

1 Peter 3:15-22 (NIV2011)

But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶ keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. ¹⁷ For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. ¹⁸ For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. ¹⁹ After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits—²⁰ to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, ²¹ and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God.^[b] It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²² who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.

Revere Christ as Lord

Sometimes it hits while you driving down the road, minding your own business. It seems to happen often when you are trying to fall asleep. You sometimes feel it pretty quickly after you calm down and see how you hurt them. Other times it's simply a feeling that *this* is the right thing to do. The conscience is an interesting thing. It's that little voice or feeling that tells us if we are doing is good or not. While by no means is it a perfect barometer to test your decision-making—as it too is corrupted by sin—the conscience does guide us. There are certain things that all people simply know; for instance, murder is wrong. There is a standard that your conscience affirms when you did the right thing and pricks you when you have not. So how can you be sure to have a good conscience? How can you protect yourself from the pricking while at the same it's in tune and in line with the standard creator, God?

Peter says in v.15: “Revere Christ as Lord.” To revere Christ means to set him apart. As Lord recognizes that Jesus and his will for your life is above your own. So what does that look like? Jesus said it clearly in John 14: “If you love me, keep my commands.” If he is your Lord and you love him, do what he says. Jesus doesn't give us a new set of commandments to follow. They are still the same: love the Lord with all your heart; love your neighbor as yourself. It's the standard on your heart and conscience. If you are a Christian and want to make that claim for your life, keep these commands. Revering Christ as Lord, that's not you trying to get your way into heaven. It's not saying we need to do this to have his love. You aren't making a repayment to Jesus. Jesus never asks for that or wants it. You already are saved. Jesus already forgives your sins. You

already have his love. And because we do, this is what we will do. It's a fruit of faith. An apple tree produces apples. Someone who loves Jesus will produce a life that follows his will.

How's your conscience doing? Peter continues in v.15-16 **“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.”**

Always be prepared to give an answer. But is anyone going to ask you? When someone looks at you, how you treat the person who is taking too long, how you talk about that person who frustrates you, how you live your life, what you post online, does it look any different from the world around you? If you are trying to avoid conversations and don't want to stick out, then, yeah, that's a good way to get around it. No one is going to start questioning someone who is like everyone else.

But that's not who God has created you to be or calls you to live. Even if no one ever asks about this hope, we all have to answer to God. Dear Christians, Peter is not just speaking to the leaders of the congregations with this letter. Revere Christ as Lord even when it is inconvenient, uncomfortable, causes you to suffer and struggle. That means when someone hurts you, you aren't looking to get back and even. That means when someone has wronged you, forgive as Jesus calls you to. There's no place for holding onto that grudge no matter how much you feel they deserve it. Vengeance is mine, says the Lord! Revere Christ as Lord. This affects how I use my time and talents. Whether you are eating or drinking or whatever you do, it is to be the glory of Jesus! That means how you live your daily life should not contradict what you confess to be in your heart. Revere Christ as Lord. Submit to the governing authorities even when you don't agree with them and they are not god-fearing people. Love your spouse as Christ loves the church especially when they seem unlovable and are being selfish. It means taking their words and actions in the kindest possible way, even when they don't do the same for you. It means not just saying, but actually leaving that sin behind and stop doing it!

How's your conscience? How truly hard it is, especially when life isn't going the way we want it to, when our plans fall through, to not just say but truly believe, “Lord, your will be done.” It can be very difficult for us to remember who is Lord and who is servant. Instead of revering Christ, we revere ourselves, and then work over-time to convince ourselves we had every right to act that way. We were just making sure they learned their lesson. We wanted to make sure they deserve that love. We were so worn out and tired. Who wouldn't lose their temper? Why shouldn't I have that extra drink?

Why is it so wrong to let your eyes wander to that website? You felt trapped and the struggle was getting old really fast. What's so bad with having those thoughts?

That's what Satan wants us to do. He wants us to believe that it's better—and even possible—to avoid any and all suffering. Even if it means going against God's will, you've heard or told yourself, "It's for the greater good." And so we file down and dull the sharp pricking of the conscience with our excuses. And instead of turning from that sin, we go back. God warns us: if we deliberately keep on sinning, no sacrifice for sins is left and have only fearful judgment and fire awaiting us (Hebrews 10:26-27). If you love Jesus, keep his commands.

How's your conscience knowing that you have not done this? The truth is that on your own you are not going to have a good conscience. No amount of excuses can make your conscience clean. No matter how adept you have become with guilt avoidance and pushing off the blame can wipe away the stain of sin clinging to you by nature.

How can we have a good conscience and do as Jesus calls us to do? Because, this is what Jesus did for you. **"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. ¹⁹ After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits"** (v.18-19). Jesus certainly suffers more than one time while living on this earth. He shares our weaknesses and is tempted just as we are. But that all leads up to *the one* when he's on the cross and suffers for your sins. That is all your past sins pricking your conscience, all those sins in your future, for every time that you have put yourself first instead of him, Jesus suffers. Think about that: you were not right with him. You offended Jesus. You hurt him. And, yet, Jesus claims them to be his own actions so that he would be punished instead of you. He suffers on that cross, the righteous for the unrighteous, forsaken by God and abandoned by him. And to top it all off he dies. The ultimate humiliation: the perfect God breathes his last and is put to death in the body because he took your sins as his own. But when that stone is rolled away three days later on Easter morning, we see Christ is risen, he is risen indeed! Jesus is made alive in the Spirit with a physical body that his people can touch and feel but He's no longer bound by the weaknesses of the flesh.

And when he is made alive, as we confess in the Apostle's Creed, Jesus descends into hell. He doesn't go to suffer more. He already did all of that once and for all. No more sacrifices need to be made. He suffers no more. No, he goes to preach to the imprisoned spirits. This wasn't a sermon to convert, but to proclaim: "You thought I lost. You couldn't have been more wrong. This has always been God's plan. You failed to believe it. It's already too late for you and you are receiving your just punishment. But those who believe, because I live, they too will live. Death is not the end. The curse of sin has

been defeated! Satan's head has been crushed. There is an end to the suffering.”
Because He suffered once, for all, for you, for me, the righteous for the unrighteous
Jesus brings us to God.

But while we are here Jesus does not leave us as orphans, abandoned in this world to fend for ourselves. He knows how the devil will come after us. If he cannot dull your conscience enough to keep you in sin, the devil will bury you in despair dragging up past sins. He loves to point out your failures. He's quick to remind you the hurtful words you spoke, the cruel thoughts you have had, the way that you hurt those you love. And if the devil isn't doing it, the world around us and our own consciences betray us. It's a fair question: “How could you ever think God would love you?”

Because I am baptized. As the water of the flood lifts the ark and saves Noah and his family, so the water and Word in Baptism now saves you. You were brought to the font a dead creature of sin. But with the cross over your head and your heart God marks you his own child. With the spoken Word and water poured you were baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Baptism isn't something you do to God. It's what God does for you. It isn't only a symbol. Baptism saves. Sin has no claim on you. The devil holds no power over you. You were buried with Jesus in the tomb and from that water you were saved through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Because Jesus lives you have the pledge of a good conscience before God. Armed with the blessing of your baptism, you can always come back to God and claim God's promise of forgiveness. For Jesus' sake who suffered once and died, forgiveness of sins is already your possession. You don't have to continually appeal to God to give it to you. It's already yours. It was sealed to you at your baptism. You already have a good conscience before God!

That means you are set free from trying to fulfill the expectations of others to ease your aching conscience. Instead, with a good conscience we serve out of love not obligation because I am a baptized child of God. Stop trying to do good things to outweigh the bad or making excuses to try and cover up. Your conscience is washed clean and all those sins have been taken away. When Satan comes accusing, when your sin or conscience oppresses you, tell them, “I am baptized.” And if I am baptized, that means forgiveness of sins is mine. That means if God does not hold my sins against me, neither can anyone else. When you suffer for doing good and right, we can confidently say, “This is God's will. It's going to be okay because He's made me his child and he will not abandon me.” Here's the reason for the hope you have: it's your baptism that connects you to Jesus who gives you a good conscience. Revere Christ as Lord, he won that for you. Amen.