

## CLEAR CONSCIENCE TOWARD OTHERS

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

Paul considered the maintenance of a clear conscience before men a priority only second to a clear conscience before God. Keeping a clear conscience before men is not easy for several reasons.

1. Hostile feelings toward God and men are rooted in men's basic natures. "By nature children of wrath . . ." Ephesians 2:3, Titus 3:3 and Romans 3:10-18.
2. The second birth does not eliminate the potential people possess for hostility. "For I am afraid when I come I may find you to be not what I wish . . ." 2 Corinthians 12:20, 1 Corinthians 1:10-11
3. It is certain that no one will get along with every person. "As far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men."
4. Christians cannot avoid arousing some ill-will. It's a natural consequence of identifying with Christ and His work. John 15:18-27. It's a natural consequence of "speaking the truth" to others. Ephesians 4:14-15, Amos 5:10, and Galatians 4:16.

If a Christian is to maintain that good conscience toward others that God commands (1 Peter 3:16), he must be ready to initiate these biblical strategies toward others when problem situations arise.

### **STRATEGY #1 SOMEONE SINS AGAINST YOU Matthew 18:15-17**

Definition: "Sins against you". While all sin is against God, sins affect people. If you're involved directly (he offends you) or indirectly (his sin affects your family or church) he has sinned against you.

Example: At school or work someone tells untrue stories about your character.

#### Biblical Strategy:

1. Go. You take the initiative even if the rules of our culture say he should come and apologize to you.
2. Reprove him in private. Go tell him his fault without embarrassing him in public and without jumping down his throat. Talk about his wrong action, not about his character.
3. If he listens you have won your brother. You've got to make it easy for him to listen by being specific and kind.
4. But if he does not listen this could become a church matter. There are times when unwillingness to quit open sin, to reconcile with a brother, to quit divisiveness, or to quit teaching contrary to Scripture require telling it to the "church". See 1 Corinthians 5:11-13; 2 Thess. 3:6,14; Titus 3:10; Galatians 1:6-9.

Caution: This should be used with non-Christians too when the offense is directly against you. It is a mistake to make forgiving the offender contingent upon his apology. God does not allow us to hold a grudge for our own sake.

#### **How to forgive:**

1. List the offense. Best to be specific and recall the hurt.
2. Check your part and see if you are to blame too. If so, ask forgiveness.
3. Fully forgive.
  - a. Do not hold it against them, or be hurt by it - mercy.
  - b. Actively love that person instead - grace. Romans 12:20&21. This is the way to overcome evil - with good.

#### **Way to forgive:**

1. You have been forgiven by God. Matthew 18:21-35, Eph. 4:32.
2. Revenge and payment is God's business. Romans 12:19.
3. Bitterness (failure to forgive) will hurt you (not the person you begrudge or hate!) Proverbs 14:10, Hebrews 12:15. It stays inside you and drains you! It is no good for you!

Dr. S.I. McMillen, None of These Diseases, chapter on "The High Cost of Getting Even": "For centuries scoffers have ridiculed the advice of Jesus, 'Love your enemies,' as being impractical, idealistic, and absurd. Now psychiatrists are recommending it as a panacea of man's ills. "When Jesus said, 'Forgive seventy times seven,' He was thinking not only of our souls, but of saving our bodies from ulcerative colitis, toxic goiters, high blood pressure, and scores of other diseases." (p.71)

To avoid lingering feelings of bitterness after you forgive them - and to avoid bitterness in the first place:

1. Look at God's sovereignty.
2. If you were to blame, learn from it.
3. If it was not your fault, give thanks for the chance to learn from being wrongfully hurt - learn the trait of Christ this could develop in you. I Peter 2:20-23.

**BITTERNESS IS THE OPPOSITE OF FORGIVENESS AND WILL STAY IF YOU DO NOT FULLY FORGIVE.**

**STRATEGY #2 YOU SIN AGAINST SOMEONE MATTHEW 5:23-24**

Definition: Your attitude or action has harmed another person directly or indirectly OR another person thinks you have offended them whether you think so or not.

Examples: Someone is mad at you because they heard that you said something bad about them.  
You were in a hurry downtown and pulled out in front of your neighbor.  
Your wife thinks you are not showing love to her.

Biblical Strategy:

A. LIST YOUR WRONGS (and whom you offended).

Some possibilities: wrong attitudes, disobedience, stubbornness, harmful words, untruthfulness, resentments, neglect, gossip.

B. ASK FORGIVENESS.

Get at the root of the problem! Not just the superficial event that is happening.

LAST WRONG	ROOT PROBLEM
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| 1. Disobeyed parents about time. | 1. Wrong attitude toward parental authority.                   |
| 2. Yelling at friend.            | 2. Selfish concern, without appreciation for other's feelings. |

Ask forgiveness for the root problem, the basic offense. Include the "last wrong" so that gets forgiven and confessed too. But then take it to the root problem and clear up the basic offense too.

**WORDING:** I realize I was wrong to disobey you the other night, but also that my attitude hasn't been right toward you as my parents. Will you forgive me (Wait for "YES")?

Caution:

Consequences of covering up sins . . .

- Inability to worship or serve God (John 4:24, Matt. 5:24)
- Inability to witness of Christ to others (I Peter 3:15,16)
- Inability to prosper (Proverbs 28:13)
- Inability to help others (Matthew 7:4,5)
- Physical and emotional ailments (Psalms 32:3,4)
- Inability to experience the control of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:30). You actually grieve the Holy Spirit.

"Woe to the world because of its offenses. For it is unavoidable that offenses come; but woe to the man through whom the offenses come." (Matthew 18:7)

### STRATEGY #3 SOMEONE GIVES YOU HARSH CRITICISM

Definition: A person who tried to use a complaint to hurt you, usually in the presence of others.

Example: A teacher at school is always pointing out what you're doing wrong in front of everyone.

Biblical Strategy:

- A. Record all the truth in his charges.
- B. Thank God for the reproof and will to correct your behavior.
- C. Protect the reputation and welfare of the critic and don't yield to the temptation for revenge.
- D. Talk to no one about it, only to God (Luke 6:28).
- E. Give God time to work!

Caution:

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| A. On the surface, these attacks always seem unjust or lies.  | David didn't murder King Saul or his family, nor did he steal his throne (II Sam. 16:5-14). |
| B. But God uses harsh critics to reveal and teach us things that are true.  | God was punishing David with Absalom's rebellion. David was a murderer.                     |
| C. God (alone) will remove the critic when we respond correctly to the charge.  | "Perhaps the Lord will bless me because of these curses!" David stopped murdering.          |
| D. Allowing friends to take up an offense for you against the critic will only hurt your friends.                           | "If the Lord has told him to curse me, who am I to say no?"                                 |
| E. Harsh criticism drains you emotionally, but will build endurance and godly character (if you let it). (Hebrews 12:3,11). | "and the king and all the people arrived weary . . ."                                       |

### STR. #4 ANOTHER CHRISTIAN IS OVERTAKEN IN A FAULT GAL. 6:1-2

Definition: "Overtaken in a fault" means a Christian trying not to sin who either fails to recognize sin, or is overtaken while fleeing it.

Examples: A child with a lying problem tried to overcome it but slips and tells another lie.

A man fails to recognize that his interest in sports takes away from his family.

Biblical Strategy:

1. You who are spiritual - people who are maturing in Christ and who have a relationship with the person overtaken should talk to him. That means in your family and among people you know, it's your responsibility to help.
2. Restore him gently. Be bold to discuss the sin with him but do so gently. Remember how gently Christ has dealt with us (Titus 3:2-5, 2 Cor. 10:1). If you're the one overcome, seek help. James 5:16 says confess your faults to each other.
3. Looking to yourselves lest you also be tempted. We all are in this together. We all have sins we're either fleeing from or surprise us and overtake us.

4. Bear one another's burdens. The burden of sin of course, but also people's emotional, physical and spiritual needs as well.

**NOTE:** This is a key principle of church life but both people overtaken and maturing Christians tend to avoid each other. This only makes the problem worse.

5. Each one shall bear his own load (Gal. 6:5). This means that each person is responsible for himself. If he is fulfilling this responsibility and has burdens, believers are to help. If he is not concerned about his own needs and merely wants someone else to carry his load for him, then the need is to confront about neglect; not to bear his burden.

Caution: Be sure not to allow "restoration" to become "criticism".

COMMON CRITICISM: Leviticus 19:17,18

Definition: An expression of dissatisfaction or displeasure over an offense.

Purpose: To verbally protest against an injustice or distasteful action.

Method: Communicated outside the circle of offense.

Goal: To satisfy a person's claim.

Basis: Based upon personal opinion.

Result: Indirect expression of opposition and discontent with God's will, destructive influence on those who hear it.

BIBLICAL RESTORATION: II Timothy 2:24-26

Definition: An expression of concern and love for the offender.

Purpose: To show someone his sin, and call him to take corrective measures.

Method: Communicated only within the circle of offense.

Goal: To restore the offender.

Basis: Based upon God's Word.

Result: Direct tool of God to express His will and love to correct others.

#### **STRATEGY #5 SOMEONE ACTS DISINTERESTED IN SPIRITUAL THINGS**

Definition: A person, neighbor or acquaintance has dropped out of Christian fellowship or perhaps is unsaved and shows no interest in Christ.

Example: Your dad is unsaved and won't attend church.

Biblical Strategy:

- A. Use disinterest in others as a mirror. Could you have said or done something to turn them off? (Matthew 7:3,4)
- B. Approach the disinterested with a thankful spirit. Do not let them intimidate you. (Philippians 1:27-28)
- C. Show them why you are concerned and what the consequence of their disinterest will be. (Ezekiel 2:4, 3:10,11,17)
- D. Praise them for anything that is praiseworthy in their lives. (I Corinthians 11:2)

- E. Communicate to them that you like it when they are around. (Romans 15:7)
- F. Tie them to healthy influences. Introduce them to others who can help. (2 Corinthians 7:14-16)
- G. Explain to them why you do things the way you do. Perhaps they misunderstand you. (2 Corinthians 1:15-17)
- H. Figure out creative ways to serve them. (I Thessalonians 2:9)
- I. Listen and practice openness. Don't overact and sermonize.
- J. Use your personal relationship and love to stimulate them. (Hebrews 10:24-25).
- K. Pray specifically for their spiritual development. (I Thessalonians 3:10-12)

Caution: Some disinterest in others toward spiritual things seems to be the Christian's responsibility to prevent its cause by avoiding:

- A. Wrong doing: "If you do what is evil, be afraid..." Romans 13:4-5, I Peter 3:17, 2:20.
- B. Unfair dealing: "Your deeds cry out against you." James 4:4-7, Proverbs 28:16
- C. Refusal to accept criticism:  
"He who listens to reproof acquires understanding." Proverbs 15:32, Matthew 7:3-5.
- D. Blemishing another's reputation/sharing confidences/bearing a bad report.  
"conceal a matter . . ." Proverbs 11:13, 17:9, 25:8-10, 30:10.
- E. Associating with others who are not good influences.  
"The companion of fools will suffer harm . . ." Proverbs 13:20, 16:29, 22:24-25, II Timothy 3:1-6.

## **STRATEGY #6 AN OPPONENT FAILS OR PROSPERS**

Definition: Someone who is your opponent in a sporting contest or who opposes you in a real life situation fails or prospers.

Example: A non-Christian at school who resents your Christian stand fails miserably in a sporting event.

Someone who has been your rival for a starting position on the team is sidelined for the season with an unexpected injury.

Biblical Strategy:

- A. Reject and confess as sin any natural responses to such news about your opponent.

NATURAL RESPONSE (MAN'S SINFUL, SELFISH FEELINGS)

If an opponent prospers = jealousy (Gal. 5:26, Psalms 73:3)

If an opponent fails = rejoice (I Cor. 13:6, Prov. 24:17)

"Natural desires become envy toward another when we have a mentality that would give us secret satisfaction at his misfortune, or strong displeasure at his prosperity." - Francis Schaeffer.

- B. React in the biblical way:

BIBLICAL RESPONSE (CHRIST'S PURE AND HOLY FEELINGS)

If an opponent prospers = rejoice (Rom. 12:15a, I Cor. 12:26b)

If an opponent fails = weep (Rom. 12:15b, I Cor. 12:26a)

Caution: Understand why envy toward an opponent is so bad.

1. It keeps people from trusting Christ as Savior. (Romans 1:29; Galatians 5:21; James 3:14,16)
2. It robs you of your love for others. (I Corinthians 13:4)
3. It will lead you to betray even family and loves ones, those closest to you. (Acts 7:9)
4. It always leads to wrong actions. (Psalms 37:8)
5. It killed Christ. (Matthew 27:18)