



2 Corinthians 1:12-2:4 Who Makes Your Plans?

Summary: When Paul is accused of being unreliable, he points to his life of integrity anchored in the character of God, and motivated by love for others.

Have you ever said you were going to do something, something big, something that involved a commitment to other people, and then later had to walk it back or change the plans? Probably so. It happens for all kinds of reasons to all kinds of people. We make some public announcement – this is what we’re doing, or this is where I’m going, and then later, circumstances change and you either let it go and hope no one asks or remembers, or you try to be proactive and announce the change and maybe even try to explain the reasons.

You might feel embarrassed or frustrated, but most people understand.

I said “most” on purpose though, because sometimes there will also be people who question your integrity and motives and commitment. Then the situation becomes doubly frustrating - it’s not bad enough that your plans were wrecked, now you also have to run clean up on the relational and emotional mess produced as people respond to the change.

This morning we’re going to see how that exact situation played out in the first century with the Apostle Paul. He said one thing, then had to do something else, and now he’s answering the claims that he’s wishy-washy, unreliable, undependable.

Paul had spent time in the city of Corinth and helped establish the church there. But then he moved on with his travels, and after he left they started to have some internal church “drama” to put it mildly. They weren’t getting along, some were actually suing each other and, they were tolerating sin that was so morally repugnant that even the local pagan community was shocked – it was a mess.

And so, Paul wrote to them to straighten things out – that’s First Corinthians. But after they received that letter, things still didn’t get better, so he came in person and confronted the issues and promised he would come back again to check up on them.

Before he could return though, he got word things were *still* a mess, so he sent another letter with additional instructions – that would have been Second Corinthians, but for some reason it was never preserved by the church and has been lost to history.

But, here’s the really important detail: in response to that letter, some people began to question Paul and his integrity, his reliability and even his authority, after all, hadn’t he said that he would come again and help settle things? Well, where was he? Why didn’t he show up? Were they not important to him? Or maybe he didn’t really mean it when we said he

cared and wanted to help. Maybe he didn't really have the authority he said he did. On and on it went.

Again, this is something many of you are familiar with – you make a change to what you said you would do, or what would happen, and now people are wondering what's really going on and why you had to make the change.

So, Paul wrote to them again, that would have been Third Corinthians if you're keeping count, and this is that letter, but since the Second was lost to history instead of being persevered in Scripture, we call Third Corinthians, Second Corinthians. Clear as mud, right?

Well, here's something that is clear: Paul's response to their questioning, murmuring, and accusations.

He admits things didn't turn out the way he said they would – he didn't show up like he said. But there was a reason for that decision and he should still be trusted. He'll explain why by pointing to three things – his own integrity, which is anchored in the nature of God, and his love for the people of the church. And those are the three things we'll focus on during our time together this morning.

Read with me and notice how Paul weaves together his defense.

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. 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 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.

In other words, Paul says, take a look at my life and conduct – look at the way we lived when we were with you and still live today. We live **with simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God**. He's saying: I'm doing my best to live as someone you can boast about as an example of what it means to follow Christ.

We'll come back to this in a minute, but I just want to start by pointing out that when you need to explain why plans had to change, it's always good to be able to point to your previous pattern of integrity. You're building the character today that people will trust tomorrow.

Parents, you know what this is all about. Sometimes you have to make hard decisions. Cancellations or modifications and your kids get upset. They pour out their frustration, disappointment, anger, or fear on you and they just don't understand why it has to be this way, why you made that decision, why it can't happen, or why it has to happen. And in that moment, it's important to know you can't completely answer their feelings with facts. You can't make them feel better about the situation with your rational explanation of why it had to be this way and how you came to that conclusion.

Instead, one of the things I will often try to do is simply ask: do you believe that your mom and dad are for you, or against you?

I know you don't like the decision; I know you don't like the change, but I'm asking you – is there enough evidence in your life that mom and dad are for you, not against you, that you can trust us in this, that we made the best decision we possibly could, all things considered?

We have to start there. I can explain the reasons later, and we may still see things differently, you may still disagree, but do you believe that mom and dad are for you, that we're trying to do what we think is best in light of the circumstances?

Mom and dad, have you demonstrated the character in the past that the kids can trust today?

Well then, for all of us, on a broader and more applicable scale, the same thing is true about our Heavenly Father. When things happen that cause you to question His goodness, His strength, His motives, His reasons, or even His existence and accessibility, remember what you've known and seen of Him in the past. You don't understand right now, OK, but think back, how has God shown you His goodness, guidance, and provision before?

How many times, and in how many ways He spoken and proven His love for you, His desire for goodness and blessing in your life? How many times and in how many ways has God proven His character to you? And then remember, He does not change. This is why we so often say: never give up in the dark what you were sure of in the light. When you don't understand your circumstances, remember God's character.

This is the principle Paul is building on when he points to the evidence of his own life, trusting that people will take his conduct and character into account as they try to process his choices. Let's read on:

15 And in this confidence I intended to come to you before, that you might have a second benefit— 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.

This was the original plan. He was going to swing through and visit Corinth in Southern Greece on his way up to Macedonia to their north. And then, after spending time in Macedonia, he planned to come right back and see the Corinthians again on his way further south to the region of Judea in Israel, where the city of Jerusalem is. This was the original plan.



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?

I'm sure many of you can identify with this conversation, because you've had some variation of it with your employees, or your boss, or your family when you have to explain why things changed.

Yes, you know what you said at first, and you meant it, you were being serious, people can trust you, they can depend on you, it's just that in this situation, things changed and now you have to cancel or delay or make other plans. You're sorry about the impact that's having on everyone, but it's not because you weren't sincere or diligent or thoughtful or capable. You're pointing to your previously established character as evidence for your argument and hoping people can see it.

Well, again, that highlights the importance of *having* previously established character and evidence in your life to point to. Which Paul does, as he's about to point out, *because* his character has been developed while following Christ. Notice with me:

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

Now, something really, really, important just happened here. Paul tied his character and integrity to the character and integrity of the gospel. He says I'm faithful because God is faithful. I'm reliable because Jesus is reliable. In just a minute, in verse 23, he calls God as witness against his soul that he's telling the truth and doing his best to make the right decisions.

Now the fact of the matter is, no one is God but God. No one can see all the factors, know all the outcomes, except God. So, of course Paul can't always guarantee that what he plans to do will happen. But he can be, we can be, honest about our motives. And if our ambition is to follow God and allow Him to develop His character in us, then we too can say, without arrogance or conceit: I'm being as serious about this as the gospel. As pure as the gospel. I want to be as dependable as the gospel.

As God is faithful, so is my word to you *because* I'm trying to be conformed to the image of Christ who is most trustworthy, reliable, dependable, stable, of all. Notice:

1 Corinthians 1:20 For all the promises of God in Him *are* Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us. 21 Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us *is* God, 22 who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.

Here's what Paul is saying – if you can trust the gospel, you can trust us. After all, many of you heard the gospel from us. We weren't lying to you about the gospel, you've experienced it yourself, and I'm not lying about my original intentions either.

So let's take a minute and notice four concrete, dependable, reliable experiences that prove the trustworthiness of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ, because these are the things Paul reminded the Corinthians of and they're still true for all Christians today.

First, notice that God has [established us in Christ](#). He makes you stand firm. He puts something solid under your feet that you can stand on and trust. He gives you strength, like an anchor for your soul. He enables you.

Friends this is meant to be how the Christian life works – God is your source, your fuel, your foundation, the rock at the bottom of your life that everything else is built on, the outlet everything else is plugged into. Jesus said without Him we can do nothing. This is how life is supposed to work – we're allowed to come to Him, turn to Him, ask Him to be the fuel in our tank, to be the thing that holds us up when everything else is falling down.

Your life is filled with uncertainties and challenges, things you can't control, you need to be [stabilized, strengthened, established, enabled](#), and God says "come to Me, and let Me do it." Let God [establish you in Christ](#).

But also, let Him [anoint you](#). Now, sometimes you'll hear someone speak or perform and afterward someone will say, oh wasn't that just anointed?

Well, yes, maybe. But to be anointed doesn't just mean you have some particular skill. To be anointed means to be divinely consecrated. And I know that's a lot of big religious words, but that's because this is a big religious concept – things like this don't happen outside of the realm of the spiritual. To be *consecrated* means to be marked for a specific purpose – something that has been consecrated is special, not ordinary. Well, *anointing* is the process of marking what has been consecrated so it's obvious to everyone, that one is special.

In the Old Testament there were special procedures for anointing a new priest or a new king. There was a special ceremony and it was a big deal. But today, all believers in Christ are [anointed by God himself](#).

You need to think about what that means – if you are born again in Christ, you maintain the same kind of status as the ancient priests and kings. God has marked you and made a big deal about you!

Church, I'm telling you again and again, God has given you an identity, a role, He has invested value, purpose, and meaning into your life; you have been [anointed by Him](#).

Number three, notice the form the anointing takes – God has [sealed you](#) with the Holy Spirit. Now, friends, this is a fact, an experiential reality. Either it has not happened and you are not saved, or you are saved and it has happened. There's no other option. If you have repented of your sin and trusted in Christ, you have been sealed, you carry an invisible, but very real, supernatural mark that prevents tampering and proves ownership.

A little background information may help here. The city of Corinth was a major hub for commercial trade. It was a port city and many of the goods that were shipped around the Roman Empire came flowing through Corinth. And, just like today, many of those shipments were **sealed** to prevent tampering or to prove ownership.



Just like today, it was a crime to tamper with or remove an official seal. This kind of metaphor would have been easily understood in Corinth – God wanted them to know that just like the valuable cargo of some ancient merchant or noble. They, as Christians, were **sealed**, they were marked, they belonged to someone, they belonged to Him.

And so too today, if you are in Christ, God has put His **seal** on you, marked you as His own. You are confirmed, authenticated, verified. And, *He* has done that *to you*, you don't do anything to yourself. You're on the receiving end of the action.

And finally, number four, we are not just sealed externally, the Holy Spirit comes to reside in us internally. We receive the presence of God in our lives as a **guarantee** that we are His. Which is important to know, because it means God hasn't just marked you on the outside, He's started a cleanup job within. He's kicked off a renovation project deep, deep, down inside of you. He's re-writing the operating system that affects the way you see and experience the world and the choices you make.

You know that, you sense it at times, you feel Him launching an invasion in there, crossing borders and boundaries in your heart and mind. There's a fight, a struggle, for control on the inside of you *because* the Spirit is *within* you drawing you closer to God.

And in the process, closer to each other. Which is the final point I want to make this morning. When Paul is accused of being unreliable, he points to 1) his life of integrity 2) anchored in the character of God, and 3) motivated by love for others.

If you go back and re-read the section you notice the plurality of it all – us, us, us, our, our, our. Paul is trying to show them how much he cares for and about them, and that even though his decision not to come disappointed some of them, it was actually made out of a desire to help them, not hurt them. Read with me:

1 Corinthians 1:23 Moreover I call God as witness against my soul, that to spare you I came no more to Corinth. **24** Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are fellow workers for your joy; for by faith you stand.

1 Corinthians 2:1 But I determined this within myself, that I would not come again to you in sorrow. **2** For if I make you sorrowful, then who is he who makes me glad but the one who is made sorrowful by me?

Remember, there were some serious problems happening in the church. He knew if he showed up right now, he would be happy to see them, but they might not be so glad to see him. Because there were going to be some hard conversations, there were going to be some heated moments, just like there had been last time he came. So, since there was really

nothing new to add until they applied what he had already said, he stayed away from any additional conflict and sent another letter instead.

But he still hoped to come again sometime after the dust had settled and they had done the right thing. Then he could be happy to see them and they could, hopefully, be glad to see him too.

3 And I wrote this very thing to you, lest, when I came, I should have sorrow over those from whom I ought to have joy, having confidence in you all that my joy is *the joy of you all*. 4 For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you, with many tears, not that you should be grieved, but that you might know the love which I have so abundantly for you.

Sometimes, when you love someone, you have to say hard things to them, expect hard things from them. And sometimes you have to say, as much as I want to do something good or fun with you, I just can't until you've done what is right. *But I want you to do that*. I really do, and so, I'll tell you what's right, encourage you in it, and then wait for you, right over here, until you do.

Friends, that's so much like what we know of God and the gospel. *For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son to save us*. He's grieved by our sin. But no matter how much He loves us, no matter how much He wants to be with us, we still have to respond to what He has said and done and *then* there can be reconciliation and abundant joy.

All throughout this passage Paul is evidencing that same heart – he says you can trust me because you've seen the evidence of my life, you've seen my witness and testimony, you know my character, and you know my character is anchored in everything I believe about God and the gospel and the reliability and dependability of all that God is doing in us through it, and finally, you can trust me because of the love I have for you – my greatest desire is that we would share joy together – that I would be excited about what's happening with you and you would be excited by what's happening with me, even if plans have to change as we're following Christ.

Church, here's what I want you to know when you leave here this morning – God is faithful, durable, dependable. He is unchanging. Life is full of uncertainty and even what feels like chaos at times, but He is in control.

You can't control the outcome of every situation. You're not Him. Even if you mean well, even if you try hard, even if your motives and desires are good, things will still happen, curveballs will still come.

But here's one thing you can do – submit and surrender. Pray, nevertheless, not my will but thy will be done.

When things don't turn out the way you had hoped, ask yourself – were my motives pure? Am I living in simplicity and godly sincerity? If not, repent. Confess, ask for forgiveness.

Either way, remember God's character even when you can't make sense of your circumstances: He is faithful, He is establishing you, He has anointed you and sealed you, marked you off as His, and the Spirit is in you as a guarantee. And once you have all of that settled in your heart and mind, then seek to love others in His name.

Let's pray.



Sermon Application and Discussion Questions

2 Corinthians 1:12-2:4 Who Makes Your Plans?

Summary: When Paul is accused of being unreliable he points to his life of integrity anchored in the nature of God, empowered by the Spirit, and motivated by love for others.

- Have you ever had to go back on plans that you had made or announced? Did it have an effect on how people viewed you or trusted you?
- Has anyone ever changed their plans on, or commitment to, you? How did you react?
- Paul was able to point to his well-established life of integrity as proof of his sincerity. Would this kind of reasoning have been helpful to you in understanding a change of plans?
- How does knowing God's character help us to trust His promises even in bad circumstances?
- How have you experienced, being stabilized, strengthened and established in God?
- How does the knowledge that you are sealed by God and indwelt by the Spirit affect the way you trust Him?
 - Cross reference Ephesians 1:13-14 – what else do you learn?
- How have you experienced the guarantee spoken of in 1 Cor 1:22? If the Scripture clearly says this has happened, what difference does it make in your life?
- Re-read 1 Cor 1:24-2:4 and note every instance of causing pain or sorrow and then every instance of desiring joy.
 - What have you learned about “tough love” in your own relationships? Were you the one showing it or receiving it? What have you learned about God's “tough love” toward you?