

“Pressure”

- 2 Corinthians 1, part 2 -

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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. 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. 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? 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. 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, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee. 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.*

1:12 *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.*

Paul knew that despite the adversity and the attacks against him and the church in general, that he had still been honest, faithful, and sincere in all of his dealings. His conscience was clear. This is how Paul got through all this negative stuff on the human level: *he knew that despite what he was accused of, it simply wasn't true.*

If that was the case, then once again we must ask ourselves why would God allow one of his best men to go through such terrible difficulties and struggles? The answer to that question...is, *on a human level*, a terrible truth that servants of God fear to even whisper: ***God can do far more with a broken man than a man who believes himself to be mighty in his own power and strength.*** It's a fact: To be usable for the kingdom, one must be humbled and broken. Oswald Chambers once said so perfectly "*Before God can use a man greatly he must wound him deeply.*"

Oh, how we wish it wasn't true! Paul *could have* dealt in deception and clandestine methods to gain ground. He could have used his own natural talent and street savvy to get the job done. Many do! Inside and outside of the ministry! He could have stretched the truth, and used what appears to be quite a lot of natural business acclamy. But Paul was straightforward and honest. He didn't play games. He was the quintessential godly man and he operated "by the grace of God." Paul's style, *his very life*, was one of simplicity. He lived in a singleness of mind and purpose. His ultimate drive was to be able to rejoice with all of them in heaven one day... he was forever a "what you see is what you get" kind of man.

Its easy to wave our pom poms and cheer on both Paul and this ideal so succinctly presented herein. But do we realize how rare this kind of man and lifestyle is today? We mentally hold such in high esteem while doing little to actually see it lived out in our own lives. I believe it has never been easier today to rise to greatness on any level because the field is very far from crowded in our generation. We would rather spend our time and efforts

on inventing excuses and hiding in the shadows of manhood rather than living out in the light of day where God can be glorified by His spirit being lived out in our lives.

1:13-14 *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 (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.*

“Our letters have been straightforward, and there is nothing written between the lines and nothing you can’t understand. I hope someday you will fully understand us, even if you don’t understand us now. Then on the day when the Lord Jesus returns, you will be proud of us in the same way we are proud of you.”

Once again, Paul’s life and speech was straight up, with nothing hidden between the lines, and nothing written in ways the Corinthians believers would not understand. We here at this church often receive letters and communicate from those who watch our TV presentations. People who send their thanks and their kudo’s toward me as a preacher. Yet I’m certainly not an affluent presenter or a gifted speaker. But they do see the one thing I have going for me which is honestly and apparently quite rare and seems to set me apart from the rest of the pack: **I just say it the way it is.** No BS...no pink ruffles. Not rudely or cutting... unless it can’t be helped...but always with grace and humility before the Spirit of God. But just the same, *no watering it down.* Where did I get such a style? What is my inspiration? ***The author of this letter...and our redeemer Himself.***

The irony herein is that despite all the problems this group of believers had caused Paul, he was still proud of them. I can absolutely say the same about all of you! Paul was clearly a “glass-half-full” kind of guy. He wasn’t teasing them or lying to them. He based his teaching on God’s leading, and backed it with the written and established Word of God.

1:15-18 *And in this confidence I intended to come to you before, that you might have a second benefit—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. 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? But as God is faithful, our word to you was not Yes and No.*

Despite what appears to be his best efforts, the congregation in Corinth seemed to still be a little miffed at Paul. He apparently had at least *insinuated* he was coming over for dinner or something and then wasn’t able to make it. Paul wanted to be clear that he wasn’t just being courteous when he told them he was going to come by. He meant what he said when he spoke of desiring to see them. It was apparent, though, that God had different plans, so Paul didn’t make it to Corinth. I know the feeling. I would love to have you all over to my house for dinner, but God has me on a short leash and at my age, I have precious little time to engage ministry at the level that I aspire to serve.

19-20 *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. For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us.*

Paul was going to default to God the Father on this issue. Not *blame* Him, but certainly credit Him for being in control of his schedule! People could say what they wanted about Paul, but he “served at the pleasure of the king,” and that king is anything but inconsistent. Therefore they would have to take it up with God, because Paul was merely following orders. If they could trust God, they could trust Him. If he wronged them, he wronged his Boss, so they were actually the least of his worries!

His job, and ours, is to bring glory to God through our lives. In doing so, we are to stand on the promises...the Word of God, not on those of men. When He says yes, you can be assured it is indeed yes! Paul was surrendered to God. He could say Amen, or “so be it” to all the plans of God. That doesn’t mean he always understood, or that his flesh agreed. But he had committed himself to God and God’s path. Therefore, the plans **God** made were ultimately **Paul’s** plans!

I am constantly astonished how so many wearing the mantle of pastors and leaders today, are still negotiating, debating, and often clearly negating scriptural mandates because they...*oh, I don’t know*...simply don’t want to do it His way? They don’t like what He is saying and don’t appreciate the position He takes, so they just ignore it or rewrite it. Really? Are you really going to hang your eternity hat on that peg? Since it will not be *those folks* who are making my positional and eternal judgement, me personally I am going to stick with the one who actually *is* going to be making it. I’m going with the King...If those clowns had the answers separate from scripture then I would think that Jesus died for nothing.

We have so accepted a milk toast version of love and commitment on every level and situation today that we have lost all grip of eternal truth upon our souls. We just don’t know how to really love anymore, and the absence of that supernatural agape only places us firmly in the category of “still in the world.” We now are plagued with divorce in our marriages and unattentive lackluster parenting in our families. We are lousy friends and unfaithful in our relationships. We are seemingly unable...albeit in truth it is *unwilling*, to stand faithful and consistent with our local church body. And ultimately we refuse to hear God say “thou shalt not” and hear instead “I am suggesting...” or “do what makes you feel good.” All because we don’t know how to love and such is inevitably manifested in the breaking of our promises.

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

“It is God who enables us, along with you, to stand firm for Christ. He has commissioned us, and he has identified us as his own by placing the Holy Spirit in our hearts as the first installment that guarantees everything he has promised us.”

Paul now pulls the Corinthian believers into his world and includes them in his standing before God. They were, in Christ, “established.” The original word means “make firm, make sure, unmovable.” If they were true redeemed followers, they too had in them the power to stand firm in their faith. Not only would they have the *ability*, but moreover the *reality*. Meaning, God has established us...*with Christ* (He quite naturally is also established...we would expect nothing less) ...God has “sealed” us...and guaranteed us. All of this is in the present/perfect form. It’s done and it is still doing. None of it...for a true born again redeemed individual is in anyway in question. So if you are bouncing around spiritually you either make God a liar, or you are not saved.

Now don’t run off into the deep end with that statement. I’m not saying or in any way insinuating you have to achieve some sinless perfection stance...that if you slip up you are out of the club. That level of perfection will never be achieved on this side of eternity. After all, Paul was having to defend himself in this chapter as to his failure to “follow through” as he had said he would. So Paul...*and myself today*...are not inferring that we are to be robotic in our interaction with each other. If God had wanted a machine he would have created such instead of human beings with the propensity for failure. Relationship, by its very nature, requires the ability to fall short. However, we can be overtly passive and forever slack when it comes to our own behavior, failing to acknowledge that grace does not mean lack of standards. I’m talking about yo-yo Christianity or burning down your life in some way to reinvent yourself. That’s not “established.”

Paul didn’t make it to Corinth for a visit because God Himself said no. The fact that it *was* God and not just Paul’s flesh attempting to spiritualize some personal decision was made evident by the fruit of that decision.

Some immediate, and some over the days and weeks which followed. What about us in such situations? How do we know? Questions to ask in such situations: **1. *Were there lies?*** Because God isn't going to ever ask you to lie. Paul hadn't promised he would come, nor did he affirm that he had checked with God and got a "thumbs up" and then later God changed His mind and sent him elsewhere. **2. *Were other brothers and sisters simply slighted or were they thrown under the bus?*** Paul hadn't *abandoned* the believers there in Corinth. He simply was delayed in coming. He still loved them, and was still engaged in their lives. **3. *Did time manifest the hand of God on the decision?*** Was there real fruit from the decision? We know that Paul and his life manifest was so gripped with Christ and the eternal reality that faithfulness and an "established life" had literally become a part of his very character. Paul knew first hand that God had repeatedly and overwhelmingly proved Himself faithful...making it impossible for Paul to be unfaithful to others. ***His*** faithfulness...as always is the case, is the ultimate proof of his grasp on the faithfulness of God!

Paul says in verse 22 that God has "sealed us." He is firmly tying himself together with these believers. Not by his will or passion, but acknowledging that as believers together, they were bound by the common union of the one Spirit. Meaning they were connected irrevocably by the Spirit of God. Not just **to** the Spirit of God, but moreover **to each other**. Paul had taken on the role of pastor (albeit in absentia), and he was seeking to firmly place them in the position of a supporting flock.

In Paul's heart and mind they were traveling 'together' on this missionary journey. His joys would be their joys. Their pain would be his. The trials, the successes, the tribulations, the fires of the enemies: they would go through all of them together. And indeed they would if they were both filled and possessed by the one common Spirit of God. Note the emphatic language of the text: "established... anointed... sealed... guarantee." Not a lot of wiggle room here on this matter. See, the unity of believers...the communion and bond we are to have, is not optional. It is John 15. It is a faithfulness and a "you-can-count-on-me" as we can count on the Spirit...as a foundational element of the gospel. Let us be brave. Let us stop cutting this truth out of the bible, and out of our Christian confession...

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

Lastly Paul states that if he ***had*** come earlier, perhaps things would not have gone so well between them. With passions and emotions no doubt running high on everyone's part after that first letter, he tells these believers that he did not want to be overly harsh with them. He must have realized, as I often do as a pastor, that his words were sometimes tough to take.

It is certainly a difficult and fine line to walk, *to teach*, as a minister of God's Word. It is difficult to love a flock, ...to not want them grieved, ...but still be personally under the obligation to interpret the scriptures clearly and without prejudice for all those God has placed under my care. To correct when obligated. To encourage when necessary. It's a hard and narrow road to perfect.

Paul did not desire to run their personal lives or the manifestation of their personal faith. He wanted to be their pastor and teacher, not their ruler. He simply wanted to be a fellow servant of their mutual King and Lord. He knew the bottom line: they would not ...*they could not*, stand firm because of ***him***. They would only stand firm because of their love of God and their passion to serve ***Him***. They would only remain standing because they belonged to the King...