

Yes in Christ

2 Corinthians 1:15–22

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Introduction

Well we return this morning to our study of 2 Corinthians, and so I would invite you to turn with me in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians chapter 1. And as we have begun our study in 2 Corinthians in these past few months, I've highlighted that the central lesson this letter teaches us is how we are to engage in **joyful, enduring ministry in the midst of affliction**. And that really is my desire for you as a fellowship group. That's what I'm after in our study of this great epistle together: that in learning the lessons presented in the life and ministry of the Apostle Paul, we would each be equipped to effectively and faithfully fulfill the ministry that the Lord Jesus Christ has entrusted to us, in whatever way we serve the body of Christ.

And contrary to what you may have intuitively thought, I've been emphasizing that you don't have to be an Apostle—like Paul was—or even a pastor, or professor, or missionary to be engaged in ministry in Christ's Church. The fact is: you are all called to ministry. By virtue of your union with Christ and your participation in the body of Christ, Almighty God has placed a call on your life to fulfill the work of His ministry—in the church and in the world. In this very letter, in chapter 3 verse 5, Paul speaks of believers as *ministers* of the New Covenant. In the same way the Old Testament priests were called into ministry as ministers of the Mosaic Covenant, God has called His Church to be a kingdom of priests to administer His blessings that are fulfilled in the New Covenant. And so 1 Peter 2:9 speaks of us as a royal priesthood, set apart to proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. In 2 Corinthians 5:18, Paul says that Christ has committed to us the *ministry* of reconciliation—that is, the proclamation of the message that God is reconciling the world to Himself—forgiving sins through faith in the atoning work Christ. And so, he says, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us to be reconciled to God. This is our calling as Christians, friends. We are all called to lay down our lives in sacrificial ministry, both (a) as we give time and effort to serving our brothers and sisters in the body of Christ, and (b) as we preach the saving Gospel of Christ to our neighbors who are lost and face God's judgment. We are all called to ministry.

And we are all called to ministry in the midst of *affliction*, because the world we've been called to minister *to* is a broken world. It is a sin-cursed world. It is a world that has always been, and, until Christ returns, always will be increasingly hostile to righteousness. Even in the church, you are called minister to those who have been set free from the penalty and the power of sin, but who have not yet been set free from the presence of sin.

And so when you're engaged in real ministry—whether in laboring for the salvation of the lost or the sanctification of the saints—you expect affliction! Because you're taking aim at people's sin, at people's idols! And sinful people like you and me don't like our idols being torn down! We get prideful, and we get offended. And so there will be *conflict*, and there will be *affliction* in ministry. And so we need to be equipped for **joyful, enduring ministry in the midst of affliction**.

And the Apostle Paul has something to teach us about that in 2 Corinthians. As we've mentioned before, Paul writes 2 Corinthians in the midst of severe controversy. It's been about six years since Paul founded the church of Corinth. And Timothy has reported that false teachers from Jerusalem have infiltrated the church in Corinth, claiming to be apostles of Christ, and at the same time claiming that Paul was not a true apostle. In order to make room for their own false teaching, they launched a full-scale assault on Paul's character. They began cooking up every accusation they could think of in order to sow seeds of doubt about Paul in the minds of the Corinthians.

Chief among those accusations was that Paul suffered far too much to be a legitimate minister of the Gospel, and that God must have been punishing Paul for his secret sins. But in chapter 1 verses 3 to 11, Paul responds to that accusation by praising God for his suffering, because he knows that his suffering is ordained by God for the sake of the spread of the Gospel, and because it's through that suffering that Paul experiences God's divine comfort. It is through his affliction that God reveals the abundance of His own power. So far from *discrediting* his genuineness as an Apostle, Paul's suffering for Christ's sake is a badge of his *authenticity*.

But the accusations didn't stop there. They also accused him of being duplicitous, of being manipulative, of being intentionally ambiguous in his communication to the Corinthians, so he could take advantage of them. But in verses 12 to 14, Paul models for us the way that the faithful Christian minister responds to the personal attacks that are sure to come in the course of our ministry. He models for us what *godly* self-defense looks like for a true servant of Christ. He defends himself by appealing to the highest human court there is: the testimony of his own conscience. As he subjected his heart and his life to the searching light of God's holiness, and as he submitted his mind to the Word of God and to the illumination of the Spirit, his biblically-informed conscience exonerated him from all charges.

He says, "We have not been duplicitous with you, we have not been phony with you, we have not been crafty and cunning and underhanded—saying one thing but meaning another. I haven't written to you in code, or in deceptive platitudes; I write nothing else to you than what you can read and understand. I've always been up front and honest with you; you've always known my mind. With me, it's always been: what you see is what you get. Before God and men, my

conscience is clear.” And so what you have in verses 12 to 14 is Paul’s general defense of his own personal integrity. Amidst all of the accusations the false apostles made against him, his proud confidence was the testimony of his clear conscience.

But after that more *general* response in defense of his integrity, starting in verse 15 Paul responds to the *specific* charge that he was untrustworthy. As we’ll see, the unrest in the Corinthian church required Paul to make several changes in his travel plans. And as is the case with desperate men, the false apostles seized upon the flimsiest of evidence—a change in itinerary!—as an opportunity to charge Paul with being fickle, indecisive, manipulative, and devoid of the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is to *this* accusation that Paul responds in our text this morning. Follow along as I read 2 Corinthians chapter 1, verses 15 to 22:

In this confidence I intended at first to come to you, so that you might twice receive a blessing; ¹⁶that is, to pass your way into Macedonia, and again from Macedonia to come to you, and by you to be helped on my journey to Judea. ¹⁷Therefore, I was not vacillating when I intended to do this, was I? Or what I purpose, do I purpose according to the flesh, so that with me there will be yes, yes and no, no at the same time? ¹⁸But as God is faithful, our word to you is not yes and no. ¹⁹For the Son of God, Christ Jesus, who was preached among you by us—by me and Silvanus and Timothy—was not yes and no, but is yes in Him. ²⁰For as many as are the promises of God, in Him they are yes; therefore also through Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us. ²¹Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God, ²²who also sealed us and gave *us* the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge.

And as we seek to faithfully carry out the ministry that has been entrusted to each one of us, there will be times when we will find ourselves in the same situation that Paul did—facing the pain of false accusations, misunderstandings, and suspicion of our character and integrity. But by examining Paul’s response in this text, we’ll learn valuable lessons about how *we* can respond to these difficult situations in a way that glorifies God.

And as we unpack what the Holy Spirit has given us in this text, our approach will be, first, to give an explanation of the text so that we understand its meaning. And we’ll unfold that meaning across **three units of thought**. And then, trusting that we will have adequately understood the meaning of Paul’s words, we’ll draw out **several lines of application** that will prove instructive for us as we seek to carry out a joyful, enduring ministry in the midst of affliction.

Explanation

I. An Account of Paul’s Travel Plans (vv. 15–16)

We have, first, in verses 15 and 16, **an account of Paul’s travel plans**. And to understand Paul’s **account of his travel plans**, we need to remind ourselves of the timeline of events that led up to the writing of 2 Corinthians. Turn back to 1 Corinthians 16, where Paul first discusses his plans to visit the Corinthians. He’s been giving them directions about collecting money for the saints in Jerusalem, and in 1 Corinthians 16, verse 5, he says: “But I will come to you after I go through Macedonia, for I am going through Macedonia; ⁶and perhaps I will stay with you, or even spend the winter, so that you may send me on my way wherever I may go. ⁷For I do not wish to see you now just in passing; for I hope to remain with you for some time, if the Lord permits. ⁸But I will remain in Ephesus until Pentecost; ⁹for a wide door for effective service has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.”

So Paul’s original plan—you could call it “Plan A”—was to stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, and then, as he traveled up through Macedonia, to come down to spend an extended time with them in Corinth, and then from Corinth to cross the Aegean to Jerusalem. But after Timothy delivered the letter of 1 Corinthians, he found out there was a blooming rebellion against Paul. And when Paul learned about this, he decided to change his plans and go to Corinth immediately. And we see this “Plan B” in 2 Corinthians 1:15–16: “In this confidence I intended to come to you first, so that you might twice receive a blessing; ¹⁶that is, to pass your way into Macedonia, and again from Macedonia to come to you, and by you to be helped on my journey to Judea.”

He says, “In this confidence”—that is to say, the confidence of what he just said in verses 13 and 14—the confidence that the Corinthians would understand that Paul, as their spiritual father (cf. 1 Cor 4:15), was not what the false apostles said he was, but was their ground for rejoicing. He was assuming the very best of them. Yes, they had been upset by the lies of the false apostles, but he figured by going there in person, he could clear up any confusion and put the rebellion to rest. Then, he would travel up from Corinth to Macedonia to collect money for the saints in Jerusalem, and then travel back to Corinth on his way to Jerusalem, which would allow him to see the Corinthians twice. And that would have provided a second opportunity for the Corinthians to contribute to the collection for the saints in Jerusalem, which Paul describes as a blessing. So he figures, “Instead of going to Macedonia first, I’ll go to Corinth first, take care of this personal issue, and then come back to Corinth after visiting Macedonia, and that’ll give the Corinthians the second blessing of giving to meet the needs of the church in Jerusalem.”

Unfortunately, that’s not how it went. That first visit to Corinth proved to be what he called his “painful visit,” or his “sorrowful visit,” chapter 2 verse 2. It was on that visit that Paul discovered that it wasn’t just a minor dispute, but that there was a full-scale mutiny incited against him by the false apostles. So rather than going to Macedonia, he went to “Plan C.” He traveled straight back to Ephesus from Corinth, and wrote the Corinthians what we call “the severe letter,” reproving them for failing to repudiate the accusations and the teaching of the false apostles (2:4). Eventually, we learn in chapter 2 verses 12 and 13, he traveled to Macedonia by way of

Troas, and it's in Macedonia where he writes 2 Corinthians. And so Paul changed his travel plans, not once, but twice.

II. The Statement of the Accusation (v. 17)

And like unscrupulous politicians running a smear campaign against their opponent, the false apostles *seized* upon this change of plans and blew it entirely out of proportion.

And so having considered, first, Paul's account of his travel plans, we come, secondly, to **the statement of the accusation**. We see something of the false apostles' accusation recast in Paul's rhetorical questions in verse 17. Paul says, "Therefore, I was not vacillating when I intended to do this, was I? Or what I purpose, do I purpose according to the flesh, so that with me there will be yes, yes and no, no at the same time?"

They accused him of "vacillating," *elaphria* in the Greek. It's a word that refers to capriciousness, to instability. It describes someone who is fickle—who just whimsically flits about from this to that and here to there. They were saying, "He said he was going from Ephesus to Macedonia. Then he said he's going to come straight to Corinth and return on his way back *from* Macedonia, and then what *actually* happened is he came from Ephesus, to Corinth, back to Ephesus, up to Macedonia. The guy is literally all over the map! How in the world can you trust him?"

They accused him of being the kind of man who declared, "Yes, yes!" and "No, no!" at the very same time. This is the picture of the kind of deceptive, untrustworthy conniver who "affirms just as fervently as he afterwards denies" (Meyer, 429). This is a man who will look you in your eye, smile at you, shake your hand, and say, "Yes, yes! Sure, absolutely!" all the while thinking to himself, "There is no way I'm going to do that!" And so like a shifty, unprincipled politician, he makes what amounts to campaign promises that he never intends on keeping. He gives his word and he breaks it. With him, it is "Yes, yes" and "No, no" at the same time.

And perhaps the weightiest aspect of the accusation in verse 17 was the implication that he "purposed according to the flesh." The one who purposes, or plans, or walks "according to the flesh" is strongly contrasted in Scripture with the one who walks by the Spirit. Romans 8:5 says, "For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit." And Paul continues in verse 6: "The mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace." So the man who "purposes according to the flesh," is the man who is devoid of the Holy Spirit of God, guided only by the impulses of their corrupt nature as fallen human beings.

This was the false apostles' accusation against Paul. "The man talks out of both sides of his mouth! He's undependable! Untrustworthy! He's a fleshly man who goes back on his word because he's guided by no higher principle than his own fallen nature! He doesn't depend on the Spirit's guidance, otherwise how do you explain the fickleness? And if you can't trust him to get *travel plans* right, how are you going to trust his apostleship? How are you going to trust his gospel?"

But Paul repudiates all of these charges. As I said, he recasts these accusations in the form of rhetorical questions. And he uses a grammatical construction in the Greek that calls for a firm and indignant negative answer. "I was not vacillating, was I? I was not purposing according to the flesh, was I? With me it's not 'Yes, yes' and 'No, no,' is it? *Absolutely not!* No way!" Paul has already said in verse 12: "We have not conducted ourselves in *fleshly wisdom* toward you." And he'll say in chapter 4 verse 2: "But we have *renounced* disgraceful, underhanded ways! We *refuse* to practice cunning!"

III. Paul's Defense against the Accusation (vv. 18–22)

And then, in verses 18 to 22, he begins his self-defense. We saw an account of his travel plans in verses 15 and 16, and then the statement of the accusation in verse 17. And now we come to the heart of the passage, **Paul's defense against the accusation**. Look with me again at verses 18 through 22: "But as God is faithful, our word to you is not yes and no. ¹⁹For the Son of God, Christ Jesus, who was preached among you by us—by me and Silvanus and Timothy—was not yes and no, but is yes in Him. ²⁰For as many as are the promises of God, in Him they are yes; therefore also through Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us. ²¹Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God, ²²who also sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge."

Now, as you read that passage, that doesn't quite sound like a conventional defense of changing one's travel plans, does it? In fact, on first reading, you might wonder what any of that has to do with why he altered his itinerary. And I believe it's this very thing that makes this such a great passage. Paul will get to exonerating himself of wrongdoing as it concerns the particulars of his travel plans, down in verse 23. But before he defends his conduct, Paul defends his integrity. And in this passage, **Paul defends his integrity first by appealing to his theology**. The reality of who God is, and what He has accomplished in Christ and in the Gospel, becomes the basis for all of his behavior. Paul's conduct is rooted in his message.

And so what we have in verses 18 to 22 are **five theological arguments** that provide the ground for Paul's integrity, and thus provide the basis of his self-defense. And while we don't have time to exhaust the theology revealed in this text, I do want to look at each of these **five arguments** in their turn, and highlight how they contribute to Paul's self-defense.

A. God is Faithful (v. 18)

Number one: **God is faithful.** Verse 18 says, “But *as God is faithful*, our word to you is not yes and no.” Now, some take this phrase to be a kind of oath, as if Paul is saying, “God as my witness....” And that could be the case. But whether it is or not, Paul’s emphasis here is his appeal to *God’s* faithfulness as the ground of *his* faithfulness. “As *God* is faithful, *our word* to you is faithful.” God’s faithfulness establishes Paul’s faithfulness, because Paul is God’s messenger and preaches God’s message.

We read in that classic passage in Number 23:19, quoted in so many systematic theology books as they treat the doctrine of God: “God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent; Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?” You see, the God who is our Father is the *paragon* of faithfulness, trustworthiness, and dependability. With Him there is no variation or shifting shadow (Jas 1:17). The great anchor of the believer’s soul is that God does not *lie* (Heb 6:19)! All of our confidence and hope rests upon the reality that God’s Word is a sure and steadfast foundation—that our God is faithful to His promises which He spoke to us clearly in His Word. He does not deal with us in cunning and craftiness; He doesn’t commit Himself to us or promise us some great blessing, only to change His mind and fail to deliver because it better suits His own interests! The immutability of God, dear friends, is not just some arcane theological doctrine reserved for heady academic debate! It is the very foundation of the faithfulness of God—our only steadfast ground of hope! And because God is faithful, we can have the great confidence that when He makes a promise to His people, His ‘Yes’ does not carry a hidden ‘No.’

And Paul says, “Dear Corinthians, as our God is faithful, so also is our word to you faithful! The pattern and principle of *my* ministry to you is the faithfulness of the very God whom we serve, and who has called me into apostolic ministry!” (Storms, 41). One commentator helpfully paraphrases Paul’s thoughts. He writes, “One could almost hear him say....: “How could I possibly preach to you the good news of a God who always acts with your best interests at heart and never fails to fulfill his promises, and then turn around and treat you with utter disregard by behaving in a double-minded and self-serving way?” (Storms, 41). He can’t! It would be an utter contradiction! **The character of God fundamentally drives and controls Paul’s life and conduct.**

B. Christ is Yes (v. 19)

There’s a **second argument.** Number one: God is faithful. Number **two: Christ is Yes.** Look with me at verse 19. Paul writes, “For the Son of God, Christ Jesus, who was preached among you by us—by me and Silvanus and Timothy—was not yes and no, but is yes in Him.”

Just as the character of God demands the minister's faithfulness, so also does the character of Christ. Just as God is faithful, so also is Jesus Christ the same, yesterday, today, and forever (Heb 13:8). He was no vacillator. There was no blending of Yes and No in His life or in His speech. There was nothing in Him that was contradictory or untrustworthy. Our Great High Priest, as Hebrews 7:26 says, is "holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens." The Apostle Peter, quoting the prophet Isaiah said of Christ that He "committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth" (1 Pet 2:22). Indeed, not, for He is, as He claimed to be in John 14:6, *the* truth. God's Word is Truth (John 17:17), and Jesus is the Word become flesh (1:14): Truth incarnate.

This glorious Savior, was the very subject and content of all of Paul's preaching. He says, "This Son of God Christ Jesus was preached among you by us. *He* was and is our preaching. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified (1 Cor 2:2)." And so if I have given my life—if I suffer through daily affliction, if I spend and am expended, if every day I am like a sheep led to the slaughter—all so that I can preach nothing but the person and work of Him who is the *Truth*, how could I be characterized by underhandedness and deception? Philip Edgcumbe Hughes captures Paul's argument well when he wrote, "Nothing could be more incongruous than to suspect of insincerity the Apostle whose entire being was dedicated to the service and proclamation of Him who is the Truth, and the Same yesterday, today, and forever. The veracity of the Christ, by faith in whom, ... [the Corinthians'] lives had been completely transformed, was evidence conclusive to them of the veracity of him who endured so much in order to bring the message to them" (35).

C. The Message is Clear (v. 20a)

And so God is faithful, and Christ is Yes. Number **three: The message is clear**. And we see this in the first half of verse 20. Paul says, "For as many as are the promises of God, in Him [that is, in Christ] they are yes." The God whom Paul serves is not yes and no. The Christ whom Paul preaches is not yes and no. And the Gospel Paul proclaims is not yes and no. *All* of God's promises find their consummate, fulfilled "Yes!" in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ!

Christ does not fulfill only *some* of God's promises. There are not some promises that God has made to which Christ says Yes, and others to which He says No. The Gospel is *not*: "Yes: today you find salvation in Jesus Christ, and No: tomorrow you must find salvation somewhere else" (cf. Garland, 103)! The Gospel is *not*: "Yes: you are saved, and I give eternal life to you, and you will never perish, and no one will snatch you out of My hand (John 10:28), and No: you may lose your salvation if you don't continue on in faithfulness!" The Gospel is *Yes!* It is *finished* (John 19:30)! "Christ, having been raised from the dead, is *never* to die again...for the death that

He died, He died to sin *once for all*” (Rom 6:9–10)! “Every priest stands daily ministering and offering, time after time, the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God.... For by *one* offering, He has perfected for *all* time those who are sanctified!” (Heb 10:11–14).

“Oh Corinthians, how can I preach *this* Gospel, of God’s glorious, unqualified, triumphant ‘Yes!’ in Christ, and in a matter as trivial as travel plans, be to you ‘Yes and no’?” For as many as are the promises of God, in Christ they are not yes and no, but are yes in Him.

D. “Amen” was Uttered (v. 20b)

God is faithful, Christ is Yes, the message is clear. Number **four**: **The “Amen” was uttered.** Look at the second half of verse 20: “...therefore also through Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us.”

Now this is truly fascinating. Paul is saying that the benefits of the Gospel that God showers upon us in Christ are not meant to evoke no response from us, the beneficiaries. A popular worship song today contains the line, “Every blessing You pour out, I’ll turn back to *praise*.” The promises of God that are fulfilled to us in Christ are meant to bring forth the fruit of thanksgiving and praise from the hearts and lips of God’s people.

And one way that we express that praise is by speaking the word “Amen” in response to God’s promises. The word “Amen” in Hebrew means “truth” or “faithfulness.” And so when say “Amen” in public or private worship—whether in prayer, or in response to some truth being proclaimed—we are expressing worshipful confidence in the faithfulness of God and the certainty of His promises. It is the voice of faith, as Jesus says in John 3:33, setting its seal to the fact that God is true (Hughes, 37).

And just as an aside: that is why we pray, “in Jesus’ name, Amen.” Because just as Christ alone is the One in whom all God’s promises are Yes, *therefore* our Amen is through *Him* to the glory of God. So when you pray, recognize what you’re saying. You’re saying: “Let it be so, Father, for the spotless Lamb of God has died, and has purchased for me every good promise that You have made, and in Him, Your promises are certain.” Glorious. That ought to transform your prayer life. But that’s not Paul’s point.

Paul’s point is: When the Corinthians had been saved, and had experienced in their own souls the fulfillment of all of God’s promises to them in Christ, they uttered the Amen *through* Christ, as the text says, to the glory of God. But how did the Corinthians come to be saved? It was through the Gospel ministry of the Apostle Paul himself! The “Amen” that the Corinthians uttered through Christ to the glory of God happened—look at the final two words of verse 20—*through*

us! The Corinthians' "Amen" is the validation of Paul's authentic apostleship, because they only experienced the fulfillment of God's promises in Christ as the Gospel was preached to them by Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy. That's why Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9, 1 and 2: "Are you not my work in the Lord? If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord." And in 2 Corinthians 3, 1 to 3: "Do we need letters of commendation to you or from you? *You* are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men; ...written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts."

"Dear Corinthians, how could you count me trustworthy to bring you the ineffable *Gospel* of Jesus Christ—and proclaim it to you in such an accurate manner that you could be saved—and then question my integrity with regard to *travel plans*? Don't you see? You're being sold a bill of goods!"

E. The Spirit is Shared (vv. 21–22)

God is faithful, Christ is Yes, the message is clear, the Amen was uttered, and finally, number five: The Spirit is shared. Verses 21 and 22: "Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God,²² who also sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge."

And here we could stop and preach a whole sermon on the glorious ministry of the Holy Spirit in salvation. But that sermon will have to wait for perhaps another time, as we can only comment briefly. Suffice it to say that Paul appeals to the ministry of the Holy Spirit the Corinthians experienced in their conversion. At the time of conversion, God confers upon every believer the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit. And the Spirit Himself is an anointing, that consecrates us and equips us for ministry to Christ's Church; He is a seal, which authenticates us, protects us, and marks us out as God's unique possession; and He is a pledge, a down payment, a guaranteed deposit of the rich inheritance that will be ours at the return of Christ. And Paul says, on the basis of that manifold and variegated ministry of the Holy Spirit, God goes on continually establishing you in Christ, strengthening you and preserving you for obedient and faithful service in His kingdom.

But the key phrase in these two verses is not "establishes," it is not "anointed," it is not "sealed," and it is not "pledge." The key phrase is "us with you": "Now He who establishes *us with you* in Christ..." Paul's authenticity as an Apostle was inextricably linked with the genuineness of the Corinthians' salvation, since it was *through* Paul's Gospel preaching that the Corinthians were saved. Paul is saying, "We share the same Spirit, and so God is not only establishing *you* in Christ; He is establishing us *with you*." Pastor John writes, "Since Paul was their spiritual father, to deny his authenticity was, figuratively, to saw off the branch on which they were sitting" (MacArthur, 45).

“How do you know that my word to you is not yes and no? How do you know that I’m not a fleshly, vacillating huckster, trying to take advantage of you? I’ll tell you how: (1) God is faithful, (2) Christ is Yes, (3) the message is clear, (4) the Amen was uttered, and (5) the Spirit is shared.” Each person of the Trinity—Father, Son, and Spirit—as well as the Gospel message itself—testifies to Paul’s integrity and authenticity. I’d say he has a strong case, wouldn’t you?

Application

Well, beside the implications that I trust the Holy Spirit of God has already been impressing upon your heart as we’ve sought to open up the meaning of this glorious text, how should this text intersect with our own daily living? What principles can we draw out of this passage and apply to our own lives? I’ll mention only **three** of them.

I. Vacillation is Fleshliness (v. 17)

First, **it is a characteristic of fleshliness and worldliness to vacillate for the sake of self-interest.** Paul characterizes this vacillation that the false apostles are accusing him of as purposing according to the flesh.

In the opening verses of 2 Corinthians chapter 10, Paul addresses another accusation—namely, that he was meek in person but then bold only in his letters. He says, in 2 Corinthians 10:2, that such people “regard us as if we walked according to the flesh.” So in Paul’s mind, to walk according to the flesh is to say one thing and do another. It is to be duplicitous. It is to be hypocritical. It is to make decisions frivolously and opportunistically, according to one’s own self-interests. To purpose according to the flesh is to be willing to give your word and make promises, but always tentatively—knowing that if keeping your word proves to be too inconvenient, you’ll just go ahead and do something else. This is the “fleshly wisdom” of chapter 1 verse 12—pretending to be something you’re not so you can take advantage of people for your own gain.

And dear friends, I plead with you, as those who profess to walk according to the Spirit, let this not be you. Repudiate all phony personas—renounce all duplicity and underhandedness. Resolve that you will not play politics, in *whatever* sphere of life you happen to be in. By the power of God’s Spirit, trust God and His Word enough to be the same person on the outside that you are on the inside. Let your yes and be yes and your no be no. And friends: keep your word. If you say you’re going to do something, then as slaves of the Lord Jesus Christ who *is* Himself the truth, as sons and daughters of the God who fulfills all of His promises, make good on *your* promises. Have nothing to do with political posturing, but follow the example of the Apostle Paul who said in 2 Corinthians 2:17, “But as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ

in the sight of God,” and again in chapter 4 verse 2: “But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning...but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God.”

The way we conduct ourselves in our interactions with one another must be in a manner worthy of the Gospel.

II. Theology Must Affect Life (vv. 18–22)

And that brings us, **secondly**, to perhaps the clearest implication from this passage: **Our theology must be brought to bear on our lives.** Paul’s entire defense against the accusation of fickleness and instability is to appeal to the nature of God, the nature of Christ, the work of the Spirit, and the nature of the Gospel message, and to say, “If the Father is who He says He is, and Christ is who He says He is, and the Spirit accomplishes what Scripture says He accomplishes, and if the Gospel is what I’ve preached it to be, then it would be ludicrous for me to be guilty of what you’re accusing me of! It would be so utterly incongruous with the *message* that I preach to behave in deceitful and underhanded ways—to be duplicitous and conniving, to take advantage of you.”

You see, what it meant for Paul to live in integrity was to constantly be bringing the implications of the nature of God and the Gospel to bear on his life. All of Paul’s conduct was rooted and directed and shaped by his theology—of who he knew God to be and what he understood the Gospel to be. The manner in which Paul conducted himself in his life and ministry was not determined by the shifting sands of his circumstances, and still less by the shifting sands of his feelings and emotions. Paul’s conduct was “the outworking of deep-seated theological principles and convictions” (Hafemann, 102).

And the same must be true of us, friends! In the language of the Book of Philippians, we need to live Gospel-driven lives! We are never going to get away from that application! We are always to let our manner of life be worthy of the Gospel of Christ (Phil 1:27). The guiding principle for all of our ethics and behavior is not quite, “What would Jesus *do*?” but rather, “In light of what Jesus *has done*—in light of what God has accomplished in my life through the Gospel—in light of the fact that I’ve been rescued from the kingdom of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of God’s own dear Son—how should those truths affect my reaction to this particular situation?”

For example, in Romans 15, Paul is wrapping up his discussion on Christian liberty. And as he brings that topic to a close, he speaks to those whose consciences are strong enough to allow them to enjoy their liberty without wounding their conscience. And he says that we should be willing to *sacrifice* that freedom for the sake of edifying and serving those whose consciences

are weak, who would stumble over the exercise of our liberty. He says, “Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves. ²Each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification.” And then in verse 3 he gives the reason for this exhortation: “For even Christ did not please Himself.” Do you see how that works? You’re thinking to yourself, “Well, Scripture doesn’t tell me I *can’t* do this, but I know that if I do it, it’s going to cause my weaker brother to stumble.” And so you think to yourself, “I have been rescued by a Savior who didn’t *have* to leave the worship of the saints and angels in heaven to be despised and rejected by the very sinners He was coming to save. I’ve been saved by a Gospel which required my Savior to consider others’ interests above His own. Therefore, I need to act consistently with those realities, and consider others’ interests before my own.”

Similarly, just a few verses later, Paul is praying for unity among Jew and Gentile in the church—that rather than hold each other at arms’ length, we must accept one another. And the ground that he gives for that exhortation comes in verse 7. He says, “Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.” Do you see the way Paul’s theology is affecting his ethical behavior there? We are to think to ourselves, “Because of my sin, I was a stranger and an alien to God and His righteousness. And yet because of His work on my behalf in the Gospel, Christ accepted me. And not only did He accept me, but He atoned for and accepted my brother in Christ. If both of us have had our sins paid for and our righteousness provided through no merit of our own—if the thrice holy *God* can accept us notwithstanding our sinfulness—surely *I* can accept my brother, and pursue unity with him.”

And so in unity, humility, joy, generosity, in purity of life and of speech—all of our conduct is to be directed and driven by what God has accomplished for us in redemptive history. We *must* bring our theology to bear on all of life.

III. God’s Promises are “Yes” in Christ Alone (vv. 19–20)

And a final application: **all of God’s promises are Yes in Christ, and in Christ alone.** All of history climaxes and culminates in the glorious person of our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ is God’s “Yes” to the covenant promises made to Abraham: that in his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed (Gen 12:3; cf. Gal 3:7–29). He is God’s “Yes” to the covenant promises made to David: that God would raise up a descendant of his to rule over Israel and would establish his throne forever (2 Sam 7:8–16; cf. Lk 1:33). And He is God’s “Yes” to the promise made to the sin-cursed world, that the seed of the woman shall crush the head of the serpent (Gen 3:15). He is the second and last Adam (cf. Rom 5:14; 1 Cor 15:22, 45–49), who succeeded and obeyed where Adam failed, and therefore is the progenitor of a new humanity, recreated in the righteous image of God! It is Christ, 1 Corinthians 1:30, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption! And friends, we need to worship Him—we need to delight in Him, and stand in awe of Him—for all that He is for us!

Scripture speaks of God's promises as "His precious and magnificent promises," 2 Peter 1:4. And it says that it is *by* those promises that we become partakers of the divine nature! And in Christ, *all* of God's precious and magnificent promises are "Yes!" to us! In Christ, Colossians 2:3, are hidden *all* the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. In Christ, Ephesians 1:3, God has blessed us with *every* spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. The limitless bounties of all of the infinite goodness, love, and beneficence of God Himself are *ours* through God's Almighty "Yes" in Christ!

And if you're here this morning, and you are outside of this Christ—if you are not trusting in *this* Christ alone for your righteousness before God—then you need to be certain: God's response to you, as you seek to claim His good promises, is a resounding, "No!" But there is no reason that that has to stay that way! Because this Christ who is "Yes!" to all God's promises stands yet willing to receive you this very day!

Friend, think of it! Forgiveness of sins! "Yes!" God's righteous wrath satisfied! "Yes!" The provision of a perfect righteousness to stand before Him! "Yes!" The gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit! "Yes!" The strength to fight sin and put on holiness! "Yes!" The peace of God that surpasses all comprehension (Phil 4:7)! "Yes!" Joy inexpressible and full of glory (1 Pet 1:8)! "Yes!" A glorified body free from sin, fit for life on the New Earth in God's immediate presence! "Yes!" As many as are the promises of God, in Him they are Yes!

Dear sinner, I plead with you this morning: have done with your sin! Turn from a life lived in your own strength, for your own glory, to your own ends, in your own way. Own your guilt before a holy God. Cast away any hope of earning your righteousness by your own works. And put all your trust in this crucified and risen Christ alone. Repent of your sin; receive the Savior; and enter into the joy of God's eternal "Yes" in Jesus Christ!