

Loved ones, just for the benefit of any brothers and sisters that might just be here for the first time tonight, we try to talk about the spiritual life. And we try to talk about it in terms of the outline in 1 Thessalonians 5:23. What we believe is a good model of scriptural psychology. It is that loved ones. [He puts up a diagram of the personality which consists of 3 concentric rectangles and as he quotes the verse indicates 'spirit' as the innermost, then 'soul' as the middle level and 'body' as the outer most.] "May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

And then we have followed out, in past years, the references to 'spirit' in the Old and New Testament. And particularly in the New Testament, you begin to realize that some of the functions of 'spirit' are these that you see, [Visual shows under 'spirit' are listed 'Communion', 'Intuition', and 'Conscience'] the ability to commune with God, the ability to know apart from our minds what he wants us to do much as a husband knows what a wife is thinking without them speaking to one another. And then the conscience judges us according to what we have received in our intuition. The conscience always acts to move us and encourage us to live up to our intuition -- constrains our will. [Visual shows under 'Soul' are listed 'Will', 'Mind', and 'Emotions'.] And then you come to the psychological part of us, our soul. The Greek word for soul is "psyche" which gives us our 'psyche' or psychological and that includes our mind, and emotions, and our will. And then we can see that there's a trinity in the body also. [Visual shows 'Blood', "Bones", and 'Flesh' under 'Body'.]

And the spiritual life is really that life. That's what the spiritual life is. [On visual he shows at the top above the outermost rectangle 'God's Spirit'.] It's a life that moves, you see, from God's spirit through our spirits, expressed through our souls, through our bodies to the world. So it's an outward moving life -- you can see that -- where the conscience constrains the will to obey it. The will directs the mind to understand what God has given us in our intuition. And the emotions express the joy of our communion with God to the world. And that of course, is a fleshly life, the life that most people live apart from Jesus. [On visual overlays another transparency with green arrows up from outside the bottom of the outer rectangle: 'The World'.] A life that moves inwards as the green arrows show -- in from the world trying to get from the world what we are meant to get from God- the sense of security, the sense of significance, and happiness that his love gives us. [In the 'Soul' rectangle shows again the mind, emotions and will trying to get these things through the body from the world.]

Of course, as a result of that, our spirits have become atrophied, and useless, and dead, and comatose. And so most people are said to be dead in their sins because their spirits are encased in a casket, and are dead to God. And they live dominated by their body -- at times by their souls. And so when we talk about the spiritual life, loved ones, we're talking about that kind of life there, [On diagram he indicates the spirit.] the spiritual life that moves from the spirit outwards.

Now, what we are talking about particularly in these Sunday evenings is the part of the spirit that is our conscience. And we've been talking, perhaps the past three Sundays, about the need for a good conscience. And you can see that the conscience is part of the spirit. So that's what our

topic is, loved ones. And I thought we should spend just one more evening on a good conscience. And you get the mention of it made, you remember, in -- it's 1 Timothy 1:5. I'll just mention a few things that we mentioned last Sunday and then go on to some new truths that the Bible teaches about a good conscience. And you remember Paul encapsulates the Christian faith, "Whereas the aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and sincere faith." And that's where we get the phrase, "A good conscience." You can't have pure love and you can't have real love unless you've a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. And that's what God has brought us into Jesus for, so that we'll express love out of a pure heart, and a good conscience, and a sincere faith.

Now, it's interesting what John mentioned about -- he used the example of the Baptist church but I think I could use the example of many Methodist churches that I was in. And you remember he said that somehow we felt guilty about everything. And I just thought that that does tie up with what scripture says is the way to have a good conscience. And I'll tell you -- you find it in Hebrews. And it's a verse we looked up before: Hebrews 10:22. And I do believe that it's the misunderstanding of this verse that has burdened many churches with a heaviness and a constant sense of guilt. It explains how to have a good conscience, you see. "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water."

And I'll tell you, I for one was absolutely sure for years that that meant you sprinkle your conscience clean with the blood of Jesus. And I do think that many loved ones in churches believe that, that the only way to have a clean conscience is to come day-after-day, week-after-week before God and plead the blood of Jesus to cover the sins in our lives. And of course, that's not what the verse says. The verse says, "Have our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience." And of course, it ties up, if you just keep your finger in that verse -- it ties up with Ezekiel, the promise, you remember, that was made about the new covenant in Ezekiel 36. And there you remember, God talks about this sprinkling again. Ezekiel 36:25, "I will sprinkle clean water upon you," -- this is God's promise of the new covenant -- "And you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you." And do you see that the whole emphasis there is that the water will clean your heart and you'll have a clean heart, and therefore, your conscience will be clean? And so the way to a clean conscience is not by eternally trying to live in sin and trying to plead the blood of Jesus on top of your conscience to somehow cover your sins

But the whole emphasis here is clean water. And every time water is mentioned in the Old Testament it means cleanness, ethical cleanness. And of course loved ones, do you see that that's the emphasis even back in that verse in Hebrews? Because, you see how that verse goes on in Hebrews 10:22. There's the promise that our hearts will be clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. So really, the way to have a clean conscience is to have a clean heart and a clean outward life.

And loved ones, I do think that many loved ones in churches labor under continual guilt because, instead of bringing their lives into alignment with God's will, as Jesus death and resurrection has enabled them to do, they believe Satan's lie that they have to sin, and sin again, and again, day-after-day, day-after-day, doing what they know to be wrong and then somehow trying to plead the blood of Jesus on top of that to cover those sins.

And of course, what you and I saw in previous Sundays was, that was the old covenant. "Blessed is

he whose sin is covered." That was all that people could have done in the Old Testament: their sin could be covered. It could never be remitted or sent away, it could only be covered until Jesus' death and resurrection was placarded before us all as the way in which we were transformed and changed by God, where our old hearts were destroyed, and our new hearts were made clean. And until that death of Jesus took place before all our eyes, we were not able to believe for that. But ever since then it's been possible for us to walk above known sin.

And loved ones, you see that. And do think about it. If it catches you as a surprise tonight, look at those verses again, and see the emphasis that you have to have a clean conscience through having your heart sprinkled with pure water. And your heart is where you have your thoughts, and your feelings, and your inner most attitudes. And loved ones, there's just no way to have a clean conscience until your heart is clean. And you know that, because the moment there is something in your heart that is dirty, or tawdry, or a little questionable, immediately your conscience pricks, and it makes you aware of it. It makes you aware you're not living up to the highest. And immediately your conscience becomes sullied in some way and dirtied.

And of course, it's no answer to somehow flood it out with the blood of Jesus, with some kind of intellectual belief, "Well, the blood of Jesus covers this, covers it, prevents God seeing it." No, the blood of Jesus is the life of the Holy Spirit. It is the life of Jesus poured out and available to us to live the same way that Jesus himself did. So what we've been sharing these Sunday evenings is the way to a clean conscience is by -- well, you remember how we put it -- by submitting your will to your conscience. [Shows on diagram the 'will' in the 'soul' submitting to the 'conscience' in the 'spirit'.] The only way is to make your will obey your conscience; that's the way to have a clean conscience. There's no other way.

And so your conscience is always urging you to live up to the best that God has shown you and your only answer to that is to make your will obey your conscience. And that's the way you have a clean conscience. And of course, you know as you sit there this evening, that even if this is a little new or a little blunt to your mind, it witnesses in your spirit because you have known that. You have known moments when you're up to date in your accounts with God -- when you had everything up to date.

And then you do something that is questionable, and it's then that the conscience becomes sullied again and you become uncertain of your relationship with God. And of course it's then that Satan has his gospel that, "That's alright. That's normal. You ought to walk through life with a burden of many disobediences in your heart, and in your conscience. But you just cover them over by pleading the blood of Jesus." And so instead of the highway of holiness being filled with soldiers, the Calvary Road is filled with hypocrites who are trying to use Jesus' blood to cover their own failure and failing short of God's commands to them.

So it is good to be clear tonight about what we said before, that a good conscience is maintained by making your will obey your conscience. And do you remember we shared a little about those sins that are besetting sins where we try, and we try, and we try again? And you remember, I shared with you that what God is looking for there, is a heart that is bent completely towards him. It's not so much that God is eager, even to find a life that is absolutely unstained, though he does want that, but he wants to see a heart that is fighting sin with all it's being, and that is getting up every time it falls, and moving on, refusing to compromise or rationalize with sin.

And that's what God wants. And he enables us to have a clean heart if our intention is pure. And

you remember, that's the distinction we saw between 'mortal sin' and 'venal sin', or sin that you can pray for and sin that ought not be prayed for. And sin that ought not be prayed for, is sin that we commit again, and again, knowingly, and consciously, and deliberately, because we have simply compromised with it. We know it's wrong, but we're going to continue to do it. It's that sin that brings death to our spirits. It's that sin that cannot be prayed for, that the blood of Jesus can in no way cleanse at all.

But the sin that he can cleanse is the sin that is involuntary. You do the thing. You've done it. You didn't intend it. You didn't mean it. And immediately your conscience witnesses that God looks at you with a loving eye and forgives you. And you move on. Or, the sin you're fighting with all your heart, and you know there is victory in Jesus' death and resurrection, and you're hungering after that with all your being. And that's when Jesus said, "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled."

So loved ones, a clean conscience comes from a heart that has a pure desire to be like God, and a pure desire to obey him. But I would just mention again, even though we've said it before, don't defend yourself. Don't defend yourself. Don't stand up on your hind legs and say, "I have a right to sin." You have no right to sin. In God's kingdom, and in the light of Calvary, you have no right to sin.

And there is no degree of sin that is consistent with a child of God. There is no degree of sin that is consistent with being a child of God. Every degree of sin is to be opposed and fought with all our being. Some of us make all kinds of excuses about the baptism with the Holy Spirit, and we haven't been crucified with Christ, and all kinds of other technical semantic terms. Loved ones, there are people in heaven who know nothing about these terms, but they wanted God with all their hearts. And that has maintained their consciences clean. So that's where a clean conscience comes from.

Now loved ones, it is important maybe, to mention that that is why the conscience is so important at that point in your life, you see. We just talked about that briefly. When you are dead towards God, when you are not a child of God, when you're unregenerate, when you're lost and going to hell, the only part of your spirit that is even a little alive is your conscience. And your conscience keeps speaking to you, the voice of the Holy Spirit. And that's why when a person wants to be born of God, the most important thing they should do is listen to their conscience, and do what their conscience tells them, because their conscience is the only part of the spirit that is in some sense still alive.

So that's before conversion. Now, after conversion, it's the same. Your conscience is your guide, because the conscience is that part of you that is always lifting you up to God's best plans for you. So listen to your conscience.

A loved one asked me last Sunday evening about the gnats. She didn't ask me about 'gnats' but that's really what she was asking me about. Now, I'd like you to see what Jesus said about the 'gnats'. Matthew 23:24, for you insect lovers, and Jesus, you remember, is speaking to the Pharisees. "You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel!" And Jesus is so dear and so good, making it so clear. Here they are all taken up with straining out a gnat and they're actually swallowing a camel. So I don't know what they did, but I suppose in Ireland we would strain the tea leaves out of tea. And here they are taking every care to strain out every little gnat and then they're swallowing a camel whole.

And Jesus implied that the Pharisees – well, he said it there in Verse 23 you see, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin,” -- all kinds of little things you do -- “And have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith; these you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel!”

And this loved one brought out what often happens to many of us. Instead of listening to our conscience we confuse the issue with our minds. We have overactive minds. And most of us, of course, because our spirits were so dead, overdeveloped our souls. All of us overdeveloped our bodies and the domineering position the body has in our lives, but many of us have overdeveloped our souls. And so our mind often comes in as a kind of 'overdrive' to our conscience, and gets us preoccupied with gnats, that is, gets us preoccupied with, "You're eating too much!. You're eating too much." And we get all taken up with our diet, and with the fact that we're not eating right. Or others of us get all taken up with other little things. It's the equivalent of what we did when we were kids, not walking on the black lines of the sidewalk. You get little things in your mind. You say, "I must walk not on any of the black lines." And very quickly your mind can be 'overdriving' your conscience. And it can be coming in there with all kinds of obligations, that your conscience isn't talking about at all. And you can come under real bondage -- not to your conscience at all you see -- because your conscience is always bearing witness to our position in Jesus at the right hand of God, and our position of crucifixion with Christ, and our resurrection with him, but bears witness to certain little ideas or thoughts that other people have inserted into our minds.

Now, if you say, “How do you deal with that?” I think first of all scripture is a guide. I think the conscience will always draw you -- if you read scripture -- will always draw you to scripture, and will always align you with what scripture is saying. Because the Holy Spirit is the one informing your conscience and he is also the one who wrote his words in scripture. So scripture, I think, can be a guide. You ought first go to the Bible. And you ought to see, “Now, does the Bible say anything about this?”

Now, I agree with all of you the Bible doesn't speak about every matter explicitly. So just because a thing is forbidden or not forbidden in the Bible is not absolute at all. But, you should go first of all to scripture and see, “What does scripture say?” And usually in a thing like eating, scripture is very plain: moderation in all things. And then, those of you who have got caught in the whole fasting thing -- and for those of us who aren't caught in it, it just seems ridiculous. You probably realize that. We just can't understand what you're facing at all. But, if you get so overwhelmed by this 'mind game' that you just don't know what is normal to eat, then look at what other people are eating and eat that.

But, determine what is a normal meal. And it is; it's hard loved ones. And probably we guys think, “Oh you girls, you're crazy! How do you get into that stuff?” But you do. You get into such absolute bewilderment that you don't any longer know what is normal, because you feel a gluttonous urge inside you even when you're eating an ordinary meal.

Now loved ones, I would say go first to scripture and then abide by the directions of scripture. And in the case of over eating, it's in moderation. And so look at what other people regard as a normal breakfast, a normal lunch, a normal supper, and then eat that. Then if you still have trouble, then the confirmation of the brethren comes in. And that's why God has given us to each other as brothers

and sisters in the body. Then come to one of us whom you trust, to me, or to an elder, or to some older brother or sister and set the thing before them and say, "What do you think? I'm having trouble with this. I somehow feel that Satan here is manipulating me through over exercise of my mind. And I have difficulty discerning what is my conscience and what is my mind. Now, will you help me?" And then abide by what they say and abide by the sane and sober judgment of another person in Jesus.

So loved ones, you do have to be clear that you're not involved in catching or straining gnats by allowing your mind's opinions to operate upon you instead of your conscience. I must admit, if you go to the dear Holy Spirit and you say, "Holy Spirit will you make clear to me what is my conscience here and what is my mind?" The Holy Spirit is able to do that. He is able to reveal those things. But if you find it impossible then, first scripture, and then the confirmation of the brethren.

Now loved ones, maybe we could just -- as people who want to be used by Jesus -- maybe we could just look at a few verses that show us some more truths about the conscience. 2 Timothy 1:3, "I thank God whom I serve with a clear conscience, as did my fathers, when I remember you constantly in my prayers." "I thank God whom I serve with a clear conscience." Now, there is no service of God unless your conscience is clear. So, don't think you can do all kinds of things for God, and all kinds of things for the church, and all kinds of things for Jesus, and your conscience is muddled.

You're not doing a thing loved ones. You're only confusing the whole issue because from you is coming a mixed life, a life that appears to be the life of a sheep, but actually it's a wolf in sheep's clothing. And so all you're involved in there is the spirit of antichrist. So don't try to serve God unless your conscience is clean.

So that's why it's important to get everything clear between you and your loved one. If you live with a wife or a husband you need to be sure that things are clean and clear between you. If you live with a roommate, you have to make sure that things are clear between you and them. You cannot be at 'daggers drawn' with a roommate, and serve God. Make sure that things are clear in your financial life, and your business life. Make sure that things are clear in your school life. If you've lied to someone about an assignment, and then you're trying to serve God in some other area, you'll do nothing. You really will do nothing. You may think that you're serving God -- outwardly you are -- but you're just again confusing the issue, because you're serving in the spirit of antichrist. You look like a sheep but you are a wolf that is actually ravenous and determined to have your own way.

So it's essential to have an absolutely clear conscience when you're engaged in serving God. And I would encourage you to do that. Well, Paul emphasizes the same thing. And maybe we should look at the verse and I'll give you the example in my own life. It's Acts 23:1. And there are many other verses loved ones, that emphasize this. "And Paul, looking intently at the council, said, 'Brethren, I have lived before God in all good conscience up to this day.'" And any speaking ministry, or any witnessing ministry requires the same kind of attitude and conscience as Paul had at that moment, that he could say, "Brethren, I have lived before God in all good conscience up to this day."

Now, I would share with you that I don't think God strikes people dead today, but I know that for me it would be death to speak to you loved ones this evening or in the morning if my conscience weren't clear. So I know that if there are any little things at home between my wife and me, those have to be settled. Those have to be absolutely brought up to date. And relationships with anyone else, or anything else that is wrong, has to be settled before I could come here.

Now, I would image Brother Carlson [an older Christian minister in the congregation] and others of you who have spoken, have found the same thing because you would – well, I don't know, I don't know that I would be afraid of being struck dead, but it would be death to me. I would feel a hypocrite, and there would be no witness of Jesus to you. There would be a furtiveness in my whole speaking and my whole witnessing.

And loved ones, what I have experienced here or what others of us have experienced in the ministry, do you see you're experiencing exactly the same way? You think you aren't. You think you're being great when you witness to somebody in the office, and things are not clean between you and your loved ones at home. But you aren't witnessing a thing. You're just witnessing death to them. And it's cutting no ice at all. Indeed, I would urge again upon you, it's simply doing harm because it's sending for a mixed, confusing signal of antichrist.

So the only way to have a successful witnessing life, or a successful speaking or ministry life, is to have a good conscience before God and before men. And it's essential therefore that you deal with everything that your conscience is speaking to you about. I don't know if that's new to you. But I do think that some of you have maybe not realized that. And I think some of you – I don't quite understand how it works, or how you come to it except that our society is so permissive and so lacking in willpower, that I probably can conceive that this might be new to some of you.

But loved ones, don't let it be new any longer. You can do nothing for God if your conscience is not clean. So I don't know; I don't know if you realize that guys like me, we're in that position, but we are. Every minister of God, everyone that stands up before anybody else, if they haven't an absolutely clean conscience they would collapse, they would tremble and collapse. If they have any respect for their God they would collapse before him. They wouldn't even wait to be struck dead; they themselves would die at that moment.

So loved ones, it's the same for you. You're just bluffing. You're just bluffing it out if you're trying to bear a witness to somebody and you have something wrong between yourself and your roommate, or something that you've done and you haven't put right. So do you see that? That it's vital to be up to date in your conscience with God.

Now, Paul stresses that again, of being up to date in Acts 24 -- just the next chapter. Acts 24:16, "So I always take pains," he says, "To have a clear conscience toward God and toward men." "I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward God and toward men." And 'taking pains', you remember, it's one of the definitions of genius, an infinite ability to take great pains. And really that's what we have to do to have a clean conscience. And oh, I just remember a silly little example of at one time in Japanese history there was a telegraph wire that went right across the country from one side to the other. And suddenly the messages stopped going through. And they sent the line man out right along it, and went right along, and couldn't find it, and right back. And at one point they found a spider's web that was damp and was conducting electricity and was stopping the messages. And it was just a spider's web.

And that's all it takes on your conscience, just a little 'misting of the mirror' of your conscience and no longer is Jesus' reflection being seen by others. And you, of course, are covering up magnificently. And you're quite right, they don't know a thing about the thing that is making your conscience unclean, but they know that somehow Jesus isn't coming through clearly. So you have to take great pains to maintain a good conscience before God and before men.

Now, it might be good too to see that that's often the reason, not only for failure in our speaking or our witnessing ministry, but in our prayer ministry. 1 John 3:21, "Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him." And that's the basis of a prayer ministry. "If our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him."

And often you have difficulty believing God for something, and you have difficulty experiencing the faith of Jesus -- because that's how you live. We live by the faith of Jesus Christ, the son of God. The faith of Jesus is exercised in us in prayer and that's how the answers come from God. You see, it's him that is interceding for us. And if we abide by his commandments then he comes into us. And it's Jesus exercising his faith through us that brings us 'faith prayers', and prayers that can be answered, and prevailing prayers that achieve their object. And that is only possible if our hearts do not condemn us. So you have to be able to come before God like Jesus and say, "The evil one has nothing in me." There needs to be that absolute confidence.

That's where the faith comes from, do you see that? You can't have an evil conscience and then be pumping up faith down there. And that's, I think, what some of us do, some of us are trying to claim the promises, "Lord you said you would answer prayer. You said you would answer prayer. I plead with you on the basis of this promise and that promise." Well, that's so silly. The promises of God are written by the Holy Spirit in scripture and they're written and rise up in our hearts if our consciences are clean.

So you find that scripture is rising up inside you and grasping the promises of God. And it's a rising spontaneous thing. It isn't something you have to fight to pump up. And so loved ones, successful prevailing prayer comes from consciences that are clean. So do you see that? "If our hearts do not condemn us we have confidence before God." We go right into his presence. We say, "Lord, you see my life. You see that it is devoted to you. It is committed to you, that I want only your glory and not my own. Father, thank you for what you're going to do in this person's life." And that's real prayer, and that's the kind of prayer that brings results, but it only happens if the conscience is clean.

So loved ones, if you find at times that you're trying to pray over a heap of stuff, then give that up and get rid of the heap. And then you'll find that prayer rises directly up to God as God intends it to.

Now, it might be good loved ones, just to look -- well, maybe it would be good just to quote Nee in connection with 1 Timothy 1:19, because that was one of the verses, you remember, that emphasizes again, the combination of conscience and faith. And there is no faith possible apart from a good conscience, you see. "...Holding faith and a good conscience." That's what Paul says. You see Verse 18, "This charge I commit to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophetic utterances which pointed to you, that inspired by them you may wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience." And Nee says, "A good conscience also enables us to receive God's promises. Christians nowadays frequently complain that their little faith is the cause for failure to live a perfect spiritual life. Naturally there are many reasons for not possessing greater faith but the gravest of these is probably an evil conscience. A good conscience is inseparable from a great faith."

And that's true, I don't know if you've often hoped that you could have a great faith. But I remember reading George Mueller and thinking, "Oh it would be great to have great faith like that." And I somehow had the idea that great faith means that you have to control your mind in a certain way, or you have to exercise your thoughts in a certain direction. No, great faith is something that springs up from within because Jesus is happy to be in your heart. It is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. Faith really is a fruit or a gift of the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit is able to bring that about because there is no opposition to him, because there is a will that is submitted to the conscience.

Now loved ones, I honestly could go on for a long time but are there any questions? I think there's a little to deal with a weaker conscience but are there any questions up to that point on the thing? See, I do think we've been gravely deceived on the business of thinking we can live with something that isn't absolutely clean. I'm sorry; I was going to start again.

Question from Audience:

The issue of those besetting sins, those things that we do, we confess, we do, we confess. Is this in conflict what we're saying this evening with the promise if we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins?

Reply from Rev. O'Neill:

And then I would push you sister, on the next verse, "And cleanse us from all unrighteousness." And I think it is true that God's promises are fair. And it seems to me, even on those besetting sins, I think some here -- trouble with lust, trouble with pride, trouble with bad temper. It's usually inward sin that gets those of us who are now children of God.

And those things keep cropping up. And we know they're wrong. And we confess them. And we know we should be clean of them. And I think God is saying, "Alright, if you confess those sins..." And 'confess' means in the Greek, putting up your hand and agreeing with God that those things are wrong. And it seems what God is saying is, "If you continue to say these are wrong. And you continue to acknowledge them before me as wrong, and therefore to be opposing them with all your heart, I will forgive you for those sins. And I will go on by my Holy Spirit to lead you into a deeper place in my Son on Calvary where I can cleanse you from all unrighteousness, not only from outward sins but from anything that is unrighteous within you."

And I think that's what we're saying, not that there's some way in which, if you are fighting a sin with all your heart that God will continue to condemn you. All we have to do is look at what a dad would do with a little child, or with a guy as he grows older. And we know fine well the attitude of a good father to a son that, say, has come under a thing like drugs. And he can tell when that son is determined to get rid of that. He can tell. He can tell and his attitude is dictated by that. And he can also tell when the son is just compromising and rationalizing the whole thing. And in that situation the only thing that will ever turn the son is seeing some wrath from his father. And so an ordinary father can tell when a person's heart is really set against the thing or is compromising with it. Of course, if an ordinary father can do it, how much more our Father can tell?

Loved ones, I would just point out to you that the whole message of Calvary is that we were crucified with Jesus, utterly destroyed with him, and that we are a new creation and that there is a

'new us' available to us through the Holy Spirit. And if we are willing to join Jesus on the cross, and to live as he lived, the Holy Spirit is able to make that new creation real in us and actually, to give us a clean heart. And of course, that's the only way finally, you'll have a clean heart. You remember. Acts 15:9, "God gave the Holy Spirit to them as he did to us cleansing their hearts by faith." And only the Holy Spirit can really cleanse our hearts. And he will only clean what we will let him clean.

And so he will clean what we'll let him clean, but we have to be willing to let him clean it. And that's different from wanting him to clean it. All of us want him to clean it as long as it doesn't involve any loss of pleasure, or any loss of satisfaction, on our part. But being willing for him to clean it, means being willing to face the consequences of a clean heart. And those are many you know, because self pity and bad temper are often things that many of us use as crutches and could not do without. And if we are to do without them, it will mean that we'll have to die to self in a deep way.

Question from Audience:

Isn't an evil conscience is a conscience that is compromising known sin and not an unregenerate spirit?

Reply from Rev. O'Neill:

That's right. I'm not sure of that last phrase because I think there are unregenerate spirits whose consciences are very active. And that's how people can be saved at all, because the conscience is still active.

Question from Audience:

Isn't it true that the conscience is active in some way even when a person is unregenerate? And doesn't then the conscience continue to be active even when a person is carnal as in that situation there? And then, doesn't a conscience continue to be active even when a person is truly spiritual?

Reply from Rev. O'Neill:

That is true John, that the conscience matures with the whole personality. And indeed that's where that verse comes in, you remember, where it said, "If we obey his commandments – we know that we have the answers to our prayers, if we obey his commandments and do what pleases him."

And of course, what you find as you move on in the spiritual life, the Holy Spirit begins to deal with you through your conscience on not simply things that are wrong but things that will especially please God. And that is of course, beginning to be a real relationship of a child with his father, when he ceases to be just preoccupied with making sure he doesn't fall off the 'highway of holiness' and into hell but where he's preoccupied with a dear father that loves him as his own son. And he's concerned with doing things that please his dad.

That's the place where God wants us to be walking. That's when the fragrance of Jesus begins to fill the places where we work, and the places where live, when we begin to live according to what

pleases our Father. And the conscience then matures and leads us to those things.

It might be good for me just to mention, in closing loved ones, that that is why it's important in connection with 'weaker brethren', to be careful to see that the conscience is finally not our absolute standard. Christ is our absolute standard.

Our conscience simply testifies to what God wants us to deal with today. Now, he may want to deal with us on different things tomorrow. And we have to respect our conscience as seeing that our conscience is not witnessing to us the five million ways in which we are not like God and the five million ways in which we're going to be like God. Our conscience isn't doing that. It isn't showing us like that. Our conscience is the dear voice of the Holy Spirit giving us maybe two or three little things that we can deal with today, because he knows these are the right moments to deal with them.

That's another reason why I would ask you to respect your conscience. The conscience times things for you. You may say, "No, no conscience I can't deal with that now it's too much." But your conscience is being governed by the Holy Spirit and is giving you just the right thing. Just as a good trainer or coach knows exactly what you can take at each point in your development, so the conscience knows what you have to deal with at this moment. And of course, that's where we get into trouble. We want to govern our conscience. We want to tell it, "No, no, I'll deal with that later. That's too difficult for me at my stage of development." That's where we begin to grieve the Holy Spirit.

Our conscience loved ones, is never too late and never too early. Our conscience is always just right. So our conscience is not our absolute standard, our conscience is simply our absolute guide for today. And he will be our absolute guide for tomorrow. But Christ is our absolute standard.

Now, do you see then that just as you respect your conscience you have to respect the consciences of others, and you cannot demand that others live according to your conscience? And indeed, if you do, here's what you do, you begin to get them to operate by their mind, by what their mind perceives of your life and your standards.

And so they begin to walk an unspiritual life. Instead of listening to their conscience they start listening to what their mind perceives in your life. So we need to respect each other. That's why many of you would do things that many others wouldn't do. And many of us here can do things that others can't do. We are all different. The conscience tailors the Holy Spirit's voice to each one of us so that we gradually come into the fullness of our resurrection in Jesus.

But you need to respect other people's consciences. That's why the Bible says, "The spiritual man is judged by no one." He can't. No one else can actually judge a spiritual man. A spiritual man or spiritual woman has to walk by their own conscience guided by scripture and by Jesus, but they cannot be guided by other people's conscience. That's why there needs to be real wisdom both in the truth that the fathers can often do things that the children cannot do. See that? Often they can, often the fathers in God can do things that the children cannot do. And the children need to respect that.

Now often, again, the fathers, because of the love of the children will abstain from meat offered to idols. And out of deference and respect to the children and so that they will maintain a good conscience not only before God but before men, and so that they will abstain from the appearance of

evil and do nothing to put a stumbling block in the way of one of these little ones, they, themselves, will submit their conscience to someone else's particular conscience. But that will be the fathers' doing it out of the love for the children.

But there needs to be wisdom and, you can see, a great gentleness and a great loving kindness. Above all, really there's no room for condemnation, no room for looking down on each other, no room for saying, "This person is allowed to do this at this stage of their life and I wasn't. They must be wrong." No, God deals with us all differently.

That's why particularly in things of the eating, and the drinking, and the smoking, and the outward things, great love has to be shown. Only the Holy Spirit knows how to deal with each one of us. And we need to honor him, and respect him, and allow him to deal with each one of us.

And particularly of course, you can see criticism is just of Satan. I mean it's directly from the pit; it's directly from the bowels of hell. Criticism -- there is no reason, there is no justification for criticism. There is none at all. I am speaking as a great former critic. So I know, loved ones. I know. And old Oswald Chambers is dead right, "Criticism is the undergraduate sin." It is. I knew everything; I told my dad exactly what was wrong with our church every Sunday, at dinner, every Sunday without a break. And then I told all the people at seminary what was wrong with the seminary. And then everyone in the Methodist church what was wrong with the Methodist church. And I knew I was right.

Criticism: there is no ground for criticism. Criticism has no justification at all, because you cannot tell how the Holy Spirit is dealing with another person's conscience. You can't. Only the Holy Spirit knows. And only that person knows.

Question from Audience:

What does swallowing a camel mean?

Reply from Rev. O'Neill:

It probably means that you have a pretty big mouth. Well, I think Jesus was implying that the Pharisees were making a big thing out of little things, in other words -- and making little things out of big things. In regard to justice, and love, and kindness to people they were abusing their conscience. They were disobeying God. But in regard to little things like which way they washed their hands for the services in the temple, they were all taken up with those things. And those were just really little gnats. While the things, the injustices that they were showing to other people were camels.

Question from Audience:

Is there ever a time you think your conscience could be a blind guide?

Reply from Rev. O'Neill:

Well, brother only, it seems to me, where the mind is confused with the conscience. I think the conscience has to be seen as a gyrocompass within that is part of the precious spirit that God has given us, our human spirit. And as long as the conscience is governed by the Holy Spirit, and by

our faith in the Holy Spirit, and is informed by what we're getting through our minds from scripture, it seems that the conscience is reliable and should be regarded that way.

It's only when we begin to bring in an 'over drive' of men's opinions through our minds and pretend that that is our conscience, then it is a blind guide. But you can see there that it is not the conscience that is the blind guide, it's us looking to the mind instead of the conscience. No. I think the conscience is an absolute urge within us to live up to the best that we know. And if our minds are being fed by scripture day-by-day, and we're exercising faith in the Holy Spirit, the conscience is reliable.

Maybe if I could just say this, I'm 45 and I have not found my conscience false. I have found it was always faithful, and always good. And I always moved forward in Jesus when I obeyed it.

Well loved ones, shall we pray?

Dear Father, we thank you for such a plain way that even the wayfaring man can find it. We thank you that it does have to be a wayfaring man, a man that is faring along his way, that is traveling, a man or a woman that is walking in your service and in your faith. But if we are doing that, then we will be able to find our way. It is a plain and simple path with many sign posts and above all with the dear counselor, the Holy Spirit who will explain to us the mysteries of our life in Jesus.

And oh we thank you, Father, for this! We see, Lord, the importance of our conscience. And we thank you for that dear faithful compass within us that will point us constantly to the 'right north'. And we would obey that conscience, and keep it clean, and take great pains to have a good conscience before God and men. And, Lord, then we know that we will see our prayer life blossoming and our witnessing life bearing fruit. And we will find our life being "raised up on wings as of eagles. We'll run and not be weary. We'll walk and not faint."

Lord, we thank you that that is all the result of maintaining a clean conscience before you and before men. We thank you Lord that we're called to that in your good book and in your own dear life.

And now the grace of our Lord Jesus, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with each one of us now and throughout this week. Amen.