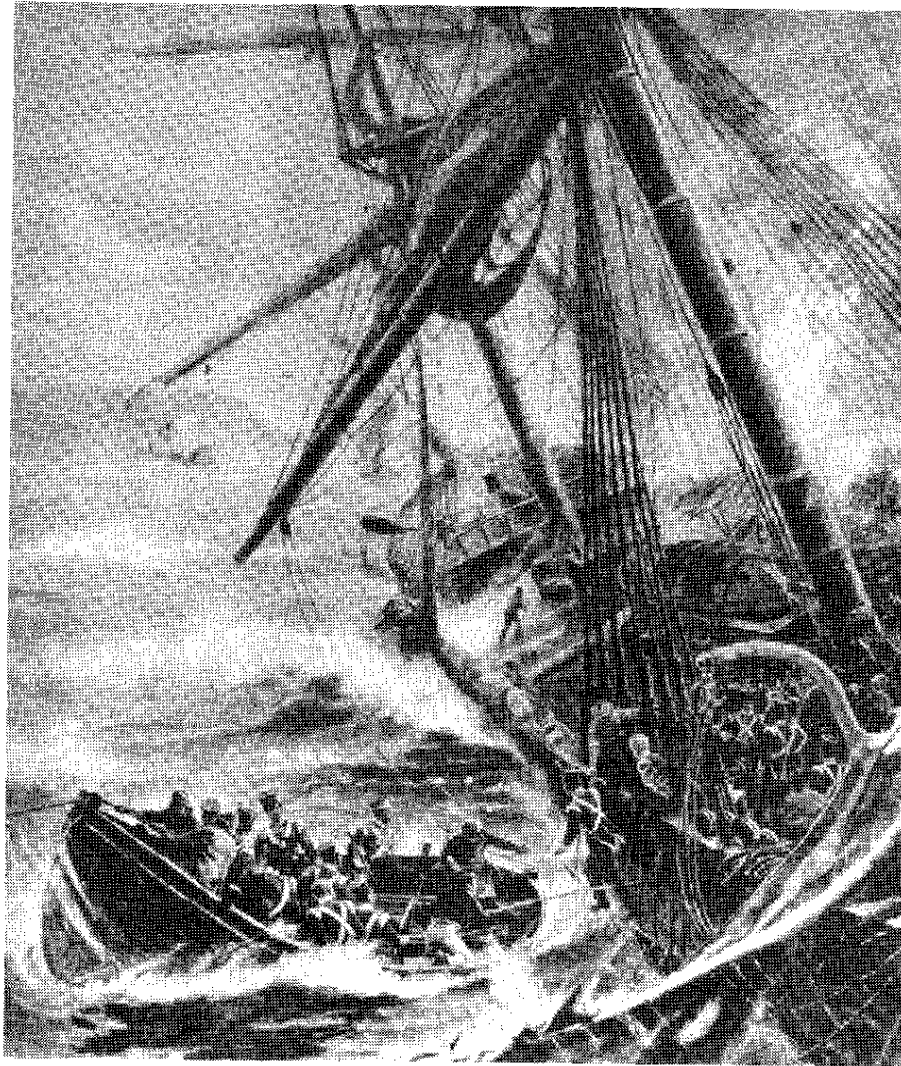


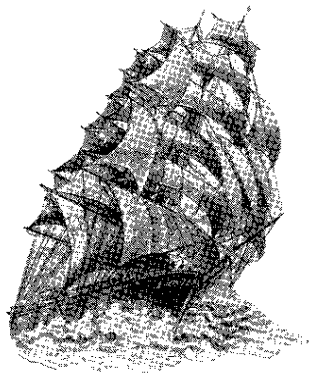
Why Is It Essential to Have a

Good Conscience



Paul warned Timothy that he sent him out to battle armed with only two things: his faith and a good conscience. He then lamented that those who laid aside these two powerful weapons “made shipwreck” of their faith.

*“Holding faith, and a **good conscience**; which some having put away concerning faith have made **shipwreck**” (I Timothy 1:19).*



WHAT IS A GOOD CONSCIENCE?

A good conscience is a healthy conscience. It is one that is cleared of offenses toward God and toward men. It gives boldness and confidence in the Christian life, and it is the one thing what will keep us going during storms of persecution.

Paul testified that he lived “. . . in all **good conscience** before God . . .” (Acts 23:1). Paul also told Timothy that the goal of the Christian life is genuine love, “. . . out of a pure heart, and of a **good conscience**, and of faith unfeigned” (I Timothy 1:5). Timothy was likewise instructed to maintain faith “. . . and a **good conscience**” (I Timothy 1:19).

Peter urged the Christians to have a **good conscience** so that anyone who spoke evil against them falsely would be ashamed. (See I Peter 3:16.)

The word for “good” in the Greek is ἀγαθός (ah-gah-THOSS). It is a primary word giving it a wide application of meaning. A **good** conscience is a strong, healthy conscience. It can be compared to good ground which has been properly cultivated, with stones and weeds removed, so it can produce a good harvest.

The goal of a **good conscience** is summarized in the Greek word, ἀπρόσκοπος (ah-PROSS-kaw-poss), which is translated, “void of offense” in Acts 24:16: “. . . To have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.”

The term means “having nothing for one to strike against” and “not causing to stumble.” It denotes a smooth road and metaphorically not leading others into sin by one’s mode of life. It is a conscience which is not troubled or distressed by the guilt of offenses.

WHAT IS A PURE CONSCIENCE?

The second word used to describe the conscience is **pure**. Deacons are to hold the mystery of the faith in a **pure** conscience. (See I Timothy 3:9.) Paul testified that he served God with a **pure** conscience. (See II Timothy 1:3.)

The Greek word is καθαρός (kah-thah-ROSS). It is related to the word *chaste*. Its primary definition is “to be cleansed or purged; free from any admixture which soils, adulterates, corrupts, or defiles.” A pure conscience is not stained with guilt toward God; it is blameless and innocent.

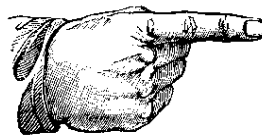
Because of our sin nature, the qualities of a pure conscience are possible only as we have our hearts cleansed by the blood of Christ.

Any works that we could do toward God would not gain for us a pure conscience. This truth is emphasized in Hebrews 9:13–14.

“How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Hebrews 9:14).

When you become a Christian, you have a pure conscience toward God through the blood of Christ. However, you will experience unnecessary hindrances in your Christian life if you do not also continue to have a good conscience toward God and toward men.

“Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift” (Matthew 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.”

WHAT DOES A GOOD CONSCIENCE INVOLVE?

• Every Thought

“Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (II Corinthians 10:5).

• Every Word

“But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment” (Matthew 12:36).

- Every Deed

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad” (II Corinthians 5:10).

- Every Attitude

“He winketh with his eyes, he speaketh with his feet, he teacheth with his fingers; Frowardness is in his heart, he deviseth mischief continually; he soweth discord” (Proverbs 6:13-14).

- Every Motive

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings” (Jeremiah 17:9-10).

WHAT EIGHT ATTITUDES ARE PREREQUISITES TO GAINING A GOOD CONSCIENCE?

When you ask a person to forgive you, that person will instantly recognize the degree to which you have developed the following attitudes. Each attitude has an important function as you carry out the steps to have a good conscience.

1 POOR IN SPIRIT



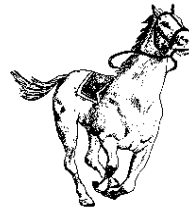
The term “poor in spirit” literally means, “one who is bankrupt and therefore must look outside himself for his daily needs.” A beggar must not be demanding and should be grateful for whatever is given to him.

2 TRUE MOURNING



The Scriptural picture of mourning is “breaking up the hardness of our hearts.” A hard heart makes repentance impossible because it hinders the work of the Holy Spirit from getting through and letting you see the offense through the other person’s eyes.

3 MEEKNESS



Meekness comes by yielding our rights to the Lord and getting under His control. When asking an offender for his forgiveness, we must yield any rights that we may think we have in the matter to the Lord. Only then is God free to do His work in the offender’s heart.

4 SPIRITUAL HUNGER



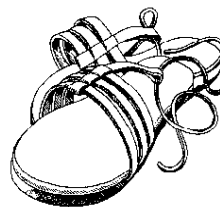
To hunger and thirst for righteousness is to long after that which pleases God and nourishes our own souls. Hunger and thirst do not diminish with time; instead, they become more intense.

5 MERCIFULNESS



The definition of the word *mercy* is “not getting the punishment we deserve.” Clearing our consciences involves asking for mercy. It is usually true, however, that those whom we have offended have also offended us; thus, we must show mercy to them. In fact if we fail to show mercy to our offenders, God will not forgive us.

6 PEACEABLENESS



A peacemaker is one who brings about reconciliation. The effectiveness of a peacemaker is determined by the advanced preparation he has made on what to say and how to say it. Having a desire for peace and having a prepared statement are essential in gaining a good conscience.

7 PURITY OF HEART



Purity of heart involves our motive in clearing our conscience. If our motive is simply to remove the pressure of our guilt, the one whom we offended will probably react to us. Instead our motive should be to deal with our root problem that caused the offense and to fully restore the one whom we have offended.

8 WILLINGNESS TO SUFFER



Restitution is a part of clearing our conscience and may be very painful and costly. It may require time, effort, and money. We may be misunderstood by the one whom we have offended or by others who have taken up the offense; however, through this humbling process God will give us more of His grace.

HOW DOES GRACE RELATE TO A GOOD CONSCIENCE?

Grace is not some static quality; it is a dynamic force from God which gives us the desire and power to do His will. Paul emphasized this truth when he explained that the work which he carried out was not in his own energy or ability but by the grace which God gave to him.

"... By the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (I Corinthians 15:10).

The result of grace in our lives is stated in Philippians 2:13: *"For it is God, which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."*

There are many other references relating grace to God's power within us, such as Ephesians 3:7:

"... I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power."

There are five important aspects of grace:

1. Grace is given to every person.

"For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men" (Titus 2:11).

2. Grace is a gift.

"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

3. Grace responded to brings more grace.

"But grow in grace . . ." (II Peter 3:18).

4. Grace can be resisted.

"Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God . . ." (Hebrews 12:15).

5. Grace is given only to the humble.

"But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble" (James 4:6).

As you humble yourself in preparing to ask for forgiveness, God will give you grace. This grace will give you the desire and the power to ask for forgiveness, which will bring further humbling but further grace. The more grace you receive, the more power you will have to live the Christian life. This is one of the rewards of gaining a good conscience.

STEPS TO GAIN A GOOD CONSCIENCE

Introspection is not the way to gain a good conscience. Through introspection we measure ourselves by what we think is right or wrong. This type of evaluation is condemned in Scripture. (See II Corinthians 10:12.)

In the course of reading Scripture and living the Christian life, the Holy Spirit will bring to your mind offenses which need to be cleared up. When these come to your remembrance, you are then to take the steps to restore a good conscience.

"And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men" (Acts 24:16).

God may bring to your mind offenses that you have committed against any of the following:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> God | <input type="checkbox"/> Your spouse |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Your father | <input type="checkbox"/> Your pastor(s) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Your mother | <input type="checkbox"/> Your teacher(s) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Your child(ren) | <input type="checkbox"/> Your friend(s) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Your stepfather | <input type="checkbox"/> Your neighbor(s) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Your stepmother | <input type="checkbox"/> Your employer(s) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Your brother(s) | <input type="checkbox"/> Business associate(s) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Your sister(s) | <input type="checkbox"/> Store owner(s) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Your relative(s) | <input type="checkbox"/> The government |

**PROJECT 1
GOOD CONSCIENCE WORKSHEET**

In the first column of the Worksheet, list those whom you have offended. Start with the ones whom you have offended the most. (See the *Basic Seminar Textbook*, pages 67 and 72.)

1 LIST THEIR OFFENSES TOWARD YOU.

There are at least two reasons for beginning with a list of offenses which others have committed toward us before we deal with our own guilt. First, we tend to balance guilt with blame and therefore never effectively deal with either one.

Second, we usually concentrate more on blaming others than we do on our guilt. By writing down why we blame them, we remove a major distraction in dealing with our own offenses.

Another purpose for writing down why we blame others is that after we have taken care of our own guilt (by working through the steps in this booklet), we can more effectively deal with forgiveness (in Booklet 5). This is the instruction of Matthew 7:3 and 5.

“And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? . . . Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother’s eye.”

**PROJECT 2
GOOD CONSCIENCE WORKSHEET**

In Column 2 list the things for which you blame each person in Column 1. (See the *Basic Seminar Textbook*, pages 43–45.)

2 LIST YOUR OFFENSES.

It is easy to minimize our offenses, and, at the same time, blame others or justify what we did. Therefore, it would be very wise to begin this next step by asking God to revive our memory.

“Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalm 139:23–24).

If I were to ask those who are offended with me what I did against them, what would they say?

WHAT DID YOU DO THAT CAUSED OTHERS TO BE OFFENDED BY YOU?

List words which were:

- Critical _____
- Judgmental _____
- Slanderous _____
- Untruthful _____
- Harsh _____
- Disruptive _____
- Vulgar _____
- Profane _____
- Contentious _____
- Indiscreet _____

List actions which were:

- Careless _____
- Dishonest _____
- Improper _____
- Sensual _____
- Disrespectful _____
- Slothful _____
- Destructive _____
- Indulgent _____
- Tardy _____
- Wasteful _____
- Hypocritical _____
- Unjust _____
- Forgetful _____
- Disobedient _____

**PROJECT 3
GOOD CONSCIENCE WORKSHEET**

From the list above, identify your major offenses toward the one you wronged and write them in Column 3 of the Worksheet.

WHAT WERE THE ATTITUDES THAT CAUSED YOUR WRONG WORDS AND ACTIONS?

The key to asking forgiveness properly is identifying the wrong attitudes before naming the wrong words and actions. Carefully consider the following two illustrations:

CASE NUMBER 1 (WRONG WAY)

The Lord convicted a young man of having stolen some building materials from a store in which he was once employed. He determined to make it right, figuring out that what he had stolen was worth \$500.

He wrote out a check for that amount and went to the owner to confess his theft. After telling

the owner what he had done, he asked forgiveness and handed the owner the check. To the deep disappointment of the young man, the owner said, "I'll take your check, but I won't forgive you."

CASE NUMBER 2 (RIGHT WAY)

A construction worker stole nine tools from the job site where he worked. The Lord convicted him of his need to ask forgiveness and make restitution. However, before going to the owner he sat down and carefully evaluated what attitudes had motivated him to steal those tools.

As he did this evaluation he realized that he did not need the tools, and he had the money to buy them if they were needed. He finally traced his actions to an attitude of ungratefulness.

He wrote out a check and went to the owner of the company. It was important to him to describe his offense accurately, so he wrote it out on a card and held it in front of him as he talked to the owner.

He said, "God has helped me to realize how ungrateful I was as an employee, and I have come to ask you to forgive me."

The owner was shocked, because he had trusted this employee. He said, "You do not need to ask me to forgive you." The former employee said, "Yes, I do, because that ungratefulness caused me to steal some tools from you."

When the owner saw the humble, broken spirit of the young man, he fully forgave him and told him to put his check of restitution in the church offering. That young man walked out with a new freedom in God's Spirit.

The first young man had focused on the wrong actions, and as a result, had not fully comprehended his offense. The owner, perhaps without knowing it, did not sense the genuine repentance which would have been evident had the young man traced his actions to wrong attitudes.

HOW DOES IDENTIFYING THE ATTITUDE PRODUCE GENUINE REPENTANCE?

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 who is being asked for forgiveness is instinctively aware that the same offenses will probably be repeated.

List attitudes which were:

- Proud _____
- Deceptive _____
- Willful _____
- Presumptuous _____
- Selfish _____
- Ungrateful _____
- Unreliable _____
- Disloyal _____
- Unconcerned _____
- Insensitive _____
- Angry _____

**PROJECT 4
GOOD CONSCIENCE WORKSHEET**

Trace the wrong words and actions which you listed in Column 3 to the wrong attitudes, and write them in Column 4.

**THE IMPORTANCE OF WORKING OUT
A PLAN OF RESTITUTION**

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.

If you stole items, they must be returned. If you cannot return them, you should pay for them. If you do not have the money to pay for them, at least one alternative plan should be offered to the person from whom you ask forgiveness.

CASE NUMBER 3

A Christian floor salesman in the retail business who was also a deacon in his church began to steal some of the money that was paid by the customers.

After several years of embezzlement, he heard a message on the importance of a good conscience and came under conviction about his stealing.

However, he was terrified at the prospect of facing the owner of the company. He was already under financial pressure, and this could mean losing his job and even going to jail. But he determined that a good conscience was more important than any resulting consequences, and he reasoned that whatever penalties would be given to him were justly deserved.

He went to the owner, confessed an attitude of covetousness and selfishness, and explained that he had demonstrated those wrong attitudes by taking money that should have gone into the cash register.

He then explained that because he did not have the money to pay back what he had stolen, he would be willing to work for the owner every Saturday, doing whatever jobs the owner needed at home or at the store.

The owner was convinced of his sincerity and forgave him and was very impressed with the diligent and faithful work which the man carried out each Saturday.

When that salesman achieved a good conscience, he experienced an overwhelming sense of joy and gratefulness. This resulted in a spirit of generosity to the Lord. His witness ultimately caused the store owner to become a Christian. The salesman became a dynamic soulwinner.

**HOW RESTITUTION COMMUNICATES
GENUINE REPENTANCE**

Simply to give back items that were stolen does not fulfill the spirit of God's Law on restitution as set forth in both the Old and New Testaments. (See Exodus 22:1-5 and Matthew 5:38-42.)

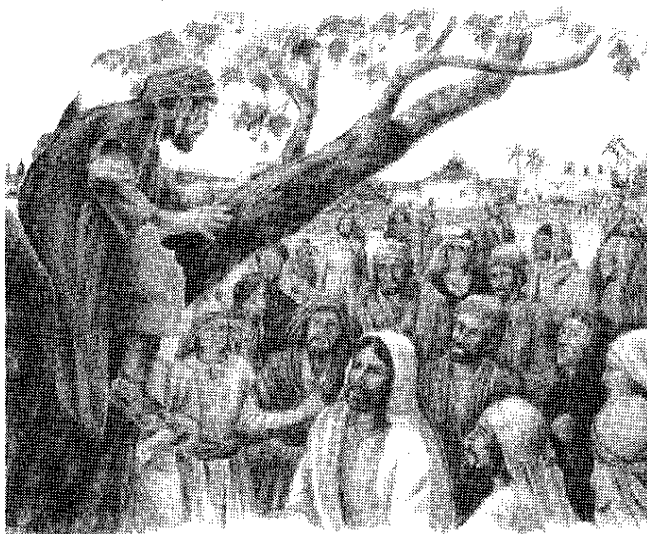
Let's use the example of the man who stole the tools. Assuming that the tools were needed on the job, the owner would have been forced to go out and buy new tools. This would have involved time and more of his funds. Most likely, the cost of replacing the tools would have been greater due to higher prices. Certain tools may not even have been available. The owner would have also lost the interest on the money which he used to buy the tools.

Thus, returning the tools or paying what they were worth would not have covered the costs that the owner incurred because of the theft.

For this reason God's Law calls for at least a double repayment of what was stolen. (See Exodus 22:1-7.)

Oxen were used for plowing, pulling carts, treading out corn, and other functions. They were vital tools to their owner. Thus, an owner suffered a greater loss when an ox was stolen than when a sheep was stolen.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus emphasized the importance of repaying more than what was stolen: "And if any many will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also" (Matthew 5:40).



To have a good conscience, Zacchaeus offered to pay back four times what he had stolen.

When Jesus called Zacchaeus to come to Him, the crowd murmured because Zacchaeus had wronged many people. His reputation was marred by numerous fraudulent dealings. When he came to Christ, he said, "... Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold" (Luke 19:8).

It is important to note that Zacchaeus purposed to have a good conscience only after he had met the Lord.

PROJECT 5

GOOD CONSCIENCE WORKSHEET

Determine what restitution is required to replace the loss and fulfill the spirit of Biblical restitution. Write your conclusions in Column 5 of the Worksheet. (See the *Basic Seminar Textbook*, pages 49-55 and 61-66.)

3 PURPOSE TO ASK FORGIVENESS.

BEGIN WITH THOSE WHOM YOU HAVE OFFENDED THE MOST.

God is the One Whom we have offended the most. If we fail to understand this fact and to act upon it, God's blessing will be missing from our lives when we go to ask forgiveness of others. Asking forgiveness of God requires that we trace our offenses to violations of His commandments.

- If you have stolen, you have broken the commandment "Thou shalt not steal" (Exodus 20:15).
- If you have lied, you have broken the commandment "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour" (Exodus 20:16).
- If you have caused a weaker brother to stumble, you have broken the commandment "... that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way" (Romans 14:13).

By breaking God's commandments, we confirm the fact that we do not love Him: "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me..." (John 14:21).

By not loving the Lord, we break the greatest of all commandments.

"... Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment" (Matthew 22:37-38).

When we offend another Christian we also offend Christ. "... Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:40.)

"If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" (I John 4:20).



Stop and Pray.

"O Lord, I have sinned against You by my lack of love for You which is manifested by my offense toward _____.

"I now confess this sin to You and thank You for Your faithfulness and justice to forgive this sin and to cleanse me from all unrighteousness through the blood of Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen."

After gaining a good conscience with the Lord and receiving His forgiveness, go on to the next most offended person. This individual should be listed in the first column of the Worksheet.

The individual you offended the most may be the hardest one to approach; however, if you avoid this person the guilt will hinder your objectivity in clearing your conscience with others.

SEPARATE GUILT FROM BLAME.

One of the greatest hindrances you may experience in asking forgiveness is the feeling that the one you wronged was also guilty. You may even feel that he or she deserved what you did.

It will be your tendency to magnify the blame which you have toward the one you offended, just as it will be his or her tendency to magnify the blame toward you.

Mixing guilt and blame will not only stop you from gaining a clear conscience, but it will also cause these two spiritual poisons to eat away at your soul and to reduce the spiritual potential which God has for your life.

The only solution is to determine what percentage of blame you have in the matter. Then, see that blame through the eyes of the one you offended.

Percentage I am wrong _____

Let us suppose that you are responsible for just 5 or 10 percent of the offense. Realize that the one whom you offended probably feels that he is also only 5 or 10 percent to blame. Thus, in many conflicts, the vast majority of blame is not claimed by either party.

It may be that from your viewpoint your offense is like a splinter in the eye of the one you offended. However, from his perspective it probably feels like a beam. When you see your offense through his eyes, it will become the beam which Jesus referred to in Matthew 7:1-5.

RELIVE YOUR OFFENSES THROUGH THEIR FEELINGS.

You must have a genuine spirit of repentance before you go to a person to ask for forgiveness. If the one whom you offended does not detect such a spirit, that individual may withhold forgiveness or even take further steps to bring you to repentance.

You can experience genuine repentance by reliving your offenses through the feelings of the ones whom you offended.

Without knowing how hurtful your words or actions were, the request for forgiveness will be shallow, and you will not be motivated to avoid similar offenses in the future.

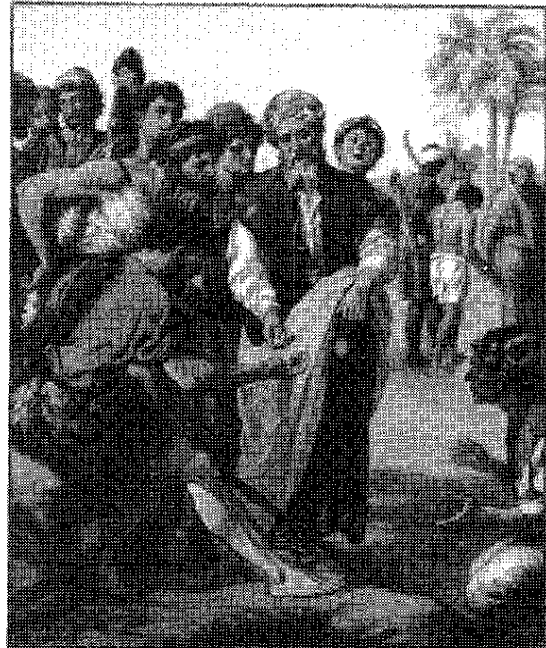
HOW DO YOU RELIVE YOUR OFFENSES?

Picture yourself as the one whom you offended. In your mind reenact the circumstances leading up to the offense. Try to imagine how he or she felt when the offense came. Think through the consequences that have come into his or her life because of the offense.

A married couple, close friends, or family members could help each other relive offenses by responding to the following phrases:

1. What you did which offended me
2. How I felt when you did it
3. What I did in return
4. What God is teaching me through the offense

This is such an important step that if you do not accomplish it yourself or have the other person help you to do it, God may allow you to experience the same offenses.



Bible Art Series, Standard Publishing Cincinnati

The account of Joseph describes how God brought his brothers to see their offense through the feelings of the one they offended.

CASE NUMBER 4

A second-born son watched with hatred as a despised half-brother approached him at the job site.

He said to his brothers, "Let's do away with this proud half-brother of ours."

His older brother tried to reason with him, "Let's not kill him ourselves. Let's arrange it so that he will die on his own." All the brothers agreed and carried out their evil plan.

For years they lived with their guilt, but one day they relived their offenses through their half-brother's feelings. They were falsely accused and thrown in prison for three days.

It was because of this prison experience that they said to one another, "... *We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us.*"

Even though they acknowledged their guilt, they still did not have a genuine spirit of repentance. Instead they began to blame each other. For this reason, they experienced more anguish, false accusation, and imprisonment.

It was not until several years later that they finally came to the place of asking forgiveness of their half-brother with a genuine spirit of repentance:

"... *Forgive, I pray thee now, the trespass of thy brethren, and their sin; for they did unto thee evil: and now, we pray thee, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of thy father...*" (See Genesis 42:17, 21–24, and 50:17.)

CHOOSE THE RIGHT WORDING.

The importance of selecting the right words for your confession cannot be overemphasized: "*For the ear trieth words, as the mouth tasteth meat*" (Job 34:3).

It would be wise to write out the words that you plan to use in asking for forgiveness. The Scriptural precedent for doing this appears in Jesus' parable of the prodigal son.

The prodigal son carefully chose each word. He said: "*I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants*" (Luke 15:18–19).

The words which you choose should focus only on your part of the offense. In no way should they project blame to the other person. This would rule out any statement that would imply, "I was wrong, but so were you."

Neither should the words project justification or excuses. They should directly acknowledge guilt and genuine repentance.

Suggested wording:

God has helped me to realize that I was wrong in [root attitudes and resulting offenses].
Would you forgive me?

Evaluating this wording:

- It is concise and to the point. The longer a confession, the more danger there is for self-justification.
- It does not blame by implying, "I was wrong, but you were too."
- It does not communicate pride by statements like "If I was wrong . . ."
- It does not offer excuses such as "I got angry because I was tired."
- It does not suggest flippancy by such words as, "I'm sorry."
- It acknowledges guilt the correct way by saying, "I was wrong."
- It focuses on the root attitude first and explains how wrong actions grew out of wrong attitudes.
- It does not demand forgiveness, but instead pleads for it.
- It requires a direct answer rather than a generous response.
- It calls for a verbal response.
- It identifies the basic offense.

PROJECT 6 GOOD CONSCIENCE WORKSHEET

Write out the exact wording that you will use in asking for forgiveness. Evaluate each word and make sure it will be spoken in a spirit of genuine repentance. (See the *Basic Seminar Textbook*, pages 47, 49, 50–60, and 68–70.)

DETERMINE WHETHER A PHONE CALL OR A VISIT IS BEST.

The natural tendency at this point is to simply write a letter in which you ask forgiveness. The appeal of this wrong method is that it avoids any personal confrontation.

However, the lack of personal contact also eliminates the possibility of gaining one of the most important benefits—verbal assurance that you are forgiven. It is normal for those who receive a letter which asks for forgiveness not to respond to it.

There are many other benefits which are lost by a letter. The one you offended does not have the benefit of sensing the sincerity of your voice or asking further questions to clarify what you are saying.

A personal visit or phone call allows you to clear up an offense, whereas a letter documents the offense and can be misused in the future.

Normally, making a personal visit would be the best approach, especially if there is need for restitution. However, in the case of a past moral offense, a personal visit may create new temptations or misunderstandings. Therefore, a personal phone call would be more appropriate.

PROJECT 7 GOOD CONSCIENCE WORKSHEET

Determine whether a visit or a phone call would be the most appropriate method to use in having a good conscience. Check this on Column 7 of the Worksheet. (See the *Basic Seminar Textbook*, pages 70–71.)

SELECT THE BEST TIME TO ASK FORGIVENESS.

The closer you come to approaching the person whom you offended, the more difficult it will probably become to ask forgiveness.

The following rationalizations may prevent you from humbling yourself. Each one must be rejected to have a conscience void of offense toward God and toward men.

COMMON RATIONALIZATIONS:

- It happened before I was a Christian.

Becoming a Christian should only increase your motivation and ability to clear your conscience. In fact, salvation will give you the very best basis for explaining why you are asking for forgiveness.

It will also glorify God by giving witness to the fact that His Holy Spirit is giving you new discernment into right and wrong.

It might be appropriate to expand the phrase, “God has helped me to realize . . .” to “I have become a Christian, and God has helped me to realize . . .”

- My sins are all covered by Christ’s blood.

When you became a Christian, the blood of Jesus Christ cleansed you from all sin. He removed your transgressions as far as the east is from the west. He blotted out your transgressions and will remember them no more against you. (See Psalms 79:8 and 103:12.)

The difficulty is that what happened to you spiritually does not remove the bitterness or damage to those whom you offended. God forgets, but they remember.

Each former offense becomes like a “handle of guilt” on your “spiritual back.” Each time you desire to walk forward in your Christian life or come closer to the Lord, it is as if Satan reaches out, grabs one of the convenient “handles of guilt” on your “spiritual back,” and states, “Just where do you think you are going; don’t you remember what you did?”

- Paul told us to forget those things which are behind.

The Scripture referred to here is Philippians 3:13–14: “. . . *This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind . . . I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God. . . .*”

The “things” Paul referred to were his former achievements, not his former offenses.

“. . . *If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews . . . touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ*” (Philippians 3:4–7).

- **It happened so long ago.**

We tend to forget the things we do wrong. Therefore, the fact that you still remember an offense with guilt or shame is sufficient evidence that you need to take care of it.

God has indicated that He will use our memory in directing us to clear our conscience.

“Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee . . .” (Matthew 5:23).

- **Things have gotten better between us.**

Even though the relationship has improved between you and the one whom you offended, your offense is still in the back of his mind, and when you offend again he will react to you with the combined wrath of both present and past offenses.

Many relationships are destroyed in this way. Little offenses which were never cleared up become conscious or unconscious barriers between the spirits of two people. When past offenses are confessed, these walls are removed.

After overcoming your rationalizations and being prepared with the right wording, it is important that you determine the best time in which to make your appeal for forgiveness.

The wise procedures which Queen Esther used to make her appeal to the king can be directly applied to making an appeal for forgiveness.



Others had to convince her of the importance of making her appeal.

Esther brought up many legitimate reasons for not going before the king to make her appeal. However, those people closest to her pointed out the consequences that would come to her and others if she should fail to do so.

Esther finally came to the conclusion that it was her responsibility to make the appeal and whatever happened was God's responsibility.

“ . . . If I perish, I perish” (Esther 4:16).

She spent three days in spiritual preparation.

Esther purposed to spend three days in fasting and prayer before she made her appeal. She asked

others to join her in this fast. *“Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me. . . . I also and my maidens will fast likewise . . .” (Esther 4:16).*

She set a definite time to make her appeal.

The fact that others were fasting and praying with her was strong motivation to follow through on the commitment to go before the king at the end of three days. *“ . . . So will I go in unto the king . . .” (Esther 4:16).*

She discerned the wisest sequence for her appeal.

One of the benefits of Esther's spiritual preparation was discernment of the Lord's timing and method of making her request. She made the initial contact on schedule, but she waited upon the Lord for the right timing for the appeal.

Esther made sure that the people who should hear her request did so. *“ . . . Let the king and Haman come this day unto the banquet that I have prepared for him” (Esther 5:4).*

PROJECT 8 GOOD CONSCIENCE WORKSHEET

Select a time within the next week when you will follow through on asking for forgiveness. Fill in the proposed date in the eighth column of the Worksheet.

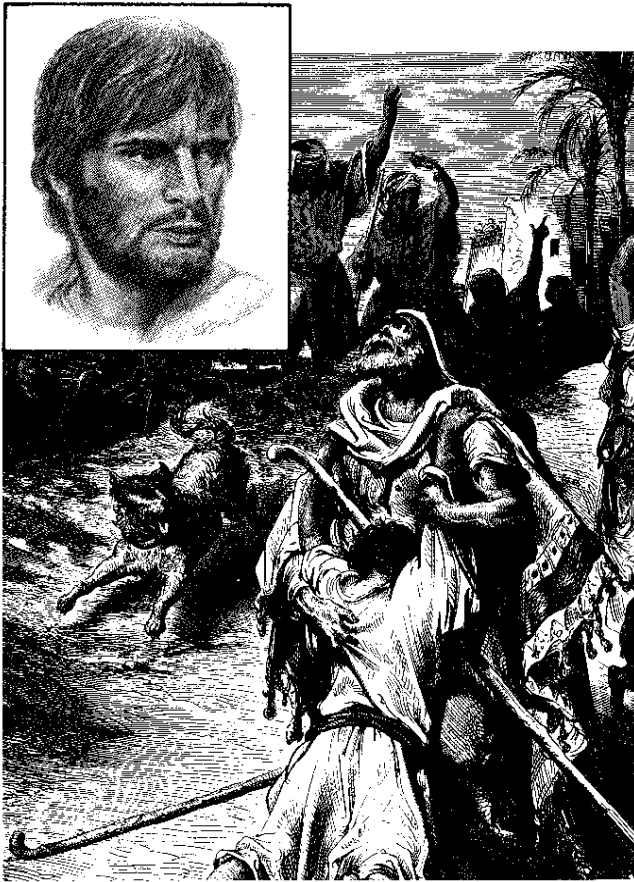
Ask those in your group to pray with you as you prepare for that day. (The entire follow-up group could take this week as a time of fasting and prayer for each other to clear their consciences.) Plan on reporting the results at your next session together. (See the *Basic Seminar Textbook*, pages 56–60 and 70.)

WRITE OUT THE RESULTS.

When you ask forgiveness, do not expect to receive it. There are several reasons that the person you offended may not grant it, including the fact that you may be increasing his load of guilt. If you do receive forgiveness, express genuine appreciation for it.

Write down any special situations you encounter in the column for results, and if needed, discuss them with your group at the next meeting. Review the steps on the Worksheet together.

HOW DOES THE PRODIGAL SON REVEAL SPECIAL INSIGHTS INTO HAVING A GOOD CONSCIENCE?



The prodigal son's father forgave him, but the son faced the continuing "classroom" of limitations and disciplines.

Christ's parable of the prodigal son contains rich insights about the real essence of repentance. Here are just a few of them:

- **Repentance begins by "coming to our senses."**

"And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!" (Luke 15:17).

The prodigal son had demanded his own way and lived in the excesses of sensual pleasure. It was only when all his resources were gone that he was ready to consider the need for a good conscience.

- **Repentance is admitting that "I have sinned."**

"I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee" (Luke 15:18).

Those who fail usually blame people or circumstances for their misfortunes. True repentance is saying with clear understanding, "I have sinned."

- **Repentance recognizes personal unworthiness.**

"And am no more worthy to be called thy son . . ." (Luke 15:19).

When the prodigal son recognized his unworthiness before God and his family, he was ready to receive the enabling power which God gives to overcome a sinful way of life. He also worked out the wording of his confession ahead of time.

- **Repentance accepts new limitations.**

" . . . Make me as one of thy hired servants" (Luke 15:19).

The prodigal son realized that by repenting of his sin and returning to his father he would not automatically regain everything he had lost. He was now willing to accept the limitations of discipline which he threw off when he got out from under his father's umbrella of protection. He simply desired the position of a servant.

- **Repentance will not react when tested.**

"Now his elder son was in the field. . . . And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and entreated him.

"And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid . . . But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf" (Luke 15:25, 28-30).

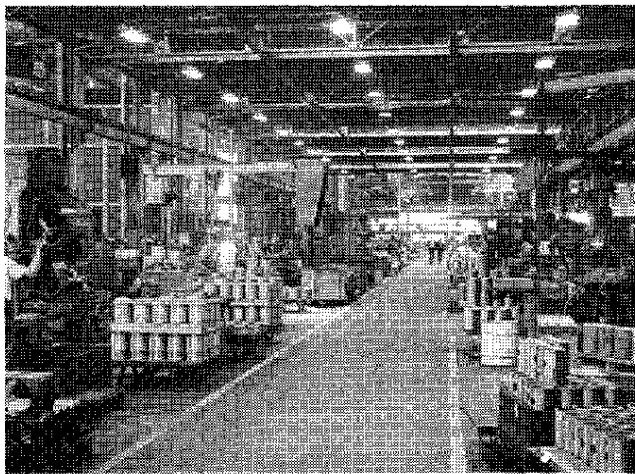
The prodigal son did not sin only against God and his father—his sin affected every other family member. A confession to his older brother might have mellowed or removed the older brother's anger.

- **Repentance will convince the skeptics.**

"And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found" (Luke 15:31-32).

The father restored his son to full fellowship; however, he did not restore his inheritance. With its loss, the prodigal son would one day be under direction of and accountability to his older brother. We can be certain that he would be treated skeptically until he proved himself.

CASE STUDY



Ewing Galloway

WHY DID THIS MAN FAIL TO HAVE A GOOD CONSCIENCE?

"I am writing to you concerning my unsuccessful attempts to gain a clear conscience. Ten years ago I offended my employer when I tried to organize a union. My major offense was disloyalty. There were many hard feelings on both sides over the incident.

"I finally got the courage to call one of the owners who was also the plant manager. He was my direct supervisor at the time. My greatest offense was committed against him. He had entrusted to me the position of 'lead-man supervisor.'

"I asked his forgiveness. He asked me a few questions and said he hardly thought of the incident. He then readily forgave me and told me to get a good night's sleep.

"When I got off the phone, I wept. You do not know what a great disappointment this was to me. It was the gravest violation I could have committed against my employer. I know it has been as great a disappointment to God as it has been to me. I weep and grieve often because there is no way to make restitution to those I offended.

"At the time of this incident, the company's major stockholder was a silent partner, so to speak. He held the title of president. We would see him about once a month around the plant. The plant manager ran the office and production departments for the company.

"When the union drive was under way, the president took great offense at the persons involved

and specifically at me because, after all, it was all my fault.

"I called him on the phone and appealed to him to forgive me. He flatly refused. He said, 'There are many things we need in life, but we don't always get them.' He then thanked me for calling and hung up.

"One reason I had not called him before now was that the offense was so great that I did not expect forgiveness. I now feel foolish and still guilty.

"As long as I did not ask forgiveness, there was always a possibility in the future to ask and he would have forgiven me at a later date. However, now I feel this offense of mine will never be resolved fully.

"This man is a very important and influential man in our community. I don't dare contact him again. I am very disillusioned at this point, for it took me five years to muster up enough courage to call him.

"After his rejection of my plea, I cannot possibly bother him again. This experience has brought back to my remembrance all the bad things and feelings and attitudes of my past. I feel only remorse and pain for my wrongdoing.

"God knows the defeat I feel in my own life because of my lack of submission to authority in the past. Every major conflict in my life has resulted from my lack of submission to those whom I know God has placed over me. My laughter has been turned into mourning and my joy into heaviness.

An Alumnus from Tennessee
Used by permission

EVALUATION:

Whenever there is a negative response to your attempts to have a good conscience, it is important to go back over the Good Conscience Worksheet and reevaluate each column. Let us ask this former employee the following questions you should ask yourself.

1. Did you accurately identify the person whom you offended the most?

Answer: No

He offended the president more than the supervisor. The reason given for going to the supervisor appears to be rationalization because of his fear of going to the president.

2. Did you list the president's offenses?

Answer: No

The statement that "there were many hard feelings on both sides" indicates that he did not take this step. Guilt and blame would have been separated, and there would have been new creativity in dealing with both of them.

3. Did you correctly identify the specific ways in which you failed the president?

Answer: No

In this man's report, there is no mention of specific words or actions which were offensive to the president.

4. Did you identify the root attitudes?

Answer: Partially

The man identified disloyalty, but he later confessed to the root cause of insubordination and rejection of God-given authority.

5. Did you work out ways in which you could make restitution?

Answer: No

There are several things this man could have done to begin making things right before contacting the president.

- He could have gone back to fellow dissidents and gathered letters of appreciation.
- He could have printed up posters on loyalty and offered to give them and his testimony to the present employees. (See *Character Sketches*, Volume I, Part 1.)
- He could have bought space in the local newspaper and written a public letter of appreciation for the benefits which he received while working for the president and the company.

6. Did you use the right wording in asking for forgiveness?

Answer: No

Based on the president's response, the former employee had apparently said, "I need your forgiveness."

He should have said, "God has brought me to the place of realizing how disloyal and insubordinate I was to you when I worked for you. I see now that every major conflict in my life has resulted from my lack of submission to authority. I was wrong in the damage I did to you and to the company by my rebellious words and actions.

"I have thought of some ways to try to undo the damage I did, but first I would like to ask, 'Would you forgive me for damaging you and the company by my insubordination and disloyalty?'"

7. Did you use the right method?

Answer: No

In this case the telephone was not the best method. A personal visit would have been much more effective in achieving proper reconciliation.

8. Did you select the right time in which to contact the president?

Answer: No

Based on the insights which God gives to us from the account of Esther, the proper timing was not selected. (See pages 11-12.)

9. Have you followed up on the results?

Answer: No

Rather than getting freedom, this man was plunged into further guilt and despair. His discouragement hindered him from any further creativity.

The anguish he experienced, however, may have been beneficial in keeping him from other acts of insubordination and disloyalty.

By reevaluating each step of the Worksheet, he should now have the freedom to take the right steps.

- The first step would be to thank God that the forgiveness he requested was denied. This would force him to go much deeper into resolving the whole situation.
- The second step would be to realize that he probably has a blind spot of insubordination which God was trying to clear up by using the president.
- The third step would be to begin taking steps of restitution in order to approach the president in the right way.

GOOD CONSCIENCE WORKSHEET

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

WHOM DID I OFFEND?	HOW DID HE OFFEND ME?	HOW DID I OFFEND HIM?	WRONG ATTITUDES?	HOW CAN I RESTORE?	WHAT SHOULD I SAY IN ASKING FORGIVENESS?	PHONE	VISIT	WHEN WILL I DO IT?	SHOULD I FOLLOW UP ON THE RESULTS?
(Initials)					<p style="text-align: center;">God has helped me to realize that I was wrong in (root attitude—resulting offense). Would you forgive me?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">In addition to asking your forgiveness, I have purposed to _____</p>				