



Discussions with My Friend: An Introduction to the Gospel of Jesus Christ By David Stewart

Chapter 05: Conscience: The Divine Light Within



Socrates recognized that the divine light or conscience of each person retains knowledge from before we were born, and attests to the immortality of the soul.^[1] Every person, regardless of upbringing, understands innately that dishonesty, theft, murder, adultery, and other sins are wrong. Sociology, neurophysiology, and behavioral science to date have not produced satisfactory explanations for conscience. Conscience is not an adaptive mechanism of Darwinian survival, as it encourages honesty and uprightness often against self-interest.

The universality and divine origin of this innate knowledge between good and evil has been recognized from the earliest times and among non-Christians as a divine gift to guide mankind. Confucius taught: "The superior man understands what is right; the inferior man understands what will sell...The superior man thinks of virtue, the small man thinks of comfort... The superior man will watch over himself when he is alone. He examines his heart that there may be nothing wrong there, and that he may have no cause of dissatisfaction with himself." The Roman statesman Cicero wrote: "the greatest theater for virtue is conscience;" Seneca noted: "Let us satisfy our own consciences, and trouble not ourselves by looking for fame;" German philosopher Immanuel Kant observed: "Two things fill me with constantly increasing admiration and awe, the longer and more earnestly I reflect on them: the starry heavens without and the moral law within." George Washington stated: "Labor to keep alive in your breast that little celestial fire, called conscience." Abraham Lincoln declared: "I desire so to conduct the affairs of this administration that if at the end I have lost every other friend on earth, I shall at least have one friend left, and that friend shall be down inside of me." Albert Einstein wrote: "The most important human endeavor is the striving for morality in our actions. Our inner balance and even our very existence depend on it. Only morality in our actions can give beauty and dignity to life." Mahatma Gandhi observed: "In matters of conscience, the law of majority has no place." Former U.N. Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjold stated: "Never 'for the sake of peace and quiet' deny your own experience or convictions."

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Genesis teaches that in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve received knowledge between good and evil that has been transmitted to their descendants. This knowledge makes man, at least in this respect, "as the gods"^[2] and differentiates him from beast. The Book of Mormon prophet Moroni observed the power of conscience in helping individuals to find and follow truth:

"Take heed, my beloved brethren, that ye do not judge that which is evil to be of God, or that which is good and of God to be of the devil. For behold, my brethren, it is given unto you to judge, that ye may know good from evil; and the way to judge is as plain, that ye may know with a perfect knowledge, as the daylight is from the dark night. For behold, the Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that he may know good from evil; wherefore, I show unto you the way to judge; for

every thing which inviteth to do good, and to persuade to believe in Christ, is sent forth by the power and gift of Christ; wherefore ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of God. But whatsoever thing persuadeth men to do evil, and believe not in Christ, and deny him, and serve not God, then ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of the devil; for after this manner doth the devil work, for he persuadeth no man to do good...Wherefore, I beseech of you, brethren, that ye should search diligently in the light of Christ that ye may know good from evil; and if ye will lay hold upon every good thing, and condemn it not, ye certainly will be a child of Christ."[\[3\]](#)

Individuals can become more sensitive to conscience as they give it heed, or can deaden it as they violate its promptings. The first step in our quest to find God's truth and to purify our lives is to bring our personal conduct into harmony with our conscience. If we do not give heed to the divine light inside, how will we be able to hear the still small voice of God amid the tumult of the world?

[\[1\]](#) Socrates, Phaedo.

[\[2\]](#) Genesis 3:5,22

[\[3\]](#)Moroni 7:14-19