

Fatal Conflict of Conscience

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Date: 23 April 2023

[0 : 00] Before we get back to Luke chapter number 23, I want to talk to you about this word that I said earlier, conscience. It's not a word that you hear said very often when we talk. But it's very common in reading, especially in reading and commentaries this week, and then reading different quotes from different people on the subject about what is a conscience.

Let me start with this first one, and the guys in the back will help us follow along. But this is by Martin Luther, and he said, Unless I'm convinced by sacred scripture or by evident reason, I cannot recant, for my conscience is held captive by the word of God, and to act against conscience is neither right nor safe.

What a wonderful quote. His conscience is held captive by the word of God. That should be true for every one of us, is that our understanding is held right and wrong according to God's word.

Here's a second quote, something more modern by a former president. Ronald Reagan said, This is how it's often was used.

I got a couple more for you here, okay? I couldn't just pick one, all right? Here's another one here by Watchman, a pastor in China. Whatever conscience condemns is condemned by God. Can the holiness of God pursue a lower standard than our conscience?

[1 : 31] And then lastly here, Mark Twain. It doesn't say conscience, but he says, Man is the only animal that blushes, and the only animal that needs to. Mark Twain had a way about him, didn't he? Just saying it.

It speaks there of our conscience. This, nobody is free unless they are forgiven. And instead of being able to look God in the face and look another in the face, we often run away and we hide when our conscience is in trouble.

That's the explanation of Adam and Eve in the garden. That God comes in the cool of the day, and because of their conscience, they were not able to be there in front of God. And so they want to hide themselves.

Today, when the word conscience is used, I looked up and wanted to find some recent articles of how it's being used, and it's most commonly used when speaking about artificial intelligence. All right?

Some of you in here are a little bit nerdier than the other group. You get real excited when you talk about that. It's artificial intelligence. And a computer doesn't have a conscience. And so there's people right now that are having discussions about how to be a conscience for that, because it doesn't know right from wrong.

[2 : 37] There's nothing written on the internal hard drive of its heart that tells it that killing is wrong. And so if we don't tell the robots it's wrong, they will take over. All right?

And so speaking of conscience here, so where does this come from? Where does the conscience come from? So when we speak about the revelation of God, the revealing of God to man, we divide it into two different categories.

One of them is specific or special revelation, and that's what we were talking about in the seed line. It's the Word of God, the Scripture, that God revealed Himself to us.

It's the reason as a church that we make so much out of the Word of God is because where it's His, He's revealed to us. It's where we learn about the crucifixion. It's where we learn about the resurrection. It's where we learn that God created the world.

The things that we need to know about God are given to us from God's Word, and we call that special revelation. The Bible also tells us that through creation, Romans 1.20, by the things that are seen, we know of the invisible God, that God reveals Himself in a way to all people in a general sense.

[3 : 41] And so God reveals in the law and the mind of every human by planting a conscience within each of us. And so there's the external revelation, but there's also what's internally placed upon us.

And now what we learn as we grow up about our conscience is that our ethics, we want them to align with the way we live, so we turn down the volume on our conscience. We decide that we want our conscience to be quiet in the things that we want to do, and so we try to find ways to turn it down.

I won't ask any of you to confess because confessing to me won't do anything for you, but I won't ask you today, I will though, but the first time that you remember just wrestling with your conscience between, I know this is right, but that is not what I want to do.

I was fishing, I don't know how old I was, and I wasn't supposed to get as close to the water as I did, but I did and I fell in all the way, head to toe, I went under.

And I went back to my mom and my mom was going to ask me, did you go where you weren't supposed to go and did you fall in? I did not want to tell her that story. So I had to create another story that I thought would be believable.

[4 : 48] And so as I was walking to her, I remember there was these different puddles that were along the way. And so I'm just going to tell her I fell in a puddle, all right? You know, a four-inch puddle and I'm soaked head to toe.

And so I remember working through this and just wrestling and thinking, this is so hard to do this. But what's the supreme irony and tragedy of sin is, is the more you repeat sin, the greater the guilt you will incur, but the less sensitive we become to the guilt in our conscience.

And when a person destroys their own conscience, they will do everything in their power to try to destroy the conscience of their neighbor. And that's what we're living right now in America and the world in which we're living in, is that those that have turned down the volume of their own conscience want the rest of us to turn down the volume in our own conscience as well.

And so could you rightly say that your conscience is held captive by the word of God, realizing the act against your conscience is neither safe nor is it right.

So in this passage here, as I told you, three separate occasions, it says that Jesus is innocent. Because Luke, before you get to the crucifixion, he is going to answer the questions that you may ask.

[6 : 06] Why is Jesus on the cross? Why is he being crucified? What charges are brought against him? Since the charges were proven to be untrue, why does he end up on the cross?

And all these questions are answered in the verses that we read leading up to it, the ones we've read already. His innocence has been established. In John's recording of this, written by inspiration by God, in John chapter number 19, Pilate gets to a place and he says, he puts the robe on him, they make mockery of him, and he says, Behold this man.

You see him right there. And what they should be able to see is a man that was innocent. It started off in verse number 4. He says, I find no fault with this man.

Then when he sends Jesus to Herod, then he comes back and he says, I found no fault in this man touching those things whereof he is accused of, and he is not worthy of death.

But he's saying, Now, Herod agrees with me on what I'm saying. And then he says a third time. He makes it clear to those that are listening. The third time I'm telling you this. What evil has he done?

[7 : 13] I find no cause of death. In verse number 22. I find no, He's not guilty. I find no cause for death. And then he says, I will therefore chastise him and let him go.

Could you imagine, Stephen was talking about his family last night, but could you imagine a kid standing in front of you and saying, I don't see that you've done anything wrong, so I'm only going to give you two, I'm only going to ground you for two weeks.

They would say, That's not how this works, right? I haven't done anything. And so he says, Jesus hasn't done anything, but I'm going to chastise him.

I am going to beat him, is what he did. Because he is wrestling with his conscience. In one hand, this is right, this is truth, but this is what the people want of me.

And so he's trying to bring the two together. And in his conscience, he finds a way to pacify, trying to pacify the crowd, because he can't pacify his conscience. He tries to pacify the crowd.

[8 : 08] And so he says, I will beat Jesus, but they say that that is not enough. And in verse number 23, they say he's required to be crucified. And it says, In the voices of them, of the chief priests, they prevailed.

You see that last word? They prevailed. He couldn't pacify his conscience, so he tries to pacify the crowd. And so Pilate here is facing the same dilemma that Herod had faced before.

It says that they were made friends together. There's a fellowship between, in verse number 12, they didn't normally get along. There's always a power struggle. But in this area, it says that they were made friends together.

That's verse number 12, Luke chapter number 23. And so as he had walked past Herod, and he had walked past Pilate, Pilate comes to a place where the fatal conclusion, Herod had once wrestled with the same conscience concerning this innocent man.

Luke chapter number 3, verse 19 and 20. Herod is upset with John the Baptist. And as he is upset with him, because Herod had taken a wife that he was not to take, he'd taken from his brother.

[9 : 20] And so as Herod hears the words of John the Baptist, it says that he, in verse number 20, that he shut him up in the prison. It means that he locked him. It means he also made him be quiet, right?

It says that he shut him up in the prison. And so what Herod is trying to do with John the Baptist, as he's faced with the truth, John the Baptist is speaking truth towards Herod.

And he's saying, you're living a life that you shouldn't be living. And so Herod says, I don't want to hear you. I'm going to shut you up. And I'm going to put you in prison. And John the Baptist is warning him of his sin.

But as John the Baptist is in that prison cell, it says in Mark chapter number 6, verse 20, that Herod comes to fear the Lord, knowing that he is a just man, a holy man, and he observed him, and he watched him, and he did many things, and he heard him gladly.

So as Herod was dealing with John the Baptist, he knew that this man was right. He knew that this man was just. And because of that, he didn't want to do anything against John the Baptist.

[10 : 26] He just put off the decision. Other people wanted John the Baptist dead. His wife wanted John the Baptist dead. But as a matter of conscience, he just kept John the Baptist in the prison. But then one night, and having a party, as he loses control of his normal thought processes, loses control of what he would do on an average day, he gets to a place where he says to a woman who danced in front of him and to his wife's daughter, and as she danced in front of him, he makes this statement.

I will give up to half my kingdom. Whatever you want, let me know. She leaves the room. She goes to her mother, and she says, what is it that we want?

And she said, we want the head of John the Baptist. And the girl runs back into the room, and when she does, she adds to it a little bit. She not only says, we want the head of John the Baptist, but she says, we want the head of John the Baptist on a platter.

All right? And he was stuck. The decision that he had been trying to put off, he no longer could do that, and he had a conflict. And so it says in Mark 6, 26, and it says, the king was exceedingly sorry for yet for his oath's sake and for the sake which he set with him, he would not reject her.

And so it wasn't just, I spoke unto my word, and I have to live by it. Because of his reputation, because of the way he wanted to look in front of the other people, he had made a commitment, and he was going to follow through with it, and he was going to kill this man.

[12 : 00] And so that is the Herod, that when Pilate says, send this Jesus of Galilee back to that area, now he's in front of Herod. And so Herod, it says, in Luke 23, verse 8, we read it, it said that he was exceedingly glad to see Jesus, because of being exceedingly glad to see Jesus, because he had hoped to see some kind of miracle done by him.

Pilate had tried to pass the blame, pass the buck to Herod, and it brings me to one of the saddest stories that you will ever read as you feel the weight of the silence.

Have you ever heard of what many people call the unforgivable, unforgivable, or unpardonable sin? How many have ever heard of that statement before? Many people have said, some would say, if it's a real bad sin of murder, or denying Christ under pressure, or some would say it's committing suicide, some would say it's when you attribute spirit-empowered miracles to Satan, but we would know from Scripture in Luke 12, 10, that it's when you reject clear truth that the Spirit reveals about Jesus.

This is what Jesus said, this is the passage that people take and make up those different other understandings of it. It comes from this story where Jesus says in Luke 12, 10, And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him.

But unto him that blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven. When a truth has been revealed by the Spirit and it's been rejected.

[13 : 30] Pilate is rejecting truth. One pastor says it's like this when explaining the sin. With evil intention we resist God's truth although by its brightness that so touched that we cannot claim ignorance.

What it's simply saying here is when the Holy Spirit convicts you and stirs in your conscience to recognize that this is truth and if you deny it then there can be no forgiveness of your sins.

And that makes complete sense, doesn't it? Because if you will not recognize that you're a sinner, if you will not recognize the work of God inside of your heart that's bringing conviction to you then there is no way for you to ever repent of your sins.

And that's what's being said here. The unpardonable sin is when you reject the work of the Holy Spirit in your life. And why do I bring that up when we're speaking about Pilate? It's because Pilate knew that Jesus was innocent but he had continually rejected the truth.

And as Pilate can get to a place where he no longer would hear the voice of truth. This is staggering and it is a weighty thought that on some Sundays there's people that will hear the truth and they'll respond to it and they'll find assurance.

[14 : 48] Others will hear the truth and they'll have conviction and they will wrestle with it. But some will sit under the preaching of truth with an apathy because they've been so hardened to it.

Verse number 9 of Luke 23 it says look at the last five words of this verse. Then he questioned with him in many words but he answered him nothing.

He answered him nothing. Jesus does not speak to Herod that Herod had said no to the truth and said no to the truth over and over again that when Pilate sends Jesus to Herod that Jesus says nothing to him and now Jesus is going to come back to Pilate.

See Pilate isn't where Herod has been. Pilate is where Herod had been sometime before where he's still wrestling in his conscience. He's still not so hardened to it that he has yet made a decision.

Look at some of the grace that has been showed in Pilate's life for this opportunity to hear and respond. If some of you are familiar with the story maybe most of you are familiar with the story but Pilate's wife in Matthew 27 she has a dream an early morning dream and she goes to him and says in this I usually have nothing to do with this just man.

[16 : 11] The fact she knew about Jesus followed her into her sleep and when she dreamed and in our conscience she realized our family needs nothing to do with convicting this innocent man.

And so we have a conversation here between two non-believers between Pilate and his wife and his wife says this man does not need to be crucified. You do not want to be involved in this and that conversation goes back and forth.

So there we see Pilate wrestling with it. He's being warned by his wife. She's coming to him and saying this is an innocent man. The second thing we see in Pilate here is he has a decision to make.

Remember when I said out of necessity, out of tradition, somebody is going to be released. It was either going to be Jesus or Barabbas or maybe there was another options we don't know about but at that time somebody was going to be released and he had the opportunity to say that it would have been Jesus but his conscience he wanted to please the crowd.

And so so much of the world lives with Pilate's problem. You do not accept him as king but it leaves you with no middle ground. All the way from Genesis where man sins and God provides redemption and he provides a covering for the sin through the Old Testament where there's sacrifices all the way up to the last day of Christ where there's Barabbas.

[17 : 34] God is showing through scriptures man needs somebody to pay for their sins. And here is Pilate having another opportunity but he does not.

He does not look to Barabbas but he looks to Jesus even though his conscience would tell him to choose Christ. He chooses Barabbas. And so this is Pilate's fatal conflict of his conscience.

He was willing but he gave into the will of the people. Would you look down and do a copy of God's word at verse number 20 and verse number 25. Look down there and see it.

Find both verses because I want you to see in verse number 20 it says Pilate therefore willing to release Jesus and then down in verse number 25 but he delivered Jesus to their will.

There is a conflict in his conscience that he loses and gives in to and instead of truth choosing truth he chooses a lie. He chooses sin. And then instead of questioning himself he questions the question.

[18 : 38] Instead of questioning himself he questions the question. I get this from the story in John chapter number 18. Pilate saith unto them what is truth?

What is truth? And when he had said this he went out again unto the Jews and saith unto them I find in him no fault at all. This is an old lie that is renewed in our day.

Is this what is truth? He should have questioned himself but he doesn't. He questions the question. Truth is the self disclosure of God himself. Truth is and always will be divine, absolute, singular, objective, and authoritative and the truth cannot be killed.

So Pilate and Herod and others in the story looked at truth in the face. He saw Jesus and he saw that he was innocent and he had an opportunity to act upon it but he goes against his conscience and he chooses something else.

Sixty-seven percent of adults say that there is no such thing as absolute truth. That is they believe that what is true for one person may not be true for another. I can tell you that if that number goes from sixty-seven percent to one hundred percent it will not change the definition of truth.

[19 : 54] Truth is divine, it's absolute, it's singular, it's subjective, and it is authoritative and when you look at Jesus you are looking at the truth. Abraham Lincoln said it like this, how many legs would a sheep have if you called a tail a leg?

They quickly answered five. And the president said no, you would only have four legs because calling a tail a leg doesn't make it one, right? Abraham, I don't know if he said half the things we say that he said but somebody said it and he goes to Abraham Lincoln but he's like changing what you call something doesn't change the truth and Pilate knew that here and so it makes sense.

Have you ever known that as I referenced my wife far too many times but as she likes to watch these criminal cases and study them and as forensics and the way that people they act, you know, you can read the tail of what they're doing like I'm nervous right now if you don't notice.

I'm not looking at my wife. That's something that ought to tell you that I'm in trouble here, all right? And one of the things that they physically want to take away that guilt. So what does Pilate do in the story?

What does he do in Matthew 27, 24? It says Pilate, he took water and he washes his hands before the multitude saying innocent of the blood of this just person.

[21 : 07] He wants to wipe his hands clean of the blood of Christ. He wants to ease his conscience so he's physically manifesting what's going on in the inside and you cannot walk away from truth without having made a decision.

Pilate couldn't and you can't do it either. He sought to clear his conscience and the reason is all sin is ultimately a sin against God and only God can redeem you of a violated conscience.

Just as in the garden when man had sinned it took the initiative of God to provide forgiveness for Adam and Eve. And so a good conscience is only possible through identification with the truth.

Would you turn with me to the first Peter, the last portion of scripture I want to go to, going out of the book of Luke. I don't want to cause confusion and this is a passage that is often misunderstood but it is so clear for us today of people who would want to have a good conscience.

Travis, in my office there is a pillow from a mattress firm that they're donating to the golf tournament where Stephen might have got it and it had a price tag of \$300. I've looked at this pillow, it is not worth \$300, all right?

[22 : 20] There might be something inside the pillow, I might cut it open, all right? But we've all heard before that the best conscience, the best pillow is a good conscience, right? How does a person have a good conscience?

Believer, unbeliever, where would we find some teaching on this? And so in 1 Peter chapter number 3 verse 14 through 16, I'm going to read this to you.

Obviously Pilate didn't have this but the truth was still there in his day but I want you to think about Pilate as I read this to you. Verse 14, but and if ye suffer for righteousness sake, happy are ye and be not afraid of their terror neither be troubled.

He was not suffering for righteousness sake but if he would have, he should have been happy. He could have been happy. He could have taken a stand with Christ. He could have claimed his promises that were here but the afraid of their terror neither be troubled.

Pilate is a troubled man. He is worried about what he's going to do with this crowd. He's worried about what he's going to do with his future. He's worried about what he's going to do with his standing.

[23 : 25] All these things he is troubled about. But sanctify the Lord God in your heart and be ready always the given answer to every man that asketh you a reason of hope that is in you with meekness and fear.

A different fear. A reverence towards God that would outshine any of the fear that would be of man. Having a good conscience, which is what we said we all desire, that whereas they speak evil of you as an evildoer, that they may be ashamed that falsely accuse you of good conversation in Christ.

Pilate was certainly afraid of his terror and troubled. He was not ready to give any kind of answer of hope. He did not have a good conscience. What could have Pilate have done to truly have a clear conscience?

Verse number 21 of the same passage tells us he could publicly identify with Christ. Verse 21, the like figure whereunto even baptism does also now save us.

Now the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of good conscience towards God by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He was exhorting him to have the courage to commit himself to a course of action of taking a public stand for Christ through baptism.

[24 : 37] The act of baptism would not save him, but it would save him from the temptation, the sacrifice, his good conscience in order to avoid persecution. In the first century Christian, baptism meant that he was following through on his commitment to Christ regardless of the consequence.

There's that verse still up there for us and it says here, but the answer of a good conscience toward God. Pilate saw the truth, he saw an innocent Savior, he saw the king right there in front of him.

In his heart, he knew that this man was innocent. But over here, he had all the pressures, all the guilt and shame, I'm too far into this, I agree with Herod on this, I can't be involved with it.

And so he goes back and forth on the matter. According to 1 Peter, according to God's word, the answer to a good conscience would have been him to publicly identify and in that moment say, this is the king of kings, this man is innocent, he hasn't done anything, this is the Savior, this is the Messiah, this is the anointed one, this is the one that we've been waiting on.

And anything less than that would only lead to a conscience that was not clear and that was not good. And so we're called upon, the story in 1 Peter wasn't just for Pilate, but it's for every one of us in here, that the matters of conscience are matters of us identifying with the truth that is Jesus Christ.

[25 : 59] And so the first century baptism, and it's still true today, and the decision we make, but baptism isn't the only decision in which we make that we will decide that we are going to be identified with the truth of God's word.

We will not halt you between two opinions, as it says in the Bible, this is truth and I will stand with it. Herod, the crowd, Pilate, they look truth in the face and they wrestle with their conscience.

As the musicians come, I remind you of that first quote that I read to you the day by Martin Luther, where it says, conscience is held captive by the word of God. I remind you, putting off a question that's in front of you today does not make the matter go away.

Herod was put into jail, Pilate tries to send the decision of Jesus away, but eventually he has to make a decision. And a delayed decision is a decision that is made for you by not taking action.

Pilate got to a place where he could no longer ignore his responsibility to decide something. And you, in here, may never be better equipped to answer a question than you are right now.

[27 : 11] You may be hardened to the truth every time you walk away from it. So, this is the part of the service where birds show up. Maybe you don't recognize that reference, but Jesus tells us in Luke chapter number 8, verses 5 through 7, it says that a sower goes forth to sow a seed and he throws it out and some walk upon it.

But then it says that the fowls of the air come in and they eat that and they take it away. And then other times that the thorns and the thistles grow up. That I want to employ you in here at this moment is that the conviction that you would have upon the truth to walk away from it is to harden yourself towards it.

Remember in the passage earlier, Herod, he had many questions, but Jesus answered nothing. And going through this passage today with teenagers, I told them one of the most important things that you should look after there in your teenage years is your conscience.

That being sensitive to the Holy Spirit. Because you find yourself at a place where Jesus Christ is, where the Holy Spirit is convicting you. Maybe if you're in here today and you've never put your faith and trust in him, today he's working in your heart.

And just like with Pilate, you're going between the two here and he's working in your heart. But there could come a day and there's no way for me to determine that. And I pray that you have every day of your life.

[28 : 36] But there could come a day just like in Herod where what you're being convicted about right now by the Holy Spirit is just so silent that he just says nothing. It's not that he doesn't love you and care for you, but you have just hardened yourself to it.

So I want to tell you in here, believer, tonight we will have the ordination for Ben Mison. I'm so excited about it. But one of the qualifications that says of a deacon is that he would hold the mystery of faith and a good conscience.

That he would live his life obedient to the moving of the Holy Spirit in his life. I want to ask you today, where is your sensitivity to the work of the Holy Spirit that has now been made alive inside of you by putting your faith in Christ?

The Holy Spirit now lives inside of you and he guides you. And I want you to pray today, believer. This speaks of the spiritual life, not of just those of the deacons, but all of us. In other words, they might not just profess one thing, but practice another.

And so what decision have you put off week after week? And I want to help you. In a moment, I'm going to ask you to pray there in your seat. And I'm going to ask my son to put up my email address in here.

[29 : 43] But there's nothing that I would rather do that in my life is to help a person take their next step in following Christ. And you can find us at the Next Steps table by email.

Be available on the slide when you leave the day. But I would like to encourage you, whatever it is that you've been wrestling with, don't say, I'll do this later. Because the conviction that you feel today, you don't know that the next time you come to it, you just become more apathetic towards it.

And that's no way to treat a loving Savior towards you. So believer, I pray for you today. Every head bowed and every eye closed. And I first speak to you in here as I've been doing. To those of you here who profess Christ, that the Holy Spirit has been convicting in you.

And you know there's a decision to be made. Find your way down to an altar. An altar is something that Christians have used for generations, which is just a response to say, God, you're speaking to me and I'm saying yes to what you're saying to me today.

That you're making a decision in this moment. That the decision that you need to make when you leave this place is already being started right now. That your first step is a step that you're taking in this room at this time.

[30 : 55] And there ought to be a decision that you ought to make in your heart to say, I'm going to be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit in my life. And I don't want to become hardened to it. As believers are praying, some at the altar and some here in your seat, I speak to you in here today.

If you do not know Jesus Christ as your Savior, that he brings us rest. That the problem with believing that we can do good enough to earn our own salvation is that we have saw sin as something that is too small.

It is not something that we need reforming from. It's not something that we need to make small modifications. That because of our sin, that we have broken our relationship with the Creator and we need a substitute.

You will never clean your life up enough to be stand before a holy God. You need the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ in your place. And so maybe you've heard the story by a loved one or a friend as you went to church and that conviction is there.

And you're not like Herod. You're not dead on the inside. You're not hardened, but you're like Pilate. And the day could be the day of salvation for you. And so let me encourage you. Don't wait another moment right there in your seat.

[32 : 06] Recognize that you are the sinner and that Jesus is innocent, that his death could be is in your place and that you repent of your sins. You recognize that you're a sinner and that he is perfect and that you ask him to provide forgiveness of your sins and provide that new life that is only available through him.

Pray that right now and in this moment. And I would love the opportunity to rejoice with you, to give you some resources, to pray with you, to connect you to another believer who will walk with you through the foundational teaching of God's Word so you can grow in your understanding of how wonderful the gospel is and how it changes your life.

Heavenly Father, I thank you for our time in God's Word. Father, I pray that every decision that needs to be made in this room is being made right now. That not a single one of us, Lord, would look truth in the face and walk away and say for another day, Father, whatever you have revealed to your people, Lord, I pray that there will be a response.

And then, Lord, whatever that response is, whatever it would call upon us as a church to do, I pray that we will. If there's people in here today, Lord, that have put their faith and trust in you, I pray that we will follow through and do all that we can to help them grow.

If there's young people in here or older people or husbands or wives, Lord, that have felt the conviction of something and they know there needs to be changes in their home and in their life, I pray that we will be supported of them and we will help them live according to the conscience, Lord, identifying with you that we will walk in truth, Lord, which is what we must do, Lord.

[33 : 42] We want to have a conscience that is good and that is right. I thank you for your Word. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.