

MY ENLIGHTENED CONSCIENCE

The *Random House Webster's Unabridged Dictionary* (1998) defines the word *conscience*:

con·science (kon'shəns), *n.*

1. the inner sense of what is right or wrong in one's conduct or motives, impelling one toward right action: *to follow the dictates of conscience.*
2. the complex of ethical and moral principles that controls or inhibits the actions or thoughts of an individual.
3. an inhibiting sense of what is prudent: *I'd eat another piece of pie but my conscience would bother me.*

The Bible tells of the Apostle's attitude regarding his own conscience in the following passage:

And Paul, looking intently at the Council, said, "Brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day." And the high priest Ananias commanded those standing beside him to strike him on the mouth. Then Paul said to him, "God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! And do you sit to try me according to the Law, and in violation of the Law order me to be struck?" (Acts 23:1-3; NASB)

I find myself in a similar situation to what the Apostle Paul faced. I am accused by my "former brethren," and that, before the civil magistrates of the United States. False statements have been levied against me both by the Plaintiffs and the Court. Yet, I honestly confess before angels and men that "I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day." In fact, on my personal home page, I published, "Judge me, O YAH, 'For I have walked in my integrity.'" (Psalm 26:1) I have further promised to uphold the words of Thomas Jefferson, "I have sworn on the altar of God Eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man."

I recall my younger days when following the dictates of my conscience was not so precious to me. I had violated myself to the degree that I actually sought death—"conscience-smitten." On one occasion I endeavored to thrust myself headlong upon some huge boulders along the Tennessee River bank. I abhorred myself and saw no further reason to live. Thanks to the mighty power of YAH, I found my way home.

I am encouraged to this day by a cherished paragraph from the little book *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*:

Our heavenly Father is never unmindful of those whom sorrow has touched. When David went up the Mount Olivet, "and wept as he went up, and had his head covered, and he went barefoot" (2 Samuel 15:30), the Lord was looking pityingly upon him. David was clothed in sackcloth, and his conscience was scourging him. The outward signs of humiliation testified of his contrition. In tearful, heartbroken utterances he presented his case to God, and the Lord did not forsake His servant. Never was David dearer to the heart of Infinite Love than when, conscience-smitten, he fled for his life from his enemies, who had been stirred to rebellion by his own son. The Lord says, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent." Revelation 3:19. Christ lifts up the contrite heart and refines the mourning soul until it becomes His abode. (page 11)

Now the Scriptures tell us of these last days when "some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron." (1 Timothy 4:1, 2) There comes a point at which the soul loses all sense of guilt. The conscience has no vitality or sensitivity, and the Holy Spirit's whispers fade into oblivion. It appears that my enemies have fallen to this debased condition. May YAHWEH have mercy on those poor degraded souls.

Growing up in America, I was taught the old adage, "Let your conscience be your guide." Naturally, for the average "man on the street," that proverb appears adequate and reasonable. The problem comes when new light penetrates the soul. What of conscience? Is *conscience alone* an adequate and dependable guide?

Please read and grasp the principles in the following excerpt from the inspired pen of Ellen G. White:

From Genesis to Revelation the conditions upon which eternal life is promised, are made plain. God requires that those who shall enter heaven shall be without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. Keep my commandments and live, is the requirement of God. But one says, "My conscience does not condemn me in not keeping the commandments of God." But in the word of God we read that there are good and bad consciences and the fact that your conscience does not condemn you in not keeping the law of God, does not prove that you are uncondemned in His sight. Take your conscience to the word of God, and see if your life and character are in accordance with the standard of righteousness which God has there revealed. You can then determine whether or not you have an intelligent faith, and what manner of conscience is yours. The conscience of man cannot be trusted unless it is under the influence of divine grace. Satan takes advantage of an unenlightened conscience, and thereby leads men into all manner of delusions because they have not made the word of God their counselor. Many have invented a gospel of their own in the same manner as they have substituted a law of their own for God's law. (*Adventist Review and Sabbath Herald*, Sept. 3, 1901)

Perhaps it has never occurred to you that *conscience alone* is not a trustworthy captain. A famous quote from the reformer, Martin Luther, seems applicable, "Unless I am convinced by Scripture and by plain reason, and not by popes and councils who have so often contradicted themselves, my conscience is captive to the Word of God. To go against conscience is neither right nor safe. I cannot and I will not recant—here I stand, I can do no other, God help me." (from the DVD, entitled *Luther*)

My general writings of late have been within the context of the lawsuit styled as the General Conference Corporation of Seventh-day Adventists and General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, an Unincorporated Association, Plaintiffs, v. Walter McGill, d/b/a Creation Seventh Day Adventist Church, *et al*, Defendants. (Case No. 1:06-cv-01207-JDB before the United States District Court for the Western District of Tennessee Eastern Division) You may find many particulars respecting this contest by searching online for the key words. The supreme significance of this continued controversy pertains to *My Enlightened Conscience*.

What about *My Enlightened Conscience*? It has been suggested by authorities, former brethren, professed friends, and family members that I should simply "change the name of [my] church." They continue trying to persuade me that all my problems would cease if only I would "co-operate" or "compromise." But, how can I *compromise my conscience*? Can I perjure myself by a false testimony? Can an enlightened conscience testify falsely before angels and men? How can I preserve a "perfectly good conscience before God" while disobeying His divine mandate(s)? With every beat of my heart, I wish to settle all disputes with my enemies. I long to restore peace with all men, so far as possible. But, can peace be won through *compromise* of righteous principle? It has been written, "When those in high places of trust do not consider it essential to be true as steel to principle, true to their fellow men, they will not be true to God, the highest sovereignty." (Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases Volume Seventeen*, page 210) And, I certainly believe the converse can rightly be stated, "When those in places of responsibility do not consider it essential to be true as steel to principle—true to God, they will not be true to their fellow men."

In *God's Amazing Grace*, we read:

What voice will you acknowledge as the voice of God? What power has the Lord in reserve to correct your errors and show you your course as it is? What power to work in the church? If you refuse to believe until every shadow of uncertainty and every possibility of doubt is removed, you will never believe. The doubt that demands perfect knowledge will never yield to faith. Faith rests upon evidence, not demonstration. The Lord requires us to obey the voice of duty, when there are other voices all around us urging us to pursue an opposite course. It requires earnest attention from us to distinguish the voice which speaks from God. We must resist and conquer inclination, and obey the voice of conscience without parleying or compromise, lest its promptings cease and will and impulse control. The word of the Lord comes to us all who have not resisted His Spirit by determining not to hear and obey. This voice is heard in warnings, in counsels, in reproof. It is the

Lord's message of light to His people. If we wait for louder calls or better opportunities, the light may be withdrawn, and we are left in darkness. . . . (page 202)

And from *The Upward Look*, page 25, we find the following inspiration:

The law of duty [to God] is supreme. It claims authority over reason and conscience, over talents and possessions. It will admit no rival, and will not for one moment abate its high demands. It enters into no compromise with any oppressive power of earth. In every act of duty we are hiding self in Jesus. We reach out beyond ourselves, beyond the narrow scope of selfish and present gratification. Obedience to God brings the soul into agreement with the highest laws in the universe. It imparts dignity and true greatness to the humblest occupation where Christ can preside. It crowns the lowliest position in life with the highest honors, bringing men into alliance with God and binding up His interests with plans and purposes that have existence in the infinite mind from eternity.

Taking these inspired counsels into account, how can I even *think* to compromise my faith? How shall I consider to violate *My Enlightened Conscience*? The answer is a resounding—"I cannot!" As Luther so aptly stated before the Diet, "To go against conscience is neither right nor safe."

The legal documentation often speaks to the real issue at hand. Attorney for the Defendants, Charles Holliday, has related the following facts at different places in the court record:

- 1) From the outset, Pastor McGill has viewed this case as a challenge to his First Amendment right to religious freedom under the U.S. Constitution.
- 2) Pastor McGill does not seek to excuse his actions. He has no disrespect for the law or the courts. In fact, he respectfully believes the law protects his right to use the words Seventh Day Adventist in describing his faith. For Pastor McGill, however, his faith dictates that when the two collide, he is bound to follow the laws of God.
- 3) The Court has previously recognized that Pastor McGill chose the name of this church based on a divine revelation and that it was not his intent to confuse the public into thinking he was affiliated with Plaintiffs' church.
- 4) Pastor McGill did not participate in the [court-ordered] mediation because doing so would infer that he has room to compromise on the name of his church when his convictions do not allow him to compromise his faith.
- 5) In most cases, the only thing that stands in the way of settlement is the location of the decimal point. In this case, the gap between the parties is intangible and as wide as the universe is long. Both parties claim the right to use three words: Seventh Day Adventist. Pastor McGill's religion requires him to use these words...
- 6) The Magistrate Judge concluded that Pastor McGill's actions were willful, because he refused to mediate on grounds that his religion does not allow him to compromise his belief that he is required to use particular words to describe his faith. No consideration was given to whether his belief that his religion prevents him from compromising these issues could, or should, be accommodated.
- 7) Pastor McGill was ordered to appear at mediation and participate in good faith after informing the Court that he could not compromise his beliefs. [...] It would be impossible for him to participate "in good faith" if his religion dictates that he cannot compromise on the issues in dispute.

Thanks to Charles Holliday, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the legal record bears witness to the truth. I cannot—I will not violate *My Enlightened Conscience*. "Here I stand, I can do no other, God help me." (Martin Luther)

Writing from Africa
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Pastor "Chick" McGill