



How's Your Conscience

by Carl McMurray

In Acts 23:1, Luke wrote, "Paul, looking intently at the Council, said, 'Brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day.'"

The apostle stated a truth when he said that he had lived with a clear conscience even though he had at one time entered into homes, taken Christians in chains, consented and even led them to their deaths. His conscience had been clear because Paul thought this early behavior was acceptable to God. As a faithful Jew, he thought that he had been defending Judaism by attacking an heretical sect following a false prophet. He was sincere in his beliefs and he was sincerely wrong!

Would ANYONE think that Saul of Tarsus could have been accepted by God and claim a heavenly reward, if he had continued on the persecuting path that he was going down. And if we can see clearly that sincerity would not have saved Saul from being lost, why can't we see it in our own lives and the lives of those we come in contact with? Being sincere doesn't make up for being wrong. Being a "good person" is never good enough. Do we think that one can please God by the amount of his good works? Or by his sincere ignorance?

A conscience is a great warning system, but it is not our judge. Paul's conscience was clear, even while he persecuted Christians to death, because it was not properly trained. And if the conscience of a pre-rabbi, scripture memorizing Pharisee was not trained properly, what chance does your conscience or mine have? Again, conscience is a guide, but not the final one. That role belongs to the word of God.

That's why Peter said that everything we need is provided in the knowledge of Christ, 2 Peter 1:3. That's why Paul said that it is the WORD that is given to for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness, 2 Timothy 3:16-17. That's why Jesus said that the WORD is what will judge us, John 12:48. We can reject it, but it will be at our own peril. In none of these passages is there any mention of one's conscience being one's guide, or for that matter, having anything at all to do with directing our walk before the God of heaven and earth.

A conscience is a great God-given tool, but only when it is trained to reflect accurately the guidance and counsel of our loving Father in heaven. Use it or lose it.