



FEAR

The Enemy Of The Indwelling

FORWARD BY: DR. STEPHEN R. PHINNEY

Dr. James Fowler

THE HOLY WORD OF GOD

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ChristAsLife@iomamerica.org

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Spirit Union vs. Fear

By Jim Fowler, IOM Contributing writer

Phinney | Forward

Whenever we go to the frontlines, where the enemy lives and breathes, he is bound to try chasing us away. Do not submit to his deceptive ideas and lies: there is no time; this level of combat isn't necessary; these are only words; we can put this off because we already have too many things to do; we're tired or too sick; or that we are already struggling with worries, doubts, and fears that will prevent us from completing our pathway to deliverance. We should push through it all and respond like warriors!

In rare cases, some people experience terrifying feelings of guilt, worthlessness, physical symptoms (choking, pains moving around the body, tightness above the eyes, dizziness, blackouts, or even fainting), and terrifying spells of panic and/or depression. If any of these symptoms occur to the point of “paralyzing” you from not being able to go through the study, you will need another partner (same gender) to do the study with you. Remember, fear is the fire of the dragon's mouth – it is his primary tool of intimidation. Don't worry – it's only hot air!

We have all experienced fear and some of its common variations such as apprehension, anxiety, and worry. What are we afraid of? These can be boiled down to (1) non-personal fears, (2) interpersonal fears, and (3) intra-personal fears.

Avoid becoming preoccupied with Satan and his domain. Have you ever wondered why people are intrigued with movies, video games, and music based on the dark side? Well, one of the games that the enemy plays is to create an unhealthy fascination with his work. Many people are caught up in giving more attention and credit to the enemy than they do God. I call this a “demon behind every bush” mentality. It is common for those who are struggling with satanic affliction to be preoccupied with the enemy due to their level of temptation, obsession, and negative thoughts. However, one must take special caution to keep their eyes upon Jesus. Well-trained Christians in the Word and Spirit will not fear Satan or his schemes.

Fear of confronting the enemy has held most believers back from boldly going before the throne of God regarding the temptations and afflictions of the enemy. God's greatest servants have always shared an appreciation of the magnificent power of prayer and the complete victory over Satan's kingdom available to all believers through the mighty Person and work of our Husband, Jesus Christ.

The book of Ephesians is the New Testament handbook on spiritual warfare and prayer. Get to know this book like a handbook. The believer's emphasis in prayer must be upon a biblical and sound doctrinal approach to this subject. The Word of God recognizes that we encounter the three faces of Satan—the world, the flesh, and the devil. When a person becomes born-again, his/her relationship to everything in the physical, spiritual, mental, and emotional world completely changes. Since the believer is a citizen of heaven, he is given the power to face the enemy toe-to-toe. Scary? Well, look at it this way. Either we face him head-on or he will constantly be nipping at our heels—eating away our lives a little at a time.

There is no fear in love - Love is not an affection that produces fear. In the love we have for a parent, a child, or a friend, there is no fear. If a man had perfect love for God, he would have no fear of anything; for what would he have to dread? He would have no fear of death, illness, or any other thing that tempts us to doubt God's everlasting purpose of love. It is guilt that makes people fear what is to come; but the believer who knows his sins are forgiven, knows he is filled with the love of God. He is able to walk in this world fearing nothing but God Himself. He knows and embraces the fact that God is a God of the past, present, and future. He trusts the Redeemer with all possible harm the future may bring his way. Christians filled with love believe that God causes all things to work together for good (Romans 8:28). The angels in heaven have always loved God and one another; they have no fear, for they have nothing to dread in the future. This same love, which heaven functions by, is available to us in the form of the Holy Spirit. We must willingly accept this Truth and stand boldly in that promise. The following prayer helps parents who are struggling with the fear of losing a child to illness, harm, or even death.

FEARS | Dr. James Fowler

Non-personal fears include fear of the unknown, fear of change, fear of what "might be," and fear of the future. These may also include fear of being in want, fear of sickness, bodily harm, or death, and a host of other phobias. How do we have soul-rest from these kinds of fears? Only in recognizing by faith that all unknowns are known in the sovereign omniscience of God. All change is His change; God is in all the change. All of the "might be's" are His opportunities. The future belongs to the eternal God who desires that we let Him take care of it, and instead focus on the "now" of God's present tense "I AM," without getting overly preoccupied with prophetic and futuristic concerns. The Psalmist understood, *"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want"* (Ps. 23:1), as was illustrated by God's supernatural supply for Elisha via ravens (1 Kgs. 17:4-6) and the perpetual supply of flour and oil for the widow (1 Kgs. 17:8-16). Even sickness and death cannot separate us from the love of God (Rom. 8:35-39). God has everything under control, so when we are in spirit-union with Him, we can "take things in stride," resting in His love and sufficiency.

Then there are those interpersonal fears: fear of disapproval, rejection, loneliness, separation, and broken relationships. Fear of offending someone. Fear of what others think. Fear of our enemies. Fear of what will happen to our children or grandchildren. Soul-rest in the midst of these kinds of fears comes from understanding that we 'seek not the approval of men, but of God' (Jn. 12:43), who has approved (1 Thess. 2:4), and accepted us (Rom. 15:7; Eph. 1:6-KJV). If God has accepted us, we are accepted by the only One who counts! He is not going to reject us, desert us, or forsake us (Heb. 13:5). In spirit-union with the Trinity, we are never alone - for we are brought into the relation of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. As the Psalmist wrote, *"I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me"* (Ps. 23:4, KJV). Jesus promised, *"I am with you always"* (Matt. 28:20). The solution to loneliness is not "get busy; get involved," but to recognize the union relationship we have with God and His people. Those who fear offending someone often need to understand that the problem is usually with people "taking offense," rather than our "giving offense," and Jesus was not at all concerned about the Pharisees' "taking offense" at what He did. Our desire is to 'please God, rather than man' (Gal. 1:10; 1 Thess. 2:4). It doesn't matter what others think of you or your opinions. You are free to be uniquely you, with your own thoughts and your own opinions. We must not allow the opinions of others to control us. Fears of what will happen to our loved ones are relieved when we recognize that God loves our children and grandchildren more than we do, and seeks their highest good at all times.

The third category, intrapersonal fears, includes the fear of failure and insignificance, the fear of inadequacy and responsibility, the fear of inferiority and impropriety. The fear of failure is always a result of thinking that we have to do something, and failing to appreciate the "supplied life" of Jesus Christ whereby we have *"everything pertaining to life and godliness"* (2 Pet. 1:3). The fear of inadequacy is overcome by recognition that we 'have all sufficiency in everything' (2 Cor. 3:5). How can someone have a fear of inferiority when knowing who he or she is in Christ? The fear of impropriety is based on "established attitudes" of what others have deemed proper and acceptable. When Christ is operative in us, the expression is always adequate, significant, and proper.

When we allow the sufficiency of Christ to swallow up the self-orientation of our fears, we will experience soul-rest. The positive swallows up the negative. John's statement is, *"Perfect love casts out fear"* (1 John 4:18). The question is not, "What is 'perfect love'?" but "Who is 'perfect love'?" The previous verses explain that *"God is love"* (1 John 4:8,16), and this does not mean that God has some "love" to dispense, but that He is in Himself the essence of all divine love, whereby He acts out of His own Being, and overcomes our being with His peace and security.

Anger

We hate to admit that we have emotions of anger, so we have devised many words to redefine and justify our anger. "I'm not angry, I'm just mad, annoyed, provoked, irritated, irked, hurt, fed-up, griped, sore, on edge, disgusted, upset, indignant, vexed, ticked-off, agitated, aggravated, disturbed, hot under the collar, or blowing off steam, etc." Whatever word we might use, James advises, *"The anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God"* (James 1:20). The "anger of man" is based on selfish attitudes of self-protection and self-assertion. On the other hand, there is the 'anger of God expressed in a man,' that allows us to "be angry and sin not" (Eph. 4:26). There is no doubt that Jesus expressed the emotion of anger without sin when He cleansed the temple of the merchandisers (Jn. 2:13-17), and when He pronounced the woes against the Pharisees (Matt. 23:13-37). There are times when the anger of indignation must be expressed against religious charlatans who are deceiving and using people. Paul exhibited such anger toward those who were using the girl who had a spirit of divination (Acts 16:16-18).

Much of our anger, however, is the "anger of man" that stems from our patterns of selfishness, when we "take offense" that our so-called "rights" have been violated. We may become bitter and resentful of weakness in others. We may become critical, argumentative, impatient, intolerant, and complaining. We may become envious, jealous, hateful, or vengeful. And then there are those who bombastically "blow up" with a quick temper and a sharp tongue, cursing and yelling to make their point. The "anger of man" does not express the character of Christ in us. We must allow God to do what He wants to do in other people. *"Vengeance is Mine...says the Lord"* (Rom. 12:19). Christ is the Forgiver in us. He is patience in us. He is meek, but not weak. Soul-rest frees us from having to react negatively to defend ourselves in any way.

We all have our own varieties of emotional insecurities. We don't have to be held hostage by these uncertainties, or retreat into "comfort zones" of safety. Our security of relationship with God is not to be found in a past "decision," or in church membership in a particular denomination, or in a particular doctrine of "eternal security" or "once saved always saved." Our security is in Christ, the solid rock (1 Cor. 10:4), the sure foundation (2 Tim. 2:19), where the anchor holds (Heb. 6:19). Oftentimes, God means for us to live in the insecurity of not knowing what He is doing or will do

next, willing to take His "curve balls," and to trust Him as we walk on the "swinging bridge of grace."

Another set of emotions we all experience at one time or another is discouragement, disillusionment, and despondency that may even lead to depression. These often come as a result of some kind of loss - a job, an object, physical ability, a relationship, reputation, freedom, opportunity, or the loss of a loved one in death. It's okay to be "down." Paul wrote, "*We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed*" (2 Cor. 4:8-9). There will be times when we have 'dry spells,' and seem to be 'hoeing dry ground' in the 'valley of dry bones' (Ezek. 37:1-6). Don't let the guilt-inducing religionists send you on a "guilt trip" by their statements, "If you feel distant from God, guess who moved." It may be that God intends for you to have a "dark night of the soul," to appreciate His light. Sometimes when we experience loss, we have the emotions of sorrow and grief. These are legitimate human emotions. It was at the news of the death of His friend, Lazarus, that Scripture records, "*Jesus wept*" (Jn. 11:35). Granted, Paul wrote, 'We do not grieve as those who have no hope' (1 Thess. 4:13), but that means that we do not wail and mourn, and fail to get beyond the loss because we have a selfish attitude that what happened to us is unfair.

The emotions we experience in soul-rest are not a giddy happiness or a euphoria that "everything's going my way." The objective is not to get "high" on Jesus, paste on an "evangelical smile," and walk around with a Cheshire cat grin as if we just swallowed the canary. But neither do we want to be sour-puss Christians, who look like they've been sucking on a dill pickle. Our countenance should reveal that we have the joy of the Lord (Jn. 15:11). Joy is far greater than happiness. Happiness is derived from the old English word *hap*, which meant "chance." Happiness is based on the chance that "everything's going my way." As the happenings and happenstances happen haphazardly, perhaps you might be happy, if you have no mishaps. The desire for happiness is a selfish desire.

As we said previously, the experience of emotions is part of being human. The objective of the Christian life is not to negate our humanity or make us superhuman, but to allow the Christ-life to be lived out in our humanity, which includes our emotions. We need to embrace our emotions, and allow them to be the expressive conduits of the character of Christ. That will include the emotions of perplexity, frustration, confusion, frustration, fear, anger, discouragement, and sorrow, as well as the emotions of excitement, elation, amazement, amusement, wonder, awe, satisfaction, pleasure, jubilation, etc. Emotions allow us to have passion and vibrant expression. Granted, those passions can be tainted with evil character and become "*degrading passions*" (Rom. 1:26), "*sinful passions*" (Rom. 7:5), or "*lustful passions*" (1 Thess. 4:5), but they can also express our passion for Jesus Christ, our passion for life, and our compassion for other people. The Greek word for passion is *pathos*, which refers to affliction or suffering. Compassion is to have passion together with God in His love for others, which may involve sympathy and empathy for those who need such.

Contrary to what some of us were taught, that "those who show emotions are sissies," and "big boys don't cry," God intended for us to express emotions, and even to weep. Emotional expression is not reserved for the feminine gender. Jeremiah was known as 'the weeping prophet' (Jer. 9:1, 10; 13:17). Jesus wept (Jn. 11:35; Lk. 19:41). Paul was weeping for his readers (Phil. 3:18). We are admonished to "*weep with those who weep*" (Rom. 12:15). There is nothing wrong with emotional passion that causes us to weep.

Though the "fruit of the Spirit" (Gal. 5:22-23), such as love, joy, and peace, are not essentially emotional feelings but the character of Christ indwelling our spirit. The expression of these character traits without emotion or passion can be cold, sterile, and impersonal. God's love should be shown with passionate embrace. The joy of the Lord should be enjoyed emotionally. God's peace can be a settled serenity that is beyond the comprehension of the world around us (Phil. 4:7). When our soul is at rest in the sufficiency of our spirit-union with Christ, our emotions can be utilized as passionate expressive agents for the expression of the character and "*affection of Christ*" (Phil. 1:8).

Soul-rest and the Will

The human will within the soul, the psychological function of man, is where we choose and decide how we will act within the context of our willingness to be receptive and contingently derivative from a source beyond ourselves. There has been much debate and argument about the so-called "free-will of man." My position? I categorically deny that man has "free-will." Only God has free-will; i.e., the absolute freedom to will anything into being in accord with His character (Who He is), and to put that willed determination into action out of His own Being. That's free-will, complete with the will-power to put it into action! Man does not have free-will in that sense. God created man with "freedom of choice," and our choices are choices of willingness to derive power and character in our behavior from one spiritual source or the other - God or Satan. Martin Luther wrote a classic book, *The Bondage of the Will*.¹ In that book, he does not advocate the Calvinistic idea of depraved inability to choose (as many have thought), but argues against his contemporary, Erasmus (a humanist), who taught that man could will into being in his own behavior the character of righteousness or sinfulness. Such a thesis of "salvation by willed works" is at the heart of all humanistic thought. Martin Luther argued that the will of man is bound by the context in which God created man as a choosing and derivative creature, to be contingent and dependent on God. Only God can auto-generate. Only God can self-actuate. Only God can spontaneously create. Only God can be a prime-producer or mover out of His absolute divine free-will, having the will-power to bring into being that which is expressive of His own Being. Oh, what "rest" there is in recognizing that we cannot and do not have to bring things into being with our will. We don't have to exercise so-called "will-power" that allegedly makes things happen, produces character, or generates righteousness. There is certainly no "soul-rest" in the false thinking that we have to willfully make things happen, create goodness, and hold it all together.

Many people fret in "unrest" that human life here on earth is constituted of "decisions, decisions, decisions." Without the capability of decision-making, we would be automatons or marionettes - puppets on a string. The frustration of decision-making is usually due to a desire to avoid responsibility and accountability for the decisions we make. There is no doubt that decisions have consequences, and we have to live with the consequences of our choices. Paul wrote, "*He who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done*" (Col. 3:25).

Our choices are often cast into the categories of true and false conclusions, right or wrong decisions, good or bad choices. *Relativism* argues that "whatever is true and right in your determination is truth and righteousness for you." *Utilitarianism* suggests that "it's right, if it turns out all right," for the results are the ultimate criteria. *Pragmatism* operates on the premise, "Whatever works and whatever pays off; that's good." Rather than determining legitimacy, accuracy, and propriety by individual and social subjectivism, there has to be some objective reference for identifying these choice-categories. Some would find their foundation in moral codes,

ethical formulations, behavioral rules and regulations, or even in divine "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not." The absolutism of *fundamentalism* argues, "We have figured out the true, the right and the good, and all of your choices must now be made in the parameters of our determination." The determination of the propriety of our choices and decisions is best established, however, by the character of God Himself, allowing divine justice, love, and authority to be the basis of the proper course of action. The prophet Micah declares, "*What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?*" (Micah 6:8).

Different Personalities and Decision-making

Different personalities have differing patterns or traits of decision-making. Some are strong-willed and tend to make quick, impulsive decisions based on expedience. Believing that change is always good, they are often confrontational and assertive, saying, "Just do it!" Others want to make decisions in the context of a committee, where they can talk out the issues and enlist others to make the decision with them. They want to avoid the individual blame when others do not like the decision they have made. Then there are those who would rather let others make decisions for them. "Whatever you want, it's fine with me." They are ambivalent and procrastinate, for they dislike change and seek the status-quo. They will passively acquiesce, seeking "peace at any cost." Another pattern of decision-making is that of those who are very idealistic and think that they must make a perfect choice every time, never making a wrong choice. They research their options meticulously and often end up in the paralysis of analysis, but they are convinced that their conclusion and choice is always right. None of these approaches is more right than another, for they all expose our self-oriented, self-assertive, and self-protective tendencies in decision-making.

Decision-making for Christians

Decision-making among Christians seems to be even more complicated. Christian religion often advocates that we need to choose to be more committed, to decide to be more dedicated, to consent to be more consecrated. There's no "rest" in that, for it is never enough. Evangelical humanism fails to understand that human commitment is just another form of "works" salvation. All we can commit is sin, and even that is derived from the diabolic source. Our only consistent choice is to be submitted to God for whatever He is committed to be and do in us. The commitment is on God's side. James wrote, "*Submit yourselves to God*" (James 4:7, KJV), and thereby we can "rest" in His sufficiency.

Christian religion suggests that we must discover, know, and make decisions in accord with the "will of God." This precise "will of God" is often viewed as if it were a predetermined plotted course, and we must go orienteering with our spiritual compass to find God's plotted course for our lives. Some consider searching for the "will of God" to be somewhat like water-witching for the source of God's hidden rivers. Others approach the "will of God" as if it were a maze wherein we are like rats trying to find our way to God's goal. Still others view the search for the "will of God" to be a random process of bouncing off of the walls of life. Christians are looking for the "will of God" in all the wrong places. As previously noted, the "will of God" is within us by spirit-union, and it always has to do with the expression of the character of Christ. We have the freedom to make any choice within the context of the empowering character of God. God doesn't care whether you drive a Chevy, or a Ford, or a Toyota; but He does care whether His character is exhibited while you drive whatever you choose. God doesn't care whether you choose a white shirt or a colored shirt, a print dress or a pant-suit; but He does care whether you allow for the "fruit of the Spirit" in your behavior while you wear whatever you wear. We

have great latitude and liberty in our decision-making as Christians - even in our relationship choices. Does this mean that everything is not black and white, but that there are "gray areas" of decision-making? No, behavioral expression is only expressive of godliness or sinfulness, but God's pure white character of godliness has myriad possibilities. Christians can "rest" in the freedom they have in Christ.

The contortions many Christians go through in their decision-making are a mockery of human function. Many Christians seem to be hog-tied with an endless list of limitations and perfectionistic expectations. They are "putting out fleeces" (cf. Judg. 6:36-40) to see if God will jump through the hoops and confirm their decisions. Others are "waiting on God" in indecision, failing to understand that indecision is itself a decision not to decide, and that is often a decision not to rely on Christ within. The passivism of sitting on our duff, twiddling our thumbs, and waiting for divine dynamite is not Christian decision-making. It has been said, "You can't steer a ship unless it's moving." Some are paralyzed and immobilized by the fear of making a mistake, of making a wrong choice, or a less than perfect decision in accord with the hidden "will of God." They become paranoid in their questioning, "Is this what I want to do, or is this what Jesus wants to do?" How do I decide? Such troubled restlessness is the neurotic norm of Christian religion.

On the other hand, there are Christians who put on a Pharisaical show of piety, claiming to have a "perfect God-sniffer" for their decisions, for they repeatedly say, "God told me to do this; God told me to do that." Have you noticed that their God often appears to be fickle in His change of direction? I have concluded that those who have to broadcast God's alleged direction in their lives are usually covering up for their own self-determined direction and decision-making.

It sounds so spiritual when a Christian says, "He chooses best who leaves the choice to Him," or "He chooses best who chooses what He chooses." God always chooses to express His character by the dynamic of His Son, Jesus Christ, in human behavior. That does not relieve us from decision-making. Perhaps it is better to say, "He chooses best who chooses to be receptive to the character expression of God by allowing the life of the living Christ to be lived out in his behavior." We are choosing creatures who are responsible to make choices in life. I have a statement that I repeat every morning as I begin a new day, "I am only responsible to be and to do what God wants to be and do in me today." This is a variation of Jesus' statement, "*Not My will, but Thine be done*" (Lk. 22:42, KJV), which does not deny the responsible choice that Jesus had to make in facing death.

So, how do we make choices in our will in accord with the "will of God" within us? I am convinced that the elusive "will of God" is only hidden or unknown to those who fail to recognize and affirm who they are in Christ and all they have been given in spirit-union with Christ. When we are secure in our identity in Christ and the sufficiency of Christ within, we face the choices of life by realistically considering the available options and alternatives, consulting with others if we consider such helpful (cf. Prov. 15:22; 20:18; Lk. 14:31), "listening under" that inner voice of God's personal revelation in spiritual discernment and obedience, and then following through with a decision of receptivity and availability to God, despite how foolish our action might seem both to our own minds and to others. We make a decision, trust our decisions, and act with confidence - willing to take responsibility for our willed decisions without blame-shifting, and willing to live with the consequences of our choices. Sure, we make some stupid, unwise choices (perhaps even selfish and sinful), and we may not like the consequences, but we are still God's children who move on to make additional choices of availability.

Christians will find soul-rest in their decision-making when they realize that their decisions are not earth-shattering, God-destabilizing, choices set in concrete. Christians need to be willing to make choices in accord with their intuition when "it just seems to be the right thing to do." Christians should feel free to "follow their dreams," for God has often given them those aspirations as 'the desire of their heart' (Ps. 20:4; 21:2). We can take comfort in the words of Samuel's commissioning of Saul, *"Do for yourself what the occasion requires, for God is with you"* (1 Sam. 10:7). In Augustine's words, "Love God and do what you will."² We are free to walk through life with the confidence that the divine "Yes" is operating within us. Having made a decision, we reckon it to be of God and assume it to be right, unless God makes an obvious exposure to the contrary, which He has every right to do. And even when He does so, it does not impinge on the legitimacy or propriety of our decision. There is great "rest" in that recognition.

There are some Christians who seem to think that because they have the "mind of Christ" and the "will of God" in spirit-union, every decision they make is automatically and spontaneously God's determination. They think that in spirit-union their will is fused with God's will, and all their choices are direct-drive determinations of God. On the contrary, I believe that our will, in conjunction with our mind and emotions, has been patterned with old choice-channels of actions and reactions of the past. After becoming Christians, our will-switch is spring-loaded to the routines of past choices. If we do not purposefully, moment-by-moment, choose and will to make a choice of faith to allow God to be operative in our behavior, then we will spontaneously revert to the old patterns. We are continuously responsible to make faith-choices to be receptive to the activity of Christ in our lives. Faith is a choice, a decision. It is not just the believing of accurate historical facts and theological doctrines. It is not a mystical devotion of attachment and reliance. Faith doesn't DO anything; it just receives God's character and activity. The Christian life is comprised of such faith-choices that allow for our receptivity of Christ's activity. In such a 'walk of faith' (Col. 2:6) our wills can "rest" from the pressure of performing and producing Christian behavior, and simply continue to receive the character and empowering of Christ. We do not "rest," however, from the necessity of having to make choices.

Soul-rest and the Conscience

Some consider the conscience to be an internal tormenter, a troublesome disturber of one's inner peace. It is regarded as a restrictive guilt index or a condemnatory resident judge. Those who regard the conscience as "the voice of God," and suggest, "Let your conscience be your guide," usually surmise in the midst of their failures that God's voice and direction are unrealistic and impossible, and God is extremely disappointed with their ability to listen and follow directions. There is certainly no "soul-rest" when we are suffering from the condemnation of past sins or present inadequacies and failures within our conscience

What is the Conscience?

The conscience is not a substantive organ within our physiological constitution. It is not a separate entity, property, utility, or faculty within our psyche. It is not an intrinsic authority wielding the whip of punitive consequences, nor is it an objectified compass of superintendence and direction. When the word "conscience" is used in the New Testament, it is a translation of the Greek word *suneidesis*, which means, "to know or perceive in conjunction with." The English word "conscience" is derived from the Latin word *conscientia*, which has the same meaning. What, then, does the conscience "perceive in conjunction with"? Is it regulated by an intrinsic

awareness of the universal will of God, an innate natural law acquired by natural revelation? Paul explained,

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God has made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that all are without excuse" (Rom. 1:18-20).

Making the case for the culpability of Gentiles as well as Jews, Paul continued,

"For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, those, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness, and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them" (Rom. 2:14-15).

Does our conscience "perceive in conjunction with" societal and familial norms and standards of propriety and morality? Does our conscience "perceive in conjunction with" a religiously imposed form of punishment for violating the parameters of a particular behavioral code of conduct? Yes, the conscience "perceives in conjunction with" what we have learned by natural revelation, and by familial, social, and religious recommendation, for the conscience "perceives in conjunction with" our individual "established attitudes and affections" in our mind and emotion. This individualized referent point of the conscience explains why some can have a "clear conscience" while others have a "guilty conscience" while or after engaging in the same activity. The conscience serves as a personal barometer forecasting back to the consciousness of our mind when we are contemplating the violation of what we believe to be true, or feel to be right. It seems to throw up a red flag of caution whenever we consider a volitional choice that is contrary to our established thoughts and affections. The words "conscious" and "conscience" are derived from the same Latin root, and this is understandable when we recognize that our conscience "perceives in conjunction with" our self-conscious awareness of our conscious thoughts and feelings.

We would be consigned to perpetual psychological restlessness if the conscience was an objectified and arbitrary regulator that issued a compulsory sense of "ought," or obligatory "must," or divine "thou shalt/thou shalt not" of performance. When we recognize the individual and subjective basis of the function of personal conscience, then we are not hopelessly caught in the bind of an imposed standard, but have the freedom and responsibility of rebuilding established attitudes by the 'renewing of the mind' (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:23). When we develop established attitudes that correspond with God's attitudes as revealed in Christ, the written revelation of Scriptures, and the personal revelation of the Holy Spirit, the conscience can serve as an open conduit of the certification of God's character, all the while guarding against the thoughts introduced by the tempter to accept a temporary self-oriented attitude in the present circumstance.

What about those who do not seem to have any prick of conscience? Repetitive violation of one's established attitudes can result in a 'seared conscience' (1 Tim. 4:2) that cannot locate any genuine "established attitudes" to "perceive in conjunction with." This is also true of those who adopt an attitude of relativism that refuses to accept any attitude or opinion as better than another. Such a "seared conscience" is also evidenced in those who refuse to question or

evaluate the motives of why they decide to do what they do, and what kind of character is being expressed in their behavior.

¹ Luther, Martin, *The Bondage of the Will*. Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell. 1996.

² Augustine (354-430). *Augustine's Love Sermon (1 John 4:4-12)*. Christian History Institute.
<https://www.christianhistoryinstitute.org/study/module/augustine/>

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