

Engage

- We are beginning a study into 2 Corinthians this week. I prayed about whether to begin this study or go into something different that weekly addresses the quarantine that we find ourselves in.
- I believe the words within 2 Corinthians will, themselves, bring comfort and instruction to us as we move through these times.
- Focus this week will be on the comfort that God brings in times of trouble.

EXAMINE

B. Paul defends his ministry.

1. (12-14) *Paul's boast: his integrity and simplicity in ministry towards the Corinthian Christians.*

For our boasting is this: the testimony of our conscience that we conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God, and more abundantly toward you. For we are not writing any other things to you than what you read or understand. Now I trust you will understand, even to the end (as also you have understood us in part), that we are your boast as you also *are* ours, in the day of the Lord Jesus.

a. **The testimony of our conscience:** In this section, Paul defends himself against the accusation that he is fickle and unreliable. Here, he simply states that he has a clear conscience before God and trusts that the Corinthian Christians will understand this.

b. **We conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom:** The Corinthian Christians were so accustomed to dealing with ministers who were calculating and manipulative, they figured Paul must be the same way. Therefore, when Paul said he was coming to them ([1 Corinthians 16:5](#)) but did not, they figured he was just manipulating them. Paul lets them know this was not the case.

i. The Corinthian Christians had become *cynical*. They believed that everyone had bad motives and was out for personal gain and power. They didn't trust Paul because they were cynical.

c. **We are not writing any other things to you than what you read or understand:** Paul wanted the Corinthian Christians to know he had no "hidden meanings" in his letters. His meaning was right out on top for all to see.

i. A cynical heart always thinks, "You say *this*, but you really mean *that*. You aren't telling the truth." Paul assured the Corinthian Christians that he really told the truth and he didn't communicate with manipulative hidden meanings.

ii. "In Paul's life there were no hidden actions, no hidden motives and no hidden meanings." (Barclay)

Sources

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2. (15-17) *Paul considers the accusation that he is unreliable and can't be trusted.*

And in this confidence I intended to come to you before, that you might have a second benefit—to pass by way of you to Macedonia, to come again from Macedonia to you, and be helped by you on my way to Judea. Therefore, when I was planning this, did I do it lightly? Or the things I plan, do I plan according to the flesh, that with me there should be Yes, Yes, and No, No?

a. **I intended to come to you before:** The Corinthian Christians accused Paul of being unreliable and untrustworthy because he said he would come at a certain time and did not. He was unable to come as planned, so instead he sent a letter.

- i. In [1 Corinthians 16:5-7](#) Paul promised to see the Corinthians after his trip through Macedonia.
- ii. He changed his plans and decided to see them first on his way to Macedonia and then again on his way back, to give them **a second benefit** ([2 Corinthians 1:15-16](#)).
- iii. Paul made the first visit on the way to Macedonia, but it was painful for both him and the Corinthians because it was full of confrontation (*I would not come again to you in sorrow*, [2 Corinthians 2:1](#)).
- iv. At some time after this visit, Paul (or perhaps his representative) was openly insulted in Corinth by someone from the “anti-Paul” party ([2 Corinthians 2:5-10](#), [7:12](#)).
- v. Because the first visit was so unpleasant and sensing no benefit in a second visit, Paul abandoned his plan to see them on the way back from Macedonia.
- vi. Titus was sent from Ephesus to Corinth with the “severe letter” ([2 Corinthians 2:3-9](#)). Titus was also there to collect the contribution for the church in Judea, but the Corinthians didn't give as they should have.
- vii. Paul left Ephesus and suffered his “affliction in Asia.”
- viii. Paul then went to Macedonia and among other things, he organized a collection for the needy Christians in Judea. Titus met Paul in Macedonia, and told Paul about the Corinthians' response to the “severe letter.”
- ix. Later from Macedonia, Paul wrote 2 Corinthians when he heard of more problems at Corinth. The letter was probably written in the fall of 56 A.D.

b. **Helped by you on my way:** This acknowledges the ancient custom of sending a traveler on his way at the outset of his journey. In the ancient world, when a distinguished guest came to a city, his friends and supporters met him a distance away from the city and walked into the city with him. They also sent him away the same way, walking with him for some distance away from the city.

Sources

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c. **When I was planning this, did I do it lightly?** The Corinthian Christians accused Paul of being fickle and insisted that if Paul were a man of integrity he would have come in person. Paul's change in plans made the Corinthian Christians say that Paul must be a man who says **Yes** but means **No** and says **No** but means **Yes**.

i. Paul was criticized as a man who couldn't decide on a plan or who could not carry through on a plan. His enemies among the Christians in Corinth seized on these circumstances to make Paul look bad.

ii. It was all right for the Corinthian Christians to be disappointed that Paul didn't come and visit them. But they were wrong in trying to *blame* Paul for the disappointment. They needed to see Paul's heart and God's hand in the circumstances.

3. (18) *Paul denies the accusation made against him.*

But as God is faithful, our word to you was not Yes and No.

a. **As God is faithful:** Paul can say, "**As God is faithful**, so we were faithful in what we said to you." Paul was such a man of integrity that he could liken his truthfulness to God's faithfulness.

i. "*As God is true* to his promises, so he hath taught me to be true to mine." (Poole)

b. **Our word to you was not Yes and No:** Paul did not say **Yes** and mean **No** or say **No** and mean **Yes**, as the Corinthian Christians accused him.

4. (19-22) *Paul knew their accusations were wrong based on spiritual reasons.*

For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us—by me, Silvanus, and Timothy—was not Yes and No, but in Him was Yes. For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us. Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.

a. **Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us... was not Yes and No:** Paul preached a Jesus who is completely reliable and worthy of trust. It wasn't right for the apostle of such a faithful Savior to be so quickly considered unreliable and untrustworthy.

i. Paul alludes to an important principle: The message affects the messenger. Paul could not so sincerely and so strongly preach a Jesus who is **not Yes and No** and be untouched by that Jesus. Understanding this should have made the Corinthian Christians more trusting towards Paul.

b. **For all the promises of God in Him are Yes and in Him Amen:** Can we imagine God the Father ever saying "no" to God the Son? God the Father will always say **Yes** to the Son and will always affirm what the Son says (**Amen**).

Sources

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i. "We might never have had this precious verse if Paul had not been so ill-treated by these men of Corinth. They did him great wrong, and caused him much sorrow of heart... yet you see how the evil was overruled by God for good, and through their unsavoury gossip and slander this sweet sentence was pressed out of Paul." (Spurgeon)

c. **He who establishes us... and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the**

Spirit: Paul and his associates were commissioned by God and filled with the Holy Spirit.

Understanding this should have made the Corinthian Christians reject hasty and unfounded accusations against Paul.

d. **Anointed us... sealed us... a guarantee:** Paul refers to three aspects of the Holy Spirit's work within us.

i. **Has anointed us:** The only other place where the New Testament speaks about *anointing* is in [1 John 2:20](#) and [2:27](#). Every use speaks of an anointing that is common to all believers, not a special anointing for a few Christian superstars. The idea behind **anointed** is that we are prepared and empowered for service. The fact that we are **anointed** means that we share something with the Old Testament prophets, priests, and kings who were also **anointed** ones.

ii. **Sealed us:** In the ancient world, a seal was used to *identify* and to *protect*. If something was **sealed**, everyone knew who it belonged to (the seal had an insignia), and the seal prevented anyone else from tampering with the item. The Holy Spirit is upon us to *identify* us and to *protect* us.

iii. **A guarantee:** The word **guarantee** is the word for a down payment. We have been given the Holy Spirit as a down payment for the fullness of what God will do. The Holy Spirit is a pledge of greater things to come. As Christians, God has purchased us on the lay-away plan and has given us an impressive down payment. He won't walk away from the final payment because He has so much invested already.

5. (23-24) *Paul knew their accusations were wrong based on his own personal reasons.*

Moreover I call God as witness against my soul, that to spare you I came no more to Corinth. Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are fellow workers for your joy; for by faith you stand.

a. **I call God as witness against my soul:** Paul is taking a serious oath. While Jesus said we should live our lives in such a way so that oaths are not necessary ([Matthew 5:33-37](#)), it does not mean that oaths are prohibited. On occasion, even God swears an oath ([Hebrews 6:13](#)).

b. **That to spare you I came no more to Corinth:** The Corinthian Christians had assumed that Paul did not come in person because of selfish reasons. They wanted to think he simply was not a man of integrity or was just afraid of conflict. Paul sets them straight: **to spare you I came no more**. Paul insists that it was out of concern for the Corinthian Christians that he did not make the visit at that particular time.

Sources

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c. **Not that we have dominion over your faith:** Paul is careful to point out that he is no one's lord in the church, even though he is an apostle.

i. It has been said that God reserves three things to Himself:

- First, to make something of nothing.
- Second, to know future events.
- Third, to have dominion over men's consciences.

ii. Sadly, there are far too many that are entirely willing to take dominion over other believers in a manner that Paul would not. "The SACRED WRITINGS, and they *alone*, contain what is necessary to faith and practice; and that no man, number of men, society, church, council, presbytery, consistory, or conclave, has *dominion over any man's faith*. The word of God alone is his rule, and to its Author he is to give account of the use he has made of it." (Clarke)

d. **Fellow workers for your joy:** Instead of seeing himself as some kind of "lord" over the Corinthian Christians, Paul gives a great description of what ministers should be: **fellow workers**. Leaders among Christians should work alongside their people to increase their **joy**.

A. Paul's change of plans: more reasons why the Corinthians misinterpreted why he did not come to them a second time. (2 Corinthians 2:1-4)

1. (1-2) *Paul remembers his sorrowful visit to the Corinthians.*

But I determined this within myself, that I would not come again to you in sorrow. For if I make you sorrowful, then who is he who makes me glad but the one who is made sorrowful by me?

a. **But I determined:** Carrying on the thought from chapter one, Paul defends himself against the Corinthian Christians. Some among them criticized him because he changed his travel plans and did not come when he planned to. They used this change of plans to say of Paul, "He is unreliable and untrustworthy. We don't need to listen to him at all." But Paul explains there were many reasons why he did not come as planned, one of them being he was trying to *spare* the Corinthians ([2 Corinthians 1:23](#)).

b. **I would not come again to you in sorrow:** Paul's most recent visit to Corinth was full of conflict and unpleasantness. So he **determined** that he would not have another "sorrowful" visit with the Corinthians.

i. "Because of the scandals that were among them he could not see them comfortably; and therefore he determined not to see them at all till he had reason to believe that those evils were put away." (Clarke)

Sources

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c. **If I make you sorrowful, then who is he who makes me glad?** Paul also knew that another painful visit would not be good for him. The constant conflict with the Corinthian Christians could really damage his relationship with them.

i. It seems that Paul thought it best to give the Corinthian Christians a little room, and give them space to repent and get their act together. He didn't want to rebuke and admonish them all the time. Since this was Paul's heart, he knew that another visit of the same kind would be of little benefit for either Paul or the Corinthian Christians.

2. (3-4) *Instead of a second visit, Paul wrote a letter.*

And I wrote this very thing to you, lest, when I came, I should have sorrow over those from whom I ought to have joy, having confidence in you all that my joy is *the joy of you all*. For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you, with many tears, not that you should be grieved, but that you might know the love which I have so abundantly for you.

a. **And I wrote this very thing to you:** Paul wisely understood that considering all the circumstances, a letter was better than a personal visit. A letter could show Paul's heart, yet not give as much opportunity for the deterioration of their relationship. It would give them room to repent and get right with God and Paul again.

i. Where is this letter that Paul mentions? Some good scholars see the "sorrowful letter" as 1 Corinthians, but it seems better to think of it as another letter that we don't have. Does this mean that something is missing from our Bibles? Not at all. Not every letter that Paul wrote was inspired Scripture for all God's people in all ages. We can trust that what Paul wrote in the missing letter was perfect for the Corinthian Christians at that time, but not perfect for us; otherwise, God would have preserved it. We shouldn't think that everything Paul or the other Bible writers wrote was necessarily Scripture.

b. **Lest when I came, I should have sorrow:** Paul hoped that his letter would get all the painful work out of the way. Then when he did visit them personally, it would be a pleasant visit because they would have taken advantage of the opportunity he gave them to get right.

c. **Over those from whom I ought to have joy:** The bad conduct of the Corinthian Christians was all the more troubling considering how they *should* have treated the apostle who gave them so much.

i. "All evils, as elements, are most troublesome, when out of their proper place, as impiety in professors; injustice in judges; unkindness or untowardness in a people toward their pastor."
(Trapp)

d. **Out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you:** Paul did not enjoy confronting the Corinthian Christians. It was hard for him to do, and he did it **with many tears**. His goal was **not that you should be grieved**, but instead that the Corinthian Christians would know **the love which I have so abundantly for you**.

Sources

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i. It would take some maturity for the Corinthian Christians to receive Paul's correction this way. It is easy for us to think a person offering correction is our enemy and sometimes is against us. But usually others bring correction because they love us, as Paul loved the Corinthian Christians. His goal was not to grieve them, but to love them.

ii. "Where I have known that there existed a measure of disaffection to myself, I have not recognised it, unless it has been forced upon me, but have, on the contrary, acted towards the opposing person with all the more courtesy and friendliness, and I have never heard any more of the matter. If I had treated the good man as an opponent, he would have done his best to take the part assigned him, and carry it out to his own credit." (Spurgeon)

e. **I wrote to you, with many tears:** "St. Paul's Epistles were written rather with tears than with ink." (Trapp)

QUESTIONS

- In what spirit did Paul determine not to come to the Corinthian church again? (1-2)
- What advantage did a letter have over a personal visit in a case like this –2:3?3.
- What emotions and motives characterized Paul as he wrote –2:4?
- In what spirit did Paul write his previous letter to them? (3-4)
- List some ways Christians can help one another in times of trouble.
- How did Paul describe his conduct –1:12?
- Why is such conduct important, especially when one is criticized as an impostor?
- What accusation was raised against Paul because he changed his plans –1:17?
- What claim did Paul make in response –1:18,19?
- Explain the significance of "yea" and "nay" as used here?
 - List similar passages. (Think: What does the Bible teach about keeping our promises and commitments?)
- Specifically, what is Paul affirming about God's promises in 1:19,20? (Think: Why does Paul emphasize this here?)
- Define "anoint," "seal," and "earnest"(or "guarantee")–1:21,22

Sources

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