



2 CORINTHIANS

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“Enter into the joy of the Lord.”

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PAUL'S DEFENSE OF HIS PERSONAL INTEGRITY

The days preceding the most recent Election Day proved to be quite typical of most previous elections. Many candidates tried desperately to come up with something that they could use to discredit their opponents. Some observers called it “negative campaigning.” People on the street use a more colorful term and call it plain old “mud-slinging.”

PAUL ANSWERS THE CHARGES OF UNTRUSTWORTHINESS

2 CORINTHIANS 1:12 – 24

The false teachers in Corinth engaged in vicious “mud-slinging” hoping to discredit Paul and win the support of the members of the congregation. As one writer put it, “they went right to the jugular vein of character.” They questioned Paul’s integrity. They reminded the people of an incident with which all of them were familiar. In his first letter to them, he had indeed promised to visit them right after he had traveled through Macedonia. He wrote in 1 Corinthians 16 that he was looking forward to the visit and hoped that he would be able to stay awhile. He mentioned that he even hoped to spend the entire winter with them. It was a matter of record that this didn’t happen. He had not kept that promise. The “spin” which his detractors put on Paul’s failure to keep his promise was: “See! How can you possibly trust a man who says one thing and does something else?”

PAUL ASKS THEM TO TRUST THEIR OWN EXPERIENCE

2 CORINTHIANS 1:12–14

Before Paul takes on the matter of his change of travel plans, he asks his former parishioners to just stop and think about their personal experience with him while he was their pastor. Close to two years would have given them ample time to judge his character. Had he ever done anything that would give them just cause to question his integrity? This is a rhetorical question for which Paul takes the liberty to give the answer. He tells them that this is the one thing of which he was especially proud. His record with them was impeccable. “Our conscience testifies we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from God” (v. 12).

Please note that when Paul writes, “especially with you,” he doesn’t mean to imply that he was less than that with others. He is simply suggesting that because he was with them for such an extended ministry they may have had more opportunities to be impressed with his sincerity and trustworthiness. Perhaps, to keep his detractors from using such a boast against him, he makes it clear that he was able to conduct himself with integrity because God had so empowered him.

In the last statement of verse 12 about “worldly wisdom,” Paul seems to be alluding to the underhanded tactics of the false teachers in their attack on Paul’s reputation, as well as their methods of propagating their false ideas. Paul takes the opportunity to emphasize again that both his conduct and his message of salvation and hope were gifts of “God’s grace.”

In verse 13, Paul elaborates on what this means to them. The message he had brought

them was never fuzzy or ambiguous. They could trust the integrity of it. They didn’t have to “read between the lines,” or look for double meanings. In verse 14, Paul expresses his hope that as they remember his performance while he was with them, and as they read his correspondence, they will agree with Paul about his evaluation of his ministry among them. “As you have understood us in part, you will come to understand fully that you can boast of us.” He deserved their commendations.

The apostle Paul just can’t pass up an opportunity to bring up the “end times.” He does so not to strike fear and terror into their hearts, but only to emphasize how important it was for them to live out their lives with the dimensions of eternity in the picture at all times. On the Great Day of the Lord’s Second Coming, they will experience a gratifying vindication for their “boasting” of Paul and his Gospel message. On that day they will hear God’s commendation for Paul: “Well done, good and faithful servant... enter into the joy of the Lord” (Matthew 25:21). Their pride in Paul will be accompanied by personal gratitude that they had remained loyal to Paul. For they, too, will hear God welcome them into Paradise. As you and I remain faithful to the Gospel of God, we also can look forward to hearing that same gracious invitation to “enter into the joy of the Lord.” We, too, will be filled with a new sense of appreciation for those who faithfully brought the Gospel to us — our parents, pastors, Sunday School Teachers, Bible Study Teachers, relatives and friends.

NOW ABOUT HIS CHANGE OF TRAVEL PLANS

2 CORINTHIANS 1:15–17

Before Paul launches into his explanation of how his change of plans developed, he gently chides them for allowing these itinerant theologians to spoil what he regarded as a relationship of

mutual trust. He writes: “Because I was confident of this...” (v. 15). The thought had never entered his mind that they would be anything but loyal to him. It must have been like that for God when he was “let down” by our first parents in the Garden of Eden. The Lord had a wonderful relationship with Adam and Eve. He had never disappointed them. He met all their needs and gave them a completely happy existence. God had every reason to believe that they would be loyal to Him. Along came God’s detractor, a complete stranger to them. Like a smooth-talking traveling salesman, he began to sell them “a bill of goods” that God was “holding back” something from them. Satan injected into their minds the seed of doubt. In just a matter of minutes, Adam and Eve moved from trusting God to gobbling up the “sales pitch” of God’s great enemy. Unbelievable!

Paul goes on to explain that when he decided to change plans he was thinking of what might be best for them, “so that you might benefit twice. I planned to visit you on my way to Macedonia and to come back to you from Macedonia.” This way, instead of one visit from the apostle, they would have two! Obviously, this was Paul’s answer to the charge that he was undependable, and maybe even a bit “wishy-washy.” He implied that he had given a lot of thought to his decision to alter his itinerary. He didn’t do it “lightly.” Furthermore, whenever he makes plans, as in his original plan to visit them, he sincerely intended to follow through. He didn’t “make...plans in a worldly manner,” saying “Yes, yes” and “No, no” in the same breath! Circumstances had changed. What would be best for them was always the overriding factor. If they had not allowed their minds to be contaminated by opinions of people who didn’t even know Paul personally, they probably would have given Paul the benefit of any doubt about his change of plans. Doesn’t this send a warning to us about our willingness to give credence to negative rumors (especially “juicy gossip”) about church leaders and others?

PAUL SHOOTS DOWN THE DETRACTORS’ “FALSE SPIN”

2 CORINTHIANS 1:18-20

When he wrote “But as surely as God is faithful,” Paul put himself under an oath. The “hidden agenda” of his detractors was quite obvious to him. They wanted to destroy his credibility so the people in Corinth would be more open to accepting the “new teachings” which they wanted to promote among them. Unlike other biblical authors, it was fairly common for Paul to use oaths when he wanted to defend or emphasize a crucial truth. This fits in quite well with what we know about his passion for the Gospel and the intensity of his personality.

It was especially appropriate in these circumstances. For Paul, it was a real crisis. They needed to know that there was absolutely nothing shaky or questionable about the saving truths which he and his associates, Silas and Timothy, had taught them. It was never a Yes or No, but always and only “Yes.” Paul goes beyond concern for his standing with them. He inserts a “plug” for the Old Testament Scripture as well. All of the Messianic Prophecies, God had miraculously fulfilled in the person and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. In Jesus, all of them were a resounding “YES!” What Paul taught them could be validated by checking it against what the Scriptures of the Old Testament clearly taught. Since this was something they could count on, Paul writes: “And so through him [Jesus] the ‘Amen’ is spoken by us to the glory of God.”

Paul may be alluding here to a practice in Jewish synagogues of that day. When the worship leader spoke a word of praise to God, members of the congregation would personally validate what the leader had said by declaring “Amen!” The word was carried over to the New Testament worship. In some churches today, “Amen” has become a formalized response to prayers and benedictions, which are spoken by the worship leader.

Sometimes it is sung and at other times is simply spoken. In churches with less-structured worship, congregation members are encouraged to shout “Amen” whenever they are moved “by the Spirit” to express their endorsement of what a preacher has said. The “Amen” fervently proclaims in the vernacular: “Right on!” All of this can serve to remind us that no matter how wonderful and glorious the truths about God may be, it really doesn’t have much value for us until we personally endorse them. Whether aloud, or silently in our heart, we need to affirm with a solid Amen, through which we say: “That’s for sure!”

FOUR OTHER TRUTHS WE CAN SAY ‘AMEN’ TO

2 CORINTHIANS 1:21–22

Having established the dependability of God Himself, Paul builds on this truth as he proceeds to make his case before the people of Corinth. He reminds them that God Himself has been involved in all this, every step of the way. To help them get a clear understanding of what this means, Paul uses four illustrations or analogies, drawn from everyday life.

First, he wanted them to bring into sharp focus this basic truth: “Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ” (v. 21). The Greek word for “stand firm” was a legal term that indicated certain things will be carried out, as in a contract. In this case, Paul was focusing on his personal trustworthiness, as well as the Corinthians themselves. In effect, this is what Paul is saying here: “God will follow through on what He has begun.” It’s in the contract! God will not let you down (2 Timothy 1:12).

Second, Paul says it was God who had called him to be a special messenger who would speak for God. He says he had been “anointed” by God to take on this awesome responsibility. He used the same word (*chríoo*) that the Septuagint (Greek Translation of the Old Testament) used in Exodus 28:41 where Moses was told to anoint his brother Aaron and his sons to be priests of God. Saul was similarly “anointed” to be the first King of Israel (1 Samuel 9:16). In the Old Testament, anointing involved a ceremony in which oil was poured on the head of a person designated by God for a certain task. The English translation of the title “Messiah” is simply “The Anointed One.” The Greek word for “Messiah” is “Christos.” The root in the verb “*chríoo*” means “to anoint.” It is quite obvious that Paul was not speaking of a literal anointing with oil. He had in mind an anointing by the Holy Spirit. Paul wanted to leave this thought with them: He did what he did because God had commissioned him. Thus, his message had the authority and efficacy of God behind it.

The third “picture” word which Paul reminds them to keep in mind is that God had “set his seal of ownership on us.” Again, this is a term from the world of commerce. It referred to the practice of attaching a wax seal to the opening of a sack or an

envelope, to indicate ownership and to be a warning not to mess with its contents. Some students of the Bible take this as a reference to Holy Baptism, through which God claims us as His very own. We receive the sign of the Cross on our forehead and over our heart, to signify that through Christ, our crucified Savior, we belong to God with all of our being. Others see it as a reference to the evidence of the indwelling Holy Spirit which effectively identifies us as belonging to God!

The fourth analogy which Paul uses is from the world of commerce. Paul says that God had “put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.” A deposit is made by a buyer to a seller as a guarantee that the balance of the purchase price will soon be paid. When believers experience a measure of the Holy Spirit in their lives, it points to the future when believers will experience to the full what it means to be in a saving relationship with God. Paul wants them to know that he and his colleagues have the Spirit of God in their lives now, and they take this as a strong guarantee that they will experience the fullness of it someday. God will keep His Word! When you and I express our faith in the Gospel and in God’s promises for life and eternity, we can be sure that the Spirit of God is within us (See: 1 Corinthians 2:10–16).

Why did Paul go to such great lengths to make these four concepts illustrate the complete dependability of God? A very plausible explanation is that he wants them to understand that God has been involved every step of the way in all of Paul’s planning and doing. Thus the charge that he has been fickle and frivolous in his dealings with the Corinthians simply doesn’t “hold water.” The charge brought against Paul by his detractors simply doesn’t have any basis in reality, whatsoever.

BOTTOM LINE:

HE WAS CONCERNED ABOUT THEM!

2 CORINTHIANS 1:23–24

Once again, Paul uses an oath, calling God as his “witness” to corroborate what Paul gave as his reason for his change of plans. It was for their benefit: “In order to spare you” (v. 23).

Verse 24 is almost like a parenthetical statement that Paul slipped into this discussion about his intense concern for them. He may have sensed that a possible response to this could have been that Paul was “stepping over the line” a bit. “Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, because it is by faith you stand firm.” It’s like he’s taking a step back to make clear that he recognized that ultimately they have personal responsibility in the matter of faith. However, because of his love for them, he wants to work with them to get them back on solid ground. His motive for his passionate concern is that they might experience the joy that comes from being faithful to God. Paul gives us a neat model of ministry. It emphasizes genuine pastoral concern that shows itself in a cooperative “working together,” rather than in a domineering, “knuckle under,” authoritarian pastoral style.

Paul isn’t quite finished with his impressive vindication of his ministry and his personal integrity. He told the members of the church at Corinth not to listen to the renegade false teachers. He assured them that he loved them and wanted only the best for them — always!

PERSONAL APPLICATION

2 CORINTHIANS 2:1–13

Lord Jesus Christ, what a remarkable man Your apostle Paul was! The more that I learn about his faith and love, the more I appreciate him as an example and mentor for the kind of person I know You want me to be. Please help me to put into practice what I learn from him. Thank you Lord Jesus! Amen.

Review

1. Why was the Apostle Paul so concerned about how the members of the church in Corinth felt about his personal integrity?
 - a. His pride had been deeply wounded by the unfair charges of his detractors.
 - b. He felt rejected by the people of Corinth who were very important to him.
 - c. He did not want them to have any doubt about the message he proclaimed to them.
2. What does he do twice in chapter 1:18–23 to show how deeply concerned he was about making sure they would believe him, rather than his detractors?

2 Corinthians 2:1–4

3. In 2 Corinthians 1:23, Paul explained that he had postponed his planned visit because he wanted to “spare” them. From what did he want to spare them (2:1)?

Do you think Paul is referring to his first visit of about 2 years (2:4–7)? Why or why not?

In 12:14 and 13:1, what number does Paul give his next planned visit? _____

In 2:3, Paul wants to spare not only them by delaying his visit, but who else?

4. Paul refers to this intermediate visit and the written communication which followed as “painful” and “severe.” What inferences can you draw from verses 5–7 as to what would make it so “painful” for everyone involved?

What does Paul say in verses 2–4 that required him to write this “severe” letter?

5. This letter was not included in the New Testament. What possibilities could account for its absence from the canon of Scripture? (See John 20:30 & 21:25)
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2 Corinthians 2:5–11

6. This portion of chapter 2 deals with the treatment which should be accorded to a man who had committed an offense, that Paul says had severely “grieved” both him and the people to whom he is writing. What do you think the offense might be?

7. On what directive of Paul had the congregation at Corinth evidently followed through, according to verse 6?

8. What kind of punishment do you think they might have given him?

9. What did a minority feel about the extent of the punishment that had been meted out to the offender?

10. Why was Paul concerned about “excessive” punishment for the man who had asked for forgiveness (v.7)?

11. Who might claim the victory if this happened (v. 11)?

12. What positive things does Paul say (v. 7) they were to “put into the mix” when dealing with the penitent man?

What else does Paul say they are to do in verse 8?

13. In verse 10, Paul directs them to find strength to do this in the same place where he found it. Where is that?

2 Corinthians 2:12–13

14. In what city in Asia Minor would Paul wait for Titus, after he took Paul’s letter to Corinth?

15. How did Paul keep busy there?

16. Why did he go to Macedonia?

17. What was helpful to you in this lesson?