

CHAPTER THREE

CONSCIENCE

Besides the intuition and fellowship, our spirit has another important function which is to correct our wrong doings and reprove us so that we will not have peace when we come short of the glory of God. We are talking about the conscience. Just as God's holiness condemns evil and delights in goodness, the conscience of the believers also rebukes uncleanness and pursues goodness. The conscience of the believers is where God's holiness is expressed. If we wish to walk according to the spirit, we cannot ignore what the conscience speaks to us because it is impossible not to make mistakes or incline toward making mistakes, no matter at what stage we are. The conscience does not just reprove us when we have done something wrong to bring us to repentance; if this were the case, the function of the conscience would not be complete. Additionally, while we are considering our path, and before we do anything, the conscience will rise up to protest along with our intuition if we think about something that does not please the Holy Spirit. This will cause us to lose the sense of peace. If believers are willing to listen to the voice of the conscience speaking through the intuition, they will not fail like they do at the present time.

CONSCIENCE AND SALVATION

When we were unbelievers, our spirit was completely dead. The conscience was also dead and unable to function in a normal way. This does not mean that the conscience was completely devoid of any function. The conscience of a sinner still works, but it is in a deep sleep. Even when it is awakened, it only condemns the sinner; it is powerless to lead men to God. Although the conscience of man is dead towards God, He is pleased that the conscience still remains in man's heart for the purpose of doing a very small work. It seems that in the deadened spirit of man, the conscience can still do more than the other parts. The deadness of the intuition and fellowship is more severe than that of the conscience. There is a reason for this. When Adam ate of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, his intuition and fellowship towards God died completely; nevertheless, his power to differentiate between good and evil (the conscience) increased. To this day a sinner's intuition towards God and his fellowship with God is completely dead without a trace, but the conscience still has a little activity. This is not to say that man's conscience is living because, according to the meaning of the Bible, living is related to having the life of God. Being without the life of God is to be dead. According to the Bible, the conscience of a sinner is dead because it does not contain the life of God, but according to the sensation of man, it still can act. This activity of the conscience only causes a sinner with a deadened intuition to feel more painful.

Because the conscience can still act in this manner, the Holy Spirit starts to do the work of salvation by first awakening the dormant conscience. He uses the thunder and lightning of Mount Sinai to shake and enlighten this darkened conscience to realize that it has already transgressed God's law and cannot meet His righteous requirements. In this way, it has been condemned and should perish. If the conscience is willing to confess its transgressions and the sin of unbelief, it will reproach itself and seek mercy from God. The parable of the publican who went to the temple to pray illustrates the working of the Holy Spirit in the conscience. According to the words spoken by the Lord Jesus, the first step in the work of the Holy Spirit causes men to reprove themselves because of sin, righteousness, and judgment. If the conscience rejects this work, a sinner would not have the possibility of receiving salvation.

The Holy Spirit shines the light of God's law into the conscience of a sinner so that he may know his sins. The Holy Spirit also grants man's conscience the light of the gospel so that he may be saved. After the sinner knows about sins and has heard about the gospel of grace, God will also give him the faith to receive salvation, if he is willing to accept it. Then he will see how the precious blood of the Lord Jesus satisfies all the accusations of his conscience. Even though he has sinned, the blood of the Lord Jesus has already been shed. The punishment for sin has already been received. Is there anything left to be accused of? The blood of the Lord Jesus has washed the believer of all the sins in his life; therefore, the conscience does not need to accuse him anymore. Since the conscience of the worshipper has been purified, it does not sense any more sin (Heb. 10:2). The precious blood of the Lord Jesus has been sprinkled on our conscience (9:14) so that we may stand boldly before God. The certainty of salvation is a fact because the voice of the conscience has been silenced by the precious blood. If the heart does not believe in the precious blood, the conscience still accuses us of how evil we were before our regeneration.

Both the terrifying light of the law and the loving light of the gospel shine into the conscience. Therefore, should we not pay attention to men's conscience when we preach? If our purpose is only to cause men to understand with their minds, to be stirred up in their emotions, or to resolve in their will, and if our message does not reach their conscience, then even if they understand, are stirred up, and decide in their will, the Holy Spirit will have no way to do a deeper work. This is because the deeper work of regeneration is based on the conscience thoroughly knowing sins and the precious blood. In our teachings, we must give equal attention to the precious blood and the conscience. Many people emphasize the conscience and seldom speak of the precious blood; hence, men strive to repent and do good, hoping that through these things they might turn away God's anger. Others emphasize the precious blood without talking about the conscience. As a result men may understand in their minds, be stirred in their emotions, and resolve in their will, but their "faith" has no root because their conscience still has not been moved by the Holy Spirit of God. Therefore, these two things must be equally preached. Whoever sees the offenses of his conscience accepts the significance of the precious blood.

CONSCIENCE AND FELLOWSHIP

The following verse shows us the relationship between the conscience and man's fellowship with God in the intuition. "How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (Heb. 9:14). If man wants to fellowship with God and "serve God," his conscience must first be cleansed by the precious blood. Because the conscience of the believer is cleansed by the Lord's blood, he is regenerated. Therefore, according to the Bible, the cleansing by the blood and the regeneration of the spirit happen at the same instant. The conscience must be cleansed by the blood so that a believer can obtain a new life and have his intuition quickened; then he may serve God. The spirit can only serve God in the intuition if the conscience receives the cleansing of the blood first. The relationship between the conscience and the intuition cannot be separated.

Hebrews 10:22 says, "Let us come forward to the Holy of Holies with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water." When we come forward to God, we do not use our bodies like those in the Old Testament, because our Holy of Holies (v. 19) is in the

heavens; neither do we use our thoughts and feelings because these parts of the soul cannot have fellowship with God. Only the regenerated spirit can come forward to God. The believer can only worship God through his revived intuition (we have said this in the past). This verse of the Bible shows that washing away the offenses of the conscience is the foundation for fellowship with God in the intuition; if the conscience is conscious of any offense, there cannot be any fellowship with God in the intuition. If the conscience has any offense, a believer will spontaneously condemn himself. Then the intuition, which is closely knit with the conscience, is immediately affected. The believer therefore dares not, and cannot, draw near to God. Moreover, when the believer is fellowshiping with God, there cannot be a lack of "a true heart in full assurance of faith." Once the conscience has any offense, the believer will draw near to God with reluctance and not out of a true heart; naturally, he will not be able to believe that God is for him, and that He has nothing against him. This type of self-condemnation and doubting oppresses the intuition so that it cannot freely have fellowship with God. The believer must not have any condemnation from the conscience at all. He should know that he has already been washed of his sins by the blood of the Lord, and that there is nothing to oppose him (Rom. 8:33-34). A tiny offense in the conscience is sufficient to oppress, hinder, and stop the work of fellowship by the intuition. Whenever a believer is conscious of any sin, all of the spirit's power is concentrated on getting rid of this particular sin, and there is no strength to go outward or ascend toward heaven.

THE CONSCIENCE OF THE BELIEVER

After the spirit of the believer has been regenerated, his conscience is made alive. The precious blood of the Lord Jesus has purified the conscience so that the conscience is clean, possessing the sharpest feeling, and able to work according to the will of the Holy Spirit. The sanctifying and renewing work of the Holy Spirit in man and the work of the conscience are mutually related and interconnected. If the believer wants to be filled by the Holy Spirit, wants to be sanctified, wants his life to fit into God's purpose, and wants to walk fully according to the spirit, he cannot ignore the voice of the conscience. If we do not give the conscience the position it deserves, we definitely will fall into the position of walking according to the flesh. Being faithful in dealing with the conscience is the first step in the work of sanctification. Walking according to the conscience is a sign of real spirituality. If a fleshly believer does not allow the conscience to do a thorough job, he has no way of entering into the spiritual realm. Even if a man thinks of himself as being spiritual, his spirituality is without foundation. If sins and the things which are not according to God's purpose and do not befit the saints' proper conduct are not dealt with, according to the voice of the conscience, then a spiritual foundation has not been properly laid. No matter how many spiritual ideals are built upon it, they will eventually collapse.

The work of the conscience is to testify to us whether we are right with God and men, and whether our deeds, thoughts, and words are according to God's will and not in rebellion against Christ. Whenever there is progress in the Christian life, the testimony of the conscience and the testimony of the Holy Spirit are almost identical. When the conscience is completely controlled by the Holy Spirit, the conscience becomes keener day by day until it matches the speaking of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, the Holy Spirit also speaks to the believers through the conscience. This is the meaning of the words of the apostle: "My conscience bearing witness with me in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 9:1).

If our conscience testifies that we are wrong, then we are wrong. If the conscience condemns us of sins, we must repent immediately. We definitely cannot cover up or

bribe the conscience. "If our heart blames us, it is because God is greater than our heart" (1 John 3:20). Will God not condemn us even more? The condemnation of the conscience tells us that we are wrong. Whatever our conscience condemns is definitely condemned by God as well. There is certainly no such thing as the righteousness of God being less than the standard of our conscience. Therefore, if our conscience tells us that we are wrong, we must certainly be wrong.

Since we are wrong, what should we do? If we have not done the thing yet, we should stop; if we have committed it, we must repent, confess our sins, and seek the cleansing of the precious blood. It is a pity that believers do not walk this way today. Once the conscience reproves, they think about bribing and making peace with it so that the conscience will no longer voice its disapproval. In this situation, believers usually have two choices. One choice for believers is to argue with the conscience, trying to use reasons to justify their actions. They think that anything that can be justified by reasonings must be according to God's will. Therefore, they hope that the conscience will also be quiet. Little do they know that the conscience, like the intuition, does not function by reasonings. It knows God's will through the intuition; it condemns whatever is not the will of God. It only speaks on behalf of the will of God and does not care about the reasons. A believer should not walk according to reason nor do whatever is reasonable; rather, he should do the will of God as revealed in the intuition. Whenever the believer rebels against the moving of the intuition, the conscience will speak out to condemn. Although explanations by way of reason may satisfy the mind, they are not sufficient to satisfy the conscience. Once the conscience has condemned a certain matter, it will never accept any reasoning or stop condemning until the matter is removed. Initially, the conscience only testifies of right and wrong; after the believer has grown in the spiritual life, it not only testifies of right and wrong, but also of what is and is not of God. Therefore, even though many things are good in the eyes of man, they are condemned by the conscience unless they are based on God's revelation and not the believer's initiation.

The second choice is that a believer will try to do many other things to comfort the conscience. On the one hand, he is not willing to obey the voice of the conscience and follow its direction to please God. On the other hand, he is afraid of the condemnation of the conscience which troubles him and makes him feel miserable. Therefore, he thinks of doing many good things to cover up. He tries to replace God's will with good deeds. He does not submit himself to God, but he says that his present deeds are as good as God's instructions and perhaps, they are even better, more beautiful, wider in scope, more profitable, more useful, and more influential. He considers his work as the best. Regardless of how much he does and how men appraise his work, there is not any spiritual usefulness in the eyes of God. It is not how much fat there is, nor how many burnt offerings there are, but how much obedience there is to God. If God has revealed in the spirit that something should be removed, then no matter how good your intentions are, no matter how fat your cattle are, or how heavy your gold and silver are, they are not sufficient to move God's heart. The voice of the conscience must be obeyed. Otherwise, God is not pleased, no matter how good your work is. Even if the offering is many times more than what is required by God, it will not stop the voice of the conscience. The conscience requires us only to obey; it does not require us to do anything extraordinary to serve God.

Therefore, let us not have any self-deceiving conduct. If we want to walk according to the spirit, we have to obey the guidance of the conscience. Do not try to escape the "inward rebuke!" Moreover, listen carefully. If we want to walk according to the spirit all

the time, we must humble ourselves and give heed to the corrections of the conscience. A believer should not make a general confession, thinking that his mistakes are so numerous that they cannot be articulated. A vague confession does not allow the conscience to do a thorough job. The believer must allow the Holy Spirit, through the conscience, to point out his sins one by one. He must humbly, quietly, and submissively allow the conscience to rebuke and condemn him of his sins one by one. He must accept the rebuke of the conscience and be willing, according to the mind of the Holy Spirit, to remove everything that opposes God. Dare you allow the conscience to examine your life? Do you have the boldness to let the conscience tell you the real condition of your whole life? Are you willing to allow the conscience to place your entire living and conduct before you, according to God's mind? Are you willing to allow the conscience to open up all of your sins? If you are unwilling and draw back, afraid in your heart, this indicates that there are still many things in your life that should be condemned and nailed to the cross; yet you do not obey. It also indicates that you do not completely submit to God in many things, nor do you walk according to the spirit. Between you and God there is still not a complete fellowship, and many obstacles still remain. Consequently, you cannot say to God, "There is no separation between You and me."

An unconditional, unlimited acceptance of the rebuke of the conscience and a complete willingness to walk according to its revelation prove whether our consecration to God is complete, whether we genuinely hate sins, and whether we sincerely want to do His will. Many times we are willing to submit completely to the Lord, walk according to the Spirit, and be a man who really pleases God; now is the time to test our intentions, whether they are true or false, whether they are complete or lacking. If we are still involved with sins and not completely cut off from sins, then most of our spirituality may be false. If a believer cannot walk completely according to the conscience, then he cannot walk completely according to the spirit, because the requirement of the conscience has not been fulfilled. Therefore, other than the "imaginary spirit" which leads him, the real spirit is persistently demanding that he listen to the speaking of the conscience. If the believer is stricken in his conscience after self-examination, but does not want to be judged by the light of God, does not repent, and is not thoroughly dealt with, then his spiritual life will surely have no real progress. Whether the believer's consecration and work are true or false depends on his willingness to submit completely to the Lord, obeying His commandment and rebuke.

After the believer has allowed the conscience to work, he should not just remain at this stage. A certain sin may have been dealt with already but other sins also need to be dealt with progressively, until all the sins have been thoroughly dealt with. If the believer is faithful to deal with all his iniquities and walk according to the conscience, then the heavenly light will shine brighter and brighter within him. Then he can discover the sins which were not noticed formerly; he can comprehend more and more each day, reading and knowing the law which the Holy Spirit has written in his heart. In this manner, the believer will know what is holiness, righteousness, purity, and uprightness. The former things that were unclear will be deeply inscribed in his heart. The intuition will be greatly helped, and its keenness in understanding the intention of the Holy Spirit will be increased. Therefore, when the conscience rebukes, the believer should tell God, "I am willing to submit." He should let Christ be the Lord of his life again, and he should be willing to be taught and rely on the teachings of the Holy Spirit. If the believer truly follows the conscience, then the Holy Spirit certainly will come to help.

The conscience is the window of a believer's spirit. The light from heaven shines through it so that the believer's spirit and whole being are filled with light. The entire being of

the believer and his spirit will see the light of heaven through it. Every time we think, talk, and do something not good or not befitting the proper conduct of a believer, the heavenly light will shine through the conscience to expose our wrongdoing and condemn our failures. If we allow the conscience to work, submit to it, and remove everything which it condemns, the heavenly light will shine even brighter the next time. If we do not confess our mistakes or remove our sins, the stain of sins will remain and the conscience will be defiled (Titus 1:15) because we do not walk according to the teaching of God's light. Then one sin will come after another, one mark will be added to another, causing the window to become darker and darker so that it is difficult for the light to shine through. Consequently, the believer will sin willfully without feeling uneasy. The conscience will be stifled and the intuition will be dulled by sins. The more spiritual a believer is, the keener his conscience. There is no believer who is so spiritual that he does not have to confess his sins anymore. If the conscience is dull and, perhaps, even without feeling, then he must be spiritually degraded. The greatest knowledge, diligent toil, fervent emotion, and firmness of will, can never replace the keenness of the conscience. If a believer does not take care of the conscience and, instead, seeks after mental and emotional progress, he will regress in his spiritual walk.

The sensitivity of the conscience can increase and also decrease. If a believer gives ground for the conscience to work, his window will become brighter every time. If he ignores the speaking of the conscience or, as we said before, uses reasonings or other works to replace the demands of the conscience, the conscience will speak again and again. But after about ten times, it will then stop speaking. The voice will become softer and softer until it vanishes in the end. Every time a believer does not listen to the voice of his conscience, his spiritual life is damaged. If he allows his spiritual life to be continually hurt, eventually the believer will definitely fall into a fleshly position. He will no longer hate sins and aspire for victory as he did in the past. If he does not face the rebuke of the conscience, he cannot know the importance of listening to the voice of the conscience and walking according to the spirit.

A CONSCIENCE VOID OF OFFENSE

The apostle Paul said, "I have conducted myself in all good conscience before God until this day" (Acts 23:1). This was the secret of his life. The conscience spoken of here is not the conscience of an unregenerated man, but a conscience filled with the Holy Spirit. The apostle was bold in going forward to have full fellowship with God because his regenerated conscience did not reprove him. All of his conduct was according to his conscience. He did not commit, even once, anything that his conscience reprovved, nor did he, even once, allow anything that the conscience had condemned to remain in him. Therefore, he was bold towards God and men. Whenever there is any offense in the conscience, we cannot be completely without fear. The apostle said, "I also exercise myself to always have a conscience without offense toward God and men" (Acts 24:16) because "if our heart does not blame us, we have boldness toward God; and whatever we ask we receive from Him because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight" (1 John 3:21-22).

Many believers do not consider the importance of the conscience. As long as we walk according to the spirit, we think that everything will be fine. But whenever our conscience has an offense, we cannot be completely without fear before God. As soon as we have fear before God, there will immediately be a barrier in our fellowship with Him. The offense of the conscience is the greatest hindrance of the intuition's fellowship with God. If we do not keep His commandments and the things which are pleasing to Him,

our hearts will naturally be rebuked. There will be offenses and shrinking back from God. Furthermore, we will not receive the things which we ask of Him. Only a "pure conscience" is capable of serving God (2 Tim. 1:3). A conscience with offense causes the intuition to draw back and fear approaching God.

"For our boasting is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in singleness and sincerity of God, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world" (2 Cor. 1:12). This verse talks about the testimony of the conscience. Only a conscience void of offense can testify for the believer. Even though the testimony of man is good, the testimony of one's own conscience is more precious. The apostle said that he boasted in this. In our path of walking according to the spirit, we should often have such a testimony from the conscience. Many times what other people say about us may be wrong because they cannot understand how God is leading us. They may misunderstand us and they may misjudge us, just as the apostles were misunderstood and misjudged by the believers in the past. On the other hand, they may also overly praise and admire us. Because of following the Lord, many people may often disparage us, even though we are actually obeying the Lord. At other times men will extol us because of what they see in us; however, most of this comes from sudden emotions or imaginations. Therefore, outward praise and criticism are not the criteria; only the testimony of our own resurrected conscience counts for anything. We must examine how our conscience testifies concerning us. What kind of person does the conscience testify that we are? Does the conscience condemn us of hypocrisy? Does the conscience say that we cover up our faults and assume an impressive appearance? Or does the conscience testify that we conduct ourselves in this world, according to the singleness and sincerity of God? Does the conscience testify that we have walked according to the light we have received?

What did the conscience testify concerning Paul? The testimony was that "not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world." In fact, this is the only testimony of the conscience. The conscience strives for and insists that the believer live by the grace of God and not according to fleshly wisdom. The wisdom of the flesh is of no use in the work of God and the will of God. Neither is it of any use in the spiritual life of the believer. Man's mind is of absolutely no use in fellowship with God; even in contact between man and physical things, it also occupies a subordinate position. The conduct of the believer in the world is completely dependent upon the grace of God. Grace means that God does everything and man does nothing (Rom. 11:6). Only when the believer lives by fully depending upon God, not allowing himself to initiate anything, not allowing the mind of man to enter and dominate anything, can the conscience testify that we live in the world according to the singleness and sincerity of God. In other words, the conscience works together with the intuition. The conscience only testifies and approves of the conduct of a believer which is according to the intuition. Any conduct that goes against the intuition, even though it may be very much according to the wisdom of man, will be resisted by the conscience. In short, the conscience does not approve anything other than the revelation of the intuition. The intuition leads the believer, and the conscience urges the believer to obey the intuition when he thinks of disobeying it.

A conscience that is void of offense before God testifies that God is pleased with the believer and that there is no separation between God and the believer. Such a testimony of the conscience is indispensable to a life that walks according to the spirit. This should be the goal of the believer; if this has not been attained, the believer should not be satisfied. This is the normal life of a believer; the apostle Paul lived such a life and so

must today's believers. Enoch was one who had an undefiled conscience; therefore, he knew that he pleased God. The testimony of God's being pleased with us can help us to progress. But we should be cautious; otherwise, we will exalt the "self," thinking that we can please God in ourselves. All the glory belongs to Him. We should "encourage ourselves" to keep our conscience void of offense. If our conscience is really void of offense, we should guard against the flesh entering in a subtle way.

If our conscience frequently testifies of God's pleasure, then when we unfortunately fail, we will trust more boldly in the blood of the Lord Jesus to wash us again. If we desire to have a conscience void of offense, we should not depart for a moment from the blood that washes us eternally. We should not depart, because we often give opportunities for offenses in the conscience in small matters, even if we have not slipped in great matters. Therefore, confessing sins and trusting in the precious blood should not be avoided. Since our sinful nature and its many hidden works are still within us, we may possibly have to wait for our spiritual life to grow more before we can know them. This is why there are many things which we now consider to be wrong, but which we once felt were not wrong. If it were not for the precious blood covering everything, we would never be at peace. Once the precious blood has been sprinkled upon our conscience, it functions there continually because of the intercession of the Lord Jesus and the eternal life He gave us.

The apostle told us that he entreated that he would have a conscience void of offense before God and man. These two matters, towards God and towards man, are intimately connected together. If we wish to have a conscience void of offense towards man, we must first have a conscience void of offense towards God, because a conscience that has an offense before God naturally has an offense before man. Therefore, all believers who seek after a spiritual living should continually seek after a good conscience before God (1 Pet. 3:21). This does not mean that our condition before man is unimportant. We not only have to seek for a good conscience towards God, we also have to seek for a good conscience towards man. Many things are acceptable before God but are not proper before man. Only a conscience that is clear before men has a good testimony before them. Even if someone misunderstands, you should have a "good conscience, so that in the matter in which you are spoken against, those who revile your good manner of life in Christ may be put to shame" (v. 16). Once the conscience is unclear, then no matter how good your outward conduct is, it is of no use; once your conscience is without offense, it cannot be affected even by men's slandering.

A conscience without offense not only is able to testify for us before man, but it also enables us to receive God's promises. Today's believers often complain that their faith is too small and therefore, that they are unable to have a completely spiritual living. Naturally, there may be many causes, but is not an offense in the conscience one of the most important causes? A conscience without offense and a faith that is strong are inseparable. The moment the conscience has an offense, faith is immediately weakened. Let us see how the Holy Bible links these two matters together: "Love out of a pure heart and out of a good conscience and out of unfeigned faith" (1 Tim. 1:5), and "holding faith and a good conscience" (v. 19). The conscience is the faculty of our faith. God hates sin the most. The zenith of God's glory is His boundless holiness. His holiness cannot tolerate sin even momentarily. If a believer does not follow the guidance of his conscience, but rather prefers whatever is not according to the will of God, he will immediately lose his fellowship with God. It can be said that all the spiritual promises in the Bible given by God to the believers are conditional. None of them are given to the believer to satisfy the intentions of his flesh. If sins and the flesh are not removed, then

neither the Holy Spirit, nor fellowship with God, nor answers to prayers will be granted to the believer. If our conscience has already accused us, how can we boldly approach God to seek for His promises? If our conscience is unable to testify that we live on the earth according to the holiness and righteousness of God, how can we be men of prayer who seek for God's unlimited free gifts? If our conscience rebukes us the moment we lift up our hands to God, then what is the use of our prayer? Our sins must be rejected and washed away before we can have the faith to pray.

The conscience must be void of offense. This does not mean that it should be better than in the past or that many evil things have been removed. Being void of offense, having no offense whatever, and being completely without fear before God are the necessary conditions of the conscience. If we are willing to submit to the conscience and let it reprove us, and if we fully consecrate ourselves to the Lord and are willing to do all of His will, our boldness will certainly increase, knowing that a pure conscience can be attained. We would then be able to tell God that we have not held anything back, that there is nothing that is not open to Him, that we have no hidden things, and that there is no more separation between us and Him. In living according to the spirit, a believer should never allow his conscience to be unclear in any small matter. Everything that is condemned by the conscience should be rejected at once and confessions made immediately. The believer should seek for the cleansing of the blood immediately and allow no trace of this matter to remain. Every day he should seek for a conscience that is continually clear, because a conscience that is unclear, for no matter how short a time, will cause the spirit to suffer a great loss. The apostle's example is "to always have a conscience without offense." In this manner, we will see that our fellowship with God is truly unbroken.

CONSCIENCE AND KNOWLEDGE

In walking according to the spirit and listening to the voice of the conscience, we should also remember that the conscience is limited by its knowledge. Our conscience is the organ for distinguishing good and evil. To distinguish means to have the knowledge. The knowledge to differentiate between good and evil is not the same among many Christians. Some have more knowledge and some have less knowledge, because individual circumstances are not the same and, perhaps, the lessons learned are also not similar. Therefore, we cannot act according to someone else's standard, nor can we expect others to live according to the light we have. In the fellowship between the believer and God, an unknown sin will not hinder the fellowship. If the believer walks according to the standard which he already knows: keeping (obeying) everything which he knows to be according to God's will and rejecting everything which he knows to be condemned by God, he is able to have a complete fellowship with God. A young believer always thinks that his knowledge is insufficient and, therefore, that he cannot please God. On one hand, spiritual knowledge is very high in value, but on the other hand, the lack of knowledge is not an obstruction in the fellowship with God. In God's fellowship with man, He cares about our attitude toward His will, not how much we know concerning His will. If our attitude is to seek after His will sincerely and truly, even desiring to keep it wholeheartedly, the presence of many unknown sins will not cause us to lose our fellowship or even have a limited fellowship with God. If fellowship is determined according to God's holiness, none of the most holy saints from the past until the present time would be qualified to have a complete fellowship with God even for a moment. Furthermore, they would all be driven away from the face of the Lord and from the glory of His might. The sins that we are not aware of have been covered under the precious blood.

On the other hand, if we are aware of and tolerate a little sin that the conscience has condemned, spontaneously we will not have a full fellowship with God. Just as a very tiny speck in the eye can impede our eyesight and give us pain, a sin that we are aware of, no matter how small, can prevent us from seeing the smiling face of God. Once the conscience has an offense, fellowship will also suffer. A particular sin may remain in the believer for many years, but as long as he does not know about it, it will not hinder his fellowship with God. However, the moment light (knowledge) comes, the conscience condemns. Then if it remains for another day, the fellowship of that day will be lost. God fellowships with us according to the level of our conscience. If we think that a particular sin, which has remained for many years without causing any hindrance, can continue to remain and cause no harm, we are the most foolish persons.

The reason for this is that the conscience can only condemn according to the most recent light it receives. It cannot condemn any sin that it does not know to be sin. Since there is advancement in the believer's knowledge, his conscience also advances; the more knowledge the believer has, the more sins the conscience will condemn. The believer does not have to grieve for anything that he does not know, nor does he need to strive to do anything. As long as he absolutely submits to what he knows, it is sufficient. "But if we walk in the light," that is, if we walk in the light which we have already, "as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from every sin" (even though many are still unknown) (1 John 1:7). God has limitless light, yet God also walks according to His limitless light. The light which we have is very limited, yet we must walk according to this light. Only then can we have fellowship with God, and only then will the blood of His Son cleanse us from all our sins. We still have sins which have not been removed, but if we do not know about them and the light has not yet shone, we are still able to have full fellowship with God. We must remember that even though the conscience is very crucial, the conscience is not the measurement of our holiness because of knowledge. Christ is the unique standard of our holiness. But in our fellowship with God, God uses the matter of having a conscience void of offense as the condition of His fellowship with us. Therefore, after we completely submit to the guidance of the conscience, we should never think, even for a moment, that we are already "perfect." A good conscience only tells us that according to what we know, we have achieved what we should achieve at the present.

Thus, as our biblical knowledge increases and our spiritual experiences grow, the standard of our conduct will also rise accordingly. In the gradual increase of light, our conduct must become gradually more holy for our conscience to be preserved without offense. Once we have another year of knowledge and experience, our conscience will accuse us if our conduct is the same as the previous year's. In the previous year God did not cut off His fellowship with us, because we were ignorant of our transgressions. But once we have knowledge of the same transgressions, the fellowship with God will be lost if we do not renounce them. The conscience is given by God to the believers to be the present standard of their holiness. If a believer violates the standard, they will be considered as having sinned.

The Lord still has many things to speak to us, but because of the immaturity of our spiritual understanding, He still has to wait. God deals with His children according to their individual condition. Some matters are considered to be extremely evil and sinful by some believers, yet others may not feel the same way. This is due to differences in the knowledge of their conscience. Therefore, let us not criticize one another. Only the Father God knows how to deal with His children. He certainly does not expect to see His "little children" have the strength of the "young men," or His "young men" to have the

experiences of the "fathers." However, He expects all of His children to submit to Him according to what they already know. If we know with certainty --this is not easy --that God has already spoken to our brother's conscience concerning a certain matter, and he does not obey, then we can urge him. But we must never force our brother to follow the feeling of our conscience. If the absolutely holy God did not reject us because of past wrongdoings which we were ignorant about, then how can we, according to our present level, judge our brother who only possesses the knowledge which we had last year?

In fact, if we are helping others, we do not have to compel them again and again to obey every minor point. We only have to beseech them to walk fully according to the guidance of their conscience. If they have surrendered to God, then whenever the Holy Spirit enlightens them on any of the things clearly recorded in the Bible, they will obey. If the will has been surrendered, then any time the conscience receives light, a believer will walk according to the will of God. This is the same for us. We do not have to extend ourselves to use the strength of the soul to understand many truths for which the right time has not come. As long as we are willing to hear the present speaking of God, this is good enough. If the Holy Spirit wishes to lead us in our intuition to examine some truths, we should not hesitate to comply; otherwise, we would lower our own standard of holiness and become complacent. In short, if we are willing to move according to our spirit, there will be no problem at all.

THE WEAKNESS OF THE CONSCIENCE

We have clearly said before that Christ is the standard of holiness for our life. Even though the conscience is important, it is not the standard. At the same time, even though the conscience is not the standard of holiness, it is the standard that testifies whether or not we please God in our daily living. In other words, the conscience is the standard of the present level of our holiness. If we can live every day according to the leading of the conscience, we have attained to the level we presently should attain to. If we maintain a good conscience, we will not fall behind in our spiritual journey. Thus in our daily path of walking according to the spirit, the conscience is a very necessary factor. In whatever our conscience guides us, if we disobey it, we will be rebuked, lose our peace, and be temporarily cut off from God in our fellowship. It is indisputable that we should follow the spirit completely through all the guidance of the conscience. But is the leading of the conscience perfect? This question still remains.

We know that the conscience is controlled by its knowledge. It can only guide people according to what it knows. Then if men do not obey, it condemns. It does not condemn something that it does not know. Therefore, if we compare the standard of the conscience with the standard of God's holiness, the standard of the conscience is very inferior. It has at least two shortcomings. One, as we said before, is the limitation of its knowledge; it can only condemn the wrongdoings that it knows. Consequently, since our conscience does not possess certain knowledge, we allow many things that are not according to God's will to remain in our lives. God knows, and believers who are more mature than us also know, that our shortcomings are numerous. But since we have not received the light, these shortcomings remain. Is this not a big defect? This, however, is permissible because God does not condemn what we do not know. Even though we are at fault, God is well pleased, and He fellowships with us because we have acted according to the leading of the conscience.

There is still a second defect which can hinder the fellowship of the believer with God. A little knowledge can not only lead the believer to condemn something that should be

condemned, it can also lead him to condemn something which should not be condemned. What should we say then? Has the conscience led wrongly? No, the leading of the conscience cannot be wrong and should be obeyed by the believer. But the measure or degree of knowledge differs. Due to a believer's lack of knowledge, there are many things which he will be permitted to do when he possesses more knowledge, but these things are not allowed at the present time because of the lack of knowledge. If he were to do them, the conscience would condemn, and he would have sinned. This is the immaturity of the believer. This means that many things are fully permissible for the fathers because they have the knowledge, experience, and position. But if the children were to do what the father does, it would definitely not be permitted due to their lack of knowledge, experience, and position. This is not to say that there are two criteria for right and wrong, but that it is impossible for the criteria for right and wrong not to be different according to each one's position. This is true in spiritual things as well as in physical things. Many things, when done by the mature believer, are completely in accordance with the will of God. However, if a young believer were to follow and do the same, to him it would be a sin.

The reason for this is none other than differences in the degree of the knowledge of the conscience. If, according to the conscience of a believer, a certain thing is permitted, and he does it, he is doing the will of God. But if the conscience of another believer does not permit the same thing, he will sin if he does it. As we said before, this does not mean that the highest will of God is different, but that God leads each one according to his respective position. One who has knowledge has a stronger conscience; consequently, he has more liberty. One who is without knowledge is weaker; consequently, he is more restricted.

This matter is clearly taught by the apostle in 1 Corinthians. At that time, the believers in Corinth had many misunderstandings about the matter of eating things offered to idols. Some thought that idols were nothing and that the food could be eaten, whether or not it was offered to idols, since God is one and there is no other God (8:4). Others, before they were believers, had been idol worshippers. Therefore, when they saw that the food they were eating had been offered to idols, they could not help remembering the past. Consequently their conscience was not at peace. When they ate, they were defiled because their conscience was weak (v. 7). The apostle understood that this distinction was caused by the presence or absence of knowledge (v. 7). The former, because of their knowledge, were not rebuked by their conscience; therefore, after eating, they did not sin. The latter, because of their lack of knowledge, were not at peace in their conscience; therefore, their eating became their sin. From this we see that knowledge is very important. More knowledge can sometimes cause the conscience to condemn more, but it can also cause the conscience to have less condemnation.

Therefore, in similar matters of the shadows of the things to come, we should ask the Lord to grant us more knowledge so that we will not be unreasonably bound. However, such knowledge should be kept with a humble heart; otherwise, we will fall into the flesh like the Corinthian believers. If our knowledge is inadequate and the conscience still rebukes, we still have to obey the voice of the conscience no matter how great a price we have to pay. We should not think that because this is not wrong according to the highest standard, that we do not need to care for the conscience and can just do it. We should remember that the conscience is the current standard of God's guidance. We should obey; disobeying is a sin. What is condemned by our conscience is certainly condemned by God.

We have spoken concerning outward things such as food. Concerning more spiritual things, regardless of how much knowledge we possess, there can never be the difference of freedom or bondage to us. What is spoken of here concerns outward things of the flesh. God's dealing with His children is according to their age. Towards young believers, God is very concerned about outward things such as eating, clothing, and so on because God wants to put to death the evil deeds of their bodies. If young believers have the heart to follow the Lord, they will see that the Lord often causes them to subdue these things through the conscience of the spirit. Those who have more experience in the Lord, because they know how to submit to the Lord, seem to have a little more freedom in their conscience.

However, older believers have a big danger in this regard; their conscience may be too strong, and it may become cold and hard. Immature believers who seek the Lord wholeheartedly will submit to the Lord in many things because their conscience and intuition are sensitive, and they are easily moved by the Holy Spirit. Elderly believers may become cold and hard in their conscience because too much knowledge has caused their mind to be overdeveloped; consequently, the sensitivity of the intuition is lost. They do everything according to the knowledge of their mind; the Holy Spirit seemingly cannot move them. This is a fatal wound to the spiritual life. It causes the believer's life to lose its freshness; everything is old. Regardless of how much knowledge we have, we should not follow the knowledge but the intuition of the spirit (conscience). If we do not care for the condemnation of the conscience through the intuition, but use our knowledge as the standard of our conduct, then we will walk according to the flesh. Many times, according to the truth which we know, it is permissible for us to do a certain thing. Yet does not our conscience become unrestful if we go ahead and do it? If the conscience condemns a certain matter, it still does not fit into God's will even if, according to the knowledge of the mind, the matter is good. Often the knowledge which we have gained is acquired through the intelligence of the mind, and it is not the revelation of the intuition. Therefore, the leading of the conscience can be at conflict with the knowledge.

The apostle reckoned that if a believer does not care for the rebuke of the weakened conscience and instead walks according to the knowledge of the mind, his spiritual life will be grievously damaged. "For if anyone sees you who have knowledge reclining at table in an idol temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be emboldened to eat the things sacrificed to the idols? For the one who is weak is being destroyed by your knowledge, the brother because of whom Christ died" (1 Cor. 8:10-11). This concerns believers who have knowledge and those who do not. If a believer who does not have knowledge sees one who has knowledge eating food offered to idols, then he will reason that if the other believer can eat, he also can eat. He will not care for the voice of his conscience and will eat. This causes the believer to fall. This is the meaning in these verses. A believer who does not have knowledge can only understand with his mind the knowledge that his brother possesses. If he walks according to this knowledge, ignoring his conscience, he will fall. May we always remember that we should not walk according to the knowledge that we have, even if it is only for a short period of time. All believers, regardless of their knowledge, should walk according to the intuition and the conscience of the spirit. Their knowledge may influence their conscience, but they should directly follow the conscience alone. Concerning the conduct of believers, God cares more for their obedience to His will than for their good conduct. Listening to the voice of the conscience guarantees that our consecration and obedience are true. Through the conscience, God observes whether our priority is submitting to Him or whether we have other motives.

There is another matter which a believer should pay attention to. He should be cautious not to allow his conscience to be surrounded. Many times our conscience loses its normal function because it has been encircled. Our conscience becomes cold because the consciences of those around us are cold and hard, and because their reasonings, talk, teachings, encouragement, examples, and hindrances influence us. We should be wary of teachers whose consciences are cold and hard. We should guard against any man-made conscience; the conscience made by others for us should be rejected. Our conscience should be directly responsible to God in every single matter. We should know the will of God, and we should be responsible to keep it. If we do not care for our own conscience and follow the consciences of others, we will fail.

In short, the conscience of the believer is an important faculty of the spirit. The believer should fully follow its leading. Even though it is influenced by knowledge, all of its speaking represents the highest will of God for us today. As long as we attain to the highest peak that we should attain to today, this is sufficient. We do not need to worry about all the other things. We should always keep our conscience healthy and not allow a single sin to damage its perception. Once we become cold and hard at any time, nothing will be able to move us. Then we should know that we have fallen deeply into the flesh. All of our scriptural knowledge will be kept in the mind of the flesh and not have a living power. We should always walk according to the intuition of the spirit and be filled with the Holy Spirit so that the perception of the conscience becomes keener day after day. Then even a small matter that is not right with God can be detected and repented of. Do not labor just in the mind and forget about the intuition of the conscience. The growth of our spiritual stature ensures the increase of the sensitivity of our conscience. So many believers do not possess any liveliness today because they did not care for their conscience, but only kept dead knowledge in their mind. We should be watchful every day and not fall into complacency. Do not fear being moved easily. If it is the moving of the conscience, we should fear that it is too little, not that it is too much. The conscience is God's brake. It tells us what parts are in trouble and should be repaired before proceeding. If we are willing to listen, we will avoid a great deal of tearing down work later.