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GREAT

TO  
GOOD



HOW FOLLOWING  
JESUS RESHAPES  
OUR AMBITIONS



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## CULTIVATE A GOOD CONSCIENCE



IN THE CLASSIC TALE OF *PINOCCHIO*, the eponymous character—a boy made out of wood—learns a powerful lesson about the enduring nature of the conscience. Pinocchio attempts to silence the cricket since it continuously nags him with moral advice, and he eventually kills the cricket, only for the creature to return as a ghost. Endlessly reminding Pinocchio to live a righteous life, the cricket symbolizes the conscience, which never truly fades away.

Deep within every human heart lies a conscience and its antithesis, which usually manifests as selfishness or a self-serving vengeance. Of these two, the conscience is the good and noble heart that God has placed within us. It guides us in our quest to know God and to live in accordance with his purpose for our lives. Although our conscience may be tainted by sin and be imperfect, the conscience still functions within us and points us toward the right path.

The Greek word for conscience, *syneidesis*, is a compound word that literally means “to know together.” This word captures the idea that conscience is an intrinsic understanding that helps us understand ourselves and our place in the world. Similarly, the English word *conscience* implies a sense of knowing (“science”) together (“con”) with something else.

In some Native American cultures, the conscience is conceived of as a triangle within the human mind. When a person does something wrong, the sharp corners of the triangle poke through the walls of their inner selves, causing discomfort and unease. Over time the edges of the triangle become worn down and calluses form on the walls of the inner self, making it harder to feel the pangs of the conscience. This image reminds us that we must always be attentive to the voice of our conscience, lest it becomes dulled by our own neglect or stubbornness.

Genuine faith compels us to follow a good conscience. Without faith, we cannot possess a good conscience, and without a good conscience, faith cannot be sustained. Having a good conscience does not mean living a perfect life without any sin; instead, it means believing in the forgiveness of our sins through the blood of Jesus Christ and experiencing new birth, even in the midst of our sinful corruption. The power of the cross enables the survival of a good conscience and weakens the hold of vengeance within us. The Holy Spirit empowers our conscience to function as God intended.

First Timothy 1:19 speaks of “holding on to faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and so have suffered shipwreck with regard to the faith.”

Our conscience is like our eyes—it does not produce light, but it receives light. In other words, our conscience is an instrument that hears God’s voice like a window that lets in light. Just as Pinocchio should have listened to the cricket, we must listen attentively to hear the sound of our conscience. It grows louder and clearer when we abide in the Holy Spirit because the living God continues to work through our conscience. A good conscience is always revealed through his work. Abandoning our conscience means forsaking our very identity and dignity while immersing ourselves in darkness.

Vengeance, on the other hand, is an evil impulse that arises from sin. It leads to rage and becomes a tool of Satan. Vengeance can sometimes disguise itself as justice. Declarations of conscience born out of dissatisfaction can actually be declarations of self-serving vengeance. Such acts, sometimes done in the name of faith, do not reflect true faith. True faith does not seek revenge. Genuine faith does not become preoccupied with religious rituals and procedures.

In the New Testament, the word *conscience* appears thirty-two times, with twenty-one instances attributed to the apostle Paul. He exemplifies a man of conscience. Conscience serves as a multitude of fearless witnesses, like faithful friends who stand boldly in front of anyone. A good conscience, as seen in Paul's life, emboldens a person to speak the truth even in unjust circumstances, without seeking retaliation against others.

When we neglect to follow our good conscience, it becomes weak. Then this weak conscience eventually becomes a withered conscience, and a withered conscience can easily be consumed by revenge. It boldly justifies evil actions and labels them as good, without any hesitation.

Governor Felix, who encountered Paul, had an opportunity to accept the gospel; however, his conscience was haunted by his desire for revenge (see Acts 24:10-27). Similarly, despite affirming Jesus' innocence three times, Pilate abandoned his conscience and succumbed to evil to appease the people and safeguard his position.

A genuine life of faith entails resolute determination and action in accordance with a good conscience. To allow our good conscience to have the final say, we must embrace Jesus' death on the cross and experience the revitalization of our conscience. "How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through

the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!” (Hebrews 9:14). Through the work of the Holy Spirit, we can restore the boldness to follow our conscience faithfully.

Martin Luther’s remarkable leadership during the Reformation, despite immense persecution and obstacles, stemmed from his unwavering commitment to act in accordance with his conscience. In 1521 he openly declared, “My conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen.”

When we emulate the faith and conscience-driven lives of individuals like the apostle Paul and Martin Luther, we, too, can experience the same boldness and transformative power they exhibited. By relinquishing our desire for vengeance and attentively heeding the resounding voice of our conscience, we become living testimonies to the presence of a living God. Regardless of the injustices we encounter, our faithful obedience allows us to rise above adversity and exemplify the transformative power of divine grace.

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