

SECOND CORINTHIANS

1:12-24

Introduction

Paul the apostle was a planner. He had made plans regarding a visit to the church at Corinth:

1 Corinthians 16:5 Now I will come to you when I pass through Macedonia (for I am passing through Macedonia).

1 Corinthians 16:6 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.

1 Corinthians 16:7 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.

Paul wrote those words from Ephesus. He planned to visit the Macedonian churches and then afterward visit the church at Corinth. The plans Paul made changed. He decided to make a quick trip to Corinth, then go on to Macedonia, then return to Corinth. But after arriving in Corinth, his plans changed again. He returned to Ephesus rather than going on to Macedonia. Once back in Ephesus there was another change of plans: He decided to return to his original plan of traveling through Macedonia on his way back to Corinth.

Does that seem inconsistent and flaky to you? It did to some members of the church at Corinth! Paul's enemies seized upon his change of plans as evidence that he should not be trusted as a Christian leader. They said that he planned "according to the flesh" (1:17) rather than following the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Paul answers their criticism in these verses. He *defends* his plans, and he tells them that he ultimately *depends* upon God's plans for his life to lead and guide him.

You've made plans for God; **you've changed** your plans for God. Are you inconsistent and flaky? Maybe... But maybe not! It all depends on what you learn in these verses.

You learn two things: #1 You Should Always Be Able To Defend Your Plans For God, and #2 You Are Always Able To Depend Upon God's Plans For You.

#1 You Should Always Be Able To
Defend Your Plans For God
(v12-20 & 23-24)

Paul defends his plans – *even though they changed several times!* He doesn't defend the *particulars* of his plans; he defends the *preparation* of his plans. Even though the particular plans changed, they were always prepared in a godly manner.

This is the key to what these verses teach you about making your plans for God. It should be obvious that your particular plans for God will often change. But you should be able to defend the plans you made because they were prepared in a godly manner.

You can tell whether your plans were prepared in a godly manner by analyzing three essential qualities: Your *motives*, your *message*, and your *methods*.

Analyze your motives:

2 Corinthians 1:12 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.

2 Corinthians 1:13 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

2 Corinthians 1:14 (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.

2 Corinthians 1:15 And in this confidence I intended to come to you before, that you might have a second benefit—

2 Corinthians 1:16 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.

Paul's heart is at the heart of these verses. He declares to them that his motives were godly in the preparation of his plans. His plans to visit them were always motivated only by his godly desire to share fellowship with them. He uses two words to summarize his desire for fellowship: "benefit" and "boasting":

1. He wanted to share mutual benefits, “that [they] might... benefit,” from him and that he might “be helped by” them.
2. He speaks of being able to “boast” about them to others, and of their “boasting” about him.

These verses contain a number of key words that relate to your motives. The first such word is “conscience.” Check to see if you have a clear conscience. Conscience is the mental faculty for moral self-judgment that either *acquits* you or *accuses* you. If your conscience is accusing you in some area of unconfessed sin, you cannot defend the plans you are making for God.

Next check to see if “simplicity” describes your motives. Paul uses the word “simplicity” in verse twelve, then in verse thirteen says,

2 Corinthians 1:13 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

Do you keep things simple so people can understand you? Or do you complicate things on purpose to appear more spiritual? Do you use college words in order to appear more intelligent? You should be characterized by a simplicity that makes you understandable. If not, your motives are wrong.

Next check for “godly sincerity.” Sincerity is from a Greek word meaning *without wax*, or *tested by sunlight*. Unscrupulous artists would sometimes use wax to repair damage they did to a sculpture. When the sculpture was tested by the sunlight, the wax portions would melt! Godly sincerity speaks of integrity. Do you promote or portray yourself as being more spiritual than you really are? If so you cannot defend your plans.

Next Paul says, “not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God.” Too many plans and programs in the church are motivated by the fleshly, or *natural*, wisdom of the world. Instead they should be motivated by the grace of God.

In verse fourteen Paul refers to “the day of the Lord Jesus.” It is a reminder that Jesus is coming to rapture you. When He does, you will stand before His reward seat. Jesus will search your heart and

reveal your motives! Your reward in that glorious day will be based upon the quality of your motives, so analyze them now.

You should always be able to defend your plans for God by analyzing your motives. Next,

Analyze your message:

2 Corinthians 1:17 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?

2 Corinthians 1:18 But as God *is* faithful, our word to you was not Yes and No.

2 Corinthians 1:19 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.

2 Corinthians 1:20 For all the promises of God in Him *are* Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us.

The emphasis in these verses is on Paul's message to the Corinthians. He calls it "our word to you" (verse 18) and describes it as "all the promises of God" (verse 20). He and his companions "preached" this message of the Gospel of the "Son of God, Jesus Christ."

He says his message was *not* "Yes, Yes, and No, No... not Yes and No... but in [Jesus] it was Yes."

Okay, that sounds weird to me, too! It's not the kind of sentence you normally get a good grade on in an essay. But Paul's idea is clear. He had been faithful to preach the message of the Gospel to the Corinthians. They came to Jesus Christ and claimed the things promised to them in that message and God said "Yes" to them because of Jesus. God wasn't and isn't wishy-washy or inconsistent; He doesn't say "Yes," then change His mind and say "No." **You** can come before Him, claim His promises, and go away saying "Amen" - knowing that God is faithful Who promised and He will bring everything He promised to pass, in His timing, for your good and His glory.

Paul's message was therefore not "Yes and No." It *was* and *is* a trustworthy message of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

The message of the Gospel of grace influenced all of his plans. When he said “Yes, Yes” to a plan that he was making for God, he did so because he believed it would give him the greatest opportunity to preach the Gospel. When he said “No, No” to a plan that he had made for God, he did so because it would give him the greatest opportunity to preach the Gospel. His plans were never made “lightly” or “according to the flesh.” They only changed when it became obvious to Paul that God was the One changing them for the purpose of giving Paul greater opportunities to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

I apply these thoughts by pointing out how easy it is for you to become sidetracked when you forget the essential message of the Gospel. Too many Christians are promoting their own particular agenda, arguing amongst themselves, and ignoring the greater responsibility to preach the Gospel. Instead, *keep the main thing the main thing!* Make plans that seek to get the Gospel out and you will be able to defend them.

Skipping down to verses twenty-three and twenty-four, you are told to,

Analyze your methods:

2 Corinthians 1:23 Moreover I call God as witness against my soul, that to spare you I came no more to Corinth.

Paul changed his original plans largely because of circumstances in Corinth. Serious problems in the church there had prompted him to make a short visit. He says in chapter two that it caused them to be “sorrowful.” He also wrote a painful letter to them about the situation, a letter which no longer exists. Now he says that his plans were changed again because of his desire “to spare [them]” from further pain.

He discusses his methods among them when he says,

2 Corinthians 1:24 Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are fellow workers for your joy; for by faith you stand.

Paul had the authority of an apostle of Jesus Christ. But he refused to “dominate” them into obeying him. He saw himself as a “fellow worker” whose goal was to encourage them to experience the “joy” of obeying God on their own. It is “by [personal] faith” that each Christian must “stand” before the Lord and account for his or her life.

Too often the methods Christians use in teaching and discipling involve pressuring and manipulating others to do the right thing. The end never justifies the use of these methods!

It’s good to make plans for the future – plans for serving God. The particulars will change; but the preparation should not.

There is something else you should keep in mind as you make plans for God: God has plans for you!

#2 You Are Always Able To Depend Upon God’s Plans For You (v21-22)

Throughout your Christian life you discover the particulars of God’s plans for your life – where you are supposed to live, who you are supposed to marry, what church you should attend, what gifts you have. Behind each of these things are some foundational things; some things that all believers can count on. They involve the ministry of the Holy Spirit in your life and are discussed in verses twenty-one and twenty-two.

2 Corinthians 1:21 Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us *is* God,
2 Corinthians 1:22 who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.

If you are a Christian, you can depend upon God to “establish” you, “anoint” you, “seal” you, and “guarantee” you!

God “establishes” you. The word is a legal word that means *confirms*. The idea here is that God has made and confirmed a covenant with you. It is the new covenant of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. God planned from eternity past to save you by sending His Son, Jesus Christ, to die for your sins. He offers you the forgiveness of sins and eternal life when you trust Christ alone to save you. **You** can depend upon God’s plan of salvation!

God “anoints” you. In the Old Testament, prophets, priests, and kings were anointed with oil that symbolized the Holy Spirit coming upon their lives to equip them for service. Jesus said that He would send the Holy Spirit. He did: On the Day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit came and anointed the disciples to equip them for their service. Then they continually asked for the Spirit to go on anointing them for their service. **You** can depend upon God’s plan to anoint you for service!

God has “sealed” you. Seals denote ownership and protection. If something is stamped with a seal, you can tell its owner. If you tamper with the seal, the owner will act to protect his property. God’s seal upon you means you are secure in Him. You can depend upon God’s plan for your security.

God “guarantees” you. Another translation says God “has given us the Spirit in our hearts as a deposit.” The indwelling Holy Spirit is a deposit that guarantees you God will complete the spiritual work He has begun in you. **You** can depend upon God’s plan to sanctify you.

This is God’s plan for you: He *saves* and *seals* you; He anoints you for *service* in the present and guarantees your future, final *sanctification*. You can absolutely depend upon Him for these things. They form the foundation of all your plans for Him.

Conclusion

It’s good to make plans for God – *as long as they are good plans!* Your plans for God will often change, but that’s Okay. His plans for you never change – and that is too wonderful to fully comprehend!