2 Corinthians 1:15-20

Christ’s Life and Ministry Focuses on God’s People & Christ Part 1

15 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? 18 But as God is faithful, our word to you is not yes and no. 19 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. 20 For 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.

# Introduction

The writings of Paul sometimes contain personal discourse and this letter definitely contains Paul’s writing about his contentions with the church in Corinth. They were disrespectful of his position as Apostle and so we find here that Paul defends himself and his actions. However, graciously, Paul draws attention to God’s plan and his agency as God’s ambassador of the gospel. Paul wants to remind them of where He is going: wherever the Lord sends him.

*What things in Paul’s life could he have predicted?*

James 4:13-16a presents the principle of vanity in planning outside of the understanding of God’s sovereignty. We can make plans, like Paul did, but we rest in knowing God has our steps numbered and directed.

# Confident, Tentative Plans (15-17a)

Paul communicated his intentions with the church in Corinth so that they would expect him to come through Corinth twice on his third missionary journey. This would have given him a reason to spend more time with them over the winter [c.f. 1 Corinthians 16:5-7].

Paul, in his defense of his actions from the beginning of this chapter (vs. 8-9) and on into the next chapter (2:1-13), explains his intent from his earlier letter. Sometimes we plan things, and then God works out other arrangements, and here we find Paul’s explanation of that very thing. It seems some in the church were offended by this variance and Paul explains that he is not a liar, but at the mercy of God’s direction. In our own lives the Lord often allows us to set our sights on various goals, but then moves us into a different direction. As we abide as believers we recognize His provision and relax on the things that we planned because we see His direction and walk by faith into those good works [Ephesians 2:10]. Paul’s plan to go to Macedonia was changed as he journeyed through Macedonia and Greece and back down through what was then called Asia and then set sail through the Isle of Rhodes to Jerusalem [Acts 20:1-21:25].

*What plans are you grateful for God changing?*

## Two Blessings (15b-16)

If Paul had been able to circle back around through Corinth as he had originally planned this would have given the church in Corinth more time with him and thus receiving twice a blessing. If the Corinthian culture was heavily influenced by the need for social recognition and bragging rights then having Paul make it a point to see them twice would have been advantageous. However, those are carnal motives. They’re the desire in the flesh to be able to be used for leverage, which is not a spiritually focused thing. Rather than being self-centered, Paul is pushing them to realize God’s sovereignty in directing Paul.

In reality Paul had already come through Corinth before on his second missionary journey and preached the gospel to the church there. Having returned he was clear on his goals to see them and impart more spiritual truth. The two letters to the Corinthians are estimated to have been written and exchanged during this, his third missionary journey, which would explain how quickly the various letters could have been exchanged compared to Paul being elsewhere in Asia or down in Judea.

*Has the Lord sent people into your life once or twice that have been a huge blessing?*

*Do you get angry at the Lord for not bringing those people back into your life?*

# Yeses and Nos (17b-20)

Paul brings the idea of being accused of lying to a pointed head: he refuses to be misrepresented and draws attention to their passionate carrying of the truth of the gospel as being their singular focus. If the gospel is true how can they mix truth with lies? While Corinth was a mix of cultures because of its location as a port city integrity was important from a Christian perspective – any ability to negotiate or get ahead through deception from secular culture would have been outside of the expected moral behavior of a believer.

The underlying Greek phrase here that is translated vacillate in English [NASB] is an interesting one: it means to use lightness. Paul was not joking or pulling their collective legs, he had genuinely intended to come. His Yes was indeed a yes, and his No was indeed a no.

*What are at least three reasons we can give for not being able to execute on our intentions?*

## God is Faithful (v18)

Is there a name beyond God’s for faithfulness? Surely not, and Paul calls this out as His standard for integrity. If God is faithful and Paul is His ambassador, then the same character should be represented. The prophecies of the Old Testament (and later the New Testament) required a faithful God. The gospel requires a faithful God. If we have a God who is anything but faithful the outcome of our faith in Him is suspect.

*Do we consider God’s faithfulness when we think about the chronology of the scriptures?*

## Yes in Him (v19)

The Son of God was preached and that preaching was an absolutely true Yes in Him. Paul, Timothy and Silvanus came in humility, they served in humility, and they preached in humility. But what they preached was Christ. If the gospel comes mixed with deception it is no gospel at all, and Paul points that out as being critical to his own ministry, and that of anyone who preaches it.

*What things about the gospel come to light when we think of it as a ‘yes’?*

## Amen the Glory of God Through Us (v20)

### The Promises of God

God’s promises include His covenants with Noah, Abraham, Moses [and Israel], and David. His promises include prophesies. And His promises are even here in this letter to the Corinthians (1:3-4, for example). Since Paul has declared God’s faithfulness already we see that he is building on this principle for the establishment of the argument that the further promises that God makes (not what Paul had intended) are faithful.

*What are some promises of God?*

*How many promises are there for believers?*

### Amen to the Glory of God

Amen, meaning ‘so be it’, a phrase of agreement, is something that we often hear in prayer or in various church circles, and we may forget the purpose on account of its familiarity. Paul wants to live as an amen of God’s will unto the further glorification of God. When we see God’s glory as our highest goal it changes our perspective from being earthly to being heavenly; a core tenet of abiding.

*Does agreeing with God mean that Paul will get what he wants?*

# Conclusion

When we bury our heads in the sand of the day-to-day distractions and we don’t consider God’s plans and His faithfulness we find ourselves wrestling with the tensions of carnality. However, when we begin to see the scope of our lives in light of His sovereignty we start to be able to rest in His faithfulness. We can see He changed the steps of our feet to bring us to where we are and can trust that He is working all things for the good of His saints (Romans 8:28) so that we’re conformed to the image of His Son.

*When we share our intentions, like Paul did in his earlier letter, what should we do in light of God’s sovereignty?*