**Holding the Mystery of the Faith with a Clear Conscience**

**Doxology Insight on Faith Conference**

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1. **The Aim of Our Charge: A Good Conscience**

* Doctor’s remark about the need of his patients for pastoral help
* The charge of a doctor
* Prevention of sickness and promotion of good health
* Diagnosis and treatment of sickness
* Pastor’s charge
* To deal with spiritual sickness
* Symptom: bad conscience
* Call for pastors to become experts in matters of the conscience
* Amazing claim in Hebrews 13:18: ***we are sure that we have a good conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things.***
* Post-modern challenge to our traditional understanding of the conscience as bound by God’s Word
* Shown in the 2009 ELCA statement: **Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust**
* Justification of homosexuality by dubious appeal to the conscience
* The *bound conscience* of those who approve of homosexual intercourse: sincere faith in sincerely held beliefs
* *Conscience-bound beliefs* as the norm for their conscience rather than God’s Word, let alone His commandments
* Demand for respect for the *conscience-bound beliefs* of the neighbor
* Articulation of common position: concern for sincerity rather than truth
* Presupposition: the voice of conscience as the voice of God
* Paul’s charge to the church in Ephesus and its pastors in 1 Tim 1:3-11: ***As I urged you…remain in Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith. The aim of our charge is love (that issues) from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith…Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, understanding that the law is not laid down for a righteous person, but for those who are lawless and insubordinate, the ungodly and sinners, the unholy and sacrilegious, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, adulterers, sodomites, slave traders, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to the healthy/sound teaching that is in keeping with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.***
* Situation: Paul’s sending of Timothy to deal with the troubled church in Ephesus
* 1Timothy: written brief for Timothy
* Broader task: ***stewardship from God that is by faith*** (1:4)
* Church as God’s household (3:15)
* Steward = housekeeper, manager of the household
* Responsibility to keep faith and hand it on
* Summary of ***charge*** in 2:1-4:5
* Problem of false teachers in Ephesus
* Religious speculation about origins rather than stewardship of faith
* Use of the ritual law to promote higher levels of consciousness
* Prohibition of marriage and certain foods like meat as spiritually unclean
* Misplaced quest for spiritual purity
* Repudiation of a good conscience ►shipwreck of faith
* ***Our charge***: Christ ►Paul and the apostles ►Timothy ►church in Ephesus
* Goal of faith/ministry = ***love***
* Summary of the Decalogue in 1:9-10
* Right use of the law for sinners rather than ***the righteous***
* Paul’s concern for ***healing teaching/sound doctrine*:** see Paul’s use of “healthy/healing/sound” for words (1 Tim 6:3; 2 Tim 1:13), teaching (1 Tim 1:10; 2 Tim 4:3; Tit 1:9; 2:2), and faith (Tit 1:13; 2:2).
* Connection with “sound-mindedness/selfcontrol” (2 Tim 1:7; Tit 2:4, 6, 12)
* Healing teaching as the right application of law according to the gospel
* ***Gospel of glory*** = gospel that gives sinners access to God’s glory as his hidden presence with us
* Summary of the gospel in 1:15: ***Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.***
* The fruit of a bad conscience = feigned faith and lack of love
* ***Love*** as the product of three interrelated things: ascending order
* ***Pure heart***
* Heart as our whole conscious mind with our sensing, thinking, feeling, imagining, desiring, and judging
* Cleansing from the stain of sin
* ***Good conscience***
* Result of a pure heart
* Right self-assessment from God’s approval
* ***Sincere faith***
* Sincere:unhypocritical, unfeigned
* Faith that is honest with God about myself and my status before Him
* Close connection of faith and love with a good conscience
* Basic qualification for a deacon or church worker in 1 Tim 3:9 : ***holding the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience***
* My aim as a Christian and a pastor
* Live every day with a good conscience before God and others
* Reception of good conscience from the divine service each Sunday
* Delivery of good conscience to people in every pastoral act that I perform
* Home visit and sick visit
* Baptism and confirmation
* Wedding and funeral
* Bible study and class that I teach
* Devotion and counsel
* Appeal to the conscience in my ministry like Paul in 2 Cor 4:2b: ***We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God’s word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God***.
* Two pictures of my work as a pastor
* Myself as the keeper of God’s house/household: promotion of faith and love
* Myself as a doctor: healing the conscience through teaching of God’s Word as law and gospel
* What is our conscience?
* Luther (EA 44:298): ***For the conscience is not the***

***power of acting but the power of judging. Its proper work (as Paul says in Romans 2) is to accuse or to excuse, to cause one to stand accused or absolved, terrified or secure. Its purpose is not to do, but to speak about what has been done and should be done, and this judgment makes us stand accused or saved before God.***

* Post-modern equation of self-esteem with a good

conscience

* Feeling good about ourselves as persons and what

we do

* Goal of therapy and new goal of education and

worship

* Confusion of emotional mood with spiritual state
* Guilt and shame as bad feelings that have no

positive worth but must be eliminated from the

conscience

* Bad feelings as “the hell” of the post-modern world

and loss of self-esteem as its “damnation”

* Salvation: well being from carbon righteousness
* Axiom: “God wants me to be happy.”
* Greek term: συνείδησις
* Literal sense: *seeing the same* as others
* Awareness of how others *see* us as well as how that differs from the way we *see* ourselves
* Moral sense of right and wrong ►moral self assessment
* Outer direction ► inner direction
* Internalised voice of parents and those in authority
* Capacity to experience shame and guilt
* Shame: something wrong with me in another’s eyes
* Guilt: done something wrong to someone else
  + - Use of this term in popular Greek
* Aspect of conscious human life in an ordered universe
* Bad conscience from violation of that cosmic order
* Sacrilege as the worst violation: then murder and incest
* Origin from gods who order the universe and human life in the world
* Purpose of the conscience: nursemaid or guardian to protect people from physical and moral harm rather than a moral or spiritual teacher
* Link with the Eumenides, the Furies that torment the minds of evil-doers and exact their downfall (*nemesis*)
  + Budziszewski on the five furies of the conscience
* Remorse ► suppression and distraction from thinking about the evil deed
* Confession ► repeated narration without admission of guilt and the need for restitution
* Atonement ► self-punishment and self-

purification

* Reconcilation ► isolation from the offended persons and fellowship with other transgressors in a counter-community
* Justification ► self-justification with demand for social recognition
  + - Moral experience of a good conscience
* Result of right behavior
* Good behavior according to a given legal standard
* Family law
* Social law
* Political law
* Natural law
* Personal law: own code
* Evaluation of people by assessment of what they do
* Justification by works: observance of the law
  + Religious sense in the New Testament
* Consciousness of God (1 Pet 2:19) and of sin before God (Heb 10:2)
* *Seeing* ourselves as God *sees* us
* Dependence on God’s assessment of me now and at the Last Judgment
* Clash between my need for approval and God’s disapproval of me: my self-justification as a righteous person and God’s judgment of me as sinner
* Result: the conflicted conscience that Paul ascribes to the Gentiles in Rom 2:13, 15-16: ***For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified… – they (the Gentiles) show that the work of the law is written in their hearts, as their conscience also bears witness (to the law), and the conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them – on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of human hearts by Christ Jesus.***
* Session of a personal court case in my mind with my conscience as the witness for and against me
* Human law or God’s law as the basis for the testimony, the verdict, and the sentence
* I as person on trial
* I as both the counsel for my prosecution and the counsel for my defense
* Oscillation between self-condemnation and self-vindication
* No final verdict or sentence as there is no proper judge until God’s Word does its work on us
* Secret operation: preliminary hearings before the final trial before God with Jesus as my advocate
  + The importance of conscience for human life
* Necessary for right relationships: value of guilt and shame in sensitizing us as persons to other people
* Absence in sociopaths and psychopaths: shameless people who never feel bad about anything that they have done
* Shamelessness as hopeless state in Jer 8:12:

***Are they ashamed of their loathsome conduct?***

***No, they have no shame at all;***

***They do not even know how to blush.***

* Darkened and desensitized minds of pagans (Rom 1:21; Eph 4:18-19)
* Desensitization of conscience = dehumanization
  + Four images from Paul for the distortion of the unfaithful

conscience of Christians

* Deviation (ἀστοχέω) from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith by teachers of different doctrine than the gospel (1 Tim 1:5-6)
* Repudiation (ἀπωθέω) of faith and a good conscience (1 Tim 1:19)
* Pollution (μιαίνω) of the mind and the conscience by turning away from the truth in following human commands and denying God by their works (Tit 1:15-16; cf. 1 Cor 8:7)
* Seared conscience (καυστηριάζω) of false teachers like skin with a red hot iron (1 Tim 4:2): ***Now the Spirit expressly says that in the later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and the teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars (false-speakers) whose consciences are seared.***
* Rejection of the Christian faith for the teachings of demons
* Devotion to deceitful spirits
* Result: desensitized conscience
  + Modern psychological understanding of the sovereign

conscience

* Conscience governed by my own standards
* Accountability to no one but myself: *Only to thy self be true*

(Polonius in Hamlet)

* Demand for others to respect and approve of my beliefs
* My autonomous self as my ruler, lawmaker, and judge: moral solipsism
* Bad conscience as inauthentic, neurotic self-consciousness
* Self-absolution by redefinition: no sins ► no case against me
  + Paul’s rejection of his conscience as his judge in 1 Cor

4:3-4: ***But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. I have nothing on my conscience, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me.***

* + Luther’s analysis of the religion of the conscience as

idolatry

* Conscience as the inner voice of God
* Autonomous self as lawmaker and judge apart from God and His Word
* Rejection of God’s law that judges us and His gospel that saves us
* Rejection of His Word by which He tells us who He is and how we have access to Him in the divine service
* Replacement by our notions of God and self-devised spirituality for our self-justification and salvation
* Luther (EA 9: 130-31): ***Strange gods…are an erring notion or conscience devised about the true God. For as the conscience is, so is God…See this is what it means to make and follow other gods; it means to worship gods whom you do not know, because you do not feel or understand that in the place of the true God you worship a notion and an idol. Nor do you notice how uncertain you are in that worship, and how you think and know nothing concerning the true God, since you think about Him without His Word. But He cannot be known or thought of except through His Word. So you see that every way of inventing and worshiping strange gods is nothing else than that godless notion by which we chose and believe that we can please God without the Word of God, by this or that work, at this or that place, by this or that rite, when He is not of that sort and yet under His name another (god) is concocted in the heart.***
  + Biblical view of the conscience as inner umpire rather

than law maker: not the sun but lit up by the sun

* It does not make the rules but applies them.
* It does not instruct but receives instruction.
* It does not pass judgment but receives God’s

judgment, verdict and sentence.

* It is governed by God’s Word as law and gospel.
* It is not just bound by the gospel with its promises but also by God’s commands.
* It is free and unbound when it has no divine prohibition or divine commandment (1 Cor 10:23-30): see the teaching on adiaphora.
* It is as weak or strong as the faith of a person in Christ and his Word (1 Cor 8:7, 10, 12).
* Life and ministry with a good conscience
  + Christ as my judge: person and ministry
  + Standard for conscience: God’s word as law and gospel
* Misapplication of law and gospel by Satan
* Law to condemn sinners rather than to show God’s

and convict of sin

* Gospel to excuse sin rather than pardon sinners
* Purpose: to confuse or dull the conscience
* Clear conscience from right application of law and gospel
* Reception of a good conscience through the gospel:

Justification by grace through faith in Christ and the

gospel

* Result: assurance of salvation and God’s approval of me

**2. The Gift of a Clear Conscience: First White, then Green**

* Promise in Isaiah 1:18: ***Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.***
* Modern motto with concern for pollution: green = clean
* Two pictures: clear mirror and clear window
* Desire for a good conscience: I and my life in good order so that I feel good about myself and can think well of myself
* Christian experience of a good conscience
* Result of **faith** in Jesus Christ and of what we receive from him rather than the fruit of our good behavior (1 Tim 1:19; 3:9; Heb 10:21)
* A gift that we **have**from God (Acts 24:16; 1 Tim 1:19; Heb 13:18; 1 Pet 3:16)
* Gift of a **clean/clear heart** (Matt 5:8; 1 Tim 1:5; 2 Tim 2:22; 1 Pet 1:22) with a **clean/clear conscience** (1 Tim 3:9; 2 Tim 1:3)
* Justification by grace through faith in Jesus: reliance on the gospel
* The gift of a good conscience through baptism in 1 Pet 3:21-22:

***Baptism...now saves you, not as the removal of dirt from***

***the body, but as the appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right side of God, with angels, authorities and powers having been subordinated to him.***

* Note the use of the emphatic ***now*:** our present salvation through the resurrection of Jesus
* Risen Jesus as our mediator who “brings” us to God (3:16): liturgical image of access to God as in Rom 5:2; Eph 2:18; 3:12
* Contrast between the cleansing of the body and the reception of a good conscience
* Ongoing reception of salvation and a good conscience from the risen Christ through **baptism**
* Helpful distinction between the ceremony of baptism and the baptized state: see analogy with adoption and marriage
* The state of a good conscience as fruit of salvation
* ***Appeal*** = authorised request
* Double sense of ***the appeal of a good conscience***: appeal for a good conscience and appeal from a good conscience
* Surprise: emphasis on our ongoing appeal to God for a good conscience rather than our possession of it
* See Luther on the significance of baptism: daily repentance and daily renewal by the Holy Spirit
* Baptism is the foundation for life with a good conscience: God’s Word rather than the water
* Confirmation of a good conscience
* The testimony of our works: doing what God has commanded us to do (Heb 13:18; 1 John 3:19-24; cf. 2 Pet 1:5-10)
* The testimony of our reputation before the world: just and innocent behavior (Rom 13:5; 2 Cor 1:12; 1 Pet 3:13-17)
* The testimony of the Holy Spirit to my honesty (Rom 9:1) and my sonship by prompting prayer to God as my Father (Rom 8:14-17)
* Life with a good conscience
  + - God the Father as my Judge and Jesus as my savior and advocate before God
* Faith in Jesus for pardon from sin and justification before God: final verdict already now
* Result of justification: good conscience
  + - Teaching on two awakenings by Pietist Lutherans from Eph 5:14
* Picture: unbelieving conscience as asleep and dead to God
* First awakening by the law: awareness of God as Judge
* Second awakening by the gospel: assurance of salvation
* See the case of Dr Savonius in Bo Giertz, *The Hammer of God*, 3-131.
  + - Standard for conscience: God’s Word as law and gospel
* God’s commandments for correction of misplaced or neurotic guilt: guilt before God
* Law with its commandments for diagnosis of sin: accusation for conviction of sin by the Holy Spirit (John 16:8-10. See the alternate version of John 8:9 about being ***convicted by their conscience***)
* Gospel with its promises for pardon and cleansing from sin: assurance of salvation
* Commandments for God-pleasing work
* Attack by Satan on those who “have faith and a good

conscience” in 1 Tim 1:19

* Purpose: to destroy the good conscience by undermining faith in Christ
* Misapplication of law and gospel by Satan
* Law to condemn justified sinners: accuser and slanderer
* Gospel to excuse sin: liar and murderer
* Satan’s goal: to confuse or dull the conscience of believers
* Clear conscience from right application of law and gospel
* Reception of a clear conscience through the gospel: justification by grace through faith in Christ and the gospel
* Result: assurance of salvation and God’s approval of me
* The purpose of God’s requirement for a clean conscience
* Purity as the prerequisite for access to God’s presence

and reception of His blessings in the divine service in Ps

24:3-5:

**Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord?**

**And who may stand in his holy place?**

**He who has clean hands and a pure heart,**

**who does not lift up his soul to a false idol**

**and does not swear deceitfully?**

**He will receive blessing from the Lord**

**and righteousness/vindication from the God of his salvation**.

* See Jesus in Matt 5:8: **Blessed are the pure in heart,**

**for they shall see God.**

* Impurity that results in desecration of God’s holiness
* Bodily cleansing through the blood of sacrificed animals in the OT for participation in the divine service at the tabernacle and temple (Heb 9:13)
* Bodily purity in OT ►purity of heart in the NT
* Teaching of Jesus for his disciples in Mark 7:21-23 on

what desecrates their holiness: ***For from within, out of the human heart, come evil thoughts: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, covetousness, evildoing, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they desecrate/defile a person.***

* Total cleansing through Jesus and his blood: John 15:3;

Acts 15:9; Eph 5:26; Tit 2:14; Heb 1:3; 9:14; 1 John 1:7, 9

* The purpose of a cleansed conscience in Heb 9:13-14: ***For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of those who had become common, sanctifies in connection with the purity of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Jesus, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.***
* Partial bodily cleansing in the OT for access to God in his

earthly sanctuary

* Inability of animal blood to perfect the conscience of those

who serve God there (Heb 9:5; 10:2)

* Offering of Christ to atone for all people
* Cleansing of conscience through his blood in baptism and

Holy Communion

* Purpose: participation in the heavenly service with all the angels and saints
* Delivery of a clean conscience for participation in the heavenly liturgy through our order of service
* The invocation and absolution ► access to God and hearing his Word with a good conscience
* The readings and the sermon ► offering, prayers and reception of HC with a good conscience: see Bar 19:12: ***You shall not approach prayer with a bad conscience.***
* The reception of HC and benediction ► life with a good conscience in station and vocation
* Access to the heavenly realm with a clear conscience in Heb 10:19-20: **Therefore, my brothers, since we have confidence for entry into the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he inaugurated for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us come near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled (clean) from an bad conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.**
* Greek noun for **confidence**: *parrêsia*
* Right of speech in public assembly
* Frank, bold speech in public
* Unrestricted access to a person
* Confidence in approaching and addressing a person
* Access to God for audience with him (Heb 4:16; 10:35)
* Assurance of God’s approval in his judgment of us
* Contrast: restricted access v open access to God
* Jesus: high priest in the heavenly sanctuary
* Standing in for us before God the Father: intercession
* Standing in for the Father with us: delivery of gifts
* Open access to the heavenly sanctuary together with Jesus as our priest
* Our approach through the flesh and blood of Jesus in Holy Communion
* Our qualification for entry: clean conscience
* Washing of bodies with water in baptism
* Sprinkling of hearts with the blood of Jesus
* Gift of clean conscience
* Faith: assurance of favorable reception
* Access to the Father’s presence through the divine service
* Entry with Jesus into the sanctuary
* Service as priests with him in heaven and earth
* Confidence in prayer: see Luther in the Large Catechism on the fifth petition, 92: ***Thus this petition is really an appeal…to grant us a happy and cheerful conscience to stand before him in prayer. Where the heart is not right with God and cannot achieve such confidence, it will never dare to pray.***
* The spiritual effect of a good conscience with God
* Moral discernment of right and wrong ►spiritual discernment of good and evil
* The effect of a **bad conscience** (Heb 10:22)
* Fearful diffidence
* Sense of condemnation by God: worthlessness
* Dislocated restlessness: see Luther on the Cain in EA 1:300: ***But just as the whole sky is open for the little bird so that it is at liberty to fly where it desires but never has a safe place where it is safe from the attacks of other birds, so Adam sends Cain away…He is simply sent away to any indefinite place and work without the addition of any promise or command, just like a bird which roams uncertainly in the*** ***open air***.
* Expectation of bad things from God even when things go right for us: spiritual pessimism, frustration and depression
* Seeing others and ourselves, the world and God in a bad light: polluted world
* Critical spirit: disapproval and condemnation of others
* Loss of joy and diminished enjoyment
* Bad spiritual “mood”
* The effect of a **good conscience**: see Acts 13:1; 1 Tim 1:5, 19; Heb 13:18; 1 Pet 3:16, 21
* Fearless confidence
* Assurance of God’s approval and delight in us: peaceful sense of worth
* Settled location under God and at home with Him in our station and vocation on earth
* Expectation of good things from God even when go wrong for us
* Perception of God’s goodness in his good gifts in creation and redemption: vision of beauty in a sinful world
* Appreciation of others
* Enjoyment of life
* Good spiritual “mood”
* The role of the conscience in our experience of God and his creation in Tit 1:15: ***To the pure all things are pure, but to contaminated and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their mind and conscience are contaminated.***
* Echo of Ps 18:25-26:

***With the merciful you show yourself merciful;***

***with the blameless you show yourself blameless;***

***with the purified you show yourself pure***

***and with the crooked you appear tortuous.***

* ***All things*** = all things that God has created
* Spiritual state that governs our perception of the world and what we receive from God through it
* Right attitude of faith as the right aptitude for reception: TV set
* Luther: ***faith is the purity of the conscience, which believes that it is pleasing to God*** (EA 29:46)
* Pure mind and conscience ►right evaluation and enjoyment of created things as God gifts for us
* Contamination of mind (thinking and feeling) and conscience (judging and valuing) by unbelief: distortion and perversion of reality
* Luther: ***they have been blinded by their impurity*** (EA 29:47)
* Luther in LW 9:130: ***For as the conscience is, so is God***.
* Guilty person ► angry God
* Forgiven person ► gracious God
* Conclusion
* German proverb: ***Ein gutes Gewissen ist ein sanftes Ruhekissen***.

***If you take a good conscience with you to bed,***

***you will have a soft cushion to rest your head.***

* Augustine: **A good conscience is the palace of Christ; the temple of the Holy Spirit; the paradise of delight; the lasting Sabbath of the saints.**

**3. Ministry with a Clear Conscience: Well Done!**

* Paul’s boast in 2 Cor 1:12: ***For our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience, that we have behaved in the world with the holiness and sincerity/purity that are from God, not with worldly wisdom but by the grace of God, and supremely so towards you.***
* Good conscience from honest, holy behavior that is governed by God’s grace
* Handing on the purity and holiness that come from God
* Paul on the basic spiritual qualification for deacons in 1 Tim 3:9: ***those having the mystery of faith with a clear conscience.***
  + Clear conscience as the main qualification for a deacon
* Deacon as assistant to pastor
* Modern equivalent: seminary student
  + The mystery of faith
* Hidden realities that are disclosed by God’s word
* Presence of risen Lord as the bridge between heaven and earth in the church (Col 1:26; 1 Tim 3:16)
* The Lord’s Supper
  + Access to triune God through faith that provides a clear conscience
* Loss of emphasis on the care of conscience as basis for care of souls
  + Purpose of ministry as the delivery of good conscience in 2 Cor 4:1-2: ***Therefore having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced disgraceful underhanded ways. We refuse to use cunning or to tamper with God’s word, but by an open statement of the truth*** ***we commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God.***
  + Problem: how can I deliver good conscience if I have a bad conscience about myself as a pastor?
  + Wrong reasons for bad conscience
    - Expectation of members and leaders
    - Own pervasive sense of failure
    - Misplaced sense of guilt: human demands rather than God’s word
  + Self promotion ► burnout
  + Confusion: person and works
  + Sabotage of ministry by bad conscience about my ministry: sense of failure
* Two words from St Paul for guidance
  + Acts 20:28: ***Pay attention to yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.***
  + 1 Tim 4:16: ***Pay close attention to yourself and to what is taught (doctrine). Persevere in them, because if you do so, you will save yourself and your hearers.***
* Surprise: accent on attention to self before attention to congregation and teaching
* Honest spiritual self-appraisal as part of pastoral work
* Attention to conscience as first priority
* The peril of a pastor in ministry
* Care of others with spiritual self- neglect
* Giving without receiving
* Result: burnout/ compassion fatigue
* The use of secular instruments in the church for the appraisal of pastors
* Psychological or managerial models
* Focus on performance and popularity
* Political use by leaders
* Neglect of spiritual matters
* Pressure for pastoral self-promotion ► self-deception from desire for recognition and approval
* The key for ministry with a good conscience
  + Jesus as the judge of my ministry: stand or fall before him

(Rom 14:4)

* + Standard for conscience: God’s Word as law and gospel
* Clear conscience from right application of law and gospel
* Reception of a good conscience about myself as a person through the gospel: justification by grace through faith in Christ and the gospel
* Result: assurance of salvation and God’s approval of me
* Two judgments: person and works
* First: God’s judgment of me as a person
* Faith in Christ and the gospel
* Justification by the Father’s grace through faith in Jesus
* Result: God the Father is as pleased with me as with Jesus
* Second: God’s judgment of my works: Matt 7:24-27; Rom 14:12; 1 Cor 3:12-15; 4:3-5; 2 Cor 5:12
* Works that are built on Christ and his words (1 Cor 3:12-15)
* His approval of my ministry (2 Tim 2:15)
* His pleasure in my works (Rom 12:2; 14:18; 15:6; Eph 5:10; Col 1:10; 3:20; 1 Thess 4:1; Heb 12:28; 13:21; 1 Pet 2:5)
* Two kinds of self-examination
* Personal: myself before God
* Vocational: my duty to my spouse and children and my congregation
  + - Personal self-examination
* Paul in 2 Cor 13:5: ***examine your selves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves.***
* Danger of introspection: digging for dirt
* Call for unusual self-examination
* Audit of ***faith*** in Christ rather than spiritual success
* Faith as reliance on Christ rather than self-confidence
* Basic issue: faith rather than innocence
* Luther’s advice on self-examination before confession in the Small Catechism: ***Consider your place in life (station) according to the Ten Commandments: Are you a father or a mother, son, daughter, husband, wife, or worker? Have you been disobedient, unfaithful, or lazy? Have you been hot-tempered, rude, or quarrelsome? Have you hurt someone by your words or deeds? Have you stolen, been negligent, wasted anything, or done any harm?***
* Use of Ten Commandments for spiritual self-diagnosis
* Guilt for sin: my sins against others in my station and vocation
* Anger from abuse: the sins of others against me
* Confession: handing over the problem to Christ in prayer
* Reception of pardon for sin ► private absolution
* Healing from abuse through the blood of Jesus in Holy Communion ► personal ministry
* Faith in Christ and his word of pardon or deliverance
* Vocational self-examination
* Paul in Gal 6:4-5: ***But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself and not his neighbor. For each will have to bear his own load.***
* New questions for the justified person: pastor on Sunday night or Monday morning
* How can I be sure that God is pleased with my work as a pastor or church worker?
* Which works please him and so meet his approval?
* Which works will last for time and for eternity?
* Reasons for uncertainty about my work as a pastor
* Impossible task: doing God’s work
* Favorable comparison with others ► self-promotion
* Unfavorable self-criticism ► self-debasement
* Criticism from other people
* Adopting their agenda for my ministry
* Need to prove myself that results in sense of failure
* Spiritual attack by the devil
* Result of bad conscience about ministry
  + Search for approval, popularity, and praise
  + Discouragement and burnout
* Delivery of a good conscience about my works through God’s commandments: see 1 John 3:21-22: ***Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence (freedom of speech) before God, and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him.***
* Pleasing God by doing what He has given me to do as His agent and representative: His works in and through me
* Divinely instituted ministry in my station and vocation: holy work as working with God
* Positive role of God’s commandments: God’s approval and support
* Commendation in Rev 14:12: ***Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus. And I heard a voice from heaven saying, “Write this: blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.” “Blessed indeed,” says the Spirit, “that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them.”***
* See words of Jesus to his apostles in Luke 17:10: ***So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.’***
* Audit with the first three commandments: basic liturgical, devotional and practical temptations in ministry
* Self-service: see first three petitions of the Lord’s Prayer and its doxology
* Self-reliance rather than prayer
* Use of own ideas rather than God’s holy Word
* Audit of my call with God’s instructions for ministry such as Matt 28:16-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 18:1; 22:19-21; John 20:21-23; 2 Tim 4:1-2; 1 Pet 5:1-4
* Call to ministry as privilege rather than a burden
* Importance of ordination and call for ministry with a good conscience
* Criterion for evaluation: faithfulness rather than apparent success
* Attack by the devil on the certainty about my call to ministry
* Paul’s reliance on God’s judgment in 1 Cor 4:1-5: ***This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy. But with me it is no small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each will receive his commendation from God.***
* Problem: appraisal of ministry by others or by self
* Pastors as stewards of God’s mysteries: need for faithfulness
* Accountability to God as the only Judge
* Danger of ignorant and premature judgment
* The discipline of working in the light of the Last Day
* Difference between the judgment of people and the judgment of their works (see 1 Cor 3:10-15)
* God’s judgment of works as good news
* Reception of praise from God

**4. God-pleasing Work: Brittle, Crazy Glass**

* Picture: yourself as a stained glass window
* Translucence: godliness
* Refraction: humanity
* God as unlike a hard to please parent or spouse
* Uncertain approval due to stated expectations or impossible demands
* Withheld approval
* Qualified approval
* Blanket approval
* How can I have a good conscience about my work as a pastor or church worker?
* Impossible task
* Doing God’s work
* Serving as God’s showpiece
* The curse of uncertainty
* Right place?
* Right work?
* Enough work?
* The devil’s attack on our vocation
* Ministry as threat to his cause
* Worst attack on most conscientious pastors and most faithful members
* Three avowals of St Paul
  + Paul before Sanhedrin in Acts 23:1: ***My brothers, I have fulfilled my***

***duty to God in all good conscience to this day.***

* + - Greek verb πολιτεύομαι: discharging obligations as citizen of a city state
    - Sanhedrin as God’s court on earth
    - Ananias as God’s representative
    - Amazing claim of good conscience
    - Basic orientation: duty towards God
  + Paul to Felix in Acts 24:16: ***So I strive always to keep my***

***conscience blameless/inoffensive before God and man.***

* Felix as representative of humanity
* Double focus: God and man
* *Always:* daily, regularly
* Daily task in daily devotions and daily vocation
* Law and prophets as foundation for blameless conscience (24:14)
* Conscience governed by God’s word with its promise of the resurrection of the just and the unjust
  + Paul to Timothy in 2 Tim 1:3: ***I thank God, whom I serve,***

***as my forefathers did, with a clear conscience, as night***

***and day I constantly remember you in my prayers.***

* Thanksgiving: from the gift of clear conscience
* Link of clear conscience with daily prayer
* Daily reception of clear conscience
* Clear conscience as condition for service of God
* The foundation for vocational certainty in 1 John 3:21-22: ***Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him.***
* Heart = conscience
* Removal of condemnation by faith in Christ with the assurance of salvation
* Confidence before God based on his approval
* Greek: freedom of speech before God
* Two results
* Pleasing God by keeping his commandments
* Receptive prayer
* God’s instruction of what pleases him by his commandments
* See I John 5:2-3: loving God ► keeping his unburdensome, unburdening commandments
* Working with God by keeping his commandments
* Doing what pleases God by enacting His Word
* God-pleasing faith ►God-pleasing work

* Divinely given certainty
* Uncertainty from self-chosen, self-devised service (Col 3:23)
* Luther’s emphasis on what God has instituted for us through his commandments
* Luther’s understanding of the Ten Commandments as a resource for doing God-pleasing work in the Large Catechism 311: ***Here, then, we have the Ten Commandments, a summary of divine teaching on what we are to do to make our whole life pleasing to God…Apart from these Ten Commandments no action or life can be good or pleasing to God, no matter how great or precious it may be in the eyes of the world.***
* Commanded works in which God rejoices together with his angels (LC 198)
* Note the recurrence of this theme of God-pleasing work in his exposition of the Decalogue: LC 16, 77, 92, 102, 113, 115, 117, 118, 125, 143, 151, 152, 217, 252, 290, 311, 328.
* Reasons for divine institution our works through His Word
* Heavenly mandate for earthly service in Eph 2:10: ***we are his workmanship (work of art), created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should/could walk in them***.
* Provision of good order for the reception and distribution of God’s blessings
* Instruction in God-pleasing work
* Certainty of God’s approval from obedience to His commands rather than my character or sanctity or motivation or expertise
* Confident commitment to work in one’s station and vocation: see Luther (AE, 374): ***You see consciences can never be certain without a Word that declares to us the will of God toward us. However, when conscience has in this way been strengthened through the Word and made sure that God approves a work of the kind that it has initiated at God’s command, then it dares anything.***
* Direction in what to seek and receive from God in prayer
* Empowerment by the Holy Spirit through the inspiring Word and faith in it
* Sanctification by the Word of God and prayer (1 Tim 4:5): see Luther on the Third Commandment LC 92-93: ***God’s Word is the treasure that makes everything holy. By it all the saints have themselves been made holy…Accordingly, I constantly repeat that all our life and work must be based on God’s Word if they are to be God-pleasing or holy***.
* Protection from spiritual attack: see Luther in EA 1:301: ***However when we walk along fortified by the command and promise of God, then the devil exerts himself in vain; for God strengthens and fortifies him with His command.***
* Certainty from work within our station and vocation: see 1 Cor 7:17-23: ***Only let each person walk in the way that the Lord has assigned him, and to which God has called him…For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God. Let each one remain in the calling in which he was called… So brothers, wherever each was called, let him remain there with God.***
* Stress on location: allotted place with its given way of life
* Foundation for Luther’s teaching on our station and vocation in three divinely instituted orders: family, church, society
* God’s commandments as His vocational guidance
* Three senses of vocation/calling
* Assigned place: location for work
* Assigned duties for work in that location
* Assigned work with God as member of his holy priesthood: general vocation of all Christians to love others and to pray for them
* Good conscience from limited responsibility in my station
* Care for my spouse
* Care for my children and grandchildren
* Care for my mother in law (parents)
* Care for my students (members)
* Care for people in my congregation
* Allotted joy and enjoyment from allotted work and leisure (Eccles 5:18-20; 9:9)
* Christ’s provision for ministry with a good conscience
* His institution of the pastoral office with clearly defined tasks
* Preaching and teaching God’s Word
* Catechizing and baptizing disciples
* Administering the Lord’s Supper
* Absolving penitent sinners
* Pastoral care for the sick and spiritually oppressed
* His provision of divine resources for ministry
* God’s Word
* The Holy Spirit and other heavenly gifts
* Prayer to the Father in the name of Jesus
* My call to the holy ministry and to the place for it: see the rite for ordination and the letter of call for God’s terms of service
* Advice in I Clement 41:1: ***Let each of you, brothers, please God in his own position with a good conscience, without going beyond his prescribed sphere of liturgical ministry.***
* How can we perform the divine service in a God-pleasing way?
* See Heb 12: 28: ***Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace/gratitude, by which we may serve God in a well-pleasing way with reverence and awe.***
* Bad conscience from the worship wars: pleasing ourselves rather than God
* Solution: reception of God’s grace through the means of grace
* Doing what has been divinely instituted
* Doing everything in the divine service with God’s Word: commands and promises
* Faithful enactment of God’s Word as the basis for a good conscience in the office of the ministry

1. **Conclusion**

* 1 Tim 4:16: ***Pay close attention to yourself and to what is taught (doctrine). Persevere in them, because if you do so, you will save yourself and your hearers.***
* Learning from your conscience to minister to the consciences of your people
* **The Windows** (George Herbert)

**Lord, how can man preach thy eternal Word?**

**He is a brittle, crazy glass;**

**Yet in thy temple thou dost him afford**

**This glorious and transcendent place,**

**To be a window, through thy grace.**

**But when thou dost anneal (burn) in glass thy story,**

**Making thy life shine within**

**Thy holy preachers; then the light and glory**

**More rev’rent grows, and more doth win,**

**Which else shows watrish, bleak and thin.**

**Doctrine and life, colors and light, in one**

**When they combine and mingle, bring**

**A strong regard and awe; but speech alone**

**Doth vanish like a flaring thing,**

**And in the ear, not conscience ring.**

**Recommended Further Reading**

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Wilfred M. McClay, “The Moral Economy of Guilt,” *First Things*, May 2011.

C. A. Pierce, *Conscience in the New Testament*, SCM: London, 1955.

Alfred M. Rehwinkel, *The Voice of Conscience*, Concordia: Saint Louis, 1956.

Randall C. Zachmann, *The Assurance of the Conscience: Conscience in the Theology of Martin Luther and John Calvin,* Fortress: Minneapolis, 1993.