

Be Consistent – Part 2

Acts 24:1-16

How about a little quiz this morning on our 3 “B’s”?

1. The Lord stood next to Paul at night and told him what? (BE COURAGEOUS)

We are to take courage from the Word.

We are to take courage in our walk.

We are to take courage in our witness.

On September 28 is the annual “See You at the Pole” for the kids. Be courageous students to stand at the pole and identify yourself as a Jesus follower. If you’re not sure of your rights, check out the Alliance Defense fund.

2. What was our next “be” clause? (BE CONFIDENT)

Because God’s thoughts and ways are higher than ours we won’t and don’t always understand why certain life events happen to us be certain God’s plan for us will not fail. If He has some Rome, some place that He wants you to be, His plan and protection to get you to that place won’t fail. It’s secure. Be confident in His plans and protection.

3. Last week we looked at the capstone verse “**So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.**” How does Paul’s life and example teach us about the way we should live? (BE CONSISTENT)

Let’s recap the passage. Turn in your Bible with me in **Acts 24:1-16**.

Someone said that power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely. Power had corrupted both Felix and Ananias and they wielded it as a weapon to suit their needs.

From a human perspective it appeared that Paul had no hope of getting out alive, but as I said last week Paul’s hope was not in the wisdom of man but in the promise and power of God who told him to take courage, that he would in fact be a witness in Rome.

When all seems hopeless, don’t listen to the rhetoric of man - remember the promises of God. Be sustained by His Word.

It helps us to be courageous.

It helps us to be confident.

It helps us to be consistent.

In his own defense he hid nothing; he used no flowery language to flatter the governor. He spoke the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Everything he believed could be proven from both the Law and the prophets. His hope in the resurrection was the same thing his accusers also believed in. The proof of his hope in the resurrection was clearly seen in his character stated in his defense “**So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.**” This hope in the resurrection motivated him each day to live a life free of offending God or others.

What are some practical lessons that we can observe from this verse and throughout Paul’s writings that can apply to us? Does having a clear conscience really matter to us? Paul thought so and he lived his life that way.

I. HIS WALK WAS WITH EFFORT

I think we would all agree that the Christian life is no cake walk. Anything that takes effort will have a cost associated with it. David Jeremiah defines consistency as “the act of living true to what you believe regardless of the cost.” If we desire to live godly then there will be some cost, it will require effort.

Just ask the town clerk in a city in New York State who resigned her position because she was told she had to sign same sex marriage licenses and refused to do so because it violated her religious beliefs.

Ask the pastor of a church in Arizona who was ordered to stop holding meetings and Bible studies in his own private home.

Ask the five Christian men who were threatened with arrest for sharing their faith on a public sidewalk in Virginia.

Ask the Christian student at a university in Missouri who was threatened with having her degree withheld because she refused to write a letter to the state legislature expressing her support for homosexual adoption.

This is in America, folks the place that is supposed to be the land of the free. If we don't stand for our faith now our faith won't stand during tough times. It's not easy to live for Christ. As a matter of fact it's downright hard work. It takes effort.

I Corinthians 9:24-27

I have in the margin of my study Bible a little note that says to give all you have in the race. Run to win. Pay the price to win. Have direction. It means to me to have dedication. Be committed to winning. No one competes to come in second place. Every athlete no matter how old or what skills they have works their hardest to do well. I read recently of a 9 year old girl who holds national records in several track events. Her motto is 2nd place is not an option.

Last week we went north so I could compete in run up in Mio for cancer in memory of my Mom. On the entry form there was a disclaimer stating that I had trained adequately to participate. After the race I was talking with the guy who finished second. He had passed into first place on a hill near the end but told me he gave the spot back because he's not very competitive. He lacked full effort.

I can't imagine going into a race being unprepared. Yet many Christians approach the Christian life with little preparation. They lack effort because they aren't spiritually prepared many aren't willing to pay the price for the kind of effort it takes to be consistent in their Christian faith. *When temptations come along they don't have spiritual*

fortitude to stand against them. When tough times come they don't have spiritual faith to sustain them. Some days they may even wonder if living the Christian life is really worth it. It seems like the greater desire to live godly, the more difficult it becomes. Besides you look around and watch those who aren't Christians and man, they look like they're having a ball. Nothing seems to be bothering them. To make the claim as Paul did that he had a clear conscience, one that was free of offending God and man takes work!

The Greek word used here for exercise or strive is a word that eventually came to mean gaining piety by severe hardship. We get the word ascetic from it. Originally associated with any form of disciplined practice, the term has come to mean anyone who practices a renunciation of worldly pursuits to achieve higher spiritual goals for himself through a lifestyle characterized by abstinence from various sorts of worldly pleasures

The word developed into something not intended, but it gives you the sense in which Paul took great pains to avoid offending or causing someone harm by his actions or words. He wanted a clear conscience. It is the ability to know right from wrong with an urge to do right, moral judgment that opposes the violation of a previously recognized ethical principle that leads to feelings of guilt if those principles are violated.

Paul expressed that he was disciplined to have this attitude. He would on occasion speak about his discipline in the Christian life much as an athlete would discipline himself preparing to participate in the games. It was a claim of living a consistent life all the time so that no one could point an accusing finger against him. That kind of desire took effort. That Paul spoke of his hope in the resurrection to come wasn't just a doctrinal issue about the future, its hope compelled him to live now in light of that future event. He didn't want to stumble and he didn't want anyone to stumble on account of him. It was a disciplined way of life for him. That's why he could say at the end of his life that he had run the race well. He had sought after the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. **(Philippians 3:14)**

He was striving hard after the eternal reward that waited for him. Seeking the prize to come motivated him in this life to strain hard after that reward by living consistently.

Hebrews 12:1-3

Did you notice here the effort for which the author is pursuing his goal? The Christian life is already difficult enough, so strip off anything that is going to be a hindrance in the race. They say that a runner who is 15 pounds overweight can feel like running with 30 extra pounds the last mile of a 10 mile run. I found that out in my race last weekend. Near the end of the race there was a nasty hill that took its toll and I could feel those extra pounds I'm carrying that I need to lose to be more competitive.

This passage is an opportunity to examine your walk and determine if there is anything that might be a weight that should come off, to consider things that might be offensive to God and man, things that are keeping from living a consistent Christian life. If you're not sure what such a list might look like then consider just a couple of passages.

Galatians 5:16-26

Ephesians 5:1-5

Colossians 3:5-24

Notice also in Hebrews that the author encourages us to focus on Christ who endured tremendous hardship. Keep focused on Him to help in the Christian life when life seems toughest. Osaffa Powell from Jamaica is one of the premier sprinters in the world. Former sprinters and commentators alike say for him to win he needs to stop one habit. As he approaches the finish line he looks sideways to see where his opponents are. That gesture costs him fractions of a second and instead of winning, he ends up losing. He needs to keep his focus on the finish line.

When did Peter start to sink? It was after he took his eyes off Christ. **When are we prone to sink in the Christian life?** It is after we take our eyes off

Christ. Keep your focus on Christ through storms and you will live consistent in your faith. But remember, it takes effort.

I Thessalonians 5:22-24 “May God Himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and He will do it.”

Titus 2:11-13 “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope – the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.”

I Peter 3:16 “Keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.”

His walk took effort. He focused on Christ. Notice as well that his walk was encompassing.

II. HIS WALK WAS ENCOMPASSING

Back to our verse - “**So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.**”

The KJV begins the verse with the word “**herein.**” It is a word that speaks of a person's whole confession of belief. Paul is saying that his daily focus, all his attention and effort was about striving to be consistent in his life so that he didn't offend anyone. It insinuates that there is great pain to do all he can to live consistent in his walk. He labored at obeying the laws of God so as not to offend Him in any way. He labored at obeying the laws of man so as not offend them in any way.

Notice again in our verse that Paul said he “**ALWAYS**” strove to have a clear conscience. It

means a continuous effort, through all time or time throughout which a thing is done. It's a continuous practice carried on without being abandoned. *Many years ago I read an article in [Runner's World](#) magazine about a man who had run without missing a single day for something like 20 years.*

Paul's practice of godliness was every day, every minute of every day. He never let his guard down. He never lost sight of the goal. He never wanted to back off pursuing godly living for a moment otherwise he would get off course and offend someone in some way. He always pursued the goal of a clear conscience with diligence, persistence and perseverance. Jesus on several occasions would remind his disciples to be watchful. Always keep an eye out for trouble. Always keep your spiritual guard up. Always implies a readiness to act, alertness at all times on all occasions, in every instance.

Paul exhorted the Corinthians (**10:31**) to do everything for the glory of God. If the goal is to glorify God in everything we do then we will always have a clear conscience.

Paul's walk was with effort.

Paul's walk was encompassing.

Paul's walk was with equality.

III. HIS WALK WAS WITH EQUALITY

“So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.”

Notice that he didn't leave anyone out. He didn't say that his conscience was clear before God and all the Jews, or before God and all the Christians, or before God and all the Gentiles, or before God and the Romans. No. He said his conscience was clear before God and man. That means everyone. No one was excluded from Paul's list. Can that be said of us? Think about the people you interact with at school or in the office or around the neighborhood. Would we exclude anyone? If so, then we can't say

we have a clear conscience before all men, and if our conscience isn't clear before even just one person then we can't honestly say that it's clear before God who commanded us to love one another with the same love He has for us.

Paul made a bold statement in claiming that his conscience was clear before God and man. I think they go hand in hand. John would state it this way: how can we say we love God if we hate our brother whom God has commanded that we love. If we hate our brother for some reason, then we in effect are offending them and offending God at the same time because we are not keeping the commandment God gave us to love others without exception.

Paul is stating that when it came to how he treated people, he did it in such a way that it was pleasing to God. When it came to pleasing God, his behavior was such that it affected how he treated people. That's why I think they go hand in hand and why John could write that we show true love for God when we show the same love we have for God in our conduct toward others.

I Thessalonians 2:10 “You are witnesses and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed.” That's a clear conscience.

Can that be said of us? Do we treat others in the same way we say we treat God? Are we critical of others in any way? Are we condescending in how we talk to others? Are we malicious in how we talk about others? Are we deceitful toward others? Do we lie to others or about others? Do we harbor anger toward others?

A Christian should not be offensive with either his lips or his life.

A. Paul's Lips Were Not Offensive.

1. He did not offend by lying.

Colossians 3:9-10 “Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.”

The Christian doesn't lie on tests, on taxes, on resumes, in conversations or in any way, shape or form. He doesn't exaggerate or embellish things. He tells it like it is. He doesn't leave things out. It offends God and man. In **Proverbs 6** of the seven things God hates, a lying tongue is one of them. When Paul was given the opportunity to speak he told the truth and didn't fabricate anything, and he didn't flatter the governor in any way. Did you know flattery is a form of lying? The dictionary says that flattery is to praise too much, untruly, or insincerely in order to win favor.

Not only is lying offensive but our language can be offensive. You may ask what's the difference.

2. **He did not offend with His language.**

Ephesians 4:29 “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.”

The KJV uses the word “**corrupt**” in its description of speech that should be eliminated from our mouth. Corrupt things are rotten, perverse, depraved or evil. The person with the clear conscience will speak words that benefit and encourage others, not words that are perverse or depraved. **Honestly, think for a moment, who would you rather be around, those who tear you down with what they say or those who build you up?**

Ephesians 5:4 – “Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving.”

Obscenity has to do with any talk that is degrading or disgraceful. Obscenity isn't just in reference to swearing, it can be any kind of comment that degrades someone else, something that is cutting or

demoralizing. I had another room mate in college (not my friend Dick who spoke here) and on occasion we would get to telling “you're so ugly” jokes. They were meant in good fun, but after a while we noticed we were taking on a critical spirit. Convicted we both stopped.

Obscenity overlaps the next word that should be absent from the Christian who walks with consistency. Foolish talk is a Greek word that is made up of two words. The first is transliterated “moron” and means dull or stupid. The second word means to speak. **John MacArthur refers to it as “stupid talk, talk only befitting someone who is intellectually deficient and sometimes referred to as low obscenity, foolish talk that comes from the drunk or the gutter mouth.” Ever been around someone who can't speak a sentence without foul language?**

Then there is coarse jesting. It is talk that is more pointed and direct. This person takes something that is said or done no matter how innocent and quickly turns it into something that is suggestive or perverse. Coarse jesting can off colored or dirty jokes. They're the ones that are told around the water cooler or in the locker room. **When I'm at the Y running, I always know when a dirty joke is being told that they don't want me to hear because they know I'm a pastor. They always go up to the other person and whisper followed by loud laughter.** This kind of speech reveals a very immoral mind and we ought to walk away or tell the person we don't want to hear it. All these kinds of speaking come from a heart of filthiness.

Instead Paul tells us that we are to **“be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.” (Colossians 4:5-6)**

The New Living Translation says that our conversation should be **“gracious and attractive.”**

Here’s the Message **“Be gracious in your speech. The goal is to bring out the best in others in a conversation, not put them down, not cut them out.”**

If we are going to be salt to the world, a taste that is flavorful and appealing to non-Christians, then our language must be different from the world. I’ve talked with some kids who are wrestling with their language. They don’t like it but they do it, influenced by others around them and sadly that influence comes from other Christians. To have a clear conscience, be consistent in what you say and guard your tongue.

But it’s not in just what we say, but in how we say things. Criticism and sarcasm are offensive. Speaking in a condescending tone or in anger are also offensive. They cut like a knife. Sticks and stones aren’t the only things that break something. *Words and the tone in which they are said wound deeply and offend quickly.* That’s why Paul exhorts us to speak words that will encourage one another not tear them down. What we say and how it is said can offend both God and man. When it comes to a clear conscience be consistent by making your words such that it demonstrates equality toward both God and man.

Job 27:4 – “My lips will not speak wickedness, and my tongue will utter no deceit.”

Psalm 34:13 – “Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking lies.”

Psalm 39:1 – “I said, I will watch my ways and keep my tongue from sin; I will put a muzzle on my mouth as long as the wicked are in my presence.”

Proverbs 21:23 – “He who keeps his mouth and his tongue keeps his soul from troubles.”

Psalm 141:3 – “Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips.”

As Paul defended his case before Felix, he didn’t flatter with words that were untrue; he told the truth without exaggeration. He didn’t become defensive or speak in anger or even attack his accusers. He simply spoke the truth. He said it straight. A clear conscience comes from integrity and integrity fosters credibility. Paul would write to the **Ephesians (4:15)** that when we speak the truth in love, we are maturing in Christ.

But it wasn’t just in his lips that he had a clear conscience. He not only had a clear conscience when it came to his language, but also his life.

B. His Life was not Offensive

I Thessalonians 2:10 “You are witnesses and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed.”

II Thessalonians 3:7 “For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example.”

I Peter 2:21-22 “To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps. He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in His mouth.”

There is one final point I would like to make in respect to Paul’s conscience in the way he walked that showed it was clear before God and man.

IV. HIS WALK WAS ETERNAL

His life was devoted to pleasing God. Everything Paul did was with an eternal perspective or motivation. In his defense before Felix Paul said that his hope was in the resurrection. He was waiting for the return of Christ. His efforts here and now were about becoming like Christ in character as he anticipated the final reward that awaited him.

John would put it in these words:

I John 2:28 “And now, dear children, continue in Him, so that when He appears we may be confident and unashamed before Him at His coming.”

I John 3:2-3 “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when He shall appear we will be like Him for we shall see Him as He is. Every man that has this hope in Him purifies himself even as He is pure.”

Of this verse John MacArthur writes “The hope of Christ’s return makes a practical difference in the lifestyle and behavior of believers.” Does Christ’s return make a difference in the effort you put forth in the Christian life?

A pastor was in line behind a lady at the store holding up progress with an unordinary request. The previous night she had purchased two pencil sharpeners but was only charged for one. She was returning to pay for the other pencil sharpener. Neither the cashier nor the manager could figure out how to ring up a day old correction. The manager pleaded with her just to keep the second item and not pay for it. After getting his purchases paid for the pastor caught up with the woman and asked why she was so insistent on being honest. The woman replied that the way things were going in the world, the Rapture could happen any day and she didn’t want to get caught with a stolen pencil sharpener. She wanted a clear conscience before God and man.

Peter would sum it up this way:

I Peter 1:15-16 “But, as He who has called you is holy so be ye holy in all manner of life. Because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy.’”

If we want a clear conscience before God and before man we need to be consistent in how we live now in light of eternity all the while recognizing that such a lifestyle will be one that does not offend

God or others. We need to live with the expectation of seeing Christ. We need to ready ourselves and that means striving to become like Christ in character. It will take effort.

General Wainwright was left in charge of the American and Filipino forces in the Philippines when General MacArthur was ordered to Australia during World War II. Wainwright was captured and placed on the island of Corregidor in a prison camp. He began to lose hope. MacArthur heard of his predicament and sent the Special Forces to let him know that he would return and soon the battle would be won. As soon as he heard this news, Wainwright began to eat again, shined his buttons, and began getting ready at the expectancy of MacArthur’s coming.

The Amplified Bible reads **“Therefore I always exercise and discipline myself [mortifying my body, deadening my carnal affections, bodily appetites, and worldly desires, endeavoring in all respects] to have a clear (unshaken, blameless) conscience, void of offense toward God and toward men.”**

Have you lost sight of the goal? Has your walk become marred with a likeness resembling the world? Can you say that you have a clear conscience in all things before God and before others?

The Christian life is hard to live, but if we strive to please God then I believe we too, like Paul, can have a clear conscience. The Lord is coming back. He is coming to take us to be with Him for eternity. Don’t lose hope in the daily battle. Be courageous. Be confident. Be consistent. Keep on striving to live for the Lord no matter how weary the battle gets or how difficult it is to live a godly life. Remember the rewards that await faithful living **“well done good and faithful servant.”** Next week we we’ll see from our passage that our witness must be clear.