

The Gables – Clear Conscience

Opening Story:

When I [Rick] was in high school, I went on a school trip to Spain. I believe the year was 1973. While staying at the Hotel Colon in Madrid, I stole a towel, with the words HOTEL COLON imprinted on it in light blue letters, as a souvenir. Over the years it had remained in one closet or another in my home. It occurred to me, from time to time, that I should not have taken it, and should have returned it, but I never got around to doing so.

Fast forward to 2016. I attended the WIHS Christian Radio Station annual banquet in Cromwell, Connecticut. The speaker was Dr. Erwin Lutzer, who is frequently heard on this radio station. I purchased one of his books entitled, *The Power of a Clear Conscience – Let God Free You from Your Past*. After reading this book, I decided I must return the towel.

I don't have an exact copy of the letter I sent to the Hotel Colon in October of 2016, but it went something like this:

*Manager
Ayre Gran Hotel Colon
c/Pez Volador 1-11
28007 Madrid
Spain*

Dear Manager:

In the early 1970s I visited your hotel on a trip with my high school. While there, I stole the enclosed towel as a souvenir.

I am very sorry for doing this. Please forgive me. Enclosed is \$20.00 as compensation.

May God bless you and your entire staff.

Sincerely,

Rick Stockwell

On Christmas morning 2016, as we were in the midst of opening presents, my wife asked if I was going to open the box shipped from Spain. I didn't know what she was talking about. She said it was the box in my son's old bedroom, which I was now using as a study. I retrieved the box, opened it, and found the letter below enclosed:

Dear Mr. Stockwell,

I have received your letter, the bath mat and the \$20 bill.

The Gables – Clear Conscience

In the early 70's I was probably not born yet. It is such a nice surprise to me that you have been keeping this bath mat for longer than my entire life.

We have been missing this mat year after year since the day you decided to take it and carefully keep it to return it to us in a far future but please do not feel sorry for this, we have more bath mats. I have inquired all the Ayre Gran Hotel Colon team and I am pleased to inform you that we all have forgiven you.

Find attached the \$20 bill you sent us. Now it's signed by all hotel heads department and it has turned into a voucher for a free three nights stay in our hotel.

As we love this bath mat and we are not giving it back to you, we have decided to send you a customized bathrobe. We hope you like it.

Looking forward to hear from you soon.

Kindest regards,

*Alberto Garcia
General Manager*

Later that Christmas Day, I shared this true story with my side of the family at brunch and Donna's side of the family at dinner. On New Year's Eve, I shared it with several of my high school friends and their families. I also shared this story with friends at my church.

Dialog:

Rick: Hey Donna. What lessons can be learned from this true story?

Donna: It pays to steal? I can't wait to stay in Madrid for free someday.

Rick: [Sigh.] That wasn't quite the answer I was looking for.

Donna: Didn't one of your brothers say he was going to start stealing hotel bath towels.

Rick: Yes, but he was only kidding.

Donna: Oh. Sorry. This *is* a Bible study, isn't it?

Rick: Yes.

Donna: Well, what does the Bible say about the conscience?

The Gables – Clear Conscience

Rick: First, let's define what a conscience is. Dr. Lutzer says, "The conscience is the rudimentary law of God written on every human heart."¹

Romans 2:14-16 says, "(Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.) This will take place on the day when God judges people's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares."

Donna: So, everyone has a conscience, and everyone is accountable before God.

Rick: Yes. Hebrews 9:27 says, "... people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment." We will all have to stand before God one day to give an account of what we've done, and even what we've thought.

Donna: Even what we've thought?

Rick: Yes. Psalm 139:2 says, "You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar."

Donna: So we can't hide anything from God.

Rick: Correct. Proverbs 5:21 says, "For your ways are in full view of the Lord, and he examines all your paths."

Donna: What should we do with this information?

Rick: You should strive to walk through life with a clear conscience - before God, before others, and before yourself.

Donna: How do we do that?

Rick:

- *Pursue Righteousness.* We should strive to do what's right in everything we do. Colossians 3:23 says, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters..."
- *Make Confession.* If you've done something wrong, confess it to God. If you've done something wrong against another person, confess it to them, if you are able, and ask for their forgiveness.

¹ Dr. Erwin Lutzer, *The Power of a Clear Conscience – Let God Free You from Your Past*, (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers), page 9.

The Gables – Clear Conscience

Donna: Why?

Rick:

- When asked what the greatest commandment is, Jesus said, in Luke 10:27: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” We can’t fully obey these commandments if God or another person has something against us (Matthew 5:23-24).
- God’s standard for right relationship with him is perfection. We can’t attain that on our own, so we rely on Jesus to make us perfect by imputing his righteousness to us through his death on the cross. Trusting in the fact that he paid the penalty for our sins on the cross makes us God’s adopted sons or daughters.
- Even though we are now God’s children, we still need to be sure we maintain a right relationship with him on a day-to-day basis. To do that, we must ensure there is no unconfessed sin in our life. When we sin, and confess it, we can be certain we are forgiven and are in right standing with him. This is confirmed in 1 John 1:9: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”
- If we fail to do this, our joy will be diminished. Jesus said, in John 15:10-12, “If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.”

Donna: How do we know if we’ve confessed all the sins we’re supposed to?

Rick:

- In Psalm 139: 23-24 King David said, “Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” So, we need to ask God if there is any sin in our lives that we need to confess and repent of.
- If we have searched our hearts, and asked God to search our hearts, and confessed and repented of any known sins, we can have a clear conscience. 1 John 3:21 says, “Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we can have confidence before God.”

Donna: What, if after doing all that, we still feel guilt or shame?

Rick:

- You can’t always trust your feelings. It may be that you have faulty thinking based on unreliable sources, or your conscience was improperly trained with false guilt during your childhood.
- It may be a servant of Satan is harassing you, striving to make you ineffective as a Christian. The goal of Satan is condemnation for sin, while the goal of God is restoration from sin, and a return of innocence once lost. Isaiah 61:2-3 states that God wants "... to

The Gables – Clear Conscience

bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair."

- God not only removes our sin. He removes our shame. Dr. Lutzer writes, "God knows your need. He knows the objective shame you carry because of your sins. He also knows the subjective, undeserved shame you carry from your past. No matter what the source of your shame and guilt may be, God is bigger than all of it. In His grace and mercy, he can meet you in your need so that you have a 'good conscience and a sincere faith' ... When Jesus was bearing our guilt on the cross, He was also bearing our shame. He was bringing about a deliverance that would go deep into our hearts so that we would be free. We can lay down our heavy emotional load on His shoulders."²

Donna: What is left for us to do?

Rick:

- In Acts 24:16, the Apostle Paul said, "So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man." We too should strive to keep our consciences clear, so we can enjoy a closer relationship with God and with other people.
- Ephesians 3:12 says, "In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence." Wouldn't you like to be able to approach God with freedom and confidence? You can, if your conscience is clear.

Donna: Amen.

² Lutzer, *Ibid.*, pages 32-33.