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# **Clear Conscience Toward God**

**538-A**

**Series: The Beatitudes**

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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# Clear Conscience Toward God

In our study of “Blessed are the pure in heart”, we have previously looked at the question, “What is the heart?” The heart is the person that lives inside of you, the man God sees when He looks at you. It is your real mind, emotion and will. It is your mind. This is what you think about when you think no one knows what you think. It is your emotions. It is how you really feel about God, about your parents, about your husband. and about your circumstances. It is your will, what you would choose to do if there were neither restraints nor consequences. This is the person called the real you.

God’s desire for the heart is progressive purity. It is to become increasingly clear with less and less phoniness, compromise, and filth. It is more and more of the “real thing”, as the commercial says, only this is from the inside out. God promises us that, as our hearts become more pure, our capacity to see God will multiply. As we see Him, we become more like Him. In other words, what we are dealing with is the essence of godliness. We have discussed two of at least five characteristics of a pure heart. The first two concern a transparent spirit. They are the absence of hypocrisy and the presence of a pure motive. In the last lesson, we saw Satan has three basic motives he wants to use to motivate the believer. These are self-preservation, self-gratification and self-exaltation. God, meanwhile, has one motivation, the love of Christ that constrains us.

In this lesson we will start with the third attribute of a pure heart: a clear conscience. The outline for these next few lessons:

## I- Conscience Defined

A- What is a conscience?

B- What is a clear conscience?

## II- Conscience Directed

This being so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men. (Acts 24:16)

The Amplified Translation says,

Therefore, I ought to always exercise and discipline myself, mortifying my body, deadening my carnal affections, bodily appetites and worldly desires, endeavoring in all respects to have a clear, unshaken, blameless conscience, void of offense toward God and void of offense toward man.

Our outline for the next few lessons will be basically the three directions a clear conscience takes.

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1- To be void of offense toward God. This is to have nothing between you and God.

2- To have a clear conscience toward man. We can imagine a picture of two men, each relating to God. Your clear conscience depends partly on whether there is anything you have done that would come between your brother and God. In the next lesson, we will do a study of I Corinthians 8, 9, 10 and I John 3. This will show us what a Christian's responsibility is to other Christians as it relates to our conscience and theirs.

3- To have a clear conscience toward or with man means that there is nothing between you and your brother. This is very relevant in making the wrongs righted with those who are personally offended by you.

*So there are three kinds of offenses: 1) an offense against God. 2) an offense when you have caused another to be offended with God. 3) an offense where you have caused another to be offended.*

### OUR CONSCIENCE TOWARD GOD

This lesson will deal with the first offense, our conscience toward God. What is your conscience? We have all heard someone say, "I was about to do something, but my conscience got the best of me." Or you may hear a politician or businessman say, "My conscience is perfectly clear." Or you may have said, "I've got a problem. I have a guilty conscience." What does this mean? Do you have a conscience? Does everybody have a conscience? Do unbelievers have a conscience? Does everyone's conscience have the same degree of sensitivity? How does Satan deaden and cauterize our conscience? Does the Bible have anything to say about the conscience of a man? How do we get a clear conscience anyway? We need to find the answers to these questions. Fortunately, the Bible does have both the answers and the illustrations.

The word conscience is found in the New Testament. In the Greek it is spelled, *suneidesis*. It comes from two words put together that literally mean "to know oneself". Do you know yourself? It also means to become one's own witness. In other words, rightly defined, a conscience is the mechanism placed in the heart of man by God for the discernment of good or evil.

Let me try to illustrate this. Do you watch the news in the evening? When you are watching the weather, there is a piece of high-priced radar equipment. It gives a picture of the area that

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lights up with dark and light. The scanner goes around and lights up the bad weather. The weathermen are very excited about these types of radars that can show the storms that are coming, how far away they are, how fast they are traveling and how much rain they are dumping on the area. Your conscience is the radar of your heart. Its purpose is to light up, expose, and illuminate evil. If you could draw a picture of your heart, your conscience would be the scanner that God places to go back and forth continuing to expose evil.

This definition can be confirmed in some passages in Scripture. One of these passages is Genesis 2:9. This passage tells us that there were two trees in the garden. There was a tree of life and a tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Adam and Eve were not to partake of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Satan's argument was very deceptive. The Living Bible says that it was the tree of conscience that would give knowledge between good and evil. Before the fall, we don't know whether man had a conscience or not. I don't think man needed a conscience, all he needed was a God-conscienceness. That is what Adam had, God-conscienceness. But, he reached out and partook and ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the tree of conscience. He became self-conscious. He realized he was naked. It had never bothered him before. He became self-conscious. Why? He had taken a bite of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. He now could see good and evil. He now had choices to make for the rest of his life. Proverbs 20:27 also confirms our definition. It says that a man's conscience is the Lord's searchlight that exposes his hidden motives. In other words, it is the radar on God's screen that scans back and forth and points out evil and sin in the heart of a Christian.

When do you receive a conscience, at birth or at conversion?  
Let's turn to Romans 2,

For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law

(for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified;

for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves,

who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them)

(Romans 2:12-15 NKJV)

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In the Living Bible,

He will punish sin wherever it is found. He will punish the heathen when they sin, even though they never had God's written laws, for down in their hearts they know right from wrong. God's laws are written within them; their own conscience accuses them or sometimes excuses them. And God will punish the Jews for sinning because they have His written laws but don't obey them. They know what is right and don't do it.  
(Romans 2:12-15 TLB)

So the unbeliever has a conscience toward God. He knows the difference between good and evil. If you were to draw a diagram, you would see the unbeliever has a heart. If you draw a picture of the world next to that heart, his conscience is continually being deadened. Not having the Word of God and the Spirit of God, his concepts are being translated by the world. Is it wrong to lie? To the world it isn't if you don't get caught. Is it wrong to steal? It isn't to the world's thinking if it is in small amounts, or if you are hungry. Are there standards of moral purity? Certainly, but they are changing. This is what the world teaches the conscience of the unbeliever.

When you respond and accept Jesus into your heart, then your conscience undergoes a struggle, a warfare. The Word of God tries to explain to your conscience what the will of God is. The world, if you allow it to infiltrate your life, is still continually telling you not to be carried away with absolutes.

What part does man's conscience play in his conversion? Turn to I Corinthians 14. In the Living Bible it goes like this,

But if you prophesy, preaching God's Word, and an unsaved person or a new Christian comes in who does not understand about these things, all these sermons will convince him of the fact that he is a sinner, and his conscience will be pricked by everything he hears.

As he listens, his secret thoughts will be laid bare and he will fall down on his knees and worship God, declaring that God is really there among you.  
(I Corinthians 14:24-25 TLB)

I can remember when I was not a Christian, I was exposed to the Word. I can remember that there was a veneer in my heart that covered up what was right and what was wrong. It was like somebody had stripped it away, and my conscience was being pricked. My conscience was being stirred. It is called conviction of sin.

There may be some of you who go through all of the outward externals of being a Christian, yet have never personally responded

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to Christ. You may even resent going to places where the Word of God is taught, because there is a continual gnawing or ripping away of what you consider to be good and evil. You resent replacing it with what God says is good and not being able to measure up to that good, apart from the blood of Jesus Christ.

Once you become a Christian, how does God use your conscience to make you sensitive to the will of God? In I Samuel 24, we see Saul had gone into a cave where David and his men were hiding.

“Now is your time!” David’s men whispered to him. “Today is the day the Lord was talking about when He said, ‘I will certainly put Saul into your power, to do with as you wish!’” Then David crept forward and quietly slit off the bottom of Saul’s robe!

But then his conscience began bothering him.

“I shouldn’t have done it,” he said to his men. “It is a serious sin to attack God’s chosen king in any way.”

(I Samuel 24:4-6 TLB)

David’s conscience began bothering him. One thing a conscience does for you is that after you have sinned, in this case a brother was wronged, your conscience raises a red flag to say, “Whoa! You were wrong. Do something about it.” We can turn to II Samuel 24,

But after he had taken a census, David’s conscience began to bother him, and he said to the Lord, “What I did was very wrong. Please forgive this foolish wickedness of mine.”

(II Samuel 24:10 TLB)

David had wronged God. He had overstepped the will of God. He had done in the flesh what God wanted to do in the Spirit. His conscience said, “Wait a minute, David, you are wrong. You have displeased the heart of God.” We can then turn to Romans 7 in The Living Bible. Paul is speaking to us as he says,

I don’t understand myself at all, for I really want to do what is right, but I can’t. I do what I don’t want to—what I hate.

I know perfectly well that what I am doing is wrong, and my bad conscience proves that I agree with these laws I am breaking.

But I can’t help myself, because I’m no longer doing it. It is sin inside of me that is stronger than I am that makes me do these evil things.

I know that I am rotten through and through so far as my old sinful nature is concerned. No matter which way I turn I can’t make myself do right. I want to but I can’t.

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21 It seems to be a fact of life that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong.

I love to do God's will as far as my new nature is concerned, but there is something deep within me, in my lower nature that is at war with my mind and wins the fight and makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. In my mind I want to be God's willing servant but instead I find myself still enslaved to sin. So you see how it is: my new life tells me to do what is right, but my old nature that is still inside me loves to sin.

What a terrible predicament I am in! Who will free me from my slavery to this deadly lower nature?

Thank God! It has been done by Jesus Christ our Lord. He has set me free. (Romans 7:15-18, 21-25 TLB)

So there is now no condemnation. (Romans 8:1 TLB)

In other words, from God's perspective, it has been done. We have been set free. It is our conscience within us that is continually surfacing the conflict in our hearts between what we pretend to be and what we really are. What is the result of ignoring your conscience? Here are three verses of Scripture. The first is Job 27. This is his final defense.

I will never, never agree that you are right; until I die I will vow my innocence.

I am not a sinner-I repeat it again and again. My conscience is clear for as long as I live. (Job 27:5,6 TLB)

Those who declare otherwise are my wicked enemies. They are evil men. (Job 27:7 TLB)

When you ignore your conscience, you begin to develop a bitter spirit. You become insulated from sin. You begin to reject the counsel of your friends as enemies. Proverbs 5:4 talks about eventual bitterness and despair that comes into the heart of one who does not pay attention to his conscience. I Timothy 1 is one of the most important passages of this study.

This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare,

having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck, (I Timothy 1:18,19 NKJV)

When you ignore the whispering of your conscience, you eventually can reject the will of God until you become shipwrecked, put on the shelf, no longer usable and no longer used.

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What does it mean to have a clear conscience? It means to have a conscience that is pure. In Hebrews 13:18 we are told to pray for one another. We need to pray that we would have a clear conscience to see and do the will of God. Paul said in I Corinthians 4:1-5 that we should pray for one another for a clear conscience, but we cannot be the judge of whether another's conscience is clear or not. We cannot even be a perfect judge of our own. In Acts 23:1 we read of Paul's confession that his conscience is clear. Immediately after he said that, the enemy struck, and he committed a grievous sin against authority and had to apologize. He boasted of his clear conscience, which he shouldn't have done, and then he blew it. He had to eat his words.

To have a clear conscience before God means to have nothing between you and God. Let me remind you that every sin that you commit is a sin against God. You may say, "I really blew it. I offended my friend. I have to ask his forgiveness." Perhaps you do, but the key is to first of all go before God, because every sin is against Him. When the prodigal son returned home, he said to his father, "I have sinned against heaven and against you." When Moses and the children of Israel were in the wilderness, the children rebelled against Moses. He asked them, "Why have you rebelled against God?" Jesus said, "As much as you have committed it to the least of these my brothers, you have done it unto Me."

So every sin is a sin against God. It is a given that we are going to commit a lot of mistakes. We want to please God, and we blow it. So the question is, what do we do to clear our conscience? The price has already been paid. It was paid at Calvary, so from God's eyes we are forgiven. But what do we do to clear our conscience? How do we get back the freedom of spirit that we've lost? What is the key to obtaining a clear conscience?

The key is that we need to confess our sin. We find this in I John 1:9. What does it mean to confess sin? The word confess in Greek is "*homologeō*." It is a combination of two words that means "to agree with another, to say the same thing, to acknowledge, to speak the same language, to bring into harmony with." Luke 12:8 says he that will confess Me before men. What does the word confess mean in this passage? Does it mean that you just tell somebody? No, it means "he that will take a stand with Me before men." What does it mean in John 1:12? We read that John the Baptist confessed and denied not, but he confessed, "I am not the Christ." What did he mean? He took a stand. He said, "You can call me whatever



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you will, but I am not the Messiah.” He took a stand. In John 9:22 we see that if anyone confessed Jesus as the Christ, they would be put out of the synagogue, so they refused to confess that Jesus was the Christ. They wouldn’t take a stand. In John 12:42 we see that many of the rulers believed in Christ, but they wouldn’t confess Him because they were afraid. They wouldn’t declare Him openly. They wouldn’t take a stand. In Acts 24:14 Paul says as he was being tried, “I openly confess before you that I agree with the Way. I am one of His followers.” He did take a stand. A very important passage is Romans 10,

that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe  
in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will  
be saved. (Romans 10:9 NKJV)

The key is that you confess. You make a verbal agreement that Jesus is Lord. Why? Because you believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead. Would it mean anything to God if you confessed verbally that Jesus was the Son of God, if you didn’t believe that God raised Him from the dead? Would you be saved? Yes or no? No. Then confession is more than just the verbal expression of words. It means to take a stand with God over sin.

Grace is grace. We don’t deserve I John 1:9. None of us deserve the blessings of being forgiven. While grace is grace, God has a divine purpose in I John 1:9 that I think we as evangelical Christians have cheapened into some kind of a scriptural genie that we can rub in order to make God’s computer delete and disregard the real intent of the heart. In his interpretation of this passage, Wuest says this means so much more than just to say something before God. It means to come into total harmony and agreement with how God feels about sin, in particular, about the sin that you are confessing.

The conscience convicts you of sin, if it is to lead you to true confession. It means all three - mind, emotion, and will - confessing to God. It means that the mind is assuming God’s attitude toward the sin. He hates it. It means that the emotions are crushed that the heart of God is broken. The will repents and asks God for forgiveness. That is what it means to confess your sins. I want to ask you four questions about confessing sin.

Question 1- Are you confessing sin, if in your heart you are not convicted that it is sin? Give God an honest answer. With your mouth you may say, “God, forgive me!”, but in your heart is the real you that God sees. You may be inwardly thinking that it isn’t so bad, because everybody else does it. With your emotions

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you don't feel guilty, because it was just a little thing, and you know God doesn't want you to get too emotional. With your will you say, "I'm sorry God, I will probably do it again because it was fun." But you go ahead and confess it, because you think you need power to teach a Sunday School lesson or to go witnessing or to solve a problem. The Scripture says, shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid! The key is that when you have this attitude, have you really confessed it?

Question 2- Are you confessing your sin when you are using I John 1:9 not because you are convicted, but because you are about to be caught? It is like the child who has his hand in the cookie jar, and Mom comes into the kitchen. He looks up and says, "Mommy, I'm sorry." He is sorry that he got caught. I usually ask for forgiveness when the heat is on. I usually cry out to God, when I am about to be found out. We are not afraid of offending God much of the time, we are afraid of being found out. That is why understanding the heart is so important.

Question 3- Are you confessing, if you don't intend to stop sinning? That is the goal of God for the Christian anyway you slice it. It is not that we wear out our vocal chords apologizing to God, but having apologized to God, having been forgiven, we forsake the sin at whatever the cost. We may need to fast. We may need to pray. We may need to have others pray with us and for us. We may need to seek counsel. We may need to make certain choices and actually eliminate things in our lives that we enjoy and want. The key is that whatever the cost, if we really understand confession, if we really feel God's position concerning our sins, we will do whatever it takes to forsake that sin. Otherwise, we are not really confessing at all. That is why Jesus said, "Why do you call Me Lord, Lord and do not the things that I say?" That is why when so many people came to Him, He would heal them, He would deal with them, and then say, "Go thy way and sin no more." That is why Jesus said, "Let him that steals, steal no more."

It is like the little child who comes into the kitchen bouncing a ball. The mother asks him not to bounce the ball in the house. He says, "I won't bounce the ball anymore, Mommy." Then he goes into the living room and bounces the ball. The mom follows him in and asks him not to bounce the ball in the living room or in the house at all. He apologizes and says, "I won't do it anymore." He goes into the bedroom and begins bouncing the ball. The mom goes into the bedroom and says, "Don't bounce the ball at all!" He says,

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“I’m sorry, Momma.” She then says, “If you’re sorry, then stop it.”

I will admit that we in ourselves don’t have the power, but in ourselves we have Christ, and He is the power to overcome. We must choose to let Him.

Question 4- Do you really understand what sin looks like and what it does to the heart of God? I want to tell you a story about a famous judge. This judge went to court. He drove up in his car. He was grieved to see that the courthouse had been in flames and was burned to the ground. He ran to a reporter covering the scene and found that many of his friends, other judges, the court reporter, and his secretary had been trapped in the fire and died. He was grieved, because he knew it was the work of an arsonist. He raced home only to see that his own house had gone up in flames. The same arsonist had set fire to his home. He found that his family had also perished. He knew that his only son was at school. He raced to school only to find that the school was in flames, also, and his only son had perished.

Grieved, he tried to get back to normal. He set a temporary courtroom in order. He put on his robes and came before the people. The first person brought before him was the person guilty of arson. This was the man being tried for the fires that had taken the lives of those he loved, especially his only son. As the young man came up to the judge, he looked up and said, “Hey man, I’m sorry, we all do a little prank now and then.” Let me ask you, can you imagine how that judge felt in his heart? Surely he might have mercy, but can you imagine how he felt in his heart?

Do you want to know how God feels about willful sin? It was the fire of sin that wrecked His heaven and the angels had to be cast out. It was the fire of sin that wrecked this earth He had created. It was the fire of sin that separated Him from His family and took the life of His only Son. We then come waltzing into His presence, playing with matches, tossing fires here and there. We then say, “Oh, Lord, I’m sorry, I didn’t really mean to do that much harm.” This is the difference between religion and relationship. Religion says, “I broke God’s law, I hope I get off easy.” Relationship says, “I broke God’s heart, and I can’t stand it.”

Remember that God does have a heart. If you don’t believe that, read Genesis 6:6 and 8:21. God does have a heart. His heart breaks over sin. Your heart ought to break when you break God’s heart. He is the lover of your soul. He died for you. He

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loves you more than words can tell. Yet, you and I do the very things He asks us not to do. We then casually meander into His presence and say, "Hey man, I'm sorry." Or, do you suddenly see with your mind what a grievous thing you have done? Do you shudder in your emotions that you have broken His heart and cry out, "Please forgive me!" Then you can purpose in your heart by God's grace to never let that sin come between you and God. I don't mean to change your concepts of God's grace. I John 1:9 is in the Bible.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (I John 1:9)

Perhaps that's all it means, that if you say the right words God will forgive you. Certainly, God is loving enough to do that if He chooses. But I'm not sure that is what this verse means. I believe it means that if you agree with God about the gravity of your sin, mind, emotion and will, then cry out asking for forgiveness, He will forgive you. I believe that is what it means to confess your sins.

Either way, the intent of His heart is that our hearts be changed. His perspective of sin should be our perspective of sin. He hates it. He hates what it has done. It has wrecked His heaven. It has wrecked His earth. It has separated Him from His family. It has cost Him the life of His only Son. I wonder if some of us this week need to linger before God in total solitude and take a fresh look at some of the sins in our lives that we have just allowed to remain there, simply tossing our head in God's face, occasionally saying, "Oh Lord, forgive me for that. I didn't mean to be caught." When we come to feel about sin as God does, maybe we will begin to understand what it means to gain a clear conscience before God. Having a clear conscience before God will begin the process of gaining a pure heart.

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