

1

There is in Man a Conscience

“And Paul, earnestly beholding the council said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.” Acts 23:1

In the foregoing chapter the apostle Paul declares at large unto the Jews the miraculous manner of his conversion to the Christian faith; and being thus converted he was very forward to propagate that faith which once he endeavored to destroy. He tells them plainly that in opposing Jesus of Nazareth he had been a fighter against God Himself, and that the stone that heretofore he had stumbled at is that chief cornerstone that is laid in Zion for a fountain on which whoever builds his building shall never fall. This he perceived evidently in his way to Damascus as he was journeying with authority and commission to persecute the Christians. Christ Himself both meets and stops him. At midday he saw a light from heaven above the brightness of the sun that both struck him blind with its excessive shining and yet also opened his eyes to behold his former error in setting himself against the Lord of life and glory.

The design of this relation was to convince the Jews, and to persuade them to embrace that Jesus who was crucified indeed that He might redeem them from the curse they could never escape by any other means; but who lives by the power of God and is exalted far above all heavens that He might fill all things.

Well, they heard the apostle with patience until he told them of his commission to preach the gospel to the Gentiles;

and then a most satanic envy and fury stops their ears and they cry out, “away with such a fellow from the earth.” And truly from the earth they would have quickly sent him if the chief captain Lysias, understanding that he was a Roman (that is, though a Jew by birth, yet having the privilege of a Roman citizen) had not rescued him out of their hands.

Being thus delivered from the multitude he is brought and set before the council. He stands alone indeed to make his defense; but as the Lord stood by him to strengthen him so he brings with him a good conscience, which was as much, nay, more to make him undaunted than if he had had a thousand witness of his innocence. “And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.”

The words contain the apostle’s profession in which several particulars are very remarkable.

1. He professes that he had lived in good conscience; he speaks of conscience to his adversaries that he might awaken theirs to do their duty so that hereby they might be hindered from doing wrong to him, but more wrong to themselves by unrighteous judgment. He farther adds that his conscience was good and did not at all accuse but clear him.

2. “He had acted as before God” and had good assurance that God approved of what he had done. He had cause to be confident that the supreme and most righteous Judge would not condemn him but was pleased at that for which the Jews were so much offended. [John] Chrysostom observes that the apostle speaks thus to take away the Jews’ prejudice against him, and to convince them that he had done nothing that was injurious to them or worthy of the bonds that were upon him.

3. He had approved himself unto God and conscience in all things. He was not ruled by carnal interest or fleshly wisdom, but there was simplicity and godly sincerity in the whole