

Instructions About Heart-work

Lesson 8 — Governing the heart, Part 3

- I. Samuel Ward: four marks of a good conscience by which you may determine if you have one, cf. Heb 13.18.
- A. **A Willing.** He that has a good conscience not only does well, but *wills* to do well, not forcibly or out of external and sinister motives, but voluntarily, from an internal principle, a sanctified and rectified will, which God accepts for the deed and above the deed, 1Kgs 8.18; 2Chr 19.1-3
1. This sanctified will may of course be crossed by the flesh (Gal 5.17), captivated by the world (2Sam 11.2-4), and hindered by the devil (Gal 5.7; 1Th 2.18) such that it suffers many a blow (cf. Rom 7). Yet, it holds its own bent and eventually overcomes the law of rebellion in the heart, because it partakes of the divine holiness and will prevail.
 2. A good conscience is one that—for all its battles, for all the tugs of its own flesh, for all its stumbles in the world, for all its defeats under the devil’s temptations—*wills* to do good. Good is not forced upon it or wrested from its hands, but it desires to do it, delights to do it, longs to do it, rejoices in doing it, and is at home in doing it. Sin is utterly despised and, if it could, it would never sin again but do only good, all good, all the time.
- B. **Universally.** Though in many things the will to do good fails (Rom 7), yet this will extends in its intent and desire to *all* righteousness, before God and man, i.e. to both Tables of the Law.
1. In duties divine and human, of piety and charity, whatsoever is done for God’s sake and conscience’s sake is done equally. For no man really makes conscience of one duty but he that makes conscience of all duties, Js 2.10-11.
 2. The sanctified will of a good conscience desires to do *all* good and doesn't stop short of *any* Commandment in its desire to please God. Loving God Himself, the sanctified will of a good conscience desires to do *all* that pleases Him.
 3. This universal obedience is the best distinguishing touchstone of good and bad consciences. A bad conscience is like Herod’s who heard John gladly but wouldn’t give up his Herodias; and like Ananias who would be glad to be thought to give the church all as long as he could keep a little for himself; and like the rich young ruler who would be glad to do anything but give up his riches.
 4. A good conscience strains at gross sins and yet won’t swallow gnats. Though it will struggle in living it out as it fights against the flesh, the world, and the devil, to the good conscience all sin is sin and every duty is duty. The man with a good conscience is, in this sense, a true universalist.
- C. **Constantly.** He that has a good conscience strives to be the same man at every turn and to walk evenly in all his conduct because he’s not aiming to please this or that man in this or that situation, but God, who is everywhere in every situation, Acts 23.1; 24.16
1. A weak conscience falls at every turn. It’s godly in one company, profane in another. But a man with a good conscience is a square cube, the same whichever way you turn him. Turn him to God or to his neighbor, to company or to himself, turn him to all providences, turn him to his wife, to his children, to his co-worker, to strangers, and he holds his own, he intends to walk honorably in them all.
 2. Every day we see the life of man in brief as it begins with alertness and ends in sleep. Morning and evening are like birth and death to him. He begins with God, then turns to

his family, to his work, to his play, to society, to eating and drinking, and at night returns to God and his rest. In all these, a man with a good conscience strives to walk godly, soberly, and righteously, and is able to say more truly than anyone, I have lived this day before God. Whereas he that lets one day's watch slip and crosses his conscience by sin may come to the same bed at night but not in good conscience.

3. Conscience is like a vessel that may be kept clean if rinsed daily by examination and repentance; but if it's allowed to remain dirty, it will gather soil, grow weeds, hardens, and will require more than ordinary repentance.

D. **Honorably.** The word is very comprehensive. The man with a good conscience seeks to walk worthily, decently, accurately, circumspectly, gravely, comely, praiseworthy, lively, famously. The word speaks of walking in such a way that our conduct shines before men and set out God's glory.

1. There is in every duty, besides the deed done, an honorable decorum that could set it apart from the mere doing of it. For example, there's listening and listening eagerly; there's preaching and preaching heartily; tithing and tithing cheerfully; &c. so that it becomes us as Christians to exceed the Pharisee and civil unbeliever and seek to obey our Master honorably—which is done when our obedience is done for love's sake and not simply duty's sake.
2. Thus a man with a good conscience asks not what he may do with a good conscience but with an excellent one; not what is merely lawful but what is expedient and honorable.

II. Thus these four are the four marks of a good conscience.

A. The first proves it good, the second true, the third strong, the fourth excellent.

1. He that has the *will*, has the seeds of religion is a Christian and not an atheist.
2. He that wills *universally* is a sound Christian and not a hypocrite.
3. He that wills to walk *constantly* is a mature Christian and not a babe or weakling.
4. He that wills to walk *honorably* is an excellent Christian and not an ordinary one.

B. Wherever we are in this progression, if we have secured a good conscience by faith in Christ and resolve, out of a love for Him, to not sin, then let us not be discouraged, but take heart, be encouraged, and strive to press on Christ in faith until our consciences are excellent and we are excellent Christians.

1. For there are three days coming for all of us when the comfort of a good conscience will be worth more than all the world: the day of sickness, the day of death, and the day of judgment.

Still to come:

- how conscience actually works
- several kinds of consciences, especially as it relates to the regenerate and the wicked
- our duties towards conscience, i.e. how to prevent its troubles and how to relieve its troubles