

## Holding Onto Faith and a Good Conscience

*“<sup>18</sup>This charge I entrust to you, Timothy my son, in keeping with the prophecies once spoken about you, so that by them you fight the good fight,<sup>19</sup> holding onto faith and a good conscience. By rejecting these, some have suffered shipwreck regarding their faith” (1 Timothy 1:18-19)*

The Bible states that must have faith: *“...the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of realities not seen” (Hebrews 11:1)*. In the daily battle with the enemy of God and our souls (and sometimes with our own selves) we want to win. Our weapons include faith and a good conscience. The apostle Paul so charged Timothy, his “adopted” son by his own admission. Is it essential to have a good and clear conscience?

A clear conscience is the inner spiritual freedom toward God and others that comes by knowing that God’s Holiness is not offended by our thoughts or actions, and that no one can point the finger at us and say, *“you’ve offended me, and you’ve never asked for my forgiveness.”* We are told to fight the good fight armed with faith and a good conscience – *“...a clear conscience before both God and men” (Acts 24:16)*. The greatest single hindrance to gaining a clear conscience is the feeling that the ones we offended were also wrong (they often are)! We often feel that they were mostly (>50%) wrong. Our focus (*Yeshua’s* speck vs. the beam in our own eye) on blaming them balances our own guilt and forces us to live with both guilt and blame. It is our “natural inclination” to find other people or circumstances which are to blame for what we have done in order to justify or excuse our offenses and shortcomings. The greater our guilt, the more we must blame. This results in bitterness and guilt and they are devastating to our mental and emotional health and balance. He warns us to not resist His grace: *“<sup>15</sup>See to it that no one falls short (resists) of the grace of God; and see to it that no bitter root springs up and causes trouble, and by it many be defiled” (Hebrew 12:15)*. Doesn’t *Yeshua* want us to look at life from both sides now – from our perspective and from our brother’s perspective? Answer: No! It is from our perspective and from His perspective!

*Yeshua’s disciples* (that is you and me) are commanded to pray this prayer, *“And forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtor” (Matthew 6:12)*. He went on to solemnly warn us that if we do not forgive others when they sin against us, the Lord will not forgive us – *“<sup>14</sup>For if you forgive others their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. <sup>15</sup>But if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your transgressions” (Matthew 6:14-15)*. Thus for us as disciples of *Yeshua*, (that is for us here in *Kol Simcha*) issues of forgiveness are not optional. We do not have the luxury of holding grudges or nursing bitterness. We are not privileged to retain our anger or to repay evil with evil.

### **Responding to our Enemies – How close are our natural inclinations to Scripture?**

Our ways are not God’s ways and our thoughts are not God’s thoughts: *“<sup>8</sup>For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways.” It is a declaration of Adonai: “<sup>9</sup>For as the heavens are higher than earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Is. 55:8-9)*. Our response when we are attacked (or criticized) provides a very good example of how our natural inclinations lead us to a path that leads to death – *“There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death” (Prov. 14:12)*. How often we forget that God has his own ways of getting even – *“...“Vengeance is Mine; I will repay,” says Adonai...” (See Ro. 12:15-21)* In the heat of the battle, it is easy to forget that God’s methods are much more efficient and effective than our methods. The problem is that we tend to trust our experience and wisdom more than we trust His. Here are some examples of how we react on a regular basis to situations and how far that is from *His ways*.

1. When we come under attack, our first reaction is to defend ourselves – *“The first to state his case seems just, until another comes and cross-examines him” (Prov. 18:17)*. But God tells us to first thoroughly examine ourselves to find our *blind spots*. *“For if we were judging (examining) ourselves thoroughly, we wouldn’t be coming under judgment” (1 Cor. 11:31)*

2. When we defend ourselves by attacking back (since we are the *ones in the right*) our foe will almost always plan revenge (because he has other problems, not just me). Our natural inclination is to discredit him. All of a sudden his friends tell us things (secrets) about him. “*Never take your own revenge, loved ones, but give room for God’s wrath—for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine; I will repay” (Romans 12:19)*. What are we supposed to do in these cases? Scripture states that we are to discover their needs and minister to them: “*1 Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught doing something wrong, you who are directed by the Ruach, restore such a person in a spirit of gentleness—looking closely at yourself so you are not tempted also. 2 Bear one another’s burdens, and in this way you fulfill the Torah of Messiah” (Gal. 6:1-2)*.
3. But to our great dismay, what happens next is totally unexpected – our enemy prospers! We immediately think: ‘*God, You’re blessing the wrong one!*’ And what is our response? We become envious (see Ps. 73). Instead, we should be rejoicing in G-d’s goodness when He withholds from anyone (including me and you) what we really deserve: “*4 Or do you belittle the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience—not realizing that God’s kindness leads you to repentance?” (Ro. 2:4)*
4. But it is not long when our enemy encounters real problems (he has some big problems – we could have told you that). What do we do? We rejoice. No! We must not laugh when God spans or He will stop he spanking: “*17 Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, or let your heart be glad when he stumbles, 18 or Adonai may see it as evil in His eyes, and turn His wrath away from him” (Prov. 24:17-18)*. The Bible says that what we are supposed to do is to quickly meet their needs – “*20 Rather, “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink. For by doing so you will heap coals of fire upon his head.” 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” (Ro. 12:20-21)*.
5. Suppose he repents as a result of our good toward him? What is our response? It is often a holier than thou attitude – we cover up our problems. *Yeshua* said: “*2 For with the judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you” (Matt. 7:2)*. He tells us to be more than conquerors (super-conquerors) through Messiah who strengthens us. (Ro. 8:37)

Without doubt, the Lord wants us to fully forgive our offenders. This is because God has forgiven us our enormous debt against Him. Therefore, it should be an easy matter for us to forgive the comparatively minor offenses of others against us. This is easier said than done. To help us do this, *Yeshua* gave a parable about a king who, checking up on his servants, found that one of them owed him a huge debt.

The king demanded payment, and when the servant could not pay, the king commanded that he and his wife and children be sold as slaves in lieu of the payment. The servant fell to his knees and worshiped the king and said, “*Be patient with me, and I’ll repay you everything.*” The king had compassion on him and forgave him the entire unpayable debt. That same servant went out and found a fellow servant who owed him a small amount of money He grabbed him by the throat and demanded immediate payment. His fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, “*Be patient with me, and I’ll repay you everything*” (notice the same wording of his appeal before the king). The servant rejected his plea and had him thrown into prison.

When the king learned what this servant had done, he called him in and reproved him for not doing to his fellow servant what the king had done for him. Then he reinstated the unpayable debt and sent him off to prison with instructions that the tormentors (torturers, in the Greek, that is demons) were to afflict him until he paid every last penny. *Yeshua* concluded the parable by saying, “*So also My heavenly Father will do to you, unless each of you, from your hearts, forgives his brother” (Matthew 18:21-35)*. Whether it is easy or not, His Will is for us to **fully forgive** our offenders. In striving to do it then we can *fight the good fight armed with faith & a clear conscience, void of offense toward man and toward God*. Shabbat Shalom!