

Clear Your Conscience, Part 2

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: B120724

by John MacArthur

A working conscience is one that's free from the burden of unchecked sin and unaddressed guilt. It's not weighed down by impurity or dulled by neglect. In a word, it's *clear*.

But how can we keep our consciences clear? How do we properly respond to guilt feelings in a way that keeps our consciences soft, sharp, and strong? Here are some simple, practical principles to keep in mind.

Confess and forsake known sin. Examine your guilt feelings in light of Scripture. Deal with the sin God's Word reveals. Proverbs 28:13 says, "He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion." First John 1 speaks of confession of sin as an ongoing characteristic of the Christian life: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (v. 9).

We should certainly confess to those we have wronged: "Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed" (James 5:16). But above all, we should confess to the One whom sin offends most. As David wrote, "I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I did not hide; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord'; and You forgave the guilt of my sin" (Psalm 32:5).

Ask forgiveness and be reconciled to anyone you have wronged. Jesus instructed us, "Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering" (Matthew 5:23-24). "If you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions" (Matthew 6:14-15).

Make restitution. God told Moses: "Speak to the sons of Israel, 'When a man or woman commits any of the sins of mankind, acting unfaithfully against the Lord, and that person is guilty, then he shall confess his sins which he has committed, and he shall make restitution in full for his wrong, and add to it one-fifth of it, and give it to him whom he has wronged'" (Numbers 5:6-7). The principle behind this law is binding on believers living in the New Testament era as well (cf. Philemon 19; Luke 19:8).

Educate your conscience. As we've discussed previously, a weak, easily grieved conscience results from a lack of spiritual knowledge (1 Corinthians 8:7). If your conscience is too easily wounded, don't violate it; to do so is sin (v. 12). Instead, immerse it in God's Word so it can begin to function with reliable data.

Don't tolerate a grieved conscience. Paul said he did his best "to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men" (Acts 24:16). Some people put off dealing with their guilt, thinking their conscience will clear *itself* in time. It won't. Procrastination allows the guilt feelings to fester. That in turn generates depression, anxiety, and other emotional problems.

Guilt feelings may persist long after the offense is forgotten, often spilling over to other areas of our lives. That's one reason people often feel guilty and are not sure why. Such confused guilt may be a symptom that something is terribly wrong spiritually. Paul may have had that in mind when he wrote, "To those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled" (Titus 1:15).

Dealing with a wounded conscience immediately by heartsearching prayer before God is the only way to keep it clear and sensitive. Putting off dealing with guilt inevitably compounds the problems.

Lingering, unaddressed sin is cancer to the believer. It cripples your spiritual growth and stifles your usefulness. Once your conscience has identified sin in your life, you need to move quickly to deal with it biblically and thoroughly. That's where we'll pick it up next time.

(Adapted from *The Vanishing Conscience*.)

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2015 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).