

## All the Promises of God Are Yes in Christ

Let's turn to 2 Cor. 1 as we continue our series Messy Grace.

<sup>12</sup> Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, with integrity and godly sincerity. We have done so, relying not on worldly wisdom but on God's grace. <sup>13</sup> For we do not write you anything you cannot read or understand. And I hope that, <sup>14</sup> as you have understood us in part, you will come to understand fully that you can boast of us just as we will boast of you in the day of the Lord Jesus.

<sup>15</sup> Because I was confident of this, I wanted to visit you first so that you might benefit twice. <sup>16</sup> I wanted to visit you on my way to Macedonia and to come back to you from Macedonia, and then to have you send me on my way to Judea. <sup>17</sup> Was I fickle when I intended to do this? Or do I make my plans in a worldly manner so that in the same breath I say both "Yes, yes" and "No, no"?

<sup>18</sup> But as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not "Yes" and "No." <sup>19</sup> For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us—by me and Silas and Timothy—was not "Yes" and "No," but in him it has always been "Yes." <sup>20</sup> For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God. <sup>21</sup> Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, <sup>22</sup> set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. 2 Thess. 1:12-22 (NIV)

Paul's relationship with the Corinthian church is, to coin a phrase, complicated. Almost immediately after he arrived in Corinth, he met strong opposition and abusive treatment, and he must have been ready to throw in the towel because an angel appeared to him saying don't be afraid, I have many people in this city." Paul remained in Corinth preaching the gospel and planting the church for a year and a half.

We have two letters from Paul to Corinthian church, but there were at least four letters altogether. After he left he wrote the church a letter, and they wrote him a letter asking questions about different issues and we have his answers to these questions in 1 Corinthians.

The Corinthian church was a troubled church. It was a divided church, with factions developing over who followed which Christian leader. Sexual perversion was tolerated – even celebrated, some were drinking so much communion wine they were getting drunk, the spiritual gifts were being abused, and there were those who were slandering Paul.

After writing 1 Cor., Paul visited them on his way to Macedonia, but things went really bad and after he left them he wrote them a severe – and tear-stained - letter.

We will gradually see how this played out as we go through 2 Corinthians, but for us to understand this passage it's important for us to know that there's all this mess going on between Paul and the Corinthians. There's tension, there's conflict. And some in the church are seeing this relational mess as an opportunity to slander and undermine Paul's legitimacy as an apostle so that they can promote themselves as the true apostles.

And their slander campaign against Paul has just been handed a gift.

Paul had expressed his intentions to come back to Corinth for an extended stay after his trip to Macedonia, but then he didn't return at all. Those who wanted to undermine Paul began to whisper: he broke his promise. He's unreliable, he's fickle, we can't trust him to do what he says. He says one thing but does another.

Their whisper campaign wasn't pulled out of thin air. There is truth in it: Paul said he planned to come and he didn't. That is a fact. Before we look at Paul's defense, there's an important lesson we can learn from this group trying to hurt Paul's reputation.

I heard a saying years ago that said people are like paintings, we should always try to put them in their best light.

Whether it's one person, or a group of people slandering Paul, we don't know, but what we know is they are purposely putting Paul in the worst light possible. Exaggerating the things that make Paul look bad, ignoring the things that make Paul look good, reading into Paul's motives, putting words into Paul's mouth, twisting the facts to say Paul isn't someone we can trust.

They are standing in the shadows shooting arrows at Paul's reputation. It reminds me of Psalm 11:2

*For look, the wicked bend their bows; they set their arrows against the strings to shoot from the shadows at the upright in heart. Psalm 11:2*

It's easy to destroy people's reputations. It doesn't take much work to pull people down. A rumor dropped here. An insinuation dropped there. A piece of gossip shared in the name of love and concern. It's easier to pull people down than to pull them up. And it all can be done in the shadows – cowards can do it without ever having to face the ones they're trying to destroy.

Here's the lesson: let's not be that person! They aren't building up the kingdom, they are tearing it down for their own selfish agenda. They shall forever remain nameless, just as they shall forever remain useless in the church and to God's eternal purposes.

I'm not talking about honest criticism, we need that. But even when honest criticism is called for, let's do it in the light of love, and criticize in the light of grace. Let's not be that person who shoots arrows at others from the shadows.

Paul went on to change history to the glory of God probably more than any other human being other than Jesus. These slanderers and their accusations ended up on the garbage heap of history. Let's not be that person!

### **Paul's defense**

We'll see in chapter two more of Paul's reasons for not making that second visit to Corinth, but it's interesting that Paul doesn't start his defense with explanations or justifications. Where Paul begins his defense might actually surprise us. He begins by boasting.

*Now this is our boast:* (vs. 12)

And then he goes on to boast about his clear conscience and integrity of character.

<sup>12</sup> *Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, with integrity and godly sincerity.* (vs 12)

As we understand the word “boast” this bothers us. You don’t defend your character by bragging. But Paul begins his defense with a boast.

The word for boast can mean the kind of foolish bragging about what we have achieved, but it can also mean celebrating or glorying in what God has done. Of the ten times Paul uses the word “boast” (six of those ten times being in 2 Cor.) only twice does it refer to the foolish kind of bragging. The other eight times Paul is speaking of glorying in God’s work. Paul boasts in the Lord, boasts in the cross, and here, he boasts in the integrity which God has worked in and through his ministry.

Paul’s conscience is clear before God...because of God.

*We have done so, relying **not on worldly wisdom but on God’s grace.*** Vs. 12

Paul is a man of integrity, and his ministry is sincere. Without wax. In those days unscrupulous sculptors would hide flaws and cracks in their statues by filling the cracks with wax. The wax would make the statue look perfect to the eye but over time it would melt.

Paul says, you’ve seen my life, you’ve heard my message. It’s sincere. Without wax. I have conducted myself with integrity. By the grace of God. My opponents are trying to read into my words meanings that aren’t there. They are trying to interpret into my change of plans motives that aren’t there. I hope you understand me truthfully – based on simple integrity and sincerity. Don’t read into my words, read my words. Don’t read into my motives some dark agenda, know that my motive is that on the day of Christ Jesus I might boast in what God did in you just as you are able to boast in what God did in you through my ministry – all for the glory of Jesus Christ!

Paul then admits that it was his plan to visit them again so they might receive a double blessing. Now here’s where the shadow-shooters got it wrong. They’re accusing Paul of promising he’d come back and spend a lot of time with them but then breaking that promise. But they are suppressing information that doesn’t fit their narrative. An honest assessment would see that when he shares his plans in 1 Cor. 16 he uses phrases like:

***Perhaps** I will stay with you or even spend the winter...(1 Cor. 16:6)*

*I **hope** to spend some time with you, **if the Lord permits.*** (1 Cor. 16:7)

Plans change sometimes. God’s will may unfold differently than what we want or expect. Paul asks rhetorically, does that make me fickle? Does that make me an untrustworthy person who talks out of both sides of my mouth? Yes, yes, and no, no at the same time?

Then Paul begins to transition the conversation from his reputation to God's reputation. From his trustworthiness to God's trustworthiness.

*<sup>18</sup> But as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not "Yes" and "No." <sup>19</sup> For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us—by me and Silas and Timothy—was not "Yes" and "No," but in him it has always been "Yes." <sup>20</sup> For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. (2 Cor. 1:18-20)*

Temporal plans may change. We may want to go through a door and God says, "no", We may hope for a certain outcome and God says, "no". We may lift up fervent prayers and God says "no".

Life isn't always going to go the way we want it to. Our plans – no matter how carefully we make them – won't always work out the way we planned. Life is unpredictable. God's will is, as Romans 11:33 says,

*Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! Rom. 11:33*

But you know what isn't beyond tracing out? You know what always gets a yes? Every single promise God has made. They are all yes in Christ. Jesus unlocked the "yes" to all God's promises when he came to give his life in our place.

When Jesus prayed "Father, if possible, let this cup pass from me" God answered "no" so that God's promises to us all would be "yes".

- God's promise to save us – yes in Christ
- God's promise to adopt us as sons and daughters – yes in Christ
- God's promise to provide for us – yes in Christ
- God's promise to protect us – yes in Christ
- God's promise to work all things for good to those in Christ – yes in Christ.
- God's promise to give us the kingdom – yes in Christ
- God's promise that death would not be the end, but we would live eternally – yes in Christ

And to God's "yes" we say "amen" – so be it, expressing our confidence and faith that God will never renege on His promise. His yes and our amen resound to God's great glory as the Promise-keeper.

And to assure us of the vast, eternal joys contained in His promise, an eternity spent in His presence, He has given us a down payment. The Holy Spirit. God Himself living within us.

We talked last week about affliction and comfort. God's promises don't exempt us from suffering, they prepare us for suffering. God's promises are big enough that even if everything else in life is taken away, even if life itself is taken away, His promises are so great that our hearts can rejoice in those promises!

In fact, the darker things get, the brighter God's promises in Christ shine hope in our hearts.

Let's recap the lessons: don't be the person shooting arrows in the shadows.

Let's seek to live sincere, honest lives in integrity by God's grace.

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And let's accept that our plans and our expectations won't always work out, but God's plans and His promises always will work out for our good. Because He loves us.

I want us to take a few minutes to allow the Holy Spirit to minister to our hearts. Maybe you are facing a disappointment in your life right now. Something isn't going the way you'd hoped. Plans got changed. Doors you thought would open were closed.

Believe God! Believe His promises! Claim His promises! Stand on His promises!

*For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us—by me and Silas and Timothy—was not "Yes" and "No," but in him it has always been "Yes." <sup>20</sup> For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ.*