

1 Peter 3:13-17

1Pe 3:13 (NKJV) **And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good? ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed. 'And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled.'** ¹⁵ But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always *be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear;* ¹⁶ having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. ¹⁷ For *it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.*

In this part of our study, we want to look at the phrase in v16 where Peter talks about “**having a good conscience**”. A “**good conscience**” is listed in Scripture as one of the greatest weapons for being able to be spiritually successful in our life. For instance, [1 Timothy 1:18-19](#) reads as follows,

1Ti 1:18 (NKJV) **This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, ¹⁹ having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck,**

The primary reason in [1 Peter 3:16](#) for maintaining a “**good conscience**” is because Peter has anticipated that because of his readers’ faith in Christ that they will be “**defamed as evildoers**” and that they will be “**reviled**” because of their godly conduct. The phrase “**defamed as evildoers**” is actually just one word in the Greek New Testament - “*katalaleo*” where “*kata*” means against, and “*laleo*” means to speak. So, it simply means to be spoken against or to be spoken evil of.¹ The word for “**revile**” is the Greek word “*epereazo*” and it means to insult, to slander, to falsely accuse, or to spitefully treat someone. Now, we are not going to specifically teach on those two words in this particular study, but rather try and gain a clear understanding of what it means to have “**a good conscience**” and how to actually maintain a “**good conscience**”. We will look at the maintaining part in more detail in the next study.

Obviously, Paul understood the critical nature of a person’s conscience and how it is able to impact their life and witness to other people – either positively or negatively. It is very difficult to faithfully share God’s Word and His truth with someone if we know that there are things that are wrong in our own life. A secondary side of this reality is that without a “**good conscience**”, it seems very unlikely that the Holy Spirit will be inclined to even bless our efforts even though we may have good intentions at the time. I simply cannot speak to someone about loving their wife like Christ loved the church if in reality that is not how I treat my wife. If I am unkind to her, get angry with her, insult her, and demean her person, why would the Holy Spirit have any inclination whatsoever to bless my hypocritical remarks to someone else about why they should love their wife? I seriously doubt that He would. So, both having and maintaining a “**good conscience**” becomes very critical to any witness that we may have to others.

Now, there is a critical observation that needs to be made right at the beginning of this discussion. One of the most difficult areas for anyone to overcome is in the area of their pride. We are absolutely ingenious in rationalizing and devising schemes not to do what internally we know God wants us to do. In fact, we will do almost anything that we need to do to circumvent, avoid, bypass, and skirt dealing

¹ Zodhiates, 834.

with our pride. Let us just assume that we have spoken inappropriately to someone. Maybe we spoke to them out of frustration and anger because of something they did. It may even have been something they said to us or about us. So, rather than just responding, we over reacted and said something that we know was wrong and not how God would have wanted us to talk to them. Even in the act, we knew it was wrong. Very often this happens in our families and with those with whom we are the closest. It is at that very point that we begin to make excuses and develop all kinds of reasons as to why we do not really want to go back to that person and make things right and seek their forgiveness. For a student in school, maybe they cheated on an exam. Maybe we lied to someone. I had to meet with a person this week to help them deal with some problems in their life and they literally lied to me several times with absolutely no remorse. In fact, when I confronted them about their dishonesty, they became angry and hostile towards me. In my opinion they have reached a place in their life where the truth is no longer important to them. They have misled people for so long that they have become addicted to being dishonest if they think it will benefit them personally.

We come up with excuses like *“it’s over now”*, or *“it was no big deal”*. It might be that *“they were just as wrong as I was”* or *“things seem to have improved since then”*. I have heard people say *“no one’s perfect”*. In that case, the issue may simply be that our standard of perfection has been set way too low. We procrastinate and say *“I’ll do it later”* or we rationalize that we simply will not make the same mistake the next time something happens. The problem with all of those rationalizations and excuses is simple – they never solve the problem, and the tension that we created only festers. It is not something that gets better over time, but rather it strengthens in its bitterness and resentment. People become cynical and indignant towards us, and so often never have anything meaningful to do with us. In many cases, we make an enemy for life and the problem that we created is never resolved.

I am personally convinced that if a person is not willing to deal with the problems that they have created and if they continue to ignore the conflicts they have created, that over a long period of time that it will simply drain them of their spiritual and emotional strength. Here is what we need to understand, and this is very critical if we are ever going to make progress in our Christian life relative to our conscience. The people that God allows into our life, and especially those individuals with whom we may have conflicts, are generally God’s tools to chip off the rough edges of our life so that we can become useful to Christ. Think of your life as being a diamond in the rough and an uncut jewel that God wants to display to others.

So, when these difficult moments arise in your life, God uses them like a professional jeweler to chisel off the rough edges so that you are now a diamond and not a diamond in the rough. Please appreciate that your life and your ministry to others will never be any better than the relationships you maintain with people. You can fight allowing God to make these adjustments in your life, you can resist His work, and you can ignore His promptings. However, if that is the path that you choose, I doubt seriously that God will use you to any degree. You must see others that God allows in your life as God’s tools to reshape your life and to refine your life so that you can be a useful vessel in His hands. There comes a point in time when God simply wants you to acknowledge that these other people with whom you are having conflict are His tools for shaping and conforming your life to be as much like Christ as possible. You have to see them as God’s tools and then give Him thanks for allowing them into your life. If you have wronged someone, then you must seek their forgiveness, and in that process never justify what you

did. If you go to someone and ask them to forgive you, yet justify what you did in the process, they have no motivation to forgive you. If all you say to them is “*I’m sorry*”, that will not be effective either. You have to take full responsibility for your actions – even when they do not.

Now, what we want to do is to take a closer technical look at our passage and specifically the phrase “**having a good conscience**”. We will come back in the next study with some practical ways to both gain and maintain a “**good conscience**”. It is important to reiterate that in the context of these verses, Peter is speaking specifically about Christians who were being defamed and reviled for their faith, but God did not want them to overreact, but simply to maintain not only good behavior towards those that were mistreating them, but also to maintain a “**good conscience**” as a testimony to those causing them trouble. I understand that I am deviating a little from the [1 Peter 3](#) context, but I will try and tie it all together before we conclude.

The Greek word for “**having**” is “*echo*” and it is a verbal participle in the present tense, active voice and in the imperative sense. So, it is a command where we are personally responsible to maintain a “**good conscience**” all the time. By definition, the Greek word “*echo*” implies having a continued possession of something. It means to both have and to hold, or to keep.² A synonym would be that of “keeping” something versus losing something. I like the word “maintaining” or “keeping” vs. “having” just because of the present tense of the verb, but the actual definition is that of both having and holding. The adjective “**good**” is the Greek word “*agathos*” and it refers to something that is virtuous and has integrity. I love [Romans 12:9](#) where it says this,

Ro 12:9 (NKJV) **Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good.**

That is the idea – clinging to what is good, virtuous, moral, upright, and honest. In the context of [1 Peter 3:16](#), it is specifically speaking of a person’s behavior. When a believer has and maintains a “**good conscience**”, it is an obvious reflection on the quality of that person’s life.

The last word that we are addressing is the word “**conscience**”. It is the Greek word “*syneidesis*” and refers to the moral consciousness that a person has. A man’s conscience is something that has been divinely placed in him.³ It is internal and is often used in Scripture in conjunction with a person’s mind and heart, as well as their personal faith in God. The conscience serves a twofold purpose in a person’s life as provided in [Romans 2:14-15](#),

Ro 2:14 (NKJV) **for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves,¹⁵ who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them**

This is a passage talking about Gentiles, or in our vernacular, people who are not saved. On the one hand the person’s conscience **accuses** and indicts the individual when they do something that they know is wrong. On the other hand, it actually **defends** the person when they do what is right. The Greek word for “**excusing**” is “*apologeomai*” which simply means to give a defense. It must be appreciated that the conscience is God’s mechanism and His instrument that He has placed in a man so that the man can

² Zodhiates, 692.

³ MacArthur, 202.

know when he has violated God’s standards. Paul actually says in this passage that the work of the law has been “**written in their hearts**”. That is one reason why no man will stand before God and accuse Him of not letting the individual know what was the difference between right and wrong.

The word “**conscience**” is often spoken of as a man’s soul reflecting on itself and what he is truly like.⁴ We all know ourselves. We know what we are truly like. We know what it is that no one else may see or know about us. We know if we are honest, if we are moral, if we are kind, and if we really love God with all of our heart. We know when we have sinned against someone or have sinned against God. Our conscience always gives us the right answer. For the unbeliever, they may have ignored the work of their conscience so much that it becomes seared and they no longer hear what it is saying to them. That is a very real place in which lost people find themselves – having a seared conscience. The only place this is mentioned in Scripture is [1 Timothy 4:2](#) which says,

1Ti 4:2 (NKJV) **speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron,**

The idea here is that when the conscience is “**seared (as) with a hot iron**” that it numbs, deadens, and dulls the conscience to such a degree that the individual is no longer able to hear their conscience speaking to them. They become deaf to what it is saying and they lose all sensibilities regarding what is right and what is wrong. They reach a place where they simply do not care. Even though I cannot defend my position biblically, I personally do not believe that a Christian can actually sear their conscience. The reason is because they are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. I do not believe that His presence can be seared or eliminated in a believer’s life. Obviously, He can be ignored and disobeyed, but His presence actively remains in the believer and is always operational in their life.

We must keep in mind that the conscience is not God actually speaking to someone and it is not His moral law speaking to them. It is a human faculty just like their mind is a human faculty. In fact, if a person has ignored God for such a long time, their conscience may actually excuse them from some action that is blatantly unbiblical.⁵ This happens all the time. Just think of someone like Hugh Hefner who created Playboy. He justified everything that he did and spoke of God in the most derogatory of terms. He had so defiled his conscience that he felt compelled to accuse God as being repulsive and abhorrent because of His Word speaking of fornication and lasciviousness as being ungodly. His conscience had been totally seared. We think of people like Adolf Hitler who without any mercy or remorse killed millions of Jews. He has lost all moral restraints.

I would say at this point that if a believer chooses to reject the work of the conscience in their life that they are flirting with spiritual repercussions that they will not like. What we know as believers is that God holds us accountable to His standards and not to our own personal standards. That is why the more that you learn of God’s Word, the higher should be your standard. If you have been a Christian for many years, then your conscience will constantly remind you of God’s standard to which He has called you to live.⁶ Listen to how Paul addressed this in [1 Timothy 1:5](#) when he said the following,

⁴ MacArthur, 202.

⁵ MacArthur, 202-203.

⁶ MacArthur, 203.

1Ti 1:5 (NKJV) **Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, *from* a good conscience, and *from* sincere faith,**

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