

Conscience,  
Morality  
and Spirituality  
001 and 002

A businessman and prominent member of his church unexpectedly knocked at his pastor's front door. The anguished look on the visitor's face told the Pastor immediately that something was very wrong. He invited him in. They sat on the sofa together, and for two hours, often in tears, this respected businessman explained that his business largely depends on the production and sale of pornographic magazines. He told how over the years of seeing young women and children exploited he had agonized over whether to continue in his work. The look in the eyes of a child in one particular photo had seared into his heart and now haunted his conscience.

But, said the man, he could not now leave his job. There were no other employment options open to him in the current economy. The security of his family and future required him to continue in this work in which he had established position, seniority, and a pension. What did he want from the pastor? The man wanted him to assure him that, if he increased his giving to twenty percent of his income to the church, his occupation would be okay with God. In effect he was saying, “It is both in my best interest and in God’s best interest that I keep this job; the Church needs the money just as much as I need this job.”

- Paul referred to “conscience” (*syneidēsis*) more often than did any other New Testament writer.
- Conscience is the capacity to evaluate acts or intentions as either right or wrong.
- Paul believed that all people have a conscience, and his description of its function is briefly stated in Romans 2:15.
- Because it serves as a moral mechanism, Paul usually advised people to live in light of the dictates of their conscience, even if the issue in question was addressed by the revelation of God.

- For example, when the Corinthians debated the question of whether it was right or wrong to buy meat that had been part of an idol sacrifice, Paul told people that to eat or not to eat this meat was a matter of moral indifference (1 Cor. 8:8).
- Unlike the prohibitions concerning certain foods under the old covenant (e.g., Deut. 14:3–21), nothing that God created was to be regarded as unclean in the era of the new covenant (1 Cor. 10:25–26; Rom. 14:14).
- But Paul recognized that the conscience is formed by a variety of factors and complex associations.

- Matters of conscience are not just intellectually based but have emotional roots that may slow the process of change in individual thinking and behavior.
- So he advised people to act according to their conscience (Rom. 14:5).
- He also warned individuals not to do anything that might cause another person to act in a way contrary to his or her conscience, either by example (1 Cor. 8:10) or argumentation (Rom. 14:1, 22).

Zuck, R. B. (1994; Published in electronic form by Logos Research Systems, 1996). A Biblical Theology of the New Testament (electronic ed.) (265). Chicago: Moody Press.

*8:1 With regard to food sacrificed to idols, we know that “we all have knowledge.” Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. 8:2 If someone thinks he knows something, he does not yet know to the degree that he needs to know. 8:3 But if someone loves God, he is known by God.*

*8:4 With regard then to eating food sacrificed to idols, we know that “an idol in this world is nothing,” and that “there is no God but one.” 8:5 If after all there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), 8:6 yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we live, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we live. 8:7 But this knowledge is not shared by all. And some, by being accustomed to idols in former times, eat this food as an idol sacrifice, and their conscience, because it is weak, is defiled.*

*8:8 Now food will not bring us close to God. We are no worse if we do not eat and no better if we do. 8:9 But be careful that this liberty of yours does not become a hindrance to the weak. 8:10 For if someone weak sees you who possess knowledge dining in an idol's temple, will not his conscience be "strengthened" to eat food offered to idols?*

*8:11 So by your knowledge the weak brother or sister, for whom Christ died, is destroyed. 8:12 If you sin against your brothers or sisters in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. 8:13 For this reason, if food causes my brother or sister to sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I may not cause one of them to sin.*

- So, let's look at the importance of Conscience.
- We will examine it from several aspects:
- Of what is Conscience composed?
- Is the Conscience of the Believer different from the Conscience of the Unbeliever?
- Of what import is Conscience to the Unbeliever?
- Of what import is it to the Believer?
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- Let's begin with an exegetical study of Romans 2:14-16

*For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness, and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending themselves, on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Jesus Christ. (Rom. 2:14-16 NASB)*

- "For", or "When" is *hotan*. Paul is supposing a case which may occur at any time.
- There is no article before "Gentiles." The supposed case occurs among the Gentiles. It is, Gentiles as such.
- Denney says, "There is, indeed, when we look closely, no such thing as a man absolutely without the knowledge of God's will, and therefore such a judgment as the apostle has described is legitimate. Gentiles, 'such as have not law,' in any special shape, when they do by nature the things required by the law given to Israel, the only one known to the apostle—are in spite of not having law (as is a supposition here) a law to themselves." (Wuest)

14. NIV makes a parenthesis of vv. 14–15, and many others as well hold that these verses are an aside. But it seems better to take them as a continuation of the argument. The word “for” (which NIV renders *Indeed* and JB “For instance”) ties the following words into the argument. Paul has just shown that for the Jew it is not a matter of hearing the law but of doing it. What then of the Gentiles who do not have the law? Paul proceeds to show that they know enough about what is right for them to be judged by the same general principle, if not the same precise law. (Pillar)

*When* is more exactly “whenever”. Gentiles do not always do what is right, but sometimes they do. *Gentiles* really brings us to one of Paul’s deep interests. As we saw in 1:5 (where see note), he uses the term in one third of all its New Testament occurrences, and he uses it especially often in Romans times). The word is always plural in Paul (except in two quotations from LXX, both in 10:19), and most frequently it has the article, but here it lacks it. As he is thus departing from his custom of seeing the Gentiles as a definite group, we must take this as significant. It is not the Gentiles as a whole that Paul has in mind here, but people who have the quality of being Gentiles. (Pillar)

- Hodge denies that the form without the article means here “some Gentiles”.
- It includes them all, for “Men generally, not some men, but all men, show by their acts that they have a knowledge of right and wrong.”
- We should probably deduce this also from the absence of the article with *law*.
- While the reference is to the law of Moses, it is its quality as law, and not this particular law as distinct from all other law, on which the emphasis falls. (Pillar)

- Doing *by nature things required by the law* refers to those occasions when a Gentile does something that is also prescribed in the law.
- Thus he may honor his parents or refrain from stealing.
- He does these things *by nature* (i.e., “by native instinct or propension, by spontaneous impulse as distinguished from what is induced by forces extraneous to ourselves”, Murray), not because he is trying to obey the divinely given law.
- He cannot.
- He does not know it.
- Many commentators point out that this is not unlike “the unwritten law” mentioned by many pagan authors.

- They think of something within people that points them to the right way, though it is not embodied in written statutes, and often see that something as more important than any written code.
- Paul's point is that the Gentile knows enough to know that this is the kind of thing he ought to do.
- He is not consciously fulfilling the law, but nevertheless he is keeping some of the law's provisions (some only, for his thoughts still "accuse" him, v. 15).
- Paul does not say that he has a law of his own; in fact, twice he says that he does not have a law.
- He says that he *is* a law in himself, or perhaps for himself or to himself.

- As Barrett puts it, “The fact is that the Gentile is not really outside the sphere of law, though he is of course outside the sphere of the law of Moses.”
- We see the sort of thing Paul has in mind in the words of Peter in the house of Cornelius, “God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right” (Acts 10:34–35).
- The Gentile does not have the law revealed in the Old Testament, but his conduct shows that he knows right from wrong.

- God is at work in him.
- He knows enough of “law” to be guilty when he sins, even though he may not know the God who prescribes right conduct, or even that there is a God who prescribes it.
- Manson comments, “If they are loyal to the good they know, they will be acceptable to God; but it is a very big ‘if’.”

- Verse 15. *Since* ties the words that follow to the preceding, and *show* points to a continuing reality.
- The expression translated *the requirements of the law* is more exactly “the work of the law” (KJV), an unusual expression found here only in the New Testament (though the plural, “works of law”, occurs in 3:20, 28; Gal. 2:16 [*ter*]; 3:2, 5, 10, and the reverse, “law of works”, in 3:27).
- NIV gives the sense of it.
- The singular “work” may hint at the unity of the law—it is not a haphazard series of unrelated regulations; but perhaps this is reading too much into it.
- Though they are not trying to obey God’s revealed law, Gentiles at times do the thing the law requires. And this, Paul says, is *written on their hearts* (cf. Jer. 31:33; 2 Cor. 3:3).

- There seems to be a mixture of two constructions here; Paul is saying two things at once: these people manifest the work of the law (they do what the law requires), and second they show that what the law requires is written on their hearts (they act out of a deep-seated conviction that such-and-such things are right).
- He is not saying that the law is written on their hearts, as people often say, but that “the work of the law”, what the law requires of people, is written there.
- Theodoret pointed to Joseph’s brothers and to Abimelech (Gen. 20:4–5) as people who gave evidence of knowing right and wrong and who lived long before the giving of the law by Moses.

- “Which” is *hoitines*, a double relative which shows class or kind.
- Translate, “which are of such a class” as to etc. Denney translates, “inasmuch as they show.”
- “The work of the law,” “is the work which the law prescribes” (Denney). [As opposed to the Jewish Law of Moses]
- “Excusing” is *apologeomai*, “to speak in one’s own defense.”
- Denney’s note is helpful, “ ‘Written on their hearts,’ when contrasted with the law written on the tables of stone, is equal to ‘unwritten’; the apostle refers to what the Greeks called *agraphos nomos* (ἀγραφος νομος) (unwritten law). (Wuest)

- To the Greeks however, this was something greater and more sacred than any statute, or civil constitution; to the apostle it was less than the great revelation of God's will, which had been made and interpreted to Israel, but nevertheless a true moral authority.
- There is triple proof that Gentiles, who are regarded as not having law, are a law to themselves. (Wuest)

- (1) The appeal to their conduct, as interpreted by the apostle, their conduct evinces at least in some, the possession of a law written on the heart;
- (2) the action of conscience: it joins its testimony, though it be only an inward one to the outward testimony borne by their conduct; and
- (3) their thoughts. Their thoughts bear witness to the existence of a law in them, inasmuch as in their mutual intercourse these thoughts are busy bringing accusations, or in rarer cases putting forward defences, i.e., in any case, exercising moral functions which imply the recognition of a law.” (Wuest)

- *Their consciences also bearing witness* (cf. 9:1).  
Conscience is not an Old Testament concept; it is one of the few Pauline concepts that are Greek rather than Jewish (though Leenhardt does not agree; he says, “the Pauline conscience is a ripe fruit of the Israelite ethic”).
- The word translated “consciencences” can have any one of a number of meanings.
- It sometimes refers to consciousness, as in “consciousness of sin” (Heb. 10:2, see RSV).
- Or it can denote moral consciousness or conscience.
- Sometimes it means “conscientiousness”, but this does not seem to occur in the New Testament (it is found in the late papyri; see BAGD).
- Here the meaning is “conscience”, but this must be properly understood. (Pillar)

- V. P. Furnish notes the opinion of M. Enslin that the term always looks back on completed acts, and that of W. D. Davies that it sometimes has a future reference.
- He himself thinks that Paul “never establishes conscience as a firm principle or guide for moral action.
- Its chief function is to *evaluate* actions (e.g. Rom. 2:15; I Cor. 8:7ff.; 10:25ff.) or persons (e.g. Rom. 9:1; II Cor. 4:2; 5:11), not to identify and define ‘the good’ or ‘God’s will’ either abstractly or concretely.
- Conscience has a strictly limited and provisional place in the Christian’s life.”

- This should be pondered in an age like ours when the conscience of the individual is often elevated to the supreme place and almost any course of action becomes permissible on the grounds that it does not offend one's conscience.
- No one, of course, argues that conscience may be ignored.
- If a prospective course of action troubles one's conscience, then it should not be pursued.
- But if we are looking for the proper line of conduct, we should notice that in the Bible it is the revelation God has made that is to be our guide, not any subjective process.
- A conscience may be oversensitive (1 Cor. 10:25) or not sensitive enough (1 Tim. 4:2); it pronounces on other people's activities (2 Cor. 4:2; 5:11) as well as one's own (2 Cor. 1:12).

- Both form evidence that the Gentile has no excuse when he does wrong. And Paul proceeds to a third witness.

There is a problem, for some hold that we should understand the apostle to refer to “conflicting thoughts” (RSV), a process that takes place within the individual, others that we should see the meaning as, “their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another” (KJV), a process involving other people.

The context favors RSV, for Paul is not speaking of the way we regard or should regard our neighbor; he is speaking of the way a person’s thoughts back up the witness of his better actions and his conscience in pointing to what is right.

- It does this whether these thoughts accuse or excuse him. Leenhardt comments, “This dialogue which man conducts with himself, this debate in which he is in turn the accuser and the defender of himself, shows that, for the appreciation of his conduct, he has at his disposition some objective term of reference, something in fact which God has ingrained in his heart and to which his conscience brings a subjective confirmation”.
- The verbs Paul uses, *accusing* and *defending*, are both legal terms, used for bringing charges in court and for offering a defence in court.

- Paul is fond of imagery from the law courts, though here this cannot be pressed.
- He is simply pointing out that those who have no law nevertheless have convictions about what they do.
- Their thoughts about their actions sometimes take the form of severe accusation and sometimes of acquittal.
- The Gentile, though he lacks the divinely given law that was so important for the Jew, is not without guidance: “there are criteria for a person which he himself has not set” (Käsemann, p. 66).
- His upright actions show that deep down in his heart there is that which points to the right.

- His conscience bears witness to him of his past acts. And there are his conflicting thoughts.
- Often they accuse him, sometimes they excuse him, but all the time they form a witness to right and wrong.
- This threefold witness shows quite clearly that the Gentile has all he needs to guide him along the right way and to leave him without excuse when he does the wrong.
- He cannot say: “I did not have the law, and therefore I did not know what was right.”

- Verse 16. *The day* is the Day of Judgment.
- Paul does not use this name, but he describes the day with reference to its function.
- Most interpreters connect this rather closely with verse 13 and take verses 14–15 as a parenthesis (as NIV does); KJV makes the parenthesis verses 13–15.
- O'Neill removes verses 14–15 as a marginal gloss.
- Moffatt puts verse 16 before verse 14, as does Barclay.
- As one can see, there is a good deal of confusion among expositors.
- At the same time there is a tendency to overlook the fact that we must not always expect perfect connections in a lengthy piece of dictated matter.

- Perhaps we would have expressed it otherwise, but the connection is there.
- Parry, for example, regards verses 14–15 as “strictly necessary to the argument”, and Black can say, “there is no justification for detaching the clause from its present place” (he rejects Moffatt’s suggestion).
- The connection between verses 15 and 16 is in fact quite a good one.
- Whatever their conscience may do in the meantime, it will certainly be a witness against sinners on Judgment Day.
- The strong eschatological note runs through the whole section.

- The connection of judgment with the gospel should not be overlooked.
- We are apt to set the two in opposition to one another and to think that the one excludes the other.
- But the gospel does not preclude the thought of judgment.
- Indeed, it demands it.
- Unless judgment is a stern reality, there is nothing from which sinners need to be saved and accordingly no “good news”, no gospel.
- Paul speaks here of *my* gospel (as in 16:25).
- He has appropriated it and made it his own.
- He does not mean that he thought it up or that it belongs to him in any special way or that there is some peculiarity in the way he sets it forth.

- He means that he knows it really and not theoretically. He espouses it wholeheartedly and not formally.
- To preach the gospel effectually it is necessary to make it one's own.
- It is God who will judge.
- The verb may be a present (as RSV) or a future (as NIV), but the meaning will be the same.
- Paul is not speaking of judgment as a present activity but of the judgment that will take place at the end of the age; if his verb is present, that is for greater vividness.
- *Men's secrets* reminds us of the searching nature of that judgment.
- Nothing can be kept hidden on that day.
- It is this that makes it so serious.

- We may present a respectable front to the world so that people do not know about the things of which we are ashamed.
- If those things could remain hidden we would fare so much better in any judgment.
- But they cannot remain hidden at the end.
- God will judge all things, hidden from men or not.
- This judgment will be done *through Jesus Christ* (cf. John 5:27; Acts 17:31).
- This is the distinctive Christian teaching about judgment.
- The Jews taught that in the end God alone would judge the world; he would commit judgment to no one, not even the Messiah.

- When the Christians taught that God would judge through Jesus the Messiah, they were introducing a new teaching (cf. John 5:22).
- In one sense it mitigates the judgment.
- Our Judge will be the one who died for us, so we could not look for anyone more predisposed in our favor.
- All that can be done for sinners he will certainly do.
- But this adds a note of solemnity to the judgment.
- Since he has done so much for us, we cannot expect to get by with a shabby attainment, a half-hearted attitude to the duties we have shirked.

- Vincent says of the expression, “my gospel,” “as distinguished from false teaching. Paul’s assurance of the truth of the gospel is shown in his confident assertion that it will form the standard of judgment in the great day.”

*Translation. For whenever Gentiles which have no law do habitually by nature the things of the law, these having no law are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing joint-witness and their reasonings in the meanwhile accusing or also excusing one another, in the day when God judges the hidden things of men according to my gospel through Jesus Christ.*  
(Wuest)

## CONSCIENCE (Chafer)

- As a native faculty of every human being, conscience is most difficult of understanding and has too often been wholly neglected in works on Anthropology and psychology.
- When Immanuel Kant presented what has come to be the time-honored threefold division of the immaterial part of man as intellect, sensibility, and will, he failed to include conscience, vital feature of human existence though it is.
- The subject at best is shrouded in mystery.
- Personality seems to express its full scope and inclusiveness when it wills and executes its purpose guided by the intellect and the sensibilities; nevertheless, over and above this manifestation of personality, conscience sits in judgment whether the action be good or bad.

- The assumption of conscience as not having part in that which otherwise engages the entire being and yet being intuitively aware of each action to the extent of rendering judgment upon the deed suggests the peculiar and elusive character of this faculty.
- A wide range of opinion exists respecting the conscience.
- At the one extreme lies the contention that conscience is an acquired attitude of mind, a mere habit formed by the discipline of early training, which training accentuated the values of good and evil.

- The acid test of this opinion is somewhat brought to light by uncivilized people who have had no moral ideals held before them.
- Since conscience is capable of being weakened and seared, it could be expected that, whatever may have been its native strength in the early childhood of heathen peoples, it would be all but destroyed as one's years advance.
- At the other extreme lies a conviction that conscience is the voice of God speaking directly in the human soul.
- A test for this theory to pass would be the evident fact that conscience is capable of being weakened and wholly defeated—tendencies which are not easily associated with the actual voice of God.

- The Bible assumes the presence of conscience in man as a native factor of his being and predicates such limitations of it as to make it a fallible human characteristic.
- Though subject to weakening through abuse, conscience is presented in the Scriptures as a monitor over human actions.
- It seems to be something inborn and universal rather than an acquired faculty, and to be a voice of human origin rather than the voice of God.
- When an induction is made of all Scripture bearing on the conscience, the dependable facts representing this human competency will be revealed.

- The word occurs thirty times in the New Testament.
- The following general divisions of the subject are suggested:
  - (1) The conscience acts judicially, accusing or excusing (Rom. 2:15).
  - (2) The conscience acts punitively, inflicting remorse and self-punishment.
  - (3) The conscience anticipates future judgments and then acts by way of prediction.
  - (4) The conscience acts socially in judging others (Rom. 14:4; 1 Cor. 8:13).

- The truth respecting the human conscience is even more complex in the case of a believer.
- Being indwelt by the Holy Spirit and therefore subject to the mind and voice of the Spirit, the question may be raised whether a Christian really lives at all by the restricted impressions which an unaided conscience engenders.
- The Holy Spirit becomes the new Monitor, and the child of God either grieves or does not grieve the Holy Spirit.
- It is therefore written: “And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption” (Eph. 4:30).

It is possible that the Holy Spirit works in and through the human conscience when registering His reactions to the believer's thought and conduct.

The Apostle thus testified of himself, "My conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost" (Rom. 9:1).

- Philosophers have long debated the question whether man is capable of originating a conscious distinction between right and wrong, whether the laws he makes for himself—though made through the medium of his limited understanding—are a reflection of his own ideals or whether they are derived from God.
- Theoretically, it is a question whether the voice of conscience—man's intuition about what is right and true—is directly or indirectly the voice of God, or whether conscience is to be recognized as a natural factor in man's being.

- Attention has been given to this subject in a previous section of this work and there it was asserted that conscience seems to stand over, or above, the other faculties of man's being as a monitor or judge—a voice outside the action of the intellect, the sensibilities, and the will; yet a voice which may be stultified if not silenced, or, on the other hand, may be stimulated to keen discernment.
- Has God created a delicate instrument which, within its own resources, is able to contend for that which is right, or is conscience the immediate voice of God speaking in the inner consciousness of man?
- One thing is assured, which is, that God is the original good and all that is good in the universe is derived from Him.

- Conscience. The faculty of *conscience* is one of the major manifestations of the immaterial part of man, and doubtless no other faculty reflects more fully that which is in likeness to God.
- The estimation on the part of men of what the conscience really is varies to a large degree.
- Some maintain that it is not an integral part of man, but is rather the voice of God speaking directly to the one who is exercised by conscience.
- On the other hand, and far removed indeed, is the notion that conscience is no more than a bent of mind received by the discipline of childhood.

- Neither one of these extremes is sustained by Scripture. It is to be observed, however, that the voice of conscience, when normal to any degree, is ever true to the divine ideal, and this in spite of the fact that there is much in man—especially his flesh—which is contrary to God.
- Conscience is not subject to the will, but rather sits in judgment over the will and all other features of the life of man.

The unity of man's being is none the less real regardless of the various elements in his immaterial nature—*soul, spirit, heart, flesh, and mind*—and regardless of the various modes of expression of that immaterial nature—*intellect, sensibility, will, memory, and conscience*.

- All these elements and manifestations perfectly articulate to form one experience which is called *life*.
- The mind may originate thoughts, the memory may retain thoughts, the spirit may discern the value of thoughts, and the soul respond to thoughts, but the conscience judges thoughts in respect to their moral worthiness.
- Naturally but little that is experienced by man is moral in character and therefore the conscience is not always exercised.
- At times and as occasion demands, conscience may become a torment, a lash, which is all but unbearable.

- In this, God seems to be more or less identified by every individual. He knows that God knows what he knows.
- Conscience is little concerned with the fact, as the case may be, that other people know that which constitutes its burden.
- The Bible testimony concerning conscience is that it is either
  - (a) *natural*—that which belongs to the unregenerate—  
or
  - (b) *supernatural* that which belongs to the regenerate.
- The conscience of the unregenerate is *defiled* (Titus 1:15), *evil* (Heb. 10:22), *convicting* (John 8:9), *seared* (1 Tim. 4:2).
- On the other hand, the supernatural conscience, or that of the Christian, is far more complex.

- In fact a real question is raised properly whether the Christian lives by his conscience at all.
- It is contended that he is influenced by the indwelling Holy Spirit who is either grieved or not grieved by the manner of the Christian's life.
- No more vivid description of the experience of one in whom the Spirit is grieved could be found than that written by David concerning himself in Psalm 32:3–4.
- He declares: “When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Selah.”

- The Apostle Paul significantly states that his conscience bore him witness in the Holy Ghost (Rom. 9:1).
- By this it would seem that the Spirit employs the conscience as His means of expression and impression, and perhaps that is the unveiling of the true relation between the Holy Spirit and the believer's conscience.
- With this in mind, certain revealed truths regarding the Christian's conscience may be considered.
- The conscience is *purged*.
- It is written: "For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect.
- For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins" (Heb. 10:1–2).

- There is no intimation here that the Christian will not be conscious of unconfessed sin in his life; it is rather that the whole record of past sins, having been forgiven as a part of salvation, the purged conscience will not be exercised over them.
- This specific Scripture presents a vital test which may prove whether one is saved and may be applied to any professed believer.
- Closely related to this is the *good* conscience which is mentioned six times in the New Testament (note [1 Pet. 3:16](#)).
- This aspect of conscience relates to or reflects the state of the believer's heart.
- A good conscience is free from self-condemnation.

- Two passages serve to describe this reality. In 1 Corinthians 4:4, the Apostle asserts, “For I know nothing by [or, against] myself,” and in 1 John 3:20–22 this good conscience is said to be an important factor in effectual prayer.
- The passage states: “For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.”
- Evidently the particular form of conscience noted here was experienced by those who were faithful to Jehovah under Judaism (cf. Acts 23:1; 2 Tim. 1:3).
- It is in this manner that conscience *witnesses* (Rom. 9:1) and may be void of offense (Acts 24:16).

- It is also worthy of note that the conscience of an immature Christian may be encouraged in the ways of sin by the example which other Christians present.
- It is written: “For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol’s temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols?” (1 Cor. 8:10).
- The Apostle also identifies this as a *wounded* conscience: “But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ” (vs. 12).

## HUMAN CONSCIENCE.

- A return is made at this point to the contemplation of that mysterious faculty of the natural man, or within the natural man, which conforms not merely to that which *is*, but rather to that which *ought to be*—a faculty which so far transcends, in things moral, the intellect, the sensibilities, and the will, that it sits in judgment over them.
- The conscience, though acting as judge, does not essay to execute its decrees.
- Having declared what ought to be in that clearness which is commensurable with its competence, conscience must depend upon the spirit of man acting through his will to execute its decrees.

- In its broadest phase, this vital faculty of man's being which governs and yet does not execute its judgments, is the *moral law*.
- The law in its written form presents only a general statement of that which in principle is applicable to those to whom it is addressed.
- It cannot trace the specific obligations which arise in relation to the individual's peculiar and ever-changing circumstances.
- The conscience alone can guide in these details of life. Obviously, what is thus said applies to the unregenerate; for a different relationship and responsibility rests on the regenerate, who, being indwelt by the Holy Spirit, are privileged to be led of the Spirit.

- Over against this, or to be added to this, God has spoken with particular directness to Jews and with another particular directness to Christians with due consideration of their different spheres of relationship to Him; but all are, like the inner voice of conscience, only proclamations of the one moral law—that which proceedeth from God and is the affirmation of His holy nature.
- This conception of law does not necessarily presuppose evil in the individual to be corrected; it is primarily a positive directing, a pointing of the way, to those who otherwise would not know.

- Even human laws are to a large degree based on divine revelation and are usually accepted or rejected according to the conscience, or convictions due to conscience, of those to whom such authority is given.
- It has been true that human authorities have sometimes confused their authority to act with their power to act, supposing that mere power determined that which is right; but the very resistance of such perversion argues strongly for the existence in men of the *moral law* as an innate sense of that which is right as in contrast to that which is wrong.
- Thus conscience, as a feature of moral law, coincides with all other forms of law and, normally, proclaims that which God requires.
- A violation of conscience, in so far as conscience asserts its authority, is sin.(end Chafer)

## Conscience (Chambers)

- Conscience is that innate faculty in a man's spirit that attaches itself to the highest the man knows, whether he be an atheist or a Christian.
- The highest the Christian knows is God: the highest the atheist knows is his principles.
- That "Conscience is the voice of God" is easily proved to be absurd.
- If conscience were the voice of God, it would be the same in everyone. "I verily thought with myself," said Paul, "that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth" (Acts 26:9).
- Paul acted according to his conscience; and Our Lord said, "Whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service" (John 16:2)—they will obey their conscience in putting you to death.

- The eye in the body records exactly what it looks at. The eye simply records, and the record is according to the light thrown on what it looks at.
- Conscience is the eye of the soul which looks out on what it is taught is God, and how conscience records depends entirely upon what light is thrown upon God.
- Our Lord Jesus Christ is the only true light on God.
- When a man sees Jesus Christ he does not get a new conscience, but a totally new light is thrown upon God, and conscience records accordingly, with the result that he is absolutely upset by conviction of sin.

## 1. The Articles of Conscience

- By the “articles” of conscience we mean the regulations of conscience in man fresh from the hand of his Creator, and those articles are—God is Love; God is Holy; God is Near.
- The Bible records that “God is love”; but it must be borne in mind that it is the love *of God*, and that love, which is inexpressible bliss to a Being like Jesus Christ, or to a being like Adam as God created him, is a veritable hell of pain to those of us who are not like either.
- To know that God is love, God is holy, God is near, is pure delight to man in his innocent relationship to God, but a terror extreme since the fall.

- God can never leave a man until He has burned him as pure as He is Himself.
- It is God's love that forbids He should let him go.
- These regulations of conscience are ingrained in the spirit of fallen man as they are in the spirit of a man who is born from above (rv mg).

## 2. The Attitudes of Conscience

- When God is revealed as Love, as Holy, and as Near, it is man's conscience that alarms him from his sleep of death; it makes hell for a man instead of a life of peace.
- “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword” ([Matthew 10:34](#)).
- Wherever Jesus comes He reveals that man is away from God by reason of sin, and he is terrified at His presence.
- That is why men will put anything in the place of Jesus Christ, anything rather than let God come near in His startling purity, because immediately God comes near, conscience records that God is holy and nothing unholy can live with Him, consequently His presence hurts the sinner.

“If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin; but now they have no cloke for their sin” (John 15:22).

- [The "cloke for sin" is man's conscience - "excusing" themselves of their inherent consciousness of the existence of God.
- Romans chapter 1 tells us that all men are aware of God's existence, but that they 'run' from it, relying on their own "righteousness", their own "dead works", their own 'standard' established by their perversion of the God-ordained conscience in them.]

### ***(a) Self-Consciousness***

- The first thing conscience does is to rouse up self-consciousness, and that produces embarrassment.
- A little child is full of winsome beauty because he is utterly free from self-consciousness; when he begins to be conscious of himself he becomes awkward and shy and does all kinds of affected things; and when once the conscience of man is roused by the presence of God, it produces a consciousness of self that makes us scuttle out of His presence like bats out of the light.

- Most of us know much too little about what conscience succeeds in doing when we stand in the presence of God.
- We talk much too lightly about sin. Stand one second in the presence of God, in the light of conscience with the Spirit of God illuminating it, without Jesus Christ, and instantly you are conscious of what is stated in Genesis 3:7, viz. your kinship with the brute creation, with no God-quality in you.

### ***(b) World-Consciousness***

- One effect of the disturbance caused by the light of conscience is to drive us into the outside hubbub of things. In the early days of Christianity men brooded on their sins, nowadays psychologists tell us the more wholesome way is to forget all about sin—fling yourself into the work of the world.
- Rushing into work in order to deaden conscience is characteristic of the life we live today.
- “Live the simple life; keep a healthy body; never let your conscience be disturbed; for any sake keep away from religious meetings; don’t bring before us the morbid tendency of things.”
- We shall find that the morbid tendency of things is the conviction of the Holy Ghost.

### ***(c) God-Consciousness***

- The consciousness of God will break out in spite of all our sense of uncleanness, in spite of all our rush and interest in the work of the world, and in spite of all our logic, the implicit sense of God will come and disturb our peace.
- We are laying down the fundamentals of the way God has constituted man.
- God is holy, therefore nothing that does not partake of His holiness can abide in His presence, and that means pain.

- When conscience begins to be awakened by God, we either become subtle hypocrites or saints, that is, either we let God's law working through conscience bring us to the place where we can be put right, or we begin to hoodwink ourselves, to affect a religious pose, not before other people, but before ourselves, in order to appease conscience—anything to be kept out of the real presence of God because wherever He comes, He disturbs.

### 3. The Awakening of Conscience

#### ***(a) Armoured in Sin***

- The majority of men are dead in trespasses and sins. Our Lord illustrates this—“When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace: but when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils” (Luke 11:21-22).
- When the prince of this world rules, men are armoured in sin, not necessarily in wrongdoing, but in a wrong attitude, consequently they have no disturbance, no trouble, no perplexity.

- As the Psalmist says, “They are not in trouble as other men; they have more than heart could wish. . . . There are no pangs in their death” (see Psalm 73:4-7 rv).

### ***(b) Awakened in Sin***

- How is conscience in men like that to be awakened?
- No man can awaken another man; the Spirit of God alone can awaken him.
- Our Lord did not say that the strong man *battles* with the stronger man: He says, “When a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him . . . .”
- When once the Spirit of God shows Jesus Christ to a man in that condition, his armour is gone, and he experiences distress and pain and upset, exactly as Jesus said he would.
- Before, he had been armoured with the peace of the prince of this world and his conscience recorded that everything was all right.

- Immediately Jesus Christ is presented, conscience records what the man is in the light of God, and the garrison within is disturbed, his peace and joy are gone, and he is under what is called conviction of sin.

### ***(c) Awakening to Holiness***

- “And He, when He is come, will convict . . . of sin” (*rv*).
- We are apt to put conviction of sin in the wrong place in a man’s life.
- The man of all men who experienced conviction of sin was the saintly apostle Paul.
- “For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died” (Romans 7:9).
- There is no mention of conviction of sin in Paul’s account of his conversion, only conviction of darkness and distress and of being out of order.
- But after Paul had been three years in Arabia with the Holy Ghost blazing through him, he began to write the diagnoses of sin which we have in his Epistles.
- The sense of sin is in proportion to the sense of holiness.

- It does not mean that indwelling sin and indwelling holiness abide together: indwelling sin can never abide with indwelling holiness; it means exactly what Paul said, “I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing . . .” (Romans 7:18), “But we had the sentence of death in ourselves that we should not trust in ourselves . . .” (2 Corinthians 1:9).
- The majority of us have caught on the jargon of holiness without the tremendous panging pain that follows the awakening to holiness.
- The Spirit of God brings us to face ourselves steadily in the light of God until sin is seen in its true nature.

- If you want to know what sin is, don't ask the convicted sinner, ask the saint, the one who has been awakened to the holiness of God through the Atonement; he is the one who can begin to tell you what sin is.
- The man writhing at the penitent form is affected because his sins have upset him, but he has very little knowledge of sin.
- It is only as we walk in the light as God is in the light that we begin to understand the unfathomable depths of cleansing to which the blood of Jesus Christ goes (1 John 1:7).
- Every now and again the Spirit of God allows the saint to look back as the apostle Paul did when he said, "I was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious" (rv).

- Paul was a mature saint at this time, but he is looking back into what he was before Jesus Christ apprehended him.
- Conscience is the internal perception of God's moral law.
- Have you ever been convicted of sin by conscience through the Spirit of God?
- If you have, you know this—that God dare not forgive you and be God.
- There is a lot of sentimental talk about God forgiving because He is love: God is so holy that He cannot forgive.
- God can only destroy for ever the thing that is unlike Himself.

- The Atonement does not mean that God forgives a sinner and allows him to go on sinning and receiving forgiveness; it means that God saves the sinner and turns him into a saint, i.e. destroys the sinner out of him, and through his conscience he realises that by the Atonement God has done what He never could have done apart from it.
- When people testify you can always tell whether they have been convicted by the Spirit of God or whether their equilibrium has been disturbed by doing wrong things.
- When a man is convicted of sin by the Spirit of God through his conscience, his relationship to other people is absolute child's play.

- If when you were convicted of sin, you had been told to go and lick the dust off the boots of your greatest enemy, you would have done it willingly.
- Your relationship to men is the last thing that bothers you.
- It is your relationship to God that bothers you.
- I am completely out of the love of God, out of the holiness of God, and I tremble with terror when I think of God drawing near.
- That is the real element of conviction of sin, and it is one of the rarest things nowadays because men are not uplifting the white light of Jesus Christ upon God, they are uplifting arbitrary standards of right.

- They are uplifting, for instance, the conduct of man to man; they are telling us we should love our fellow men.
- The consequence is the majority of us get off scot-free, we begin to feel very self-righteous, “. . . but they . . . comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.”
- But when conscience is illuminated by the Holy Ghost, these three amazing articles —God is Love, God is Holy, God is Near—are brought straight down to our inner life and we can neither look up nor down for terror.
- When a man begins his life with God there are great tracts of his life that he never bothers his head about, but slowly and surely the Spirit of God educates him down to the tiny little scruple.

- Every crook and cranny of the physical life, every imagination and emotion is perfectly known to God, and He demands that all these be blameless.
- That brings us to absolute despair unless Jesus Christ can do what He claims He can.
- The marvel of the Atonement is just this very thing, that the perfect Saviour imparts His perfections to me, and as I walk in the light as God is in the light, every part of bodily life, of affectionate life and of spirit life are kept unblameable in holiness; my duty is to keep in the light, God does all the rest.
- That is why the life of God within the saint produces agony every now and again, because God won't leave us alone, He won't say, "Now that will do."

- He will keep at us, blazing and burning us, He is a “consuming fire.”
- That phrase becomes the greatest consolation we ever had.
- God will consume and shake, and shake and consume, till there is nothing more to be consumed, but only Himself—incandescent with the presence of God. (end Chambers)

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A businessman and prominent member of his church unexpectedly knocked at his pastor's front door. The anguished look on the visitor's face told the Pastor immediately that something was very wrong. He invited him in. They sat on the sofa together, and for two hours, often in tears, this respected businessman explained that his business largely depends on the production and sale of pornographic magazines. He told how over the years of seeing young women and children exploited he had agonized over whether to continue in his work. The look in the eyes of a child in one particular photo had seared into his heart and now haunted his conscience.

But, said the man, he could not now leave his job. There were no other employment options open to him in the current economy. The security of his family and future required him to continue in this work in which he had established position, seniority, and a pension. What did he want from the pastor? The man wanted him to assure him that, if he increased his giving to twenty percent of his income to the church, his occupation would be okay with God. In effect he was saying, “It is both in my best interest and in God’s best interest that I keep this job; the Church needs the money just as much as I need this job.”

- What is there to observe in this man?
- What about his conscience?
- What is he attempting to do?
- Is his conscience governed by the Holy Spirit?
- Is it subject to the Word of God?