

"A Good Conscience"

Every person has a voice inside that monitors his thoughts, words, and behaviors. Hello, I'm Phil Sanders, and this is a Bible study "In Search of the Lord's Way." Today we're looking at the value of having a good conscience.

Welcome to In SEARCH of the Lord's Way! We're here to search the Scriptures for God's will. We diligently seek the truth, because only the truth can set us free. We diligently seek to know God and to know what He desires from us. We don't want quick answers from single passages that ignore the rest of God's teaching. We want to be fully assured in all the will of God. Thanks for taking time with us today. Tell a friend about this program. We'd love to hear from you and we want to be a part of your life each week.

God gave each of us a voice inside our hearts. This voice sees everything that we see, hears everything we hear, and experiences everything that we experience. Its task is moral. It monitors, judges, reminds, nags, and congratulates us. God placed this conscience into our hearts, and because it's moral the conscience is truly indicating that we're made in the image of God. Feelings of regret, shame, and self-condemnation are found in every human heart. The conscience witnesses and monitors us when we've done what is right and when we've violated moral laws.

Now other than God's knowledge of us, no one knows our hearts and lives better than we do ourselves. We know all the good, the bad, and the indifferent. We know when we do what's right, and we know when we're sinning against God. We can ignore or deny that we have a conscience, but we cannot escape it. If we please our conscience, it blesses us; but if we defile our consciences, it rebukes us and remembers.

1 Timothy 1 and verse 5 says, "But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith." We care and we want you to have a good conscience in Christ.

Now this is an important study on a good conscience, and we offer it free! If you'd like a printed copy and live in the United States, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or, call our toll-free telephone number. That number is 1-800-321-8633. We also have free materials on our website at www.searchtv.org. You can also see us on YouTube.

We'll now worship in song, we'll read from Psalm 32 verses 1 to 5, and we'll see the great value of having a good conscience in Christ.

Our reading today comes from Psalm 32 verses 1 to 5. This is a psalm of David who knew what it was to have a guilty conscience and what it was to be forgiven.

How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven,
Whose sin is covered!

How blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity,
And in whose spirit there is no deceit!

When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away
Through my groaning all day long.

For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me;

My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer. Selah.

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.

That's a reading from God's holy word. And how good it is to be forgiven. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father we're thankful that through Your grace and love and mercy we can find forgiveness. Help us Heavenly Father always to serve You to love You and to be close to You. And Father give us strength so that we may repent of the things that we've done wrong. This is our prayer in the name of Jesus, Amen.

God gave every person a conscience. Even people who don't know God have a conscience. We're all made in God's image. Sadly, some people's consciences have little knowledge of what God says. Others have consciences that believe falsehoods and so judge incorrectly, and some have calloused their consciences so that they feel no guilt or shame. The word "guilt" refers to a behavior. When we sin, we are guilty of breaking God's commandments. The word "shame" refers to how we feel about ourselves when we've done something wrong. Believing that we've done wrong causes that shame. And because of our conscience and our knowledge of God's holiness and love, we become ashamed of our sins.

The Bible describes how all people, whether they know about God or not, have a functioning conscience. Romans 2:14 to 16 says, "For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them, on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus."

Now when a person is guilty, his conscience accuses him of sin and makes him feel ashamed of doing something wrong. When a person does what his conscience approves, he defends his choices and behaviors. Now David described his shame when he knew his sin of committing adultery with Bathsheba and then later killing Uriah. He said in Psalm 32:3 and 4, you know "When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away Through my groaning all day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; (and) My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer." A guilty conscience brings no pleasure. Though sin may bring some enjoyment, the guilt of sin brings a heavy heart and a loss of respect for oneself.

After Nathan confronted David for his sin against Bathsheba and Uriah, the king realized his need for mercy and forgiveness. He said in Psalm 51:1 to 4, "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment."

David wanted to be clean again. Sin had stained his soul. And he asked God in Psalm 51:7 to 12, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice. Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit." David wanted the guilt and the shame removed from his heart, so that he could have a good or clear conscience.

Saul of Tarsus, who became the apostle Paul, also wrestled with a memory of the sins that he committed before he became a Christian. Acts 8 and verse 1 reads, "And Saul was consenting unto his death." Well whose death? The servant of God, Stephen. Though Paul was an apostle of Christ by the

will of God, he remembered his past. When Stephen was stoned, Paul thought agreeing to it was the right thing to do. And Paul said, 'Brethren, I have lived in all good conscience until this day' (Acts 23 verse 1).

Please notice carefully that while Saul was giving consent to the death of Stephen, he was acting in good conscience. He was doing what he thought was right. Did he sin? Yes. At times, we sin even when we act in good conscience, because we don't know the truth. Paul didn't understand. He didn't believe in Jesus that He was the Messiah but He was an imposter. That's what Saul thought. And his followers were blasphemers. He was doing his best to uphold Judaism. Paul said that he thought he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus (Acts 26 verses 9 and 10), so he persecuted the church. One can believe what one is doing is right, even when it's wrong.

Paul confessed in 1 Timothy 1:12 to 16, "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. (he says) Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus. It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. (and) Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life." While our conscience tells us to do what we believe is right, our consciences need training from the standard found in God's word.

A good moral life demands that we treat others right, study the Bible, pray, worship at church, and live holy lives. But none of these will fit together in the total picture of what God wants for us, unless we do these with a pure heart and a good conscience. God realizes that an obedient heart of love allows us to have a good conscience. Having a right relationship through the grace of God gives us the opportunity to have a conscience that respects us rather than accuses us of sin.

God's inspired word says in Titus 1:15 to 16, "To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled. They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed." Sadly, some are so enslaved their sins that their consciences are defiled to the point that they deny God exists. Jeremiah lived in such a time that sin dominated the hearts of the people of Judah. And Jeremiah 6:15 says, "Were they ashamed because of the abomination they have done? (well) They were not even ashamed at all; They did not even know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; At the time that I punish them, They shall be cast down," says the LORD. They didn't care if they had sinned. Simply.

Many today convince themselves, like Paul, that something they're doing is okay when in fact they're sinning against God. Some have read the Scriptures about matters of life and sexuality but they dismiss or reject what they teach. They have convinced themselves that God won't hold them responsible, but they are deceiving themselves. I hear people say about things in the Bible, "well that was then, and this is now." They think that the passing of time and changing of culture will turn something sinful into something that God accepts. It won't. And they forget God lives above time and culture. They forget He is God and not subject to the whims of time and culture. His teaching is for all time and for every culture.

We shouldn't imagine that the godless and hard-hearted culture in which we live today is brand new and something strange to God. We shouldn't imagine that He is unaware of the sin, chaos, and confusion that dominates our society. We shouldn't assume that He approves of lies and immorality

today. He's never approved of lies and immorality and never will approve of them. Paul described the culture in which he lived, and how God responded.

Romans 1 verses 28 to 32 says, "And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them." I tell ya we live in very confused period of time.

You may not practice sinful things; but if you approve and accept them, well you're just as rebellious toward God as those who do practice sinful things. Some think that it's loving to affirm others who live in confusion and sin, but aren't you contributing to the confusion and sin? Is it loving to allow confusion to continue? Is it loving never to speak out against sin? The Lord Jesus didn't remain silent about sin. His message from the beginning of His ministry was to call people to repent (Matthew 4 and verse 17).

The Lord said in Matthew 5:29 to 30 that, "If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell." Sin is a terrible thing, and if you don't have the cleansing blood of Jesus washing away your sin, you will have to bear the consequences. Are you right with God?

Paul clearly describes the differences between a godless and guilty culture and the new life that we have in Christ. He wrote by inspiration in Ephesians 4:17 to 24, "So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.

But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, that, in reference to your former manner of life, (that) you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth." Are you free from sin, or are you callous and living with a guilty and impure conscience? Paul said in Acts 24:16, "I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men." Do you do your best?

Isaiah 55:6 to 7 says, "Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." The time for you to make changes in your life is now. Forsake wicked ways and wicked thoughts. Repent and obey the Lord. Quit living a life separated from God and from His people. Start worshiping with the church. Would you rather face God in eternity with the blood of Jesus or without the blood of Jesus? Would you rather be cleansed with that blood or be defiled? Is your conscience defiled and calloused, or is it cleansed from sin and right with God?

Let's pray together. Oh Father help us to take the message of grace and mercy seriously. To turn our hearts from things that are evil so that we may live with a good conscience and be followers of Yours and love You always. In Jesus name, Amen.

If I'm guilty of unresolved sin, my conscience will regret it and punish me like it did David. Many people try to rid themselves of their guilt by every means except the way the Lord teaches. They blame others, they blame God, they deny reality, and they give all kinds of excuses; but none of these remedies free us from the guilt of sin. Some would rather do anything other than repent. The Lord said in Jeremiah 17:9 to 10 that, "The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it? I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give to each man according to his ways, According to the results of his deeds." You will never be free from sin, until you forsake your sins.

Peter on the day of Pentecost told the guilty people who crucified Jesus in Acts 2:38 to 39, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." If you wish to be forgiven, repent and be baptized. Now repentance is turning your heart and life from sin to living for the Lord. Baptism is when God washes away your sins. 1 Peter 3 and verse 21 says, "Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ."

We pray that today's study about a good conscience has helped you see God's desire for you to be right with Him. Now if you live in the United States and you want a free printed copy of this message, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or, you can call the Search office toll-free at 1-800-321-8633. There's also a schedule of our programs and a there's a map with the location of churches in your area at www.searchtv.org. now you can watch SEARCH anytime on YouTube! Subscribe to our channel, "SearchTVMinistry." Be sure to like the programs that you watch; this helps us spread the program. We also offer free Bible Correspondence courses. Now don't worry, we're not here asking for money. We're here to help you draw close to God.

Focus your heart on God by worshiping at church. Everybody needs a church family. And I realize that some of you for health reasons can't attend worship; I'm speaking to those who can attend but haven't been. There's probably a church of Christ that's near you. If you're looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, we'll gladly help you find one. We'll be back next week, Lord willing. So keep searching God's Word with us and tell a friend about this program. As always we say, God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.