



HAVING a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ. 17 For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing. 18 For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: 19 By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; 20 Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. 21 The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ: 22 Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him. (1 Peter 3:16-22 (KJV))

The conscience has often been compared to the guiding principles of the magnetic compass. *“The compass of a wooden ship will keep true to the pole unless there is something in the cargo to deflect it such as of a massive metallic nature. It is found to be very difficult to make a compass that will work reliably on an iron vessel. We remember when Captain Murray of the ill-fated ATLANTIC (RMS Atlantic of the White Star Lines, sunk offshore Halifax Nova Scotia on April 1, 1873 with a loss of 535 souls) showed us the compass of that luxurious steamship which was his especial pride and thought to be perfect. That compass failed to do perfect work, and that noble ship was wrecked upon the rocks because of it. The conscience is the compass by which man steers his bark. It is a defective thing. Base metal of the world in its cargo has often destroyed its polarity and hurled its possessor upon the rocks. Perfect consciences are rare, and those so esteemed fail at the most important crisis. The compass is sometimes elevated on iron*



ships so as to get above disturbing influences. It is an example for us. We must get up so near God as to be above earthly allurements." - from a period account of the disaster.

In more recent history, radio beams have been used by aircraft to navigate to their destinations. These beams provided a direct-path reference to our destinations. They do not curve or vary from the direct path. But now, in even more contemporary times, GPS is used for navigation. In real time, our progress on the map, or across real terrain, is plotted for us by means of satellite communications. Though technologically advanced, these means of navigation, too, can be compared to our consciences. The straight-line courses to the desired destination must not be ignored if we desire to arrive on time and without needless delay, or even risk becoming hopelessly lost on a sea of sin and ungodliness. The benefit of a good conscience must likewise be relied upon if we are to continue on that straight and narrow path which we, as Christians, must travel. If we, through foolish neglect or even deliberate intention, disregard the wooing of the conscience, we will get off course and may never find our way back without a drastic correction to course. When we first doubt the righteousness of an act or thought, we must squelch that thought or act at once, or risk grave error.

God has equipped each soul with a means of navigation through life. It is a direct beam of light that will always point the way to righteousness and good conduct. But for many, the cares of this world have extinguished that light and those who are lost grope about as blind men seeking the path of least resistance. Men who walk in darkness have suffered their light of conscience to be extinguished. They are on the Broad Road down to destruction.

The conscience is compared to God's Lamp in the breast of every man, woman, and child. *The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord.* (Prov 20:27a) The conscience is a counsellor, not a tyrant. It does not scream and shout out directions. It simply, in a humble and quiet voice, whispers to us that we are wrong in doing a certain thing, or in thinking a certain thought. The Lord said to Elijah, in his distress: *Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord. And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: And after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice. And it was so, when Elijah heard it.* (1 Kings 19:11-13) Though the conscience speaks in a still small voice, and is incomprehensible to all others, Godly ears will hear, heed, and obey that voice.

Great men of old have heeded the gentle impulses of a good conscience – as a matter of fact, that is what made them great. Remember Joseph, in the very prime of youth and manhood, was tempted by the wife of Potifar. He had every earthly thing to gain by being seduced by this rich and powerful woman; but conscience would not allow it. Joseph's response? . . . *how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God? And it came to pass, as she spake to Joseph day by day, that he hearkened not unto her, to lie by her, or to be with her.* (Gen 39:9-11) Joseph had a conscience that was keen to hear the promptings of the Holy Ghost, and he quitted himself accordingly.

We are all born with a conscience. Unfortunately, our compasses are often ill-treated and influenced by other worldly masses that pass into our purview. *1 Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; 2 Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron* (1 Tim 4:1-2) I once wrote about the benefit of 'habitual righteousness' as opposed to 'habitual sin.' When we are first made aware of our salvation and election in Christ, our hearts are overflowing with joy. But soon after, our thoughts of virtue and righteousness are smothered out by the cares and temptations of

the world. *But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.* (Matt 13:20-21)

Let me give an example: If I hear a humorous story that can be repeated before good people, I rush to repeat it as soon as I can. In that way, I do not forget the story. The same is true with works of righteousness that reflect our salvation by grace alone in Christ. The more I begin to do good works worthy of my calling, the easier it becomes to continue in that vain. Of course, I have a long way to go to grow in my calling; but righteousness in living is bolstered by habitually following in good works. The same is true of sin. When we are first saved, if we look back (as Lot's wife did at Sodom) to our old ways with lingering desire, it becomes impossible to break our old habits of sin. Perhaps we were not truly called and chosen in the first instant.

In the old days, wounds that bled profusely were seared with a hot iron to stop the bleeding. But the site of the wound became hardened, and there was a subsequent loss of feeling at the scar made by the hot iron. When we sin habitually and disregard that "*small still voice*" within, our ears grow dead to the sound of the voice. The Holy Spirit may beckon loudly to our unaccustomed ears, but as we ignore that voice, it grows weaker to our senses until it is no longer a sound we can sense. If, at the age of five, there was suddenly an endless knocking on the door that never ceased, we would either answer the door; or else, over time, the knocking would be more and more subdued to our hearing so that, at last, we would no longer hear though it continued as before.

There is also another kind of conscience that is not deaf to that "*small still voice*" but it hears it very weakly. Such was the case with Pontius Pilate, the Roman Curate. He even pronounced Christ INNOCENT and sought ways to free Him (which was within his power), but he failed out of a sense of political correctness and religious fervor on the part of the Jewish rulers. *Pilate saith unto them, What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ? They all say unto him, Let him be crucified. And the governor said, Why, what evil hath he done? But they cried out the more, saying, Let him be crucified. When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it.* (Matt 27:22-24) If one is fully aware of the justice of God, it would take far greater courage to sin, regardless the mortal consequences, then to act with righteousness. Pilate failed the test because that was the kind of fellow he was, and God knew Him to be that kind of person beforehand.

On the other hand, some hear the voice of conscience too late and respond to it in the wrong way. Such a man was the "*man of perdition*" – Judas Iscariot. *Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood.* (Matt 27:3-4) Judas heard that small still voice, but responded too late and in the wrong way. He repented HIMSELF, but not to God.

We all have a conscience of sorts: Some speak in loud and audible tones, some speak imperceptibly, and others speak too late for our good. Which kind do you have, and do you heed the VOICE that whispers to you?