

Dr. Gary Meadors, 1 Corinthians, Lecture 24, 1 Corinthians 8:1-11:1, Paul's Response to the Question of Food Sacrificed to Idols, 1 Cor. 10 Excursus on Conscience

© 2024 Gary Meadors and Ted Hildebrandt

This is Dr. Gary Meadors in his teaching on the book of 1 Corinthians. This is lecture 24, 1 Corinthians 8:1-11:1, Paul's Response to the Question of Food Sacrificed to Idols. 1 Corinthians 10, Excursus on Conscience.

Well, welcome again to our lectures on 1 Corinthians. This is Hawaii day. My Hawaiian shirt is for my friends Victor Wyman and Nathan Zakahi, who used to pastor in Hawaii; both of them from there, and they've moved on to other places now, but I have fond memories of my trip to Hawaii to be with them a number of years ago.

So, this is Hawaii Day. Now, last time we were in 1 Corinthians chapter 10, and I was lecturing on conscience when the memory card in the camera filled up and cut out. So, I'm going to actually do this as an independent lecture on conscience, which will be a little repetitious from the end of the preceding video.

Nonetheless, that'll make it at least have good continuity, and there's never any harm actually in a little bit of repetition because, as you remember, the three R's of learning are repetition, repetition, repetition, followed up by research, research, research. I'm just trying to tease you and set some patterns in your thinking. But 1 Corinthians 10 brings to our attention this issue of conscience, and I have a chapter on this in my book on Decision Making God's Way, a book that has to do with knowing God's will.

It's really a biblical theology of God's will, a Christian epistemology if you please, and if you can pick that up, you can see the expanded chapter on this issue of conscience. It's available in the Lagos software, both in English and Spanish. But anyway, on page 127 of your notes, and this would be in notepad number 11, notepad number 11, page 127, we want to talk about conscience.

So, it's an interesting word that's used a lot by Christians. Martin Luther sort of made it famous at the Diet of Worms. It's neither right nor safe to go against one's conscience.

Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise or some quote to that effect. But what is the biblical use? I'm just focusing exclusively on the biblical use of the term conscience

out of the Greek, sunetesis, and I'm looking at the New Testament primarily because it's virtually absent in the Old Testament.

And I'm not trying to say everything there is to say about the concept of conscience. Psychology uses it. Philosophy uses it.

But I just want to look at the biblical data and ask what it yields to us, and start there with this concept of conscience. We talk about this phenomenon constantly, but when faced with explaining it, we often find ourselves in a quandary. In a recent column on Dr. Dobson Answers Your Questions, a popular American psychologist, Dobson struggled with how to explain this term.

He begins by saying that the subject of the conscience is an extremely complex and weighty topic. Philosophers and theologians have struggled with its meaning for centuries. He then makes some observations concerning its usage in psychological analysis, which was put forward with a sound intuition of the precariousness of an appeal to conscience.

He closes, however, by noting that the New Testament cites the term on many occasions and that the Holy Spirit influences us through it. So he says we don't know a lot about it, and then he jumps to conclusions about it. He pointed out that conscience is not our guide on the one hand but asserts that it may be used by God on the other.

Which is it at any given moment? How do we delineate appropriate promptings internally, and what do we often call conscience? How do we deal with people whose conscience gives them no promptings at all? How would we respond to Martin Luther's statement? It's neither right nor safe to go against one's conscience. And so there's a lot to think about in terms of conscience, and I want to take my lead from what I find in the Bible, particularly the New Testament, dated. The road to understanding the nature and function of conscience is to discern what role it plays in relation to the value system, which we've identified as the product of a transformed mind.

My thesis is that the value system, which is the worldview and value system, is our guide as the only database that can be objectively analyzed. The conscience is a God-given function of our self-awareness, our self-consciousness, and our self-reflection. It witnesses to the dictates of our worldview and value system.

I go on page 128, and I'm reading this because I've tried to pack a lot into a few words, and they're very important. Conscience is not a lawgiver. Say that again.

Conscience is not a lawgiver. It is a witness. Underline the word witness.

That's the operative term that's used in the New Testament with the conscience. It's a witness to the laws that exist within the frame of reference by which we make judgments about ourselves and our world. Conscience is not some independent entity within our being.

It's only one aspect of a human being's ability for self-aware critique. If we violate the values that we recognize and apply, then the pain we feel is what we call conscience. The term conscience itself is a word that is logically constructed to explain the inward pain of violation.

It is a term of description. It's not a term of ontology. If we contemplate a course of action, and we feel no pain, in other words, no self-critique pops up immediately and tells us no, no, no.

If we contemplate that course of action and we feel no pain, then we assume it is appropriate. We sort of take the lead of not feeling bad about it, that it's appropriate since our conscience does not alert us. That's kind of, so the conscience didn't witness against what we're contemplating.

But if the conscience can only arise to the level of our worldview and values, all that means is that our currently held worldview and values allow that. This last scenario, however, is faulty. If the role of conscience is to monitor how we relate to our worldview and values, and our value system is not programmed in a certain area, we may not perceive the function of conscience since its function is bound, it's captive to the realm of witnessing to our value judgments.

When Paul was resisting and putting the church down, even to the point of perhaps violence and death, maybe he was at the death of Stephen when Stephen was stoned. Paul's conscience was telling him, you're doing a good thing. You're protecting Judaism.

And that was a high priority for Paul. But after Paul met Jesus on the road to Damascus and had that marvelous conversion, Paul's worldview and value system were adjusted. He was transformed.

He could no longer continue his persecution of the church. Because he now held to the worldview and values of the church. And his conscience would not allow him to do that.

You remember the apostles were scared to meet with him, particularly Peter, because of his former reputation after he claimed his conversion. But when they did, they discovered a new Paul. Saul became Paul.

He had the same name all the time; just depended on whether he was Jewish or Greek. Paul was his Greek name, and it became his dominant name in the New Testament. Conscience does not provide independent judgments, as if outside of ourselves.

Conscience is not just an audience room for the voice of God or for the voice of the devil. Sometimes, I've seen bumper stickers that said, the devil made me do it. We often appeal to these inner voices telling us what to do.

I play banjo, and in one of my banjo cases, I have a sticker. I only do what the little voices tell me to do. Well, actually, that's kind of one of the definitions of being crazy, isn't it? Doing what the little voices tell me to do. But as Christians, we often appeal to these internal voices inside of us, as if they're external voices that are guiding us.

And that can be very dangerous. Serial killers have the same testimonies. We need to be very, very careful with our descriptions of the subjective domain of how we operate.

The conscience is a witness to something, to the worldview and values that we recognize and apply. It's captive to that, just like software is captive to perform a certain task within a computer. Your conscience is captive to perform the task of keeping you aligned with the worldview and values that you recognize and apply.

I got that phrase a long time ago from F.F. Bruce. I don't even remember where now. It's been so long. But just that little tiny phrase, that conscience relates to the worldview and values that we recognize and apply.

I probably added some to it in the process. So, it's not just, once again, my wild idea. We are all the product of our reading and our research.

So, conscience does not provide independent judgments, as if outside of it, of ourselves. But it witnesses the judgments that the worldview and value system have already delivered to our self-reflective capacity. And as we are transformed by the renewing of our mind, after Romans 12, 1, and 2, we adjust to it.

The above paragraph on page 128, redundantly labors some key concepts which constitute the nature and function of conscience. Some terminology may be new to you as the hearer since certain terms are essential in this discussion. Having given a summary statement of conscience, I want to now walk through some of the data with you.

What I've just said is actually the end product of an extended study of conscience in the New Testament. Now I want to come back and walk through some of that data

with you, just in the brief time that we have together. Conscience is a term we hear in the middle of page 128, and it is used frequently.

But for most people, conscience is like an Almond Joy candy bar. I don't know if you ever remember the advertisement on television, if you live in the United States. But the Almond Joy candy bar is a coconut, chocolate candy bar with an almond or two in it.

And they had an advertisement that Almond Joy is indescribably delicious. When it comes to the subjective domain of Christian living, whether it's the conscience or whether it's the role of the spirit, I'm afraid that many people come to that domain and have never thought critically and adequately about it. And for them, it's indescribably delicious.

They love it, but they can't tell you a thing about what it means or how it operates. Now, we can say some things about how worldviews and values operate. We can say some things about what it means to be transformed in our worldview and in our values to biblical worldview and biblical values.

We can talk a lot about that. But all of a sudden, when we go to conscience or even to the role of the Holy Spirit, it is a subjective domain, and we start feeling lost because we do not keep both of those categories tied to the scriptures themselves. Both the conscience and the Holy Spirit serve similar roles.

They are witnesses. The spirit witnesses to Christ. The conscience witnesses to the word.

The spirit witnesses to the word. These descriptions are used in scripture for both of these categories. Think a little bit about the history of the usage in the Bible.

There's no specific term for conscience in the Hebrew Old Testament. The term heart comes very close to it in certain contexts. The Greek Old Testament Septuagint only uses the noun conscience in two places, Ecclesiastes 10 and Job 27.

Ecclesiastes is interesting because it talks about being in your bedroom, which is the most private place in the world. It's your bedroom. It's supposed to be a place of total privacy.

And you may say something nasty about the king in your bedroom. And some little bird may fly off and take that word to the king and endanger your very life when he finds out what you think in that most private place of your life. And that concept was carried into the internal life of a person.

When you're talking to somebody in a conversation, many, many times in the midst of that conversation, you're thinking of things that you're not going to say. You have opinions, maybe about the person or the subject. And so, you're sort of carrying on an internal secret conversation with yourself that may not come to the table.

Conscience is that self-reflective capacity that once again is tracking with this worldview and value system. Let's come back to that little stick person that I should have drawn in my notes and failed to do so. But I usually have a board.

Remember, you got the head, and you got the little stick person. And over here, you're left, my right, your left, and you've got data. Data comes into the head, and on the other side, it comes out as signifying its meaning over here.

That doesn't mean data doesn't have absolute meaning in and of itself. The answer to whether, if a tree falls in the forest and nobody's there, it makes a sound. The answer is yes, because I believe in an objective view of nature. You don't have to be there to witness it.

And so, you got data, and data could have absolute meaning. God could suspend his truth in the universe and not have anybody there to witness it. And it would still mean the same thing, and it would still be absolute truth.

But in the human realm, data goes through our mind, through our grid. Remember, we draw it like the heart because in the Bible, as a man thinks in his heart, so is he. For out of the heart come the issues of life, Jesus said.

The heart in scripture is often a synonym for the rational process, for the mind. So, you come in with data. It's run through this grid.

We call this the perceptual set. And it kicks it out on the other side. And it's been run through the grid and assigned meaning.

For example, run sinner through the grid. Okay, if you've got a non-informed Christian, if you've got a non-informed grid, in other words, you're not a you're not a Christian, you haven't thought about the bible, and sinner comes in, it probably kicks out a meaning on the other side religious fanatic or a crazy people or something like that. But if you're an informed Christian and the word sinner comes in, you assign meaning to that as a violation, a transgression against the revealed will of God.

And that's the meaning that gets kicked out because you have educated your grid. You're being transformed by the renewing of your mind. You're getting theological education, and you start to describe your world from that standpoint when the data comes in.

All right, data comes in. Say you're going down the road and you see a lewd billboard, or you're watching television, and there's an extremely suggestive commercial or a movie or whatever. And all of a sudden, in your mind, you start entertaining sexual temptation, for example.

What happens? If you're a good Christian, immediately in your mind, your conscience is going to point out that your worldview and values don't follow that line of thinking. And you're going to start either critiquing what you're viewing, or you might turn the channel. It's better sometimes not to turn the channel because that's nothing but denial.

You need to engage these things critically. Consequently, you deal with that, but your conscience alerts you to it. If you were not a Christian, you might start thinking of other things.

How can I be successful in that regard? So, it's this aspect of our perceptual set. The domain where we assign meaning to data and conscience is there. It doesn't assign the meaning.

Worldview and values assign the meaning. But conscience is a monitor, is a witness to alert us when we're violating our worldview and our conscience. It keeps us in line with what we recognize and apply as correct, right, and moral, for example.

So, the Greek Old Testament only uses it a couple of times, and in that Ecclesiastes passage it's a beautiful illustration. Self-knowledge, self-understanding, self-critique. Don't say anything in the most private place because a little birdie might slip away, and then you're going to be held guilty.

You'll be exposed. The concept in the Old Testament is under the idea of heart. I'm not going to talk about that right now.

Conscience comes from a verb to know. Sunadesis is to know with. It uses a preposition soon and then aid is the stem for know.

One of the verbs and one of the stems for know goes into verbs, and it goes into nouns. Its oldest usage merely means to know, to be aware, and to share knowledge. But if knowledge is shared secretly, that's when we start to see this little bit of a development of secret knowledge as part of what's internal to us and the conscience monitors.

Act 5, too, is where Ananias and Sapphira came up. Chronologically, it's first used in the New Testament in the 1 Corinthians, and its largest pattern is in the First Corinthians. In fact, some think that Paul's treatment of conscience is stimulated by

the Corinthian conversation and some of the aspects that they had in relation to conscience Paul came in and dealt with and corrected.

The New Testament pattern of conscience is used 27 times in Paul. There's 22. There are five in Hebrews.

You can decide who wrote Hebrews. Then Peter uses it three times. There are a few more that use the verb.

Those are all nouns. In fact, in the list that I've given you in your notes here, I've listed out the occurrences of the word conscience. I'd suggest you go through this list.

You look at the text. Look at a formal translation, lay it out, and see how it comes up. Sometimes, you won't see the word conscience, particularly if it's a verb, because the verb will say something like no, and I'll talk a little bit about that in a couple of them.

But there's a list of the pertinent terms to study the concept of conscience. All right, well, in 1 Corinthians, we get our first mention of this, and you'll notice how many times we have it here in 1 Corinthians. Three, six, we have eight, and then we have three more in 2 Corinthians.

In the Corinthian correspondence, we have 11 usages. That's the most of any one place, even though there are a number of others. And yet, outside of Paul, we have some occurrences in Acts, but several of those are in the Pauline section.

And then we have the issue of Peter, first Peter, and then we've got that issue of Hebrews, which was, I think at least most would admit, even if Paul didn't write it, that it was certainly influenced by Pauline thinking. And so, this idea of conscience is our self-reflective capacity. I just love looking at 1 Corinthians 4:4. I want you to look at this text 1 Corinthians 4:4. Now, we need a couple of versions.

Remember, I hope by now you're never satisfied with just one bible. You need four of them at least so that you have a formal and functional dynamic, as we've called it. You can use either of those terms, and then you've got something like the new living translation that's even more functional and dynamic.

But in 1 Corinthians 4:4, listen to the NRSV. I am not aware of anything against myself. That phrase, the verb, is used here.

You'll see the v behind the reference at the bottom of page 128. Verb. I am not aware of anything.

And listen to the NIV 2011. My conscience is clear. See the dynamic or the functional translation.

I'm not aware of anything. The translator knows that Paul's talking about his internal mechanism for self-critique. Paul runs it through his grid, and he comes up with I didn't do anything.

I'm free. He says I'm not aware of anything. My conscience is clear.

That captures in a sense, turns it into a noun while it's actually a verb here. But it does capture what Paul was saying. My conscience is clear.

When he does that self-critique of searching his worldview and his values, he's not able to surface anything that bothers him in that relationship. His conscience is clear. But I want you to know what he follows up with immediately.

In the NRSV, I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. Listen to the NIV.

My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. I like that translation. That does not make me innocent.

It is the Lord who judges me. Ah, that's quite an insight, isn't it? Do you ever use the fact that your conscience doesn't bother you as a reason for an action? Oh, I can do this. My conscience doesn't bother me.

Do you realize how precarious that is? Because your conscience isn't the last word. Your worldview and your values are the last word. Paul searched his worldview and values in his relationship with the Corinthians as he began that testimony in chapter four about being a servant.

We didn't cover that like I'd like to, but because of time, and you can research it yourself, we can't say everything. We can't say a pittance of what needs to be said about Corinthians, even though we're doing quite a bit of time here. You can do that.

Go, do your homework. But Paul says, look, I've searched my worldview and my values, and I'm innocent. I can't bring up anything that would contradict my relationship with you in this regard.

But that doesn't make me innocent because God, at the end of the day, is going to have to make that judgment. Wow, that's powerful. And it opens a window to the fact that conscience is not your guide only.

So, it's both and on that answer. Let conscience be your guide. No, yes. No, in the sense that your worldview and your values are your guide.

Yes, in the sense that conscience is a God-created mechanism of our self-reflective capacity to make us keep in touch with our worldview and values. Even a pagan has this mechanism. They have values, they have worldviews, and their conscience in their own cultural community keeps them in touch with that.

And if they violate it, they will feel pain. In my chapter in the book on Will of God, I try to illustrate this a little bit between two women struggling with the question of an unborn child and abortion. And the atheist and the Christian come to the same conclusion for different reasons.

There are similar reasons to some extent, but different authorities to be sure. I try to use that illustration to shock people and to realize that sinners can think, too. They also have worldviews and values that they need to recognize.

Now, it's not within our time frame for me to walk through all these passages. Patterns come from these passages. You walk through them.

You ask yourself, what are the categories that occur? This is a good basic word study. What are the categories that I see? And when you read through passages, you'll read a couple, and they say something different. And all of a sudden, you'll read one.

Oh, that said the same thing as that other verse. That's what you call categorization. You categorize them into classifications, and then you deal with them.

Well, what classifications did I come up with? All right, I'm going to share that with you. First of all, I want to give you this definition. I call it a preliminary definition.

This definition is actually the result of all that study. But I'm going to give it to you, and then I'm going to come back to it in terms of looking at some examples. Here's my preliminary definition of conscience.

Conscience is a critical inner awareness, a witness in reference to the norms and values that we recognize and apply. It does not create norms and values but merely responds to our existing software. In other words, it's a witness.

It's searching for that, like software would do. That period should be inside the quote mark, by the way. Conscience must be educated, educated, and programmed in relation to a critically developed world and life view.

Everybody has a world and life view. Everybody has a worldview and value system. And you automatically have a conscience that's adjusted to it because that's what you've accepted.

And when you start to get readjusted by transformation, it takes a little while for conscience to come along, just like my billiards illustration that I used. I used to have a problem with playing pool because of the context in which I learned it.

When I went to a Christian serviceman center and heard billiard balls, I had to go back and see if I was in the right place because I only knew that from beer halls when I was a teenager in a small Indiana town. But after I realized that it wasn't the table and it wasn't the billiard balls that were the problem, it was the context in which they occur, and then I could play it. But it took me a long time to transition because my conscience was dragging its feet as I changed my worldview and values.

That's always a process. This development for the Christian is rooted in special revelation in the Bible. We build our worldview and our value system from scripture.

We don't build it from subjective domains. We build it from objective domains. The subjective domains are tricky.

Even nature is tricky. Yes, David could walk out and say, talk about creation and how wonderful it was and how God had done it, but David did that as an atheist. An atheist can walk out and say, look at how chance has brought all this together.

Shake their fist in God's face and say, kill me if you're a god, and nothing happens. So they fallaciously say there is no god because he didn't strike them dead. Worldview and values control everything about life.

It is our epistemology, and it is resulting in our axiology. That's a Greek word *axios* has to do with values and worth. Our worldview and our values.

Okay, that's the definition that, in my opinion, is the result of looking at the New Testament data. Let me now look at some of it with you. Consider several characteristics of conscience in relation to Christian decision-making.

When I did this study, I was in the midst of writing this material on the will of God, and of course, so many people justify God's will by saying their conscience is clear, or some say I can't do it because my conscience bothers me. I hope you're starting to see those are bad responses. That it's not conscience, it's worldview and values that need to be critiqued.

Conscience has to adjust the worldview and values. It's an important mechanism. It keeps pagans under control.

It keeps Christians under control. But if your worldview and values are wrong, you can be wrong. I have known wicked Christians, people that I do not question their salvation.

Prominent people, well-known people, preachers, and professors treated other Christians in wicked ways. Why? Because these people's worldviews and values differ from their own worldviews and values. Now, they're both under the umbrella of being Christian, but they both come to some different conclusions.

And like Paul persecuting the church, some Christians persecute other Christians because they think because they've deified their own opinions that they're doing God a favor. And they seem to lack the capacity to self-critique of their own thinking. I've seen more conflicts in the church at high levels in this regard.

The church and church history is littered with these kinds of situations. Every church split, every school split, every Christian organization is littered with these kinds of things. And people will appeal to conscience as the voice of God when really what they're doing is deifying their own way of thinking.

You've got to be able to critically evaluate worldviews and values to get on the same page. Paul told the Corinthians he wants them to have the same mind, not the same emotions, not the same assumptions, the same mind. It's a variation in the sense of being transformed by the renewing of your mind.

Now, conscience, first of all, here's the first major point that I see, the first major category. Conscience is a God-given capacity for self-critique. Conscience is an aspect of humankind's capacity for self-reflection.

God created us with the capacity for self-reflection, the capacity to think, and the capacity to critique our thinking. And conscience is all part of that. Conscience is not a separate ontological unit in a human being but is an aspect of our ability to do critical thinking.

Conscience, for example, should not be personified into an aspect independent of the person. For example, conscience is not the voice of God, and neither is conscience the voice of the devil. Conscience is yourself talking to yourself.

Now, there's no question, but it's another subject that God can influence us. But when you look at the concept of conscience and restrict yourself to it, you will not find that coming to the surface. That is not a focus that is produced by looking at the concept of conscience in the intestinal.

It's tied to worldview and values. How do you have a good conscience? How do you have a clear conscience? How do you have a pure conscience? You have it because you align yourself with the teaching that has been established. That's the criteria.

That's the judgment. Self-reflection is ourselves talking to ourselves, and conscience interfaces with that internal discussion. It is a check if we are in line with our recognized values.

Now I just mentioned 1 Corinthians 4:4, the verb form *sunetesis* is used. The absence of conviction does not in itself provide justification for another action. If we say my conscience doesn't bother me, it's okay.

No, it isn't. We have to look at worldviews and values. Let's figure that out, and then we'll decide which of our consciences is best because it's aligned correctly.

Romans 2:14 and 15 is an interesting text in my mind. This one's been used in a lot of different ways, but I think a little differently about it after studying conscience. Romans 2:14 and 15.

I may have to put my glasses on here if you don't mind, so I can see. Romans 2, look at verse 12 in Romans 2. All who sin apart from the law. Now remember, Paul's talking to Jews and Gentiles in these early chapters, and he's talked about how the Jews are privileged because they have the law, and the Gentiles don't have it.

And let's see what he says about the Gentiles in light of the fact that they do not have it. All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law. All who sin under the law will be judged by the law.

So, you're not off the hook in either direction. For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous. Now, notice that even in the 2011 NIV, you have a parenthesis in verse 14.

Remember, all of this, all punctuation, this parenthesis, verses, all that stuff, those are all added by later editors. Nothing in the Greek. The Greek just flows.

Context is what determines this. So, by the judgment of every translation, we have a parenthetical statement in verses 14 through the end of 15. It's sort of Paul standing outside of himself and looking down on this conversation, and he makes an explanatory statement.

Indeed, when Gentiles who do not have the law do by nature things required by the law, they've created a law, their own cultural law. They didn't; they don't have the

Torah, but they've created a law in their own settings, in their own culture. Human beings do that, even though they do not have the law.

They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts and their conscience, and they also bear what? Bearing witness and their thoughts, this internal self-reflective process, accusing or defending them. Oh, there's a lot right here, isn't there? What does it mean that they show the law written on their hearts? They show the process of law. Law is something that every culture has: mores, values, worldviews, and those internal that want to function in that culture, be it atheist, be it Christian, be it Jewish, be it Islam, be it pagans that have never seen another tribe outside of New Zealand and New Guinea back a century or two ago.

Every one of them has laws and standards, and their conscience reminds them to keep their standards. They had the function of the law inside of them. Now, I think that Calvin was correct that there's a sense of the divine that's a part of being created in the image of God, but it's not software in the sense of content, but the mechanism works exactly the same.

Why is it that today, in 2017, when I'm cutting these lectures, we're looking at a world that is fraught with the issue of terrorism? Unfortunately, it does center in one religious expression of Islam. There are other terrorists in the world, to be sure. There have been Christian terrorists, there have been terrorists of various kinds, but right now, we're focused on this one.

Why is it that guns and bombs and all that stuff doesn't overcome it? I'll tell you why because it's driven by a religious principle. People will die for religious principles. German soldiers, by and large, wouldn't always die for that principle.

They were following their orders, and some of them probably were happy to give up. They thought they were protecting the homeland, perhaps, and that's a noble thing to do, but protecting it under the rubric of someone who was evil. So, you've got this going on in all cultures, all religions because it's actually evidence that God created as he said he did.

Human beings have that in common: self-critical capacity in relation to worldview and values, and conscience keeps us all in tune with it. It doesn't give those worldviews and values to us. It keeps us in tune with our worldview and values.

Even as it says here, they show the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their conscience bearing witness, bearing witness to what? To the worldview and values they've recognized and applied, even if they didn't come from the law or the Old Testament. They still had a law to themselves.

Oh, what a great illustration. That's how conscience operates. So, conscience is an illustration.

Romans 2 is an illustration, and I've said to you here that the Gentile self-critique mechanism works better than the Jews. That was the condemnation that Paul was putting on the table. The Gentiles are better than you.

Why? Not because they don't have the law, and you do have it, but because they act like they're supposed to act in relation to the worldviews and values, and you don't. That's the condemnation. The Jews resist the law's role as convictor.

The Gentile's conscience worked and should shame the Jew. This was a statement of shame to those who had privilege. There are a number of other texts that talk about critique gone sour in 1 Timothy and Titus in Hebrews.

I can't go through all those with you, but what is the implication of this category of texts? In other words, these texts have a similar theme, and they come together and create a category. It's this that conscience is self-critique. It's a witness to our worldview and values, and that is critique, and you can't get away from it.

Now, you can cauterize your conscience, as some texts talk about. You can shut it down if, over a long period of time, you say no when you should have said yes. I really wish I had time right now to go back and preach the sermon of Lot to you.

Lot, to me, is one of the great examples in the Bible of a person who knew what was right but didn't have the intestinal fortitude to do it. Even Peter says that he vexed his soul. He was tormented and vexed in his internal process because he knew what was right.

He had a worldview and value system from Abraham that was correct, but he ended up on the court in the city of Sodom. That's what being in the gate means. It's an ancient Near Eastern term for being a city official, and every time he had to make a judgment, he had to say yes when his internal complex said no.

He was vexed and tormented, according to Peter's insight into the internal process of Lot. Conscience is an amazing feature of being created in the image of God. A second category of conscience will overlap a little bit because it's so part of the fabric of conscience.

Conscience is a witness to the worldview and value system which we recognize and apply. Have you heard that enough yet? Passages that describe conscience under the picture of a witness, where you find the term witness, and there are a ton of these passages. A witness does not create evidence.

A witness testifies to the evidence that exists. That's why conscience is not a judge. Judges initiate opinions.

Conscience can only witness. You put a witness on the stand, and they are not allowed to have a personal opinion about the crime. They're only allowed to say what they saw and what they witnessed, and the rest of it is not admissible as evidence.

Romans 2:15, we just looked at. I'll just look at a couple here. Romans 9.1, for example, is another one.

I speak the truth in Christ. I am not lying. My conscience confirms it, even through the Holy Spirit.

Here, he connects conscience and the Holy Spirit under the rubric of conviction. Not under the rubric of giving him content but under the rubric of evaluating the content that he had. That's the role of the conscience, and that is the role of the Spirit.

The Spirit convicts, the conscience convicts. I think, frankly, that it's extremely difficult, if not impossible, to separate the two on many situations. They're performing in the same way, and the only way to deal with those internal voices, those subjective testimonies, is to analyze the worldview and values to the point of saying it's true or it's not true.

It's right or it's not right. That's how you judge whether these internal voices are good or bad. Well, it goes on.

It's talked about as a witness. I want you to notice the adjectives there under Category B. Conscience is a witness to the worldview. Look how many times conscience is used with the word clear.

How many times conscience, only a few, are used with the word good? A good conscience, a clear conscience. Look at the dominance of the word clear.

Don't you see that conscience is that witness? And if you have a clear conscience, that means your worldview and values, you're living in alignment with them. And that's all great if you've been transformed appropriately and have come to appropriate conclusions. That's all great.

But it's possible, and it's very possible, that as Christians, we can have some bad worldviews and values. We can drink so deeply from the well of our world that, like a fish, doesn't feel wet. We don't feel how our culture has led us astray.

Oh man, this is a tricky area. This is tough stuff. There's a lot at stake here.

If a ministry leader cannot adjudicate the scriptures at a deep level, that person is in jeopardy of leading the congregation astray. I mean, in my household, I'm kind of famous for going to sleep on the couch while the TVs are on. It puts me right to sleep.

But there are occasions when maybe I drank a cup of coffee too late. And this happened to me just last night. And at midnight, I was still wide-eyed and bushy-tailed.

And this dude came on who has some big church in Miami, Florida. Oh, he was a handsome fellow dressed to kill in the sense of being cool. And he was speaking on the book of Revelation.

And I sat there in amazement. This major ministry leader with a full congregation of, who knows, a thousand or more people, didn't have a clue what he was talking about. But he's a good talker.

Now he didn't mean bad. And I don't think that he was some kind of charlatan. Just ripping off the congregation.

He probably was very sincere. But sincerity is not an adequate judge of whether you should be doing ministry or not. Listen, my friends, Christianity is a religion that calls for a firm grasp of a biblical worldview and value system, which is the product of a very hard course of study in scripture.

In order to be able to lead the sheep appropriately and adequately. Someone said God builds his work on our failures and mistakes. Well, we ought to be glad about that because who's really capable at the end of the day?

But we are responsible. We're responsible for training ourselves to the nth degree so that we can develop a good worldview and values that are justified by the text of scripture. We know where the absolutes and negotiables are, and we can lead people to understand them.

That's absolutely crucial in the domain of ministry leadership. You fail at that, and you fail at everything. I was a seminary teacher for nearly 30 years or a little over.

I watched, I don't know what, two or three generations of particularly American students, but we had internationals in the class delightfully. That was it, and that was always an interesting dynamic. Frankly, a lot of them have a better work ethic than the USA.

Because the American culture was diminishing that domain, it was diminishing the value of Greek and Hebrew and exegesis and theology. That's just too much work.

I've got to go out and work for Jesus. You'll go out and mess up the church is what you'll do. I'd rather you sell used cars than do that.

This is important work. It's not frivolous. You may say, well, my conscience is clear.

Well, your conscience is clear. Your worldview and values are all messed up. You need a better work ethic.

I used to tell students who would complain about going through a Master of Divinity program that requires three years of very hard study if you got a good classics program. One year in school is worth 10 years on your own or more if you're lazy when you get out. One year is worth 10.

So, you do three years in school, and you start like you're at the 30-year level of understanding the Bible. You can do sermons faster. You can do exegesis faster as a foundation for those sermons.

You can open up time for doing ministry as if that wasn't doing ministry because you've prepared yourself to the best degree you can. And then you continue to learn—nothing like preaching to learn.

Preachers cover more of the Bible than I do. I taught courses that tend to focus on certain things, but a preacher can't repeat himself over and over again if he's living in the same place and preaching in the same church for a good long period of time. You need to say something new.

You need to study another part of the Bible. Isn't that wonderful? Thank God if you've been called to pastoral ministry. But pastoral ministry is not just marrying, burying, and dedicating babies.

Pastoral ministry is teaching the people. Mentoring them in the transformation of their minds so that they can be a community of power because they think correctly and together. So, look at all those adjectives.

1 Corinthians 8, which we looked at earlier, 7 to 13 notes the terms knowledge and conscience. A weak conscience is one which lacks knowledge. In Romans 14, which is not exactly a parallel to 1 Corinthians 8 to 10, there are a lot of arguments about Romans 14 and 15 about that.

But the fact is it doesn't use the word conscience in Romans. It uses the word knowledge. They're weak in knowledge, whereas in 1 Corinthians 8, they're weak in conscience.

They're saying, in many ways, the same thing. They can't function correctly because they don't have a grid that's adequately informed. A weak conscience is one which lacks knowledge upon which conviction can be built.

If our worldview is faulty, then our conscience is also faulty, and our lives are not what they're supposed to be or should be. The transition of knowledge is always, in one sense, a period of weakness because we're learning new things. And it takes a transition.

Hopefully, the ministry leaders have been through those transitions and can help others do the same. Page 131C. Conscience is a monitor of our thinking.

It's a witness. It's a monitor. It's monitoring.

It's the hall monitor in relation to decision-making. It does not provide the reasons for decisions. If someone tells me they're doing something because their conscience told them to, we're going to have a long conversation.

It does not provide the reason for decisions but red and green lights in relation to the decisions. Yet, that still depends on whether the worldview and values are correct. Whether you have a clear conscience or whether you don't.

Because a clear conscience isn't the end of the day, you've got to adjudicate the issue of whether that worldview and value system is right. And gives you the legitimacy of a clear conscience.

Conscience is not able to judge the right or wrong of your values. It merely monitors what your grid recognizes as right or wrong. This is where chapter 8 and some of chapter 10 come back in 1 Corinthians.

Remember, Paul said, raise no questions for conscience's sake. What he meant was that conscience doesn't matter here because it's wrong or right. And you can't appeal to conscience.

Conscience is what you appeal to. You appeal to the worldview and the values. So, you can't go to the market and hold conscience over someone's head who doesn't see idols as anything, and they bought a piece of meat, and you come up and start reading them the act and tell them that conscience says no conscience doesn't say worldview and values say and your worldview and values are wrong.

The weak were acting like the strong in that particular kind of context. Go back and think through that. I have an article in the bibliography by Gooch, G-O-O-C-H on 1 Corinthians 8 and 10.

It's a great article that shows how the conscience is not a judge in 1 Corinthians 8. That's not its role. So, if someone says don't do it for conscience sake, that's not what Paul's saying. Paul's saying don't even raise the question of conscience because it's not part of the conversation.

Worldview and values are part of the conversation. He'll come back and bring the full orb aspect of conscience to bear, but that's why that word conscience seems so strange in some of those contexts and some of those paragraphs in chapter 8, even in chapter 10. Well, what's my conclusion? Well, my conclusion is what I read to you as my definition.

As ministry leaders, we must focus on worldview and values, and that's not just focusing on what's my theology. Don't jump to theology before you learn the bible. The Bible is a much bigger book than all of the theologies put together, and whatever theology is good is because you can see lines of reason from the text to the theology and not because the theology put it in the text.

Be a biblical student first and a theologian second. These aren't in conflict. Remember our theological encyclopedia? Remember the pyramid? You move up through the bible to theology, not from theology down to the bible.

The Bible is a big book we need to learn it in its own context, and when you and all this is going on at the same time, you can't compartmentalize this so easily because there's not enough time in life just about like me, just about the time you got a handle on it you're going to you know you're at the end of your life. How many years do I have left? I'm already pressing the envelope. You're at the beginning.

Well, welcome to the journey. I hope you get a better start than I did. You'll be farther along when you reach my age.

Be a biblically informed Christian. We live in a day; in fact, this was just discussed on a page I noticed recently. There are some people who are so naive. When people pull the Bible, these people say oh, you're just a biblical person.

You're worshiping the bible instead of Jesus. There's a bifurcation if there ever was one. The Bible is the only way you can know Jesus.

If you reject the critical study of the gospels and learning about Jesus and his teachings, then the apostles, you have undermined the very avenue of your

epistemology on the basis of your own faulty and limited emotional devotionals. To the text, Isaiah said to the testimony of scripture.

Not to your what you feel. I couldn't care less what you feel about Jesus. I want to know if you live according to the dictates of Jesus.

Man shall not live by bread alone. Man shall not live by emotions alone. Man shall not live by singing choruses alone.

Man shall not live by being entertained at church but by the word of God. What a novel idea in our current culture. So, man up, woman up, and be the kinds of leaders that help people along in their worldview and values and in the transition of their transformed minds so that their conscience can be a good operator because they've got a good foundation from which to operate.

Now, I've given you a bibliography here. It's not everything by any stretch of the imagination, but there are a number of things, and I'd like to just maybe mention a couple in regard to this. This is so select that you really need to look at it as much as you can, but it is one particularly helpful book, and I'm going blank here, and I'll see it here in a minute.

There's the Gooch article on page 132, Conscience in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10. Oh I'm getting old students. Where's my Pierce, C.A. Pierce, Conscience in the New Testament.

That's a classic study that's considered to be a standard in terms of thinking about conscience. But the book I've mentioned to you before and now I'm going crazy. I hope it's in, I'm sure it's in this bibliography, but I'm not surfacing my book.

Sorry for this delay here that I didn't, Bernard Ram. Ram, is it under Ram? For some crazy reason, class. Ram, R-A-M-M.

I don't have that here. R-A-M-M, and it's Bernard, B-E-R-N-A-R-D. The title of the book is *The Witness of the Spirit*.

By the time you get this I may be able to update these notes and include that but if I don't. Bernard Ram, *The Witness of the Spirit*. Small book, extremely readable.

It was a dissertation that was put into a book but it doesn't read like a dissertation. It reads like something you can understand. I think that's a great place to start with along with some of these other items to get your mind into this question of conscience.

But this is a very limited bibliography in light of the overall subject. So, 1 Corinthians brings us to this term that we use so commonly in our culture, but often, I think without understanding. I hope that what we've done here has sensitized you not only to the role of conscience as a witness but the most important thing is that you have got to work on your worldview and your values.

You've got to be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Just a simple biblical command, and it starts now, and it's a lifelong process. Nobody's arrived.

We're all working at it. There's always somebody who's farther along and not as far along as we are. We help those under us.

We get help from those above us and we march as the kingdom of God toward the eschaton in our own frail ways. God accomplishes his work in the world. Aren't you glad you're a part of it? God bless you and we'll see you in our next lecture.

This is Dr. Gary Meadors in his teaching on the book of 1 Corinthians. This is lecture 24, 1 Corinthians 8:1-11:1, Paul's Response to the Question of Food Sacrificed to Idols. 1 Corinthians 10, Excursus on Conscience.