

Review: Understanding the conscience. Before we can understand our conscience, we must understand other truths about the Lord and ourselves. Without the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit the conscience of sinful man runs amok with his own sinful nature.¹ The conscience is that area of the heart of man where he knows right from wrong, innocence and guilt is determined by the individual himself. Here are some points to remember when it comes to the conscience of both sinful man and the believer.

- When illuminated by the truth of the Lord, a man's conscience declares himself to be guilty - accurately (see [John 8:9](#)).
- The conscience can be defiled by unbelief ([Titus 1:15](#)).
- The conscience can be seared through speaking lies in hypocrisy ([1 Timothy 4:2](#)).
- The conscience can be "cluttered" with dead works and needs to be purged ([Hebrews 9:14](#)). Here is the key passage to understanding the believers' difficulty when dealing with past, forgiven sins. See also [Hebrews 10:2](#).

Understanding Forgiveness. First, let's take a look at the definition of the English word forgiveness:

*Etymology: Middle English, from Old English *forgifan*, from *for-* + *gifan* to give transitive senses*

1 a : to give up resentment of or claim to requital for <forgive an insult> b : to grant relief from payment of <forgive a debt>

*2 : to cease to feel resentment against (an offender) : PARDON <forgive one's enemies>.*²

Please note that forgiveness has a note of generosity on the part of the person doing the forgiving. Herein lies the "rub" as it were. Sinful man is not naturally generous in attitude – God is. If we derive our concept of forgiveness from the thinking of man we will always have strings attached – I'll forgive you if you will do this or that, for example. God seeks no such strings from the sinner. God seeks the sinner, his enemy, in order to forgive him ([Romans 5:10](#)). The objective of forgiveness is restoration – not vengeance.

²¹Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. ²²But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation. Colossians 1:21, 22. NIV.³

¹ If we refuse the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit, we are placed under Divine Discipline.

² From Merriam-Webster online dictionary.

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The idea of forgiveness is restoration and wholeness of soul – not a continuation of condemnation. There are various images that the Bible uses to depict divine forgiveness but the most remarkable is found in Psalm 103:12:

**as far as the east is from the west,
so far has he removed our
transgressions from us. NIV.**

Why not the North from the South? We have heard this explanation many times but it is worth repeating – there is no limitation when going around the equator of earth – we never hit a terminator and ending of heading East or West but let me remind us all the meaning of the original for our word “removed.”⁴ It graphically describes a new status for the object of forgiveness. The sin is literally removed from the sinner – dismissed – sent away. How far? An infinite distance – that’s the true nature of forgiveness from the Lord.⁵

Illustration, Jesus forgives the unfaithful woman.

¹⁰When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? ¹¹She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more. ¹²Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life. KJV,

I have taught on this before – the suggestion here is that not only was the woman forgiven by the Lord – but the condemnation was removed by her former judges and perhaps even her husband – so complete was this forgiveness that she had another chance to redeem herself before society and her husband.

So we enter into an area that at one time or another is soul-wrenching for all believer – dealing with a guilty conscience. Be certain of this: I am not talking about a believer who is, in his personal sins, are ignoring the conviction of the Holy Spirit. Rather, this believer has acknowledged his sin and is still plagued with feelings of guilt.

The KJV Old Testament Hebrew Lexicon

Strong's Number: 07368		Browse Lexicon	KJV Verse Count
Original Word	Word Origin		
רחק	a primitive root		Genesis 2
Transliterated Word	TONT Entry		Exodus 3
Rachaq	TWOT - 2151		Deuteronomy 2
Phonetic Spelling	Parts of Speech		Joshua 2
raw-khak' 𐤓𐤕𐤑			Judges 1
Definition			Job 8
v			Psalms 11
1. to be or become far, be or become distant, be removed, go far away			Proverbs 6
a. (Qal) to be far, be distant			Ecclesiastes 2
b. (Piel) to send far away, extend			Isaiah 8
c. (Hiphil)			Jeremiah 2
1. to make or exhibit distance, be gone far			Lamentations 1
2. to remove, put far away			Ezekiel 5
2. (Niphal) loose v inf (as adv)			Joel 2
3. at a distance			Micah 1
		Total	56

⁴ From Bible Study tools <http://crosswalk.com/>

⁵ The scapegoat is yet another illustration of God removing geographically our confessed sins.

Dealing with a guilty conscience.

¹⁹ And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him. ²⁰ For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. ²¹ Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.
1John 3:19-21.

Bible commentators are all over the map on this passage. I accept Vincent's commentary on this. "If our hearts condemn us..." means that our hearts condemn ourselves much as a court of law would condemn someone accused of a crime *even though we have confessed our sin before the Father*. Now, there is nothing wrong with being convicted of a sin through the ministry of the Holy Spirit and

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God's word but when we take over with our own faulty conscience and start to "kick ourselves all over town" after we have been forgiven then that's a problem. The problem is when the internal judgment of conscience is at variance with God's forgiveness, says Vincent. See also [Amplified](#) translation on this.

We need to approach this passage with great care. One extreme is for the believer to go around with a constant condemning spirit – one that condemns himself and others around him. His forgiveness by the blood of Christ is not a reality in his life – rather he operates *in the flesh* basing his spiritual successes or failures on his own criteria not on the word of God and the operation of the Holy Spirit in his life. ***This I would like to call sinful conscience hijacking the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit.***

On the other hand the other extreme is to assume that since he is positionally under the cleansing of the blood of Christ he has no accountability for his personal actions / sins. ***This approach renders the illuminating ministry of the Holy Spirit null and void.*** Neither approach is biblically sound. Rather, the believer who is rightly under the filling of the Holy Spirit knows he has sinned because he has been convicted by the Holy Spirit. But he also knows that the blood of Christ cleanses him from all sin and that confession is a normal outcome of the convicting, illuminating ministry of the Holy Spirit. Notice that in [1 John 5:20](#)⁶ that God is greater⁷ than our

⁶ And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.
1 John 5:20 (KJV)

⁷ completely sovereign – reigns supremely.

conscience and knows everything *including our personal sins*. The key here is for the believer to be reassured of this fact to the point of complete transparency with the Father in dealing with personal sins and also dealing with the responsibility of one's actions. It is also very important to note the phrase "...we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ..." I'm going to insert here the translation from Lenski:

We know, moreover, that the Son of God is come, and he has given to us understanding so that we know the real One. And we are in connection with the real One, in connection with his Son Jesus Christ. This is the real God and life eternal. 1 John 5:20, Lenski.

The first point from Lenski's translation is that there is a great emphasis on reality – spiritual reality. If we submit our conscience to the work of the Holy Spirit we will be joined with the real One – Jesus Christ, God's Son. Second point I want to pull out of this verse is that of our connection – our relationship with God. Again, I feel compelled to quote Lenski's commentary on this:

"And we are in connection with the real one.' the Son of God has placed us in connection by giving us dianoia⁸ and thus making us know God. There is nothing fictional about either the God with whom we are connected or about our being in him, about our fellowship and connection with him. It is God himself who made this real God known to us and joined us to him."

The greatness of God versus the condemnation of our hearts. At this point I feel compelled to lift a quotation from

Vincent: *"Is this superior greatness to be regarded as related to God's judgment, or to His compassion? If to His judgment, the sense is: God who is greater than our heart and knows all things, must not only endorse but emphasize our self-accusation. If our heart condemn, how*

much more God, who is greater than our heart. If to His compassion, the sense is: when our heart condemns us we shall quiet it with the assurance that we are in the hands of a God who is greater than our heart - who surpasses man in love and compassion no less than in knowledge. This latter sense better suits the whole drift of the discussion."...

The fact is that for the truly regenerate mind the issue is not to "get away with anything" but to please the Lord – no matter how one slices it. In this regard we can rest assured that the Lord knows our frame and that we can come to Him in complete transparency with no preconditions and be confident that He accepts and loves us. The quieting of the heart in verse 21 reflect this idea that we receive a quieted heart as we are reassured by the Lord that we are truly forgiven. Amen.

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⁸ *Dianoia* the ability to think through resulting in understanding. This cannot be achieved by the unsaved or those who name Christ and are operating in the flesh.