

### The Lord Directs Paul to Change Plans

#### 2 Corinthians 1:12-24

*2 Corinthians 1:12-24: For our boasting is this: the testimony of our conscience that we conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God, and more abundantly toward you. 13 For we are not writing any other things to you than what you read or understand. Now I trust you will understand, even to the end 14 (as also you have understood us in part), that we are your boast as you also are ours, in the day of the Lord Jesus. 15 And in this confidence I intended to come to you before, that you might have a second benefit— 16 to pass by way of you to Macedonia, to come again from Macedonia to you, and be helped by you on my way to Judea.*

*17 Therefore, when I was planning this, did I do it lightly? Or the things I plan, do I plan according to the flesh, that with me there should be Yes, Yes, and No, No? 18 But as God is faithful, our word to you was not Yes and No. 19 For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us—by me, Silvanus, and Timothy—was not Yes and No, but in Him was Yes. 20 For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us. 21 Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, 22 who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee. 23 Moreover I call God as witness against my soul, that to spare you I came no more to Corinth. 24 Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are fellow workers for your joy; for by faith you stand.*

#### Background Notes

After Paul's opening greeting in this letter to the Corinthian church, he wrote that wonderful, encouraging portion of Scripture concerning the comfort of God. God is the God of all comfort, and He will comfort us in all our afflictions, when we turn to Him in time of need.

Beginning with verse 12, Paul then moved on to one of his main purposes for writing this letter. Certain people at Corinth were questioning Paul's authority as an apostle, and one of the arguments they were putting forward to undermine the apostle's credibility was that Paul "vacillated" in his plans and promises!

In the last chapter of 1 Corinthians, Paul had written that he planned to come to Corinth and perhaps spend the winter there with them. 1 Corinthians 16:5-9: *"Now I will come to you when I pass through Macedonia (for I am passing through Macedonia). And it may be that I will remain, or even spend the winter with you, that you may send me on my journey, wherever I go. For I do not wish to see you now on the way; but I hope to stay a while with you, if the Lord permits. But I will tarry in Ephesus until Pentecost. For a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries."*

So we see that Paul intended to come to Corinth and spend the whole winter there. But for good reasons, Paul's plans changed. He did not make a prolonged visit to Corinth that winter, and probably only made that short painful or disciplinary visit that we mentioned in our first talk on 2 Corinthians 1.

Notice that in 1 Corinthians 16:6 Paul used the word "perhaps" or "it may be," so Paul did not promise that there would be absolutely no change in his plans. As it turned out, Paul did come to Corinth on his third missionary journey, and he spent three months there. It was just a little later than he had originally planned. And of course that visit would have been after the writing of 2 Corinthians. We read about Paul's three-month stay in Corinth in Acts 20:1-3 - *"After the uproar had ceased, Paul called the disciples to himself, embraced them, and departed to go to Macedonia. Now when he had gone over that region and encouraged them with many words, he came to Greece and stayed three months."*

We would probably think that this delay in coming to Corinth was no big deal. For good reasons, Paul changed his plans. He stayed longer in Asia than he had originally intended, to minister in Ephesus as well as at Troas (as we'll see). But the people at Corinth who were trying to undermine Paul's authority as an apostle made a big deal of this change of plans. They accused Paul of vacillation, and of failing to keep his promises. They said that Paul couldn't be trusted, and shouldn't be given apostolic status.

Who were Paul's detractors in Corinth? In chapter 11, Paul referred to them as "false apostles" and "deceitful workers." 2 Corinthians 11:13-14 - *"For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light."* So these troublemakers were unbelieving religious teachers and workers, probably unsaved Judaizers, who had infiltrated the church at Corinth and were causing the true believers there to question Paul's motives and authority.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. Believers will be accused of vacillation by fellow believers.

It's hard enough to be wrongly accused by unbelievers - but when they are able to persuade your fellow believers that you are not a person of your word, that hurts! Paul defended himself by reminding the Corinthians how he had always dealt with them with godly sincerity (v12), and he had always written to them in an above board and straightforward way (v13).

Paul had no hidden agendas or ulterior motives. Paul was a "what you see is what you get" person - and that's the way we should be as well. Furthermore, Paul was confident that in the day of Jesus Christ (at the judgment seat of Christ), when motives will be revealed and rewards will be given out, they would rejoice in the Lord together (v14).

In the meantime, Paul wrote, *"Believe me when I tell you that I was not vacillating and saying "yes" and "no" at the same*

*time. I really did intend to visit you and the fact that it did not happen as I originally intended does not make me a vacillating person. Just as our preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ was straightforward and not a “yes” or “no” message at the same time, so my communication with you about my planned itinerary was not “yes” and “no” at the same time” (v15-20).*

Just as Paul’s fellow believers in Corinth wrongly accused him of not being a person of his word, fellow believers may accuse us wrongly as well. Gossip, rumors, false accusation, jealousy, and Christians who vacillate themselves may all contribute to this unfortunate reality. It’s more than likely that somewhere along the line, we will be accused of flip-flopping, or of not keeping our word when our plans change.

Have you ever had that happen? I’ve been accused of flip-flopping between Calvinism and Arminianism. When I emphasize the sovereignty of God, folks think I’m a Calvinist. When I emphasize the responsibility of man to make the right choice and receive Christ, fellow believers think I’m an Arminian. I’m neither a Calvinist nor an Arminian! The Bible teaches *both doctrines* - the sovereignty of God *and* the responsibility of people.

Many other examples could be given. Let’s just make sure that we are consistent in our doctrine and our lifestyle. But even when you are consistent, some fellow believers may accuse you of vacillation or breaking your promises.

## **2. Believers will be accused of oppression by fellow believers.**

In verse 23, Paul reminded the Corinthians that if he had come to Corinth for a prolonged stay as he had originally planned, he would have had to spend all his time correcting them (as he did in his short painful visit). So they should have been thankful that his travel plans were changed, because they were spared as a result!

Paul then assured the Corinthians that even though he had apostolic authority, and he did have to point out their problems and recommend discipline, his purpose was not to lord it over them, or dominate them, but rather to joyfully work with them (v24). Apparently those people who were trying to undermine Paul’s apostolic authority were also accusing Paul of throwing his weight around and oppressing the Corinthian Christians with his supposed apostolic authority. But Paul assured them that he was not a tyrant, nor a dictator, nor an oppressor. He didn’t want to lord it over them or dominate them. Paul’s desire was to see them stand firm in the Lord and in the Christian faith.

As Paul was accused of using his authority to oppress and lord it over the Corinthians, so fellow believers may accuse us of oppression. This is especially true for believers who are in positions of authority, such as a church or ministry leader. As soon as you make a decision with which someone disagrees, or you have to discipline someone who’s out of line, you may be accused of throwing your weight around, or dictating, or oppressing. It’s part of the package of being a Christian

leader. It's not nice, and it's not pleasant, and it's wrong - but unfortunately it happens, so it's wise to be prepared. Fellow believers may accuse you of oppression.

## Practical Application

### Don't call God a liar by questioning your eternal security!

The Bible clearly teaches that when you become a Christian, you're saved from your sins, you are given eternal life, and you are *eternally secure*. You can't lose your salvation!

In verses 21-22, we have **three ministries of the Holy Spirit** – the ministry of **anointing**, the ministry of **sealing**, and the ministry of being a **guarantee**. *“Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.”*

As the divinely chosen kings and priests in the Old Testament were anointed with oil, so we who are chosen in Christ have been anointed with the Holy Spirit.

As an important document was sealed to indicate ownership and protection, so we as Christians have been sealed with the Holy Spirit when we became believers. Ephesians 1:13 says, *“When you believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.”*

As a deposit or down payment is a pledge and guarantee of what is to come, so the Holy Spirit is given to us as a guarantee of the whole package of salvation, including our eternal future.

What more could God say to us, to prove to us that we are eternally secure? He couldn't say it in a better or plainer way! So if you don't believe that you are eternally secure, you're calling God a liar. Don't call God a liar by questioning your eternal security!