

The Inscrutable Question: The Conscience & the Problem-Solving Devices: Review, "The Patriot"; Grace Orientation

Tonight we will undertake a brief review of paragraph *E* in our study of the fifth compartment of the stream of consciousness, the conscience. That paragraph addresses the "Conscience and the Problem-Solving Devices." Our review will include the relationship of the conscience with the first three of the problem-solving devices: rebound, the filling of the Holy Spirit, and the faith-rest drill in the light of a question I received late this afternoon through e-mail from Casey Hunt. Here is Casey's observation and his question:

In an attempt to apply Sunday's class to *The Patriot*: the movie opened up with Mel Gibson's character [Benjamin Martin] thinking he was afraid that someday he would pay for his sins. We later learn what his sins were. Do you think the main reason for his inactivity during the advent of the war was due to a guilt complex from his past sins? I think he was afraid of experiencing that violent rage that he showed signs of after the death of his first son [Thomas Martin]. Is this a good illustration of guilt neutralizing God's perfect plan for a believer?

Here is my response back to Casey:

Casey:

You are an educated man. Now I really hate you. I commend you on your observation for I had completely forgotten that aspect of the movie. And, of course, you are right. His sins were so horrible in his own eyes that he couldn't bear them and he was certain that God would sooner or later exact revenge. The only way he felt he could avoid such impending disaster was to avoid the current fight but nevertheless he carried around with him a dread that affected his decision-making process. His human-viewpoint solution was to become a pacifist and he justified his decision by hiding behind a professed loyalty to the Crown. Only when Tavington unleashed violence, equal to that which he had imposed upon others, upon his own son did he feel impelled to release himself from that loyalty. He reverted back to the same violence that drove him to similar atrocities during the French and Indian War. Following that he was driven to become a leader in the South Carolinians' effort against the British. At that point he takes on the persona of Francis Marion, a guerrilla fighter whose leadership qualities were able to inspire others to hold against Cornwallis, a hit and run strategy that, historically, assisted Washington's efforts in the north.

There are such things as war crimes and it is quite possible that justice balanced its books on Benjamin Martin. Nevertheless, it is very difficult to measure the motivations of men whose most precious possessions in life—their children, are threatened and even slaughtered, and their freedom is suppressed under a growing tyranny. The believer is under obligation to protect and preserve each and the measures he takes under the crucible of experience may involve thoughts, decisions, and actions that in times of peace would be rejected out of hand. That's why war is a dirty business and those who become entangled in its vortex often have guilt complexes when it is over. The modern term is post-traumatic stress syndrome. This is psychobabble for the problems that come from extreme outside adversity that must be managed in a moment but whose effects cannot be easily undone. The great reward for those who get involved in such high-pressure decision-making is freedom. It doesn't come at an easy price and some go to their graves with a perpetual remorse. This can be seen also in the elderly "Tom Hanks" character [John Miller] in *Saving Private Ryan*.

[NOTE: A review of rebound, the filling of the Holy Spirit, and the faith-rest drill followed with emphasis on the character, Benjamin Martin, in *The Patriot*.]

4. Grace Orientation

1. The conscience that is founded on biblical norms and standards is equipped to deal with many of the injustices that are typical in life.
2. Rather than becoming angry and bitter and striking out through violence, revenge, and crusader arrogance, the believer with a strong conscience is able to turn victim status into a means of evangelism.

1 Peter 2:18 - Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable.

v 19 - For this finds favor if, for the sake of conscience toward God, a man bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly.

v 20 - For what credit [with God] is there to you if [and let us assume it is true for the sake of argument] when you sin and receive punishment for your wrongdoing and you endure it. What credit is there for enduring just punishment [divine discipline]? None. [If you do what is right and suffer, this finds favor with God. This is undeserved suffering and is a blessing from God. Such suffering glorifies God. Misery from divine discipline is self-induced and does not glorify God].

v 21 - But if when you do what is right and you suffer for it and you endure [Royal Law], this is grace associated with God [for you have been called for this purpose since Christ also suffered for you].

3. This passage was originally directed toward those who were in a condition of slavery and, of course, still does.
4. However, its application is to be utilized by any who are subordinates in any system of authority.
5. Every system of authority can be abused and is. Consequently, when the believer finds himself the victim of unfair and unjust authority he must rely on his conscience to manage the circumstances involved.
6. The conscience is instructed in 1 Peter 2:18-20 to develop the norm and standard of endurance with patience under pressure.
7. Verse 18 begins the passage with a mandate: the servant is to submit with respect to his master, both the "good and gentle" as well as the "unreasonable."

Colossians 3:22 - Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord.

v 23 - Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men;

Colossians 3:24 - knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.

v 25 - For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality.

8. A conscience that is grace oriented to the Royal Law is prepared to bear up under the most intense of pressures that come from unfair treatment.
9. The man with the weak conscience complains, foments rebellion in others, and becomes a loser without portfolio.
10. The believer who is grace oriented has the poise under pressure to submit and to do so without wrong motivation.