

Henry Ow
1 Peter 3:13-22

My Conscience Bears Me Witness: The Blessing of a Good Conscience

INTRODUCTION

1. Image: I watched Titanic on the small screen rather than the silver screen.
2. Need: Our experiences often shape our conscience.
3. Subject: How do we experience the blessing of a good conscience?
4. Text: 1 Peter 3:13-22
5. Preview: What makes a conscience good? How did Christ establish your new identity? What is the blessing of a good conscience?

BODY

(What makes a conscience good?)

- I. A new identity undergirds a good conscience (3:21-22)
 - A. Peter reminds his readers that a new identity in Christ leads to receiving a good conscience.
 1. A new identity in Christ is depicted through baptism (3:21)
 2. Baptism symbolizes your new life in Christ (3:21)
 - a. Churches remind members of the importance of baptism by placing the baptismal font in the front of the church
 - b. Peter corrects a misunderstanding about baptism – removal of dirt from the body.
 3. Your new life in Christ leads to the receipt of a good conscience (3:21).
 - a. Pledge symbolized by swearing in
 - b. Pledge symbolized by wedding ring.
 - c. Spider-man received spider-sense.
 - B. Think about how your identity in Christ increased the sensitivity of your conscience.
 1. It increased my sensitivity to a biblical view of dating
 2. There are other ways that it sensitizes you: work, study, dress, or film.

(How did Christ establish your new identity?)

- II. Christ's suffering established your new identity (3: 18-20)
 - A. Peter reminds his suffering dealt with four things
 1. Christ's suffering dealt with sin's authority (3:18)
 2. Christ's suffering dealt with our separation from God (3:18)
 3. Christ's suffering dealt with our flesh (3:18)
 4. Christ's suffering dealt with the spiritual forces (3:19-20)
 - a. Spirits refers to fallen angels (3:19)
 - b. Proclaim is a generic word for heralding (3:19)
 - c. Think about the victory that Christ has attained
 - B. Find strength in the suffering of Christ to follow your conscience
 - a. Fixing a report
 - b. Incorrect time sheet reporting

(What is the blessing of a good conscience?)

- III. A good conscience helps you respond (faithfully?) in various contexts (3:13-17)
 - A. Peter reminds his readers that a good conscience requires believers to give a reason for their faith even though it may result in suffering (3:13-17)
 - 1. Have a clear conscience before God (3:15, 16)
 - 2. We will experience social suffering (3:14, 17, 16)
 - 3. Be prepared to make a defense (3:15)
 - B. Reflect on what your conscience is saying in different contexts
 - 1. Friends invite you to watch a movie with sexual content
 - 2. Friend sets you up with nonbeliever
 - C. Allow the word to shape your conscience in those moments.
 - 1. The Bible doesn't give specific instructions
 - 2. The Bible isn't a magic eight ball.

CONCLUSION

- 1. Summary: A good conscience helps you respond in faithfully in various contexts.
- 2. Closing Image: I bought an actual Microsoft office license.

MANUSCRIPT

I watched the film Titanic on the small screen rather than the silver screen. My family watched this film in the comfort of our living room rather than in a movie theater. My aunt had somehow purchased a copy of the film. We popped the movie in, sat back, and enjoyed the cinematic journey. Now if you looked very carefully, then you might see the silhouette of a theater goer's head bob up and down. This experience introduced me to bootlegged films. For those who don't know, a bootlegged film is one where someone sneaked a video recording device typically a camcorder back in the day and recorded the film. Later they would sell it. Watching the bootlegged film Titanic with my family in our living room didn't bother my conscience. I didn't think that there was anything wrong with it. This experience affected my view on bootlegged films.

Flash forward 5-7 years, I studied abroad in China. Every street corner sold the newest films in DVD format. Some of these films were still out in theaters at home such as Batman Begins or Mr. and Mrs. Smith. Because of my earlier experience with Titanic, I had no problem on filling out my DVD collection. Again, my conscience was clear.

Our experience often shapes our consciences. How we did things in the past influence how we do things in the present. Maybe in a prior relationship, the other person you dated felt comfortable kissing. You expect to be able to kiss in future relationships. In the past, you felt alright with "borrowing" some office supplies. After all, they restocked the supply cabinets at the end of the month. At future work places, you "borrow" supplies as well. Growing up you rarely went out to eat to save money. When you went out to eat in college, it made you feel uneasy. **Our experience often shapes our consciences.**

But should experience be the only thing that influences our conscience. All of us have it. Our conscience helps us determine right from wrong. Some have a more sensitive conscience. Others have a more dulled conscience. What does it mean then to have a good conscience? After all the Bible talks about having a good conscience. More importantly, how do we experience the blessing of a good conscience?

To answer this question, we'll turn to a letter written by the apostle Peter to some churches located in present day Asia Minor or Turkey. The letter is titled: 1 Peter. It was written to encourage believers as they suffered for the sake of the gospel to persevere in their faith. The reason why we're turning here is because he uses the phrase: "good conscience" occurs twice in 1 Peter, chapter 3. 1 Peter, chapter 3.

We'll be looking at three questions this morning. First, what makes a conscience good? What makes a conscience good?

A new identity. **A new identity undergirds a good conscience.** The foundation to a good conscience is a believer's identity in Christ. Our identity in Christ transforms our conscience. **A new identity undergirds a good conscience.**

Peter reminds his readers that a new identity in Christ leads to receiving a good conscience. We see this in 1 Peter, chapter 3, verse 21. 1 Peter, chapter 3, verse 21. Let me read it for us: *"Baptism which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience," through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him."*

A new identity in Christ is depicted through baptism. The phrase: “corresponds to this” is actually one word in the Greek: antitupon. This is from which we get the idea: antitype. An antitype derives its meaning from the image of an imprint left by a stamp. In other words, baptism is a symbol of something.

Baptism symbolizes your new life in Christ. Now the word: baptism is often used in the context of dying cloth. Someone would take a piece of white cloth and baptize it in purple dye. The white cloth would then no longer be white but take on the color purple. Just as the color of the cloth has changed so has a believer’s identity when they are baptized. They go from sinner to being justified by Christ.

Churches would remind church members about the importance of baptism by placing their baptismal font in the lobby so that members would pass by it as they entered into the sanctuary. It reminds believers that only through baptism would one be allowed to enter into church life and participate in the Lord’s supper. Some churches still continue this architectural practice. Some of these baptistries were even shaped in the form of a cross reinforcing the importance of baptism.

Peter also attempts to correct a misunderstanding about baptism. He writes: “*not as a removal of dirt from the body.*” In other words, baptism is not just a physical act of going into the water to bathe. But there’s also something important in the word: body. The NASB renders that word: the flesh. Why is that important? Well, the flesh throughout the New Testament refers to the sinful disposition of man toward themselves. Peter may also be saying that the act of baptism doesn’t just cleanse you from your sinful behavior. Otherwise, every time we lied we would have get baptized again. There is a spiritual reality depicted by the act of baptism – a

conferral of a new identity. Though baptism you have been knighted. You have received a new life in Christ.

Your new life in Christ leads to the receipt of a good conscience. Read with me in verse 21: *“but as an appeal to God for a good conscience.”* Look at the word: “appeal”. The word: “appeal” in the NIV is “pledge”. Baptism serves as the pledge that you make to God. It’s as though when you baptized, you raise your right hand to say: I solemnly swear to follow God for the rest of my life. It’s kind of like my wedding ring. When Josephine placed it on my finger almost 5 years ago, she made a pledge that she would stick with me through thick and thin. Likewise, I put a ring on her finger making the same pledge. When we make this pledge, we also receive from God: “a good conscience.” This means that God purifies and sensitizes our consciences so that we can live according to his will.

Think of the super-hero: Spider-man. Prior to his run-in with a radioactive spider, he had the normal senses: sight, smell, touch, hearing, and taste. But after the radioactive spider bit Peter Parker, he received different powers like the ability to crawl on walls, leap to amazing heights, and also exhibited extraordinary strength. He also received a spider-sense, which informed him of danger. This heightened his senses so that he would know if danger came his way.

It’s as though when we believe in Christ as depicted by baptism we receive a good conscience which makes our conscience more aware of what we do. Our conscience has become more sensitive with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Think about how your identity in Christ increased the sensitivity of your conscience.

Consider how it made you aware of things that you might not have been aware of before. For

instance, before maturing in my faith I didn't see an issue with believers dating non-believers. But as I grew in my understanding of the word, the Lord made me more sensitized to the issue and realized that the Lord has commanded believers to pursue relationships with believers. (Refer to 1 Cor 7:39; 2 Cor 6:14) As your conscience becomes more sensitive to what God has instructed be sure to follow it. For the Spirit is using your conscience to point you toward obedience. This applies not only in the area of dating but also to when you clock in for work, how you study, how you dress, or even the films that you watch. Your identity in Christ makes your conscience more sensitive by considering whether or not certain activities help you love God and love your neighbor.

We recognize that **a new identity ungirds a good conscience**. This leads us to our second question. *How did Christ establish your new identity?* What did Jesus have to do in order to obtain for us a new identity?

Christ's suffering established your new identity. Peter writes to his audience during a time when the persecution of Christians is increasing. One of the reasons why Peter may be writing to churches that Paul once served is because Paul has either been killed or will be martyred soon. Peter encourages his readers that even though suffering is on the rise, they should remain steadfast in their faith because out of Christ's suffering something good came. The crucifixion of Christ and his resurrection accomplished a lot more than anyone could ever expect. **Christ's suffering established your new identity.** It established your identity in him.

Peter reminds his readers that Christ's suffering accomplished four things. First, **Christ's suffering dealt with sin's authority.** Read with me in verse 18: *"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous."* We see here that when Christ's suffered on

the cross, he dealt with sins once and for all. The authority of sin has been broken in the lives of those who have placed their faith in Christ's redeeming work. But also notice, how Peter highlights: "*the righteous for the unrighteous.*" Jesus was a righteous person, yet he suffered. The purpose of his suffering as a person who did no wrong was for the sake of those who were sinners – those who are unrighteous. It was only because Jesus was without sin could he deal with our sins.

Second, **Christ's suffering dealt with our separation from God.** Continue with me in verse 18: "*that he might bring us to God*". Prior to faith in Christ, we were all separated from God due to sin. Sin separated us from God and we needed help in being brought near to God once more. We don't need to offer the blood of sheep or goats to draw near to God because Christ's shed blood made it possible for us to draw near to him.

Third, **Christ's suffering dealt with our flesh.** When we think of the idea of the flesh, it should remind us of our bodies. Our bodies due to sin have been corrupted. It's as though we are living in diseased bodies. It's not just the aches and pains that we experience when we grow older. But it's also the sinful disposition that resides within our physical bodies which some call the sin nature. Peter writes this in verse 18: "*being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the Spirit.*" When Jesus died on the cross, his physical body died. But the Spirit raised him three days later from the dead. Likewise, believers can expect ourselves to be raised if Christ doesn't return soon by the Spirit into resurrected bodies. Think of Jesus's resurrection of a trailer of things to come.

Forth, **Christ's suffering dealt with the spiritual forces.** Read with me in verse 19: "*in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, because they formerly did not obey, when*

God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is eight persons were brought safely through the water." These are some difficult verses to interpret. If we ever have a Sunday school class on 1 Peter, that would be an appropriate context to go through the various contexts. But this is the position that I take concerning these verses. I believe that Jesus by his death and resurrection proclaimed victory over all the spiritual forces over the world. In other words, the power of the spiritual forces over this world has been broken. A spiritual D-day has commenced.

When you read: "the spirits in prison." Who are the spirits? Typically, the spirits refer to those who are heavenly beings. In this context, they refer to fallen angels because of the reference to the days of Noah. If you recall back in Genesis 6, you would read of angels have sexual relations with women. These would be reference to fallen angels. Moreover, the word: "proclaim" in verse 19 refers to a word that refers to the proclamation of a message. The message that Jesus proclaims to these spirits is "I win."

We, like Noah's family, have been saved from God's wrath as it is poured out upon unbelievers and fallen heavenly beings at a future time.

When we think of the suffering of Christ, we are meant to think also of the victory he attained. Out of his suffering came triumph. And if we think about it, often time suffering accompanies triumph. For an Olympic athlete to win a gold medal, they have to go through a grueling diet and rigorous physical training. Think about how much work you need to put into studying and examinations in order to receive a diploma. While this suffering pales in comparison to the suffering of Christ, we recognize in a small part that sometimes-suffering leads to good.

Find strength in the suffering of Christ to follow our conscience. Peter reminded his readers about Christ's suffering to encourage them to continue living out the Christian life because Christ's triumph.

There will be times when following our conscience will be difficult. Your boss may ask you to fix the numbers on a report. But your conscience says: "No", this isn't right. Will you be able to stand up to your boss even though it may cost you your job? When your boss asks you to work overtime, but not mark it down in your time sheet, what will you do? Will you follow company policy and record the time you work? Or will you follow your boss's instruction which you believe is wrong. When people ask you about your view on marriage, will you be able to respond with your belief that marriage is reserved between a man and a woman? Would you be able to endure bearing the label of being "intolerant."? When your classmate asks you borrow your homework because they didn't get a chance to complete it, then what will you do? When we come to these moments where our conscience moves us to respond in an unpopular way, we need to think about the suffering of Christ and how it compels us to follow our conscience.

We've asked two questions thus far: "What makes a conscience good?" and "How did Christ establish your new identity?" Let's move onto the last question: "What is the blessing of a good conscience."

A good conscience helps you respond faithfully in various contexts. A good conscience aids you to know what to do in different scenarios. A conscience sensitized by your identity in Christ enables you to know to act when different situations arise. **A good conscience helps you respond faithfully in various contexts.**

Peter reminds his readers that a good conscience enables believers to give a reason for their faith even though it may result in suffering. A good conscience helps one explain their faith even though it may be difficult. A good conscience enables you to do what is right. Read with me beginning in verse 13: *“Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be good’s will than for doing evil.”*

The phrase: “good conscience” occurs in verse 16: *“having a good conscience”*. The idea of responding to those who ask you about your faith is that you respond in a way so that your conscience is clear before God. In other words, you are behaving and responding in a way that is pleasing to God. Peter reinforces this idea in verse 15: *“But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy.”* Heart here refers not to the physical organ but serves as a metaphor for the control center of your thoughts and actions. That means in our thoughts and actions, Christ is front and center.

What type of suffering should we expect? After all, it’s mentioned in verse 14: *“suffer for righteousness’ sake”* and verse 17: *“For it is better to suffer for doing good.”* The suffering that Peter is referring to is probably social. Look at verse 16: *“having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered.”* Slander refers to someone making false statements about you. When you explain why you do things you do and believe in the thing you believe, people may

malign you in public. In the book of Acts, such slander led to the mobilization of mobs and eventually physically harm. But in our present age, we can expect people to increase their criticism of us or even avoid us because of our faith.

Whatever the consequences, God expects us to make defense as it says in verse 15: *“always being prepared to make a defense.”* The phrase: “make a defense” is from which we get the word: “apologetics.” This doesn’t mean that we need to so well read that we can defend every nuance of the Christian faith. Believers are expected to explain why they believe what they do and do what they do.

Sometimes, we have to explain to other the motivations for our behavior. Why do you decide to go back to the hotel rather than join your co-workers as they explore the night life of the city? Why do you decide to go into the office early so that you can make it to small group in time? Why do you decide to spend our retirement serving at church or serving in mission rather than spend it on leisure? People may look at you and wonder: “What is going on?”

How do we respond faithfully in various situations or contexts? First, **reflect on what your conscience is saying in different contexts.** What is your conscience telling you to do? For instance, your friends invite you go to watch a new film. You decide to go on google and check what the premise of the film is. You discover that the film has some sexual content. But you know that sexual purity has been a struggle. If you go watch this film, then it may cause you to stumble. But you don’t want to tell your friends: “no” because you don’t get too many opportunities to hang out with them. Yet your conscience is saying to you: “It’s probably not a good idea to go see the movie.” In that moment, reflect on what your conscience is telling you and how the Spirit may be using it to direct you. You decide not to go. When your friends ask

you, you have an opportunity to explain the thought process behind why you decided not to go. It may open an opportunity to share about your faith with a unbelieving friend.

When someone wishes to set you up with a friend, your conscience may prompt you to ask: "Do you know if she's a Christian?" Your friend may reply: "What does that have to do with anything?" This would open up an opportunity why you believe that it's biblical for believers to date believers.

This applies not only in the areas of film or dating. But it could apply to the context of discipline. How do you discipline your kids? How do you decide to treat your spouse? How do you conduct yourself in your workplace? How do you handle your consumption of media? In each of these instances, reflect on how the Holy Spirit may be prompting you through the conscience to act.

We should reflect on your conscience is saying in different contexts. But you should **allow the word to shape your conscience in those moments. Allow the word to shape your conscience in those moments.** Jason in pervious sermons has spoken about the idea of calibrating your conscience. How do we train our consciences to distinguish between from right and wrong; what is wise and unwise? This requires us to understand what God's word says. The bible doesn't give specific instructions in every situation. The Bible never says: "Thou shall avoid online dating." "You should ask (blank) out on a date." "You shall wear this outfit." But the Bible does provide various principles to shape our consciences so that we know what is the right thing to do and what is the wise thing to do. This would mean that we need to set aside regular time to spend understanding what the word says and sitting under the teaching of the word.

God never gave us a magic eight ball to shake every time we encounter a situation. Should I go watch this movie? Shake... Yes. Should I go court this person or date them? Shake... Date them. Should I wear a collared shirt or t-shirt to service? Shake... Collared shirt. Should I have family devotionals? Shake... Definitely. God gave us his word so that we can apply its wisdom faithfully in a variety of situations. Again, this requires us to evaluate: Is my conscience operating in accord the truth of God's word?

We answered three questions this morning. What makes a conscience good? A new identity ungirds a good conscience. How did Christ establish your new identity? Christ's suffering established your new identity. What is the blessing of a good conscience? A good conscience helps you respond faithfully in various contexts.

During college, a friend of mine engaged me on a conversation about the ethics of watching bootleg films and using bootlegged software. He helped me to see that using bootleg material is a form of stealing. It robs people from their creative work. But it also fails to give credit where credit was due. My conscience which was once clear was now tweaked. Moreover, it became more sensitive to the use of bootlegged material.

My computer from freshmen year eventually died. I had to purchase a new computer. After buying the computer, I had to decide on what to do about word processing software. In my previous computer, I had used a bootlegged copy of Microsoft office. I wrestled with whether or not to use the bootlegged version again or should I go buy the \$30.00 copy in the bookstore. I thought to myself \$30.00 is quite a bit of money. It's all my Milk Tea allowance for the quarter. I continued to wrestle with it. But the Holy Spirit through my conscience led me to

walk into the bookstore and buy a copy of the Microsoft office. Remember a good conscience helps you respond faithfully in various contexts.

I remember when I began seminary, we had a dress code: collared shirts, slacks, and dress shoes. I know that some seminaries have stricter dress codes such as suit and tie. Halfway through my seminary studies, they changed the dress code to allow jeans. Although I had the freedom to wear jeans, I felt uncomfortable wearing them to class.