

DISCIPLESHIP PRINCIPLE #9

1 Tim. 1:5-6; 1:18-19; Acts 24:14-16

GAINING AND MAINTAINING A CLEAR CONSCIENCE BEFORE GOD AND MEN

¹⁸ *This command I entrust to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may fight the good fight, ¹⁹ keeping faith and a **good conscience**, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith.* — 1 Tim. 1:18-19

¹⁴ *“I do serve the God of our fathers, ...¹⁵ and have a hope in God... ¹⁶ In view of this, I also do my best to maintain always a **blameless conscience** both before God and before men.”* — Acts 24:14-16

How many people stand between you and a clear conscience? How many people could say to you, “you wronged me and have never tried to make it right.”? Our need for a clear conscience before God and man is addressed 27 times in the New Testament. It is essential to our usefulness and fruitfulness in serving our Savior in the work of the age.

Many believers, saved by grace and sin’s penalty, have weak, calloused, or defiled consciences. The resulting GUILT in their souls, if not cleared up by gaining and keeping a clear conscience, diminishes their capacity to love God and others, which is the consummate attribute of a mature disciple of Christ. Such a guilty conscience can bring doubt, fear, and depression and keeps them from the confidence, assurance, and power that should and can be theirs in Christ.

⁵ *The goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a **good conscience** and a sincere faith. ⁶ For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion.* — 1Tim. 1:5-6

We can gain and keep a clear conscience before God and men by learning:

1. What our conscience is.
2. How to gain a clear conscience.
3. How to keep our conscience clear.

1. What Is Our Conscience?

Adam and Eve were created with a conscience. It differed from the other capacities of their soul (their mind, will, and emotions) being **an internal recognition of right and wrong**. Our conscience evaluates the moral quality of our thoughts and actions compared to God's standards. Guilt is not a function of our mind. Whether we agree with God regarding what is right or wrong, our conscience bears witness to our conduct.

God told Adam and Eve not to eat the fruit of a certain tree in the garden of Eden. But they considered their opinions better than God's, so they decided to do something wrong in God's sight. We call this "sin".

But something happened within them as they were convicted by their consciences and were ashamed. They got some leaves and used them to "cover up" their guilt. When God appeared to them again, He said "who told you, you were naked?" They were dealing with the guilt that had come from their conscience.

When a little child does something his mother has said not to do, although he may not even be able to talk yet, his conscience bears witness to him and his bodily expressions bear witness to his mother. They say, "I did something wrong."

God wants us to have a clear conscience which Paul describes as one that is "void of offense"

¹⁶ *"I do my best to maintain always a **blameless conscience** both before God and before men."* — Acts 24:16

Paul used the Greek word "aproskopos" which is translated "blameless" here. It means "void of offense". It is a conscience that is not troubled or distressed by the guilt that must be removed if we are to be most useful to our Lord. The guilt that has come is to be removed by confession and forgiveness. Christians who do not clear their consciences experience hindrances in their life, which is why the Lord said to his disciples,

²³ *"If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴leave your offering there before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering."* — Matt. 5:23-24

A good conscience is one that allows me to look every person in the eye knowing that not one of them can point a finger and say, "you wronged me and you never tried to make it right!" So...

2. How Do I Gain A Clear Conscience Before God And Men?

How do I remove guilt from my soul? There are a number of do's and don't's here.

1. LIST YOUR OFFENSES IF YOU HAVE NEVER DONE THIS.

Ask God to bring to your mind what needs to be dealt with. (See Ps. 139:23-24)

Members of your family and past relationships will probably lead the list.

2. COMMIT TO ASK FORGIVENESS.

3. THINK THROUGH A WISE PLAN AS TO WHAT YOU WILL SAY AND WHAT YOU SHOULD DO – AND NOT DO.

There are several factors here that are important.

- You must have a genuine spirit of repentance and grief before you go.
- You should carefully choose appropriate wording and even write it down before you go.
- You should consider whether restitution is required.
- You should determine whether writing a letter or direct contact is best.
- Don't embarrass the other party. Don't cause relational problems for the other party. Ensure it is done privately.

3. How Do I Keep A Clear Conscience Before God And Men?

Paul, speaking of his lengthy service for Christ after his salvation said,

¹⁶ *"I do my best to **maintain always a blameless conscience** both before God and before men."* — Acts 24:16

This tells us that, for Paul, there was ONGOING confession and asking forgiveness for his personal weakness and his failures to heed God's will and sin. He undoubtedly applied 1 John 1:9 on a regular basis to be able to say this. His example leads us to not let a day go by, after we have failed in our walk, to clear our conscience with the Lord. Let us not let the enemy use our failures to convince us that God cannot and will not use us as "vessels of honor".

²⁰ *Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor.*
²¹ *Therefore, if a man cleanses himself from these things, (by maintaining a clear conscience) he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work.*

²² *Now flee from youthful lusts, and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.* — 2 Tim. 2:20-22

UNIT 9 STUDY SESSION #1

In preparation for the group study of this principle of living for Christ, read and study the preceding scriptures and summary and then complete the following evaluation.

What Is The Status Of My Conscience Before God And Men?

1. I understand what my conscience is, how it differs from my own standards of right and wrong, and I can explain and define it. _____

2. I understand what guilt is, what causes it, and how it can be removed from my soul.

I have been able to clear my conscience **before God**, accepting His forgiveness of my past sins through Christ, even though they may have been great. (see Jude 24-25)

3. I understand that I need to gain a clear conscience **before men**. I have done this _____. I have done this partially _____. I need to do this _____.

4. I have cleared my conscience in the past, but I know that **I must maintain** a clear conscience as I go on in life, serving Christ. I am doing this _____. I am doing this poorly _____. There is work to do _____. (see 1 John 1:9)

5. Helping other Christians in this important area of serving Christ is part of making mature disciples for Him. I am able to help others in this area _____. I have _____.

6. How many people stand between you and a clear conscience? How many can say, "You wronged me and never tried to make it right"? _____
Will you commit to correct this? _____

Discussion Questions for Unit 9 Study Session #1

1. If I have stood for truth and, by doing that, I have offended some, is that an offense I need to remove? (See 2 Tim.4:3-5). What about the way I spoke to them? Does that matter? (See 2 Tim. 2:24-26)
2. Are you clear on what a conscience is? Does it operate even if with my mind I don't think something that is sin to God is not sin in my opinion?
3. The steps to a clear conscience involve asking to be forgiven for your sin. What must we be careful about when pursuing this with those we have wronged, lest we possibly make matters worse?
4. How does Jude 24-25 help me with God and 1 John 1:9 help me with both God and men in the matter of a clear conscience?
5. What about those who have wronged me and never cleared it up, leaving the relationship damaged or broken? What responsibility do I have in this instance? (See Study #7 which addresses this question)
6. Having a good conscience before God and men means that both my past sins **and** my ongoing sins must be dealt with. How do I deal with **my ongoing sins** as a Christian? What happens when we do not do this?

UNIT 9 STUDY SESSION #2

In preparation for the second study session please consider doing one or more of the following projects for the coming week.

Preparation For Session #2: Application Project

- Make a list of those you have wronged in the past and never tried to make it right and purpose to prepare and seek forgiveness of each one. Ask the Lord to bring to mind all those who should be on your list, to remove this hindrance to your usefulness to Him. Carefully prepare how to proceed, and begin to work through your list.
- If your ongoing manner of dealing with the inevitable sins that you commit as a Christian is not allowing you to maintain a clear conscience, commit to applying 1 John 1:9 every day, every time you sin. Begin keeping a daily journal of your asking forgiveness of the Lord for your “secret” sins and of others when you wrong them. Keep doing this in this formal manner until it is a habitual life practice. Commit to doing it until you can say,

¹⁶ *“I always do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men.”* — Acts 24:16

Let your conscience be your guide.

- Memorize 2 or more of the 27 references to our conscience in the N.T. (e.g. Acts 23:2, 24:16, 2 Tim. 1:3, 1 Tim. 1:5, 18-19, 1 Pet. 3:16)

Discussion Questions for Unit 9 Study Session #2

1. If you were able to pursue one of the application projects, can you share with us how this is going?
2. What are the consequences of the primary approach of modern psychotherapy, that is, to blame others for your problems and not therefore to clear your conscience? If personal guilt is covered up and not dealt with, what would the symptoms be?
3. Can the sensitivity of our conscience be diminished? How? How could a person's conscience become "calloused" or "scarred", and therefore less sensitive to sin?
4. We observe much of the church in our day increasingly accepting and adopting the standards and conduct of our humanistic culture. This often is not producing outward signs of guilt, shame, remorse, or concern. What has happened to their consciences? Why? What is the remedy?
5. Why might it be hard for another person to forgive you if you asked them to? If they also have guilt in the matter and are able to live with it by blaming you, what would happen if the blame is gone? Is it probable that some may not forgive you, even if you ask, because of this?

Prayer Together

Recommended For Further Study

- Stand Firm (chapter 1) by John MacArthur