

(Secret of Paul's Authority) 2. Paul Kept His Conscience Clean

by Zac Poonen

The secret to Paul's authority lies in his relationship with Jesus Christ and his practice of keeping a clean conscience.

Duration: 44:49

Scripture: Genesis 3:12, Isaiah 52:11, Matthew 28:18-19, Acts 24:16, Romans 6:22, 1 John 1:7

Topics: "Authority"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares a story about a godly cobbler who refused to compromise his work for the sake of making more money. The cobbler's assistant suggests using old leather to repair shoes, knowing that they would quickly wear out and bring more business. However, the cobbler refuses, fearing the judgment of God. He believes that when he stands before the judgment seat of Christ, he will be held accountable for his actions. The speaker emphasizes the importance of understanding the authority of Jesus Christ and how it is the foundation for fulfilling the great commission to preach the gospel to all nations.

Transcript

Listen to thy word, our eyes may be turned away from men to thyself, and our ears may hear the voice of thy Holy Spirit, speaking to each one of us personally and meeting our individual needs. We pray, Lord, that thy word may shine like a searchlight into the depths of our hearts. We pray it may be like a mirror in which we can see ourselves.

Lord, grant liberty for this ministry, and grant that your great name will be glorified this evening. We trust thee for this. We lean upon thee.

Our confidence is in nothing human, but in the power of thy Holy Spirit. And Lord, we know that we shall not be disappointed. We pray with thanksgiving in Jesus' name.

Amen. I mentioned yesterday evening of the great need of spiritual authority in the Church of Jesus Christ. One of the things that Paul wanted the Ephesian Christians to know was that Jesus Christ was seated above all principality and power and dominion, that God had given him a name above every name, that everything was under his feet.

We read this in Ephesians 1, the last verses of that chapter. And there is no full stop after that. If you read the last portion of Ephesians 1, you'll find that Paul's prayer is, I want you people in Ephesus to know that Jesus Christ is there with everything under his feet.

He is absolutely sovereign, and God has given him to be the head of the Church, which is his body. Now, there's a great truth there. You see, when a king sits on a throne, it's not just the head part of him which has authority.

The whole body is the king, and the whole body has the authority which he has when being king, sitting on the throne. And Paul says, I want you people to see this. Jesus, having all things under his feet, and he's the head of the Church, which is his body.

And if the members of the Church live under his headship, recognize their position in the body, and live under his headship, they shall know something of that authority which Jesus Christ wields today in heaven. I believe there's a great need in our Churches for a manifestation of that authority. You know, the Church of Jesus Christ is called primarily not merely to sing and preach, and not merely just to present the Gospel and then forget about it, but to register the victory of Christ, the victory that Jesus Christ has won on Calvary's cross and through his resurrection, to register that victory in the territory of the devil.

That's the calling of the Church of Jesus Christ. That's the calling of a Christian, to so stand in Christ's victory himself that he registers that victory wherever he goes. It doesn't mean everybody will be converted, but it does mean that people will be struck by spiritual authority that is found in such a Church, that's found in such a servant of God.

Now, this does not come by anything human. It's not human qualification, it's not seminary training, it's not the fact that other people think very highly of us because we are very influential, or because of any status we have in Christian work. None of these things.

It's not because of the size of our Church, or the size of our annual income, any of these things. These are not the things that are going to produce spiritual authority. There are reasons deeper than all this.

There's a price to be paid. In the life of the Apostle Paul, we find so clearly a servant of God who had spiritual authority. He was not a VIP.

He was treated, as he says in 1 Corinthians 4, like the filth and the garbage of the world. When he arrived in various cities, the mayor and the governor didn't come to receive him. No.

He was treated as the filth and garbage. He was kicked out, stoned. But he was a man who wielded spiritual authority in his life.

And we are looking into his life to see some of the reasons why God could commit his authority to the servant of his. We must remember that when Jesus Christ sent out his disciples, the fact that he had authority, all authority in heaven and earth, was the basis on which he gave them the great commission. Very often we hear the great commission repeated before us in Matthew 28, 19, "...go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." But we must never forget that that statement was preceded by verse 18, where Jesus said, "...all authority in heaven and earth is given to me." And the great commission, really, in its full content is, "...all authority in heaven and earth is given to me," says the Lord, "...therefore, go into all the world and preach the gospel and make disciples of all nations." The total authority and the sovereignty of Jesus Christ over everything, over all people, over all circumstances, over

everything in heaven and earth and hell, is the foundation for his servants to go out to obey that great commission.

And if we do not know something of that authority in our life, we shall fail in fulfilling the great commission. This is the thing. Paul succeeded because he went forth on the basis of that authority.

He obeyed verse 19 of Matthew 28 because he knew the authority of verse 18 of that same chapter. We saw yesterday that one of the reasons why God could commit his authority to the Apostle Paul was because he was a bond slave of Jesus Christ, not just a servant, not a hireling, not to serve for pay or for any other thing. He was a bond slave of Jesus Christ, purchased by his Master, and he gave up every right to himself.

Now let's look at another reason this evening, why God could commit his authority to the Apostle Paul. Acts 24, verse 16. Here Paul tells us, this was the testimony that he gave before the governor, and there he says in Acts 24, verse 16, something about his own life.

He says, herein do I exercise myself to have always a conscience without offense toward God and toward men. Here's something that he tells us was a regular practice in his life, not something that he did once in a while, but something that he says he did not even daily, but always, always, always he kept his conscience free from any condemnation, either in his relationship to God or in his relationship to men. In both directions, in the vertical and in the horizontal, he kept his conscience clean, always.

And this was another secret of his authority. This was another reason why God committed his authority so wholeheartedly to this man, because in Paul, God found a man who was willing to keep his conscience clean, always. Notice what he tells the Corinthians, in 2 Corinthians 1, 12.

He says, our rejoicing is this. What is it that Paul glories in? He says, our rejoicing is this. Not that so many people came to hear my message in Corinth, not that people wrote a good report about my ministry in the newspapers in Corinth, but the testimony of our conscience.

Paul says, that means a lot more to me than what the newspaper reporters have to say. The testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with the wisdom of the flesh, but by the grace of God, we had our behavior in this world, and more abundantly towards you. It's a wonderful thing when a man can say that.

He says, when a man can say, my rejoicing is this, that my conscience tells me clearly that as I have sought to be a Christian, witness before others, I have lived in simplicity and godly sincerity. Not just what other people think about me, but what my conscience says. You know, this conscience that God has given us, I believe, is one of the greatest gifts that God has given to man, and yet one which man still abuses and so neglects.

This is the one thing that raises man above all the rest of creation in this world. This is what elevates man above the animals. Very often, men behave like animals because they ignore this one thing which elevates them above the rest of the animal kingdom.

Conscience. And when a man does not care for his conscience, he descends to the level of an animal. He is no better than an animal then.

That's why we find this world in the state it is in today. Because that one thing which man has, which no animal has, is the very thing which man neglects. Man cares so much for his body, to feed it, to clothe it, to live in such comfort.

But a body, even an animal has. Man cares so much for his mind, to educate it and feed it. But even animals have a mind.

But the one thing which elevates man above the animals, his conscience, is the very thing foolish man so often neglects. How blind man is! But Paul was not. God had opened his eyes to see the value of that great gift of conscience.

And you know, brothers and sisters, if only our eyes could be opened to see the value of this, I believe it would mean something more of God committing his authority into your life and mine, into your ministry and mine, if we would recognize the importance of conscience in our life. From the time that sin came into the world, it has been always man's desire to hide. You know, when Adam committed sin in the Garden of Eden, what he did? The first thing that he did, the Bible says, was he got behind a tree.

Sin makes a real fool of a man, as if he could get behind a tree and hide from the God who knows everything and who is everywhere. So that's what he did. He wanted to hide, because he had sinned.

And not only that, he wanted to blame somebody else. When God came to Adam and finally found him out and said, Adam, have you committed the sin? Have you eaten of that tree which I told you not to eat? What's his immediate reaction? Instead of saying, oh yes, God, I'm sorry, I blundered and I committed sin, forgive me. Instead of saying that, he says, Lord, the trouble's not mine.

The whole trouble is with this wife of mine. And if you hadn't given her to me, there'd be no trouble at all. Now, that's man's tendency, to hide, and when he's caught, to put the blame on somebody else.

And this is why, even among Christians, you find so many people who profess to be Christians, who are absolutely void of spiritual power, because they do not know what it is to be open and to walk in the light, and to acknowledge their guilt. One of the verses, which is often misquoted, is this verse, the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin. Is there a verse like that in the Bible? If taken by itself, it can give us an entirely wrong picture.

The Bible does not say, the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin. 1 John 1, 7 says, if we walk in the light, as God is in the light, then, and then only, the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin. There is a condition attached, and if we try to claim that promise without fulfilling the condition, we are going to fool ourselves that the blood of Jesus has cleansed us, when it has not.

To walk in the light means, that what my conscience tells me is wrong, I'm willing to admit. I'm not going to hide. You remember what Jesus said, men love darkness more than light, because their deeds were evil.

And because their deeds were evil, they want to stay in the darkness, and not let them be seen. You see, if I've got spots in my shirt, as long as I'm in the darkness, no one can see it. But when I'm in the light, I cannot hide it.

And this is what it means to walk in the light. That means when God's light shines upon me, and my conscience tells me something, I don't hide it like Adam. I don't put the blame on somebody else.

I acknowledge it. I confess it. And this is the way of deliverance.

Not just confession of the fact, oh God, I'm a sinner, but confession of that specific sin which God points out. And this was the type of conscience that Paul had, that he speaks of in Acts 24. A sensitive conscience.

You know what can happen, if we keep on ignoring the voice of conscience, or keep on telling our conscience to shut up. Ultimately, we shall stop hearing that voice. We shall be, our conscience will be deadened, and we shall have lost the most precious gift that God has given to us.

Paul knew that danger, and so he kept his conscience sensitive. The smallest prick, and he would immediately confess. The first time that we know from scripture that Paul's conscience started bothering him, I believe, was when he saw Stephen, the martyr, being killed.

The Bible says that Paul was standing there when Stephen was being killed. And you know, Paul had seen, I'm sure, many people being killed. But there was something different about this man, Stephen.

When Paul looked at the way Stephen behaved himself, no grudge, and no bitterness against these people who are killing him, and even praying that God will forgive them. I tell you, I'm sure, something began to work in Paul's conscience, which told him, you know, this thing you're persecuting may after all be right, you may be wrong. And his conscience started bothering him, I believe, from that day, and perhaps for many days, he kept on fighting against it.

Until on the road to Damascus, in Acts chapter 9, the Lord spoke to him and said, Paul, it is hard for you to keep on kicking against the pricks of your conscience. Acts 9 verse 5. It's hard for you to keep on kicking against the pricks of your conscience. If you keep on doing that, you will ultimately ruin yourself.

And Paul yielded. And from that day, he kept a sensitive conscience. He kept his conscience free from offense toward God and toward men.

And Paul had such a sensitive conscience, he was so conscious of the corruption within him, that he made this statement once, more than 25 years after his conversion. He says once, 1 Timothy 1 15, I am the chief of sinners. Not I was the chief of sinners, we could have understood it if he had said that, but I am the chief of sinners.

You know why he said that? Because the more a man comes into the light of God's presence, the more conscious he becomes of sin within him. The more a man draws nearer to that holy light, to which no man can approach, as the Bible says, the more he becomes conscious of selfishness, of self-centered motives, of hidden uncleannesses, which he was not aware of before. And I believe this is one of the marks of growth in the Christian life.

The more we grow, if we are keeping a sensitive conscience, the more we shall see, as God's light begins to reveal to us, hidden uncleanness in, sometimes in the most sacred areas, where God begins to point out and say, that service that you did for me came out of a selfish motive. That time when you stood up and preached, you wanted people to think what a fine preacher you were. That time when you stood up to sing, you were not singing for my glory, you were singing for your own.

You know, self in the most sacred place. You are more concerned about the honor of men than my honor. These things, the light of God begins to point out, as a man draws closer and closer and closer to God.

And if he keeps on cleansing them, cleansing away these sins and seeking God's deliverance from them, he will grow into the likeness of Christ to that point where he will be delivered from self completely. This is the path that Paul walked. And he knew that God could use him only on that basis.

He knew that the Old Testament said in Isaiah 52 verse 11, be clean that bear the vessels of the Lord. You see, what we need to do is to keep ourselves clean. And God will take care of giving us his authority.

Sometimes we put the cart before the horse. We say, oh God, we want your authority. We want to be filled with your spirit and we want you to empower us.

But the Lord says, I'll take care of that if you take care of your conscience. If you take care of keeping your conscience clean, that's about all that you need to bother about. I'll take care of committing my authority to your life.

Isn't this the mistake that many Christians make? Look what Jesus said about the conscience in Luke chapter 11. In this passage that we just read, verse 34, the light of the body is the eye. Therefore, when your eye is single, your whole body is full of light.

But if your eye is diseased, your whole body is full of darkness. Jesus said if your eye is whole, that's what that word single means, whole, free from disease, clear, then light comes into your whole body. Isn't that right? But if there's a cataract in your eye, or some type of disease, then there's darkness in your body, no light comes in.

Now Jesus said it's exactly the same in the spiritual realm. The eye in the spiritual realm is the conscience. And just like you need to keep your eye clean if you want your body to be full of light, you need to keep your conscience clean if our soul is to be filled with God's light.

See, the eye is one of the most sensitive parts, perhaps the most sensitive part of the external part of our body. That's why God has given it a protection with the eyelids, which opens and closes hundreds of times a day. Do you know why the eyelids open and close hundreds of times a day? To keep on washing and cleaning that eye so that no dust accumulates on that eye.

Because if dust accumulates on the eyes, it can be very dangerous. You can lose your eyesight altogether. I don't know whether you have much of leprosy here in Singapore.

In India we have some unfortunate people stricken with leprosy, and I have seen people who have leprosy. My wife was working among them, and I met some of them whose eyelids, the nerves of their eyelids have died because of this disease. And because of that, they cannot close their eyelids.

Their eyelids remain open all the time, because the nerves of their eyelids have died due to leprosy. And the result is the dust that is in the atmosphere accumulates on their eye, and the eyelids are not closing to wash away the dust. And ultimately they become blind.

Just because their eyelids are not washing their eyes day by day. Now it's exactly the same in the spiritual realm. Our conscience is like the eye, and when sin is allowed to accumulate on the conscience, whether we know it or not, and if we don't do anything about it, if we don't cleanse it away, one day we shall lose our spiritual vision.

One day we shall lose our spiritual vision. This is why you find Christians who don't have spiritual vision. What is the secret of spiritual vision? Jesus said, blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

It's one thing to read the bible, and it's another thing to see God. Only the pure in heart can see God. Anybody with good eyesight can read the bible, but only the pure in heart can see God, can see Christ in the scripture.

Can see the full glory of Jesus Christ. You know this is a privilege God has reserved for those who keep their conscience clean. There is nothing more glorious in the whole world than to see in our soul the glory of Jesus Christ, and that privilege can be ours.

Without going to any seminary, if you will only keep your conscience clean, keep your heart pure, like you keep your eye. When you get a speck of dust in your eye, immediately your eyelids begin to open and shut. It is as if the eye were saying, there's a speck in me, please take it out immediately.

And what do you do? You say, oh wait, I'll take it out later on. I've got other work to do. No.

You stop all your work, even if it is the most busy work that you're doing, you stop it. You lay down your pen, you lay down your tools, and you get that cleaned out. But do you do that with your conscience? That's what Paul did.

The moment his conscience told him, that was a sin, he stopped, set that matter right, and then continued. How many Christians are there who live like that? I tell you, if we were honest, very, very few. Well, no wonder we don't have Paul's authority.

God sees our hearts. Men may look at our outward appearance, they may think we are wonderful fellows, but God sees our hearts, and he knows whether we are men like this, who the moment something comes on our conscience, we immediately set it right. You know, we say that the soul is more important than the body, but we are quicker to get specks out of our eyes than to get specks out of our conscience, and so our actions belie our words.

We don't really believe what we say, because if we really believed that our soul was more important than our body, we'd take more care over the specks that came over our conscience than the specks that came into our eyes. And we wouldn't wait till the end of the day to confess all our sins. We'd get rid of it immediately.

That's what Paul said. Herein I exercise myself always to have a conscience free from offense, both towards God and towards men. Notice another statement that he made, Paul, concerning himself, in 1 Corinthians 4, verses 3, 4 and 5. 1 Corinthians 4, verses 3 to 5. He says, with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you or by any man.

Yea, I judge not my own self, for I know nothing against myself. Yet am I not hereby justified, but he who judges me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time until the Lord comes.

He will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, make manifest the counsels of the heart. You know, Paul could say, I'm living in the light of God, and as far as I know, there is no known sin in my life. I want to ask a very pointed question to each one of you, and I ask it to myself as well.

Can you say, this evening, as far as I know, there is no known sin in my life? This was the secret of Paul's authority. He always lived like that. That's why he accomplished great things for God.

Always he could say, as far as I know, there's no known sin in my life. As soon as he was aware of anything, he immediately confessed it, forsook it, and set the matter right. He lived, verse 5, he's speaking about the judgment seat of Christ.

You see, he lived with the light of the judgment seat of Christ. In the light of that, he had the judgment seat of Christ before him at all times. That's why he says, in verse 3, he says, I'm not bothered what you fellows think about me.

You people may think I'm a wonderful Christian, but that doesn't impress me, Paul says. You people in Corinth may think I'm a great apostle, but I'm not unduly elated by that, because I know that the one who judges me is the Lord, and he may have quite another opinion about me than you fellows have. And when I stand before him at his judgment seat, he's not going to ask for your recommendation about my life, because he knows me.

What a fact that we need to bear in mind. And if we would only live in the light of that judgment seat at all times, it would make a great difference in our actions. I remember hearing the story of a cobbler.

We have many cobblers who sit by the wayside, who have little shops in India. And here was a cobbler who had a little assistant, and this cobbler was a godly man, and he would do his work faithfully. When he repaired a shoe, he would put the best leather he could get and repair that shoe.

And one day his little assistant came to him and said, Master, I've discovered a secret by which we can increase our business. It's what all the other cobblers do down the street. You know, when somebody brings a shoe to us for repair, if we put some old leather on it, which will get worn out very quickly, then you know that shoe will get worn out quickly and it'll come back to us for repair again very soon.

And then we can make more money. And the cobbler said, I know that, but I don't want to do it, because I fear the Lord. And you know, he told him, he told his little assistant boy, he said, when I stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

Remember, this cobbler was a simple man, and his way of looking at things was quite simple. He said, when I stand at the judgment seat of Christ, and all the people are being judged, and my turn comes, and I stand before my Lord, by the side of the Lord's throne there'll be a great pile of shoes, all the shoes that I repaired. And the Lord will take them up one by one and examine them.

And he'll ask me, if I didn't repair them properly, John, why did you repair the shoe like this? What will I say? So I fear God, I'm not going to do that. That man's faith was simple. But I tell you, he had a lot more wisdom than many of us.

You know, if only we recognized that fact, it would make a great difference in the way we work in our offices. It would make a great difference in our diligence to doing our duty, whether it's at home, or in the office, or anywhere else. Why is it so many Christians are so casual, whose conscience doesn't even seem to bother them when they are not doing their work faithfully and properly? It's because they don't live for the eye of God alone.

They live for the eye of man. They are satisfied if other people have a good opinion of their Christianity. Are you like that? Are you one who's quite content that your pastor thinks you're a wonderful Christian, your bishop thinks you're a wonderful Christian, and you couldn't ask for anything more in the world? Well, you're in the category of the Pharisees.

The Pharisees in Jesus' day were like that. They cared only for the impression they made upon others, not upon God. They lived for the eyes of men.

Paul was a Pharisee once, but he got out of that. This was why Jesus condemned the Pharisees as hypocrites. You know, that word hypocrite comes from a Greek word which means actor.

And you know what an actor does? He's playing a part to show other people that he's something which he's not actually. For example, on a stage, an actor may act like John the Baptist, such a holy man. In real life that man may be a drunkard, but on the stage he acts like John the Baptist, the great prophet, who's playing a part before the eyes of others.

That's a hypocrite, a man who's pretending to be something which he is not in real life, because he doesn't bother about his conscience. That's how many Christians are. They are only playing a part.

They are out to convince other people that they are so holy, so saintly, so sacred, so devoted. But in private life they are something else. They're only playing a part.

They're acting. They're acting on Sunday morning in the presence of other Christians in their churches, as very wonderful people. But if you ask the people who live with them and work with them, you'll hear another story.

That's a hypocrite. And if you could only look into their hearts and see what goes on in their hearts and what goes on in their mind, oh, it would be an altogether different story from the holy, sacred, pious, humble appearance they have before us. That's a hypocrite, a man who's living a double life, who's one thing when he plays his part, quite another thing in his private life.

One thing before the eyes of men, quite another thing before the eyes of God. And I believe the reason why hypocrisy comes into a man's life is basically because that man has no fear of God. It's one of the tests of whether a man has got fear of God or not.

You know, a hypocrite is one who does not commit a sin when other believers are looking, because he wants to maintain a good testimony before them. But when no believers are looking, only God is watching him, he feels quite free to sin. You know why? Because he fears those believers, but he doesn't fear God.

He's afraid to be seen smoking by those believers, but he'll get into his bathroom locked up all by himself and smoke. When only God can see him, you see. He fears the believers, but he doesn't fear God.

And this is one of the tests of whether a man fears God or not. Very easy to say, I'm a God-fearing man, but the real test is this. Are you more afraid of sinning when other believers are watching you, or when you're all alone and only God is watching you? One of the tests of whether we fear God or not.

One of the tests of whether we bother about our conscience or not. One of the clearest evidences to me that Paul was a man who feared God is that word. I always keep my conscience free from offense toward God and toward men.

Who could see his conscience? Only God. And he feared God and kept that conscience clean. In 2nd Corinthians 1.12, you remember that verse I read earlier.

He could say, the rejoicing, our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience that in simplicity and godly sincerity we live with you. He was sincere. That means there was no double life in him.

Now, I've heard it said that that word sincere comes from, I think it's from the Latin, *sinisere*, meaning without wax. And I understand that the origin of the word goes back to the days when people used to make marble statues in Europe. And sometimes, you know, when these sculptors were making these marble statues, sometimes by an accident they would make a chip in the wrong place and some part of the statue would be chipped.

It would be very expensive to go and make another statue all over again. So what would they do? They'd get some wax which looks just like marble and they would fill up that chipped spot on the statue so that it looks as if it's not chipped at all. And you know, people who went to buy these statues gradually began to discover this type of trick that the sculptors were playing on them.

And so whenever they bought a statue they would say we want to test the statue and they'll put it out in the hot sun and then when the sun is blazing in its heat if there's any wax on it it begins to melt and then you see the chips. So without wax means, that's what sincere means, without wax, that means I'm not trying to cover up the little chips here and there in my life and pretend to be so holy, so saintly, when I'm not. That's what Paul was, sincere.

Not that he was perfect. Perfection will have to wait till we get into heaven. We shall be like Jesus only when he comes again.

But God does ask us to be sincere, to be without wax. If there are chips in our life, not to try and hide it, but to be honest. God asks us not to be perfect.

That will come if we are willing to take the first step of being honest. That's what it means to walk in the light. Paul said that he not only had a good conscience toward God, but he also had a good conscience toward men.

It was not only in the vertical direction, but also in the horizontal direction. Now one area in which people, many Christians I have met in many churches don't have a good conscience toward men, is in the area of forgiveness. There are many Christians who harbor within their heart an unforgiving spirit toward someone who has harmed them.

Is there anyone sitting here like that? You got a grudge against somebody who hurt you some way or harmed you? I tell you, you don't have a good conscience. You can serve God till doomsday, but God won't accept one bit of your service, because it comes from a heart which has not been cleansed in the blood of Christ. You can pray forgive us our sins as we forgive others, but you have not forgiven others, and so God cannot forgive you.

If we've got an unforgiving spirit against someone, no matter how great the harm that someone else has done to me, if I'm not willing to forgive him, the Bible says that God will never forgive me. Jesus said a story about a man who forgave his servant a great sum of money, two million dollars almost, and that man went out and caught hold of another servant who owed him a paltry sum, and he couldn't forgive him. And the master caught hold of this man and locked him up in jail.

And Jesus said, likewise will my heavenly father do unto you, Matthew 18 35, if you from your hearts do not forgive freely every man your brother. Do you have a good conscience toward all men in the world? This is one of the secrets of Paul's authority. There was nobody in the world that he had a grudge against.

What a wonderful state to live in, to have a grudge against no one. Man may harm me, tell evil stories about me, hurt me, injure me, scandalize me, but to say, I have no grudge, it doesn't matter what he does to me, I love him, I forgive him. Wonderful.

God is merciful, the Bible says, to those who show mercy to others. You know, one of the marks of hell is the total absence of mercy. Hell is a place where there is no mercy at all.

And there's a lesson there. If you lack mercy in your attitude to others, that means you've got a little bit of hell right in your heart. Because hell is the only place where there's no mercy at all.

And if you say, that man, I can never forgive him for what he did, whether you know it or not, you've got a little bit of hell right down inside you, because you lack mercy, and you can't have a clean conscience. And in one of those wonderful books called None of These Diseases by Dr. MacMillan, he says how these things can affect your body. There are people who've got ulcers in their stomachs and arthritis in their systems, which no amount of pills can cure and no amount of operations can cure.

The reason is they haven't forgiven somebody. They've got a bitterness, a grudge, which they're not willing to give up. And they've got diseases in their system because of it.

And far worse, they have none of the authority of God in their lives. They are living wasted lives because of some petty grudge against someone. They don't realize that they are robbing themselves of the privilege of having God's authority in their life by holding on to this petty grudge.

And it also means to have a clean conscience towards others. It means that if I have offended somebody, I must be willing to go and ask his forgiveness. Now, I don't know how it is in Singapore, but in India, it's considered quite degrading for a husband to ask forgiveness from his wife.

Because, you know, they feel that the women is the lower species of creation, and man is a little higher. And how can a husband ever stoop down and ask forgiveness from his wife? Now, these are the heathen concepts that our country is surrounded with in India. You know, 98 percent of India is heathen religions.

And this type of feeling creeps into Christian homes as well. And I remember speaking at a convention where a man who was over 70 years old got up and testified saying, this is the first time in my life that I realized that I must ask forgiveness from my wife if I have wronged. Now, I don't know how it is here, but the Bible teaches that if we have wronged anybody, we must be willing to go and ask forgiveness, to say, I'm sorry.

I was wrong. Please forgive me. This is how we can keep a clean conscience toward men.

Not only toward God. That's how Paul was. We see an example of that in Acts 23, where he reviled the high priest.

And people asked him, do you revile God's high priest? And Paul said, I'm sorry, I didn't know he was the high priest. He was quick. He didn't realize it.

He didn't know that this was the high priest. And as soon as he recognized it, he was willing to confess his sin. Now, this is one reason, as I said, why God could commit his authority to this man.

He was a man who kept his conscience clean. Do you keep your conscience clean? Have you given back the things that you took wrongfully from others in past days? Have you made restitution? I don't believe you can keep your conscience clean unless you have settled every score, settled every bill. Are there debts in your life which you're making no effort to repay? You say, oh well, I borrowed that money 25 years ago.

I don't have to bother to repay it now. That's all forgiven and covered under the blood of Christ. It is not.

It's not. And if we don't settle it now, we'll have to settle it at the judgment seat of Christ, which will be far worse. You know, it's in these little things.

I remember when I was converted, God spoke to me about restitution. God spoke to me about various ways in which I had cheated the government of India, of money that rightfully belonged to them, that I had not given to them. Taxes that were due to the government, that I had cheated the government of.

And I had no peace in my heart until I saved up that money and gave it all back to the government. And I remember that day when my bank account was empty. But God filled my heart with joy.

And I tell you this, I believe many a Christian is missing God's best because he does not have a sensitive conscience in these little matters. Things that you have taken wrongfully from somewhere. Have you returned it? Paul was careful about the way he kept his conscience.

And thus, because he was faithful in these little things, he built up a strong inner life so that even the devil trembled at this man. And because they knew that here was a man whom they couldn't touch because he kept his conscience clean. That's the only type of man the devil cannot touch.

May God find many in our midst like that.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/26/SID26043.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/zac-poonen/secret-of-pauls-authority-2-paul-kept-his-conscience-clean/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net