

**“Striving for a good conscience.”** There was division everywhere. The Jews were fighting the Romans. The Romans were fighting the Jews. The Jews were fighting each other. The Romans were fighting each other. And they were all **upset** at me and the Kingdom, that was so very different from theirs, that I was proclaiming. I had been arrested, beaten, put on trial, almost assassinated, and then moved through the night with a whole army to protect me from Jerusalem to Caesarea. There I awaited trial with Roman Governor Felix. He brought the chief priests in from Jerusalem and wanted to hear my case. They accused me of starting riots everywhere I went, all throughout the Roman Empire, and then desecrating the sacred temple in Jerusalem. I told the governor that two weeks before I had arrived in Jerusalem for the celebration of one of our feasts. I did not start **any** rioting or dissension in the city and instead was just following the Way of Jesus while practicing all that the Law and Prophets proclaim. I told him that all of us ultimately have to stand before the Creator and that he is going to raise all the dead—righteous and unrighteous—to be judged. Because I knew I was going to be judged by the Creator who sees and knows all things, I told him I lived everyday **“striving for a good conscience before the Creator and humanity.”** Because of that I was in the temple offering gifts for the poor, serving the Creator by helping the lowly, when I was arrested under false pretenses.

Roman Governor Felix, who was listening to my trial, actually understood the Way of Jesus and its complicated relationship with the temple and the Law of Moses. So he put off deciding anything and **left me** in prison, saying he would decide things in a few days. But the days dragged on. He called me to speak to him and his wife multiple times, wanting to understand the faith, true righteousness, a life of self-control, and the Creator’s judgment. As I taught him, he was **overwhelmed** by these things and eventually stopped calling me in. And the days kept dragging on. The months dragged on. Felix knew I was one of the key leaders of the church, of the Way of Jesus, and he was holding on to me, thinking that the church would offer him a large sum of money to release me. But that never happened, the Church was waiting on the Creator and his will for me. Then violence broke out in our Roman province and Felix intervened against the Jews, crushing them. The Jews then complained to the Roman Empire. Which led the Roman Empire to do two things to appease the Israelites: 1) they **removed** Felix as governor and replaced him with Festus and 2) they **left me** in prison.

For two years I sat in prison in Caesarea, waiting for a fair trial. When Festus came into office, I figured things wouldn’t **really** be any different. Rome had really upset the Jews and the Romans were needing to do anything they could to keep the Jews happy. So when I heard that Festus would be listening to me, I knew it was a fraud. At least he wasn’t moving me from Caesarea, for I knew the Jews still wanted to assassinate me if I was relocated. But I didn’t trust Festus to keep me safe for long. So when I stood on trial before Festus, I was ready. I told him I had committed no punishable offense against the Jews or the Romans. Then he asked me what I knew was coming, **“Paul, are you willing to go to Jerusalem and stand trial before me there?”** He was going to move me and allow them to assassinate me on the road as a political favor to the Jews. So I said, **“I am already on trial before you here. If I have done something worthy of death, then kill me. But you have no right to hand me over to them! I appeal to the Roman Emperor!”** Festus was shocked. It was my right as a Roman citizen to appeal to the Emperor if I felt I wasn’t getting a fair trial. Festus had no choice, he had to send me to Caesar, to stand trial before the Emperor.

Everything that I was doing was so much bigger than **me**. I had lived in my selfish bubble for so long, only seeing life through “me” and “my desires.” Now everything I was doing was about the Creator and the good of all his creation. The Lord had helped me develop a **conscience** and I wanted to do everything I could to keep that conscience **good**. To have a good conscience I had to **obey** the Creator’s will and commands, I had to **listen** to the teachings of Jesus, I had to **pay attention** to how my decisions would impact those around me. Jesus demanded love, a love for even my enemies, so my conscience, informed and taught by his Word, was urging me to live into that everyday. To keep my conscience good I had to listen and obey, even if it meant sitting in prison for two years, even if it meant suffering, even if it meant being killed. My ego, on the other hand, was demanding that I run away and save myself, that I **survive** at all costs. But my conscience told me life was bigger than me and following my ego and doing what **I** wanted would be to sin against the Creator and all those around me.

**“Striving for a good conscience.”** Having a **conscience** is the opposite of being **selfish**. Selfishness only thinks about “me” and what **I** desire—what **I** want—what **I** need. Selfishness can only see the world from **my** perspective. The conscience, on the other hand, recognizes that the world is much, much bigger than me, the conscience is **considerate** of the fact that there are **other** creatures around me and that my choices and actions affect **them**. “Conscience” literally means to “know or see with”—to see with **others** who are **outside** of myself. To have a conscience we must become aware that the world is much, much bigger than ourselves. We must slow down and truly **listen** to others to develop a conscience. Having a conscience is having the ability to put ourselves in the shoes of those around us and see and know the world from **their** perspective.

Seeing the world from the perspective of others, of those **outside** of ourselves, will give us an inner voice which will urge us to make decisions with the awareness of the other creatures who are around us. It is the conscience that speaks up inside my soul when I want to follow and indulge **my** selfish desires—the conscience **stops** me and urges me to think about the consequences of my indulgence on those around me. It urges me to put myself in the shoes of those around me before I say or do **anything**. And the conscience is **good** and healthiest when it has a deep awareness and consideration of the Creator—allowing us to see the world from the Creator’s perspective by patiently **listening** to his Word and the teachings of his Son Jesus. The healthy and good conscience reminds me of the Creator’s perspective and that listening to and obeying Jesus is the single most important thing I can do for myself, others, and all of creation.

**“Striving for a good conscience.”** If we are to live in the Creator’s Kingdom then we must have a conscience aware of the Creator and all of his creation. To develop a good conscience we must **die** to ourselves, say **no** to ourselves, and **come out** of our selfishness every single day of our lives. We must daily nurture a conscience by stopping the inner voice of our egos and then listening, **truly** listening to all those around us, especially to the Creator. We need to let the Creator’s perspective enter into our hearts, minds, and souls. We need to see the world around us through **his** eyes. And we can only do this by shutting up our egos and **listening** to others, especially to Jesus’s Word. So **“strive for a good conscience.”** Step outside of your limited, selfish perspective. Step outside of your ego that tells you **everything** is about **you**. See the world with others. See the world from their perspective. But above all, see the world with Jesus, see it from Jesus’s perspective. Listen to him, watch how he lives, so that you can have a **good conscience** that can guide you to life with him. **Amen.**