

# “Cultivating a Clear Conscience”

(Luke 9:7-9)

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## I. Introduction

### A. The meeting

1. Successful businessman
2. As he broke down sobbing
3. Happened 25 years ago
  - a. While in college
4. Hadn't shared it
5. Kept it bottled up for 25 years
6. Eating at his very soul
  - a. Inner shame and guilt
7. It poured out like a tidal wave

### B. A guilty conscience can haunt you!

1. Sophocles

*There is no witness so terrible, no accuser so powerful as the conscience which dwells within us.*

2. It can suck the joy out of your life

*Your conscience doesn't always keep you from doing wrong...but it does keep you from enjoying it.*

3. The fear of being discovered
  - a. Cheating on your taxes

- b. Selling a car with bad transmission
  - c. Cheated on your wife
    - 1. Youth pastor...10 years ago
  - d. That your parents will find out
  - e. Sharing a secret from a friend
4. Your conscience keeps you awake at night

### **C. On the other hand, a clear conscience is priceless**

- 1. *There is no pillow so soft as a clear conscience*
  - a. Having nothing to hide
- 2. I Peter 3:16

***(16) Keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.***

### **D. What exactly is the “conscience?”**

- 1. Conscience is that internal voice that sits in judgment over our will
- 2. Is it the voice of God?
- 3. Is it to be trusted?
- 4. What about the conscience of a non-Christian?

### **E. The conscience of a guy named Herod**

- 1. Had committed a horrible act
- 2. His conscience haunted him day and night
- 3. He was unable to let it go

## **II. Text**

### **A. A ghost from the past (Luke 9:7-9)**

*(7) Now Herod the Tetrarch heard about all that was going on. And he was perplexed, because some were saying that John had been raised from the dead, (8) others that Elijah had appeared, and still others that one of the prophets of long ago had come back to life. (9) But Herod said, “I beheaded John. Who, then, is this I hear such things about?” And he tried to see him,*

1. Had heard *“about all that was going on”*
  - a. The teaching and miracles of Jesus
  - b. How Jesus had now sent his disciples out two-by-two
2. Why was he so *“perplexed?”*
  - a. Herod had murdered John the Baptist
  - b. Feared that John had risen from the dead
    1. That Jesus was the ghost of John the Baptist
  - c. And he was coming after Herod
3. Let’s meet Herod the Tetrarch
  - a. One of the sons of **“Herod the Great”**
    1. The Herod of Christmas
      - a. The baby killer at the birth of Jesus (Mt. 2:1)
    2. Ruthless and despised
    3. The greatest of builders...flair for the spectacular
      - a. Caesarea by the Sea
      - b. Herodian
      - c. Masada
      - d. The Temple
    4. Had plenty of offspring by a variety of women
      - a. Most had “Herod in their name”

- b. Even the daughters
- c. Makes this confusing

**5. Some of the sons mentioned in the Bible**

- a. Herod Agrippa I**
- b. Phillip Herod**
- c. Herod Phillip**
- d. Herod Archelaus**
- e. Herod Antipas**

b. When Herod died, his kingdom was divided into three parts

**1. Phillip Herod....North**

**2. Herod Archelaus.....South**

- a. Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria

**3. Herod Antipas.....Middle**

- a. Galilee and the coast
- b. Including Nazareth, where Jesus lived
- c. This is Herod the ***“tetrarch”***

1. Meant *any* subordinate ruler

2. Under dominion of Rome

c. Herod Antipas (the tetrarch) ruled where Jesus was doing all of his miracles

1. On the west shore of the Sea of Galilee

d. He had heard of the miracles being done

1. This is two years after the baptism of Jesus

2. The *big* question—Who is that guy?
3. Herod Antipas was convinced it was John the Baptist

**a. Matthew 14:1-2**

***(1) At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the reports about Jesus, (2) and he said to his attendants, “This is John the Baptist; he has risen from the dead! That is why miraculous powers are at work in him.”***

- b. Alive again...or his ghost
4. John and Jesus may have looked similar
  - a. From same family
  - b. Similar age
  - c. Similar power
  - d. Similar message
5. Haunted by what he had done to John

**B. The Flashback (Matthew 14:3-12)**

***(3) Now Herod had arrested John and bound him and put him in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, (4) for John had been saying to him: “It is not lawful for you to have her.,” (5) Herod wanted to kill John, but he was afraid of the people, because they considered him a prophet.***

1. Herod had thrown John into prison (v. 3-4)
  - a. Because John spoke out against a terrible sin
2. Herod had married his sister-in-law
  - a. ***“Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife”***
    1. Herodias was the wife of his brother, Herod Phillip
      - a. Not to be mistaken for Philip Herod
    2. They lived in Rome
  - b. While visiting Rome, Herod seduced Herodias

- c. Herod was *already* married at the time
  - 1. To the daughter of the King of “Nabotean Arabia”
  - 2. They decided to dump their spouses and marry
- d. Not just adultery—but also incest
  - 1. She was the daughter of one of his other brothers
    - a. Herod Agrippa
  - 2. She was his *niece*
- 3. John the Baptist screamed out in righteous anger

***(4) For John had been saying to him: “It is not lawful for you to have her.” (5) Herod wanted to kill John, but he was afraid of the people, because they considered him a prophet.***

- a. Not alone
  - 1. His first wife’s dad (Eretus) sent an army
  - 2. Herod was saved by Roman army
- b. The other Jews were offended also
- 4. But John wouldn’t let it go
  - a. Herodias got tired of it and pushed for John’s death
  - b. But Herod feared the people
  - c. Instead, Herod threw John into the palace prison
- 5. But that still didn’t satisfy Herodias
- 6. Herodias hatched her plan (Matthew 14:6-12)

***(6) On Herod’s birthday the daughter of Herodias (Salome) danced for them and pleased Herod so much (7) that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked. (8) Prompted by her mother, she said, “Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist.” (9) The king was distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he ordered that her request be granted (10) and had John beheaded in the prison. (11) His head was brought***

*in on a platter and given to the girl, who carried it to her mother. (12) John's disciples came and took his body and buried it. Then they went and told Jesus.*

- a. Jesus then left the area and went to the North
  - b. Herod's birthday party
    - 1. Jews considered such parties a disgrace
    - 2. The only women there were prostitutes and the like
  - c. The daughter of Herodias danced
    - 1. Her name was "*Sa lom' e*"
    - 2. She was about 16 years old
  - d. It pleased Herod
    - 1. It turned him on!
    - 2. Already drunk
  - e. His oath
    - 1. "Anything you want!"
    - 2. "For your services" (incest)
    - 3. "Up to half of my kingdom"
      - a. The old fool!
  - f. She checked with mom,
    - 1. She asked for John's head on a platter
7. What was the old fool to do?
- a. Herod was afraid to back down
8. He had it done
- a. The head, to Herodias on a platter
9. And Herod's *conscience* haunted him from that day on

10. Guilt and shame mixed with fear

## C. Your Conscience

### 1. *God speaks to the unsaved through their consciences*

a. John 8:9

*(9) Then those who heard it, being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. (NKJV)*

1. That still small voice
2. God's inner warning system
3. Common grace to all
4. All are born with a sense of right and wrong
5. Some hardened their hearts to the call of God

b. Romans 2:15

*(15) Since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.*

c. All mankind bears the image of God

1. A general sense of right and wrong
2. Part of the reason that "they are without excuse"
3. They are without excuse (Romans 1)

### 2. *There's nothing more liberating than a clear conscience*

a. No fear of a phone call to your wife

1. Or a letter from the IRS
2. Statement yesterday from the State

b. What God has to say about your conscience

## 1. Acts 24:16

***(16) So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.***

- a. Before God
- b. Before man

## 2. I Peter 3:16

***(16) Keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.***

- a. Quiet confidence

## 3. I Timothy 3:9

***(9) They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience***

- c. No fear of having a dark secret exposed
- d. No accusation has merit and need be feared

***3. There's nothing more tragic than a seared conscience***

- a. All people are created in the image of God
  - 1. Some choose to harden themselves toward God
- b. I Timothy 4:2

***(2) Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron.***

- 1. Have allowed their minds and consciences to become corrupted
  - a. Ignoring conviction one small step at a time
  - b. A callous builds
- 2. Hardened unbelievers
  - a. Building a callous
- c. Titus 1:15

*(15) To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted.*

**4. *Time doesn't heal a guilty conscience***

- a. There are some wounds that time will not heal
  - 1. The wounded conscience
  - 2. The guilty conscience
- b. Guilt and shame can eat away at your very soul
- c. The convicting of the Holy Spirit
- d. The need to come clean
  - 1. With God first
  - 2. With the people affected

**5. *A tender conscience should be prized and protected***

- a. Our son John's tender conscience
- b. The value of a conscience that is tender
  - 1. Where the smallest sin pricks your conscience
  - 2. It may not hurt others...but it devastates you
  - 3. A tender conscience is a precious thing
- c. How to maintain a tender conscience
  - 1. Don't let friends talk you into doing something that your conscience says is wrong
  - 2. Be sensitive to the convicting of the Spirit of God
  - 3. Confess every sin that you become aware of
  - 4. Seek to learn and obey God's Word.
  - 5. Don't resist the prompting of God

- 6. Avoid exposure to evil
- 7. Read uplifting materials
- d. How to tenderize a hardened conscience
  - 1. Plow like a fallow field
  - 2. Confess to God and man
  - 3. Be thorough
  - 4. Be specific

***6. The conscience must be tested and trained***

- a. Not all people...or Christians...are sensitive to the same things
- b. *Because we have a sinful nature, obedience to the voice of conscience must always be tested with the revealed will of God in the scriptures*
  - 1. Must be tested by God's revealed truth
  - 2. The standard of measurement
- c. The conscience of the "weaker brother"
  - 1. I Corinthians 10:29

***(29) For why should my freedom be judged by another's conscience?***

- d. Mistaking cultural training with the still small voice of God
  - 1. Culturally engrained
- e. The conscience must be trained and cultivated
  - 1. Must learn God's truth
- f. When we know what is right or wrong, it is our conscience that insists that we do what is right.
- g. II Peter 1:3-4

***(3) His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. (4) Through these he has***

*given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.*

### **7. Don't let Satan mess with your conscience**

- a. He is referred to as the “accuser of the brethren”
  - 1. When we feel a vague sense of undefined guilt
  - 2. Without a specific sin
  - 3. Or one you've already confessed
- b. Nothing so impedes your access to God as a guilty conscience.
- c. Christ completely satisfied God for you
  - 1. Hebrews 9:14

*How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!*

- 2. *Remind yourself that God welcomes you into his presence not on the grounds of your Christian progress, the depth of your knowledge, or even the degree of victory you have found, but on the grounds of the blood of the Lamb.*
- 3. Your activity does not make you any more acceptable to God.
- 4. Jesus did...and does

## **III. Summary**

### **A. Herod had sought to see Jesus**

- 1. Luke 9:9

*(9) But Herod said, “I beheaded John. Who, then, is this I hear such things about?” And he tried to see him,*

- 2. When they finally met 18 months later
  - a. The trial of Jesus...night before crucifixion
  - b. Luke 23:6-12

*(6) On hearing this, Pilate asked if the man was a Galilean. (7) When he learned that Jesus was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time.*

*(8) When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he had been wanting to see him. From what he had heard about him, he hoped to see him perform some miracle. (9) He plied him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer. (10) The chief priests and the teachers of the law were standing there, vehemently accusing him. (11) Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him. Dressing him in an elegant robe, they sent him back to Pilate. (12) That day Herod and Pilate became friends—before this they had been enemies.*

## **B. How's your conscience?**

1. Time doesn't heal the wounds to the conscience
  - a. What's eating at your heart?
  - b. What do you fear being exposed?
2. Time to start plowing and confessing
3. Time to make amends with God...and people
4. Nothing more liberating than being at peace with God and man