**Text**: 2 Corinthians 1:12-14
**Title**: Sincere Conduct
**Truth**: Christians must conduct themselves by God's grace in godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom.
**Date/Location**: October 12, 2025 at FBC (rev. of 8/14/2025)

## Introduction

The outline of 2 Corinthians is this: After introducing himself, Paul speaks of his ministry and how it connects with the Corinthian church (ch. 1-7). He teaches the church about their responsibilities with regard to a financial offering they were participating in (ch. 8-9). He returns to defending himself and his apostleship (ch. 10-12:13) and then reports that he will soon return for a third time to the church, and he hopes it will be a good visit (12:14-13:14).

The overarching concern from 1:12 through chapter 7:16 is an explanation and defense of Paul's ministry to the Corinthians against its detractors. Paul explains the principles by which he exercises his work under God, and in particular with respect to his relationship to the Corinthians.

What should you do if there is a problem—hard feelings—that develop between you and someone else? What did Paul do here? He addressed it head-on by mentioning all the problems and responding straightforwardly to them. That is a model for us. We do not deal with problems by ignoring them, or hiding from them, or not talking about them as if that will make them go away, or by isolating from the person with whom we have the problems. Those things will only make the problem worse over time. (Of course, if it is a minor problem, it may just go away if you are patient. You need not talk every problem into the ground!)

## I. The Charge of Insincerity and Its Impact

A. Paul is under fire because of perceptions prevalent among some of the congregation. They could have developed a laundry list of complaints, much like it happens when someone begins to separate from another person or church. In Paul's case, there were four items:

1. **Flip-flopping his travel plans**. Paul's travel plans changed as many as three times after he communicated them to the Corinthians.[1] You cannot blame the Corinthians for becoming confused, if not upset, about Paul's "poor" planning. Coupled with negative feelings about Paul to begin with, this could easily be used as a criticism. After all, opponents will latch onto *anything* that they can use to criticize, even if it is minor and blown out of proportion, or outright false.

2. **Writing letters that are equivocal**, evasive, or duplicitous. Equivocal describes a statement that can be interpreted in two or more ways, usually to confuse or mislead the hearer/reader. Paul was emphatically *not* that way, but the Corinthians thought so. They had already misunderstood Paul's first letter (1 Cor. 5:9-13). Peter even said that what Paul wrote was hard to understand at times (2 Peter 3:15-16).

3. **Conducting himself in a manner that lacks integrity**. There may be "hanging out there" an accusation about his handling of the large sum of money being collected for offering to the Jerusalem saints (1 Cor. 16:2-3 notwithstanding, and 2 Cor. 8:20-21).

4. **Inconsistent personal and remote manner**. In 2 Cor. 10:10 they said that his letters were powerful, but when he came in person, he was weak, and he could not speak well.

B. Paul offered responses to these charges: 1. 2 Cor. 1:15-2:4; 2. 2 Cor. 1:13; 3. 2 Cor. 1:12, 4:2, 6:3, 8:20-21. 4. 2 Cor. 10:11.

[1] 1 Cor. 16:3-8 the travel plan was Ephesus → Macedonia → Corinth → Jerusalem (possibly). In 2 Cor. 1:15-16 the plan was modified to Ephesus → Corinth (in Achaia) → Macedonia → Corinth again → Jerusalem. He did not make it as planned. His travel plans were changed when he went to Corinth in the midst of his stay at Ephesus, so that his final travel itinerary was this: Ephesus → Corinth (the painful visit) → Ephesus, followed by his original plan, Ephesus → Macedonia → Corinth → Jerusalem (Acts 20:1-3, 2 Cor. 2:12-13). Unfortunately, the plot on his life in Greece caused him to change the latter part of the plan yet again, dropping the immediate travel to Jerusalem and going Corinth → Macedonia → Philippi → Troas → Miletus → Tyre → Ptolemais → Caesarea → and then to Jerusalem (Acts 20:3-21:17).

C. The Corinthians had some false impressions of Paul and did not understand him well. But that fake information led them to have very real negative feelings. It undoubtedly has happened in your relationships. Misunderstandings of facts turn into very real hard feelings. Perception is reality, as the common proverb says. Maybe we should make a corollary to that proverb, because "misperception is reality" too. Some of the Corinthians' wrong perceptions of Paul really closed their heart toward him. This caused real effects in the real world, even though their thoughts were based on *wrong or incomplete information*. For example: in 2 Cor. 7:2 Paul appeals to the believers to open their hearts. Their hearts were closed. The closed condition of heart is what happens to someone who has "closed themselves off" from another person, when they have anger, malice, suspicion, doubt, many criticisms, etc. about a person. That is no way to treat a brother or sister in Christ!

D. But what if you can listen to one another, and break the cycle of fake news and real feelings, or fix some issue that you have, and move on in Christian forgiveness?

E. Changing travel plans should be no big deal. We are not talking about someone who affirms they are coming and then repeatedly does not come. This was a case where there was a death threat and other valid ministry issues, so a change should not have elicited any hard feelings. In the eternal scheme of things, it is *nothing*. But from what I can tell, the Corinthians made it a big issue.

## II. Integrity in Conduct – 1:12

A. The first three charges are answered in 1:12-2:4. The point is that in conduct and letter, including the matter of the travel plans, Paul is conducting himself with integrity. He maintains this good conduct toward the world and abundantly so toward the Corinthians. The basis of his conduct is not fleshly or worldly wisdom, but God's grace. He gives credit to God for how he is able to live.

B. At the start of this section, Paul says that he has a reason or source of pride with respect to his ministry. He is not shy and retiring about it. Rather, he really believes that he has done a good ministry and had faithful interactions with the Corinthians. (We can believe him; but *we* need to make sure that our conduct really is that way before we make such a statement!)

He says that this has to do with the testimony of his conscience.

1. The conscience is the intuitive knowledge of God's moral laws and demands. It is an accusing or defending mechanism that allows us to discern right and wrong. It is part of being human. The conscience can be wrongly informed or damaged (1 Tim. 4:2, Titus 1:15), thus causing it to operate with a wrong standard. But Paul's conscience has been redeemed and rightly informed, and he is confident of how he is living for God.

2. Paul's conscience defended his conduct as being proper. He uses several words and phrases to describe it.

C. Description of His Conduct

1. First, **simplicity** is not the opposite of *complexity*, but rather of *duplicity*. It means sincerity, uprightness, frankness, proper motivation, simple goodness, without strings attached or hidden agendas or motives.

2. Second, **sincerity** is similar. It means free of dissimulation, sincerity, purity of motive, without hidden motives or pretense. The Corinthians were suspicious that something else was going on behind the scenes. "No one can be that good. There must be something amiss." Or "he must be trying to pull the wool over our eyes." Or it could be that God is at work in the person's life!

3. Third, the word **conduct** means to live in terms of certain principles, to act, or behave. No rocket science there.

At this point, be sure to note that Paul is speaking in general terms about the integrity of his conduct. He is not suggesting sinless perfection, for no one possesses that until heaven.

D. Coming up, we will see a particular test case, namely his recent travel plans. He said he was coming to Corinth, but he did not.

Using that as a "foil," let me comment regarding the problem of people saying they will do something and not doing so.

1. When folks say they will do something yet do not do it, it can cause distress. It could be a) they say they are going to church and do not; b) they say that they will take care of something, and they do not; or something like that. Now understand that I am not talking about providential hindrance – sickness or car breakdown or whatever. But you soon get the idea about someone when they have a pattern of "saying and not doing."

2. They could be completely honest in their initial statement in the sense that **they intend to carry it out**. But they could a) lack planning or ability so they promise something they cannot deliver. They are over-zealous. Or b) they might be double-minded, saying one thing and then changing their mind. Or c) they could be lazy and disrespectful.

3. But what is more distressing still are people who say that they will do X but while they are saying so they have a hidden agenda, i.e., they mean that they will not do X, or they will do something different instead. In other words, **the intent *at the time* was to mislead**. It is wicked and sinful. This is what we call dissimulation or duplicitousness.

   *Dissimulation* means to hide feelings or motives by pretense. To *dissemble*[2] means to conceal something under false appearance (Rom. 12:9), to conceal truth, to behave hypocritically (Gal. 2:13). It is relevant in matters of love (Rom. 12:9, 2 Cor. 6:6, 1 Peter 1:22), faith (1 Tim. 1:5, 2 Tim. 1:5), and wisdom (James 3:17).

   To be *duplicitous* means to be deceitful, double-dealing, to use hypocritical cunning or deception. It starts inside (Matt. 23:28, Mark 12:15, Luke 12:1, 1 Peter 2:1) which comes out in lies (1 Tim. 4:2).

E. In the first case, the intent may really have been there. The problem was a lack of following through for some reason. The worse case is when the intention was never really there. Their

[2] A good KJV word, used only four times: Josh. 7:11, Ps. 26:4, Jer. 42:20, and Gal. 2:13.

motivation was wrong to begin with. If you have behaved this way, take note. That is shameful conduct for anyone, let alone a Christian. You need to repent.

F. Basis of His Conduct

1. Paul's conduct *was not* based on fleshly wisdom, that is, with thoughts that reject God's sovereignty and supremacy, with worldly planning, etc. See James 4:13-17.

2. His conduct *is* based on the grace of God. His whole life was governed by the principles and rule of God's grace. This notion of the basis of his conduct also spills over into the question of "who gets the credit?" It was certainly not Paul's own abilities or wisdom that were due the credit. Rather, credit belonged to God for all that Paul was enabled to do, and the fact that he *cared* in the first place about living with a good conscience.

G. Result of His Conduct.

Finally, note that Paul did not conduct himself in integrity simply because that would allow him to boast. Instead, he conducted himself that way simply because it was the right thing to do. Doing so had the beneficial side effect that he could use his conduct and the testimony of his conscience in his defense when it was questioned. But whether or not it is pragmatically helpful to conduct yourself this way, you must do so. In other settings, it may be *disadvantageous to do so*—like if your boss asks you to lie and you conduct yourself uprightly. You could lose a job or promotion.

## III. Integrity in Letters – 1:13a

A. Recall that in 1 Cor. 5:9ff Paul mentions a previous letter. That letter, at least in part, was misunderstood by the Corinthian believers, and called for a clarification in 1 Corinthians. Peter even said that some of Paul's letters were hard to understand. Even so, here Paul is saying that in his writing he is not writing evasively, shrewdly, with double-meaning, or between the lines. What he means he writes, and what he wrote he means. The point is that his writing is clear and plain. It is certainly not duplicitous.

B. We should note that Paul was quite transparent with these people in his oft writing to them and visiting. There was nothing hidden or sneaky. The goal was simply understanding!

If there is anything that you do not understand or have a problem with, please ask or talk about it with the appropriate person!

C. For instance, he does not write about his refusal to receive financial support in 1 Corinthians in order to be able, by some sort of "reverse psychology" to get the Corinthians to support him. We should not do that kind of thing either.

## IV. Hope of Improved Relations – 1:13b-14

A. The "end" is the opposite of "partially" in the next verse. Paul was hoping that they would fully understand him and his communications with them, even as they partially did already. Paul is saying that he wants the Corinthians to find pride in him without reserve, and that Paul would likewise be proud of them. In other words, if they continued in their present state, they would always have an asterisk in their mind—at best—about Paul's integrity and this would cloud their view of him. They would not be fully happy to be associated with him. But if they could carefully consider Paul's reasoning and circumstances, they would see that further investigation would actually enhance his credibility, not diminish it.

B. In other words, he wants them not to be ashamed of each other in the last day, the day of judgment and blessing. Paul would not be ashamed of them because of their contentious conduct toward him because soon—hopefully—it would be fixed. And they would not be ashamed of him as if he were some sort of second-rate apostle because they would read the rest of this letter and the light bulb would turn on.

C. But beyond that, that they would take pride in the fact that each are there in the day of the Lord Jesus. Personalize that for a moment. Won't you be so happy to see your fellow church members and family in the future with Jesus in Heaven? After making it through all the problems in this life, we will be able to say, "Look, Jesus worked in them so that they lived for the Lord and did a great job." That is the boasting Paul speaks of.

D. In the near term, this would mean improved relations between Paul and the Corinthians because they would have confidence in him now (not just in the future) and so would defend him against those coming into their assembly who criticized him.

## Conclusion

The main point of what we have said in this message is that we must conduct ourselves in sincerity—not just "I tried" but "I did." There is no excuse for not carrying through with what you say; no excuse for saying things you do not mean; no excuse for duplicitousness. The bottom line is that we must also live "in simplicity and in godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God."

Here are some examples to help you grasp this principle:

1. King Saul started out humble and seemingly sincere. But soon he cut corners, disobeyed God, and did things for appearance's sake. He ended up in paranoia and tyranny. King David repented after he sinned and was a man after God's own heart.

2. Two students take an exam. One uses worldly wisdom by taking shortcuts, cramming, and preparing to cheat if needed. The other paces her studies over the course of several days and tries to really understand the material. The end result will be different, but even if the first student gets a better grade than the second student, the second has pleased God in her conduct.

3. At a workplace, there may be two kinds of people. There is one who does the bare minimum to get by but talks a big game and gives the impression that they are doing all kinds of work. They try to figure out ways to make themselves look better (but not necessarily *be* better). This is fleshly wisdom. There is another worker who diligently attends to their job and also fixes the issues left by others so that things will go smoothly down the line. They do not say much, but just keep plugging away, trusting God to reward them. This is godly wisdom and sincerity.

How can you conduct yourself at home with godly sincerity and not fleshly wisdom? At school? Church? Work? Online?

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