

Background

Paul seems to be under fire from Corinth because of perceptions prevalent among some of the congregation. These things include:

- a. **Flip-flopping his travel plans.** Note that in 1 Cor. 16:3-8 the travel plan is Ephesus → Macedonia → Corinth → Jerusalem (possibly). In 2 Cor. 1:15-16 was modified to Ephesus → Corinth → Macedonia → Corinth → Jerusalem. But the point is that he did not make it. As we said before, his travel plans were changed when he went to Corinth in the midst of his stay at Ephesus, so that his final travel plan was this: Ephesus → Corinth → Ephesus (the painful visit), followed by his original plan, Ephesus → Macedonia → Corinth → Jerusalem (Acts 20:1-3, 2 Cor. 2:12-13). Unfortunately, the plot on his life in Greece caused him to change plans yet again, dropping the immediate travel to Jerusalem and going Corinth → Macedonia → Philippi → Troas → Miletus → Tyre → Ptolemais → Caesarea → Jerusalem (Acts 20:3-21:17).
- b. **Writing letters that are equivocal,** evasive, or duplicitous. The Corinthians already misunderstood Paul's first letter (1 Cor. 5:9-13). Peter even said that what Paul wrote was hard to understand at times (2 Peter 3:15-16).
- c. **In general, conducting himself in a manner that lacks integrity.** This could be in relation to his handling of the monies being collected for the Jerusalem saints (1 Cor. 16:2-3 notwithstanding, and 2 Cor. 8:20-21).

The overarching concern from 1:12 through chapter 7:16 is a defense of Paul's ministry to the Corinthians against its detractors. It includes the principles by which Paul exercises his work under God, and in particular with respect to his relationship to the Corinthians. The following passages offer responses to these charges against Paul: a. 2 Cor. 1:15-2:4; b. 2 Cor. 1:13; c. 2 Cor. 1:12, 4:2, 6:3, 8:20-21.

Introduction

As you can see, 1:12-2:4 offer a response to all three of these charges. The point basically is that in conduct and letter, including the matter of the travel plans, Paul is conducting himself in integrity. At one and the same time, he maintains this conduct toward the world as well as, and in increased measure to, the Corinthians. The basis of his conduct is not fleshly or worldly wisdom, but God's grace—that is what underlies and is given credit for what He is able to do.

1. Integrity in Conduct – 1:12

At the start of this new section, Paul says that he has a reason or source of pride with respect to his ministry. He says that it has to do with the testimony of his conscience.

The conscience is the intuitive knowledge of God's moral laws and demands. It is an accusing or defending mechanism that allows us to discern right and wrong. It is part of being human. The conscience can be wrongly informed or damaged (1 Tim. 4:2, Titus 1:15), thus causing it to operate with a wrong standard.

Paul's conscience defended his conduct as being proper. He uses several words and phrases to describe it.

A. Description of His Conduct

First, simplicity is not the opposite of complexity, but rather of duplicity. It means sincerity, uprightness, frankness (proper motivation), simple goodness, without strings attached or hidden agendas.

Second, sincerity is similar. It means free of dissimulation, sincerity, purity of motive, without hidden motives or pretense.

Third, the word conduct means to conduct oneself in terms of certain principles, to act, behave, live.

At this point, be sure to note that Paul is speaking in general terms about the integrity of his conduct. But coming up we will see a particular test case, namely his recent travel plans. He said he was coming to Corinth but did not. Using that as a foil then, let me make a couple of comments regarding the problem of folks saying they will do something and not doing so.

First of all, it is distressing enough when folks say they will do something yet don't do it. It could be a) they say they are going to church and don't; b) they say that will take care of something and they don't; or something like that. Now understand that I am not talking about providential hindrance – sickness or car breakdown or whatever. But I think you soon get the idea about someone when they are in a pattern of "saying and not doing."

They could be completely honest in their initial statement in the sense that they intend to carry it out. But they could a) lack planning or ability, i.e. promising something that they cannot deliver. They are the over-zealous type. Or b) they might be double-minded, saying one thing and then changing their mind. Or c) they could have yet another problem—laziness and disrespect or whatever.

But what is more distressing still are people who say that will do X but while they are saying it they have a hidden agenda, i.e. they mean that they will do not X or Y (something totally different) instead. In other words, the intent *at the time of saying* it is wrong. It is wicked and sinful. This is what we call dissimulation or duplicitous.

Dissimulation means to hide feelings or motives by pretense. To dissemble means to conceal something under false appearance (Rom. 12:9), to conceal truth, to behave hypocritically (Gal. 2:13). It is relevant in matters of love (Rom. 12:9, 2 Cor. 6:6, 1 Peter 1:22), faith (1 Tim. 1:5, 2 Tim. 1:5), and wisdom (James 3:17).

To be duplicitous means to be deceitful, double-dealing, to use hypocritical cunning or deception. It is an inner thing (Matt. 23:28, Mark 12:15, Luke 12:1, 1 Peter 2:1) but comes out in lies (1 Tim. 4:2) and false speech (James 5:12).

In the first case (the "distressing enough" case), the intent may really have been there. The problem was a lack of carrying through for some reason. Here, the intention was never really there. The motivation was wrong to begin with. If such has been your portion, take note. That is shameful conduct for anyone, let alone a Christian.

B. Basis of His Conduct

First, Paul's conduct *was not* based on fleshly wisdom, that is, with thoughts that reject God's sovereignty and supremacy, with worldly planning, etc.

Second, his conduct *is* based on the grace of God. His whole life was governed by the principles and rule of God's grace.

This notion of the basis of his conduct also spills over into the question of "who gets the credit?" It was certainly not Paul, not his own inherent abilities or wisdom that were due the credit. Rather, credit belonged to God for all that Paul was enabled to do.

Finally, please note that Paul did not conduct himself in integrity because that would allow him to boast. Instead, he conducted himself that way simply because it was the right thing to do. Doing so had the beneficial side effect that he could use his conduct and the testimony of his conscience in his defense when it was questioned. But whether or not it is pragmatically helpful to conduct yourself this way, you must do so.

2. Integrity in Letters – 1:13a

Recall that in 1 Cor. 5:9ff a previous letter is mentioned. That letter, at least in part, was misunderstood by the Corinthian believers, and called for a clarification in 1 Corinthians. Peter said that some of Paul's letters were hard to understand. Even so, here Paul is saying that in his writing he is not writing evasively, shrewdly, with double-meaning, or between the lines. What he means he writes, and what he wrote he means. The point is that his writing is clear and plain. It is certainly not duplicitous.

For instance, he does not write about his refusal to receive financial support in 1 Corinthians in order to be able, by some sort of "reverse psychology" to get the Corinthians to support him. He is not doing that. Neither should we, dear friends!

3. Hope of Improved Relations – 1:13b-14

The “end” refers to the judgment seat of Christ in the end time. It is not opposite of “partially” in the next verse. It is true that the Corinthians either partially understood what Paul was getting at, or only some of the Corinthians understood what he was saying. But in any case, what Paul is saying here is that he wants that in the last day (the judgment seat of Christ, see 2 Cor. 5:10) that the Corinthians would find pride in Paul, and that Paul would likewise find pride in them.

In other words, they would not be ashamed of each other at the judgment. Paul would not be ashamed of them because of their contentious conduct toward him; and they would not be ashamed of him as if he were some sort of second-rate apostle.

But beyond that, that they would take pride in the fact that each are there at the judgment. In the near term, this would mean improved relations between Paul and the Corinthians because they would have confidence in him now (not just at the end) and so would defend him against those coming into their assembly who criticized him.

Conclusion

The main point of what we have said in this message is that we must conduct ourselves in sincerity—not just “I tried” but “I did.” There is no excuse for not carrying through with what you say; no excuse for saying things you do not mean; and the bottom line is that we must also live “in simplicity and in godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God.”

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