplines of a Godly Man*, R. Kent Hughes rightly says, “...we must lay down as fundamental to our Christianity this truth: a Christian mind demands conscious

negation; a Christian mind is impossible without the discipline of refusal (p.73)

4. Good works

- a) Eph 2:10 “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.”
- b) Col 1:10 “So that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God”
- c) 2 Tim 2:21 “Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work.”

Week Six Lesson Plan: Experiencing the Extraordinary Power of a Clear Conscience:

Past and Present Considerations

- Week 6 will provide the historical background for the Church’s diminished role in counseling and the rise of humanistic solutions to the problems of the conscience. We will note the resurgence of biblical counseling and seek to provide hope and direction for a much-needed reformation in the way the Church shepherds its members.
- **Learning Outcome:** By the end of this week, students should understand the historical issues that led to the Church’s current deviation from Scripture and the need for the Church to return to the sufficiency of Scripture.
- **Suggested Supplemental Reading:** *The Vanishing Conscience* by John F. MacArthur Jr. Appendix 1. “Gaining Victory Over Sin”

I. Introduction

- A. Troubled mind, troubled conscience
- B. Dr. Jay Adams quote:

“At one time counseling was considered to be an integral part of the work of Christ’s church...The church ministered to families and persons in every sort of human/human and human/divine relationship (note that this ministry covered a broader scope than modern competitive systems allow for), and the public recognized that it was the task of the church (in general) and of pastors (in particular) to attend to matters of belief, attitude, value, behavior, relationship, etc. Now psychotherapists attempt to usurp that role.”

II. Historical Considerations: How did we get here?

- A. Changes caused by Industrial Revolution
 - 1. Abandonment of traditional vocations
 - 2. Harsh working conditions
 - 3. Increase in sinful vices
- B. Rise of “nerves”/“nervous disease”
 - 1. Stress and overwork
 - 2. Guilt over sinful choices
- C. Response to this epidemic
 - 1. Neurology
 - a) Attributed nerves to outside factors
 - b) Required specialized education for practitioners
 - 2. Clergy

- a) Considered unprofessional compared to neurologists
 - b) Loss of society's respect
- D. Problems in the church
- 1. Academic priority over pastoral ministry
 - 2. Social concerns over spiritual concerns
 - 3. Pastors feeling inferior to medical professionals
- E. Rise of psychiatry and psychology
- 1. Gained validation through elite education
 - 2. Flourished under the policy of hospitalization for the insane
 - 3. Attributed nerves to environmental problems rather than spiritual problems
- F. Church's response
- 1. Integrationism
 - a) Amalgamation of psychology and Scripture
 - b) Dichotomy versus Trichotomy
 - c) Deferred therapy by clergy to "specialists"
 - 2. Biblical Counseling
 - a) Supremacy of Scripture
 - b) Sufficiency of Scripture
 - c) Efficacy of Christ's redemption

III. Present Considerations: What do we do now?

- A. Biblical preaching and teaching
- 1. Regular exposition
 - 2. Effort to reach the conscience
 - 3. Convey the effectiveness of Christ's redemption
- B. Adherence to sufficiency of Scripture (2 Tim 3:16–17)
- 1. Scripture is profitable
 - 2. Scripture discerns doctrinal error
 - 3. Scripture provides correction
 - 4. Scripture trains in righteousness

Dr. Carl Trueman quote:

“The congregation goes from being reminded and convicted of their sin, to calling out to God for forgiveness, to being reminded that in Christ God has acted in a startling and decisive way to cast our sin as far away as the east is from the west. We are reminded of the entire gospel, from fall to redemption to consummation, in the space of just a few minutes... This moment in the church service has come to mean much to me. This is the point where, after a week of failure—of not living up to the standards I set myself, let alone those set for me by my Creator—I am reminded once again that all is well: Christ has dealt with my sin; my failings were placed on his shoulders on the cross; and my heavenly Father has annihilated them there. It is not, of course, that I do not know this Monday to

Saturday; it is not that I do not read the gospel every day in my Bible; it is not that I do not confess my sins during the week and look then to Christ. But this is a word from outside, God's work spoken to me by another human being, which lifts my head once again and *assures my conscience* [emphasis mine] that I am clean despite the filth I so often choose to wade in. So often I enter church weighted down with care; when I am once again reminded of God's rich forgiveness in Christ, the weight is wonderfully lifted from my shoulders."

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ABSTRACT

TEACHING MEMBERS THE POWER OF A CLEAR CONSCIENCE AT TWIN CITY BIBLE CHURCH IN WINSTON-SALEM, NORTH CAROLINA

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The purpose of this project was to teach the members of Twin City Bible Church, Winston-Salem, North Carolina, how to attain, maintain, and experience a clear conscience in the Christian life. Chapter 1 describes the ministerial context, rationale, purpose, goals, and research methodology. It also provides definitions and limitations of this study. Chapter 2 provides the biblical and theological foundations for attaining and maintaining a clear conscience in the Christian life from four passages (Rom 2:12–15; Heb 9:9–14; 2 Tim 3:9; 1 Sam 24:5–15). Chapter 3 examines the applicational considerations related to the importance of teaching the church the biblical view of the conscience. Chapter 4 describes the details related to implementing this ministry project as well as the statistical and quantitative results. Chapter 5 discusses an evaluation of the project's purpose, goals, strengths, and weaknesses, as well as theological and personal reflections.

VITA

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Pastoral Intern, First Baptist Church, Rockland, Massachusetts, 1999–2002

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