

## 2 Cor 1:12-14 Characteristics of Correct Conduct

One of the great problems of human communication is the tendency to misunderstand what others are saying and doing. That is especially true in our era in which so much communication is done through short written messages—email, text. We often communicate through little bursts of writing, and in doing so, it's easy to miscommunicate. It's hard to fully grasp what the writer is trying to say.

Paul had that same problem. Not that he was communicating through email or text, but the people of the church didn't fully understand what he was saying and what he was doing. The book of 2 Cor is an effort to help the church better understand his teaching and his conduct.

We are now ready to get into the body of the letter itself. Remember that the first part of the book gives us Paul's Explanation of His Conduct and Apostolic Ministry (chapters 1-7). The first 11 verses of the book are mostly introductory. Starting in 1:12, Paul begins to explain himself to his readers.

And he has to explain himself because he had heard of various accusations or complaints against him. Some of the people in the church at Corinth were very critical of Paul; they opposed him and found fault with him. He wanted to address these issues, and he does it by showing that there was nothing in his conduct to warrant this kind of opposition or criticism.

The main verb in this passage is "we conducted ourselves" – it's actually just one word in the original language (ἀνεστράφημεν)—"we behaved." The KJV uses the words "we had our conversation," but the word refers to daily behavior; i.e., conduct, lifestyle, how you live, not just how you talk.

In our world, unless you are hermit, it's almost impossible to avoid criticism. Someone is always going to find fault with what you say or how you live. Because we are imperfect people, someone will always notice and point out our failures, no matter how small they might be.

The response to such criticism is consistently godly behavior. When you live an honest, sincere, and godly lifestyle, you can be confident that criticisms are untrue.

In this short passage, we have several characteristics of correct conduct. These characteristics were true of Paul, and they should be true of us as well. We should be careful to make sure our conduct is correct. How should we conduct ourselves?

- I. .12 Conduct yourself with confidence. I.e., make sure that your conduct is right.

- A. Note the words “For our boasting is this.” KJV has “our rejoicing is this.” The word is often translated as boasting, glorying, or rejoicing.
- B. Typically, we think of boasting as something we do to honor ourselves. Boasting is usually self-centered and proud, at least in the way we think of it. When someone boasts, he brags about what he’s done.
- C. But the sense in which Paul uses the word here (*καυχησις*) is not a self-centered boast, but an expression of confidence. Read 2 Cor 7:4 and 14, 8:24, 9:2. In each of these cases, Paul is expressing his confidence in the church.
- D. So the boasting/rejoicing here probably pertains to Paul’s confidence; he is confident that his behavior has been appropriate. And he says this because some in the church have been critical of his behavior. But Paul responds by saying that he is sure that his behavior has been appropriate.

Confident behavior is that which you know is right. Paul knew that his behavior was right; no one could condemn him for anything he’d done.

Likewise, our aim/goal should be to live the kind of lifestyle that cannot be condemned.

Cf. Titus 2:8 (NKJV) *sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you.*

We can be and should be confident that our conduct is right. We don’t brag about how good we are; but if we are behaving ourselves according to biblical standards, we can be confident that our lifestyle is right/proper.

**Trans:** So Paul begins by stating his confidence that his behavior has been correct, no matter what others might say.

## II. Conduct yourself according to a good conscience. .12b

- A. Notice that Paul appeals to “the testimony of our conscience.” The Bible teaches that we all have a conscience. We all have an inner sense of right and wrong. We all have an inner moral compass showing us what to do or not do. We are all able to evaluate our own behavior. The conscience either condemns us because we’ve done something wrong or acquits us because we haven’t done anything wrong.
- B. The problem is that the conscience is a rather sensitive and easily-damaged capacity.

1. It can be insensitive—calloused, burned.
  2. It can be overly sensitive.
- C. Your conscience responds to what it has been taught. How you allow your conscience to be formed/taught is very important.
- D. If your conscience is working correctly, then it can be a valuable tool in guiding your behavior.
- E. Paul’s conscience gave witness to the truth that he had behaved himself appropriately. His conscience is clear; he has not done anything wrong.

**App:** We should never violate our conscience through our behavior. If you have an inner hesitation about any activity, you should not do it, even if you see other Christians doing it. If your conscience is not clear, don’t do it.

**Trans:** If your conscience is in good working order, and if your conscience is clear, then you can be confident that your conduct has been proper. Don’t ignore that inner sense of right and wrong.

### III. Conduct yourself with candor; i.e., with sincerity.

- A. The word here is “simplicity” (ἀπλότητι), and in this case, the word refers to the absence of pretense and hypocrisy (Acts 2:46; 2 Cor. 1:12; 11:3).<sup>1</sup> The word describes pure motives, as distinct from devious motives.
- B. A person can be “simple” in the sense of being without guile, naïve in a good sense. E.g., a typical 4-year-old is “simple” in the sense of being innocent and naïve, not hypocritical, two-faced, or devious.
- C. Paul is saying that he was not hypocritical in his behavior. He didn’t require a standard of others that he was not willing to uphold himself. His motives were pure; he was not being devious.

**App:** We know that nobody is perfect, and we aspire to standards higher than we actually keep. We are fallen people, and we should not expect sinless perfection from anybody this side of heaven.

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<sup>1</sup> Ronald F. Youngblood, F. F. Bruce, and R. K. Harrison, Thomas Nelson Publishers, eds., *Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1995).

However, we should expect people to live consistently with the set of standards and ideals that they claim to hold. If we are Christians, then we should live according to Christian standards of behavior. When we fall short of that, we repent and renew our efforts to live like we should.

Many people who claim to be Christians do not even attempt to live according to Christian moral standards. They say that they know Christ yet they deny that claim by living in open violation of his commands.

**Trans:** The Christian faith requires that we live sincerely—that is, we live out what we claim to believe. We don't expect perfection, but we do expect professing Christians to uphold and maintain high standards of godly behavior. We should be working toward that goal.

#### IV. Conduct yourself purity, i.e., with cleanness .12c

A. The next word, in fact, is translated as “sincerity.” It's almost synonymous with the previous word—having pure motives, being sincere, having integrity.

B. This is an interesting and unusual word (εἰλικρινεΐα).

It's a compound word from the root words “the sun” and “I judge,” thus literally “judged by the light of the sun.” If you have examined something under a good light and found nothing corrupt or inappropriate, you would use this word to describe it. A strong light has revealed it to be pure, spotless, and wholesome.

C. So if your conduct can withstand close scrutiny or evaluation without finding impurities, then your conduct is pure/sincere.

D. And notice this is “godly sincerity.” So the standard for purity here is God himself.

1. A common human flaw is that we tend to compare ourselves with others. It's easy to overlook our own failures or the sins and flaws of those we love. We tend to excuse our bad behavior. “Everyone is doing it; I'm no worse than anyone else. In fact, I'm better than a lot of people I know.”

2. But from God's point of view, godly purity/sincerity is far more stringent than human evaluation would be.

3. We judge things by God's standards, not our own. It doesn't matter how good you are in comparison to other people; that's not the standard of comparison.

- E. John 3:18f tells us that “men love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil.” People don’t want their deeds exposed to the light of God’s word. They don’t want to shine a bright light on their behavior. Paul stated that his conduct/behavior was such that, even when exposed to the light, nothing impure or inappropriate would be found. His conduct was characterized by godly purity.

**App:** I wonder if that could be said of you. If we were to expose your behavior to the light of God’s Word, would anything show up that was improper or ungodly? That’s a rather intimidating idea; who would want his behavior to be exposed in that way? But proper conduct is that which can be exposed to the light without any impurities being found. That should be our goal.

Psalm 139:23–24 *23 Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if [there be any] wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*

- V. Conduct yourself “not with fleshly wisdom.” (οὐκ ἐν σοφίᾳ σαρκικῇ) I.e., without corruption. .12d
- A. “Flesh” in the NT refers to the old, sinful, corrupt, depraved nature. If something is “fleshly,” it means that it is consistent with a sinful, unsaved way of living. The flesh seeks to indulge in sinful passions and lusts.
- B. Paul gave a whole list of the works of the flesh—  
Galatians 5:19–21 *Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, 20 idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, 21 envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.*
- C. If that list describes your behavior, then it can be described as “fleshly wisdom.” Wisdom in this sense is not true wisdom, but shrewdness or human cleverness. Living that way is not really wise, but it is very common in our world.  
James 3:15 *This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic.*
- D. So if your behavior/conduct is fleshly—depraved, corrupt, self-centered, like the unsaved world—then it is clearly not correct.

**App:** We live in an increasingly depraved, demonic, corrupt world, and it's very hard to avoid falling into that kind of conduct. But that's what we must do; we must avoid fleshly, immoral, corrupt living. We must separate ourselves from that kind of conduct.

VI. Conduct yourself contingently – “by the grace of God.” .12e

Something “contingent” is dependent, not self-sufficient. Correct conduct is dependent on God's grace.

A. Notice the little word “but,” which tells us that this is a contrast to what came before.

B. The opposite of “fleshly wisdom/cleverness” is the grace of God. Instead of indulging in the flesh—that is, following our own evil hearts—we should live according to God's grace.

**Quote:** [Paul's] actions have always been [motivated] by God's grace, not marked by scheming calculation.<sup>2</sup>

**App:** The only way we can conduct ourselves properly is through the grace of God. Our actions must be motivated by God's grace. We are dependent on God's grace in our lives to behave ourselves properly. Proper conduct is not something that comes from within ourselves—our own willpower.

More than that is necessary for consistently correct behavior. In addition to self-discipline, we trust that God's grace will provide what we need to live in the way that God has called us to live. We trust that God will enable us, by his grace, to live a godly lifestyle.

Philippians 2:13 *for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.*

VII. .12end Conduct yourself considerately; with a view toward others. Consider who is following your example.

Note two phrases that come after “we conducted ourselves.”

A. We conduct ourselves “in the world”—we should be concerned about our conduct and testimony in the eyes of the unsaved world. What we do “in the world” testifies either for or against Christ.

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<sup>2</sup> Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Milton Keynes, UK: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.; Paternoster Press, 2005), 186.

1. If our behavior is consistent with Christian standards, then we are testifying that Christianity is important to us; our faith influences our behavior.
2. On the other hand, if our behavior is inconsistent and hypocritical, we are testifying to the world that Christianity doesn't mean much to us; it has not changed our behavior.
3. All of us conduct ourselves "in the world," and it should be our goal that we give a positive testimony about Christ to the unsaved people around us.

**App:** What does the unsaved world conclude about you based on your behavior? Do they conclude that you are a Christian, or do they assume that you are just one of them? Is your behavior so like the world that there's no difference between you and them? Our behavior should testify to the unsaved world that we are followers of Christ.

- B. "more abundantly/exceedingly toward you" – Paul was especially careful in his behavior toward the people in Corinth, i.e., toward fellow believers.

**App:** We should be concerned about our conduct/testimony in the eyes of fellow believers. In fact, we should be more concerned about how other Christians see us than we are about how the unsaved world sees us.

- C. There should be no double standard, as if we conduct ourselves one way around unbelievers and differently among believers. We should be concerned about our conduct in the world and within the church.

**App:** Both the unsaved and the saved should see that our behavior is consistent with the Gospel and with Christian expectations. We should strive to maintain a good testimony among unbelievers as well as a good testimony among fellow Christians and church members.

Some people say, "I don't care what other people think. I'm going to do whatever I want." That's an unbiblical attitude. Christians are obligated to maintain a good testimony before unbelievers and even before other believers.

#### VIII. .13-14 Conduct yourself consistently.

- A. The point of verse 13 seems to be that what Paul was writing now was consistent with what he'd written before.

- B. Remember that this is likely the 4<sup>th</sup> letter Paul had written to the church. They had understood his previous letters, at least partially, and he's not writing anything different to them now.
- C. Paul had spent a year and a half with the people of Corinth. They knew him well, and he knew them. He had been consistent in his teaching, whether face to face or in his letters.
- D. .13b "I trust that you will understand" – apparently, the Corinthians did *not* understand Paul's behavior, but he hopes that they would.
- E. .13end "even to the end" – this is an expression that means "fully/completely." The people of the church had understood him partially, but Paul hoped they would understand him fully.

**App:** It's rather common that a church does not fully understand what the pastor is trying to teach. Even the great Apostle Paul had difficulty communicating in a way that his audience understood.

In 2 Pet 3:16, Peter acknowledges that there are "some things hard to be understood" in Paul's letters. We should not be surprised if we struggle to understand some things in the Bible.

- F. .14 Paul returns to his boasting/rejoicing again. He begins and ends the paragraph by using the same word.  
"we are your boast." Paul wishes that his readers had more confidence in him. He is confident in them, and he wishes that they would express more confidence in him.
- G. .14end Their true motives and conduct would be revealed in that great day, "the day of our Lord Jesus."

The Bible teaches that we will all appear at the Judgment Seat of Christ, and at that point we'll find out for sure whether our conduct was correct or not.

**App:** Consistent conduct is very difficult. It's hard to live consistently with what we believe. Behaving ourselves properly in all situations is not easy. The temptation is to tailor our behavior to the circumstances.

**E.g.,** if you thought you could avoid hurting someone's feelings by telling a lie, then tell a lie. People do that all the time.

God's law determines the rightness or wrongness of any behavior, and it's our duty to behave ourselves consistently according to God's expectations.



Notice one thing Paul does *not* say in response to the criticism he was receiving. He doesn't say "My conduct doesn't really matter. God loves me so much that he pays no attention to my sinful conduct." That's what a lot of people today say—unconditional love means that conduct doesn't matter. God's grace allows me to ignore rules, expectations, and traditions.

No, Paul didn't say that conduct doesn't matter. He said that his conduct was right and good, not worthy of condemnation or criticism. He invited close scrutiny of his behavior, knowing that he had done nothing wrong. We can't use the grace of God as an excuse for ungodly behavior. Instead, God's grace motivates us to conduct ourselves correctly.

These three short verses tell us a lot about proper behavior, and they set some very high goals/expectations for us. Paul conducted himself correctly, and the implication is that we should do the same.

Our behavior should be characterized by confidence that we are doing the right thing, a clear conscience, sincerity, purity, not indulging the flesh but living by the grace of God, considering our testimony before others, and living consistently with the teachings of the Christian faith. If that's true of your behavior, then you are conducting yourself correctly, no matter how others may criticize you.

That's a high set of standards to maintain, but it is a goal that we should be aiming at. And especially if other are critical of our behavior or questioning our motives, we must insure that our behavior is proper and appropriate according to biblical expectations.

This kind of conduct is possible only "by the grace of God" (vs. 12). We can't do it through will power or self-control alone. We must depend on God's grace to conform our conduct to biblical expectations.