

# Cheated On an Exam, Should I Clear My Conscience?

Tim Conway | [illbehonest.com](http://illbehonest.com)

**James:** Someone asked this. They said, "I 'malpracticed' in my exam by asking for help. Should I set that right? I repeatedly had thoughts of discouragement regarding the matter and was about to set it right. I prayed about it and was about to send an apology email. Just before that, I asked my brother in Christ, and he told me to wait and pray, and later advised it is not required. I left it as he said, but I now get condemned or convicted. Should I set it right now? Please help."

**Tim:** You know, when I was in engineering school, I didn't know any Christians. I think probably everybody cheated. Everybody did what they could do to get the best grade possible. So if you knew somebody that had an old test, you'd look at it. You'd study it. You'd try to figure out what that certain professor was going to put on this exam. If you had an exact copy of the exam, you wanted to make sure that you knew exactly how to do it. There were tests that I took that you were supposed to memorize all the formulas. And I basically would write the formulas on the cover of my folders and I'd put them down under my feet. I was good in math, but I was lazy. And I got by the best way that I could. You know, I knew how to do the work. I actually did the work, but I had the formulas written.

When God saved me, I mean, I guess when God saved me, I felt like cheating was dishonesty. And one of the things that God really convicted me of was setting my lies straight. And so with all sorts of fear and horrible trembling, it was not an easy day. I remember I was already a year in the engineering field. And I remember marching on a gloomy, gray day into the engineering office there at Western Michigan University. I went in to the head of the engineering department and I confessed to him that I had cheated. And he laughed at me. He laughed at me and he told me I was already an engineer for a year. I had already proven myself in the field. He told me he was a Gideon, which is really interesting. His name was Hamlink - Dr. Hamlink. I had actually had him for some of the courses when I was in the school. He was the head of the engineering department. It's interesting he told me he was a Gideon and he didn't tell me he was a Christian. It seems like the one would have been better than the other to tell me. But he laughed at me. He sent me on my way. I felt like a free bird after that.

I mean, look, it's like the Spirit's not letting this guy go. He's under conviction. Personally, I think he's going to be miserable until he makes it right. And my counsel to him is: go make it right. Because, look, love covers a multitude of sins. That's not just us. That's God. There's a lot of things that we've done in our life that Jesus paid for, God doesn't make us do restitution for. We may not even know we did it, or at least, so overtly as what to God it was, what kind of offense it was to Him. But when the Spirit of God is bringing things to our mind that we need to make right, and we pray about it and it keeps coming back, then yeah, it needs to be made right.

**James:** And so, obviously, he has some sort of fear that if he makes it right, he might lose something. What if he does?

**Tim:** Oh, he might. I mean look, when we make restitution for sin, it often costs something. I mean, I not only went back to everybody and confessed the lies that came to my mind that I needed to make right, I also went back and restored things that I stole or things that I vandalized, I tried to make right by paying for or at least confessing. You guys, my friends and I, we did horrible things. I mean, all the things that I did, I made a whole list of them after God saved me and I just determined that I was going to seek to deal with one of them a day until I had all of them taken care of. I went through all my possessions. If I had anything that was stolen, I thought about any lies that I had told that really stood out. But my friends and I, we had destroyed greens on a golf course and destroyed golf carts. There were houses that I had lived in in college that we just totally destroyed. Some of them, I went back to this lady that had been my landlord one of the years. There were like 10 of us that lived in this house. We were an animal house. We had parties in that place. The carpet was so soaked with beer. One of my friends brought out his compound bow and stuck arrows in the walls. Some of the guys put a platform on the roof pounding nails through all the shingles so they could sunbathe up there. We just absolutely destroyed this place. And when I was saved, I went back to the lady. I called her up and I said, "M'am, I lived in your house back in this time." Oh, she remembered. She said, "Oh no... you boys were so sweet. Oh, it was expected." It was like, okay...

And there were other things. I remember there was another landlord that I had skipped out on and I hadn't paid him all the rent. And I showed up at his door and I had - I forget how much I had in my hand. I think I had like a wad of \$300 of twenties and I was explaining to him I skipped out on him. He's like oh, no, it's okay. He looked down at that wad of money and he grabbed it.

But I went back to that golf course. I said I've probably caused tens of thousands of dollars, I said, look, you can call the police and report me. You can have me work it off. Or you can have me pay for it. And he took down my name and he told the guy that headed up the golf course and they never called me. So there were all sorts of things like that.

I'll tell you where it came from. It came from reading Ezekiel and it talked about returning the things stolen. And I thought that's what I've got to do. And oh, it was good just to have a clear conscience and be done with those things.

And you know, one of the things was my memory. It's like I remember I worked for a certain employer. And I didn't steal anything from this employer, but I took sick days when I wasn't really sick. So I was convicted by it. So I wrote a check. It's the place where I first met Craig. It was called Interkal up in Kalamazoo, Michigan. And I wrote a check and I sent it to them for what I thought would cover all their expenses for a whole day's work of mine, all the taxes they have to pay and everything and what they probably lost. I think I did it two or three days. So I

tallied it all up and I sent them a check. And then I forgot that I did it. And then I was seized with this sense of: Oh no, I think I wronged them. So I did it all over again. I sent them another check. And now the guy in accounting there sent me back this rude letter like "we don't want your money!" He sent me the check back. I think he sent me the check back both times.

Anyway, some of it was extremely humiliating. I went to my grandfather and admitted that I had stolen some stuff from him. It was hard. Going to the college campus was one of the hardest.

**James:** Someone asked a follow-up. Did being saved make it easier to make restitution? Did the Holy Spirit make it any less painful?

**Tim:** I don't know about that easier. I mean, when I was lost, I wouldn't have done it. So, I don't know about any way of comparing. When I was lost I had no conscience that I needed to do that. That would have been the last thing. In fact, I told my kids, I said if I would have known all the restitution I would have to do when I was actually doing those things, I would have never done them in the first place.

The first one that I did was the one where the guy grabbed the money out of my hand - the old landlord. And I remember it was lunchtime and I had an hour for lunch, so I drove over there. I was sitting in my car. I was probably listening to a John MacArthur sermon. But I was so scared. And I'm not going to say that it was easy. But what the Spirit did was just the Spirit convicted me that it was right no matter how difficult it was. I'll tell you this, that having a defiled conscience is more difficult than the difficulty that I experienced in making the restitution. And I can tell you when I walked away from those places, oh, there was such unbelievable joy. I can tell you I slept well every night after having to do one of those. And the thing was, the consequences were of little concern to me, like how much money or if it took work or even if they were going to slap me in jail. I just wanted a clean conscience.

**James:** Amen.