



## PART 2

# PAUL IN CORINTH: LEADERSHIP UNDER FIRE

## Chapter Six

### PAUL DEFENDS HIS SINCERITY

In this vital but often-overlooked passage of Scripture, we see highlighted three keys to Paul's sincerity.

**First**, he always operated with a clear conscience.

**Second**, he always sought to show himself reliable in words and action.

And **third**, as the Corinthians themselves were well aware, his dealings with them were never self-serving or heavy-handed, but always driven by a genuine, tender affection for them. Here is why Paul's enemies were ultimately unsuccessful in portraying him as insincere or two-faced:

### INTEGRITY THAT MAINTAINS A CLEAR CONSCIENCE

Notice that the first witness Paul calls in defense of his sincerity is his own conscience. He had never deliberately misled the Corinthians, deceived them with verbal trickery, or even been purposely vague with them ("We do not write you anything you cannot read or understand" [2 Corinthians 1:13 NIV]).

**2 Corinthians 1:13 (NASB)**

<sup>13</sup> "For **we write nothing else to you than what you read and understand**, and I hope you will understand until the end."

As far as his enemies' charge that he was inconsistent, Paul's conscience was completely clear.

This, too, is absolutely essential to good leadership: *A leader keeps a clear conscience.*

**LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLE #12**

**A LEADER KEEPS A CLEAR CONSCIENCE**



Remember, good leadership is a matter of character, and a righteous character depends on a healthy conscience. To see the role of conscience in leadership, we need to look closely at this amazing God-given faculty of the heart and mind.

The conscience is a built-in warning system that signals us when something we have done is wrong. The conscience is to our souls what pain sensors are to our bodies: it inflicts distress, in the form of guilt, whenever we violate what our hearts tell us is right.

The conscience bears witness to the reality that some knowledge of God's moral law is inscribed on every human heart from creation ([Romans 2:15](#)).

[Romans 2:15 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>15</sup>“In that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them.”

Both the Greek word for “conscience” (*suneidesis*) and the Latin root from which the English term is derived have to do with **self-knowledge**—specifically, **a moral self-awareness**. That capacity for moral reflection is an essential aspect of what Scripture means when it says we are made in the image of God. Our sensitivity to personal guilt is therefore a fundamental trait of our humanness that distinguishes us from animals. To try to suppress the conscience is in effect to diminish one's own humanity.

The conscience is by no means infallible. A defiled or poorly instructed conscience might accuse us when we're not really guilty or acquit us when we are, in fact, wrong. Paul said in [1 Corinthians 4:4](#), “I know of nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this.”

[1 Corinthians 4:4 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>4</sup>“For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord.”

He also acknowledged that some people's consciences are unnecessarily weak and too easily offended ([1 Corinthians 8:7](#)), so the conscience itself must be instructed by and conformed to the perfect standard of God's Word ([Psalm 119:11, 34, 80](#)).

[1 Corinthians 8:7 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>7</sup>“However not all men have this knowledge; but some, being accustomed to the idol until now, eat *food* as if it were sacrificed to an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled.”

[Psalm 119:11 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>11</sup>“Your word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against You.”

[Psalm 119:34 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>34</sup>“Give me understanding, that I may observe Your law And keep it with all *my* heart.”

[Psalm 119:80 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>80</sup>“May my heart be blameless in Your statutes, So that I will not be ashamed.”



Suppressing the conscience or deliberately violating it is deadly to our spiritual well-being. To disobey the conscience is itself a sin ([Romans 14:14, 23](#); [James 4:17](#)), even if the conscience is ignorant or is misinformed.

[Romans 14:14 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>14</sup>“I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.”

[Romans 14:23 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>23</sup>“But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because *his eating is not from faith*; and whatever is not from faith is sin.”

[James 4:17 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>17</sup>“Therefore, to one who knows *the* right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.”

And to suppress the conscience is tantamount to searing it with a hot iron ([1 Timothy 4:2](#)), leaving it insensitive and thereby dangerously removing a vital defense against temptation ([1 Corinthians 8:10](#)).

[1 Timothy 4:2 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>2</sup>“By means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron.”

[1 Corinthians 8:10 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>10</sup>“For if someone sees you, who have knowledge, dining in an idol’s temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be strengthened to eat things sacrificed to idols?”

Paul therefore placed a very high premium on the value of a clear conscience. His farewell speech to the elders at Ephesus began with these words:

[Acts 23:1 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>1</sup>“Paul, looking intently at the Council, said, “Brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day.”

He told Timothy, “I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience, as my forefathers did” ([2 Timothy 1:3](#)).

[2 Timothy 1:3 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>3</sup>“I thank God, whom I serve with a clear conscience the way my forefathers did, as I constantly remember you in my prayers night and day.”

In his defense before Felix, he said,

[Acts 24:16 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>16</sup>“In view of this, I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience *both* before God and before men.”

He characterized the positive benefit of the law of God this way:

[1 Timothy 1:5 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>5</sup>“But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.”

**A defiled conscience, if tolerated or suppressed, makes real integrity impossible.** Until the wounded conscience is cleansed and restored, guilt will assault the mind. Repressing the guilt may ease the pangs of conscience, but it doesn't eliminate the fact of the guilt. Guilt and blamelessness are mutually exclusive. In other words, the person who dishonors and then ignores his own conscience is by definition not a person of integrity. **A tarnished conscience therefore undermines the most basic requirement of all leadership.**

Paul assured the Corinthians that his own conscience was completely clear. He had not lied to them. He had not misled them. He had not spoken out of both sides of his mouth. He could cite no higher authority than his own conscience to prove it, so he boldly did just that.

This was not any *selfish* kind of “boasting” ([2 Corinthians 1:12](#)).

**2 Corinthians 1:12 (NASB)**

<sup>12</sup>“For our proud confidence is this: the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you.”

It was a candid and straightforward declaration from a sincere heart. Such a “boast” itself was proof of the very point Paul was trying to make: He had *always* shot straight with them. His words were always **plain, honest, forthright, unflinching, and non-evasive**—just like the apostle himself.

## RELIABILITY THAT STEMS FROM CLEAR CONVICTIONS

Next, Paul reminded them from their own experience with him that they had no grounds whatsoever to accuse him of ever being vacillating or unreliable. Not only had he always written and spoken to them in words that were clear and unambiguous ([2 Corinthians 1:13](#)), he had also consistently backed up his words with a life that was dependable and wholly in harmony with what he taught.

**2 Corinthians 1:13 (NASB)**

<sup>13</sup>“For we write nothing else to you than what you read and understand, and I hope you will understand until the end.”

In fact, Paul said, the doctrine he taught was the whole basis for his constancy and steadfastness. Just as God is faithful to all His promises, Paul himself always strove to imitate that steadfastness by being **decisive, distinct, definitive**, and true to his word. Paul was the very epitome of a transparent man.

So again, he puts it to them bluntly and directly:

**2 Corinthians 1:17 (NASB)**

<sup>17</sup>“Therefore, I was not vacillating when I intended to do this, was I? Or what I purpose, do I purpose according to the flesh, so that with me there will be yes, yes and no, no *at the same time?*”