

“Paul’s Good Conscience”
Acts 23:1-11
(Preached at Trinity, April 2, 2008)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As we saw in **Chapter 21**, soon after Paul entered into Jerusalem he ran into trouble. In an effort to accommodate the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem Paul agreed to accompany two brothers to the Temple for ceremonial purification. Having entered into the Temple the Jews suddenly descended upon Paul with false accusations and were determined to kill him. Paul was rescued by the Roman authorities and taken into custody. Paul requested permission to speak and then stood on the stairs and spoke to the Jews in their Hebrew tongue.
2. In the course of his speaking he recounted his conversion experience describing how Jesus had come crushing his rebellion and calling him as a servant.
3. Hearing Paul describe his testimony and how Christ had commanded Paul to pass over the Jews and bring salvation to the Gentiles the Jews were outraged.
Acts 22:22-23 – “And they gave him audience unto this word, and *then* lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a *fellow* from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live. ²³ And as they cried out, and cast off *their* clothes, and threw dust into the air,”
4. **Verse 24** – The Roman commander realizing the crowd was out of control ordered the soldiers to take Paul to the barracks. It was his duty to maintain peace in the city. He had no idea what was causing the uproar so he decided to have Paul examined by scourging to find out all that he wanted to know.
5. They prepared Paul for scourging and Paul understanding that he was in mortal danger As they stretched him out for scourging he informed the guard of his Roman citizenship. Since it was illegal to scourge a Roman citizen Paul was immediately questioned by the captain of the guard. Seeing Paul dirty and in torn clothes from his ordeal with the Jews the captain boasted that he had acquired his citizenship with much money. Paul simply responded, “I was free born.”
6. The next day the captain ordered Paul to stand before the Jewish leaders in order to finally determine the reason for their fury against Paul.
7. In our text tonight we find Paul before the Sanhedrin, the highest court in the Jewish nation – although it was now under the dominion of Rome. Paul is once again allowed to speak.
 - A. He begins to earnestly gaze upon them. This was the very body that Paul had brought Christians to be judged, although much of the membership had changed. It was the very place Stephen had stood. Paul stood before them boldly holding on to the promise Christ had made years before.

Luke 12:11-12 – “And when they bring you unto the synagogues, and unto magistrates, and powers, take ye no thought how or what thing ye shall answer, or what ye shall say: ¹² For the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say.”

- B. The first thing he does is testify of his own life before God. He had been accused of several different crimes by the Jews
Acts 21:28 – “. . . This is the man, that teacheth all *men* every where against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place.”
- C. Paul is stating that whatever accusations they may have against him his conscience is clear before God.
Acts 23:1 – “I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.”
8. Paul is making the claim that he had faithfully fulfilled his duty before God. He wasn’t claiming perfection. Paul was always quick to admit of his struggles with sin consistent with every believer.
Romans 7:19-21 – “For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me.”
9. And, of course, before Paul was converted he had been rebellious as every lost person.
1 Timothy 1:15 – “This *is* a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.”
10. But Paul is testifying that his life consistently manifested faithfulness to God.
 The NIV translates this:
^{NIV} **Acts 23:1** – “I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day.”
11. Anyone could examine him and see that this is true. But Paul here isn’t asking them to examine him. He is asking God to examine him. This is the only true testimony of our life. What does God think? The source of Paul’s confidence here was his conscience.
Acts 23:1 – “And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men *and* brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.”
12. Paul frequently expressed that his conscience was free from condemnation.
Acts 24:16 – “And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and *toward* men.”
Romans 9:1 – “I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost,”
2 Timothy 1:3 – “I thank God, whom I serve from *my* forefathers with pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day;”
13. Tonight I want to briefly examine Paul’s great statement before the Sanhedrin that his conscience was clear before God. First I’ll need to say a few things to remind you about the nature of the human conscience and then we’ll look at some areas where this would have applied to Paul.
- I. First, we need to look once again at the nature of the conscience – what was Paul talking about here?
- A. In the lost man it is the inward voice that discerns between right and wrong.
1. Its existence is also a testimony to the mercy of God.
 - a. God uses it to restrain the utter wickedness of our hearts

- b. Knowing the wickedness of man it's a wonder we have a conscience at all.
 - 2. The conscience is shaped by several influences
 - a. It is shaped by moral values instilled in us from our youth
 - b. It is shaped by the mores of society
Society often shapes morality – There was a time when sex outside of wedlock was considered shameful, divorces were relatively rare, drunkenness was considered great sin
People naturally want people to think well of them.
 - c. It is shaped by God's Law which is written upon the hearts of men.
The conscience is God's revelation of Himself upon the hearts of men.
Romans 2:14-15 – “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: 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;”
 - 3. The conscience isn't an infallible witness, particularly in the life of an unbeliever.
 - a. Many justify themselves clearing their conscience of wrongdoing.
Titus 1:15 – “Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving *is* nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled.”
 - b. Before Paul was converted he considered himself blameless. He thought persecuting Christians was doing the work of God.
He wrote to the Philippians:
Philippians 3:4-6 – “Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: ⁵ Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.”
 - c. Christ slew his conscience and declared him vile and wicked.
- B. In the believer the conscience is the inner voice that warns us of sin.
 - 1. Our conscience is taught and corrected by the Word of God. It is that inner voice whereby the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin. It is a warning system for the soul much like pain is a warning system for the body.
 - 2. The conscience is used by the Holy Spirit as a gate to keep us from sin
 - a. It is that small voice within that tells us, “I shouldn't be doing this.”
“I shouldn't be watching or listening to this.” “I need to do this.”
 - b. We need to discipline ourselves to listen to the voice of conscience.
 - 3. The strength of the conscience is different in each of us
 - a. There are degrees of maturity. God teaches us and changes our lives by degree.

- b. We have to be taught of God's standard of righteousness.
This is one of the purposes of the Law
Psalm 119:11 – "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.
- c. The believer's conscience should be very tender.
It should be open to the gentle stirrings of the Holy Spirit as well as the strong convicting shouts.
- 4. Of course, the conscience should not be just a subjective feeling
It must be directed by the Word of God.

II. What exactly was Paul claiming before the Sanhedrin?

Paul was claiming faithfulness to duty before God in at least three areas

A. Faithfulness to the demeanor of his life

- 1. In other words, Paul had lived his life in the constant pursuit of holiness
1 Peter 1:15 – "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation;"
- 2. Paul made every effort in life to live as unto the Lord
Acts 24:16 – "And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and *toward* men."
 - a. For Paul his motive in all things was the glory of God. All things were done as before God.
 - b. Calvin: "No man can rightly handle the doctrine of godliness, unless the fear of God reign and bear the chief sway in him."
 - c. In contrast, the Pharisees and Sadducees were only outwardly holy.
Inward they were dead men's bones.
- 3. Paul's continued teaching was that of holiness
He exhorted Timothy:
1 Timothy 6:11-12 – ". . . follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. ¹² Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses."
- 4. Paul knew that God demands of His elect people holiness, separation
Leviticus 20:7 – "Sanctify yourselves therefore, and be ye holy: for I *am* the LORD your God."
2 Corinthians 6:17-18 Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you, ¹⁸ And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.
- 5. Paul maintained a consistent life of holiness. His conscience was clear
How about yours?

B. Second, Paul maintained faithfulness in doctrinal purity

- 1. After his pursuit of holiness, this was Paul's passion
- 2. This too was his continued teaching.
1 Timothy 4:16 – "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee."
1 Timothy 4:13 – "Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine."

3. Paul's conscience was clear concerning his doctrine.
2 Corinthians 4:2 – “But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.”
 4. We must never diminish the importance of doctrine. There is a danger of having just a head knowledge – to be more enamored with what we know than we are with Christ. But we cannot know Christ apart from doctrine. And if we know Christ we will want to know more about Him and to know it accurately.
- C. Third, Paul maintained faithfulness to his Divine calling
1. Paul was called to be an apostle
Romans 1:1 – “Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called *to be* an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God,”
 2. Paul never failed to be faithful in his calling.
1 Corinthians 4:1-2 – “Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. ² Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.”
 3. He tells the Sanhedrin that he had been faithful “Until this day”
That faithfulness would continue until the end.
2 Timothy 4:7 – “I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith:”
 4. All of these things worked together in Paul's life
2 Timothy 3:10-11 – “But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience, ¹¹ Persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of *them* all the Lord delivered me.”
 5. Are you being faithful in your calling?
You cannot say that since you are not an Apostle, or pastor you have no calling.
 - a. You are called first to be a Christian
 - b. You are called to be a witness for Christ.
Mark 8:38 – “Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”
 - c. You are called to be a husband, wife, father, mother
 - d. You are called to be a good employee
 - e. You have been called to this church.
You are personally responsible for it's health

Conclusion:

1. What was Paul's motivation for his faithfulness that had left his conscience clear? Paul had met Christ.
Paul had been captivated by Christ. Listen to Paul's continued outpouring of praise.
Ephesians 3:20-21 – "Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, ²¹ Unto him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."
Romans 11:36 – "For of him, and through him, and to him, *are* all things: to whom *be* glory for ever. Amen."
1 Timothy 1:17 – "Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, *be* honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen."
2. The difference between Paul and the members of the Sanhedrin was Christ. It was because of Christ that Paul remained steadfast, purposed, was not distracted
His whole life was directed to pleasing Christ
3. Are you pressing on because of Him? Is your conscience clear?