

BIBLE LIFE MESSAGES

# How to Get Rid of a Guilty Conscience

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Matthew 5:21-26

**1 When you get a guilty conscience how does it make you feel? You may have hurt or offended someone so you feel bad about it. Wouldn't you like to get rid of it so you would feel better and not have that person resenting you? God's Word tells you how you can do it. 2**

**In Matthew, chapter 5, verses 21 through 26, we read, “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell. 3**

**“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you; leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.” 4**

**“Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.”** <sup>5</sup>

**The first question you would want to ask might be . . .**

## **I. Why Would You Want to Get Rid of a Guilty Conscience?**

**Why would you want to get rid of a guilty conscience?**

**The first reason affects your relationship to the Lord. <sup>6</sup> God is not as much concerned about what you do as much as He is about the attitude that prompted you to do it. <sup>7</sup> Notice in verse 21, You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. In the Jewish system, the consequence for murder was capital punishment. The**

one who committed murder was tried before the local elders and, if found guilty, was stoned to death. However, during the first century capital punishment could only be carried out by the Romans. That is why, after the Lord's trial before the high priest, it was necessary also to be found guilty by the Roman governor. Then, the Romans would carry out the sentence. <sup>8</sup>

But the Lord said that the one who provokes himself to anger is just as guilty before God and deserves the same sentence. <sup>9</sup>

The word "Raca" <sup>1</sup> in verse 22 means "idiot", literally, "empty headed". It was the expression of scorn to someone's intelligence. <sup>10</sup> Apparently the consequence could be trial by the national Jewish supreme court, the Sanhedrin. It was a big swear word! <sup>11</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> ῥακά.

The phrase "you fool" <sup>2</sup> means "stupid". We get our English word "moron" from this phrase. This phrase was to scorn someone's intelligence, but implied also gross immorality; a huge accusation in that religious culture. <sup>12</sup> The consequence of a statement like that had the most severe of punishment. Gehenna, the reference to hell, was the garbage pit outside the southern walls of Jerusalem. There were fires constantly burning foul smelling trash there. When the wind blew just right, residents of the southern section could smell the horrible odors. It was the worst possible place to be close to. <sup>13</sup>

The other reason to get rid of a guilty conscience is it affects your relationship to other people. It can destroy the effectiveness of your life message. As a Christian, you want your life to be the purest example to others of your walk with the Lord. Guilt can hamper that. <sup>14</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> μωρός.

What are some of the benefits of having a clear conscience? <sup>15</sup> Acts, chapter 24 <sup>3</sup> tells us it's a part of your Christian discipline. <sup>16</sup> II Corinthians, chapter 1 <sup>4</sup> says it's a cause for rejoicing. <sup>17</sup> Proverbs, chapter 28 <sup>5</sup> explains that it's a condition for receiving forgiveness.

18

Observe First Timothy, chapter 1, verses 18 and 19, Timothy, my son, I give you this instruction in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by following them you may fight the good fight, holding on to faith and a good conscience. Some have rejected these and so have shipwrecked their faith. A clear conscience is an essential weapon for fighting Satan! <sup>19</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Acts 24:16 - So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.

<sup>4</sup> II Corinthians 1:12 - Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from God.

<sup>5</sup> Proverbs 28:13 - He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy.

And, then, in First Peter, chapter 3 <sup>6</sup> we are told that it's important in supplying you power for your Christian witness! <sup>20</sup>

A clear conscience before God and other people is the testimony your total life presents to the world! <sup>21</sup>

So . . .

## II. How Can You Get Rid of a Guilty Conscience? - v23-26

How can you get rid of a guilty conscience? <sup>22</sup> The simple answer is correct the damage; don't just pretend it didn't happen! <sup>23</sup>

You know what most genuine Christians do? They confess their sin to God. First John, chapter 1, verse 8, says, **If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.** So, you confess your sin to God

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<sup>6</sup> I Peter 3:16 - But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

and He will forgive you, right? <sup>24</sup> But verse 24 <sup>7</sup> reminds you that if you can right a wrong you are obligated to do it! <sup>25</sup> Acts, chapter 26, verse 20 emphasizes, **I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds.**

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Let's take a look at the steps you can take in making restitution. <sup>27</sup>

Look into the mirror of God's Word. <sup>28</sup> James, chapter 1, verses 23 through 25, tell us, **Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it — he will be blessed in what he does.** <sup>29</sup> So, how do you use this mirror? Ask yourself: <sup>30</sup> **Have you stolen anything?** <sup>31</sup> **Have you lied to anyone?** <sup>32</sup> **Have you lost**

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<sup>7</sup> v24 - . . . leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.



**your temper lately? <sup>33</sup> Do you harbor bitterness? <sup>34</sup>  
Have you acted cool to anyone? <sup>35</sup>**

**The next step is to plan and rehearse your apology. <sup>36</sup>  
Notice how the lost son did it! <sup>8</sup> **When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men. <sup>37</sup>****

**Then, James, chapter 4, <sup>9</sup> says to place yourself in the other person's shoes and then express yourself with a repentant heart! The apology must come from a humble heart. <sup>38</sup> When Jacob approached his brother**

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<sup>8</sup> Luke 15:17-19.

<sup>9</sup> James 4:8-10 - Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

**Esau, after deceiving him years before, he approached him with a very humble spirit. <sup>10</sup> 39**

**Then, actually confess to that person that you were wrong! Let's not have this, "I'm sorry. Please forgive me" stuff. Make it genuine! "I was wrong! Will you please forgive me?" 40**

**The last step in making restitution, according to verses 25 and 26, <sup>11</sup> is to plan the right time to do it. 41 Saturate the matter with prayer before you go. 42 Then, as verse 25 recommends, approach your opponent at his most convenient time; when he is in the most receptive mood. You wouldn't come to a wife/mother at supper time when she's trying to fix the evening**

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<sup>10</sup> Genesis 33:1-3 - Jacob looked up and there was Esau, coming with his four hundred men; so he divided the children among Leah, Rachel and the two maidservants. He put the maidservants and their children in front, Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph in the rear. He himself went on ahead and bowed down to the ground seven times as he approached his brother.

<sup>11</sup> v25-26 - Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.

meal. <sup>43</sup> **Make it a time when neither of you will be rushed.** <sup>44</sup>

**Finally, remember verse 24! <sup>12</sup> Make restitution before you worship! Clear up your horizontal relationships before you involve yourself with the vertical one!**

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<sup>12</sup> v24 - . . . leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.