

The Testimony Of Paul's Conscience

“For our glorying is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and sincerity of God, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we behaved ourselves in the world and more abundantly to you-ward” (2 Cor. 1:12).

Paul often wrote of the conscience: his and others. He wrote that some had seared their conscience “as with a hot iron” (1 Tim. 4:2); that some were “past feeling” (a clear reference to the conscience) (Eph. 4:19) and if he authored the Hebrew letter, he spoke of Jews under the law who still had a consciousness of sin after animal sacrifices were made for forgiveness (Heb. 10:2). But perhaps it was of his own conscience that he made most reference: he testified to a Jewish council “I have lived before God in all conscience to this day” (Acts 21:3) and he assured his Roman readers that his conscience bore witness to the fact that he had great sorrow and unceasing pain in his heart, this latter because of his concern for his nation who had rejected its Messiah (Rom. 9:1-3).

The conscience is one of four functions of the spiritual heart of man; the other three functions being that of the intellect (man believes, thinks, and reasons with his heart); emotions (we love, desire, sorrow, and hate in our heart); and, will (we purpose with our heart). But, it was Paul's conscience that bore witness that he had acted consistently with what his principles and precepts were — specifically in this Corinthian text his conscience bore witness that his actions in Corinth had been in holiness and sincerity of God: in holiness because Paul's behavior among Corinthians was in holiness of life. He had not taken advantage of them to his own benefit; he had not behaved in an unseemly fashion among them. He had acted consistent with God's command to “come out from among them, and be ye separate saith the Lord and touch not the unclean thing and I will receive you” (2 Cor. 6:17). This is God's expectation for all His children for in Paul's first letter, is this warning: “Know ye not that the unrighteousness shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived, neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with men, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 6:9f). He also appealed to Christians to live in holiness of life in Titus 2:11f. And, Paul's conscience bore witness to his words that he had indeed lived in holiness of life while he was in Corinth. His conscience further testified he had acted sincerely — he sought not theirs, but them (2 Cor. 12:14). He wrote the Thessalonians that he had not worn a cloak of covetousness among them; rather he had nurtured them as a nurse would have nurtured her own children and that he had worked “night and day” that he might not burden any of them (1 Thess. 1:5, 7, 9). His motives, not only to the Corinthians, but to all was ever the same, sincerely seeking the best interest of his brethren, even to his own hurt. He constantly sacrificed his own interests and material interests to advance that of others. Paul's conscience bore witness of such sincerity of actions in their midst.

But Paul's sincerity was not only witnessed by his conscience, it was by his behavior as well. He made no distinction in his dealing with men when he preached the gospel to

them. He behaved the same to all. To have acted in one way to the world and another to brethren would have demonstrated that Paul was insincere, a hypocrite. And, although Paul's righteous behavior as a known truth to the Corinthians (or should have been), Paul felt it necessary to remind them of his constancy in actions toward them and the world.

In the first century the behavior of Jewish teachers in the world had caused God's name to be blasphemed among the Gentiles because their behavior was a denial of what they taught (Rom. 2:24). And the effects of hypocrisy on the part of professing Christians toward those in the world always is the same. Jesus taught His disciples that we are a light on a hill, a lamp on a lamp stand (Mt. 5:14-16). The Philippians were reminded they were seen as lights in the world, holding forth the word of light (Phil. 2:15). To have the same results of our labor today as Paul did in his day, our conscience must give testimony that we have walked holy and sincerely before all men.

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