

Lesson 14

FORMATION OF CONSCIENCE



The Commandments which God gave in the Old Testament and the commandment of love which Jesus gave in the New Testament help man to lead a good life. **The essence of these commandments is to keep away from evil and do good.** In spite of that, man falls a prey to evil when we commit sin, we are troubled and we repent of that. It is the divine power within each human being that helps to do this.

Conscience

By birth, each human being has an internal power. This inner power tells us what to do and what we should not. On each occasion, this eternal power persuades us to do good. **Conscience is the powerful interior voice that inspires a person with good and persuades him to act accordingly.** Conscience is the voice of God. Though this voice comes from the interior of man, it is not human, it is divine.

Conscience tells us to give up evil and to accept goodness. If we heed to the voice of conscience from the heart, it will lead us to goodness. When we rebel against conscience, evil would grow in us. The Second Vatican council teaches us, referring to the conscience, that it is a law written by God in each man's heart.

Good and Evil in Man

Man loves goodness and wishes to do good. He likes to have values like truth, Justice, sacrifice, love etc. the different expressions of goodness. He has the freedom to practice them too. The decision man takes in this freedom is known as the decision of the conscience.

We often see good people doing evil acts. The reason for this is the influence of evil in man. The conflict between evil and good is ever present in man. St. Paul speaks of it: "I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do" (Rom 7:18-19).

Conscience in the Holy Bible

In the Old Testament, the word 'conscience' is not usually used. In the Old Testament, conscience meant heart. It is the heart that inspires us to do good. But in the New Testament St. Paul teaches in detail about conscience. He says that, those who have not accepted the commandments of God should act according to the voice of their conscience. They have not received any special law. At the same time they have naturally received the law in their heart. Their obedience to the conscience is equal to keeping the law.

Conscience and Faith

For those who believe in Jesus, the faith itself is the basis for their conscience. Hence, the faithful will have to form their conscience according to the principles and teachings of their faith. The moral voice formed according to Christian faith is Christian conscience.

The spirit of God permeates all men, Gods children. Hence we say the voice of conscience is the voice of God. But, for Christians who have received the Holy spirit through baptism and anointing, this spirit will specially help them in the decisions of their conscience. St. Paul teaches us, "my conscience is inspired by the Holy spirit" (Rom. 9:1).

Formation of Conscience

Good conscience helps man, who does evil in spite of his desire to do good, to lead a life in goodness. Formation of good conscience is necessary for true Christian life. **The first thing in the formation of good conscience is to discern what is good and what is evil.** It is necessary to have training for this discernment. For us Christians, the Word of God and the teachings of the Church will help us to get this knowledge.

The second thing is the training of the mind to take decisions giving up evil and accepting the good. This training gives the mind the power and maturity to face the challenges of living in goodness and to remain faithful to it. It also gives the attitude to do good and love God and our brethren. These are the important factors in the formation of conscience.

Formation of Christian Conscience

Christian conscience is that conscience which is formed according to the Word of God and the teachings of the Church. If we have not formed a good conscience, our decisions may not be right. Hence, we must take care to form a Christian conscience. The following factors will help us in this:

1. **Get proper knowledge:** We must gain knowledge and training in human and Christian values. Thus we get knowledge to evaluate good and evil in all circumstances.
2. **Clear the doubts:** Decisions should be taken in the light of the right knowledge of good and evil. If we have any doubts, either read good books or consult people with knowledge and discretion. Then we will be able to take proper decisions.
3. **Preserve the freedom of mind:** Conscience can work only in an atmosphere of freedom. We must try not to lose the freedom of conscience by one's own selfishness and undue influence of other people. Then only, we will be able to act according to the promptings of the conscience.

4. **Seek the assistance of the Holy Spirit:** We need the power of the Holy spirit to discern good and evil, to choose the good and act accordingly. The gifts of the Holy Spirit will help us here. Hence we have to pray to the Holy Spirit.

A conscience formed according to the Word of God and teachings of the Church will help us to grow in true discipleship of Christ. If we have formed the right conscience, we will be able to examine our conscience sincerely and regulate our lives accordingly. A good Christian conscience is the right means for the true Christian life in this world with different problems and difficulties.

Let us Pray

O God, who inspires us to avoid evil and do good through our conscience, help us to live according to the voice of our conscience.

Read the Word of God and Narrate

Rom. 2:1-16.

Word of God for our Guidance

“They must hold fast to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience” (1 Tim 3:9).

Let us Do

Discuss with your friends on conscience and promptings of the conscience.

My Resolution

I will listen to the voice of my conscience and act accordingly.

Find out the Answer

1. What is conscience?
2. What is the relationship between faith and conscience?
3. Why is it necessary that we must form conscience?
4. What are the factors necessary to form Christian conscience?
5. How does conscience help us?