

A GOOD CONSCIENCE

“And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men *and* brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.” (Acts 23:1 KJV)

Many in the Jewish council were familiar with Paul's life. His Jewish credentials were impeccable. He was born of the tribe of Benjamin and circumcised the eighth day. He was trained by the highly revered Gamaliel, and as a Pharisee followed the strictest teaching of Mosaic Law. He was an excellent student and advanced beyond those of his own age in the Jew's religion. Being extremely zealous for God he persecuted the followers of Jesus. He even received letters from the High Priest to the Jews in Damascus that he might bind those who believed in Jesus and bring them as prisoners to Jerusalem. By his own admission he was the chief of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15).

YET PAUL STOOD BEFORE THE COUNCIL WITH A “GOOD CONSCIENCE”. Later, on trial before the Governor Felix, he testified that he had always had a “conscience void of offence” (Acts 24:16). He later reminded Timothy that he had served God “from my forefathers with pure conscience” (2 Tim. 1:3). There is no way around it. At the very time Paul was persecuting Christians his conscience was pure. He was obviously wrong, but he thought he was right. He did the most ungodly things with a “good conscience”.

Paul's conversion was therefore quite simple. Since he had a “good conscience” all that Jesus had to do to convert Paul was to provide him with “good information”. Because Paul had a “good conscience” he changed immediately. He not only immediately witnessed in Damascus for Christ, but labored more abundantly than other apostles in preaching the Good News (1 Cor. 15:10).

By contrast, there are others who do not have a “good conscience”. They speak lies in hypocrisy and their conscience has been seared with a hot iron (1 Tim. 4:2). Nothing is pure to the person with a defiled conscience (Tit. 1:15). Since our conscience is the doorway to salvation, those without a “good conscience” make shipwreck of the faith (1 Tim. 1:15). Some have a conscience so calloused and hard that it is impossible to renew them to repentance (Heb.6:6).

James reminds us that when we know to do good, and do not do it, it is a sin (Ja. 4:17). There is nothing wrong, for example, with eating meat for every creature of God is good and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving (1 Tim. 4:4). There is, however, not in every man that knowledge. So, if a person violates his conscience and eats meat when he believes it is wrong, he is condemned for violating his conscience. For whatsoever is not of faith is sin (Rom. 14:23). Letting your conscience be your guide does not mean you are doing what is right, or pleasing God, but it does mean that you are at least maintaining a “good conscience”.

Paul deals with the importance of a “good conscience” in several passages of Scripture. Take, for example, 1 Cor. 8:1 - 13). Paul could eat meat offered to idols because he “knew” that there was only one God and that eating meat, or not eating meat does not make us either good or bad. It does, however, defile our conscience if we eat good meat believing it is bad. Damaging someone's conscience was so serious that Paul declared that if eating meat caused his brother to stumble he would eat no flesh while the world was standing (1 Cor. 8:13).

Please do not be ignorant of the devil's devices. He will tempt you to take better care of your body than your soul. Please don't abuse your conscience! A “good conscience” is essential to your salvation! When you “know” something is wrong, don't do it! When you “know” something is right, then do it! Above all, educate your conscience with the Word of God for God's people are destroyed for the lack of knowledge. When we reject knowledge, God rejects us (Hos. 4:6).