

The Testimony of Conscience

by Thomas Reade

A good conscience is the work of grace, resulting from faith in the atonement and the application of the blood of Christ to the conscience by the Spirit.

Scripture: Psalm 51:10, Proverbs 4:23, Acts 23:1, 2 Corinthians 1:12, Philippians 1:10, Colossians 3:23, 1 Timothy 1:5, Hebrews 10:22, 1 Peter 3:16

Topics: "Good Conscience", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

Thomas Reade preaches on the importance of having a good conscience, highlighting the transformation in Saul of Tarsus from persecutor to Apostle through the enlightenment of the Spirit. He emphasizes that a good conscience is a work of grace, bringing peace and purity to the soul, and enabling a sincere and faithful walk with God. Reade urges believers to maintain a clear conscience, rooted in faith, love, and hope, and to be vigilant against worldly influences that may dull their spiritual sensitivity.

Transcript

46. THE TESTIMONY OF CONSCIENCE

"We can say with confidence and a clear conscience that we have been honest and sincere in all our dealings. We have depended on God's grace, not on our own earthly wisdom. That is how we have acted toward everyone, and especially toward you." 2 Cor. 1:12

To have a good conscience is an unspeakable blessing. But what is it that makes the conscience good? Saul of Tarsus thought that he had a good conscience, while he was blindly persecuting the Church of Christ. When enumerating his legal grounds for confidence, he mentions "zeal, persecuting the Church." In his powerful appeal before Agrippa, he declared; " I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth." To the Galatians he writes "Beyond measure I persecuted the Church of God, and wasted it." In all this, Saul of Tarsus fulfilled the words of Christ; "The time comes, that whoever kills you will think that he does God service." And where this fiery zeal arise? Our Lord tells us; "And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me." It arose from ignorance of God and of Christ. When the eyes of Saul were enlightened by the Spirit, he saw himself to be a blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious; yes, the chief of sinners.

How different were his views and feelings when he became an Apostle of Jesus Christ. While beholding the council, before whom he stood as the prisoner of Jesus Christ, he could say; "Men and brethren, I

have lived in all good conscience before God until this day." To Festus he boldly said; "But I admit that I follow the Way, which they call a sect. I worship the God of our ancestors, and I firmly believe the Jewish law and everything written in the books of prophecy. I have hope in God, just as these men do, that he will raise both the righteous and the ungodly. Because of this, I always try to maintain a clear conscience before God and everyone else."

A good conscience is the sunshine of the soul. It is the work of grace. When the sinner is awakened to a sense of his guilt and danger; when he is led to see the all-sufficiency of the Atonement of Christ; when he is enabled by faith to receive the atonement; and when the precious blood of Christ is applied to his conscience by the Spirit, then the soul, bowed down under a sense of guilt, obtains rest, and the conscience, goaded by tormenting fears, enjoys peace. The conscience, thus pacified and purified, becomes, in the scriptural sense of the term, a good conscience. Almighty God is no longer dreaded as an enemy, but feared as a father; and sin is no longer cherished as a friend, but resisted as a foe.

Paul describes this happy state when exhorting the Hebrew Christians to steadfastness in the faith; "And so, dear friends, we can boldly enter heaven's Most Holy Place because of the blood of Jesus. This is the new, life-giving way that Christ has opened up for us through the sacred curtain, by means of his death for us. And since we have a great High Priest who rules over God's people, let us go right into the presence of God, with true hearts fully trusting him. For our evil consciences have been sprinkled with Christ's blood to make us clean, and our bodies have been washed with pure water. Without wavering, let us hold tightly to the hope we say we have, for God can be trusted to keep his promise."

To Timothy, the Apostle also writes; "The end of the commandment is charity, out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned." Happy, then, are they who hold "the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience," a conscience purged from dead works to serve the living God.

A good conscience is tender, alive to the approach of evil, and sensible of the subtle workings of indwelling sin. It is the faithful monitor of the soul. It speaks for God, and in accordance with his word. A scrupulous conscience is always inconsistent. It strains at a gnat and swallows a camel. A seared conscience is devoutly to be dreaded; it is the presage of eternal death. "Ephraim is joined to idols let him alone!" The true believer in Jesus can rejoice in the testimony of his conscience, this inward witness to the sincerity of his profession. He can say with Peter; "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." And with Paul; "I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience."

Lord give me an enlightened conscience, sprinkled with the blood of Jesus, jealous of sin, and ever awake to the motions of the enemy. Keep me watchful, and prayerful, and dependent on your grace. Preserve me from all blindness and hardness of heart. Teach me your way, and enable me to walk therein, even that way of holiness, in which all the Patriarchs, Prophets, and Apostles walked; that way in which all the redeemed are found, as they pass from the earthly to the heavenly Canaan.

Simplicity and godly sincerity are two precious ornaments which adorn the Christian character. Faith is the uniting grace; love is the active principle, which keeps the wheels in motion; hope is the sustaining grace. How wonderful is the work of God in the soul of man. When a divine light irradiates the understanding, directs the will, and spiritualizes the affections, the sinner becomes a new creature. Oh! that this blessedness may be mine.

Lord! pity a poor wanderer from your fold. Without you I must perish. "O save me for your mercies' sake." "Remember me with the favor that you bear unto your people; O visit me with your salvation; that I may

see the good of your chosen ones, that I may rejoice in the gladness of your nation, that I may glory with your inheritance." I want, O Lord, to love you. I want to feel my heart continually drawn to you. I am miserable when my heart wanders from you, and yet, alas! I am perpetually wandering. Restore my soul; lead me in the paths of righteousness for your name's sake. Lord! unite my heart to fear your name. Uphold my goings in your way. Preserve me, O God, from hypocrisy and vain-glory. Let me ever remember that You are a Spirit; that true religion is altogether of a spiritual nature; and therefore, that you must be worshiped in spirit and in truth.

Guard me from the subtle poison of praise and flattery. Make me deeply sensible of my guilt and wretchedness, and of your righteousness and fullness. May I never seek the praise of men, nor be grieved if I am despised for your sake. But may I rather rejoice, when I am counted worthy to suffer shame for your name. Give me grace to live to you and for you. May I delight in your will.

Keep me from a worldly spirit. I have daily to mourn over the workings of a worldly spirit. O! wean my heart from earth, and fix it upon yourself alone. Enlarge my views of holiness and heaven. Increase my longings after purity and peace. Let me not rest until my desires be abundantly satisfied in your presence where fullness of joy is, and at your right hand where are pleasures for evermore. Until that happy period arrive, may my rejoicing be this, the testimony of my conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, I live my life in the world.

To set the Lord always before us is the great secret of holy living. This we can only do, by living a life of faith in the Son of God; for faith is the eye, which, by steadily looking unto Jesus, keeps the soul in the narrow path which leads unto life eternal. We must draw an evidence of our real state and character, not so much from our public, as from our private conduct; not so much from our words, as from our thoughts. In the company of truly pious people, where a holy atmosphere surrounds us, we are constrained to assume an air of decorum and sobriety; but, when we are in the midst of worldly people, if we then throw off the garment of restraint, and enter into their spirit and conversation, we have an indisputable evidence that our hearts, whatever our outward profession may be, are not right with God.

When no eye sees us but the omniscient eye of God, are we as circumspect as when surrounded by our fellow-creatures? If we are not, we may surely conclude, that the fear of man, and the love of human estimation, is more operative in our souls than the fear of God; and that our consciences are asleep, or in an unenlightened state.

So also with respect to thoughts, which are unknown to those around us; if we are secretly indulging thoughts which are all intimately known to the heart searching God, while we would not dare to utter those thoughts to friends about us; must we not conclude, that with all our professions of piety, we are practicers of iniquity, and in the utmost peril of everlasting damnation? The pure in heart, shall see God. To keep the heart with all diligence, to set the Lord always before us, to live as seeing Him who is invisible, to act at all times with an eye to his approbation, is the very essence of true religion, the very evidence of the simplicity and sincerity of our motives.

This state of heart is the work of the Spirit; a progressive work. It meets with much opposition from our carnal nature, and the force of indwelling sin; but still it goes on toward perfection. In heaven the work is complete when the law in the members shall no longer war against the law of the mind. Until then we must fight, and wrestle, and struggle by faith and prayer. Jesus is almighty. Through Him we shall overcome. His grace is sufficient for us, and he has promised that it shall prevail.

If we are sincere in our desires after the attainment of the truth; if we have simplicity of intention in our search for it, we shall be savingly anxious to know these four things;

1. The state of our own hearts;
2. The way of salvation by grace, through Jesus Christ;
3. The path of duty as revealed in the Gospel;
4. The means for growing in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

To know these experimentally and practically, will enable us to glorify God by a life of holy obedience. We shall then daily realize the presence of God; have an eye continually to the providence of God; and draw comfort and strength from the promises of God. In prosperity we shall be humble, in adversity resigned, in all conditions thankful and dependent.

Oh! blessed Lord, impart unto your poor unworthy child these spiritual blessings. Give me an insight into myself. Preserve me from self-delusion and hypocrisy. Let me never aim at mere appearances before others, but labor after simplicity and godly sincerity. Make me ever an humble suppliant at your mercy-seat, a thankful recipient of your bounties. Watch over me, O Lord, for good. Guard me from the snares and wiles of the devil. Keep me from a covetous mind. Wean my affections from this vain world, and cause me to set them on things above. May you be my portion. Make me more spiritually-minded, more alive to you, more solicitous about the good of others. May it be my daily intention to please you, my daily endeavor to glorify your name. Give me the blessing of a good conscience, a conscience sprinkled with the blood of Jesus, a conscience enlightened by the Spirit of truth. Shine on me with beams of love, until, through your grace, I shine in the heavenly temple with beams of glory.

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