

## 2120 Week 12: The Restoration of Broken Humanity

### A: Conscience, its nature and Limits

#### 1. Conscience in the Purposes of God

- a. the English word conscience from Latin *conscientia* means “to know together with”
- b. it is a God given internal moral faculty that distinguishes between good and evil and bears testimony to this within a person
- c. conscience is innate and universal (Rom 2:14- 15); it is not the product of, though influenced by, education, culture, experience etc. (n.b. where theism is abandoned e.g. Marx, Freud, the objective reference point of conscience is denied)
- d. in the Old Testament the word “conscience” does not appear, but the first sign of conscience is the guilt Adam and Eve feel over their sin (Compare 2 Sam 24:10; Job 27:6; Ps 32:1- 5; 51:1- 9.)
- e. this indicates that the deliverances of conscience are equivalent to “the knowledge of good and evil”
- f. conscience is an indispensable dimension of the image of God; “Conscience is what makes man man, makes him one and makes him eternal.” (P.T. Forsyth).
- g. in the beginning, the purpose of the Word – informed conscience was to keep humanity in unity with the divine judgement concerning good and evil. It would do this by urging Adam and Eve to do what they knew was right and to restrain from what they knew to be wrong (obligatory function) (Gen 2:17)
- h. by obeying God they would have received the sentence of justification/peace with God, through disobedience they were self- condemned/guilty (judicial and executive function) (Gen 3:7ff.)

#### 2. The Fallen Conscience

- a. in falling away from God, humans replace unity with God through his Word with their own self- deliberations
- b. the fallen conscience seeks the best for a person as it understands this, by discerning, warning and predicting punishment, it is however an enemy of truth
- c. characteristically, the fallen conscience accuses God and excuses itself (Rom 2:15-16); this is especially true in terms of its response to Jesus radical call to discipleship in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5- 7)

- d. the conscience forms an image of God and his will, this is always idolatrous and never gracious (it may be legalistic or indulgent)
- e. what was meant to bring light is now darkened (Matt 6:23; Luke 11:35)
- f. conscience can be weak (1 Cor 8:7,12 = overactive), doubting (Rom 14:23), seared (1 Tim 4:2 = insensitive), defiled (Tit 1:5), legalistic (1 Tim 4:3; Heb 9:14)
- g. a “corrupt” (Tit 1:15) or “defiled” conscience (1 Cor 8:7) is one that is polluted by self-justifying thoughts and works
- h. in this state a human being is aware of internal division/cleavage (Rom 7:17ff.) that (knowingly or not) testifies to their alienation from God
- i. it is “moral suicide” to act against conscience, as it is a relic of the image of God, the end result of the violation of conscience is psychopathy
- j. this is not to imply that the fallen conscience is a reliable indicator of truth
- k. Christ is the only solution to the entrapment of humanity in its own conscience driven state

### 3. Christ the Redeemer of Conscience

- a. the promise of the new covenant is of an internalised law of God (Jer 31:33)
- b. the gospel as God’s power for salvation can recreate the conscience so that it functions to strengthen our union with God through Christ
- c. the New Testament especially relates the blood of Christ to the transformation of the conscience e.g. Heb 9:13- 14; 10:19- 22
- d. this is because the blood of Christ (= violent death) is the cause of the major elements of our salvation (Rom 3:25; 5:5; Eph 1:7; Heb 9:22; 12:24; 1 Pet 1:2; 1 John 1:7; Rev 1:5)
- e. when the gospel is proclaimed faith in God’s justice is created in the hearer (Rom 10:17) through a revelation of God’s righteous judgement in forgiving sinners through Christ (Rom 1:17; 3:21; 10:3)
- f. the grace of the gospel (Acts 20:24; Eph 2:8 - 9) liberates the conscience from a fear of inescapable judgement so that guilt may be acknowledged
- g. repentance means abandoning our self- centred knowledge of good and evil and agreeing with the judgements of God, the result is a clear conscience

h. “Jesus Christ has become my conscience” (Bonhoeffer)

#### 4. Living with a Good Conscience

a. scripture speaks of a “good” (Acts 23:1; 1 Tim 1:5, 19; 1 Pet 3:16, 21) or “clear” (Acts 24:16; 1 Tim 3:9; 2 Tim 1:3; Heb 13:18) conscience

b. this does not mean a perfect conscience, but one that is not conscious of a present will to sin and the disposition to dead works that defile the conscience

c. this requires ongoing faith in the completed work of the cross (1 Tim 1:5, 19; Heb 9:14)

d. this means we share by faith God’s awareness of himself in his covenantal faithfulness to humanity as Father, Son and Spirit

e. this brings spiritual fruit, such as the joy of sonship (Luke 3:22; Rom 8:16 -17; Gal 5:22)

f. where compromise is consciously entered into, or trust is placed in personal well – doing (such as one’s own spirituality), a good conscience is immediately lost

g. one must turn back to grace and the Holy Spirit (Rom 9:1)

h. Christian maturity consists in living consistently with a discerning conscience (Heb 5:14)

i. only when we see God face to face (Rev 22:4) will the role of conscience end

#### 5. Principles for Counsellors

‘Nothing will satisfy the conscience of man, which does not first satisfy the conscience of God’. (P.T. Forsyth)

a. the Christian counsellor needs to be able to distinguish between what the mind assents to and what the conscience witnesses to

b. when a believer (or an unbeliever) affirms a proposition *about* God e.g. I know God loves me, I know that I am forgiven but I cannot forgive myself, but inwardly lacks peace about these things, it is plain that the conscience needs cleansing from guilt (Rom 5:1)

c. the wise counsellor will direct the person’s attention away from their own inner state to what has been achieved for them by God in Christ (2 Cor 5:19)

- d. as the truth of the Word is spoken about how the work of Christ has satisfied the Father (see section “3” above) the Spirit bears witness in such a way that faith is imparted (Rom 10:17) and the conscience aligns itself with this truth and the heart is set free (John 8:36; Rom 8:1- 2; 2 Cor 3:17; Gal 5:1) to obey God (Rom 6:17)
- e. it should be recognised that a liberated conscience possesses a new sensitivity, and will be attacked by the accusations of the devil (Eph 6:16; Rev 12:10)
- f. the counselor will advise their subject to make full use of “the means of grace” i.e. scripture, prayer, fellowship, the Lord’s Supper etc.

## **B: Will and Responsibility**

### 1. The Sovereignty of God

- a. that God is sovereign is a biblical affirmation e.g. Mark 10:27; 14:35; Rom 11:36; Eph 1:11
- b. this extends to the human will e.g. Ex 14:8; Deut 2:30; Ezra 7:27; Prov 21:1; Phil 2:13

### 2. The bondage of the will

- a. in sin, human beings have lost the freedom to rightly respond to God e.g. Rom 5:6; Rom 8:7-8; 1 Cor 2:14; 2 Cor 4:4; Eph 2:1
- b. this is not to deny that human beings make real and voluntary choices i.e. they are not constrained by any external force
- c. human nature is such that no one left to themselves freely chooses to do good e.g. Gen 6:5; Jer 17:9; Rom 3:11- 12

### 3. Human Responsibility

- a. divine sovereignty and human sovereignty are contradictory, but divine sovereignty and human responsibility are not
- b. the classic example is the crucifixion, which pairs *both* human decisions and God’s foreordination (Acts 2:23; 4:27- 28)
- c. we must believe that God by grace is able to restore and strengthen the human will so that it is free to obey him as it was created to do
- d. this is through regeneration and union with Christ who alone was perfectly free e.g. John 8:36; Matt 26:39

#### 4. Situations of Forgetfulness

- a. often a person will not be able to remember making a decision or choosing to take up an attitude that has been exposed in counselling as wrong
- b. if they deny all responsible choice in past situations they removes the possibility of change in the present
- c. we can only repent when we acknowledge responsibility for our thoughts, words and deeds
- d. decisions made as little children, now forgotten, can be brought to mind by the Holy Spirit if necessary

#### 5. Situations of “no choice”

- a. there is no clear case in scripture where God does not hold us responsible in some measure for our actions e.g. Gen 3
- b. this is not to be equated with taking responsibility/blame for what has been done to us
- c. young children are particularly vulnerable and powerless to change their situations, God recognizes this e.g. Matt 18:6
- d. this does not mean children had no choice and the adult has no responsibility for sustaining the damaging attitude
- e. God is not wanting to heap blame and condemnation on them; rather he wants them to acknowledge their responsibility so that they can receive his forgiveness and healing.
- f. he wants to heap blessings on them, but he will not violate their will, and if they want to hang on to a position of justifying their behaviour, he will let them

#### 6. The culture of Victimhood

- a. post modern culture delights in a culture of victimhood e.g. gays, women, Moslems
- b. victims are portrayed as helpless in the hands of persecutors e.g. fundamentalists, right wing governments, men, homophobes, Islamophobes
- c. victims claim unique status because they have been wronged e.g. adult campaigners against child sexual abuse, Israel, Palestine
- d. when the vocabulary of sin is exchanged for that of victimhood, the language of therapy and self- help replaces the gospel

- e. the church becomes a support group rather than a place where the word of the cross and resurrection is proclaimed

## **C: Understanding and Dealing with Anger**

### 1. A Recurring Problem

- a. everyone is angry at something; some deny this aggressively
- b. scripture emphasises the importance of gaining victory over anger because of its dire consequences e.g. Prov 16:32; Matt 5:21- 22; Gal 5:20; Eph 4:31; 1 Tim 2:8; James 1:19- 20
- c. anger is a feature of our age e.g. road rage, at umpires, at the weather, at Moslems, at governments, in marriages
- d. this sort of anger is detrimental to physical (Prov 14:29- 30), relational (Prov 29:22; 30:33) and spiritual life (Num 20:10- 13; 1 John 3:14- 15)
- e. the “angry people” of the Bible e.g. Cain (Gen 4:1- 16); Esau (Gen 27:1- 46) lose their inheritance

### 2. Righteous Anger

- a. this is found in God e.g. Ps 7:11; Rom 1:18ff.; but he does not take pleasure in anger (Ezek 18:3, 23) but in grace (Ps 30:5; Isa 54:8).
- b. it is exhibited in Jesus (Matt 16:23; 23:23; Mark 3:5; 11:15; John 11:38)
- c. it is possible for Christians to appropriately be angry (Acts 13:9 -11; Eph 4:26)
- d. righteous anger is opposition to all injustice, it is not self – interested
- e. this is part of the image of God and a necessary consequence of holiness
- f. not to have this anger is to deny the justice of God and encourage injustice  
Edmund Burke: “All that is necessary for evil to succeed is that good men do nothing.”

### 3. The Causes of Unrighteous Anger

- a. the causes of righteous and unrighteous anger in God and man are the same- opposition to that which is perceived to be evil, unjust and destructive
- b. the false wisdom of sin is that I can discern for myself what is good and evil (Gen 3:5 – 6)

- c. human beings are angry with God (Rom 1:30; 5:10; Col 1:21) because things don't go "our way" and we believe God is not lovingly concerned for us
- d. all fantasy worlds are an attempt to control things to suit our desires
- e. unrighteous human anger is a judgment against the justice of God (cf. Eli Weisel, *The Night*)
- f. we angry at God because we believe he is wrongly angry at us
- g. repression of this sort of anger is itself a sin as it is not "walking in the light" (1 John 1:5- 7)
- h. repression can "break out" in other symptoms e.g. depression, self- hate, gluttony, substance abuse

#### 4. Dealing with Anger

- a. confess you have a problem – this deals with the repression
- b. admit the root cause- unbelief in God's providential care (Rom 8:28)
- c. look to Jesus, who despite experiencing absolute injustice (1 Pet 2:23) and the absence of the presence of God (Mark 15:34) refused to become angry for his own sake and trusted his Father
- d. see your guilt and shame dealt with in the cross- the cross reveals the perfect nature of God's love and forgiveness in dealing with the fullness of human rage (1 Pet 2:22- 24; Ps 2:1)
- e. repent – make a will choice before God in prayer not to be angry (Eph 4:31; Col 3:8)
- f. seek the power of the Spirit to put anger to death in your life (1 Cor 6:9- 11; Gal 5:19ff.)
- g. enter more fully into the peace of Christ (Isa 9:7; John 14:27; Phil 4:4- 7) which flows from justification (Rom 5:1)
- h. grow in the grace that frees us from personal ambition