

A Change in Plans
2 Corinthians 1:15-17
Part 2

This September I will have been a pastor in this church for 36 years. In those nearly 36 years I have tried to be faithful to my calling in the strength that God has provided me.

I remember the day when I left my apartment to come down to this church in order to start my first official day of ministry. It seemed all so surreal. But it didn't take long for the reality of it all to settle in.

That first week I was responsible for preparing two messages: a Sunday morning message and a Sunday night message as well as a Wednesday night mid-week lesson. In addition to this I felt that I had to find a way to provide leadership for this church quickly in light of all its very obvious and pressing needs, and I had to do this while seeking to care for a group of people that I did not know and who were for the most part far older than me. But God has been faithful over all these years and I would hope that you have come to see me as a faithful pastor who, along with four other elders, has been seeking to bring godly care and oversight to this fellowship.

And what have I come to see in you? I have come to see a group of believers who have received instruction. I have come to see a group of believers who have sought to apply that instruction to their lives. I have come to see a group of believers who have not only grown in their love for God but who have also grown in their love for one another and for the lost of this world.

So let me ask you this question. In light of our shared experience with each other over all these many years and hopefully our shared confidence in each other, how disappointing do you believe it would be for me if someone came into our fellowship and within a very few months, through various charges against me, caused you to question my integrity in matters that I knew myself to be innocent.

So how would I feel? I would feel terrible and not so much for myself but for our church and how that loss of confidence might affect our future ministry together in the Antelope Valley and the world. It is a terrible thing when a church loses confidence in its leaders for in that loss of confidence

the church will become susceptible to all kinds of problems that Satan can easily exploit, causing spiritual havoc not only in the church as a whole but also in the individual lives of the members of that church as well. Therefore it behooves the spiritual leaders of a church not to take attacks against their character in the church lightly for the spiritual vitality of the church as well as the spiritual vitality of all its members is potentially at stake.

And this brings us back to our study of **2 Corinthians** and more specifically to our study of **2 Corinthians 1:12-2:4** which we started last week. And the question we are seeking to answer is this: How did Paul respond to the charges against him by certain false teachers that he lacked personal integrity (2 Corinthians 1:12-2:4)? This is how he responded?

Paul, first of all, responded to the charges against him by introducing the testimony of his own conscience (2 Corinthians 1:12-14). We saw this in **2 Corinthians 1:12-14**. **“For our proud confidence in this: the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you. (13) For we write nothing else to you than what you read and understand, and I hope you will understand until the end; (14) just as you also partially did understand us, that we are your reason to be proud as you also are ours, in the day of our Lord Jesus.**

False teachers who had joined themselves to the church at Corinth were attacking Paul. But He was at peace with himself because his conscience, sitting in judgment on his soul, had declared him innocent of all the charges. And how else had the testimony of Paul’s conscience ministered to him? Paul’s conscience rising up in his defense also made it possible for him to nurture the hope that his ministry among the Corinthians would not be in vain, a hope that he believed would later be confirmed when he found himself standing with them in glory on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. But introducing the testimony of his own conscience was not Paul’s only response to the charges against him.

Paul, secondly, responded to the charges against him by denying them (2 Corinthians 1:15-17). We find this in **2 Corinthians 1:15-17**. These are the verses that we will be examining this morning.

So now let me read these verses for you. **“In this confidence I intended at first to come to you, so that you might twice receive a blessing; (16) that 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. (17) 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?”**

So did Paul in these verses deny the charges made against him? Absolutely! This is exactly what he did. And it is this denial that we will be looking at this morning.

And what is my hope for this message as we examine this denial? My hope for this message as we examine this denial is this: that God would use it to challenge all of us, whether we are a leader or not a leader, to live our lives in such a way that, if we were falsely accused, those around us will be able to say that the accusations are not consistent with who they have come to know us to be. For if we can live our lives in this way when we are being falsely accused then it will be far less likely that those false accusations will be able to be exploited by Satan to disrupt the church and the individual lives of those who make up the church.

So now let us begin to look more carefully at this denial as we break it down verse by verse. And we will begin by looking at **verse 15**. **“In this confidence I intended at first to come to you, so that you might twice receive a blessing.”** As we look at this verse there are several different questions that will immediately come to mind?

First of all, when Paul said, **“in this confidence,”** what did he mean? The phrase, “in this confidence,” at the beginning of verse 15 refers back to the confidence that Paul and the Corinthians had in each other when he first came to them. And what specifically was this confidence they had in each other when Paul first came to the Corinthians? The Corinthians were confident that Paul was an apostle of Christ, and Paul was confident that they were true disciples of Christ. It was in this confidence, the confidence that they had in one another, that led Paul to devise the plan that he details for us in **verse 15**. The very confidence that Paul believed would be confirmed as justified when they found themselves in glory on the day of Jesus Christ according to **verse 14**.

So, what else do we learn about this travel plan from **verse 15**, a travel plan that would later become so controversial based on **verse 17**? We learn a couple of things. First of all, we learn that this initial travel plan entailed Paul going to the Corinthians **“first.”** And, secondly, we learn that Paul intended to go to the Corinthians **“first”** in this initial travel plan in order that the Corinthians might be **“twice blessed.”** Isn’t this what **verse 15** tells us? Yes this is exactly what **verse 15** tells us.

So, what did Paul mean when he said these things about going to the Corinthians **“first,”** and what did Paul mean when he said that he was going to the Corinthians **“first”** so that they might be **“twice blessed”**?

Both of these questions are answered in **2 Corinthians 1:16**. So let me now read that verse for you. **“That 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.”**

So, what did Paul mean when he told the Corinthians that he had planned to come to them **“first?”** When Paul told the Corinthians that he had planned to come to them “first” he meant that he planned to come to them before he visited the churches of Macedonia (2 Corinthians 1:16). This is what he meant.

And how would visiting the Corinthians **“first”** before visiting the churches in Macedonia make it possible for the Corinthians to be **“twice blessed?”** By planning to visit the Corinthians “first” made it possible for the Corinthians to be “twice blessed” because Paul would be able to visit them twice, once on his way to Macedonia and once again on his way back (2 Corinthians 1:16). This is what he meant by twice blessed.

So we now know the basic details of Paul’s initial travel plan based on **verses 15-16**. But we still do not know when he made this plan or when he altered this plan which he obviously did based on the charge against him of vacillation that we will see Paul denying in **verse 17**. So is there any chapter and verse in the Bible that we can look at that will definitively tell us when the plan was made and later changed? No! Unfortunately there is not.

But even though we may not know with absolute certainty when he made this plan or when he altered this plan that we see spelled out for us here in **verses 15-16** I believe that we can make a certain educated guess.

According to **2 Corinthians 12:14** Paul had made two visits to Corinth prior to him writing this epistle. The first visit, on his second missionary journey, lasted eighteen months and through the preaching of the gospel and by the grace of God resulted in the Church at Corinth being established.

Unfortunately it appears that shortly after he left this newly founded church it began to experience problems. And how did Paul respond? Paul responded by sitting down and writing a non-canonical letter, which of course did not survive and therefore is no longer available to us.

And how do we know this? We know this because Paul referred to this letter in **1 Corinthians 5:9**. And what was the point of this earlier non-canonical letter according to **1 Corinthians 5:9**? The point of this earlier letter according to **1 Corinthians 5:9** was to encourage the Corinthian church to separate themselves from immoral people, not immoral people among the citizens of Corinth but from immoral people among the church at Corinth, so-called brothers and sisters in Christ, who stubbornly continued to walk in sin. This was the point of this earlier letter.

And did the Corinthian Church respond to this letter? No, they didn't! And because of this the church at Corinth continued to deteriorate, which led Paul, while he was on his third missionary journey and in the City of Ephesus, to write them a second letter that we now know as **1 Corinthians**. Now what is so very interesting about this letter is that it spelled out for the Corinthians a very specific travel plan that once again involved them, but clearly this plan did not include Paul visiting them "**first.**" And where do we find his travel plan? We find it in **1 Corinthians 16:5-6**.

Let me read these verses for you. "**But I will come to you** [first? No, this is not what it says. It rather says, I will come to you] **after I go through Macedonia; (6) and perhaps I will stay with you, or even spend the winter, so that you may send me on my way wherever I may go.**" This publicly stated travel plan that Paul spelled out for the Corinthians here in **1 Corinthians 16:5-6** is different than the plan Paul referenced in **2 Corinthians 1:15-16**. There is no doubt about that. It is a different plan.

So now it would seem that we now know when the original plan to come to the Corinthians “**first**” was shared with them by Paul, and we also now know when it was later altered by Paul.

Paul initially laid out his plan to visit the Corinthian church “first” in a non-canonical letter that we presently do not have that was referenced in 1 Corinthians 5:9 and was later changed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 16:5-6.

So did this change initially upset the Corinthians? I don’t believe that it did. I don’t believe that they gave it much thought until false teachers arrived in the church at Corinth shortly after 1 Corinthians was written. I believe that it was only then when the false teachers made it an issue that it became an issue. And I believe it was only then that it became an issue for certain Corinthians believers and caused them to have doubts about Paul

But even though certain Corinthian believers may have begun to have doubts about Paul, this was not true of Paul. He had remained resolute in the confidence that he had in them and he remained resolute in his belief that they when everything was done and said they would continue to have confidence in him. And we see this in the way he begins **verse 17**.

Let us look at the very first word of that verse. “**Therefore,**” or in other words, in light of this confidence that the Corinthians had in him and that he had in them, he will now ask them a question. And what was the question? Let us go on and read the next part of the verse?

“**Therefore** [or in other words in light of this confidence you had in me and I had in you], **I was not vacillating when I intended to do this** [or in other words intended to come to you first before going to Macedonia], **was I?**” And what does Paul expect their answer to be? He expected their answer to be no, you were not vacillating.

This is what he expected their answer to be based on his confidence in them and their confidence in him.

Yes, he had changed his plan, but his confidence in them as those who had come to faith in Christ through the message that he had proclaimed had not changed. And neither did he believe that their confidence in him as an

apostle of Christ had changed in spite of these viscous attacks upon him and his integrity by the false teachers.

When Paul's accusers charged Paul with vacillation, they inferred he was a shifty opportunist, a shallow, fickle, frivolous liar who said and did what he did in order to serve himself. But nothing could be further from the truth.

Paul did not see himself as fickle. He rather saw himself in the plans that he made and later altered as being consistent with his calling an apostle of Christ and not according to the flesh.

So where do we see this in the text? We see it in the next rhetorical question that he asks? Let us now continue to read **verse 17** and what does it say? **“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?”**

And of course the answer that Paul expected that would be given to this second question if they would truly reflect on it, based on all that they had come to know about him and the confidence that they had come to have in him, would have been this: “Paul of course we know that you were not vacillating when you initially purposed to come to us for we know that you have always consistently made your decisions based on your love for God and for us and in these things you have been resolute. And even if your plans did change your heart has not and therefore we reject the charge that when you altered your plans that you proved yourself guilty of saying “yes, yes” and “no, no” at the same time.”

When everything was done and said, when the dust finally settled on all the charges that were being brought against Paul, this is the answer that Paul expected.

So, what was my hope for this message? My hope for this message was that God might use it to challenge us to live our lives in such a way that if we were falsely accused, those around us will be able to say that the accusations are not consistent with who they have come to know us to be. And why is this important? It is because it protects this church from being exploited by Satan in the midst of these false charges.

Almost thirty years ago I believe that certain individuals in this congregation were falsely accusing me. They were accusing me of being unloving, manipulative and unrepentant. Their accusations were being disseminated throughout our congregation. Our church was in process of being torn apart.

In the midst of these attacks I asked to be put on trial in front of the executive board of our church. This trial lasted for days. Every word of the trial was recorded. And after all my accusers had the opportunity to present their case the executive board then went into deliberations.

And their conclusion, based on testimony of my accusers, was that the charges were unfounded, and they also concluded that the charges were not consistent with what they had up to that point in time had come to know about me.

Is what people have come to believe about us through their interaction with us important in protecting this church from the possible consequences of false accusations? Absolutely!

May God give us the grace to live our lives in such a way that when we are falsely accused, those around us will be able to say that the accusations are not consistent with who they have come to know us to be.