

A Seared Conscience--No. 2

by Charles Finney

A seared conscience leads to a life of sin and destruction, while a quick and searching conscience is essential for growth in grace and effective gospel ministry.

Scripture: Matthew 7:21-23, Romans 2:15, 2 Corinthians 1:12, Galatians 6:7-8, Ephesians 4:19, 1 Timothy 4:2, Hebrews 10:22, James 1:22, 1 Peter 2:19, 1 John 1:9

Topics: "Conscience", "Spiritual Sensitivity"

Description

Charles Finney warns about the dire consequences of a seared conscience, emphasizing that it leads to delusion regarding one's moral character, false security, and a mistaken sense of hope. He explains that a seared conscience can result in abandonment by the Spirit of God, a life of uselessness, and even physical ailments due to neglect of moral and physical laws. Finney stresses the importance of maintaining a sensitive conscience to avoid becoming a negative influence on others and to fulfill one's potential for good in the world. He calls for self-examination and the cultivation of a quick conscience, especially among those in ministry, to prevent the spread of sin and to promote true holiness.

Transcript

TEXT--1 Tim. 4:2: "Having their conscience seared with a hot iron."

In continuing this subject I am to show:

VI. The consequences of a seared conscience.

1. A certain delusion in regard to your character and deserts. If your conscience becomes so seared as not to call your particular attention to the moral quality of your actions, you are already under a deep and damning delusion in regard to your real character before God.
2. A false security, arising out of a delusion in respect to your real deserts.
3. A false hope may be, and probably will be another result of a seared conscience. If your conscience is seared, you will almost of course mistake a mere Antinomian religion for the true religion, and hold on to a hope that is but as a spider's web.
4. A false peace, or mistaking a mere apathy on moral subjects and in respect to the moral quality of your actions, for that peace which they have who love the law of God.

5. An abandonment by the Spirit of God. Indeed, the very fact that your conscience is seared, is an evidence that the Spirit has forsaken you. And when your conscience becomes seared, it may prevent his return for ever.

6. You may be given up to the buffetings of Satan, until he may bewilder, harass, and deceive you; till he has led you to destroy your own life.

7. You may be given up to believe a lie, that you may be damned.

8. False anticipations in regard to your future usefulness. If your conscience has become seared, you may rest assured, you will do little or no good in the world. And as a general truth, you will be useless, in proportion as your conscience is seared.

9. Another consequence may be, a broken down constitution. If you have, and will have no conscience in regard to your physiological and dietetic habits; if you will neglect or resist the light, and even sneer at these reforms, you may expect, sooner or later, to experience at least the penalty of violated physical law, in a broken down constitution, and a premature grave.

10. Another consequence may be, a worse than useless life. Do but persist in your dietetic errors, trample down the laws of your being, and madly presume upon the strength of your constitution, until you become a dyspeptic, or until some form of chronic disease has seized upon you, and ten to one if your life is not worse than useless in the world. In such circumstances, you may be so hardened, and your conscience so seared, as not to be ashamed to complain of your ill-health, and think yourself abused, if you do not have the sympathy and assiduous attention of all around you. But mark what I say. In such cases, God as deeply abhors the diseased state of your body, as if you had those forms of disease that are universally known to be a consequence of vile indulgences. If you had one of those diseases, you would expect contempt, rather than pity and sympathy. And how is it, that your conscience is so seared with a hot iron, that you can have any other form of disease, which is the result of a reckless violation of physical law, without shame and deep remorse? For myself, I cannot be sick, unless I have been placed in such circumstances as necessarily to overwork my organs, without feeling the deepest shame and remorse. All sickness is the result of violated physical law; and when that violation can be avoided, that is a deep sin and shame, that produces sickness. But all this you may overlook, and will overlook, if your conscience becomes seared. And you may go down to your grave and to hell, under the deep abhorrence of God, for your reckless violations of the laws of your being; pitying yourself, and ascribing both your disease and death to a mysterious providence.

11. If you sear your conscience, your influence will be pernicious upon all who come within its reach. If they have confidence in you, they will be emboldened to practice what they see you practice, to say, do, and neglect, what they behold in you. And thus you may become a pest and a curse to the community in which you live.

12. You may become a great annoyance to those who are around you. I would as soon have a pestilential disease in my family as a person with a seared conscience, who can violate the Sabbath by improper conversation, improper reading, a trifling and gossiping spirit, who has no conscience in respect to attending to those things that are expected of him--can say, do, and omit many things that are inconsistent with the law of love, and yet have no conscience about it. Such a person is an insufferable annoyance and a nuisance in any family.

13. If your conscience is seared, you may in all probability ruin your posterity, if you have any. Your reckless violations of the law of love will inculcate lessons upon them that will probably ruin their souls.

14. If your conscience is seared, you will entail ruin upon the country in which you dwell, just in proportion to the amount of your influence. Are you a minister, a deacon, an elder, a man or woman of leading influence--how dreadful must be your recklessness when your conscience has become seared with a hot iron. Perhaps you can use or vend intoxicating drinks; perhaps you can use or vend tobacco; perhaps you can encourage the Church and community in the use of tea and coffee, and other worse than useless articles of luxury, and have no conscience about it--you can listen to the appeals and wails of six hundred millions of heathen, and complain of hard times, and yet have no conscience on the subject. Perhaps in a great measure through your example, the Church and the community of which you are a member are expending vastly more, merely to gratify their appetites, and indulge their lusts, than to save a world from eternal hell, and you have no conscience about it. "O shame, where is thy blush?" O man, where is your conscience?

15. If your conscience becomes seared you will certainly do much to depress the standard of holiness, to resist the principles of reform, and hinder the conversion of the world. You will be right in the way, and yet perhaps the last man to be sensible of it. You will be a real and terrible curse to the world, and yet imagine that you are in a good degree useful.

16. If your conscience becomes seared, you may, as Achan did, bring the curse of God upon the community to which you belong.

17. If you are impenitent sinners, if your conscience becomes seared, it will effectually prevent your conversion.

18. If you have ever been converted, and your conscience becomes seared, it will effectually prevent your sanctification.

19. If it becomes seared, it may lead you into a deep delusion in respect to the degree in which you are sanctified, and you may vainly imagine, that you live without sin, while you are in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity.

20. If your conscience becomes seared, you will feel very little horror at the idea of sinning against God. With a seared conscience, you can expect to sin, more or less, as a thing of course, from day to day, without feeling such abhorrence of sin as to make you avoid it as you would avoid the gates of death. Nay, if your conscience becomes seared, you may plead for sin, defend it as something unavoidable, which nobody is expected to live without; and may wallow in your iniquities with very little more remorse than a swine.

REMARKS.

1. From this subject we see why many persons have no conscience on a great variety of moral questions. Few things are more common, than to find even professors of religion, when expostulated with about certain habits and practices, which are as manifestly sinful, when viewed in the light of God's law, as any thing whatever, reply, that they have no conscientious scruples, and indeed that they have no conscience upon the subject. They can practice many forms of intemperance, trifle with their health, squander their time and money, neglect to save, and do much to injure the world, in many ways, and yet have no

conscience about it.

2. Their having no conscience on such questions, is no proof that they are not guilty in the sight of God, and that their practices are not contrary to the law of God. Their consciences are seared, and, for the time being, maintain an indignant silence. But does this prove, that what they are doing is not displeasing to God?

3. A silent or a seared conscience is a conclusive evidence that you are wrong. Conscience is never silent with respect to what is right, and will always smile its approbation, and fill the mind with peace, when you do right. When, therefore, you have no conscience at all, upon a subject--when you are not impressed with a sense of doing either morally right or wrong--when you are neither filled with peace nor stung with remorse, you may rest assured that you are wrong, and that conscience is maintaining an indignant silence.

4. A professor of religion with a seared conscience is more injurious to the cause of religion than many infidels. Who professes to look to an infidel as an example on moral subjects? But let a professor of religion have a seared conscience, and make no scruple to practice any form of intemperance, trifle with the Sabbath, become excited in party politics, transact business upon selfish principles, engage in novel reading, squander his money upon his lusts, throw away his time, speak evil of his neighbors, or indulge in any form of sin, and his example is a thrust at the very vitals of religion. Why, he is a professor of religion! It is therefore taken for granted, that almost any thing he may do is right, or that to say the least it is not inconsistent with salvation. And thus multitudes are emboldened in sin.

5. You see that many persons mistake a seared for an approving conscience. They profess to be conscientious in what they are doing, evidently meaning by this that they feel no compunction in doing as they do, while it is manifest that they have not the peace of God, the deep approbation of conscience in the course they are pursuing. Now the absence of the approving smiles of conscience should teach them, that they are laboring under a delusion in supposing themselves to act in accordance with the dictates of conscience.

6. You see from this subject how it is that many professors of religion manage to retain their hope, notwithstanding they are as manifestly in their selfishness and sin, as they are in the world. The fact is, that their conscience has become seared with a hot iron. And having very little sense of moral obligation, they pass along securely with a lie in their right hand. To them the words of the prophet apply with great emphasis: "A deceived heart hath turned them aside so that they cannot deliver their soul, nor say, have I not a lie in my right hand?"

7. There are many persons whose consciences are seared on almost all moral subjects, and seem to have been so for a long time. They seldom or never appear to be impressed with the deep conviction that they deserve the damnation of hell. Others seem to have a conscience measurably awake on some subjects, but profoundly asleep upon other subjects, where they have for a long time resisted truth and indulged in sin.

8. It is easy to see why persons become Universalists, and reject the idea that sin deserves eternal punishment. I doubt whether there was ever a case, since the world began, in which a man became a Universalist until his conscience became seared. Nay, I doubt whether it is naturally possible for a man, with a thoroughly developed and active conscience, to doubt the justice of eternal punishment.

9. You see the importance of cultivating, especially in children, a quick, sound, thorough conscience. Their reason should be developed as early as possible, so as to give conscience, at the earliest possible hour, an influence over their will, before their habits of indulging the flesh have become too much confirmed to render it hardly possible for them to be converted.

10. You see why there is so much indulging the flesh among professors of religion, without remorse, notwithstanding they are expressly commanded to "put on Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof." Yet, as a general thing, I cannot perceive that they are not just as eager in their inquiries and efforts to obtain those things that will gratify their appetites, as most of the ungodly are. They are as great epicures, seem to take as much pains, and are at as much expense to gratify their tastes, and seem to lay as much stress upon mere gustatory enjoyment, as if to gratify their appetites is the end for which they live. Many of them will manifest as much uneasiness, and even disgust and loathing, at a plain, simple, wholesome diet, as ungodly sinners do. And yet, they appear to have no conscience on the subject. And farther, they can, not only gratify their appetite for food or drink, but their hearts seem set upon gratifying all their animal appetites and passions; and instead of "keeping their bodies under, and bringing them into subjection," they seem to have given up the rein to appetite. An Apostle might say of them, "Their god is their belly, they glory in their shame, and mind earthly things."

11. You see why so many can allow themselves to be ignorant on so many important practical questions, without remorse. Why they never have examined many questions of great moment that have often been pressed upon their attention, and when the means of knowledge are within their reach, and yet have no conscience about them.

12. When the conscience becomes seared upon one subject, it will in all probability become seared upon other subjects. And by a natural process, it will ultimately become generally seared, and prepare the way for embracing Universalism and infidelity. I might easily explain the philosophy of this, but have already said so much in this discourse that, at present, I must defer the explanation.

13. You see the infinite importance of a quick and searching conscience. It is wholly indispensable to growth in grace. There can be no such thing as a healthy piety without it.

14. But especially is a quick and searching conscience important to a gospel minister. If his conscience is seared, many sins will be practiced by himself, and suffered to exist among his people, without his reproving or even seeing them.

15. This subject shows why so many forms of sin are suffered to exist in some churches; so much selfishness, worldly-mindedness, pride, vanity, luxury, speculation, novel reading, party going, evil speaking, and many forms of sin, are allowed to exist from year to year, without rebuke, and without hardly appearing to be perceived by the minister. Now who does not see, that such a minister is "a blind leader of the blind?" His conscience is so seared, that he has very little moral sensibility. If his conscience were awake, such a state of things would wring his heart with insupportable anguish. He could not hold his peace. He would cry out in his pangs. His soul would be in travail day and night. He would lift up his voice like a trumpet, and rebuke those iniquities, come on him what would.

16. You can see the grand secret of the barrenness of many ministers. Having a seared conscience they know not how to bring the Church under conviction for their sins. They do not know how to develop the conscience, either of saints or sinners. They know not how to enter into the secret workings of the human heart, and ferret out the various forms of iniquity that are lurking there. They do not know how to carry the

light of the law of God into every department of human action, and so to develop conscience as to send a thrill of agony along every fibre of the moral nature, while indulging in any form of sin. The fact is, that if a man would get at the conscience of others, he must have a conscience himself. And again, I say, a minister with a seared conscience is "a blind leader of the blind."

17. Let this subject be a warning to young men who are in a course of preparation for the gospel ministry. My dear brethren, I beseech you to remember, that your consciences need to be cultivated as much as your intellect. And do remember, that a thorough preparation for the ministry implies, the education of the whole man. And unless your moral powers be developed, your conscience quickened, and kept in a state of intense sensibility, however great your intellectual progress may be, you can never make a useful minister.

18. We see from this subject, why so few young men do, as a matter of fact, make thorough, efficient and successful ministers. Why, in how many forms of sin do they habitually indulge, while in college, and indeed through all their course of education. While they are disciplining their intellect and acquiring a knowledge of the sciences, they are benumbing and searing their consciences. They are, as it were, putting out the eyes of their minds, on moral subjects. In short, they are doing just what will effectually disqualify them for, and render it impossible that they should ever make successful ministers. My dear young brethren, if in your education, you indulge any form of sin; if you do not as assiduously cultivate a tender conscience, as you pursue any branch of education whatever, you not only entirely overlook what constitutes a thorough course of preparation, but, on the contrary, are taking a course that is a mere burlesque upon the idea of a thorough preparation for the ministry.

19. We see that it is utterly in vain to talk so loud and boastingly about a thorough course of training for the ministry, while so much sin is allowed among the young men in the course of training, and so little pains are taken to develop and quicken their consciences and sanctify their hearts. As a matter of fact, the present courses of education for the ministry are, to a great extent, a failure. It is in vain to deny this. It is worse than in vain--it is arrant wickedness, to deny it.

"Facts are stubborn things." And the average rate of ministerial usefulness, throughout the whole of Christendom, affords a demonstration of this truth, that ought to alarm and agonize the Church, and cause those of us who are engaged in educating ministers to tremble, and inquire upon our knees before the blessed God, what it is that makes so great a majority of the young men who are trained under those influences so nearly useless in the Church of God. Will this be called censoriousness?

It is the solemn truth. I say it with pain and agony; but say it I must, and say it I would, if I knew it would cost me my life. Why, beloved brethren, unless there is more conscience in the Christian ministry--a broader, deeper, more efficient, and practical knowledge of the claims of the law of God--a deeper, quicker, more agonizing insight into the depths of iniquity of the human heart--a greater abhorrence of every form of sin--a more insupportable agony in view of its existence in every form and in every degree--the world and the Church too, will sink down to hell, under our administration.

I appeal to you, my brethren, who are already in the ministry; I appeal to your churches; I appeal to the lookers on; I appeal to angels and to God, and inquire, how many forms of sin are allowed to exist in you, and in your churches, without any thing like that pointed rebuke which the nature of the case demands? Why, my brethren, do not many of you satisfy yourselves simply with preaching against sin, while you are afraid so much as to name the different forms of sin that exist among those to whom you are preaching?

Do you not preach against sin in the abstract, with very little or no descending to particulars? Do you arraign selfishness in all the various forms that it exists among your people? Do you rebuke their pride, self-indulgence, vanity, luxury, speculations, party spirit; and, indeed, my brethren, do you name and bring the law and gospel of God fully to bear upon the various forms of iniquity, in the detail, that exist among your people? Or are the consciences of some of you so seared, as to render you almost blind to any thing like the details of sin as they exist around you?

Said a discerning man in my hearing, not long since, Our minister preaches against sin; but he does not tell what sin is. He preaches against sin in general; but never against any particular sin. He denounces it in the aggregate; but never meddles with it in the detail, as it exists among his people. I do not give the words, but the substance of his remarks. Now, my beloved brethren, of how many of us could such a testimony as this be borne with truth? And how many such ministers, think you, would it require to convert the world?

Of what use is it, I pray you, to preach against sin, or in favor of holiness, in the abstract, without so far entering into the detail as to possess our people of the true idea of what sin and holiness are?

20. You see the importance of praying continually for a quick, and tender, and powerful conscience.

21. You see the importance of great watchfulness, lest we should abuse and seduce our conscience, by indulgence in sin.

22. You see the great importance of faithful dealing with the consciences of all around us, so as to keep our own and their consciences fully awake, and as quick and sensitive as the apple of the eye.

23. You see the importance of self-examination, in regard to the real state of our consciences, whether they are fully awake to the whole circle of moral duties and obligations, or whether they are asleep and seared, on a great many questions that come within the cognizance of the law of God.

24. You see one grand design of preaching the gospel. It is to develop and quicken conscience, until it gains the ascendancy in the mind, and exercises that influence over the will that belongs to it.

25. You see why converts backslide, so soon after a revival of religion. It is because so little pains are taken, to quicken, develop, and keep their consciences awake on every subject. If they are allowed to practice any iniquity; if they are not urged up continually to a full and complete renunciation of every form of sin; if they are not urged to aim at holiness, and expect to get away from all sin, they will assuredly indulge in various forms of sin. Their consciences will become more and more seared, until they can shamelessly backslide and disgrace the cause of Christ.

26. You can see what infinite evil has resulted to the Church, and is still resulting, from the denial that men are expected to live without sin in this life. Why, this denial is to my mind one of the most death-dealing errors that can be held up before the eyes of sinners. What! are men to be generally taught that they are not to expect, and even that it is a dangerous heresy to expect to live, even for a single day, without going into rebellion against Almighty God? Are they thus to be taught to expect to sin? Who does not see, that this must result in their indulging in sin, with very little remorse or self-abhorrence?

27. You see how the doctrine of sanctification in this life appears to one who has a quick and sensitive conscience. Only let a man's conscience become so thoroughly awake as that the thought of sinning is to him as terrible as death, so that conscience will roll a wave of unutterable pain across his mind, and weigh

him down with agony, at every step he takes in sin--let his conscience be in such a state as to agonize his soul to a degree that will cause the perspiration to pour out from his body almost in streams, as is sometimes the case, and then present to that soul the offer of a full salvation. Tell him, if he will confess his sins, "Christ is faithful and just to forgive his sins, and cleanse him from all unrighteousness"--announce to him the fact, that the gospel has provided a salvation from sin in this life, and he will perhaps answer you at first, 'This is too good news to be true--O that it were true!' But turn the subject over, and present the scripture promises, and with what eagerness he will grasp at them. O, he will cry out, 'this is indeed a gospel suited to the circumstances and character of man. This is a salvation worthy of the Son of God.'

28. You see how this doctrine can be doubted by the church without absolute horror. Why, beloved, suppose a man's conscience thoroughly awake, until sin should appear to him in a great measure as it does to the inhabitants of heaven. Then announce to that soul that he must expect to live in sin as long as life lasts--he must expect to sin against God every day till he dies. Why, methinks, he would shriek, and scream, and faint, and die with agony. "O horrible," he would exclaim, "with such a conscience as this, inflicting on me the pangs of the second death every time I sin, must I continue to sin as long as I live? Is there no hope that I shall escape? Has the gospel made no provision for my entire sanctification in this life? Then woe is me! I am undone. And if it is heresy to believe I shall escape from my sin before I die, O that death would come upon me this moment." This has been the actual feeling of many whose consciences have become thoroughly awake, and who were taught that there was no such provision in the gospel as that they might reasonably expect a present deliverance from all sin. Indeed, the denial of the attainability of a state of entire sanctification in this life, to an individual whose conscience is thoroughly quickened and full of power, would agonize him like the thrusting a poisoned dagger to his heart. It seems to me that within the last two or three years, I have sometimes felt as if I could not live if I did not believe the doctrine of a full salvation from sin in this life.

29. We see what the spiritual state of those must be who manifest an unwillingness to have this doctrine true. There are those who manifest the greatest want of candor in weighing the evidences in its favor, and seem disposed to resort to any shift to disprove it. It were easy to show that their writings and their sayings have every mark of an utter unwillingness to have this doctrine true. Now I ask what must their spiritual state be? What is the state of their conscience? How much do they sympathize with the inhabitants of heaven in regard to the exceeding sinfulness of sin? Do they feel horror-stricken at the idea of sinning against God? Do they know what it is to have the perspiration flow like rain when they fall into the slightest sin? Are they crying out in their prayers for a deliverance? No, but they are denouncing those that do, and who are reaching after and expecting a full salvation, as heretics and fanatics, and as explaining away the law of God!

30. You see that until the conscience of the church is quickened, but little can be done for the salvation of the world. See that tobacco-chewing minister, see that whiskey or cider drinking deacon. Why, how many forms of luxury and self-indulgence are allowed in the Church without any conscience, while the world is going down to hell. Even agents of tract, missionary and other societies for the spread of the gospel, will go through the country, smoking and chewing tobacco, drinking tea and coffee, and thus by their example encouraging the Church in the use of these pernicious articles, and in spending more, and perhaps ten times as much, every year for these pernicious luxuries, as they give for the spread of the blessed gospel.

31. It is amazing that tobacco-chewing ministers can (as they have in some instances, as I have been informed,) find fault with others for letting down the claims of the law. They seem at the same breath to

find fault with others, for insisting upon physiological and dietetic reform, and indeed, for pressing the subject of reform so extensively as they do, and yet complain that their teaching is letting down the claims of the law of God. One of the eastern papers, but a few months since, in reviewing one of my sermons, protested in the most earnest manner against my extending the claims of the law too far. The writer said the law of God was itself strict enough, and that he must protest against its being extended beyond its real meaning. My beloved brethren, what consistency is there in maintaining at the same time two such opposite sentiments as are often maintained upon this subject? But let me say again that until the conscience of the ministry and of the church of God is thoroughly quickened upon the subject of universal reformation, the world can never be converted.

How is it possible that ministers can waste God's money, set such an example to the church, and abuse their own bodies and souls by the habitual use of tobacco, one of the most hurtful and disgusting practices that ever disgraced mankind, without compunction of conscience, and yet complain of any body's letting down the claims of the law of God, and even go so far as to write pastoral letters against the heresy of letting down the law of God, while they have no conscience on the subject of such practices. How can men be so engaged to defend the purity, the strictness, and the honor of the law of God while in the very face of their churches and in the face of heaven, they can indulge in such things as these. I would say this, with the utmost kindness and yet faithfulness to them and to God, to the church, and to my own soul. I must say it though with unutterable grief.

32. It is strange that so many churches who are living in the habitual indulgence of so many forms of sin, can manifest so much alarm at the idea of letting down the claims of the law of God. They hardly seem to have ever thought of practicing any self-denial, keeping their bodies under, crucifying and mortifying the flesh. Almost innumerable forms of sin are allowed to exist among them without their blushing or being at all ashamed of them. And yet they manifest a great degree of alarm lest the claims of the law should be let down, and some forms of sin allowed to escape detection, and pass without rebuke. There are many things in the present day that strongly remind one of the conduct of the scribes and Pharisees, whose fears were greatly excited on the subject of our Lord Jesus Christ's letting down the law of God. They accused him of violating the Sabbath, having a wicked spirit, and of even being possessed of the devil, and seemed to be horrified with his loose notions of the claims of the law of God. They were exceedingly zealous, and cried out with great vehemence and bitterness against his want of principle and firm adherence to the law of God. I would not on any account make any such allusions as this, or say one word unnecessarily to wound the feelings of any one. But it seems to be important at the present time to call the attention of the church to the great inconsistency of exclaiming against this letting down the law of God, while they are indulging with so little remorse in great multitudes of most manifest and even flagrant violations of the law. And while we contend for universal reformation, and obedience to the law of God, they are opposing us on the one hand for our strictness, and on the other for our looseness. Nor can they contend that our strictness extends only to some subjects of minor importance, for we do insist upon universal obedience to the law of God, in heart and life.

33. It is impossible for me to understand how persons should really be in love with the law of God, earnestly and honestly engaged in supporting it in all the length and breadth of its claims, and yet indulge in so many forms of violating it with so little compunction. Is there not, my beloved brethren, some delusion in the thing? Can any man be deeply and thoroughly honest in defending the purity and strictness of that law that says--"Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," who can hold slaves, use or vend alcohol as an article of common use, and encourage the church in using tobacco and other worse than useless narcotics

and filthy things, to the great injury of their health, and to the robbing of the treasury of the Lord?

34. You see the mistake of supposing that conscience will always admonish us when we do wrong. When it has become seared on any point we may continue in that form of iniquity without experiencing the rebuke of conscience.

35. We see the danger of this belief. If you take it for granted that you are not sinning, because you are not rebuked by your conscience, you will probably sleep on until you are in the depths of hell.

36. There is no safety in stopping short of universal reformation in heart and life.

37. A generally seared conscience is a fearful evidence of a state of hopeless reprobation.

38. A mind with a seared conscience is like a tub without a bottom. Truth flows right through it, and there is no such thing as influencing the will by truth. You may as well expect to influence a mere brute by moral considerations as a man whose conscience is asleep, or seared.

39. You see why so many can ridicule many important branches of reform, and even scoff at them.

40. You see why many persons cry out upon many branches of reform as legal, as self-righteousness, as something which overlooks the gospel. Here it is of the utmost importance to remember, that to do any thing from a mere constrained compliance with the demands of conscience without a love to what is right for its own sake, is by no means obedience to the law of God. Conscience enforces moral obligation and love complies with it. Conscience decrees oughtness, or that you ought to do thus and thus, and benevolence walks up, joyfully and instantly, to meet the imposed responsibility. It should never be forgotten or overlooked that love is the substance of all obedience to the law of God, and that whenever the dictates of conscience are outwardly complied with for other than disinterestedly benevolent reasons, this is in reality regarding neither the demand of conscience nor of God; for conscience demands that right shall be done, and done from love to God and love to right. Whatever is not of love is not obedience to God. But again I must say, that love or benevolence, without a most strict regard to the injunctions of conscience, is a downright absurdity. Benevolence, without universal obedience, is absurd. If there is love, there will be a most punctilious wakefulness to every affirmation of conscience. And I do not hesitate to say, that he who can call this a legal, instead of a gospel righteousness, is an Antinomian. He is guilty of a fundamental and soul-destroying error.

41. Conscience will not always remain silent. A man may in this life pervert and silence his conscience, and even destroy his moral agency, by making himself a lunatic. But let it be understood, that the time is coming when God will secure the fixed attention of the mind to those great moral truths that will arouse and arm the conscience with a thousand scorpions. When it awakes in eternity, its rebukes will be terrible beyond all description and imagination. How often it awakes even here towards the close of life, and inflicts the sharpest and most unutterable pangs upon subjects where it has long been silent. Cases have occurred under my own observation in which conscience has been so quickened upon some subjects, on which it had been nearly entirely silent, as to pierce the soul with such agonies as were almost entirely insupportable. Instances have occurred where persons have fallen like dead men, under the rebukes of conscience. In some cases men who have been the most hardened, whose consciences have been for years seared with a hot iron, have been made to wail out, even in this life, like a soul in the prison of despair. O, sinner, O, professor of religion, do not suppose that you can always, through time and eternity, stupefy and benumb your conscience, and drown the clamors of your outraged moral nature. It will, by and

by, speak out with terror and in a voice of thunder. It will sit and gnaw upon your soul, and prove itself to be "the worm that never dies." It will transfix your soul as with the arrow of eternal death.

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