

## By Faith We Stand • 2 Corinthians 1:24

### I. INTRODUCTION

#### A. *Personal*

1. Next to 2 Tim, Paul's last letter, written just before his execution by Nero – 2 Cor is his most personal letter.
2. Paul *visited* Corinth 3 times & *wrote* them 4 letters.
3. So, much of what we find in 2 Cor. relates to Paul's *interaction* with them.
4. That's especially true of the first couple chapters.

#### B. *Vs. 12-24*

1. We're going to begin by reading vs. 12-24, which are probably going to be a bit confusing.
2. It's like we're coming in on the middle of a conversation, & what Paul writes here is difficult to understand – so let me give the back story . . .
  - a. At the end of 1 Cor., Paul told them he would visit Corinth on his way to Macedonia & pick up the collection they'd promised for the needy believers in Jerusalem, where Paul was soon headed.
  - b. Then word reached him in Ephesus that there were some serious problems in Corinth so he sent them a *strong* letter meant to *correct* them.
  - c. He planned to *follow-up* with a visit; but God had other plans & Paul was unable to go.
  - d. There was a man in Corinth who'd launched a campaign *against* Paul.
    - 1) He seized on Paul's change of plans as a point of attack.
    - 2) He said Paul was *fickle*; that he said one thing but did another.
    - 3) It was easy to attack Paul because he wasn't there to answer the charges.
    - 4) Plus, the Corinthians had little info on how dramatically God was using Paul in Ephesus.
    - 5) So this guy seized on Paul's change of plans & claimed it revealed he wasn't really led by the Spirit.
    - 6) And if he wasn't led by the Spirit, then what he had taught them couldn't be trusted.
    - 7) It was a clever ploy that had led to many of the Corinthians questioning Paul's calling.
3. So he wrote to clear up the matter; he was *not* fickle!
4. It was precisely **BECAUSE** he walked in the Spirit he'd not visited them.
5. You see, in 1 Cor. 16 where he'd told them of his plans, he'd *qualified* it all by saying, "If the Lord permits." [v. 7]
6. Well, God *hadn't* permitted.
7. With this as our background, let's read vs. 12-24 . . .

### II. TEXT

#### A. *Not Fickle*

1. Influenced by his antagonist, some of the Corinthians had come to believe Paul was fickle & lacked integrity.
2. So he says . . .

**12 For our boasting [position, confidence] 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.**

3. When the Corinthians called him 2-faced & double-minded, he'd taken it to the Lord to see if there was truth to the charge.
  4. There wasn't. On the contrary, *all* his decisions had been made with *one* goal, to obey God.
  5. That's why he *qualified* his plans to visit Corinth by saying, "If the Lord permits."
  6. But they'd not heeded that part; they'd set their own expectations & when Paul didn't meet them, got upset.
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7. How often we do this! We hear what we *want* to hear then build up our expectations.
    - a. When those expectations aren't met we get hurt or angry & attack the person for not doing what we think they said.
    - b. This happens with kids all the time.
      - 1) "Mommy, Daddy, can we go to Disneyland?" / "Maybe."
      - 2) "You *promised* to take me to Disneyland!" / "When did I promise that?"
      - 3) "Well—you didn't say "No.""
  8. It isn't just kids that do this. Grown ups *also* make ungrounded expectations on each other.
    - a. Husbands & wives do so with one another. Parents do it with their children.
    - b. Church members do it of their pastors & pastors do it with their flock.
  9. The Corinthians did it with Paul. And when he didn't meet their expectations they accused him of being double-minded.
  10. So he tells them far from it, there was 1 over-riding priority that governed him – the grace of God & living out that grace toward others.

**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 <sup>14</sup> (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.**

11. He appeals to the Corinthians to look back over all he'd said & done.
12. Since he was the one who'd planted the church in Corinth, they'd known him from the beginning.
13. During all that time, he'd never gone back on his word or done anything that lacked integrity.

**15 And in this confidence I intended to come to you before, that you might have a second benefit— <sup>16</sup> 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.**

14. Paul *had* intended to visit them, *not once but twice*.
15. Since Corinth was on the way to Macedonia, he'd wanted to stop both on the way, then on the way back as he sailed to Jerusalem.

**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?**

16. He challenges them saying, “Come on you guys, I thought you knew me better than that!”
- “When I was with you, did I ever act fickle? Have I ever lacked integrity?”
  - “Haven’t I kept all my *other* promises?”
  - “Then why regarding this 1 thing are you so willing to assume I’m a flake?”
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17. Paul’s response provides a valuable insight for us.
18. We must be on guard against lightly accepting accusations toward our spiritual leaders.
- One of satan’s favorite tactics is to assails the credibility of spiritual authority.
  - It’s how he began with Eve in the Garden – “Has God said?”
  - Then went on to suggest Eve could not trust God.
19. In 1 Tim 5:19 we’re told not to receive an accusation against an elder unless it’s verified by 2 or 3 *credible* witnesses; people who don’t just repeat the accusation but can give testimony to its truthfulness.
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**<sup>18</sup> But as God is faithful, our word to you was not Yes and No.**

20. Paul had *not* been fickle; saying one thing one day & something else the next.

**<sup>19</sup> 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.**

21. Here’s the point Paul’s been driving toward → *He* wasn’t fickle *because God isn’t!*

22. Walking with God means being changed into His image.

23. Being born again ushers us into a new life that *becomes* more & more like its Author.

24. If God is our Father, as we grow in grace *we’ll* become *like Him*.

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25. There’s an unfortunate mindset all too common among some, that faith has little impact on behavior.

- They think they can do whatever they want,
- But as long as they “believe in Jesus,” when they die they’ll go to heaven.
- For them, faith is nothing but accepting the historical fact of Jesus’ life & death.
- Their belief in Jesus is like their belief in the Julius Caesar & has exactly the same impact on how they live their life.

26. But *faith* is more than intellectual agreement with historical facts.

27. It’s *trust, reliance, dependence, compliance*.

28. Faith is *entrance* upon an abiding, intimate relationship with God *that results in change*.

29. Where there’s no change, there’s no life, no faith.

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**B. Amen!**

**<sup>20</sup> For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him → Amen, to the glory of God through us.**

- 1 This is where the translation becomes especially difficult.
  - a. What Paul means here is God says “**Yes!**” to us -
  - b. And we reply, “**Amen.**”

2. Look at it again –

**For all the promises of God in Him [Christ] are Yes.**

- a. All God has for us is located *in Jesus*.
- b. He is The Way, The Truth, & The Life.

**and in Him**

- c. That is, by faith *that places us in Him*, we reply *to* the promises of God . . .

**Amen,**

- d. Resulting in . . .

**the glory of God through us.**

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3. What Paul says here is one of the most important truths we in our time need to appropriate.
4. We’ve been profoundly influenced by a philosophy called *existentialism* & don’t even know it.
5. Existentialism began at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century & has had a huge impact on literature & movies.
  - a. While there are many flavors of existentialism, their common theme is the emphasis on the human will, on *the importance of making choices*.
  - b. It’s in making a choice that we set in course events that bear *consequences*.
  - c. We *feel* those consequences, **& when we feel**, we know that we’re alive, that we *exist*.
  - d. Hence the name, Existentialism.

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- e. But here’s where existentialism goes wrong.
  - 1) Existentialists want to *feel* because it’s feeling they equate with life & meaning.
  - 2) It doesn’t matter *what* you feel, just so long as it’s *intense*.
  - 3) So, if you go along with the status quo, with what’s accepted by society, you lessen your chance of *reaction*.
  - 4) The consequences aren’t as great, so you’ll *feel* less, & to that degree, your life lacks significance & *authenticity*; which is what they’re after.
  - 5) The *authentic* person is the one who *bucks tradition*.
  - 6) The authentic man/woman is courageous & does that which others reject *precisely because* it’s taboo, forbidden, shocking.
  - 7) *The greater the reaction, the better*, because the consequences will be larger & create more feeling.
- f. The premier existentialist was *Fredrick Nietzsche*.
  - 1) He described society as a *herd*. Those who lived traditional, conventional lives followed a *herd mentality*.
  - 2) The authentic person was the one who broke away from the herd by making *outrageous* choices.
  - 3) In fact, it was his/her *duty* to do so.
  - 4) No wonder Adolph Hitler & the Nazis leaned so heavily on Nietzsche.
6. As I said, Existentialism is one of the main ideas behind much of modern literature & movies.

7. It's colored a lot of the way we think; here's how . . .
  - a. Existentialism has a knee-jerk resistance to **authority**.
  - b. Tradition & convention are under suspicion for no other reason than they appeal to an outside authority.
  - c. Existentialism abhors authority & opposes it at every turn.
8. You've probably heard the term '**postmodern**.'
  - a. That's what many call the prevailing philosophy of our time.
  - b. Pomo means to give up the idea of absolute, unchanging, universal truth that governs all.
  - c. Truth, they say, is personal; discovered & defined by each person.
  - d. My truth my not be yours. Yours certainly isn't mine.
  - e. Truth isn't what's real so much as what works.
  - f. And so we say, "Hey, it works for me." "Whatever rings your bell."

9. See – it's existentialism!
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10. But here's how this mindset effects our relationship with God.
  - a. Because God is our Creator, the **Author** of our Faith – He possesses absolute authority.
  - b. When He speaks, our immediate, whole-hearted response **ought** to be, "Amen."
11. Is it? Not usually. Most often, there's something within us that thinks there's something **virtuous**, something **authentic** that **evaluates** the words & promises of God.
  - a. We may not have a "Question Authority" bumper sticker on our car,
  - b. But we do have one on our hearts.
12. Instead of seeing our **reluctance** to cultivate a heart of wholesale submission to God **as a weakness, we've made it a virtue**.
13. While it may indeed be wise to qualify or question our trust in **human** authority, the follower of Christ must **put away any conditions or hesitation** in saying "Amen" to God.

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**<sup>21</sup> Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, <sup>22</sup> who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.**

14. As we walk in the Spirit we're brought to the place where we can "Amen" God's promise.

### **C. By Faith We Stand**

1. Having made clear to the Corinthians that his faith in God meant he **couldn't** be double-minded, Paul says . . .

**<sup>23</sup> Moreover I call God as witness against my soul, that to spare you I came no more to Corinth.**

2. One of the reasons Paul had not gone to Corinth was because if he had, he'd have confronted some folks he knew it was better to leave to the Spirit to deal with.
3. His absence allowed for that to happen.
4. A good part of spiritual leadership is knowing when to confront & when to leave it alone.

5. Paul showed wisdom in waiting, because as we learn, the Corinthians *did* repent & dealt with the guy who'd stirred things up on their own.

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6. But Paul doesn't want his comment about *sparing them* to sound as though he possessed some kind of *rule* over them, so he says . . .
- 24 Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are fellow workers for your joy; for by faith you stand.**
7. Though Paul was an apostle & had authority to lay down those doctrines that frame the Faith, he did **NOT** possess the authority to *demand* how people lived.
  - a. He could teach, encourage, exhort, even warn.
  - b. But he possessed no right to *rule* them.
8. In the Church, no one, no group → Rules!
  - a. No one has the authority to make up a list of laws that govern life & demand you follow them.
  - b. That's one of the reasons we disagree with groups like the Mormons, JW's, the ICC, & ultra-Pentecostal groups.
  - c. All these tell people what they can & can't wear, listen to, watch, eat.
  - d. When & where they have to worship, or be baptized, go to school, or work, even live.
10. For goodness sake, *Paul was an apostle* but would claim *no such authority!*
11. He saw himself as a servant who's job was not to burden people with rules but to enhance their joy.
12. So he ends with this because it's the means of that joy –  
**By faith you stand.**

### III. CONCLUSION

#### A. Faith

1. We stand by faith, not rules!
2. We don't *need* a rules because faith ushers us into a dynamic, moment by moment *relationship* with God.
3. And it's *that relationship* that becomes the context for every choice, every decision.
4. Let me put it this way, if Jesus was visible & went with you everywhere you go, would it make a difference in your choices?
  - a. Sitting on the couch, watching TV?
  - b. At the computer?
  - c. To school / work, what you say & do?
  - d. At store, what you buy?
  - e. In the car, how you drive, where you go?
5. Here's the point, **IF** we're *always* standing by faith, the answer to that would be "No" *because faith sees Jesus* at our side *all the time*.

#### B. Growing

1. As time goes by, *we ought to be growing* in that faith, so that we spend more time standing, than falling.
2. Because faith is *an abiding trust in God*, think of it this way . . .
  - a. 4 year old on side of pool with daddy in the water; arms out calling for little

- one to jump.
- b. 10 year old, 15 year old, 25 year old.
  - c. No, jump in and find trusting.
  - d. But daddy wants more, learn to swim. There teaching, going with through it.
  - e. Backstroke, side stroke, breast stroke, freestyle.
  - f. Diving. → Water polo.
  - g. Kiddie pool – Olympic pool.
  - h. Then, ocean. → Swimming, boogie boarding, surfing, wind-surfing.
  - i. Big wave surfing! Guys that look for storms. Laird Hamilton Teahupoo – *beyond that.*