

A CLEAR VOICE CONFRONTS CHANGING CIRCUMSTANCES

2 Corinthians 1:12-2:13

David Lowery: “Few preachers undertake a systematic exposition of 2 Cor. For those undaunted by its demands, an intimate picture of a pastor’s heart may be found as Paul shepherds the wayward Corinthians and reveals a love which only comes from God.”

“Paul answers insinuations about the authenticity, propriety, and sincerity of his commitment.”

Even Paul had to deal with such accusations about his ministry. His response to *their* accusations teaches *us* lessons about how we should respond when we face criticism for not measuring up to the standards others place on us.

Have you ever tried to do what’s right, only to fail and have to live with the distrust that results from a broken promise or unfulfilled duty?

Sometimes it’s a real offense; sometimes it’s just a perceived failure.

Spouse or parents expect us to do something; we forget or don’t live up to the standard.

At work, we don’t satisfy someone’s expectations; they think we’re shady or unreliable.

Sometimes at church; people expect something and we don’t meet expectations.

Paul deals with that kind of reaction in his relationship with the church at Corinth.

He tries to do what’s right. But he doesn’t always meet their expectations.

His critics aren’t willing to give him the benefit of the doubt and refuse to trust him.

All he can do is assure them of his love and concern for them, encourage them to take the next steps God wants them to take, and remain faithful himself, whether they acknowledge it or not.

When we're forced to change our plans, sometimes people accuse us of being unreliable or of not really caring about them.

Even when it's obvious God changed the plan, people don't always accept a change.

People hold conflicting views of what God's will ought to be in a situation.

Paul deals with that kind of difference of opinion in 2 Cor. 1-2. God frequently leads us one step at a time.

Long-range plans may need to be modified.

Circumstances may change, making it necessary to revise our plans.

We hold firmly to eternal values, but change our plans as God leads us from day to day.

That may lead to tension when others don't understand how God leads us.

EXPLANATION OF PAUL'S DELAY 1:12-2:13

In explaining his delay in visiting them,

Paul models the kind of love he's seeking to develop in them.

Paul's delay isn't due to lack of interest in them.

He's concerned about them, but hasn't been able to go because of ministry in Asia.

PAUL'S CONCERN FOR THEM 1:12-14

In spite of criticism Paul has received from people in the church, and their lack of love for one another, Paul responds to them in love.

His concern for them is evident in his response to their attacks.

He refuses to let them drag him down to their level.

He's concerned that his response reflect the character and purposes of God.

He wants them to understand that his original plan was sincere, based on careful planning, as far as he understood what was best for them.

Paul is content about the way he has dealt with the Corinthians.

His conscience is clear because he has acted with integrity

(holiness <= simplicity/single mindedness => *integrity*) **and sincerity.**

Those who oppose Paul may accuse him of lack of integrity or insincerity.

But Paul is content, knowing that he serves God with a clear conscience.

Though we live in the world, a godly response doesn't come from the world's way of doing things; it doesn't come from our fleshly efforts.

It doesn't come from responding in kind to those who criticize us.

God enables us to respond in a godly way to less than godly treatment.

Paul doesn't try to manipulate or obtain personal benefit from his dealings with them.

Even in the face of conflict, immaturity, and lack of love, Paul shows genuine concern for his brothers and sisters in Christ.

While they're not acting towards him, or toward one another in love, Paul still demonstrates sincere love for them.

PAUL'S INTEGRITY IN CHANGING HIS PLANS 1:15-2:4

PAUL'S INTENTION TO VISIT THEM 1:15-16

Paul explains the sequence of events that led him to change his travel plans.

He had every good intention of going through there and visiting them twice.

His plans are well intentioned, but things don't always work out the way we plan.

God sometimes has a different idea. We follow Him, one step at a time.

THE FALSE ACCUSATION AGAINST HIM 1:17

When he fails to come, some accuse him of taking this trip lightly; of imitating the world's way of planning.

He's unreliable and fails to follow through with his promises.

Paul responds that he didn't vacillate in his intention to go to them.

His change of plans wasn't self-serving; he's seeking their welfare.

Sometimes God changes our plans—He has a better idea.

That doesn't discredit the sincerity of the plan, nor the original desire to go.

Paul doesn't cling to his own ideas—He wants to follow God's leading.

PAUL'S RESPONSE TO THE ACCUSATION 1:18-22

Paul responds to the charge that he misled them.

**He appeals to his track record,
to God as witness to his integrity,
and to his pure motives.**

In his ministry to them, Paul has always spoken the truth clearly to them.

He is God's spokesman and truth is critically important.

God's character is trustworthy; His representatives should be likewise!

Paul answers the accusation, denying that he took the promise lightly.

He doesn't say one thing and do another.

He desires to imitate God's faithfulness to fulfill His promises.

God speaks clearly and does what He says.

God doesn't vacillate about what He has promised to do.

God causes us to stand firm.

God guarantees the fulfillment of His promises and affirms that guarantee with the presence of His Spirit who resides in us.

The "deposit" is a down payment which obligates the payer and assures the seller that the payer will complete what he started.

The Spirit in us is God's guarantee that He will finish what He started.

Paul wishes to imitate that godly, faithful spirit in dealing with them.

Just as Paul's message is clear and firmly established by God, so Paul's word to them is reliable.

As God extends mercy to us, Paul desires to extend mercy to them.

God is the source of our stability;

God makes us stand firm; He keeps us faithful.

Integrity is critical to godly leadership.

Thus, whether the people recognize it or not,

Paul is committed to integrity. He wants them to see what "makes him tick."

It's not about getting his way or accomplishing his purposes.

It's about doing God's will.

PAUL'S DELAY TO AVOID JUDGMENT 1:23-2:4

Paul decides to write, rather than go personally, so as to spare them.

If he wants to demonstrate his authority and get his way, he could come deal with this matter personally and firmly.

They accuse him of changing his mind out of spineless vacillation.

His change of plans is motivated by mercy and love.

Paul could have come authoritatively and forced his will on them.

He wants to come to them as a loving father, not as a stern disciplinarian.

He wants to come with arms outstretched to them, not with a rod in his hand.

A loving parent doesn't enjoy spanking his children;
Paul doesn't want to punish them. He prefers to love them.

To avoid judgment Paul gives them time to correct the problem.

He does this to demonstrate his love for them.

Paul is more concerned about building up their faith, than about defending his position and proving that he's boss (24).

He wants us to share in the joy of serving God together.

He wants us to stand firm in faith together.

This isn't about us; it's about God.

We work together to help each other stand firm and glorify God together.

We tend to think that when a problem arises, we should "jump in with both feet."

Paul realizes that sometimes it's best to let God handle it—to wait on Him.

He reminds them of his love, but He waits for God to prepare the way.

He's seeking their best interests.

When the body functions well, we encourage each other's joy.

We celebrate together.

RESTORATION OF THE OFFENDER 2:5-11

It isn't clear what the issue is—

whether it's the brother in 1 Cor. 5, or someone who offends Paul another way.

Most believe that after Paul's last visit to Corinth, a critic attacked him.

Details aren't given, but they're probably attacks on the effectiveness of his ministry and his integrity.

Apparently many Corinthians supported the criticism.

The church disciplined the attacker sternly, as they should have, with a goal of restoring fellowship.

Apparently **not everyone agreed that the matter was handled properly**. (6)

Some disagreed with the decision of their leaders about how to handle it.

Paul is convinced he's been properly dealt with.

Some may have desired more severe punishment.

Paul believes he's suffered enough.

Paul pleads for forgiveness rather than vengeance.

In contrast to some who turn their back on the church that seeks to restore them,

this person acknowledged his error and turned from it.

Now that the problem has been resolved,

Paul urges them to forgive and restore the offender. (7-8)

He's more concerned about showing mercy than getting vengeance.

We should be more concerned about *restoring* a brother, than *making him pay*!

That's how Christ loved us. "*While we were still sinners, Christ died for us!*"

Paul wants them to reconfirm their love for him.

Some refuse to forgive and restore a fallen brother.

Satan uses that attitude to tear the church apart.

An unforgiving spirit will eat us alive, and disrupt God's work.
If we love him as we should, God will be glorified by his restoration to fellowship.

If we refuse to restore the offender, Satan will accomplish his goal of dividing us.

We need to remember that we're all capable of any sin.

"There but for the grace of God go I!"

"The only difference between him and me is that his sin shows!"

If we want to be forgiven, we ought to demonstrate a forgiving spirit.

Paul has forgiven this person for the offense.

Paul wants to see the man re-affirmed in fellowship and encouraged by the rest.

He tells them that when they're satisfied, he is.

He's not convinced there's any reason he needs to forgive this person, but he'll accept their resolution of the problem.

He urges them to forgive and restore him to fellowship.

Satan could use the circumstance to hurt God's work there.

Satan would love to use this conflict to stop the progress of the work.

Forgiveness and restoration will prevent his strategy.

CONCERN CAUSED BY TITUS' DELAY 2:12-13

His love for them causes Paul to leave a great preaching opportunity, because of his concern for them.

When Paul sent Titus, he was concerned about the consequences

When Titus delays his return, Paul becomes anxious because he loves them.

God opens a door for him to preach in Troas, but he can't stay there and preach, until he's sure things are alright in Corinth.

Paul leaves Troas and goes to Macedonia to look for Titus.

LESSONS FROM PAUL'S EXAMPLE:

Paul's example in dealing with the conflicts at Corinth demonstrates the priority of working together for the good of the body.

Paul wants us to understand the depth and implications of God's love.

–importance of loving each other and seeking the welfare of our brothers in Christ.

**We must be willing to give up our plans,
when the welfare of the body of Christ is at stake.**

As we serve God together and build up the people of God, our faith will stand firm and our joy will be full.