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Getting A Clear Conscience

- *Alertness* -

A conscience that is cluttered with guilt, unforgiveness, and contamination is not free to pay attention to the current stimuli. We need to ask others, whom we have offended, for forgiveness and be willing to make restitution if appropriate. We need to give the gift of forgiveness to those who have offended us and allow God to restore our souls. Finally, we need to receive cleansing from vicarious contamination.

The Sin Of Judah

To get a clear conscience and a clear mind, we must first recognize that we may make our conscience unclean in at least three different ways. First, we may defile our conscience when we sin against others. Second, we may befoul our conscience when we hold unforgiveness toward others. Third, we may contaminate our conscience vicariously through listening to or watching the sins of others. The following story of Judah illustrates how we may receive the cleansing from our offenses toward God and others.

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Isaiah, the Old Testament prophet, began his book by relating his own experience of being a prophet in perilous times. He said that he had various visions from the Lord of God's judgment upon the nation of Judah. He describes Judah as, "*Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, as seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters*" (Isaiah 1:4a). One could not get much lower than Judah. Judah had turned from God and had turned to her own evil desires. She had not only corrupted herself, but had corrupted the lives of others.

For these reasons, God had pronounced judgment upon Judah. Her head was sick, and her heart was faint. There was no soundness in her body. Her body was full of wounds, bruises, and putrefying sores. The enemy had come in and destroyed her cities with fire. Strangers had laid her land desolate before her eyes. If God had not intervened, Judah would have been like Sodom and Gomorrah. It was ironically strange that "Judah", which meant "praise", was compared to the cities which God destroyed with fire and brimstone. God had saved only a remnant of Judah.

Judah had brought sacrifices before God, but her worship was in vain. The people worshipped God by going through the motions of worship, but there was sin and iniquity in their hearts. God bluntly said that Judah would not find Him and that He would not hear their prayers. It seemed like a hopeless situation with no way out. Judah had crossed the line! How could she step back across?

However, God was merciful and told the people that there was a way out. There was a way for Judah to get a clean conscience and to restore her good standing before the Lord. God said, "*Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do will; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow*" (Isaiah 1:16-17). Judah must be willing to do her part of the cleansing process, and then God would do His. Judah was to make herself clean by ceasing that which was evil in God's eyes and to turn to do that which was right in God's eyes. This is an excellent picture of the meaning of *repentance*.

Once Judah had done her part, God would do His part. "*Come now, let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool*" (Isaiah 1:18). God would do what seemed impossible! The concept of being *scarlet* meant that the garment was twice-dyed to increase the intensity of the color. However, God said that He would make it white as snow. God continued the analogy by saying though the garment had a deep color like crimson, He will make the garment as though it has never been exposed to dye. Impossible? No! With God all things are possible.

Furthermore, God told Judah, *"If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it"* (Isaiah 1:19-20). Obedience is a very important step toward recovery. One must be willing to see the connections between his actions and God's response to his actions. God lays out before us a choice of actions and His response to our actions.

Let me begin by stating that in one sense, it doesn't matter what you have done. Sin is sin. It doesn't matter if you have stolen a paper clip or murdered someone, both are still sins. God is willing to start with you where you are. It doesn't matter if you have failed repeatedly or just failed once. It doesn't matter who knows about it and who doesn't know about it. It doesn't matter if you have cursed your brother or cursed God. God has provided a way out.

Steps In Clearing One's Conscience

The **first** step in the clearing of one's conscience is experiencing the judgment of God (Hebrews 12:6-13). God, in one sense, doesn't discipline Satan's kids; however, He is quick to discipline His own. One may experience physical illness because he abuses his body, the temple of God. Judah was sick in the head and in the body. One may have migraine headaches because he is wrestling with guilt. He may have family problems with his spouse and children. He may have social problems at work, school, or with civil authorities. He may experience mental agony of depression, fear, worry, and anxiety. He may have financial problems and not be able to pay his bills. He may experience a bondage to various addictions (drugs, alcohol, sex, and work). God may simply turn us over to our enemies for destruction as he did with Judah. Sin always has a consequence, the judgment of God.

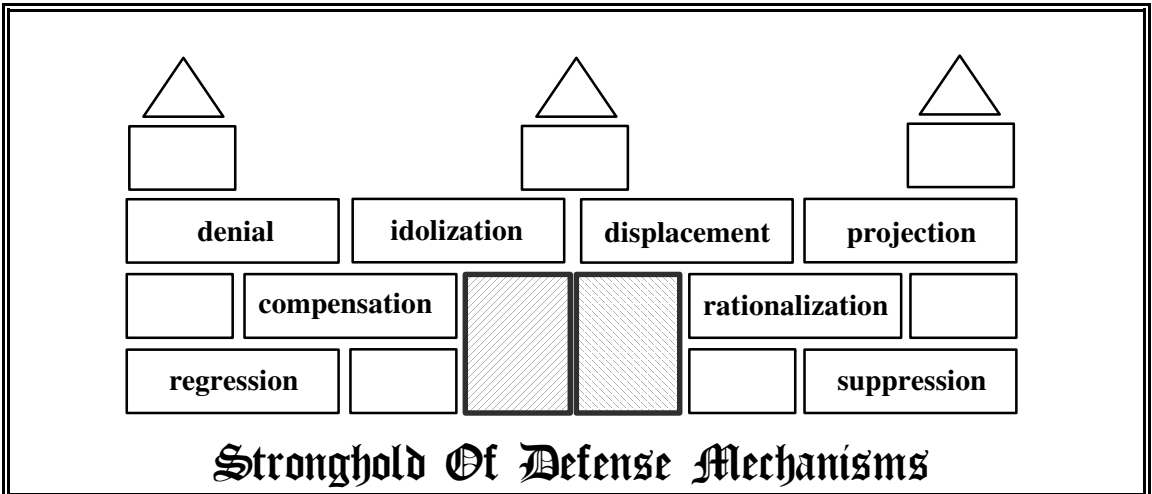
In Biblical times, a city would have a group of judgment chambers set just inside the gates of the city. Today we might call the chambers "city hall". It was a place where certain city officials such as the sheriff, judge, city manager, and mayor would have their offices. Whoever sat in the gates was to have a tremendous influence upon the affairs and character of the city. The husband of the virtuous woman was known in the gates (Proverbs 31:32). God instructed the people to put righteous officers in the gates. *"Judges and officer shall thou make thee in all thy gates, which the LORD thy God giveth thee, throughout all thy tribes; and they shall judge the people with just judgment"* (Deuteronomy 16:18). Those who sat in the gates also controlled what went into and out of the city (Genesis 34:20:21).

The **soul** of man is like a city. Moreover, within the gates of the **conscience** is the seat of judgment. God has put his Law within our conscience for correct judgment.

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"These are the things that ye shall do; Speak ye every man the truth to his neighbour; execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates: And let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbour; and love no false oath: for all these are things that I hate, saith the LORD" (Zechariah 8:16-17). However, we may become like Lot, who sat within the gates of the city of Sodom (Genesis 19:1) and allowed the evil in the city to influence him rather than influencing the evil of the city. The consequence was that God destroyed the city with fire and brimstone (Genesis 19:24).

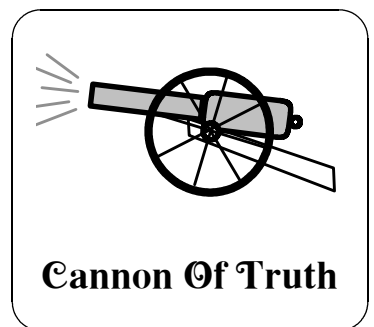
The **second** step is to come to the acknowledgment of sin. Again, the soul is like a city. The sins which one harbors in his soul are like **strongholds** within the city. One may be afraid that other people might find out about the inner strongholds of sin; therefore, he builds a **wall of defense** around the city. The field of psychology has come up with several dozen defense mechanisms that we may use to keep from facing the truth about our failures and our lives. The psychological defense mechanisms are like the stones that make up the wall about the city. Some of the more formal ones are denial, suppression, projection, rationalization, regression, displacement, idolization, and compensation. (1) Denial is when we simply deny that we did what we did. "I didn't do it!" Peter used denial when he was asked if he knew Jesus (Matthew 26:69-75). (2) Suppression is voluntarily pressing something that we have done down deep in our subconscious so that we won't have to look at it. (3) Projection is projecting our sinful behavior upon someone else. "I didn't do it. John did it." (4) Rationalization is trying to reason away any guilt involved. It is saying, "Well, it was only a little white lie." (5) Regression is an attempt to relive an earlier time of our lives so that we don't have to face the current situation. (6) Displacement is one that we all use. Instead of taking responsibility for our wrong, we kick the cat or scream at the children. (7) Idolization is redirecting our attention off ourselves and placing it upon someone whom we would like to be. (8) Compensation is trying to make up for some failure in one area of our lives by



excelling in another area of our lives. Each of these are **lies** of the enemy that make up a stronghold. They are **sins**. Although the devil blinds our eyes at times, we allow him to do so.

Besides these formal defense mechanisms, we may also see some informal ones. We may use deception, avoidance, blame, rejection of others, exaggeration, anger, pouting, silence, withdrawal, and flattery to build up our wall of defense. (1) **Deception** is a deliberate coloring of the truth to make us acceptable in the eyes of others. (2) **Avoidance** is sidestepping the truth. We avoid certain people who may see through our defenses. We may avoid certain topics that might lead to the truth about us. (3) **Blame** is excusing ourselves by blaming others, God, or circumstances for our failures. (4) We may use **rejection** if someone gets too near the truth in our lives. All of a sudden we reject their friendship. (5) **Exaggeration**, like compensation, emphasizes a positive area of our lives to keep others from discovering the bad area. (6) We may use **anger** to control the situation. The child that throws a temper tantrum may be attempting to use anger to keep others from seeing his failures. (7) We may use **pouting** to gain sympathy. (8) We may use **silence** to keep from telling the truth or facing the truth. (9) **Withdrawal** shuts the curtains to the windows of our soul so that no one can see in. Withdrawal may be physical, sexual, emotional, or verbal in nature. (10) **Flattery** *exaggerates* the good in others to take their attention away from us. In reality, all these defenses are wrapped up in the **fear** of others finding out what is on the inside of us. Again, all these defenses are lies, and lies are sins.

The **problem** is that as long as one has his defense system in place, he is **not** likely to face the truth about his strongholds of sin. For a counselor to be **effective**, he must do more than listen to the "defenses" of the person he is counseling. He must at times be **confrontative**. He must be willing to share the truth in love. *"But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ"* (Ephesians 4:15). The way to tear down the defense system is to confront the defense with the truth of **God's Word**. Jesus said, *"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free"* (John 8:32). The approach may be, "You said, that you didn't actually kill him, but Jesus said if you are angry with your bother without cause, then you are in danger of judgment." We may cast an evil spirit out of the city, but if we leave a walled city, sooner or later that spirit will return with more spirits to support him. The stronghold is a fortress of lies, concealing the enemy which is inside. We are to tear down the stronghold using the Word of God. *"(For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of*

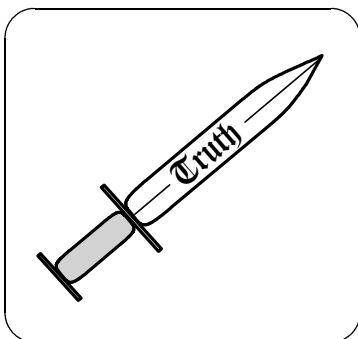


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God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (II Corinthians 10:4-5). Then, if needed, we are to bind and cast out the evil spirits. Jesus said "Or else how can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house" (Matthew 12:29). I plan to discuss other spiritual weapons in a later book.

Therefore, we must first come to acknowledge that what we have done is sin. Isaiah was taken up in a vision before the throne of God. He saw the LORD sitting upon his throne and His glory filled the temple. He saw the two guardian angelic beings before the throne of God declaring, "*Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory*" (Isaiah 6:3). He saw the majesty and power of God in His temple. "*Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts*" (Isaiah 6:5). It is not until we are confronted with the presence of the Holy God that we see the depth of our sin. A sheep may look white compared to dry grass, but the same sheep may look rather dirty compared to a field of snow. "*Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but the LORD pundereth the hearts*" (Proverbs 21:2). When we compare ourselves to others, we may appear clean, but when we compare ourselves to God, we see ourselves as being wholly unclean. Even our righteousness may be unclean. "*But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags: and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like a wind, have taken us away*" (Isaiah 64:6).

Isaiah confessed his sin and also the sin of his people. God responded by sending one of the angelic beings to cleanse his mouth with a hot coal from off the altar. "*And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged*" (Isaiah 6:7). This tells us that only God can complete the purifying of our lives. Please remember that we have our part, and God has His part in cleansing us. Once Isaiah had been purified, he was ready for service.



We should again remember that sin is sin. Some churches may even classify types of sin. However, God's Word says, "*For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all*" (James 2:10). Stealing is stealing if it a ball-point pen from the office or a million-dollars embezzlement. We should take heed to the words of Solomon when he said that it was the little foxes that spoil the vines (Song Of Solomon 2:15). We are not only to blast down the walls of defense to the city of our soul with the **Truth**, we are also to go from block to block and house to house rooting out the enemy with the **Truth** of the Word (Ephesians 6:17).

There are three directions of sin. There is sin against God, sin against others, and sin against self. First, there is sin against God. *"And the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, saying We have sinned against thee, both because we have forsaken our God, and also served Baalim"* (Judges 10:10). When we turn from God to do our own thing we sin against God. Anytime we break the commandments of God we sin against Him. Anytime we rebel against authorities we sin against God. Second, when we seek to hurt or harm others we sin against them. We should exclude self defense and various military services. When we cause a weak brother to fall, we sin against him. We also sin against Christ in such a case. *"But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ"* (I Corinthians 8:12). Third, we may also sin against ourselves. *"Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body"* (I Corinthians 6:18). Of course we may also speak curses upon ourselves. "I am such an idiot."

The **third** step to get a clear conscience is to experience the fear of the LORD. *"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction"* (Proverbs 1:7). The fear of the LORD is to connect our wrong actions to God's response to our actions. Until we do this, we will continue in our ways of sin. We must realize that God sees and knows everything that we do wrong whether it is in the dark or anyone else knows about it or not. God exhorts us by saying, *"Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil"* (Proverbs 3:7). The fear of the LORD goes beyond the fear of getting caught. God's Word says, *"The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate"* (Proverbs 8:13). We should also understand that if we can trust God to discipline us, then we may also trust Him to reward us. *"In the fear of the LORD is strong confidence: and his children shall have a place of refuge"* (Proverbs 14:26). We should see that we must begin with the fear of the LORD; then we can move on to restoration. *"The fear of the LORD is the instruction of wisdom; and before honour is humility"* (Proverbs 15:33).

Some people have the belief that "the fear of the LORD" is just an Old Testament concept, but there are some rather strong verses in the New Testament on the topic. *"Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear"* (Hebrews 12:28). *"And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear"* (I Peter 1:17).

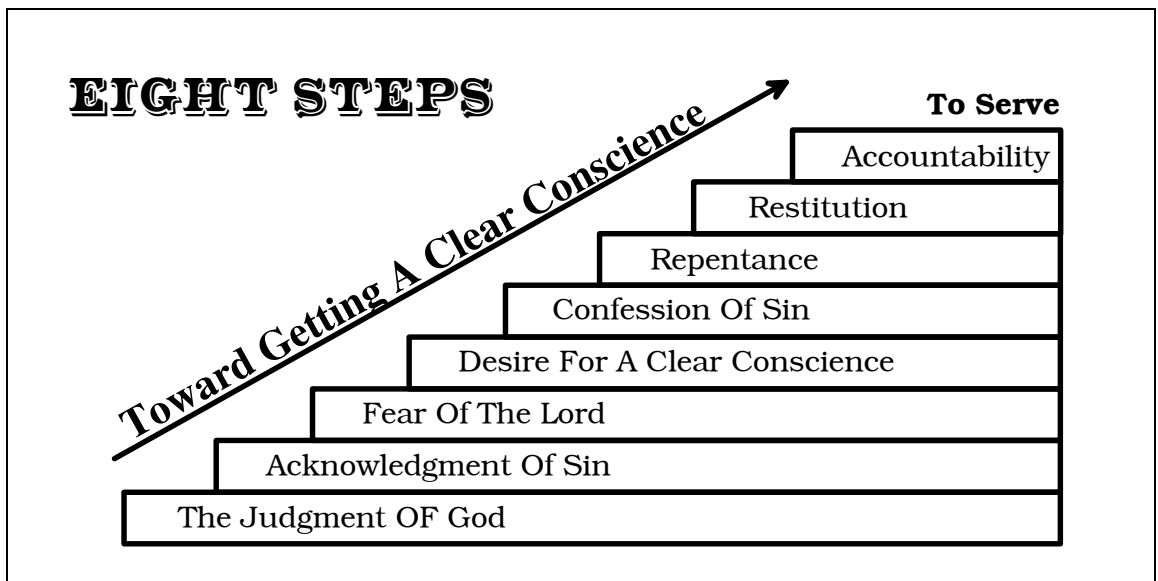
Fourth, to get a clear conscience we must desire a clear conscience. Not everyone will have this desire. Some will desire the pleasure of sin much more than doing what is right. Others will fear the consequences of what they might have to do to get a clear conscience. David expressed God's desire by saying, *"Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shall make me to know wisdom"* (Psalm 51:6).

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Then David said, *"Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou has broken may rejoice. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me"* (Psalm 51:7-10).

We should understand that God's law is written in our conscience. *"Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another"* (Romans 2:15). We should also understand that when we sin we defile our conscience. *"Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled. They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate"* (Titus 1:15-16). Again, the Word of God must be used to crack through the hardness.

When we do something wrong, the Holy Spirit convicts us through our conscience that we need to clear our conscience. When some religious men brought a lady who was



caught in the act of adultery to Jesus, he knelt down and began to write on the ground. He probably wrote the sins of the men on the ground. *"And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst"* (John 8:9).

If we fail to heed what the Holy Spirit is saying through our conscience, we may end up shipwrecked. Paul wrote to Timothy, *"Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck"* (I Timothy 1:19). We

may even sear our conscience so much that we become insensitive to the work of the Holy Spirit. Paul also told Timothy about some who, "*Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron*" (I Timothy 4:2). If God has brought some sin to your mind while reading this chapter, **now** is the time to plan to get a clear conscience. You may say, "Well, it happened so long ago that it doesn't matter now." If it doesn't matter, why is it still on your conscience? God doesn't have a *statute of limitations* that He goes by. Today is the day of salvation for you.

Some years ago, when I was about to finish my course study in seminary, I was assigned to read five books for a particular class at the beginning of the semester. I started to read several of the books but found them to be written from a humanistic point of view. I laid them aside to do other studies. The professor did not mention the books again until the end of the semester. He said that there would be a question about them on the final exam. Sure enough, the question was, "Did you read the books that were assigned?" Furthermore, the question was worth about twenty points out of one hundred total points. I did not want to flunk the course and stay another semester in seminary. Therefore, I rationalized that I would answer "yes" to the question on the exam and read the books later. I wrote "yes" on the exam.

From time to time my conscience would convict me, but I kept procrastinating about reading the books. Finally, about twelve years after I graduated, my conscience convicted me that I still had not read the books. Therefore, I purposed to struggle through what I considered to be humanistic literature. I finally finished reading all the books. Then, it was about two years later that the Holy Spirit convicted me that I had still lied on the examination, and that I needed to do something to clear my conscience.

I decided to call the seminary and to ask to speak to the president of the seminary. I told him that I knew that I had brought an offense against the seminary, and that I was asking for forgiveness. I told him that I was willing to turn my degree back to the seminary if necessary, or that I would be willing to do extra makeup work if that was required. The president listened politely and then said, "This has been on your conscience all these years hasn't it?" I responded, "Yes." The president graciously said, "I believe that you are repentant; therefore, you may keep your degree." He also told me that as far as the seminary was concerned, I was forgiven, and the matter was forgotten. It is difficult to put into words the freedom that I felt when I hung up the phone. The burden that I had carried in my conscience over the years was miraculously gone.

Paul, in the book of Acts, encourages us by his example, "*And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men*" (Acts 24:16). When we have broken one of God's commandments, we need to get a clear conscience before God. By prayer, we are to confess our wrong and ask for forgiveness

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based upon the sacrifice of Jesus for our sin. John writes, *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* (1 John 1:9). God not only gives us the gift of forgiveness, He also cleanses our conscience. Jesus also said, *"Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift"* (Matthew 5:23-24). Therefore, we also need to get a clear conscience when we offend others. It is to be a priority in our lives. **To have a clear conscience** is to say that no one (God or man) can truthfully say that I have wronged them without returning to ask forgiveness and make restitution with him if necessary. We may also sin against others through holding unforgiveness toward them. I will cover this later in more detail.

The **fifth** step to achieve a clear conscience is to make a confession of your sins. James exhorts us by saying, *"Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much"* (James 5 :16). The first part of confession is agreeing with God and others that we have sinned. Confession is saying, "I was wrong. Please forgive me." It is not saying, "I am sorry." Someone may have a car wreck in front of your house and you may say to them, "I am sorry that you had the wreck." However, you are not expressing any responsibility in what you said. We should be careful not to use blame toward others in our confession. For example, we should not say, "I guess I was wrong, but if you hadn't done such and such, I wouldn't have done what I did." We must take responsibility for what we have done and let others take responsibility for what they have done. Literally one should say, "I was wrong" or "God has convicted me that I was wrong." A partial confession will not work. One must tell the whole truth.

Next, we should express how we were wrong. We may have had wrong actions, wrong words, wrong attitudes, or wrong motives. In expressing a wrong action, one might say, "I should have paid more attention to you when you were speaking." In expressing wrong words, one might say, "I should not have said that you were lazy. I was very inconsiderate of all the work you have done in the past." In expressing a wrong attitude one might say, "I should not have gotten angry at you as I did." Finally, in confessing a wrong motive, one might say, "I showed extra respect toward you (my boss) so that you would give me a better position. I should have shown you respect because you are the authority that God has placed over me."

A second part of confession is asking the person whom we have offended for forgiveness. We should recognize that forgiveness is never deserved. Therefore when we ask for forgiveness, we are actually making a request. We are not demanding it. Therefore, we should leave the request with the other person, whether or not he is willing to forgive. God is quick to forgive because it is of His nature to forgive through Jesus.

However, it may be quite difficult for others to forgive us. The other person may not be willing to forgive us if he is balancing blaming us with his own offense. If the other person, in such a case, forgives us, then he must look at his own guilt. He may not, therefore, be willing to face the things that he has done to offend us.

We find an example of seeking forgiveness in the story of Joseph and his brothers. Joseph's brothers were extremely jealous of Joseph, in part, because Joseph was their father's favorite son. They also resented Joseph for bragging about his dreams. They first thought to kill him, but later agreed to sell him as a slave to a Midianite caravan going to Egypt. This they did. Some years later, Joseph became first in command under Pharaoh, king of Egypt. Joseph's brothers also had to travel to Egypt to buy grain for food. Furthermore, when Joseph revealed his identity to them, they asked for his forgiveness. *"Forgive, I pray thee now the trespass of thy brethren, and their sin: for they did unto thee evil and now, we pray thee, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of thy Father"* (Genesis 50:17a).

It is also good to plan what you will say. If you wait until you are facing the person you have offended, you may be too emotionally charged to communicate clearly. Jesus tells of the planned confession of the prodigal son. *"I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy servants"* (Luke 15:18-19). Normally, we should go to and face the person that we have sinned against. Letters are usually not the best way of confession for two reasons: people read between the lines, and they may use the written words against us. Phone calls may be acceptable in many cases. We normally should not have others to relay the message for us because they may distort the message.

The **sixth** step in getting a clear conscience is repentance. The word repentance comes from a military concept meaning to do *an about-face*. We are headed in the wrong direction. We are to stop, turn around, and go in the right direction. Ezekiel gives us a picture of repentance by saying, *"But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die"* (Ezekiel 18:21). It is a turning from sin to do that which is right. Peter puts it this way in the book of Acts, *"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord"* (Acts 3:19).



Someone might ask, "Isn't repentance for sinners? Do Believers also need to repent?" The answer is "Yes" to both questions. *"If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked*

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ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land" (II Chronicles 7:14). God spoke those words to His chosen people, but they may apply to us today. Furthermore, Jesus told the church of the Laodiceans to repent. Jesus said, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent" (Revelation 3:19). We must understand that true repentance is more than an outward act, it is an inward change of heart. "For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death" (II Corinthians 7:10).

The **seventh** step toward getting a clear conscience is that of making restitution. Although there are various biblical laws, let us take a look at several. *"If a man shall deliver unto his neighbour money or stuff to keep, and it be stolen out of the man's house; if the thief be found, let him pay double" (Exodus 22:7). Notice that the thief was to pay double for that which he stole. In another situation, a thief was to pay seven times as much as he had stolen. "But if he be found, he shall restore sevenfold; he shall give all the substance of his house" (Proverbs 6:31).*

Luke records an occasion where Zacchaeus, a tax collector, climbed up into a tree to see Jesus as he passed by. Jesus stopped and called to him to come down from the tree and go and fix him a meal. Zacchaeus submitted himself to Jesus as Lord and said that he was willing to make restitution. *"And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold" (Luke 19:8). Restitution brings freedom because we have to give up more than we originally took.*

The **eighth** step toward achieving a clear conscience is accountability. Inmates in prison often declare that it easier for them to be in prison than to be walking around in society. Why? In prison, the guards hold them accountable for their actions. In society, they are pretty much on their own. Therefore, it is important for one who is in the process of clearing his conscience to submit himself to an authority that will hold him accountable.

We have the Biblical story of Nebuchadnezzar who was the king who lost his sanity and lived with the beasts of the field for seven years before he came to himself. When his sanity returned, he submitted himself to God. *"And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation: And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou? At the same time my reason returned unto me; and for the glory of my kingdom, mine honour and brightness returned unto me; and my*

counsellors and my lords sought unto me; and I was established in my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added unto me. Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase" (Daniel 4:34-37).

Paul also exhorts us to submit ourselves to authority. *"Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake" (Romans 13:1-5).* Look again at the last clause. We are to submit ourselves to those in authority for conscience sake. The authority may first need to deal with the stronghold of stubbornness in our lives before he releases us into service or ministry.

Stubbornness is often the root sin that keeps us from fully getting a lasting, clear conscience. Stubbornness is often the stub (stump) sin in the heart. It may manifest itself in the forms of rebellion and perversion. By submitting to the discipline of authority and making ourselves accountable, we have a much stronger plan of recovery. True submission to the proper authority **breaks** stubbornness.

Once we have walked through the eight steps of getting a clear conscience we should be ready to serve. Isaiah, after the angelic being purified his lips, was able to hear the voice of God. *"Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me" (Isaiah 6:8).* David said almost the same thing. *"Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit. Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee" (Psalm 51:10-13).*

Jacob And Esau

The second major way we make our conscience unclean is through holding unforgiveness toward others who have offended us. The story of Jacob and Esau, which begins in Genesis 25:21, gives us examples of unforgiveness, contamination, and forgiveness. Isaac prayed for his wife, Rebekah, to become pregnant. God answered Isaac's prayer with Rebekah's conception of twins. These two began a war inside Rebekah before they were born. Esau was the stronger and the first to be born. However, the second child,

Stubbornness

"For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry" (I Samuel 15:23).

Stubbornness says:

1. "I have a better idea"
2. "I can't understand why you can't see things my way."
3. "I don't care what others think, I will do what I want to do."
4. "I believe . . . , I don't care what the Bible says."
5. "I don't care how others feel, I have certain needs that must be met."
6. "I think I am right although my idea is a little strange."

When things go "right".

1. "Look at all that I have done."
2. "I should get more credit for what I have done."

When things go "wrong".

1. "I just got a bad break."
2. "I would have done better if my boss hadn't put so much pressure on me."
3. "My idea would have worked if I had been given more time."
4. "I still believe that I was right."
5. "Let me try it again. I know that it will work next time."
6. "It wasn't all that bad. After all, look at what Jim did."

Techniques that stubbornness uses to get his way.

1. "You will do what I tell you." (demanding).
2. "If you won't do it my way, I'll take my ball and go home." (rejection).
3. "You are a stupid idiot if you don't see things my way." (intimidation).
4. "You *#+=% come here this *#+=% minute!!!" (anger and cursing).
5. "Everyone is against me, and no one understands me." (pouting).
6. "If you don't . . . , I will beat the *living daylights* out of you." (fear).

Motives of stubbornness:

1. To have his own way.
2. To fulfill the desires of self.
3. To fulfill the desires of the flesh.
4. To get the credit whenever possible.

Jacob, had hold of Esau's heel at the birthing. The name "Jacob" means *supplanter or deceiver*. As the boys grew, Esau became the outdoors man, the hunter, while Jacob became the farmer. The two were totally opposite. Isaac, the father, loved Esau, while

Rebekah, the mother, loved Jacob. Therefore, there was great rivalry between the two youngsters.

With Esau being the eldest son, he had his family's birthright. The birthright meant that he would become head of the family when his father died. It also meant that he would receive twice as much inheritance. Therefore, Jacob, the deceiver, plotted how he might get Esau's birthright. One day Esau came in from hunting, exhausted and faint from the lack of food. Jacob seized the opportunity to sell his brother a pot of soup and bread in exchange for his birthright. Esau was so hungry that he gave in to the deal. He sold his birthright to Jacob.

Later when Isaac became aged and almost blind, it became time to pronounce a blessing upon his eldest son before he died. Rebekah overheard Isaac tell Esau to go hunting, kill a deer, and cook it for him. Isaac said that he would then pronounce the blessing upon Esau. Rebekah encouraged Jacob to steal the blessing while Esau was away hunting. She told Jacob that she would cook a kid goat like the venison his father so loved. Jacob was to disguise himself in his brother's clothing, even covering his hands and neck with goat's skin to appear hairy like his brother.

In brief, the scheme worked. Jacob, disguised as Esau, carried the food to his father and requested the blessing. Although Jacob suspected something was wrong, he went ahead and blessed Jacob, thinking that he was Esau. The blessing was a prophecy spoken over the son to be fulfilled in due time.

A short time later, Esau returned to discover that Jacob had stolen his blessing. Esau exploded in bitterness and demanded that his father bless him also. Isaac told him that he couldn't reverse the blessing. Esau pleaded with his father to bless him and wept aloud. His father spoke a brief blessing of prosperity over him but also told him that he would serve his brother. The hurt turned to bitterness, the bitterness turned to hate, and the hate turned to a plan of murder. Esau said in his heart that as soon as his father died and was buried, he would kill Jacob (Genesis 27:41). Jacob had to flee for his life by moving away from his home.

As the two young men grew up, living some distance from each other, they got married, and each had their own families. Each gained their own wealth. About twenty-one years passed before the two brothers met again. Jacob was still fearful of his brother's wrath when he returned to the land where Esau lived. Jacob, in his distress, sent servants ahead of him to announce his return to Esau. The servants returned to Jacob and told him that Esau was coming to meet him with four hundred men. I am sure that Jacob's heart sank at that point. In fear, Jacob divided his company of herds, flock, and camels into two groups thinking that if Esau destroyed one group, the other group might

Bringing Every Thought Captive

flee and escape. Jacob also prepared generous gifts of goats, sheep, camels, cattle, and donkeys to appease the wrath of Esau (Genesis 32:13-15). Jacob was so fearful that he bowed himself to the ground seven times before he came near Esau.

God, however, had performed a miracle of forgiveness in Esau. *"And Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him: and they wept"* (Genesis 33:4). When Jacob offered the gifts to Esau, Esau told him that he really didn't need them. Jacob then insisted that Esau receive them and he did. Esau even helped Jacob by having some of his own servants stay behind to help with the caravan travel the rest of the journey. Although the Scripture doesn't explicitly tell us that Esau forgave Jacob, his actions clearly demonstrate that he did. Unfortunately, the generational curses that had been established through earlier unforgiveness were never broken. Therefore, the rivalry continued between the two families.

Unforgiveness Contaminates

The enemy uses **unforgiveness** to come into our lives and contaminate our souls. Jesus gives us some strong warnings against holding unforgiveness toward others. In the middle of the model prayer Jesus says that we should pray, *"And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors"* (Matthew 6:12). Then at the closing of the prayer Jesus again emphasizes the importance of forgiveness. *"For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses"* (Matthew 6:14-15). Allow me to insert that through the sacrifice of Jesus every Believer is forgiven of sins: past sins, present sins, and even future sins as far as eternity is concerned. However, there is a certain bondage that we face here and now because of the unforgiveness that we hold toward others. We, in effect, also hold others in bondage through unforgiveness. However, God will also allow the enemy to hold us in bondage because of our unforgiveness.

Peter asked Jesus a very important question about forgiveness, suggesting maybe seven times is enough. *"Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven"* (Matthew 18:22). In essence, Jesus was saying by his language description that we are not to stop forgiving others. Then Jesus gives a story to illustrate his point. He said that there was a king who had a servant that owed him about twenty million dollars. The king called his servant in and demanded payment. The king told him that if he wouldn't pay, then he would be sold as a slave along with his family and all his possessions. The servant fell down before the king and said, *"Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all"* (Matthew 18:26b). The king having compassion for the servant, let him go and forgave the entire debt.

Strangely enough, the same servant went out and grabbed a fellow servant by the throat that owed him about twenty dollars and demanded that he pay the debt. That fellow servant said begging, *"Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all"* (Matthew 18:29). Look at the response of the first servant, *"And he would not: but went and cast him into prison till he should pay the debt"* (Matthew 18:30). The king got word of what the first servant had done to the other servant and became furious. He called the first servant back into court and confronted him with the fact that he had forgiven him, but he in turn had not forgiven his fellow servant. He, directly, told him he should have forgiven his fellow servant as he had been forgiven. *"And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him"* (Matthew 18:34).

There are some important questions about the story. Why did the king forgive the note when the first servant only asked for an extension of time to pay everything? The answer is in the fact that the king realized that the servant could never pay the debt. Why would someone who had just been forgiven twenty million dollars demand payment for a note of twenty dollars? The obvious reason is that he was unwilling to accept fully the forgiveness of his own debt. He was filled with pride. He was going to grab every fellow servant that owed him anything so that he could try to pay off his own debt. Why did the first servant become angry and throw his fellow servant into prison until he paid off the debt? It doesn't make sense. His fellow servant could not earn wages in prison. When the first servant realized that he could not get any money from his fellow servant, he became angry. Anger blurred his ability to reason. Finally, why did the king turn the first servant over to the tormentors until such time as he should pay all the debt? The king was hoping that the servant would come to realize that he could never pay the debt, and that the tormentors would make it so miserable for him that he would come to ask for mercy.

Look at the last words of Jesus. *"So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses"* (Matthew 19:35). The Word of God says that our sins are like debts that we cannot pay. We are not able to balance the scales by doing good works. All that we can do is, by faith, accept the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross as full payment for all our sins (past, present, and future). Isaiah prophesies of Jesus by saying, *"But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed"* (Isaiah 53:5). Jesus spoke of himself by saying, *"Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many"* (Matthew 20:28). Although the full payment has already been made for us, we still have to receive it by faith. Furthermore, since we are forgiven, God expects us to forgive others, our fellow servants. If we are unwilling to forgive others, then God will turn us over to the tormentors. The tormentors are nothing less than *evil spirits*. Demonic spirits cannot possess a Believer, but a believer may leave a door open for them

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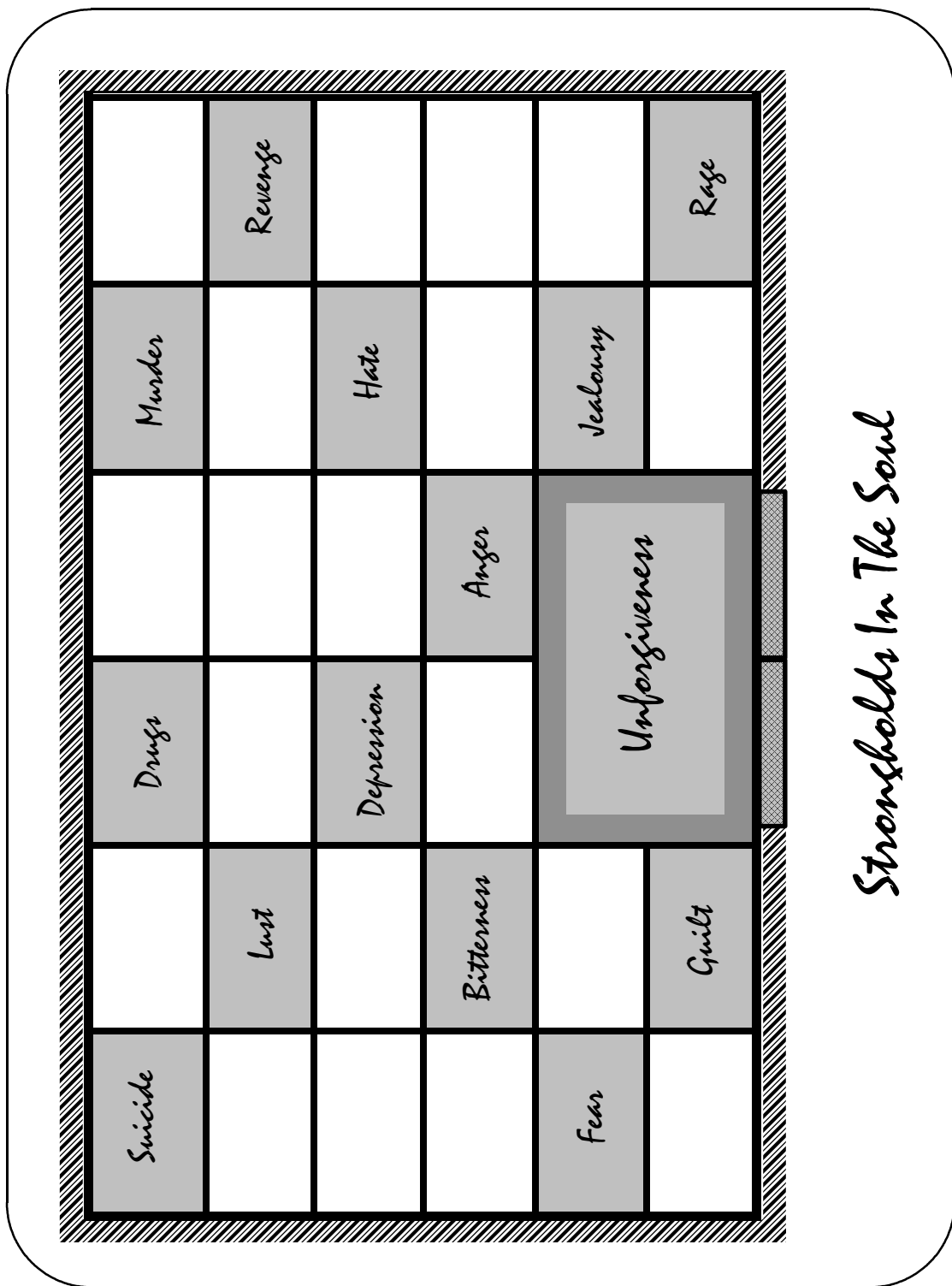
to enter and take control in a specific area. In essence, they may take up *squatting rights* in the soul (mind, will, and emotions) of the Believer.

We get a clear picture of this through the writing of Paul. "*Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: Neither give place to the devil*" (Ephesians 4:26-27). I have to remind those whom I work with that anger is not a sin. It is not a sin for a Believer to get angry. God, Himself, gets angry. Therefore, anger is a God-given emotion. However, God is slow to anger. Therefore, we are to be slow to get angry and should not fly off the handle at every little thing. Most importantly, we are to limit our anger to one day. If we are angry for more than one day, then we open the door of our soul for the enemy to come in and claim squatting rights.

When I work with children, I usually ask if they have a dog. Their answer is not all that important, but the question sets the stage for talking about what happens when we stay angry. I might continue by asking if there is any big, bad dog in their neighborhood. Again, their response is not critical. I would then continue by asking them what would happen if they left the front door of their house open all night long, and there was a big, mean dog roaming the streets. Then I would suggest, if they don't get the point, that they might wake up to find that big dog in their bedroom. They are usually quick to get the picture. Next, I explain that staying angry longer than one day is like leaving the door open all night. When we stay angry longer than one day, we open the door for evil spirits to come inside of us to take control of our thoughts, decisions, and emotions.

Look again at Ephesians 4:26-27. Paul says that we are not to *give place* to the devil. The Greek word "τοπον" translated place means a space with limited occupancy. The place may be our soul (our mind, will, and emotions). He who dwells there has control there. If we allow the devil (evil spirits) to dwell there, then he has control in that place. On the following page you may see that the major stronghold is unforgiveness. However, misery loves company. One foot in the door brings two feet into the house. Therefore, you may readily see the relationship between unforgiveness and guilt. Guilt also opens the door for fear to enter. Unforgiveness opens the door for anger, anger for hate, hate for revenge, and revenge for murder. Unforgiveness opens the door for bitterness, bitterness for depression, depression for lust, lust for drugs, and drugs for thoughts of suicide. Depression also opens the door for other addictions such as work or entertainment. Unforgiveness often opens the door for jealousy, and jealousy opens the door to rage. Then rage opens the door to violence.

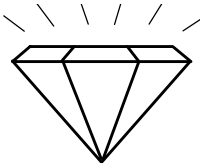
If we have allowed our soul to be **befouled** through unforgiveness, we are not free to think clearly or make wise decisions. I have seen people become so befouled in their soul that they could not function in society. They become so afraid they can't leave their home



Strongholds In The Soul

to go to the local store. They would get up, eat a bite, and go back to bed for several hours before getting up again. Then they couldn't sleep any that night.

Therefore, God has given us a responsibility to forgive others. Jesus says that we are to go to them and confront them. *"Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to*



The Diamond Of Forgiveness

Forgiveness is like a diamond because it is rare, it has great value, it reflects the light of godliness, it can endure tremendous hardships, and it has many facets.

There are twenty-one facets of forgiveness listed below. **1.** Forgiveness is a grace that comes from God. **2.** Forgiveness is a gift that we are to give to others. **3.** Forgiveness is an act of obedience. **4.** Forgiveness comes from understanding and receiving God's perfect forgiveness. **5.** Forgiveness is never deserved. **6.** Forgiveness comes from trusting God by believing that He is for us even if others are against us, by believing that He is working all things together for our good, and by believing that He has a higher designed purpose for our lives. **7.** Forgiveness is an act of the will (I choose, by God's grace, to forgive). **8.** Forgiveness is never earned. **9.** Forgiveness is releasing anger, bitterness, hate and revenge. **10.** Forgiveness is demonstrating God's love (love is an act and must be expressed by saying, "I forgive you."). **11.** Forgiveness is releasing the judgment of others by placing their judgment into God's hands and asking Him to also forgive them. **12.** Forgiveness gives us the ability to withstand the little irritations of life. **13.** Forgiveness is releasing our "rights" to God (holding on demonstrates unforgiveness). **14.** Forgiveness is affirming the value of the offender. **15.** Forgiveness is demonstrating a God-likeness. **16.** Forgiveness shows no partiality (no prejudices). **17.** Forgiveness doesn't measure the offense. **18.** Forgiveness desires God's best for the offender. **19.** Forgiveness doesn't keep records. **20.** Forgiveness doesn't attempt to balance the scales. **21.** Forgiveness keeps a conscience clear of offenses toward others, God, and self.

Note: **Emotional Healing** must accompany forgiveness for it to be complete.

*hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican" (Matthew 18:15-17). In any case, we are to forgive them. "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: **And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you"** (Ephesians 4:29-32).*

Steps To Freedom

1. Surrender your life totally to God through accepting Jesus as your LORD (ruler, king, boss). **Do it now even if you have done it before.** Pray, "Dear God I believe that Jesus Christ died for all my sins and arose again the third day that I might have Eternal Life. Therefore, I give my life to Jesus letting, Him become my Lord. Amen." (Romans 10:9-10).
2. Ask for God's grace (His divine ability) to enable you to forgive each person who has hurt you. Pray, "Dear God, I ask for your help that I may forgive those who have hurt me." (Hebrews 4:16).
3. Bind up in the name of Jesus anything (anger, fear, hate, bitterness, revenge, murder, and confusion) that would keep you from making the choice to forgive others. Declare aloud, "In the name of Jesus I bind _____ and declare that these will have no power to keep me from forgiving others." (Matthew 16:19).
4. Understand that neither Satan nor any of his powers can keep you, as a Believer, from walking through the door of forgiveness. God is on your side! (Romans 8:31).
5. By using your will in faith, choose now in your heart to forgive (release) each of those you have hurt you. "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." (Matthew 6:12).
6. Now confess your choice before God. Say, "Dear God, I purpose in my heart by your grace to forgive (release) _____ (put the name of each person in the blank) for what they have done to hurt me." (Matthew 6:14). This step may take some time as the Holy Spirit reveals various names and events to you.
7. Next, place each person who has hurt you in God's hands and ask Him to release them from what they have done to hurt you. Pray, "Lord, I place _____ (their names) in your hands for your judgment and ask that You also forgive them for what they have done to me." (Luke 23:34, Acts 7:60).

Bringing Every Thought Captive

8. Now that you have stepped through the door to freedom, ask God to keep His Word and release you from the consequences of the sin of unforgiveness. Pray, "Dear God, I have forgiven _____ and ask that you forgive me of having unforgiveness toward _____." (Matthew 6:14).

9. Next, ask God to forgive and cleanse you from other sins related to unforgiveness. Pray, "Heavenly Father, I ask that you forgive me of _____ (examples: anger, hate, revenge, bitterness, and depression) and cleanse my life of all these things." (I John 1:9). Ask God to restore your soul (Psalms 23:3). Pray, "Lord, I ask that You take back the property that I have yielded to the enemy through unforgiveness." Note: God is the one who restores one's soul.

10. In the name of Jesus command all those evil spirits of _____ and _____ to be bound and to leave your mind, will, and emotions and not to come back. Say, "In the name of Jesus, I command _____ to leave and not to return again." (Mark 16:17). (Although every Believer has authority to do this in the name of Jesus, it is wise to have a Christian counselor to assist you. You may unknowingly be overcome by some strong spirit.)

11. It is good to verify that you are free in a particular area. The Holy Spirit is a witness with your spirit to the amount of freedom that you have received. Pray, "Holy Spirit, since you are a witness to my spirit, am I now free in this area?" Then listen in faith for the Holy Spirit to speak to you. (Again, it is good to have the confirmation of a Christian counselor's spiritual discernment.) **REMEMBER:** *"If the Son (Jesus) shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed"* (John 8:36).

12. **DON'T FORGET TO SHUT THE DOOR BEHIND YOU.** You don't want evil to follow you. You can shut the door by receiving the healing of your hurts through trusting in Jesus. Jesus said that the Father had sent Him to heal the brokenhearted (Luke 4:18). Pray, "I ask you, Heavenly Father, to heal the wounds through the work of Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Amen." Finally, ask the Lord to show you how you can begin to **bless** the one who has offended you. When Job prayed for his friends, God set him free. *"And the LORD turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends: also the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before"* (Job 42:10).

The Counselor's Responsibility To Restore

There are two important Scriptures that apply to the counselor. *"In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will"* (II Timothy 2:25). *"The Spirit of*

the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18-19).

First, the counselor should confront the counselee with the truth of God's judgment. Jesus tells us if someone has offended us that we are to confront them (Matthew 18:15-17). If someone commits adultery, they need to know that God's Law states that they should be put to death. I realize that in our society we do not adhere to the death penalty concerning adultery. However, the person needs to realize how serious God considers adultery. In the case of the sin of elders, they are to be rebuked before all (I Timothy 5:20). In some more extreme cases, one is to be thrown out of the church and turned over to the devil for the destruction of the flesh (I Corinthians 5:5). I have had to turn certain cases over to the civil authorities to keep myself within the civil law. All of this is done that, in time, the person may be restored, if possible.

Second, the counselor should also establish with the individual the principles of forgiveness (Matthew 6:12-15, 18:21-22). The counselor should also show God's mercy toward those who have sinned against God and against others (Matthew 5:7). However, mercy usually follows an understanding of judgment. Mercy is not giving what others deserve. Grace follows mercy. Grace is giving to others what they don't deserve. We should show grace toward those who have offended God and others (Hebrew 4:16, James 4:6, Ephesians 4:29). David gave Shimei life when he deserved death (II Samuel 16:5-10, 19:23).

Third, the counselor should receive others in love. We should receive others as God has received us (Romans 15:7). Our goal should be to restore others (Galatians 6:1). God has given Christian counselors a ministry of reconciliation (II Corinthians 5:18).

Fourth, every counselor has some responsibility in holding those whom he counsels responsible for their restoration and growth. You see, God holds us responsible for the counsel that we give (Hebrews 13:17). If I don't hold others responsible, then God will hold me responsible for their failures.

Fifth, at the appropriate time, the counselor should begin to bless the individual with prayers, words, and actions. The counselor needs to give the counselee hope (Hosea 6:1-2). The counselor needs to help lift up those that have fallen down (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10). Then the counselor needs to help place the individuals into service, work, or ministry (Acts 15:37-40, II Timothy 4:11).

Cleansing From Vicarious Contamination

The third major way by which our conscience becomes unclean is through vicarious contamination. Almost everyone in any kind of counseling service or ministry becomes exposed to the pain and filth in the lives of others. You may be a physician who tended to a young lady that has just been mugged and raped. You may be a professional counselor that listens to a mother tell of her explosion of anger and violence upon her year old child. You may be just someone who asks a friend how they are doing, and the friend dumps all their guilt of being a sodomite (homosexual) upon you. You may be a pastor who listens to a wife telling of her husband's adulterous affairs. You may be a teacher who listens to a student tell of their recent attempt at suicide. You become the *garbage dump* for the pain, failures, disappointments, hate, bitterness, sin, and perversion of others.

You may be just watching what you thought was a family program on TV, when, without notice, you are exposed to some filth that you did not plan on watching. You may have gone to a "PG" rated movie not realizing that it should have been rated "R" for the language. We all have stepped into situations and been exposed to words and scenes that we wish we had never experienced. One day I walked into a public rest room in a department store to see a stall door open with two men in the same stall. I became sick to my stomach.



The truth is that we all become contaminated in our conscience by some of the things we see, hear, read, and imagine. Some counselors drop out of counseling because of the continuous bombardment of filth. Many ministers refuse to counsel because of the garbage they must listen to while counseling. I have heard ministers say, "I do my counseling from the pulpit." A counselor can not shut off his emotions or emotionally grab someone by the shoulders and shake some sense into them.

For a counselor to be effective in counseling, he must be willing to listen to and even, by Holy Spirit-directed imagination, to visualize some of the garbage in the lives of others. If we are not willing to patiently listen, the door will most likely be closed for ministry. People sometimes need to dump on someone that they can trust. People need other people who will relate to them where they are in life. The counselor needs to develop an honest rapport with his counselees. The catch is that the counselor will become contaminated along the way by the things that he hears, the emotions he senses, and even by the spirits that a counselee leaves behind when he leaves the session.

I remember a case of a young man that came to me when I was just beginning to do some counseling. The young man declared that he had committed his life, at one time, to the Lord Jesus, but that he had fallen into the pits of life. He had fallen so far that he had gotten involved in the occult. I sensed that he was strongly controlled by demonic spirits. During the counseling, I attempted to cast out the evil spirits in the name of Jesus. I could see them through the windows of his eyes as he stared at me. They refused to leave. I ask the young man if there was something that he was holding on to in regard to the occult. He said, "Yes." It was a weapon. He started to tell me how it was used, probably in some ritual. I stopped him because I did not want to hear it. I self-righteously told him that God could forgive him no matter what he had done. What I said was true, but my motive was wrong. Immediately, he shut the door for any effective ministry. I later came to realize that he needed to confess his sin and that I needed to listen to him.

On another occasion, a counseling organization of which I was a part, invited a "rescuer" of occult youth to come and give some lectures. The "rescuer" told in detail about various occult practices and brought some artifacts to show us. The individual also brought two youth who were trying to get out of occultic practices. The problem was that they also brought with them a host of evil spirits. The night after the first lecture, I had nightmares and fought evil spirits a good part of the night.

At one point in my counseling ministry, I had some really rough counseling cases. The exposure to all the filth and garbage became unbearable for me. I reached the point that my stomach was tied up in knots and that I could not get the sleep that I needed. I prayed and told God that He had to show me how to cleanse my conscience, or I would have to stop counseling. Then God revealed a principle of "contamination" in the Old Testament.

There are various laws in the Old Testament concerning contamination. For example, a woman was to be unclean during her menstrual cycle. Also, man became contaminated by touching a dead body. He would remain unclean for a period of time. *"He that toucheth the dead body of any man shall be unclean seven days"* (Numbers 19:11). Even a person that touched an unclean person became contaminated. *"And whatsoever the unclean person toucheth shall be unclean; and the soul that toucheth it shall be unclean until even"* (Numbers 19:22).

The Law gave at least four specific ways of cleansing for one who had become contaminated. **First**, one way was to offer a sacrifice. *"And the priest shall offer the burnt offering and the meat offering upon the altar: and the priest shall make an atonement for him, and he shall be clean"* (Leviticus 14:20). Now, we are not under the Law.

Bringing Every Thought Captive

We don't go to the temple and have the priest to offer an animal sacrifice. However, we may see a principle of cleansing in the Law.

Jesus became the sacrifice for our cleansing of all sins, including vicarious sins. *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* (I John 1:9). In faith, we are simply to ask God to cleanse our hearts and minds from the contamination of the exposure of the sins of others.

Second, the Law required that people wash themselves in running water. *"And every soul that eateth that which died of itself, or that which was torn with beasts, whether it be one of your own country, or a stranger, he shall both wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and be unclean until the even: then shall he be clean"* (Leviticus 17:15). Moses gives us a more detailed passage in the book of Numbers. *"And for an unclean person they shall take of the ashes of the burnt heifer of purification for sin, and running water shall be put thereto in a vessel: And a clean person shall take hyssop, and dip it in the water, and sprinkle it upon the tent, and upon all the vessels, and upon the persons that were there, and upon him that touched a bone, or one slain, or one dead, or a grave: And the clean person shall sprinkle upon the unclean on the third day, and on the seventh day: and on the seventh day he shall purify himself, and wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and shall be clean at even"* (Numbers 19:17-19). I remember ministering in a prison system where at times it was spiritually like walking through a beehive of demonic spirits. I felt so contaminated and unclean when I returned home that I looked forward to getting into the shower and washing away the spirits in my imagination. Of course, that was just a mental exercise.

What we are to do is to wash our minds and imaginations with the Word of God. Paul explains to the Church that Christ cleanses it by the washing of the Word. *"That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word"* (Ephesians 5:26). By application, we need to take time to read and meditate on the Word of God that we may receive cleansing from vicarious contamination.

A **third** way to receive cleansing is by receiving the anointing of oil from a priest. *"And the priest shall put of the oil that is in his hand upon the tip of the right ear of him that is to be cleansed, and upon the thumb of his right hand, and upon the great toe of his right foot, upon the place of the blood of the trespass offering"* (Leviticus 14:28). Again, we don't live under the Law, but under the principles of the Law.

We may go to a church, have the elders anoint us with oil, and pray over us. *"Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be*

forgiven him" (James 5:14-15). Paul explains that the Holy Spirit is involved in this work of cleansing and restoring. *"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost"* (Titus 3:5). We may just ask for a fresh filling of the Holy Spirit to flush out anything that is unclean within us.

A **fourth** way that we may receive cleansing from vicarious exposure is by being set apart for a time. The Law considered anyone who had an issue to be unclean. Furthermore, anyone who touched the person's bed also became unclean. *"And whosoever toucheth his bed shall wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and be unclean until the even"* (Leviticus 15:5). He was to set himself apart until that evening. Furthermore, *"He that toucheth the dead body of any man shall be unclean seven days"* (Numbers 19:11). There are numerous other laws concerning being set apart. Again, I am not trying, at this point, to promote a strict adherence to the Law, but I am encouraging the reader to see a spiritual principle.

Jesus, himself, gave us the principle. When the disciples returned from healing sicknesses and casting out evil spirits, Jesus addressed the issue. *"And he said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat"* (Mark 6:31). A practical application for me is to schedule at least a thirty minute break between counseling sessions. If I have had some particularly rough sessions, I may take an afternoon off to wash my car. I knew one pastor who took off on Friday afternoon to go to his ranch and was unavailable except for emergencies until Sunday morning. He told me that that was the way he kept his sanity.

In addition to these four principles of cleansing from vicarious contamination, one may also have to do some house cleaning and deliverance. There are, as mentioned earlier, times when people leave spirits behind following a counseling session. When this happens, it is a good time to take personal inventory to see if you have any open doors for those spirits to enter and shut them if needed. Furthermore, one may also choose to anoint the doors of their house or office with oil in the name of Jesus and command any evil spirits to leave.

Appendix

Conscience Scriptures

I. General

A. Law written in.

Romans 2:15 Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another.

B. Conscience defiled.

Titus 1:15-16 Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled. They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.

C. Conscience convicts.

John 8:9 And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst.

D. Denial brings disaster.

I Timothy 1:19 Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck.

E. Conscience seared.

I Timothy 4:2 Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron.

II. Clearing conscience of offense toward God.

Hebrews 9:14 How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

Hebrews 10:2 For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins.

Hebrews 10:22 Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

I John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

III. Clearing conscience of offense toward others.

A. Leave gift at the altar.

Matthew 5:23-24 Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

B. Take care not to offend.

I Corinthians 8:12 But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ.

C. Have conscience void of offense.

Acts 24:16 And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.

IV. Witness through good conscience.

I Peter 3:16 Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ.

I Timothy 1:5 Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.

I Timothy 3:9 Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.

Romans 9:1 I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost.

Romans 13:5 Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.

V. Defilement through bitterness.

Hebrews 12:15 Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many are defiled.

Repentance Scriptures

II Chronicles 7:14 If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.

Proverbs 4:15 Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away.

Ezekiel 18:21 But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die.

Matthew 3:2 And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Matthew 3:8 Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance:

Matthew 9:13 But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

Mark 6:12 And they went out, and preached that men should repent.

Luke 13:3 I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

Acts 3:19 Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.

Acts 8:22 Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.

Acts 17:30 And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent.

Acts 20:21 Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

II Corinthians 7:10 For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.

II Timothy 2:25 In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth.

II Peter 2:21 For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.

II Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

Revelation 2:5 Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.

Revelation 2:16 Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

Revelation 2:21 And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not.

Revelation 3:19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.

Forgiveness Scriptures

Psalms 103:3 Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases.

Psalms 103:12 As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.

Psalms 130:4 But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.

Isaiah 1:18 Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

Isaiah 40:2 Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD'S hand double for all her sins.

Ezekiel 36:25 Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you.

Micah 7:19 He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.

Acts 13:38 Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins.

I Corinthians 6:11 And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

Ephesians 1:7 In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;

Colossians 2:14 Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross;

Hebrews 8:12 For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.

THREE CONDITIONS OF FORGIVENESS:

1. Confession

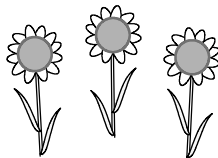
I John 1:7-9 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

2. Repentance

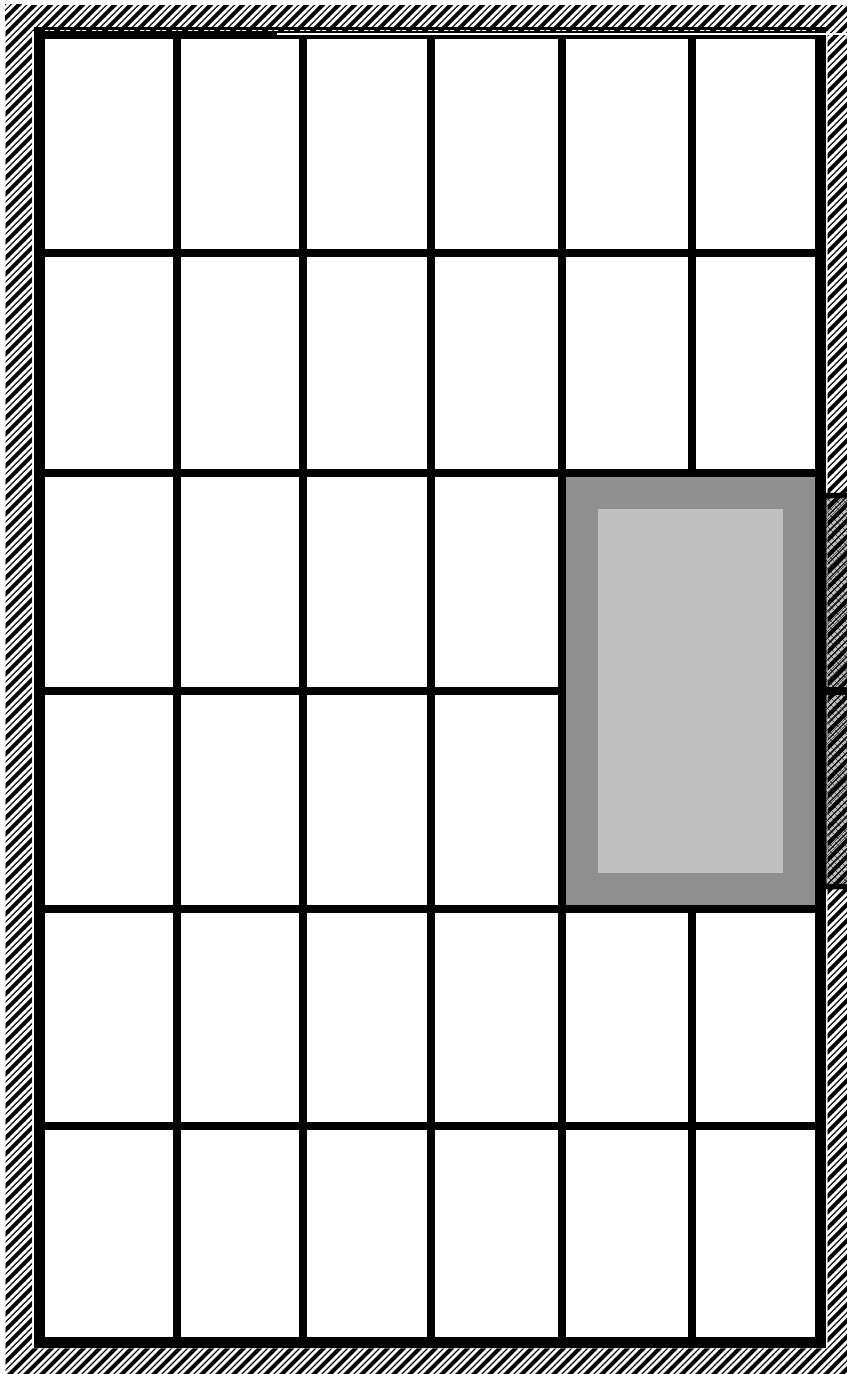
Acts 3:19 Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.

3. Forgiving others

Matthew 6:14 For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.



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Strongholds In The Soul

Benefits Of A Clear Conscience

1. A freedom to enter into the presence of God (Psalm 15:1-2, 24:3-4).
2. A freedom from fear of destruction by the enemy (Psalm 91:1-16).
3. A freedom from guilt (Romans 8:1).
4. A freedom to hear and obey the voice of God (Isaiah 6:8-9).
5. A freedom to receive physical healing (Psalm 103:2-3).
6. A freedom to receive God's blessings (Psalm 24:3-4, 32:1-2).
7. A freedom to serve God (Hebrews 9:14).
8. A freedom to teach others (Psalm 51:13).
9. A freedom from the power of sin (Romans 6:17-18).
10. A freedom to witness (I Peter 2:12, 3:15-16).
11. A freedom to rejoice (Psalm 51:8,12, Proverbs 12:20, II Corinthians 1:12).
12. A freedom to live a long life (I Peter 3:8-10).
13. A freedom to see from God's perspective (wisdom) (Psalm 51:6).
14. A freedom to receive answers to your prayers (Psalm 66:18-19).
15. A freedom to receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit (Proverbs 1:23).
16. A freedom to believe God (Hebrews 10:22, I Timothy 3:9).
17. A freedom to receive God's mercy (Proverbs 28:13).
18. A freedom from shame and confusion (James 3:16, Isaiah 61:7).
19. A freedom to sleep at night (Psalm 4:4-8).
20. A freedom to find peace (Psalm 37:37).