

## PEACE OF CONSCIENCE

Excerpt taken from "The Christian in Complete Armour", Volume two, pages 304 thru 323; A modernized abridgement of the Puritan Classic by William Gurnall

### PEACE OF CONSCIENCE

Peace of reconciliation reconciles a man to God; but peace of conscience reconciles him to himself. Since man broke peace with God he has not been able to be a friend to his own conscience. This second kind of peace is so necessary that the person cannot taste the sweetness of reconciliation with God, or of any other mercy, without it.

Peace of conscience is to the soul what health is to the body. Even a suit of gold cloth does not feel comfortable on a diseased man's shoulders. And neither does anything seem joyous to a distressed conscience. When Moses brought good news to the troubled Israelites in Egypt 'they hearkened not' to him 'for anguish of spirit' (Exod. 6:9). Hannah went up to the festival at Jerusalem with her husband but 'she wept, and did not eat' (1 Sam. 1:7). Thus the wounded soul goes to the sermon but does not partake of it; she hears many precious promises but cannot receive the life they offer.

A royal banquet spread before a deeply troubled man does not make him happy; he would rather go off in a corner by himself and cry. 'A wounded spirit who can bear?' (Prov. 18:14). Diseases which are incurable are called the physician's reproach. And the spiritual perplexity of an accusing conscience puts all the world to shame for their vain attempts to apply a cure.

### Seventh Consideration: The Christian's Spiritual Shoe

Peace of conscience is the blessing of the gospel and only of the gospel. Conscience knows Jesus, and the gospel of Jesus; it refuses to obey anyone or anything else. Two particular themes will demonstrate this truth – first, what satisfies the conscience; and second, what applies this satisfaction to the conscience.

#### I. WHAT SATISFIES THE CONSCIENCE?

Sin causes the convulsions of horror which distort and torment a person's conscience. If this little word – but such a deadly plague – could ever be blotted out of men's minds, the storm would soon be stilled and the soul would immediately become a calm sea, quiet and smooth, without the least wave of fear to disturb its face. But sin is the Jonah which stirs up the tempest; wherever it comes, war is sure to follow.

When Adam sinned he drank away this sweet peace of conscience in one unhappy swallow. No wonder it almost choked him as soon as it was down his throat – 'and they knew that they were naked' (Gen. 3:7). Now, whatever is to bring true peace to the conscience must first prostrate this Goliath of sin before the war can end and peace can heal.

It is true – the poisoned head of sin's arrow which burns and throbs in the sinner's conscience is guilt. It robs the person of his rest by giving the alarm that judgment is coming and punishment is inevitable. Because that man dreads what will happen when this infinite wrath of the eternal living God comes for him, he lives in fear and agony of that expectation.

Now if you want to comfort a conscience which roasts on the burning embers of God's anger, kindled by his own guilt, you must first quench those coals and present the news that God forgives sin and that He will make reconciliation with sinners who repent and believe. Nothing but this gospel can offer the man true peace with his

own thoughts. 'Son, be of good cheer,' Jesus said to the palsied man. 'Thy sins be forgiven thee' (Matt. 9:2). Not 'be of good cheer because your health is given' (although that was restored too); but 'your sins are forgiven.'

It would not help a condemned man on the road to execution if you put a fragrant rose in his hand and advised him to smell the flower and feel better about everything. He would still see the gallows just ahead. If a messenger from the prince should press a pardon into his hand, though, he would be overcome with joy. But this is the only thing that could change the man's heart. Anything short of pardoning mercy is as insignificant to a troubled conscience as that flower would be in a dying man's hands.

Conscience is God's sergeant to arrest the sinner. Now this sergeant does not have any power to release his prisoner on any private arrangement; he must receive official notice that the debt has been fully paid or the creditor completely satisfied. Only then can conscience free his prisoner.

(a) *The source of God's peace covenant*

There is no other way a man's sins can be forgiven and his soul reconciled to God except by the gospel of Christ. Here alone is the covenant of peace to be read between God and sinners; here is the sacrifice to purchase the pardon. If the serpent-bitten Israelites had looked on anything else besides the brazen serpent they would not have been healed. And neither will the sin-bitten conscience be eased by looking on anything but Christ in the gospel promise.

Both the priest and the Levite saw the wounded man, but would not go near him; he could have lain there and died in his own blood for all they cared. Only the good Samaritan poured oil into his wounds. It is not the law, but Christ by His blood, that bathes and cures the



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wounded conscience. Not all the drops of oil in the world are worth anything for healing – only what God has stored up in His gospel vial.

The Jews offered up an abundance of sacrifices, but the blood of all those animals put together never quieted a single conscience or purged a sin. The 'conscience of sins' – that is, guilt – would have remained unblotted had it been separated from the spiritual significance of these sacrifices (*Heb. 10:2*). And the apostle wrote out the reason: 'For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins' (*v. 4*). There is no redeeming relationship between sin and the blood of beasts, even if it could swell into an ocean. Man's sin deserves man's death – eternal death of both body and soul in hell. This is the price God has put on the head of every sin.

But the gospel brings joyful news of a fountain of precious blood, the blood of Jesus Christ who freely poured it out upon the cross and 'obtained eternal redemption for us' (*Heb. 9:12*). This is the only door where all true peace and joy can enter the conscience. This is why God tells us to anchor our confidence, and take our comfort, here and nowhere else. 'Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience' (*Heb. 10:22*).

(b) *The office of conscience*

God appoints conscience to judge man's spiritual status, good or bad, forgiven or unforgiven. If his condition is good, then conscience acquits and comforts; if evil, it accuses and condemns. Therefore the Bible calls the accusing conscience the evil conscience.

The evil conscience condemns the sinner to God's just punishment for sin; but a person who has been sprinkled by the blood of Christ and has had this offering applied to his heart by the Spirit is free to enjoy pardon and

reconciliation with God. In the law, sprinkling meant the person was cleansed from all legal impurities. Therefore we understand the essence of David's prayer: 'Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean' (*Ps. 51:7*) – that is, 'apply the blood of Jesus to my troubled conscience as priests used hyssop dipped into a beast's blood to cleanse the leper. The sin which stains my conscience will be washed off and I can have peace, as if I had never sinned.'

The Holy Spirit alludes to this sprinkling of blood when He says: 'come to Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel' (*Heb. 12:24*) – 'better things' in the conscience. The guilt of Abel's blood, sprinkled upon Cain's conscience, spoke damnation and hell; but the blood of Christ sprinkled in the conscience of a penitent sinner speaks pardon and peace. Thus it is called 'the answer of a good conscience toward God, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ' (*1 Pet. 3:21*).

An answer, of course, implies there has been a question; and an 'answer toward God' presupposes a question which God has asked. His question to the sinner is this: 'What will you say when you stand doomed to damnation by the curse of My righteous law? Why should you not die the same death pronounced against every sinner of all time?'

Now the man who has heard of Christ and has taken Him into his heart by faith is the only one who can answer this question in a way that satisfies both himself and God. The Holy Spirit, through the apostle Paul, formed and fitted the answer for the mouth of every believer: 'Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us' (*Rom. 8:34*). Because this confession is a response which God will not reject, Paul represents all Christians when he rejoices in its invincible



strength against the enemies of our salvation: 'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?' (*v. 35*). The apostle continues to challenge death and devils, with all their attendants, to step forward and do the worst they can against believers armed in God's breastwork. Finally he leaves the battle, filled with the holy confidence that none of them – no matter what they do – can ever hurt Christians: 'I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers . . . shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord' (*Rom. 8:38, 39*). In a word, the Christian fastens all his flags of allegiance to Christ and places all his confidence in Him. If I have spent much time on this subject, my brothers, it is because it is the richest vein in the whole mine of gospel treasure.

II. WHAT APPLIES SATISFACTION TO THE CONSCIENCE? Conscience is a lock which is not easily opened. Even if the key fits, a weak hand cannot make it turn in the lock. Thus when a mere man holds the key of comfort, conscience refuses to open; its doubts and fears will not be resolved until there is a work of God's Spirit.

Conscience is God's officer; and although the debt is paid in full from heaven, this official will not let the soul go free until the Spirit of God authorizes and brings a divine warrant. 'When he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble? and when he hideth his face, who then can behold him?' (*Job 34:29*). Now follow me as I demonstrate why an abundant peace of conscience cannot be found apart from the gospel and the working of the Holy Spirit.

(a) Only the gospel presents God's Spirit as the Comforter. The comfort of the Holy Spirit rests in the satisfaction of Jesus Christ. After He had shed His blood and paid the full price of the sinner's peace with God, He returned to





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heaven and asked His Father to send the Comforter. Now Christ could not have made this request, nor could His Father have granted it, unless His death had protected God's justice from receiving any damage when believers received comfort from the Spirit. Christ told His disciples this: 'If I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you: but if I depart, I will send him unto you' (*John 16:7*).

Now the Spirit was sent to believers as soon as Jesus appeared in the heavens with His blood as an intercessor. But you may be wondering how Old Testament saints could have had this peace and comfort since they lived before Christ's return to heaven – even before He came to earth the first time. Well, they found comfort in the same Person who bought their pardon. They were forgiven through the blood of Christ, who was a Lamb slain from the beginning of the world; and they were comforted by His Spirit. All their pardons were sent out on the credit of Christ, who even then stood ready to lay down His life in the fullness of time, and it is on that same credit that the Holy Spirit's comforts came to them.

Thus you can see that the Spirit is a comforter because of God's gospel covenant; He could never have spoken a word if it had not been for this gospel promise. Therefore when the Father sends Him to comfort He comes in Christ's name, who has stood in the gap between Him and sinners – that is, for His sake and at His request.

What does the Holy Spirit say when He comforts? The joyful news He brings is gospel intelligence: 'He shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak' (*John 16:13*). In other words, His teaching will not bring new light, different from what shines in the gospel but He will teach the same truth Christ preached.

When the Spirit comforts, the ingredients of His soul-reviving refreshments have been gathered from the gospel

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garden: 'He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you' – that is, Christ's death, His worthiness, His resurrection, ascension and intercession, the promises purchased and sealed with His blood (*v. 14*).

#### (b) *The Holy Spirit has power to comfort*

The gospel supplies sufficient power to satisfy the most troubled conscience in the world – the full satisfaction which Christ's precious blood has made to God for sinners. But if a person were left to understand and profit from this plan by himself, he might have to remain in the pains of scorched conscience because not one drop of cool balm has come to heal it. But just as God's love and wisdom provided a Savior to purchase eternal redemption for us, He also sent a Comforter to apply purchased redemption to us. This divine work is called appropriately 'strong consolation' (*Heb. 6:18*).

Christ showed His strength when He unhinged the gates of the grave and made His way out of that dark prison by His glorious resurrection. By this demonstration He was 'declared to be the Son of God with power' (*Rom. 1:4*). And it requires no less power to break open the dungeon where the guilty conscience lies confined. In fact, the same stone is upon the sinner's conscience to keep him from being resurrected to comfort as was on Christ's tomb to keep Him from being resurrected to life. Remember, though, that the strongest seal on Jesus' grave was not the stone which man rolled upon Him, nor the seal the Jews tried to fasten the grave with, but the curse of the law for sin which divine justice attached to Him. Not even the angel who rolled away the stone could have removed such a curse.

Suppose we could look in on the grave of this distressed conscience, where guilt has buried it, and sense the hell in its dread and fears. 'I am damned,' is the language ringing

continually in his own ears. But what keeps his conscience here? Why can he not be lifted out of this pit of horror? You pour out the ointment of comfort in vain, for God's curse sticks like a dagger in his heart; and His anger weighs like a mountain of lead on the sinner's conscience. Unless you can take away this curse and anger, peace and comfort are impossible – the same gravestone rests on both.

But the Comforter comes to tell you good news. The same Spirit who kept Jesus from seeing corruption in the grave, who restrained death from feeding on Him, who quickened His dead body and raised Him not only to life but to immortality – He is the One whom Christ calls to satisfy your sorrowing conscience for His love's sake.

This blessed Holy Spirit has all the characteristics of a comforter. He is so pure and holy that He cannot deceive; He is called 'the Spirit of truth' (*John 14:17*). If He says your sins are forgiven, you can believe Him; He will not flatter. If it were not so He would have told you, for He can chide as well as comfort – He can convince of sin as well as of righteousness. And the Spirit of God is so wise that He cannot be deceived; He never knocks at the wrong door nor delivers messages to the wrong person, but knows the exact purpose which the heart of God holds for each person on earth. 'The Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God' (*1 Cor. 2:10*).

These 'deep things of God' which the apostle mentions are God's counsels of love which lie deep in His heart until the Spirit draws them out and shows them to men and women. And He also knows perfectly the frame of man's heart. It would be strange if the cabinet maker did not know every secret compartment in the cabinet. Despite their long study, neither man nor the devil have anything even approaching a full knowledge of that little world, the microcosm of man's soul. But as in everything else, God

knows this field perfectly and cannot be deceived.

In a word, God's Spirit is so irresistible that no one can stand against the power of His peace. For example, the pardon Nathan took to David was not all that he had hoped for; so David begged the Comforter to ease his pain. He went on his knees and prayed hard to have his lost joy restored and his softened heart established by the free Spirit of God. You might baffle man, and through your own melancholy manipulation, even evade the truths which Christians bring for comfort; but when the Holy Spirit Himself comes, all disputes will end. Satan cannot pull rank or his false logic on Him. Confusion vanishes and our fears with it, as darkness disappears before the sun. The Holy Spirit overruns the heart so sweetly and forcefully with a flood of joy that the soul can no more see sin and guilt than Noah could see ant hills when the whole earth was under water.

## REPROOF TO THOSE WHO DENY THAT PEACE OF CONSCIENCE IS THE BLESSING OF THE GOSPEL

### I. SOME DENY THE ASSURANCE OF SALVATION

If we could not know in this life that we are children of God, the uncertainty would shatter the vessel He molded to hold our joy and peace. It is not possible, of course, to have peace with our own consciences apart from the knowledge of our peace with God: 'Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God' (*Rom. 5:1, 2*).

If the gospel cannot settle the question of whether you will go to heaven or to hell, you can forget about inward peace. In that case you may as well describe a saint's

spiritual groping in the words of John: He 'walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth' (1 John 2:11). A gospel like this could be called a gospel of doubt and fear rather than the gospel of peace.

Is that which is near the bottom of the law's curse upon sinners to be made the topmost part of the blessing which the gospel brings to Christians – that their 'life shall hang in doubt'; and they shall 'fear day and night,' and 'have none assurance' (*Deut. 28:66*)? God forbid! Men teach from a premise of foolish boldness when they so disfigure the sweet face of the gospel that they make Christ speak His precious promises as doubtfully to His saints as the devil lures his followers with vague enticements. Because their hypocrisy makes them question their own salvation – with good reason – they must therefore seal up the wells of salvation from sincere believers and then blame the gospel for their own doubt.

But there is a mystery of iniquity at the root of this false and uncomfortable doctrine. These religious leaders are similar to Judas, a thief who carried the money. Proponents of this teaching deposit more gold and silver in their treasury than Judas ever thought about putting in his. Although the doctrine of gospel grace brings peace to sinners' consciences, these men preach a superstitious fear which keeps ignorant parishioners pouring more and more money into their purses in pursuit of comfort. And the worst part of it all is that this principle of 'give-to-get' lies so near the heart of their religion that the gospel, heaven, and even Christ Himself must all bow to it.

II. SOME IMAGINE FOOLISH THINGS ABOUT THE GOSPEL AND ITS PEACE TO THE CONSCIENCE BECAUSE OF THE ABSENCE OF THAT PEACE IN SOME WHO PROFESS THE GOSPEL

Some people profess to believe the gospel but have no



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more peace and comfort than they who are still strangers to it. In fact, they may be even more troubled in spirit than ever before.

Not everyone who confesses belief in the gospel is a Christian – but this is not God's fault. He does not lavish His eternal treasure upon everyone who knows the facts of salvation. The Spirit of God is too shrewd to sign a blank cheque.

Ministers offer the peace of the gospel to all who will accept it. But this peace refuses to stay where it meets an insincere heart. 'If the house be worthy, let your peace come upon it: but if it be not worthy, let your peace return to you' (*Matt. 10:13*). Just as the dove returned to the ark when it found the earth under water, so God's Spirit takes His comfort back to heaven from a soul still swimming around in sin, soaking in lust and worldliness.

(a) *Many are sincere but ignorant of the gospel's doctrines*  
If light, joy, and comfort are missing from a sincere person's conscience it may be because his understanding is still dim. But the ignorance of the artist does not discredit the art – there is much more in art itself than the achievement of one artist. Fulness of comfort in principles of the gospel is an attainable reality, but not every Christian has yet attained to the 'riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ', as the way in which 'their hearts might be comforted' (*Col. 2:2*).

(b) *Some do not walk in gospel doctrine*  
There are those who do understand the doctrine of salvation by faith in Christ – the only foundation to build true comfort of conscience on – but they neglect to walk carefully by the gospel and deprive themselves of sweet peace from God's promises: 'As many as walk according to

this rule, peace be on them' (Gal. 6:16). When peace is absent, then, can we blame the gospel? No matter how superior the pen is, even in the hand of a skilled scribe, it will not write on wet paper. It is not the pen's fault, nor the hand's – the problem is the paper.

If the heart of a saint – no matter how famous and respected – is defiled by a lust which has not yielded to repentance, God's promise will not speak peace. This person has become a disorderly walker, and no joy and peace can reach him in his self-made prison. The Spirit knows how to use His rod of correction.

(c) *Many misunderstand the meaning of peace*

As for those who walk as close to the gospel as they can but still see no comfort, they may have peace and not realize it. The saint's joy is not a giggling lightheadedness like the world's; true joy is real. The parlor where the Spirit of Christ entertains the Christian is an inner room, not a porch next to the street where everyone who passes by can smell the banquet. 'A stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy' (Prov. 14:10). Christ and the Christian may be having supper within, even though you have not seen a single dish go in, or heard the music which sounds so splendid to believers. You might assume this soul does not have peace because he has not hung out a conspicuous sign on his countenance announcing the peace which he has inside.

On the contrary, sometimes there is never more inward peace and comfort in a saint's heart than when his face is covered with tears. If you should hear a Christian moaning and sobbing about his sins you might go home thinking that Christianity is a melancholy, dismal religion. And yet the one you pity would not part with his sorrow for all the giddy joy the world gives away. There is a mystery in these tears which human understanding cannot resolve.

Anguish of heart stems from guilt of sin and dread of God's anger because of it. Yet another kind of sorrow flows, not from fear or guilt but from awareness of the sin which remains in the soul and provokes the saint to dishonor God, who has freely loved him and forgiven his sins. This, then, is the sorrow which sometimes makes Christians seem sad or uncomfortable when all the time their hearts are as full of the assurance of God's pardoning mercy as they can hold. Their grief is like a summer shower, melted by the sense of God's love, like the warm sun. And it leaves the soul, like a garden of sweet flowers, refreshed by the gentle rain which falls upon it.

In a word, some saints who have embraced the gospel still may lack rest in their conscience. And while they might be troubled for a while in their spirits, all true believers have peace of conscience in three ways – the price, the promise, and the seed.

(i) *In the price.* The gospel puts into the hand that price which will certainly suffice to purchase peace – the blood of Jesus. We say, 'Anything is gold which is worth gold' – that is, which we can exchange anywhere for gold. Such is the blood of Christ – it is the peace of conscience because the soul that has it can exchange it for peace. Thus God cannot ever deny a prayer like this one: 'Lord, give me peace of conscience – here is Christ's blood to pay for it.' And whatever pays the debt can surely guarantee the receipt as well.

Peace of conscience is simply a seal under God's hand that the debt due to divine justice has been fully paid. If the blood of Jesus has purchased the greatest gift – salvation – it can pay for peace too. If there were medication which could infallibly produce health, we would say that the sick man has health as soon as he

swallows this tonic, although he might not necessarily feel it immediately. It will come in time.

(ii) In the promise. A bond is as good as money in the bank. Now if God is determined to give peace to His children, who can stop Him? 'The Lord will bless his people with peace' (Ps. 29:11). This psalm shows what great things God can do; it is no harder for Him to create peace than to speak the word. 'The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty' (v. 4).

Now God promises to bless His people with both outward and inward peace. It would be a sad peace to have quiet streets but the cutting of throats inside our homes. Yet it would be even worse to have peace both in our streets and houses but war in our guilty consciences. Therefore Christ purchased the peace of pardon to obtain peace of conscience for His forgiven ones; and then He willed it to us in the promise: 'Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you' (John 14:27). There He both writes and executes His own will – to give out with His hands what His love has bequeathed to believers. There is no fear, then – His will shall be performed to the fullest, seeing that He lives to get that done by the power of His Spirit.

(iii) In the seed. 'Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart' (Ps. 97:11). It is planted in the believer when principles of grace and holiness are dropped into it by the Spirit of God. Thus it is called 'the peaceable fruit of righteousness' (Heb. 12:11). It sprouts up as naturally from holiness as any fruit does from seed of its own kind. It is true that this seed ripens into fruit sooner in some than it does in others – spiritual harvest does not take place at the same time in everyone. But here is the security – whoever has a seed-time of grace in his heart will also have his harvest-time of joy.

God would not be keeping His promise if even one saint

should go without his reaping time. 'He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him' (Ps. 126:6). Now if you think the gospel might be defective because a certain Christian's peace has not matured, know this – it is on the way, and when it does come it will be everlasting. Do not focus on how the saint begins but how he ends. 'Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace' (Ps. 37:36).

III. SOME SEARCH FOR PEACE OUTSIDE THE GOSPEL

Men are deceived if they try to heal their consciences with anything besides the refreshing ointment of the gospel. They turn away from the waters of living comfort which flow from this fountain opened in the gospel by Christ to draw peace and comfort from wells they have dug themselves – either a carnal cistern or a legal cistern.

(a) *A carnal cistern*

Sinners collect a wide variety of self-deceiving remedies to cure the fear of God's fury in their guilty consciences. If these people are awakened even slightly by Scripture their hearts become chilled from a few serious thoughts of their lost condition and they resort to the same alternative Felix chose. As soon as Paul's sermon sickened Felix's conscience, he hurried to get rid of the preacher and the disturbing noises he was making: 'Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time' (Acts 24:25).

Thus many turn their backs from God and run as fast and as far as they can from anyone or anything that irritates their already inflamed consciences and reminds them of their sad plight. One poor man, for instance, refused to attend funerals and even dyed his gray hair because he could not cope with thoughts of death. Yet this cowardly strategy was all this man had between him and a hell on earth in his conscience.



Other people have such a strong conscience that its light glares on them day and night, even though they calculatingly avoid all contact with Scripture, saints, and sermons. These men and women are so constantly haunted by their own guilt that they not only go 'from the presence of the Lord,' as Cain did, but apply all their energy to building 'a city' and giving their consciences the slip in a crowd of worldly business (*Gen. 4:16, 17*).

Diversion, then, is the great hungry beast that swallows up every thought of heaven and hell. Busy people are devoted to such complex projects and pressing schedules that conscience rarely finds the chance to speak a word. Besides, conscience is as offensive among sinners as Joseph's dream was among his brothers. So the unwelcome message of truth drives men to bribe their consciences with the worldly promise of profit.

But even that most sophisticated ploy to avoid gospel light is too weak to work without flaw; so sinners often invite Saul's harp and Nabal's feast to drown their cares and lull their raving consciences to sleep. Thus many soak their spiritual awareness with crude pleasures of sin; and while it sleeps in senseless stupidity they can sin without limit. But this is the height of help which a carnal recipe can give the sinner – a sleeping pill which dulls the senses of conscience for awhile, affording him a short season to forget; for the horror of his condition soon comes back to smother his peace more persistently than ever.

God keep you from such a cure for the troubles of your conscience! It is a thousand times worse than the disease itself. Undoubtedly it is better to have a dog that barks incessantly to betray a thief than to have one that sits still and lets us be robbed before we know danger is anywhere near.

(b) *A legal cistern*  
Other people, thirsty for peace, have no relief except from

their own morality; they bless themselves by performing a good deed each time a qualm comes over their consciences. The cordial drink which they use to revive themselves is not drawn from the satisfaction of Christ's death but from the righteousness of their carefully disciplined activities. This wine has not been pressed from the precious intercession Christ makes in heaven but from their earthly prayers for themselves. In a word, even though the sparks of agitation kindle in their consciences – and this is inevitable with so much combustible matter for a roaring fire – it is not Christ's blood but their own tears with which they try to extinguish it.

Well, no matter who you are, if you build up peace of conscience with wood, hay, and stubble, I accuse you of being an enemy of Jesus Christ and of His gospel. If any herb grew in your own garden that could heal your wounded conscience, why did God prescribe such a rare balm compounded with the blood of His only Son? Why does He call sinners away from everything else except Himself? You can know this: either Christ was an imposter, and the gospel a fable – and I hope you are not such an infidel, worse than Satan himself, to believe that – or else you are not taking the right method of healing your conscience and obtaining peace for it.

Now as for laying a sure foundation for solid peace in your heart, you cannot complete it without prayers and tears – I mean repentance. But by themselves, these remedies will never provide peace with God. Peace of conscience is nothing more than the echo of pardoning mercy which brings the soul into sweet rest as its pleasant music sounds in the conscience. This echo is only the same voice repeated; so if tears and prayers and good works cannot purchase our peace of pardon, they cannot effect the peace of comfort either. Remember what I have said –

you cannot have inner peace without these; but you cannot have it by them alone.

A common wound will hardly heal unless it is wrapped up from the open air and kept clean; yet these measures do not cure it – the medicine does. I do not want you to stop praying and serving; just do not expect peace to grow only from their root. If you do rely on this you isolate yourself from any benefit of true peace which the gospel offers. One resists the other like two famous rivers in Germany, whose streams will not mingle when they meet.

Gospel peace will not merge with any other peace. You must drink it pure and undiluted or not at all. Speaking for himself and for all other sincere believers, Paul testified, 'We are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh' (*Phil. 3:3*). He was declaring, 'We do not fall behind in any holy duty or service. No, we go beyond them, because we worship God in the spirit; but even this is not the tap where we draw our joy and comfort. We rejoice in Christ Jesus, not in the flesh.' Thus anything which opposes Christ and our rejoicing in Him, Paul calls flesh.

Indeed there are many who do use the balm of the gospel's mercy for the healing of a wounded conscience but they do not follow the scriptural order in applying it. Instead, they snatch a promise presumptuously and ravish it rather than wait for Christ's consent. Too often they are like Saul, who was in such a hurry that he could not wait until Samuel came to sacrifice for him but went to work first, disobeying God every minute that he served.

Impulsive people do not wait for God's Spirit to come and sprinkle their consciences with the blood of Christ according to the gospel; they do it themselves by applying

the comfort of promises which do not pertain to them at present. For example, what would you think of a man who refused to wait for his doctor's prescription but rushed to the pharmacy and started mixing the medicine himself? Yet this is what every person does who sprinkles himself with the blood of Christ and blesses himself in the pardoning mercy of God before he turns away from sin.

Let every profane person know this. Just as the blood of the paschal lamb was not applied to the Egyptians' doors, but to the Israelites', neither will the blood of Jesus be sprinkled on the obstinate sinner but on the sincere penitent. That blood was not put on the threshold of the Israelites' doors where it might be walked on, but on the sideposts, where its mark became sacred. Neither is Christ's blood reserved, then, for anyone who continuously practices sin. This would be pouring out the most holy sacrifice to be trampled on. Remember, David had to confess his sin with shame before Nathan could comfort him with news of pardon.

CHARACTERISTICS OF

DO NOT GO TO UPON ME, BECAUSE THE LORD WILL AVENGE ME