



A Change of Plans?

2 Corinthians 1:12-22

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Good morning. Once again, we are going to be looking at Paul's second letter to the Corinthians in your New Testament. If you would turn there with me, we are going to be looking at a section from chapter 1. Not the remainder of chapter 1. We'll look at that next week as we spill into chapter 2, but for this morning we will begin at verse 12 and take our reading down through verse 22. Please give attention to the reading of God's Holy Word. For the Word of the Lord is completely inerrant, the Word of the Lord is completely sufficient, and the Word of the Lord is completely authoritative. Second Corinthians, chapter 1, beginning at verse 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. For we are not writing to you anything other than what you read and understand and I hope you will fully understand—just as you did partially understand us—that on the day of our Lord Jesus you will boast of us as we will boast of you.

Because I was sure of this, I wanted to come to you first, so that you might have a second experience of grace. I 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. Was 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? As surely as God is faithful, our word to you has not been Yes and No.

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

Thus far the reading of God's Holy Word. Let's pray for his blessing upon it. Oh, our Lord God, we pray that you would open up your Word to us, that even as we study your Word we would see in it the Lord Jesus Christ, we would see his mercy and grace, his majesty and beauty. Lord, we long to be in the presence of Christ, but until we are, we thank you for your Word and we pray that it would be a great blessing for us this morning. This we ask in Christ's precious name, amen.

Integrity is important. When you don't have integrity, no one will listen to you. At the same time, integrity is very difficult to maintain, because anytime an opponent finds even the smallest opportunity or crack in your integrity, they are sure to seize upon it, to point out duplicity, hypocrisy, as a means not just of pointing out an individual instance of a lack of integrity but of making sure others do not listen to anything you say.

That's what happened to Paul, but rather than attack back, instead, he links his integrity to the gospel in our passage this morning. So, we have an opportunity this morning not only to see Paul's integrity but to see God's integrity as well. You can trust the Lord this morning because he is faithful and true. He is a God of integrity. He has fulfilled all of his promises in the Lord Jesus Christ. The gospel comes to us as God's true word, a word of integrity and grace.

This morning, I'd like us to see three things from our text. First, Paul tells us about the *integrity in the gospel*. Then, secondly, Paul tells us about *yes in the gospel*, the *yes* that comes to us in the Lord Jesus Christ in the gospel. Then, finally, Paul tells us about the *encouragements that are ours in the gospel*. Integrity in the gospel, yes in the gospel, and encouragements in the gospel.

Integrity in the Gospel

Let's begin, then, by looking at Paul setting forth his integrity and his general defense of his actions that begin in verse 12. Verse 12 really begins the body of this letter to the Corinthians. The initial section we've looked at the past few weeks is, indeed, important. Paul reminded us that God is with us in trials. Paul also reminded the Corinthians that he was for them, that he loved them, and that he needed their prayers. But now he moves on to the body of the letter proper and a defense of his ministry to them.

This will lead, as we go through this letter, to a defense of the ministry of the new covenant in general, what we would call *gospel ministry*. Paul begins here, we must understand, after having already come under attack. He was attacked by some in Corinth as being weak, as being a failure, because he didn't have success stories to boast about. He didn't have tales of excitement and success.

Some said that if Paul was a real minister, if he was a really successful minister, then he would have shown much more success. He would have had much less opposition. He would not have had to change his plans. He would not have had to do anything differently. All of his enemies would simply fall down before his feet. In this attack, they were attacking not only Paul and his preaching but they were attacking the gospel itself.

This is, in a way, not unlike the so-called *prosperity gospel* of our day, which judges the success of God's work by how wealthy God's people are or how few times they go to visit the doctor, as if somehow that is the measure of God's success, the success of the gospel, and the building up of the kingdom, a merely earthly test, earthly measurements...money, followers, influence, success.

That's what they were saying to Paul. "If you were really a good minister, you'd have more money. You wouldn't have to tent-make, Paul. You would have much more influence. People would listen to you and obey you. You would have much more success everywhere you go." Now, it is indeed tempting to view the gospel through that lens, because it's easier to quantify, but Paul rises up to defend his ministry and the true gospel message of hope in Jesus Christ, and he starts in verse 12 with a boast.

Now, this seems odd, doesn't it? Have you ever been told by your mother or your grandmother that you're not supposed to boast, that you're not supposed to blow your own horn, that you're not supposed to tell other people about your own accomplishments, that it's not proper? Well, if you're thinking in *those* terms, you might look a

little bit aside at Paul, but we have to understand that when Paul uses this term *boast*, it can be positive if it is used in the right object.

Paul is boasting here not in *his* accomplishments but in the Lord's. Look with me at verse 12. "For our boast is this..." What is it, Paul? "...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." Paul is telling us that his conscience is clear because of what God has done.

Paul talks about the conscience more than anyone else in the Bible. What does he mean by the conscience? What Paul means when he speaks of *his* conscience or *your* conscience is that inner assessment we have of our own actions. Sometimes we refer to it as the *voice inside our head*. It doesn't need to be audible, but it is an inner assessment of our life and our actions. It is not something that is divine but is rather human.

So, what Paul has done is looked out and examined his ministry and his actions, and his conscience is not only clear, it allows him to boast, and his boast is that he has behaved with integrity and sincerity. At first, this sounds prideful. Paul has assessed himself, we might say, and he's behaving excellently. Again, in the wrong context, this can certainly be prideful and inappropriate, but notice how Paul's behavior has come about. How is it that Paul has been able to act with integrity, with sincerity?

Paul tells us, specifically, it was not with earthly wisdom. What that means is Paul is taking absolutely no credit for his behavior. He's saying, "It's not because I was trained well under Gamaliel. It's not because I had the church behind me training me. It's not because I've studied God's Word so well. It's not because I tried my best." No, none of those things are in Paul's view.

When we hear Paul saying it's not of earthly wisdom, do not get the impression that Paul is making earthly wisdom a bad thing. Earthly wisdom can be good. It can be applying the skills you have learned, but what it means is that Paul was not responsible for any of it. He did not arrange his integrity and his sincerity. Well, who did then? God.

It was by the grace of God, Paul tells us...literally, *in* the grace of God...that Paul acted as he did. His actions were sincere and with integrity because God kept him in integrity. It was only the grace of God. So Paul boasts in the Lord. He gives the Lord all the credit, all the honor, all the glory. He says, "God has done this work in me." This is obvious, I think, if we study the book of Acts.

If we see Paul before he comes to the Lord Jesus Christ, he is anything but a model of sincerity and integrity. He is a murderer. He is one who's seeking to destroy the church, who is full of himself and his learning. When he meets Jesus on the road to Damascus, everything is changed. He becomes Jesus' man, and that makes him a man of integrity, honesty, and sincerity.

What do *you* have confidence in? What can *you* boast in? Is it financial security or your health or your family and your relationships? You need to know that all of that can go away in an instant. Paul reminds us that we are to boast in the grace of God, that whenever we are able to, for whatever we have done, we are able to do it only by

God's grace. When you are tempted to take credit for something you've done, remember that it is God who is at work in you to bring it about.

Paul then defends not only his behavior but his previous letters. His critics have accused him of writing one thing while intending another thing; basically, of not caring for the Corinthians at all but only wanting to have power and authority over them, but Paul says he meant everything he wrote in verse 13. "We are not writing to you anything other than what you read and understand." Paul says he meant everything he wrote, and he wrote it because he cares for them.

He wants them to understand his care for them, that his letters are grounded in the relationship he has with them. That's why on the day of the Lord he will boast in them and they will boast in him, because Jesus is at work in the gathering together of a people. Now, what better thing is there to boast in? That Jesus uses ministers to save people through the gospel and that the saved remind ministers of the importance of gospel ministry. Could there be anything greater to boast in?

Paul then moves on from his general integrity, and he applies it to this situation at hand. In verse 15, it's because Paul is sure of his integrity by grace and the work of Jesus Christ that he can tell the Corinthians about his current plans and how they've come about. Paul had originally planned to come to Corinth and stay a while there after going through Macedonia, but you remember that we said a few weeks ago that Paul had gotten a troubling report from Timothy, and that caused him to rush over to Corinth and make a brief, what has been called, sorrowful visit, one of those hard conversation visits.

Then he left, and he told them his next plan was to visit them twice, to give them a double blessing, a double grace, if you will; to go to them first, then to go to Macedonia, then back to Corinth, and then off to Judea with the offering for Jerusalem. That was his promise. "I'll come and be with you twice and perhaps even stay a while." But now those plans have changed. Paul has decided to go back to his original plan to go to Macedonia first and then on to Corinth.

Now, we don't know exactly why. It could be because he has just been there. It could be because he wants some more time to allow the letter he has sent previous to *this* letter to take root in the church, for them to understand his heart, but his plans have changed. Now, why is that important? Are we Paul's travel agents? Why does it really matter which place he goes to first? It's important because some have taken this as an opportunity to attack Paul as being dishonest.

They went so far as to say Paul is only thinking about himself and his own needs and not the gospel and that if Paul would have really been an honest and sincere minister he would have kept his word and come first to Corinth and then come back. The criticism went something like *this*. It was very biting. "You know, God doesn't change his plans. If Paul has to change his plans, then I bet you it's because he's not following God. He's not in God's will. He's trying to do what's best for Paul, not what's best for us, not what's best for the kingdom. God wouldn't have Paul change his plans."

Paul's defense here is that he is not fickle, he is not worldly. What he does in verse 17 is he asks two questions of the Corinthians. Both of these questions expect no answers. You know what that's like, don't you? Perhaps now or when you were younger you had your father or your mother look at you and ask you a question you knew only had one answer. "You're not going to go out in *those* clothes, are you?"

"No, Dad. I was just about to go up and change."

"You're not going to try to leave without cleaning your room, are you?"

"No, Mom. I wouldn't think of it at all. I was going to get on that. No, not at all."

That's what Paul does when he asks these two questions here in verse 17. "Was I vacillating when I wanted to do this? Of course I wasn't! Do I make my plans according to the flesh, ready to say 'Yes, yes' and 'No, no' at the same time, to speak out of both sides of my mouth, as it were? Of course not! It's not that I couldn't make up my mind, that I'm vacillating. It's not that I'm hedging my bets, saying yes and no just to be safe on both sides. No."

Paul says his past actions are evidence of his integrity and honesty, and his future actions will prove this as well. This is why acting with integrity is so important. Compromise comes back to haunt you. Paul was confident because he lived with integrity for Christ. Are you living with integrity now? Are there areas of *your* life that could be used against you? Worse, are there areas of your life that could be used against the gospel? The Lord wants you to be faithful for the sake of his kingdom.

Yes in the Gospel

The second thing we see Paul tell us is that there is a *yes* in the gospel. Paul knows this is about more than his reputation in Corinth. Now, we would expect Paul to defend his own reputation, but more is at stake simply than Paul's good name. If Paul is found to lack integrity, and if Paul is found not to care about the Corinthians, then everything he has established in Corinth will fall apart, and more importantly, the gospel message that took root in Corinth will be destroyed.

So from Paul's perspective, this is an attack not on him but on God himself. This isn't because Paul thinks he's supremely important, that God can't get along without Paul, that he has to have Paul. No. It's because Paul is aware that if he is God's messenger and if he is unfaithful, then God would have been unfaithful in sending him to Corinth.

So in verse 18, he comes out with an oath. "As surely as God is faithful, our word to you has not been Yes and No." He says, "Because God is faithful, you can trust me." Do you see what Paul does here? So often, I think, we have it in reverse. We say, "Listen. You know me. I'm a good guy. I'm faithful. I try hard. You should believe what I'm telling you about God." Paul takes the exact opposite tactic. He says, "It is God who's faithful. It is God whom we can trust, and because you know God is true, therefore, you can trust *me* whom God has sent."

Again, Paul makes himself secondary, not primary. Would that more preachers of the gospel would follow his lead, to put the Lord Jesus Christ and his glory and his truth front and center so they could stand in his shadow. It's as

if what Paul is saying here is "I swear by God's faithfulness that my yes is yes." I don't know of any way he could put this more strongly. He's looking at God and his character for his own reputation.

We also need to see the foundation of what Paul is saying. He's reminding the Corinthians of what they have staked their lives on. You have to remember that when Paul came to the Corinthians, they were pagans. They worshiped Greek gods...the sun, the moon, the stars. They abandoned all of that when Paul brought them the gospel. That abandonment came at a cost. It cost them reputation in the city. It may have cost them family members. It may have cost them business and wealth.

Why did they abandon all of this? Because they believed God. They believed that God was speaking through Paul, and they trusted the Lord and staked their lives upon it. What Paul is essentially saying here is that God has not abandoned *them*. He has not abandoned *him*. God is still for them. God is with them. God is faithful. He's faithful to his message, and he's faithful to his messenger.

So Paul is telling the Corinthians and *you* this morning, "You can trust God. You *should* trust God." We might put it *this* way, to use an analogy: God is the gold standard of integrity and faithfulness. There is nothing more faithful than God. So in your life, you must start with the Lord. Everything else flows from that. When life is hard, what you have to do is trust the Lord. When you're uncertain, trust the Lord.

The Christian life is not about what you can accomplish or the specific things you can do and hold up for God. No. The Christian life is about trusting the Lord, trusting him with everything...with your health, with your financial security, with your children, with your spouse or future spouse. Trust the Lord with everything. He is worthy of that trust.

Paul brings all of this together, as we would expect, in the person of Jesus Christ. This isn't surprising, because Jesus was everything to Paul. Jesus was the reason Paul went to Corinth to begin with. Jesus is the reason Paul pursued the Corinthians, that they might know the Lord Jesus Christ, that they might be saved and that Jesus might get all the glory.

Jesus, Paul tells us, is the greatest evidence of the faithfulness of God. Look at verse 19. "For 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. For all the promises of God find their Yes in him." What Paul is saying here is "My word to you is faithful, just like it was when Timothy, Silas, and I preached Jesus to you. Just like we proclaimed Jesus to you, so I am writing to you now," he says.

"I haven't changed. I will follow Jesus. I still am Jesus' servant. I'm still on Jesus' mission. You know this. You know me," Paul says. "You've seen and you've heard me. You've heard Timothy. You've heard Silas. Weren't we acting in your best interests when we brought the gospel to you?" Paul would say. "Why do you think that would have changed now?"

This is all very important, but there's also something even *more* important here. Paul wants us to see that Jesus is the evidence of God's faithfulness. There is no vacillation in Jesus. There is no fickleness in Jesus. In Jesus it is

always "Yes." In Jesus, all of the promises of God are "Yes." What this reminds us is that the Old Testament makes no sense outside of Jesus.

One commentator puts it very well. He says, "To read the Old Testament without reference to Christ is like reading a mystery novel with the final chapter torn out." It makes no sense. There are clues throughout the book, but how do you understand how they fit together or what they mean in the final analysis? So it is with the Old Testament. It has no purpose outside of the person and work of Jesus Christ. Every single promise the Lord has made to you is true in Jesus.

We could spend the rest of the day talking about the promises of God in the Old Testament that are fulfilled in Jesus, but let's just think about a few. Jesus is the seed of the woman who would crush the Serpent's head in Genesis 3. Jesus is the descendant of Abraham through whom all families of the earth would be blessed. Jesus is the prophet who is greater than the prophet Moses in Deuteronomy 18.

Jesus is the conquering warrior who defeats sin in Joshua 5. Jesus is the one who will sit forever on the throne of David in 2 Samuel 7. Jesus is the temple of God who, though it be destroyed, will be raised back up again in three days. Jesus is the servant of the Lord who bears the sins of his people in Isaiah 53. Jesus is the one who drinks the cup of the Lord's wrath so his people would be spared in Jeremiah 25.

Jesus is the Son of Man and the Ancient of Days whose dominion is everlasting in Daniel 7. Jesus is the King who comes to Jerusalem humbly on a donkey, bringing salvation, from Zechariah 7. And Jesus is the sun of righteousness who will rise with healing in his wings in Malachi 4. Every promise God has given to you in the Old Testament finds its fulfillment in Jesus.

Do you know this Jesus, this suffering servant, the one who hung on a cross to pay the penalty for your sin, this King who reigns forevermore? Like Paul, I am calling you to this Jesus now. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and all of God's promises are yours. You can be forgiven. You can be restored. You can be blessed. All you need to do is believe.

Encouragement in the Gospel

Well, after pointing us to Jesus, Paul leaves us with a third thing: encouragement...encouragement in the gospel. Paul wants you to know these promises are not just theoretical. They actually change who we are and how we live. Now, we've been talking in recent days about how COVID-19 changes everything, but you know what? It doesn't. It changes *some* things, but it doesn't change our entire perspective on life.

If you want evidence of this, just go this afternoon on Facebook, and you will see people talking in the same manner with the same expressions and the same hearts that they did before this crisis came. But Jesus changes everything. Once we hear and see God's *yes* that comes to us in the gospel, we will never be the same. Before Jesus, we were focused on ourselves, because that's human nature. "The world revolves around me" is what we think. That's what sin does.

When sin entered into the world, the cosmic reality of man was to be self-centered, to think about me, myself, and I. We even see this in the church here at Corinth. Rather than think about all that Paul had done for them, how he had brought them the gospel, delivered them from unbelief, now, instead, they're worried about how it affects them that Paul has changed his travel plans. Talk about self-centered. For us, after you meet Jesus, you are united to God's people and you are united to Christ.

So, it's not only that all God's promises have their *yes*, or we might say *amen*, in Jesus. It's that we raise our voices together to shout our "Amen" along with Paul. Do you believe in God's promises in Jesus? Then shout your "Amen." Go ahead. You can do it, even at home. "Amen!" When you shout, you are shouting for the glory of God, that God is faithful, that he is Savior, and that he has delivered you from sin and death. What an encouragement to know that you are united to the people of Christ and that you are united to Christ himself. And this is no temporary thing.

Now, I want you to think for a moment back to something wonderful in your life...your wedding, the birth of a child. These types of events are wonderful, aren't they? But there's one major problem with them. They don't last. That's why we have to take pictures: so we can reminisce and relive those events. Being united to Christ is a lasting thing. It never ends. It doesn't fade away. It doesn't stop. That's what Paul tells you in verse 21. He says, "And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us..."

When Paul tells us that we are established by God, that means to stand firm or, perhaps better, to be confirmed in place. God is strengthening you in Christ. Now what does that mean? It means that whether it's today or tomorrow or next month, when you think you are at the breaking point, when you think you just can't take anymore, remember that God strengthens you in Christ. Look to the Lord Jesus Christ for strength. He will sustain you. He will confirm you.

Finally, we have a trio of blessings, encouragements, that the Lord gives to us by the Spirit. Before we look at those, just a brief point. Do you see how thoroughly Trinitarian Paul is here as in other places? When Paul talks about our salvation and the benefits of our salvation, he always speaks of the Father or the Lord and of Jesus Christ and of the Holy Spirit. He reminds us that God is triune and that each member of the Trinity...Father, Son, and Holy Spirit...are each involved in our salvation. They bring it about together in perfect harmony.

That's one of the reasons Paul brings up the Holy Spirit here. He wants us to understand that we have encouragement because we are blessed by the Holy Spirit. It's not just that the Father has called us. It's not just that Jesus has purchased our redemption. The Holy Spirit applies that redemption to us and all of its blessings.

So, first, Paul tells us that we are anointed, in verse 21. This is a wonderful reminder of our status in Jesus, because after all, Jesus Christ is *the* Anointed One. That's what *Christ* means: Anointed One. So because Jesus is *the* Anointed, we are anointed. We are set apart by the Spirit for Jesus. The picture here is found throughout the Scriptures. Anointing was a way of setting someone apart, usually with oil poured over the head.

We see in the Old Testament that kings were anointed and set apart, priests were anointed and set apart. It was God setting apart people for his service. So if you know Jesus, you are an anointed one. You are an anointed child

of God. You are set apart by God to be a part of his family. What a blessing to know this. What an encouragement for us to know that we are set apart by God for himself.

The second thing Paul tells us is that we are sealed. God has also put his seal on us through the Spirit. In Paul's day, something was sealed to show ownership. You may think of a seal in our modern day about sealing an envelope, where you put moisture on an envelope seal and fold it down and put your fingers over it so that it stays closed, but that was not nearly as safe as sealing a letter in Paul's day.

Perhaps you've seen or heard about how someone can use steam to open an envelope and look in its contents and then reseal it. You couldn't do that in Paul's day, because letters weren't sealed with glue. They were bound with a seal of wax. A papyrus would be rolled up and tied off, and then a seal, hot wax, poured over that area to close it and a signet ring impressed in it so that you would know this came from the king.

The king's ring let you know this was the king's letter and it wasn't counterfeit and could not be broken into. That's what Paul describes the work of God in the believer, that we are sealed. We belong to the Lord. The moment you put your faith in Jesus, you belong to the Lord. You cannot be lost. You are held by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The third and final thing that is an encouragement to us is that we have the Spirit himself as a guarantee. Not only do we receive blessings *from* the Spirit; we receive the Spirit himself as a guarantee. Now, how can you be so sure of that? Well, Paul tells you that when God puts his seal on you, he gives you a deposit, a down payment of your redemption, the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee. He uses this word *guarantee*. It's a special word loved by Paul, only used by Paul in the New Testament.

He uses it to describe the Holy Spirit in the believer's life as a pledge or first installment of God's promises. Do you wonder about your own growth in grace, in holiness? Do you wonder about heaven? Do you wonder about the resurrection? Don't. You have the Spirit, and he is God's first installment in fulfilling all of these promises. You know that all of these promises are answered "yea and amen" in Jesus Christ, because God has sent his Spirit to be the down payment, the guarantee of your salvation.

In conclusion, integrity is important. Paul thought it was important enough to defend himself before the Corinthians, but the reason integrity is important is because we have opportunities to share the gospel with others. Every day, people are dying without Jesus. Every day, people need forgiveness and grace. The calling of God's people is to tell others about the grace of God in Jesus Christ, to tell them that forgiveness can be theirs just by believing in Jesus.

If you know that grace, then shout your "Amen" and take that grace to a world that is in desperate need of healing and hope. The promises of God are always "Yes" in Jesus. Those are the promises that a dying, sinful world needs. Show others the fulfillment of God's promises. Show them Jesus.