**Grace to You** :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

**The Soul's Warning System Part 2**
Scripture: 2 Corinthians 1:12-14
Code: 47-6

Now for our study in God's Word, we return to 2 Corinthians chapter 1. We are looking at a brief text, verses 12 through 14. For those of you who are visiting with us, we go through books of the Bible, particularly the New Testament, verse by verse, seeing what God has to say in His mighty and true Word. And we find ourselves in this wonderful letter that Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, the first chapter, verses 12 through 14, looking at the subject of conscience. You will notice in verse 12 the word "conscience" appeared and we got stuck on that word last week and I want to sort of pick it up where we left off.

The ancient Greeks personified conscience as they personified many things in their religious tradition. In fact they identified conscience as a goddess and gave her a name and the name of the goddess of conscience was Nemesis. Nemesis was believed to be the very personification of reverence for moral law. And secondly, Nemesis was also believed to be the angel of vengeance, overtaking individuals with full retribution for all their reckless transgressions. Frankly, the Greeks had a pretty good fix on what conscience is and what conscience does. And that personification is a fairly accurate assessment of conscience because conscience does include reverence for moral law and it does include retribution and vengeance.

In fact, a graphic painting expresses the work of Nemesis, at least by one author's judgment...or one artist's judgment, I should say. And in this painting he depicts a man fleeing for his life and it is obvious from the painting that the man is running as rapidly as he can with a great amount of fear. It is obvious from the expression on the man's face that his soul has become the harbinger of a thousand terrors and he is being tormented like a storm. His eyes are bulging out of their sockets in fear. And as he runs in this rapid head-long kind of flight, following behind him flying swiftly is Nemesis and in her hand is a great flashing sword ready to strike him down. Such was the Greek perception of conscience.

I remember in some of my literature classes in college being fascinated by a particular poet by the name of Lord Byron, fascinated for a number of reasons, not the least of which was the moral debauchery of his life connected to the sheer genius of his mind. Lord Byron, as one might imagine, was beset with the pangs of conscience in a great measure because he was so committed to sin and vice. At one point in his writing he wrote a poem which was an ode to none other than Nemesis. He wrote:
"O thou who never yet of human wrong, left the unbalanced scale, great Nemesis. Thou didst call the

furies from the abyss and bid them howl and hiss."

Well the Greeks and even those who understood Greek literature had a fairly accurate view of conscience. Conscience is reverence for moral law. Conscience can be a tormenter. In fact, someone said, and I think it's true, conscience is either your best friend or your worst enemy. Conscience, as we've been learning, is a marvelous gift from God. Conscience is an internal component of humanity designed to warn you about sin. That's what it does.

And as Paul writes this second letter to the Corinthians, conscience is much on his mind because as it says in Romans 2:14 and 15, conscience either accuses you or excuses you. It either indicts you or it exonerates you. Conscience is your own self commentary on the state of your righteousness or sin.

Now the reason that this is a big issue to Paul as he writes this letter is because conscience...listen carefully...is the highest human court of appeal. Did you hear that? Conscience is the highest human court of appeal. There is no court on earth higher than the court of conscience. The Superior Court of this city and state, the Supreme Court of this nation could deliver an innocent verdict and a person could walk out being exonerated by the highest courts in this land only to be besieged by an indicting conscience that knows the truth. There is no higher human court than conscience.

And so, Paul speaks much about conscience in this letter, reflecting much on what is going on in his own conscience because he is in the midst of a defense of himself. And he appeals to the highest human court. Conscience is not a divine court. It is not God. But for the divine adjudication, one must wait until we are in the presence of God, then will every man hear the verdict that God has rendered. But in the meantime, on earth conscience is the highest court.

Now remember, some false apostles had come along and they were assaulting Paul. They wanted to take over the Corinthian church and teach error. They were messengers of Satan, disguised as angels of light, but really they were men teaching demon doctrine from the pit. They wanted to destroy the church and replace truth with error, so they began to attack the truth teacher at Corinth and that was Paul. If they could destroy people's trust and confidence in Paul, they could then take his place and propagate their error. They attacked his character, they attacked his integrity, and they attacked his teaching.

In fact, let's just take three categories and that will sum up the categories of their assault: first--personal, second--relational, thirdly--spiritual. They attacked Paul on the personal level, that is his own life, his own personal life. They attacked him on the relational level, that is his relationship with others. And they attacked him on the spiritual level, that is his relationship with God. And they said he is in sin in all three categories.

In the personal category they charged him with being wicked, sinful, living a life of evil, being a sinner, being impure. And as a result, having to suffer the chastening of God. They accused him in front of the Corinthian church of being a sinful, wicked person.

Secondly, they attacked him relationally. They charged him with being insincere, cunning, shrewd, deceptive, manipulative. They said that he used people to gain his own selfish ambitions and he was not what he appeared to be on the surface, he was a fake and phoney, and underneath were all kinds of subterfuges in which he was trying to take advantage of others.

Thirdly, they attacked him on the spiritual level and they charged him with misrepresenting God, misrepresenting God's Word and misrepresenting God's truth. They said he was a false teacher and a liar and a fake.

So on the three basic fronts they assaulted him. Self, others and God...that sums it up. All a man has is himself, his relation to others and his relation to God. And they hit him on all three fronts. Sadly, but apparently, many in the church bought into these lies, even though there was no ground for them whatsoever. They had seen and experienced the power of God's truth through Paul. They had no reason to question him personally, relationally, or spiritually. There was no substance to any of the charges, it was all innuendo, it was all implication and there was no evidence, and yet they bought into it.

You hate to think that people do that but they do. They did it then and they still do it today. You could come into the church and start rumors about almost anybody and you would find at some point people who would join in the revolt and the mutiny. Paul wrote a letter to confront this mutiny, that letter was delivered by Titus, it's not in the New Testament. Titus took that letter, delivered it. Paul himself made a visit to just see the thing first hand. And the Corinthians apparently responded positively to these efforts because by the time he writes 2 Corinthians they're starting to move back toward Paul. In fact, as we noted in earlier messages, Paul was comforted when Titus came back and told him that people had such a positive response. Chapter 7 tells us about that.

So things are looking up. The mutiny has been quieted for the moment, the rebellion has been stemmed for the time. But Paul knows that it can rise again. He knows that these kinds of things may have had a severe wound, but not a mortal one. But the false apostles are still there and there are still going to be some willing hearts to hear. And so to make sure that the accusations are put to rest, he writes 2 Corinthians. It's a rather long letter, thirteen chapters. And in it he lays out every conceivable way under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit his own integrity. They had attacked his behavior, they had attacked his motives in his relationships and they had attacked his doctrine and therefore his relationship to God. It was a complete assault on his life and this letter is written, even though he knows that many people have come back toward him and the mutiny has been quelled for the moment, he writes this to settle the issues once and for all. And the amazing thing is that he appeals

to the highest court of evidence humanly speaking and that is his own conscience.

By the way, one verse sums up these categories of accusation. Go to chapter 4 and I'll show you this. I think it's kind of a...it's kind of an interesting little verse because it has implications for the whole of the assault. Paul in verse 1 talks about having this ministry, receiving this ministry by mercy and not losing heart, even though he's assaulted, even though he's attacked he doesn't lose heart. And then he answers these three areas of attack by saying this..."We have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the Word of God." Stop right there.

Now there in his own words reference is made to each of the three areas of attack. In the first category of personal attack he says, "We have renounced the things hidden because of shame." That is to say the secret practices of personal, private sin. Sensual things and shameful things in one's own personal, private life, he has renounced sin at the level of personal conduct, he says. We've renounced that.

Secondly, not walking in craftiness is another way of saying we have renounced the cunning deceptive devises or tricks used to take advantage of others, a shameful, sinful motive that cause one to use people for personal gain. He had renounced sin at the level of personal conduct and he had renounced sin at the level of relationships with others so that he was not shrewdly and cunningly using devices to elicit from them something they did not want to give but were tricked into giving.

And then thirdly he says we have renounced adulterating the Word of God. And here he answers the attack on the spiritual level that he was misrepresenting God, misrepresenting the gospel, falsifying the truth. He said we renounced all such corrupt teaching that was certainly part of his Judaistic past. He says my life is not dominated by personal vice, it is not dominated by self-interested deception of others and it is not dominated by a corruption of God's truth, no matter what the accusers are saying. He denies that not only in this verse but throughout this entire epistle. And anyone who knows him knows that is true, verse 2, "By the manifestation of truth we have commended ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." He says anybody who knows has the witness of their own conscience that there is nothing in my life that speaks of personal sin, relational sin, spiritual sin. So he denies those charges. These are the categories, however, that make up the assault on Paul.

Let's go back then to our text because I think the same three categories flow into picture here. There are three lines of defense that Paul has in this section...personal, relational and spiritual...his own personal life, his life with others and his life with God. These are the categories of assaults so these are the categories in which he answers. And in our text, verses 12 to 14, he appeals to the highest human court again which is a fully informed conscience...a fully informed conscience, a full y sensitized conscience is the highest form of human adjudication.

Paul could have said...Look, you're questioning my character, you're questioning my relationships, you're questioning my theology and my relationship to God, I've got some pretty fine friends who are going to write you some letters. And he could have found his friends, people like Timothy and others who were associated with him, Titus, and had them write long letters extolling Paul's human character, his relationships and his theology. He could even have said...I would like to identify in your own Corinthian assembly so-and-so and so-and-so and so-and-so and gone down some of the names of people that he had himself influenced greatly and I'm going to ask them to come next Sunday and stand up and give testimony to my character and to my relationships and to my spiritual connection with God and truth. But he didn't. He didn't appeal to his friends. He didn't appeal to his coworkers. He appealed to a higher court than all of those. He appealed to his conscience.

Let me be so bold as to follow that up for a moment. You hear people talk about accountability all the time. You hear people say that it's very important that you have relationships of accountability, that if you're going to grow spiritually you have some kind of discipling partnership, somebody who comes alongside of you and holds you accountable to a certain level of conduct, a certain level of spiritual behavior, attitude. And I agree that that's important. And certainly it should be said that a life partner, a husband or a wife should fulfill that role at a level that nobody else can because they know you best and they should take it upon themselves to be, as it were, your strength spiritually.

I have acknowledged to you and acknowledge again through the years that there is no higher point of accountability on the part of some other human being than I have with my own wife. She knows me best and she's around me most. She understands my strengths and she understands my weaknesses. And she has this ridiculously high standard. She actually believes that I should live everything I preach...can you believe it? She holds me to it and her proximity to me keeps that demand very much before my eyes. And that is a very, very wonderful level of accountability to have. I have around me men in the various ministries that God has given to me who have very high expectations of what I am as a man, of how I conduct myself of attitudes and actions of words and deeds that I do. And there is a high level of accountability with them as well.

Much more sensitive than those men and much more sensitive, however, than my own wife and much more informed than any of them is my conscience. There is no point of accountability greater than my conscience. There are things that others cannot know and never will know and my conscience knows them full well. There are indictments that my conscience can make against me that no one in this world can make and that is why conscience is the highest human court. And when a man can say "I have the testimony of my conscience bearing me witness" he has appealed at the highest level. That is the purest point of human accountability.

And it is amazing how good people can get at fooling all of the people around them but they can't fool their conscience. Learning to live sensitively and responsively to what conscience says is at the heart of spirituality because you can fool anybody...anybody, but not conscience, not a fully informed

conscience. And so we listen to conscience if nobody's there. Conscience knows what no one can know. And the wounded conscience will shoot a thousand piercing arrows.

Now in Paul's case conscience is appealed to and conscience exonerates. He says in verse 12, "For this proud confidence, our proud confidence is this, the testimony of our conscience." You call me a sinner, you call me a deceiver, you call me a false prophet and I will say in response...my conscience gives the opposite testimony.

Conscience was very important to Paul. He lived very, very sensitively with regard to his conscience. Go to Acts chapter 23 and remind yourself of what he said here because it really is a window on his whole life. Acts 23:1, the chief priests and all the Jewish council have brought Paul in to accuse him. And Paul looked intently at the council in chapter 23 verse 1, they're prepared to indict him, of course, and he says this, "You may indict me, brethren, but I have to let you know I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day." The lower court had said he's guilty, the highest human court of conscience said he's not.

In chapter 24 of Acts verse 14, again Paul is defending himself here against charges that were leveled against him. "I admit to you...he says...that according to the way which they call a sect, I do serve the God of our fathers, believing everything that is in accordance with the law and that is written in the prophets, having a hope in God which these men cherish themselves that there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. In view of this, I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience, both before God and before men." There is a great testimony. He was very careful in responding to his conscience. He had lived with a perfectly good conscience. He had maintained a blameless conscience. What a testimony.

In 1 Timothy chapter 3 Paul says to Timothy, "Now when you select deacons to serve in the church, they must be men who hold to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience." Unlike the hypocritical false teachers of chapter 4 verse 2 who are seared or scarred in their own conscience as with a branding iron, so that all of the nerves are burned dead and can't feel anything.

And then in 2 Timothy chapter 1 and verse 3 he says, "I thank God whom I serve with a clear conscience." Conscience was very, very important to Paul in defending himself, in getting in touch with his own heart. The word "conscience" in the Greek, suneidesis, means to know with oneself. In the English it means the same. Science is "to know," or it's about knowledge, con, "with." So even the English word means to have self-knowledge. The philosopher was right when he said, "Know thyself and to thine own self be true." He was simply saying listen to your conscience. Paul wanted to be at peace with himself. His conscience was not like Nemesis, was not chasing him and waving a flashing sword over his head about to severe it from his body. Even though when Paul wrote to Timothy and affirmed that he had a clear conscience, he was in a dungeon, he was condemned to die by having his head chopped off with an axe but he was perfectly at peace because he had a clear conscience.

That was the court that concerned him. And frankly, that was the only court that concerned him. Men could lie and falsely accuse all they wanted and he would appeal to conscience because conscience knew the truth. And if there was a wounding conscience, it would pierce him with a thousand arrows.

But in this case, back to 2 Corinthians chapter 1, conscience was not condemning him at all. In fact, conscience--the higher court--was overturning the biased, ill-conceived, lying verdicts of the lower courts of Satan's messengers who found Paul guilty. However, in the Supreme Court of conscience he was found innocent on all charges. And so he says as he begins verse 12, "Our proud confidence is this, the testimony of our conscience." The witness, the evidence is clear in the court of conscience. His fully enlightened conscience exonerates him completely.

And then he goes on to discuss how his conscience affirmed him and I believe he touches on the three categories of accusation.

The first one I told you was...what?...personal. Let's look at verse 12. In the personal aspect, they had accused him of personal sin, conduct of iniquity, he says, "The testimony of our conscience is this, 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." My conscience says that our conduct is not sinful but the opposite. There's the court of conscience overturning the verdict of the lower courts of Satan's messengers.

Remember now, the key to the plot to destroy the church was to destroy Paul, to try to make him personally sinful and wicked and characterize him as behaving in an evil way, of having a vile heart, of being filled with secret sins and iniquities. We don't know all the specific things that they said but the lies were behind the testimony that Paul is giving. Just to give a little bit of a feel for this, go over to chapter 6 because here you see him again referring to these same kinds of lies about his personal life. He says in verse 3, "Giving no cause for offense in anything in order that the ministry be not discredited, but in everything commending ourselves as servants of God in much endurance, in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses, in beatings, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in hunger,...here...in purity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness in the Holy Spirit, in genuine love, in the Word of truth, in the power of God by the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left, by glory and dishonor, by evil report and good report, regarded as deceivers and yet true."

He says in verse 8, "Some people want to give us glory, some want to give us shame, some have an evil report, some have a good report, some see us as deceivers, some see us as true. But I'll tell you this...he says...here's how I have lived...in verse 6...in purity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in genuine love, in the Word of truth, in the power of God and by the weapons of righteousness." All of this reflects that attack on his personal character, as well, of course, as an attack on his relationships there and on his teaching. But you can see that he's defending himself by

saying there's purity in my life. The lies against him were just that, lies.

Now you can go back to chapter 1 and here his conscience says that he is conducting himself in holiness and godly sincerity. Holiness, a unique word that means sanctity. There is a lesser attested reading and some Bibles pick it up called "simplicity." Sometimes you see the word "simplicity" here, it may even be in your edition. That's not as good a choice as the original word, hagiotes which basically means sanctity, or holiness. The idea is moral purity in contrast to the immorality and the corruption of which he was being accused by the false apostles who lived like that.

And then he mentions godly sincerity. The word "sincerity" is a marvelous word. In the English, sincere comes from two Latin terms, sincera which means "without wax." And that connects up with the idea of the Greek word eilikrinia, and that word means "to be tested by the sun," eili(?) is sun, krine(?) is to judge, or to examine. To say that someone was tested by the sun simply meant they were held up to the light for inspection. If you went into the marketplace to buy a piece of fabric, it would be very important for you to get it out from under the awning that you might have been in, or in the little shop you were in and take it out and hold it up to the sunlight and make sure, first of all, that the colors had not faded or run together, and secondly, that the workmanship or craftsmanship of stitching and sewing had been done to perfection. And if you were to buy some kind of a piece of metal that had been made into some kind of a box or utensil, you would take it out in the light where you could see that all was as it should be. If you were to purchase a pot, you would take it and hold it up to the sun because unscrupulous potters would have a crack in their pot after it was fired, and they'd want to sell it anyway, so they'd fill it with wax and, of course, as soon as you heated it the wax would melt and everything would run out of the pot. It was useless. And so you held the pot up to the sun and moved it around to see the sun shine through, and it would reveal the wax. You wanted to make sure it was eilikrines, tested by the sun and proven to be of high quality, that it was without wax. And Paul is saying that about his life. There aren't any flaws being covered up. There's nothing that's covered. You can take me out and hold me up to the sun and you're not going to find any wax.

A godly, personal sincerity or integrity went along with purity of life. He was not immoral. He was moral. He was a pure, godly man. He was a man who could be taken out in the sunlight and tested. There were no skeletons in his closet. This sincerity is a godly sincerity, that is a kind of sincerity that is devoted to God that is from God, that is God-given and God-related and God-oriented. Lest you think that he's achieved this on his own, he says it's not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God. It's not something by my own cleverness achieved, this holiness, this godly sincerity to which my conscience gives witness is not something that I have done by my own wisdom, it's not because I somehow have my own clever insight into religion and spiritual duty. This is not produced by fallen human nature, this is not produced by human wisdom or human desire. You already know how he feels about human wisdom, go back and read 1 Corinthians chapter 1 and chapter 2 and even into chapter 3 verse 19. Human wisdom was foolishness. Human wisdom is nothing but the expression of sinful man's revolt against the sovereignty of God both in being and in knowledge. Fleshly wisdom is

everything apart from Christ, everything apart from God, everything apart from Scripture, everything man comes up with on his own. And Paul says my godly sincerity and my holiness is not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God. He had not induced his own holiness and his own virtue by some clever personal scheme, rather it came from God and that's why in 1 Corinthians 15:10 he has that tremendous testimony in which he says, "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 within me." Whatever he was God's grace had produced.

So, he says the testimony of our conscience is that in holiness and godly sincerity produced not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God we have conducted ourselves in the world and especially toward you. I will not acknowledge that accusation of sin in my life...he says...ongoing sin. He wasn't perfect but whatever sin did rise, he dealt with it immediately and maintained clear accounts with God. There was no place in the world, no place in the world...he says...from which an accusation might come and be legitimate. In every place that he had been across the world, everywhere he went, everywhere he lived, everything he did, there was no place there was going to be the potential of a disastrous indictment. At all places and all times from the very time that he committed his life to Jesus Christ he had walked in holiness and godly sincerity. That's how he conducted himself in the world and especially, he said, toward you. More abundantly is what especially means, even more so toward you. If anybody knows that, you know it, I was there 18 months. You had ample proof. All the months, all the letters, the latest visit, all the personal contacts when people from your church have met me in other places, you know the holiness and the sincerity of my life. They knew his character, it was set against the ugly black backdrop of Corinthian corruption. They knew first hand the quality of his life. There was no question about it. There wasn't anything he ever did in the 18 months in Corinth, there wasn't anything he ever did anywhere else that could come back and provide a legitimate indictment for accusing him.

So Paul calls on conscience to testify of his innocence and of the accusations. And conscience ruled in his behalf. And he says, "My conscience gives bold testimony to my holiness and godly sincerity, not only with you, but everywhere else I've ever been." What a tremendous testimony, isn't it? Can you say that? Whether you're at home or somewhere else, whether in you're in your own house or traveling somewhere, whether you're with your friends, your wife, or your family, or whether you're alone, that there couldn't come an accusation from any part of the globe that could bring an indictment against you that would stand? Tremendous testimony.

You say, "Does that make a perfect man?" No, he's not a perfect man. Go to chapter 4 of 1 Corinthians for a moment and let me show you why. Verse 4, 1 Corinthians 4:4, he said, "I am conscious of nothing against myself." That is an absolutely astounding statement, isn't it? My conscience doesn't accuse me at all, "Yet I am not by this acquitted." What? I thought you just said that conscience was the highest human court? I did. But it's not divine. And you want to know something? Your conscience doesn't know everything. Do you realize that you sin and you don't even

know it? Sin is so much a part of your life that you can sin and it doesn't register? An attitude can pass, a thought can pass so fast that it doesn't even find a place in your memory bank, therefore it can provide nothing for conscience to accuse. You could have a clear conscience and not be perfect because there are some things your conscience doesn't know. Your conscience only reacts to what your mind knows and there are sins in your life your mind doesn't even record. And that's why he says I am conscience of nothing against myself, yet I'm not by this acquitted, the One who examines me is...whom?...the Lord. So we have to wait until the Lord does the final judging in verse 5.

Conscience knows what the mind knows. And Paul's mind and yours and mine is richly informed but not perfect. And our mind can't know all our sin. And so God is the ultimate judge, right? Until then, conscience holds high court. And aren't you glad that your conscience can't know everything? So Paul says...Look, you can accuse me of personal sin, my conscience exonerates me. Secondly, the relational question, and just briefly...verse 13, "For we write nothing else to you than what you read and understand or what you literally, what you've taken up into your knowledge, your deep knowledge, both the word "read" and "understand" are forms of ginosko, with prepositions on the front of them which have to do with knowledge. You could read it this way...We write nothing else to you than what you know and I hope you will know deeply or understand deeply until the end just as you also partially did understand us.

What's the point here? This is a sweeping testimony of answering the second category of accusation against him for his supposed relationships. Did Paul use people? Did he have foul personal selfish motives? Did he fake loving them in order to take advantage of them? Was he a deceiving manipulator? This is exactly what they were saying.

Over in chapter 7 verse 2 he says, "Make room for us in your hearts, we wronged no one." We corrupted no one, we took advantage of no one. That was what they were saying. And so he answers that several places. Chapter 11 again he answers it. Verse 9 he says, "When I was present with you and was in need, I was not a burden to anyone." I was in your midst and I had needs but I didn't ask for anything. I never took advantage of you.

Well here is the verdict of conscience on that. His conscience affirms that when we wrote we wrote nothing other...rather, when we wrote we said nothing other to you than what you understood. And I hope you will understand completely, that's what "until the end" means, telos, just as you partially did understand us.

What is he saying? He's saying...Look, there's no hidden agenda. That's what he's saying. There's no...there's no secret self-interest, there's no other issue here. Nothing is more...nothing more is on my heart than what I said. When I was with you and I spoke, in the letters when I wrote, that's all there is. We write nothing now than what you read and understand. What you anaginosko and epiginosko, what you take up and deeply understand. You know what we wrote was always clear,

was always straightforward, it was always consistent, it was always genuine, it was always transparent. There were no ambiguities. It's not a fair accusation to say there's a hidden agenda and I'm saying one thing and meaning another thing. Over in chapter 10 verse 11 he says, "Let such a person consider this, that what we are in word by letters when absent such persons we are also in deed when present." What I say to you in a letter when I'm gone is exactly what I'll be to you when I'm present. There is no hidden agenda. There is nothing under the table. You read it, you understood it. Verse 14 indicates that you partially did understand and then I hope now you will fully understand.

In other words, there's continuing information. When I taught you, when I wrote you, you read, you understood what I said. It was partial, that is there was more to reveal, and as I've written more and said more, it's unfolded and you've continued to understand, and I hope you'll understand perfectly. I want you to have the deep knowledge of what the Lord says to you and I want you to know that's all there is, folks, that's all there is. There isn't anything else. And my relationship to you is that honest. I just want you to understand the things I write and the things I say...that's all. I don't have any agenda, I don't want your money, I don't want your sexual favors. I don't want anything except that you would understand fully everything I've written to you. That's all I've said and that's all I meant to say.

That's a bold testimony that his conscience was clear, that there was never an ulterior motive. His conscience wasn't saying...Well, how about the time you hoped they took a love offering? His conscience didn't say that. There never was that time. Or...Well you really would have liked it a lot if they'd have given you some gifts so that it would have been easier for you to travel. His conscience didn't pang him on that. The bold testimony of his clear conscience with regard to his personal behavior was that he was holy and godly in sincerity...in sincerity and the bold testimony of his conscience with regard to his relationships was that he was pure and that all he ever wanted was exactly what he said. And that was that they understand the truth fully. That's all he wanted, no matter what the critics said.

And then lastly, they said that he was a false teacher misrepresented God, was a charlatan in terms of that and teaching errant theology. He should be classified as a false teacher. This is a serious charge of violating God's truth. And he has to answer this throughout the letter. For example, chapter 2 verse 17, "We are not like many, peddling the Word of God. But as from sincerity, as from God we speak in Christ in the sight of God." I'm not a peddler of the Word of God, a huckster, a con-man using the Bible to gain my own ends. I'm not twisting the truth of God. That's what they had accused him of.

Chapter 13 verse 8, he says we can do nothing against the truth, only for the truth. And again, the conscience of Paul responded to this indictment in verse 14. He says that we are your reason to be proud as you also are ours in the day of our Lord Jesus. What's that? He's looking forward to the day of the Lord Jesus. What's that? The day when Jesus comes.

Now if his relationship to God wasn't right, do you think he'd be looking forward to that? He was looking forward to that day. He was longing for that day, that day when the Lord Jesus would come. Why? In order that we together...can be together. And he says that we are your reason to be proud as you also are ours in the day of our Lord Jesus. I can't wait to get to that day and to be able to see you there. And as he said to the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 2:19 and 20, you are our crown of rejoicing. I can't wait to get to that day when I can rejoice in glory over you and I would like to think that when we arrive there you'll do the same over me. He's saying I don't understand why you don't feel about me the way I feel about you, as we look forward to that great time when the Lord comes.

Instead of being ashamed of Paul because supposedly he misrepresented the Word of God, instead of being embarrassed to be linked with a false teacher like Paul, Paul should be the reason for their boasting. He should be the reason for their joy. And they should be so proud of what God has brought to them through him. They should be so proud that they can't wait till the day when they're both together in the presence of Jesus Christ and they can embrace each other in eternal and perfect friendship. It should be for them an honor to be associated with Paul, as it was for him to be...to be in association with them.

He loved them. He rejoiced in them. He wanted them to feel the same toward him, particularly at that moment when the Lord Jesus came. I want to be as proud of what God has done...I want you to be as proud of what God has done through me for you as I am of what God has done through you for me...particularly in the day of the Lord Jesus. That's the day when we face Christ. That's the judgment seat of Christ. That's the day when God will bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts and then each man's praise will come to him from God...1 Corinthians 4:5. The day when the Lord takes His own and gives them their eternal reward, the day when everything becomes clear, and he's saying I just want you to feel about me the way I'll feel about you.

The point that I want to make is that he was looking forward to the coming of Christ. A man doesn't do that if his relationships isn't right. Paul was anticipating the coming of Christ because he knew it would be joy for him and he wanted it to be joy for them. And he knew his attitude was right and his heart was right and the joy would be his, and he wanted theirs to be right so that the full joy would be theirs. His conscience was clear with the Lord. His conscience was clear with them. His conscience was clear with himself. He had no fear of any earthly accusation and he had no fear even of the return of Jesus Christ. That's how clear his conscience was.

What a man. Nothing in his personal life, nothing in his relationship with anybody else, nothing between him and God that caused his conscience to accuse him. And thus the man lived in spite of difficulty and pain and in spite of abuse, false accusation, physical cruelty, disappointment, defections, all of it he lived content, absolutely content because his conscience wasn't accusing him.

How can it be? How can we ever reach that kind of point in our spiritual life? It can happen if you learn the Word of God and become strong in the truth, if you meditate on the truth, if you continually watch and pray, if you are carefully suspicious of your own spirituality, not thinking more highly of yourself than you ought to think, if you don't underestimate the seriousness of your sin, if you will purpose not to sin, if you will resist the first impulses of evil desire and when you sin immediately repent and be restored, you too can live the way he lived. What a testimony.

And then when the accusations come, you can appeal to the highest human court and be exonerated. That's the way to live. That's the way God intends for us to live. That's His provision in the power of the Holy Spirit and by His grace. Let's bow together in prayer.

Father, we thank you for again this wonderful time of worship. We thank You that we have been called to accountability again, accountability to this highest human court of conscience, a fully informed conscience that's been taught the truth. Father, we ask right now that You'll forgive all our sins, cleanse us, Lord. We know You did that at salvation, we were sprinkled from an evil conscience, we were washed. And, Lord, we want You to keep on cleansing us, keep that conscience clean. May our personal life and conduct be right, both here and anywhere else in the world. May our relationships be right, genuine, transparent, honest, open, not deceptive. And may our relationship to You be right. May we speak truth with You and with men so that we can look forward to Your return with no accusing conscience. Father, that's our desire and that's our prayer and, of course, it's all so that You can be honored and that You can be glorified in and through us. We don't want to be ashamed. As it says in 1 John 2, "Little children, abide in Him so that when He appears we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming." We...we want a clear conscience, a conscience that is affirming us and giving us joy and peace and contentment, no matter what's going on around us. Help us to so live in obedience to you, both in attitude and act as to maintain a good conscience. We thank You for that gift, for in it comes our assurance and our joy. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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