

# The Gift & Curse of a Conscience

Great to see you all this morning. If you have a bible, turn with me to the book of **Romans, chapter 2**. I'll just **keep it real** with you guys: today, I have more content to give you than I have time to give it. So the *responsible* thing for me to do would've been to trim it all down. But instead, the thing *I* did, was keep it all *in*, and then vow to talk faster than normal. Because I was emotionally attached to all of it. So if you're good with it, we are just going to dive straight in.

Real quickly, if you weren't here **last week, we kicked off a series** in the Ten Commandments. And we started it *off* talking about **the recurring problem with humanity. Namely, that we have all decided to reject God's definition of right and wrong, and instead define right and wrong for ourselves**. (I don't have time to unpack all of that in detail, because that's what *last* week was.) But *this* week, I want to talk in depth about *where* we get our definitions of right and wrong *from*. In a *word*, I want to talk about our conscience. And specifically, **I want to try and show you that our consciences may not be nearly as objective as we think they are**.

And **for that, we're going to take a look** at Romans 2. What we're about to read is basically just a brief *aside*; it's a *detour* Paul takes en route to his main point in the chapter as a whole. But even though it's *brief*, I think it tells us *so much* about our innate sense of right and wrong as human beings—*about* our “conscience.” So take look with me, starting in v. 14:

**14 (Indeed, when Gentiles**—which *here*, is just shorthand for “people who don't know God—“Gentiles...”—**who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law.**  
**15 They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.)**

Okay, **Paul is observing** that *even* people who don't *know* God—who don't yet follow Jesus—still at least *sometimes* feel led to do the things God tells people to do. And, often feel *bad* about *doing* some of the things God says *not* to do. **For example, people who want nothing to do with God are still led to adopt, still led to give money away to people in need. Plenty of non-Christians feel guilty after being cruel and unloving towards others.** These people may not know or agree with the specifics of God's commands, but *still*, they possess an innate sense of right and wrong—they have a *conscience*. And that conscience at least sometimes lines up with *God's* perspective on right and wrong. And

Paul says that this gravitational pull on their minds and hearts is evidence that in some sense, the “law of God is written on everyone’s hearts.”→

This **also explains why** people who *claim* to have no explicit moral “code” will still say things like “well I did that because it seemed like the *right* thing to do.” *Logically* speaking, that’s odd—since, according to their own worldview, there technically *isn’t* any such thing as a “right thing to do.” But they functionally believe there is, at least at times. **To Paul, all of this is evidence that God exists, and that he has made all human beings in his image, with an essence of his nature imprinted on their minds and hearts.** The word that Paul uses for this idea in the passage is the word *conscience*.

So, with that established—this morning, I want us to walk through **several assumptions the bible makes** (here, and in *other* places) about our *consciences*, that I think have profound implications for how you and I think about morality. *First* assumption...

### **You have a conscience.**

The argument Paul makes **here in Romans 2** is simple. **All of us—both people who know God and people who don’t—we all have a conscience.** God hard-wired into every person this innate tendency to discern between right and wrong, acceptable actions and not-acceptable actions. **When you were little and realized that it was kind of fun to pick on other kids at school, but it also made you feel bad when you saw the hurt on their face, that was your conscience at work.** It’s why my seven year old feels bad and often confesses the worst thing he did that day when I get home from work.

This is an important part of how God made us. **Conscience is a gift that God has built into our very nature.** *Plants* don’t have consciences. **A few weeks ago we had our landscapers pull down some kudzu that had basically taken over an entire outside wall of our building. That kudzu did not feel bad about scaling our wall and potentially causing damage to our building. It did not feel emotionally rejected after we tore it down. A cactus doesn’t feel bad about injuring your hand when you touch it. Because it doesn’t have a conscience: it doesn’t have a perception of right and wrong. It doesn’t feel shame or empathy.** But you and I, as image bearers of God, *we do*.

We were made with an **onboard morality detector.** It doesn’t always *keep us* from doing what’s wrong, but it’s always there, functioning to some degree. **We as a society actually have a word for people who seem to have no conscience at all: we call them sociopaths.** Because we know that *normally*, human beings *have* functioning consciences. Your conscience doesn’t *determine* what is right and wrong, but it does serve as a warning system. Now, we may not use the word “conscience” to describe this. We might use

language like “what *seems* right to us.” Or “going with our gut.” Or something else along those lines. But what we’re referring to there is what the bible calls *conscience*. You *have* a conscience. *But*, second point...

## Your conscience is corrupted by sin.

So ~~although our conscience exists and functions to a certain degree, it is not at all an ultimately trustworthy source of determining right from wrong.~~ It’s broken by sin, which makes it heavily biased a lot of the time. We see this in places like **Jeremiah 17:9:**

*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?*

**Jeremiah says** that our “heart”—what we might call our gut or our conscience—is “desperately sick.” It’s *deceitful*. Sin has broken its ability to function like it should a lot of the time. So a metaphor might help: *our consciences are kind of like a malfunctioning smoke detector. Sometimes, it beeps when there’s smoke nearby. Other times, it beeps, but there’s no smoke. Other times, there is smoke, but it doesn’t beep.* That’s the effect that sin has on our conscience. It might lead you to believe that things that are *not* acceptable to God are totally fine, or even that things that *are* acceptable to God are *wrong*.

**On a more experiential level:** this is why sometimes we do things in life that genuinely *seem* like the best thing to do, and then years *later*, look back and go “why in the world did I think that was the right thing to do? Why in the world did I think that was a good decision?” What we’re experiencing there is a *consequence* of what Jeremiah says: “the heart is deceitful and desperately sick...who can understand it?” The Bible says that our hearts, our gut, our moral instincts are *sick*. Doesn’t mean they’re always wrong, but it does mean that they aren’t trustworthy as an *ultimate source of authority* on how to live.

The bible even **says elsewhere that our consciences can be seared.**<sup>1</sup> That we can develop a complete *disconnect* from right and wrong in certain arenas of life. *Our smoke detector can actually stop working altogether in certain respects.* Which is why certain people can say or think things like, “I know that God says this is wrong, but I don’t *feel* conviction over it, so it must not be wrong.” That’s the outworking of a conscience that has been *seared* by sin. It doesn’t mean *God* is wrong; it means our *consciences* are *broken*.

*But*, **sin isn’t the only thing** that impacts your conscience. Additionally...

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<sup>1</sup> See 1 Timothy 4:1-2

## Your conscience is *shaped* by your culture.

This is the assumption that leads Paul to say things like “do not be conformed to the pattern of this world...”<sup>2</sup> He says that because he knows the *tendency is for our conscience to be shaped by the world around us—by our culture*. I want us to spend a good bit of time on this one, because I think it’s really important, and I think it tends to get overlooked. Our consciences, as they stand, have been *informed*, and *formed*, and *shaped* by the society that we live in. And quite often, we do not even realize the *extent* to which this has happened to us. We just *assume* that the way we think is *normal*; that we came up with it on our own. But listen: every culture has blindspots that tend to go unnoticed by the people living within it. Different people in the *world* think very differently than us, simply because they were born at a different place, or in a different time and place, than we were.

This phenomenon—the power of a particular culture to shape people’s consciences—is actually *easiest to see in the most negative extreme situations*. Think about a few examples with me. Somehow, an awful *lot* of people, less than a century ago in Nazi Germany, felt like the *right* thing to do was to *exterminate* entire ethnicities of people. And somehow, they *reconciled* this evil with their conscience. It wasn’t that people back then were going around going “we know this is pure evil, but we’re going to do it anyway.” No—they somehow convinced themselves in their mind, and in their *gut*, that this was the *right* decision for them to make.

Going a little *further back in history*, people in the *U.S.* came to the conclusion that it was *right* to *displace* an entire Native American population, and then later, that it was reasonable to kidnap millions of Africans, bring *them* here, and forcefully *enslave* them once they were here. They *rationalized* those decisions with their conscience. Going back a little *further*, many cultures convinced themselves that it was *correct* to offer their newborn babies on altars to foreign gods as living sacrifices to gain a better life. Their *conscience* led them to believe that was *good* to do. There are *multitudes* of examples out there where entire segments of society did *horrific* things, because they were convinced that was the *right* thing to do.

Now, as I said, these are *obviously negative, extreme* examples. *But if you are thinking critically*, they *should* be a little bit terrifying to you. Because if you hear those examples and you think to yourself, “man—everybody who lived *before* us was really evil and stupid and unenlightened; I sure am glad we’re not like that and have no cultural blindspots whatsoever,” you are *entirely* missing the point. **The point isn’t that a few specific cultures throughout history have had cultural blindspots. The point is that every**

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<sup>2</sup> See Romans 12:2

**culture has cultural blindspots.** *Including* our own, present culture. **A lot of why you think, what you think is because our society has trained you to think those things.**

So, **question:** how many of you would say **your grandparents,** generally speaking, are wonderful, *delightful* people. But *still,* they hold a belief or two that you find really embarrassing, outdated, and wrong. Maybe even *unacceptably* wrong. Okay—do you not think that your grandkids will think the same exact thing about you? Or do you think you are finally the generation that has finally *arrived*? You are the generation that finally got it all right—no improvement needed from here on out? Do you see what I’m getting at?

**We should be very concerned** about what cultural blindspots we might have *now,* that people outside of our immediate cultural context will not share. One day, *they* will also look at *us* and go “how did *you* guys go *along* with this?” “How did you guys just assume this was okay?” **In the same way that you and I would go up to a slave-owner two hundred years ago and say, “how in the world are you okay with this?”** Future generations will, I guarantee you, think similar things about you and I. **Because our “gut” (our conscience) is not neutral.** It doesn’t exist in a vacuum. It has been informed and formed and shaped by the time and the place that we live. **The gift of having a conscience is that we have an onboard sense of right and wrong. The curse of having a conscience is that we tend to believe our conscience is always right.** And that may not be the case at all.

So, **what I want to do next** is try and give you some specifics. I want to try and *show you* some specific ways that your **conscience may not be as developed** as it needs to be. But in order to *do* that, I need to bombard you with some concepts from the world of ethics and moral psychology. **So full disclosure: what we’re going to cover for the next little bit is not directly out of the bible.** It’s not authoritative in the way that most of the stuff we talk about from the *bible* is. But I personally have found it incredibly *helpful* for analyzing why I believe some of the things I do, and how some of that could be creating *barriers* in my mind to things the Scriptures teach. So again: not from the bible, so feel free to take it or leave it—but I think you might find it helpful as well. Make sense?

Okay. So there’s **a professor and moral psychologist** named **Jonathan Haidt.** He has devoted his professional life to studying how different cultures around the world develop their sense of *morality*—or, we might say, their *conscience*. And particularly, he has spent time *studying* how different *cultures* think about morality in very different ways from one another. He wrote a book several years back called *The Righteous Mind.* / And *in* that book, based on decades of research, he lays out what he considers to be five primary *categories* for how human beings think about right and wrong. *Moral* categories, in other words.

It might help to **think of these sort of like *taste buds***.<sup>3</sup> Our *taste buds* help us experience food, and decide what things we like and don't like. But not everyone's taste buds are the same. Certain people think some things are delicious, that other people think are disgusting, and vice versa. I know of no other explanation for how a restaurant like Stock & Barrel, and a restaurant like Subway right next to it, can both stay in business. People's taste buds are *different* from each other.

So **these categories I'm about to list out** are like *taste buds*, but for your sense of *morality*. They are different ways we evaluate the world around us, and then come to conclusions about what is right and what is wrong, and how to live, as a result. But what's interesting is that **every society has certain "taste buds" they are strong in, and others they're not as strong in**. Some things that *you and I* think about morality, aren't *shared* by other people on the other side of the world, and vice versa. So for the next little while, I am going to paint with some fairly "broad brushes"—I'm going to speak in *generalities*, and I hope you'll give me some leeway there. But these are what Haidt calls the five "moral foundations"—ways human beings across history and around the world think about right and wrong. The *first* category is what we might call...

## Care/Harm

This is **when we know something is *right*** because it properly *cares* for other people, and we know something is *wrong* because it disproportionately *harms* other people. Something is *wrong*, in other words, if it *hurts* someone else; if it creates a *victim*. The *virtues* in this category are things like kindness, empathy, and compassion. And the greatest *wrongs* in this category are things like *cruelty*, *harshness*, or *insensitivity*. If person A does something that *cares* for person B, we tend to think person A is *right*. If they do something that *harms* person B, we tend to think they're *wrong*.  
Make sense?

Okay. So, question for us: **would you say that American** society, as a whole, tends to feel strongly about the "care/harm" category of morality? Is this tastebud functioning *well* in our culture as a whole? // I would say yes, it is. I would say we're very *strong* in this category. We're very concerned about *cares* for other people and not *harming* other people. This is definitely a *priority* for us. Okay? Here's the *second* moral category:

## Fairness/Cheating

So using *this* moral "taste bud," we tend to think **something is *wrong* if someone isn't being treated *fairly*** by it. So this is where we get ideas like *equality* and *justice* and

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<sup>3</sup> This is actually a metaphor borrowed directly from Haidt's book.

“rights.” The greatest *sins* here are things like *cheating* or *oppression* or *injustice*. From racial and ethnic groups insisting on being treated equitably, to a kid taking a toy from another kid, to why you want to beat up the vending machine that stole your dollar—this category is where all of that comes from: the framework of *fairness*. We think things *should be fair*.

So **same question here:** would you say that the average American cares about things like *equality* and *justice* and *rights*? I would say again, yes, we do. *Now we don't always see eye-to-eye on whether that means equal outcomes or equal opportunities*, but overall, the idea of fairness and equality is very much woven into our collective *conscience*: we believe that people should be treated *fairly*. Okay, *third* category is that of...

### Authority/Subversion

This is **when something is wrong because** it goes *against* or *subverts* legitimate authority. So *respect* for *authority*—whether it be a parent, a boss, a government, or something else—in this framework, is considered *important*. The belief is that there should be some amount of *deference* to those *above* you or *older* than you, simply because of their position. And to dishonor, disrespect, or *disobey* those people is often seen as morally *wrong* to do.

So some **friends of mine once visited an Asian-American church**. And while they were there, they started noticing that in every single member's home they went in, *nobody* had a TV. And the members of this church were relatively wealthy people. TVs nowhere to be found. And they eventually asked, “hey—why don't y'all have TVs in your houses?” And the *answer* was—I kid you not—“well our pastor told us *he* doesn't have a TV, and the bible says we should follow the example of our pastor,<sup>4</sup> so we decided not to have a TV either.” Excuse me—what?

I would imagine that **to a lot of us**, that feels *overly* deferential to authority. But that's because *most* of *us* in the room have probably been more *formed* by Western thinking than we have by Eastern thinking, where they put a much higher emphasis on authority than we do. *Now*, another determining factor in whether or not you think this way is probably your *age*. In general, even people here in the States who are, say, 50 years old and *above*, tend to place a *higher* emphasis on authority than *younger* people do. But on the *whole*, our society is probably not quite as dialed into *this* category of morality as we are to the first two. Here's the *fourth* category. It's what we might call...

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<sup>4</sup> See Hebrews 13:7

## Loyalty/Betrayal

So this is where **we perceive something to be wrong** if it is *disloyal* to a person or a **group that you are in relationship with**. The *assumption* is that if you belong to a group or a relationship, you should *do* things that *benefit* that group or relationship, and *not* do things that *betray* that group or relationship. The greatest *sins* here are to be a “traitor” or be “disloyal.”

This one also is especially strong in more *collectivist* societies, in other parts of the world. Here in America, probably not as much. **Now certain subgroups** of our society probably value this more. I would say that communities made up of people of *color* do often value this category more than primarily *white* communities do. People who are a part of the *military* also tend to place a high value on loyalty. But *overall*, at a *societal* level, I would not say *this* category is as strong in our minds. *Maybe* I'd even put it this way: a person from a truly *collectivist* society, that *does* value loyalty and betrayal highly, would tell most Americans that *we* do *not* value this category very highly.

**In fact, I would argue that** in some ways, *we* effectively *devalue* loyalty to a group that we're a part of, because we teach people that the most important thing in life is *you*. *You need to chart your own course, be yourself, and become the best version of you*. And if a group you're a part of is keeping you from doing that, we functionally believe you actually have a moral *obligation* to *reject* that group, *abandon* that group, and chart your *own* course instead. *If you pay attention, that is the narrative underneath a lot of our movies in America; it's certainly the plot of most Disney movies. From us telling Moana she has to leave the island to go in search for “who you arrrrr” to Ariel wanting to leave the ocean behind to be “where the people are” to Kung Fu Panda leaving behind the family noodle shop in search of kung fu glory. We could go on and on. But the reason those plots are compelling to us as Americans is because we don't tend to value loyalty very highly. If we did, we'd be bothered by those plots, instead of inspired by them. The majority of Americans tend not to* place a high value on *loyalty* to a people or a group. We're not especially *strong* in this category.

And then *lastly*, the final category, is what we might describe as...

## Sanctity/Degradation

In this category, **some things are wrong because they're degrading** to participate in. **The belief is that there are certain things that are meant to be holy, elevated, special, or set apart**. And *therefore*, some things are wrong simply because they degrade, contaminate, corrupt or treat those things as *common*. *Think of a Muslim not allowing a copy of the Qur'an to touch the ground or other common surfaces*. The belief at play



there is that there is something special, *holy* about the Qur'an, that shouldn't be degraded by having it touch common ground. But I'll just go ahead and tell you: **this moral category is probably the most *foreign* one to us as modern Americans.** We don't tend to think in this framework very often.

But we do have **some faint echoes of it**, even if we don't fully *realize* that's what we're feeling. So in Jonathan Haidt's book that I mentioned earlier, he details a psychological experiment that he and a team of researchers once conducted. They gave each subject in the experiment a hypothetical scenario to consider. The *scenario* was as follows: *an adult-aged brother and sister decide that they want to sleep with each other. They both consent to it, they both enjoy it, and they use multiple forms of birth control to ensure that no pregnancy results from it. They also only do it once, and they agree not to tell anyone about it.* That was the *scenario*.

The **researchers then asked** every subject in the experiment a question: they asked, *was what this brother and sister did, morally wrong?* And **every participant** in the story, without exception, immediately answered the same way: *yes, without a doubt, what they did was wrong.* But when asked *why* it was wrong, most of them struggled to articulate a *reason*. "Well it could lead to birth defects if they get pregnant." *But there's no chance of them getting pregnant.* "Well it's exploitative." *No, they both wanted to participate in it and they both enjoyed it. And they're both adults.* "Well incest is just wrong." *Okay sure—but why is it wrong?* "Well...it just is."<sup>5</sup>

Okay, **that statement: "it just is wrong," is the lost remnant** of a sanctity/degradation framework speaking. It's "the law written on our hearts." The fact of the matter is that there is something unique, something *different* about a familial relationship from other types of relationships. And there's something about *sex*, in *that* context, that *contaminates, corrupts* that relationship. And even though we can't articulate a concrete logical *reason* for *why* it's wrong, pretty much everyone agrees that it *is* wrong. We have an almost *visceral* response to the situation. That's because we do still have a *sense*, even if it's distant and unfamiliar, of this moral framework. It's because we do still believe in sanctity and degradation, at least a *little* bit. Does that make sense?

Okay. So let me **give you a much more real-life example.** *Constantly*, we will have engaged couples that we do premarital counseling for here at City Church. And it will become obvious during the counseling that they are sleeping together *prior* to getting married. And every time, we start at the same place with them: we ask if they *know* what the bible teaches about sex and specifically, that sex is reserved for the context of

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<sup>5</sup> This experiment is detailed in p. 44-47 of the Kindle edition of the book.

marriage. And almost always, their response will be to say something like “yes, we *do* know. *But* we both *want* to sleep together, and it’s not *hurting* anybody, so how can it be wrong?” And within an exclusively Western, individualistic moral framework, that’s a very understandable question to ask.

**But do you hear the words *used* there? Those are the words of someone who believes that “fairness/cheating” and “care/harm” are the only categories there are for determining morality.** “If we both *want* it” (fairness/cheating), and “it’s not hurting anybody” (care/harm), “...it can’t be wrong.” *But*, what if there are *more* categories than that? What if in this situation, sex is actually the thing that is supposed to be unique and special and holy? And what if in *this* scenario, taking sex *outside* of its intended context, and treating it as if it is *common* and *mundane*, is actually morally *wrong* to do? What if by engaging in sex *outside* of a marriage context, you are actually *degrading*, and treating as *ordinary*, what *God* meant to be *special* and *unique*?<sup>6</sup> I think it’s a question very worth asking.

Now, I would imagine that **with the last *three categories*** I mentioned—the ones that aren’t as common here in the States—many of us would say that the reason we don’t ascribe to *those* is because they’re potentially “dangerous.” It’s *dangerous* to think that submitting to authority is always right. It’s *dangerous* to elevate loyalty to a person or group above all else. It’s *dangerous* to think that certain things are morally “contaminating” because it could lead to unnecessary shame. And here’s the thing: you’re *right*. *All* of these moral categories, *on their own*—including the ones *we do* believe in—are *incomplete*. **The point isn’t that we need to exclusively, *always* believe in *any one category*. The point is that we need *all* of them to build out a full, robust understanding of morality.** The point is simply that there is more to morality than just “harm” and “fairness.” **And if we don’t acknowledge that, we end up with a very *anemic*, incomplete understanding of right and wrong.** Does that make sense?

Okay. So with that, **our mini-session on moral psychology is officially over.** Thanks for hanging in there. But **here’s the reason** I take you *through* all of that. Because in two weeks, we are going to begin working our way, one-by-one, through the Ten Commandments. And chances *are*, as we work through them, *some* of the commands are going to make a lot of logical, rational sense to us. **We’re going to hear commands like “do not murder,” and we’re going to think, “yes. I agree. I would very much like to not be murdered. And I think it is *harmful* to murder others. So I’m on board with the command ‘do *not* murder.’” We’re going to hear commands like “do not *steal*,” and we’re going to think “I *also* agree with that. It’s unfair and unjust to others to steal, so we**

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<sup>6</sup> This seems to be much of the moral reasoning at work in Hebrews 13:4

shouldn't steal. Good thinking, God. I *like* that rule too." In other words, we're probably going to agree with the commands that appeal to the moral taste buds we already have—the ones we're strongest in already.

But **then we're going to arrive at other commands.** Commands like "honor your father and mother." Like "honor the Sabbath and keep it holy." Like "do not use the name of God in vain." And we're going to think to ourselves, "well, I don't know about *that*." Bare minimum, we're not going to feel like *those* commands are nearly as *important* as some of the others to follow. And *sometimes*, we might even think that those commands are *unnecessary*, or potentially even *harmful*, to obey. But *listen*: **that's because those commands are assuming additional moral frameworks that we may or may not yet possess.** That we may *not* be strong in. That our society has *not* taught us to value—or even sometimes, taught us to *devalue*.

**So in those moments:** we have a decision to make. We could assume that God's definition of morality is *wrong*; that it's *misguided*, and our own is *better*. That's one option. **Or, we could ask if maybe God has a more developed sense of morality than we currently do.** We could ask if maybe he has a more *complete* understanding of right and wrong than our modern, Western society does. I would argue *that's* the far more *healthy* response to take. Certainly as a follower of Jesus, but even just as a human being. I would argue that it reeks a bit of *arrogance* when we operate as if we already know everything there is to know about the world. As if we already *understand* everything there is to *understand*. And I would argue it sounds a lot like *humility* when we are willing to keep our mind open to new ways of thinking about the world. And just as a reminder: for a follower of Jesus, humility is actually a requirement.<sup>7</sup>

So **all this leads us our final point—in**arguably the most important—which is this...

## The Spirit Realigns Your Conscience with God

Part of **the role of the Holy Spirit** in the life of a follower of Jesus is this: to continually align and realign our *conscience* with what is true. To convict us of the various ways we think that are *out* of alignment with the kingdom of God,<sup>8</sup> that are at *odds* with *his* definition of right and wrong, and *realign* us with him. Look at how Jesus puts this in **John 16**, starting in **v. 12**. This is *Jesus* speaking. He says:

*I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth.*<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See James 4:6

<sup>8</sup> John 16:8

<sup>9</sup> John 16:12-13a

The Holy Spirit *aligns* our conscience with God. **With the truth.** As we follow him. **Ultimately, it's not just that we need to get a little *better* at some particular moral categories—ultimately, that's not the point. Ultimately, the point is that we need the Spirit of God residing within us, to guide us.** And *that* is precisely **what Jesus died to make possible.** In that same chapter of John 16, Jesus tells the disciples that it's actually *good* for them that he goes away, i.e. to die.<sup>10</sup> Because once that *happens*, he says, they will not need him to *teach* them and answer all their questions; they will have the Holy Spirit residing in them to do that at all times.<sup>11</sup>

That's **one of many things** that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus made possible for us: the ability to have the very Spirit of God residing within us. Who can continually realign our conscience, more in more, to be like his. Not just to make us *agree* with God's definition of morality, but to help us *want* the things that God wants, *desire* the things God desires, and *become* the things God wants us to become. All of that is made possible by the good news of Jesus, dying on the cross, rising again from the grave.

**Which is why every week,** as a community, we go to the tables throughout this room and remember that. We commemorate the full, unhindered access we have to God's Spirit, made possible through Jesus' death on the cross. We remember his body, his blood—and we remember that because of that, we've been given a *new heart* and a *new mind* that is being renewed daily in the image of our Creator.<sup>12</sup> So if you're a follower of Jesus, or if you want to *become* a follower of Jesus, you're invited to participate with us as we respond.

Let's pray.

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<sup>10</sup> See v. 7

<sup>11</sup> See v. 23

<sup>12</sup> Colossians 3:10