

# The Function of Conscience

by Steve Mays

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*The conscience is a divine gift that guides us in making decisions and living a life that is pleasing to God, and it must be fed with spiritual nourishment to remain healthy and effective.*

**Duration:** 33:10

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:33, John 8:9, Acts 24:16, 1 Timothy 1:5, 1 Timothy 4:12, 1 Timothy 6:11

**Topics:** "Conscience"

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## Description

In this sermon, Pastor Steve Mays discusses the function of the conscience and its role in guiding our choices. He explains that the conscience can commend, condemn, or convict us based on our actions. It serves as a red flag, warning us when we are about to make wrong choices. However, ultimately, it is up to us to stay within the parameters set by our conscience. Pastor Mays emphasizes the importance of allowing God's word to guide our lives and living our Christianity for the sake of Jesus Christ.

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## Transcript

It's the 2012 Summer of Sermons with Steve Mays. Your conscience can commend you, or it can condemn you, or it can convict you. Today, Pastor Steve Mays talks about the function of the conscience.

It becomes like a detective, a counselor. It becomes someone that rings a red flag up. Don't go down that road.

All of a sudden some gal walks in front and your eyes are going. And the umpire stands up, personal foul, personal foul. That's why you have a pure conscience, because there's something going on.

Light of the world, light of the world. Hope shines in darkness, so follow the light of the world. What is the function of the conscience? I've heard it described as the double yellow line on the highway of life.

It's what God has given us to guide us where to go and where not to go, what to do and what not to do. But like the double yellow lines, the choice is still really up to us, whether we're going to stay within those parameters. You see, the conscience can't keep us from making wrong choices, so what can it do? That's what Pastor Steve explains today on Light of the Word.

It's good insight from the Apostle Paul's counsel to young Timothy, as found in the book of 1 Timothy. Here's Steve. So we turn in our Bibles this morning to 1 Timothy, chapter 3. 1 Timothy, chapter 3. If you're taking notes, you can jot down the function of conscience.

The function of conscience. And we can pick up at chapter 1, probably be the best way to start. It's kind of a unique study, I want to tell you up front.

Usually I kind of like taking one verse and building on it. But every once in a while, it's just good to kind of lay the foundation and begin to understand some of the teaching and what made Paul so great within his life. Paul is now teaching Timothy.

Timothy and Titus were two young men who had been called to the ministry. Titus was a Gentile. Timothy was a Jew.

And Timothy joined Paul there in Lystra. He lived there with his grandmother and mother. And Paul took him, and he became one of the great, great men by Paul's side.

In fact, I think the greatest statement of anyone in the Bible is said about Timothy. I have no man like-minded, for all seek their own and not the things of Christ. And how important that is that Paul understood that he had a young man that was committed to him and to the body of Christ.

And so Paul now begins to open his heart to really the secret of what really motivated his own personal decisions. And sometimes when you see greatness, you don't know what makes them tick. But if you can get inside of their minds and begin to see, then you can kind of begin to go down that very same road.

And most who are great have certain strong convictions within their life. And they're kind of cool when you finally get together. What made him sensitive, and what made Paul so forceful, and what instructed him daily.

And he tells us here, Timothy, in chapter 1, verse 5, Now the end of the commandment is charity, out of a pure heart and a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned. So underline the word good conscience. And then in 1 Timothy 1, verse 19, the very same chapter, verse 19, Holding faith and a good conscience, which some having put away concerning faith, has made shipwrecked.

And we know that to be Hymenaeus and again Alexander. And so underline the word good conscience. And then if you would take a look at 1 Timothy 3.9 Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.

So Paul now begins to drive the point home to Timothy. Now Timothy, you need to hold the mystery of God. The oracles that God is going to now give to you with a pure conscience.

In chapter 3, verse 9. And then we come to chapter 4, verse 2, 1 Timothy 4.2 Speaking lies and hypocrisy, having their conscience seared with a hot iron. In other words, something happened to the conscience. And then lastly, in Timothy, 2 Timothy 1.3 And these are the five times this word is used.

In 2 Timothy 1.3 I thank God who I serve from my forefathers with a pure conscience. That without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayer night and day. So a good conscience and a pure conscience.

And as I look now at what Paul is seeking to teach Timothy. It really does make more sense now in my life than before. Because the conscience is that divine gift that God has placed inside of you.

To commend you when you are doing that which is right in the sight of God. And to condemn you when you are going contrary to the will of God. It is that voice that will be silent when you are doing what is right with God.

And it will shout when all of a sudden you begin to go down a road. And so we say things like, were there any roadblocks in the way? Did anyone tell you not to do it? Did you have any sense that you should not have signed that contract? Or did you think that maybe you should not have married that person? Or maybe possibly do you think that you should not have taken the job, the one that you have now? And we are looking for an answer. We are looking for someone to help us, someone to guide us.

And because often times we are living in such a perverse and corrupt world. And because we really don't understand the work of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes we are blinded to the work of the conscience.

And sometimes we have said no to this voice so much that we have kind of figured it out. That it goes away. But your conscience is something that God has given to you to help you, to lead you.

It cannot make the decisions for you. But you must understand that you have to feed it. And so when I have said to you before why you should be in the word of God.

That you would be able to keep yourself from sin. The positive side that I have never taught you, that I want to teach you this morning. Is that as you are spending time in the word, you are feeding your conscience.

You are now supplying that inner strength, that inner man, that conscience that speaks to you. With the word of life. And it becomes crystal clear.

It becomes a lamp unto my feet. And so when I begin to go contrary, it speaks very quickly and very sharply and to the point. I have almost a relationship with it.

And as I spend more time in the word, it becomes even more adjusted and readjusted to the things of God. And it can help me make great decisions in my life. But if I avoid the word of God.

If I say well I don't really need the word because I have Calvary Chapel to come listen. Then I'm going to be feeding that conscience with my decisions with sin. It's going to become weak.

It's going to become evil. And I'm not going to hear it crystal clear. And I'm going to make decisions that are going to be devastating decisions in my life.

And that's why we blame God when things don't go right. But the reality is I took my eyes off of the Lord. So the definition of a conscience is found in Romans 2.15. Which show the work of the law written in their hearts.

Their conscience also bearing witness and their thought. The meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another. So in other words their conscience bearing them witness.

Either it's going to be accusing or it's going to be excusing that work in your life. And there is a tremendous importance to understand. And I'm going to jump into the study.

Your conscience is more important than your intelligence. You can study your whole life to be intelligent. And never minister to your conscience.

And when it's all said and done. And you stand before God. God is not going to listen or ask any questions of your intelligence.

He's going to draw witness from your conscience. And the conscience is the thing that you want to feed. So if you are wise you're going to grow mentally, emotionally, spiritually with the Lord.

But you need to see that sometimes reading the book of Leviticus. It's like nothing's there. Never say that.

Your conscience is taking in the word of light. There are three things I want to share with you this morning. Three simple things concerning the conscience.

And the conscience is a word that means very simply. The word *kan* means to come alongside. And the word knowledge or science is the word knowledge.

So it means to know alongside. In other words you have knowledge alongside of all of your decisions. And the conscience is to warn against everything that is contrary to the will of God.

It is to urge you towards that which is righteous in God. And it is to help you understand the importance. It is absolutely truthful.

You will find that your conscience is one of the most honest things in your life. You will say I am loving her when in reality your heart will tell you you're lusting. And then you will be driving down the street saying I like to have that house.

And what you're saying is man I want that house more than anything in my life. Your conscience can become a wonderful thing. But there's three things I want to look at this morning.

Number one. It can commend you. Very simply your conscience can commend you.

And secondly it can condemn you. Secondly it can condemn you. And thirdly it can convict you.

So it can commend you. In other words doing that which is right in the sight of God. God's going to bless you.

He's going to minister to your heart. Or it can condemn you. You shouldn't be in bed with that gal.

You shouldn't be drinking, smoking that joint. Shouldn't be doing these things. You know it.

God knows it. I know it. You shouldn't be doing it.

And so you feel the guilt. You feel the shame. Or it can convict you.

In other words I need to do something about it. So it can commend me or it can condemn me or it can convict me. And let's take a look at these three because I think they're kind of interesting when I do.

First of all it can commend you. In other words if I have God's word. Let me come all the way down to the simple teaching of God's word.

If I allow the light or the lamp of God's word to come into my heart. I'm not living this Christianity for any other reason but Jesus Christ. And I'm not allowing just the teaching of the Bible on Sunday morning.

But I am now opening the Bible on a daily basis in my life. God begins to light the candle of your heart. It says in Proverbs that the spirit of man is like the candle of the Lord.

And as you read, as you spend time with Jesus. As your relationship begins to grow. Something happens very real in your heart.

The first thing that happens with a spirit that is in the word of God. Is you find that you have a good conscience. It says here in 1 Timothy 1.5. Now the end of the commandment is love.

And out of a pure heart and a good conscience of faith unframe. In other words there's something good about the way you're thinking. Every thought, every action.

The fantasies of your life, they're good. There's nothing evil at this point in your life. You're thinking on that which is holy and that which is good.

Spiritual things. And you're beginning to look around and you have a pure heart towards people. You can look at a sister and you can see that she's beautiful.

But you're not lusting after her because you have a good conscience. In other words, you've been in the word. And the word has lit the candle.

And the candle is burning bright. And because it's burning bright, it's going to tell you, back off. It's going to tell you, look up.

It's going to tell you, walk away. But you have a good conscience. And Paul was saying, it doesn't make a difference what anybody else says about who I am, Timothy.

I have a good conscience before God. In other words, my knowledge alongside this God that lives with me. This God that knows everything I've done.

He is saying to me, Timothy, that my life is good. And I think that's what he's talking about. When I have a good conscience, it means that I'm walking in the presence of God.

Oh, I'm going to make mistakes. But I'm not going to be stumbling over lusting and greed and jealousy and trying to pull strings. I've got a good conscience.

He says again in 1 Timothy 1.19, holding faith and a good conscience. With some having put away concerning faith, even shipwrecked. Hymenaeus, you remember? He was the guy that was seeking to bring false teaching.

And Alexander was the one that was gossiping about Paul. And it really drove and hindered the work of God. And so Paul said, I pray that God you would reward them according to their works.

But God then turns around and says, but Paul, you have a good conscience. These men are evil. You have not taken them by your side.

In other words, you've maintained your integrity before me. And then he mentions not only a good conscience, but also he mentions a pure conscience. Notice in chapter 3 verse 9, holding the mystery of the faith and a pure conscience.

And what he's saying here is that when I've given you a ministry, or I've given you a wife, or I've made you single, or I've allowed you to become a widow, or whatever I've done in your life, you have a pure conscience in the sense that you're doing this thing in the right way for the glory of God. You're not

double-minded. You want to be single-hearted.

And so here's a man or a woman being in God's Word, being by the candle of the Word of God, and because of that lamp, now they have a good conscience and they have a pure conscience. But also, one other under this whole entitlement of commending, he says in Acts chapter 24 verse 16, And herein do I exercise myself to have a conscience void of offense towards God and towards others. In Acts chapter 24 verse 16.

So the three things that come under this one topic. In other words, he has commended my heart. He's commending me.

Why? Because of a good conscience, because of a pure conscience, and because of a sincere conscience. That there's no offense. That I'm not out hurting people, stepping on people, desiring to take advantage of people.

Things are happening in my life. You're saying, well time out. I don't think my conscience is good.

I'm kind of mad right now and I don't think my conscience is real pure. I'm kind of lusting right now and I know that I don't have a sincere conscience because I want to get even. Well, let me tell you why.

You are out of the Word of God. What Paul was saying to Timothy is, Timothy my son, when your lamp is lit and the Word of God is being ministered, and you are feeding this conscience, it will guide you into goodness. It will lead you into purity.

And it will cause you from stumbling other people in your life. And that's the most exciting thing to realize, that it becomes an umpire. It becomes like a detective, a counselor.

It becomes someone that rings a red flag up. Don't go down that road. All of a sudden some gal walks in front and your eyes are going.

And the umpire stands up, personal foul, personal foul. You know, it's like all of a sudden you realize it and you bounce your eyes and you pull back. And that's why you have a pure conscience, because there's something going on.

You know that's wrong and you know this is right. And you can't cross over because it's too crystal clear. It's too evident in your life.

You say, well how does that happen? Well it only happens when all of a sudden you understand what everyone has been trying to teach you for all these years in your life. I don't like devotions. Then you don't like a good conscience.

And the problem, if you don't have a good conscience, that conscience is going to keep you up all night. It's going to condemn you. It's going to wear you out.

It's going to drag you down. It's going to fry you. It's going to destroy your own personal life.

So here's what you do. God, I understand that me sitting before you reading my Bible is not because I have to, but I am personally responsible for feeding this organ that God you've given to me. Now I have an organ right in front of me called my stomach.

I've been faithful. Stephen, if you will feed this organ my word, I promise you when you have to make a decision at church you won't make a mistake. And when you have to sit down with your wife and talk to her, you won't make a mistake.

In other words, I'm going to be crystal clear because it speaks to my heart. So first of all, I realize it can commend you. Secondly, it can condemn you.

Let me tell you how it works very simply. Notice if you would, and just stay where you are, it would probably be the very best. If I lose the lamp, and say I'm out of fellowship and no longer sensitive to God, maybe I'm just coming to Bible studies on Sunday morning, and that's the only time I get the word of God, and I'm trying to hold this little flicker, and you're trying to take this little lamp, and we've just got a little, little tiny bit of flicker going on.

And all of a sudden you are coming sitting in the front row, and you've got this little tiny bit. Well, I want to pour gas on top of you and just set you on fire. Why? Because I want you to see the light.

I need you to be illuminated. And when all of a sudden you're not illuminating your inner man, your spiritual man, you're going to become weak. And it says in here, 1 Corinthians 8, 7. I'm just going to read a couple of scriptures, and you can stay where you are.

How bid it there is not in every man that knowledge, for some with conscience of idols unto the hour eat the things offered unto them of idols, and there for conscience sake being weak is defiled. So the first time I see this, I realize the possibility of me having a weak conscience. In other words, I'm kind of insecure, kind of timid, kind of resistant, not really strong.

And all of a sudden I begin to see that being out of God's word, I begin to need people and want people and have to have people. And how do people view me? And I'm not real strong. And you offend me, and why offend them? And now I'm in this whole realm of people.

And it becomes a real problem. I find my conscience is weak. But that's not the end of it.

I think if it could just stop there, it'd be okay. But it then goes to another area. It says in Hebrews 10.22, Let us draw near with a true heart and full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience.

Now it went from just a weak conscience to an evil conscience. It was in the word and it got out of the word. Now it's just kind of hanging out once in a while in the word.

Now this person has come by and it's added a little bit of evil. And now the word isn't important, so this is important. And I begin to feed my life with evil.

And I begin to talk evil. I begin to curse. And I begin to see things that are evil.

And I begin to embrace evil. And all of a sudden I have an evil conscience. I'm not convicted by things.

And things don't bother me, and so it doesn't bother me. I don't feel guilty any longer. I've justified living with other people.

No big thing, but down deep in my heart something's horribly wrong. And if I leave it there and don't do anything, it turns to another. In Titus 1.15, he said, Unto the pure all things are pure, but unto them that are

defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure, and their mind and their conscience is defiled.

So it started weak. It went evil. Now it's defiled.

In other words, it's inside. It is just stripping all the things of God out of your life. It's like a virus gone crazy inside of your mind.

The scriptures that you knew. The convictions that you had. And now you're looking at women with the desire to pick them up.

And you're looking at the drinking. And not only that, but you're buying it. And you're walking in with no shame.

You're buying it and just enjoying it. But it gets deeper. It gets worse.

And finally, we see in 1 Timothy 4.2, Speaking lies and hypocrisy. Having their conscience sheared with a hot iron. And there it is.

All of a sudden, I realize that my heart has been just branded. There's no feelings. It's been cauterized.

In other words, I allow this anger to get into my life. This bitterness to dominate my life. This horrible thing taking place.

And now I have no feelings whatsoever about my kids. About my wife. About the church.

About community. About the family. I don't care about nobody.

It's all about me. And I'm going to live my life for myself. What happened? What in the world happened? And I just want to tell you.

I really believe I have an answer for you. When this guy or gal was in the Word, It was good. And it was pure.

And it was sincere. When they got away from the Word, They got weak. And they became evil.

And they defiled themselves. And now they're bitter and hard and callous. And they're out there and they don't know what to do.

And they're absolutely miserable. And it becomes a torment. And your conscience will torment you.

And haunt you. And come after you. Because that's why God gave it to you.

Something's wrong. And it's terrible. You show me two people.

One in the Word and one out of the Word. And I'll show you the person out of God's Word Has justified and made decisions. And their life is a mess.

Their business is a mess. Everything's a mess. What happened? They're not being guided.

And so I can be commended. Or I can be condemned. Or third, I'll leave you right here.

It can convict me. Notice it says, I found his lamp. So I had the lamp.

And then I lost the lamp. And now I'm able to find his lamp once again. And John 8, 9. And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience.

Who does that sound like? The prodigal son? Man, I'm eating corn. I could have it better. I mean, he's just able to talk to himself.

This is the pit. I don't like the guilt, the shame. Oh, the enjoyment of sex was great.

But the guilt I have to live with in the Holy Spirit showing me in the emptiness and the filthiness and the dirt. I just can't bear it. I can't bear it.

I can't do it no more. Next Friday night. Hi, how are you doing? You want to sleep with me? Sure.

Somehow, you keep killing it. And it kind of gets stuffed. And it's an interesting word.

I don't know if I can say it in the Greek. But it means kind of like a record player that's been filled up and there's no grooves. And when the conviction of the Holy Spirit comes, He cuts a new groove into the record.

And God has to go deep inside of your conscience and reformat. Maybe that's the word. He needs to reformat your computer.

And sometimes that computer or that record needs to be reformatted so He cuts deep with the Word. And they were convicted. And their conscience convicted them because of who they were.

And you remember the story. They were ready to throw rocks at the woman who had committed adultery. And Jesus wrote in the sands and they walked away.

But here's the verse I want to leave you with this morning. Hebrews 9.14 How much more shall the blood of Christ who through the eternal Spirit offer Himself without spot to God purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And that is the most exciting verse because this is what it tells me. Hey, I was in the Word and I got really busy and got out of the Word.

Made some horrible decisions in my life. Kind of let down my standard. Weakened my inner man.

I kind of got defiled and my attitude stinks. But God, I'm so convicted. Lord, would You have me back? And Jesus said, by the blood of Christ He'll take me out of dead works to serve the living God.

And God can once again give you a tender conscience. But here's how it has to happen. It has nothing to do with you.

It has everything to do with God's flashlight of His Word shining it on that conscience. And so the mandate for you and I is those that point God's Word to their conscience will be happy people. And those that don't will be miserable people.

And if you're miserable but you love God, it's because your conscience is condemning you. If you're blessed, it's because you're right with God. And there are times I can say, Lord, man, I can teach, I can do, I have confidence, I've got boldness, but hey, I've been busy, haven't been around You, haven't been feeding and kind of lowered my standard and kind of looking here and I shouldn't be looking there.

And my heart's kind of wicked and I don't feel the throbbing. I don't feel the power of the Holy Spirit. Something's dead inside of me.

And all of a sudden you hear this burnt flesh. You've been seared and I'm just dead. At that point, it takes the work of the Holy Spirit to touch you and to give you a new conscience, to fire up the light, to shine in your heart the hope of glory.

But I must feed my conscience. And once a week isn't going to do it. If you only feed it once a week, then your conscience is going to be constantly dilling in your life of what you should be doing and you're not.

So feed it. Pastor Steve Mays, on the function of the conscience in the life of a believer, a lesson that was one of our most requested of last year. Now, we also want you to know that several of these ideas Steve shared today have been translated in the book called Choices.

Not a day goes by in which we don't have to make several decisions. It may be as simple as when to eat, what to wear, or maybe as difficult as choosing a career or your future mate. Whatever the case, no one is exempt from making choices.

But here's the question. What has been the result of the choices you've made in life? Have they been the cause of satisfaction or regret? After all, so much of our future depends on the choices we make right now. And that's why we're glad to tell you about a tremendously useful book by Pastor Steve called Choices.

It'll help you make decisions based on God's will for your life. If you're seeing a disconnect between your direction in life and where God would like you to be, well then get in touch and ask about the book Choices. We'll be glad to tell you how it can be sent your way today.

Dial 800-339-WISE. That's 1-800-339-WISE. It's also there at our website, [lightoftheword.org](http://lightoftheword.org). That's [lightoftheword.org](http://lightoftheword.org). Join us back here next time as we take an exciting look at our future in heaven.

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