

**A Change in Plans
2 Corinthians 1:12-14
Part One**

This morning I would like to begin by asking you this question. What is the conscience? We all have it. We all need it. But what is it? One writer has defined the conscience as “the soul reflecting on itself.” But it is more than that. Our conscience is our soul reflecting on itself in judgment either defending us or accusing us (Romans 2:14).

Let me read for you **Romans 2:14-15. For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, (15) in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them.”**

So let me ask you this question. If you were to allow your soul to reflect on itself this morning would it accuse you or would it defend you? This is the question. And is this question important? Of course it is.

Let us, first of all, consider the potential consequences of ignoring our conscience when it is accusing us. Not only would it be likely that we would lose our sense of well being, but ignoring our conscience when it is accusing us could also bring about personal disaster.

Let me share with you a story that I came across while preparing for this message. **“On the night of November 27, 1983, Avianca flight 011, en route from Paris to Bogota via Madrid, approached the Barajas airport. The weather was good, and there were no mechanical problems with the 747 jet. The crew was experienced; the pilot had more than 20,000 hours of flying time and had made this same approach twenty-five times before. Yet with its flaps extended and its landing gear down, the jumbo jet smashed into a series of low hills about seven miles short of the runway. The plane cartwheeled, broke into pieces, and came to rest upside down. Tragically, 181 of the 192 people on board lost their lives. Investigators determined that a series of errors by the crew caused the crash. The crew misunderstood the reality of their location. They thought they knew the truth about the plane’s position, but they did not. Shockingly, the final and fatal error came when the pilot, so sure he**

knew where he was heading, ignored the computerized voice of the plane's ground proximity warning system, which repeatedly warned him, "Pull up! Pull up! Pull up!"

And how did the pilot respond to this warning? The cockpit voice recorder recorded this response, "**Shut up, gringo,**" and then he turned off the warning device, which resulted in the deaths of 181 people.

Is it dangerous to ignore our God-given warning device, or in other words our conscience, when it begins to accuse us of wrong behavior? Of course it is! It's dangerous! And hopefully this morning we will take this to heart. If we are here this morning and our conscience is telling us to pull up, then I would hope we would do exactly what our conscience is telling us. That we by the grace of God would repent of our sin and choose to move in a better and more righteous direction thus producing peace and hopefully protecting us perhaps from some totally unnecessary personal disaster.

But our conscience is not just about bringing accusations against us when we are doing things we believe to be wrong. Our conscience is also about rising up to our defense when we believe that we are being false accused by one or more persons. And is this important? Absolutely! Not only will this make it possible for us to enjoy peace in the midst of the attacks, but it will also provide us the hope that our ministry, though under attack, will not be in vain and that the fruit of our ministry will endure.

And this brings us back to our study of **2 Corinthians** and more specifically this morning to **2 Corinthians 1:12-2:4**.

So, what is the setting for this particular passage that we will only begin to examine this morning? Paul, in this passage, is responding to an attack upon his integrity, leveled against him by certain false teachers in the Church at Corinth. And why were they doing this? Why were they attacking Paul's integrity? They were doing this in order to destroy Paul's reputation so that they might replace Paul as the primary spiritual authority in the Church at Corinth. Was this a concern to Paul? Absolutely!

And it should be a concern for us as well since our effectiveness in ministry will be totally dependent upon others.

Therefore my hope for this message is this: that as we begin to examine Paul's response to the charge against him, we will be able to appreciate even more the value of our conscience both in accusing us as well as defending us. And in light of this let me know as you the following question:

How did Paul respond to the various charges by certain false teachers within the Church at Corinth that he lacked personal integrity in 2 Corinthians 1:12-2:4? Paul appealed to the testimony of his own conscience.

Let me read for you **2 Corinthians 1:12**. **“For our proud confidence 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.”**

So how did Paul respond to the false teachers attack upon his integrity according to **2 Corinthians 1:12**? Paul, first of all, responded to the charges against him by introducing the testimony of his own conscience (2 Corinthians 1:12-14).

So let me ask you this question. When our personal integrity is under attack, what would be more important to us? That our conscience would be able to testify to the fact of our integrity, or that certain friends and family members would be able to testify to the fact of our integrity?

If our integrity were under attack, it would be far and away more important that our conscience be able to testify to that fact, to the fact of our integrity, rather than certain friends and family members. And why is this?

If our conscience is not able to testify to the fact of our integrity, then we will stand condemned in our own eyes no matter what certain friends and family members may be saying about us.

Now I am not saying that it wouldn't be nice to have our friends and family members testifying to the fact of our integrity. But the reality again is this: if our conscience is not able to testify to that fact of our integrity, then we will stand forever condemned in our own eyes no matter what others might be saying about us.

And because of this Paul, in defending himself against these attacks, started where he needed to start and that was with his own conscience. And this is where we need to start when we are being personally attacked. We need to take a close look at ourselves before the throne of God and see if our conscience will accuse us or defend us.

Did Paul do this? Yes! And what was the conclusion of this? Paul's conscience concluded that his conduct in this world and especially toward the Church at Corinth was conducted in holiness and godly sincerity (2 Corinthians 1:12).

Let us go back and read **2 Corinthians 1:12** one more time and see if this is not so. **“For our proud confidence [or in other words, the proud confidence of both myself and Timothy] is this: the testimony of our conscience [Is what?], 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.”**

So, what was the conclusion of Paul's conscience, in the midst of these attacks, as it sat in judgment upon Paul's conduct? It concluded, just as I have already told you, that all of Paul's conduct in this world and especially toward the church at Corinth was conducted in holiness and godly sincerity.

So, what did Paul mean when he said that his conscience had concluded that his conduct in the world had been conducted **“in holiness?”** The word “holiness” (HAGIOTES) refers to moral purity. When Paul said that his conscience had concluded that his conduct was “in holiness,” he was in effect saying that his conscience had concluded that all of his conduct was morally pure based on his own perceived standard of righteousness!

Wow? What an amazing statement! But why is it so amazing? When our conscience sits in judgment upon our conduct at any given point in time it will judge us according to our own perceived standard of righteousness, or in other words, according to our own personal view of what is right and wrong at that moment in time. And how might our personal perceived standard of righteousness at this particular moment in time compare to Paul's when he wrote the words that he wrote in **2 Corinthians 1:12**? I would have to think that his personal perceived standard or righteousness when he wrote this verse would have been far superior to our own thus providing his conscience

a far more precise tool for evaluating whether or not his conduct was truly done or not done “in holiness.”

Should this realization that Paul most likely had a much more mature standard of righteousness and therefore a better handle on what might be right or wrong in any given specific situation discourage us? No! It should not discourage us. Rather it should encourage us to study the Word of God. And not only to study the Word of God, but to also prayerfully meditate upon it day and night so that our own perceived standard of righteousness might become as mature as Paul’s.

So, what did Paul’s conscience with its very mature standard of righteousness conclude about all of Paul’s conduct in the world and especially among the Corinthians? It concluded that all his conduct had been done “in holiness.”

But this was not all that Paul’s conscience had concluded. Paul’s conscience had also concluded, based on **verse 12**, that his conduct had been done “**in godly sincerity.**”

So, what is the significance of this phrase? The word “sincerity” (EILIKRINEIA) is a combination of two Greek words, one word, “EILE,” meaning “sunlight,” and “KRINO,” meaning “to judge.” It pictures something held up to the light of the sun for inspection.

When Paul’s conscience held up his conduct in the world and among the Corinthian Church to the light of Paul’s very exalted and mature perceived standard of righteousness, no cracks were detected. In other words, Paul’s conscience found him to be innocent or sincere in every matter of his life. This is just another way of emphasizing the holiness of Paul’s conduct.

But Paul didn’t just say that his conscience had found his conduct in the world to have been done “in holiness” and in “sincerity,” he says that his conscience had found his conduct to have been done “in holiness and godly sincerity.” This word “godly” is important.

Paul called his sincerity godly because God was its object and its source (1 Corinthians 15:10, Colossians 1:29). And why would Paul want the Corinthians to know this? Paul wanted the Corinthians to know the object

and source of his sincerity was God so that the Corinthians would understand that no credit should go to him. This is why the word “godly” was so important.

Paul drives this point home even further when he, after speaking of “**godly sincerity,**” went on to say “**not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God.**”

So why did Paul take no credit for his conscience, having concluded that all his conduct in the world and among the Corinthians had been done in holiness in godly sincerity? He took no credit because he understood that anything accomplished by him was only through the grace of God.

This was a common theme of Paul’s throughout his epistles. Listen to what Paul said in **1 Corinthians 15:10**. “**But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.**” And now let us listen to what Paul said in **Colossians 1:29**. “**For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me**” So who gets the credit for Paul’s conscience being able to testify that all his conduct in this world and among the Corinthians was done in holiness and in sincerity? God’s grace should get the credit.

Fleshly wisdom cannot produce holiness and godly sincerity. Only God can produce these things as He pours out His grace upon us.

If we understand these things hopefully we will spend far less time strategizing about how we might be better people and far more time bowed before God’s throne asking Him for help in understanding and applying His Word to our lives.

Let us now go on and read **2 Corinthians 1:13**. “**For we write nothing else to you than what you read and understand, and I hope you will understand until the end.**” So how does this fit in with what Paul has just said in **2 Corinthians 1:12**?

Paul wants to assure the Corinthians, that in light of the fact that his conscience had defended him, they could continue to place their confidence in what they had come to know through him.

And this would have included what they have had come to know through his writings or through their personal contact with him (2 Corinthians 1:13).

We know that both of these sources of knowledge were on his mind when we wrote these words based on the phrase, “**read and understand.**” The word “**read**” and the word “**understand**” are compound forms of the same Greek verb GINOSKO that means, “to know,” forming a play on words in the Greek. Philip E. Hughes, in commenting on this play of words, said the following: “**The play on words between ANAGINOSKETE AND EPIGINOSKETE cannot successfully be reproduced in English.**” The first word “**read**” (ANAGINOSKETE) refers to what they to know through what they read in his letters and the second word “**understand**” (EPIGINOSKETE) refers to what they came to know through personal contact with him.

But no matter how they came to know what they had come to know, Paul, based on the testimony of his conscience, appealed to the Corinthians to continue to hold on to what they had come to know through him.

And how long did Paul hope that the Corinthians would hold on to this knowledge? He hoped that the Corinthians would continue to hold on to what they had come to know to the end. Isn't that what the verse said? Let me read it for you again. “**For we write nothing else to you than what you read and understand, and I hope you understand until the end.**” But what does this mean?

When Paul said that he hoped that the Corinthians would understand what he written to them until “the end,” he meant to the end of their lives (2 Corinthians 1:13). Paul and his writings were under attack, and certainly in light of this we can understand why Paul, in the midst of this attack, would appeal to the Corinthians to hold on to what they had come to know through him.

He saw them in jeopardy from these false teachers and he needed them to hang on. So after making this appeal to hang on to what they had come to know through his writings and personal contact with him, he takes them back in time to an earlier time in **verse 14.**

Let me now read for you the first part of **2 Corinthians 1:14**. **“Just as you also partially did understand us.”** Notice the past tense “did.” When Paul, in 2 Corinthians 1:14, said, “just as you also partially did understand us,” he was referring to when he and Timothy were there with them during the founding of the church.

During that time, even though the Corinthians may not have necessarily understood everything that Paul was saying to them, they did come to understand certain things and among those things was the gospel of Christ, the very message that had brought them life and the hope of future glory.

A message Paul believed the Corinthians still embraced even in spite of the attacks against him and would continue to embrace to the end which led him to conclude **verse 14** with a very hopeful statement, **“that we are your reason to be proud as you also are ours, in the day of our Lord Jesus.”**

Paul obviously by this statement believed that the Corinthians would indeed hold on to the end of their lives and would not fall away from the truths that they had come to know through him even in spite of these personal attacks against him.

And how do we know this? We know this because Paul sees himself and the Corinthians together in the Day of our Lord Jesus.

And what is the day of our Lord Jesus? The day of our Lord Jesus refers to that time when Christ appears and takes His church to heaven.

So if Paul and the Corinthians were together on the day on our Lord Jesus, what would this mean? This would mean that everything that the Corinthians had chosen to believe about Paul and what he had taught them was true. And what would this mean for Paul? This would mean that everything that Paul had chosen to believe about the Corinthians in respect to what he had taught them was also true.

And it is because of this that Paul could say at the end of **verse 14**, **“that we are your reason to be proud as you also are ours, in the day of our Lord Jesus.”** In other words, neither Paul nor the Corinthians would find any reason to be disappointed in the other. Paul’s presence with them on that day will assure the Corinthians that he was in fact an apostle of Christ Jesus and

that he had indeed spoken to them the truth. And the Corinthians presence on that day with Paul will assure Paul that his ministry among the Corinthians had not been rejected but had indeed been received.

Paul's integrity was under attack by certain false teachers in Corinth. And how did he initially respond to that attack? Paul responded by introducing the testimony of his conscience, which concluded using a very mature perceived standard of righteousness that all of his conduct in the world and among the Corinthians had been done "in holiness" and "in godly sincerity."

And based on the testimony of his conscience, Paul appealed to the Corinthians to hang on to what they had come to know through him, both through his writings and through their personal contact with him.

Is our living in light of our conscience important? Absolutely! So let us, in light of this, press forward in the study of God's Word and our meditation upon it so that we might, through our ever maturing conscience, not only be protected from personal disasters but be blessed with the certain knowledge that our ministry will not be in vain, and that the fruit of our ministry will be manifested on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. And this brings us to our prayer.

May our conscience, by the grace of God, be perfected so that it will accuse when it should accuse us and defend us when it should defend us.