

Standing Firm in Integrity for the Gospel, Part 2

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Preacher: Gregory Garrison

[0 : 00] Well, Robert Tumley, or Bobby as he was known, was a man marked by quiet faith. A carpenter by trade, he ran a small workshop in the town of Red Hollow, and he had no desire to be seen, only to be faithful to his work and to his neighbors and to his Lord.

Most days you could find him at dawn with a cup of coffee and his open Bible on the porch, praying for people most of the town had forgotten. He was known as trustworthy and gentle and steadfast. At church, he led a small Bible class on Sunday evenings and often visited the shut-ins during the week. But that reputation unraveled overnight.

It began with a robbery at the local hardware store. Then a teenage girl from the church youth group went missing. Finally, the community center caught on fire.

And within days, suspicion fell on Bobby. A customer had mentioned seeing him near the hardware store that morning. The missing girl had once mentioned him in her prayer journal.

[1 : 14] His fingerprints were found on the charred community center door, a lock he had fixed two weeks earlier. The sheriff of Red Hollow, under pressure, made an arrest.

And it was Bobby. The town recoiled. Clients canceled jobs. Bobby's phone stopped ringing. Church friends faded away.

His reputation, once clean and strong, was suddenly rubble. In the county jail, Bobby found himself alone except for the Word of God.

He read the letters of Paul, especially 2 Corinthians, with new eyes. The apostle Paul, too, had been accused of being untrustworthy and being weak and not measuring up.

Paul, too, had loved people who now questioned him. Yet Paul did not fight with pride. Instead, he wrote with tears.

[2 : 22] He pleaded with truth and with grace. I wrote to you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to grieve you, but to let you know the depth of my love for you.

2 Corinthians 2, verse 4. Bobby began to write, not out of bitterness, but with a heart for restoration. He wrote to the church elders, gently explaining the misunderstandings.

He acknowledged where his silence might have looked like guilt. He reminded them of his life, not to boast about it, but to ask for grace.

Bobby wrote to the girls' family, expressing sorrow for their fear and offering Scripture and prayer.

He even wrote to the sheriff, not with accusations, but with understanding, acknowledging the pressure the town was under and expressing hope that the truth would soon be found.

I don't write to defend myself for pride's sake, Bobby wrote in one letter, but so that you might remember the life I've lived among you and that I've always pointed you to Christ.

[3 : 39] If that witness has failed in your eyes, then I ask forgiveness. But I still believe that love tells the truth, even when the truth is hard to hear.

Well, weeks passed, and then the truth surfaced. A drifter passing through town was caught pawning stolen goods from the hardware store.

Security footage at the community center, previously dismissed as corrupted, was recovered, revealing someone else lighting the fire. And the missing girl called home from another state.

She had run away out of fear for reasons unrelated to Bobby. Bobby was exonerated. The town murmured apologies.

A few letters trickled in. His name was cleared, but the scars remained. Yet Bobby did not retaliate.

[4 : 41] He returned to his workbench and reopened his shop. And he began visiting the jail regularly, not as an inmate, of course, but as a chaplain.

He told men with broken past about Jesus, the Savior who had also been faultfully accused, who was rejected by those he loved, and who still gave himself for them.

For our sake, he, God, made him, Jesus, to be sin, who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

2 Corinthians 5.21 When a local reporter asked Bobby if he planned to pursue legal action, he explained, well, in the Bible, the Apostle Paul did defend himself against his accusers. But he did so not out of pride. He did it to protect the gospel message from being discredited and to keep people from being led astray by false teaching.

[5 : 45] As for me, Bobby said, I'm content that the truth has prevailed. Thus the story of Robert Bobby Tumley.

Well, Paul's second letter to the Corinthians is filled with this same kind of tension. Truth held in tenderness. Defense without pride.

And wounds carried with grace. Paul didn't defend himself to protect his name. He did it to protect the church and the gospel message. He didn't boast in power, but he boasted in weakness.

And above all, he called the church to reconciliation. Reconciliation with him, with Paul, yes, but ultimately, reconciliation with God.

2 Corinthians 5.20 Paul writes, So as we open 2 Corinthians together this morning, we will see Paul standing firmly in integrity, not for himself, but for the sake of the gospel.

[6 : 59] And so that's the title of my sermon this morning, Standing Firm in Integrity for the Gospel. Part 2. Right? So if you were here last week, you know that this is a continuation of what we started last Sunday morning.

Last week, we spent our time detailing the background of Paul's relationship with the Corinthian church. And it was necessary to do so, so that we fully understand and rightly interpret what Paul writes in this epistle in 2 Corinthians.

Now, if you weren't here last week, I would encourage you to go back and listen to that recording. Not because I preached it, but because we did spend a good hour just walking through the background and the context of 2 Corinthians.

I think you'll find it useful. And not only as I continue to preach through 2 Corinthians this morning and the opportunities that I have in the months to come, but also for those of you who are following our church's Bible reading plan, and I'm not going to ask you to raise hands, but for those of you who are following our church's Bible reading plan this year, it has us right now in 2 Corinthians.

We read the first four chapters in July. We're currently in chapters 5, 6, and 7 in August. Three more chapters in September, and then we'll finish up 2 Corinthians in October.

[8 : 25] Now, for our guests who are here this morning, in the previous years, we sort of mix it up here at Grace as far as Bible reading plans go. We'll do a through the Bible in one year plan, but this year we've chosen to slow down, pick a couple of chapters out of a book or out of an epistle, and just read that repeatedly throughout the month.

So in July last month, our church, for those who are following this particular plan, we've been reading chapters 1, 2, 3, and 4 over and over and over daily, if possible, during the month of July. So we're currently in chapters 5, 6, and 7. So having this background, I hope, will supplement some of the reading in our Bible reading plan. But to summarize, so we do have guests here this morning. So I do have a slide summarizing last week. Now, I'm not going to take an hour, and my wife may be cringing, because when I say it's time to review, she knows, uh-oh, we're going to spend a lot of time.

So I'm not going to do that this morning. I have it on one slide, and it was optional, depending on who was here this morning. There's enough of you here for the first time that weren't here last week that I do want to take, don't time me, but no more than four or five minutes going over a review, okay?

[9 : 38] It'll be helpful as we dive into verses 12, 13, and 14. All right? So to summarize, we know, let's see, do I have it?

Here we go. All right. So we know that the Corinthian church was established. We read that in Acts 18. That's part of Paul's second missionary journey. He traveled there to Corinth. He spent about 18 months there.

He established the church, and then he moved on. At some point after he departed Corinth, perhaps as he was finishing his second journey or into his subsequent third missionary journey, he received word of immorality that was occurring in the church in Corinth.

So Paul sent them a letter. Now this is not 1 Corinthians, right? This is a letter that's since been lost. We have no record of it, but we do know that it's referenced in 1 Corinthians, that Paul sent them that letter addressing their immorality.

Later in Ephesus, so during the third missionary journey, as he was spending his three years in Ephesus, Paul received reports of divisions and also inquiries regarding doctrinal questions.

[10:45] And so he wrote what we know as 1 Corinthians. All right? Likely he sent it with Timothy to Corinth, accompanying that letter. Later, Paul receives more negative reports.

And unfortunately, not just negative reports of what's happening with the church there, but also that false apostles are starting to infiltrate the church and starting to lead the people astray with false teaching, trying to discredit Paul and therefore discredit the teaching, which is the gospel that he taught in those 18 months before.

The false apostles, as we will learn, falsely accused Paul of many things. And we reviewed this last week. I don't have a slide for this, but let me go through some of the things that we know that they falsely accused Paul of.

Now we know this because of direct references in 1 and 2 Corinthians or by inference in 1 and 2 Corinthians. Paul was accused of being a ministry failure.

He was accused of being weak and lacking rhetorical skills. They accused him of being fickle, unreliable, of being a false apostle, of being a money seeker, of lacking spiritual power, of manipulating the gospel, of being boastful, and having false humility.

[12:07] Now, put yourself in the shoes of a church member at Corinth. And you have these other false apostles.

Paul refers to them as super apostles in sarcasm coming in and discrediting a man who established the church and taught you for 18 months. Well, when Paul hears this, he's in Ephesus during his three years in Ephesus.

He halts his ministry at Ephesus. He takes an emergency trip over to Corinth to figure out what's going on, to get firsthand witnessing, if you would, of what's happening with the church, with the church members, but also with these false apostles that are infiltrating the church.

So he takes an emergency trip. It's called a painful visit in 2 Corinthians 1, verses 15 and 16. It's referred to as. This emergency visit was cut short because of some painful confrontation.

And we see that reference in chapter 2, verse 1. The false apostles appeared to have already begun their meddling in the church, discrediting Paul and persuading the people about different teachings and different doctrines than Paul had taught them.

[13:24] But the defining moment of that emergency or painful visit appears to have been abuse or some offense that was poured upon Paul by someone in the congregation during that visit.

Maybe by one of the outsiders, but not likely. Paul's pain was intensified when the church either supported this individual, this one doing the offending, or they either supported the individual or they just stood silently and did not come to Paul's defense.

We see that in chapter 2, verse 5, and a reference to that in chapter 7, verse 12. And we don't know for sure, but based on what Paul wrote later in 2 Corinthians, some Bible commentators suggest that this dispute seemed to be over some affront directed either at Paul's person, his ministry style, maybe in his attempts to discipline the church, or all of the above.

Notice what was left out of there. Doctrine. Right? They were unimpressed. They were in disagreement with style over substance with Paul.

So Paul withdraws back to Ephesus. He's vexed. He's humiliated. But by withdrawing, Paul is attempting to diffuse what could be an explosive situation and to give it time to let things cool down.

[15:02] And this results in him changing his original travel plans to go to Corinth. We read in chapter 1 of his plans he wanted to go on his way to Macedonia. He wanted to go by and stop and stay at Corinth, then continue to Macedonia, but then when he departed Macedonia to come back and spend a second long visit with Corinth.

But those plans changed after this painful visit. Now, can you see how the false apostles twisted that around? Ah, Paul, he's fickle. He makes plans and then changes them.

How can you trust him? He doesn't know what he's doing. From day to day, he can't make up his mind. Just one example. So this changes his plans. So we won't study that this morning, but in future sermons, I hope to get to where we'll unpack that a bit more.

So, Paul back in Ephesus hurt because of many things I just mentioned. He sends them what's referred to as a severe letter. And he sends it with Titus. He sends it to Corinth. He eventually departs Ephesus. So Titus is on his way to Corinth. There's a, in Acts 19, I think we read, or Acts 18, we read about a riot.

[16:18] And so, Paul gets out of town to Ephesus. He travels to Troas to hopefully meet up with Titus to get a report about this letter. No Titus in Troas.

So he continues to Macedonia where he eventually meets Titus on the return there. And guess what? He receives a positive report from Titus.

Titus told Paul of the Corinthians' longing that they had for him, of their mourning for what had happened in that interaction with him, and for their zeal for Paul.

Wow. What a turnaround, right? So Paul was encouraged, but he also anticipates that there's still pockets of resistance in Corinth.

Right? Probably still some, still some disgruntled church members, maybe some false apostles still holding out, trying to, again, dissuade the church from Paul's doctrine.

[17:17] And so, he writes 2 Corinthians and sends that to them. He sends it with Titus, and he writes 2 Corinthians to prepare for his eventual visit there.

And the letter includes a refutation of many of the accusations against him. And so, that was hopefully, was that five minutes? Hopefully that was quick.

But that's sort of what we went over last week, but in a little more detail last week. That sets the stage for 2 Corinthians. Now, in previous months, I've preached through the first 11 verses in 2 Corinthians, which is more of an introduction and a greeting.

And so, here we are in verse 12, starting to get into the meat of 2 Corinthians. And so, turn your Bibles, if you're not there already, turn your Bibles to 2 Corinthians 1.

And I'm going to read from verse 12 to verse 22. This morning, we'll only go through verses 12, 13, and 14, but I want to read through verse 22 for our reference.

[18:25] Alright? So, 2 Corinthians 1, starting at verse 12. Paul writes, For our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience, that we behaved in the world with simplicity and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom, but by the grace of God, and supremely so toward you.

For we are not writing to you anything other than what you read and understand, and I hope you will fully understand, just as you did partially understand us, that on the day of our Lord Jesus, you will boast of us as we will boast of you.

Because I was sure of this, I wanted to come to you first so that you might have a second experience of grace. I wanted to visit you on my way to Macedonia and to come back to you from Macedonia and have you send me on my way back to Judea.

Was I vacillating when I wanted to do this? Do I make my plans according to the flesh, ready to say yes, yes, and no, no at the same time?

As surely as God is faithful, our word to you has not been yes and no. For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you, Silvanus and Timothy and I, was not yes and no, but in Him it is always yes.

[19:52] For all the promises of God find their yes in Him. And that is why it is through Him that we utter our amen to God for His glory.

And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us and who has also put His seal on us and given us His Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.

So we see in these verses, in this section of verses between 12 and verse 22, three ways that Paul stands firm in integrity for the gospel.

The three ways we see, and it's broken down by verses, number one, he stands with a clear conscience in God's grace. That's important, in God's grace. And that's what we'll unpack this morning.

In the future, we'll unpack verses 15 through 20. We see that Paul stands on God's faithfulness as he stands firm in integrity. And then lastly, in verses 21 and 22, we see that Paul stands together with Christ.

[20:57] But for this morning, we'll cover the first point. Paul stands with a clear conscience in God's grace. So I have verse 12 up on the screen. Let me read it again.

For our boast is this, Paul writes, Now if you see, I've colored some of the words in orange.

And those are the words that we'll sort of focus in on during our time this morning. As we understand again the context of how Paul stands firmly in integrity.

Right? He, how do you do that when you're accused of all these things that maybe on the surface there's some truth to them.

Right? I mean, we see that, this is one example, Paul did change his travel plans, but when you understand why he changed the travel plans, it makes total sense. But those false apostles will twist that, right?

[22 : 03] Just like politics nowadays, right? Look for any opportunity to twist and turn the truth into something that's false. So in verse 12, Paul says, For our boast is this.

So we see the word boast is present in verse 12. And if you read ahead, if you paid attention in your Bible as I read, we see it again in verse 14. In verse 12, Paul begins by presenting his grounds for boasting.

That is, the testimony of his conscience. And then when we get to verse 14 near the end of the sermon, we'll see that he expresses hope that the Corinthians will boast of him at the day of the Lord, just as he will boast of them.

Now, even though we're just getting started with verse 12, we have to stop. Right? And we have to acknowledge that it seems a bit odd or perhaps even counterproductive that Paul would speak in terms of boasting here.

Right? He was wanting to refute the negative claims and accusations against him. So, in my human, small-minded thinking, I don't know that I would start it out by talking about me boasting.

[23 : 22] Right? It would seem that I'm playing right into the hands of those false accusers. Even more noteworthy is that Paul's references to boasting occurs more frequently in this letter than in all of his other writings combined.

Now, I've got a number for you. Of the 55 total references to boasting in all of his writings in Scripture, of the 55 references in all of Paul's writings, 29 of them are right here in 2 Corinthians. Over half of the references to boasting are here in 2 Corinthians. So, we have to ask ourselves why the heavy usage here of boasting?

Well, the answer is is because boasting is unfortunately a concept or a trait or a characteristic that resonates with those in Corinth.

That's not a compliment. Right? One might say that Paul is speaking their language. He's speaking the language of boasting because it's something they will resonate with that they'll understand.

[24 : 30] See, boasting and arrogance and contempt for others of any sort of lesser degree, that was common in the Corinthian environment. And it was gaining a foothold in the church as well.

And we see this in Paul's earlier epistle to the church in 1 Corinthians. And so, I want us to turn back a few pages just to help you understand the severity of this issue of boasting of arrogance in the Corinthian church.

So, turn back to 1 Corinthians. Go to chapter 1 and I'm going to read verses 26 through 31 just to give us a sense of what this boasting looks like and what this boasting is about as Paul writes and refers to it in 1 Corinthians.

So, 1 Corinthians chapter 1 verse 26 Paul writes and remember he's writing to the church to his brothers. Verse 26 For consider your calling brothers not many of you were wise according to worldly standards not many were powerful not many were of noble birth but God God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong God chose what is low and despised in the world even things that are not to bring to nothing things that are so that no human being might boast in the presence of God verse 30 and because of him you are in Christ Jesus who became to us wisdom from God righteousness and sanctification and redemption so that as it is written let the one who boasts boast in the Lord see Paul emphasizes that the Corinthians should not boast in any worldly position any accomplishment because their calling and salvation they're entirely of whose work of their work or of God's work of God's work and we see that the purpose of God in choosing the weak and the foolish is to prevent human boasting and so by Paul addressing this then we know that there's an issue in the Corinthian church with this but that's not the only place and there's more as the television commercial would say there's more right so let your eyes move over to chapter 3 in chapter 3 let's see what Paul writes in verses 3 through 7 that this may be familiar to you some of you

Bible students who have read 1 Corinthians right so verses 3 through 7 for you are still of the flesh for while there is jealousy and strife among you get that jealousy and strife among you you are not

of the flesh and behaving only in a human way for when one says I follow Paul and another I follow Apollos are you not merely being human what then is Apollos what is Paul servants through whom you believed as the Lord assigned to each I planted Apollos watered but God gave the growth so neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything but only God who gives the growth so we read about the divisions that are taking place in the Corinthian church why because they're boastful they're arrogant I follow Apollos well you may follow Apollos but

[28 : 11] I follow Paul right boastful prideful yeah I'm you know I'm following the apostle Paul right I'm with the main guy Apollos he just came on the scene recently right why do they do that right why do we do that sometimes right it's because you're being boastful you're trying to raise yourself into an elevated position Paul basically tells them to stop that to stop with all the jealousy and strife caused by their boasting and their boasting and the leaders who they follow Paul insists that all the work is done by God not by human leaders boasting in human leaders or in one's allegiance to a particular teacher it's just misplaced and it's ultimately God who causes the growth but there's more let me read for you a few verses out of chapter 4 chapter 4 verses 6 and 7 Paul writes I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit brothers that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another for who sees anything different in you what do you have that you did not receive if then you received it why do you boast!

as if you did not receive it verse 18 some are arrogant as though I were not coming to you but I will come to you soon if the Lord wills and I will find out not the talk of the arrogant people but their power so he's referring to some arrogant people in Corinth again it could be the church folks there it could be the false apostles that may be infiltrated earlier but he's referring to them as arrogant boastful people one more chapter 5 verses 1 and 2 it is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans for a man has his father's wife and you are arrogant in the ESV there's an exclamation point after that and you are arrogant are you not rather mourn to mourn let him who has done this be removed from among you he's highlighting sin that's taking place in the church because of pride and boastfulness and arrogance well unfortunately we see that the Corinthian

Christians were little different from their pagan fellow citizens in regard to boasting and arrogance they even looked down on Paul for they took offense now get this they took offense that he worked with his hands and they derided his humble condition let me go back to chapter 4 again this is in 1st Corinthians and let me read what Paul writes now this is this is a different flavor of boastfulness right this is the people in Corinth looking down at Paul looking down at Timothy and Titus looking down at the apostles in their state right Paul writes in chapter 4 verse 8 already you already and this is sort of sarcastic alright so you have to catch the sarcasm here already you have all you want already you have become rich without us you have become kings and would you that you did reign so that we might share the rule with you for I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all like men sentenced to death and now he's getting serious like men sentenced to death because we have become a spectacle to the world and to angels and to men we are fools for Christ's sake but you are wise in Christ we are weak but you are strong you are held in honor but we in disrepute in disrepute verse 11 to the present hour we hunger and thirst we are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless and we labor working with our own hands when reviled we bless when persecuted we endure when slandered we entreat we have become and are still like the scum of the world the refuse of all things many of the

Corinthian Christians many of them did not appreciate Paul's work as an apostle why? because they had adopted this false means by which to measure apostles and their ministry right this false means of of being poor and of working with their hands right like wait a minute right they you know it's we see that today right class warfare I suppose right that that folks that are a little more elite look down upon those who work with their hands who are financially poor right who are in not a generous position in life as they are right there's an arrogance right there's a condescending sort of spirit toward them and this is what is happening in the church in Corinth against Paul you see how it just sort of just fills in some of that background of what Paul is against and because they have this sort of condescending spirit toward Paul and toward those working with him here's the caution here's the problem it leaves them vulnerable to the influences of the false apostles who would arrive and infiltrate the church because of their attitude and because of their false perspective on the apostles they are being set up they are just being so vulnerable for the enemy to come in through

the false apostles and to discredit

Paul just right for the picking as we would say so that gives us a little bit of perspective on what's happening in the Corinthian church as it relates to their spirit of boastfulness and arrogance so coming back to 2nd Corinthians in chapter 1 in verse 12 the verse that we're looking at we see that Paul is using boasting as a theme that the Corinthian Christians fully understand does that make sense now now understand now you sort of get some insight into where Paul is going not not necessarily as whoa wait a minute what's Paul doing talking about being boastful now he's talking their language but take a closer look in what he tells them in which he boasts in what he puts his confidence in what's the verse say our boast is in this the testimony of our conscience I'm a bit behind on the slides these are just some of the scripture references you can get this

[35 : 26] I'd rather you just listen you can get this on the website when it's done those are the verses that I referred to earlier all right all right here we go so so Paul writes for our boast is this the testimony of our conscience so what is our conscience what is our conscience all right so I have the Greek word up there sunadesis if you can pronounce it great if you can't that's okay I can't pronounce most of these words either all right but this Greek word behind our word that we know is conscience it has the idea of knowing oneself right the soul reflecting on itself it refers to the human faculty whereby a person either approves or disapproves of his or her own actions it denotes the human faculty of critical self-evaluation now that sounds like sort of a dry boring definition great what's that mean can you can you explain it in simpler terms well yes

I can John MacArthur you know the late John MacArthur in his commentary he describes conscience as a warning system and I think if you all if some of you have the MacArthur study bible if you look down the study notes I think this is what you'll read as well that he likens one's conscience to a warning system placed by God into the very framework the human soul like physical pain which warns of damage to the body the conscience warns of damage to the soul it either affirms right behavior or it condemns sinful behavior okay I think I think we have a good sense of what our conscience is right another bible commentator and I put this is on the screen I loved how he put it this way he says the conscience is not to be equated with the voice of God or even the moral law all right so be careful some of you may think oh the conscience that's that voice in my head that's

God speaking to me no it's not that is not your conscience the conscience is not to be equated with the voice of God or even the moral law rather it's a human faculty which adjudicates fancy word for saying it renders a decision based on evidence it adjudicates human action get this by the light of the highest standard that a person perceives by the highest standard that a person perceives now since all human nature has been affected by sin right for all have sinned right scripture teaches that we've all sinned that means that our conscience is also affected by that sin that's why we can't say that the conscience is God's voice to us all right it's a human faculty it's a human faculty for example it's possible that one's conscience might excuse some action for which God would not excuse right and vice versa right our conscience may condemn us for an action that God would allow all right as Paul writes in 1st Corinthians 4 verses 2 through 5 the final judgment of anything that we do the final judgment belongs only to

God in verse 4 there Paul writes for I'm not aware of anything against myself he says my conscience is clear this again in 1st Corinthians chapter 4 I'm not aware of anything against myself my conscience is clear but I am not thereby acquitted it is the Lord who judges me all right so the conscience can never be accorded the same position of ultimate judge of one's behavior all right so now you're thinking okay so can I trust the conscience can I trust my conscience or can I not well let's go back to that definition that this commentator provided us right since the conscience holds people to their highest perceived standard believers need to set that standard to the highest level yes how do we do that how do we set the highest standard to ourselves and our perception well the answer is simple you know the answer right it's by reading by studying by meditating on by memorizing and by submitting to all of God's word by reading studying meditating on memorizing and submitting to all of

God's word the judgment right the adjudication again fancy word the decision making of our conscience is only right if it accords with God's divine truth let me repeat that the judgment or the decision making the adjudication of our own conscience is only right if it accords with God's divine truth I read this somewhere or I heard it in a sermon a while back I don't remember but it stuck with me the person who I heard it from I think it was a preacher he said that the conscience functions

like a skylight not like a lamp think about that for a minute right our conscience functions like a skylight anybody have a skylight in their home you know probably a tube or a rectangle you know lets the light in from outside our conscience operates sort of like a skylight not like a lamp it does not produce its own light but merely lets moral light in that's good that's good isn't it right it doesn't produce its own light our conscience doesn't produce its own light but it lets moral light in the apostle

[41 : 54] Paul was so attuned to God's calling and so permeated so saturated with divine truth and Christian values that his conscience was indeed a reliable judge of his conduct and can the same be said about us can the same be said about us we'll hold the application until the end of the sermon okay so Paul argues back to verse 12 that the inner tribunal of his conscience has assessed whether or not he conducted himself according to simplicity or holiness and godly sincerity right that's verse 12 and the verdict of his conscience is yes yes he has conducted himself according to simplicity and to godly sincerity why because he is attuned he's saturated he is filled with God's truth and God's law God's word if you look at verse 12

Paul writes the testimony of our conscience that we behaved in the world now the ESV says with simplicity and godly sincerity so let me go over that briefly so simplicity I have the word up there on the screen haplates haplates simplicity and the next word godly sincerity these are very similar words in meaning this particular word can also be rendered and it's probably rendered in some of the different translations represented this morning right a sincerity holiness or maybe you'll see integrity in your Bible and it conveys the idea of sincerity and wholeness and purity right it's to act with singleness of heart right you're single hearted you're not duplicitous that's what Paul is saying I'm not acting duplicitously if that's a word right I'm not double minded in what I am sharing with you Corinthians I'm single minded in purpose

Paul uses the same word over in chapter 11 verse 3 it's a familiar verse Paul writes but I'm afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere same word from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ with a single minded devotion to Christ Paul has acted with the Corinthians in purity of heart and mind that seeks their good Paul acted with simplicity Paul acted with godly sincerity too according to verse 12 godly sincerity this Greek word signifies purity and carries an association of transparency right so the previous word single mindedness sincerity this word more about purity and transparency the root word here connotes being judged by sunlight right something to be found pure when it's unfolded and examined by the sun's light in Paul's day unscrupulous potters would fill the cracks in their pots with wax before selling them careful buyers would hold the pots up to the sun by which the light would clearly make visible the wax filled cracks that's sort of the picture here right you're shining light on something to see something as transparent and pure that's what this word means this is what

Paul is communicating to his brothers in Corinth Paul writes again verse 12 for our boast is this the testimony of our conscience that we behaved in the world with simplicity and with godly sincerity Paul is found to be truthful honest and transparent he writes in chapter 2 verse 17 just a few paragraphs over he writes for we are not like so many peddlers of God's word but as men of sincerity as commissioned by God in the sight of God we speak in Christ so Paul acts with simplicity with holiness Paul acts with godly sincerity with transparency with transparency with purity and if you follow along in verse 12 Paul's actions were not guided by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God so again based on the translation that you have the words here may be earthly wisdom might be fleshly wisdom worldly wisdom human wisdom right those all synonymous right basically these terms just mean the opposite of true wisdom of God's wisdom only coming from God now I found this is an interesting point when talking about wisdom worldly wisdom most people in the ancient world regarded wisdom to be holy good no matter what form it took so ancient world wisdom intelligence no matter what it was was good you can see now how when these false apostles infiltrate the church they present their own earthly wisdom their own human wisdom and sometimes the folks in the

Corinthian church would follow along hook line sinker wisdom by definition was an understanding of what was true right or lasting and was manifest in behavior marked by common sense and good judgment but Paul get this Paul did not believe that Christ simply offered greater wisdom that could be added to worldly wisdom right now there's a catch there right you've probably heard this in weeks and months gone by Jesus plus right Jesus wisdom biblical wisdom heavenly wisdom plus worldly wisdom right Paul doesn't believe that and neither should we Christ offered the only true

wisdom and the world offers only a false fleshly wisdom they cannot be mixed so you can see how the church in Corinth that they're vulnerable right they've they've received true wisdom from Paul when he was there and now they're receiving false wisdom worldly wisdom from others and they're persuaded to discredit

[49 : 06] Paul and the message that he gave earlier well Paul's defense also makes clear that his exemplary conduct is guided by God's grace so again follow along in verse 12 I'm just sort of going phrase by phrase for our boast is this the testimony of our conscience that we behave in the world with simplicity and godly sincerity not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God now this is good this is good all right grace of God let me read a couple of verses to you because this reference to grace of God may not be what you think on the surface okay so interestingly comparing this statement with a parallel statement in chapter 2 verse 5 so just a couple of paragraphs over Paul writes in chapter 2 verse 5 I'm sorry in 1st Corinthians 1st Corinthians 2 5 I'm sorry and I think I have yeah it's up on the screen 1st Corinthians 2 5 Paul writes so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men worldly wisdom human wisdom right so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God parallel statement so we see that Paul also understands grace as an expression of God's power right it's more than just what we think about grace you know it's it's it's

God's favor on us that we don't deserve right usually usually that's sort of a way that it's easy to think about grace God's favor that I don't deserve and then mercy is he withholds what I do deserve right in this which is true in this context though if we look at some of the parallel statements that Paul makes in other parts of his writings when he refers to God's grace it's an expression of God's power which takes on a whole new meaning when he's communicating to the Corinthians in 2nd Corinthians chapter 12 verse 9 again another parallel Paul writes the Lord said to me this was the context here chapter 12 in 2nd Corinthians is about the thorn in the flesh right Paul's asking the Lord to take this from him right in verse 9 Paul writes but the Lord said to me my grace is sufficient for you for my power is made perfect in weakness therefore

I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses so that the power of Christ may rest upon me these are great words to underline your Bible or highlight in your Bible right so again 2nd Corinthians chapter 12 verse 9 the Lord said to me my grace is sufficient for you for my power is made perfect in weakness therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses Paul writes so that the power of Christ may rest upon me so grace here back in chapter 1 verse 12 grace here refers to the power that God grants to live according to his will and it is the driving force behind Paul's work as an apostle so we see in verse 12 that Paul boasts not in what he has done right let's go back to a few minutes ago what why is

Paul is going to launch into here talking about what he's boasting of Paul are you sure now we understand verse 12 Paul boasts not in what he has done not in his own efforts not in his own power but in what God has done through him that through the grace through the power of God he has behaved in the world and with the Corinthians with simplicity and godly sincerity so let me read verse 12 one more time and then we'll move on with that in mind Paul writes for our boast is this the testimony of our conscience the testimony of our conscience the adjudication the decision making the evaluation that my conscience is bringing to bear my conscience which is enveloped in the truth of God's love and God's word my conscience that we behaved in the world with simplicity with sincerity right and in godly sincerity in purity in transparency not by earthly wisdom but by the grace and right in their power by the grace by the power of God and then he adds and supremely so toward you now there wasn't a lot of commentary on supremely so toward you one of the commentators thought yeah that was Paul put a little dig in there right it's like listen

Corinthian Christians hey listen by God's power by God's grace I was I acted sincerely to you I acted purely single-minded single-hearted I loved you with everything that I have and supremely so toward you Corinthians right can you see there's a little bit of humor there I think if that's the right way to interpret that he had his hands full right if you read 1st Corinthians and 2nd Corinthians right Paul had his hands full with the church in Corinth so I just wonder maybe maybe not right so he ends that verse supremely so toward you alright let's move on to verse 13 I don't know am I keeping up with the slides alright we're coming to an end pretty quick verse 13 Paul writes so we'll do 13 in the first half of verse 14 for we are not writing to you anything other than what you read and understand and I hope you will fully understand just as you did partially understand us right so what word shows up three times there in that verse and a half understand right well as you recall from

our background review that we did a few minutes ago suspicions had arisen because of the poor impression that Paul made with the Corinthians when he was there right a discrepancy between the message and the messenger now at this point since we're looking at 2nd Corinthians let's remember that Paul's already sent three letters to them right the first letter before 1st [56 : 00] Corinthians the first letter when he was addressing immorality in the church then 1st Corinthians the one that's canonized in scripture right and then the severe letter the one that he wrote from Ephesus before he departed when he caught wind when he heard about the reports of the false apostles right so at this point he's been communicating a lot with him right with the Corinthian church he's been there in person during the second missionary journey he's been writing back and forth to them so three letters to the Corinthian church perhaps some of the Corinthians could not reconcile Paul's own suffering and afflictions with a message supposed to be good news that make sense Paul I'm hearing about all these struggles that you're having Paul tell me again about this gospel it doesn't look like you're living in good news you're afflicted you're going through trials you're suffering

I'm trying to reconcile your life and what you look like with your message I'm having trouble perhaps there's some in Corinth that are having trouble reconciling those well if so if that was the case and I'm sure it was for some they could not yet see that Christ's strength is made perfect in the apostles weakness it's hard to see perhaps Paul was unimpressive in person to others which might make the gospel unattractive to them right think about politics right think about the people you see on TV I fear to know if I would really know and understand people that what appeals to them on these TV ads or on these speeches right is it how one looks is it is it styled over substance right that's the regality and there's probably some of that in the

Corinthian church as well Paul writes in chapter 10 verse 10 Paul writes this is how we know Paul writes well for they say his letters referring to himself for they say his letters are weighty and strong but his bodily presence is weak and his speech of no account so there's not a favorable impression of Paul by some of those in Corinth and so they're trying to reconcile Paul physically and his message but in his strong writing so Paul's response to these suspicions or impressions or accusations it's here in verse 13 and the first part of verse 14 right Paul basically says church I have no hidden motives I have no hidden meanings that need to be deciphered from my letters Paul wrote nothing else to them other than what they could read and understand right there's no hidden meanings there again verse 13 for for we are not writing to you anything other than what you read and understand and I hope you will fully understand just as you did partially understand us Paul's making the claim the statement that I'm being as simple minded as I can in my messaging in my communication to you Paul's message is that he has spoken clearly simply openly and freely he writes in chapter 6 verse 11 we have spoken freely to you Corinthians our heart is wide open and so Paul affirms the straightforward character of his letters in verse 13 his teaching is not veiled it's not equivocal to put it plainly Paul wrote what he meant and meant what he wrote and again we see in this verse and a half we see the term understand three times well let's make sure there's nothing there's some of the verses that I referred to earlier right so this term understand that it's used three times in this verse and a half it's what you would think it means right it signifies a proving knowledge or a recollection of something that's already known the point here being that when Paul's writing to the Corinthians he's acknowledging you all have acknowledged and you understand what I have written in the past why all of a sudden now are you thinking that I'm being duplicitous that I'm being double-minded in my communications to you Corinthians remember our relationship and how it was I shared the gospel message and you understood it we established the church there you know you are genuine believers you know the gospel what's gotten into you don't all of a sudden forget what I've taught you that's what he's saying there right for we are not writing to you anything other than what you read and what you understand and I hope that you will fully understand just as you did partially understand us for the Corinthian believers who possess the gospel they should have recognized and approved that which

[61 : 32] Paul openly writes as an apostle they shouldn't have been taken away by these false apostles that were accusing Paul of these various things for the Corinthian believers did possess the gospel and Paul reminds them in chapter 4 verse 2 Paul says we have renounced disgraceful underhanded ways we refuse to practice cunning or tamper with God's word but by the open statement of truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God that's chapter 4 verse 2 in chapter 13 verse 8 again in 2 Corinthians Paul insists for we cannot do

anything against the truth but only for the truth and so the Corinthian believers should not therefore be influenced by Paul's physical appearance by his verbal speech by his circumstances by his trials and his afflictions and sufferings and they shouldn't be persuaded at all by these false apostles and their false accusations and then finally we go to we wrap it up in the last half of this verse 14

Paul concludes this section that on the day of our Lord Jesus you will boast of us as we will boast of you instead of being ashamed of Paul the Corinthians should have boasted in the Lord about how God so mightily used Paul both in Corinth and elsewhere they should have been proud so proud of Paul that they eagerly looked forward to the day of our Lord Jesus when they would embrace him in eternal and perfect fellowship now to be clear the reference here that Paul uses on the day of our Lord Jesus that's not the day of the Lord which is the time of God's fierce and final judgment on the sinful world this day the day that's referred to here is the time when glorified believers will appear before the Lord Jesus when their salvation will be completed and made perfect does that make sense that's why Paul says you will boast of us as we will boast of you

Paul looked forward to that day when the presence of those to whom he administered would bring him great joy 1 Thessalonians 2 19 and 20 Paul writes this!

That's good isn't it?

That's good Paul's looking forward to that time that day of our Lord when there will be great rejoicing and great boasting great boasting and so Paul's back to boasting that's where we started in verse 12 with him boasting we're back at the end of verse 14 with him boasting but again this is boasting in what the Lord has done and so when we think about this Paul says we are talking about boasting of one another not boasting in one another the slight difference when you boast of one another that's what Paul wants to boast of the Corinthians he wants to boast of the Thessalonians but he's not going to boast in them who's he going to boast in who are we supposed to boast in in the Lord that's right and that's what Paul's point is don't misread this it's easy if you're just reading through here and then it could come across that well Paul's pretty full of himself right

[65 : 18] I mean come on did you not read this at one point in time and you had to him what's that all about that sounds really prideful no no no no no he wants them to boast of Paul in the Lord 2nd Corinthians 10 17 Paul writes this let the one who boasts boast in the Lord are you looking forward to that day think about especially for those of you who are a little bit older in age and and you've had the opportunity to know many many believers you've maybe lived life with friends with family you've been a part of different churches isn't going to be a glorious day that day of the Lord when we all as believers are going to come together and we're going to see people that we know right and we're going to remember oh yeah

I remember walking through a trial with you and somebody may say Greg thank you for being there you didn't even know it but you were there when I needed you most right there's going to be great boasting thank you thank you Chris thank you Bob beautiful memories of the past not boasting in them right we're thanking the Lord for them right it's like what we do each month when we recognize birthdays and anniversaries right so for our guests who are here at the beginning of each month for those in our membership we sort of highlight whose birthdays and whose anniversaries there are why are we celebrating!

are we trying to lift up the person who's having a birthday or having an anniversary no that's not the intent right the intent is to recognize we want to boast of you in the Lord because the years of marriage that he has given your marriage for the years you've had on this earth to be a faithful servant of him that's why we talk about birthdays and anniversaries right we want to brag on the Lord and this is much the same way well in these three verses I'm out of time thank you for hanging in there in these three verses we see how Paul stands with a clear conscience in God's grace and because of this Paul was able to look forward to the day of our Lord Jesus with great joy as I hope you do too he did not have to fear false accusations against him because his conscience verified by the power or by the grace of the Lord that he had not perverted divine truth and he would gladly stand before his

Lord with no fear his conscience he boasted of the testimony of his conscience he had a clear conscience for that looking forward to that great day when he would be with those who he ministered to so in summary I would like just I going to throw this up on the screen for your and again I did horrible with all right here we go with you can get this all right look at this real quick and then we'll close so as we think about as we look and witness how Paul handled this very stressful very tense situation with the church of Corinth right what can we learn from Paul and how he

handled that and here are just some questions that I came up with the first bullet right our ministry and daily life should flow from a conscience aligned with God's truth right we talked about that so question for you do you examine your motives regularly before the Lord something to think about we saw that

Paul did that secondly integrity does not come from charisma or cleverness right it's the fruit of grace do you depend daily on the Holy Spirit for wisdom or are you leaning on strategy and image are you leaning on style over substance the Lord knows the Lord knows thirdly let your words be trustworthy whether you're teaching or texting or testifying or working or playing are your words sincere and consistent with your life are they single minded are they when they're held up to the light would we see cracks wax!

[69 : 43] filled cracks like cracks in a pot or would we see single minded purpose and devotion and purity in your words and as we say this often right out of the heart right out of your heart is when it comes to your words lastly are you investing in relationships that will endure to eternity think about it look ahead to that great glorious day of the Lord Jesus are you discipling are you encouraging!

you serving others in a way that will bring mutual joy before Jesus simply asked are you investing in things that are eternal and not temporal these are some things that I observed as I studied these three verses and how I saw how Paul reacted to the situations he was in what about you let's pray father I just praise you for your word I praise you for the apostle Paul I praise you for insights that you give us through the word Lord thank you that you give us a word that displays your glory and your majesty that displays both the tough times and the trials and afflictions but thank you for showing how godly men handled it but most importantly father thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ thank you for your grace thank you for the power that we have through him thank you for the ability for us to live with joy and though life is hard and sin is great in this world that we can look forward to a time of boasting in you and what you have done through us and through others thank you for Jesus Christ the one who saves the one who reconciles the one who gives us hope father we have read in this letter that Paul lived for you that you alone are worthy of his life father he lived sold out for you I thank you for the clear conscience that we read about in his life Lord and even now I know that you challenge us to live in it with a clear conscience as well so help us not be lackadaisical about it help us to be on the alert to be on the offensive to study your word to learn and to memorize and to meditate on it and pray for our guests who are here I pray that they would work for a clear conscience and I praise you for those who do have a clear conscience that their moral tank is full of your truth and your love thank you for that

Father thank you for our time together Lord thank you that you allow us to worship you in spirit and truth with our voices and with our ears grateful in Christ's name Amen