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The Conscience

By David Crawford

Man is the only creature possessing a faculty called conscience. The conscience is a Bible subject, the word itself is mentioned thirty times in the New Testament. Since the conscience plays such an important role in our lives, it is imperative that we study and understand it. The office or function of the conscience has been brutally abused by many religious teachers. In this article, I will endeavor to bring to light some things the Bible reveals about the conscience; especially things relating to the true office of the conscience.

What is the conscience? Webster defines the conscience as: "A knowledge or sense of right and wrong; moral judgment that opposes the violation of a previously recognized ethical principle, and that leads to feelings of guilt if one violates such a principle." The conscience is a gift of God to help man follow the laws of God. It is a subject of education, which can be taught right or wrong. Like a computer, it reacts in keeping with the data it has been fed. The conscience that pleases God must be educated and trained by the Bible.

There are several different conditions of the conscience spoken of in the word of God. Good conscience: "I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day." (Acts 23:1.) Pure conscience: "Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience." (1 Tim. 3:9.) A pure conscience is one that is free from mixture; not contaminated or defiled. Weak conscience: "But when ye sin so against the brethren and wound their weak conscience ye sin against Christ." (1 Cor. 8:12.) This is an immature conscience that has not been trained and lacks strength. Defiled conscience: "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.) This is a corrupted conscience, contaminated or polluted. Evil conscience: "Let us draw near in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience." (Heb. 10:22.) An evil conscience is evidently one that has been trained to approve evil. Seared conscience: "Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron." (1 Tim. 4:2.) A conscience that has been violated so much that it has lost its

power to discriminate between good and evil. Evidently it cannot be aroused, not even by the power of the gospel. (See Matt. 7:6, and Eph. 4:17-19).

In searching for the answer to the question, "What is the office of the conscience?" Let us begin from the negative; pointing out what the office is not. First, it is not the authority in religion. Jesus is the authority. All things, including every thought and intent of the heart must be in subjection to Him. In 2 Cor. 10:5 Paul wrote, "Casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." The conscience is not our guide in religious matters. A favorite expression of many religionists is; "Let your conscience be your guide." This may sound reasonable, but it is not scriptural. The Bible is the only infallible guide. The conscience is not the judge in deciding religious matters. (See 1 Cor. 4:3-4.) The judgment of the conscience is not always safe; both persecutor and persecuted have said, "I am serving God." In Acts 26:9 Paul said, "I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus told the apostles, "They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service." (John 16:2.)

What then is the office of the conscience? Simply stated, the conscience is designed to help us follow our guide, the Bible. It is a gift of God to assist us in living righteously. When trained and educated by God's word, primarily it does two things: First, it convicts us when we have sinned as seen in John 8:9, "And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience went out one by one." Secondly, it commends us when we have done that which we believe to be right. Both of these functions are discussed by the apostle John in 1 John 3:20-21.

Surely nothing could be more terrible than an evil conscience. The Bible emphasizes the horrors of an evil conscience. "The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no

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Some Strong Statements About Marriage

By James Knight

We are living in a time when marriage is being disparaged, and many are saying that it is on the way out. Some seem to believe the day will come when people no longer will enter into traditional (Biblical) marriage. However, I do not believe, and the statistics prove, that marriage will ever be replaced by any other kind of institution. I believe that marriage is here to stay.

When we read about marriage in the Bible we are immediately impressed with the strong statements that are used in connection therewith. I believe that it will do us all good to take a look at some of these statements. I believe that marriage will take on new meaning, not only for those who are already married, but for those who are thinking about getting married.

In Genesis 2:21-24 we have the record of the first marriage. God, the author of marriage, performed the first ceremony that united man and woman as husband and wife. There is no way for us to know just what he said, but I would like for us to notice some of the things that were said when God brought the woman to man.

In Gen. 2:23 Adam said, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." The Bible then states, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." In this verse there are several strong statements which should be noticed. First it is said that a man should LEAVE father and mother, and CLEAVE unto his wife. When a young man falls in love with a young woman and desires to marry her, and when the young woman agrees to become his wife, he enters a relationship with her that demands that he leave his father and mother. What does this mean? I am firmly convinced that it means that the man is to move out and live separately from his parents. There are too many who marry and continue to live with father and mother, or the parents of the bride. This is not a good situation, and often creates many problems for the

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The Conscience (Cont.)

peace saith my God to the wicked." (Isa. 57:20-21.) "The wicked flee when no man pursueth." (Prov. 28:1.) In contrast, what could be more wonderful than a good and pure conscience? The person who has a good conscience enjoys peace, assurance, and happiness. "Happy is he that condemneth not himself." (Rom. 14:22.)

Conscience is a faculty of training. It can be trained either right or wrong. But however trained it will lead you. Remember it is not our authority, judge, or guide, but a helper reacting to its training.

What type of conscience do you have? Is it one that has been educated by the Bible; one that commends you, or is it one that condemns you? If your conscience has been properly trained it will urge you to obey the gospel. Notice 1 Pet. 3:21, "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."

The conscience must be lived with forever, it is part of the eternal soul given to man by Jehovah. May we so live as to be able to say with the great apostle, "And herein do I exercise myself to have always a conscience void of offense toward God, and toward men." (Acts 24:16.)

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Obey Them That Have The Rule Over You

By Leon Barns

The New Testament contains a large number of passages which deal with the work of elders and their relationship with the congregation. But one that could very well serve as a text for all the Bible says on this theme is Heb. 13:17 which says: "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you." Without doubt, it is the elders of whom the writer here speaks, for in 1 Tim. 5:17 Paul says, "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor . . ." They are the ones that have the oversight in a congregation, and who are to present themselves as examples of how every Christian should live (Acts 20:28, 1 Pet. 5:1-2).

But, let it be noted, that the Hebrew writer demands that the elders in any given congregation be "Obeyed" by the members of that congregation. This means that when men are ordained as elders of a congregation, they have a right to make decisions with reference to matters of judgment, expediency or matters authorized by generic commands of the Bible, which does not give the particular way for a thing to be done. Elders, of course, do not have a right to make decisions which would go against something legislated in the Word of God. Also the lesson is here that when elders make decisions in the realm in which they have a right, they are to be obeyed: and to disobey them is to disobey God Almighty. Thus if the elders decide to support a particular work, meet on a given night, or have a meeting at a certain time, such is to be followed by the congregation.

One obeys when he agrees with what has been decided; but what if one disagrees with a decision made by the elders? He is to "Submit" or to yield, if it is a matter of judgment which the elders had a right to decide. The Hebrew writer, being guided by the Spirit of God, knew full well that situations would arise when individuals would not agree with the decisions made by those who have the oversight, so he demands that we submit. The elders, after all, are men who must meet some strict qualifications, as given by God, before ever being put into the office of an elder (1 Tim. 3, Titus 1). If they are men who actually meet the qualifications, they will make wise and spiritual decisions that will build up the cause of Christ rather than tear it down. If they do not meet the qualifications

God gave, they ought not to be elders. Unqualified elders overseeing the body of Christ is as unscriptural as the Pope of Rome.

The writer goes ahead now to explain why we are to obey and be in submission to the elders when he says, "For they watch for your souls, as they that must give account." Back in the Old Testament, the prophets were often referred to as "Watchmen" and now this same word is taken and applied to the elders. They are "Overseers" and "Shepherds" over the spiritual flock which is the church. Their duty is not primarily that of watching the use of the money, nor of hiring and firing preachers, but of WATCHING FOR THE SOULS of people. It is sad (but true) that many elders have never even begun to do that which is their primary purpose for existing. Too many elders do not even know the names of the members, much less know their spiritual welfare. And if they do not know their spiritual welfare, it is highly unlikely that they will do anything about it. One of the big reasons that there is so little church discipline practiced today is that many elderships would not know whom to discipline if they started.

Notice, that these elders are not left alone to do as they please without any thought of future judgment, for they must "Give account" unto God as to how they have served in the office of elders. Thus when an elder stands before the judgment bar on high, he will not be judged only for how he lived the Christian life, but also for how he served as an elder. It might very well be possible that a man would have lived the Christian life and have been saved if he had not been an elder, but then be cast into outer darkness, because when he was judged as an elder he was weighed in the balances and found woefully wanting. Of course this same principle is true of deacons, preachers, teachers, etc. (See James 3:1).

The phrase: "That they may do it with joy, and not with grief; for bringing them grief in the day of judgment will be of no profit to you." The implication is that bringing them joy in the day of judgment will be of profit to the members of the local church. The implication is also there that the faithfulness and dependability of elders is to a large degree dependent upon how the members of the congregation follow their leadership. So, if the elders where you worship are not what they ought to be as elders, the reason may be that you are not what you ought to be as a follower. Become a better follower and this will encourage them to become better leaders.

Mechanical Music In Spiritual Worship

By Harold Turner

Many of the people who visit our worship for the first time seem puzzled that we use no type of mechanical music. Since most every other church uses mechanical music, it is only natural that they question why the church of Christ does not use them.

With many, I'm sure, the authority for using mechanical music in worship has never been questioned. For as long as they can remember such music has been a part of their worship.

The use of mechanical music in worship has been a subject which has undergone numerous discussions through the past years. This controversial issue has divided believers from both fellowship and worshipping together. Why do people use mechanical music in worship? Who authorized their use? Do we have assurance from God that this type of music pleases Him? These questions deserve an answer that can be proven by the Bible.

The Bible states that Christ has all authority (Matt. 28:18), and that he is the head over all things to the church (Eph. 1:22-23). From Col. 3:17 we learn, "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus . . ." A thing cannot be done in the name of Christ unless he has authorized it. Did Christ authorize the use of mechanical music in the worship of the church? If so, where? If not, why is it used? In 2 John 9 we are warned, that whosoever goes beyond and abides not in the doctrine of Christ "Hath not God."

In the following part of this article, let's notice some of the reasons offered by those who use mechanical music in worship.

MECHANICAL MUSIC WAS USED IN THE OLD TESTAMENT.

This is one of the most common and frequently used arguments to support mechanical music in worship. It is true that mechanical music was used in the worship of the Old Testament. It was first introduced into the worship by King David, and was obviously acceptable with God; at least for a period of time. From Amos 6:5 it seems that such music failed to please God, for He said, "Woe to them that chant to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of music, like David." But dismissing this statement, does the fact that mechanical music was used in the Old Testament with God's approval mean that it can be used in the worship of the church with His approval?

In answer to this question, some reply, "God is the same yesterday, today, and forever." This is suggested to prove

that since God accepted music in the Old Testament, he will accept it in the church today, for He is unchangeable. If this is the meaning of this statement, then any and every thing that once pleased God will still please Him. But does it? Does God approve of our lighting lamps as a part of our worship today? He did once (Exod. 27:20-21). Does God approve of our burning incense as a part of our worship today? He did in the Old Testament (Exod. 30:8). Will he approve of our offering animal sacrifices in worship today? He did throughout the Old Testament.

Certainly, not all things that once pleased God, will please Him today. Circumcision was once commanded by the Lord. He approved of it. It was a condition to the blessings of the Old Testament. But not so today. Yet, God is the same today as yesterday. Paul wrote in Gal. 5:2-4, "If ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace." Paul here shows that going back to the Old Testament to justify religious practices makes us a debtor to do the whole law, and that in so doing Christ profits us nothing. We cannot have the practices of the old Testament, which are unauthorized by Christ, and still have Christ.

The very fact that people turn to the Old Testament, in an effort to justify using mechanical music, indicates that there is no support for their use in the New Testament. Christ has all authority today. To have to use the Old Testament to justify a practice is to reject the authority of Christ. We must abide in His doctrine if we are to have God (2 John 9).

MECHANICAL MUSIC WILL BE USED IN HEAVEN.

One person wrote, "Musical instruments are allowed in heaven (Rev. 8:2), why not allow them in worship on earth? Notice how harps will be used to accompany singing in heaven (Rev. 5:8, 14:2, 15:2)."

Not one of the above Scriptures state that singing was accompanied by playing harps. The book of Revelation is a book of symbols. Most of the language is highly symbolic and figurative. In every Scripture mentioned, with reference to musical instruments in heaven, the language is highly symbolic. Notice Rev. 5:8, "And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty

elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of the saints." Are the beasts literal? Did they play on mechanical harps? This Scripture tells us that the harps and golden vials "Are the prayers of the saints."

Those in heaven will have spiritual bodies (1 Cor. 15:44-46). It is not likely that spiritual beings will be playing mechanical instruments. But, even if such is the case, this does not provide us authorization for their use in the church today.

THE BIBLE DOESN'T SAY, "THOU SHALT NOT USE THEM."

Is everything that the Bible does not specifically forbid by a "Thou shalt not" acceptable to use in worship today? We know that it is not. We must worship in truth (John 4:24). Jesus assured the apostles that the Spirit would guide them into all truth (John 16:13). The apostles preached and wrote the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27, 1 Cor. 14:37). Yet, they never mentioned using mechanical music in worship. We cannot use them and worship in truth.

We all understand that when a thing is specifically stated it includes only what is stated, and excludes all that is not stated. God told Noah to build an ark of gopher wood. This limited the type of wood to be used. It would have been wrong for Noah to have argued that God did not say, "Thou shalt not use pine", and on this basis use pine or some other wood. God tells us what he wants us to use, and this is sufficient to the honest and sincere person. The only type of music used in the early church was vocal music (1 Cor. 14:15, Eph. 5:19, Col. 3:16, Heb. 2:12, and James 5:13).

The Scriptures do clearly teach us not to use mechanical music. 2 John 9 forbids us going beyond the doctrine of Christ. Col. 3:17 states that all must be done in the name of Christ. We are to worship in truth, truth doesn't mention them. We are to worship by faith, and whatsoever is not of faith is sin (Rom. 14:23). Faith comes by hearing the gospel, but the gospel is silent about the use of instruments. The specific use of "Sing" excludes playing an instrument.

WHY ARE INSTRUMENTS USED?

As already stated, they are not authorized by Christ; hence they are not used because God teaches us that he likes them. They are used because men like them, and because men have authorized them.

Worship is not doing what we like, but
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Some Strong Statements (Cont.)

marriage. The Bible also states that the man is to cleave to his wife. The word cleave means to be glued to, or to stick to. This shows the closeness that is involved in the marriage relationship. The final statement in this verse is, "And they shall be one flesh." Jesus made reference to this in Matt. 19:5, saying, "Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh." When we compare this to other statements in the Bible we find it to have a deep meaning. In Eph. 5:28-29 Paul said, "So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church." Just as the church is the body of Christ, so the wife is part of the man. She is bone of his bones, and flesh of his flesh. These statements should impress upon us the seriousness and closeness of marriage.

Jesus also makes a strong statement about marriage in Matt. 19:6: He said, "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." Many seem to think that the preacher is the one who joins a couple in marriage as husband and wife. Jesus shows that such is not the case, but rather God joins them together. If all realized this, they would think more seriously before getting a divorce. What God joins together, no man has the right to put asunder. And when the law of the land grants a divorce it does not mean that God recognizes, and is pleased with it.

In Romans 7:4 we find another strong statement made relative to marriage. Paul teaches that the wife is BOUND BY LAW to her husband as long as he lives. Marriage is a life long contract, and to be broken only by death of either the husband or wife. There is only one exception to this rule. In Matt. 19:9 and Matt. 5:23, Jesus said, "Whosoever shall put away his wife, except for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her that is put away doth commit adultery." This is certainly a strong statement when we consider the easy avenues of divorce in this day and age.

The last strong statement that we will consider concerns the relationship of husband and wife. In Eph. 5:23, the apostle Paul said, "For the husband is the HEAD of the wife, even as Christ is the HEAD of the church . . ." Husbands and wives need to realize that the authority in the home rests with the husband. Husbands are not to be dictators, but they are to rule with love for all members of the family.

I firmly believe that when we all come to recognize how strong these statements are, and begin to live our lives in harmony with them, that we will see a marked change in many marriages.

Religious Unity Can Exist Only In Christ

By Leslie Leonard

Most religious people desire unity; but religious unity can only exist among those who are Christians in order to have any real meaning. Any union that exists among non-Christians or with non-Christians (We can only determine who God considers a Christian by studying His inspired message, the Bible.) is of little value.

In John 17:20-21 Jesus prayed, "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word: That they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." He is not praying for unity among all religious groups (denominations); because Jesus only spoke from a one church viewpoint. The unity that he prayed for is a unity among his people, Christians.

Unity, or rather a union, can be established between any two or more religious groups, however they may not necessarily be united in Christ. Unity can be established between two groups that are not Christian. For example: unity can be established between an apostate (rebellious Christian group) and some Eastern religion, or two apostate groups can reach an agreement to establish a union, but such a union would not necessarily make them any more, or less, Christian.

A group of Christians could enter into an agreement with an apostate religious group, but that would not make the apostate religion a Christian religion. It would probably make the Christian apostatize.

For true religious harmony to exist there must first be agreement with Christ. If a group is in harmony with Christ then it naturally follows that they will be in harmony with all others, who are in harmony with Christ. And they will be out of harmony, or agreement, with all others, who are not in harmony with Christ. Christ adds those who are saved to the church, and unity (being as one) can only exist among those who have been added.

Our first task then is to make sure that we are right with Christ, or to make sure that we are a Christian. Then we can be sure that we are in unity with Christ and with all who belong to Him. The only way that we can be sure of this is to examine ourselves in light of what the Scriptures tell us. We must take God at His word. If He, through the Holy Spirit, inspired the writers of the Scriptures to state that certain people are saved, we must believe him, and believing him would force us to also believe that those who have not done as these, are not saved. The Scriptures clearly state who is

saved, and they mention certain things that must be done by those who believe. Quite obviously, those who disbelieve in God will not do his will.

Once we have made sure that we are a Christian; we can then determine who our fellow Christians are. It will not be a matter of opinion or feelings, but a matter of faith. We either believe what God has said, or we reject it and hold our own opinions. If we reject God's word while claiming to be a Christian, we are then calling God a liar. He alone has stated the conditions which will save us. If we accept those as Christians, whom God has not promised salvation, then we're making God a liar, and suggesting that He doesn't mean what He has said.

Religious unity is not a problem among Christians. The fact that they are Christians unites them in the "One body," which is the church. The problem of religious unity is one among those outside Christ. Christians are obligated to maintain unity within the church, and to bring as many into Christ's church as possible so they too can be united with those who are saved. But Christians should never attempt to unite with anything that is not among the saved. To do so only corrupts the church, as seen by the world, and never really brings them into the body of Christ.

Mechanical Music (Cont.)

doing what God teaches us that he likes. Worship is spiritual not mechanical. Mechanical music has no place in spiritual worship. Jesus said, "In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." (Matt. 15:9). He further stated that those who follow him must "Deny" themselves (Luke 9:23).

How simple to do only those things that we are taught in the Scriptures. And, yet, the only assurance we have of pleasing God, is in doing only the things he has taught us (Matt. 7:21). May his warning ever be impressed upon our mind, "Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, HATH NOT GOD . . ." (2 John 9).