

Conscience - Part 2

by Dai Patterson

Dai Patterson explores the role of conscience in the ministry of John the Baptist and its implications for believers today.

Scripture: Proverbs 20:27, Matthew 5:14, Luke 3:12, John 1:8, Romans 12:1, Philippians 2:25-30, Hebrews 8:10

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Spiritual Renewal"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of allowing the word of God to transform our lives. He uses the analogy of giving someone something to eat, indicating that when we receive and internalize God's laws in our hearts and minds, it brings about a conscious and readjusted life. The speaker also highlights the role of the Holy Spirit in empowering believers to have a profound impact on their generation. He mentions the healing power of God, particularly in relation to backsliding, and references the book of Jeremiah where God promises to heal Israel's backsliding. The speaker concludes by expressing the need for God to move in the current state of the world and emphasizes that God can use individuals as vehicles for His work.

Transcript

Well, I'm going to go back to my subject of the conscience, and I want to go back to John's Gospel, and to Chapter 1, where we read concerning John, John Baptist. And in verse 6, we read this, There came a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came for a witness, that he might bear witness of the light, that all might believe through him.

He was not the light, but he came, that he might bear witness of the light. There was the true light, which coming into the world enlightened every man. I want to say a few things in relation to John, and John's ministry amongst the people of Israel.

You are aware that when he came, there had not been a prophet for around about 400 years. It seemed like the heavens were very quiet and still, and there had been no word of the Lord for so very, very long. And then John appears on the scene, and he comes, and it is said of him, of course, that there was no greater prophet than John.

That's a remarkable statement. It doesn't say that he was the greatest, but there was none greater. So, you put all the others alongside him, and there was none greater than him.

And he came, as I'm sure you are all well aware, to prepare the way, to prepare the way for the way, for Christ to come, who is the way, the truth, the life. John came with a very clear, specific purpose, and as we've just noticed, he was sent from God. He did not come by volunteering.

I'm often a bit concerned when people volunteer for things, especially when it comes to things like the ministry. You don't need to volunteer. God will call you and send you.

It's good to volunteer for anything, anything that's going, especially, you know, doing the dishes and things, essential things. But, wow, to be sent is the most wonderful of things. And when he came, he came and he brought the Word of God into a society that for 400 years or thereabouts had never heard a prophetic voice.

And he came as a conscience to Israel, and things that he said and the life that he demonstrated had the most profound effect. I'm going to, maybe tonight, if not, it'll be tomorrow morning, pick up on the way in which my life and your life must profoundly affect the conscience of our day. And that is given to you and to I by the power of the Spirit.

And I wonder how many of us in this room really do believe, really do believe that the Spirit of God comes to empower us so that we may have the most profound effect upon our day and generation. I must confess, I don't see much of it. I was reminded only just recently that this year and next year marks the 100th anniversary of the revival back in the homeland.

The other day there's a short videotape that's been produced by somebody running through the life of Evan Roberts and pinpointing the particular highlights of the revival. And I guess there will be all sorts of meetings and there may even be walks to Lacha or to Newcastle Emlyn or to the places where the revival broke out and people will be speaking of it and being reminded of it and perhaps even looking back with longing, but to what end? My country as yours is in the most awful mess and we need God to come and move. When you begin to read of the beginnings of the revival what God did was to raise up some men and some women and He got hold of them in such a way that they became the vehicle through whom He moved.

God needs me, goodness knows why, and He needs you and you and I need to be a prophetic voice in our day, but in a far more profound way than John. Now that might sound most insulting to John. It is not.

John was the most remarkable of men. His ministry touched the very conscience of the people to whom he came. Let me just note that he came in verse 8 for a witness that he might bear witness of the light.

Do you remember yesterday we read from Proverbs chapter 20 and verse 27 where we read that the Spirit of man is the lamp of the Lord, not the light, but the lamp. And we were reminded this morning that Jesus Christ is the light and the light comes forth from the life. The life is the light of men.

Without the life there is no light and without the light you and I cannot be a lamp, the lamp of the Lord, a city set on a hill. You remember that Christ spoke in the Beatitudes, we are as a city set upon a hill. It can't be hid.

That is what we are meant to be, individually, corporately. Such demonstrations of this life that produces this light, that that light has the most profound effect upon the conscience of our day. But we're not being very effective, are we? All we want to be, how we long to be, I hope that we all do.

Okay, now what did John do? What was the consequence of his ministry? If you will just note, he came to bear witness to the light. He was like a lamp to his day and generation and the light that shone through him was the light of the Spirit of God. And yet, in John's ministry there were such limitations.

I'm going to touch upon a few of them in a moment or two. But those opening verses I read indicate something of John's prophetic ministry as the conscience pricker of his day. And he came as the conscience to Israel and stirred something that had not been stirred.

He turned the fathers to the son and the son to the fathers. He began to stir something within his society that had not been touched for such a long time. If you come back into the Gospel of Luke and in the third chapter we read of the ministry of John in the opening verses.

We are told that he began to move around the Jordan preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Luke quotes in verses 4 on down from Isaiah chapter 40 and John is absolutely fearless. He is prepared to strike right to the very heart of the condition of the people of his day and he warns them.

In verse 7 he calls them a brood of vipers. That is perhaps not the best way to gather a crowd. And yet John managed to do so.

He became flocking to him. And yet his language is such that you would think, well this guy is going to stand preaching to himself. He's going to lose his crowd.

That was of no concern to John. He knew that he'd come with a message and he had to speak. And he had to speak to the conscience of his day.

He was not there to tickle their ears. He was not there to gather a crowd, to build a little empire, to establish a new mood in Israel. He comes as the voice of one crying in the wilderness.

Now I don't think that means that it was his voice that was crying, but he was only echoing a cry. A cry of the one who should have been at the very heart of Israel but was out there in the wilderness. Somewhat like, you read in the Revelation, that Christ was outside the door of the church whereas he should have been in it.

Centre of it and everything functioning around him. But there he was outside of it. Appealing just to one, will you open the door and let me come in to the one.

And how amazing it is that the one can have the most profound effect upon the multitude once the one has opened the door and has learned to suck with him and he with the Lord. And there can, out of that, come the most remarkable changes. And if you know anything about the Revival back at home in Wales, they talk about Evan Roberts.

But before Evan Roberts, oh there was Josh and Seth Joshua. There was a man called Jenkins. There weren't any Joneses.

I don't know what happened to the Joneses. God was raising up people and he was using them, dealing with them, getting hold of them. And they became a voice to the conscience of Wales.

And it's a remarkable story. Remarkable. And if you get a chance to read it, please do.

You'll be thrilled with it. But what about our day? What about our day? Listen to this. Having preached, in verse 12, we read this.

And some tax gatherers also came to be baptised. And they said to him, Teacher, what shall we do? Now please do notice something. And there are going to be three occasions now when there is an appeal to the voice of the prophet.

How do we conduct ourselves? How are we to behave? What should be our response? And herein lies the limitation of the prophet. He could advise. He could suggest.

But it was all from an outward position. They said to him, what shall we do? He said to them, Collect no more than what you have been ordered to. Now if you're anything like me, when I read that, I think, were they stupid or something? Isn't that plain common sense? But listen, to a people who have not heard a prophetic word for 400 years, who were sunken in a condition and state and attitude of heart and mind, that was beddened to the Spirit of God, this came as something entirely new.

What do we do? Then you notice, there were soldiers, presumably these were not Jewish but Roman, they questioned him and said, And what about us? What shall we do? And he said to them, Do not take money from anyone by force, or accuse anyone falsely, and be content with your wages. Now if you're sitting here, and you know that the Spirit of Jesus Christ is within your heart, you will say, Well, I don't need anyone to tell me that. And therein lies the difference.

They did. You and I, by the Spirit of God operating living within us, do not need to be instructed in the way that they needed to be instructed. Thirdly, have I missed one? Tax collectors.

Oh yeah, there we are, sorry. The multitude were questioning him and said, What shall we do? And he answered and said, Let the man who has two tunics share with him who has none, and let him who has food do likewise. And you might say to yourself, Isn't that lovely? That's wonderfully Christian.

That's the basis upon which so many charitable organisations operate. But if I said to you, That's not Christian, there is certainly an element of humanitarianism in it, there's a tremendous amount of care, but here is a man who is suggesting to these people a way of behaviour. He is instructing their conscience, and they are going to have to readjust the way they think.

I said yesterday that the conscience has to be educated, because you and I as fallen men and women, our conscience likewise is fallen and it needs to be re-educated. John was in the process, he began it. But he also declared that he was limited.

Now if you'll notice this in verse 16, or 15, While the people were in a state of expectation, and all were wondering in their hearts about John, as to whether he might be the Christ. Is this the one? Is this the one? John then answered and said to them, As for me, I baptise you with water. John would not do so unless there was repentance.

And that repentance led to a rethinking and a reorganising within the conscience of the man, the woman that was baptised. And they came up with questions, Well how do I now live my life? And John was able to direct them. But one is coming who is mightier than I. And I am not fit to untie the thong of his sandals.

He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. And his winnowing fork is in his hand to thoroughly clean his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn and he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable

fire. And so with many other exhortations also, he preached the gospel to the people.

Now what gospel did John preach? Well, he preached the gospel of repentance. But you will now notice that he recognises his limitation and he points off to another and says, Now listen, I can instruct your conscience up to a certain level. I can tell you, live this way.

Don't do that anymore. Stop that. That's not acceptable.

But there is one coming who is going to do something so profound that he will be able to reconstitute you, remake you, remould you, educate your conscience from within. Not from without. And that is one of the most profound things for us to understand.

That by this baptism of the Spirit, there comes about the glorious possibility for Jesus Christ from within to instruct, to reorganise, to reconstitute my whole way of living and thinking. It is, what I am saying is, I'm putting really into my words what time and time again is quoted from Jeremiah, that God declares, I will make a new covenant. I will write my laws into your hearts and into your minds.

And the mind is ever so closely linked with the conscience. There's a statement made in Titus chapter 1, and let me read it to you, and in the 15th verse, I hope, which says this, Yes, to the pure all things are pure. But to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure.

But both, please note both, their minds and their conscience are defiled. If the conscience is defiled, the mind is defiled, the thinking is defiled, there is no way that a man can live with a good conscience before God and before men. So, John declares, Yes, I've come.

I'm the voice of one who's crying. I am as the conscience to Israel, but I am directing you to one who is able to do something within that will radically alter the whole attitude and disposition of the heart and of the mind, and can establish from within a transformation in the whole process that takes place within the conscience. Now, isn't that a glorious, glorious miracle? I recently read through the book of Jeremiah.

One of the things that struck me, and I think there are four if perhaps five occasions when Jeremiah talks about healing, and one of the statements that the Lord makes to Israel through Jeremiah is this, I will heal your backslidings. How about that? How many people I seem to come across who they start and they stop, and they start and they stop. Constant complaints about backsliding, going back, says Jeremiah, I'll heal it.

Or rather the Lord says, I'll heal it. Is it possible to be healed in the heart and in the mind? Is it possible for the conscience to be so reorganized that I am somehow by the ability, the grace, the mercies of God able to go on, to go on, to go on? I'm going to, I think probably on Tuesday or Wednesday morning, get to Romans chapter 12. Somebody this morning quoted it where Paul says this, I beseech you therefore brethren, by the mercies of God.

Let me ask you, what are the mercies of God? What mercies is Paul speaking about? And of course that 12th chapter and those opening verses present the practical side of the Gospel, of the epistle. Chapters 1 to 5 deal with justification by faith. And justification by faith is not the way I look at myself.

It's the way that God looks at me. And then 6, 7 and 8 deal with sanctification. And then 9, 10 and 11 deal with issues which would have arisen in a Jewish mind and questions that they would have perhaps put to the apostle had they been able to talk to him.

And then comes the practical side. And the practical side begins with the mind. And one of the great faculties, if not the greatest faculty, is the conscience.

Let me read you a little quote. I like little quotes. It's a shame that they're not mine, but they're not.

Listen to this. This is Catherine Booth. You've all heard of Catherine Booth.

I am told that she was a better preacher than William. I don't know whether that's true or not, but that's the kind of comment that's made. I don't know where people get those comments from.

I wouldn't have minded listening to him. But this is what Catherine said. Conscience is an independent witness standing between God and man.

It is in man but for God. And it cannot be silenced or bribed. It will call a lie a lie, and it will not allow a man to escape by calling the lie hyperbole.

Now for Jean-Paul, who's over there, in case he asks me afterwards what hyperbole is, it's a white lie. Sorry about that. But it's trying to cover over something, call it something which it's not.

And people do it. Someone called it, the conscience that is, someone called it, this is still Catherine, God's spirit in the soul of man. And is certainly the most wonderful part of man.

I thought that was a statement. It was originally set with the great moral law of God and to which it was amenable. It loved the law of God.

But I know, until Jesus Christ got hold of my life, I didn't love the law of God. In fact, I can even recall raising my fist to Him and telling Him how much I hated it because it cramped my style. It imposed upon my conscience restrictions which I did not want to have.

And I foolishly fought against those restrictions and the impositions upon me of God's law until I went my own way. How easy, once you've gone your own way, the first time to go the second time far easier. And the third and the fourth and the fifth until conscience can become seared.

And I've heard it said that once the conscience is seared, there's no hope. Let me tell you something. I don't believe that.

I don't believe it. Because if I believe that, God would never have been able to get hold of me. God is greater than a seared conscience, a damaged conscience.

He's greater than a weak one or a strong one or a defiled one or a damaged one or a scrupulous one or a legalistic one. Words I used yesterday which we're going to come back to. He's greater than them.

And He can, praise God, cleanse the conscience and make clean that which has lived in rottenness and corruption and filth. He can make it clean. Isn't that wonderful? Don't you think? What love and grace.

And the mercies of God that Paul spoke of in that opening verse of chapter 12, I beseech you by the mercies of God, I don't beseech you by greater effort, by greater determination, by greater devotion. Such things never achieve anything. And again we were reminded of it this morning.

It's not by the will of the flesh. It's not by the will of man. It's not.

And being able to live with a conscience void of offense before God and man, it's not possible by one's own self-effort and will. He said it's by the mercies of God, His justifying, sanctifying work. Those are the mercies.

They're the mercies that Paul has been laying out in those earlier chapters. And he says it's by those mercies, by those and those alone, that you are now to present your body. I've always, not always, I used to struggle with that.

How can you present your body? How can you offer it? How can you present it, give a gift, offer it, and then walk away? If I were to put my hand in my pocket and to give Ron the sum total of the contents of my pocket, which wouldn't amount to very much, but if I said, Ron, there it is, I give it to him, I leave it with him, and I withdraw. He's got the present. But I can't do that with this thing, can I? I can't detach me from it.

How do I present my body? How can I give it in the sense that I give it, and though it's been received, and then somehow do I step back from the gift I've given? Plainly no. Plainly that cannot be the case. So he says, I want you to do it, and the consequence, or the cause of doing it, is this, by the renewing of the mind.

And I've kind of been brought up with the idea, I discover wrongly, you know, I've had to rethink so many things. I'm a very slow learner. But I discovered that sanctification is nothing to do with the body, not fundamentally.

Sanctification is to do with the mind, and I can have a sanctified body only if I've got a sanctified mind. I can't offer this, I can't know that God has accepted it, I can't be certain that he's working and operating through it, unless I know that my mind and conscience are sanctified, and it's a sanctified mind that can give a body, and say, Lord, there it is. Do with it as you will.

I no longer give it to this, to this, to that, to the other thing. I no longer indulge it with whatever. I give it to you, but unless the mind does the giving, I know I shall walk away and take it with me, and carry on just as I was.

Oh, to have a sanctified mind and conscience, and that statement in Titus, I think is most important to get hold of. It has to do with the mind and conscience, if those two are defiled, and don't separate them. And please can I also just add this, that conscience, mind, is a faculty of the spirit.

It is not a thing that operates in the brain. The brain is the mechanism whereby I give expression to it, but Paul said that we are to be renewed in the spirit of our mind. The mind is connected to the spirit, which is why, if you go back to Proverbs chapter 20 and verse 27, the spirit of man is the lamp of the Lord, and when that lamp is lit, glory be to God by the light.

And the only way that the spirit can be lit by the light is when the light comes, which is why John made it clear to the people of his day, I can bring you so far, but look, there He is, it's Him. He will baptise you with Holy Spirit, His life in you. And then the spirit is a light, and the spirit begins to search.

Do you hear it kind of said, maybe you thought it for yourself, that sometimes when God begins to put His finger on things, it's a little painful. And I hear people kind of make that comment. Let me tell you something, it's only painful if there's a resistance.

The moment the spirit of God sheds the light upon something in the heart, the response should be immediate. Immediate. I heard a comment not so long ago, somebody was interviewing a brother who's been in the ministry for a long time, and has gone on in the things of God, and God has used him and got hold of his life in the most lovely way.

And somebody said to him, Brother, how is it that you've gone on like you have? And this was his comment, he said, Right from the beginning, I learned to say yes. How I go on, that's it, that's it. It's not my learning, it's not whether I've got my, you know, I've got knowledge, we're going to come to knowledge in 1 Corinthians chapter 8. Where we're going to talk about knowledge in relation to conscience.

And the wonderful thing about conscience is, where it truly is operating as God wants it to operate, it comes under the power of the love of God. And it can do no harm to a brother. How much harm is done in this world? How much harm is done in church circles? How much harm is done by a word? How much harm is done by me taking a superior position to you? How much harm is done by my conscience wanting to impose upon somebody else my particular knowledge, instead of the love of God possessing, and moving, and causing me to be able to receive my brother.

Ah man, I've just completely lost track of where I was going. I was reading Catherine Boone. Listen, it was the conscience, it says, it was originally set with the great moral law of God, and to which it was amenable.

It delighted in it. Sin ruined it. But listen, when God comes and he writes his laws, does God live by laws? We want to dispense with legalism, don't we? We want to kind of say, well, you know, we're free to do, to go, to be as we please.

But God said, I will write my laws into your heart and mind. Does God live by laws? Oh, does he? And the answer to the question is, yes, he sure does. Who imposed them upon him? Oh, nobody.

So what laws are they that he lives by, or lives under? Well, they are the laws of his being. They're not imposed laws that he imposes upon himself, nor are they imposed upon him by others. They are the laws of his being, just the way he is.

And that's the absolute miracle of new birth, that Jesus Christ comes to write the laws of his being on my heart and on my mind, so that I become a man, you, a man or woman, who begins to express just naturally the laws which are now operating in your heart, your mind, your conscience. We have recently started a men's gathering back in Lampeter, and we've only done, I think, two or three, and the last time we combined with another fellowship near to us, and we asked the young pastor of this church to come and share something. And we had the most lovely evening, and he spoke from the Philippian epistle, and he touched upon the mind, and he was using, from the second chapter, Epaphroditus as his model, as a picture, a demonstration of the outworking of the life of Christ in someone's life.

And afterwards, we kind of got talking about it, and there was some discussion, and he said to me, well, you know, Father, what do you think? And I said, well, let me tell you what I think. I said, in that same second chapter, there is a reference to Timothy. I expect you've all read it.

And I made this comment, I said, to me, the most wonderful word in the passage about Timothy and Epaphroditus is this. Paul said, I'm going to send Timothy to you who will, now what's the word? Naturally. And he'll do it naturally.

Isn't that amazing? He'll do it because he can't help doing it. It'll just be in his nature to do it. It's not an outworking of knowledge, of some principle that I hold, some value I hold, but written into the heart, into the mind, into the conscience, into the whole demeanour of somebody is meant to be that whereby you know this man will naturally do it.

He won't do it because, you know, he thinks he's got some great ministry and Paul could send Timothy knowing that Timothy was not going to usurp his position. He was not going to gather around himself a gathering. He was going to go and care for them and he would do it all so naturally.

Now I want to ask everybody in this room, is that how you live? You've got the right to ask me if that's how I live. Or do we? Is that how it is? So we don't do things to be noticed, we don't do things to somehow gain a name, be recognised, we do it naturally. And I wonder if that's the basis upon which that young man became the great elder in Ephesus because he did it naturally.

And how wonderful when our hearts and minds and our conscience just does it. You remember this, listen to this. In the Roman Epistle, let me read you this.

In the opening verses of the ninth chapter of the Roman Epistle, we have something of a testimony of God. This great man of God. And you will notice he begins by speaking about telling the truth.

I want to come back to that and relate it to something that Paul wrote in the second Corinthian Epistle and we'll come to it tomorrow where he talks about manifesting the truth. It's a great word. Not just to hold it or even to believe it, even to have it spot on and to be as down the line as Paul but to manifest it.

That's a different ball game, isn't it? How easy it is to have it clear in your mind. For some of us it's easier than others but to be able to say, well, I believe this, this, this, this, this, this. But is that what Paul meant? Not at all.

Listen to this. I am telling the truth in Christ. He didn't say I'm telling the truth about Christ.

I am telling the truth in Christ. Here is the environment in which I live. Here is the life in which I dwell.

I am not lying. My conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart for I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh. You know, never once in all of Paul's testimony does he speak in the way in which he speaks in verse 2. He could write, I mentioned the Philippian letter.

He can write from a prison cell. Rejoice! Never once does he say, I rejoice unceasingly. Here he says, I've got unceasing grief in my heart.

What a funny old combination of things this man was. What a seeming mass of contradictions. Joyful, triumphant, glorious, with a ministry perhaps unequalled and yet a man who could talk in terms of this tremendous sense of sorrow.

Now was he using rhetoric? Was he writing, hoping that maybe some of his fellow Jewish people would read this and think, oh well, you know, Paul really does love us. Was it language that was used to try and stir an emotion in them? No, he says, listen, there's one who bears witness. In fact, two who bear witness.

My conscience and the Holy Spirit. Please note the combining of the two. We've already noted John's statement regarding Christ.

He was going to baptize in the Spirit. There comes by that baptism, by the receiving of that life, that light that bears witness. And Paul could say, my conscience bears me witness.

What does your conscience bear witness to this very night now as we're sitting here? What does it bear witness to? What would you be able to say about yourself? Wow, that's quite something, isn't it? What would you be able to say about yourself? I'm a miserable, rotten man. I'm struggling. I do believe, Lord, but I don't know.

Nothing seems to work out. I get a dose of joy. I lose it and I can't keep myself together and I'm forever backsliding off here and I lose my temper there and I get irritated with them.

The dog and the cat except the stack of books. I get fed up. He said, listen, my conscience bears me witness.

It speaks in the very innermost place of my heart. It bears witness to this. What's it bearing witness to? Some emotionalism, Paul, that you've got? Some nationalistic thing that you've got because you're Jewish and therefore you feel this towards your Jewish brothers and sisters.

No, this is the witness of my conscience. I would be accursed from them. Paul, you don't really mean that.

You can't really mean that. Are you really saying you honestly would be accursed for their sake? It's rhetoric. It's language.

You can't mean it. I believe with all my heart he did. I believe he did.

And his conscience bore witness to what I'm saying is the truth. How do I get to a place like that where I can speak it out? And we were encouraged to speak out this morning or was it last night, whatever it was. Encouraged to speak it out.

And here he is. This is the truth. This is me.

This is what I am like. And it was all so natural for him. And oh, I have to ask myself and say, I guess to you, do you ever say to yourself, Lord, come and search me.

Search the deepest, innermost motives of my being. What does my conscience bear witness to? What does it bear witness to? What does it say? What is the spontaneous sense of knowing? The intuitive knowing of your heart. What do you know? What do you know about yourself? Because that's what the word means.

A knowing with oneself. An intuitive knowing. Not something, not knowledge gained as we've been reminded of, but a sense of just knowing something about myself.

What do I know about me? And when I come in contact with you, what do I know about you? Well, you can give me a good lecture on justification by faith. You can put me right on this particular kind of, you know, doctrinal system that I'm not quite right on. I don't want to know that.

I want to know what the real you is like. Would you lay down your life for me? Would I for you? Is that what the church is meant to be like? A body of people who've got nothing unkind to say about anybody. Oh boy.

You must be joking, Dai. Oh dear. I come across people all the time.

Hurting, hurting, hurting. And when you find out why they're hurting, well, I've just come, I've been in a church. I come through this, come.

Yeah. I talked to a brother and he came, he's come through some real difficulties in the church. And we sat together one day and he's a dear, dear fellow.

I love him to bits. And he said to me, Dai, he said, whatever happened to kindness? And that just about said everything. And I didn't know what to say to him.

Whatever happened to kindness? Sheesh. I want to have a conscience that bears witness that there is something in me that's been wrought and done that makes me naturally a man who will care. It doesn't matter whether you can stand up here for an hour and preach a sermon.

It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter. And it doesn't matter, you know.

It doesn't. It's not whether you're an elder or you're not an elder. So much harm is done because men are wanting positions, fighting for it, touting for it, manipulating for it.

What does it matter? What does it matter? All that we would care. And until you come there, I can't ever see God ever raising a man up to be anything in the Church of Jesus Christ. Like I've already said, I think that Timothy became an elder in Ephesus because he naturally cared.

Isn't it amazing that Paul had enough confidence and trust in him he could send him? And he said this of him, I have no man like mine did. And the conscience of this man, Timothy, was like that of Paul. And he would go and he would lay his life down for them.

He would care for them. And here says this man, I'm not lying. I remember years back reading this kind of thing and I thought to myself, this guy must be from a different planet.

Does he expect me to live like this? Am I supposed to be able to testify to this? And we can excuse ourselves by saying, oh, well, no, no, no, no, no. This was the plot, the apostle Paul. Let me tell you, this was a murdering, ignorant, arrogant man.

But a man who lived up to the highest which his conscience knew, but he was in ignorance. And God had mercy on him because he was ignorant. But the moment that the Spirit of God came, his conscience was a light and alive and alert.

And everything changed. And God expects that of you and of me. He does.

He expects you and me to be men and women of like character, not like gifting, not with the same abilities, but of like character. I wonder what you're sitting there thinking. Are you thinking I've got a long way to go? Eh? Now, listen, whatever you do, will you please make sure this night that you know that that baptism that John said Jesus was going to give, you received.

Because if you received that baptism, then there is within you that life, and the outworking of that life will be the light that will search all the innermost parts of us in order that we might be readjusted, readjusted. And how wonderful to have no longer an outward prophet to tell us, well, stop doing this. Stop doing that.

Give a little more here. Don't do that. Don't pinch his garment.

Make sure if you see somebody hungry, you give them something to eat. Those things now become the expression of the natural outworking of a conscience readjusted because God's put his laws into our hearts and into our minds. How wonderful.

Boy, the moment that we begin to get hold of this, we can begin to stop struggling and trying to be something that we just can't be. I'm going to finish in about five minutes. Do you remember the story? I read it in Paul White's Jungle Doctor books.

Have you ever read them? Oh, they're crackers. You should read them. And there's the story of the leopard.

Have you ever read the story of the leopard? The little boy who went out into the bush and heard this noise and thought, oh, what's this? Hound the noise and discovered a little tiny bundle of fur and picked it up, brought it back to the village. And of course, all the kids gathered round and, oh, the delight and this beautiful little tiny thing that was just a delight to hold and everybody wanted to pick it up and cuddle it and, you know. And the village chief saw the gathering, came over to where the crowd of kids were and there were one or two mums and dads who joined this group and he looked and he said, you give it to me.

And they said, well, what are you going to do? He said, I'm going to take it out of the village and I'm going to kill it. And you can imagine, oh, look at it. So sweet and innocent and lovely and great.

You couldn't harm a thing. You nasty man. We're going to report you to the animal, you know, whatever, people.

And he was persuaded by this huge crowd of voices and against the dictates of his own conscience, he allowed it. Let me just make a passing comment. Be careful that you don't listen to the majority voice.

Do you know that the minority voice is very often the right one? I can think of two men who came back after spying out the land and they said, it's our status, let's go. And they all said, oh, and the majority voice said, we're like grasshoppers in their eyes. And the other two said, don't talk so stupid.

It's ours, let's go, fellas. And the majority voice won. And the minority voice, the voice of conscience is persuaded.

It's ours. It's ours. They were overcome.

Well, you'll know what happened in the end. As always, God in his faithfulness made sure that his Joshua's and his Caleb's all got in. The two of them, the rest all died and they never entered into what was theirs.

Oh, that we might listen to the voice of conscience, listen to yours, act upon it. But if you know, or you are suspicious or slightly unsure that maybe your conscience is not acting according to knowledge, then you ask God to teach you and educate you. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 8, not all men have this knowledge.

Whatever that knowledge is, we'll come back to. But not all do. And if you think to yourself, Lord, I need you to come and educate my conscience, my heart, my mind, tell him and he'll come and do it.

Know the story. So he gave in to the majority voice. And this little tiny thing grew and grew and grew and they fed it on porridge.

It's amazing. And it grew and it got big and it became an adult and it was the most lovely leopard, covered in its spots and there it was. And the kids would sit on its back and ride around the village on it.

And they, you know, the girls would put ribbons around its neck and the boys would take, put it on a lead and take it for walks. And one day the lad, by this time no longer such a little lad, he went out into the bush and his leopard followed him just about everywhere he went. And he rubbed against a thorn bush and he cut himself and he bled and he went, and the leopard came up and licked the wound and you can guess the rest.

And the leopard didn't change its spots. It gave the appearance of being everything that it was not. But the moment the right circumstances came, or perhaps for the boy, the wrong circumstances came, the leopard proved to be what it was.

Now we need, all of us in this room, to know that we have had that that John spoke about. I can take you so far. I can educate your conscience and I can teach you, tell you, don't do this but do that.

Give here where you can. Stop doing that if you've been doing it. But now he says there's one who can come and he can educate you from the inside out.

Have you ever noticed at the end of the book of Exodus, when Moses is told to rear up a tabernacle, do you know where he started? What did he put up first? He started from the inside out. He didn't start with the outer court and work in, he started with the inner and he worked out. Isn't that most interesting? That's God's business to deal with us right in the citadel, the centre.

The throne room where he is meant to be and where his Shekinah glory is meant to rest and it all works out and everything gets adjusted and put right when that is allowed to operate. Okay, I'll come back to myself tomorrow. Let's pray, shall we? Lord, I want to say thank you to you for providing a salvation beyond anything that I or any other could imagine.

And I want to thank you for making it known, for revealing, for demonstrating what true life is like. I want to say thank you to you, Lord, and I am sure that every brother and sister in this room would want to join me in saying Amen to it. We want to say thank you for the One who has come.

And we thank you this evening, Lord, that you came with a purpose and it wasn't only to die on a cross nor to be raised from death, but that the very life which is yours should be in us and that the light of that life should illuminate our whole beings. Thank you for coming and wanting, Lord, to write your laws on our hearts and our minds. I can't think of a greater miracle, Lord.

I can't think of anything more wonderful that I, Lord, should be a man who can naturally, naturally care, naturally want the things of God, naturally love you, naturally love my brothers, naturally. To do it spontaneously, not because it's a duty, but to do it because it's the law of my heart and life and mind and conscience. So, Lord, this night, as we just bow before you, we ask you, will you please put the searchlight on us? And we thank you, Lord, that when you do, it is not to expose but to adjust.

It is not to reveal, certainly not to anybody else, but only that we might see it and recognise that you've come to change. Lord, I am delighted that you have written into the book and told us about the prejudice of Peter. And thank you, Lord, that when he was up on that upper room in the house of that man, Simon the Tanner, he didn't have an audience, there was no one else around.

You came and you spoke to him. It was him and you and nobody else. And you used the most ordinary, natural thing, his hunger, to speak to him.

Thank you, Lord, that you can take the simplest of things and you can profoundly affect our whole way of living. Will you please come tonight, Lord, and change all of us and make our way of living sweetly beautiful, sweetly simple. Lord, give us, give us, give us, we pray, a knowing with ourselves, grant to us that we, like Paul, might be able to say, my conscience bears me witness and I know the Holy Spirit bears witness that this is the truth about my life.

It's not an act, it's not a performance, this is how it is. Lord, I so want that to be an ongoing, increasing reality in my life. I do ask you then to come and do that, Lord, for every one of us.

And we want to say to you a great, very big, great thank you, Lord, for the possibilities, for the glorious possibility. Lord, in our faith, that blessed gift of God to our hearts, we rise now and say to you, Lord, what has seemed impossible, we will believe to be possible. Lord, that area of conscience that's condemned me, that attitude that perhaps is rendered, tonight, Lord, we come and say, heal our backslidings, if there be any.

Heal them, and once healed, they're healed. Now, Lord, we come, and we come, we come just because we can and because we're your children and because we're invited and because we want as sons to be led on by the Spirit. Therefore, Spirit of God, come and minister to every one of our hearts, even in the closing minutes of this meeting, we ask, in Jesus' name, Amen.

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