

Divisions and competition are one way the enemy of the church can rein in the effectiveness of a group of believers. Our pride is the foothold Satan uses to get us to walk in the flesh rather than the Spirit. Once we have declared where we stand and it is challenged by others, our ego wants to defend itself, so we dig in our heels in and try to find others we can convince to join our side. Then we form the ungodly fruit of factions (Galatians 5:19,20ⁱ). Paul dealt with this in the first letter, but now he deals with some of the Corinthians personal rejection of himself. These detractors pointed to the fact that Paul did not come when he suggested that he might at the end of his first letter to the Corinthians. They claimed that he says one thing and then does another. Paul had to defend his actions not out of pride but for the sake of the gospel he has proclaimed.

¹² For our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience, that we behaved in the world with simplicity and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God, and supremely so toward you. 2 Corinthians 1:12 When at a later time Paul would testify to the Jewish ruling council, he would claim that his entire life was lived according to his conscience (Acts 23:1ⁱⁱ). That is informative, for Paul tells us in a letter to Timothy that he is the chief of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15ⁱⁱⁱ), for before his conversion he persecuted Christians. His misinformed mind caused his conscience to be skewed. But after meeting the resurrected Christ, his conscience changed, and he became a proclaimer of Christ. Paul explains that what he did to Christians was done in ignorance (1 Timothy 1:13^{iv}). He truly thought they were perverting Judaism.

I believe we can conclude from Paul's statements that we should live according to our conscience but that we should also be open to having our minds informed which can change our conscience (Romans 12:2^v). What you are convinced is right today, you may realize is not right in God's sight another day. But **acting according to your conscience is always better than violating your conscience.** "Better heresy of doctrine than heresy of heart."^{vi} Paul's boast to the Corinthians was that regarding his behavior toward them, his conscience was clear. He always acted in a way that he believed was upright. Despite accusations against him, "the testimony of his conscience" vindicated him (1 Timothy 3:9^{vii}).

He explained that his team always acted with simplicity. There is a variation in the ancient manuscripts. Instead of simplicity, some manuscripts have "holiness." In Greek the words sound very similar. Simplicity implies sincerity whereas holiness implies sanctity. The meanings somewhat overlap. It is to be entirely honest. Later in this letter Paul will tell them, *² But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.* 2 Corinthians 4:2

Some itinerant ministers must have been acting in a deceitful way for personal gain, but Paul says his team abhors that kind of behavior and asks them to judge by their own consciences in the sight of God. Had they ever seen him use deceitful means or take advantage of them monetarily? He knew that if they were honest, they would reject any such accusations against him. He was always honest and truthful with the Corinthians.

He adds that his testimony was of godly sincerity. This has the same nuance as the previous description. LEB translates it as "purity of motive from God." He concludes the description of his testimony by saying it was not with earthly wisdom but by the grace of

God. This reminds us of a phrase from the first letter where he said in 2:4^{viii} that his speech and message was *not with plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power*. That was God's grace supremely demonstrated toward them.

This is what makes all the difference: man's efforts or God's grace upon the speaker. Men train to be eloquent speakers. They study to carefully understand the text they are to preach. They can diagram the sentence structure. But in the end, it is the grace of God upon the message and willingness of the one who proclaims the message to say what the Spirit is prompting him or her to say. Paul ends the verse by saying God's grace was supremely manifest to them. They were witnesses of that grace coming through Paul.

Many years ago, I had to preach two services back to back. They were never the same because the audience was different. My manuscript was the same, but the grace of God was often greater upon one group than another. God only knows why. I often thought one was less powerful only to hear afterward that God was actually moving more hearts in that service. It is the grace of God upon the congregation, not the eloquence or knowledge of the speaker. Eloquence and knowledge affect the mind and emotions, but God's Spirit moves hearts. Manifest grace was Paul's testimony. His defense is to remind them of the grace of God in his ministry, thereby giving God all the glory.

¹³ For we are not writing to you anything other than what you read and understand and I hope you will fully understand—¹⁴ just as you did partially understand us—that on the day of our Lord Jesus you will boast of us as we will boast of you. 2 Corinthians 1:13,14 Paul refers to a letter written between this one and the first one sometimes referred to as the "severe" letter (2 Corinthians 13:10^{ix}). They had apparently in part received the rebukes and instruction from that letter, but now he wants them to fully understand the reason for it. Grace often comes in the form of discipline.

Paul wanted the Corinthians to fully realize what God was doing through his ministry with them. While they were boasting in their favorite speaker or their special gifts of the Spirit, what matters in the light of eternity is knowing and understanding God. Paul is referring to Jeremiah 9:23,24^x where we are told not to boast in wisdom, strength, or riches, but rather to boast in knowing the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice, and righteousness. Those are the things that God delights in. Boasting in oneself is sinful. Instead, Paul wanted them to boast in how God was using him to lavish the grace of God upon them and for Paul to boast in how they received and acted on that grace. They could boast in the kindness of God and what He was doing through Paul for them rather than in themselves.

Do not boast in your elders but on the grace of God expressed through them for your growth in Christ. We boast in the testimonies we see in you. When people ask me what God is doing at Wayside, I tell them of how your lives are being transformed, of your generosity to missions, and your contribution to one another, which is an expression of God's grace through your lives. God gets all the glory. Without His grace we could do nothing (John 15:5^{xi}). This is what Paul wanted to remind them in his letters and help them fully understand.

While we do that now, Paul is pointing forward to the day of the Lord Jesus. On that glorious day, I think all we will be talking about is the grace of God shown to us through others, especially the grace of correction. That is ultimately boasting in the Lord's goodness and kindness toward us. It is also boasting in His justice and righteousness because Jesus paid our sin debt.

15 Because I was sure of this, I wanted to come to you first, so that you might have a second experience of grace. 2 Corinthians 1:15 Paul had seen God's grace flowing out to the Corinthians as he taught and as he wrote. He had seen their appreciation of that grace, but false teachers were calling his ministry into question. Instead of waiting until after his trip to Macedonia, He came to them before he went so they would have another chance to experience that grace. That manifest grace would nullify the claims of the false teachers that Paul was too weak and sickly to be God's messenger. "Something is wrong with him," they would say, "because he does not accept financial support. Perhaps he has another motive or realizes he does not deserve it." But if Paul came again, they would again experience the grace of God coming to them through his teaching. They would be reminded of how God used him as an instrument of grace when he spent that year and a half with them.

16 I wanted to visit you on my way to Macedonia, and to come back to you from Macedonia and have you send me on my way to Judea. 17 Was I vacillating when I wanted to do this? Do I make my plans according to the flesh, ready to say "Yes, yes" and "No, no" at the same time? 2 Corinthians 1:16,17 In 1 Corinthians 16:5^{xii} Paul's plan was to visit Macedonia and then come to Corinth in the winter "if the Lord permits" (1 Corinthians 16:7^{xiii}). They would have another chance to express grace by helping to send him on to Jerusalem with the brothers carrying their gift (1 Corinthians 16:6,7^{xiv}). The language in Greek is unclear whether they receive or give grace and it may be intentionally so, for Paul wrote of how we mutually encourage one another by each other's faith (Romans 1:11,12^{xv}). Sometime in-between this letter and the previous one, the Spirit must have moved him to come to them first because of the problems in the church. Perhaps Timothy had brought back word that the situation was worse than they thought. So, when Paul changed his plans, his detractors were saying he vacillates back and forth. He said he was coming in winter but then he came *before* going to Macedonia. Paul's defense is that it was not because of the flesh that he changed his mind. It was because of the leading of the Spirit. God was faithful to direct him. He asked them to recall that what he said in the past he always did. He was a person of integrity, and that is why his preaching, though unimpressive by human standards, had power (2 Corinthians 10:10^{xvi}). *"Integrity lay at the heart of apostolic ministry. Truth was the medium. Sincerity was the evidence. (Grace manifested as) power was the outcome."*^{xvii}

It seems that this short visit before going to Macedonia was full of contention, and Paul decided it was better to go on to Macedonia rather than to escalate the problem. If one can see that their presence is not improving the situation, there are times when a retreat and leaving things in God's hands is a sign of trusting God more than trusting in oneself. Once things cool down and the Spirit has time to work on hearts, another encounter might be more fruitful. Sexual sin was being ignored and debauchery was being justified by some in the church, perhaps under the excuse of freedom and grace (2 Corinthians 12:21^{xviii}). Their defiance had hardened some in the church against Paul. We will see in the next chapter that Paul sent Titus to deliver the "sorrowful letter" rather than to return in person.

Titus was a Greek convert and probably had a stronger presence than Timothy. The faction that was defending the sin was most likely a minority, perhaps one family, but a bold minority can intimidate the entire congregation. I have witnessed this myself. In verse 9 of the next chapter Paul declares that that letter was a test to see if the

congregation would unite and discipline the blatant sin and be obedient to what the Spirit was directing through Paul (2 Corinthians 2:9^{xix}). We will see in chapter 7:6-13 that Titus reported back that for the most part the congregation repented and acted on the Spirit's leading which was a great relief to Paul.

¹⁸ As surely as God is faithful, our word to you has not been Yes and No. 2 Corinthians 1:18 Paul's critics were saying that he said one thing and did another. Before explaining why he did not come, Paul reminds the Corinthians that God is faithful. He does not promise something and change his mind (Numbers 23:19^{xx}). Paul's faithfulness to them is the clear presentation of the gospel. It is not based on his travel plans or whether he is led in a different direction than he assumed. God does not need to make an oath because his Word is reliable. Paul does not make oaths either as Jesus taught that our yes should mean yes and our no should mean no (Matthew 5:33-37^{xxi}). Paul was clear in saying that his plans were up to the Lord's will. His critics attacks were over being led differently than what he first thought, something they probably did every day. When people have a critical spirit, they need to remember that as they judge others, they will be judged (Matthew 7:2^{xxii}).

¹⁹ For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you, Silvanus and Timothy and I, was not Yes and No, but in him it is always Yes. ²⁰ For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory. 2 Corinthians 1:19,20 *Christ is God's yes to all meaningful human hopes. Christ is God's yes to human longing for life, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification (1Corinthians 1:30^{xxiii}). But we should be mindful that God also speaks a no "to every selfish and perverted longing of humanity, to every desire to 'get rich quick,' to dominate others, or to organize society for selfish advantage."^{xxiv}*

The Son of God, Jesus Christ did not play games with His words. He did not say one thing one day and something else the next. He never contradicted Himself or the Scriptures, for He is the Word made flesh (John 1:14)^{xxv}. Everything He said was from the Father, absolutely dependable, truthful, and righteous. His word will remain even if heaven and earth passed away (Matthew 24:35^{xxvi}). You can absolutely count on them. Every promise of God finds its affirmation in Him, and He is the fulfillment of most of them. Uttering their Amen through Him to the glory of God means their agreement with everything Jesus taught. That brings God glory, for when we agree with the Word of God and live accordingly, the likeness of Christ is seen in us. That can only be done through Christ.

After benedictions the congregation would say, "Amen!" It is similar to saying, "Surely it is so!" It is an affirmation that what was said is true and right. If they affirm that God is true, then they surely can affirm that His messengers are true as well. If they affirm Paul's faithfulness to God in delivering the gospel to them, they can surely know God is faithful to direct Paul in his travel plans as well. Paul is emphasizing that he does not say things lightly. The promise to come after visiting Macedonia was intentionally followed by the "Lord willing" condition.

²¹ And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, ²² and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee. 2 Corinthians 1:21,22 Next, Paul describes his unity with them in Christ. He says it is God who has established them with him and his team in Christ. We do not stand firm by our own will power or effort. Whatever union we have with Christ is God's ongoing work. If

you came to Christ and were saved it was the work of God. If you remain in Him today it is the ongoing work of God in your lives.

The other things that God has done mentioned in this verse are in a verb tense that means they started in the past and continue to the present. He anointed us. Priests of the Old Testament were anointed with oil, a picture of the Holy Spirit upon them to perform their assigned ministries (Exodus 29:29^{xxvii}). God wanted Israel to be a kingdom of priests (Exodus 19:6^{xxviii}). In other words, He wanted them to represent God to the world, but they failed miserably. Now God made a new kingdom of priests out of Spirit filled followers of Jesus (2 Peter 2:9^{xxix}). We are not anointed with oil but with what the oil represents, the presence of the Holy Spirit upon us to express the gifts He has given us for the building up of one another (1 John 2:20^{xxx}). The Holy Spirit also has sealed us with the ongoing effect that we continue to be sealed as God's own children (Ephesians 1:13^{xxxi}), the guarantee of which is the presence of the Spirit in our hearts.

The Greek word here translated as guarantee is something like we would say is a first deposit. It is a partial payment for work to be done, the balance of which is due upon completion. The Scriptures tell us that when Jesus returns, He will bring His reward with Him (Isaiah 62:11^{xxxii}). His work in us will be completed (Philippians 1:6^{xxxiii}).

Our thoughts and desires are continually influenced by the Holy Spirit, rejecting ungodly thoughts and emotions while embracing that which aligns with the will of God. As wonderful as the Spirit's presence is in us, it is only the down payment of what is to come.

Paul is telling them that even though some question his calling they stand firm together in Christ. They have the same Holy Spirit. They are sealed together in one body. And this is how we should see ourselves with all genuine followers of our Lord and Savior. How can you tell if they are believers? You can tell by their fruits (Matthew 7:20^{xxxiv}). They have the fruit of the Spirit. You can often tell by just looking at them that the Spirit of God is in in them.

In these few verses we have seen the defense of a good conscience, the witness of manifest grace, the bond we have with other believers, our reason to boast being our relationship with God, and how we are being established. Paul has defended his ministry to them because it is the ministry of the gospel, the unfailing Word of God.

Questions:

- 1 How can we use conscience as a guide?
- 2 How was that expressed by Paul's team?
- 3 Why do some sermons change our lives?
- 4 Why does Paul say in 14b *you will boast of us as we will boast of you?*
- 5 Why did Paul think that a second experience of grace might help?
- 6 Why does Paul compare his faithfulness with God's?
- 7 How do all the promises of God find their yes in Jesus?
- 8 What does uttering our Amen to God mean? How does it bring Him glory?
- 9 What are the implications of "establishing us with you?"
- 10 Go over the ways we are established.

ⁱ **Galatians 5:19-20 (ESV)**

¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality,

²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions,

ⁱⁱ **Acts 23:1 (ESV)**

¹ And looking intently at the council, Paul said, “Brothers, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day.”

ⁱⁱⁱ **1 Timothy 1:15 (ESV)**

¹⁵ The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.

^{iv} **1 Timothy 1:13 (ESV)**

¹³ though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief,

^v **Romans 12:2 (ESV)**

² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

^{vi} Mary Garvin stanza 22

^{vii} **1 Timothy 3:9 (ESV)**

⁹ They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.

^{viii} **1 Corinthians 2:4 (ESV)**

⁴ and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,

^{ix} **2 Corinthians 13:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ For this reason I write these things while I am away from you, that when I come I may not have to be severe in my use of the authority that the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down.

^x **Jeremiah 9:23-24 (ESV)**

²³ Thus says the LORD: “Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, ²⁴ but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.”

^{xi} **John 15:5 (ESV)**

⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

^{xii} **1 Corinthians 16:5 (ESV)**

⁵ I will visit you after passing through Macedonia, for I intend to pass through Macedonia,

^{xiii} **1 Corinthians 16:7 (ESV)**

⁷ For I do not want to see you now just in passing. I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits.

^{xiv} **1 Corinthians 16:6-7 (ESV)**

⁶ and perhaps I will stay with you or even spend the winter, so that you may help me on my journey, wherever I go.

⁷ For I do not want to see you now just in passing. I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits.

^{xv} **Romans 1:11-12 (ESV)**

¹¹ For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you— ¹² that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith, both yours and mine.

^{xvi} **2 Corinthians 10:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ For they say, “His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account.”

^{xvii} R. Kent Hughes, [2 Corinthians: Power in Weakness](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006), 42.

^{xviii} **2 Corinthians 12:21 (ESV)**

²¹ I fear that when I come again my God may humble me before you, and I may have to mourn over many of those who sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual immorality, and sensuality that they have practiced.

^{xix} **2 Corinthians 2:9 (ESV)**

⁹ For this is why I wrote, that I might test you and know whether you are obedient in everything.

^{xx} **Numbers 23:19 (ESV)**

¹⁹ God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?

^{xxi} **Matthew 5:33-37 (ESV)**

³³ “Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.’ ³⁴ But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, ³⁵ or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. ³⁶ And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. ³⁷ Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil.

^{xxii} **Matthew 7:2 (ESV)**

² For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.

^{xxiii} **1 Corinthians 1:30 (ESV)**

³⁰ And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption,

^{xxiv} David E. Garland, [2 Corinthians](#), vol. 29, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 103

^{xxv} **John 1:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

^{xxvi} **Matthew 24:35 (ESV)**

³⁵ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

^{xxvii} **Exodus 29:29 (ESV)**

²⁹ “The holy garments of Aaron shall be for his sons after him; they shall be anointed in them and ordained in them.

^{xxviii} **Exodus 19:6 (ESV)**

⁶ and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.”

^{xxix} **2 Peter 2:9 (ESV)**

⁹ then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment,

^{xxx} **1 John 2:20 (ESV)**

²⁰ But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge.

^{xxxi} **Ephesians 1:13 (ESV)**

¹³ In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit,

^{xxxii} **Isaiah 62:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ Behold, the LORD has proclaimed to the end of the earth: Say to the daughter of Zion, “Behold, your salvation comes; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him.”

^{xxxiii} **Philippians 1:6 (ESV)**

⁶ And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

^{xxxiv} **Matthew 7:20 (ESV)**

²⁰ Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.