

LIVING FAITH BOOKS
Books for Today's Life and Faith

This Volume—
THE CONSCIENCE—CONQUERING OR CONQUERED?

- What is conscience?
- How does it effect human freedom?
- How can we control and use it?
- What are its dynamics?

The writer of this book—*The Conscience—Conquering or Conquered?*—writes out of a fund of experience on the subject. Whilst the conscience is often written about by psychologists, the essence of its nature lies in the creation of man in the image of God. Man universally feels guilty about not being what he ought to, or could, be, i.e. what he *should* be.

In a book so small it would seem that many of the above questions could not be answered, yet, remarkably enough, substantial answers and explanations are forthcoming in simple enough ways. We may be much better off for learning the nature of conscience and discovering how it can be a valuable friend rather than a cruel and ruthless opponent.

The book will certainly well repay the time given to reading it.

Geoffrey Bingham is an Anglican minister. His experience as soldier, prisoner of war, farmer, writer, teacher and family man, as well as theologian, has given him grounds for writing material which is Australian in tone, and relevant to the society in which we live. Some have found his books life-changing.



NEW CREATION PUBLICATIONS INC.

THE CONSCIENCE— CONQUERING OR CONQUERED?

GEOFFREY C. BINGHAM



Other Books in this series

Christian Mediator
Conscience—Conquering or Conquered?
Creation & Reconciliation
Dear Darling Idols
Dear Death or dark Devourer
Fellowship of Suffering (The)
Freely Flows Forgiveness
God's Calling: Our Response
Hope without Shame
Living in Liberation
Man, Woman & Sexuality
Shepherds of the Flock
True Preaching: the Agony & the Ecstasy

www.newcreation.org.au

THE
CONSCIENCE—
CONQUERING
OR
CONQUERED?

GEOFFREY C. BINGHAM

NEW CREATION PUBLICATIONS INC.
PO Box 403, Blackwood, South Australia, 5051

2001

First published 1980
First edition in book form 1987
Reprinted 1993, 2001

© Geoffrey C. Bingham 1980, 1987

National Library of Australia card number and
ISBN 0 86408 067 0

This book is copyright. Apart from any use as permitted under the *Copyright Act 1968*, no part may be reproduced by any process without written permission. Inquiries should be addressed to the publisher.

Wholly set and printed at

NEW CREATION PUBLICATIONS INC.
Coromandel East, South Australia

GENERAL FOREWORD

The series *Living Faith Studies* was commenced in 1975, under the title of *Masters' Classes* which were intended as materials to be Used by pastors and teachers. The idea was that I would gather together materials from available bibliography and add that dash of co-ordination and understanding that I possessed. The studies were put into note form, each one being bound.

Because the title *Masters' Classes* scared some who might otherwise have read them, it was decided to call them *Living Faith Studies*. Over a period of five years, fifty studies were formed. They were put out in A4 paper format, and hence difficult to display in bookshops. It was then decided to turn them into the present series.

For the most part the studies have not been greatly revised or reshaped, though doubtless they would benefit from revision and editing. I could not see myself having the time to do this in the light of other books I am presently writing. Our publishing company felt, nevertheless, that the materials available in this series have real value to readers who wished to have quick access to the themes they contain.

Thematic writing has its drawbacks simply because themes are abstracted from the Scriptures, where, in fact, they are not presented thematically. No one theme can be properly treated since its context is a holistic one. Even so,

much that is useful can be achieved by thematic research and presentation.

It is with the hope--and trust--that these books may be valuable to readers that we publish them. They require serious reading, the looking up of the biblical references nominated, and, where possible, the use of books nominated in the Bibliographies.

Geoffrey Bingham

SUMMARY OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----|
| General Foreword | vii |
| Foreword | xi |
| I: INTRODUCTION: | |
| 1. THE MATTER OF CONSCIENCE | 1 |
| 2: THE NATURE OF CONSCIENCE | 3 |
| 3: A BRIEF HISTORY OF CONSCIENCE | 6 |
| The Pure Created Conscience | 6 |
| Effects of Rebellion | 7 |
| 4: MAN, CONSCIENCE, AND LAW | 11 |
| Man a Creature of law | 11 |
| Law Always Extant | 12 |
| Conscience and the Heart | 13 |
| Conscience and Law | 15 |
| The State of Man Under Law and Conscience | 18 |
| Conscience and Authority | 19 |
| 5. THE CONSCIENCE REHABILITATED | 22 |
| The Conscience is Rehabilitated | 22 |
| How the Conscience is Rehabilitated | 24 |
| The Christian Man and the Rehabilitated Conscience | 27 |
| 6. THE CHRISTIAN MAN AND THE WORKING OF CONSCIENCE | 29 |
| Conscience and Faith | 29 |

SUMMARY OF CONTENTS

| | |
|-------------------------------|----|
| Conscience and Freedom | 31 |
| Conscience and Integrity | 32 |
| Conscience and Service | 35 |
| Conscience and Indwelling Sin | 36 |
| Conscience and Confession | 38 |
| Conscience and Law | 40 |
| –Law and Guilt | 40 |
| –Law and Grace | 42 |
| 7: A SUMMARY OF CONSCIENCE | 45 |
| Bibliography | 49 |

FOREWORD

‘Conscience doth make cowards of us all’ is a word from Shakespeare and not from the Bible, but it certainly is biblical in its content. PT Forsyth never wrote a book on the conscience, but few seem to have understood it better than he did. He said that conscience makes us man, makes us one, and makes us eternal. He appears to be saying that of all creatures man is endowed the conscience, and without conscience he is not truly man. He is also saying that it is one of the most dynamic factors common to every human being, and that transcending class, language, race and creed it gives us that by which we can understand humanity-at least on the moral level. That is why Forsyth also said, ‘That which goes deepest to the conscience goes widest to the world ‘. Nothing we do of right or wrong can relate only to this world, but to eternity, ie. sin and wrongdoing meets its judgement in the eternal sphere, and not just in this world.

Conscience then, is a powerful factor in human living. Some humans try to dull their conscience, or ignore them. Others become morbidly fixated on conscience, and so conscience exercises a tyranny, especially when a person is habitually legalistic. That is why we have entitled our book, ‘The Conscience-Conquering or Conquered?’ The question is most significant. A person’s conscience which

has received the revelation of God's justification through the Cross will help the person to live in rich freedom. The legalistic conscience can drive its owner (host), into frightening states of continual dread, and compulsive self-justifying works and labours.

This little book attempts to inform us regarding the dynamics of guilt and grace, ie. to help a person arrive at that state of heart and mind where it is free from fear and dread of death, and is able to live richly in life. Whilst one cannot actually conquer one's conscience, one can find it to be a friend, an aide, and a defender. ! hope this minimal treatment. may bring maximal joy and release.

*Geoffrey Bingham,
Coromandel, April 1987.*

1

INTRODUCTION: THE MATTER OF CONSCIENCE

'The aim of our charge', said Paul the apostle, 'is love that issues from a pure heart, and *a good conscience*, and a sincere faith'. Doubtless heart, conscience, and faith are closely related. Yet think of it--'a good conscience!' How many would greatly desire to have that! In the Old Testament a good heart is something wonderful-to possess. In the, New Testament the matter of a good heart is not missing, but the idea of a good conscience is known to be a matter of confidence and serenity. Paul is sure this is a good idea. He says, '... I always take pains to have *a clear conscience* toward God and man'. In another place he says, 'I thank God whom I serve with a *clear conscience*...' ; and, '... holding faith and a *good conscience*', '... holding the mystery of the faith with a *clear conscience*'. A revealing statement is, 'I am speaking the truth in Christ, I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit' (see I Timothy 1:5, Acts 24:16, II Timothy 1:3, I Timothy 1:19, Romans 9:1).

These statements about conscience encourage us to

know that a human being, living now, can have a pure, a good, and a clear conscience. We do not need to be told the advantages of such. At the same time the Scriptures speak of a weak conscience, a seared conscience, a defiled conscience and an evil conscience. Equally we can understand that these states of conscience can only bring trouble and misery to those who possess such states of conscience.

It is true to say that conscience—whatever it is—is the sensitive point of man where he meets both good and evil, and good and evil meet him. Man is really what his state of conscience is. We need to know what conscience is. We need to live with a good conscience, without fear, and in genuine serenity.

2

THE NATURE OF CONSCIENCE

The Oxford Dictionary speaks of conscience (from the Latin *conscientia*), as privity of knowledge, consciousness, from *conscire*, 'know or be privy with another or oneself'. It adds, 'inward knowledge or consciousness; internal, conviction... The internal recognition of the moral quality of one's motives and actions; the faculty or principle which pronounces upon the moral quality of one's actions. or motives, approving the right and condemning' the wrong'. It indicates that the original word was *unwit!* This is a rich and powerful word. In any case the description fits what we understand as conscience. The Greek word *syneidesis* really parallels the Latin-English term. The verb *synoida* speaks of *awareness*, as in I. Corinthians 4:4, 'I am not aware [conscious] of anything against myself'. The word then adds up to something like 'conscious with' and that may mean, 'one is conscious of, and with Oneself', or it could mean 'to know in common with' meaning 'a joint awareness'. Some have conjectured that it must mean first consciousness of what is right and true, ie. consciousness of God, and so consciousness of what is true in creation. The idea of 'co-awareness' then could mean 'aware of

things (right and wrong) along with God, because God is present'. Certainly although the term does not directly indicate this fact, yet that is what happens from a biblical point of view, especially when the conscience is 'pure', 'good', 'clear' and 'strong'.

Conscience certainly has to do with a consciousness or awareness of good and evil, at least to that point where the conscience has been trained. In Hebrews 10:2 the writer speaks of 'a consciousness of sin' which is literally a 'conscience of sins'. In 10:22 he speaks of having 'a heart sprinkled clean from an evil conscience'. Conscience then has 'an awareness of evil and of good. Titus 1: 15 when linked with' Psalm 18:26 ('with the pure thou dost show thyself pure: with the perverse thou dost show thyself perverse') appears to teach that a person with an evil conscience will see things evilly, whereas a person with a clear conscience will 'see things clearly'.

Some attempts at defining conscience are: '...that faculty in man by which he distinguishes between the morally right and wrong, and which urges him to do that which he recognises to be right...which passes judgement on his acts and executes that judgement within his soul'. '... a guardian of morality, justice and decency in the world'. Alfred Rehwinkel (*Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, pp. 136-137, Pickering & Inglis, London 1970). '... a court of appeal which is not able to promulgate any statutes... but is able to deliver judgement on the cases that are before it'. H. C. Hahn (*Dictionary of N. T. Theology*, Vol. I, Paternoster, Exeter 1975). Others may define it as the ability to discern what is good and evil, and to pass and execute judgement because of the awareness that arises

from that faculty and which, when it is truly functional, is revealing the mind of God to the person. C. A. Pierce (*Conscience in the NT*, p. 122, SCM, London 1958) quotes Menander as saying, 'Conscience is God in every man'. Pierce cautions against receiving this as a generalisation. Conscience needs the tutoring of the Bible, Church, Ministry, Sacraments, worship and devotion: Nevertheless the principle is correct. It concurs with the Sibbes statement, 'Conscience... is knowledge with God'. Doubtless the conscience is not perfect, cannot ordinarily be accepted fully 'as a reliable guide, and needs to be sensitised by God to operate properly, yet it is a faculty innate in man. It may well require re-education, but innately it is a most significant faculty in man. P. T. Forsyth once said that 'conscience is that which makes man man, which makes him one, and which makes him eternal'.

The Puritan R. Sibbes observes,

'Conscience is not one power, but conscience is in all the powers of the soul... in the understanding... in the will... in the affections... and so it runs through the whole soul'. (*Works*, Vol. 3, p. 29, James Nichol, Edinburgh 1862.)

He adds, '... it is a knowledge *with* God '.

3

A BRIEF HISTORY OF CONSCIENCE**The Pure Created Conscience**

Created man was placed into a world or creation of which creation God said, 'It is Very good'. This presupposes moral order and 'excellence. The term 'good' in the Bible means something which is really as it ought to Be, ie.: something valid because it is functionally part of the whole of the harmony of creation. In one sense the primal couple must have had no consciousness of evil, but it does not mean they lacked a faculty to discern good and evil. They, for themselves, had no consciousness of evil, ie. an evil conscience. They related to God. Nevertheless they must have had the ability to discern, or, as we may say, to see things from God's point of view. In that sense, being innocent they could discern good and evil.

The temptation of Satan lay in the point that man, having eaten of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, would then know, *from himself* or *of himself*, the true nature of good and evil. 'Of himself' is the key to the temptation. Of *God* they did know good and evil. That is they were equipped to know good and evil whilst wholly

dependent upon God. The very term 'good and evil' would have made no sense to them otherwise. It would have seemed a reasonable thing to perceive, of themselves, what good and evil might be. Thus from having a continuing consciousness of God they changed to having a consciousness of their own evil. Yet, curiously enough, they did not really understand the nature of the evil, for they began to rationalise their act of rebellion, apportioning blame to others (Genesis 3:10ff.).

Hebrews 5:11-14 speaks of believers becoming mature enough to digest the meat of the Word. Mature people are those, 'who have their faculties trained by practice to discern good and evil'. This presupposes a mind or heart which has been renewed by the gift of redemption. It is an approach to good and evil which differs from the sinful sophistication of the primal couple.

Effects of Rebellion

Without doubt moral law was innate in creation, eg. marriage and the sabbath. The injunction to love and worship God is likewise innate in creation. Right dealing with all men must also be implicit. However, the fall of man has changed his mind to creational law. Doubtless his fear of God (Genesis 3:10) does not permit him to see things clearly. He dreads the judgement of God. Thus law, far from being functional and beneficial to man, appears as heavy, authoritarian, and speaks to him of punishment. In this context the conscience of man has to exercise functions which do not operate in the same way as would

be the case were the person innocent. This precludes man from really knowing the essential nature of sin, and so of understanding the rational nature of judgement, as also the liberating nature of grace.

In this regard, examples of a good conscience and an evil conscience are seen in the story of Cain and Abel. Abel with a good conscience offers his gift to God. Cain with a bad conscience also offers a gift to God. God sees Cain's anger and says, 'If you do well shall you not be accepted? And if you do not well, sin is couching at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it'. That is, 'You must do well, have a clear conscience and so defeat evil. An evil conscience will bring you under sifts power'.

The wide effects of rebellion work to make man see God through the lens of his own guilt, and so see Him as grim and judgemental. The law, as we have said, is not seen as the source of delights which the Psalmists discovered, but is that means by which a bad conscience brings terror and burden to the human heart. The story of Cain and Abel tells us that men can be either of a good conscience or of an evil conscience. The bad deeds of one person condemn him, and the good deeds done by another than he also condemn him, so much so that he can be enraged to the point of murdering. In one sense even the bad conscience is correct concerning God for He will judge: He is judgemental. Yet because a man is evil he will see this righteous judgement only with an evil assessment. The repentant person will see it as just. Indeed the repentant person will actually welcome judgement, for his conscience tells him it is deserved, and judgement will release him, once it has been passed on him and then executed.

Without doubt conscience is always related to law, whatever the law may be. We mean that if the person will, perversely, not have the law of God, yet the conscience will work on some law or other. In Galatians 4:1-10 Paul speaks of two laws, the first being that which is of the covenant given through Moses, and the second that which the elemental spirits of the world (ie. the gods and idols) imposed upon their devotees. As we will see, men may seek to quieten or suppress their consciences and tutor them to accept standards other than the true law of God, but the conscience will nevertheless still prove to be whatever the law it espouses may be.

The history of conscience then is upon this principle: 'When man rejects God he rejects His law. This law is the true law of creation, and man suffers because he does not obey. Conscience works guilt in the subject who rejects true law. The one who rejects suffers from moral awryness and disjointedness. He is out of kilter with things as they truly are. The subject then seeks to alter the basic moral law, hoping to satisfy his conscience with less than the level demanded by true law. This conditioning of his conscience does not put the conscience off from accusing. Even if it accedes to new cultural, social, moral and spiritual conditioning, it will nevertheless act in tyranny over its subject. It will continue to demand right action. The subject may have changed one law from another, but by doing so he does not really master his conscience.

With grace the person is released, the conscience being satisfied by the action of God's love in Christ. This is the time when the conscience is, so to speak, rehabilitated so that the person is set free to live. Law and conscience no

longer are felt as tyrannous. A new understanding of God's law is introduced, and obedience becomes attractive. If, then, 'Conscience is God in every man', then conscience becomes a matter of joy. The history of conscience, so to speak, is completed. Certainly with the glorification of man, when conscience will not be dependent upon faith, the final, unfailing freedom will be the norm for humanity.

4

MAN, CONSCIENCE, AND LAW

Man A Creature of Law

We have already indicated that law is innately part of creation. The Ten Commandments speak only of that which is natural to created man, although not necessarily accepted by sinful man. Man being created in the image of God has moral responsibility. He has the gift of choice which is essential to him as a moral being. Also he must understand what is right and wrong: otherwise he can make no true decisions.

Man in the Garden is to tend and *keep* it. The sense must be *guard*. The prohibition against eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is a protective prohibition, not a negative one. Since all creation was 'very good' man needed to go along with it, and not get 'out of kilter' with it. Likewise, being in the image of God, whose image is holiness, righteousness, goodness, love and truth, man was naturally set to reflect these characteristics. Hence law in no sense was restrictive, but rather the way of liberty, as men later discovered. We can see such things in Psalms 1, 19, and 119. In obeying law, man has his true being.

Romans 5:12ff. alerts us to the fact that man stood at the beginning of time as the representative of the whole human race--'... in His image made He them; male and female made He them, and called them Man'. Hence man's choice was to serve for the whole race. Adam's attitude then was to be representative and determinative of the attitude of the whole race towards law. His negative act would, so to speak, impound the conscience of man in the realm of law, ie. under its judgements rather than being expressive of its excellencies.

It has been said that the conscience is set in man to prevent him from going beyond those bounds which are set for man. He is to be hedged into what it is to be truly human. Since, as Jeremiah says, 'The way of man is not in himself; it is not in man to direct his own footsteps', then it is not in man's power *of himself* to determine what is right choice. Hence his need for God. Hence his need for conscience. Hence his need for law.

Law Always Extant

We have pointed to the fact of creational law. The mandate of Genesis 1:28ff. may be equated with law. When, however, we remember that law (Hebrew: *Torah*) meant 'instruction', then we realise law is directive. That is man is set upon the path of action and operation which is vocational and which is consonant with, and fulfilling of, his true humanity.

Accounts of the time from creation to Abraham suggest strong moral consciousness, and so knowledge of law.

Abraham is said to have kept God's laws and commandments (Genesis 26:4-5), so that he must have known law.

The law given to Israel in the time of Moses was not necessarily new law. Romans 1:20ff. shows man rejected God and His truth, setting out to live a lie. Hence it can be said that in one sense he lost the full truth of law. Yet the Romans passage says man was aware that the evil he did deserved death. Also the Gentiles were able to know law if they wished (Romans 2: 12-16). The giving of formulated law to Israel was recognised by Israel as a unique gift of God. Its innate value was recognised. When Israel departed from it the prophets exhorted them to repentance and renewal of obedience. The prophets never opposed the law. They spoke against hypocrisy and traditional legalism.

In the NT we see from certain of Christ's sayings that he would not abrogate the law, that he saw love for God and neighbour as an authentic summary of the law, and for that matter, of the prophets. Both Paul and James agree that the Decalogue was the royal law of liberty, and that it was summed up in love, especially in love for one's neighbour. The nature of law is objective. It is, as we have said, man's true way of living as man.

Conscience and The Heart

We have observed that in the OT there is no word for conscience. This does not mean there was no conscience but that the Hebrews did not think in this precise term of the Greeks and others. The term they used was heart.

Heart is tautology for the whole human person. When it came to law *the Hebrew never separated it from God*. He had to love God with his whole being, and to love God was to keep His law, because 'the law was the very Outshining of the person and nature of God '. The Hebrew could not separate law from God. There was no true love of God without fear of God, and that fear was 'the beginning of wisdom'. Wisdom was walking in what God taught His people. Thus the Psalmist saw no difference between the instruction of the heart and the direction of the Lord (Psalm 119:11, Psalm 40:8). When it came to knowing good and evil--a function of the conscience--this was given to man through His law (Psalm 16:7). That is why Israel saw law as revelational, and therefore mandatory for him in every decision.

As for the heart, David could speak of his heart *smiting* him (1 Samuel 24:5), and Job of the fact that his heart did not *reproach* him (Job 27:6), whilst David again speaks in 11 Samuel 24:10 of his heart smiting him. In Psalm 51:10 he prays for a clean heart, knowing that God requires truth in the inward parts. If these details were aligned with the New Testament they would go close to saying that Job claimed a pure conscience or a good conscience whilst David stated that he had a heart that was conscious of evil. It can be accepted then that the OT 'heart' is the closest we can get to the NT conscience. We must remember, however, that heart and conscience are often used differently in the NT 'Heart' may sometimes include conscience but conscience is used specifically. What concerns us is that when man separates the law from God, then his conscience becomes a relentless tyrant.

The heart that is related to God, and sees His law as intended for good, and not simply for judgement, will not see the law as a matter for slavish fear. For the person who has separated the law from God there is a deep problem. He will be inundated with guilt. He will then see the Lawmaker as the dread Judge, and his efforts to keep law will drive him further into the complex of sin-guilt-condemnation.

In the OT, 'law was given on the basis of grace. The creational law was given on the basis of the grace of creation. The law of Moses was given to enrich the Covenant people, and their motive for obedience was that God 'had brought them out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage' (Exodus 20:1ff.). Israel then was to understand law in the light of grace, so that the heart circumcised by God to love Him would love the law of the liberating Lord (Deuteronomy 30:6).

Conscience And Law

If true conscience is a co-awareness. ie. man and God together. then the conscience is that faculty which makes a man aware of God, and in awareness makes him know what is true law. If man refuses that co-awareness (ie. he with God), then conscience will fight against him, because he does not wish to be aware of the wrongness of his own actions. He cannot displace the creational faculty of the conscience, so he must war with it. He must seek to control its elements which, not being allowed to help man. must now be enlisted--against God--to give him the peace

which may only come from true obedience, ie. true creational functioning. Man then, seeks to control his conscience and re-educate it, even to the point of being enlisted in idolatry.

The conscience has various elements:

(a) In Jeremiah 17:1 it is said, 'The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron: with a point of diamond it is engraved on the tablet of their heart... 'This means man's sin is written ineradicably. Conscience ensures that. Nothing can obliterate indelible sin. Conscience always has this point of contact.

(b) Conscience always has had *witness*. it witnesses *to*, *for*, and *against* the person. In II Corinthians 1:12, and Romans 9: 1, Paul speaks of the conscience bearing witness to him. In I Corinthians 4:2 and 5:11 he appeals to the consciences of his readers as to the truth of what he is and what he is saying. It is strange then to think of the conscience bearing witness *against* its own person. All of this is on the basis of unchangeable law.

(c) The conscience is not only witness *but judge*. Paul in the last two references speaks of the capacity of the conscience to judge the truth (or otherwise) in another. We saw that Job said his conscience did not judge him--presumably because his way was righteous. David said on two occasions that his heart smote him. Romans 2:15 speaks of a conscience which accuses on the Day of Jesus Christ, ie. the day of judgement.

(d) Every man knows he lives under the judgement of his own conscience, and that that judgement is also *the punishment* to which he is subjected. He feels pain because of his conscience. This is sentence executed.

Conscience then is an executor of judgement.

(e) There is a great debate as to whether the conscience acts before a person accedes to temptation to transgression or after the event has happened. It is best to say that there is a *directive* ministry of the conscience, by which the persons can know whether a certain action is right or wrong. Some would see this as the faculty of the heart, and this may well be true, but it is difficult to isolate the heart from the conscience. Certain it is that subsequent to wrong action there is a punitive element experienced. We need to see the link-up of conscience and the wrath of God, and to remember that God's wrath is not some impersonal thing which acts mechanistically upon sinners, but is the personal action of God upon those who are violating His creation and its functional principles. We see this in the case of persons such as Cain, Judas, King Saul and Herod. Shakespeare has wonderfully worked out the nemesis of conscience in Macbeth, whilst Hamlet can say, 'Conscience doth make cowards of us all.'

We will see that law, of itself, is not a tyrant. To the man with a good conscience it is a delightful thing.

(f) Finally we see that conscience has a *predictive* element especially in regard to law. Forsyth's statement, 'Conscience makes man one (it is the common moral factor in all humanity. however differently persons may handle it), and makes him eternal', must mean that man knows his actions are not significant simply and only for time, but relate to that which is beyond time. He has a sense of the eternal, and so a sense of the worth (or worthlessness) of his actions in the light of eternity. The *directive* and *predictive* elements then must be related.

One is directed with a view to the significant outcome of the predicted result. If in fact there were no outcome from our moral (or, immoral) actions then there would be nothing for man to be concerned about. Conscience then is directing man to consider the future and the outcome of his wrong (or right) decisions.

The State of Man Under Law and Conscience

The story told in Genesis chapter three is that man believed his eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil would liberate him to become independent of God and able *of himself* to know good and evil. In fact that act brought him into bondage of evil. It altered his relationship with God, the creation, and his fellow-beings. Unable to face the basic truth of things-as-they-essentially-are, man is thus unable to accept the true law of God. Thus he has to oppose his conscience on the basic truth, when it adjudicates along such lines.

Since the way of a man is not *in* himself (ie. of himself), man has to devise a rationale of God, creation, and man. His new rationale cannot be acceptable to the conscience which essentially relates to the truth of things. Man then is in double conflict. What proves to be distressing to him is the essential nature of things which he has opposed. Man has to live with a consciousness of evil, ie. an evil conscience. When he seeks to suppress his conscience he does damage to himself. Romans 1: 18 says that God's wrath is upon those who suppress the truth by acts of unrighteous-

ness. This wrath is primarily felt and experienced in the conscience and this more so because God *personally* opposes man in his sin.

Should man seek to justify himself by obedience to law, then he comes under the curse of the law (cf., Galatians 3: 10). He will then know innate rebellion and disobedience on the one hand, and seek to pacify his conscience by law-observance on the other hand. Further to this his sins are ineradicable, so that he is beset about by fear of judgment and punishment, and in fact knows something of these elements from the action that takes place within his own conscience. This action as we have seen is condemnatory and punitive.

Man certainly is in a humanly insoluble predicament.

Conscience And Authority

We have observed that in the case of the primal couple conscience came into operation as a consciousness of evil, rather than the undisturbed serenity of innocence. It has sometimes been pointed out that the clear, limpid lake before the throne of God (Revelation 4) is a symbol of an innocent or justified conscience. Nevertheless man's sense of his own evil is not primarily at his individual acts of sin, so much as his total approach to God. This was expressed in his desire for autonomy.

Law, then, is God's instruction to man in the way of living the true functional way of life in conformity with creation. In this sense law is related to authority. The Whole question of authority is so vexed that few, if indeed

any, can view it objectively. Since man rebels against God he is not going to take kindly to authority. Yet authority which is genuine authority is always 'authority for others' sakes', and not (as in authoritarianism) 'authority for (the) authority's sake'.

Without doubt the biblical presentation is an hierarchy of authorities. Paul's brief explanation in Romans 13:1-7 is, '... there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore he who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed '.. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad.' Paul's conclusion is, 'Therefore one must be subject, not only to avoid God's wrath, but also for the *sake of conscience*'.

What does Paul mean? It may mean, as in I Corinthians 10:25-29, that the conscience at this point sees obedience as good, although in fact this may not necessarily be the case, or it may mean that this is God's appointed order, and therefore the person is sinning against that. Paul is surely saying, 'Don't act properly simply because you will be punished if you don't. Act this way because it is the way of truth, the way of God '.

If this is so then it raises the whole question of authority. In Romans 13:3 one does what is *good*. This is similar to God's statement to Cain, 'If you do *well*, shall you not be accepted?'. Similarly in I Peter 2:18-19 one is to obey the authority even if that same authority be overbearing. Peter says, 'For one is approved if, *mindful of God*, he endures pain while suffering unjustly'. 'Mindful of God' can be translated, 'for the sake of co-knowledge with God ', or 'for the sake of consciousness of God'. The Greek term

includes the word *syneidesis*.

Jesus, as we know, was the only man ever to live with a clear conscience. It is interesting that he only ever did what the Father told him. He had perfect knowledge of authority. Indeed it is fruitful to examine his attitude to authority. He paid taxes where they were due. He submitted to a judgement which in fact was not a true judgement. Far from being the revolutionary he is often depicted to be, he upheld authority. He was void of offence before God and man.

We take it then that the redeemed conscience will fit itself again to the true created order of the universe, and with the accession of grace will view even bad authorities through the eyes of grace. In any case, Conscience must adhere to law and authority.

5

THE CONSCIENCE REHABILITATED**The Conscience Is Rehabilitated**

We have seen that man as created and innocent had a pure conscience. Law to him would have been no heavy matter. Conscience being his close awareness of God, and **so** of functional law flowing from Him, would keep the obedient person in peace and harmony. Guilt, however, is what man feels through his conscience. Thus man cannot truly serve God.

The writer of Hebrews has some interesting things to say about conscience and its action. He says in Hebrews 10:1-4 that the worshipper has a conscience of sin, ie. a consciousness of sin. He uses the term *syneidesis*. or conscience. He says the sacrifices are not effective in taking away this conscience of sin, indeed they only point to the further need for sacrifice. *Sins have to be taken away before there is no conscience of sins.* In Hebrews 6:1 and 9:14 the writer infers that sins are dead works. In dead works one *cannot serve the living God.*

The same writer shows in Hebrews 9:14 that the death of Christ *cleanses the conscience from dead works.* *The*

person whose conscience is cleansed can now serve God as the *living* God. In Hebrews 10:12-22 he shows that the one sacrifice of Christ has forever dealt with the matter of sin. The offering is effective for all time. He then quotes Jeremiah 31:31-34 which is the New Covenant (cf. Matthew 26:28) and speaks of what happens in the heart through the New Covenant. That is (a) the law is now made inward, ie. internalised in the heart; (b) sin and iniquity are put away for ever. Since forgiveness is total there is no need for further offering. Now the believer may have confidence. He says,

'Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience..

It is the Cross then, that rehabilitates the conscience. Hebrews 1:3 speaks of the total purification of sins. Sin has been deceitful (Hebrews 3:13) and in this sense has hardened the heart. It has to some degree conditioned the conscience. Another way of saying this is that the person has rejected God, and so dulled his awareness of God, and any awareness of law which has remained has brought only guilt and bondage. Now, through purification, the conscience is rehabilitated.

It is no longer an evil conscience, ie. a conscience conscious of the evil of the person. In Titus 1: 1-15 Paul has said, 'To the pure all things are pure, but to the corrupt and unbelieving nothing is pure; their very minds and consciences are corrupted '. We see then that through sin *'their very minds and consciences are corrupted '*. Now, by the Cross, that corruption is cleansed away. The heart is pure, so nothing of guilt remains upon the conscience. What, then, the heart is, so is the conscience. Whilst we tend to

personalise conscience, and make it an element which is monitor, arbiter, and judge of man, yet it must be seen to be innately part of man. We need then to see how man lives with his conscience as created, fallen, regenerated and (if possible) glorified. This we will examine, but at this point we need to know *how* the conscience is rehabilitated. In fact the question we are really asking is, 'How is man, as a person, rehabilitated?'

How The Conscience Is Rehabilitated

We repeat here that conscience is man's co-awareness of himself, especially where the connotation is moral, and most vividly when God is present to the person, then, conscience is an integral element of man. So this conscience must also be regenerated to concur with the whole regeneration of man. This aligns with the statement, 'the blood of Christ purge your conscience'. The conscience needs to be cleansed. The writer of Hebrews further speaks of 'a heart sprinkled from an evil conscience', meaning the heart no longer has that consciousness of evil which was part of its unregenerated state. Titus 1:15 explains this. Thus the *pure, good* and *clear* conscience indicated in the epistles must result from a man being regenerated to a *pure, good* and *clear* state.

In order, then, to understand the renewal of the conscience we need to follow the steps of the renewal of the person. We have suggested that for the person who is opposed to God, ie. who does not trust in Him, the conscience will work against him. The evil conscience is

really a consciousness of evil, that is the conscience communicates, at least in some measure, to the person his evil and the wrath and judgement of God which accompany this. Hence the person cannot see his own sin impartially or view God as the God of truth and grace. He sees God through the lens of his own guilt.

Paul says that the *knowledge* of sin is by the law (Romans 3:19-21). More than *knowledge* of sin is needed: *conviction* is needed. This is a work of the Holy Spirit (John 16:7-11). Whilst the conscience can discern, inform and (in a sense) judge concerning sin, the Holy Spirit alone can convict. Nevertheless it must be through the conscience that the Spirit operates (Romans 9:1). Conviction is the preliminary to repentance, although not all who are convicted repent. It must also be seen that conscience is involved in the work of conviction. In some manuscripts of John 8:9 it is said, 'each being convicted in his own conscience...' The very presence of Jesus must have formed the basis of this conviction, ie. his holy person. In John 16:7. Jesus says it was best that he should go so that the Spirit could come and convict. As we have suggested, the Holy Spirit works through the conscience. Notice that the conscience requires this conviction that grace has wholly purged the guilt and pollution of the person.

Repentance is a gift of God (Acts 5:30-31, 11:18). Repentance is a *change of mind* and this must greatly affect the conscience. True repentance is followed by the gift of *forgiveness*. Hence the person is freed from the past. The conscience may now work freely. *Cleansing from sin* /s (Hebrews 9: 14, I Corinthians 6:11, Titus 3:5) means that the heart is now cleansed from a consciousness of evil. At

the same time, believing man is justified by faith. *Justification* means the taking away of accusation and guilt. Man is freed from the indictment of sin. Hence he is freed in his conscience, for it has to do with law, judgement and punishment. Paul says, 'There is... no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus'. We notice, then, that the rehabilitation of the person is paralleled by the rehabilitation of the conscience.

In this matter of conversion, the person is now dynamically related to God. He knows the Father and the Son, and lives in the Spirit. He does all of this without legal fear. All conditions are present then, for a co-awareness with God of himself, his own life, and the purposes of God for him, both moral and vocational. From being a rebel he has become a son of the Father, a servant of the Son who is Lord, and has been transformed to being a new creation. This means his world-view, time-view, and eternity-view, have been transmuted from their former state to a new state. Hence the redeemed person is enabled to understand the true nature of law. He is also motivated to obedience (II Corinthians 5: 14, John 14:15, I John 4: 19). Conscience then is no longer a tyrant because:

- (a) the person is not now guilty and under wrath;
- (b) the person is free to see the true nature of things;
- (c) the law is not viewed as a tyrant and an entity detached from God;
- (d) the new person has a will to do the will of God.

Under these circumstances conscience is a friend and not a foe.

The Christian Man and The Rehabilitated Conscience

The Christian conscience—if the term be permitted—is described in the New Testament in the following manner:

- (a) A *good* conscience, ie. a consciousness of good, things good, not a sense of evil, a conscience which works well (Acts 23:1, I Timothy 1:5, 19, Hebrews 13:18, I Peter 3:16, 21).
- (b) A *pure* conscience. This probably means the same as a good conscience. The person does not have a sense of being impure. There is no sense of evil, although of course there is true discernment of evil as well as of good, of purity as well as of impurity (cf. I Timothy 3:9, II Timothy 1:3, Titus 1:15, and Hebrews 9:14).
- (c) A conscience *void of offence* (Acts 24:16), ie. the person, living by his conscience, seeks to do that which is right, and so not to be an offence to God and man. Thus Paul calls for the commendation of others' consciences as to his own right action, as in Acts 23: 1, Romans 9: 1, II Corinthians 1:12, 4:2, 5:11, cf. Hebrews 13:18.
- (d) A *weak* or a *strong* conscience. One has either a weak or a strong conscience. Romans 14 speaks of persons who are weak *in faith* as against those who are *strong in faith*. 1 Corinthians 8 speaks of a weak conscience, as also, by implication, a strong conscience. It seems that a weak faith parallels a weak conscience, ie. each derives from the other. Certainly,

as we will see, faith has everything to do with conscience, as conscience also with faith. Briefly it seems that where full faith is lacking in the complete work of the Cross for justification, then the person will always be seeking, unwittingly, to justify himself by what he does, and by what he refuses to do, whereas the man of faith will seek in no way to justify himself. Notice, then, that it is a Christian who has a weak conscience or a weak faith, and not simply an unbeliever.

Against this list we see that the unbelieving person can have the following as his conscience: A defiled conscience (Titus 1:15), an evil conscience (Hebrews 10:2, 22), a conscience filled with dead works (Hebrews 9: 14), and a seared conscience, ie. a conscience which is deadened to moral sensing (I Timothy 4:2). Probably all of these elements of conscience exist together and in the one person.

6

THE CHRISTIAN MAN AND THE WORKING OF CONSCIENCE

Every day the Christian person has to live by conscience. There are many elements related to such living and it is helpful to know them, All elements also are interrelated, so that to deal with them separately may be inadequate. However, we ought to examine these elements, and as holistically as possible. They are as follows:

Conscience and Faith

We have seen that conscience keeps man under tyranny when he is in guilt. Yet the Spirit convicts (John 16:7f.) and to do this he must start at, and in, conscience. Conviction of sin includes conviction of the effective work of Christ. I Peter 3:21 indicates that through baptism, or rather through the death of Christ there is a cleansing, and this is also the effecting of the clean conscience, by which man can stand confident before God. Faith, then, must understand the whole matter of the Cross so that the conscience

can be sure and confident. This tells us the need for faith. In Titus 1:15 the opposite of faith is seen to be 'corrupt and unbelieving'. Faith believes in the cleansing! In 1 Timothy 1:19 Paul speaks of '...holding faith and a good conscience'. He adds, 'By rejecting conscience, certain persons have made shipwreck of their faith'. He means that failure to believe the saving work of Christ sets one in doubt and on the path to failure. Whatever faith has received and now pronounces is that upon which the conscience stays itself. Hence Paul says the deacons 'must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience' (1 Timothy 3:9). This is really the mystery of *the* faith, ie. we hold the whole of the faith upon which conscience can rest confident, namely that guilt and pollution have been cleansed and the person is now based upon grace. That is, he. lives by faith in these true and objective facts.'

In Hebrews 3:12 an unbelieving heart causes one to fall away from God. In the,' same context, sin exercises its deceit, hardening the heart. In Hebrews 10:22 the writer exhorts, '... let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience'. Only where faith obtains can this assurance be constant. The writer of Hebrews has traversed the new covenant, and quotes from Jeremiah 31:31-34, thus showing the full forgiveness of sins, and the refusal of God to remember man's iniquities.

This then brings us to the matters of a strong conscience and a strong faith as distinct from a weak conscience and a weak faith. In Romans 14 the substance of the matter is that one brother can eat meat and being strong in faith is not harmed by the act. The man weak in faith can be

harmed, even though, of itself, eating meat is no basic act of wrong-doing. In I Corinthians 8 the matter is on the same principle. A brother with a strong conscience can even eat meat offered to idols, knowing it is still and only meat, but the brother with a weak conscience believes he is sinning, because he is being identified with idolatry. Here the strong person is asked to consider the weaker one. The weaker one seems to think that something of his spiritual salvation or growth is in peril by eating meat, especially where it is offered to idols. Clear faith should tell him nothing can interfere with his salvation. We conclude then that the conscience is weak where faith is weak, strong where faith is strong. The man of strong faith does not believe his salvation is dependent upon what he does or what he refrains from. doing.

In 1 Timothy 1:5 Paul says, 'The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and sincere faith'. He knows that love responds to true love, ie. God's love, and that the *good conscience* is one that has seen God's love in its completeness in the death of Christ. 'the *sincere faith* is on the same level, and issues from the same source. Summing up we may say that full trust in God gives the conscience assurance to act correctly, since guilt has been removed from the person, and forgiveness has covered his failure, as also it will continue to do.

Conscience and Freedom

In the Old Testament, Israel was under law, but law was not a burden to them, if we can judge by such Psalms as 1,

19 and 119—to name only a few. We have seen that David's heart smote him for his sins. In Psalm 32:3-4 he refuses confession of his sin, and suffers. In Psalm 51 he cries to God about that very sin, and believes he will receive purging and pardon. In Psalm 32:5 he says that when he confessed his sin his guilt was forgiven. In Old Testament as well as New Testament alike there has always been such forgiveness.

At the same time, as Paul points out, many Israelites lived under law as a bondage. It was in fact *the penalty* of law which brought bondage, but then as we have seen, man in being hostile to God sees His law as burdensome. He misses the true excellence of law.

With the coming of redemption, and with a life of faith, the law appears as a different matter. It does not now threaten judgement. The law is internalised (cf. Ezekiel 36:25-26, Jeremiah 31:31f.), and so law is not a bondage but a freedom. With a cleansed conscience the person wills to obey. Obedience to the law of love is then a delight. Romans 13:8, Galatians 5:13 and James 1:22f. all show us that walking the way of law is walking the way of freedom. It is simply the living of the life in love.

Conscience and Integrity

In II Corinthians 1:12 Paul says, 'For our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience that we have behaved in the world, and still more toward you, with holiness and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God'. Paul is delighted in the witness of his own con-

science. He is showing us that genuine peace and assurance come when one has right behaviour. Right behaviour, however, is not merely legal exactitude, for Titus 2:11-14 shows us that grace teaches men to live in godly fashion. It is grace which inspires obedience. In verse 14 Paul says, '... who gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds'. In Titus 3:8 he repeats the thought, 'The saying is sure. I desire you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to apply themselves to good deeds; these are excellent and profitable to men'. We see then that Christians are redeemed to execute good works. This balance between grace and works is seen in Ephesians 2:8-10. One works from grace, not penal fear.

Paul then can rest serene when his own conscience testifies to his true action. He expects a similar witness in the consciences of others towards himself. In II Corinthians 4:2 he says, 'We have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways; we refuse to practise cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God'. He is showing that when he lives in sincerity then the consciences of others will testify to the fact. In II Corinthians 5:11 he says, '... but what we are is known to God, and I hope it is also known to your conscience'. Doubtless this is what he means in Acts 23:1, 'And Paul, looking intently at the council, said, "Brethren, I have lived before God in all good conscience up to this day"'. He means he has always obeyed his conscience and received its commendation. Acts 24:16 really sums this up,

‘So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward God and toward men’. If his conscience is clear towards God and man then he has indeed kept (and developed) his integrity. The writer of Hebrews (13:18) conveys exactly the same idea and principle, ‘Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honourably in all things’.

Paul then has the witness of his own conscience, and witness of the conscience of other believers. In Romans 9:1 he speaks of the conscience bearing him witness *in the Holy Spirit*. NEB has it, ‘I am speaking the truth in Christ, and my own conscience, *enlightened by the Holy Spirit*, assures me it is no lie’. The Jerusalem Bible says, ‘What I want to say now is no pretence: I say it in union with Christ--it is the truth--my conscience in union with the Holy Spirit assures me of it too’. We see then that the Holy Spirit and conscience work together. Otherwise we may assume that the conscience is not in a position to witness to the truth. It needs the enlightenment and instruction of the Holy Spirit.

Finally Acts 24:16 says, ‘I always take pains to have a clear conscience towards God and towards men’. Paul must mean that he so obeys the law of love to God and man that he does nothing for which his conscience judges him, and so he is right with God and man. This must mean he is always on the alert to do what is right. Of course many will misjudge his actions, but then that is not his fault. Such actions are not done out of legal fear but out of love-compulsion (11 Corinthians 5:14, John 14:15).

Conscience and Service

Hebrews 9:14 shows that when the blood (death) of Christ cleanses the conscience from dead works, then the believer is free, and impelled to serve the living God. This service is worship and action. One has served gods; now one serves the true God. Revelation 7:14 shows the great multitude of the redeemed. Having made their robes white in the blood of the Lamb they now *serve* Him day and night. In 11 Timothy 1:3 Paul says, ‘I thank God whom I serve with a clear conscience’.

Doubtless when one had a consciousness of evil, one could not see God as He is, and so love and serve Him. When one is in the clear with God ‘and sees Him as He is, then one loves because He first loved, and so wishes to serve Him. Service is part of the law of love. Paul says, ‘The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart, and a good conscience and a sincere faith’.

Love is the key to all service to both God and man. In I John 3:16-23 the writer is speaking first of all about the love of God, and he exhorts his readers to like action, ie. to laying down life for the brethren. He says that if a man has the means to meet the needs of a needy person then he ought to do so. Love is not just ideas or uttered words, but true action. He then adds words which are often misunderstood, ‘Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us then we have confidence towards God’. This is really the conscience. He has said, ‘...whenever our hearts condemn us... God is greater than our hearts, and He knows everything’. He means, ‘If our consciences condemn us, how

much more will God who knows even beyond our consciences'.* John has said, in effect, 'When we do in act what is the truth, our consciences do not condemn us, but rather assure us we are right'.

True service, then, is the service of love. In a way this seems to have shifted the emphasis of the conscience from a meticulous observance of (moral) law to the area of love. When we see from many New Testament references that love is in fact the fulfilling of the law, then we see that service which means worship, and worship which means love, is the true way of life, and that way of life which the conscience commends (cf. Romans 12:1-2). This must mean that our self-awareness is only valid when it is at the same time true God-awareness. We will develop this thought further at a later stage.

Conscience and Indwelling Sin

Romans 7:13-25 has always been the source of study concerning man and his sin. Two differing schools of thought exist, and from these two issue many graduations of these two basic stated principles. One school maintains Paul is speaking of his pre-conversion experience because he says, 'I am sold under sin' (v. 14), which, it is claimed, cannot be spoken of a Christian seeing that Romans 6:12ff. demonstrates that man is triumphant over sin. The second

* Some see this as meaning, 'If our heart (conscience) condemns then do not worry. Grace overrides this condemnation of the conscience'. This is wrong. When conscience condemns our failure to love in action then even more will God see this failure to love as very wrong.

school fastens on Paul's statement, 'I delight in the law of God after the inner man', (v. 22) and says such delight cannot be the experience of an unconverted person since it relates to the godly man of Psalm 1, and the joys and delights of law expressed in Psalms 19, 119, and other places. Some exegetes see the portion as relating to both Christian and non-Christian persons. Some merely see it as a temporary spiritual regression on the part of Paul.

What concerns us is Paul's appreciation of himself, or, as we say his awareness (co-awareness) of himself. He sees that he *of himself is* desirous of doing good and refraining from evil. In practice *of himself* he does what he opposes. At the deepest level he delights only in obedience. He speaks of the power of indwelling sin *to force his hand*. He says, 'It is not I that do it, but sin that dwells in me'. Sin is the true culprit. Yet Paul does not let himself off responsibility for his own actions. He simply argues that this is not his disposition or intention, ie. to sin. His desire is otherwise. This is why he says that he *of himself is* 'sold under sin'.

Doubtless it is here that we see the conscience at its most sensitive and powerful state. The legal man is at this point crushed by his conscience. He is in despair for he is judged. Paul, however, whilst recognising he does the evil, puts it down *not to his own disposition but the innate power of indwelling sin*, ie. sin *of itself* is stronger than Paul *of himself*. In the sense of James' description of sin (James 1:14-15), Paul is not sinning. In the sense that Paul *of himself* is weaker than sin *of itself*, Paul is not culpable. The only thing of which Paul can be culpable is endeavouring *of himself* to do good and refrain from evil with a view

to defeating the principle of sin which is always with him whenever he desires to do good. Paul must never seek to defeat sin or accomplish good by his own *powers, for he has none!* The principle of Romans 8 is the principle of the power of the Spirit which aids Paul against sin, and assists him in doing good (c.f. Romans 8:13). In this way sin's power is transcended by the power of the Spirit and the Gospel.

Paul's conscience then in disapproving of the sin, but in excusing from culpability, in this case must be a *grace-informed* conscience. The text of Romans 7:13-25 precludes any possibility of it referring to a pre-conversion experience, or a post-conversion experience of moral recession. Innately man is weak *of himself*, but in Christ and in the Spirit he can transcend the power of sin.

The Christian man, then, has to understand these matters so that evil cannot, once again, take advantage of the law, and, using it as a fulcrum, lever redeemed man, precipitating him into sinning. The wisdom of living in obedience, with one's conscience, is thus clearly shown. The Christian man must keep his moral integrity. In fact his joy and serenity are contingent upon this action.

Conscience and Confession

John's famous statement, 'If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us, but if we confess our sin he is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness', was undoubtedly

aimed at gnostics and similar types. Redeemed man sins, although he does not seek or desire the *praxis* of sinning. Primarily John is saying that if these persons who do not admit their sinfulness and sins were to confess it as reality, then they would be forgiven, and so become free. John, in this passage, is certainly not advising a technique of confession (*par excellence*) which draws forgiveness from God. Forgiveness is a total gift of God, so that confession, in a way of speaking, is catching up with God's (already given) forgiveness.

What is clear is that guilt accumulates (so to speak) in the human mind, heart, and conscience, where the person refuses to admit to it. Hence the need for confession. Such confession is not seated in penance, but in repentance. Where it is seated in remorse and not repentance there is no lasting value to it. A forgiveness which is 'bought' by remorse and actions of remorse does not relieve guilt, but in fact increases it. The grace-informed conscience will reject remorse as inadmissible for true confession and forgiveness. The conscience that is not grace-informed, and which lives in legal guilt and legal endeavours will only perpetuate guilt, evoke spasms of remorse, and increase legal fear and all its concomitants. The conscience must be based in forgiveness, love, and must be in the Holy Spirit in order to have a true assessment of what love demands for heartfelt obedience.

This then leads us again to the whole matter of the conscience and the law. We are now in a position to view it from a new vantage point.

Conscience and Law

We have already discussed much of this subject under the heading, 'Man, Conscience, and Law'. We have seen that created man in innocence did not have a legal consciousness of law. Innocence does not see the law merely in its legislative or punitive elements. Guilt from disobedience alters this situation. It poses law as an enemy, and sees God, the Law-Giver, as Judge. This of course is correct, but then guilt brings prejudice, fear and hatred. Hence the law is denigrated. Likewise man's view of God is prejudiced.

We saw from Genesis 3 and Romans I that sinful man has deep problems. The true operation of conscience demands full awareness of God, and thus right understanding of law, not as primarily prohibitory of certain actions and punitive where guilt is, but as the functional way of life for created man within his creation. If this is what Paul is pointing to in Romans 2:14-15, then it must mean man is divided within himself. He has at least *some* awareness of the rightness of law, but seeks to rationalise his rebellion against God. and his own attempts to achieve autonomy. In the long run it is not the fact of rejection of commandments which is primary and most reprehensible, but the refusal to live in dependency upon God. Man goes against his created creatureliness and seeks to be an autonomous creature which, by nature of the case, is impossible. Man is most worried by conscience when he refuses his functional being, and its functional operations. His seated sin lies in his refusal to accept God as autonomous

in His universe. He will not admit that this divine autonomy is man's basic freedom. Hence his *actions* which proceed from a wrong and rebellious *attitude* are occasions for the conscience to exercise its various functions.

Man then is in the following predicament: Man demands his personal freedom in autonomy. In doing so he is at variance with his created self. Conscience does not approve of what he is doing. In that sense he is a judge against himself (cf. Romans 1:32). Law and conscience work together to produce guilt, and sin then operates by the guilt of sin. Paul has very powerfully described this in Romans 7:5-12. Man seeks to be free by refusing the law, and by manufacturing his own law. He will not admit his sin and its guilt, therefore he hopes for the impossible, ie. to live without guilt, or even to live with it! The compounding of guilt by sinning, and sinning by guilt brings man to an intolerable situation. Romans I: 18-32 describes this as the application of the wrath of God. Man would be released by confession since the God of grace stands behind all law. Without receiving and using the gift of repentance, man is in the grip of guilt-dynamics. He can only pass through remorse, and achieve a temporary reprieve from the burden of guilt, or he can seek by slavish submission to law as a principle to expiate for his own evil.

The Scriptures show us in Cain, King Saul, Judas and Ananias and Sapphira the dreadful workings of guilt. The same is shown in the early life of Luther. and to some degree Saul of Tarsus. However, it is in the lives of David, Job, Paul and Luther that we see the emergence from law-guilt to Gospel-grace.

LAW AND GRACE

If we need to understand the dynamics of guilt as they relate to a defiled conscience, a sinful conscience, and even a seared conscience, then we need also to understand the dynamics of forgiveness, grace and love. Man without an enlightened conscience is always subject to wrath, confusion, misery and guilt. With the enlightened conscience he is able to understand the true and rich nature of law. He is assured that he has no past, that his sins are forgiven, and that his heart is purified. The objective bearing of his sins upon the Cross is the basis of the removal now, objectively, of his guilt. To the degree to which his faith works upon these facts, to that degree he will live under the liberty brought to him by grace. If there were no objective happening of the Cross then he would have no objective basis for his faith.

We have also seen that the internalised nature of law aids the conscience that is under grace, as the conscience also aids the person who is graced. Because of the education of the conscience by the revelation given through the Word and the Spirit, the person is not driven legalistically by conscience but can operate under grace. This is 'holding the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience'. This is 'love which issues from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith'.

In other words, the conscience no longer has to prove itself as a tyrant, but gives basic aid to the believer. This nevertheless, requires the believer to live in the Spirit, use the means of grace of prayer, fellowship, the Scriptures, and to live in obedience to the will of God under the Lordship of His Son, Jesus Christ. It also means living in

constant awareness of God as Father, and of His people as the brethren. It means deliberately avoiding offence to God and man, and so living in the serenity which comes when we accept the authority of God, and the authorities He has placed in our world. It means living functionally in a functional world in the way of love with the motivation of love that has redeemed and which goes on being redemptive.

Redeemed man therefore must have a true view of creation. I Timothy 4:4, and I Timothy 6:17, show that creation is good (cf. Genesis 1:31, Ecclesiastes 3:11, I Corinthians 10:26). Man then must enjoy the gifts of God. Man under grace can do this, but man under law in legalism cannot enjoy the creation. He sees God as parsimonious. He sees creation as having much in it that is harmful, and he suspects the very nature of creation. Hence his dualism. I Timothy 4:1-4 shows that thinking is demonically inspired to reject the good things of life such as foods, marriage, and the like. These are for our enjoyment. The seared conscience is that conscience which is not truly creation-conscious. It is conscious only of fear, of things which will destroy. It cannot admit the total goodness of God in giving man all things richly to enjoy. A seared conscience means it is anaesthetised. Yet seared flesh, whilst being insensitive, may, along the edges of searing be over-sensitive (hyperaesthetic). A seared conscience is therefore morbidly sensitive to an evil which does not really exist.

It is imperative then for man to live under grace, and for his conscience to be free. This freedom is a work of the Spirit (Romans 8:3f., II Corinthians 3:17). Unless the

conscience of man has witnessed in revelation the complete work of the Cross, the believer will always have a deficient view of grace and a partially morbid view of law. When the conscience is convinced that the Cross covers the sin and pollution of the person, then that conscience acts under resultant grace. It makes the person genuinely sensitive to sin, willingly acceptive of authority, and motivated to true obedience.

7

A SUMMARY OF CONSCIENCE

- Conscience is that awareness a man has, with, and of himself, in regard to what is right and wrong. Innocent man would have had awareness without condemnation and guilt.
- Fallen man's awareness is altered because he is out of God. Awareness is only vital and authentic in the presence of God. Conscience is then, indeed, co-awareness.
- Fallen man has conscience as an enemy, although it seeks the best for the person. It discerns, warns, and predicts punishment. When ignored so that wrong action takes place, it judges and executes something of a sentence.
- The effect of conscience outside obedience is to portray God as judgemental and without grace and love. With disobedience, fear and hatred are compounded.
- By the conscience evil may manipulate a person, and even use the law to do this. In fact it uses the law liberally, whether the law of God, of man or of the idols.
- By the conscience the Holy Spirit brings conviction of sin, righteousness and judgement. If the person responds, and the gifts of grace are received and used a person

- repents, believes, and receives forgiveness, cleansing and justification. This can be called regeneration.
- Through the work of regeneration the person and his conscience are rehabilitated. The conscience is now pure, good, clear. By this conscience a person holds the mystery of the faith. His faith in Christ's saving work, and the love of the Father is the context in which the conscience now operates.
 - Serenity and joy are known as the person, aided by the conscience and a new view of law, lives life daily in integrity of personhood. Such daily living involves the use of the means of grace, and heartfelt obedience to the command of Christ. All this is done in the context of the Word of God, the Spirit of God, and the fellowship of the people of God.
 - The Christian man discovers he is a person who will always need to be dependent upon God, as also aided by His power. The dynamics of evil are such that man cannot counter them by himself. The dynamics of grace are more than a counter for evil, and in the use of these the conscience is a powerful factor. It is not predictive of judgement so much as of reward. It does not prove judgemental but commendatory. It does not execute punishment so much as it gives reward.
 - The operation of conscience is dependent upon grace. The objective work of Christ to destroy the guilt and pollution of man is that upon which the person can base his faith. In fact it is on the Person of the Father, and the Person of the Son, that he really bases his faith.
 - A Christian who is weak in faith will falter, and tend to come under legalism. He will tend to justify himself by

- good actions, or feel unjustified by failures. The man weak in faith is weak in conscience. Conversely the man strong in faith is strong in conscience. He must discover in love that he must make concessions to this weaker brother. This will not weaken his own faith or conscience. Rather it will strengthen him, making him even more mature.
- The testimony of conscience to the person is to be trusted only when that one is in grace and the Holy Spirit, otherwise he will tend, through the conscience, to legalism. His constant will to obedience will prevent lawlessness on the one hand with the accompanying condemnation of conscience, and will encourage personal integrity on the other.
 - The conscience, in grace, does not let the person off when he is guilty, but, rather it rebukes where the law of love has been controverted without bringing the person into legal bondage.
 - In the ultimate, conscience when it is good is one of the primary factors in the flowing outwards (from that person) of love. This is because it is a joyous co-awareness (with God) of what a person truly is, what the law of love is, and what God is about in His creation as Father, Creator, and King.
 - We conclude then that redeemed man is liberated from his conscience as a tyrant. He is liberated by the new awareness his conscience has of God, His creation, and His law. What Adam lost by his rebellion and sin, namely true awareness of good and evil, redeemed man can now know. This knowledge will be increased as man is renewed more and more in the image of his Creator (II Corinthians 3:18, cf. Colossians 3: 10).

- The mature (or maturing) person is one 'who by reason of use [has his] senses exercised to discern both good and evil' (Hebrews 5: 14). When one day he comes to know as he is known, this experimental awareness will no longer be needed. He will see God as He is (Revelation 22:4) and he will be like Him.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Articles In The Following Bible Dictionaries:

A Theological Word Book of the Bible, Ed. A. Richardson, Macmillan Co., N.Y., 1971.

Baker's Dictionary of Theology, Ed. E. F. Harrison, Picketing & Inglis, London, 1960.

A Dictionary of Christian Theology. Ed. A. Richardson, S.C.M., London, 1969.

Dictionary of N.T. Theology, Ed. C. Brown, Paternoster Press, Exeter, 1978.

Dictionary of the Bible, (! vol.), Hasting, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1963.

Dictionary of the Bible, (5 vols.), Hasting, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1903.

International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia, Eerdmans, Michigan, 1978. *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Abingdon, Nashville, 1962.

Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, (5 vols.), Ed. Merrill Tenney, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1975.

Theological Dictionary of the N.T., Eds. G. Kittel, G. Friedrich, Eerdmans, Michigan, 1971.

The New Bible Dictionary, I.V.F., London, 1962.

Vocabulary of the Bible, J. J. von Allmen, Lutterworth, London, 1958.

An Effective Conscience is Dependent Upon Spiritual Regeneration, Colin Leigh Diprose, A dissertation submitted to faculty of Baptist Theological College of Queensland.

Christian Personal Ethics, Cad P. Henry, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1957.

Conscience, O. Hallesby, I.V.P., London, 1950.

Conscience in the New Testament, C. A. Pierce, S.C.M. Press, London, 1955.

Conscience: Theological & Psychological Perspectives, Ed. C. Ellis Nelson, Newman Press, New York, 1973.

Grace of Law, Ernest F. Keyan, Carey Kinggate Pr., London, 1964.

In Understanding Be Men, T. C. Hammond, I.V.P., London, 1936.

Let Conscience Speak, David Fountain, Henry E. Walter, Worthing, 1973.

Liberty of Conscience, John Van Til, Craig Press, U.S.A. 1972.

Moral Law, Ernest F. Kevan, Sovereign Grace Publishers, Michigan, 1971.

Oh, No, Lord! Not Law, Lord?! G. C. Bingham, New Creation Publications, Blackwood, 1979.

Paul--An Outline of His Theology Herman, Ridderbos, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1975.

The Complete Works of Richard Sibbes, D.D., Vol.3., Ed. A. B. Grosart, James Nichol, Edinburgh, 1862.

'The Christian and His Conscience', Marcellus J. Kik, *Christianity Today*, Vol. VIII No. 15, 1964, p. 28.

The Delight of Law D. Meatheringham, New Creation Publications, Blackwood, 1977.

The Divine Imperative, Emil Brunner, Lutterworth Press, London, 1937.