

The Voice of Conscience

by A.W. Tozer

A.W. Tozer's sermon emphasizes the critical role of conscience in guiding Christians toward a true relationship with God amidst societal confusion about morality.

Duration: 37:52

Scripture: Malachi 3:16, John 8:1-11, Romans 2:11-12, Romans 10:9, 1 Thessalonians 1:10, 1 Timothy 4:1-2

Topics: "Conscience"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of having a sincere and reverent attitude towards God in Christ. He acknowledges the value of testimonies, songs, and occasional amens in worship, but warns against excessive and empty religious talk. The speaker highlights the significance of listening to the voice of God and the Word, as well as the inner voice that urges us to draw closer to God. He references the story of Jesus and the adulterous woman in the Bible as an example of the inner light that convicts and guides individuals. The speaker also expresses concern about the spiritual and moral decline in society despite the high number of people belonging to churches or synagogues. He suggests that true faith and love should be demonstrated through actions rather than mere words.

Transcript

Now, our Heavenly Father, who we are before Thee, we think that it's hot, and we're just slightly uncomfortable, but, O God, if we knew for positive certainty that Thy holy Son Jesus were coming at midnight tonight, nobody'd mention the weather, we'd be alert, and our loins would be girded, and our lamps lighted, and our shoes on our feet, and our staff in our hand, and we would be looking and hoping. But, Lord, we pray Thee that Thou wilt help us to live now, and to think now, as if that coming was, indeed, as soon as midnight. And we pray that Thy blessing may be on us as we think together about the call of the Holy Ghost to men.

O God, help us, we pray. May our minds be brought in from the busy world out there, and from the noise, and may they be centered upon holy things and holy thoughts. But I know, Lord, it's not certain how much longer any of us will be this side of the border, so we pray Thee while we are here, and the opportunity is ours to live hold of it and do what we can to make our calling and election sure.

Help us now tonight in the giving of this word, we pray in our Lord Jesus Christ's name. Amen. I've been talking over these nights about the voice of God calling people to himself, always calling them to himself, calling sinners out of the wild, calling half-converted Christians into a life of complete victory and

dedication.

And I talked about the love of Christ, the voice of God's love. Then I talked about the voice of reason, and I said that while it was all based upon the love of God for his people, and all these voices are the voices of God's love, yet there was a voice that we call the voice of reason. It's a reasonable thing to be a Christian, it's a right thing to be a Christian.

You don't have to do anything unreasonable to be a Christian, it's right that we should be Christians. And then last Sunday night, I talked about the voice of blood, the eloquence of Jesus' blood, and pointed out that while the voice of Abel cried for vengeance against his murderer, the voice of Jesus' blood cries for mercy for all sinners. Tonight I want to talk about the voice of conscience.

There are several places in the Bible where conscience is mentioned, and yet some of the Lord's people are very gun-shy the word conscience, because they know that some people think you get saved by obeying your conscience. And so, because there are those who say that you're saved by obeying your conscience, they won't believe in the conscience at all. They throw out the baby along with these bathwater and will have nothing to do with the conscience.

I preached on the conscience one time over in St. Paul, Minnesota, and one old man said he got a burden of the Spirit about it, that I was very heretical and off-base and out in left field. He didn't believe in the conscience. A lot of the Lord's people don't.

But I find the old devotional writers have no hesitation in mentioning the conscience, and I find also the Holy Ghost talks about the conscience, and if God talks about the conscience, I'm not going to try to be so spiritual as not to believe in it. You can always be wrong in being unspiritual, but some people are wrong by trying to be more spiritual than the apostles. I'm satisfied if I can go right along with the apostles.

So I want to talk now about the conscience and point out to you that the devil, that cagey old fighter, for there is no fighter cagier than the devil, by means of pseudo-learned propaganda has brought many a life of verities into disrepute. Even the short time I've lived, and I've lived longer than some of you, but I haven't lived yet as long as Methuselah and some others, and even the period of time that I've covered that I can recall, there's been a great change about certain verities of truth. There was a day when worldliness was looked down upon by the people of God.

They didn't have to be told what it was to be worldly, they just sort of knew what it was to be worldly, and so they gave up worldliness and turned to the Lord. But then the devil began to send people around to argue about it, and they have what they call a dialogue. Christians are always engaging in a dialogue now, one fellow talking to another fellow, putting on panel discussions, which I call pooling of their ignorance.

One talking to the other, and the other talking to the other, and pretty soon we said, well, because people's views of worldliness differ, therefore we can't be sure what's worldly and what isn't worldly, and so we just opened our mouth and gulped the whole world down. And the result is that Christians now are worldly, and if you say anything to them about it, they say, well, that's old-fashioned because, don't you know, worldliness is what we believe it to be, and Christians are not agreed on it. Now, the devil did that by what they call religious conversations, tossing it back between two professors before a student, telling them that worldliness was different, believed in differently by different people.

Same with the flesh and sin. Sin was a great verity at one time, and when a man went around preaching the gospel, he preached that people should quit sin and come to the Lord Jesus Christ. But because sin has now been redefined.

You know, when you don't want to do a thing, you just redefine it. That's quite the thing now. We redefine it.

If we don't want to obey God, we redefine the commandment. We redefine it. If we don't want to give a thing up, we write to the editor and get a redefinition of what it means to give it up, and so the result is we hang to it.

We lose our power, of course, by doing it, but then the devil sees to it we don't notice that. Now, conscience is another matter here, a great verity which the devil has, in recent times, taken away from the world and from the Church, for that matter. And conscience is mentioned only with a good-natured smirk now, and when it is used seriously, after a while, the use of it has to be defended.

But I don't want to bother defending, or take your time or mine defending, what the universal wisdom of the race has accepted, and what the Christian scriptures take for granted and teach. Now, I wasn't just using words when I said take for granted and teach, because the scriptures take some things for granted and teach some things, and their teaching of certain things requires that they take certain other things for granted. A sample of the some things taken for granted, for instance, is that God exists.

You don't find any place in the Bible, not one place in the Bible from the beginning of Genesis to the close of Revelation, where there's a chapter devoted to the proofs that God exists. Theologians go into what they call proofs, and they have ontological proofs and teleological proofs and cause-and-effect proofs, and all kinds of proofs. But the Bible knows that God exists, for God wrote the Bible, and so the Bible simply begins there.

And the learned brethren begin way out in left field and reason themselves in toward first base, and God's already been there, and all the simple-hearted people that believe, they've been there all the time, they haven't been away. They believe God exists, and they don't give any time on the question of whether he exists or not. But conscience now, what do we mean by it? We mean that the voice of conscience is over on the side of God, just as the voice of reason is over on the side of God, if we listen to it, and the voice of love is over on God's side, and the voice of Jesus' crying blood is over on God's side, all saying the same thing.

Come home, come in out of the wilderness, come back to God, come to the fold, come in out of the wilds, all saying the same thing. But what is conscience? Well, conscience always refers to right or wrong. Not to the wisdom of something, but to the rightness or the wrongness of it always, and it always has to do with an individual's personal relation to God.

It's individual and exclusive. Conscience never deals with plurals. There is something about what we call companionship that is very comforting.

You're up in an airplane, as my wife and I were this afternoon, flying along, and we fly into a storm as we did. It's a bit comforting to have somebody else along with you, but you know if anything happened, each person added would just be one more dead person. Yet there's something about companionship that sort of comforts you.

And people in the world, when they face up to the fact they've got to deal with God, they take what consolation they can from the companionship of the people round about. But the human conscience never deals with companions, and it never deals with plurals. It never deals with two, always with one.

The human conscience deals with one. Thou art the man, says the Holy Ghost. Thou art the man.

Instead of you two are the men, it's thou art the man. Not you three are the men, but you are the man. One.

And so the human conscience deals not with plurals, but with singulars, with that one individual, and it gives moral inward awareness. Now, the ground of the human conscience, somebody wants to know about it. I remember reading a book by a fellow named Herbert Spencer, who was a great scholar and philosopher and ought to have you back a generation and a half ago, and he claimed the human conscience was the result of your parents telling you right and wrong.

You tell your little fellow at the table, don't eat with your fingers, and slowly he develops the idea that it's wrong to eat with your fingers, and he builds that in. They say it's the same thing with everything else. You tell him, don't lie, and slowly he gets the idea that it's wrong to lie.

And he made conscience to be a synthetic thing built into you by your parents. Of course, that was one more effort of the devil to take away a verity and to substitute something else for it. But the scripture tells us something else altogether.

The scripture tells us about a secret inner light. There is a light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world. That's in 1 John 1.9. Now, I've seen how the different translators handle that, but none of them manages quite to get rid of it.

It remains there that the presence, the unseen, mysterious, wonderful presence of that which we call the logos, the word, the word which is older than creation, the word which was with God and the word which is God, that unseen presence in the world is like a fragrance, like light, like some strange thing that you can't lay your hand on, but it's there. And it is this light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world. Look over in Romans 2. You'll find something there that most people skip, but I want to read it to you.

For there is no respect of persons with God, for as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law. For not the hearers of the law are just, but the doers. For when the Gentiles which have not the law do by nature the things contained in the law, these having not the law are a law unto themselves, which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another." Now, that's what the scripture says about conscience.

It says that the Holy Spirit is in the world, and that there is a light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world, and that secret inner light, that secret presence, that moral awareness, is everywhere throughout the world. So you don't have to preach the gospel to a man to confirm his judgment. If you preach the gospel to a man and he rejects it, that of course is the last thing that God can do, because God ties up every man's salvation to the gospel of Christ.

But a man is lost without having heard the gospel, because there is a light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world, and that light ambidates and precedes the preaching of the gospel so that it's in the heart and conscience of man, that secret inner light. An example in the Bible of that secret light, that thing

that lays the lash onto a man inside, is where they brought that woman in the 8th chapter of John, and they said, "'This woman was guilty of adultery, what shall we do with her?'" Jesus said, "'Let he that is without sin among you cast the first stone at her.'" And they began, after standing around embarrassingly for a few minutes, they began at the oldest and cleared down to the least, and one by one they filed out and left Jesus and the woman standing alone. What was it? The Lord didn't say to them, "'You've been guilty of this, too.'" He simply said, "'You that haven't been, you cast the first stone,'" and their conscience took care of the rest.

And they knew in their hearts that they were guilty also, and they simply turned and walked away. So that conscience is a faithful witness in the heart, and faith and conscience never preaches to more than one. And conscience is always on God's side, and it judges conduct by moral law, and it excuses or accuses according as the right is.

Now, that's what the scripture teaches about it. Now, I'd like to point out to you that every one of us listening here tonight, every one of us here tonight has felt that strange, mysterious pull, that tug of the heart toward God and toward righteousness. We've all felt it, and yet there are some who excuse themselves.

They say, if I could hear or have heard Finney, if I could have heard Dr. Simpson, if I could have heard Dale Moody, it might be different. But I hold that excuse to be hypocritical, because everybody that says that has already heard the only voice that made their voice any good. They have heard the voice of God speaking to them in a hundred ways from a hundred directions.

One of them is that I have mentioned here tonight. Now, let's look a little bit at what people do to their consciences. First Timothy 1 tells us that the word of God was given that there might be love and a good conscience and sincere faith, or faith unfeigned.

The love of love and a good conscience and faith unfeigned, and from which some had turned aside, and their religion had become vain jangling. I suppose there never was a time when there was more talk about religion than there is now. And there never was, at least in my lifetime, a time when religion meant so very little to more people than it does now.

I read down in Chicago Friday or Saturday a booklet written by somebody who was trying to persuade people they ought to enter the ministry. He should have been doing something else, but he wrote the booklet, and he said it was, I think, I've forgotten, I always forget statistics, but a very high percentage of Americans now belong to church, or as they say, church or synagogue. They belong to one or the other.

But I don't think there ever was a time when the spiritual condition and the moral level of things down there were as low as they are now, and yet more people belong to church. They have turned aside and they've turned away from a good conscience and from sincere faith and from love, and their religion has simply become talk. It seems to me that that which is the most real to us is that about which we talk less.

Now let me explain that. For if we talk about it more, we talk about it reverently and in a more hushed tone. Do you remember what Shakespeare said about a woman who was telling how much she loved her husband? He said, I think the lady doth protest too much.

He didn't believe her, she talked too much. And the very fact that there is so much religion now, so much religious talk now, and so little morality, leaves the impression with me that we tend to be more reverently

quiet about that which comes the closest to us. When in public a man is prepared to call his wife too many sweet names, I'm wondering what he says to her at home.

And when the patriot wraps himself in a flag and puts on a lot of show about his patriotism, I just wonder where he's got his hand in what trough. There are some things you don't say too much about, brethren. I don't even like the fellow that'll grab thee above the hand and roar into your ear, praise the Lord, and ring it off.

There's something very wonderfully sweet and quiet and tender about some things, and one of them is our attitude toward God and Christ. Now we should witness, we must witness. I believe in testimonies, I believe in songs, and I even believe in people saying amen occasionally.

So it won't bother me at all if you want to say amen. But I'm talking about what they call religious logaria, running off at the mouth, and there's too much of it. They live that vain jangling.

They're careless living Christians, and remember there's a penalty, always there's a penalty. The word of God was given that we might have love and sincere faith and a good conscience, and if you won't listen to the voice of God and the voice of the word and the silent voice within you that urges you to be right and to move toward God, if you begin to argue with it and compromise with it and debate it, pretty soon you'll become a vain jangler and enter into the modern religious conversation. I smile to myself rather sourly when I read in the newspaper somewhere that some religious people are having conversations about something.

You'd think it was a peace conference. Well, we Christians aren't supposed to be out having conversations with the devil or having conversations with people who don't believe the truth. We are supposed to be listening to the voice of God and reading the word and reverently speaking to each other.

They that love the Lord speak often one to another. But it wasn't the vain jangling, it wasn't the careless rattling of voices, it was the reverent speech of those who walk with God and live within the presence of God. Well, then I read in 1 Timothy 4, 1 and 2, maybe I'd just better read it here so that we'll get it.

It says in 1 Timothy, or is it 4, 1 and 2? Yes, 4, 1 and 2. It says, Now the Spirit speaketh expressly that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their conscience seared with a hot iron. Now, the searing of the conscience with a hot iron, what does that mean? Well, you know that if you handle hot things, your hand will slowly become callous. Seared, they call it there.

And pretty soon you can pick up things so hot that another person, if they tried to pick it up, would let out a scream. Men who work in factories where the material is very hot and they learn to pick it up, they learn to do it without a glove, because their hands get seared. So they don't know how hot a thing is because there are crust forms, callous forms over the sensitive nerve ends, and pretty soon they can handle hot things without being bothered.

It's possible to deal with your conscience like that, my friends. It's possible to argue with your conscience, or to violate it, or to do what you know the Spirit is leading you not to do, or to refuse to do what you know the Spirit is leading you to do, and pretty soon get peace about it. I get lots of letters from people who say to me, they're in some jam or other, but they'll say, My conscience is clear, Mr. Totion, I have peace about it.

And I'm not at all sure, but sometimes a clear conscience isn't simply another way of saying a seared conscience. The conscience that has been calloused over, we haven't done the will of God as we've understood it, and so little by little the Lord has taken away from us his voice. I think that's very plain in the scriptures, where it tells us that if we don't walk in the light that we have, that light will become darkness to us.

And yet that man who hasn't walked in the light and isn't walking in the light, he will say, But I'm feeling restful about it. I have no bad feeling about it now, my heart's at peace. Did he ever stop to think it may be that he stopped hearing from God about it? If a woman wants something bad enough, or a man, they want something bad enough, and they'll argue about it, and they'll go from one preacher to another about it.

And finally, after a while they manage to tell themselves, This is all right, and I've been a big fool for worrying about it. Then they get what they call peace concerning it. But let me tell you that if you have peace about something that's wrong, that peace is not from God.

If you have a feeling of peace concerning something that at one time bothered you, you'd better go to the scriptures and ask God to help you, and you'd better break up your fallowed ground, for it's possible, and even more than possible, that what you have is a seared conscience. In Titus 1, 15 and 16, another passage which I've marked here for tonight, it says that we are not to give heed to Jewish fables and commandments of men that are turned from the truth, because unto the pure all things are pure. But unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure, but even their minds and conscience is defiled.

And they profess that they know God, but in works they deny him being abominable and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobates. Now, there is what you call a defiled conscience. I was in the church one time.

I stepped in the church building, and I saw a sign in one room, No Smoking, and I wondered about that. It's a No Smoking sign in a church. I suppose that particular room was set aside for the non-smokers, but the impression I got was that you could run around puffing through the rest of the church but that particular one.

Now, maybe I don't know. I know it doesn't stay in the Bible, Thou shalt not puff yourself with cancer. I know it says that.

But I also know that the conscience of evangelical people is pretty universal on that, and it's possible to get our conscience defiled and say, It's all right, my conscience doesn't bother me about it. They're corrupt inwardly, so our thoughts get impure and our language often gets soiled, and we end up reprobates. I would say to you, brethren, that if you're worried about whether you're too extreme in your Christian life, better be extreme one way or the other.

But if you're going to be extreme, be extreme on the side of righteousness. If you're dubious about anything being right or wrong, you'd better take the side where you're right and you know you're right, rather than go the other direction. For too many of the Lord's people have learned to live with a careless conscience, and the result is that they have become hardened and corrupt.

And then there is that fatal silence, that fatal silence of the inward voice. The man has a reason to lie, and maybe it'll mean money to him if he lies, maybe it'll mean getting out of a jam if he lies. He's bothered about it at first because he knows what the scripture says about the liar, but he reasons with himself,

maybe even goes and seeks counsel and finds out what other people think about it.

And somebody says to him, Well, I think lying in a certain circumstance is all right. And so he goes out feeling better about it, and pretty soon he's reasoned himself into a belief that lying is all right, and he becomes a liar. Or if it's a question of dishonesty, the man asks himself, Now, would this be all right, you suppose? Could I do this honestly? And he goes and asks advice, and by a lot of reasoning and vein-jangling and religious conversations and dialogues, he manages finally to arrive at a place where he says to himself, Well, it's all right.

This is considered dishonest by certain people who are tight-laced, but as for me, I think I can do it all right. And he does it. And strange silence falls on his heart, and he doesn't notice it.

He doesn't notice that the voice of God is not warmly speaking within him anymore. He doesn't notice that when he reads the scripture that it doesn't speak back to him as it used to. He has allowed dishonesty to sear his heart and defile it.

Then there's such a thing as grudges. It might have been the day when that Christian brother there, if he got in bad with anybody or spoke harshly to anybody or said anything that he felt he should ask forgiveness for, he did it immediately. Then slowly he got so that now he can bear grudges, not mind it.

And he says, My conscience doesn't bother me. It's because he has bothered his conscience too long and has turned on him. Well, then there's another thing about conscience that I want to speak about, and that's Hebrews 10, 19-22.

It says there about our conscience, having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh. And having a high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart and full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. There is such a thing as a sprinkled conscience.

That is, when we come to the Lord Jesus Christ, our conscience may be diseased, it may be smarting and protesting, it may be a defiled conscience or an evil conscience, but it can be healed, and it can be cleansed and can be relieved and put to rest, not by hardening it, but by bringing it to the precious blood of Jesus Christ and having our spirits and souls washed from all sin. And when God speaks to a man inside and tells him, he's right through the word of the living God, and his mind knows his sins are gone, he knows they're forgiven. Something wonderfully healing and hopeful and helpful and marvelous about all this, and we know the difference.

We know the difference. When David was forgiven of his sin, it was quite a vastly different thing than when Saul had hardened his conscience and gone to the witch of Endor. Quite a different thing.

Quite a different thing when Peter looked up at his master and wept. Quite different from Demas, who loved this present world and went back from following the Lord. There's a difference between getting my conscience quiet by choking it down, by being careless.

Quite a difference, I say, in having it washed by the precious blood of Jesus and made clean because it's forgiven. I have been dishonest, all right. I go to God and I tell him so in plain language, and I offer to straighten that out all I can and do everything humanly possible to bring my life into line with the moral standards of the scriptures.

God forgives my sin and purges me and washes me so completely that I feel rested and healed because God has given me a sprinkle conscience. And so with every other sin that we may have committed, may God grant that we Christians do not live with a bad conscience. For the voice of the human heart, the voice of conscience, not me by nature, but that light that lighted every man that disturbs and troubles my heart, that voice of God is on the side of righteousness, and the gospel, and truth, and righteousness, living and holy living.

So I can say to you tonight that everywhere the voices are sounding. The voice of God's love sounding and saying, Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden. The voice of Jesus' blood speaking better things than that of Abel.

The voice of God saying, Come now and let us reason together. And the voice of the human conscience crying out within us, disturbed and needed by the voice of the Holy Ghost. And it's on God's side, too.

It's on the side of righteousness. Dear man and woman, there isn't a good thing in the world that isn't on the side of your being a Christian, and there isn't in the word of God or in the human heart touched, disturbed, and troubled by the word of God. There isn't anything that in any way can justify my failure to come to God and live right before God in Christ.

And if I'm a Christian, every good thing says I ought to be a better Christian. The voice of the blood of the Lamb, the voice of moral reason, the voice of God's love, and the voice of my own heart. Disturbed, I repeat, by the word of God, for without the word of God the human heart is deceitful and above all things indesperately wicked.

But disturbed and troubled by the light that lighted every man that cometh into the world, and bothered and worried by the word of God, the human heart then is on the side of reason and righteousness. So I say, dear people, all that God has to say in whatever medium of communication he may use, it is that if you're not a Christian, you become a Christian. And it is if you're a Christian, you become right away a better Christian.

Begin now to do something about it so your life will be a better life. Let's pray. Now, dear Lord, we pray tonight for hearts that are gentle and humble and docile and manageable, so that thou canst lead us not with a bit and a bridle as a stubborn horse, but by the sound of thy voice as a tractable sheep, ready to come home and follow the shepherd and do the shepherd's bidding quietly and without making a big scene.

But do what's right and do it because it's in the book and because it's the substance of the Holy Ghost's witness to our hearts. We pray thy blessing upon these friends who are here this evening. O God, thou knowest the old world out there isn't a friend of grace.

It isn't a friend of grace to lead us on to thee. We thank thee we have more than enough. We have the word of God, we have the Spirit of the living God, and we have our two knees, and we have an entrance into the Holy of Holies by the blood of Jesus.

We have thy promises firm and sure, and he that is for us is more than all they that can be against us. So we believe that it's possible to live for thee, possible to live right in the wrong world, and to live good in the bad world, and to be upright in a crooked world. We believe it's entirely possible.

Our Father, wilt thou graciously bless this company. It's hot, it's noisy, but O Lord, thou hast been with us. We've talked together and mused over these holy things.

Help us to hear thee speak to us when thou dost say, if today you will hear his voice harder not, your heart is in the day of the provocation. For the word is nigh thee even in thy mouth, and in thy heart even the word of faith which we preach. Thou shalt believe in thy heart and confess with thy mouth thou shalt be saved, for with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

Now we're trusting thee, Lord Jesus. Thou bless all the churches as at about this time they're drawing their services to a close. We pray that every gospel message might be confirmed by the Spirit tonight.

We pray that every preacher may have the anointing of the Spirit upon him. We pray that thou will rescue from Satan's grasp numbers tonight in the various churches. It will come out of darkness into light, serve the living God, and wait for his Son from heaven.

In Christ's name, Amen.

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