

Love Sometimes Says No

2 Corinthians 1:15-24

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 answer is 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 from me right now?” Love also has to ask, “What is actually best for this person?”

That is the situation Paul is dealing with in this passage. He had genuinely planned to go to Corinth. In fact, he had planned to see them, go into Macedonia, and then come back through Corinth again. But he changed that plan, and once he did, a question naturally came up: Can Paul’s word be trusted?

Paul does not dodge that question. He deals with his integrity, points them to the unchanging truth of God, and then tells them exactly why he had not come: his purpose was to spare them. The immediate context connects his difficult dealings with them to his love for them. That gives us the burden of this sermon: love does not always say yes. Sometimes love says, “Not now,” because saying yes at that moment would not truly help the person we care about.

I. A Sincere Plan Can Change — Verses 15–17

2 Corinthians 1:15-17 “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?”

Paul begins by making it clear that his original plan was real. He intended to come, and his purpose was that they would receive a second benefit. He was not looking for a reason to stay away from them. His original desire was to come and be a benefit to them.

Then verse 17 asks the hard question about whether he had used lightness. Paul understood what the changed plan could look like. If somebody tells you one thing and then does another, you may wonder whether their word means anything. Paul does not act like that concern is silly. He answers it.

The immediate context matters here. Before Paul talks about his travel plan, he has already talked about the character of his conduct.

2 Corinthians 1:12 “For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward.”

So when Paul asks whether he purposed according to the flesh, that is not a random question. He has already said that his conduct toward them was marked by godly sincerity rather than fleshly wisdom. His defense is not that his word does not matter. His defense is that the original intention was sincere and the later change had a legitimate reason.

This passage is not permission to make careless promises, change our minds whenever something becomes inconvenient, and then call it love. Scripture values dependable speech. Matthew 5:37 teaches that our yes and no should be straightforward, and Psalm 15:4 praises the man who keeps a sworn commitment even when it costs him.

But a sincere plan is not the same thing as an unconditional vow. Human plans are made by people who do not control every circumstance. Paul really meant to go when he planned the visit, and later he had a real reason not to go at that time.

So when you have to change course, ask yourself why. Is it because you simply do not want to be bothered? Is it because keeping your word became inconvenient? Or is there a legitimate reason connected to what is right and what will truly help the other person? Love does not make your word meaningless, but love may sometimes require you to change a sincere plan.

II. God’s Truth Does Not Change — Verses 18–22

2 Corinthians 1:18-22 “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.”

Paul now moves from his changing travel plans to something that does not change. Verse 18 begins by grounding the argument in the truthfulness of God. Paul’s itinerary changed, but God did not change.

Paul says that the message preached to them was not unstable. Jesus Christ was not uncertain, and God’s promises in Christ were not uncertain. Paul will not allow a change in his human schedule to become an argument that the message of Christ is unreliable.

Hebrews 13:8 “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.”

There is a difference between changing a human plan and changing the truth. Love may change the time. Love may change the approach. Love may decide that what was planned for today needs to happen later. But love does not get to change what God has said.

We cannot say that because we love someone, we will soften the truth until it says what they want. We cannot turn God's yes into no or God's no into yes. Paul changed his route, but he did not change Christ. He changed his timing, but he did not change the promises of God.

Then verses 21 and 22 turn our attention to what God Himself had done. God establishes His people in Christ, and Paul names God as the One who had anointed, sealed, and given the earnest of the Spirit. Paul places himself together with the Corinthians under God's work rather than presenting himself as spiritually independent or superior.

That keeps this sermon from becoming a lesson in human superiority: "I know best, so I will decide what everybody else needs." Paul's confidence is not built on himself. He points them back to God, to Christ, and to the certainty of God's truth.

There are times when the loving decision may be difficult and the circumstances may be confusing. In those moments, hold tightly to what does not change. Your plan may change. Your timing may change. Your method may change. God's truth does not change.

III. Love Sometimes Says "Not Now" — Verses 23–24

2 Corinthians 1:23-24 "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."

Now we reach the reason Paul has been building toward. Verse 23 is a solemn statement because Paul invokes God as witness concerning his motive. He says that he had not yet come to Corinth because he intended to spare them.

Notice the timing in the verse. Paul is not saying that he will never come. His decision was a delay. It was a "not now," and the stated reason concerned their welfare, not merely his own convenience.

The verses immediately following our passage explain what that meant.

2 Corinthians 2:1-4 "But I determined this with myself, that I would not come again to you in heaviness. **2** For if I make you sorry, who is he then that maketh me glad, but the same which is made sorry by me? **3** And I wrote this same unto you, lest, when I came, I should have sorrow from them of whom I ought to rejoice; 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 unto you with many tears; not that ye should be grieved, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you."

There is the explicit connection to love in the immediate context. Paul was not avoiding every hard subject. He had written to them, and that communication had involved sorrow and many tears. But his purpose was not simply to hurt them. He wanted them to know the abundance of his love toward them.

Love and immediate happiness are not always the same thing. Sometimes the person you love will be disappointed with your answer. Sometimes doing what is best will produce sorrow before it produces joy. Paul cared enough about the Corinthians to think not only about what needed to happen, but about when and how it should happen.

He had even raised that question with them earlier.

1 Corinthians 4:21 "What will ye? shall I come unto you with a rod, or in love, and in the spirit of meekness?"

The manner of his coming mattered. The timing mattered. Paul was capable of correction, so his restraint should not be reduced to fear of confrontation. Sometimes the wise and loving decision is not to do the expected thing at the expected moment.

But verse 24 gives us a necessary boundary. Paul denies having dominion over their faith. He describes himself and his fellow ministers as helpers of their joy, while the Corinthians themselves stand by faith.

That is a warning we need. We can use the words “I am only doing this because I love you” as an excuse to control people. Paul would not allow that. Loving concern may lead you to say no, but it does not give you ownership over another person’s faith. The goal is to help, not dominate.

So whether you are dealing with your family, another believer, or somebody you are trying to help, ask what kind of no you are giving. Is it selfish, or is it meant for their good? Is it controlling, or is it helping? Is it avoiding what is right, or is it choosing the right time and manner to deal with it? Paul’s example gives us a careful kind of love: truthful, responsible, willing to deal with hard things, but also willing to restrain itself for another person’s good.

CONCLUSION

Paul wanted to go to Corinth. His plan was sincere. When the plan changed, he knew his integrity could be questioned, so he answered that concern and made it clear that God’s truth had not changed. Then he told them why he had delayed: he intended to spare them.

That is why love sometimes says no. Not because love enjoys refusing people. Not because our word does not matter. Not because we get to control somebody else’s faith. Love sometimes says no because there are moments when giving a person what they expect right now would not truly serve their good.

Maybe the loving answer is yes. Paul’s original desire was to go and benefit them. But maybe the loving answer is “not now.” The question is not merely, “What do they want from me?” The question is, “What will truly help them, while I remain truthful, faithful to God’s Word, and a helper of their joy?”

Sometimes love gives. Sometimes love goes. Sometimes love stays. And sometimes love says no.

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