

# HOW TO GAIN A CLEAR CONSCIENCE<sup>1</sup>

The apostle Paul: “*I exercise myself always to have a conscience<sup>2</sup> void of offense towards God, and towards man*” – Acts 24:16

## INTRODUCTORY THOUGHTS:

- 1) Look into the mirror of *your memory*.
- 2) Look into the mirror of *others attitudes* towards you.

## HOW IMPORTANT IS IT TO ASK FORGIVENESS & CLEAR YOUR CONSCIENCE? - Mt. 5:23-24

### WHOSE “MOVE” IS IT? – Mt. 18:15

## SUGGESTIONS REGARDING THE RIGHT WAY TO ASK FORGIVENESS:

- 1) KNOW EXACTLY WHAT YOU ARE GOING TO SAY – Lk. 15:18-19 cf. v. 21.
- 2) ADMIT YOU WERE WRONG! Don’t say, “*If I offended you*” or “*If I was wrong.*” Also don’t say “*I was wrong, but you were too!*” Such statements reflect pride, not a humble spirit. Instead, clearly acknowledge your sin & error: “*I WAS WRONG*” or “*I WRONGED YOU BY...*”
- 3) NAME THE BASIC OFFENSE – e.g. “*I was not the example to you of a Christian that I should have been*” or “*What I said was wrong & offensive to you and a disgrace to Christ*”, etc. **Do NOT go into the gross details or glorify sin.** – cf. Eph. 5:11 “*...it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret...*”
- 4) ASK: “WILL YOU FORGIVE ME?” By putting it in the form of a question it means that you will have to wait for an answer. *That’s good.* That way you can actually resolve the problem (unless they refuse to forgive you). To merely say to a person, “*I’d like you to forgive me*” does not mean that they have done so. Likewise, to say “*I’m sorry*” is not very good. After all, they’re probably sorry too! Admittedly, asking this question (“*Will you forgive me?*”) and then waiting for an answer is one of the hardest things you will ever do. However it needs to be done.

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<sup>1</sup> These notes were taken from a lecture presented in Detroit, Michigan in 1971, by an organization now called the Institute in Basic Life Principles. I’ve revised & rearranged the material numerous times since, most recently March, 2019. –Mike Edwards, Bible Baptist Church, Madison, Ohio

<sup>2</sup> There are a number of different kinds of consciences mentioned in Scripture. They include: a) a *blameless* conscience (Acts 24:16-NASV cf. “*void of offense*”-KJV); b) a *weak* conscience (I Cor. 8:7, 10, 12); c) a *good* conscience (I Tim. 1:5, 19; Heb. 13:8; I Pet. 3:16, 21); d) a *clear* conscience (I Tim. 3:9); e) a *seared* conscience (I Tim. 4); f) a *pure* conscience (II Tim. 1:3); g) a *defiled* conscience (Titus 1:15) & h) an *evil* conscience (Heb. 10:22).

## **IMPORTANT CAUTIONS:**

- 1) **DON'T ASK FORGIVENESS VIA A LETTER OR EMAIL!** Going in person, face to face is best. A second option is to use the phone. The main problem with writing a letter is that you may never get an answer! In addition, you are simply documenting your sin which may cause even more problems! Likewise sending an email or posting an apology on Facebook has all the same negatives as writing a letter.
- 2) **PRAY BEFOREHAND, and AS YOU GO** – Rom. 8:26; etc.
- 3) **GO WITH A HUMBLE SPIRIT & ATTITUDE** – James 4:9; I Pet. 5:6; etc.
- 4) **THIS IS NOT THE TIME TO TRY TO WITNESS TO AN UNSAVED PERSON.** *Just take care of your sin.* That's your purpose in going to someone, and it will be the most powerful testimony you can exhibit. Save the witnessing for another time, after you have demonstrated the sincerity and genuineness of your restitution and repentance by your life.
- 5) **THE "CIRCLE OF CONFESSION" SHOULD BE ONLY AS WIDE AS THE "CIRCLE OF OFFENSE"** – Mt. 18:15-17. In other words, if you've offended one person, you should go ask that individual to forgive you. You do *NOT* ask a whole group of people, a church congregation, etc., to forgive you for something done privately to one or two people. The others quite likely know nothing about the matter and now you have *compounded the original problem* by causing them to imagine all sorts of things. Violating this principle can open another whole "*can of worms.*"

## **TYPICAL EXCUSES FOR FAILING TO STRAIGHTEN OUT PAST OFFENSES & SINS:**

- 1) ***"IT WAS SUCH A LONG TIME AGO."*** *So then why do you still remember it?*
- 2) ***"I DON'T KNOW WHERE THEY ARE NOW."*** *Ask God to help you find them and then do your best to locate them! You'll be surprised what He can do to help you find them!*
- 3) ***"IT WAS SUCH A SMALL THING."*** *Then why do you still remember it?*
- 4) ***"THEY WON'T UNDERSTAND."*** *Go try and talk to them anyway and just see what God may do.*