

"A Good Conscience"

Many people are burdened by shame and guilt. What would you do to gain a good conscience? Hello, I'm Phil Sanders, and this is a Bible study "In Search of the Lord's Way." Today we're exploring the value of a good conscience.

Welcome to In SEARCH of the Lord's Way! We're here to search the Scriptures for God's will. When we follow God's will, God blesses us spiritually with peace, joy, and a good conscience. Salvation, forgiveness of sins, eternal life, hope, and peace all come through the blessing of God's grace. When we obey the truth of God, God purifies our souls (1 Peter 1:22). He puts us on the right track. Thanks for taking time with us today. We want to be a part of your life each week.

Paul charged Timothy in 1 Timothy 1:18 to 19, "This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience." There are few blessings in life more heart-warming than realizing that you have done the right thing. Guilt brings shame, but righteousness gives one inner peace with God and himself. A good conscience allows a person to sleep peacefully, while a guilty conscience burdens a person with regret and fear.

I've often heard people say, "If I could just go back and do things over, I wouldn't have done that awful thing." They regret words they spoke, harm they caused, and choices they made. People can't change the past, but they can find a solution to the evils in their past through the grace and forgiveness of God. They can be born again and crucify their old man of sin. They can have a new life filled with grace and peace rather than sin and regret. What would you give to have a good conscience? Are your past mistakes burdening you? When people have unresolved sin in their lives, they begin to feel small in their own eyes. They're like the prodigal son who didn't feel worthy to be his father's son. Thankfully, God gives us the answer!

Now we offer this study on a good conscience free. And if you'd like a printed copy 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 on our website, www.searchtv.org.

The Edmond church will now worship in song, we'll read from Hebrews 10:22 to 25, and we'll explore the beauty and joy of a good conscience.

Our scripture reading today comes from Hebrews 10: 22 to 25, discussing how we are to approach God as we come and worship Him. "Let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near." That's a reading from God's holy word.

Let's pray together. "Oh Father, we're thankful for the grace that comes to us through the blood of Jesus Christ, that our sins can be forgiven, and that we can be free from an evil conscience. And Father we pray that our love for You, and our willingness to serve You may grow more and more as days go by. In Jesus name, Amen."

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 with new gloves, 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. Sure that no one was looking, she took a quarter.

When she returned with her cookie, her granddaddy asked her to show him her gloves. She held out only her left hand and he said, "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" and said, "Darlin', you can have anything in the world that I have, but it breaks my heart that you would ever steal it." Some 50 years later, this story of how her granddaddy gave her the gift of conscience still brought tears to her eyes. Few things have as large an impact on shaping the values of a child as the sting of lovingly administered shame. It helps to define right from wrong and gives a powerful emotional dimension to issues of ethics and character.

Titus 1, verses 15 to 16 describes the difference between a good conscience and a defiled one. It says, "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."

Many people speak as if all guilt is a terrible thing. It's not! I would worry far more about someone who feels no guilt or shame. Oh, I realize that some have abused others with shame, but I'm not arguing for abuse. I'm arguing for a heart that feels shame when it is truly guilty. Sadly, some feel no shame for their sins. Jeremiah described people in his day in Jeremiah 6:15, "Were they ashamed when they committed abomination? No, they were not at all ashamed; they did not know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; at the time that I punish them, they shall be overthrown," says the LORD. When people are callous to their sins and feel no shame, they also have little use for moral behavior.

God gave us a conscience, that voice in our hearts, and it's for our blessing. The conscience is a moral governor that warns and judges wrong and praises righteousness. Guilt stings us for what is evil and warns us to repent. And every thinking person should be thankful for the conscience as one of God's gifts. We are moral beings, because God is moral and made us to be.

Many ignore their guilt and make their hearts callous. 1 Timothy 4, verse 2 speaks of "liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron." Others don't see the seriousness of sin. Sin is described for them as a "mistake," or "poor judgment," or "the result of wrong influences," or even "a valid choice of lifestyle." Man's responsibility then is explained away. Words such as "sin", and "judgment", and even "hell" are considered obsolete and are rapidly being dropped from the vocabulary of modern man. Sadly, some preachers no longer speak against sin.

Sin, however, is not imaginary or trivial. It's real. Its consequences are so great that Christ had to come and die to free us from them. And if we allow sin to overcome us, we'll lose our souls and separate ourselves from the God who made us. All sin is more than offensive to God; it's rebellion and must be punished. Isaiah 59:2 says, "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."

Now people who realize the seriousness of sin, grieve over it, and want to leave it, and they repent. Paul rebuked the church at Corinth, and they repented. And he describes this event in 2 Corinthians 7:8 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."

Now God takes note of those who grieve over their sins. David said in Psalm 51:17, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise." In Psalm 34:18 David revealed, "The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit." James admonishes us in James 4:8 to 10, "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you." How long has it been since you were pierced to the heart or wept over your sin?

Scripture describes how the conscience functions. That every person has within his heart, this moral voice and governor. And even people who do not realize there is right and wrong have it! Romans 2:14 to 16 says, "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 that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus." When people do what is wrong, their consciences accuse them and sting. When people do what is right, their consciences excuse them. A guilty conscience causes grief, but a good conscience provides peace.

We should make it our aim to please God, so that we can be at peace with God and with ourselves. Paul said in Acts 23:1, "Brothers, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day." Now he said this even though he was once the chief of sinners. When he persecuted the church, he was deceived, doing what was wrong while thinking it was right. Yes, the conscience is a moral function of the heart; but it can be deceived by false values. It can believe it's doing what is right, when in reality it's sinning. We must never justify in our hearts what God calls sinful.

God 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." People lie to themselves about their sins, but the Lord knows. People find others to help them find ways to justify sin, but the Lord knows. I read recently of a person who searched for a lifetime for a way to justify committing a sin. Believing the lie that one can live in sin and still please God, well this person chose the sin and abandoned being pure. Polluting the heart with sinful desire and false reasoning will lead people into sin and away from God's blessing.

Are we being desensitized by the present evil world? Do things that once shocked us now pass us by with little notice? Have our sexual ethics slackened? What are we watching on our televisions and computers? How much violence and sex did we watch last week? How many murders? Has all the exposure we've had to shameful words and acts caused our consciences to become calloused? Hebrews 3:12 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's called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."

The world has always been worldly; we shouldn't be surprised. They've always tried to justify sin. They sin and in time don't care at all. Knowing what is wrong, they laugh and flaunt their participation in evil. They harden their hearts by wallowing in the sin until the sin no longer stinks to them. Then they get offended when others are bothered by the sin which no longer bothers them! Sinful people want everyone else to join them in their sin.

Our ungodly world despises anyone who exposes sin for what it is. Jesus described it this way in John 3:19 to 20, "This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed." Now this difference between Light and darkness is why the Christian must keep himself free from sin and worldliness.

2 Corinthians 6:14 to 18 speaks to believers, "Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, 'I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate,' says the Lord. 'And do not touch what is unclean; and I will welcome you. And I'll be a father to you, And you shall be sons and daughters to Me,' Says the Lord Almighty."

2 Corinthians 7 and verse 1 continues, "Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." We must rid ourselves of evil hearts and evil lives and make it our goal to imitate Christ, because we do fear the wrath of God against evil. The evil in this world will do everything it can to make us stop loving God. And unless we separate ourselves from worldly ways, the worldly ways will separate us from God! We cannot leave this world, but we don't have to have that worldly way become our ways. Let's live for the Lord and serve Him. Christians are not ruined by living in the world but by the world living in them.

We must seek for purity and holiness in our lives. Psalm 24:3 to 5 says, "Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully. He will receive a blessing from the Lord and righteousness from the God of his salvation." Oh, the Lord Jesus simply said in Matthew 5 and verse 8, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 2, verse 22, "Now flee from youthful lusts, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart." 1 Peter 1, verse 15 says, "like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior." Of all the blessings that God gives, few are as precious as forgiveness and a good conscience. Do you have a good conscience?

Let's pray. "Oh Father, we're thankful for the grace that You have given to us through Jesus Christ our Lord. We're thankful for the love that You have shared with us in blessing us every single day. Father help us to live pure lives, to have pure hearts, to give ourselves fully and freely to You, and to love You with everything inside of us. And may Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus name, Amen."

The apostle Paul said in Acts 24:16, "So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man." Paul describes what that means in Galatians 6:14, he says "But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." One cannot separate faith from conscience. When you believe in Jesus Christ, and believing in Him means believing what He taught, you realize your conscience follows your faith. When you violate the Lord's morals or the Lord's teaching, your heart and your conscience knows it and will tell you so! When you live for the Lord, your conscience will also tell you so!

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." We need to

make it our aim not to sin at all; that's a tall order! No one is perfect. 1 John 1:8 says, "If we say that we have no sin, we're deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us." Now this doesn't mean, that we shouldn't make every effort to purify our lives. Do you?

You know, the blood of Jesus is what forgives sins. And when we place our faith in Christ, repent and turn away from our sins, confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and we're baptized into Christ, that God forgives our sins (Acts 2 and verse 38). Won't you obey the Lord?

We hope that today's study about a good conscience has stirred you to get right with God, so you can be right with yourself. If you live in the United States and 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. Now you can download these lessons or a newsletter online at www.searchtv.org. There's also a schedule of our programs and a map with the location of churches that are in your area. You can watch SEARCH anytime on YouTube! Subscribe to our channel, "SearchTVMinistry", and like the programs. We also offer free Bible Correspondence courses. Now don't worry, we're not asking for money. We're here to help you get to heaven.

Why not focus your heart today on worshiping God at church. Everyone needs a church family. And there's probably a church of Christ in your area. And if you're looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, we'll be happy to help you find one. Well we'll be back next week. So keep searching God's Word with us. God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.