

¹⁰Lovingkindness and truth have met together; Righteousness and peace have kissed each other. Psalm 85:10, NASB.¹

Why do I bring Psalm 85 into this subject of the conscience of man? David wrote this psalm during the oppression by the Philistines. He is entering into a statement of national conscience: that Israel has sinned against the Lord and that he is, corporately, asking for forgiveness. Phrases such as "...⁴**Restore us, O God of our salvation, And cause Your indignation toward us to cease....**"² show that Israel as a nation has been guilty of sin and thus the discipline of the Lord. But that is to be over and done with. God's forgiveness and appeasement was on the way. The true nature of God's forgiveness is declared in verse 10 with this beautiful image of two lovers meeting and the world being set right because of this heavenly encounter: lovingkindness and truth meet in the garden, if you please, in a moment of intimacy. Righteousness and peace kiss in the ultimate embrace and the conscience of forgiven man is at rest – or so it would seem.³

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. The conscience is that area of the heart of man where right and 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>

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² NASB

³ I put this reservation in only because of the topic of this lesson: dealing with a guilty conscience when forgiven by the Lord.

2 : to cease to feel resentment against (an offender) : PARDON <forgive one's enemies>.⁴

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. 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.⁵

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.”⁶ 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.

The KJV Old Testament Hebrew Lexicon

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

⁴ From Merriam-Webster online dictionary.

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⁶ From Bible Study tools <http://crosswalk.com/>

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.

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 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.

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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. 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. Neither approach is biblically sound. Rather, the believer who is rightly under the filling of the Holy Spirit knows he has sinned but also knows that the blood of Christ cleanses him from all sin and that confession is a normal outcome of that spiritual operation. Notice that in verse 20 that God is greater than our 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.

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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