

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.**

Now, in beginning this morning with our study on [1 Peter 3:13-17](#), we want to continue to address a believer's conscience and specifically v16 that we began in our last study. Our conscience is that divinely imparted faculty that helps us distinguish between what is right or wrong in our life. It is a divinely implanted awareness and consciousness of information about things in our life.¹ These are things that for the most part only we know. They are the areas in which we struggle and do not want anyone else to know. The conscience will deal with those areas of our life that we know need improvement. Obviously, the Holy Spirit is doing the same thing, but the conscience is much different from the Holy Spirit in that it does not prompt us to do godly things. It simply lets us know if what we are doing or saying is right or wrong, moral or immoral, honest or dishonest. The serious side of the conscience is that it can easily become something that we ignore and disregard. Please appreciate again that the conscience does not have a spiritual component to it. It is a simple right or wrong faculty inside of us that sends out an alarm when we are doing something that is wrong. It is similar to a radar gun that a policeman uses. When I go to Springfield to teach in the extension there, I go through the town of Salley and often it has one of those radar signs that lets someone know how fast they are travelling. As long as you are driving under the speed limit, the sign only provides your speed. However, if you are going over the speed limit, it begins flashing in a different color to let you know that you have violated the posted speed limit. The word that we addressed in the last study was that the conscience could become "seared" and eventually lose its value and purpose in our life.

The good news is that when you were saved, God the Father "cleansed" your conscience of all of the sins that you had previously committed against Him. [Hebrews 9:14](#) says,

Heb 9:14 (NKJV) **how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?**

In the context of [Hebrews 9](#), this verse is specifically talking about that time when Christ entered into the most Holy Place and offered His blood to the Father so that we could be completely forgiven. The Father fully accepted Christ's sacrifice and at that moment we were fully cleansed, forgiven, and accepted by the Father as holy in His sight. The word for "cleanse" in this verse is translated in the Greek Interlinear as "will purify" – a verb in the indicative mood, future tense, and active voice. What that parsing is saying is that God, in the future after we have been saved, will continue to purify and cleanse our conscience when it tries to condemn us. [Romans 8:1](#) declares that there is "no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus" – not now, not from the past, and not in the future.

¹ O'Brien, 325.

The word “**cleanse**” is “*katharizō*” and in this context, it simply means to purify from the pollution and guilt that sin produces in our life – and sin produces both.² It is not that we are just to ignore where we may have failed and not learn from it, but rather to realize that constantly recalling and dwelling on some sin that we may have committed will simply pollute our mind and heart. We have to accept God’s forgiveness and cleansing, or we will be destined to constant depression and despair. Dwelling on a sin that is fully forgiven will condemn you and cause you to constantly feel guilty, worthless, useless, and spiritually hollow. So, God cleanses you of that. He delivers you from that by helping you to understand that even though you may have failed and sinned against Him that He has fully delivered you from any condemnation. He wants you to live without any fear of His judgment because of what Jesus Christ has accomplished for you. If you continue to sin, you do need to recognize that God may “**discipline**” you in some way, but discipline is much different than judgment.

God does not want the value and benefit of Christ’s sacrifice to be wasted in your life, but for you to embrace its cleansing work. So, what this verse means is that as a believer we do not have to live in the constant recollection of sins we may have committed in the past. It means that we do not have to be alarmed, and disturbed by the fear of some future punishment by God.³ We will not be punished for our sins simply because Christ has taken our place and all of the punishment that we deserved was placed on Him in His death – and God the Father fully accepted that sacrifice.

Now, if you have ever suffered and wrestled with past sins, this should be great news to you. There are things that maybe you did before you were saved, and even after you were saved, that today would bring shame and guilt into your life if you dwelt on them. The truth, however, is that God has cleansed both you and your conscience from those sins and He continues to cleanse you even when you may sin in the present. Obviously, one thing that God did not remove was our remembrance of what we may have done, but when He cleanses our conscience, what it means is that we no longer have to feel guilty because of those sins. They have been completely forgiven and cleansed. All of your sins were fully and completely pardoned by God and this is a spiritual reality that every believer needs to fully embrace. [Hebrews 10:19-22](#) says it this way,

Heb 10:19 (NKJV) Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus,²⁰ by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh,²¹ and *having* a High Priest over the house of God,²² let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

What v22 is saying is that because of what Christ did for you that your conscience has been supernaturally cleansed and programmed **NOT** to condemn you for sins committed before your salvation. God is never condemning you – never. If you feel condemned for something, the devil may be condemning you, your own thought life may be condemning you, some person may be condemning you, but you can be assured that God the Father, Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit will never condemn you for those things that you did outside of and before Christ was real to you. Please appreciate that

² Zodhiates, 793.

³ Allen, 473.

there is a significant difference between feeling condemned and feeling sorrowful and regretful for something that we may have done. The Bible speaks about “**godly sorrow**” in [2 Corinthians 7:9-10](#),

2Co 7:9 (NKJV) Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing.
¹⁰ For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.

Condemnation crushes you and crushes your spirit and is NEVER from God in the believer’s life. However, “**godly sorrow produces repentance**” and strengthens you and motivates you so that the same sins do not become recurring in your life.

So, if you want to maintain a good conscience before God and before others, that is very possible. There are obvious things involved in this. The first is that we should fully avoid any conscious or willful disobedience towards God. Secondly, if we do sin we should immediately repent of that sin and confess it to God for the practical cleansing of that sin in our life. [1 John 1:9](#) says,

1Jn 1:9 (NKJV) If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

We have to agree with God relative to when we knowingly commit sin in our life.

Now, what we want to do is to try to get a better understanding of a “**good conscience**” and what we can do to ensure that we have one. The AMP Bible, NIV, HCSB, ISV, RSV, and NRSV all use the phrase “**clear conscience**”. Now, I do not want to make too much of this, but in my study of the word “**good**” I did not find one piece of information that should lead someone to use the word “**clear**”. It seems to me personally that for some reason some of those translators are reading into the word what they think it means. It is as if you have an unclean or dirty conscience, so you have to wipe your slate clear or clean, similar to erasing a white board of what may be on it. However, the word “**good**” refers much more to the idea of having integrity, moral uprightness, virtue, and honesty in a believer’s life than it does the idea of “clearing” the conscience. Let me explain the difference this way. When someone has a “**good conscience**”, an honest conscience, a virtuous conscience, they have a kind of assurance that they can be transparent with everyone they meet. Have they failed, and even miserably at times? Yes! However, they still have integrity and virtue in their life, and even though they may have failed in some area, it does not mean that they are failures or useless. It just means that they failed, but they still have integrity in their life. I may inadvertently mistreat my wife in some way, but that does NOT mean that I do not deeply love her. I simply failed in an area of my life. So, in our relationship to other people, what this idea of having a “**good conscience**” is saying is that we know that no one can point a finger at us and accuse us of never having made something right.

Whenever someone has a good, virtuous, honest conscience, it means that they are sensitive to when they may hurt someone. Each of us instinctively know when we have mistreated someone or dealt with them harshly. We know if our words were critical and uncaring. We know if our attitude was bitter and resentful. We know these things simply because we have a conscience that always speaks to us – even when we try and ignore it and resist it. Here is the way that Paul addressed this idea of integrity in [Acts 24:16](#) when he was making his defense with Felix. He said,

Ac 24:16 (NKJV) **This *being* so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men.**

He says the following in [2 Corinthians 1:12](#),

2Co 1:12 (NKJV) **For our boasting is this: the testimony of our conscience that we conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God, and more abundantly toward you.**

Now, there are several factors that create a “**good conscience**” in a believer, and that is what we are after in our life. What we want to happen is to allow God to create a deep rooted conviction in our heart and mind about Him and about His Word. This kind of conviction is absolutely critical to developing a “**good conscience**” and it comes directly from the Word of God. We read and study the Word, and it clearly defines what God is like and how He wants us to imitate His character in our personal lives. So, as we study the Word of God, we begin to see God’s ideal and principles for our life, and as we see them and understand them, at that same time we begin to become much more sensitive to our personal need to develop godly qualities in our own lives.

This happens all the time at church. The pastor teaches the Word, it is clear, and as he teaches, people’s minds and hearts are challenged to allow that Word to begin to take over their own life, to dictate how they live and how they will respond to difficult moments in their life. What happens is that we may violate one of God’s righteous standards for our life, and in that moment of failure, our conscience speaks to us and makes us aware of that failure. Why is that? It is not to condemn us – not at all, but rather to help us see our need for a deeper conviction in that area of our life. Let us just assume that we get angry with someone and speak to them harshly and arrogantly. We almost boast in our anger towards them. Immediately, both the Holy Spirit and our conscience reprove us, and they do so in order that we can change our behavior. It is at that moment that we have a very critical decision to make – will we allow God to work in us to make the necessary corrections of our misplaced anger? We may need to seek forgiveness. We may need to exercise a level of humility in our life that was previously missing. We may need to re-evaluate our personal walk with God. So, the Word of God makes us aware of our need and our conscience lets us know if we really decided to make the necessary changes that are so needful at that moment in our life.

Our problem is that we are experts at rationalizing everything away and justifying our actions, but our conscience simply will not let us rest with that kind of thinking. Listen very carefully. If we fail to respond to God’s divine impulse that so often comes through our conscience, it will not be long until we will justify and rationalize every misbehavior in our life. (1) Ultimately, we will not be able to even make good or godly decisions simply because we ignored God’s precious work in our life. We ignored our conscience. (2) We will not have power to overcome strong temptations because we have defiled our conscience. (3) We will not be able to maintain meaningful relationships with people because we know that we have mistreated them and not made things right. [Proverbs 28:13](#) seems to summarize a lot of this for us when it says,

Pr 28:13 (NKJV) **He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes *them* will have mercy.**

Let us just assume that you have wronged someone in a relationship and you never made it right with them. In your mind, they were 90% of the problem and you were only 10%, so they had the greater responsibility to come to you. So, you just ignore doing anything. If that were the case, then how would you approach [Matthew 5:23-24](#) which says,

Mt 5:23 (NKJV) Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you,²⁴ leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

That is how God works. Whether we accept it or even believe it, God has ordained that the various individuals and circumstances that constantly define our lives are His tools to reinforce and highlight the qualities that He wants to develop in us. God uses reproof as a means of building conviction in the believer. What you will eventually find to be true is that the people that you have offended but never made it right with will become your enemies. However, the people that you offended and with whom you made it right, they will become your trusted friends. Your humility will win them over. Here is what happens in a scenario like the one I just described. When you go back and make things right, at that moment you have a good conscience, and having a good conscience will bring you great joy. It will actually change your countenance from bitterness and resentment, from pride and arrogance to a countenance of joyfulness.

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