

Habitation
Sunday, September 22, 2008

Clearing Your Conscience

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, having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck, of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.

1 Timothy 1:18–20

Then Paul, looking earnestly at the council, said, “Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.”

Acts 23:1

“I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men.”

Acts 24:16

What is a Clear Conscience?

A clear conscience is one where you can stand before anyone and know that not one of them can point a finger and say, “You wronged me, and you never tried to make it right.”

“Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.”

Matthew 6:23–24

HOW TO CLEAR YOUR CONSCIENCE

1. Identify the Offense

Ask the Holy Spirit to bring to your mind offenses that need to be resolved. You might be surprised by what you suddenly remember.

a) Whom Did I Offend?

God, parents, children, siblings, relatives, spouse, pastors, teachers, friends, neighbors, employers, coworkers, etc.

b) List Their Offenses Towards You

There are two reasons to begin with a list of offenses others have committed towards us before we deal with our guilt. Firstly, we tend to balance guilt with blame and never deal effectively with either one. Secondly, we usually concentrate more on blaming others than we do dealing with our guilt. By writing down why we blame them, we remove a major distraction in dealing with our own offenses.

c) List Your Offense Towards Them

Relive your offenses through their eyes. Try to imagine how he or she felt when the offense came. Think through the consequences of your offense on their life.

d) Identify Wrong Words and Actions

List words which were critical, judgmental, slanderous, untruthful, harsh, disruptive, vulgar, profane, contentious and indiscreet.

List actions which were careless, dishonest, improper, sensual, disrespectful, slothful, destructive, indulgent, tardy, wasteful, hypocritical, unjust, forgetful and disobedient.

e) Identify Wrong Attitudes

There are two essential reasons why wrong attitudes must be confessed before wrong actions. The first reason is that wrong attitudes are usually more hurtful and offensive than wrong words or actions. The second reason is that if the offending attitude is not corrected, the person you offended is instinctively aware that the same offense will probably be repeated.

2. Ask for Forgiveness

God is the One whom we have offended the most. Repent and ask forgiveness.

After gaining a good conscience with the Lord and receiving His forgiveness, go to the next most offended person.

Determine whether a phone call or visit is best. A visit or call gives personal contact, allowing the offended party to sense the sincerity of your voice or ask further questions. Avoid letters if at all possible. A letter documents the offense and can be used against you and makes a response unlikely.

Guidelines for Asking Forgiveness:

- a) Select the best time to ask for forgiveness.
- b) Write out the exact wording.
- c) Be concise and to the point.
- d) Focus on your part of the offense.
- e) Do not project blame, justification or excuses.
- f) Do not say, "I was wrong, but you were, too."
- g) Do not say, "If I was wrong"
- h) Do not offer excuses.
- i) Do not just say, "I am sorry," say "I was wrong."
- j) Identify the basic offense.
- k) Focus on the root attitude and how actions grew out of attitude.
- l) Acknowledge your guilt and show genuine repentance.
- m) Do not demand forgiveness.

3. Make it Right (Make Restitution)

Restitution—the act of restoring to the rightful owner some thing or right of which he has been unjustly deprived. The act of making good for any loss, damage or injury.

A clear conscience involves repentance. Repentance is changing your mind. Even though you are forgiven, there are still consequences for your sin. One of the clearest evidences of genuine repentance is the willingness to make right any damage that was suffered by the one whom you wronged. You may be required to make restitution—to pay what you owe. Restitution is not just paying the literal value of what was stolen, but also paying the value of all costs incurred because of the theft.

One of the best examples of restitution in the New Testament is the story of Zacchaeus related in Luke:

Then Jesus entered and passed through Jericho. Now behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus who was a chief tax collector, and he was rich. And he sought to see who Jesus was, but could not because of the crowd, for he was of short stature. So he ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Him, for He was going to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, He looked up and saw him, and said to him, "Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house." So he made haste and came down, and received Him joyfully. But when they saw it, they all complained, saying, "He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner." Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold." And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham; for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." (Luke 19:1–10)

As the Holy Spirit brings offenses to mind, the Enemy will throw every argument he can at you to keep you from asking forgiveness. Some common arguments and answers are:

Argument: "It happened before I was a Christian."

Answer: Becoming a Christian should only increase your motivation to clear your conscience and is an excellent reason for explaining why you're asking for forgiveness.

Argument: "My sins are all covered by Christ's blood."

Answer: Your salvation does not remove the bitterness or damage to those whom you offended. God forgets but they remember.

Argument: “Paul told us to forget those things which are behind.”

Answer: Paul was referring to former achievements, not his former offenses.

Argument: “It was so small or it happened so long ago that it’s not important.”

Answer: Then why do you still remember it? If you remember it, they probably do too.

Argument: “I don’t know how to get in touch with them.”

Answer: Ask God to put you in touch with them. If you will commit to restitution, God will move heaven and earth to give you the opportunity

4. Write Out the Results and Give Glory to God