

ROMANS 13:5

CHRISTIAN CONSCIENCE AND THE STATE

“One must be in subjection, not only to avoid God’s wrath but also for the sake of conscience.”¹

How many sermons have you ever heard concerning the conscience? I confess that I have been in service to the churches for almost forty years, and on only two previous occasions have I ever preached a sermon dealing with conscience. Just as telling is the fact that I cannot recall ever hearing a single message dealing with the conscience. Comparatively few systematic theologies even make mention of conscience. Listen carefully, therefore, for the message which you are about to hear may be the sole message on this subject you will ever hear.

In our studies through this portion of the Apostle’s contribution to the Word of God, we have witnessed Paul teaching about the proper function of government. Additionally, he has presented the expectation that Christians will be exemplary in their submission toward the legitimate authority of government. As we have seen throughout this series of studies, whenever we speak of submission and authority we enter the realm of controversy. Accordingly, I am compelled to issue a caution to those who either listen to this message or read it. I caution not to draw unwarranted conclusions concerning the role of Christians in the modern state on the basis of this single message. You must be cautious before making any statement concerning the legitimate authority of government based upon this message in isolation from the truths presented in the entire passage.

The purpose of this message seeks neither to explore the authority of government nor to explore the limits of obedience toward government; these issues have been explored previously. We previously explored the parameters of governmental authority and the requirement for Christian submission. I encourage you to review the previous messages in this particular series before you draw any conclusions concerning a biblical view of the Christian in the modern state.² We have witnessed two powerful reasons for this required submission. First, government receives authority from God. Thus, if we resist the authority of the state, we are resisting the authority of God, and God will judge us. Second, the state itself will judge us if we resist its authority. The state will insist upon obedience and will punish us if we do not submit to its authority.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible, English Standard Version** © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

² Michael Stark, “Christians in the Modern State,”

<http://newbeginningsbaptist.ca/clientimages/42652/sermonarchive/1%20peter%202.13-17%20christians%20in%20the%20modern%20state.pdf>; Michael Stark, “Limits on the Authority of the State,”

<http://newbeginningsbaptist.ca/clientimages/42652/sermonarchive/john%2019.10,%2011%20limits%20on%20the%20state%27s%20authority.pdf>; Michael Stark, “Authority,” <http://newbeginningsbaptist.ca/clientimages/42652/sermonarchive/romans%2013.01%20authority.pdf>;

Michael Stark, “Must Caesar Always be Obeyed,” <http://newbeginningsbaptist.ca/clientimages/42652/sermonarchive/romans%2013.02%20must%20caesar%20always%20be%20obeyed.pdf>; Michael Stark, “The Power of the Sword,”

<http://newbeginningsbaptist.ca/clientimages/42652/sermonarchive/romans%2013.03-04%20the%20power%20of%20the%20sword.pdf>

Together, these are two good reasons for Christian submission to the authority of the state. At this point, we might think that Paul is prepared to move on. However, just as we think he is prepared to wrap up his argument, he says, almost as an afterthought, “Oh, yes, and also because of conscience.”

No longer is Paul’s argument merely pragmatic, but now it touches the very heart of our lives as children of the True and Living God. To this point, it is as if Paul had said, “You should obey the state because you will get in trouble if you don’t.” Now, however, he says, “You should obey the state because it is the right thing to do; and you know you should do what is right.” James Boice observes, “Instead of treating us as we might treat an animal, training it to respond mechanically by rewarding desired behaviour and punishing undesirable behaviour, Paul treats people as responsible moral agents—that is, as human beings made in God’s image—by appealing to our consciences.”³

A DEFINITION OF CONSCIENCE — We know that the concept of the conscience was more important to Paul than to all other Bible writers. I say this because the word *conscience* occurs twenty-nine times in the **ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION OF THE BIBLE**, only one of which occurrences is in the Old Testament. There, it translates the Hebrew word which was usually translated “heart.”

The word *conscience* occurs in the New Testament twenty-eight times. Peter uses the word twice and the author of Hebrews uses the word four times. However, the Apostle Paul uses the word no less than twenty-two times (including two times in statements recorded in the Book of Acts). The English word conscience is from the Latin *conscientia*, a compound of *con* (“together” or “with”) and *scio* (“to know”). This is a translation of the Greek *suneidāsis*, which means literally “knowledge with.”⁴ This is fine, but what is the conscience? The nominal meaning of the concept of *conscience* is “an inner awareness, a knowledge within one’s self.”⁵ Roger Congdon, in a thorough study of the concept of *conscience*, concludes that “conscience is our ‘knowing with’ God’s law by which we realise whether or not we are conforming to His standard.”⁶

Conscience appears to be inherited, for though the wicked may act as though they are without conscience, evidence seems to point to the conclusion that conscience is a part of all mankind. Congdon argues persuasively, “In the natural man, of a surety, it is not dominant, for the sin nature prevails and perverts it. Education may colour it; exercise will strengthen it. To disobey its voice dulls the power it has, and to ignore it constantly will result in a callused conscience. But the voice is still there and still capable of speaking. It seems probable that if a man were absolutely destitute of conscience he could not be saved, because it would be impossible for him to realise his need of a Saviour otherwise. As long as the gospel is addressed to all men, then, and all are saveable, it would appear a logical conclusion to say that all have workable consciences.”⁷

³ James Montgomery Boice, **Romans: Volume 4, The New Humanity: Romans 12-16** (Baker, Grand Rapids, MI 1995) 1664

⁴ Roy B. Zuck, “The Doctrine of the Conscience,” (art.), **Bibliotheca Sacra**, Vol. 126, #504, Oct., 1969, 329

⁵ Zuck, op. cit., 331

⁶ Roger Douglas Congdon, “The Doctrine of Conscience,” (art.), **Bibliotheca Sacra**, Vol. 102, #408, Oct., 1945, 474-89

⁷ Roger Douglas Congdon, “The Doctrine of Conscience,” (art.), **Bibliotheca Sacra**, Vol. 103, #409, Jan., 1946, 68-81

Secular writers usually employ the concept of *conscience* in a negative manner. One might argue that this is the proper use of the concept since we are sinful creatures. Each of us is compelled to confess that we are guilty of many offences against Holy God, and consequently, our consciences usually condemn us. I would suppose it accurate to say that a guilty conscience is one of the greatest struggles facing any of us as Christians.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, creator of Sherlock Holmes, was also a creative practical joker. The story is told of one horrendously clever practical joke that he once played. He wrote a short, unsigned telegram, all in fun, to twelve of the best known men in England. The anonymous message was the same—six scary words. “All is discovered. Flee at once.” Within 24 hours, not one of those men could be found. The Apostle said that God’s law is written on the heart [see **ROMANS 2:15**]. Although people may be desensitised to evil, they really cannot forget that it is evil. Though conscience may be driven underground, we can never erase it. Chuck Colson refers to a survey of fifteen abortionists. “You might think that abortion didn’t trouble them, but you’d be wrong. Some of the staff reported that they refused to look at the aborted fetus.

“Others looked but felt ‘shock, dismay, amazement, disgust, fear, and sadness.’ Two thought that abortion ‘must eventually damage the physician psychologically.’ One found herself becoming increasingly resentful about the casual attitudes of some patients, even though she approved of abortion herself. Two of the staff described dreams about vomiting up fetuses or about protecting other people from looking at them.”

He observes, “It was once expected that RU-486 would be an easy way to have an abortion because swallowing a pill is simpler than undergoing a surgical procedure. The facts are much different: RU-486 can cause severe bleeding, cramping and nausea. The expulsion of the embryo may take several days, and the woman may be able to recognize the remains of her child in the toilet or collection bucket.

“But get this: Pro-abortion researchers in clinical trials of RU-486 argued that for some women, these awful burdens are just what makes RU-486 attractive. These women welcome the increased suffering because they regard it as a price they ought to pay, a kind of atonement for having an abortion -- interesting. Now why would they be trying to atone if they didn’t know that abortion is wrong?”

He relates a final story, “Budziszewski quotes a pro-abortion counselor who told a pro-abortion journalist, ‘I am not confident even now, with abortion so widely used, that women feel it’s okay to want an abortion without feeling guilty. They say, “Am I some sort of monster that I feel all right about this?”’ That question is revealing. Plainly, if a woman has guilty feelings for not having guilty feelings, she must know that what she did is wrong. Her conscience is very much alive.”⁸

An individual’s conscience can be “weak” [**1 CORINTHIANS 8:7-12**]. Perhaps the best definition of a weak conscience is one which is overly scrupulous or over sensitive. “Someone who has been reared by legalistic parents who used guilt and shame to manipulate their children often has a conscience that is overly sensitive. Some have consciences so twisted and confused, they need extensive help before they can start thinking correctly.”⁹ An individual with a shame-based needs help to understand their deficit. And a conscience that is legalistic is not a good guide.

⁸ Chuck Colson, “It Won’t Let Go: Conscience is Not a Feeling,” <http://www.breakpoint.org/bpcommentaries/entry/13/17496>, accessed 1 August 2011

⁹ Charles R. Swindoll, **The Tale of the Tardy Oxcart** (Word, Nashville, TN 1998) 117

The Apostle knew that a weak conscience may easily degenerate into one that is “defiled” [1 CORINTHIANS 8:7]. “If we persist in some action against which conscience has witnessed, we thereby defile it and thus prevent its faithful functioning. When a watch stops, it is not the fault of the watch but of the dust which has clogged its delicate mechanism. So with conscience, especially in the realm of purity.”¹⁰

According to TITUS 1:15, morally defiled unbelievers have minds and consciences that are defiled. In other words, they are so involved in sin that their consciences are unreliable. “The more one sins, the more he becomes comfortable in his sins. By lowering his standards, he is less sensitive to and feels less remorse about previously accepted standards. As a poor judge, his conscience renders unreliable judgements and does not adequately prompt him toward morally correct actions. Such an individual possesses an evil conscience [HEBREWS 10:22], in need of the spiritual cleansing of regeneration.”¹¹

Consequently, a conscience can be “evil” [HEBREWS 10:22]. It is possible for an individual to defy the voice of his conscience habitually until it is reduced to insensitivity. Paul describes this condition as seared—conscience is made insensitive like an animal skin that has been cauterised by a branding iron [1 TIMOTHY 4:2].

Paul also knew that one’s conscience can condemn. In ACTS 24:16, he states that he takes pains “to have a clear conscience toward both God and man.” The Apostle did not wish to be condemned by his conscience, so he sought a clear conscience—one which was void of offence toward God and man.

Paul speaks of possessing a “good conscience” [1 TIMOTHY 1:5, 19]. A good conscience permits the believer to love the Lord and others [1 TIMOTHY 1:5], and to be a strong soldier for the cause of Christ [1 TIMOTHY 1:19]. Peter will add that a good conscience brings shame to those who accuse the one with a good conscience. Paul also teaches the need to possess a “clear conscience.” Deacons are to have a “clear [pure] conscience” [1 TIMOTHY 3:9]. Likewise, the Apostle himself said he served God with a “clear [pure] conscience” [2 TIMOTHY 1:3]. Standing before the Jewish Council, the great man could declare, “Brothers, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day” [ACTS 23:1].

In the Second Corinthian Letter the Apostle would testify, “Our boast is this: the testimony of our conscience that we behaved in the world with simplicity and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God, and supremely so toward you” [2 CORINTHIANS 1:12]. At a later point in that same letter, he wrote, “We have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God’s word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God” [2 CORINTHIANS 4:2].

There is an obvious difference in Paul’s use of conscience and that of secular writers. Secular writers speak of conscience as that faculty which condemns us. Paul writes of conscience as that faculty which commends us. The difference is that “God has quickened the Christian’s moral nature so that he or she not only knows what is right as opposed to what is wrong, but also has been given a true desire and ability to do what conscience demands.”¹²

¹⁰ J. Oswald Sanders, cited in Zuck, *op. cit.* 339

¹¹ Zuck, *ibid.*

¹² Boice, *op. cit.*, 1666

CHRISTIAN CONSCIENCE AND OUR RELATIONSHIP TO THE STATE —Czech sociologist Vaclav Belohradsky said, “European tradition means not ever being able to live above and beyond one’s conscience by reducing it to an anonymous apparatus like the law or the state. This ‘fixed point’ of the conscience is a legacy of the Greek, Christian, and bourgeois tradition. The irreducibility of the conscience to institutions is threatened in the era of mass media, totalitarian states, and the generalised computerisation of society. Indeed, it is very easy for us to succeed in imagining institutions organised so perfectly as to impose any action of theirs as legitimate. Having an efficient organisation is enough to enable one to legitimise anything. Thus, we could sum up the essence of what threatens us as this: states programming their citizens, industries, consumers, publishers, readers, etc. All of society, little by little, becomes something that the state produces for itself.”¹³

This is an ominous view of what is happening within contemporary society. Belohradsky is correct in his assessment; we are more culturally conditioned than we care to think. We are not generally conditioned by our Faith; we are thus in desperate need of biblical instruction in order to resist conformity to the statist views of our culture. From the beginning of Christian history, the problem of the relationship with the state has existed. Paul sent a fugitive slave who had converted to Christ back home. That slave carried a message to his master, a man named Philemon, who was also a Christian. In that letter, Paul reminded Philemon that he could no longer consider the returning man as a slave, but as a brother and a friend. Never before had a Roman citizen dared to affirm such a drastic change from the ancient mentality which enshrined in law that slaves were considered as mere tools. Nevertheless, conscience dictated that the way things had been done could no longer serve as justification for continuing in that tradition.

An anonymous Second Century author defended Christians in “The Epistle of Diognetus.” Responding to the charge that Christians did not consider idols as gods and that they thus eluded the common social responsibility, that author wrote that Christians hold, not a doctrine that is an “earthly discovery,” or a “mortal invention.”

Rather, “The omnipotent Creator of all, the invisible God Himself, established among men the truth and the holy, incomprehensible word from heaven and fixed it firmly in their hearts, not, as one might imagine, by sending to men some subordinate, or angel or ruler or one of those who manage earthly matters, or one of those entrusted with the administration of things in heaven, but the Designer and Creator of the universe himself... as a king might send his son who is a king; he sent him as God; he sent him as a man to men. When he sent him, he did so as one who saves by persuasion, not compulsion, for compulsion is no attribute of God.”¹⁴

Therefore, the author states of Christians, “They live on earth, but their citizenship is in heaven. They obey the established laws; indeed in their private lives they transcend the laws.”¹⁵ Vignali perceptively states, “The value of conscience in the conception of the person and of life [goes] beyond mere observance of external rules.”¹⁶

¹³ cited in Raffaello Vignali, “Give Caesar What Belongs to Caesar,” <http://www.traces-cl.com/dic01/giveces.htm>, accessed 30 July 2011

¹⁴ Michael William Holmes, **The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations**, Updated ed. (Baker, Grand Rapids, MI 1999), 543-45.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, 541

¹⁶ Vignali, *op. cit.*

What is involved for us when Paul says, “One must be in subjection, not only to avoid God’s wrath but also for the sake of conscience?” Two issues come to mind. First, **CHRISTIANS HAVE A HIGHER MOTIVE FOR SUBMISSION TO THE STATE THAN DO OTHERS.** Christians are to obey secular authorities. The first reason given is that God established human government. This truth is something which only Christians can fully appreciate. Even this, however, can appeal to a rather low motive if all we mean by that is that God will punish those who disobey the governments He has established. However, Paul elevates our motive through an appeal to conscience. He is saying subjection to government is the right thing to do, and because we are moral beings, we should do what is right.

What we do does matter! There is considerable truth in the old saying that actions speak louder than words. To be certain, there are many voices prepared to tell us that what really matters is what we believe; and there is an element of truth to that assertion. However, what we believe will be revealed through that way we live. Consequently, if we believe that God is sovereign, that He grants authority and that there is no authority except that which God gives, then we must live as though that truth were valid. God is honoured through our choice to live lives reflecting a submissive attitude. Our message is a message of peace, and it can only be emphasised through subjection to those in authority beginning with subjection to governing authorities and continuing with appropriate attitudes of submission in the workplace, in the church and in the home.

Society is better because we live in subjection to the governing authorities. While it is true that some laws are so ill considered that they are generally disobeyed, Christians ought not to be among those disobeying them simply because they are silly or non-effective. The current gun registration requirement for Canadians is a foolish law; it has been repeatedly demonstrated to have been ill-conceived and excessively costly. Nevertheless, Christians cannot argue that their conscience is violated by this concession to big-city hysteria and therefore refuse to register their firearms.

Though James Boice wrote of his concerns for the United States, his words undoubtedly apply in our own nation, especially in this present day. “One of the great tragedies of our country today is that many people have little or no respect for authority and therefore feel free to break any laws that seem inconvenient to them. So civil disorder is rising. The police are unable to contain the disorder.”¹⁷

WE HAVE A STRONGER REASON FOR DISOBEDIENCE WHEN DISOBEDIENCE IS REQUIRED. Bear in mind that all authority is given by God. Authority does not simply devolve by virtue of existence, position or birth. Therefore, since authority is given by God, government is responsible to God for how it exercises authority. We have already established that government cannot forbid the free exercise of religion, nor can government regulate the propagation of religion. Government has no right to violate the Ten Commandments nor can government compel others to violate those divine laws. The ruling authorities cannot compel Christians to perform unjust acts or deliberately to violate conscience.

With that word, we have just returned to the focus of this message—conscience! Christians are expected to have enlightened consciences because they know the Word of God! You who are believers in the Risen Son of God have a new nature which desires the things of God and seeks righteousness. The Spirit of God lives within the believer. “We have the mind of Christ” [**1 CORINTHIANS 2:16**].

¹⁷ Boice, op. cit.

Secular authorities may know what the right course of action is, but like gophers raising their noses from subterranean playpens to test which way the wind is blowing, they seem compelled to see which way the political winds are blowing before making a decision. Christians, however, are not called to act out of convenience; rather, they are to act out of conviction. Oh, that we would learn the importance of embracing the Psalm, which praises the one “who swears to his own hurt and does not change” [PSALM 15:4]. Let us determine that our “Yes” will mean “Yes,” and our “No” will mean “No.”

As Christians, we are obligated to resist the state when it does wrong. Through resisting the state, we hold it accountable, without counting the cost. Christians are not called to live calculating whether their actions will be popular or self-serving, but they are instead called to live such that their actions honour God. Determine whether you are right; and then stand firm. Governments are frequently wrong; but Christians are obligated to hold those governments accountable when their errors infringe on conscience. Christians must so act “for the sake of conscience.”

EXAMPLES OF THE EXERCISE OF CONSCIENCE — No doubt, someone is prepared to challenge me because I contend that governments are frequently wrong. To answer the question before it is asked, I point to several issues which should concern us as Christians.

Marriage. We have a government which is unable to stand firm on the issue of marriage. In June of 1999, Parliament passed a resolution stating that “marriage is and should remain the union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others, and that Parliament will take all steps within the jurisdiction of the Parliament of Canada to preserve this definition of marriage in Canada.” Now, in light of the rulings by various activist judges, Parliament no longer makes laws, but rather the courts of the various provinces make law and Parliament accepts the court rulings. Consequently, as of June 10, 2003, marriage in Canada consists of a union between two persons, which necessitated a redefinition of “person.”

What shall we do about this? Well, each of us can certainly protest to governing officials, both federal and provincial. Additionally, we can openly affirm marriage, beginning with the one in which we are united. We can strengthen the concept of marriage before our family and friends by speaking well of our own spouse and living godly lives within the boundaries of marriage, as God intended. Above all else, we must make ourselves aware of the biblical reasons for marriage as we have known it to this point, equipping ourselves to defend that holy institution in open discourse.

Pornography. We would not seek to violate the rights of free speech for anyone; but assuredly “free speech” does not include a right to make or to distribute pornography. I realise that judges have difficulty defining pornography; however, I am certain that gathering any five citizens from within the average Canadian community, one would quickly determine whether material was pornographic or not.

Our children are inundated with pornography. Surely, I need not go into detail to convince you that this is so. One need but review movies, television shows, available videos, contemporary music or the news stand to realise the veracity of this charge. What is to be done? I recommend that Christians in conscience must review what they watch, what web-sites they visit, the content of their music, and what they read to ensure that they are not consumers of pornography. I charge that many of us are incapable of saying why pornography is wrong. We are theologically ignorant and thus helpless before the arguments of the world.

There are Christian parents who permit their children to dress in apparel that is ungodly—clothing that undercuts any argument against pornography you might mount. When our daughters dress in bikinis—two strips of cloth that covers less than does their underwear—we need to ask how this promotes modesty. If you think I am exaggerating this matter, ask yourself whether your daughter could wear her underwear to school and not be expelled. What is the purpose of a bikini if not to reveal as much skin as possible in hopes of demonstrating sexual attractiveness? So long as we permit our daughters to undress in the spirit of a tan line or wear low-cut pants that reveal more buttock than can be deemed modest, we are vicariously contributing to pornography.

Abortion. This is one of the significant areas in which government demonstrates moral failure. Abortion is said to be a matter to be decided between a woman and her physician. How do women get into this condition called pregnancy? Wasn't there a man involved at some point? Doesn't that man have any voice in this decision?

More important to the Christian point of view is the failure of government to protect the voiceless. In order to murder the unborn, it was necessary to redefine terms. Consequently, women no longer carry a baby if they intend to abort the child; the baby is renamed "fœtus," which is Latin for "infant." If the term is sufficiently exotic, we no longer see the child as human and he or she may be slaughtered with impunity.

Disenfranchising the unborn is no different from what was once done lawfully to enslave blacks. To deny the humanity of the unborn is precisely what Hitler did to the untermenschen, permitting him to slaughter Jews, Slavs, Gypsies and mentally and emotionally injured peoples who unfortunately fell under the tyranny of the Third Reich. We must demonstrate that all mankind is made in God's image.

Homosexuality. Increasingly, the government appears intent on compelling toleration of that which is against nature. At every level of government, we witness politicians promoting homosexuality as normal. The few voices that resist commending such wickedness are increasingly attacked and castigated. No one thinks that sodomites and lesbians are reproducing; therefore, they must be recruiting. However, to state the obvious is to be labelled as "homophobic," which sounds like some sort of milk allergy. Increasingly, we are being compelled to be tolerant through the intolerance of those who detest obedience to the Word of God.

Do you know why such activity as homosexuality is wrong? If you are unable to state the biblical reason for God's condemnation of such acts, you will be labelled as reactionary and unreasoning. However, there is little argument that is capable of being mounted against the Word of the Living God.

Hate Speech. Government has concluded that all people, with the exception of white, male Christians, must be protected against all unpleasant speech. Accordingly, that speech which fails to embrace the vapid philosophy of "I'm okay, you're okay," is designated as hate speech. Christians must be prepared to educate an illiterate society that speaking the truth in love is anything but hateful.

Public Education. I realise that many people wish to see prayers and Bible reading reinstated in the public schools. Personally, I do not favour such activity. I cannot imagine a more deadening activity than coercing an unbelieving teacher to lead a class in reciting the Model Prayer in a manner that fairly shouts unbelief. When I mention my concern about public education, I am not speaking of prayer in the schools, however. I am concerned about the education process itself.

I am concerned that education is not even happening; rather, what is witnessed is indoctrination. I am disturbed that educators are more concerned about socialisation than they are with preparing students to compete in an increasingly competitive world. When education does happen, too often it is in an environment that destroys Christian values, coercing students to adopt the prevailing philosophy of the moment. Christians should have the option to refuse to support such a system and to provide for alternative systems.

As Christians, we are responsible to expose all such failures. However, we should not be content with merely pointing out the problems; we should be prepared to suggest alternatives, whether religious or secular.

I have not attempted to construct a social agenda for Christians; I have merely listed examples which should concern each follower of Christ the Lord. The area of conflict between conscientious Christians and the state constantly grows. If you have not yet entered into the conflict, it is either because you are cowering in some theological foxhole, you are absent without leave or you are deliberately disobedient. Such refusal to engage in conflict will shortly distinguish mere pretenders from those possessing true faith. God will not long permit His holy people to continue as though their hearts were unchanged. He will, as He did with righteous Lot, torment your righteous soul with the lawless deeds of this fallen world. Soon, you will find that you are compelled to speak and stake out a place to stand. If not now, then when your children succumb to the allure of contemporary philosophy advanced by the state, you will attempt to stand.

Perhaps it is necessary to caution against the great sin which besets us as Christians. We are susceptible to pride. We are easily persuaded that our consciences have been enlightened, and therefore the answers we advance are all correct. Certainly, we should have convictions, but I caution you that we must hold our convictions with humility. We don't have all the answers. We need to listen to others, even well informed non-Christians. Our consciences are reliable only when they are enlightened by the written Word of God.

We must individually and collectively determine where we will stand. We need Christians now who know where they stand and who refuse to move from that position. More than ever we need Christian men and women who stand for the right and who do what is right "for the sake of conscience." However, if you start a crusade, make certain that your stance is biblical and that you are not merely serving yourself or enhancing your own reputation. Be a builder and not a destroyer.

Of course, building is impossible if you do not have the Spirit of God. His Spirit transforms our hearts and our lives as He exercises control over us. He does this in a perceptible fashion as He enters into our lives following salvation. If you are content to merely grumble and let the world continue on its way to hell, it may be because you have yet to be born from above. I warn some—even some who claim membership in this church—your fruits are wanting. Listen and act on the Word of God.

That Word promises, "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, 'Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.' For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved'" [ROMANS 10:9-13]. Be saved today. Amen.