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"For the Word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev 1:9)

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IMPORTANCE OF BUILDING, KEEPING AND VALIDATING YOUR CONSCIENCE

Introduction

Threatened with his life by a cohort of the enemies of the Gospel facing an unsympathetic Council at Worms in 1521, Martin Luther concluded his defense of the doctrine of the 'justification by faith alone' by uttering those immortal words with full assurance and confidence, *"unless I am convicted by scripture and plain reason - I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other - 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."* Why was Martin Luther so bold and confident in insisting upon not betraying his own conscience? It is because his conscience is '**captive to the Word of God**'. In other words, his conscience is built upon, maintained and validated by the principles and truths founded in the Holy, inerrant and infallible Word of God - a pure conscience was what he had enables him to be a powerful witness of the gospel! Having possessed a **pure conscience** before God and man, Luther was unmovable and uncompromised in his biblical conviction of 'justification by faith alone' though the whole world might seem against him. However, such **pure conscience** that Luther had was not given to him at birth, though every man has **conscience** (Romans 2:15) but was marred by the fall of Adam. Luther's conscience, like anyone else, had to be nurtured on the infallible foundation of God's Word in order to bring glory to the Almighty God. The question is, how can a Christian possess a pure conscience? And how can a believer's conscience be kept pure and validated? The writer shall seek to answer these questions from a biblical and Christian perspective.

There is a need to define the term conscience. Webster's 1828 dictionary defines conscience as *"internal or self-knowledge, or judgment of right and wrong; or the faculty, power or principle within us, which decides on the lawfulness or unlawfulness of our own actions and affections, and instantly approves or condemns them."* As Paul said in Romans 2:15 that says, *"....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."* The Holy Spirit of God today still employ conscience as a mean to convict sinners of their sins and also use to direct believers to judge in the matters of right and wrong to serve as a guide and energize believers to be a powerful witness of His truth when the conscience is solidly built upon and kept pure. But how can one have a **pure conscience** like Martin Luther? Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 1:12 tells us that a pure conscience must be built upon a sound and biblical foundation on '**simplicity**' and '**godly sincerity**'. What are '**simplicity**' and '**godly sincerity**'?

Simplicity and Godly Sincerity: Foundation of a Pure conscience (2 Corinthians 1:12).

Apostle Paul wrote to urge the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 1:12, *"for our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity..."* Apostle Paul says...

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that he and his fellow-labours had a **'testimony of their conscience'**. This implies that conscience can be witnessed for or against. Yet, what is the testimony of Paul and others' conscience? That is, in their ministry and preaching, it brings glory and honour to God and Saviour Jesus Christ by replying totally upon God's wisdom and His Grace, which their conscience could testify. As Paul in verse 2 Corinthians 1:12b says, *"...not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward."* And Paul and others could certainly echo with the writer of Hebrews where in Hebrews 13:18 which says, *"...for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly."* And that is a conscience that is based on **'simplicity and godly sincerity'**, which in terms could be a powerful influence in a believer's personal relationships with people and ministry.

Simplicity as the Foundation of a Pure Conscience

By the way, what is simplicity? John Gill, a great Reformed Baptist theologian, defines 'simplicity' as **"in opposition to double mindedness"**. With regard to the passage mentioned above, in his commentary, Gill comments, *"they [apostle Paul and others] did not say one thing, and mean another, and act contrary to both; their heart and mouth went together, and their conduct agreed with both; what they promised they meant to perform."* My simpler definition for 'simplicity' is simply *"an attitude or conduct without deceitfulness or hypocrisy and always consistent or honest in his motive, pursuit and behavior before God and man."* He is a man constantly in close walk and communion with God and is conscious of God's presence and seeks to glorify and honour God wherever he goes, whatever he says and business he engages in his daily life. The righteous Job of the land of Uz was no doubt was the example given to us in the Bible, for his life motto was **"let me be weighed in an even balance, that God may know mine integrity."** (Job 31:6). And we all know that God's evaluation for Job was, **"....there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil."** (Job 1:1) Why? Because Job had an attitude or conduct without 'deceitfulness or hypocrisy' and always consistent or honest in his motive, pursuit and behaviour before God and man and even the devil could not fault him (Job 1:8, 9). In other words, godly 'simplicity' is consistent God honouring lifestyle, conduct and behaviour before God and man without pretence, so that no one could find fault, not even the devil. Thus, any Christian who desires to build up a pure conscience, should have simplicity as the first foundation.

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Godly Sincerity as the Foundation of a Pure Conscience

The second foundation of a pure conscience is 'godly sincerity'. What is godly sincerity? 'Godly sincerity,' as pointed out by Albert Barne, can also be render as *"sincerity of God"* or *"sincerity that God approves"*. This implies that it is not enough merely to be 'sincere' but an individual must possess sincerity that God approves. Most in the world, namely the unregenerated, are often sincerely wrong without even realizing it by offering their sincerity to idols and other deities or embrace themselves in defected standards of morality and ethics. The Scripture reveals to us that true and godly sincerity does not approve whatever seems good or right in a man's own eye (Judges 21:25). Rather, godly sincerity, as Luther's confession stressed, is knitted with a conscience that is 'captive to the Word of God'. That is to say, a pure conscience must be built upon 'sincerity that God approves'. This means that a 'godly sincerity' refers to the ultimate standard of right and wrong that God approves as revealed in the inerrant and infallible Holy Scripture. This must be another foundation for building a pure conscience and this was unarguably what Luther based his conscience upon. Only when conscience is built on simplicity and godly sincerity, his conscience may be purified and may be employed by the Holy Spirit to be reckoned as a powerful witness for the gospel and a positive influence among believers and unbelievers alike and may render the Almighty God glory and honour due to Him.

A Pure Conscience is Kept Pure in a Sound Faith (Titus 1:15; 1 Timothy 4:1)

Conscience can be Polluted by the World

A man who possess a good or pure conscience must constantly in watch that his conscience would not be polluted by having sound faith; and not rendered useless with carelessness and complacency.

How can a believer's conscience be kept pure? It is kept pure by having a sound faith as Paul suggests in Titus 1:15, *"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.**"* Paul said that it is unbelief that defiles both the mind and the conscience. A man cannot have a pure conscience unless he has faith in God. This not only applies to the unconverted who are not able to have a pure conscience, but it also applies to believers who has not in careful watch of his faith, though it does not imply that he may lose his salvation. The believers though regenerated by the Holy Spirit, may have his conscience weakened or defiled. The culminating effect for a unbeliever who has not a pure conscience of course would ultimately result him in condemnation one day. As Paul said in 1 Timothy 4:1, *"Now the spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils;"* 1 Timothy 4:2, *"speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron."* The expression of conscience being seared with hot iron all begins with absence of faith because he had not any from the beginning and naturally, the unbelieving cannot produce anything good or bear spiritual fruit in Christ. The...

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conscience if properly maintained or kept pure in sound faith or rooted in spiritual knowledge it could become a formidable influence in a believer's life for the cause of Christ to be a powerful witness of the gospel and be light and salt of the world.

Therefore, there is a need for believers to keep his conscience pure in a sound faith otherwise his conscience may be weakened due to lack of spiritual knowledge or not rooted in sound faith thus render his conscience useless or ineffective to be employed by the Spirit of God as a powerful witness and a positive influence.

Conscience Must be Guarded Against the Attack of Evil One

There is a need to keep our conscience pure because the devil relentlessly attacks the conscience of the saints. Thomas Manton, a puritan theologian says, *"If you yield to Satan in the least, he will carry you further and further, till he has left you under a stupefied or terrified conscience: stupefied, till thou hast lost all thy tenderness. A stone at the top of a hill, when it begins to roll down, ceases not till it comes to the bottom. Thou thinkest it is but yielding a little, and so by degrees are carried on, till thou hast sinned away all thy profession, and all principles of conscience, by the secret witchery of his temptations."* Are we not being attacked daily by 'the secret witchery of devil's temptations'? Is our conscience serving us well to rightly judge what is right and wrong; or, has it been 'stupefied and lost all tenderness' as Manton fear what might happen to a child of God? When the devil tempts us to employ worldly wisdom and say to us, *'It is ok to tell a white lie, after all everybody is telling it.'* Would your conscience warn us, *'No, lying is wrong, not even a so-called white lie!'* When the devil appeals to our fleshly lust and says to us, *'It is ok to indulge yourself in the lust of the eyes...you deserve it.'* Would our conscience object and admonish us and say, *"No, 'I must flee from youthful lust' or 'I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should i think upon a maid?'"* When the devil appeals to our greediness and discontented spirit and says, *"Come on, go grab yourself the latest model of what you already have, don't be so content with the older model of the same thing."* Would our conscience wake us up and say, *"No, 'godliness with contentment is great gain'."* When the devil appeals to our fleshly desire and suggest to us, *"Don't be so rigid, follow your heart's desire!"* Would our conscience say, *"No, 'I must walk circumspectly' and 'redeeming the time.'"* Did not our Lord guarded from the attack of the devil with the pure Word of God? Satan seeks to pollute our conscience with 'philosophy of man and vain deceit' (Colossians 2:8) and 'the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life' (1 John 2:16) and 'evil concupiscence' (1 Thessalonians 4:5). Christians must know his Bible well, for our conscience can be polluted easily. Guard our consciences and keep them pure from the attack of Satan aiming at polluting our conscience with his dirty tricks with the application of God's Word.

A Pure Conscience is Validated (1 Corinthians 10:24-29; Romans 2:15)

Conscience is not an Infallible and Ultimate Standard

A believer's conscience, though must be built upon on 'simplicity' and 'godly sincerity' and be kept by sound doctrine and be guarded against by knowing the Word of God; nevertheless, conscience can never be an infallible or ultimate standard of right and wrong. According to 2 Corinthians 4:2 and John 8:9, though conscience is given by God to every man, but it has been corrupted or defective, except for the divine help and illumination of the Holy Spirit. Though it also served as an internal law of right and wrong in the hearts of the heathen (Romans 1:21), but since it has been marred by Adam's fall, thus, it would serve to condemn them (Romans 2:14.15) in the final judgment. Yet, in other times, it also serves to be a mean to convict people of their sins (John 8:9) through the working of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of man. However, it cannot save a person because having the Holy Spirit working in the hearts of man is not an evidence of indwelling of the Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit could work in believers' and unbelievers' heart to bring glory to God. For, believers, the Holy Spirit build and cultivate their conscience by the written Word of God to judge what is right and wrong. However, there is a need to validate even a believer's conscience, it can always be the lack of time and knowledge, and thus it is not infallible.

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Conscience Must be Validated by God's Truth

When is there a need to validate your conscience? It is when a person's conscience is weakened due to lack of knowledge. In such cases, conscience is rendered useless because it fails to counsel a person's in making a right judgment. After Apostle Paul dealt with food offered to idols in chapter 8, he stressed it again in chapter 10 verses 25 to 29 and he said, *"Whatsoever is sold in the shambles, that eat, asking no question for conscience sake: for the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof. If any of them that believe not bid you to a feast, and ye be disposed to go; whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience sake. but if any man say unto you, this is offered in sacrifice unto idols, eat not for his sake that shewed it, and for conscience sake: for the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof: conscience, I say, not thine own, but of the other: for why is my liberty judged of another man's conscience?"* Apparently, some Corinthian Christians were hesitant for buying meat from the market of Corinth, where all the meats have been offered to idols before they were sold to the public. Nonetheless, Paul concluded that their action is due to lack of knowledge which results in having a weak conscience (1 Corinthians 8:7). What knowledge was Paul talking about? It is the knowledge according to 1 Cor chapter 8:4 where Paul said that idols are nothing; and eating food offered to idols are nothing.

They were only forbidden from eating food offered to idols unless they presumptuously abuse such liberty in Christ by joining the feast of the devil or would ultimately cause a brother to stumble because of the weak conscience on the part of those who lack knowledge. Therefore, it is obvious that man's conscience is not infallible and can be weakened through lack of knowledge. That is the reason why the judgment of human conscience must be validated by the infallible truth and should not be an ultimate and final authority of right and wrong.

Conclusion

Conscience is a gift of God to every man as an internal law or a general standard of right and wrong. Yet, it has been marred, corrupted or rendered imperfect by the fall of Adam. Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit of God today could still employ conscience as a mean to convict sinners' (John 8:9) or prick by their conscience or give us a pure conscience again (Acts 2:37) and ultimately draw them to Christ through His regenerating and saving power. Believers are challenged to build their conscience upon 'simplicity' and 'godly sincerity' and keep his conscience pure as a powerful witness in the dark and sinful world and enabling Christians to be effective witnesses of the gospel like Martin Luther and other men and women of faith. Nevertheless, one's conscience can never attain unto perfection in this life even by the best of the saints. It must always be validated by God's infallible truth, for God's Holy Word alone is the ultimate standard of right and wrong. May God help us.

*Pr David Weng, Maranatha B-P Church, S'pore
(adapted from Maranatha Messenger bulletin dated 2 March 2008)*

WELCOME TO NEW LIFE B-P CHURCH LONDON
CHURCH THEME: WORK OUT YOUR OWN SALVATION WITH FEAR
AND TREMBLING. (Philippians 2:12)

Our worship services begin promptly at **11.00 am and 4.00 pm.**

Please stay back for Bible Study and fellowship lunch after the morning worship and for tea after the evening service. Do invite your friends to come to Church.

Worship Services			WELCOME
Morning	<i>Today: 16/03/2008</i>	<i>Next Week: 23/03/2008</i>	We extend a warm welcome to all worshippers this Lord's Day. We like to welcome Nicholas to the morning worship service last Lord's Day.
<i>Chairman:</i>	John Poh	Pr Mok Chee Cheong	
<i>Preacher:</i>	Pr Mok Chee Cheong	Ps Jeff O'Neil	
<i>Message:</i>	Wonderful Work in Your Life	Tbd	
<i>Text:</i>	Phil 1:1-6; 2:12-13	Judges 16:21, 22	
<i>Organist:</i>	Pr Mark Chen	Anthony	
Evening			NEWS/ANNOUNCEMENTS
<i>Chairman:</i>	Jonathan Kim	Pr Mark Chen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Church Easter Camp – 21 to 24 Mar: The speaker will be Ps Jeff O'Neil. The theme of the camp is "Godliness" (Theme verse is 1 Tim 4:7). Registration forms for the camp are now available. Please register by 16 Mar. For those who wish to assist with the logistics of the camp and the cleaning up in preparation for the camp, please inform Anthony. • Gospel Outreach – 24 Mar: The gospel outreach, followed by a BBQ session, will be held on 24 Mar (Mon). You are encouraged to invite your friends to attend this event. • Duties of Office Bearers: For those who are serving on Lord's Day, please refer to the insert regarding your duties for the service unto the Lord. Please also refer to the rota found on the notice board in the Fellowship Hall for the schedule of duties. For those who want to render your service, please approach Jonathan. • Family Worship: For those who would like to open up their homes for family worship, please contact Pr Mok.
<i>Preacher:</i>	Pr Mok Chee Cheong	Ps Jeff O'Neil	
<i>Message:</i>	A Father's Word to His Son	Tbd	
<i>Text:</i>	Proverbs 1:8-19	Acts 16:14	
<i>Pianist:</i>	Joy	Sophia	
Other Duties			
	<i>Today: 16/03/2008</i>	<i>Next Week: 23/03/2008</i>	
<i>Ushers</i>	Anthony/Esmeralda	Daniel/Yetta	
<i>Sunday Sch:</i>	Hui Min	No Class	
<i>Lunch:</i>	Maureen	Constance	
<i>Washing-up:</i>	Volunteers	Volunteers	
<i>Bible Study:</i>	No DHW Class	No DHW Class	
Appointments of the Week			
Fri 21 Mar	7:30pm	Young Adults Fellowship: Led by Pr Mark Chen	
Sat 22 Mar	4:00pm	Prayer Meeting & Bible Study: Led by Pr Mok	
Last Week's Worship Service Collections			
Offering:	£478.69	YAF: £22.00 Lunch: £42.90	
<u>Memory Verse</u>			
<i>Last Week (Mar 08 Wk 2): Psalm 121:2</i>			
My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth.			
<i>This Week (Mar 08 Wk 3): Psalm 121:3</i>			
He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber.			