

Love Sometimes Says No

2 Corinthians 1:15-24

SERMON TEXT

2 Corinthians 1:15-24 “And in this confidence I was minded to come unto you before, that ye might have a second benefit; **16** And to pass by you into Macedonia, and to come again out of Macedonia unto you, and of you to be brought on my way toward Judaea. **17** When I therefore was thus minded, did I use lightness? or the things that I purpose, do I purpose according to the flesh, that with me there should be yea yea, and nay nay? **18** But as God is true, our word toward you was not yea and nay. **19** For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, even by me and Silvanus and Timotheus, was not yea and nay, but in him was yea. **20** For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us. **21** Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; **22** Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts. **23** Moreover I call God for a record upon my soul, that to spare you I came not as yet unto Corinth. **24** Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith ye stand.”

INTRODUCTION

Sometimes the easiest thing to do is say yes. Somebody wants something from us, somebody expects something from us, and we do not want to disappoint them. But love cannot only ask, “What does this person want right now?” Love also has to ask, “What is actually best for this person?”

That is what Paul is dealing with here. He had planned to come to Corinth. He really intended to come, and he believed that visit would benefit them. But then the plan changed. Naturally that raised a question: Can Paul's word be trusted?

Paul does not ignore that question. He explains himself. And when we finally reach verse 23, he tells them why he did not come: “to spare you I came not as yet unto Corinth.”

Paul did not stay away because he did not care about them. He stayed away because he did care about them. Sometimes love says yes. Sometimes love says no. And sometimes love's no means, “Not yet.”

I. A SINCERE PLAN CAN STILL NEED TO CHANGE — 2 CORINTHIANS

1:15-17

Paul begins by saying, “I was minded to come unto you before.” This was a real plan. Verse 16 even lays out the route. He intended to come to Corinth, go into Macedonia, come back through Corinth, and then continue toward Judaea.

And why did he want to come? Verse 15 says, “that ye might have a second benefit.” His original plan was for their good. Paul was not looking for a reason to stay away. He wanted to come. He believed being with them would help them.

That matters because the point of this sermon is not that love enjoys telling people no. Paul started with yes. His first desire was to do something he believed would benefit them.

But then the plan changed, and Paul understood how that could look. So in verse 17 he asks, “did I use lightness?” Was he treating his word casually? Was he saying one thing today and something else tomorrow? Was he making his decisions “according to the flesh”?

Paul cared whether people could trust what he said.

That is important. We cannot take this passage and say, “Plans change, so keeping your word does not matter.” Paul does not do that. He takes the accusation seriously because integrity matters. Matthew 5:37 and James 5:12 reinforce that same need for clear and dependable speech.

There is a difference between changing a plan for a legitimate reason and becoming somebody whose word nobody can trust.

Sometimes circumstances change. Sometimes you learn something you did not know when you first made the decision. Sometimes what you originally intended to do is no longer the wisest course. That does not automatically mean the original intention was dishonest.

So the question becomes: Why did Paul change the plan?

The answer is coming. But before Paul gives it, he makes sure they understand something even more important.

II. OUR PLANS MAY CHANGE, BUT GOD'S TRUTH NEVER DOES — 2 CORINTHIANS 1:18-22

Verse 18 begins, “But as God is true.” Paul takes the discussion beyond his travel schedule. His plan changed, but God did not change. His itinerary changed, but the message he preached did not change.

Verse 19 says that “the Son of God, Jesus Christ” was not “yea and nay.” Paul, Silvanus, and Timotheus had preached Christ among these people. Paul would not allow somebody to take a change in his travel plans and use that as an argument that the message itself could not be trusted.

Then verse 20 says, “For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen.” Paul is drawing an important distinction. Human plans can change. God's truth does not.

We need to remember that when people disappoint us. People may change plans. People may let us down. Even sincere people sometimes have to change what they intended to do.

But God is true.

Do not judge God's faithfulness by somebody else's failure. Do not judge Jesus Christ by whether some Christian disappointed you. Do not judge the promises of God by whether somebody did everything you expected.

Paul points them away from himself and back to God.

Then verses 21 and 22 continue that emphasis. God is the One who “stablisheth us with you in Christ.” God “hath anointed us.” God “hath also sealed us.” God has “given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.”

Notice who is doing the work. God is.

And notice the words “us with you in Christ.” Paul and the Corinthians are both dependent upon God. Paul may be the apostle writing this letter, but he is not the foundation of their faith.

Ephesians 1:13-14 and 2 Corinthians 5:5 strongly connect with Paul's language here concerning sealing and the earnest of the Spirit. The larger truth is clear: God's work remains sure even when human circumstances are changing.

So yes, love may change the plan. But love does not change the truth.

We cannot say, “I love you,” and then bend what God says because somebody does not like it. Paul changed his travel plan while still standing firmly on this statement: “God is true.”

Our circumstances may change.

Our plans may change.

But God's truth does not change.

III. LOVE SOMETIMES SAYS, “NOT YET” — 2 CORINTHIANS 1:23-24

Now we reach the reason for all of it.

Verse 23 says, “Moreover I call God for a record upon my soul, that to spare you I came not as yet unto Corinth.”

Paul makes this extremely serious. He calls God as witness concerning his motive. Then he tells them exactly why he did not come: “to spare you.”

There is the heart of the passage.

Paul had planned to come. They expected him to come. But he did not come because coming at that time would not have been best for them.

And notice those words “as yet.” Paul is not saying, “I am never coming.” This was not necessarily a permanent no.

This was a “not yet.”

Sometimes that is what love has to say.

Sometimes a child wants something, and the loving answer is no. Sometimes somebody wants you to agree with a decision, and the loving answer is, “I cannot agree with that.” Sometimes somebody wants something immediately, and the loving answer is, “Not now.”

The verses immediately following this passage, 2 Corinthians 2:1-4, help explain Paul's reasoning. He did not want to come to them in heaviness. His dealings with them involved sorrow. Yet that same context connects his difficult dealings with his love toward them.

That means love is not the same thing as keeping everybody happy all the time.

Sometimes love disappoints somebody in the moment. Sometimes love has to correct. Sometimes love has to wait. Sometimes love has to change how something is handled because the timing matters.

Paul did not abandon the Corinthians. He did not decide their problems were no longer his concern. He changed the manner and timing of how he dealt with them.

Then verse 24 gives us a necessary warning: “Not for that we have dominion over your faith.”

Paul was trying to spare them, but that did not mean he owned them.

You can love somebody without controlling them. You can warn somebody without trying to run their life. You can say no without turning your concern into domination.

Paul says instead, “but are helpers of your joy.”

His goal was to help them, not control them.

Parents need to remember that. Pastors need to remember that. Husbands and wives need to remember that. Friends need to remember that. Saying, “I am doing this for your own good,” does not automatically make everything you do right.

Paul finishes by saying, “for by faith ye stand.” He could preach to them. He could warn them. He could correct them. But their faith did not belong to Paul.

So when we say no to somebody, we ought to examine our motives. Why am I saying no? Is it anger? Is it selfishness? Do I simply not want to be bothered? Am I trying to control this person, or am I genuinely trying to help them?

Paul could call God as witness and say, “to spare you I came not as yet unto Corinth.”

That is a serious standard.

CONCLUSION

Paul had a real plan. He wanted to come to Corinth. He believed his visit would benefit them. But when the situation required another course, he delayed that visit.

His changed plan did not mean truth no longer mattered. Paul defended his integrity and then pointed them directly to God: “But as God is true.” Human plans may change, but Jesus Christ does not become “yea and nay,” and the promises of God do not become uncertain.

Then Paul tells us why he stayed away: “to spare you.”

Sometimes love says yes. Sometimes love says no. Sometimes love says, “Not yet.”

But when love says no, it still tells the truth. It still keeps its motives right. It does not use concern as an excuse to control people. It seeks to help.

That is exactly what Paul says in verse 24. He did not want “dominion over your faith.” He wanted to be a helper of their joy.

So do not measure love only by whether somebody gives you what you want right now. And when you are the one making the decision, do not measure love only by whether saying no is easier.

Ask the better question: What will actually help this person?

Sometimes the answer will be yes.

Sometimes, because you genuinely care about them, the answer will have to be no.

Sometimes love says, “Not yet.”

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