

The
Souls Looking-Glass,
lively representing its
Estate before
GOD:
With a Treatise of
CONSCIENCE;

Wherein the definitions and distinctions thereof are unfolded,
and several Cases
resolved:

By that reverend and faithful Minister of the Word,
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Acts 24. 16.

I exercise my self to have always a conscience void of offense toward God and toward men.

CAMBRIDGE.

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For John Rothwell at the Sunne in Pauls
church-yard. 1643.

To the Christian Reader.

IT was the saying of Solon,* That there were many good laws made, but there was needed one law to make us put all those laws into effect. The like may be said concerning the books that are written nowadays. There are many good books written, but there is one book needed to make us put those good books into practice. Such a book is worth writing, and worth reading. And I know no reason but that this book (if the Spirit of God would write it in our hearts) may have this happy effect: For it is a book that will teach us how to come into the state of grace, and how to get and keep a good conscience. And whosoever reads a book

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* Solon was an Athenian statesman, lawmaker, and poet. He is remembered particularly for his efforts to legislate against political, economic, and moral decline in ... Athens. *Wikipedia*

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with a good conscience will make conscience to practice what he reads: For a good conscience is, as Aristotle said of justice, a synopsis and epitome of all virtues; it is a panacea to cure all soul-diseases; it is medicine to eliminate all the excesses of books.

There are four sorts of Conscience: Some bad and unquiet, some bad and quiet, some good and unquiet, some good and quiet. For a conscience to be bad and quiet is the worst temper that can be. Better to have a bad and unquiet than a bad and quiet conscience; better to have a tormenting hell in the soul than a fool's paradise. The best frame of conscience is the good and quiet conscience; this is a paradise upon earth, a foretaste and anticipation of heaven, a mansion for

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the Trinity to dwell in. Now this ensuing treatise will teach us how to purchase this precious jewel of a good and quiet conscience. A treatise very necessary in these unconscionable days, wherein most people have no qualms in sinning against conscience; and some have sinned so long against conscience that they have lost all conscience of sin. As St. Augustine says of the name of a Christian, so may I say of conscience, *Multi conscientiam habent, non ad remedium sed as iudicium*, Many have a conscience for their condemnation and not for their salvation. Conscience is the house of the soul. But this house lies in waste, and is in much ruin and decayed in these times, wherein there's never more science, but never less conscience. Conscience is a private

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judgment-day before the public Day of Judgment. And it is an ill presage that most people will never stand upright in the court of Heaven, because they stand accused and condemned in the court of conscience. Conscience is God's preacher in our bosoms. And it is a most certain rule: That that man that will not regard the preacher in his bosom will never regard the preacher in the pulpit. And the reason why the preacher in the pulpit does no more good than he does, is because the preacher in the bosom is so much despised and neglected. And therefore I have no doubt not that this book (these motives considered) will be very acceptable to all those that have or desire to have a good and quiet conscience. For as St. Bernard most excellently says, *Every man's conscience is his book; and all the books are written to discover and amend the errors of the book of conscience.*

To the Reader

Let those that read this book of conscience look into the book of their own conscience, and amend all the faults of that book by this.

The reverend author of this book was a minister very conscientious, and one that had a great ability given him by God to preach unto and work upon the consciences of people, to awaken the sleepy conscience, to inform the erroneous conscience, to settle the doubtful conscience, and to comfort the wounded conscience. His sermons were all dipt in conscience. And therefore, the subject of conscience is very necessary and welcome from such a preacher. It is true that this book is *Posthumum opus*, and comes out after the death of the author. But I hope it will be beneficial to revive the memory of him whose life and labors were deservedly precious in the esteem of

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God's people. And if conscience, though for a while blind, and dumb, and seared, and put out of all office, will notwithstanding at last be put into office, and made to see, speak and feel, to the utter destruction of an impenitent sinner; why may not a discourse of conscience, though long ago preached, be encouraged to revive and live for the salvation of those that shall have grace to rightly read it, especially considering that these sermons were perfected by himself in his lifetime?

I could say much in commendation of this worthy Divine, both in regard to his tireless pains in preaching—consuming his own body to save the souls of others, as also to his learning and exemplary piety; but I restrain. All that I will say is this: They that fully knew him did love and reverence him. And if any did disesteem him, it was because they did not fully know him.

To the Reader

He is now a shining star in the firmament of Heaven and there are hundreds of people who will bless God to all eternity for his pains. He doesn't need our praises, but our imitation.

All that I desire from you who read this short treatise is this: That you would either get a good conscience by the reading of this book, or bring a good conscience to the reading of it. Labor to add to the heavenly joys of this faithful servant of God by making this book a means of bringing your soul to those heavenly joys, which are at God's right hand forevermore; which are joys unspeakable and glorious—so great that, as St. Augustine says, *If one drop of the joys of Heaven should fall into Hell, it would swallow up all the bitterness of Hell.* And that God would make you heirs of this joy, is the prayer of your soul-friend.

EDM. C.

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An Enquiry after a man's Estate before God.

COLOSS. 4:8

Whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that he may know your estate and comfort your hearts.

THE estate of a man before God is the relation that he stands in before God, as God is the free fountain of all spiritual life and salvation, and the determiner of men's everlasting conditions, either in heaven or hell. So that when we question about a man's estate, we question whether he be in Christ or not; whether he has true grace, yes or no; whether he be one of God's children or not; whether he be yet no better than a reprobate.

There are three things to be considered in this definition of every man's estate. First, it is *a relation unto God*; not as a man is in himself, it may be rich, it may be poor in the world; but I speak here as he is in relation towards God, whether he be rich towards God, yes or no. I do not speak as a man is in regard to others; it may be he is a father or a son, a master or a servant, a king or a subject: but in relation to God, whether God's servant or not, God's child or not. *Salute Apelles*, says Paul; and he tells

us in what estate Apelles was in before God, namely, in an estate of approbation, *approved in Christ*. And the same Apostle speaks on the contrary of the unconverted Gentiles, that they were *strangers from the life of God*, Ephes. 4:18. Secondly, as it is a relation unto God, so it is a *standing* relation: That wherein he stands towards God, that is a man's estate before God. There is a difference between one that does sin and one that is in the state of sin. A child of God may sin, but he is not in a state of sin; you cannot call him a wicked man. So also there is a difference between one that does some good actions and one that is in a good estate. A carnal man may do some good things, but he is not in a good estate. The estate of a man is a standing thing, it is the relation that he stands in towards God. Thirdly, it is the relation that a man stands in towards God *as he is the free fountain of spiritual life and salvation*. It is not every standing relation towards God. For a man may be considered in relation to God as a Creator, and so the heavens and the earth and the very brute beasts stand in relation to God as they are his creatures; but they do not have this estate that we speak of, which is a relation to God as the free giver of spiritual life and salvation. (He is free, he may choose whether he will give it or not). Now this is a man's estate, the relation he stands in before God, whether the Lord has given him his saving grace, yes or no; spiritual life in Christ Jesus, yes or no; title to heaven and salvation, yes or no? This is the meaning when we speak of a

after a man's estate. 3

man's estate. It is said of Sodom, *They were sinners before God*: that is they were in a bad estate, a state of sin. It is said of Zacharias and Elizabeth, *They were both righteous before God*; that is, they were both in a very good state.

All Christians believe that there is a God: It behooves everyone now to consider in what estate he stands to his God. This is a great question that we who are ministers ought to demand of our people, to know their estates.

First, because we are shepherds, and are bound to carefully observe how it stands with our flock. If we do not labor to know your estates, we can never carefully observe your souls. Consider that place in the Proverbs, *Be diligent to know the state of your flock, and look well to your herds*. Where the wise man first requires that we should look well to our flocks, and then directs us in the manner how, *viz.* by being diligent to know their estate, how it stands with them.

Secondly, we are God's laborers; and we must know the estate in which our work stands, else we may labor and labor and all in vain; we may preach and exhort and call upon our people to hear and believe and obey, and all this may still be in vain, if we do not enquire in what estate they are. This is the reason why Paul could not forbear sending and enquiring how it stood with the Thessalonians, in what estate they were in, how it went with their faith, whether they kept it or not, lest the tempter had tempted them, and his labor should have been

in vain; for so it had been for all his preaching and teaching them if they had not been in a good estate; therefore, he sent to enquire.

Thirdly, we are to take care and charge of your souls. Now then, how can we be quiet if we do not know in what estate your souls are? A good father cannot be at peace if he does not know how it is with his children: What if they are sick? what if undone? Oh, it would comfort a good father to know that his children are in a good state! But if it were otherwise with them, though it would grieve him much, yet he would rather know it than not; for if he knows it, he can better tell what to do. So it was with the Apostle; his very bowels yearned for the Philip-pians, *Oh my poor people*, he thought, *I wonder what estate they are in. What if they totter? What if they miscarry? What if the devil has tempted them to sin and to apostatize? What if their conscience is troubled?* He could never be at peace till he knew their estate: *I trust in the Lord Jesus*, says he, *to send Timothy shortly to you, that I may also be of good comfort when I know your estate*. He had a great care of their souls, and therefore it would comfort his heart to know what estate they were in.

Fourthly, we are teachers, and therefore we must know the estate of our people: otherwise we are ignorant of what doctrine to provide for them, what points to handle among them. Paul in this epistle to the Colossians knowing only their estate in general, delivers an abundance of general precepts and exhortations unto them:

after a man's estate. 5

he describes to them the mystery of Christ, admonishes them to continue steadfast therein, to embrace the preaching of the word, to beware of philosophy and the vain traditions and sophistry of men, to take heed of doting upon ceremonies, which have all ended in Christ, to set their affections on heaven, to mortify the deeds of the flesh, to put off the old man; he warns them to be loving and humble: he bids wives to do their duties to their husbands, and husbands to love their wives; children to obey their parents, and parents to encourage their children; servants to obey their masters, and masters to deal well with their servants; all to continue in prayer, watchfulness, thanksgiving; to walk wisely towards those who are outside, to be careful of godly and holy communication. Thus knowing their estate only generally, he teaches them in general, and therefore now he concludes, as if he should say, *I speak somewhat generally because I do not know your estates in particular; and therefore I send to you Tychicus, a faithful good minister, that he may learn your estates in particular and deal with you answerably. It may be some of you want corrosives; it may be some of you want cordials; it may be some of you need to be searched and humbled, some of you to be encouraged and comforted: I have sent him to enquire into your estates in particular, that he may do accordingly. Whom I have sent to you for the same purpose, that he may know your estate and comfort your hearts.*

The use of this is threefold.

First, for instruction. Hence we may see that a minister does but his duty when he enquires into men's estates, how they stand before God: It is not prying into other men's matters; it is not busy-bodiness in other men's affairs; it is not a spirit of meddling. No, a minister does but his duty when he does it. How can a Physician apply true and proper medicine unless he enquire into the state of men's bodies? Now a minister is a physician to men's souls; and therefore he is to enquire into the state of men's souls, how they stand before God. They are men of Belial that say, *What, must the minister know all? And, Can there be nothing done but the minister must hear of it?* These are very evil speeches. The minister does but his duty when he is inquisitive.

The second use may be for reproof. If it be the duty of a minister to enquire into men's estates before God, then those people are to blame that will not make known their estates. What is the reason that so many men abide in a rotten estate, but because they are reluctant to reveal truly and fully what they are to God's ministers? No, many are like the prophet, *who say to the seers, See not.* They would not have God's ministers see what they do, nor see what they are. I confess that there are some who will reveal some things about their estates, but not all they know about themselves: They keep in the main; like some foolish clients who misinform their Counsel, making their case better than indeed it is, and so their cause miscarries. So some hide that which would give most light to judge

after a man's estate. 7

their estates: But this ought not be so. I can tell you an example of one that being troubled about his estate before God, and some ministers present, said *Oh, I will tell you all that I know of myself; I'll not hide a syllable from you: and if I be yet no better than a wretch, I beseech you to tell me plainly that I am so; and if I be in Christ, I beseech you prove it plainly to me.* This man took a right course, and thereby through God's mercy came quickly to the assurance of his own blessed estate and condition.

Thirdly, for exhortation. Let God's ministers know of your estates, that they may be able to speak to you accordingly. By this means they may speak words in due season, and like the heads of a home give every one his portion. If you had but a cut finger, would you not be glad to have the right bandage? and if you had a burning fever, would you not desire the right remedy? how much more in curing the sickness of the soul?

Now from the text itself, without any cutting up of the words, we may gather four propositions:

1. That there is an estate that every man is in, either an estate of grace or an estate of sin.
 2. That this state may be known.
 3. That every man should be willing to have his estate examined, that it may be known whether it is good or not.
 4. That a man can never have true comfort until it is known that he is in a good estate.
- I. For the first, That there is an estate that

everyone is in, either of grace or sin; We see this in Simon Magus: *I perceive*, says St. Peter, *thou art in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity*. See, he tells him what estate he was in, *viz.* a very bad estate, in a desperate and damnable condition. In this state of sin and misery are all they who are not renewed by Christ Jesus. And for the other, see an example, Rom. 16:7. *Salute Rufus chosen in the Lord*: The text there tells us what estate he was in, a very good estate; He was a man in Christ, *a choice man*, that is, a man in the state of grace and salvation. In this estate are all they that are called and sanctified and made new creatures unto God. Every man is in one of the two estates: there is no middle estate, which is neither the one nor the other, but in one of these two is the whole world. The reason is,

1. From everlasting, the world was divided only into two ranks, either Elect or Reprobates.
2. Here in this life, the world is divided only into two companies, either Godly or Ungodly.
3. On the day of judgement the Lord will divide the whole world only into two sorts, either Sheep or Goats.

II. For the second proposition, this estate may be known: Especially every man may come to the knowledge of his own estate before God. I do not say that every man may know whether he be elect or reprobate: yet this I say too, that a Godly soul may know that it is elected to life. The Apostle exhorts all who are godly

to give diligence to make their election sure, 2
Pet. 1:10. He that attains to that faith which the
Apostle calls *the faith of God's elect*, Titus 1:1,
and receives the word of God, as Paul says the
Thessalonians did and thence concludes they
were chosen of God, 1 Thess. 1:4,5, he may have
much assurance of his election. But though a
godly man may know he is God's Elect, yet for
reprobation the case is not the same: 1. Because
ungodliness is not always joined with persever-
ence. 2. Besides, God has many reasons why he
does not reveal men's reprobation to them: They
would then be outrageous in evil, desperate in
wickedness; there could be no order or govern-
ment in human life. Besides that, the form of
Christ's administration of his kingdom could not
be so as it now is: for Christ has commanded his
ministers to preach the gospel to every crea-
ture—to whole parishes and towns—no excep-
tions. Christ will not tell his ministers who the
reprobates are and who are not, that they may
preach unto all, and labor to work upon every
soul; and there is none in a parish but the minis-
ter must look upon him as one who may be
saved: Christ will not tell his people which ones
are reprobates, so that they may look upon
everyone as one who may be won to the faith for
anything they know: Christ will not tell the
reprobates themselves that they are repro-
bates, that every one of them may come to the use of
the means; How do they know but they may find
grace? yes and the Lord does seriously call them;
and it is their fault if they do not obey. It

is God's infinite mercy, that election, which is such a comfortable point, may be revealed to God's children; and that reprobation, which is so intolerable and bitter, is not revealed to the reprobate. Nevertheless let me add, that some particular men have known of their own reprobation, as Cain and Judas, etc. And there are shrewd signs of it: (I do not speak as though I mean to persuade any man that he is one, but only that he may take heed of these examples.)

1. Hating the known truth is a very shrewd sign: As when men know that godliness is pleasing to God, and yet they hate a man for it; when men know that the minister is commanded to rebuke sin, and yet they will spite him for so doing: this is a very shrewd sign. Paul persecuted the truth; *but yet* says he, *I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly*, 1 Tim. 1:13, intimating that if he had done it against knowledge he was in danger of finding no mercy. And therefore you who mock and hate those ways which God has commanded, I beseech you, take heed lest you sin unpardonably.

2. Absolute apostacy is a shrewd sign too of reprobation: When men have been very forward in the profession of the truth, and fall totally away and prove miserably profane, as the Apostle shows, Heb. 6:6.

3. Final impenitency. This is an infallible sign of reprobation, when a man lives in sin, dies in sin, and goes away without repentance. Luke 13:3, *Except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish*. There are many of us who have stood out

long in impenitency; let us take heed lest if we stay any longer, we fall upon this great evil.

I return to the point: A man may come to the knowledge of his own estate before God. I do not mean, whether he is in the state of election or reprobation: but he may know whether he is in the state of salvation or damnation, that is, whether he is in the way that leads to heaven or hell, whether he is in such a case that if he die now he shall be saved or not saved: Every man may thus know in what estate he is;

Because the word of God shows a man this: As for example, *He that committeth sin is of the devil.* Mark; the Apostle tells us what estate that man is in who lives in sin, in a very bad estate. So on the contrary; *He that hath this hope purgeth himself.* Mark; the Apostle tells us what estate that man is in who purges himself; he is in a very good estate, in a state of true hope in Christ. And so, 1Cor. 6:10, the Apostle names many who are not in the state of salvation but of damnation: if they die in such case, they cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven. So that if a man will but fear the Word, and believe that what God says is true, he may know his estate.

2. Without this knowledge a man cannot have an accusing or an excusing conscience in respect of his estate; but men may have, yes many men have, a conscience accusing them of being in a very bad estate; and many men have an excusing conscience that plainly does witness that they are in a very good and gracious estate.

I and my people are wicked, said Pharaoh. His conscience did accuse him of being in a bad estate. *I am holy*, said David; *I am thy servant*. His conscience told him that he was in the state of grace. So, you need not go far to know what estate you are in: there is in your bosom that which can decide the matter.

3. Men cannot desire nor flee from an unknown estate: But men are commanded to flee from a bad estate, and seek out a good one. Therefore, they may know the one and the other. *O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance*, says John to the Pharisees. He supposes these men might easily know that they were in a very bad estate, or else how could he say this to them?

Before I come to the Uses, let us consider these three things:

1. That every man living is born in a very bad estate. We all know it well; but oh, that we would consider it! *We are all by nature children of wrath*. Now here lies the question, "When did we change our estates?" We are in the same state of damnation wherein we were born, except we have come out of it. I say, here lies the question, Whether we have come out of it or no, whether we have mended our estate.

2. Consider that the greatest part of the world never mends their estates: But as they were born in a cursed estate, so they live and die in it. And I speak not this of heathen only; but alas! how many in the visible church do so? How many were there in the church of Philippi whom the

Apostle could not think of without weeping when he considered in what estate they were. So in the church of Corinth, not many wise, not many rich, not many noble called; but commonly the meanest in the eyes of the world were in the best estate towards God. No, more than so; Many of them who seek to get into a good estate miss it and perish. See Luke 13:24—*Strive to enter in at the straight gate*; Mark, it's a straight gate, and lets but few in—*for many shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able*. Here and there a few, even where the constant ministry is.

3. Consider that it is a marvelously hard thing to pass from state to state, from a bad to a good estate. There is a very vast gulf between the state of sin and the state of grace, and it is marvelously hard to pass it. These things premised, the Uses follow.

1. This point may be in many ways useful: First, for instruction. If God has made it possible for us to find out what estate every one of us is in, then it is certain he would have us go about and enquire after it. God might have left us to perish in our natural blindness, never to have known in what case we had been until we were past recovery. First, we are all wanderers from God and from the ways of peace, and therefore God might justly have suffered us forever to wander, and never to have been able to find out whether we had been right or wrong. Secondly, God has dealt so with some: He has suffered some to go on all their days blindfolded to Hell. Thus the Lord dealt with the scribes

and Pharisees; *Let them alone*, says he, *they be blind leaders of the blind: and if the blind lead the blind, they will both fall into the ditch*. You see how the Lord has dealt with some; and it is his mercy that he has not dealt so with us. Since God has made it possible for us to know, it is our duty to enquire after it: And that yet further for these reasons:

1. First, because the Lord commands it: *Examine your own selves whether ye be in the faith; prove your selves: know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?* Where you see the Apostle commands the duty of self-trial: And consider how he presses it upon us: *1. Do you not know what estate you are in? Then examine and enquire. 2. Do you think you are in a good estate? Look and prove it, and be sure you are not in error. Do you object that you do not know, neither can you know? No? Then your estate is very bad: find out some good tokens in you, except you be reprobates.* This command makes it a clear duty.

2. But a second reason to prove it our duty to enquire what estate we are in is, because without the knowledge thereof we can never have any true peace in our consciences: The conscience will be without peace so long as we are ignorant of what estate we are in: *Being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.* First, the Apostle shows their estate; they were in a state of justification: and from the knowledge of this they had *peace*. We are bound to get true peace to our consciences; Oh, what a lamentable

after a man's estate. 15

maze we are in until our consciences have peace!
And this they cannot have until we are fully ac-
quainted with what case we stand before God:
Acquaint thy self with God, and be at peace.

3. Thirdly,