

Good Morning Friend,

The apostle Paul states in Acts 24:16 that he always desired to have . . . *a conscience void of offense toward God, and toward men* (KJV). I'll get back to this text in a minute.

I've never written about pillows until now. On a recent trip to India, two events involving pillows caught my attention. (1) When I entered my room in the hotel, the bed had many varied types of pillows on it. Some were large. Others were small. Some were soft while others were firm. Some were down-filled while others were sponge-filled. There was another one . . . a huge, elongated "body pillow," which I'd never seen before. Amid the pillows was a card explaining that I could use any pillow that I wanted. I could even call the house-keeping department to get more of any 'favorite' pillow I might prefer. (2) At another hotel I saw a beautifully embossed poster with these words, taken from a French proverb . . . *There is no pillow as soft as a clear conscience.*

Please take another look at the text in the opening paragraph of this letter. Paul candidly says that his conscience is *void of offense toward God and toward men*. This phrase, *void of offense*, means that he had a clear conscience . . . a clean conscience . . . a blameless conscience . . . an unashamed conscience, as stated in various translations. As we look more closely at the text, he states . . .

- Firstly, that he is *void of offense toward God*. He practiced the confession of his sin and sins. He kept short accounts with God. He didn't allow sins to 'pile up' but rather, he confessed his sins quickly, thoroughly, and thoughtfully. He knew that forgiveness always follows confession. In I John 1:9, John states that when we confess our sins, God *cleanses and forgives* us. It happens immediately. And when God forgives us, let us quickly thank Him. We **are** forgiven. It is not a matter of **feeling** forgiven, but it is the reality of **knowing** we are forgiven because God's Word says so.
- Secondly, that he is *void of offense toward men*. We must humbly search our own hearts to see how we are in relationship to people. Have I lashed out in retaliation to someone who abused me? Am I carrying old grudges? Is there any smoldering anger in me? Have I wronged anyone? Have I spoken unkindly to someone? Do I carry bitter feelings about someone, though perhaps I haven't sinned in speech or action toward such a person? Have I failed to apologize? If I say YES to any of these questions, then I am NOT *void of offense toward another*.

But, you say, what about this phrase: "Let your conscience be your guide"? Have you heard that? It might sound good but it is not biblical. And, it is not good advice. It is not adequate advice. Here's why! The Bible speaks of . . .

- **Weak Consciences** often characteristic of shallow, immature believers.
- **Corrupted Consciences** often warped by unchecked sinfulness.
- **Seared Consciences** often hardened and desensitized by neglect.

As a seminary student, I often heard our counseling professor, Dr. Henry Brandt, say this descriptive phrase . . . *There's a trouble in his breast that will never let him rest.*

William Morley Punshon states . . . *Cowardice asks, Is it safe? Expediency asks, Is it politic? Vanity asks, Is it popular? But conscience asks, Is it right?*

In our basic text, Acts 24:16, Paul uses a descriptive word that indicates he urgently made it his goal, *to have a conscience void of offense toward God, and toward men*. Let's also make this our goal and practice.

Be encouraged,

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