

Conscience, the Umpire of God

by George Kulp

Conscience is a faculty of the soul that witnesses to every act and secret thought, and judges every action and decision, and it cannot be corrupted or silenced.

Scripture: Psalm 139:23, Proverbs 20:27, Acts 24:16, Romans 2:15, Romans 14:22, Colossians 3:23, 1 Timothy 1:5, Hebrews 13:18, 1 Peter 3:16, 1 John 3:20

Topics: "Conscience", "Sanctification"

Description

George Kulp preaches on the power and significance of conscience, emphasizing its role as a witness, judge, and recorder of our actions and thoughts. He illustrates how conscience, being a faculty of the soul, is like a magic ring that warns us against sin and serves as God's umpire within us. Kulp highlights that an enlightened conscience aligns with God's will and Word, guiding us along His straight paths, and stresses the importance of maintaining a good conscience to avoid eternal condemnation.

Transcript

"And herein do I always exercise myself to have a conscience void of offense toward God and men."

Acts 24:16

The word "conscience" is mentioned thirty times in the New Testament and there are doubtless more than thirty definitions of the word, but, however we may define it, every man and woman in this house tonight knows, whether you acknowledge it or not, the power of conscience. Some time ago a man sent an anonymous communication to the United States Government, saying to the Treasurer: "Enclosed find a sum of money (several thousand dollars) belonging to the Government." The Conscience Fund of the United States Treasury is being enlarged every year and is a standing and constantly increasing testimony to the power of conscience. In England, where they have an income tax, there is a like fund augmenting constantly by the additions received from men who have lied in regard to their incomes, and sworn to the lie. The income tax once laid by the United States was repealed, because one of its results was we were fast becoming a nation of liars, and oftentimes money was returned by men impelled by their conscience to make acknowledgment of money wrongfully withheld.

Conscience is a faculty of the soul. Dr. Young says: "It is God in man." Milton speaks of it as "God's Umpire." Dr. Clarke calls it "the eye of the soul," and Chrysostom says, "It is a special gift from God." We have two words in the English language that are best defined by conscience, and, in view of the judgment

seat of Christ, and the future welfare of the soul, it is best for every man to side with a conscience enlightened by the Word of God,. in this definition, because an enlightened conscience always sides with God. These two words are right and wrong, words with which every person here tonight is well acquainted. Let conscience now define them and let every one listen to the definitions. Right, agreement with the will of God as made known in His Word. Agreement with the will of God as made known in his Word. Wrong, disagreement with the will and Word of God, in the daily life. If our conscience condemn us, God is greater than our conscience, and He will also condemn us, but if our conscience condemn us not, neither will God condemn us.

There is an old legend that once a magic ring was given to an Oriental monarch. It was of inestimable value, not for the diamonds and pearls that adorned it, but for a magic property that it possessed. It sat easily enough on the finger in ordinary times, but as soon as an evil thought crossed the wearer's mind, or he designed or committed a bad action, the ring became a monitor, and suddenly contracting it pressed painfully on the wearer's finger, warning him against sin. Such a monitor every man possesses in the conscience, the voice of God within him. Is it not strange that there are men who would drown the voice of God, hush the very voice of God in the soul, strangle, annihilate conscience if they could? But listen! A man can never get rid of his conscience, he cannot get away from himself, his conscience is a faculty of his soul, a part of his very being.

The Czar of Russia ordered that a railroad be built from St. Petersburg to Moscow, and the engineer came to him and asked him to indicate on the map the course he wished the line to take. Without a moment's hesitation he promptly seized a ruler and drew a perfectly straight line between the two cities, and in accordance with that mandate, the line runs as straight as an arrow between the two cities. In like manner God, the rightful King of human hearts, has drawn a straight line from the soul to Himself, and an enlightened conscience always travels and leads men along God's straight lines. A good conscience is a consciousness of walking in all things according to the will and Word of God.

Just as a man has two eyes and there is only one sight, so the Spirit of God and conscience agree in regard to the moral quality of an action, and together they say: "Do that which is right; Do not do that which you know to be wrong." An enlightened conscience never goes contrary to the Spirit of God. No wonder Daniel Webster said: "A conscience void of offense toward God and man is an inheritance for Eternity." Brother, you may have it, all may have it, and may have it tonight.

I want to call your attention to several thoughts further in connection with this subject.

First. Conscience is a witness, a living witness, a witness to every act, to every secret thought, and not only a witness but a judge, a recorder, and every time a person commits an act, conscience at once summons the party to the act into court, and accuses or excuses him. And by the side of conscience stand the Spirit of God and the Word of God, and there before Conscience, before the Spirit, before the Word, man must plead immediately, innocent or guilty, "guilty or not guilty." When thus arraigned, the sinner is speechless.

Look yonder. A guilty king, surrounded by his court. A banquet is in progress; mirth and worldliness reign supreme. But look! The king turns pale, his knees smite each other, the wine glass falls from his hands. See the hand that is writing on the wall. Read the message God sends that wicked monster: "Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting." If it is not true, what need Belshazzar care though dozens of hands write messages on the wall? But conscience tells him it is true; his conscience and the

writing on the wall agree.

Yonder on the throne sits the ruler of a Roman province. Before him stands a prisoner, aye, a prisoner chained to his guard. That ruler has nothing to fear from that prisoner, but, as Paul proceeds, and reasons of righteousness and temperance and judgment to come, that ruler trembles, trembles like the meanest criminal that ever stood at his own tribunal, like a benighted traveler when all of a sudden the lightning discloses the awful precipice whose brink he is approaching, like the man under sentence of death, when, in his cell at the midnight hour, he hears the knocking of the hammer erecting the scaffold on which he is to die on the morrow. Why? Because the truth the prisoner preached finds an echo in the conscience as he reasons of righteousness, temperance and judgment to come. Conscience is the self-registering thermometer of the soul and by it this man knows that God condemns him, and in that judgment to come, SURE TO COME, he will awaken unto eternal condemnation.

Those who have seen Holman Hunt's picture of "An Awakened Conscience" will not soon forget it. There are only two figures, a man and a woman, sitting in a gaudily furnished room, beside a piano. His fingers are on the instrument, his face, which is reflected in a mirror, is handsome and vacant, evidently that of a man about town, who supposes that the brightest part of creation is to furnish him amusement. A music book on the floor is open at the words, "Oft in the Stilly Night." That tune has struck some chord in his companion's heart. Her face of horror shows what no language could say: "That tune has told of other days when I was what I am not now." The tune has done what the best rules that were ever devised could not do. It has brought a message from a father's house by awakening her conscience.

Conscience Cannot Be Corrupted. Human tribunals may be, legislators may be, juries have been and may be again. A few weeks ago there was a case in court in Chicago, where a child had been run over by a street car and injured severely. The parents of the child sued for damages. A jury was drawn and the case was tried, and it developed in the trial that, through the scheming of the Company's agents, the jury, or, three of their number, had been "fixed," and a new trial was ordered by the court. At the second trial ten thousand dollars in damages were awarded. Juries can be corrupted, but Conscience, God's vicegerent in man, never can.

The old Duke of Wellington very much desired a piece of land that adjoined his property and was willing to pay a good price for it. One day his steward came to him and said: "I bought that piece of property you have been wanting, and I got it at quite a bargain." "Did you?" "Yes, I bought it for eight hundred pounds, and it is easily worth fifteen hundred." The old Duke arose in his wrath and turning to his steward said: "Take the owner of the property seven hundred pounds more, and never again tell me that is a bargain which deprives another man a single pound that belongs to him." Conscience cannot be corrupted by dollars and cents; cannot be bribed, nor silenced. Conscience will speak; it is "God's Umpire," and that man who trembles before the voice of conscience may well dread to meet God, for where conscience condemns, GOD will also condemn.

Distance cannot obscure the testimony of conscience. A few years ago an officer of the State of Michigan entered into a deal by which the state was defrauded out of thousands of dollars. The fraud was finally detected, and an aroused public demanded the punishment of the offender. He was well connected, had hitherto borne a spotless reputation, and his friends were moving in many directions in order to save him. In the meantime, dreading an arrest, he went to New Orleans, engaged himself to the agents of the British Government who were buying mules in the South for the use of troops during the Boer War, and shipped with a cargo to Africa; but his conscience gave him no peace. He was thousands of miles from Michigan,

the officers knew nothing of his whereabouts, practically he was safe from arrest. But God's Officer, Conscience, had him under arrest continually. He had no more peace in Africa than he had had in America, and at last he hastened back over the many thousand miles he had traversed, to give himself up -- appease the law, suffer the penalty, and get on the side of his conscience.

"The mind that broods o'er guilty woes

Is like the scorpion girt by fire

In narrowing circle as it glows,

The flames around their captive close

Till only searched by thousand throes

And maddening in her ire,

One and sole relief she knows,

The sting she nourished for her foes.

Whose venom never yet was vain,

Gives but one pang, and cures all pain,

And darts into her desperate brain.

"So do the dark in soul expire,

Or live like scorpion girt with fire.

So writhes the mind remorse has riven;

Unfit for earth, undoomed for Heaven,

Darkness above, despair beneath,

Around it flame, within it death."

The flight of time cannot obscure the testimony of conscience. Years may roll by -- ten, twenty, thirty, forty years gone -- but conscience never forgets; its testimony is the same after the flight of years as it was when the sin was committed. Conscience is the book in which our daily sins are written and time never effaces the record.

When Bishop Latimer was before the cruel Bonner, he took especial care in the placing of his words, because he heard the pen writing in the other room and he knew that it was setting down all that he said. So conscience, as a scribe, makes note of all our ways, and that so clearly and evidently that, go where we will, the characters thus written down will appear against us at the Judgment seat of Christ, unless canceled by His own precious blood.

During the Crimean War a soldier was fatally wounded. The chaplain could get near to all the men but him; he would always turn his face to the wall, but finally he grew so weak he could not turn and one day

the chaplain came in and said to him: "Is there anything I can do for you, my dear fellow?" The man said: "Do you know who I am? I am the worst man in my regiment, the leader in all wickedness and wrong-doing. One time there came to our company a young recruit, a raw country lad, who knew nothing of what we who had been raised in the cities knew. I determined to make that young fellow as bad as myself. I did it. At the last engagement he was at my side and was shot dead just as he was uttering an oath that I had taught him. Can you remove that from my conscience; take that out of my life?" And with this record upon his conscience the man refused to be comforted, or assured of mercy, and died. The agonies of death were upon him, but the agonies of conscience surpassed all these. The sinner's conscience is the best reflector of the judgment seat, in life and in death.

There are no limitations in the court of Conscience. Years make no difference. The brethren of Joseph put him in a pit, sold him to the Ishmaelites, and lied to their father. The years roll on -- ten, twenty years go by -- and one day they are in the presence of the Governor of Egypt. Twenty years may have some relation to the memory of the intellect, but they have no relation to the tormenting memory of conscience. As those men stand there before the ruler, they talk among themselves: "Surely our brother's blood is upon us." Conscience is doing its work and it unerringly points to the past. They see again the coat of many colors dyed in blood, again that lie told to Jacob lives, they see the boy they sold into slavery, and say: "Verily we are guilty of our brother's blood." Twenty years is not a veil through which conscience cannot see; neither do they weaken the voice of conscience. A man cannot fly from his conscience; cannot throw it off. He may hide, as did Adam and Eve, but conscience is there, and, Cain-like, he will cry in his agony: "My punishment is greater than I can bear."

Rosseau is an old man, but listen to him: "A sin that I committed in my youth still gives me sleepless nights."

The chief of police in New York City says: "The best ally of the police is the conscience of the criminal."

Webster murdered Parkman, was taken to jail, and confined in a cell. The next morning he begged of the jailer to take him out and transfer him to some other quarters. When asked the reason why, he replied that "All night long the man in the adjoining cell kept crying, 'Thou art a bloody man! Thou art a bloody man!' " but there were no Occupants of the cells adjoining. He had heard the thunder tones of conscience and could not sleep.

When Benjamin Abbott was preaching in New Jersey with a great zeal against sin in its worst forms, in the midst of a discourse he cried out, "For aught I know, there may be a murderer in this congregation." Immediately a stalwart, lusty man started for the door, and when he got there he bawled out, stretching out his arms in agony: "I am a murderer -- fifteen years ago I killed a man." Conscience, God's vicegerent, was on the side of the preacher and drove that murderer to confession.

There was once in Boston an old codfish dealer, a very earnest and sincere man, who lived prayerfully every day. One of the great joys of his life was the hour of family worship. One year two other merchants persuaded him to go into a deal with them by which they could control all the codfish in the market, and greatly increase the price. The plan was succeeding well, when the good man learned that many poor people in Boston were suffering because of the great advance in the price of codfish. It troubled him so that he broke down in trying to pray at the family altar and went straight to the men who had led him into the plot and told them he could not go on with it. Said the old man: "I cannot afford to do anything which interferes with my family prayers, and this morning when I got down to pray there was a mountain of

codfish before me high enough to shut out the throne of God; and I could not pray. I tried my best to get around it, or get over it, but every time I started to pray that codfish loomed up between me and my God. I wouldn't have my family prayers spoiled for all the codfish in the Atlantic Ocean, and I shall have nothing more to do with it, or with any money made out of it."

Away down in the engine room of a great steamer, the ponderous driving wheel turns round and round, the mighty shaft moves resistlessly to and fro, and the huge ship plows her way onward through the waves. But suddenly, at the sound of a warning bell, the engineer springs to his lever, the engine is reversed, and the boat comes to a stop. The signal comes from the officer up in the wheel-house and must be obeyed, or disaster cannot be prevented.

Conscience within us is like that warning bell. It bids us reverse our course when we are tempted to do wrong. Our safety lies in obedience; in keeping a good conscience. Judas allowed selfishness and greed to deafen his ears to this inner voice, and made shipwreck of his life. Peter, on the other hand, though he, too, grieved his Lord, gave heed to the inward monitor, and recovered himself by an honest and heart-felt repentance. Temptations will come, as we voyage over the sea of life, but if we listen to the voice of God in our conscience, we shall safely make our way through them all and reach at last the haven of eternal rest.

The blood of Jesus purges the conscience. The Holy Ghost brings to the penitent sinner intelligence of pardon of all the sins of the soul, and reconciliation through the blood. Then the prayer of the redeemed is expressed by the words of the poet:

"Oh, that my tender soul may fly
The first abhorred approach of ill;
Quick as the apple of an eye,
The slightest touch of sin to feel."

Let me add right here the following directions to preserve a good conscience -- they are Scriptural and Wesleyan.

"Take heed of every sin; count no sin small, and obey every command with all your might.

"Consider yourself as living under God's eye live as in the sensible presence of God.

"Be serious and frequent in the examination of your heart and life.

"Exercise thyself unto Godliness. Be more diligent in religion than you are in business.

"Do not venture on sin because Christ has purchased a pardon; that is a most horrible abuse of Christ.

"Be nothing in your own eyes. Consult duty, not events. What advice you would give to another take to yourself.

"Do nothing on which you cannot ask God's blessing. Every action of a Christian that is good is sanctified by the Word of God and prayer.

"Think and speak and do what you are persuaded Christ Himself would do in your case, were He on earth. By imitating Christ you become an example to all. Whatever treatment you receive from the world, remember Him and follow His footsteps, who did no sin neither was guile found in His mouth; who, when He was reviled, reviled not again, but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously.

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