

III. The Trouble with Travels

September 30 & October 1/2, 2014 2 Corinthians 1:12-2:4

Aim: To appreciate that the changes in Paul's travel plans were not due to a lack of integrity; on the contrary, it was the apostle's merciful and loving concern for the Corinthians that motivated him.

In popular novels nothing ever goes wrong for the hero. He strides through each episode of the story with success after success. It is not like that for ordinary people in real life; it was not like that for Paul. Because he did not return immediately to Corinth, as he had indicated he would, the Corinthians now regard Paul as a double-minded man, unable to stick to his plans. One sense in these words of Paul that nothing he can say will be able to change the Corinthians' opinion about him. And yet from his viewpoint he had the best of reasons for changing his plans and honorable motives for doing so.

Relationships with our fellow believers bring unique joy; but if spoiled, they may also bring grade sorrow. Those who ought to make us rejoice may sometimes distress us (2:2-3). That was Paul's experience with the Corinthians. Out of his desire to keep in touch, Paul made promises to visit them (1:16). The carrying out of Paul's intended plan to visit the Corinthians (1 Cor. 16:5-9), however, had not been as straightforward as he had anticipated. Circumstances arose that meant he had not kept his promise. As a consequence some of the Corinthians accused him of making his plans lightly, of promising to visit them without that purpose really being in his heart (1:17). It seems that this was being treated as a black mark against his character as a Christian. It is significant that Paul deals with this issue straight away. He must have realized that the acceptance of what he was to say later in the letter was to a large extent dependent on clearing away misunderstanding first of all.

In 1:12-14, Paul gave a general defense of his personal righteousness, appealing to the highest court in the human realm, his own conscience. The apostle's conscience exonerated him of all the false charges leveled against him. His personal life, relationships with others, and ministry were all above reproach. After that general response, Paul replied in 1:15-2:4 to the specific charge that he was not trustworthy. The false apostles claimed that Paul did not always speak the truth, but was unfaithful, fickle, and vacillating. They supported that trumped-up charge with the flimsiest, most trivial evidence: a change in Paul's travel plans. Instead of merely explaining why he made that change in plans, Paul dealt with the deeper issue of his integrity and truthfulness. Rather than engage in a battle of details, of specific charges and countercharges, he elevated the discussion to the motives and attitudes of his heart. By so doing, he provided a priceless look at a noble man of God.

A. Paul Defends His Change of Plans (2 Corinthians 1:12-22)

The higher demands of leadership leave the leader vulnerable to insinuations and false accusations by his people—and especially those who have a mind to question his leadership. The focus of the criticism recorded here was on Paul's changing his plans to visit the Corinthians. Initially he had promised to pay them an extended visit after passing through Macedonia, and perhaps even spend a winter there (cp. 1 Cor. 16:5-9). But then, after a report from Timothy, he paid the Corinthians a brief painful visit, promising he would return. However, once away from Corinth, he decided to send a harsh corrective letter, indicating that he

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would visit them twice as he traveled to and from Macedonia on his way to Judea with an offering for the poor. These changes, from the perspective of Paul's detractors, were evidence that the Spirit of God was not with him. They argued that Paul's conduct should be consonant with the unchanging character of God and that his word should reflect a God who never lies. Paul, they charged, was double-minded and duplicitous. And some even insinuated that his announced extra visit was really to extract more money from himself.

There were a number of factors about Paul's circumstances that explain and justify his behavior. First, it became apparent by the time he left Corinth that the problem that occasioned his visit was still unresolved. Back in Ephesus he may well have reasoned that a letter and time for the Corinthians to think things over might be a better approach. As it happened the (lost) letter to the Corinthians did bring about a resolution to the problem (7:5-16). Secondly, a crisis had occurred in Ephesus which put his life at risk and which necessitated his withdrawal (1:9; cp. Acts 20:1). Although Paul refrains from saying so, it may have been the Corinthians who were in the wrong in this matter. Instead of showing loving concern for him in his grave difficulties in Ephesus they had written him off as unspiritual and vacillating. We do well to avoid such ill-formed and unkind opinions as shown by the Corinthians. Let the facts first be gathered and explanations provided before firm opinions are reached.

1. A Clear Conscience (1:12-14)

Paul's reply, when reduced to basics, is that he has interrogated his *conscience* (1:12) in prospect of 'the day of the Lord' (1:14). The testimony of his conscience is that, on that day, Paul will be shown to have behaved both in the world at large and towards the Corinthians with holiness and 'sincerity that are from God' (1:12).

Notice that Paul carefully framed his opening statement with repetitions of the word 'boast' at the beginning and end and then used repetitions of the word 'acknowledge' to conclude the statement, to fix before his hearers the truth of his good conduct.

The false apostles had launched a three-pronged attack on Paul's credibility. On the moral level, they accused him of secretly being a wicked sinner, justly suffering all the time because of the chastening of God. On the relational level, they accused him of being insincere, deceptive, and manipulative. They charged that he was not what he appeared to be on the surface; that in reality, he was using the Corinthians for his own selfish purposes. On the theological level, they charged that Paul misrepresented God's Word and was a liar and a false teacher. What hurt Paul more than those baseless, slanderous lies was the sad fact that many in the Corinthian congregation believed them.

a) *Conscience (1:12)*

¹²*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.*

The defensive nature of his words reveals that Paul was under strong criticism from the Corinthian church, or a section of it. They felt that he had *conducted* himself badly both *in the world* and also in his *relations with* them.

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(1) Boast

The word ‘boast,’ which is common in this letter (noun and verb forms occur 25 times), has an ugly and un-Christian ring to it. It must be remembered, however, that boasting of achievement was common among both Gentiles and Jews. Paul is actually inverting their practice and throwing it back in their teeth. So far from revealing arrogance, which indeed it does in his critics, Paul’s boasting actually reflects his humility before the Lord. In particular the apostle is concerned to show that his motives, irreproachable as they are, do not rise from within himself, from ‘worldly wisdom,’ but from ‘the grace of God.’

Boastfulness is not usually reckoned a Christian virtue, but we should not misunderstand Paul. The term has a particular nuance as he uses it in this letter. We normally think of a boastful person as self-justifying and therefore as self-centered, but it is very clear here that Paul attributes his personal integrity to God’s grace at work in him. It is second nature to attribute any godly qualities he has to God’s gracious initiative.

Paul frequently used *kauchēsis* (‘proud confidence’ or ‘boast’), the related noun *kauchēma*, and the verb *kauchaomai* in this letter—twenty-nine of their fifty-nine uses in the New Testament are in 2 Corinthians. Negatively, *kauchēsis* describes unwarranted boasting in one’s achievements and merits (cp. Rom. 3:27; James 4:16). It can also be used, however, of legitimate confidence in what God is doing in one’s life (cp. 2 Cor. 7:4, 14; 8:24; 11:10; Rom. 15:17; 1 Cor. 15:31), as it is here. Boasting in the Lord and what He accomplishes in His people is proper; in fact, God Himself delights in such boasting (cp. Jer. 9:23-24).

(2) Conscience

The term ‘conscience’ comes from general Greek culture rather than the Old Testament. Nevertheless, Paul puts it to service in the gospel of Christ. It relates to the moral judgment we make on our conscious actions. It makes us ask if this or that action of ours was right or wrong. The word’s prominence in Paul’s Corinthian letters may indicate that it was a favorite word of the Christians at Corinth with their Greek background. Critics at Corinth may have condemned him, but his conscience, surely influenced by the Spirit of God, has not done so. This does not mean, of course, that conscience is infallible and never tells lies, for it needs to be educated by the Word of God, but in Paul’s case the exposure of his conscience to God’s truth was very far-reaching and he knew he had acted with integrity, however the situation may have looked to others.

Paul’s boast was about his clear conscience. The conscience is the soul reflecting on itself; both the Greek word *suneidēsis* (‘conscience’) and the English word ‘conscience’) have the idea of knowing oneself. The conscience either affirms right behavior or condemns sinful behavior. The conscience, however, is not infallible. It is neither the voice of God, nor His moral law. Since the conscience holds people to their highest perceived standard, believers need to set that standard to the highest level by submitting to all of God’s Word.

(3) Holiness (Simplicity) and Sincerity

The first false charge was that Paul’s suffering was God’s chastening for his sin. But Paul’s conscience was affirmed that his conduct had been ‘in holiness and godly sincerity’ (cp. 6:3-10). ‘Holiness’ is from *hagiotēs*, a word that describes moral purity or pure motives. (Some English versions, reflecting a reading with less support in the Greek manuscripts, read ‘simplicity’ instead of ‘holiness.’) ‘Sincerity’ translates the Greek word *eilikrineia*, a compound word made

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up of *eilē* ('sunlight') and *krinō* ('to judge'). It pictures something held up to the light of the sun for inspection. Paul's sincerity flowed from his holiness and purity of life. He characterized it as godly because God was its object and source. They did not stem from Paul's wisdom or his insights into religion and spirituality. 'Fleshly wisdom cannot produce 'holiness and godly sincerity,' because it is nothing more than the manifestation of sinful man's rebellion against God.

Paul says his relations with the Corinthians have been characterized by holiness and sincerity that are from God, or by God's grace rather than by worldly wisdom. The Corinthians seem to have been quite enamored by human wisdom, and Paul spent much time in dealing with the true nature of wisdom in writing chapters 1-4 of First Corinthians. There he made it clear that the practical outlook and actions of a Christian should be motivated and directed by a wisdom that is from God, a wisdom that cuts right across the world's outlook. It is not by expediency but principle that governs this kind of wisdom, for at the heart of it there is a deep concern for truth. 'Holiness' and 'sincerity' are certainly words indicative of principle. God's grace is the basis of this new wisdom.

Paul had heard their hurtful charges, but his conscience, which he knew would be judged by God, cleared him (cp. 1 Cor. 4:5). His conscience was clear because he had behaved with 'simplicity' (or uprightness) and 'godly sincerity,' and he did so by the grace of God. In Paul's thought, conscience—a clear conscience, a good conscience—is foundational to ministry (cp. 1 Tim. 1:5; 3:0; 2 Tim. 1:3; Acts 23:1; 24:16; Rom. 9:1).

God's holiness precludes the possibility of Him ever deceiving us. He is perfectly sincere in all His dealings with us. The Greek word for 'sincere' comes from two words meaning 'warmth or light of the sun' and the verb 'to test,' so that it literally means 'tested by sunlight,' that is to say, pure. Looking at the windows in our home on a dull day, we may feel they are clean. When the sun shines, however, we see the truth—they are dirty! God is utterly flawless.

b) Communication (1:13-14a)

¹³*For we are not writing to you anything other than what you read and understand and I hope you will fully understand—¹⁴just as you did partially understand us—*

Not only was Paul innocent of moral wrongdoing; he also was not guilty of relational wrongdoing. He had defrauded no one; he had used no one for his own selfish ends; he had deceived and manipulated no one (cp. 7:2; 11:9). Nor did Paul write his letters to the Corinthians with a hidden agenda. There was no deception involved; Paul wrote what he meant, and meant what he wrote. His letters were clear, straightforward, consistent, genuine, transparent, and without ambiguity. Both 'read' and 'understand' are compound forms of the verb *ginōskō* ('to know', forming a play on words in the Greek. The play on words *anaginōskete ... epiginōskete*, cannot successfully be reproduced in English. *Anaginōskete* refers to what they read in his letters and *epiginōskete* to what they know through personal contact with him. They are being assured that the two are in complete harmony.

They alleged that what he had written to them was difficult to *understand*. His conscience tells him that his holy and sincere motives have been operative both in the former (lost) letter as well as in the present one. He had written so as to be understood, which in part he was; he now writes with the intention that the Corinthians 'will understand fully.'

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The apostle was also sure that he had communicated clearly in his most recent correspondence to the Corinthians (the so-called ‘severe’ letter), and that what he was now writing was consonant with what he had already written.

Paul indicates too that his letters did not contain veiled hints that only the very astute could pick up, nor did he word them to make them open to more than one interpretation, so that he was ‘hedging his bets.’ His communications were absolutely straightforward. This clarity is characteristic of the Bible generally and the Reformers called this quality of it ‘the perspicuity of Scripture.’ They did not mean that everything in the Bible is easy to understand nor, for instance, that there was no richness of thought in Paul’s letters, for this is clearly not true. This feature of Scripture does mean though that the essential truths about God, about ourselves, and about the gospel of Christ, are expressed with crystal clarity, and that when an inspired writer is communicating at a practical level, it is never to confuse or to deceive.

This should be an encouragement to us in our Bible study. Certainly the Bible contains deep truth, but there is always truth in its surface meaning. There is a plainness about the Bible, for it was not written simply for professional theologians but for the ordinary Christian man and woman.

c) Consummation (1:14b)

—that on the day of our Lord Jesus you will boast of us as we will boast of you.

The last and most serious charge against Paul was that he was a false teacher. The false apostles alleged that he was guilty of spiritual wrongdoing because he taught errant theology. Like the two previous charges, Paul replied to this charge throughout the letter (cp. 2:17; 4:2; 13:8). The Corinthians should have been so proud of Paul that they eagerly looked forward to ‘the day of our Lord Jesus,’ when they will embrace him in eternal and perfect fellowship. Paul looked forward to that day, when the presence of those to whom he had ministered would bring him great joy.

Their questioning of his motives is ill based. When the great and coming day arrives and everything is revealed, he is confident that they will ‘boast’ of him.

Paul believes that the truth of what he says will eventuate in their mutual boasting in each other in the consummation of all things in Christ. What a reversal—they will boast in him! Paul is absolutely sure of his integrity and that it will stand the final judgment. And that is why he stands so tall here. He is armed with faith and a clear conscience.

Paul hopes any lingering qualms the Corinthian Christians may have about him will be fully dispelled and that they will become as proud of him and his ministry as he expected to be of them when Christ came again, for it is to the second advent that the phrase ‘the day of the Lord Jesus (cp. 1 Cor. 1:8) applies. All Paul’s work was done in the light of that coming, when he knew the value of it would be tested (cp. 1 Cor. 3:10-15).

As we get to know and appreciate the genuineness of one another’s holiness and sincerity, we are similarly able to boast of each other as the true work of God. The boasting is not in ourselves but in God. We know that the praise is not ours, but His. Paul needed to behave, as we all do, with the Day of Judgment in view. Although we may not always understand one another well now, ‘on the day of our Lord Jesus’ we shall know the truth about each other and our reputations. The final assessment of all character and conduct will be on that day.

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2. A Desired Visit (1:15-16)

¹⁵Because I was sure of this, I wanted to come to you first, so that you might have a second experience of grace. ¹⁶I 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 to Judea.

These verses show one of the major reasons for Paul's writing of this letter, for they clearly suggest he was under attack by some at Corinth for a change of plan. They are however of real value to us for they show that Paul faced real problems in his ministry, just as we often do, and we can learn practical lessons from the way he deals with them. A comparison with 1 Corinthians 16 shows this outline of his plans to be a little different from the one set out there. Why is this? Apparently, he had decided, after writing the earlier letter, to visit them twice rather than once. He seems to be saying that, far from intending to go back on his promise to them, he had changed his plans to benefit them even more fully. If he had fulfilled this second plan, they would surely not have criticized him. In actual fact Paul had not fulfilled this plan, for reasons he gives later (1:23-24). Sometimes such alterations in a projected itinerary are unavoidable and they should not be regarded as due to lack of integrity if the original intention was completely sincere. In fact, Paul had high motives for his delay. Personal integrity is an essential part of our witness for Christ in modern society and is the more impressive when it is lacking in society in general.

What had Paul done to provoke this hostility in Corinth? Their complaints arose from the changes Paul had made to his plans to come and see them before he finally withdrew from the Aegean region. Originally (Acts 19:21; 1 Cor. 16:5-7), when the churches of Corinth and Ephesus were relatively stable, he had written that his withdrawal plan would be Asia → Macedonia → Achaia → Judea. But after writing 1 Corinthians it was necessary to make an unscheduled 'painful' visit (2:1) to Corinth during which he said that he would return to them before going to Macedonia (1:15-16). However, instead of coming back to them immediately, he wrote a letter (1:23; 2:4), and reverted to his original plan to go first to Macedonia and then to Achaia. Looking at things from the Corinthians' standpoint, Paul had made major changes to his plans and could be seen to be a vacillating man whose behavior reflected a *worldly* rather than a godly wisdom.

The only reason Paul planned to visit the Corinthians in the first place was his loyalty to them. Despite the rebellion against him in the Corinthian congregation, Paul believed the majority was still loyal to him. In 1 Corinthians 16:5-6, Paul wrote that he intended to leave Ephesus, minister in Macedonia, then come to spend the winter (when travel was difficult) with the believers in Corinth. After writing 1 Corinthians, Paul decided to change his plan and also make a visit to Corinth before going to Macedonia so that the Corinthians might 'twice receive' the 'blessing' (*charis*; 'grace,' 'favor,' 'benefit') of fellowship with him before *and* after his Macedonian trip. However, as he will later explain (1:23-2:1), the apostle had to cancel the first visit and revert to his original plan of visiting Corinth only after ministering in Macedonia. Paul's enemies pounced on this minor change in travel plans and accused him of untrustworthiness and fickleness. They ridiculously, but apparently with some success, argued that if Paul's statements about his travel plans were untrustworthy, why should the Corinthians believe his theological statements? But Paul was not fickle. His circumstances changed but not his heart attitude. Here Paul affirms that he is loyal to his flock.

Having defended his integrity Paul further defends himself against charges of vacillation. Paul had not equivocated. The apostle had changed his plans precisely to benefit the Corinthians with

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two visits as he went in and out of Macedonia, so they would have two experiences of grace. Likely the experiences of grace Paul is referring to are two opportunities to donate to the offering for the poor in Jerusalem, because in chapters 8-9, ‘grace’ is used to describe the act of contributing to the collection. Thus the Corinthians would get twice the benefit—they would be double-graced! In any event, Paul was not capricious in his plans, but rather made them with graced intentionality.

The word rendered ‘blessing’ is *charis* (‘grace’). Paul perhaps mean that they will experience new dimensions of God’s grace by helping and encouraging Paul himself on his way first of all to Macedonia and then to Judea. Certainly one of his purposes in going to Corinth would have been to solicit the prayers and support of the Christians there for the Judean visit. To ‘send me on my way’ may suggest provision as well as valediction (cp. Rom. 15:24), so that it would refer to an all-round act of generous fellowship.

3. A Pure Intent (1:17-18)

¹⁷Was 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? ¹⁸As surely as God is faithful, our word to you has not been Yes and No.

Not content with impugning his loyalty, Paul’s accusers also questioned his honesty. Paul was likely quoting one of their accusations when he denied that he was guilty of ‘vacillating’ in what he had said he intended to do. The apostle found it incredible that anyone would construe a change in travel plans as evidence of a dishonest character. Certainly the Corinthians were not slighted by Paul’s change in plans; the two visits became instead one long visit (cp. 1 Cor. 16:6-7).

Paul did not make plans in purely human fashion. He did not seek to please himself, to make decisions to suit his own selfish interests. He did not talk out of both sides of his mouth; his words were not ‘yes, yes and no, no at the same time.’ After closely observing Paul’s life during his more than eighteen months in their city, the Corinthians had plenty of reason to affirm that he was an honest man. In declaring that ‘God is faithful,’ Paul may have been taking an oath, boldly calling God as faithful witness to his truthfulness. Paul’s point is that God is truthful, and he, as God’s representative, is also truthful. No matter how his plans changed, Paul remained both loyal and honest.

Thus Paul posed two rhetorical questions to the Corinthians that both required negations. ‘Was I vacillating [literally, was I light, i.e., frivolous] when I wanted to do this?’ No! ‘Do I make my plans according to the flesh, ready to say, “Yes, yes” and “No, no” at the same time?’ That is, ‘do I make my plans in such a fleshly manner that I am ready to swear a double “yes” and double “no” at the same time?’ Absolutely not! Paul was no impulsive lightweight. Like his Master, his yes was yes and his no was no. You could count on his word.

No less serious was their belief that Paul was a vacillating *worldly* man to say Yes and No *in the same breath*. In summary, Paul’s spoken message was that ‘God is faithful’ to His promises.

4. A Sure Gospel (1:19-20)

¹⁹For 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. ²⁰For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory.

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The two terms used most often in the New Testament with reference to the deity of Jesus are ‘Lord’ and ‘Son of God.’ Both are relational terms but they are not complete synonyms. ‘Lord’ refers to the deity of Jesus in terms of His sovereignty over the universe, over all nations, and over His people, while ‘Son of God’ is concerned with the inner relationships of the eternal Trinity. In relation to us He is ‘Lord,’ while in relation to the Father He is ‘Son of God.’ The term Paul uses most frequently is ‘Lord,’ and this occurs with great frequency in his writings. The expression ‘Son of God’ is nothing like as common in his letters, but it has been observed that wherever he uses it there is either a certain elevation of his writing style or a most exalted topic, or both. This is certainly true here, for Paul is writing about the very character of God.

Having slanderously accused Paul of being untrustworthy because of his change in travel plans, they also alleged that his teaching on the Lord Jesus was untrustworthy. Responding to their attack on His Lord, Paul emphasized Christ’s nature as the God-man by using the full, rich title ‘the Son of God, Christ Jesus.’ Paul was not the only one who preached these truths; Silvanus (Silas) and Timothy had preached the message to them. Silas was a prominent leader in the Jerusalem church. The Jerusalem Council entrusted him to carry its decision to the church at Antioch (Acts 15:22). He later became Paul’s companion on the apostle’s second missionary journey, replacing Barnabas (Acts 15:39-40). Timothy was Paul’s beloved son in the faith.

Paul reminds the Corinthians of how he, Silas, and Timothy preached the Lord Jesus when they were with them. In preaching the Lord Jesus, Paul and his colleagues proclaimed the promises God makes in Him – promises the Old Testament records, and promises the Lord Jesus Himself gave during His ministry. They shared the lovely promises God makes to all believers about the Holy Spirit. In proclaiming these promises in the Lord Jesus, Paul and his colleagues did not preach Him as an uncertain Savior who sometimes saves and other times does not. They did not suggest that occasionally God keeps His promises in Him and other times goes back on them. All God’s promises find their certain ‘Yes’ in Jesus. When we present our requests to God in view of His promises in the Lord Jesus, the answer is always ‘Yes.’ To every promise of God we, as believers, may add the name of Jesus and know that we have God’s ‘Yes’ on it.

The reason underlying this radical truth ethic for Paul was Christ himself. Because Christ is the grand consummating Yes—God’s unambiguous, ultimate Yes—He is the ground and fulcrum of all Christian ethics. Those who are in Christ and embrace Him as the Yes with all their hearts embrace truth—and truth-telling as a way of life. Nothing could be more dissonant and logically contradictory than to accuse the Apostle Paul (whose whole being was dedicated to preaching Christ) of playing with the truth!

In summary, Paul’s spoken message was that ‘God is faithful’ to His promises (v. 18). There is no ambiguity, ‘Yes’ and ‘No,’ about the Son of God. It is as if God is saying, ‘Jesus Christ, my Son, is my “yes” to every promise I have ever made. He fulfills everything I have ever said.’ Because God’s promises come true in Christ, we say the ‘Amen’ (Hebrew, ‘it is true’) through Christ to the glory of God. Christ is the ‘go-between.’ God speaks to us *in* Christ, and we, who have received the message, speak back to God *through* Christ. Since Christ is the fulfillment (God’s ‘Yes’) to all of God’s numerous promises, it follows that the Old Testament, where the promises are made, really makes sense only when read with Christ in mind. Christ is the end to which the Old Testament pointed, the goal toward which it moves.

All of God’s salvation promises—of blessing, peace, joy, goodness, fellowship, forgiveness, strength, and hope of eternal life—‘are yes,’ meaning they all come true, in Christ. They are all

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made possible by His person and work. It is not surprising, therefore, that when we pray, we offer our prayers in the name of our Savior and that our final word is ‘Amen’ – a word that simply and powerfully expresses the certainty and reliability of everything God promises us in His Son. ‘Amen’ really means ‘That is true!’ ‘Amen’ is not a native Greek word but a Hebrew one transliterated, whose root meaning is ‘firm.’

‘Amen’ is a solemn affirmation of the truthfulness of a statement. When Paul, Silas, and Timothy preached the gospel, it was all about Christ, who by His glorious work brings to pass all salvation realities. The Corinthians probably even had joined in saying ‘Amen to the glory of God.’ The congregation had affirmed that the preachers reliably spoke God’s truth about Christ when they believed the gospel message Paul and his companions preached, and it transformed their lives. How utterly absurd, Paul argued, to accept and experience the gospel message as reliable, but consider those who preached it unreliable. How ridiculous to trust Paul’s word about eternal things, but not about mundane things like travel plans.

If we say ‘Amen’ to the truth about Christ as Paul calls us to in his conclusion, then we must also live lives of truth, of radical veracity. Integrity lay at the heart of apostolic ministry. Truth was the medium. Sincerity was the evidence. Power was the outcome.

5. A Shared Faith (1:21-22)

²¹And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, ²²and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.

Paul describes four glorious works that God had done in his life. The phrase ‘with you’ and the fourfold repetition of ‘us’ indicate Paul’s confidence that the Corinthians also experienced those divine works, as do all believers.

a) God Establishes Believers (1:21a)

First, God ‘establishes’ believers in Christ at salvation. This is the work of saving grace that puts believers into union with Him. And with each other. Paul’s authenticity was inextricably linked with that of the Corinthians, and to deny it was to deny the reality of their own spiritual life.

After Paul adds his ‘Amen’ stating his firm assurance in the promises of God, he goes on to say that it is God, the God of Christ, who makes Christians firm and stable. This suggests truthful character and personal integrity, but Paul’s thought probably goes even beyond this. God gives an all-round spiritual stability and strength to His people.

Paul turns from the promises of God in the remote past to the present experience of the Corinthians. If God has proved faithful to His ancient promises, He has also proved faithful in His present dealings with the Corinthians. Speaking to them as people who have heard and responded to the message of the Son of God, he assures them that God Himself will keep them in their relationship with Christ. The word for ‘makes ... stand firm’ was used in business law to signify a seller’s guarantee to honor a contract. God is the guarantor of our life-long relationship with the Son of God. The present tense shows this to be no short-term guarantee but a permanent one.

The logic of Paul’s defense surely put his critics back on their heels. And it is here that he co-opted them, including them with himself as surely established in Christ. The phrase ‘And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ’ is in the present tense, describing an ongoing experience as Paul and his believing critics are being continually established in Christ. Yet the

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establishing rests on a single complete action that is stated as three closely related actions, each involving the spirit.

b) *God Anoints Believers (1:21b)*

The words ‘... in Christ’ followed immediately by, ‘He anointed us...’ are very interesting in Greek, for they read *eis Christon kai chrisas hemas theos* and they contain two words with an obvious connection. *Christos* (of which *Christon* is an inflected form), means ‘the anointed One’ while *chrisas* means ‘anointed.’ Paul seems to be saying that something of Christ’s anointing by God passes over to and is shared by those who are in Christ.

God has ‘anointed us,’ which in the original features a beautiful play on words that goes something like ‘God...christed us Christward,’ indicating that He has made us Christ’s people, a messianic community.

‘Anointing’ is a service concept. The idea is employed in the Old Testament, where kings and priests were regularly anointed with oil as a sign that their equipment for service came from God and not from themselves. The Messiah, the Christ, is of course the supremely-anointed One. The way Paul uses these two words *Christos* and *chrisas* here suggests the profound idea, well worth exploring, that the particular service each of us has to engage in arises out of the vocation of Christ. If we are anointed in Christ, this also implies that our service can only be fulfilled in that fellowship with Christ which union with Him makes possible.

God ‘anointed’ believers. To anoint someone is to commission them for service. The verb *chriō* (‘anointed’) appears four other times in the New Testament, each time in a passage referring to Christ (Luke 4:18; Acts 4:27; 10:38; Heb. 1:9). The related noun *chrisma* describes the anointing all believers have when they receive from Christ the Holy Spirit (cp. 1 Cor. 12:13), who guides, empowers, and teaches them (1 Jn. 2:20, 27).

c) *God Seals Believers (1:22a)*

God ‘sealed’ believers. *Sphragizō* (‘sealed’) refers to stamping an identifying mark on something (cp. Mt. 27:66; Jn. 3:33; 6:27; Rom. 15:28; Rev. 7:3-4). Here, as in Ephesians 1:13, 4:30, and 2 Timothy 2:19, it refers to believers’, stamped as God’s, receiving the indwelling Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9), whose presence identifies them as God’s true and eternal possession, whom He will protect and keep.

He has ‘put his seal on us,’ His sign of ownership that identifies us as His. This seal marks us out for redemption (cp. Eph. 1:13; 4:30). The ‘seal’ in antiquity was an impression made on wax by a special instrument (also called a seal) to indicate the ownership of a document. The presence of the Holy Spirit within us is a seal of ownership.

d) *God Guarantees Believers (1:22b)*

Finally, God gave believers the Spirit in their ‘hearts as a pledge.’ The indwelling Holy Spirit is not only the anointing and seal, but also the down payment or guarantee of believers’ eternal inheritance (cp. 1 Peter 1:4), the first installment of future glory.

He has ‘given us His Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.’ The initial installment guarantees the full inheritance to come. We should remember that we do not belong to ourselves but to God. The ‘guarantee’ in Paul’s day was a deposit or down payment in pledge of payment in full.

The term ‘deposit’ is a commercial one used in Ephesians 1:13. The Greek word *arrabon* was originally Phoenician, and the Phoenicians were the great traders of the ancient Mediterranean

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world. In the trading customs of the day, a deposit of one item against a promised full inventory had the legal status of a pledge, but it was more than this, for it would act as a foretaste of what was to come. It sealed the bargain, was legally accepted as an indication of a binding commercial transaction, and was a sample, so that the rest of the consignment, on its later arrival, could be compared with it to make certain the quality was just as high.

How do we know we have the Holy Spirit dwelling ‘in our hearts’? Through the Holy Spirit God conveys to us the awareness that He is our Father and we are His children. Only through the Holy Spirit do I have this filial awareness and confidence. Do I understand that God is my Father? If I do, then this is the evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit within my life. The God who was faithful in keeping His promises made under the Old Covenant is also faithful and active in keeping me in relationship with Christ, and as a reassurance of His fidelity, He has given the Holy Spirit as a seal of ownership and guarantee of completed contract.

God set both Paul and all believers on the unshakable and eternal promise of salvation in Christ. God has guaranteed that promise of eternal inheritance through the indwelling Holy Spirit. How foolish it was, in light of Paul’s preaching those glorious, eternal divine realities, to question his legitimacy as an apostle because of a minor change in his travel plans!

This dazzling triad of the Spirit’s work in establishing them together in Christ would thrill any earnest Corinthian and demonstrates how foolish the criticism of Paul was. After all, it was Paul’s preaching that enabled them to be established in Christ. Rather than criticism, they all ought to be thanking Paul for his integrity of heart.

B. Paul Explains His Change of Plans (2 Corinthians 1:23-2:4)

During his recent emergency visit to Corinth, Paul had told the Corinthians that he would pay them a return visit in the near future. Due to the force of circumstances, however, he had written them a letter – the so-called ‘sorrowful’ letter. He would now visit them at the end, not the beginning, of his itinerary. The change of plans certainly looked bad. Paul’s reasons for delaying his return were, to put it briefly, to avoid further pain in his relationship with them.

Paul’s supposed vacillation (and lack of integrity) had come to the fore because he didn’t pay a second visit to the Corinthians as he had promised. Instead he sent them a harsh letter. This was considered to be another evidence of his spineless failure of character. So now, for the Corinthians who still believed this line, Paul demonstrates that he changed his plans purely out of mercy and love.

1. The Painful Visit (1:23-2:2)

a) A Visit Avoided (1:23-24)

²³*But I call God to witness against me—it was to spare you that I refrained from coming again to Corinth. ²⁴Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, for you stand firm in your faith.*

Paul’s merciful heart shines in the paragraph beginning in verse 23, showing his desire to spare the Corinthians the pain that would have attended his coming. His smiling suggestion that he wouldn’t have anyone to cheer him if he paid another painful visit was true (cp. 13:2b). Far better to have written a severe letter than show up with the lash.

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Part of Paul's honesty was to state the real reason he had not visited them again – it was to spare them pain. If God dishonoring behavior in the church at Corinth had not been put right by the time of his visit, it was inevitable that he would have had to initiate disciplinary action. Paul's primary concern was the best interests of the Corinthians' faith. He wanted them to be strong in faith and in the obedience to God that true faith produces. A pastoral objective is to see believers persevere in the faith, to stand firm in the faith with joy.

For the second time in Chapter 1, Paul invokes the name of God: 'I call God as witness against my life.' This is very solemn indeed, for he is really saying that if he is lying, God should kill him. This shows not only his sincerity, but also his deep concern to make the motives of his actions really clear to his readers. His change of plans (cp. 1:15-16), was not imaginary but real, and it had a pastoral cause to it. It had nothing whatever to do with personal expediency, but was determined by his love for the Corinthian Christians. Paul's ministry to the Corinthians, as to other churches, always called for their co-operation, and he sought this. He was so eager to work with them for their blessing.

Only after defending his integrity by affirming his loyalty, honest, reliability, and authenticity did Paul finally explain why he changed his travel plans. And he prefaced his explanation with the solemn oath 'I call God as witness to my soul.' The apostle appealed to God to verify the truth of what he was about to write and to judge him if he were lying. It was 'to spare' the Corinthians the rod of discipline (cp. 13:2, 10; 1 Cor. 4:21) that Paul 'came no more to Corinth.' He mercifully wanted to give them time to correct the problems he wrote of in 1 Corinthians. Also, some at Corinth were guilty of being led into mutiny (the mutiny that prompted Paul to write the 'severe letter' referred to in 2:4) against him by the false teachers who had come to the church, and he wanted to give them time to repent. The apostle was also hoping for a good report from Titus about the Corinthians' repenting and rejecting the false apostles in favor of him before visiting them. That report, a positive one, as Paul hoped, is described in 7:6ff. The apostle displayed great patience and sensitivity towards the Corinthians.

b) A Visit Remembered (2:1-2)

¹*For I made up my mind not to make another painful visit to you.* ²*For if I cause you pain, who is there to make me glad but the one whom I have pained?*

At some point back in Ephesus Paul made up his mind not to make another 'painful visit' to Corinth. The verb he uses also means 'judged,' implying careful consideration in arriving at this decision. He must have known that his failure to visit them would involve serious criticism of his character. The reason he decided not to come was to 'spare' them further grief (cp. 1:23). Clearly the former visit had involved both Paul and the Corinthians in suffering (2:3), though what specifically had happened back in Corinth is not stated.

The apostle was referring to a painful visit he had earlier made to Corinth. Learning of the false prophets' arrival, Paul left Ephesus and hurried to Corinth to deal with the situation. The visit was not a success; in fact, someone (possibly one of the false apostles) openly insulted Paul (cp. 2:5-8, 10; 7:12), and the Corinthians did not defend him. It was that painful visit that had promoted Paul to write the 'severe letter' he referred to in 2:4. By giving the Corinthians time to repent, Paul hoped to avoid another painful encounter with them. Thus, his change in travel plans was not motivated by fickleness and unreliability, as the false teachers claimed, but by Paul's sensitivity toward his beloved church.

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Our difficulty is that, while Paul and the Corinthians know what he is referring to, we today do not. The best we can do is gather the bits and pieces of information in the letter and attempt to reconstruct the situation in Corinth.

It seems that a particular man had caused the problem in Corinth, as 2:5-9 suggest (cp. 7:12). Evidently a person in the Corinthian church had committed an act of aggression, immorality, or injustice against another person. Since Paul writes of a ‘majority’ who subsequently punished him (2:6), we may suppose that a minority supported, and perhaps continued to support, the offender, possibly because he was an influential member of the Corinthian congregation.

Paul had undertaken his unscheduled visit to Corinth in an attempt to resolve the matter. It seems that while the majority agreed with Paul’s views they were not prepared to take any action. This, apparently, was the context in which Paul inflicted ‘pain’ upon the Corinthians, though he does not say what he means. It is difficult to be sure of the details but it seems clear that he is speaking about the pain of damaged relationships between himself and them.

On his return to Ephesus he came to realize that to revisit Corinth in the immediate future could only lead to more pain – both for them and for him. If the recent visit were unhelpful, would another one prove any different?

The pain of the Corinthians was their own fault, but this was certainly not true of Paul’s pain, for it arose out of a deep, passionate concern for them. His deep sensitivity, and the hurt he felt when relations with those he loved in the Lord were less than warm, comes out so clearly here.

Paul’s sensitivity and patience with the Corinthians did not mean that he was unwilling to discipline them if they did not repent. His zeal for the purity of the church made him willing to cause them sorrow if necessary. If he did, the only thing that would make him glad would be the repentance of those whom he made sorrowful.

If ‘disguise’ is the mark of his opponents, the false apostles (11:13), then openness is the mark of Paul, an openness that is made possible by the grace of God in forgiveness. If Paul is transparent, then, clearly, so too should the Corinthians be transparent. In embodying the gospel qualities of dependence and openness Paul shows himself to be the great Christian leader and teacher he was, continually modeling a godly lifestyle before the people.

2. The Sorrowful Letter (2:3-4)

a) *The Purpose of Writing (2:3)*

³*And I wrote as I did, so that when I came I might not suffer pain from those who should have made me rejoice, for I felt sure of all of you, that my joy would be the joy of you all.*

It was his concern for purity in the Corinthian church that prompted the letters that Paul wrote. But unlike many in the evangelical church today, Paul did not place church unity above truth and holiness. He was willing to confront unrepentant sin, even at the cost of his own joy. Paul hoped the sinful issues he confronted in his letters would be settled before he again visited Corinth, and he had confidence that they would be. Then his ‘joy would be the joy of’ them all; they could not have mutual joy as long as the Corinthians continued in sin. Paul’s expression of confidence in the Corinthians was also meant to encourage the majority of the congregation, who looked to him as their revered spiritual leader.

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The letter to which he refers was written from Ephesus, but unfortunately it has not survived. It was delivered by Titus who brought their response to Paul in Macedonia (cp. 7:8-13). It should be noted that Paul wrote in the knowledge that the majority agreed with him, but were not prepared to take whatever action was necessary to deal with the wrongdoer. Confident of their loyalty, he wrote in an attempt to secure a unified action towards the offender (7:12). Their lack of action against the wrongdoer was a barrier preventing the restoration of relationships between them and the apostle.

It the circumstances it comes as something of a surprise to find him saying that he had confidence in all them, that they would all share his joy. Why was this? Is it a kind of facile optimism? No! He was too experienced a Christian worker for this. It was surely a combination of his conviction that, with all their faults, they were true believers in whose characters the Spirit of God was working, along with his belief that God would answer his prayers for them.

It was this restoration that the apostle really sought. What he wanted was that they would all share his joy, which could only happen when he and they shared the same moral perspectives in this matter. Paul's over-riding objective, therefore, was spiritual unity between them and him.

b) The Concern in Writing (2:4)

⁴For I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you.

The Corinthians had been a source of much affliction and heartache to Paul. And it had been while Paul was undergoing the unbearable affliction in Asia, when his strength began to fail and he despaired of life, that the Corinthians' criticisms heaped internal grief upon his external miseries. These people whom he had wrestled into the kingdom through his early evangelistic disputations in Corinth and then instructed in the faith, and over whom he had prayed when they met opposition—these same people had savaged his character and motives, even questioning his apostleship. What hurt and grief to Paul's heart! Nevertheless, Paul did not respond with angered rejection but with wounded love. It was literally overflowing love that motivated and energized his severe letter and energizes him now as he defends his integrity to the Corinthians.

It took real love, not sentimentalism, for Paul to confront the Corinthians' sin. Nothing is more painful for a pastor than confronting sin in his beloved congregation. But Paul's goal in writing was not so that they would be made sorrowful, but that the Corinthians 'might know the love which' he had especially for them.

Paul's lost letter was, apparently, deeply personal. The nature of the offense brought 'great distress and anguish of heart' to him. He wrote 'with many tears' to express the depth of his love for them and not to grieve them. The writer was torn between his loving concern not to bring pain and his determination not to weaken godly standards for their congregational life.

3. A Brief Summary

The Apostle Paul's defense of his integrity is simply masterful. *Confidence*. His initial uncharacteristic boast put them back on their heels as it announced a confidence born of a clear conscience as to how he had conducted his ministry. Such was his confidence that he knew that at the resurrection he would become their boast and he would boast in them! *Grace*. Paul's clear-conscience confidence was coupled with his desire for grace for the Corinthians. And that is why he altered his plans to visit them twice. His change of plans was not irresponsible and capricious but rather showed graced intentionality under the direction of God.

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Christ. Because Christ (the great consummating Yes to all that the Scriptures promise) was the center of Paul's life. Paul was radically truthful. *Mutuality.* Furthermore, God was establishing both Paul and the Corinthians together in Christ. This began with the Spirit's anointing them, sealing them, and giving Himself as an earnest of what is to come. *Mercy and love.* Paul's change of plans was motivated by mercy. He cared enough to confront the Corinthian believers by letter, and he cared too much to visit them personally, because his presence likely would have necessitated judgment. Moreover, Paul's letter was motivated by his desire to let the Corinthians know of his overflowing love for them.

In defending his own integrity, Paul has reminded the Corinthians that they are and will continue to be Christians because of the faithfulness of God. The God who made the promises has faithfully kept them in the coming of His Son, and it is this God who has 'commissioned' Paul and his companions to proclaim Jesus Christ the Son of God, in whom the Corinthians now believe. It is God who is keeping them in their relationship with Christ, through the Holy Spirit given as seal and guarantee.

The God who was faithful to His promise is also loyal to His people. Paul is a minister of this faithful God and of His New Covenant. Let the Corinthians understand that, despite their criticisms of him, he too is faithful to them and loyal in his dealings with them. While we should make every effort to keep to our arrangements and undertakings, occasions sometimes arise, as they had with Paul, where unforeseen circumstances make it difficult or impossible to do so.

For next time: Read 2 Corinthians 2:5-17.