

GRACE GAZETTE

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Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.

Hebrews 12:12-13

CONSCIENCE

For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;) In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel.

Romans 2:14-16

One of the attributes which the LORD has bestowed upon men, which sets them apart from the rest of HIS animal creation is that of the conscience. It is through the conscience that GOD is pleased to restrain the natural wickedness and fleshly nature of men. Paul speaks of those who “*having their conscience seared with a hot iron,*” (1Tim 4:2) go about speaking lies in hypocrisy. When a man is given over to lying, his natural bent to sin will bring him to ruin quite soon apart from the mercy of GOD to deliver him. The main person that is deceived through these lies is one's own self, for it is when we begin to believe our own lies that we are in the very anteroom of hell. When Eve was deceived by Satan, she began to believe his lie and then convinced herself that he was right. Adam, on the other hand, demonstrated the natural weakness of human flesh by disregarding the plain commandment of the LORD, not being deceived but rather despising the law of GOD and ultimately disregarding his own conscience.

Apart from the mercy of GOD in stirring up the conscience to have regard to that natural law which is indelibly printed in the mind of men, all men will pursue their own lusts unto damnation and utter destruction. This “*natural law*” which the LORD has “*written in their hearts*”, is evidenced daily, as men take offence at various wrongs which they feel have been perpetrated against them. The most devious thief who has no pangs of guilt in stealing from others will become angry if someone should steal from him. Thus, he bears record that the law of GOD is most steadfast and sure even though he despises it constantly. There is no escape and all men are without excuse before HIM who is the JUDGE of all.

The English word conscience appears thirty-one times and its plural form, once, in the New Testament and none in the old. The Greek word (from which it is translated), has its root in another Greek word which is translated as “*being privy*”, when Sapphira's knowledge of Ananais's and her scheme is described. (see Acts 5:12) It is translated as “*considered*”, when Peter thought of going to the house where John Mark dwelt, and the disciples were praying for his release from prison. (see Acts 12:12). It is translated as “*ware*” (aware or wary) when Paul and Barnabas knew of the Jews intent to stone them and they fled from Iconium to Lystra. (see Acts 14:6) The fourth and final time, we find it, it is translated as “*know*” as Paul described the SOURCE of his knowledge and the inability of others to overturn it or judge him for speaking it. (see I Cor. 4:4)

Thus we learn that the “*conscience*” is that innermost place of our thoughts and considerations. It is the seat of our moral consciousness and that from which we cannot escape. It is that which shall bear witness against us in the Day of Judgement, apart from the great mercy and grace of GOD to give us a SUBSTITUTE who shall also be our ADVOCATE in that great assize.

The LORD is pleased to give unto HIS people a tender conscience which causes them to confess with the Psalmist, “*I have longed for thy salvation, O LORD; and thy law is my delight.*”

(Psa 119:174) and to rejoice even as Paul declared, *"For I delight in the law of God after the inward man."* (Rom 7:22) This tender conscience finds a place of solace in contemplating the WORD of GOD. *"With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee. Blessed art thou, O LORD: teach me thy statutes."* (Psa 119:10-12) They even confess that HIS WORD is true and HIS judgement is just even if they are destroyed by it. *"Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him."* (Job 13:15) A man with this tender conscience towards GOD must declare with Paul *"God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged."* (Rom 3:4) He must confess with Peter, when asked if he would depart from the LORD, *"Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God."* (John 6:68-69)

The scriptures speak of the conscience with several different adjectives, the most common being, "good". The term "good conscience" appears six times. *"Pray for us: for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly."* (Heb 13:18) *"Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned."* (1Tim 1:5) (see Acts 23:1; 1 Tim 1:19; 1 Pet. 3:16; 21) We could probably substitute the word "clear" for good, since there is no hint of condemnation to that man who has a "good conscience", he is satisfied with that which he professes. Even as Peter describes the act of water baptism as the *"answer of a good conscience towards GOD."* The sons of GOD are not to be immersed (i.e.; baptized) in water in order to gain something, but rather because they are satisfied with that which CHRIST has done, wishing to be identified with HIM in HIS example and HIS command.

We read of Paul saying he had a "conscience void of offence" in Acts 24:16 as he testified before Felix of his unshakeable belief and satisfaction in the Gospel of JESUS CHRIST. There was no doubt in Paul's mind of CHRIST seated on the throne of Heaven, having risen from the dead and taken captivity captive. He was not reiterating some dogma he had learned in his youth nor was he desiring promote some tenet of religion, but rather spoke of that which his very heart and soul was clinging to, to the exclusion of all other foundations.

Paul writes to Timothy of a "pure conscience" as he describes the various qualities of those prepared to be deacons, *"Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience."* (1Tim 3:9) Any believer, but especially those who would execute this noble calling, must not be double-minded nor double-tongued (i.e.; speaking one thing while doing another). The mystery of the faith is revealed as *"CHRIST in you the hope of glory."* Also, that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs in the gospel, since the LORD's elect come from every kindred, tribe, and tongue. There is no place of sectarianism among the sons of GOD due to race or ethnicity. Paul speaks of this same "pure conscience" when he confesses to be in prayer for Timothy. *"I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day."* (2Tim 1:3) This "pure conscience" is faith unfeigned.

Quite in contrast to this "good conscience", "conscience void of offence", and "pure conscience", Paul also describes a "seared conscience", a "defiled conscience", and an "evil conscience". Those who are quite overtaken in their own deceit are those with a conscience "*seared with a hot iron*", i.e.; one which exhibits no remorse and is blind. They are those who "*speak lies in hypocrisy*," and promote seducing spirits and doctrines of devils. (see 1 Tim.4:1-5) These are those "latter times" of which he speaks even as he warned Timothy of this in his day. Those who deny the supremacy and complete salvation wrought by CHRIST for HIS elect bride are in such a condition from which they cannot extricate themselves.

A defiled conscience is that which turns from the freedom purchased by CHRIST, to embrace the beggarly elements of "touch not, taste not". (see 1 Cor.8:7; Tit 1:15) An "evil conscience" is that which would keep a man from resting in the full and free redemption of CHRIST. (see Heb.10:22) What kind of conscience have you been given?

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