

## SESSION 9: THE YES OF GOD, PART ONE

2 Corinthians 1:15-17

June 1, 2025

### **PREFACE**

In our last session I spoke of Paul's troublesome relationship with the Corinth church. He loved them dearly; he wanted only what was best for them. But many in that church no longer trusted his words; they feared he had ulterior motives that they thought *not* best for them. By their standards he seemed to be one thing in print, and something else in person.

*Mark Seifrid:* Suspicions about him have arisen, not only because of his failure to come to Corinth, but also because of the poor impression he made with the Corinthians when he was there.

We need to set the stage again for what the apostle refers to in the passage before us. Paul wrote four letters to the church in Corinth—only two of which are extant; our Second Corinthians is the *fourth* letter. There are clues in First Corinthians that he has written to them before (e.g., 1 Corinthians 5:9). Thus we account for three of his letters. But it is his *third* letter—which he describes as “painful,” “sorrowful” in Second Corinthians, the second that we do not have—that is most pertinent to this passage.

It is near the end of First Corinthians that Paul writes of his plans to return to Corinth to spend some quality time with the church.

### **Read 1 Corinthians 16:5-7.**


This means he intended to visit the Corinth church in late spring or early summer of 54, and stay with them through the following winter months (54/55). 📧 *Before* sending this letter to the church via ship, Paul sends Timothy on a trip through Macedonia, that would include a stop in Corinth—but Paul expects his letter to arrive before Timothy (1 Corinthians 4:17; 16:10).

Timothy arrives in Corinth early spring of 54, and yes, the letter we know as First Corinthians had arrived at the church before him. What Timothy discovers, however, is that things are not well in the church and at least some of Paul's instructions in that letter have not been carried out.

And, you will recall, his other reason for that visit was to collect the funds they had set aside for the church in Jerusalem.

For example, there were some who, despite Paul's counsel against it, were continuing in sexual immorality and others who were continuing to sow divisiveness in the body (2 Corinthians 12:21). There were also false teachers gaining in influence.

So Timothy does not remain in Corinth as intended, and probably leaves as soon as shipping reopened in late spring of that year. Timothy either reports the situation to the apostle in a letter, or travels to Ephesus to meet with him in person.

This will throw off all of Paul's best-laid plans that he outlined at the end of the previous letter (1 Corinthians 16:1-9). Receiving this report from Timothy, Paul immediately cancels his trip through Macedonia and travels directly to Corinth,  which would have taken, from Ephesus, three to four days or possibly up to two weeks.

"Macedonia" includes Philippi, Berea, Thessalonica, and Amphipolis, Apollonia, and Neapolis.

This will mark the beginning of Paul's low point in his relationship with the church. This unplanned visit to Corinth is also unpleasant; it is a painful reunion. Based on Timothy's report, Paul felt it necessary to immediately return to address all the problems. To put it mildly, it was *not* a joyful reunion.

Shortly after leaving Corinth Paul writes a follow-up letter to the church, which is carried there by Titus. This means the painful visit was followed by a painful letter; things are not well between apostle and church.

In our passage Paul begins to explain why, after telling the church of his plans to visit them, he did not follow through on that—at least as soon as he had intended. It would be helpful to put this into more succinct, bullet-point form. By the timeline we discussed in our first session,

- the church receives the letter, our First Corinthians, somewhere around the autumn of AD 53, giving his intention for an extended visit.
- The following spring of 54, Paul makes a brief unplanned and unpleasant visit after receiving Timothy's bad report. He follows this with an unpleasant follow-up letter to them.
- In the autumn/winter of 54/55 Paul writes the letter we are studying, Second Corinthians.
- Almost two years after the unpleasant visit, and almost three years after making his promise, Paul finally returns to the church in Corinth for a three-month stay.

## Read 2 Corinthians 1:12 to 2:4.

In the previous verses Paul has been defending his integrity in general; now he moves into defending it in an isolated instance: his travel plans. He begins by stating what his original intentions had been. ➡

### vv15-16

**And in this confidence I intended at first to come to you, so that you might receive grace twice; 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.**

*And in this confidence I intended at first to come to you,*

Some commentators say that the confidence (*pepoithesis*, pep-OY-thay-sis) of which Paul speaks stems from his statement in vv13-14—that is, the church’s *understanding* of him and his teaching. The better interpretation—especially considering what follows—is that his confidence stems from what he stated in v12:

**For our boasting is 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.**

*Guthrie:* Here Paul expresses confidence not in the Corinthians’ understanding of him... Rather, his confidence is in his own integrity and the clear sense that God has led him in his decision making (1:12-13a); grounded in his integrity and the knowledge that God was leading him in his life and ministry, Paul made his plans.

In this opening phrase we have much food for contemplation, and immediate application to our own lives. No matter who we are, if we are followers of Christ Jesus we have bowed before our Lord and acknowledge that God is the one in charge of our lives. In addition to that (or, as part of it), every one of us has been called by Him to something—*and in this, as Paul, we find our confidence.*

Way back in the mid-eighties—about 40 years ago—God made it very clear to me that I was not to profit (monetarily) from the work I did in His name. While living in Southern California, our company of players was performing and some of my plays had been published; along with that I had written a Church Membership program that was being offered and sold to churches in the area.

There are differing opinions on precisely how many and which visits constitute Paul’s *original* plans, and which constitute *alternate* plans. For us here it is enough to know that he did indeed *change* his plans, and that many in the Corinth church saw this as vacillation, and a weakness in his character. It is this which he speaks against in this passage.

God took that moment to knock me up-side the head with His trusty 2x4, declaring with crystal clarity that I was not to charge for anything I did in His name; I was to give it away free-of-charge.

Now, God does not have one universal calling that He applies to every believer. There may be similarities, even duplicates, but He fashions each calling for each individual person. And so long as we are being obedient to His calling for us, no calling is better or worse, higher or lower than any other.

The Lord God calls some to receive a salary for their service (1 Corinthians 9:9-11); He calls some to give it away (1 Corinthians 9:11-12). He calls some to be world-wide evangelists, some to be Sunday School teachers. He calls some to be a daily witness in their machine shop; he calls some to be a daily witness and teacher to their children. For me—personally, individually, for whatever His reason—His call was to serve Him full time, but give it all away.

Some may see it as a happy coincidence that I was born without one entrepreneurial bone in my body. But I see it as the way God intentionally created me. For me there is thus no tension, no second thoughts, wondering if maybe I *should* charge for this or that. No, God created me in such a way as to have peace with my calling. What grace!

As a result—of the calling, of the inborn nature, of the resulting peace—I know the *confidence* of which Paul speaks, just as do most individuals who have identified and embraced their calling as a joy-filled form of worship of the Lord God and His Christ. They have learned that *the obedience is the reward*. 📌

*so that you might receive grace twice;*

There are several different interpretations for this phrase, but I believe the most sensible one is that Paul is not so much referring to his intended two visits—the Corinthians thereby receiving the benefit, the blessing (*charin*) of their mutual communion twice—but that they would experience for themselves the grace of both receiving (his visit) and giving (their offering to Judea; Acts 20:35).

Last week in class we discussed the apostle Paul's obedience to *his* calling. By all rights he could have thrown up his hands at the contentious Corinthians. How much easier it would have been for him to have the perfectly understandable reaction, *All right, if you don't accept me as I am, if you do not trust my teaching, I'll minister to those who do*. But out of obedience to his calling—in his instance, personally, intimately by Christ Jesus Himself—he couldn't do that.

**v16**

**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.**

Thank goodness for v16. Time and time again it is demonstrated that the Bible is its own best commentary. If all we had was v15 we might still be scratching our heads, but in v16 Paul pedantically explains what he is talking about.

It is, admittedly easy to get confused when studying the different visits to Corinth by Paul and then connecting them to the different references in his letters and The Acts. For example, if he is explaining why he didn't visit, well, but he *did* visit them after receiving the bad report from Timothy. Sorting through it all, we come to learn that his "Plan A," as outlined in 1 Corinthians 16, did not occur because of his unplanned "emergency," painful visit to Corinth. Then, as he outlines in our present text, Paul regrouped and put together a new "Plan B"—which never happened either, because after the painful visit he (probably) returned to Ephesus.

Verse 16 gives us Paul's intention:

- to stop over in Corinth on his way to Macedonia;
- to return to Corinth after his time in Macedonia;
- while there to acquire their collection for the Jerusalem church and giving them the *charin* of "helping him on his journey to Judea"—a standard way to express contributing food, funds, etc., for his journey there.

Apparently none of that happened. As a result of all these changes in plans—plans without fruition—the church was accusing the apostle of vacillating, of being irresponsible, of saying one thing but doing another.

## v17

In the previous two verses Paul outlined his intentions—his failure of which to implement being the cause of the church's disgruntlement. Now he begins his defense.

**Therefore, was I vacillating when I intended to do this? 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?**

The apostle's rhetorical questions here hearken back to v12 and v15. "Or what I purpose, do I purpose according to the flesh...?" That is, *Do I make my decisions based on human, worldly criteria?* He will answer this further in the verses that follow, but, in a sense, he has already answered it—especially in v12.

**For our boasting is 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.**

Paul has conducted himself—e.g., made his travel plans—“in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God.” Just so “in this confidence” (v15) he formulated his plans, but circumstances intervened—circumstances generated by the church itself!—and he had to alter those plans.

How many times has someone promised us they would call or write or meet with us, only to break their promise. Our immediate reaction, our instinctive gut reaction is often one of anger, or at least irritation: *How dare they not show up when they promised!* Only to learn later that they were delayed because of circumstances beyond their control, or because of an unexpected event or emergency that was obviously more important than their appointment with us. And we are subsequently ashamed of our petulance.

This was the situation between Paul and the church. It felt it had been callously slighted by Paul not showing up, when in truth he did it to spare their feelings, as he states in v23:

**But I call God as witness to my soul, that to spare you I did not come again to Corinth.**

His previous visit had just made matters worse, and his follow-up letter had only caused more sorrow for them. So he concluded, as he states in v2:1,

**I determined this for my own sake, that I would not come to you again in sorrow.**

To buttress his defense, Paul employs an argument that may at first sound odd to us:

**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?**

If we return to the scenario I offered before, of the no-show for an engagement, and change the variable slightly, we have a picture of the type of behavior the Corinthians are accusing Paul of demonstrating. Perhaps we have confronted a no-show who responds with something like, *Oh, I ran into an old friend of mine and we decided to \_\_\_\_\_.*

We might describe this person as being flighty, changing plans on a momentary whim, and too easily dismissing or forgetting previous commitments. This seems pretty close to what the Corinthians thought of their apostle in this moment: changing travel plans on a whim, for no good reason at all, of being wishy-washy, fleshly. Again, v12 speaks specifically against this charge.

**...in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world...**

The word translated “vacillating,” “fickle,” is most literally translated in the KJVs and, surprisingly, the original NIV: “lightly” or “lightness.” The Greek *elaphria* means just that: something light or insignificant; in secular usage it came to be used to describe impulse behavior or impetuosity; the word communicates thoughtlessness, frivolousness, and instability (Guthrie). Regarding the curious “yes, yes” and “no, no,” I’ll offer two interpretations, both of which are possible.

**The first** keys off of something Jesus said in speaking against taking oaths.

**Read Matthew 5:34-37.**

And James clarifies it further.

**But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your yes be yes, and your no, no, so that you may not fall under judgment. (James 5:12)**

The point being made is that it is wrong to overly emphasize by doubling your answer (in swearing an oath); in so doing you imply that under normal circumstances (a simple yes or no, without a formal oath) you are being untruthful.

This is why James says, “But let your yes be yes, and your no, no...” In other words, just be truthful simply and clearly, and obtain a reputation for your veracity without oath-taking.

**The second** possibility is supported by George Guthrie.

*Guthrie:* The better position is to take the double “yes” and double “no” as emphatic, straightforward, contradictory answers, which we have translated as “‘absolutely’ and ‘no way’ in the same breath”... The juxtaposition of the opposite answers can be understood as implying that Paul has been accused of talking out of both sides of his mouth. Thus at least some of the Corinthians have denounced him for lacking integrity, a moral vacuousness in which he could say “absolutely” and “no way” to the same question (here, “Am I coming to visit you first?”).

The LSB, NASB, and ESV seem to follow this line of thought, all three versions add “at the same time,” at the end of v17, which is not in the original text. As the paragraph continues, Paul will emphasize just the one answer, “Yes.”

**But as God is faithful, our word to you is not yes and no. For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us—by me and Silvanus and Timothy—was not yes and no, but has become yes in Him. 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. (2 Corinthians 1:18–20)**

This we will look at more deeply in our next session.