

## Citizen Christian: Living out the Gospel in an Unstable World by an Uneasy Conscience

**MPS** My aim is two-fold: to equip Christ-followers with a Biblical and theological foundation to bear a faithful witness to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in the public square, and to build unity as the church for the advancement of gospel mission.

**Series INTRO** Christin and I moved to Ft. Worth, TX, in August of 1994. I was set to begin seminary later that month and she would begin her teaching career. We had very little money in the bank, no jobs and enough lack of sense to not let that reality stop us. By the end of the first week we were applying for jobs and lining up interviews. I quickly landed a landscape job. (That should have been a big red flag for me.) At the end of my interview as the boss told me I had the job, he said to me, “There are two things we never discuss on the job or with clients, religion and politics.” I said, “okay.” The next day I show up for work, he sends me out with his sister, who worked for him. So, I set out that first morning with a shovel and a pick axe, riding in the very small cab of a Toyota truck with a strange, older woman. (By “older” I mean late 30s. And by “strange” I do not mean to say that “I did not know her”, but that she was strange.) Her first statement to me began, “So, you’re a seminary student. Nobody here likes seminary students because they don’t pay their bills. And, I don’t really believe in God or go to church. How about you?” For as long as I can remember, the two topics of conversation ruled “off limits” for public dialogue have been religion and politics. And yet I have found these two topics are what a majority people feel most deeply about. **Have you ever asked, “Why is it we cannot talk about that which we feel most deeply?”**

As founding and Lead Pastor of LifePoint Church, the last sixteen years have been an exercise of increasing difficulty to navigate election years. Three factors have made this most evident, 1) the diminishing spiritual and moral compass of our culture according to God’s Word, and its acceleration in that downward spiral accompanied by an increasing animosity toward the church, 2) the inability for civility in individual dialogue, public discourse, and political debate, and 3) the diminishing options presented for Christians as representatives in our government and political process. I could lengthen this list, but I could not add more severe items. If I added a fourth it would rival the top three as 4) the inability of Christians to articulate a strong Biblical and theological argument regarding most issues of political conversations.

Religion and Politics are the top two “off-limits” topics for public discourse. And yet, these are two of the most important topics for a person’s life. This will be mind-blowing for many to accept, but difficulty with these two topics in public discourse has always been a reality, it did not begin with this generation. Today I want to introduce a short sermon series entitled, “Citizen Christian: Living out the Gospel in an Unstable World by an Uneasy Conscience.”

**In this “Citizen Christian” series I will address a number of topics related to our citizenship.** I have preached on some of these topics before, while others this will be a first. I will elaborate more on this in the following weeks. The series will primarily be an introduction to Biblical and theological doctrine pertaining to the chosen topics. I hope and pray you find this series helpful because in the midst of the chaos of both the Covid-19 pandemic and this election season, we have a higher calling. **My aim in this series is a two-fold appeal to our higher calling: to equip Christ-followers with a Biblical and theological foundation to bear a faithful witness to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in the public square, and to build unity as the church for the advancement of gospel mission.**

**TRANS** So, **WHERE** do we begin to navigate complex topics with grace and truth for Christian application?

### Citizenship & the Christian Conscience

1 Timothy 1:3-7

**MPS** Christians must recognize the value of and cultivate a healthy, Christ-centered conscience according to God’s truth.

**OBJ** Every person can understand the value of the Christian conscience by five features of conscience.

**My starting point may seem a bit disconnected, but there is intentionality to my strategy.** I begin today by addressing the Christian conscience. My series subtitle is borrowed from a book with a similar title written in 1947 by Carl F. H. Henry. In his book, Henry identifies both a detailed complaint about evangelical failures, specifically in the public square, as well as



a call to renewal.<sup>1</sup> Henry explains, “the “uneasy conscience” of which I write is not one troubled about the great Biblical verities, which I consider the only outlook capable of resolving our problems, but rather one distressed by the frequent failure to apply them effectively to crucial problems confronting the modern mind. It is an application of, not a revolt against, fundamentals of the faith, for which I plead.”<sup>2</sup> The **problem** today is more this: our conscience is not nearly as shaped by Biblical and theological teaching, principles, ethics or morals as much as influenced by trending topics, hashtags, political correctness and public opinion. We’d rather beckon God to forgive our disobedience than risk public shaming, being virtue-signaled or being the culture’s latest cancel victim. [Christians should have an uneasiness about the age in which we live, this is not our home. But this is where God has placed us for this hour and age, and our uneasiness must not prevent us from engaging with the hope and truth of Jesus Christ.](#)

[Christians must recognize the value of and cultivate a healthy, Christ-centered conscience according to God’s truth.](#)

*As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith. **5**The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. **6**Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, **7**desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions. **1 Timothy 1:3-7***

Paul warns Timothy against false teachers, of their teachings, ideologies, philosophies and speculations that oppose the gospel. The motivation for his warning is “*out of love from a pure heart, a good conscience and a sincere faith.*” He goes on to say that those who swerve away from these motivations to love wander into vain discussions and ignorance. In other words, that which is called “love” but originates from other motives is an act of ignorance that deceives and destroys. A true expression of Christian love must originate from a good conscience, along with a pure heart and sincere faith. Paul places the importance of the Christian conscience as equal with a truly saved (regenerated) heart and a true (Biblical) faith. [A good conscience anchored by the gospel and Biblical truth is essential for the Christian life.](#)

**Most people hold a basic understanding of conscience.** “It’s that little voice inside your head that talks to you.” (Well, kind of, but not all of them.) Conscience is the “mind and voice of the soul”, which is formed in God’s image but broken by sin, and re-shaped by our faith and the regular diet of information, experiences and practices of daily life that create our self-awareness and calibrate our moral orientation. It is definitively part of us, but also independent from us. It constricts us as easily as it confirms us. As for the element of faith that shapes conscience, both religion and self-righteousness weaken the conscience. Religion weakens conscience because there is no need for it; its role is replaced by rules. Self-righteousness sears conscience because nothing is “out of bounds”. Only the gospel forms a good, healthy conscience. [Most importantly, conscience is constantly changing and developing, and must be continually prioritized for health and well-being.](#)

Conscience is so important that the Bible teaches we should maintain a good conscience at all times, neither denying nor ignoring it. This doesn’t mean your conscience is always right, but to ignore or deny is always wrong. **ILLUS** My Junior High band director used to tell us in rehearsal, “If you are going to make a mistake, make it loud enough so it can be heard. If we don’t hear it, we can’t fix it.” Your conscience cannot make a wrong thing right, but it can make a right thing wrong. Sometimes the only way we come to know where we need to repent, grow and mature is by the sins we are perfectly comfortable committing. [Your conscience will not always be right, but it is always wrong to betray or deny your conscience.](#)

**Christian community becomes one of the most important environments for cultivating conscience.** As you fellowship with others who seek to walk faithfully to Jesus it both strengthens the good of your conscience and exposes aspects where it does not align with God’s Word. In two weeks, Community Groups will re-gather and begin a six-week

<sup>1</sup> Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1947), Loc 10.

<sup>2</sup> Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, Loc 75.



study of developing a Christian conscience. I believe this study, alongside the Biblical and theological foundation from the sermons, is the best strategy to equip you, LifePoint, to excel in this season. I invite and urge you to connect and engage.

**TRANS** Today I want to focus on **Five Features that demonstrate The Value of the Conscience.**<sup>3</sup>

**1. Conscience is essential because it speaks with a voice that is independent of me.**

In describing his struggle with sin, Paul amplifies how his conscience speaks independent of him:

*“For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. 16Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. 17So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. 18For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. 19For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. 20Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.”* **Romans 7:15-20**

There is an internal struggle when his actions disagree with his desire or will, whether in what he does or does not do. Either way he becomes conflicted by his actions, or inactivity, because of a voice speaking to him within. This voice is one we cannot ignore. It is so powerful that it has led criminals to confess crimes, guilt-ridden people have been driven to despair, and martyrs tortured and killed all because of the strong influence of conscience. Conscience may be difficult to understand at times, but it is essential because it speaks to us independently about our way of thinking, feeling and acting.

**2. Conscience is essential because speaks with a voice that looks forwards and backwards.**

Conscience speaks to us both about that which we have already done and are considering. One reason it is so important is because it is present in our considerations and deliberations, present and working before we decide or determine to act. In this way it is constantly judging the rightness or wrongness of our thoughts, motives, intentions and actions. Conscience prevents us from living a divided life by a divided mind between what we’ve been and what we are becoming. We may not always follow what it says, but we will always pay the price when we ignore it, thinking we can overcome it.

**ILLUS** The sharp rise in mental health issues simultaneous to the moral decline of our culture is not happenstance. People live in dark condemnation by their own conscience that is trying to warn them, but they think they know better. The Christian who walks with God in a good conscience will remain unaffected by the culture’s “cancel”, “offense” or “shame” because you live and walk by a *good conscience* that is cleaned and cleared by the blood of Jesus, where sin’s stain no longer remains.

**3. Conscience is essential because other people can appeal to my conscience.**

After my brother and I had one of our (many) fights, as younger boys, he came to me to apologize and said, “I’m sorry.” (He’s the middle child and always working to keep peace in the family. I’m the baby, always working to uphold my responsibility of getting my way from the family.) I had no intention of apologizing, except his next words were, “You know it takes a big man to say, “I’m sorry.”, but it takes an even bigger man to say, “I’m sorry” back. I was so incredibly angry (pride hurt) at that moment, but as soon as he said that my heart was stricken with an undeniable sense that I must. My brother did not say, “I appeal to thy conscience to do what is right and apologize back.” But none-the-less, he rang the bell of “right and wrong” within me, and the power and influence to comply was so strong, NOT from him, but from within me, that I could not refuse. And so, I apologized too.

Other people can appeal to our conscience, and often not even know it. As one author states, “My conscience is like a disloyal part of my own army, ready to fight against me when it disagrees with me and to make my life miserable when I disagree with it.”<sup>4</sup>

**APPL** This is why Christian community and fellowship is so important in cultivating a healthy conscience. We need to regularly humble ourselves to welcome other voices into our lives that are seeking to follow after Jesus to help us.

<sup>3</sup> This list is borrowed and adapted from Christopher B. Ash, *Discovering the Joy of a Clear Conscience*. [Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> Christopher B. Ash, *Discovering the Joy of a Clear Conscience*, p22.



**4. Conscience is essential because God can appeal to my conscience.**

“The Puritans spoke of conscience as...God’s watchman and spokesman in the soul.”<sup>5</sup> While we know that God’s principle means of speaking is through His Word, we also know that the very way we were made was in God’s image, created in such a way to know God in a special relationship of glory. What we can say is that God crafted in His highest of creation the way to speak to them by the very way He created us, because communicating with us is central to His purpose for creating us.

**5. Conscience is essential because I do not need a Bible to hear the voice of my conscience.**

Very closely to number four, Romans tells us that God speaks through His creation<sup>1:20</sup> and by His law that is written on our hearts<sup>2:15</sup>. God will not be denied, and you cannot get away from Him. He created you to know Him, no matter how hard you fight against it.

**APPL** In these last two ways, Christians should never forget that no one is ever beyond of God’s redemptive call.

IF you, **Christian**, are to bear a faithful witness in any realm or sphere, and especially the public square, **you must recognize the value of and cultivate a healthy, Christ-centered conscience according to God’s truth.**

**CLOSE** What has shaped / is shaping your conscience as a Christian? Have you learned to cultivate a healthy, Truth-formed conscience that guides you in walking in Jesus’ righteousness? OR, have you ignored, dismissed and even seared your conscience so much that you give hardly any consideration to it at all?

The conscience of one seeking, pursuing and walking with God becomes a conduit for the blessing and peace of His righteousness to flow freely. The conscience that has been seared only has one recourse, and it is often not a desirable one for the conscience-bearer, spiritual surgery by the Divine Healer. But praise be to God, by His Holy Spirit, He makes what was once undesirable to us our greatest joy and highest aim. If today you sense the Father calling to you, do not harden your heart but humble yourself and let Him have His way in you.

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<sup>5</sup> Christopher B. Ash, *Discovering the Joy of a Clear Conscience*, p25.

