

**“Christ-Centered Sincerity”**  
**2 Corinthians 1:12-22**

When I was in seminary, I was in need of a new iPod so that I could listen to sermons and music, and rather than dishing out a couple of hundred dollars at the Apple store, I decided to take advantage of our technologically advanced world ☺, and searched for a used one on Craigslist. For those unfamiliar with what I’m talking about, Craigslist is a free, online classifieds site where you can purchase and sell just about anything. Marsha and I have actually bought & sold several items over the past few years. BUT, there is no guarantee everything it will go smoothly because you never know who you are dealing with on the other end of things.

This was the case when I tried to purchase the iPod from a lady who lived in Garner, NC and whose name will remain forever anonymous. I would like to read you our email exchange with some minimal commentary that details exactly what happened. At approximately 1:40 in the afternoon on May 29<sup>th</sup>, 2007 [After she agreed to sell it to me for \$50, I wrote her to make sure that everything worked properly]:

“Ms. Anonymous: Before I say “deal,” is it in perfect working condition? My boss had a nano and it started messing up after a year and a half. If so, I get off work at 5:00 and could meet you somewhere if you’d like. I live in Wake Forest. I know Garner is on the other side of Raleigh but I can come most of the way or all of the way depending on your schedule. Thanks, Tanner [At this point, if it’s in good condition, I’ve committed to buy the iPod. My *Yes* is on the table.]

To which Ms. Anonymous replied @ 2:01 p.m.: “Works fine to me. I have 2 people coming to my house at 5:30 and another at 6:00 to get other items. What do you propose? Not sure if this will fit your schedule?”

Now, I took her to mean, it’s yours, when are you going to come by and pick it up? So my *Yes* is on the table. Now it appears that her *Yes* is on the table. At this point, I’m thinking I just got an unbelievable deal. I was already considering what music and which sermons I wanted to download for my listening pleasure. Little did I know that seven minutes later my inbox would pop up another message from Ms. Anonymous that said this: “Hold on. My co-worker may take it. Will keep you posted.” [with these fateful words, Mrs. Anonymous slid her *Yes* off of the table, threw down the *Maybe* card which (as you might guess) was really her *No*.

At that point, the iPod was gone. The question is what went wrong? Some would say that she simply backed out on the deal. Others would call her disingenuous, downright deceitful, or a liar. Still others would say she lacked integrity. In addition to these, one of the terms the Bible would use to describe this scenario is insincerity.

FCF: I was pretty frustrated about that, but if I’m being honest the sin of insincerity surfaces in my own life as well. It often happens in those little “excusable” ways. When we use words of flattery to make a person feel good, all the while we know we are stretching the reality of the situation. Or what about the times when we fail to follow through on our good intentions. “Yes, I’ll call you back by tomorrow.” “Oh, don’t worry mom, I’ll do the dishes after I get done hanging with my friends.” Or for our church context: “I’ll pray for you.” And then make no concentrated effort to follow through on our word.

What about you? Do you say what you mean and mean what you say? In order to get a grasp on what the Bible says about sincerity, we can look to the ministry of the Apostle Paul in one of his letters to a church he planted in Corinth, and discover how he dealt with the charge of insincerity. I love 2 Corinthians. If you want to know Paul’s heart for ministry, read this book!! Please open your Bibles to 2 Cor. 1 (page \_\_\_\_).

Our focus will be on verses 12-22. We are going to see that Paul has been misunderstood concerning his travel plans. Although he intended to visit the Corinthians twice, he was providentially hindered. Now, in light of these events, his character is under attack.

MIT: That is why we find Paul defending his sincerity before the Corinthians by grounding his actions in the character of God and the work Christ in the gospel. Through these words God will call each of us to

**The Point: Live your life with complete sincerity in light of the gospel.**

Verses 12-14 teach us that . . .

### I. Christ-Centered Sincerity Leads to God-Glorifying Boasting (12-14).

Paul can boast about the testimony of his conscience.

- ▲ What are we to make of this? ARG: We are not supposed to boast, are we? After all, James 4:6 tells us that **“God opposes the proud right, but gives grace to the humble.”** The key of boasting is the *object* of our boasting. We will boast in ourselves, human wisdom and created things, or we will boast in Christ.
- ▲ Paul is not contradicting but is rather living out and pointing to what he has already instructed the Corinthians in 1 Cor. 1:31 when he said, **“Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.”** What was his boast? That his conscience affirmed that he lived in the world with complete integrity and “supremely so toward them” (as if to suggest there should be little doubt about this).
- ▲ What does Paul mean by referring to his conscience? The conscience is our inner sense of right and wrong. It helps us approve or disapprove our own actions and the actions of others, whether they are already performed or only intended.
- ▲ Paul’s conscience was clean, because it had been washed by the blood of Christ (Hebrews 9:14). His conscience remained clean because he pursued blameless behavior in all things.
- ▲ We see four characteristics of his blameless behavior in v.14:
- ▲ 1) *simplicity* – Paul had a single-minded purpose to proclaim the gospel and live for God’s glory. Thus,
- ▲ 2) *godly sincerity* - Paul was the genuine article and acted in a way that revealed complete integrity and purity when examined in the pure light of God’s judgment. And then he says...
- ▲ 3) *not by earthly wisdom*, but 4) *by the grace of God*: Paul’s statement here refutes any charge of boasting in his own resources. Paul understood the gospel abolished all grounds for self-congratulation and boasting. He loved to trumpet the grace of God. That’s why he said: **“But by the grace of God, I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them [super-apostles], though it was not I, but the grace of God that was with me.” (1 Corinthians 15:10)**

13-14

- ▲ Not only could the Corinthians examine Paul’s conduct, they could also discern his sincerity through his writings. Paul’s correspondence with the Corinthians was written in an honest, sincere, and understandable manner. He was not trying to confuse them in his writing. He wrote his letters out of love to be understood.
- ▲ This is foundational when it comes to our interpretation of the Bible. Some people think the Bible is an archaic document that is impossible to understand. Well, when we read the Bible, we read it the same way the Corinthians read Paul’s letter. We want to understand what Paul meant to communicate. We don’t twist God’s Word to make it mean something what we want it to mean. We want to know what Paul meant, and what Moses meant, and what John and Peter and Luke meant.
- ▲ Sadly, at this point, the Corinthians only have a partial understanding. But thankfully, it will not always be this way. Paul points the Corinthians to the day when all of their differences and misunderstanding will be straightened out. That day is the day of Christ’s return when all of our actions and motives will be revealed.

- ▲ What will happen? Christians will boast of one another. This is so good and transformative. We will boast in what God has done through each other.
- ▲ *Thomas, Pete, Camerons...* We're going to do this for all eternity. Stories of grace and redemption, and the ultimate purpose everytime is not to say how great *Thomas & Pete & Camerons* are but to say look at what God did in them, through them. All glory is his. Not an ounce belongs to us. **Our ultimate boast is Christ!**
- ▲ If we will boast of one another on the day of Christ, how much more should we be practicing this now? We should be excited about how God is working in the lives of our brothers & sisters! **(EXPOUND!!)**

So in v.12-14 our text teaches us that Christ-Centered sincerity leads to God-Glorifying Boasting, Verses 15-22 reveal the motivation behind our actions.

## II. Christ-Centered Sincerity is motivated by the work of Christ in the Gospel (15-22).

(Read 15-22) 15-16 –

- ▲ Paul desired to visit the Corinthians twice. “He was going to cross the Aegean Sea to Corinth on his way to Macedonia (where Philippi is located), come back by Corinth,” and then have them send him on to Judea (Piper). Along the way, something surfaced that made Paul change his mind as v.23ff tells us. This change in plans gave Paul’s detractors reason to question his sincerity.
- ▲ So Paul has to explain his intentions in these verses. I love what he says in v.15 “second experience of grace” When Spirit filled believers get together, there “should be an experience of grace.” This is Sundays, Community Groups, Serving Together...
- ▲ **“For I long to see you, that I may impart some spiritual gift to strengthen you—that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith, both yours and mine.” (Romans 1:11-12)**
- ▲ I hope you are experiencing mutual encouragement and grace when you connect with other Christians and fulfill the one another commands of Scripture. This is what Paul desired for the Corinthians, but not everyone in Corinth believed this.
- ▲ That is why Paul sharpens his defense in v.17 with two rhetorical questions, each anticipating a negative answer. 1) First, he asks, “Was I vacillating when I wanted to do this?” The NIV says, “When I planned this, did I do it lightly?” NO!
- ▲ 2) Then he questions, “Do I make my plans according to the flesh, ready to say “Yes, Yes” and “No, No” at the same time?” Paul says, “NO! I do not make my plans according to the flesh (the person who does this is Yes, Yes *and* No, No)?
- ▲ When I was young, I can remember my dad teaching me about people who “talk out of both sides of their mouth.” (Oh, yeah I’ll take care of that. . . . That guys is crazy if he thinks he’s getting that from me.) It was something his dad taught him in order to instill integrity in his life. Paul says he was not vacillating, speaking out of both sides of his mouth.
- ▲ Paul was not concerned about what was in this for him. He was not thinking, “I wonder if these travel plans will be an inconvenience to me or beneficial.” Paul had plenty of scars on his back to show he was not in the ministry for himself. He was not making his plans according to the flesh, but he was concerned about the Corinthians. After all, he brought the gospel to them. He is not against them but for them. He is working for their joy! (v.24)

The inference here is that Paul makes his plans according to the Spirit (under the Spirit’s leadership and in dependence upon the Spirit).

But notice in v. 18-22, how Paul ratchets it up several notches here and increases the force of his argument. We need to pause and feel the weight of seriousness and urgency in his argument. Here Paul gives the theological basis for his actions. What Paul essentially is saying is this, “I operate in light of the gospel.” “I do what do in light of what Jesus Christ has done for me.”

In v.18-20 Paul gives us a stunning example of how our lives can be absolutely Christ-centered. Paul found a theological connection to everything and shows us how the gospel affected the very details of his life, in this case, most specifically, his itinerary.

- (18) Theocentric “as surely as God is faithful” God is not a God who says one thing and does another. He is infinitely “faithful.”
- (19) Christocentric “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.”
  - a. Jesus Christ is “God’s eternal Yes” – Barnett, 103.
  - b. “in him it is always Yes” – it IS ALWAYS YES
- (20) Grounds his previous statement “For” “For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him we utter our Amen to God for his glory.”
  - a. In order to grasp the weight of this we need to step back and consider redemptive history.
  - b. Think about how a camera works. My wife is a photographer, so I know a little bit about picture resolution and how important the equipment is in professional photography. Photographers always want the lens that is going to give them the best picture in terms of its clarity and ability to focus in on the target.
  - c. When you consider God’s master plan (creation, fall, redemption, restoration) and zoom in to discover how God is working out his plan and promises, at the center of it all you will find the person of Christ.
  - d. All of God’s promises are fulfilled in him.
- Do you see Paul’s argument? Just as God is faithful to keep his promises in Christ, so I am striving in everything to reflect that reality. Christ and his work motivates the very smallest details of our lives, even our plans and what makes it on our calendar.
- The gospel should touch every minute detail of our lives, from the way we eat breakfast (I Cor. 10:31) to the way spend our money, our marriages, our love, our service, and even how we handle our day planner.

Application: If all the promises of God are Yes in him, what does that mean for us? **BECAUSE we have God’s YES in Christ**

**1) This changes our view of life because we BELONG to CHRIST!!!!**

- God has promised to be with you. God has promised to comfort you.
- God has promised to strengthen you and empower you. God has promised to hear you when you cry to him in prayer and praise. God has promised to forgive you and accept you because of the blood of his Son.
- Question: Are you experiencing the fullest measure of God’s YES to you in Jesus Christ?
- But the verse does not stop there... let’s read it again, (read v.20).

**2) This changes how we respond to God in prayer and worship.**

- Our response must be “Yes” back to him. There is a little Latin phrase that medieval scholar Thomas Aquinas built his whole theology and life around: “*Excitus et Retitus*” It means “coming out from and returning back to.” This was the theology of the Apostle Paul, was it not? **Romans 11:36, “For from him and through him and to him are all things.”** Our lives are from God, we do what we do through God’s strength, and ultimately, we should be giving glory back to him in all things.
- So, in light of all that God has done for us in Christ, we say “AMEN” back to him, through Jesus.
- Do you see that? To say “amen” is to say, “I agree” “I affirm that” “This is true.”
- This is our response. When you look up the word “amen” in Paul’s letters, it almost always occurs after doxologies. We are returning praise back to God in recognition of who he is and what he has done we say “YES!,” “It is true!,” “Amen!” John Piper says that the word amen “is the exclamation point of faith.” It is so much more than a word that we tack on to the end of a prayer.

**3) This changes how we serve others.**

- Paul was a servant. He served the Corinthians in the planting of that church and he continued to serve to see them established and built up... The point of this whole passage is that Paul served them with sincerity.
- We learn the all valuable lesson that . . . *It's not just what we do; it is why we do it and how we do it. We should do what we do with heart behind it.*
- People can see the difference. People can see when you do something with the right motivation in the right way. **"The greatest apologetic of our day is authenticity." (Dhati Lewis)**
- This is part of our mission strategy as a church plant. "We will love you longer than you can distrust us." We're here. We're for real, because Jesus is and Jesus is for real...
- We need Christ-Centered sincerity, a drive by the gospel to compel us to serve and to serve well!
- This motivates how we serve one another in the church, and it motivates how we serve our city.
- Our serving this week at Serve Medford... Pray that God would fill you with the love of Christ, so that in all of the ways we serve, authenticity would validate everything.
- The greatest way you can serve someone is to point them to Christ. The greatest service we could ever perform is to tell someone the story of Jesus. If that is true, what is the greatest disservice? To hold the gospel back.
- So, go, and help kids and beautify parks and assist businesses, and \_\_\_\_\_ but be ready to tell people why we are compelled to love and serve and give and sacrifice
- We can do so because as Paul highlights in vv. 21-22: "God establishes us" He has anointed us, sealed us, and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.

*Conclusion:*

Let's live, and worship, and serve motivated by the work of Christ so that all people might know the joy of following Jesus. Let's pray.