

SESSION 10: THE YES OF GOD, PART TWO

2 Corinthians 1:17-20

June 8, 2025

PREFACE

I ended our last session by offering two possible interpretations for the end of v17—specifically, the “yes, yes and no, no.” This week it struck me that there is a very good reason for preferring the second of those options, as explained 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.

As I pointed out last week, 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.

So what struck me this week? Boolean logic. I won’t bore you with a lot of details, but pertinent to this is that in Boolean logic operators such as AND, OR, and NOT are used to determine if an expression is true or false. Cutting to the chase, what struck me was the use of “and” (*kai*) in the “yes, yes and no, no” phrase. Using Boolean logic, *both* values (yes, no) must be true for the expression to resolve as true.

This—the “and”—supports this interpretation of the verse: Paul is being accused of saying *both* yes and no—not one OR the other, or one but NOT the other—and thus (with the AND operator) “talking out of both sides of his mouth,” or as our versions have it, “at the same time.”

And vv18-20 reinforce this by eliminating the “and” (as well as the “no”), reducing it down to just one: “yes”—the yes of God.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:17-20.

Something else that struck me this week was that all of Paul’s responses in this argument are *theological*; that is, he does not answer any of their criticisms by citing his own inherent qualities:

- if he is sincere, it is the sincerity that stems from the confidence he has by his calling from God;

- if his conduct is laudable, it is because of the grace of God;
- if he has integrity, it is because of the faithfulness of God;
- the message he preaches is not his own, but the message of “the Son of God, Jesus Christ.”

v18

But as God is faithful, our word to you is not yes and no.

Paul sees himself as a faithful worker—servant, slave—serving his Lord as His spokesman among the Gentiles—even in “partnership” with God.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:20-6:1.

This means that “He did not, as a matter of fact, say to the Corinthians, ‘Yes, I am coming back soon,’ when he really meant, ‘No, I am coming back later.’ He changed those plans, and for good reasons; but he did not lie when he was present with them in Corinth” (Barnett).

In v18 Paul associates and establishes himself with God, and I like how the ESV and NIVs use the word “surely”—“As surely as God is faithful” [and He is] *you can trust that I am not being duplicitous with you.*

v19

This world that is our present abode is filled with contradiction, insincerity, deceit, both white and black (yes and no) with endless shades of gray between. Faithfulness, with the concomitant response of trust, is a rare commodity; the flesh is weak (Mark 14:38), and *it* makes all the rules in this world.

First-century Corinth—including the church residing in it—is awash with the weakness of flesh. The Corinthian church is *not* a secure island of righteousness in a sea of worldly sin, but a gathering of mostly Christians badly contaminated by their environment. So it perceives and interprets their apostle and his fellow workers, the founders of their church, by those weak and corrupt standards. Even worse, they perceive and interpret the gospel itself—the “gospel preached among” them—by the standards of the flesh. Verse 19 reads,

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. ➡

The picture we have of the Corinthians is that they were *not* spiritually minded people. Their habit was to interpret the gospel through the filter of the world, rather than interpret the gospel by means of the Spirit. The apostle Paul, early on in his first letter, emphasizes their need for this. Look at 1 Corinthians 2.

Read 2:4-5, 7-8, 10, 12-13.

In vv18-20 Paul espouses a concept that is not discernible or understood without the Spirit, without employing a spiritual perspective. Yet it is fundamental to the gospel which he preaches.

In v18 he uses the faithfulness of God as a comparison—as a known quantity to substantiate the word, his preaching, and that of his fellows. Thus God’s faithfulness he takes to be a known and accepted quantity: *God is faithful*.

He then, immediately in v19, associates Jesus Christ with this faithful God by employing a form of title he seldom uses: “Son of God, Jesus Christ.” Biblically, a son acquires the traits of his father; he looks like him, behaves like him. And that is especially—remarkably—true in the case of Jesus and Father God.

Read John 14:7-10. ➡

By the way, most scholars agree that “Silvanus” is just the Latinized form of the Aramaic “Silas,” Paul’s companion after his parting from Barnabas at the beginning of his second missionary journey.

See also, John 5:18-23; 10:37-38.

Then Paul makes a curious statement at the end of v19.

For the Son of God, Jesus Christ...was not yes and no, but has become yes in Him.

Once more, the Bible is explained by the Bible. In v20 Paul explains the end of v19.

v20

For as many as are the promises of God, in Him they are yes.

Christ is the “Yes” of God! or, God has said “Yes” in the Son. That is, everything since Creation that God has promised is fulfilled, it is found in Christ Jesus. All the prophecies of a Messiah, all the promises for salvation and eternal life with Him, the promise of an eternal Davidic throne—all are “Yes!” in the Son.

Jesus the Christ answers them all with a resounding “Yes.” This “yes” is the gospel in a nutshell.

Guthrie: This is another way of saying that all of God’s covenant promises poured out graciously on the human race have crescendoed, with Jesus as their answer.

- The promise to Abraham of blessing for all the nations of the earth:
“And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.” (Genesis 12:3)

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him in love, (Ephesians 1:3–4)
- The promises to David concerning his messianic descendant:
“When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up one of your seed after you, who will come forth from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom... And your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever.” (2 Samuel 7:12,16)

“Behold, the days are coming,” declares Yahweh, “When I will raise up for David a righteous Branch; And He will reign as king and prosper And do justice and righteousness in the land. In His days Judah will be saved, And Israel will dwell securely; And this is His name by which He will be called, ‘Yahweh our righteousness.’” (Jeremiah 23:5–6)
- The promise of a *new* covenant given through Jeremiah:
“Behold, days are coming,” declares Yahweh, “when I will cut a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I cut with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, but I was a husband to them,” declares Yahweh. “But this is the covenant which I will cut with the house of Israel after those days,” declares Yahweh: “I will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. And they will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know Yahweh,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares Yahweh, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.” (Jeremiah 31:31–34)

All these promises, and many, many more, have their fulfillment—their “yes”—in Christ Jesus.

Therefore also through Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us.

Let me quickly dissect the words in this sentence before we digest its powerful message. First off, the LSB and NASB are accurate, but clumsy; the ESV offers us a more legible rendering.

That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory.

“Him,” of course, refers to “Son of God, Jesus Christ” (v19); “Amen” is a straight transliteration from the Hebrew, pronounced aw-MANE, meaning verily, truly, so be it. The root for the word harkens back to the idea of *faithfulness*—God’s faithfulness (vv18, 20a). So the undeveloped point of this sentence is that Paul and his fellow workers (i.e., all believers) give glory to God the Father by means of our Amen offered through Jesus.

Sunday last I pointed out in the message that Jesus is the blood, He is the priest carrying the blood, and He is the mercy seat on which the blood is applied. Here, too, Jesus *is* the Amen.

Read Revelation 3:14-15.

Since The Revelation was written by John about forty years after the writing of 2 Corinthians, Paul was not influenced by it, but John quotes the words of Jesus speaking an eternal truth of which Paul was surely knowledgeable: Jesus *is* the Amen.

When we as believers speak the Amen on earth, we *own* that to which the Amen is spoken (i.e., as if we uttered it ourselves) and the result, the effect, is that Jesus speaks that to the Father—as the prophet Isaiah spoke of this connection:

Because he who is blessed in the earth Will be blessed by the God of truth, And he who swears in the earth Will swear by the God of truth; Because the former distresses are forgotten, And because they are hidden from My sight! (Isaiah 65:16)

So when we put all these truths together—

- God is faithful (v18);
- Jesus *is* the “Yes” (v19);
- God’s promises are, in Christ, “Yes” (v20a);
- In worship we speak our “Amen” through Christ to the glory of God;
- Jesus *is* the “Amen” (Revelation 3:14);

—this extended passage reveals a dynamic, multi-faceted relationship between God and the church in and through Christ. It effectively humbles us—humbles, clarifies, and even restricts or guards our speech in worship.

Our “Amen” must have substance behind it, for it passes through Christ to the Father, and generates action—fulfillment of promises—in the Father, as Mark Seifrid states. I close with this.

Mark Seifrid: This “Amen” is not God’s word in Jesus. It is the verbal response that arises from those who have been given the gift of salvation. It is a word of faith and hope in the glory that is yet to be revealed. God’s saving Yes in the crucified and risen Christ does not return to him empty but creates its own reception and thus brings the fruit of thanksgiving and faith... In more than one way in this letter, then, Paul invites the Corinthians to utter “Amen” to God through Jesus Christ. The “Amen” to which Paul invites the Corinthians is a thankful affirmation of “the glory that comes about through us.”