

Conscience

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Date: 16 May 2021

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[0 : 00] Well, we're in week 3 of our series Inside Out, where we're looking at what the Bible says about various facets of our humanity.

And I hope that you're finding it profitable so far. I'm hoping that the last couple of sermons on the heart and the emotions have deepened your understanding of yourself, have deepened our appreciation of Christ more, and have better equipped you and I to cultivate a godly walk with Christ.

And I would really love to hear from you personally how this might be helping you on that front. Or perhaps if I've not explained something very well, or you just need more clarity on something, please do get in touch with me as well.

Later on, I'll talk about the Zoom after-service time, where you can meet with me. So maybe you can ask me a question then. Or else take advantage of our online Connect cards if you're not sure how else to get in touch with me.

That's one way you can. And it just helps me to know if I'm overcomplicating something or just needing to work even harder at applying some of these truths. Now, last week, I also forgot to mention that if you wanted to dig deeper on the subject of emotions, there was some further reading on the Order of Service last week.

[1 : 14] So you can look that up. And those were the stuff that also influenced my sermon. And this week, let me just quickly mention also at the back of your Order of Service, again, you will notice a couple of books which I found really useful in preparing today's sermon.

And this morning, just like the last two weeks, we are going to race through quite a lot of passages. But this week, we'll pause a little longer on two passages in particular, which is Hebrews 9 and 10 and Romans 14, both of which were our Bible readings today.

And so, can I encourage you right now to keep your Bibles open to Hebrews 9? Because we're not going to put those verses on the screen. And so that when I get to Hebrews 9, it's already open in front of you.

And you can just follow along quite easily. And same for Romans 14, towards the end of the sermon. So do have your Bibles open in front of you already to Hebrews 9 for later on.

But like I said, there's also a sermon outline that will help you to follow along. And let us now come to God, the one who authored these scriptures and ask Him for His help.

[2 : 26] Father, as we come today, I'm aware that there is a varied audience that I'm speaking to, Lord. People in all sorts of situations, people who have all sorts of previous experiences, Lord.

You know all of them. And so, Father, whatever situation they're in, whatever their past might be, whatever present circumstances they're facing, I pray that you'll bring a word in season for them. Help me to be clear and to be faithful as I bring forth your word on the subject of conscience this morning. All this we pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Today, we're going to focus on another aspect of our common humanity, but one that I think gets much less airtime compared to the previous two, and that is our conscience.

In two decades of adult church going, I don't think I myself have ever heard a sermon devoted to this subject. And yet, when I look at the Bible, I realize that the New Testament mentions it quite a lot, and often in quite significant ways.

[3 : 31] Now, let me take you briefly through just one book, One Timothy, to see what I mean. So, come with me to One Timothy 1, verses 18 to 19 on the screen, where Paul gives Timothy this encouragement.

Timothy, my son, I'm giving you this command in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by recalling them, you may fight the battle well, holding on to faith and a good

conscience, which some have rejected, and so have suffered shipwreck with regard to the faith. Notice what Paul is saying. He's saying that there are specific individuals who have set aside a good conscience, and as a result, their faith is like the Titanic. And so Paul is warning Timothy, don't go down that path.

A bad conscience can lead you towards destruction. Indeed, if you go down to chapter 4, verses 1 to 2, next on the screen, he says that such people can end up with seared consciences and become hypocritical liars who will teach demonic things.

So in summary, a bad conscience can put you on the side of demons and destroy your relationship with God. That's pretty serious. But look also at 1 Timothy 1 verse 5 on the screen.

[4 : 54] Love, Paul says, is always our goal. But it needs three elements to thrive. A pure heart, a sincere faith, and yes, a good conscience.

In some ways, that's common sense. Can you imagine a pure heart without a good conscience? It just doesn't work. And so, if you want to love, you need both.

You need a good conscience. And a good conscience is so highly valued that it's explicitly mentioned as a quality that a church deacon will possess.

3 verse 9. Deacons must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. And so church leaders need to have a deep integrity that is in accordance with the beliefs they profess. And so clearly, the conscience plays a significant role in determining the health of our Christian life. More than that, the conscience impacts our joy.

[5 : 56] Imagine doing something with a clear conscience. Now, imagine doing it with a nagging one. It makes a significant difference, doesn't it?

A clear conscience, it's been said, is like the best pillow ever, bringing peace and contentment and gladness. But even the most luxurious hotel suite in the world won't bring you rest if your conscience is not clear.

And so this morning, this is what we'll do. As in previous weeks, we'll explore, first of all, what the conscience is. We'll look at its defining characteristics.

Then after that, we'll see two things our conscience needs. And by the end, I hope that we'll not only have a better idea of the important role that conscience plays in our lives, but that we'll begin to experience the joy and motivating power of a clear conscience.

And so let's begin with what the conscience is. Now, the other day when I was signing into the office, I got a shock when the thermal scanner suddenly turned red and started making a beeping sound.

[7 : 10] Apparently, I was 38 degrees. Now, you'll be pleased to know that a second click turned in a more normal 36.8 degrees. But that's how a conscience works.

in essence. As you go about your daily life, your conscience turns in normal readings. But as soon as you're in danger of straying onto the wrong path, it'll turn red and go, beep-beep, beep-beep. It tells you something's wrong. And so simply put, the conscience is your consciousness of what you believe is right and wrong. That's how the New Testament scholar Andy Nassali defines it. Or to give a slightly more comprehensive definition, the one given by the Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible, the conscience is that self-awareness that judges whether or not an act one has carried out or plans to carry out is in harmony with one's moral standards.

And so it's that hyper-awareness, that bad feeling you get when you do something you believe is wrong even if no one else knows about it. And so those are the standard definitions.

[8 : 23] But let's just dwell a little longer on what a conscience is like to better understand how it works. And we'll do that by comparing it to a number of things.

And so first of all, the conscience works like a shadow that speaks. Now last week when I was teaching the final Bible overview class, I asked the students, are you your shadow?

And one of them said, well, the shadow is you and yet it's not you. It corresponds to you and yet it's also independent of you. And our conscience is a little like our shadow.

Have you ever noticed that your conscience often acts like a third party? It whispers in your ear when you don't expect it. It seems to say things that are contrary to your will at that moment.

It corresponds to you and yet it's independent of you. So perhaps you are looking in the fridge one evening and you notice that box full of chocolates that your sister or your housemate has bought.

[9 : 31] And you think, hey, if I take one she won't notice, right? She's always asking to eat my stuff anyway. But as you reach for it, suddenly a little voice pops up in your head saying, are you really

sure you have permission to eat that?

What if she's giving that to mum on Mother's Day? And that voice seems to have come out of nowhere. You see, your conscience is part of you and yet at the same time seems to come from outside of you.

Now here's another memorable definition of the conscience but one that comes from centuries ago. Someone once called the conscience God's spy in your bosom.

Now that's what it can feel like, can't it? A spy sending you secret, unexpected messages. And it can be so powerful that it can move protesters in Myanmar and dissidents in Russia to endure torture and persecution.

In Acts 23 verse 1, Paul says it's his conscience that enables him to face the Jewish council who are unjustly accusing him.

[10:43] Second of all, the conscience functions like a courtroom. Now, I owe this brilliant analogy to Christopher Ash and it's so good that I have to share it with you.

Imagine a typical courtroom and imagine all the personnel in there. And what you'll find is that the conscience takes on all their roles.

And so, it's like a court reporter. It records all the words spoken at a court proceeding. It captures live conversation and is able to replay it for you afterwards.

It also acts as a witness. It can testify on the stand either against you or for you, giving you a positive character reference or bringing hard evidence that incriminates you to light.

The conscience can also be like a prosecuting attorney, cross-examining you, asking you uncomfortable questions, making you sweat.

[11:47] And it can act like a judge. It declares to you what is right and wrong. And in fact, it can be appealed to. And finally, it can act like an executioner on death row.

It takes us captive and brings us terror as we anticipate the coming punishment that we face, bringing a cloud of condemnation to hang over us.

Now, certainly the New Testament conceives of it this way. We're not going to look at it in any detail, but here are some references for you to consider. In Romans 9 verse 1, for example, Paul affirms that his conscience bears witness to his truth-telling.

In 2 Corinthians 5:11, Paul expresses his hope that his hearers can judge Paul positively if they listen to their conscience. In Romans 2 verse 15, the conscience can accuse.

In 1 Corinthians 8 verse 7, the conscience can bring about a sense of condemnation. And even though the Old Testament never uses the word conscience, David himself is basically expressing a troubled conscience in 2 Samuel 24 verse 10 when he talks about the guilt he feels after sinning against God.

[13:08] Now, all these references are on your outline, so don't worry if you want to look them up later on. And so, the conscience is like a courtroom. But third of all, the conscience works like gold or silver.

gold and silver look solid, but it's actually malleable and can be stretched, shaped, and molded through applied pressure.

And our conscience is constantly facing pressure, whether that's from other people, from culture, from tradition, or from the word of God itself.

In other words, our conscience is malleable, it's changeable, it's not static. It can get stronger, or weaker, more Jesus shape, or less Jesus shape, depending on who or what is molding it.

And that's why our consciences are individual and personal. No two people have exactly the same conscience. And that's what we'll see in the scriptures later on, when we encounter people of varying consciences.

[14:17] but in the end, whatever their shape, every human being has a conscience. Because you and I are made in the image of God, and God is a moral God, it's no surprise that we are moral creatures who have a capacity to make moral judgments.

In Romans 2 verse 14, even the Gentiles, who did not receive God's law at Mount Sinai, do by nature things required by the law.

They are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. In other words, by virtue of their image bearing nature, even Gentiles know that they should worship God, not steal, murder, or deceive others.

According to verse 15, they have a conscience that bears witness to all this, even if they have no Bibles. And all this is a gift from God.

It's his way of restraining us from sinning more, and also his way of reforming us so that we'll do more of what's right.

[15:36] But perhaps, even as I'm speaking right now, there could be a number of you this morning who don't feel like your conscience is a gift. You see, right now, you look fine on the outside.

No one would imagine that you're troubled in any way. But inside, there's something bugging you. There's a voice speaking to you, reminding you of some past perceived transgression, whether big or small.

There's a secret that no one else knows that you're carrying with you. And so, every once in a while, you can't sleep because your mind goes back to that day, that event, that action.

Every once in a while, someone brings up a topic of conversation that's uncomfortably close to that thing, whatever it is, and you find that you can't look them in the eye.

Sometimes you're amongst friends, but you suddenly feel all alone because this thing acts like an invisible barrier between you and them. After all, if they knew you, you might feel they'll leave you.

[16:50] They'll abandon you. And above all, this thing is keeping you at arm's length from the Lord. You don't dare to draw near to God and seek his help.

And even when you do, it's done with nervousness and anxiety and anticipated disappointment. In short, you're struggling with a guilty conscience.

You feel tainted, tarnished, blemished. And so no wonder we need our conscience to be deeply cleansed.

That's the first thing our conscience needs. Now just this week, I heard an interesting story on the podcast by the Christian historian John Dixon. In 1995, Clive White claimed to have caught a giant rainbow trout weighing over 36 pounds.

It set the British record for the largest trout ever caught. But eight years later, he released a public letter where he redrew his claim to the record. This is what he wrote.

[17:57] I did not catch the fish. I'm very sorry and deeply regret what I have done but cannot live a lie anymore as it has destroyed my marriage and very nearly destroyed me.

I know a lot of people will take a dim view of what I have done but now I can sleep at night knowing I have nothing to hide. As it turns out, he had found the fish washed up on the shore rather than caught it.

And even though he received plenty of accolades, he ultimately couldn't live with his conscience. It kept telling him that he's guilty because he was.

And according to the Bible, that's why we often have a guilty conscience. It's not a mere psychological state.

It indicates what is objectively true. In other words, our problem isn't just that we feel guilty but that we are guilty.

[19:06] And our consciences won't let us forget that. It reminds us of that time when we've indulged in a lustful fantasy or spoke too harshly. It reminds us of that time when we didn't use the opportunity God gave us to act in love or share the gospel with a co-worker.

It points us to our guilty state. And this is illustrated especially vividly in Hebrews chapter 9.

Do have the Bible open in front of you. In verses 1 to 10, the writer takes us on a tour of the tabernacle. Now back in the Old Testament, God had asked his people to set up this large tent in the middle of their camp.

And this tent called the tabernacle consists of two rooms, the holy place and the most holy place. Now to get into the latter, you have to pass through the former.

There's no side door. But then, he reminds us that this tabernacle has limited access. Nobody could just enter in just like that. It has to be the priest.

[20:17] And the further you go in, the more restricted the access. Only the high priest could go into the inner room, the most holy place.

And even then, verse 7 tells us that he can't go in just as he likes. Even he can only go in once a year, and only after he has made the right preparations, offering a sacrifice for his own sin, as well as for the people.

Why is that the case? Why is the tabernacle set up that way? We're told in verse 8, and I'll read from the New Living Translation, which helpfully brings out the meaning.

By these regulations, the Holy Spirit revealed that the entrance to the most holy place was not freely open as long as the tabernacle and the system it represented were still in use.

In other words, everything about the way the tabernacle was set up was there to tell you, keep out, stay away, don't come near. Why?

[21 : 26] Because we are guilty. We cannot approach God. And this wasn't just indicated by the fact that the tabernacle had limited access.

It was also because the sacrifices themselves had limited efficacy. In verse 7, the priest can offer sacrifices for unintentional sins.

But what about intentional ones? What about sins like those committed by Clive White? There is no provision there. And so verse 9, that's why the sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshipper.

You see, you don't know if the sacrifices are good enough to clear your sin. And if you're a priest, all you're doing is offering more and more and more sacrifices, hoping for the best, and yet, knowing that they are never enough for you to enter the second room.

No wonder Hebrews 10 verse 3 says that all these sacrifices do in the end is simply remind you that you are sinful. It doesn't actually cleanse your conscience.

[22 : 49] It simply burdens it more. We know that feeling, don't we? We might not offer animal sacrifices anymore, but we're constantly looking for strategies to cleanse our conscience.

Sometimes we do so by overcompensating. Cause hurt to a friend or a family member. Okay, let's be extra nice to another friend or another family member then.

Troubled by that wrong action you did. Okay, become extra religious. Even take sermon notes today when you usually don't bother. Make these sacrifices.

Or if that doesn't work, what about trying to silence our consciences instead? Escape into work.

Escape into video games. Escape into binge eating.

Escape into pornography. Whatever it takes to make that bad feeling go away. Or decide that in the end attending all those extra Bible studies are of no use and reject God's word altogether.

[23 : 59] Hopefully our conscience will go quiet then. Or increasingly in our culture today, engage in public shaming. That's another strategy.

If you can't cope with your own guilt, then look for others who seem worse than you and show how unrighteous they are on social media.

But my friends, these attempts at sacrifices and silencing will get you nowhere. It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin.

And it is impossible for extra moral and religious and escapist efforts to cleanse your conscience.

It's still poking you. So what can wash away my sin? Enter Jesus.

[25 : 03] He too is a high priest. He too enters the most holy place, the real one. Not just the inner room of a tabernacle, but the very presence of God.

He too offers a sacrifice. Except this sacrifice is once for all. Now, think about that for a moment.

All our sacrifices repeated time and time again simply remind us in the end about our sin. As we kill another goat, we're reminded it's never enough.

Another goat is soon needed. As we put in more effort to reform ourselves, we're reminded it's never enough. There's always another part of us that needs fixing.

Even if we repeatedly offer them, our sacrifices remind us of our sin. But Jesus says, his sacrifice takes away sin.

[26 : 16] He strikes it off the record. He wipes our history clean. Never again will God bring up our sin and hold them against us.

Never again will he dredge up the memories of multiple moral failures to bring against us. Never again will he shame us.

Why not? Because verse 12, Jesus hasn't won annual redemption for us, one that he has to repeat. He's won eternal redemption for us.

His sacrifice means God can say never again. For in 10 verse 17 God says he remembers our sin no more.

Our condemnation has been removed. Our objective guilt has been fully forgiven. And so our conscience can be cleansed.

[27 : 18] And wonderfully this means Hebrews chapter 10 verse 19 that we now have confidence to enter the most holy place. We have confidence to come into the presence of God.

We have right of entry. we have the right access card. We have the right password. For we have the blood of Jesus. That is an objective truth.

And because Jesus has objectively opened up a new and living way for us, we can have subjective confidence. As Thomas Brooks once said, a good conscience and a good confidence go together. That's why verse 22 we can draw near to God with full assurance because Jesus has given us the keys to the house of God. My friends, I hope you see this.

If you have faith in Jesus today, notice Jesus never treats you like some unwelcome guest. He never feels frustrated when he sees you coming to him again even after you've fallen.

[28 : 29] Does a parent get irritated when a toddler runs to him for comfort after he accidentally banged his head on the table? Does a doctor get annoyed when a truly sick patient seeks treatment?

No. Because the whole point is that that's your job. A parent consoles, a doctor treats, and a high priest cleanses.

that's why you come for comfort and for healing. Every day, you can walk into the most holy place, into the very presence of God, and know for sure the Father's love and welcome if you're sincerely seeking his mercy.

Because Jesus has paid for your sin and cleansed your conscience. This is what it means to be a Christian. It is to know the joy of a cleansed conscience.

And if you're not a Christian this morning, this is the good news we have. And this is what we fight to believe over and over again, day after day.

[29 : 44] Every day, as 1 John 3 20 said, if our heart condemns us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.

He knows our field, our dirt, but his grace is greater. And when we believe that, we find Jesus not a harsh master, but a tender lover.

And that will cause us to turn to him in repentance as our savior. fear. And so every day, we can and need to apply the objective truth of the gospel to enjoy its subjective effects.

Confidence and joy and deep peace. And if you get nothing else from the sermon today, at least grasp that, revel with that, cling to that.

But here's the second thing our conscience needs. We need our conscience to be regularly calibrated. To be regularly calibrated.

[30 : 56] Do you remember the thermal scanner I mentioned at the beginning of this sermon? When it took my temperature, it told me I had a fever. But it was wrong. It wasn't accurate.

And here is one thing that Christians might not realise about our conscience. Our consciences are like that thermal scanner. They generally work well, but they can malfunction.

They can give us false information. And the conscience can go wrong in two ways. For one, they can tell us we are not guilty when we are.

Consider 1 Timothy 4 verse 2. There we learn that our consciences can be seared. So imagine a hot iron pressed against our flesh.

Now your skin will be burned and all your nerves killed off. You lose all feeling or sensitivity. And that's what it means to have a seared conscience. It becomes numb.

[31 : 59] You see, what happens if you keep ignoring your conscience? You render it increasingly insensitive. So, the first time you cheat in a test, you feel really jumpy.

You break into a cold sweat. You keep thinking that the teacher will spot you at any moment. You can't believe you are doing this. Your conscience just keeps sounding the alarm. But if you keep doing it, by the sixth time, it doesn't bother you anymore.

Your conscience raises no objection. That's a sign it's been sound disturbingly familiar to any of you listening in today.

Or consider the corrupted conscience. Titus 1 verse 15. To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted.

Here, you're not just dead to the right thing, you even celebrate what's wrong. So, with the seared conscience earlier, you overruled it. But with the corrupt or defiled conscience, you've re-educated it.

[33 : 14] You no longer make distinctions between the pure and impure. You begin to approve of the wrong things. So, perhaps at one time, when you chose the way of selfishness, you know you're choosing something contrary to the way of the gospel.

And so, you feel a distinct lack of peace about that. You know you're not honoring God. But as you allow yourself to be influenced by the world rather than the word, not only do you begin to feel okay about that, but now you give a Facebook like whenever someone else proclaims about how they are done caring about other people, but now they're just going to care about themselves and you give a thumbs up.

Good for you, you say, we celebrate something anti-Gospel. I wonder, is this raising an alarm bell for one or two of you this morning?

And so our consciences can fail to inform us of our guilt when they should. And that's why Paul makes this remarkable statement in 1 Corinthians 4 verse 4.

My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. Just because we think we're okay does not automatically mean we are. Our consciences can malfunction.

[34 : 41] Or as Proverbs 14 verse 12 says, there is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death. And that's why Paul goes on to say, it is the Lord who judges me.

Only Jesus himself can make an infallible judgment about us. But our consciences can also go wrong in the opposite direction.

They can tell us we are guilty when we are not. Now, some of us might have grown up in an environment that was filled with rules, including rules that go further than the Bible does.

Perhaps it was a rule that said, no alcohol under any circumstance or no kissing whatsoever when dating. And that's what Paul is also talking about in 1 Corinthians 8 verse 7.

In Corinth, there were some Gentile converts who could not eat food sacrificed in the temple because it brought back memories of their idol worshipping past.

[35 : 46] Even though objectively speaking, eating such food is perfectly harmless. Paul argues as such in these chapters because the idol is really nothing.

And next year when we come back to the book of 1 Corinthians, hopefully we'll explore this in more detail when we look at chapters 8 to 10. But in Corinth, some Christians, if they ate such food, would convince themselves that they are doing something wrong when they're really not.

And so they felt guilty. Their consciences are also malfunctioning. And Satan loves to exploit that. That's the reason he's called the accuser in the Bible.

He loves to accuse even falsely if that will bring us under false condemnation. And so here's our big point.

We shouldn't uncritically always accept our consciences as a 100% foolproof guide. Our conscience is a gift from God but it isn't God.

[36 : 57] And so rather we need to make sure that they are regularly calibrated. But how do we calibrate our consciences? Well our conscience is only as good as its underlying source.

And so that means our conscience must constantly be informed and educated by the truth of God's word. But the good news is the conscience is changeable and so it can grow in godliness as it grows in the understanding of the scriptures.

In Acts chapter 10 verses 9 to 16 that's exactly what happened to Peter. In this episode God gave Peter a vision of certain kinds of animals that the Old Testament forbade Jews to eat.

And he commanded Peter kill and eat. And Peter's conscience revolted against this command. No way Lord, I don't eat anything impure.

Peter thought he was being faithful to God's word. But because he had an incorrect understanding, his conscience was in reality weak. And so God now changed his understanding.

[38 : 09] He tells Peter, you need to understand the Old Testament has been fulfilled by Christ. He declares it all clean. And so you need to calibrate your conscience by your corrected understanding of God's word.

You can now accept food and people you previously couldn't accept. And Peter did. He goes to the home of a Gentile, Cornelius, and brings in the gospel, even fellowshiping with him there, staying in his house.

God calls us to do. Calibrate our consciences by the truth of God's word. But what should we do if different Christians have different calibrated consciences?

What if one Christian thinks that reading Harry Potter is okay and the other thinks it's wrong? What if one Christian thinks that you can't have tattoos but another thinks it's no big deal? Well, that's what Romans 14 is all about and in truth it heartily I'm going to try to sum it up in a nutshell.

So here's the issue. There were a group of Christians whom Paul identified as weak. In Romans 14 verse 2 we discover they only eat vegetables probably because they're afraid that the meat that they bought from Averice could have some association with pagan religion.

[39 : 32] And in verse 5 they also think that some days are more sacred than others. And so you should observe them. And this is probably due to their Jewish background.

But some Gentile Christians found this weird. And as a result verse 3 they began to look down on these Christians. They have contempt for them. They thought they were weak. And it was also true the other way around.

The vegetarian Christians thought that the other side were compromisers. Man they're not serious about following the Lord. And so they each had differently calibrated consciences.

Now notice that these aren't gospel issues per se but they do impact the church. So what to do? Well Paul lays down a few principles. Here's principle number one.

Don't do something if your conscience tells you it's wrong. That's what verse 5 means when Paul talks about being fully convinced in our own minds. You see that again in verse 14.

[40 : 32] If anyone regards something as unclean then for that person it is unclean. And so if a person really thinks that eating meat is disobedience to God because that's what his conscience is telling him then he shouldn't even though it's actually okay.

To sin against your conscience in this case is to sin against God because that's what you think you're doing. As Mark Devers says conscience cannot make a wrong thing right but it can make a right thing wrong.

And that brings us to principle number two. Don't lead someone to sin against their conscience and compromise their integrity. Now in verse 13 Paul talks about not being a stumbling block to our brother and sister.

Now we need to clarify the language of stumbling block here. Often Christians abuse this language. They take stumbling block to mean you doing something I don't like.

But that's not what it means. I am not a stumbling block to you if I read Harry Potter even if you don't like that. Rather I am a stumbling block to you if I pressure you to read Harry Potter because I tell you it's a great story and it's good to be familiar with pop culture so you must.

[42 : 05] And as a result although you're still a little confused and feeling that it is still wrong to read Harry Potter maybe because you think it's associated with the account or something like that you end up reading it anyway.

And so what has happened is that I've pressured you into an action that you believe is disobedient to God and cause you to compromise your integrity and in doing so I cause damage to your faith. For look at verse 23 whoever has doubts is condemned if they eat because their eating is not from faith and everything that does not come from faith is sin.

And then principle number three welcome one another even though we have differing consciences. That's what verse one says. The NIV uses the word accept but the ESV which uses the word welcome captures the intention better I think.

The idea here is not just to accept but secretly nurse a grudge. No it is to welcome the other person wholeheartedly. Verses three to four make clear that both the Harry Potter reading Christian and the non Harry Potter reading Christian are not to look down or judge one another.

[43 : 24] Why? Because the gospel says God has accepted them and God alone in the end will be their judge. But we mustn't lose track of principle number four which is really a restatement what's already been said.

Let our conscience continually be calibrated by scripture. Contrary to popular belief, Paul isn't saying that there is no right or wrong at all.

In Romans 15 verse 1, he makes clear that the vegetarian eating Christians are mistaken. It's just that he thinks out of love, we should bear with them.

But here's the thing. If these Christians, 25 years down the line, still believe that they can only eat vegetables, would Paul be happy?

I doubt it. He would have hoped by then that their consciences have been refined by God's word and brought to maturity. And so having a weak conscience is no excuse for not recalibrating it.

[44 : 31] To welcome one another does not mean not having discussions about the matter, not submitting to the teaching of the scriptures, and not looking to persuade one another. It just means that we don't do so with a condemning or condescending attitude.

And so this morning, as we finish, let me ask you a number of questions. Are you struggling with a conflicted conscience this morning? Then run to Christ.

Do you think he runs out of grace the same way that Indian hospitals have ran out of oxygen in recent weeks? Absolutely not. And so run to him.

He gives you access to life itself. But here's another question. This morning, are you failing to listen to your conscience?

Have you been ignoring or overruling it quite a bit recently? Don't do that. Don't desensitize it. It's God's alarm system graciously installed to help you be more godly.

[45 : 38] don't disable that. And then finally, are you committed to understanding God's word more and more so that you can calibrate your consciences rightly?

Are you committed to learning in community, welcoming one another, but also sharpening one another, so that together we can live according to the very will of God?

even a pandemic shouldn't stop us from that, not when we have the incredible technological resources at our disposal today. And there's no shortcut to that.

A 40 minute sermon on a Sunday isn't enough. We must be prepared to work hard and dig deeper if we want to cultivate a godly conscience. And so if you haven't participated in a Bible study recently, perhaps God is giving you a nudge today.

And as we do so, we can know the blessing of a properly trained, appropriately sensitive conscience. As we do so, we can rejoice in the finished work of Christ, who offered himself unblemished to God and cleansed our consciences from acts that lead to death so that we may serve the living God.

[47 : 01] may you know the joy of that today. Let's pray. Let's just take a few seconds in silence first to consider what we've heard, to consider whether our consciences are saying anything to us this morning as it is informed by the word of God.