

**Call to Obedience #251**  
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Our faith suffers shipwreck when our conscience becomes defiled.

## **Conscience, Faith, and Love**

**By Reimar Schultze**

“Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned: From which some having swerved have turned aside...” (1 Tim. 1:5–6).

This verse gives us the relationship between faith, love, and conscience. Did you ever realize that your capacity to hold divine, 1 Corinthians love, has a lot to do with the state of your conscience? Do you know that unless your conscience is pure, your heart is not pure, your faith is not pure, and your love is earthly? How much in the Christian life hinges on the condition of our conscience? Shall we say “a lot,” or shall we say “everything”? Indeed, what can God do with a Christian who does not have a clear conscience toward God? Yes, indeed, Christianity is very much a matter of conscience. But first let us try to understand what the conscience is all about.

### **The Nature of the Conscience.**

Conscience is a built-in power which we are born with. It is an extension of the mind of God into the soul of man. Man’s conscience came out of the breath of God: “And the Lord God...breathed into [Adam’s] nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul” (Gen. 2:7). By our conscience, we are capable of passing moral judgment on ourselves, on others, and on circumstances. Paul makes this very plain in Romans 2:14–15: “When the Gentiles, who have no knowledge of the law, act in accordance with it in light of nature, they show that they have a law in themselves, for they demonstrate the effect of a law operating in their own hearts. Their conscience endorses the existence of such a law, for there is something which condemns or commends their actions” (JB Phillips).

Our conscience is like another person living within us who checks us on our thoughts, actions, and attitudes. At times, it agrees with us, and at other times, it disagrees with us, making us feel very uncomfortable and guilty. Remember the Pharisees who caught the woman in the act of adultery, “being convicted by their own conscience, [they] went out one by one...” (John 8:9). This “other person” inside of them chastened and condemned them for their evil deeds and thoughts.

Now, although we can decide whether we want to agree with our conscience or disagree with it, we cannot shut it off. Consequently, since the conscience operates by a higher voice, it can be called the voice of God in the soul of man.

Notice that as far back as 1 Samuel 24:5, conscience is also often synonymous with the heart of man: “And it came to pass afterward, that David’s heart smote him, because he had cut off Saul’s skirt.”

### **The Training of the Conscience.**

The conscience of man is clear and clean in early childhood, before the age of accountability. However, it will lose its purity and its sharpness when it is violated and remains unreinforced by the Word of God and godly training. Every time we violate our conscience, we sin, and we

become less sensitive to discern what is that good and perfect and acceptable will of God. This makes childhood training so important, doesn't it? "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6).

So then, what is at the very heart of child training but the keeping and refining of the conscience of the child, i.e., obedience to the voice of God and the ability of the child to discern the mind of God. Can you understand now the greatness of Paul's words, "But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Heb. 5:14)?

Now you also understand why Christians disagree on certain matters like going to theaters, television programs, dating, dress, etc. Those who have frequently violated their conscience and have not been in the "meat" of the Word deeply enough will find pleasure in things that others will be convicted about. Hence, let us carefully heed the words of Paul "And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offense toward God, and toward men" (Acts 24:16).

What are we doing to our conscience when we spend hours in front of the television or when we allow our children to do so? Or what are we doing to our children when we ourselves become the television to them, exhibiting ungodly behavior, language, reactions, and attitudes? Will our child in adolescence be able to discern the voice of God as to whom to marry, or will the child's conscience, by then, be seared as with a hot iron?

By childhood training and intense devotion to the Word of God, Martin Luther's conscience was so powerful that all the Roman Catholic church fathers, scholars, bishops, arch bishops, cardinals, and the pope himself could not break it. The great Reformation came out of the conscience trained in childhood and sharpened by the Bible. So when Luther took his final stand at the Diet of Worms in 1521 AD before all the prominent secular and religious leaders, he said: "My conscience is captive to the Word of God...To go against my conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me." The great Reformation, Protestantism, came out of the conscience of a man! Father and mother, what are you doing to your child's conscience? What are you doing to your own conscience?

A conscience defiled is a conscience devoid both of the love and fear of God. And when we have neither fear of God nor love of God, we are like the unbelievers. Faith is the vessel upon which we embark when we find Christ, but if we ignore our conscience, the vessel of faith will begin to leak, its wood will begin to rot, and we shall suffer shipwreck. Yes, we may continue going to church for another thirty years, reading our Bibles and praying, but our prayers will be without effect because our faith has lost its purity and power. It will be an empty profession.

### **The Faith, Love, Conscience Connection.**

Let us consider the relationship between faith and conscience from one of the teachings of Jesus. At one point, the apostles said to Jesus, "Increase our faith" (Luke 17:5). And Jesus said, "If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you" (v. 6). A defiled conscience cannot have heart faith, but only head faith, and head faith cannot move the hand of God.

How do we increase our faith? We begin by checking our conscience to see if it is clear! Several times, Paul talks about "faith unfeigned." He means by this, faith without hypocrisy—pure faith, which can only come out of a pure conscience toward God. Faith that is as pure as a mustard seed is faith that has the potential of the growth of a mustard seed into one of the greatest of shrubs. Jesus implied that nothing is impossible to such faith, and what is true of faith is true of love. A pure conscience means a pure heart and love abounding.

What all have church people been missing in doing and getting because they have disregarded their conscience? They have prayed and prayed, and believed and believed, but their faith has no feet to move nigh unto God and no hands to hold onto the promises of God, because their conscience is defiled. There are therefore no results. Look at the saints: Enoch was translated, Noah kept building the ark, Joseph and Daniel led nations because their consciences were clear, and they could discern the will of God. Could Jesus have atoned for our sins without a pure conscience? Could the writers of Scriptures have been entrusted with the oracles of God had their consciences been defiled?

### **The Cleansing of the Conscience.**

“Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water” (Heb. 10:22). How does our conscience become cleansed? By the blood of Jesus!

What can wash away my sin?/Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

What can make me whole again?/Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

For my pardon this I see—Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

For my cleansing, this my plea—Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Oh! Precious is the flow that makes me white as snow;

No other fount I know, Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Nothing But the Blood by Robert Lowry

When we are converted, the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin, we receive a new heart, and our conscience is purified. This is brought out by Ezekiel: “Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them” (Ezek. 36:25–27).

What if, after we have received the Lord Jesus, we violate the voice of conscience? We confess, we repent, and Jesus will cleanse our conscience: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). But even if we walk with God consistently, we need the constant help of the blood of Jesus to keep our conscience clean: “...if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (v. 7). There just is no life before God without the blood. So, praise the Lord for the blood and for a conscience devoid of offence toward God and man.

So, my friend, let us consider the strong bond between faith, conscience, and love. Without a clear conscience, our faith will be weak, at best, if not dead altogether; and our love will only be human love, ever breaking down in the severe tests of life. So, consider the faith/conscience connection. It can be a matter of life and death.

“Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck” (1 Tim. 1:19).

When people’s faith suffers shipwreck, it is always preceded by the defilement of the conscience.