

"A Good Conscience"

Many people carry around the baggage of sin and a guilty conscience, when they don't have to. Hello, I'm Phil Sanders, and this is a Bible study "In Search of the Lord's Way." And today we're going to find out how to have a good conscience.

Welcome to In Search of the Lord's Way! We're here to search the Scriptures for God's will. God loves us and wants us to be His children. He wants to bless us and guide us. And He teaches us how to love and how to serve Him in His word, the Bible. The Bible is full of God's grace and wisdom. The gospel contains the power of God unto salvation, and that's why we must keep studying His word. Thanks for taking time with us today. We want to be a part of your life each week.

A Christian lady described an incident when she was only five years old. She was at her grandfather's house all dressed up in a white dress and new gloves, she was proud as she could be. Her granddaddy told her she could go into the kitchen and get herself a special cookie. Well next to the cookies was a stack of quarters. And sure that no one was looking, she took a quarter.

Well when she returned with her cookie, her grandfather asked her to show him her gloves. Well she held out only her left hand and he said, "Well show me the other hand." Well when she reluctantly did so and revealed the quarter, she immediately saw disappointment in her grandpa's eyes.

He paused a moment and then he "hugged me up" she said, and said "Darlin', you can have anything in the world that I have, but it breaks my heart that you would ever steal it." The woman said that even fifty years later, this story of how her grandfather gave her the gift of conscience still brought tears to her eyes.

Few things can shape the values and morals of a child more than the sting of lovingly administered guilt. It helps define right from wrong and gives a powerful emotional dimension to issues of ethics and character. God Himself gave us our consciences.

Now this study about consciences is free, we offer it to you. And if you'd like a printed copy or a CD of our study and you 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 you can call our toll-free telephone number. That number is 1-800-321-8633. We also have materials free online at www.searchtv.org.

The Edmond church will now worship in song, we'll read from Romans 7 verses 21 to 25, and we'll see what it means to have a good conscience.

Our reading today comes from the book of Romans, chapter 7, verses 21 to 25. "I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin." A very important reading that really speaks to all of us. Let's pray to God. Father, we're so thankful that You are our Father and that You love us and can forgive us. Help us Father to be penitent people. And Father we're thankful for the love of Jesus. Help us to love You and to do Your will always. In Jesus name, Amen!

The concepts of guilt and shame are often confused. Guilt takes place when a person feels responsibility and remorse for some offense, crime, or sin that he or she commits. Shame, on the other

hand, takes place when someone has the painful feeling that arises from the consciousness that he or she could be the kind of person who would commit a crime, offense, or sin. We feel guilt for what we do; we feel ashamed of ourselves for having done it. The young girl felt guilt for having stolen the coin, but she felt ashamed for having disappointed her grandfather. Shame follows guilt, when people realize that they could do such a thing.

And so, many people speak as if guilt or shame should never happen. It's an unfortunate thing that people think that. Oh, I understand that there are some cults and some parents who have abused others with shame, and I'm not supporting that. Instead, that we should feel guilt and shame for truly sinful acts is normal and actually vital to our spiritual lives. I worry far more about someone who sins against God or his neighbor and feels no guilt and no shame than I do for the person who feels shame when he's really guilty.

Some folks don't feel guilt when they sin. And many ignore the seriousness of sin. Rather than call sin evil people, some people describe sin as a "mistake," or "a poor judgment," or "the result of wrong influences," or even "an alternative." But by relabeling sin, they have attempted to explain man's responsibility to God away. Many consider words like "sin", "judgment", and "hell" as obsolete concepts. They would drop them from our vocabulary altogether, if they could. Sin, however, is not imaginary. It's real. Its consequences are so great that Christ had to come and die to free us from them. We cannot wish away the reality of "sin." Our consciences won't let us.

Proverbs 28 and verse 1 says, that "The wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are bold as a lion." Well why do the wicked flee? Well they know they've done something wrong. After Adam and Eve sinned by eating the fruit, they hid themselves from the presence of the Lord. They hid because they were guilty and ashamed to face the Lord for what they'd done. They had a conscience, and so does everyone, so do you. The conscience is a God-given faculty of the heart by which we know about ourselves. We know when we do right and when we do wrong. Romans 2 verses 14 to 16 says, "For when Gentiles (that is people who don't know God), (For when Gentiles) who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them on the day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus."

Now our consciences accuse us when we know we've done something wrong and excuses us when we know that we're innocent. Our conscience is our moral sense. It warns us, nags us, and rebukes us when we are at fault and then it assures us when we've done the right thing. The conscience serves as a moral monitor, and we should be thankful to God for this gift. When we sin, this moral monitor causes us to sorrow and urges us to repent. Why do we have sorrow? Because we know that when we sin we have offended the God who created us.

The very folks who think there's no such thing as sin still pass judgment on the wrongs of others. Romans 2 verses 1 to 4 says, "Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things. But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?" When we consider how God loves us and how we have hurt Him by our sins, it makes us want to change our hearts and our behavior.

The apostle Paul once had to rebuke the Corinthians because they tolerated sin. This made the Corinthians grieve over their wrong behavior. And so Paul said to them in 2 Corinthians chapter 7 verses 8 to 10, "For even if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it—though I did regret it, for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while. As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death." When people feel grief over their sins, they don't want to remain in that sin. They have to leave that sin behind and they have to do what's right.

Sadly, some people ignore their guilt and allow their consciences to become hardened. They pursue their wicked ways with such determination, that they don't care what God or anybody else thinks. The idolatrous Jews in Jeremiah's day reached the point that they didn't feel shame about their sinfulness or their idolatry. Jeremiah says in Jeremiah 6 and verse 15, "Were they ashamed when they committed abomination? No, they were not at all ashamed; they didn't know how to blush." When we lose our moral sense of right and wrong, we are destined to destroy ourselves and everyone around us. When people feel no guilt, they'll feel free to do anything. The Russian novelist, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, had one of his characters in the book *Brothers Karamazov* say, "Well if there is no God, then everything is permitted." Well when people shut God out of their lives and they harden their hearts and their consciences, they too will feel that they can do anything they please. The greatest problems of America today are not social or political, they are moral and spiritual. You cannot throw God away and expect the quality and beauty of life to improve!

Sadly, some people today will say or do any shameful thing and never blush. Many have become so desensitized to sin, they will not blush about anything. It seems no sinful behavior is off-limits on television these days. Viewers seem to want more and more programs with sex and violence. One author asked years ago, "Whatever Became of Sin?", and another spoke of *The Vanishing Conscience*. Things have only gotten morally worse since then. Hebrews 3 verse 12 to 13 warns us, "Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."

Instead, we should be more like the apostle Paul, who said in Acts 24 and verse 16, he said "I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience before God and man." To have a clear conscience toward God means that you know what God teaches. To know what God teaches you must study the Scriptures. Many people trust their own thinking rather than listen to God's word, and that gets them into trouble. If your conscience isn't in line with Scripture, you can sin against God and not even know it, and you certainly won't feel guilt. Proverbs 14 and verse 12 says, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death." Again Jeremiah 10:23 says, "I know, O LORD, that the way of man is not in himself, it's not in man who walks to direct his own steps." And this is why we must study God's word diligently. If I permit in my life something that is wrong in God's eyes, it is wrong regardless of how I feel about it. Remember, in moral matters that affect our souls God has the last say and the only say.

We need to make it our aim not to sin at all. Many people make it their aim not to sin so much, but God asks us to repent and to correct every sin. You now pollution of the heart and soul is man's greatest threat. Many people allow little sins to grow into big ones, because they permit little compromises in their lives. Now no one sets out to be a drunk, but only people who drink become drunks. The Lord Jesus said in Luke 16 and verse 10, that "One who is faithful in a very little is also

faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little thing is also dishonest in much." Little compromises lead to devastating problems.

You may have read sometime back about two high school boys in Florida. They drew suspensions for eating so much garlic that no one could stand to have them around. Well the boys said that their garlic binge began when they read garlic helps cleanse the blood and lowers blood pressure. Well at that point, each of them ate half a garlic head. Well for breakfast the next morning both students consumed three or four more heads of garlic apiece.

Well when the teachers and the students complained about their odor, the boys simply laughed and they went on eating garlic. Well when confronted by school officials, one of the boys protested that the smell couldn't be all that bad. After all, he pointed out, "We were blowing in each other's face, and we couldn't sense a garlic smell."

Well that's how sin works; with time it destroys our sense of morality. At first people experiment, then they practice sin regularly, and eventually that sin captivates and enslaves them. People enslaved to sin will laugh and boast about it. They cause their consciences to grow callous by wallowing in the sin until it no longer smells bad to them. They are offensive to others but act indignant when anyone complains. Since they don't think what they're doing is wrong, they don't understand why God or godly people are offended.

You see, sin warps our thinking about everything. Titus 1 verses 15 and 16 says, "To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled. They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work." Perhaps you know of someone who has a filthy mouth and a filthy mind. They can take the most innocent things and defile them, because they're defiled in conscience and soul. It's hypocrisy to talk like you know God while you live an ungodly life. You not only shame yourself, but you also lead others to blaspheme God.

The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 5 and verse 8, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." A person who is pure in heart seeks to please God and serve Him. He doesn't want any sin or moral stain to come between God and himself. Oh he knows sin will separate him from God. Isaiah 59 verses 1 and 2 says, "Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear." When people let wickedness and sin into their lives, it builds a barrier between God and themselves. God will turn His favor away from them and will no longer hear their prayers. We cannot live in sin and expect to have the blessing of God. My friend, do you have a clear conscience? You don't have to live with guilt or shame. God can help you. Let's pray together. Father, we're thankful for Your grace and Your wisdom and the help that You give to us every day to overcome our sins. Father we know that sin is present, but we're trying to do Your will and we ask for Your help. And may Your will be done in our lives every day, just as it's done in heaven. In Jesus name we pray, Amen!

I've spoken plainly today, because I care about your soul. Paul told Timothy in 1 Timothy 1 verse 5, "But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith." That's our goal too. We love you and we want you to love God. We want you to be right with God and to live with Him eternally in heaven. The blood of Jesus can cleanse us from sin, but God expects us to clean up our lives. Galatians 6 verses 7 to 8 says, "Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life."

When we hope in Christ, we purify our hearts and our lives. 1 John 3 verses 2 to 3 says, "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure." What about you? Can you say with Paul, "I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience before God and before men"?

Now to have a clear conscience, believe in Jesus and in His word, repent of every sin and follow the Lord, confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and be baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Now in baptism we appeal to God for a good conscience. 1 Peter 3 and verse 21 says, "Baptism... now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." Won't you get right with God and become a Christian today? I hope you will.

Well we pray that today's study about a good conscience has caused you to want to repent and to be baptized. If you live in the United States and you want a free printed copy or a CD of this message, then 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. You can download these lessons or a newsletter online at our website: www.searchtv.org. There's also a schedule of our programs and a map with the location of churches in your area. We also offer free Bible Correspondence courses. Now if you write to us, don't worry, we're not here to exploit you or to try to get your money. We're here to help you to get to heaven.

Please get involved with a church of Christ in your area. If you're looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, we'll be happy to help you find one. We'll be back next week, Lord willing. So we ask that you keep searching God's Word with us and tell a friend about this program. Your friends may want to know something about God and His will, and we hope that you'll let them know what God teaches. This is one way that you can reach out to your friends and help them to have a good conscience. Well as always, we say God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.