

12-5-21

**Acts 23:1-10**

**Read verse 1.**

When I read verse one, I was struck by a couple of things.

1. Paul treated those that mistreated him respectfully. **“Men and brethren,”**
  - I can tell you for certain that I would not be calling them by names that can be repeated in God’s word.
2. Paul said, **“I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.”**
  - I am not sure I could say that. So, this made me investigate this statement.

*“In his mind, even the things he had done when he persecuted the church had been one in good conscience, because he had done them ignorantly. A classic example of the fact that conscience is a good goad but a poor guide. The Holy Spirit’s work in conviction is to bring the Word of God to bear upon the conscience, quickening it and monitoring it so that it functions properly. Apart from that, (Holy Spirit working with it) conscience can lead people to do strange things.” John Phillips, Exploring Acts*

What do we mean when we talk about a good conscience, or a clear conscience?

*"An inner freedom of spirit toward God and others that comes from knowing that you are right with God and others, and that no one can point a finger at you and say, 'You wronged me, and you never tried to make it right.'" Pastor Chuck Sligh*

The New Testament writers had a lot to say about a good conscience.

In his first letter to Timothy, Paul tells us that next to our faith, a clear conscience is an important weapon in the Christian life

***1 Timothy 1:18-19, This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, 19 having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck,***

Paul was concerned that Timothy would keep his faith to the end, but also that he would maintain a good conscience. Paul puts a good conscience as the second most important thing for Timothy.

Peter tells us that we cannot witness effectively without a clear conscience.

***1 Peter 3:15-16 - But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; 16 having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed.***

You can witness to the lost all you want to, but they know you do not have a clear conscience, those you witness to will have cause to speak evil of you.

John informs us that we cannot pray with confidence without a clear conscience.

**1 John 3:21-22, Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God. 22 And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.**

Look at what Paul says in the next chapter.

**Acts 24:16, This being so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men.**

So, this leads me to ask how do I have a good conscience with God? How do I make it practical and apply it?

Well **(B.C.)** before salvation the only way to gain ground for a good conscience with God was to become right with Him. And the only way that was done was through Jesus Christ.

I think of the prodigal son who, when he finally came to his senses in the pig sty, said **"I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, 19 And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants."** (Luke 15:18-19)

When he returned home, **verse 21** he used the same wording he had rehearsed in the pig sty, which teaches us the importance of carefully planning our wording when attempting to gain a clear conscience. The prodigal son didn't assume that since he had made things right with God, everything was automatically right with his father. He realized he should clear his conscience with his father too.

Also, Zacchaeus a tax collector, and it was customary for tax collectors to stiff people as much as he could, and anything over the tax was his. When he was converted, he didn't assume that now that he was saved, he didn't have to worry about all the people he had cheated. No, now that things were right between him and God, he knew he needed to make things right with those he had wronged.

He said to Jesus in **Luke 19:8 - "...Behold, Lord, if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold."**

It was **THEN** that Jesus said in the next verse: **"...This day is salvation come to this house..."**-because it wasn't until Zacchaeus resolved to clear his conscience with those, he had wronged that the reality of the salvation by God was credible. The truth is that we can't truly have a good conscience before God if we don't have a good conscience before man. If there's a breakdown on the horizontal level, there is a breakdown on the vertical level.

This is proven by Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount in **Matthew 5:23-24 - "Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift."**

Jesus' teaching here is that if you don't have a clear conscience with another person, then God will not recognize your spiritual service and sacrifice to Him until you are reconciled with that person. Once you have gained a clear conscience on the horizontal level, you can then resume fellowship with God on the vertical level. Only **THEN** can you bring your gift to God and for Him to receive it.

**1. Good conscience before God is being right with Him and Others.**

- ❖ We must understand that our sin is against God, but people end up being collateral damage.
- ❖ To be right, of good conscience with God it is directly connected to how we deal with others.
- ❖ God is all about us being reconciled to other people.
- ❖ Our excuses are not accepted as good enough reason.

**2. Good conscience before God is being responsible for our OWN behavior, and no one else's.**

- ❖ We are responsible for our own wrong actions and behavior. It doesn't matter how dirty someone does us, we are responsible for our actions.
- ❖ **Read verse 2-5.**
- ❖ First off, I will say that Paul's response to being smacked is PG compared to what many of you would have said and done.
- ❖ Second, the high priest ordering anyone to be smacked without being found guilty was wrong, it was contrary to the very law they were so desperately defending.

***Deuteronomy 25:2, then it shall be, if the wicked man deserves to be beaten, that the judge will cause him to lie down and be beaten in his presence, according to his guilt, with a certain number of blows.***

- ❖ There is much debate regarding **verses 4-5**. Some believe that Paul didn't know it was a high priest that ordered the smack. While others believe that Paul knew, and his answer is more of a swipe at the high priest. Like saying, whoa I didn't know you were a Christian when I see how you act.
- ❖ I believe Paul reacted like any other person getting smacked. But when he realized it was a hit to his testimony, he was sorry for saying what he said. Paul took responsibility for what he said. He would have been right to quote scripture, but he chose to humble himself.
- ❖ What are we missing most in society today? People taking responsibility for their own behavior. There is so much denial, and deflection.
- ❖ How can we say we are obedient, or how can we say that God is using us, or everything is good in our relationship with Him, if we can't accept responsibility for our own actions?
- ❖ News flash, none of us are perfect. We will blow it. I know you don't think you do. I know you think its because of someone else and its not on you. In many cases, you are wrong! You are the weakest link.
- ❖ And even if you were wronged, it doesn't give you the freedom to respond sinfully. (I know it stinks!)

**3. Good conscience before God is proven not just in our everyday walk, also in how we respond in adversity.**

***Luke 12:48, But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.***

- ❖ This seems to be common theme, how did you or how will you respond when you get punched in the face?
- ❖ When it comes to adversity among people, the greatest responsibility is on the more spiritually mature and enlightened person in a conflict.

- ❖ **“...to whom much is given, from him much will be required;”**
- ❖ Especially for those of us that are born-again. We have the responsibility because we are more spiritually mature than those that aren't followers of God.
- ❖ We have the Holy Spirit to illuminate to help us, we have the scriptures to instruct and guide us, and we have a Christian family to admonish and encourage us.
- ❖ If we hold onto, refuse, or can't make things right or take responsibility, then we CANNOT say that our conscience is good with God. Holding onto and refusing come from pride and God has warned us about pride.

***James 4:6, But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: “God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.”***

- ❖ Paul was able to take responsibility and recognize that he was the most spiritually mature at that kangaroo court. While the crowd was still stewing, Paul was able to pivot and gain an advantage in the situation.

**Read verses 6-10.**

Paul's quick thinking worked. ***Verse 9, “We find no evil in this man; but if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him let us not fight against God.”***

Paul is placed back in prison for his own protection.

### **Conclusion**

How often we fail to gain a clear conscience because of pride-and oh, the consequences of pride in a Christian's life!

How many of us are living defeated Christian lives because, though we are God's children, God Himself is resisting us. Better to humble yourself before men and have God's blessings than have God's judgment on your life!

To have good conscience before God means we are doing our best to be obedient and honoring to Him. God is concerned with how we interact with each other. It is His desire that we treat our relationships with each other highly. That we take responsibility for our behaviors. When we blow it, own it, and seek reconciliation. God desires His followers/children to make things right. He expects the more spiritually mature to lead by example and act first.

Society today is lacking people seeking reconciliation. There is plenty of retribution and revenge, but not a lot of reconciliation (forgiveness). There isn't too many that are taking responsibility. It's everyone else's fault. People can only see the offensiveness of others and not of themselves. When things happen people walk away, avoid the other person and situation. Or they spend time they can't get back hating the other person or persons in the situation.

This shouldn't be found in the lives of God's people. How can we say that we are right with God, in His, or doing His will when we have unresolved issues with His children? When we do this and say we are in good conscience, everything is all good with God, we are liars.

What do you need to make right today? Who do you need to forgive? Will you make a promise to God that before you partake of communion you will make things, right?

**Matthew 18:15-17, "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector."**

**Matthew 5:23-24, Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift."**

**Luke 17:3-4, Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' forgive him.**

**2 Timothy 2:24, A servant of the Lord must not quarrel but must be kind to everyone, be able to teach, and be patient with difficult people.**

**Communion (Matthew 26:26-30)**