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I WANT A PRINCIPLE WITHIN
Charles Wesley, 1707-1788

“So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.” (Acts 24:16)

*Order my footsteps by Thy Word,
And make my heart sincere;
Let sin have no dominion, Lord,
But keep my conscience clear. ~Unknown*

The Bible has much to say about the importance of a Christian having a strong “inner man” (Ephesians 3:16). For instance the word *conscience* appears more than 30 times throughout the New Testament. The conscience has been described as the “rudder of the soul” or the believer’s “principle within.” One of the prime responsibilities of Christian living is to keep the conscience clear as to the things of God so that we might live worthy lives before our fellowmen. But the conscience must be continually enlightened and developed by an exposure to God’s Word if it is to serve as a reliable guide for our lives. A conscience that is allowed to become hardened and insensitive to sin will ultimately lead to spiritual and moral disaster. We must allow God to develop our conscience and then our consciences are able to develop us.

Charles Wesley was very strong in his teaching about the necessity of an enlightened conscience for believers. Part of the Wesleyan concept for the doctrine of holiness was that God’s people should be so sensitive to sin that eventually they would be able to live without known sin in their lives.

This song text first appeared in the 1749 edition of Wesley’s Hymns and Sacred Poems, with the title “For a Tender Conscience.” These words are still a worthy goal for our daily living:

- ♪ I want a principle within of watchful, Godly fear, a sensibility of sin, a pain to feel it near. Help me the first approach to feel of pride or wrong desire, to catch the wand’ring of my will and quench the Spirit’s fire.
- ♪ From Thee that I no more may stray, no more Thy goodness grieve, grant me the filial awe, I pray, the tender conscience give. Quick as the apple of an eye, O God, my conscience make! Awake my soul when sin is nigh and keep it still awake.
- ♪ Almighty God of truth and love, to me Thy pow’r impart; the burden from my soul remove, the hardness from my heart. O may the least omission pain my reawakened soul, and drive me to the grace again which makes the wounded whole. AMEN.

Amazing Grace – 366 Inspiring Hymn Stories for Daily Devotions
By Kenneth W. Osbeck

“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.” Matthew 28:18 – 20

