

Integrity in Ministry 2 Corinthians 1:12-2:4

Pastor Shane led us through a very edifying exposition of 1:8-11 last week.

- (As a quick sermon note: We are returning to our original sermon plan which involved at least someone else preaching other than me, at least once per month. That's good for me, the preacher and the church)
- I watched from the airport, as I had to travel to KY for my sister's wedding.

I haven't flown much this past year due to Covid, and have had to cancel many trips.

In this passage, Paul is discussing the **issue of his change in travel plans.**

- Seems like a rather **mundane to talk about, but he had to address it, and it's actually practical and edifying.**
- **It's both autobiographical and theological.**
- **His change in plans created quite a problem, and in addressing it, drops in some rich gospel truths.**

Recall that Paul is **being attacked** in Corinth for a few a number of reasons.

His critics are claiming...

- (1) "his **appearance** is weak" and "he suffers too much to be an apostle" "**he's a loser**"
- (2) "his **motives are not pure**"
 - the issue of money is eventually brought up
 - Here they claim he's fickle, "he said he was going to visit and he didn't" / "can't trust the guy")
- (3) "his **speaking ability isn't that great**"
- (4) "he's **not successful**"

So Paul is addressing these things throughout the letter, and in **verses 12-14** we have what some refer to as **the thesis of 2 Corinthians.**

- Paul gives a **general statement about his integrity in ministry.**
- He makes a statement about his **actions and his motives.**

Then in **the following verses**, he gets to a **specific issue**, as he defends his integrity.

- Namely, why he didn't visit the Corinthians the way he said he would.

It's awkward to defend yourself.

- **We shouldn't try to do this all the time.**
- **This was necessary because the gospel was at stake.**
- **This was Christ's apostle, and the false apostles were doing damage.**
- **This is a church that's just about 10 years old; young in the faith, and if the false teachers can discredit Paul, then they will lead many astray.**

I want to look at this whole unit in a two part way.

In **1:12-2:4**, Paul highlights **seven marks of integrity in ministry.**

Now, this is the apostle Paul, but the marks apply to every Christian who seeks to serve Christ and his church.

- The job of pastors is to “equip the saints for the work of ministry.” (Eph 4:12)
- If you’re a Christian, you have ministry to do!
- You don’t come here to be entertained, but to worship and to be equipped/encouraged to minister to others in a way that honors God.

The equipping here is about the character of the minister,
and the gospel focus needed for ministry.

This text is very timely.

We live in a world where people are often judged by their performance, rather than on their character.

- That is **not** the way of the Kingdom.
- **Character counts – in life and ministry.**
- We see people excusing **politicians** for shameful acts because of his/her performance.
- The same happens with **movie stars, business people, sports heroes** and more.
- **And it can even be seen in the church:**
 - **Pastors / leaders evaluated on the size of their church, the success of their books, the extent of their TV ministry, or their influence in the political arena.**
- **Who we are matters!**

So let’s look at these seven traits:

1. Grace-Enabled Godliness
2. An Eschatological Vision
3. Truthful Speech
4. Christ-Centered Proclamation
5. Spiritual Authenticity
6. Joy-Focused Labor
7. Heartfelt Love

#1: Grace-Enabled Godliness (1:12)

Paul introduces the term “**boasting**” here.

- It appears more in this letter than any other book.
- In Corinth, people were drawn to **human strength and impressiveness.**
- There was **a lot of boasting.** (Battle rappers:LL Cool Jay and Kool Moe Dee)
- But throughout the epistle, **Paul shows the folly of such boasting as a Christian.**
- **All of our boasting is to be “in the Lord.” (10:17)**
- In this verse, he says that **his boast is in that *his conduct has been godly* – “**by grace**”**
- **He attributes a pure motive to the Grace of God: not in his power, but God’s -- and so God gets the glory.**

His boast (empowered by grace) was that his **conscience** was clear—“**the testimony of our conscience.**”

Their assessment of him was hurtful, but his conscience was clean before God.

A clear conscious is **foundational in ministry**.

- There was no sin that he was aware of that **he wasn't confessing before the Lord**.
 - **A clear conscious doesn't mean sinless; it means that you are living in the light, and that when you are aware of sin, you are confessing it to the Lord.**
 - **Repentance is not one and done!**

The idea of a clean conscious appears a lot in the pastoral letters (and it should surprise us that it appears here, as Dane Ortlund says 2 Corinthians could also be called **a pastoral epistle**, since so much focuses on Paul's qualifications for ministry).

- He emphasizes the aim of his teaching: "love that issues from a pure heart and *a good conscience* and a sincere faith" (1 Timothy 1:5).
- Church leaders "must hold the mystery of the faith with *a clear conscience*" (1 Tim 3:9).
 - "We do not tamper with God's word" (2 Cor 4:2)
- He says of his own ministry, "I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with *a clear conscience*" (2 Timothy 1:3)

You can't always make people happy in ministry.

- **Many people will misunderstand you, be critical of you, and at times make hurtful accusations about you.**
- **What do you do? Live with a clean conscious before God.**
- **If you don't please God it doesn't matter who you please.**
 - "We make it our aim to please him" (2 Cor 5.9)

His conscious was clear because he acted in "**holiness and godly sincerity**"

How?

Notice where he goes: We have **not** acted according to "**earthly wisdom but by grace**"

- **He** hasn't relied world's strategies, **but by grace**.
 - Grace that empowers one's ministry and keeps one **faithful to Jesus**.
- In other words, **a ministry of integrity is a dependent ministry**
 - **It is reliant upon the grace of Jesus, as it does ministry in the name of Jesus.**
- He is saying "I'm thinking through my decisions for spiritual reasons."
 - **It's not just pragmatic and convenient; or whimsical but by grace.**

"**simplicity**" or "**holiness**" speaks of moral purity and purity of motives.

- **Simplicity**: "single-minded commitment,"
- **the absence of any duplicity or deviousness on his part.**

"**sincerity**" carries the picture of holding up something to the sunlight to test for inspection.

- This speaks of his **transparency**
- 2 Cor 2:17: For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.

Paul is saying that his life is above reproach and he attributes that the God's grace enabling him to live in such a way.

- McCheyne: “It’s not great talents that God so much blesses as it is great likeness to Jesus.”

May all of us pursue a holy life by God’s grace.

You may not be gifted like someone else, but you can pursue godliness.

- And you know what? **Godliness not only honors God, but it makes up for a lot of your deficiencies in gifting.**

#2: An Eschatological Vision (1:13-14)

Paul desires for the church to “fully understand” (v. 13) these things.

- In other words, he wants them to **fully grasp what it means to operate by grace, not human wisdom.**

14: Then he says something wonderful... he goes to the eschaton, when all things will be made clear, and when believers boast in each other – in those they’ve invested in.

“the day of our Lord Jesus” speaks of Christ return and triumph.

- Even though Paul doesn’t tease out a robust theology of this day; it never strays far from his mind and in his writing of this letter. (Cf, 5:10)

This is important: **We do ministry – loving, serving, teaching, caring, praying – in view of the final day!**

- And because that day is coming, what we do matters!

Paul is showing us here that investing in others is worth it!

- Paul says I will boast of you and you will boast in me.
“For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? For you are our glory and joy.” (1 Thess 2:19-20)
- “You won’t be ashamed of me, and I won’t be ashamed of you; we will glory in each other!”

It will be Christ-centered boasting on that day; and an others-focused boasting.

- Sometimes people wonder “will we know each other in heaven?”
 - I think this verse is quite clear: yes.
 - And we will boast in each other.
- This is the text that Jonathan Edwards preached for his Farewell sermon – when he was voted out as their pastor!
 - He reminded them that they will meet again and there is a special bond between pastor and parishioner.

Caring for the well being of other believers is at the heart of ministry.

- And one day the presence of Jesus Christ, we will be filled with joy as we see other believers that we invested in.
- Our joy in one another now (as great as it is) will be greater on the day of Christ.
- We look forward to a fellowship that will never end.

And that's why we can go (like the Davenports) because we have an eschatological vision.

- “**Gospel good-byes.**”
- We make sacrifices now knowing the joy that will be ours on the day of Christ when we have fellowship that will never end.

#3: Truthful Speech (1:15-17)

The Corinthians would have been excited to have two visits by Paul (“**second experience of grace**”).

- But that didn't happen.
- Paul doesn't give us all the details of the itinerary, but he does highlight his truthfulness.

In 1 Cor 16, we read that Paul intended to travel: Ephesus-Macedonia-Corinth-Jerusalem.

- And he intended to stay for the winter in Corinth — a longer visit.
- But he revised this plan (1:16) and decided to come twice: Ephesus-Corinth-Macedonia-Corinth-Jerusalem.
- But after he got a negative report about the church, he changed his mind and decided to make an emergency visit. “Painful visit” (2:1)
- Then he returned to Ephesus. Then to Troas (2:12) to Macedonia, where he wrote 2 Corinthians. And he's about to come see them again before going to Jerusalem.
- So they didn't get the long visit, but a painful visit, and they didn't get a double visit plan A and plan B failed. They got plan C.

These changes in the plans caused a rift.

- It gave some the occasion to spread rumors about Paul.
- They accused him of being fickle and untrustworthy.

Paul is trying to say “that plan really was my intention.”

- My “**yes**” is “yes” and my “no” is “no.” “I'm not fickle.”

We all know that circumstances can change and therefore plans change.

- In 2020: opening day tickets, Hamilton on Kimberly's birthday; Sabbatical; other things.
- But there was this thing called a global pandemic.

Paul was hindered – and down in 2:1ff he tells us practically why he couldn't make this visit: he wanted to spare them another painful visit

- He wanted to give them space to repent – so he wrote a letter instead.
- He views it as an expression of mercy.

In these verses (15-17), he's simply saying “I am an honest minister.”

- He's saying his plans weren't flippant.
- “My mouth didn't outran my intentions.”
- He meant what he said.

If he was flippant, that would mean he had been making **“plans according to the flesh” (17)**

- That is, in a worldly way.
- He didn't have twisted motives; he sincerely intended to spend more time there for their well being.

Two applications here:

1. Give your brothers and sisters the benefit of doubt.

- The church had been very uncharitable in their evaluation of Paul.
- He wasn't given the benefit of the doubt.
- This is a good lesson for us in these days.
- It's easy to put the worst possible spin on a narrative.
 - “He said that, but I know what he means”
 - “She said this” - really? “Well not in so many words.”

A. Some Xians lack **discernment**, believing anything. They make bad decisions.

B. Others lack restraint and **charity**, criticizing and imagining the worst.

- They like to size people up, and claim to know one's motives, actions and psychological local make up.
 - Someone looks tired - what do you conclude? You could make a very uncharitable assessment of the person, when maybe they just took NyQuil last night and there in a fog.
 - “He's from the south, therefore he thinks _____”
 - “He changed his mind, therefore, he's wishy washy.”
- That's what they did to the one who brought the gospel to them; who planted the church and cared for them.
- It is so easy to act on partial knowledge and fill in the gaps with gossip and unfair criticism.
 - And they were doing this without social media!
- Let us be marked by sympathy, kindness, direct conversation, and grace.

2. Be a person who is truthful and honest.

- Don't speak out of both sides of your mouth. Let your yes be yes and your no be no.
- Follow through on commitments. Be a person of your word.
- Paul is saying he did that; and that's why his conscious is clean. Let us do the same — by the grace of God.

#4: Christ-Centered Proclamation (1:18-20)

Above all things, a minister of integrity proclaims Christ!

Otherwise we're not a real gospel minister, but something else.

18: Paul is tying his integrity to God's integrity, God's faithfulness.

- He says his integrity is a reality because of the faithfulness of God.
- It's due to the work of God in his life.
- God's faithfulness explains his integrity.
- God is sustaining him. (Cf., 1 Thess 5:23-24)

19-20: The first proof that he gives to support his argument that God is faithful is the fact that God's promises fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

God always keeps his word. Just look at Christ's work!

And as he's makes this claim, he is continuing to defend his ministry - this time with a greater to less than argument.

"If I proclaimed the true gospel to you" (v. 19) – the big thing –
then surely you can trust me on a little thing like a change in travel plans! - the small
thing

19: What Paul says here is important for seeing how the Bible testifies to Jesus, and we we must stay committed to proclaiming Christ from his word.

"Son of God" – This highlights how Christ fulfilled the promise to David; he is the fulfillment to the great anticipation of the King of Kings (2 Sam 7; Ps 2)

20: Jesus is the **"Yes"** – the fulfillment of the promises.

- Jesus' work is God's big yes to the world; he's not the world's "maybe" – "I hope he's the one" It's yes!
- His coming had a purpose: to seek and save the lost; to reconcile sinners to God.
- He came with a clear plan and he fulfilled it!
- The Hawk after a White Sox homer: **"You can put it on the board.... yes!"**
- **because Jesus paid it all – you can put this on the board -- yes!**

All of the anticipations and predictions of the Messiah have been decisively and irreversibly declared to be "yes" in Christ.

- Gen 3:15
- Christ is "God's yes" to the promise to Abraham: that through him all the nations of the earth would be blessed
- He is David's offspring who reigns forever.
- He is Isaiah's suffering servant that was wounded for our transgressions.
- Daniel's Son of Man who will come again in glory.
- He is the ultimate prophet, priest, king, temple, sacrifice
- he is the second Adam who obeyed the Father perfectly.
- He is the better ark who provides salvation to all who run to him for refuge.
- He is the Royal King declared in the Psalms.
- He is the greater Isaac that was offered up for our salvation.
- He is the Greater Moses, who has brought us deliverance.
- He is the Greater Joshua who brings us into the Promised Land.
- He is the the greater Boaz who feeds the hungry at his table and bring us into the family.
- He is the true manna from heaven that satisfies our hungry hearts.
- He is the water from the Rock that saves us.

- He is the fulfillment of the law.
- He is the sabbath rest.

To read the Old Testament without Christ's ministry in mind is like **reading a mystery novel without the final chapter.**

- He is **the only "yes"**
- You can't find salvation in him one day but in someone else the next day.
- All other potential saviors are "no's"

He is the answer to the ultimate questions:

- **Forgiveness? Yes!**
- **Satisfaction? Yes.**
- **Eternal life? Yes.**
- **Reconciliation to God? Yes.**
- **Will he have you? Yes!**

"All the promises of God find their 'yes' in him.

- All of them.
- What God pledged, Christ fulfilled.
- What God said he would do, Christ did it!
- Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, is the ultimate proof that God is faithful!

Do you think the message of Christianity is "no"?

- A bunch of things you aren't allowed to do?
- There are "nos" (Titus 2:11-14)
- But see the "yes!"
- What God provides you is infinitely better than the fleeting pleasures of sin!
- He offers you His beloved Son to save and satisfy you; to defend and care for you.

Linger over the promises.

- Like a lozenge. Enjoy God's word.
- It's easy to move from one thing to the next without slowing down to read the promises.
- Savor his promises fulfilled in The Savior.

20b: So we utter our **"Amen."**

- Amen is an affirmation of the truthfulness of a statement. (Neh 8)
- It's the celebratory response that we declare as people who have received this salvation.
- When Paul and his companions preached Christ, the people said "Amen."
- We follow in this great tradition, declaring God is faithful, to the glory of God
- Let the Amen sound from his people again!

21-22: Paul goes on to say that the Spirit confirms this salvation, and we will pick up there next week.

**Praise be to our faithful God.
Have you said “yes” to Christ?**