

## The Holy Spirit and Conscience

Andrew Murray:

'I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost.'-Rom. 9:1.

Â'The Spirit Himself beareth witness with our spirit.'-Rom 8:16.

God's highest glory is His Holiness in virtue of which He hates and destroys the evil, loves and works the good. In man, conscience has the same work: it condemns sin and approves the right. Conscience is the remains of God's image in man, the nearest approach to the Divine in him, the guardian of God's honour amid the ruin of the fall. As a consequence, God's work of redemption must always begin with conscience. The Spirit of God is the Spirit of His Holiness ; conscience is a spark of the Divine holiness; harmony between the work of the Holy Spirit in, renewing and sanctifying man, and the work of conscience, is most intimate and essential. The believer who would be filled with the Holy Spirit, and experience to the full the blessings He has to give, must in the first place see to it that he yields to conscience the place and the honour which belong to it. Faithfulness to conscience is the first step in the path of restoration to the Holiness of God. Intense conscientiousness will be the groundwork and characteristic of true spirituality. As it is the work of conscience to witness to our being right towards our sense of duty and towards God, and the work of the Spirit to witness to God's acceptance of our faith in Christ and our obedience to Him, the testimony of the Spirit and of conscience will, as the Christian life progresses, become increasingly identical. We shall feel the need and the blessedness of saying with Paul, in regard to all our conduct: 'My conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost.'

Conscience can be compared to the window of a room, through which the light of heaven shines into it, and through which we can look out and see that heaven, with all that its light shines on. The heart is the chamber in which our Life dwells, our Ego, or Soul, with its powers and affections. On the walls of that chamber there is written the law of God. Even in the heathen it is still partly legible, though sadly darkened and defaced. 'In the believer the law is written anew by the Holy Spirit, in letters of light, which often at first are but dim, but grow clearer and glow brighter as they are freely exposed to the action of the light without. With every sin I commit, the light that shines in makes it manifest and condemns it. If the sin be not confessed and forsaken, the stain remains, and conscience becomes defiled, because the mind refused the teaching of the light (Tit. 1:15). And so with one sin after another the window gets darker and darker, until the light can hardly shine through at all, and the Christian can sin on undisturbed, with a conscience to a large extent blinded and without feeling. In His work of renewal the Holy Spirit does not create new faculties: He renews and sanctifies those already existing. Conscience is the work of the Spirit of God the Creator; the first care of the Spirit of God the Redeemer is to restore what sin has defiled. It is only by restoring conscience to full and healthy action, and revealing in it the wonderful grace of Christ, 'the Spirit bearing witness with our spirit,' that He enables the believer to live a life in the full light of God's favour. It is as the window of the heart that looks heavenward is cleansed and kept clean that we can walk in the Light.

The work of the Spirit on conscience is a threefold one. Through conscience the Spirit causes the light of God's holy law to shine into the heart. A room may have its curtains drawn, and even its shutters closed: this cannot prevent the lightning flash from time to time shining into the darkness. Conscience may be so sin-stained and seared that the strong man within dwells in perfect peace. When the lightning from Sinai flashes into the heart, conscience awakens up, and is at once ready to admit and sustain the condemnation. Both the law and the gospel, with their call to repentance and their conviction of sin, appeal to conscience. And it is not till conscience has said Amen to the charge of transgression and unbelief that deliverance can truly come.

It is through conscience that the Spirit likewise causes the light of mercy to shine. When the windows of a house are stained, they need to be washed. How much more shall the blood of Christ cleanse your conscience! The whole aim of the precious, blood of Christ is to reach the conscience, to silence its accusations, and cleanse it, till it testify: Every stain is removed; the love of the Father streams in Christ in unclouded brightness into my soul. 'A heart sprinkled from an evil conscience,' 'having no more conscience of sin' (Heb. 9:14, 10: 2, 22), is meant to be the privilege of every believer. It becomes so when conscience learns to say Amen to God's message of the Power of Jesus' Blood.

The conscience that has been cleansed in the blood must be kept clean by a walk in the obedience of faith, with the light of God's favour shining on it. To the promise of the Indwelling Spirit, and His engagement to lead in all God's will, conscience must say its Amen too, and testify that He does it. The believer is called to walk in humble tenderness and watchfulness, lest in anything, even the least, conscience should accuse him for not having done what he knew to be right, or done what was not of faith. He may be content with nothing less than Paul's joyful testimony, I Our glorying is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly

sincerity, by the grace of God, we behaved ourselves in the world' (2 Cor. 1:12. Comp. Acts 23:1, 24: 16 ; 2 Tim. 1: 3). Let us note these words well: 'Our glorying is this, the testimony of our conscience! It is as the window is kept clean and bright by our abiding in the light, that we can have fellowship with the Father and the Son, the love of heaven shining in unclouded, and our love rising up in childlike trustfulness. 'Beloved! if our heart condemn us not, we have boldness toward God, because we keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight' (1 John 3: 21,22).

The maintenance of a good conscience toward God from day to day is essential to the life of faith. The believer must aim at, must be satisfied with, nothing less than this. He may be assured that it is within his reach. The believers in the Old Testament by faith had the witness that they pleased God (Heb. 11: 4, 5, 6, 39). In the New Testament it is set before us, not only as a command to be obeyed, but as a grace to be wrought by God Himself. 'That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all well-pleasing, strengthened with all might according to His glorious power.' ' May God fulfil all the good pleasure of His goodness, and the work of faith with power.' ' Working in us that which is wellpleasing in His sight! (Col.1:10,11; 2 Thess.1:11; 1 Thess.4:1; Heb.12:28, 13:21).

The more we seek this testimony of conscience that we are doing what is well-pleasing to God, the more shall we feel the liberty, with every failure that surprises us, to look at once to the blood that ever cleanses, and the stronger will be our assurance that the indwelling sinfulness, and all its workings that are yet unknown to us, are covered by that blood too. The blood that has sprinkled the conscience abides and acts there in the power of the Eternal Life that knows no intermission, and of the unchangeable Priesthood that saves completely. 'If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin."

The cause of the feebleness of our faith is owing to nothing so much as the want of a clean conscience. Mark well how closely Paul connects them in 1 Tim.: 'Love out of a pure heart, and a good conscience, and faith unfeigned' (1: 5). 'Holding faith and a good conscience, which some having thrust from them, have made shipwreck of the faith' (1:19). And especially (3: 9), ' Holding the mystery of -the faith in a pure conscience.' The conscience is the seat of faith. He that would grow strong in faith, and have boldness with God, must know that he is pleasing Him (1 John 3: 21, 22). Jesus said most distinctly that it is for those who love Him and keep His commandments, that the promise of the Spirit, with the indwelling of the Father and the Son, the abiding in His love, and power in prayer, is meant.

How can we confidently claim these promises, unless in childlike simplicity our conscience can testify that we fulfil the conditions ? Oh, ere the Church can rise to the height of her holy calling as intercessor, and claim these unlimited promises as really within her reach, believers will have to draw nigh to their Father, glorying, like Paul, in the testimony of their conscience, that, by the Grace of God, they are walking in holiness and godly sincerity. It will have to be seen that this is the -deepest humility, and brings most glory to God's free grace, to give up man's ideas of what we can attain, and accept God's declaration of what He desires and promises, as the only standard of what we are to be.

And how is this blessed life to be attained, in which we can daily appeal to God and men with Paul: 'I say the truth in Christ, my conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost'? The first step is: Bow very low under the reproofs of conscience. Be not content with the general confession that there is a great deal wrong. Beware of confounding actual transgression with the involuntary workings of the sinful nature. If the latter are to be conquered and made dead by the indwelling Spirit (Rom. viii. 13), you must first deal with the former. Begin with some single sin, and give conscience time in silent submission and humiliation to reprove and condemn. Say to your Father, that in this one thing you are, by His grace, going to obey. Accept anew Christ's wonderful offer to take entire possession of your heart, to dwell in you as Lord and Keeper. Trust Him by His Holy Spirit to do this, even when you feel weak and helpless. Remember that obedience, the taking and keeping Christ's words in your will and life, is the only way to prove the reality of your surrender to Him, or your interest in His work and grace. And vow in faith, that by God's Grace you will exercise yourself herein, 'always to have a conscience void of offence toward God and toward man.'

When you have begun this with one sin, proceed with others, step by step. As you are faithful in keeping conscience pure, the light will shine more brightly from heaven into the heart, discovering sin you had not noticed before, bringing out distinctly the law written by the Spirit you had not been able to read. Be willing to be taught ; be trustfully sure that the Spirit will teach. Every honest effort to keep the blood-cleansed conscience clean, in the light of God, will be met with the aid of the Spirit. Only yield yourself heartily and entirely to God's will, and to the power of His Holy Spirit.

As you thus bow to the reproofs of conscience, and give yourself wholly to do God's will, your courage will

grow strong that it is possible to have a conscience void of offence. The witness of conscience, as to what you are doing, and will do by grace, will be met by the witness of the Spirit as to what Christ is doing and will do. In childlike simplicity you will seek to begin each day with the simple prayer: Father! there is nothing now between Thee and Thy child. My conscience divinely cleansed in the blood, bears me witness, Father! let not even the shadow of a cloud intervene this day. In everything would I do Thy will: Thy Spirit dwells in me, and leads me, and makes me strong in Christ. And you will enter upon that life which glories in free grace alone when it says at the close of each day, 'Our glorying is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, by the Grace of God, we have behaved ourselves in the world': 'My conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost.'

Gracious God! I thank Thee for the voice Thou hast given in our heart, to testify whether we are pleasing to Thee or not. I thank Thee, that when that witness condemned me, with its terrible Amen to the curse of Thy law, Thou didst give the blood of Thy Son to cleanse the conscience. I thank Thee that at this moment my conscience can say Amen to the voice of the blood, and that I may look up to Thee in full assurance, with a heart cleansed from the evil conscience.

I thank Thee too for the Witness from heaven to what Jesus hath done and is doing for me and in me. I thank Thee that He glorifies Christ in me, gives me His Presence and His Power, and transforms me into His likeness. I thank Thee that to the presence and the work of Thy Spirit in my heart, my conscience can likewise say, Amen.

O my Father! I desire this day to walk before Thee with a good conscience, to do nothing that might grieve Thee or my Blessed Lord Jesus. I ask Thee, may, in the power of the Holy Spirit, the cleansing in the blood be a living, continual, and most effectual deliverance from the power of sin, binding and strengthening me to Thy perfect service. And may my whole walk with Thee be in the joy of the united witness of conscience and Thy Spirit that I am wellpleasing to Thee. Amen.