

# Sincerely Yours

## Abundant Grace

### Topic

Sincerity

### Theme

A godly life is the best answer to criticism.

### Desired Learner Response

The learner will live sincerely in the sight of God.

### Materials

- Resources 1 and 3
- Fake flowers

### Scripture Focus

2 Corinthians 1:12—2:17

### Summary

Some members of the church at Corinth disputed Paul's claim to be an apostle. This lesson examines Paul's claim to sincerely be an apostle of Jesus Christ on behalf of the Corinthian believers.

### Outline

#### I. Paul's Sincere Life and Ministry (2 Cor. 1:12—2:4)

- A. In his methods (1:12)
- B. In his writings (1:13)
- C. In his mutual glorying (1:14)
- D. In his plans (1:15—22)
- E. In his intentions (1:23—2:4)

#### II. Paul's Charge for the Sincere Believer (2 Cor. 2:5—11)

#### III. Paul's Sincere Concern for the Church (2 Cor. 2:12, 13)

#### IV. Paul's Sincere Confidence in God (2 Cor. 2:14—17)

### Memory Verse

*"For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ" (2 Corinthians 2:17).*



## GETTING STARTED

### LESSON 2

#### Fooled by the Flowers

Show a bouquet of fake flowers.

**ASK:** Have you ever leaned in to smell a bouquet of flowers only to realize they were fake? What were the circumstances? (Q1)

**ASK:** How does it feel to be duped by a bouquet of flowers? (Q2)

Many religious teachers are not genuine, but they have the appearance of being genuine. Such false religious teachers feign sincerity to gain a following. Telling whether a religious teacher is genuine takes discernment. And finding out a teacher has been leading people astray can be quite damaging.

The apostle Paul guarded his sincerity. He was not interested in teaching to gain a following. He wanted his life to point to Jesus Christ.

#### Changing Plans

**ASK:** When have you changed your mind about something, causing you great embarrassment, stress, or a broken relationship?

**ASK:** Was your sincerity questioned? Explain.

This lesson concerns a change of plans Paul made and the problem it caused in his relationship with the Corinthian church. Paul's genuineness and sincerity in all he was and did helped him stand in the face of criticism.

## SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

In last week's lesson we saw how Paul opened this second letter to the Corinthians. Today we will follow Paul's transition to the first theme of the letter. He sought to assure his readers of his motives and his methods. He wrote of his sincerity both in the opening verse and in the closing verse of this section (1:12; 2:17). In the middle he explained why he had not come to Corinth earlier, and he also dealt with a problem in the Corinthian church.

#### I. Paul's Sincere Life and Ministry (2 Cor. 1:12–2:4)

##### A. In his methods (1:12)

In answer to slurs that some in the church had made about his trustworthiness and stability, Paul insisted that he had always dealt with the Corinthians sincerely and openly. Opponents in Corinth accused Paul of using cunningly devised, underhanded methods. Paul replied to this attack (2 Cor. 1:12). Paul could rejoice because his conscience was clear concerning his dealings with the Corinthian church.

**READ:** 2 Corinthians 1:12.

Paul cited three aspects of his behavior among the Corinthians. First, it was with simplicity. The word suggests openness, singleness of purpose, lack of hidden motives, and the absence of duplicity. Second, his behavior was with sincerity. This word in Greek comes from two words meaning *sun* and *judgment*, thus it means *something tested by the light of the sun*. Paul had nothing to hide. He was not guilty of any shady dealings. His behavior had been transparent before them. Third, his behavior was by God's grace. Paul did not guide his ministry by carnal, fleshly wisdom. Rather, he depended on the grace of God for his power. His behavior found its source in God's grace.

### **B. In his writings (1:13)**

Paul's opponents also accused him of writing difficult, obscure letters with dark, hidden meanings. In verse 13 Paul answered this charge.

**ASK:** What did Paul write concerning his letters? (Q3) *They were to be taken at face value. He did not include any hidden messages or double meanings.*

Paul replied that his letters were understandable. The word for *read* conveys the idea of reading aloud to a group. Some people try to find hidden meanings in Scripture. They read between the lines as if God's message to them is hidden. This verse discounts such efforts. Paul wrote what he meant and meant what he wrote. His letters were characterized by the same simplicity as his life.

### **C. In his mutual glorying (1:14)**

Verse 14 begins, *As also ye have acknowledged us in part*. Some commentators believe Paul was saying that some church members understood him and others did not. Another group of commentators believes Paul was saying the church only partly understood him. In any case, the apostle Paul wanted the whole church to fully understand him and to glory in his ministry on their behalf even as he expected to glory in them in the day of the Lord Jesus. *The day of the Lord Jesus* refers to the time when believers will stand before Christ.

**READ:** 2 Corinthians 5:10. **ASK:** What is the focus of the day of the Lord? (Q4) *Rewarding believers for what their sincere service to the Lord.*

Paul's conscience was clear that on the day of the Lord the Corinthian believers would know they had not misplaced their trust in him.

### **D. In his plans (1:15–22)**

Paul defended himself against two accusations. However, his attackers brought additional charges against him. In verse 15 he began to deal with a third one. He promised to visit Corinth, but he failed to arrive. In 1 Corinthians 16:5 he explained, *Now I will come unto you, when I shall pass through Macedonia*. Apparently, he had to change Plan A. Next, he had intended to take the sea route and visit Corinth on the way to Macedonia. But Plan B had not worked out either. Therefore, his opponents accused him of being fickle, alleging he had not intended to come in the first place. They said he was afraid to face the church and was not a man of his word. They were suspicious of his motives and maligned his char-

acter, so Paul felt compelled to explain why he had not visited Corinth.

Because he was confident that most of the Corinthians shared in the mutual trust and respect that existed between him and the church, he had determined to visit them. In Plan B, Paul planned to visit Corinth once on the way to Macedonia and once on the way back as he headed for Judea (2 Cor. 1:16). Thus, the Corinthians would have enjoyed a *second benefit* (1:15); he would have seen them twice.

Because Paul had not made the Plan B trip, his attackers accused him of being frivolous. He replied with a question in verse 17: *Did I use lightness [fickleness]*? The way the question appears in the Greek implies a negative answer. No, he was not fickle.

The accusers also claimed that Paul followed fleshly judgment in making his decisions (1:17). They said if he had been following divine methods, he would not have wavered. Paul showed that just the opposite was true. He pointed out that his plans were always subject to change because he was a man under orders. He did not plan as worldly people plan. He had to follow the will of God.

The attackers claimed further that Paul talked out of both sides of his mouth, that he was saying both yes and no at the same time (1:17). Perhaps in this case, yes, he would come, and no, he would not come. Paul informed the Corinthians that they had no right to call his trustworthiness into question. Paul was their apostle.

**READ:** 2 Corinthians 1:18. **ASK:** Since Paul was the Corinthians' apostle, Who did they implicate by doubting Paul's trustworthiness? (Q5) *God.*

Paul answered the charge of doubletalk by an appeal to God's faithfulness. God is trustworthy (1:18). In effect, Paul said that the firmness of his own speech represented God's trustworthiness. Since God is faithful, the message He gave to His apostle was also faithful (1:18).

**ASK:** How effective will a Christian's witness be at work if he consistently goes back on his word or fails to show up when promised? (Q6) *The individual's witness about God will be questioned, since he or she is insincere in other areas of life.*

Paul expanded his reply by relating it to the Godhead and the gospel. God's Son, Jesus Christ, is a solid yes. When Paul, Silvanus (Silas), and Timothy preached the gospel in Corinth, they affirmed without question that Jesus Christ is God's Son (1:19). All the promises of salvation in Christ are also positively firm (1:20).

**ASK:** What would life be like if God was not sincere in His promises for today? (Q7) *Unsettling, discouraging, filled with helplessness.*

**ASK:** What would life be like if God was not sincere in His plans for the future? (Q8) *Hopeless, terrifying.*

Paul backed his claim that he had planned and spoken without wavering. In verses 18–20 he wrote about God's faithfulness in relation to the gospel. In verses 21 and 22 he wrote about God's faithfulness as it pertained to the Corinthians and to Paul's own ministry. He testified that God had done four things: (1) God had established Paul and the Corinthians together. They shared a common spiritual foundation. We share that same foundation. (2) God had anointed them. Both Paul

and the Corinthians had a work to do for God. God calls us to His work. (3) God had sealed them. God seals us with the same seal. (4) God had given them His Spirit as an earnest, or down payment. God gives us, too, His Spirit as an earnest.

**ASK:** How can believers show they are grateful for eternal membership in God's family? (Q9) *By leading godly lives; by serving Christ.*

### **E. In his intentions (1:23–2:4)**

In verse 17 Paul implied that he changed his plans to follow the will of God. In verses 23 and 24 he plainly stated one reason he had not come to Corinth: *that to spare you I came not as yet unto Corinth*. Paul knew that if he had come earlier, he would have dealt harshly with the church because the people condoned sin. He would have come as a disciplinarian. So he delayed his arrival to give them an opportunity to deal with the sin on their own.

Paul realized that what he just said might have sounded like he claimed absolute authority over the Corinthian church. This was not the case, so he pointed out in verse 24 that he was not a despotic overlord but rather a coworker. He had waited to go to Corinth because he did not want to return there in grief. He was grieving over the sin in the Corinthian church. If his grieving had spread to the Corinthian Christians, who would be left to cheer him? While a minority in the Corinthian church was attacking Paul, the majority was still with him. Their faithfulness was a blessing to Paul. He hated to think that he should be the one to discourage them when they were encouraging him.

**READ:** 2 Corinthians 2:4. **ASK:** What evidence did Paul give of his love for the Corinthians? (Q10) *He communicated to them the anguish they caused him and the tears of love he shed for them.*

Paul indicated in 2 Corinthians 2:4 that it had not been easy to write his previous letter. It is never easy to confront someone about his or her sin. He also indicated that he loved the Corinthians abundantly. He grieved over the sin in the church at Corinth, but he did not hate the believers there.

## **II. Paul's Charge for the Sincere Believer (2 Cor. 2:5–11)**

Paul wrote, *If any have caused grief* (2:5). The people in Corinth knew that this description referred to the man who was guilty of incest, of taking his father's wife. Paul had instructed the church to stop fellowshiping with that man (1 Cor. 5:13). The church repented of its lack of discipline, obeyed Paul, and removed the offender from the church. Paul insisted, *Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many* (2 Cor. 2:6).

**READ:** Matthew 18:15; Galatians 6:1. **ASK:** What should be the goal of exercising church discipline? (Q11) *Restoration.*

**ASK:** What attitude should accompany this discipline? (Q12) *Meekness.*

Church discipline is for restoring a brother or sister, not for creating an enemy. The disciplinary action against the sinner in Corinth was a success. Once

confronted, the man repented from his sin and no longer participated in it. The man was sincere in his repentance. He was ready to be restored to fellow believers in the church.

**READ:** 2 Corinthians 2:7, 8. **ASK:** How should a church respond to a disciplined member who repents? (Q13) *Forgive, comfort, and lovingly receive the person.*

It is much harder to forgive than to condemn; however, we need to forgive those whom the Lord has forgiven. Paul urged the Corinthians to reaffirm their love to the repentant believer (1:8) and to accept him back into fellowship.

**READ:** 2 Corinthians 2:9, 10. **ASK:** What would the Corinthians prove by forgiving the sincerely repentant believer? (Q14) *Their obedience to God. Forgiving the brother and accepting him back into the church were not easy to do.*

Paul offered a reason for receiving the offender back into the fellowship of the church. The offender had fallen to Satan's attack and committed immorality. Now, without fellowship, he could fall into Satan's attack of discouragement and despondency (2:7, 11).

### III. Paul's Sincere Concern for the Church (2 Cor. 2:12, 13)

In his next paragraph (2:12, 13) Paul showed the Corinthians that it was wrong to think he did not visit them because he was fickle or did not love them. He explained that his concern for them was so strong that it had caused him to leave Troas while he still had a great opportunity to preach there.

After Paul had last written to the Corinthians, he stayed for a time in Ephesus. Then he went north from Ephesus to Troas, where he hoped to meet Titus. Titus was returning from a visit to Corinth and would have been able to tell Paul how the Corinthians had reacted to Paul's letter. In Troas God opened a door for Paul to preach the gospel. He had a great opportunity to tell others about Christ.

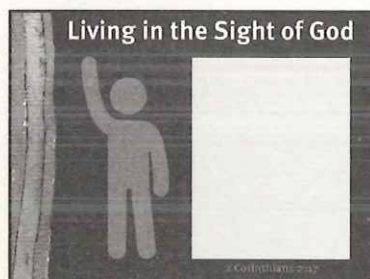
**ASK:** How do you think the Corinthians felt after Paul told them he had left opportunities to share the gospel so that he could learn about how they were doing? (Q15) *They probably felt loved and important.*

Because he was concerned about the Corinthians, Paul left Troas and sailed to Macedonia, hoping to find Titus there. Land travel between Corinth and Ephesus followed a horseshoe route: Corinth to Macedonia to Troas to Ephesus. Paul was journeying up one side, and Titus was traveling up the other. They met in Macedonia at the top of the horseshoe. There Titus updated Paul about the affairs in Corinth. It was then that Paul wrote 2 Corinthians.

### IV. Paul's Sincere Confidence in God (2 Cor. 2:14–17)

Paul had just written about the joy he felt when Titus reported that the Corinthians had repented. Paul expressed his joy in terms of a soldier marching in the triumphant procession of a victorious commander (2:14). At such a celebration incense was burned. Paul compared his preaching to the incense and indicated that it was pleasing to God (2:15). From a human point of view, the incense was a sweet

perfume of life to those who believed but was the odor of death to those who did not (2:16). Paul described his opponents as hucksters peddling the Word of God. By contrast, Paul again affirmed his sincerity (2:17).



**RESOURCE:** Display resource 3. **ASK:** How does a person ensure that he or she is living in God's eyes and not in the eyes of others? (Q16) (Record learners' answers on the resource.) *The person spends time asking God to evaluate his or her life. He or she deals with internal sins that only God can see.*

**ASK:** What difference does living in God's eyes make when criticism comes? (Q17) *The person will endure criticism knowing that God is the ultimate judge of his or her life.*

## MAKING IT PERSONAL

Sincerity marked Paul's life and ministry. Use the following questions to challenge your learners to follow Paul's example of sincerity.

### A Life of Sincerity

Challenge the learners to consider whether a charge of insincerity would be true of their lives. (Q18)

**ASK:** What steps will you take to show sincerity in all areas of your life? (Q19)

### Say What You Mean, Mean What You Say

**ASK:** What sayings do people, especially believers, use that may be glib or insincere? (Q20) *Praise the Lord! I'll be praying for you.*

Challenge the learners to say what they mean and mean what they say this week.

**ASK:** For whom will you pray sincerely, having promised to pray for that person? (Q21)

| Waves of Grace           |     |
|--------------------------|-----|
| By God's grace I can ... | 7.  |
| 1.                       | 8.  |
| 2.                       | 9.  |
| 3.                       | 10. |
| 4.                       | 11. |
| 5.                       | 12. |
| 6.                       | 13. |

### Summary and Memory Verse

Use resource 1 to review the response for this lesson: By God's grace I can live in the sight of God.

Encourage your learners to memorize 2 Corinthians 2:17. Give them an opportunity to quote the verse in class next week.