

Acts 23 - A Clear Conscience

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Conscience; Paul / Acts 23

Our conscience is such an influential factor in our lives that it demands attentive nurturing and development. In Acts 23, we will see the results of different people's consciences and value systems.

SCRIPTURE READING:

Acts 23:1–11 KJV

¹ And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men *and* brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.

² And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth.

³ Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, *thou* whited wall: for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?

⁴ And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God's high priest?

⁵ Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people.

⁶ But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men *and* brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question.

⁷ And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided.

⁸ For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both.

⁹ And there arose a great cry: and the scribes *that were* of the Pharisees' part arose, and strove, saying, We find no evil in this man: but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God.

¹⁰ And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring *him* into the castle.

¹¹ And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.

INTRODUCTION:

In 1997

10,000 Sermon Illustrations What Happened to Conscience?

What Happened to Conscience?

The early morning crash of a Brink's armored truck on a Miami highway in January held up a mirror to our nation's cultural decline. While the driver and a fellow Brink's officer lay bruised and bleeding, a festive atmosphere broke loose outside the truck as thousands of dollars blew in the breeze.

Motorists stopped in rush hour traffic, then scooped up cash before resuming their commutes to the office. Thousands of crisp bills and shiny coins rained down an overpass onto a Miami neighborhood. Below, mothers with babies grabbed coins and piled them into strollers. An elderly woman filled a box. A young school girl dumped her book bag and loaded it with coins and bills.

Onlookers and participants had plenty of justifications and rationalizations.

"Which is more moral," asked one resident of the impoverished neighborhood, "to return the money and leave your children improvised-or maybe send them to college and enrich the family for generations?"

"We deserve a little something," said another.

"The Lord was willing for it to happen here," one man commented. "There's a lot of poverty. It was a miracle."

Police estimated that more than 100 people helped themselves to money during the melee. Middle class on their way to work made off with thousands.

Was this a shocking event? It shouldn't have been. What happened in Miami was born out of a cultural drift that has left us unsure of absolute right and wrong or at least unwilling to live by such a code. We reward rule-breakers and ridicule those who extol morality. Life's ultimate reward is money and having it is the end to our worries.

Ralph Reed said that the 1996 presidential election was about the character of the American people. Maybe the Miami incident says more about that character than we care to consider.

There were some heroes on that day in Miami. Several people came forward and turned money over to authorities.

"I have children, and I needed to set a good example," said Faye McFadden, a mother who

earns \$5.00 an hour at a department store. "It was important for me to do what I felt was right."

Herbert Tarvin, 11, came forward after his teacher at St. Francis Xavier Elementary School lectured students about making the right decision. He went to police with 85 cents.

"I knew it was wrong for me to keep anything," Herbert told a television reporter, "and I knew if I kept it I would have been stealing."

Manny Rodriguez, a firefighter who recovered a bag containing \$330,000 in cash, summed things up pretty well.

"People were almost killed in that truck and people are calling it a blessing from God. That wasn't a blessing; it was a test. The rich, the poor, the middle class-everybody should have a conscience."

The God-given, human conscience is a powerful influence in our lives.

That reminds me of . . .

10,000 Sermon Illustrations Troubled Conscience

Troubled Conscience

A man consulted a doctor, "I've been misbehaving, Doc, and my conscience is troubling me," he complained.

"And you want something that will strengthen your willpower?" asked the doctor.

"Well, no," said the fellow. "I was thinking of something that would weaken my conscience."

We all are affected by our conscience.

Consider this:

10,000 Sermon Illustrations Conscience Fund

Conscience Fund

Did you know that ever since 1811 (when someone who had defrauded the government anonymously sent \$5 to Washington D.C.) the U.S. Treasury has operated a Conscience Fund? Since that time almost \$3.5 million has been received from guilt-ridden citizens.

PROPOSITION:

Our conscience is such an influential factor in our lives that it demands attentive nurturing and development.

Acts 23:1 KJV

¹ And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men *and* brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.

Paul said he lived in all good conscience before God.

May you and I be able to say the same!

A good conscience cannot be purchased.

A good conscience is worth more than gold.

May we seek a good conscience!

TRANSITION:

In Acts 23, we will see the results of different people's consciences and value systems.

Notice with me the way their lives are influenced by their consciences.

PASSAGE EXPLAINED:

Paul's Clear Conscience

Acts 23:1 KJV

¹ And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men *and* brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.

Ananias' Hypocrisy

Acts 23:2–5 KJV

² And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth.

³ Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, *thou* whited wall: for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?

⁴ And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God's high priest?

⁵ Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people.

Paul's Core Doctrine

Acts 23:6 KJV

⁶ But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men *and* brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question.

Divided Religious Leaders

Acts 23:7–10 KJV

⁷ And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided.

⁸ For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both.

⁹ And there arose a great cry: and the scribes *that were* of the Pharisees' part arose, and strove, saying, We find no evil in this man: but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God.

¹⁰ And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring *him* into the castle.

The Lord's Presence & Promise

Acts 23:11 KJV

¹¹ And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.

The Conspiring, Murderous Band

Acts 23:12–15 KJV

¹² And when it was day, certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.

¹³ And they were more than forty which had made this conspiracy.

¹⁴ And they came to the chief priests and elders, and said, We have bound ourselves under a great curse, that we will eat nothing until we have slain Paul.

¹⁵ Now therefore ye with the council signify to the chief captain that he bring him down unto you to morrow, as though ye would inquire something more perfectly concerning him: and we, or ever he come near, are ready to kill him.

Paul's Courageous, Young Newpew

Acts 23:16–22 KJV

¹⁶ And when Paul's sister's son heard of their lying in wait, he went and entered into the castle, and told Paul.

¹⁷ Then Paul called one of the centurions unto *him*, and said, Bring this young man unto the chief captain: for he hath a certain thing to tell him.

¹⁸ So he took him, and brought *him* to the chief captain, and said, Paul the prisoner called me unto *him*, and prayed me to bring this young man unto thee, who hath something to say unto thee.

¹⁹ Then the chief captain took him by the hand, and went *with him* aside privately, and asked *him*, What is that thou hast to tell me?

²⁰ And he said, The Jews have agreed to desire thee that thou wouldest bring down Paul to morrow into the council, as though they would inquire somewhat of him more perfectly.

²¹ But do not thou yield unto them: for there lie in wait for him of them more than forty men, which have bound themselves with an oath, that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him: and now are they ready, looking for a promise from thee.

²² So the chief captain *then* let the young man depart, and charged *him*, *See thou* tell no man that thou hast shewed these things to me.

The Lord's Provision through Unsaved Romans

Acts 23:23–35 KJV

²³ And he called unto *him* two centurions, saying, Make ready two hundred soldiers to go to Caesarea, and horsemen threescore and ten, and spearmen two hundred, at the third hour of the night;

²⁴ And provide *them* beasts, that they may set Paul on, and bring *him* safe unto Felix the governor.

²⁵ And he wrote a letter after this manner:

²⁶ Claudius Lysias unto the most excellent governor Felix *sendeth* greeting.

²⁷ This man was taken of the Jews, and should have been killed of them: then came I with an army, and rescued him, having understood that he was a Roman.

²⁸ And when I would have known the cause wherefore they accused him, I brought him forth into their council:

²⁹ Whom I perceived to be accused of questions of their law, but to have nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or of bonds.

³⁰ And when it was told me how that the Jews laid wait for the man, I sent straightway to thee, and gave commandment to his accusers also to say before thee what *they had* against him. Farewell.

³¹ Then the soldiers, as it was commanded them, took Paul, and brought *him* by night to Antipatris.

³² On the morrow they left the horsemen to go with him, and returned to the castle:

³³ Who, when they came to Caesarea, and delivered the epistle to the governor, presented Paul also before him.

³⁴ And when the governor had read *the letter*, he asked of what province he was. And when he understood that *he was* of Cilicia;

³⁵ I will hear thee, said he, when thine accusers are also come. And he commanded him to be kept in Herod's judgment hall.

NOTICE THEIR CONSCIENCES:

1. Paul's was clear
2. Ananias' was duplicitous and hypocritical
3. Religious leaders' were doctrinally divided
4. Paul's nephew was influenced by family loyalties
5. Roman captain was influenced by Roman law

What is the Conscience?

The conscience is defined as that part of the human psyche that induces mental anguish and feelings of guilt when we violate it and feelings of pleasure and well-being when our actions, thoughts and words are in conformity to our value systems.

The Greek word translated "conscience" in all New Testament references is *suneidēsis*, meaning "moral awareness" or "moral consciousness." The conscience reacts when one's actions, thoughts, and words conform to, or are contrary to, a standard of right and wrong.

There is no Hebrew term in the Old Testament equivalent to *suneidēsis* in the New Testament. The lack of a Hebrew word for "conscience" may be due to the Jewish worldview, which was communal rather than individual. The Hebrew considered himself as a member of a covenant community that related corporately to God and His laws, rather than as an individual. In other words, the Hebrew was confident in his own position before God if the Hebrew nation as a whole was in good fellowship with Him.

The New Testament concept of conscience is more individual in nature.

How was Paul's conscience clear?

- Use to kill Christians

- Received same redemption as Adam & Eve in Genesis 3
- Redeemed by the blood of the Lamb!

Truths About the Conscience

#1 God-given capacity for self-evaluation

Paul's conscience verified integrity of heart.

Acts 24:16 KJV

¹⁶ And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and *toward* men.

1 Corinthians 4:4 KJV

⁴ For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord.

#2 The conscience serves as a witness.

To the Gentiles

Romans 2:14–15 KJV

¹⁴ For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves:

¹⁵ Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and *their* thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;)

Speaking with truth

Romans 9:1 KJV

¹ I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost,

Good conduct

2 Corinthians 1:12 KJV

¹² For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward.

Good actions

2 Corinthians 5:11 KJV

¹¹ Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences.

#3 The conscience is a servant to your value system.

- Damaged
- Weak
- Ignorant
- Perverted
- Reprobate

It can be damaged.

ILL—Peace Child cannibals valuing treachery as honorable

ILL—NY & VA laws permitting the murder of babies just before or after birth

1 Timothy 4:1–2 KJV

¹ Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils;

² Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron;

Seared=cauterized and calloused

Can sin with abandon & deceive one's self to believe all is well with one's soul.

Treat others with insensitivity & without compassion.

CONCLUSION:

Hebrews 10:22 KJV

²² Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

1. **Stay near to God**
2. **Keep your heart true with integrity**
3. **Grow in faith and assurance**
4. **Seek a pure heart**
5. **Keep a pure body**