

# The Watchman

In this newsletter, we will be taking a deeper look at the conscience. To grasp the topic at hand, we need to examine some imagery in the Bible.

## A Walled City

The Bible uses the imagery of a walled city to teach us about self-control.

“He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls.”—*Proverbs 25:28*.

In *Psalms 127:1*, we are given additional information regarding this city imagery.

“Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.”

Every city has a watchman. His duty is to look for danger and warn the city’s inhabitants. A watchman cannot warn the city about everything, only the things he recognizes as enemies. There are three ways to capture a city: force, deception, and diplomacy. A watchman is not effective against all three of these methods. He is not an army, so the most he can do against force is close the gate and hope the walls are strong enough to keep the enemy at bay until an army is mustered. If he is taught, he can recognize a disguised enemy. He also can’t do much against diplomacy. Satan uses these three methods to attack us. If we run to God, Satan cannot overcome us with force, and he must rely upon deception, or compromise and reason.

What is the work of a watchman according to the Bible?

“So thou, O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me.”—*Ezekiel 33:7*.

Here, we see Ezekiel has been set as a spiritual watchman for the people. He is to listen for God’s warning and report it to the people. We can understand from this that the Watchman of the heart hears the Word of God and warns us when we disobey. The Watchman warns us to close our gate and use our “walls” of self-control to protect ourselves from the enemy, sin. The Watchman of the heart is what we call the conscience. But unless the Lord keeps us from sin, our conscience is aroused in vain. Sin is supernatural; it is more

powerful than our self-control. If the Holy Spirit is taking residence in our hearts, our self-control will be reinforced, and we will be strengthened to resist.

## Three different kinds of consciences

Paul identifies two kinds of conscience in *1 Corinthians 8:1-13*: A weak conscience and a strong conscience. A weak conscience is weak because of a lack of knowledge; a strong conscience has been empowered by knowledge. Interestingly enough, the burden of this section of Paul’s letter is not to justify following one’s strong conscience. His focus is more on accountability for wounding a weak conscience.

“But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ.”—*1 Corinthians 8:12*.

The correct way to react to a weak conscience is to educate, or, for the sake of the brother or sister, refrain. Thus, instead of being puffed up by knowledge and encouraging people to wound their consciences, we are built up by love. This demonstrates an important principle: the silence of the conscience is not justification for an action. Love is a higher influence than the conscience. Though the conscience did not accuse the Corinthians, it was still a sin to eat the meat because of the effect it had upon their weak brethren. The conscience is not to be regarded as our king.

The third type of conscience is a seared conscience: “having their conscience seared with a hot iron”—*1 Timothy 4:2*. The seared conscience has been made this way by repeated offenses, or by being deceived into accepting a sin as inoffensive.

“The promise of obedience they appear to fulfill when this involves no sacrifice; but when self-denial and self-sacrifice are required, when they see the cross to be lifted, they draw back. Thus, the conviction of duty wears away, and known transgression of God’s commandments becomes habit. The ear may hear God’s Word, but the spiritual perceptive powers have departed. The heart is hardened, the conscience seared.”—*Christ’s Object Lessons, pg. 279*.

A seared conscience is a horrible thing, but it does not have to be the end of Christianity. There is hope for those hardened in sin.

## The false conscience

2 The Bible indicates that there is one more thing that can convict you, or rather condemn you.

“And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him. For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.”—1 John 3:19-21.

Our hearts that are “wicked and deceitful above all things” can imitate the conscience. Our conscience is a blessing from God, but it cannot be solely relied upon to lead us to heaven. Should the heart deceive us into believing it is our conscience, we would undoubtedly be lost.

Paul in *Romans 2:14-15* indicates that the conscience plays a role in salvation, especially when one does not have access to higher knowledge:

“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.”

Even here, the conscience is not the sole guide for salvation; it is just a witness. The Gentiles were reasoning and sitting as judges of their own actions. They may not have the law, but they are being a law unto themselves. They would treat others the way they would want to be treated. While reasoning is beneficial, it can also be corrupted, and this is why we need a higher standard: the Word of God.

## Four Witnesses

The conscience cannot always lead us to salvation; it can be imitated by a wicked and deceitful heart, and it does not, by nature, possess perfect knowledge. So what is the conscience really for? As Paul mentioned in *Romans 2:14-15*, it is a witness. There are at least four witnesses to who we are. Our words and actions (*Matthew 7:20*), Jesus (*Revelation 3:5*), the Holy Spirit (*Romans 8:16*), and the Bible (*Hebrews 4:12*). The Holy Spirit convicts us of sin through our conscience, serving as our Watchman. It speaks to our conscience, and our conscience convicts us.

“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.”—*Hebrews 10:22*.

Our hearts can condemn us even after our consciences have been cleansed by confession. This is why it is so vital for us to know that we are forgiven.

“Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto

them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled.”—*Titus 1:15*.

Satan does not want us to have a clean conscience because this would help us to be pure. So he tries to write our sins on our hearts with “a pen of iron” (*Jeremiah 17:1*). He wants us to doubt our forgiveness. This is one reason why our hearts condemn us. The cleansing of the conscience is so important that it is considered the basis of salvation:

“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:”—1 Peter 3:21.

Without a pure conscience, we will not have the power to resist sin. Our conscience bears witness to our relationship status with God, but it is only one witness. We have the testimony of Jesus that our sins are forgiven. His resurrection is proof of this. Our second witness is the promise in the Bible that cannot be broken.

The Law of God serves as a mirror. We can discern our actual condition by comparing our lives to the teachings of the Bible. The peace of the Holy Spirit is also a witness, as it is only present in the lives of those who obey God. In this way, we know that we are God’s children, especially when the fruit of love is in our hearts. When one of these witnesses speaks against us, we can consult another witness to confirm whether it is indeed true, especially the witness of the Bible. A seared conscience can be repaired with biblically enlightened reasoning. This is only possible through the vivifying influence of the Holy Spirit.

We are told: “For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged”—1 Corinthians 11:31. Many people show partiality and respect of persons when they judge themselves. They are quick to condemn others’ actions but often excuse their own. Self is not to be petted and forgiven, but crucified. If we cannot be faithful judges of ourselves, we will be lost. The sword of the Spirit was given to be used in battles with self and Satan. When we use it on others, it is to be like a scalpel, with care and surgical precision.

## Satan’s deception

Unfortunately, many use conscience as an excuse to do things that the Bible and Ellen White (Who would fall under the classification of the Holy Spirit because of the Spirit of prophecy) testify against. They say, “I’m not convicted on that,” as if it justifies their disobedience.

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“Those who have the Word of God brought home to their minds and conscience occupy no neutral ground. They are either living by every Word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God and [are] entitled to all the treasures of heaven, or they are only hearers and not doers, and the storm and tempest of temptation swept away their foundation, for it is sliding sand. They are the most guilty according to their proportion of light and knowledge which they did not practice. They are regarded of the Lord as most dangerous for their careless disregard of the life and character of the life and works of Christ. Their examples lead men out of the path of obedience and faith and rectitude. One man in office who is not in works a doer of the Word does incalculable evil, and the judgment shall sit and the books be opened.”—Letter 52, 1891.

Many are bound in the chains of sin, waiting for a seared conscience to convict them. These are in a lost condition, unless decided changes are made in life. Should the conscience actually do its job, the conviction would be crushed out by disobedience. This grand deception is no coincidence, but a well-calculated plan to entrap Christians. Roger Morneau recounts these words from a demon priest:

“After it became known that the great rival Christ would come to this planet taking the nature of man to draw all men to Himself, (Satan) and his chief counselors decided to follow a strategy similar to the one that had enabled them to acquire their new dominion. This course of action would demand great diligence on the part of all demon spirits, in the counseling of human to rule their lives in a way to disqualify them from becoming members of Christ’s kingdom. **The (demon) spirits’ work would be to cause people to rule their lives by listening to their feelings, instead of the Word of Christ and His prophets. In no surer way could demon spirits obtain control of people’s lives without individuals realizing that it is so.**”—*Charmed by darkness*, Roger Morneau, pg 50-51.

The Truth is to be followed, whether or not we feel like doing it. Those who follow convictions alone will eventually be misled by their deceitful hearts. We must be followers of the Truth. There is a greater guide than our feelings and convictions.

“We are commanded, whether we eat, or drink, or whatsoever we do, to do all to the glory of God. How many have conscientiously moved from principle rather than from impulse, and obeyed this command to the letter? How many of the youthful disciples in ----- have made God their trust and portion, and have earnestly sought to know and do His will? There are many

who are servants of Christ in name, but who are not so in deed. **Where religious principle governs, the danger of committing great errors is small; for selfishness, which always blinds and deceives, is subordinate.** The sincere desire to do others good so predominates that self is forgotten. **To have firm religious principles is an inestimable treasure. It is the purest, highest, and most elevated influence mortals can possess.** Such have an anchor. Every act is well considered, lest its effect be injurious to another and lead away from Christ. The constant inquiry of the mind is: Lord, how shall I best serve Thee, and glorify Thy name in the earth? How shall I conduct my life to make Thy name a praise in the earth, and lead others to love, serve, and honor Thee? Let me only desire and choose Thy will. Let the words and example of my Redeemer be the light and strength of my heart. While I follow and trust in Him, He will not leave me to perish. He will be my crown of rejoicing.”—*2 Testimonies*, pg. 129.

### What is religious principle?

It is the purest, highest, and most elevated influence mortals can possess. Like conscience, it influences us; unlike conscience, it cannot be corrupted. Ellen White defines religious principle in these words:

“The principle for which the disciples stood so fearlessly when, in answer to the command not to speak any more in the name of Jesus, they declared, “Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye,” is the same that the adherents of the gospel struggled to maintain in the days of the Reformation. When in 1529 the German princes assembled at the Diet of Spires, there was presented the emperor’s decree restricting religious liberty, and prohibiting all further dissemination of the reformed doctrines. It seemed that the hope of the world was about to be crushed out. Would the princes accept the decree? Should the light of the gospel be shut out from the multitudes still in darkness? Mighty issues for the world were at stake. Those who had accepted the reformed faith met together, and their unanimous decision was, “Let us reject this decree. In matters of conscience the majority has no power.”—Merle d’Aubigne, *History of the Reformation*, b. 13, ch. 5. This principle we in our day are firmly to maintain. The banner of truth and religious liberty held aloft by the founders of the gospel church and by God’s witnesses during the centuries that have passed since then, has, in this last conflict, been committed to our hands. The responsibility for this great gift rests with those whom God has blessed with a knowledge of His Word. We are to

4 receive this Word as supreme authority.—*Acts of the Apostles, pg. 68.*

We ought to obey God rather than conscience, conviction, feelings, reason, governments, and everything else. If God said it, we should do it. Naturally, the quibblers will immediately question the authority of Ellen White or claim that the Bible is not in harmony with what she says. We are commanded:

“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.”—*Philippians 2:12.*

It is not possible to save someone who is not willing to save themselves and earnestly plead for strength and wisdom to fit themselves for heaven. It is an individual work.

“Here is the great danger of many in ----. They have not an experience for themselves. They have not been in the habit of prayerfully considering for themselves, with unprejudiced, unbiased judgment, questions and subjects that are new and that are ever liable to arise. They wait to see what others will think. If these dissent, that is all that is needed to convince them that the subject under consideration is of no account whatever. Although this class is large, it does not change the fact that they are inexperienced and weak-minded through long yielding to the enemy, and will always be as sickly as babes, walking by others’ light, living on others’ experience, feeling as others feel, and acting as others act. They act as though they had not an individuality. Their identity is submerged in others; they are merely shadows of those whom they think (are) right. Unless these become sensible of their wavering character and correct it, they will all fail of everlasting life; they will be unable to cope with the perils of the last days... Neither young nor old are excusable in trusting to another to have an experience for them. Said the angel: “Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm.” **A noble self-reliance is needed in the Christian experience and warfare.**”—*2 Testimonies, pg. 129.*

If our motivation is based on religious principle rather than conviction, we will be far safer than if we solely follow our conscience. Additionally, this frees us from the effects of a seared conscience. If we are willing to obey God because He tells us to, it can reawaken our conscience. Ultimately, people go astray because they do not love the Truth. If they did, God would not leave them to be deceived. Too many love their own opinions and sins; they only

*More Food for the Little Flock —*

claim to love Truth. If we choose to serve God, there will be a revitalization of all our faculties. This will be an active warfare; if we have been merely following conscience instead of Christ, we must confess it. Then we must make an earnest effort to develop an individuality through obedience to the Word of God and His prophet, Ellen White. There is no human too weak to do this. Weakness is only God’s opportunity.

“Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.”—*2 Corinthians 12:10.*

The weakest sinner has the opportunity to be the greatest champion for Christ. They would know that in their own power, they could do nothing. They would be resistant to the temptation of self-trust. Their self-distrust has prepared them to receive the righteousness imparted by Christ. The power God gives us is in proportion to our reliance upon Him. God loves to work with those who have no individuality; they are the softest clay, the easiest to refine and ennoble. But they would have to humble themselves and step out into the unknown. This may not be a pleasant experience at first. But, once we learn that God is our ever-present help, we will be able to say with Paul, “I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake.”

### Conclusion

If you have been sitting at the pool of Bethesda waiting for some mysterious force to heal you, waiting for some divine feeling, or for your silent conscience to protest sin, I bid you look up. Christ is even now bending over poor sufferers with the question, “Wilt thou be made whole?” Complete healing is available to anyone willing to exercise faith and make an effort.

*For a finished work,*



**Jonathan Taylor**

*Wisdom is justified of all her children. -Luke 7:35*