

Serving God With A Pure Conscience

2 Timothy 1:3

(All Scriptures NASV 1995 unless otherwise noted)

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Serving God With A Pure Conscience

"I thank God, whom I serve with a clear conscience the way my forefathers did, as I constantly remember you in my prayers night and day ..."

2 Timothy 1:3

2

Paul Spoke Of His Pure Conscience

- In his defense before the Sanhedrin Council.

"Paul, looking intently at the Council, said, 'Brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day.'"
(Acts 23:1)

- In his defense before Felix.

"... having a hope in God, which these men cherish themselves, that there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. In view of this, I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men."
(Acts 24:15-16)

- In his last letter to Timothy.

"I thank God, whom I serve with a clear conscience the way my forefathers did, as I constantly remember you in my prayers night and day ..." (2 Timothy 1:3)

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The Role Our Conscience Plays Is Often Misunderstood ...

- Some assume it is to be the final authority for what we do.
- What does God's word say about that?

"There is a way which seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death." (Proverbs 14:12 and 16:25)

"Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father."
(Colossians 3:17)

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The Role Our Conscience Plays Is Often Misunderstood ...

- "Let your conscience be your guide" or "Follow your heart" are a popular mottos.
- God's word warns us about following our hearts.

"The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; Who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9)

"For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man." (Mark 7:21-23)

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The Role Our Conscience Plays Is Often Misunderstood ...

- We cannot trust our own conscience.

"The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man is he who listens to counsel." (Proverbs 12:15)

"All the ways of a man are clean in his own sight, but the Lord weighs the motives." (Proverbs 16:2)

"Every man's way is right in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the hearts." (Proverbs 21:2)

"I know, O Lord, that a man's way is not in himself, Nor is it in a man who walks to direct his steps." (Jeremiah 10:23)

- **Your conscience can sometimes lead you astray!**

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The Value of a Good Conscience Is Perhaps Often Overlooked ...

- Some **don't** listen to their conscience when they should!
 - Paul addressed the subject of eating food that had been sacrificed to idols.

"Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one. For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him. However not all men have this knowledge; but some, being accustomed to the idol until now, eat food as if it were sacrificed to an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled."

(1 Corinthians 8:4-7)

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The Value of a Good Conscience Is Perhaps Often Overlooked ...

- Some don't consider the consequences of violating their own conscience, or someone else's conscience.

"But food will not commend us to God; we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat. But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. For if someone sees you, who have knowledge, dining in an idol's temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be strengthened to eat things sacrificed to idols? For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died. And so, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble."

(1 Corinthians 8:8-13)

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Conscience Defined

- Greek - *suneidesis*

"... that process of thought which distinguishes what it considers morally good or bad, commending the good, condemning the bad, and so prompting to do the former, and to avoid the latter."

(W.E. Vine – Dictionary of New Testament Words)

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Conscience Defined

- Note: Conscience is a process of thought that distinguishes or makes moral judgments.
- Conscience must be properly taught.

*"Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though **by this time you ought to be teachers**, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who **because of practice have their senses trained** to discern good and evil."* (Hebrews 5:11-14)

- A properly taught and trained conscience will appreciate and understand what is **true** and reject what is **false**.

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The Conscience May Not Always Be A Reliable Guide ...

- Paul had served God with a good conscience throughout his life ...

*"Paul, looking intently at the Council, said, 'Brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God **up to this day**.'"*

(Acts 23:1)

- ... Even when he was persecuting Christians!

"So then, I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, but also when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them. And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities."

(Acts 26:9-11)

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The Conscience May Not Always Be A Reliable Guide ...

Important questions:

1. Is what we **consider** morally good or bad **actually** good or bad?
2. Are our judgments based upon God's absolute truths, or our own think so? (cf. Proverbs 14:12 and 16:25)
3. Has our conscience been properly set?

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A Good Conscience is Commanded!

- *"But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith." (1 Timothy 1:5)*
- *"... but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience." (1 Timothy 3:9)*
- *"... and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame." (1 Peter 3:16)*

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The Conscience Developed

How A Pure Conscience Is Made Possible ...

- We are all sinners, so how can we possibly have a pure conscience?

"... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God ..."
(Romans 3:23)

"Behold, the Lord's hand is not so short that it cannot save; Nor is His ear so 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." (Isaiah 59:1-2)

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The Conscience Developed

How A Pure Conscience Is Made Possible ...

- A clean conscience is made possible through Jesus' blood.

"... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." (Romans 3:23-26)

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The Conscience Developed

How A Pure Conscience Is Made Possible ...

- A clean conscience is made possible through Jesus' blood.

- Old Testament sacrifices and ordinances were insufficient.

"Now when these things have been so prepared, the priests are continually entering the outer tabernacle performing the divine worship, but into the second, only the high priest enters once a year, not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the sins of the people committed in ignorance. The Holy Spirit is signifying this, that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed while the outer tabernacle is still standing, which is a symbol for the present time. Accordingly both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience, since they relate only to food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until a time of reformation." (Hebrews 9:6-10)

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The Conscience Developed

How A Pure Conscience Is Made Possible ...

- A clean conscience is made possible through Jesus' blood.

- Old Testament sacrifices and ordinances were insufficient.

"For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins? But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." (Hebrews 10:1-4)

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The Conscience Developed

How A Pure Conscience Is Made Possible ...

- A clean conscience is made possible through Jesus' blood.

- The blood of Jesus can cleanse one's conscience!

"But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (Hebrews 9:11-14)

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The Conscience Developed

How A Pure Conscience Is Made Possible ...

- A clean conscience is made possible through Jesus' blood, which we contact in baptism.

*"Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you – not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a **good conscience** – through the resurrection of Jesus Christ ..."*
(1 Peter 3:21)

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Baptism and *"an appeal to God for a good conscience"* (1 Peter 3:21 NASV 1995)

"... the answer of a good conscience toward God" (NKJV)

"... an appeal to God for a good conscience" (ESV)

"... the interrogation of a good conscience toward God" (ASV)

"... an appeal to God for a clear conscience" (RSV)

"... the craving for a conscience right with God" (Goodspeed)

"... the prayer for a clean conscience before God" (Moffat)

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Consistent With The Purpose Of Baptism

- Baptism is *"for the forgiveness of sins,"* to have one's sins *"washed away"* (by the blood of Christ).

*"Peter said to them, 'Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the **forgiveness of your sins**; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'"* **(Acts 2:38)**

"Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name."
(Acts 22:16)

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Consistent With The Purpose Of Baptism

- Therefore, people in New Testament times who realized they were sinners were anxious to be baptized as soon as possible!

- Jews on Pentecost

"So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls." **(Acts 2:41)**

- Samaritans

"But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike."
(Acts 8:12)

22

Consistent With The Purpose Of Baptism

- Therefore, people in New Testament times who realized they were sinners were anxious to be baptized as soon as possible!

- Eunuch

"Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him. As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, 'Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?'" *[And Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may.' And he answered and said, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.']* *And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him."* **(Acts 8:35-38)**

- Jailor

"And he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his household." **(Acts 16:33)**

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Consistent With The Purpose Of Baptism

To have our conscience *"cleansed"* by the blood of Christ – (cf. **Hebrews 9:14**)

- One is baptized to wash away sins. **(Acts 22:16)**

- Then raised to a new life through the same power of God that raised Jesus from the dead.

"Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life." **(Romans 6:3-4)**

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Consistent With The Purpose Of Baptism

Thus, **in baptism** we make an appeal for a good conscience (**cf. 1 Peter 3:21**), trusting that the blood of Jesus will wash away our sins (**cf. Acts 2:38; 22:16**).

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How A Pure Conscience Is Maintained

A Good Conscience Is Maintained By Obedience To God's Will.

- Note that failure to do what we know is right is sinful.

"Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin." (James 4:17)

- Failure to abstain from what we know is wrong is also sinful.

"Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness." (1 John 3:4)

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How A Pure Conscience Is Maintained

A Good Conscience Is Maintained By Obedience To God's Will.

- **Right conduct with godly sincerity** makes for a good conscience.

"For our proud confidence is this: the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you." (2 Corinthians 1:12)

"For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death. For behold what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow, has produced in you: what vindication of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what avenging of wrong! In everything you demonstrated yourselves to be innocent in the matter." (2 Corinthians 7:10-11)

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The Conscience Destroyed

Much Harm Can Be Done To The Conscience.

- We can **violate** our conscience, which is **sinful**.

"The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin." (Romans 14:22-23)

- We can **defile** our conscience, leading to **unbelief**.

"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." (Titus 1:15)

- We can **sear** our conscience, leading to **apostasy**.

"But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron ..." (1 Timothy 4:1-2)

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The Conscience Destroyed

Ignoring Or Violating The Conscience Is Dangerous.

- A **guilty** conscience can soon lead to a **hardened** conscience.

- Once our conscience is hardened regarding attendance in worship ...

"... and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near." (Hebrews 10:24-25)

... It is far more likely to become hardened against doing what is right in other areas.

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The Conscience Destroyed

Ignoring Or Violating The Conscience Is Dangerous.

- A **hardened** conscience can lead to a heart of **unbelief**.

"Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called 'Today,' so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." (Hebrews 3:12-13)

- The deceitfulness of sin hardens one's heart.

- A hard heart can begin to question what one once believed.

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Brothers and sisters in Christ, can we honestly say words like these?

- ***“Pray for us: for we are persuaded that we have a good conscience, desiring to live honorably in all things.”***
(Hebrews 13:18)
- ***“I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience ...”*** (2 Timothy 1:3a)

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If not, and our conscience has not yet become so hardened that we will not heed, then we need to...

- Come to **God’s Son** for the cleansing of our conscience through His blood,
 - Come to **God’s Word** for the proper understanding of what is actually right and wrong,
 - Come to **God’s Family** through frequent assembling to exhort us to do what is good.
- **If we reject faith and a good conscience, then our FAITH suffers shipwreck in our lives!**
“... keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith.” (1 Timothy 1:19)

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■ **Note Paul’s confidence.**

“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith ...” (2 Timothy 4:7)

- That was because he strove to have a good conscience.

“In view of this, I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men.”
(Acts 24:16)

- That was because he lived by faith.

“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.” (Galatians 2:20)

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Conclusion:

- Are you fighting the good fight?
- Are you keeping the faith?
- Or have you suffered shipwreck by rejecting faith and a good conscience?
- If so, then come back to the Shepherd of our souls!

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GOD’S PLAN OF SALVATION

HEAR THE TRUTH

James 1:21; Romans 10:17

BELIEVE IN JESUS

Hebrews 11:6; John 6:40

REPENT OF SINS

Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30-31

CONFESS HIS NAME

Romans 10:9-10; Matthew 10:32-33

BE BAPTIZED FOR FORGIVENESS

Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38

REMAIN OBEDIENT

Hebrews 5:9; 1 Corinthians 15:1-2

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