

When We Need Revival: Alienated From Brethr

by Ronald Glass

Revival is necessary for the church because we are prone to sin and alienation, and it helps us to return to God and live in the context of truth, hope, and resurrection.

Duration: 1:08:52

Scripture: Isaiah 59:12, Matthew 6:33, Acts 24:16, Ephesians 4:30-32

Topics: "Revival"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher shares his experience of witnessing revival in a California church. The pastor of the church was burdened and heartbroken, and the congregation was filled with fault-finding and criticism. However, during a service, a layman read a scripture passage from Ephesians 4, urging the congregation to put aside bitterness and anger and to forgive one another. This humble act sparked a revival in the church, with people confessing their faults and finding relief in their souls. The preacher also shares another example of a half-night of prayer in Indiana, where hindrances to the work of the Spirit were identified through prayer. The sermon emphasizes the importance of maintaining a blameless conscience before God and men, as stated in Acts 24:16. The preacher concludes by mentioning a spiritual awakening in Western Canada led by twin brothers Ralph and Lou Souterra.

Transcript

Well, we're going to the New Testament this week, to the book of Acts, chapter 24. Acts, chapter 24, in our ongoing series entitled Biblical Revival. I'm spending a lot of time on this subject because, actually, there's a fair amount of material on it in the Bible, and because it is so critical for the church, and I speak in terms of evangelicalism around the world here in America, at this particular juncture in history, and also because it is so important for our church here in Long Island.

Acts, chapter 24, it's the 16th verse, and Paul says, In view of this, I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience, both before God and before men. In the early 1970s, God blessed me with the opportunity to witness revival firsthand. I was in my final year or so of studies at the University of Michigan, and I was attending church at the Calvary Baptist Church in Ypsilanti, a city right next to Ann Arbor, where I was.

And in the early 1970s, there had been a great spiritual awakening in western Canada, in the provinces of western Canada. The preachers in that great awakening were twin brothers from Ohio, Ralph and Lou Sutura. They're still ministering.

I saw them on YouTube, so I know they're still out there. But God had used this pair of brothers, both of them evangelists, graduates of Bob Jones University, but God used them to minister to the churches of western Canada, and there was a tremendous awakening there. When that awakening was over and the Suterases returned, they came to the city of Detroit, spent seven weeks there, and then came out to our church in Ypsilanti, Michigan.

And we're there for three weeks. We had meetings six nights a week for three straight weeks, and it was something I had never seen before. God moved in that place, and we really were not a church that was prepared for revival, but they came, and God blessed with revival.

I remember the meetings. Very often they would start at 7 o'clock in the evening and would be done somewhere between 9.30 and 10 o'clock at night, and then after the main meeting was over and some people went home, many others would dismiss to another room, and they would sit in a large circle, and they would just share what God was doing in their lives. They called it an afterglow.

That would go on sometimes to midnight and later. There was a Christian school in that church, and they had to stop classes sometimes as kids in that school just wanted to talk about the Lord, and there was a great deal of confession of sin back and forth between students. I remember things such as a man getting up and talking about how many years before he had stolen tools from his employer, and he went, even though he was an elderly man, and it had been many years, he went back and made that right.

There were many testimonies of that sort. Well, and in fact, let me just say this too, that while this was going on in this church, Delfeisenfeld and the Life Action Ministries, which was just in its infancy at that time, also came to that town to another church, two totally unconnected ministries, but the message was the same. It was revival.

God opened up the heavens and blessed in another church there, and it brought these two churches together, and there was unity between two churches that never really had much to do with each other. Well, I left Michigan to attend seminary in Indiana, and during my studies there, I became burdened that the church which I attended and which I served was cold and formal, and that what they needed was what I had seen in the state of Michigan. They needed the Holy Spirit's reviving power, and I'd seen the Spirit of God do that.

So I began to pray. I was leading the singing at that time in the church, and so every Lord's Day morning after the last song before the sermon, I would slip out to a side room, and I spent the sermon in prayer for the pastor and for the church. I had seen what God could do, and I was praying that God would do it again.

Well, week after week, I prayed. Week after week passed, and then one Lord's Day, it happened. The pastor of the church gave an invitation that day.

He didn't often do it. I still remember he was preaching on a text from 1 John chapter 2, and I don't know everything he said. I wasn't in the room at the time when he was preaching it, but I know at the end of the sermon, he did something he didn't usually do, an issue, an invitation, and many people crowded into the front of the auditorium.

We'd never seen anything like that in that church. People began confessing that their lives were inadequate before the Lord and their commitment to live righteously. Well, it was a wonderful service, but

what was amazing was the evening service.

Came back that evening, and the place was packed. We had singing, and then there was a time of testimony, virtually spontaneous, and people began sharing what God had done, even in that afternoon. They went home from church in the morning as God had moved upon them.

They went home, and they began searching their own lives. I remember one young woman that we knew well. She was a wife of one of the seminary students there.

Went home and got on the phone to someone in another state that she had wronged in the past, and she confessed her sin and made it right. I remember another man, an older man, but a seminary student, who got up in the service and said in front of the entire congregation. Now here's a man preparing for ministry.

He got up in front of the entire congregation and said, I haven't loved my wife. I haven't loved my family. And he confessed it openly and broke down in tears.

At one point in the middle of the service, a young teenage girl walked down the aisle. There was no sermon that night. There wasn't any time for the pastor to preach.

It was all testimonies of what God was doing. She walked down the center aisle of the congregation and came to get saved right there. Just having heard the testimonies of the people, God was at work.

There was a woman, and I remember I had been playing the piano at that point. I was up on the stage, and this woman, another woman came down. The two of them hugged.

They confessed sins that they had had, grudges against each other, right there in the front of the church to each other, and then gave testimony. It was wonderful, an anointing of the Spirit of God that came down on that place, something that we could not explain in terms of what had happened. Like I said in the evening, there was not even a sermon.

Well, it only lasted one Lord's Day. I wish it had been more. I don't think the pastor knew what to do, frankly.

It was surprising to him. But it only lasted one Lord's Day. But ever since then, I have longed to see God work that way again.

I believe the church reaped blessings from that. The church was in very good spiritual health following that. And I have longed to see him do that again, and I long to see God do that here in Wading River Baptist Church.

For the fifth time in this series on biblical revival today, we ask the question, when do we need revival? Now, we've considered four answers, and in the past four sermons, we have been in Psalm 119. We've noted that we need revival when we're experiencing barrenness of soul, also when we find ourselves addicted to sin, when we are longing for righteousness. We just sense this desire to be holy and righteous, and we are weary of the battle.

And when we are distracted by distress, when life crowds in upon us and all of the demands of life crowd out the concerns, our spiritual concerns, when we are hurting and we are suffering and we are frustrated, then we need revival. But I want to explore a fifth answer to this question, and one that deals with what may be one of the most potent hindrances to revival in our churches. At least, that is what revival history

appears to teach us.

Go back and read, and you will find this. It is the sin of alienation. Now, none of us lives in isolation.

As Christians, we live and we serve the Lord together. But let's face it, living together is not always easy. We are not yet perfected in righteousness.

We still sin. We act willfully and we act selfishly. We also have an enemy who is vicious and desperately wants to destroy our fellowship and our effectiveness.

So all too often, the result of this is alienation. We get offended. We get angry.

And we find ourselves divided. Sometimes tensions erupt in open hostility. Wedges are driven between us and our fellowship is broken.

Countless church members today in churches like ours all across America are living with guilty consciences. Multitudes of believers are carrying heavy loads of guilt, loads of unconfessed and unforgiven sin. Now, do you think that that has an impact on our churches? It most certainly does.

The result is churches who are spiritually dead. The Spirit of God has been grieved. His work has been quenched.

Now, I care very much that this will not describe our church. I know for a fact in the past it has. My desire is that that description will never be true of our church in the future.

Now, the only solution in such cases is for God to revive those churches by reviving alienated brethren, and thus the subject that we come to today is of vital importance. Our text today is part of the Apostle Paul's personal defense before the Roman proconsul Felix there in the city of Caesarea. You may remember that the Apostle Paul had been arrested in the city of Jerusalem and almost killed by the mobs.

In fact, a plot was hatched by the Jews to destroy him, and because of that, the commander of the fortress of Antonia there in the city of Jerusalem just off the plaza of the temple had decided, his name was Claudius Lysias, he had decided to send the Apostle Paul out of Jerusalem to Caesarea in order that he might have a hearing before the procurator Felix. And so he had done. A few days after Paul's arrival in Caesarea, the high priest Ananias and some of the Jewish elders, probably members of the Sanhedrin, came down to the city of Caesarea with the purpose of presenting their case against Paul, obviously seeking his execution.

They brought with them a Roman orator, probably an attorney, a lawyer of Roman training and extraction. His name was Tertullus. They brought him, and he, in his eloquence, presented the case against the Apostle Paul.

After his presentation, the Apostle Paul is given an opportunity to speak in his own defense, and the verse that we have read today is part of that defense. When it comes to living the Christian life, there are three truths that we must never forget, and failure to live according to these three realities will inevitably hinder our spiritual lives, and they are a considerable hindrance to the working of the Spirit of God in reviving his church. Let me see if I can paint this for you from just this verse that the Apostle Paul has spoken here in the 16th verse of the 24th chapter of Acts.

Let me say, first of all, that we as Christians need to understand something. We as Christians need to understand that our lives have a context. We do not live in isolation, unconnected to anything else.

We have a context in which we live. Now, the Apostle Paul begins this verse by saying, in view of this. Now, in order to understand what he means by that, we obviously have to look back at the preceding verses.

In this case, verses 14 and 15. Paul makes it clear that he has lived... Well, here's the way he puts it in verse 14. This I admit to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect, I do serve the God of our fathers.

He has lived according to the Way. Now, in my translation, and perhaps in yours, the word Way is capitalized. That's because this word, the Way, is the earliest name for Christianity that we have in the New Testament.

It wasn't originally called Christianity. In fact, it wasn't even originally called the Church. It was called the Way.

It was a way of believing, and a way of living, that was considered, according to what Paul says in verse 14, it was considered, essentially, a heresy. He says, they call it a sect. The Greek word here is the root of our English word, heresy.

It is a divisive kind of thing. It is a heretical kind of thing. That was the argument of the Jews against Paul.

You've brought in some kind of religion that we never heard of before. You're a heretic. You're a sectarian.

You're divisive. Now, what does it mean to live according to the Way? Which, in Paul's terms, means to live in the context of the Christian faith. What does that mean? Well, Paul makes it clear in verses 14 and 15.

Let me give you three insights here. One, we live within the context of truth. Believing everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets.

The Apostle Paul says, I believe the Scriptures. Now, these are the very Scriptures to which the Jewish authorities also pledge their allegiance. They claim to understand and to live the Scriptures.

Well, that's what the Apostle Paul says. And so it is true of Christians. We openly insist that the Word of God is true.

We believe everything that is written in the Scriptures. You remember last time how we were in the 119th Psalm. And, in fact, in our last message, I closed it with this 160th verse.

The sum of your word is truth. Every one of your righteous ordinances is everlasting. We believe that as Christians.

But God's truth isn't just there to be there. It has a purpose. And the purpose in the mind of God is that it would change our lives.

Right there in Psalm 119 verses 4 and 5. You have ordained your precepts that we should keep them diligently. There's a purpose for God's Word. Oh, that my ways might be established to keep your statutes.

Verse 9. How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to your word. Your word I have treasured in my heart that I might not sin against you. The Lord Jesus would say in his high priestly prayer, praying to his Father concerning his followers, sanctify them in your truth.

Make them holy in your truth. What's truth? Your word is truth. Now we as Christians need to constantly ask ourselves, are we living the truth that we say we believe? Others are watching us out there.

And the quality of our lives directly impacts our testimonies. Paul makes it clear that he lived what he believed. He believed the Word of God and that's how he lived.

Now notice that there's a second aspect to this. And that is that we live not only within the context of truth, but if you are a Christian, you live within the context of hope. Verse 15.

Having a hope in God. Hope is the faith that we have and the confidence that we have in the future. What is the Christian hope? Well, we hope in God.

And above all, the New Testament tells us that our hope is for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. When we go back to the words of Paul to Titus, chapter 2, beginning in verse 11, he tells us that the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires, and to live sensibly, righteously, and godly in the present age. Doing what? Looking for the blessed hope.

What is that hope? The appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed and to purify for himself a people of his own possession, zealous of good deeds. Now, do you see the two things that are linked up in this passage? One, the hope that we have in the return of the Lord Jesus Christ, and two, the impact that that hope has on the way we live. That is that we deny ungodliness.

We deny worldly desires. We live sensibly, righteously, and godly in the present age. He has redeemed us from every lawless deed.

He is purifying us as a unique people of his own possession. Again, this hope, according to John, as he writes in the first epistle of John, this hope is a hope that produces godliness. It has a purifying impact.

Beloved, now are we the children of God, and it has not yet appeared what we will be. We know that when he appears, we will be like him because we will see him just as he is. Now, notice his next words.

This is 1 John 3, verse 3. And everyone who has this hope, this hope fixed on him, purifies himself just as he is pure. Our hope is for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that hope purifies us. Why is that? That leads me to the third insight.

And that is, Paul tells us that we live within the context of resurrection. Again, back to verse 15 here in Acts 24. Having a hope in God which these men cherish themselves, that there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.

Now, as human beings, we are mortal. We are dying human beings. Someday, short of the return of the Lord Jesus Christ, we will lay down in death.

Our bodies and our spirits will be separated, but not forever. The Christian hope is for the resurrection of the body and the resurrection life that will follow. Now, that was a great source of hope in New Testament times as it is in our own time.

The Apostle Paul says, 1 Thessalonians 4, verse 16, 1 Thessalonians 4, verse 16, The Apostle Paul's hope was in the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. What is the hope of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ? It is the hope of resurrection. That we who have died will be raised again in our physical bodies, united with our spirits once again, and we will live in eternity with the Lord Jesus Christ in our bodies.

Now, as the scriptures teach us, and as Paul mentions, this resurrection is going to take place not only for us as believers, but for the wicked. You have that very sobering scene in Revelation chapter 20, beginning in verse 11, where John sees the great white throne, and him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. This is a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ sitting upon a great throne.

And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne. Now, these are the wicked dead. The sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them.

There is a resurrection of the wicked, and they were judged, every one of them, according to their deeds, and those whose names are not written in the book of life, which in this case is none of them, they are sent to the lake of fire. For us as Christians, of course, we have a much better hope, and that hope is, of course, in the resurrection of our bodies, and our dwelling forever with the Lord in heaven. However, Paul also would tell us, as he told the Corinthians, that we face judgment.

2 Corinthians chapter 5, verse 9, Therefore, we also have as our ambition, whether at home, that is, whether in this body, or absent, whether in heaven, to be pleasing to him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. That's why Paul says that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked, and the reality is that following the resurrection of both the wicked and the godly, there is judgment.

We all face an accounting before God. Now, that's what Paul means when he says in our text, In view of this, Paul is saying, Because I live in the context of the truth of the word of God, and that truth of the word of God teaches me that we are living in hope of the appearing of Christ, and the appearing of Christ has an impact on the way we live, because there's coming a day when we are going to give an account to him of the way in which we have lived. Because of all of that, I do also my best.

Now, let's move on. Our lives have a context, but our lives also have a conscience. I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience.

Our souls have a conscience. If we believe the truth of God's word, if we believe that Christ is coming, if we believe that someday we are going to face judgment, this is going to be reflected in the way we live, and that's going to be reflected in our consciences. Now, what is conscience? Well, let me take that word apart for you.

Actually, the English word is built on to Roman or Latin words, old Latin words. And it's interesting that the word in the text of the New Testament in the Greek language is the same thing. It's not the same word, but it is built on the same two things.

One, a preposition that begins the word, which means with, and the root of that word, which means to know. So, what is conscience? It is a knowing with. Now, what do we mean by that? Conscience is the knowledge of past acts and past relationships that we share with another.

A guilty conscience is therefore the result of knowing something about our sin that someone else also knows, even if that someone is only God. You may think that you and your sin, you got away with it because nobody else knows you did it. Maybe it's a sin that is an ongoing pattern in your life, and you think nobody knows about this.

Well, at the very root of it, my friends, God knows. So, the knowledge of your sin is shared by you and God. In cases where you have sinned against other people, somebody else knows.

Now, maybe it's just one person. Maybe it's many people. But there is sin in your life, if there is sin in your life that is unconfessed and sin that is not dealt with, then that sin impacts someone else, even if that sin impacts only God.

You have grieved His Holy Spirit who dwells within you. You have offended Him. You have violated God's Word.

You have, as it were, trampled underfoot the blood of the Lord Jesus who died on the cross for you. Yes, you've offended God in your sin. That's why you have a guilty conscience.

Because you know something, and God knows it. You know something, and you know that somebody else knows that same thing. Now, that's what drove David to confess his sin finally.

Well, the prophet came to him and pointed the finger at him and said, You're the guilty man. But David sat down and thought about it, and here's what he says. Psalm 51 verse 4 Against you, you only, I have sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified when you speak.

You see, you know what I did. I thought I was the only one who really understood what I had done. Nobody knew about me and about Bathsheba, except Uriah, and he's dead.

No, against you and you only, I have sinned, so that you are justified when you speak and blameless when you judge. God is blameless. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.

Behold, you desire truth in the innermost being, and in the hidden parts you will make me know wisdom. God wants us to tell the truth. When you say, Oh, I haven't sinned.

When you know that God knows, and you know that somebody else knows, then you don't have truth in the inward parts. You're lying to yourself, and you're lying to God, and you may be well lying to other people as well. And so God expects us to live with a clear and blameless conscience.

Here's what the Apostle Paul said to Timothy. Now, he's speaking here to Timothy about ministry. Timothy was a minister.

Paul was an apostle. Timothy became a pastor. Here's what he says.

1 Timothy 1.5 But the goal of our instruction, our here being Paul, Timothy, everybody who's in ministry, the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart. We want God's people to love each other from purity of heart, and a good conscience, and a sincere faith. For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion.

Timothy, there are going to be people in your church, people who hear you teach, who do not have loving, pure hearts, who do not have a good conscience, or a sincere faith. We have a conscience. There are things we know about our lives, and our sins in particular, that someone else knows.

And that knowledge within us that somebody else knows, even if it's only God, that knowledge eats at our souls until we deal with it. That's why Paul says, I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience. Let me give you three insights into a blameless conscience.

Can I do that for you? Follow me carefully. First of all, a blameless conscience requires a committed effort. I do my best.

What we see here from Paul is an unreserved commitment. He strenuously exerted himself. Now, what does this mean? Well, in different situations, it could mean different things.

But let me give you an example of how Paul would explain this doing his best, and how we could do it as well. Just an example. Romans chapter 12, looking at verse 14.

Here's what Paul says. Bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse.

You curse, you're going to have a guilty conscience. Rejoice with those who rejoice. Weep with those who weep.

Be of the same mind one to another. Do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation.

Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, and here's a key verse.

If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Like Paul, our goal is to be moral and to be spiritual. It is moral and spiritual excellence.

That's what Paul wants. No bad conscience. No conscience that's eating at him constantly.

Now the word that he uses here that we have translated, I do my best, is actually a verb that is the root of our English word ascetic, or asceticism. Now you know what an ascetic was. An ascetic is a person who was engaged in rigorous self-examination and spiritual self-discipline.

They went away from society, hid out behind the walls of monasteries in order to get away from the influence of the world so that they could be holy. And they disciplined themselves by rigorous diet, rigorous work habits, rigorous prayer, and attention to the Scriptures. They were doing it for the wrong reasons.

They were trying to earn their salvation. But the point here is to see that this rigor, this disciplined self-examination, is something that the Apostle Paul engaged in with regard to his conscience. He wanted a blameless conscience, so he constantly searched it.

He constantly made sure that the manner of life that he lived was one that as much as possible, as much as depended upon him, was a life of peace with all men. Secondly, a blameless conscience requires a consistent effort. I'm noticing the words here.

To maintain always or continually. This was Paul's unchanging objective. There was no time when he was not conscious of this spiritual obligation.

This was something that was constantly in front of him. What Paul is saying here is that he never let down his guard with regard to his conscience. Thirdly, a blameless conscience requires a concentrated effort.

A blameless conscience, he says, that is what I always do my best to maintain. This is a conscience that is without fault. It is without offense.

That's the meaning of the language here. A clear conscience is the peace of mind which results from the knowledge that there is no one whom we have wronged and from whom we have not, if possible, sought forgiveness and reconciliation. Now, our Lord's warning about all of this is very sobering.

Listen to what Jesus said in Luke chapter 17, first verses. He said to his disciples, It is inevitable that stumbling blocks come, but woe to him through whom they come. It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea than that he would cause one of these little ones to stumble.

By the way, when we offend in the context of the body of Christ, one of the most tragic results of the divisiveness and the hatred and all of the bad feelings that come through guilty, offended consciences is what it does to the children. Jesus said, It would be better if a man who creates that kind of offense were to simply be thrown into the sea with a millstone around his neck. Now, here's the problem.

It's stated very simply and forthrightly in the book of Proverbs. Proverbs chapter 18, verse 19. A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city, and contentions are like the bars of a citadel.

You have an offended brother. You know how difficult it is to reconcile that situation. And the longer the offense goes on, and the more stubborn you are in seeking reconciliation, the harder it is to win a brother who's been offended.

Now, let me make two observations about this blameless conscience. One is that a blameless conscience is the result of godly belief. The first point at which we need to have our consciences straight is toward God with regard to our faith.

First Peter chapter 3, you know the verse as well. He is exhorting the believers to sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account of the hope that is in you with gentleness and reverence, and keep a good conscience, so that the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ, will be put to shame. In other words, Peter makes it clear that we are going to be hated and slandered for our beliefs.

Sinful people hate the truth. And because of that, they are also going to hate us. Now, the reality is that the cross is offensive.

And the gospel is offensive. The Lord Jesus Christ himself was an offense. Listen to Matthew chapter 13, verse 57.

They took offense at him. This is the people there in his hometown. They took offense at him.

Jesus said to them, except in his hometown and his own household. They took offense at the Lord Jesus, even though these were the people who had watched him grow up and knew of his unblemished

character. Matthew chapter 15, verse 12.

The disciples came to him and said, Do you know the Pharisees were offended when they heard this statement? But he answered and said, Every plant which my heavenly Father did not plant shall be uprooted. And then he said concerning the Pharisees, Let them alone. They are blind guides of the blind.

And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit. And thus, you and I as Christians may well at times be regarded as offensive because we believe what we believe and we attempt to share what we believe. Now this is inevitable.

Our Lord experienced it. But this is not the source of a guilty conscience. Listen, you and I never need to feel guilty, never need to be ashamed because we believe the Word of God or because we share the Word of God or teach it or preach it or in any way communicate it.

Our commitment to Scripture is never the source of a guilty conscience. You may have family members, for example, who are grossly offended by your faith and your attempt to share the faith. Well, don't be guilty.

Don't feel guilty over that. There's no guilt attached to that. Your conscience should be clean and pure over that.

You're standing for the truth of the Word of God, for the Savior who loved you, for the one who died for you, for the one in whom you have placed your hope, who's coming again for you, the one before whom you must give an account. There's nothing to be ashamed of in being loyal to Him. So a blameless conscience is the result of godly belief.

But let me also say that a blameless conscience is the result of godly behavior. Paul's behavior was constantly dictated by Christian love. That's why he says that he attempted to please all men in all things.

Now, that was not to compromise his conviction of the gospel, but it was in the way he treated other people. Nothing in his behavior was offensive. He disciplined himself to live without offending others, and that even included unbelievers.

Paul said as much when you come to 2 Corinthians 1, verse 12. Paul says, For our proud confidence is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, and not in fleshly wisdom, but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you. What a testimony.

If every Christian could say that, we'd have heaven on earth. Sometimes there isn't anything you can do. I'm not saying that we aren't without sin.

Sometimes we sin, and sometimes we attempt to make things right with other people, and they refuse to hear us. They refuse to meet us and talk to us. They refuse to forgive us, even when we ask for their forgiveness.

That's why Paul said in Romans 12, in the verse we looked at, verse 18, As much as is within you, as much as you can control the situation, you be free of offense. Paul was constantly hated. Paul was constantly persecuted.

We read a verse like that and say, Wait a minute, Paul. There are many people who hated you. Yeah.

But that was because of his beliefs. Not because of any ungodly behavior on his part. Because Paul tells us in our text that he disciplined himself in order to have a blameless conscience.

Now, here's what Paul says. First, Corinthians chapter 10. He says this, Whether then you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

That's what ought to determine whatever choices you make in your life. It's the glory of God. How does it serve? The glory of God.

Then he says, Give no offense, either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God. Now, that's a very powerful statement, because he's saying not to the Jews. These were the religious people.

They were lost. In Paul's day, most of them were lost. But they were very religious.

And they held a nominal commitment to the scriptures, to the Old Testament scriptures. Don't offend them. Or to the Greeks.

Those are the pagan Gentiles out there who worship idols, who have no use and no understanding of our Christianity. But Paul says, Don't offend them, either. And then he says, Or to the church of God.

To your brothers and sisters, fellow Christians within the church. Don't offend them, either. Just as I also please all men in all things.

Not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, so that they may be saved. You see, his attitude was one of selflessness. He was concerned about them more than he was concerned about himself.

He wants to please them. Not that the message he preaches is always going to please them. It isn't.

But the way he behaved, the way he acted, his attitude. He disciplined himself so that it would not be offensive. Once again, the Apostle Paul speaking in Philippians chapter 1. And he says there, beginning in verse 9, I pray that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment.

So that you may approve the things that are excellent in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ. The hope that we have until the return of Christ. Having been filled with the fruit of righteousness, which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and the praise.

And so the Apostle Paul says, I do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience before God and men. That leads me to the third thing I want to share with you. And that is, not only is it true that our lives have a context and our souls have a conscience, but it's true that our actions have a consequence.

And that's what is implied by Paul here in these words, both before God and before men. A clear conscience has two focal points. God and other people.

Both are important. A blameless conscience has two specific consequences. First is this.

We will live without offense towards God. David said it, Psalm 51.4. We read it a while ago. We've read it twice or three times already in this service.

And here it is. Against you and you only have I sinned. This is where a good conscience has to begin.

It has to begin with God. We have to have the way clear between our souls and God. Nothing standing in the way of our fellowship with God.

So that when we go into His presence and speak to Him in prayer, there's nothing that causes our prayers to be hindered. Here was Paul's testimony when he was interrogated before the Sanhedrin. You go back a chapter to Acts 23.

Paul's first words, Paul looking intently at the council, the Sanhedrin, the ruling body of the Jews said, Brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day. What was the reaction to that statement? The high priest commanded those standing beside him to strike him on the mouth. They didn't appreciate that.

They didn't believe that. So what? Paul said it and he can say it honestly. I've lived with a good conscience toward God.

My soul, my mind, my heart is right before God. And listen, if you can say that, and you can say that honestly, you're not being proud, you're not being arrogant. Every one of us ought to be able to say today, to the best of my knowledge, there's nothing standing between God and my soul.

No offenses. God doesn't know something about me that is evil, that is sinful. Now you and I are not sinless.

But you and I can live in a right relationship with the Lord. How does that work? Well, you know the verse as well from 1 John 1. If we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, there's a present tense. If we're walking, if we go on walking in the light day to day, week after week, month after month, year after year, we are walking in the light.

We have fellowship with one another, with us and with him. And the blood of Jesus his Son continues to cleanse us from all sin. You see, if we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves.

The truth is not in us. Yes, we're sinners, but if we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. That's how you live without offense towards God.

It is a constant pattern of confession and forgiveness. Lord, I sinned. Lord, I blew it today.

Lord, when I talked to that person, I didn't have a right attitude. I said things I shouldn't have said. I had a bad attitude to my kids today.

Lord, my husband made me mad, but what I said to him, I had no right to say. Lord, you know what I've done. Now I claim the blood of Jesus Christ, my Lord, and I want to walk in the light as he's in the light.

Lord, therefore, forgive my sins. And I claim the promise that if I confess, you forgive. And then you move on with your sins confessed.

That's how you live without offense towards God. But there's a second part of this, and that is that we live without offense toward other people. And here's where we get into so much trouble.

Now the New Testament is sobering on this. Listen to 1 Corinthians 8, verse 12. And so he says, By sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.

When you sin against a brother, and especially a weaker brother, you are sinning against the Lord Jesus himself. And that's why we're to be so concerned about our behavior towards unbelievers. Verse Corinthians, again, chapter 10.

We read it a moment ago. Verse 32. Give no offense, either to Jews or Greeks or to the Church of God.

It doesn't matter whether they're believers or unbelievers. 2 Corinthians, chapter 6. We read these words, verse 3. Paul said we should give no cause for offense in anything, so that the ministry will not be discredited. Our Christian testimony, and the ministry that we have, whether you're a preacher or whether you're a Sunday school teacher or whether you're a children's worker or a musician or whatever, you have a testimony where to give no cause for offense in anything, but in everything, commending ourselves as servants of God.

Others ought to be able to look at you and say, There's a servant of God. I may not like what he or she says. I may not like what he or she stands for.

I may not like the fact that he or she is constantly quoting the Bible to me, and I may not like the church they go to or anything about that kind of religion, but I've got to say, he's an honest, good, kind person. You see? I say it again. One of the greatest hindrances to revival in any church is alienated brethren.

Offended brethren are death to spiritual power. Because offended brethren means that the Holy Spirit has been grieved, and the Holy Spirit's working in a church has been quenched. Revival brings a new sensitivity to sin.

Revival brings an awakened conscience. That's a great part of the awakening work which God does, what the Spirit of God does. Suddenly, things come to mind that we haven't thought about for years.

Now, it happens in three ways. How does this revival take place? Let me give you the three steps. One, repentance.

Repentance means confessing sin and claiming the cleansing power of the Lord Jesus Christ. Repentance is the first step in bringing us into a right relationship with God. Listen to Hebrews 9.14. To serve the living power of the blood of Christ is to clean up our cup, to bring to mind the things that we have done, to bring to mind all of those sins that have distinguished us in the past, the alienation that exists between brothers and sisters in Christ.

It comes back to mind. And we confess that sin, and we again apply the blood of Jesus Christ to that sin, and we clean up our life. We repent towards God.

Second step, reconciliation. Reconciliation is the removal of personal enmity through forgiving and through being forgiven. Our Lord taught this several times.

It's that important. He said it on a number of occasions. Let me remind you.

By the way, he said it in different ways, but the point is well taken. He says, Matthew 5.23, part of the Sermon on the Mount, if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there you remember that your brother has something against you, remember your brother has something against you. You see, that's conscience.

That is the knowledge that you have with someone else. You leave your offering there before the altar, and you go first be reconciled to your brother, and your brother then come and present your offering. In the Gospel of Luke, as well as elsewhere in the Gospels, our Lord put it a slightly different way.

Luke 17, verses 3 and 4. Be on your guard. If your brother sins, rebuke him. If he repents, forgive him.

By the way, that's the way to avoid a guilty conscience. If your brother sins against you, go confront him with it. And if he repents, then you forgive him.

It's over. It's done. Conscience is clear.

If he sins against you seven times a day and returns to you seven times a day, I say, repent, you forgive him. You forgive him. If he says, I repent, you forgive him.

The Apostle Paul, again, would say the same thing to the Colossians. He writes, So as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone, just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Listen, you can't help whether a person will accept your forgiveness.

You can't help whether a person will accept your confession of sin. But you can offer the confession and the forgiveness. Your conscience will be clear.

Now, historically, one of the most conspicuous components of revival has been reconciled brethren. Jonathan Edwards, writing about the revival, explaining the revival of the 1740s there in Massachusetts, Jonathan Edwards said, and I quote, As much has been done lately at making up differences, confessing faults one to another, and making restitution probably more within two years than was done in 30 years before. I want to share with you a testimony from an evangelist of a previous generation.

His name is George Stevens. I want you to listen. And this is so typical of revival around the country.

Bear with me for a moment while I share this with you. Here's what he writes. I shall never forget how revival came to a California church when the people confessed their fault finding and criticism to one another.

One Sunday night I visited in this church where I was soon to conduct a meeting. The pastor went into his evening service with a heavily burdened spirit. There were conditions which he knew were obstacles to revival.

Sensing his heartbreak, I slipped out of the service into his study to pray for him while he poured out the burden of his soul before the people. Then he announced he would deliver his prepared sermon. That sermon was never delivered.

A member of the congregation arose and asked the pastor to let him read a scripture passage that he felt was needed in the church. He chose Ephesians 4, 30-32. And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and evil speaking be put away from you with all malice. And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. A hush fell upon the congregation.

God had begun to work through a humble layman. Turning to the members of the church, he implored them to put aside all their fault-finding and to forgive one another. One by one, people arose to confess bitterness and criticism.

When the caretaker heard certain members taking a humble place, he could scarcely believe his ears. Slipping out of the service, he hurried to the study where he knew I was kneeling in prayer. He broke into the room to exclaim excitedly, Mr. Stevens, something wonderful is happening.

Could this be revival? When the service closed around ten o'clock, people met in small classrooms, continuing to confess their critical spirit. Groups of people as well as individuals met for reconciliation. So deep and real was the work of God that the next day, couples met in homes to lay aside their differences.

One couple returning from a vacation knew immediately that there was a wonderful change in the church and wanted to know what had happened. That little city, called Sleepy Hollow by some, was greatly stirred. Revival had begun before the opening of our special meetings.

The entire church program was revived and strengthened. People volunteered to teach and to serve. Eventually, a new sanctuary and educational building were erected to accommodate the increased attendance.

Evangelism had followed a revival that broke out in the hearts of God's people. This is what we have seen, I have seen, in revivals. People made right offenses and wrongs that had been committed many years before.

People who would not talk to each other. The people who would go out this door if the other person was going out that door so that they wouldn't have to meet became reconciled. But that's not all.

Repentance, reconciliation, there's a third part, and that's restitution. Because, you see, complete reconciliation requires restitution. If you have sinned against a person and in some way harmed them or hurt them or deprived them, you have to make that right.

Like the man who had said that he stole the tools there in Michigan. Let me give you another example from George Stevens. He said, during a campaign in northern Michigan, a woman who had attended each night came to me and said, I'm getting absolutely nothing out of your messages.

I expressed my regret, adding that I would ask God to help me do a better job of declaring his word. The next night I preached from David's Prayer. Search me, O God, and know my heart.

Try me and know my thoughts, Psalm 139.23. Suddenly that same woman got up and left the meeting before I was through preaching. Later she explained that 15 years before she had handed a druggist a \$2 bill for items she had purchased and had mistakenly returned change for a \$20 bill. She accepted it, said nothing, and walked out of the store.

At every communion service for 15 years, the \$20 would dangle before her mind's eye. Do you see what we mean by conscience? She knew something that God knew and that somebody else knew. She tried to erase the memory.

Whenever she was asked to quote a verse of scripture, she tried to take refuge in Philippians 3.13, that speaks of forgetting the things that are behind and reaching forth unto the things that are before. But

during the message on God's searching our hearts and minds, she could stand the conviction no longer. The same druggist was there.

Relating her story, she returned \$15, promising to pay the balance. He could vividly recall being short in his account several years before and declared that he was glad Christianity made folks honest. In fact, the druggist was so impressed that the next night he closed his store early so his employees could attend the service.

This woman expressed the great relief of her heart when she declared, as I walked home from the drug store, I felt a whole brass band break out in my soul. She returned to the meetings with a life overflowing with blessing to others. What happiness would flood our souls.

What heavy burdens would roll away if we would only make right the things with men and with God. One night during a countryside meeting in Indiana, I called for a half night of prayer. Eighty people from 17 churches remained and knelt to pray.

After an hour of prayer, I felt something was hindering the work of the Spirit in our entire evangelistic effort. I, asking everyone to sit, I read from Isaiah 59, 12, For our transgressions are multiplied before you, and our sins testify against us. For our transgressions are with us, and for our iniquities we know them.

I then explained that I had a feeling that our individual sins were hindering our meeting. Thereupon a young man who was prominent in the church and a leader of the young people's group rose to his feet. I could see he was under deep conviction and in turmoil of soul.

He said, We can't have revival here until I confess my sin. I am the most shame-faced person in this city. And then with head bowed he related his story.

Because of the confidence placed in me, it has been my duty to carry the offering plates on Sunday morning from the sanctuary to a lower room in the church's church where the money is counted. For months now, I have been taking bills from the offering and sticking them into my sock or shoe. Desperately, he turned to me and asked, Oh, Mr. Stevens, will God ever forgive me for this? I answered, What are you going to do about it, Jonathan? I'm going to go forward Sunday morning and confess my sin before the entire church asks their forgiveness.

I may be put in jail, but if they give me a chance, I will pay it all back. Later, his minister told me that he could not preach that morning. After the young man's confession, an officer in the church arose and said, Young man, you are not the only sinner in the church.

And he, too, asked the congregation for forgiveness. And the Spirit of God melted hearts, and until 1.30 p.m., people confessed sins of omission and commission. Following this, 21 people came to accept Christ as Savior.

News of this meeting had a tremendous impact on the community. I felt certain the campaign was the greatest the county had ever experienced for over 800 people accepted Christ in that united effort. Well, this is only a sample.

Stories like this abound in the revival literature. People of experience can share the same kinds of things. This is nothing unusual when God revives.

That's the way it is. There has to be repentance. There has to be reconciliation.

There has to be restitution. And that's where there is genuine revival. We will see these powerful spiritual dynamics at work.

I leave you with this question today. Are you doing your best to live a self-examined and self-disciplined life with a clear conscience, free of accumulated offenses toward God and other people, especially your Christian brothers or sisters? Let your prayer be, in the words of an old hymn, nothing between my soul and the Savior, so that his blessed face may be seen. Nothing preventing the least of his favor.

Keep the way clear. Let nothing. Before I close in prayer, I want you, in this quiet moment, simply to think back over your life.

In fact, even ask the Spirit of God right now to range over your life in these past years. There are some things that you know that God knows. There are some things you know that perhaps somebody else or several somebody else's know.

And those are sins that have never been confessed and made right. Today, your need is for repentance and for reconciliation with other people. It may be a brother or sister in Christ in this or some other church.

It may be an unbeliever. It may be somebody with whom you've done business. It may be a boss.

It may be an employee. But there are offenses there that need to be removed. Ask God to show you what offenses are there and then to show you what you need to do to resolve these offenses.

This woman said it was like a brass band playing in her soul. What a breath of fresh air to know that there's nothing between your soul and the Savior. I'm simply going to ask you to commit yourself to God right now.

You don't have to say it to me. You don't have to say it to the congregation. You say it to God.

Lord, this afternoon, I'm going to go deal with this. I'm going to call up that person that I hurt years ago. Tomorrow morning, Lord, I'm going down to that store and return what I owe them or pay for what I stole from them.

I'm going to deal with these things, Father, not only for the sake of my soul but for the sake of my church, that the Spirit of God may flow unhindered, that revival may come, and that many people from this community might be drawn to this place to hear the message of God's forgiving grace. Lord, will you not yourself revive us again that your people may rejoice in you? In Jesus' name, amen.

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