

FAITH AND A GOOD CONSCIENCE

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"That thou by them mightest war a good warfare; holding faith and a good conscience, which some having put away, concerning faith have made shipwreck." 1Timothy 1:18, 19

I have been frequently led to admire, and I trust, not only to admire, but to feel also, the Epistles of Paul to Timothy. There are in them, to my mind, two very striking features. The one is the mellowed tone which is diffused through them. "Paul, the aged," writes as one meekened and softened by his long and wearisome pilgrimage; therefore, though he writes with authority as an apostle, yet that authority is tempered by a spirit of meekness and gentleness, produced by a long series of afflictions and consolations, as well as by the recollection of what he had been before grace come into his heart. He never forgot that he had "persecuted the church of God," had been "a blasphemer and injurious;" and the continual recollection of what he had been before the Lord called him by his grace, kept him humble at his feet. Therefore, he says, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners; **of whom I am chief.**" Still the chief of sinners, though "not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles;" "less than the least of all saints," though he had been caught up to the third heaven, and there had heard unspeakable words, which were not lawful (**or possible**) for a man to utter. The other feature in these two Epistles is, the fatherly tone in which he writes to Timothy, as being "his own son in the faith;" not using the language of haughty dictation, as though Timothy were to bow down to him sitting in the professor's chair; but writing with authority as his father in

Christ, and yet that authority softened down by the affection which he had towards him as his "dearly beloved son." Thus the warnings and instructions which he gives to his son Timothy, however solemn and faithful they are, are yet mingled with the utmost tenderness of affection and feeling. And it is this union of faithfulness and affection which gives point to all instruction, as well as edge and force to all reproof. The minister who stands up in the name of God to take forth the precious from the vile, should combine **(and he will combine them, if the Lord the Spirit is his teacher)** the extremest faithfulness with the tenderest affection; so that he may come up to that standard laid down to Paul, "speaking the truth in love." Truth must needs offend; it is a sword with a keen and cutting edge, and must needs inflict deep and painful wounds in the conscience. But we are not called upon to jag the edge by harshness in our manner and spirit, but so to use the word of truth, "the sword of the Spirit," that it may do just God's work and no more, that it may just cut between flesh and spirit, natural religion and spiritual religion, and yet not so cut as to cut away anything of God's implantation, or to wound the tenderest heart that God himself has touched with his finger. But as in other cases, here we continually err. I know not what you feel, but I know that I have never done anything right in my life; I have never said a word, nor ever done an action that could bear a strict and spiritual scrutiny. Something of my own has marred it before, in, or after it passed from me. If it came from right motives, some base and selfish feeling mingled with it and defiled it. Nor have I ever been able to wield the sword of truth aright. My heart has staggered, and my hand wavered between the two extremes of harshness and softness; and all I seem to have said and done has been clumsily and ineffectually, like one fighting with an enemy in a dream, aiming right, but the

sinews weak, and the arm unsteady, and every blow powerless and vain.

The apostle then lays before his son Timothy most solemn warnings and most profitable instruction; and yet the blessed Spirit so filled his heart with tenderness, and so anointed his pen with authority and power, that one alive in God's fear cannot recoil from the one or the other. And as our text seems to contain in it this admixture of instruction, warning, and tenderness, I shall, without farther preface, simply take up the subject as it lies before me, believing that rightly to divide "the word of truth," and to divide the living from the dead, is a division more suitable with the Scriptures, and more profitable to the people of God, than a formal division into heads of my own making, which were I to adopt, I should probably not be able to adhere to. "That thou by them mightest war a good warfare; holding faith and a good conscience, which some having put away, concerning faith have made shipwreck."

"That thou **by them**." What does the apostle mean by this expression? It refers to the words that immediately precede. "This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies that went before on thee, that thou **by them**" **(that is, by the prophecies, according to them, in obedience to them, acting with reference to them)**, "mightest war a good warfare." In the primitive church!: there were persons who were called prophets (1Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:11). Their office was not, generally speaking, to predict future events,—they were not prophets in the Old Testament sense of the word, but they were what we should call, in modern language, "preachers." This seems evident from the effect ascribed to their prophesying (1Corinthians 14:24-25). "But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is

convinced of all he is judged of all: and thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth." Here we see what the effect of their prophesying was. The prediction of future events could not "judge," that is, condemn a casual hearer, nor make manifest the secrets of his heart; but the preaching of truth in the power of God the Holy Ghost, is every way calculated to convince of sin, and lay bare the hidden recesses of conscience. Again, we read, "Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other" **(that is those who sit by)**, "judge," that is, decide, if he preaches truth. They could not judge whether he predicted future events aright, for that could be proved only by their fulfilment. "For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted." The prediction of events to come, communicates neither instruction nor comfort at the time, but preaching does both. And, therefore, we gather that these prophets were not prophets in the strict sense of the term, as predicting events to come, but preachers of God's truth. Now it seems that when Timothy was set apart for the work of the ministry, there were certain prophecies uttered by those preachers in the church to which Timothy belonged. No doubt, lessons of instruction how Timothy was to conduct himself; no doubt, lessons of deep and solemn warning, that he should be faithful to the Lord that had put him into the ministry; no doubt, encouragements also and promises that the Lord would stand by him, and enable him to do that work to which he had called him.

The apostle then, writing to Timothy, reminds him of what was spoken to him, when he was set apart for the ministry. "This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them," that is, "that thou" in strict compliance with them, "that thou" by their weight and their power resting upon thy

mind, "that thou" by the application of them to thy conscience, and by walking in the path to which those prophecies pointed, "that thou," in strict accordance with those solemn words of instruction which were dropped from the mouth of God through his prophets, "mightest war that good warfare" to which thou art called. This seems to me to be the most consistent and the most scriptural interpretation of the words.

But we gather from this apostolic charge, that Timothy was a soldier of Jesus Christ. He says to him, in his second Epistle (2Tim. 2:3,4), teaching him under figures, "Thou, therefore, endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier." Timothy then had been enlisted under the banner of the Lord. He was no voluntary recruit, but the Lord "had chosen him to be a soldier," had selected him out of others for the express purpose that he might fight his battles, had called him by his grace, and quickened him by his Spirit, had put upon him the whole armour of God, equipping him with "the breastplate of righteousness, the sword of the Spirit and the shield of faith, having shod his feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace, and girt his loins about with truth," and thus sent him into the field to war a good warfare, and to fight under the banner of Immanuel.

The apostle then, addressing him as a "faithful soldier of Jesus Christ" tells him that he must "war a good warfare," and gives him some instructions how he is to war this "good warfare," by holding "faith and a good conscience," solemnly warning him that some who had put away "a good conscience, concerning faith had made a shipwreck." The first part of his injunction is "to war a good warfare." This implies that there is such a thing as warring a bad warfare

for if there were no warring a bad warfare, there could be no meaning in the charge, that he was to war "**a good** warfare." There are many who are guilty of this capital charge. Those, for instance, war a bad warfare who fight on the side of error against truth: this comprehends all Arminians, Arians, Socinians, and other opposers of the doctrines of grace. Those too war a bad warfare who fight against the convictions of their own consciences, and against all the solemn warnings that are in the word of God against the impenitent, the ungodly, and the unbelieving. But the charge given to Timothy that he was to take especial heed to war "a good warfare," implies that it is possible even for the soldier of the Lord to war a bad warfare. The good soldier then wars a bad warfare, when he goes out into the field of battle in his own strength, wisdom, and righteousness, "at his own charges," as the apostle elsewhere speaks (1Corinthians 9:7), equipped in armour of his own making, and his own putting on. Of this folly those are guilty who attempt to convince people of the truths of religion by argument, to make proselytes to a certain scheme of doctrine, and to enlist under the banner of party those whom the Spirit of God does not call by his quickening grace.

He, too, wars a bad warfare who contends for truth in a bitter spirit, who dips his words in vinegar, and cannot spread forth a table with the milk and honey of the gospel, without setting on it the wormwood and gall of his own morose temper.

He also wars a bad warfare, who distresses "the poor and needy" of Gods family. He plays the part of Amalek, who fell upon the rear of Israel's army, and "smote the hindmost of them, even all that were feeble, faint, and weary" (Deuteronomy 25:18), and, therefore, unable to keep up with the march of Israel.

Timothy was a minister of righteousness, and yet Paul warns him to war a good warfare. Ministers, then, of truth may be led aside into warring a bad warfare. Good men have preached the gospel in their own spirit; have built up hypocrites and distressed the living family; have sought to make proselytes to their own opinions, rather than to bring converts to the feet of Jesus; have gone forth in their own strength, as though they would beat down error by weapons of their own manufacture, instead of going as "poor and needy," weak and feeble, and hanging wholly and solely upon the strength of the Lord.

And so private Christians war a bad warfare, by fighting with weapons which are not put into their hands by the Spirit of God. The living soul sometimes finds a powerful working of sin in him, a rising up of base lusts, craving and hankering after forbidden things. Convinced of the guilt of these things, and of the hatred of God against them, he seeks to overcome them in the strength of the flesh. This is not warring "a good warfare," because he wars not against his passions with spiritual weapons, but encounters flesh by flesh, and employs the strength and wisdom of the creature to keep down the evil and corruption of the creature.

Others of God's children war not "a good warfare," by not keeping to the post which the Lord has assigned them in the battle. The Lord places each of his children in a certain post; some he chooses should be weak and feeble; others he chooses should be powerful and strong. Some he sends into the front ranks to fight manfully "the good fight of faith;" others he places in the rear, because he knows that they are not strong enough to fight against his enemies. He, then, whom God places in the front rank to fight his battles, that deserts his post through cowardice or love of lucre, wars not

"a good warfare;" he is a deserter from the post where the Lord has placed him. And he that rushes, uncalled, into the front rank, when the Lord has assigned him an inferior place; he that, instigated by his own pride and presumption, pushes himself into the pulpit, without the Lord's calling him up there, wars not a good warfare, by assuming a situation to which the Captain of armies has never appointed him. He too wars a bad warfare, that leagues with God's enemies, and deserts God's friends, that wears the regimentals of the corps in which he is enlisted, and yet is carrying on treacherous designs with the enemy. Are there not professors of religion, yea, some who we hope are God's people, that can be, as they say, "all things to all men," and change their creed according to their company, that desert the principles which they profess to hold in one place, when those principles are attacked in another? And thus wearing the dress, and receiving the pay of the great King, they through cowardice, or fickleness, espouse the part of the enemy.

Again; those war a bad warfare who hang on the outskirts of the army, watching every unguarded place, observing every wavering regiment, scanning with curious eyes the weakest points, and, perhaps, affording intelligence to the enemy. These are the spies and renegades that hang upon the flanks of the army of the LORD of Hosts. Are not some such here? you keen-eyed observers that are watching for the slips and falls of God's children, that are ready to catch up every incautious expression dropped from their lips, that are ever seeking to make a minister an offender for a word, and carp and cavil unless every syllable be squared or rounded according to your fancy, are not you warring a bad warfare?

But the apostle tells Timothy what weapons he must make use of in order to war "a good warfare." "**Holding faith and**

a good conscience, which some having put away, concerning faith have made shipwreck." These are the two weapons which the LORD of Hosts equips his champions with, and which he bids them hold fast. We will consider them separately, and see how appropriate and suitable these weapons are to the soldiers that fight under the Lord's banner.

The first weapon which he is to hold is "**faith**." It is not an implement for show, but for use; not to be suspended in the armoury, like the pistols and bayonets in the Tower, nor like a rusty broadsword over a man's chimney piece; but to be grasped and held. But before he can **hold** it he must **have** it. The weapon must be put into his hands. It is the King's gift, for faith is "the gift of God." It is that which is committed to him. "O Timothy," he says, "keep that which is committed unto thy trust." The weapon of faith, therefore, is put into the hand of the soldiers of the cross; not suspended in God's word, that armoury of truth; not admired as worn by the side of others; not a mere weapon in readiness for some nightly thief, which may never be needed for a whole life; but a weapon for daily use, first received and then held, and wielded in such a way as the Lord himself shall direct.

But what has faith to do in this "good warfare?" why should it be so important, so indispensable a weapon? Because every step of ground that we advance upon, we can only advance upon through faith; every enemy that we have to contend against, we can only contend against in faith; every promise that shall be for our support, every instruction which shall direct us how to act, every reproof and solemn rebuke that shall be for our spiritual chastisement, we can only receive by faith. And, therefore, the soldier, without the weapon of faith, stands naked and defenceless before his enemy. Think not yourselves, then, soldiers in the army of the LORD of

Hosts, unless you know something of what it is to hold the weapon of faith in your hands.

This "good warfare" is carried on against three principal enemies—the flesh, the world, and the devil; and each of these enemies so closely allied to ourselves, and each so powerful and so hostile, that they must surely overcome us, unless we are "strengthened with strength in the inner man." There is the flesh, with all its baits, charms, and subtle attractions continually laying its gins and traps for our feet; perpetually ensnaring us in some evil word or some evil work, and we in ourselves utterly defenceless against it.— Said I defenceless?—yea, eager to run into it, like the silly bird that sees the grains of corn spread in the trap, but thinks not, when it flutters around it, that the brick will fall and confine it a prisoner. So we, allured by a few grains of corn spread before our eyes, often see not the snare, until we are fast entangled therein. Faith, then, is that eye of the soul which sees the concealed hook; by faith we call upon the Lord to deliver us from snatching at the bait; and by faith, as a spiritual weapon, we cut at times the snare asunder. Oh, how defenceless are we, when the temptations and allurements of the flesh plead for indulgence, unless faith is in exercise, unless faith realises the hatred of God against sin, and brings into our consciences a sense of God's heart-searching eye, and his wrath against all transgression! But where the Lord has put this weapon of faith into the hand of his soldier, he will often strengthen his arm to wield it in these seasons of extremity, even though that weapon should cut and wound self.

How Joseph was enabled to resist the snares spread for his feet, by calling to mind the presence of the Lord! How he was strengthened to break asunder that bond which was fast twining round his heart, when faith sprung up in his soul, and

he said, "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God!" How the three children who were about to be cast into the burning fiery furnace, unless they would worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up, overcame that dreadful temptation to renounce their God and prove apostates, by living faith. How the worthies record in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, who wandered about in sheep-skins and goat-skins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented: "out of weakness were made strong and waxed valiant in fight," simply through that faith whereby they were enabled to see the invisible God and the glories of the unseen world! And how in this country, and in this very metropolis, martyrs have gone to the stake, and died horrible deaths, rather than renounce the Lord Jesus, simply and solely through the exercise of that living faith which the God of all grace had implanted in their souls! Oh, what a weapon faith is, when the lord does but give us power to wield it! How, as Hart says,

It cuts its way through hosts of devils While they fall before the word.

But when sin, temptation, and unbelief beat this weapon out of our hands, when it lies seemingly shivered at our feet, and we cannot get another such sword from God's armoury, how we stand naked and defenceless before our enemies. Therefore what need we have not merely of this heavenly grace in our souls, but to hold it fast and not let it go, lest the enchantress should catch our feet in her wiles and snares.

So again with respect to **the world**. What a snare the world is to God's people! Oh, the excitement of the past week! **{The week of the general election of members of Parliament for the City of London and Metropolitan**

boroughs.} How many of God's children has it ensnared! How they have been carried headlong into the whirlpool of politics! How anxious they have been that the side which they favoured should be triumphant, and how deeply interested in all that has taken place! How their hearts have been drawn away from Him who sitteth enthroned on the water-floods, holding the reins of government, and directing all things according to the counsel of his own will! But faith in a man's bosom in lively exercise will make him proof against such political agitation, such carnal excitement. He that can look upon a suffering Jesus, that can view with eyes of faith an agonizing God, who receives into his soul dewdrops of atoning blood, and manifestations of redeeming mercy, who longs after some secluded spot, where he can hold sweet communion with the risen Lord of life and glory, what interest can he feel who holds the helm of politics, or who stands at the head of the poll? But only so far as faith realizes these eternal realities, and the soldier of the cross holds his weapon fast, can he overcome that intoxicating spirit of political excitement which now makes well nigh every heart to beat and every eye to glisten. Only by faith leading him into some spiritual sympathy and communion with heavenly things can he view these exciting scenes as an empty pageant, a gaudy show that is passing away with all its actors into an eternity of woe.

So again when Satan comes in with his fierce temptations and fiery darts, what but faith can enable the soul to stand up against them, as the apostle says, "above all having the shield of faith wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked" (Ephesians 6:16). Nothing but faith in God, in his power and presence; nothing but faith in Jesus, in his blood and his righteousness; nothing but faith in the Holy Ghost, as lifting up a standard in the heart by means of his divine operations; nothing but faith in a triune God can

enable the soul to battle against Satan's assaults. Therefore see how indispensable faith is to fight a good fight, yea, so indispensable that a good fight is called emphatically "the fight of faith;" "fight the good fight of faith" (1Timothy 6:12), implying that true faith will enable a man to come off more than conqueror through every battle and to survive every conflict.

But the apostle adds another word, and a very solemn word it is, "holding faith," he says, "and a **good conscience**, which" **(that is a "good conscience," the word in the original being in the single number)** "some having put away, concerning faith have made shipwreck."

There is another weapon, then, which the soldier of the cross has, and holds—"a good conscience." We find that, in the apostle's time, there were characters who held faith, or rather what they called faith, and put away "good conscience." He mentions by name, "Hymeneus and Alexander, whom he had delivered unto Satan," that is, excommunicated them out of the church, as heretics and blasphemers. But if to have put good conscience away, stamps a man as unfit for the visible church of God, it behoves us to search whether we have this weapon at our side, and in our hand. What does the apostle, then, mean by "a good conscience?" I believe he means a conscience alive in God's fear, a spiritual conscience, a tender conscience, what he calls, in another part, "a pure conscience:" "holding faith in a pure conscience," that is, purified from ignorance, from guilt, from the power of sin, "a conscience void of offence toward God and men." Wherever, then, there is living faith in the soul, there will be united with it "a good conscience." The Lord never sends forth a soldier to fight his battles with the weapon of faith only, he puts faith in one hand and "a good conscience" in the other. And he that goes

forth with what he thinks to be faith, and casts aside "a good conscience," will manifest himself to be one of those characters, who "concerning faith make shipwreck."

This is a solemn word of warning for you, that despise the workings of conscience, that think it legal, that are all for faith, and scorn all admonitions of an inward monitor. May the Lord apply it to your souls, lest you should prove to be one of those characters, who, having put away "a good conscience," "concerning faith! will make shipwreck."

But why is it called "a good conscience?" Because it comes down from God, who is the author of all good, the giver of "every good gift, and every perfect gift." There is none good but he (Matthew 19:17), and there is nothing good but what he himself implants and communicates. This weapon of a good conscience, that the Lord arms his soldiers with, works with faith, as well as proves its sincerity of faith, and tests its genuineness and reality. Faith, without a good conscience, is dead. It bears upon it the mark of nature, and however high it may rise in confidence, or however it may seem to abound in good works, it is not the faith of God's elect, of which the end is the salvation of the soul.

But it may be asked, how does a good conscience work with faith? What is the connexion between these two weapons, and how do they mutually support and strengthen each other? In this way. What faith believes, good conscience feels; what faith receives, good conscience holds; what faith embraces, good conscience rivets fast; when faith is weak, good conscience is feeble; and when faith is strong, good conscience is active. They grow and they wane together, and like two stems from one root together do they flourish and fade. For instance, sometimes through cowardice we shrink back from the post to which God has assigned us. How glad

should I often be never to mount a pulpit again. How willing should I be, at times, to retire to some sequestered spot, to live a quiet and secluded life, and be set free from all the trying exercises of the ministry, and all the arrows that presumptuous professors and ungodly men shoot at every one who desires to be faithful. But I feel that this cannot be; I have put my hand to the plough and dare not look back. "A good conscience" begins to work. What! to leave the Lord's work, and slink away, because the arrows fly thick and fast! To desert one's allotted post! Why, a sentinel that leaves his beat because the night is cold, or the enemy near, runs a risk of being shot. He has deserted his post through effeminacy or cowardice. He does not "endure hardness," or he turns back in the day of battle.

Sometimes, on the other hand, as I hinted before, there is that in us, which would push us out of the place which God has assigned us, would thrust us forward, when the Lord's inward work would keep us back. Here too, "good conscience" begins to work. It manifests the secret presumption of those steps; its acute ear detects the hollow ground upon which we are walking; its piercing eye discovers the volcano, near the crater of which we are treading; it checks the onward step, and realizing some measure of the displeasure of God against those who slight his word, brings back the soul to its right place, the spot where the Holy Ghost has himself set it down. Thus, if a man goes too forward, "good conscience" pulls him down to his place. If a man slink backward, "good conscience" pushes him forward into the spot which God has assigned him. Thus "good conscience" keeps the soldier at the post where the God of armies has placed him.

So, when the flesh presents its tempting baits, and comes forward with all its allurements, "good conscience" is the

sentinel on the watch. "Good conscience" descries the wriggling serpent gliding through the grass; sees the crest and hears the hissing of the adder. Before the rattle-snake springs forward, it hears the rattle, and begins to alarm and warn the soul of the dangers unperceived by all but itself. Thus "good conscience," as a watchful sentinel sounding the alarm in the soul, pulls the soldier back from the dangers that beset his path. It warns him of the mines that the enemy is working under his feet; points out the hidden stakes on which he might run and destroy himself; gives him notice of the stratagems and ambushes which the enemy is preparing. And thus, "good conscience," sounding its alarm in his ear, keeps him from the snare that is spread for his feet.

So, when the world, that powerful antagonist of the living soul, hangs out its charms, or brings forward its fear, when it comes in this shape, "If you join yourselves to the people of God, you will sink in everybody's estimation, you will lose your character, will injure your property, will offend your friends, will disgrace, as they consider it, your relations:" "good conscience" answers, "I am firmly convinced that those whom you despise are the people of the living God; that the experience which you ridicule is the truth of God; that the things I have received are things to live and die by; and therefore I will cleave to them at any cost, knowing that salvation is in them." Thus, "good conscience" keeps a man from being carried away by the fear of the world. So, when lukewarm professors seek to draw us aside into their smooth, and easy path, "good conscience" is upon the watch; "good conscience" calls to remembrance the sufferings of Jesus; and reminds us of the Lord's dealings with all his saints, and with our own souls in times past the Lord the Spirit drops his admonitions into the ear of conscience, and it testifies against all flowery paths of religion, and sounds aloud, "Through much tribulation must you enter the kingdom of

God." So, also, when Satan, the third antagonist of the living soul—the third enemy of the soldiers of the Lord, infuses base imaginations, and hurls his fiery darts, "good conscience," being alive in God's fear recoils with horror from his injections, and calls loudly upon the Lord to bruise him under our feet, and give us help and strength to resist his fearful insinuations. Or when this subtle enemy changes his garb, and transforms himself into an angel of light "good conscience," living under the Spirit's teachings, sees the swarthy skin under the robe of light, and resists his delusions as firmly as his blasphemies.

He then alone wars the good warfare, who goes forth with faith in the one hand, and "good conscience" in the other; faith strengthening conscience, and conscience strengthening faith; each doing their separate office, but still tending to one end; each accomplishing the work which the Lord had appointed, and yet each fighting the Lord's battles, and bringing the soldier safe and victorious over his enemy.

But there were those in the apostle's time, as there are those in our time, who "put away good conscience." "All they wanted," said they, "was faith; what had they to do with conscience? What need they mind about sin? Sin could not damn them or do them any harm; sin could not blot their names out of the covenant; a child of God could not backslide, "for his new nature, argued they with logical dexterity," could not go backward, and his old nature never went forward, and so, between the two, backsliding was impossible. A true believer always stood firm in the liberty of the gospel, and was not to be entangled in the yoke of bondage. What then had they to do with this legal conscience? These characters are described by Jude (Jude 1:1-2) as "feeding themselves without fear;" and by Peter, "While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the

servants of corruption." Their very language testifies an absence of living faith. They had what they called "faith," but which would more properly be called, vain confidence, presumption, and delusion." Bolstered up by this, they put away "good conscience." They would not have the ballast in the hold, that they might sail the faster. They did not want exercises, temptations, doubts, fears, distresses, and soul conflicts; they wanted to hoist the main-sail to the wind. But this lightening of their ship by casting their lading into the sea, when they loose the rudder-bands, and hoist up the mainsail to the wind, will bring them into the same spot into which it brought the ship in which Paul was a prisoner. "And falling into a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the forepart stuck fast, and remained immovable, but the hinder part was broken with the violence of the waves." (Acts 27:41) That was the fruit of casting the wheat into the sea, and hoisting the mainsail to the wind. And those will meet with the same fate who cast out the ballast, and throw overboard "good conscience" as so much lumber and legality, who heave into the sea this burdensome companion, this moping creature that is always croaking between decks. Many professors in our day put away "good conscience." They want to travel faster than "good conscience" will allow. They love a few sins which "good conscience" remonstrates against. They like their strong glass, and a little worldly conversation, and a little merry-making and amusement. A Christian, say they, is to be a cheerful character, he is not to be ever crying and groaning and sighing, and to confine himself to a few poor, moping creatures like himself, but to be lively and agreeable, to go into the world, and let his "light so shine before men," that they may see his good works (Matthew 5:16). 'And' (**say others, of the same cast,**) in business, we must do as other people do. There is no carrying on trade now-a-days unless you do business as it is generally done. You must not

be so particular and so nice about drawing bills upon fictitious credit. If there is an advantage to be taken over an unwary customer, why it is quite reasonable to take it, and make the most of your superior knowledge. People,' he says, 'of a scrupulous conscience may indeed call it cheating and swindling, but we call it a matter of trade, all in the way of business. I don't see' he argues, 'why the professor of religion should be debarred from acting as others, or why he should suffer in the world, as he can never rise to be a respectable tradesman, unless he takes such advantages as other people take in the same line of business.' Now what is all this? It is putting away "a good conscience." It is casting aside that which God stamps in his word as a weapon for his soldiers to hold fast. It is manifesting the black mark of reprobation—a seared conscience. It is showing the cloven foot beneath the robe of profession. And what is the consequence? "Concerning faith they make shipwreck." That will be the fearful end, the awful termination of the voyage. And how do they make shipwreck? They strike upon some sandbank, or some hidden shoal, and when they are stuck fast there, the waves of God's vengeance, and the winds which he has held in his fists, rise in everlasting fury, beat against the ship, and dash it into a thousand pieces. As long as there were no shoals or rocks, they could ride gallantly over the waves, and outsail many a deeply laden vessel, but when they struck upon the reef, and the breakers beat over their heads, they soon went down into the boiling waves. Thus some of these gallant ships run upon the sandbank of open sin, and when they are firmly fixed there, God manifests his wrath in their consciences, the waves of his indignation beat upon them, and down they go to eternal perdition with all their sins upon their heads. Others seem to be making with crowded sails for the harbour. But just as they near the port, a sudden and violent gust dashes them against the pier-head, and they make shipwreck, at the very

moment when they think that they are about to enter, with flowing sheet, into the haven of eternal rest. Their false peace gives way on a deathbed, and they die in all the agonies of despair. And why do they make shipwreck? Because they sailed forth in a ship of their own providing; because the Lord never sat at the helm; because "good conscience" was never upon the look-out; because faith was never examining the chart; and because there was no anxiety nor earnest cry, that the heavenly Pilot would steer their bark through the shoals and sandbanks which lay in their course. But, on they went recklessly and carelessly; "sure," they said, to be saved; they never could be lost; they stood so strong in Christ, they had such a scriptural creed, and were so well satisfied with the security of the ancient settlements, and eternal covenant transactions, that they were certain of going to heaven." And thus driven on by presumption, and neglecting all reproofs, warnings, precepts, and rebukes, trusting to the mere letter of truth, and ignorant of heavenly power, they made shipwreck of that very thing in which they put all their reliance—their faith. Now, these characters never had living faith, the faith of God's elect. Had they been possessed of divine faith, they would have had "a good conscience" with it. And therefore, when the apostle says, "who having put away a good conscience, concerning faith have made shipwreck," he does not mean to say, they had made shipwreck of real faith, but in matter of faith, concerning that which they esteemed to be faith, but which, in reality, was daring presumption, of such faith as they had made shipwreck. That bark to which they trusted their lives, and in which they expected to sail into the harbour of endless bliss, foundered and went down, because it was not built, chartered, steered, and preserved by the hands of God himself.

Now, you whom the Lord, as you profess, has called out of the world, and out of the general religion of the day to stand by the side of the gospel truth, what know you of these weapons? Has God equipped you with his own hands? Has he girt the sword of faith by your side? Has he put this divine weapon into your hands? Examine the blade; look at its temper; mark its edge. Is it of the true Damascus sort? Has it been steeped in the waters of Jordan? Has it been framed in the heavenly armoury? What is the other weapon that accompanies it? Is it "a good conscience," a tender conscience; a living conscience, a conscience that trembles at God's word? We cannot often see our faith, but we can sometimes see our conscience. We cannot always rejoice in the Lord, but we can see whether we fear his great name. We cannot always triumph over our enemies, but we can sometimes observe whether there is a sentinel upon the look-out. Thus, if you want to know whether you have faith, look at faith's companion, see what faith is attended by, and if you find not "a good conscience," write death upon your religion. Throw away your sword; it is useless; it is of human manufacture; it will break in pieces when you have to encounter your enemy, the king of terrors; God's lightnings will shiver it then. But if the Lord has given you "a good conscience," a tender conscience, a pure conscience, he will strengthen your arm to fight "the good fight of faith." You will often think your sword is so short, and your arm so weak that you cannot fight the Lord's battles. But if he has given you "a good conscience," a conscience tender in his fear, he has put into your hands the sword of faith, and he will one day manifest it clearly, that he has himself equipped you with it, by giving you victory over all your foes. Oh, may the Lord raise up in our hearts, some sweet testimony, that we have "a good conscience," and then we shall have this blessed consolation, that concerning faith we shall not make shipwreck.