

SESSION 8: CONDUCT BECOMING

2 Corinthians 1:12-14

May 25, 2025

PREFACE

So far in this study, particularly from v3, we have been discussing Paul's "afflictions" and "sufferings," and the concomitant comfort God extends to those who find themselves in such straits. In our previous session we noted that Paul, and Luke in The Acts, do not go into detail with specifics, nor do they give us a reliable timeline on which to place them.

As he closes the paragraph, Paul asks for the prayers of the Corinthians. Even though he does not state it explicitly, Paul's intended purpose is God-oriented: he wants the content of the church's prayers to be thanksgiving and praise lifted up to God, the true source of "the gracious gift bestowed on us."

Beyond that primary purpose, a secondary purpose is also important. Already in these early passages of the letter Paul is doing everything he can to draw the church into fellowship with him and his situation. The church is badly in need of healing of its own, and that healing will only be accomplished by reestablishing its communion with the apostle—the true, authentic apostle of Christ.

This means that the first reason for the prayers is praise and thanksgiving offered up to God, and the second reason for these prayers is the benefit and edification of the church—both of which he will state more explicitly in Chapter Four.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:12-14.

The Corinthians have a skewed, even distorted perspective on the gospel. They are disappointed in their apostle because he seems—and even admits to—being weak. They *want* a hero; Paul calls himself a slave—even *their* slave (which they do not want to hear). And the picture he paints is not pretty.

Read 2 Corinthians 4:5-12.

That is something the Corinthians did not want to hear.

Really, can we blame them for being confused, for doubting the authenticity of the apostle Paul when they have experience with others more dynamic and charismatic, such as Apollos (1 Corinthians 1:12)?

v12

Verse 12 opens the door on the main body of Paul's letter, and serves as the "thesis statement" for the entire letter, here and in the entire paragraph is the "foundational statement on the apostle's integrity" to the Corinth church. As such it not only establishes for the reader Paul's heart and intent, but it also challenges us today as followers of Christ to consider and examine the integrity of our own ministries and personal witness (Guthrie). ➡

For our boasting 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.

Oh that we might all be able to declare that—that in all things, at all moments, we have conducted ourselves "in holiness and godly sincerity," conducting ourselves by the wisdom that comes from above, and not from the flesh or the world.

Admittedly, Paul's "boasting" (*kauchesis*; KAW-kee-sees) rings like brass in our ears. His choice of words sounds, well, boastful, to our modern ears, and inappropriate for a humble apostle who refers to himself as a "slave." This boasting, however, is related to *confidence*, and confidence is good if one places it in the right things (Garland). When we have confidence in ourselves or mere men, that is sinful; when we have confidence in the Lord, that is righteous. Paul's idea of "boasting," which he is trying to get the Corinthians to understand, is based on what the prophet Jeremiah wrote.

Read Jeremiah 9:23-24.

Being residents of a fallen earth, it is easy for us to lose sight of the importance of understanding and knowing God; this is not just important, but *vital*. In John's gospel, in Christ's "high priestly prayer," he so defines eternal life as not just being with God in the future, but *knowing Him* in the here and now.

The first word in v12, the Greek *gar*, is often translated "for," as a link back to preceding text. But it can also be translated "now" to indicate that a new unit has begun, as in the NIVs in this verse—which does seem appropriate here. A new unit is begun here.

Here in Jeremiah and echoed by Paul is the importance of knowing God to the extent that He becomes the central force in one's life—and the only thing of which one can rightly boast. Paul writes that he has conducted himself in “godly sincerity”; the only way one can declare that honestly is if one *knows who and what God is*. In his first (extant) letter to the Corinthians, Paul laid this out to the church.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:27-31. ➡

Paul refers to this boasting and places it in proper perspective later in this letter, emphasizing that it is all for their edification.

Read 2 Corinthians 12:19, 13:8-9.

We might rightly raise a similar unease with Paul's reference to his “conscience.” But, again, the apostle is speaking of a human conscience that is God-centered. His conscience “bears witness to the fact that Paul has lived consistently in line with God's character and God's ways. Here Paul's conscience has taken the witness stand to affirm the integrity of his actions” (Guthrie).

...that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves...

We have an interesting variation in our respective versions with the word translated “holiness” in the LSB and NASB; it is “simplicity” in the ESV and KJVs; it is “integrity” in the newer NIV and back to “holiness” in the older NIV.

The fundamental reason for the difference is that the respective translators are working from different manuscripts. The Greek in one is *hagiotēs*—clearly holiness (*hagios pneuma* = “Holy Spirit”); the Greek in the other is *haplotēs*—which means simplicity, single-mindedness. What I find truly fascinating is that the ESV English-Greek Reverse Interlinear shows the Greek to be *hagiotēs*, yet it is translated to English in the ESV “simplicity”! It is as if the translators said, *We know its holiness, but we're going to translate it simplicity anyway.* (I'm sure their rationale is better than that.)

The importance of this centrality of God in a life, resulting in it being the only valid boast for a believer, Paul will repeat in Chapter Ten of this letter.

I think “holiness” fits the context because it works best in contrast to “not in fleshly [or worldly] wisdom” that immediately follows. Our wisdom is to come from above, where God dwells and works in perfect holiness. ➡

By contrast *all* of our versions translate *eilikrineia* (ee-li-KREE-nee-ah) “sincerity,” which, in Greco-Roman literature means more than just meaning what one says. The word speaks of purity, clearness, as in water that is not polluted, wine not diluted with water, pure gold without alloys, clean air unpolluted. Because of this it came to be associated with integrity and sincerity; Paul and his men had nothing to hide, no ulterior, no impure motives behind their actions and words. And, as earlier, with the phrase “in the grace of God” the apostle makes clear that these two qualities do not have a human source, but originate and are instilled by no less than God Himself.

And the final phrase, “especially toward you,” is packed with meaning. We might paraphrase its application thusly: *You Corinthians of all people should know this to be true of us.* (That is, *By your familiarity with our lives, you should know better than to question our integrity and authentic calling by God.*)

vv13-14

I remember well the painful day when Linda and I sat with my mom in her room to tell her that after five years living with us, she now, for her own good, would have to move to the local care center. Our decision was based on the fact that mom no longer trusted our counsel—especially where it came to her health, her medications. She no longer trusted our word—which, to us, meant that she needed to be cared for by professionals, whose words she *would* trust. And I remember well the pain in my heart as I saw the pain in her eyes.

This was Paul’s situation. He loved the people of the Corinth church dearly; he wanted only what was best for them. But many in that church no longer trusted his words; they feared he had ulterior motives that they thought *not* best for them. By their standards he seemed to be one thing in print, and something else in person.

To be fair, it is true that a good number—perhaps even majority—of commentators subscribe to the “simplicity” or “straightforward” interpretation.

Mark Seifrid: Suspicions about him have arisen, not only because of his failure to come to Corinth, but also because of the poor impression he made with the Corinthians when he was there. The Corinthians find a discrepancy between the message and the messenger, between Paul's *parresia* (boldness) and his *parousia* (presence) and *praxis* (deeds). They cannot yet see that Christ's strength is made perfect in the apostle's weakness.

The apostle addresses this in Chapter Ten.

Read 2 Corinthians 10:8-11.

And in Chapter Four he expresses it in a different way.

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (2 Corinthians 4:3-4)

In other words, *There is no subterfuge in what we preach; the only ones for which that is true are unbelievers who are blinded by their rejection of Christ.*

Here in our text, in vv13-14, he *introduces* his response, voicing it in eternal terms.

For we write nothing else to you than what you read and understand, and I hope you will understand until the end, just as you also partially did understand us, that we are your reason for boasting as you also are ours, in the day of our Lord Jesus. ☞

In this—indeed, in both extant letters from Paul to the Corinthians—I believe we see tangible proof of Paul's utter, unwavering dedication to the Lord. How much easier it would have been for him to have the perfectly understandable reaction, *All right, if you don't accept me as I am, if you do not trust my teaching, I'll minister to those who do.*

After all, what did Jesus tell His disciples when He sent them out on their own?

"Any place that does not receive you or listen to you, as you go out from there, shake the dust off the soles of your feet for a testimony against them." (Mark 6:11)

But Paul was determined to obey his calling. If for no other reason than for the sake of those in the church who *did* accept his teaching, he had to hang in there.

Some of you will notice a couple of variations between our versions: Some, such as the ESV, close v13 with the word "fully" rather than "until the end." The Greek is **heos telos**, which means until completion.

Another variance is seen in the NIVs, where the two verses are even broken at a different spot, incorporating "understand fully" in v14, rather than v13.

The principal difference between these is that in the NASB, LSB, and KJVs there is a stronger eschatological emphasis in *both* verses.

I hope you will understand until the end, (LSB)

I hope you will fully understand... (ESV)

Whether it be understanding *completely* all that he has been writing or saying, or recognizing (thus approving) his teaching all the way till the end of the age, till the return of Christ, the point is essentially the same: *I want you to accept all that I am teaching you, because it is the one true gospel of Christ.* He is just the messenger; their rejection is not, ultimately, of him, but the message itself—and that message is Christ, as he will put it in 4:5,

For we do not preach ourselves but Jesus Christ as Lord...

Once again Paul is giving voice to his desire for the church to join ranks with him, so that when “the day of our Lord Jesus” comes, they will walk into eternity together.

...that we are your reason for boasting as you also are ours, in the day of our Lord Jesus.

There once again is that troublesome word “boasting,” which rings so hollow to our ears. But Paul’s mind is looking into the future, to the judgment day, when every person will stand before the Lord to give an account of his or her life. And Paul’s earnest desire is that when the day finally arrives, when he and the Corinth church stand before the throne, they will be able to boast in each other. He will be able to declare to the Lord, “Here is my church.” And the Corinth congregation, in turn, can declare to the Lord, “Here is our apostle” (Garland).