

A PURE CONSCIENCE

“...fight the good fight, holding on to faith and a good conscience. Some have rejected these and so have shipwrecked their faith.”

—1 TIMOTHY 1:18-19

Much of our concern about sin is that it complicates our lives, often in very troublesome ways. We want to be forgiven and have our consciences clear, but in perpetuating our sin, we adopt this notion of the grace and love of God being unconditional. The idea, of course, is that it is better not to sin, but if we do, don't panic, just come and get forgiven. In effect, what we are saying is that we can do anything we want as long as we come to the cross of Christ, say we're sorry, and have our consciences cleared again. In reality, what we are doing is distorting the love and grace of God into something cheap and dangerous in our lives.

There is an old saying, “It's easier to get forgiveness than to get permission!” Sometimes we bring that attitude to God and often overlook the fact that our sin is against God. The idea that God's love and grace is totally unconditional is untrue of Scripture. What is true is that there is forgiveness, but there is forgiveness when there is genuine repentance. Repentance literally means a change of mind. It is a pre-emptive attitude against sin, which we have already decided upon. It isn't something we feel, but something we think.

One of the most important things we must do is maintain a pure conscience. Scripture tells us we can violate and even destroy our consciences. When we do something we know is wrong the first time, our consciences will scream at us; the second time, the scream won't be as loud; the third time, a bus hasn't run us over yet, and the fourth or

fifth time, we begin to think maybe God doesn't mind after all. Paul adamantly refutes this. He writes, "What shall we say then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin. How can we live in it any longer?" (Romans 6:1-2)

The cross of Christ is the means by which we are able to live clean and godly lives, not just in His death for us, but in our union with Him in His death. When we are genuinely repentant, we can say with Paul, "I am crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20). Being sinless is not an option, of course, but what is wonderfully true is that our sin died with Christ, and we are given new life in which we can claim, "Christ is now my strength, my life, and the power in which I live!"

PRAYER: Dear Lord, thank you for giving us your Son and through Him providing the only means by which we are forgiven.

TO REFLECT UPON: Have I become too lenient in my attitude towards sin?