

## **Being Consistent**

2Corinthians 1:15-24

### *Back when I was an electrician I started out wiring houses.*

Wiring a house usually happened in three stages.

The first stage is installing the main panel so that the builder would have power on the site.

After that was the rough in stage.

That normally happened after the roof had shingles along with the windows and doors installed.

This is where all the boxes for outlets, switches, lights, and appliances are installed and the wires are run from the panel to those boxes to supply them with power.

The last stage was the finishing stage.

That happens after the drywall is on and finished, the finished flooring is complete, and the kitchen cabinets are installed.

It's when all the plugs, switches, lights, and appliances are connected to complete the job.

### *Something that happens after each stage is an inspection.*

It's when someone from the electrical safety authority comes to look at the work to make sure everything has been done up to code.

Most of the time it was not much of an issue, but every now and again I would have to wait for an inspector to show up to a job site.

On a couple of occasions that was a real exercise in frustration because they would tell you the day but the window of time was really broad.

They said, "The inspector will be there sometime between 8am-5pm."

That was bad enough, but the worst part was I waited all day and he didn't show up, because he had higher priorities.

The challenge there is you have no choice but to reschedule because you can't move on to the next phase until the work is inspected and they are the only ones who can inspect it.

They have found a number of ways to improve that over the years, but at the time it was both frustrating and inconvenient.

### *Anyone ever have an experience like that?*

You are expecting someone to show up and they don't make it for some reason.

How does that make you feel? Unhappy right?

Something similar to that had happened between the apostle Paul and the church that he had helped start in the city of Corinth.

He had planned to make a trip to see them but his plans changed and some people used that to try and hurt his reputation within the church.

[It caused enough of a problem that Paul thought it necessary to explain the situation to them and this morning we are going to look together at the beginning of his explanation in **2Corinthians 1:15-24**. One of the things I find interesting is that he doesn't begin by giving them his reasons for changing his mind on his visit, he begins with telling them why he hasn't changed his mind towards them. Some are saying that Paul has become wishy washy and he wants them to know that he has remained consistent. I believe what he writes here shows us the importance of being consistent in the Christian life. He begins by reminding them of his original plans and why he made them. From that we learn this first lesson, that...]

**Point #1 – Christians should consistently want what is good for believers. (Verses 15-16)**

Jesus said that the world will know that we are His disciples by our love for one another. That means wanting what is best, as God defines it, for all of His people.

Verse 15 begins with the phrase, “Because I was sure of this” referring back to verses 13-14.

Those verses speak of his efforts to teach them and of his future hope that they will be able to celebrate how the Lord has used them in each other's lives.

Because of his confidence in these things he says this in **verse 15-16**.

If you are familiar with the book of Acts and the map of the Mediterranean world of that time then you know Paul covered a lot of ground as a missionary.

Like many travelers the apostle, it would seem, liked to make the most of his travel plans.

His thought is to stop by Corinth first which is located in Greece, then go North to Macedonia where he would likely stop in on the Thessalonians, the Bereans, and perhaps the Philippians, and then return to Corinth.

Meaning his intention was to make two visits to the church.

That immediately helps us understand what he means by the phrase, “a second experience of grace.”

If we read that verse out of context we might conclude that he is referring here to some kind of second special pouring out of grace relating to salvation or to spiritual gifts.

People who hold such a view tend to think of salvation is stages.

There is the initial stage where you are saved from going to hell, but then there is a second stage where the believer receives the Holy Spirit for the first time or in some new way.

As far as I can see in the scriptures the Holy Spirit indwells every believer from the moment of their salvation into eternity.

The work of the Spirit to make us more like Jesus and to empower us to serve the Lord is an ongoing work that may result in particularly powerful moments in a believer's life, but should always be thought of as a continuing work rather than a new work that was not there before.

*Paul meaning of "second experience of grace" is likely far more straight forward.*

It likely just means that he is going to visit them twice and that the LORD according to His grace will make the visits useful to the people of the church.

That is his whole reason for wanting to visit them, so that he might encourage them, teach them, and so build them up in their faith.

In other words he is hoping to visit them because he wants what is good for them.

That is as basic to Christianity as anything.

[How many people have enjoyed some time around a campfire this summer? Let's say you were to gather together some firewood, some kindling, and some newspaper and then build a nice tepee or log cabin. After that you get out lawn chairs, marshmallow roasters, and maybe some chocolate cookies. You then get everybody together and sit around the fire pit, but no one ever lights the fire. Do you have a campfire? I suppose you can still eat the marshmallows and cookies but without the flames it's not a fire.]

That is what Christianity is without any desire for the good of believers which is what love is.

Can we say that we have that desire in our hearts?

Can we say that we have it consistently?

It is a very easy thing to come to church, sing some songs, listen to a sermon, and head home.

It is a very easy thing to develop a consumer mentality in the church.

Are people nice to me, do I feel good, are my needs being met, etc?

[Some of that is legitimate. We are all people in need that is true, but we are also called to care about the good of other believers. You know what? Often times that is hard. We'll see that next week when we get into Paul's explanation for his change of plans. Despite the fact that it is hard and despite the fact that it may not always be well received, it will be present in our hearts if we have been born again because the nature of being a Christian is to consistently want what is good for the people of God. Why is that? Why is it a bad thing if we are all over the place as believers? That is what Paul shows us next. In the next few verses he tells the

believers why it is important for them to know that he is not all over the map when it comes to how he feels about them. He wants them to know that he has been consistent because...]

**Point #2 – Christian consistency reflects a consistent gospel message. (Verses 17-20)**

God never speaks out of both sides of His mouth. What He has said about how we can be saved remains the same throughout all eternity and is completely trustworthy.

Because Paul had made these plans to visit and later changed them, some in the church used that to accuse Paul of being someone who says one thing and does another.

He begins dealing with that accusation here in **verses 17-18.**

From the book of Acts we know that when the Corinthian church was first established Paul lived and worked among them for a year and a half.

You would think after that the people in the church would give him the benefit of the doubt, likely some did, but clearly many began to think of him in a more negative light.

That is especially true for those who wanted to take control of the church for themselves.

What better way to do that than to sow seeds of doubt in the minds of the people with regard to the apostle.

The questions Paul asks in verse 17 likely tell us what some people were saying about him.

He asks, “Was I vacillating (going back and forth/being fickle)?”

They must have been saying that Paul is a double minded man and you can’t trust what he says.

“Do I make plans according to the flesh?”

By flesh he means out of the desires of human nature which according to the bible is evil and self-serving.

His opponents would say, “Paul cares more about himself than you. He will tell you what you want to hear and then turn around and stab you in the back.”

[That sort of thing was common in the world back then just as it is today. If you follow politics for about five minutes you will see this sort of thing. I can’t think of very many political leaders who won’t change what they say if they think it will suit their own desires even if it is the opposite of what they said yesterday.]

Is that what Paul is like?

In the original language the way Paul asks these questions the expected answer is NO.

He is not someone who says “Yes Yes and No No” at the same time.

He is not someone who talks out of both sides of his mouth.

He tells us why in **Verses 19-20.**

The message of the gospel is a consistent one.

It is a proclamation concerning the “Son of God, Jesus Christ.”

There is a mountain of glorious theology in that title.

In the Old Testament God calls the whole nation of Israel His son, He also refers to the Davidic line of kings as His son.

The title connects Jesus to God’s people and to the throne of David.

There is more here though because the LORD is uniquely God’s Son.

His sonship began long before His being conceived in Mary’s womb, in fact His sonship has no beginning because He has existed in all eternity past sharing fully in all the attributes of His Father.

In perfect obedience God the Son took on genuine humanity and in that humanity remained perfectly obedient to His Father even to the point of dying on a cross to take the penalty of our disobedience.

Because He paid our debt if we confess our sins, if we realize our need of a Saviour, and trust Him alone for forgiveness, we are made right with God.

We know that His death can save us from God’s eternal wrath, because God raised Him from the dead.

And on account of trusting Jesus alone we are also adopted as sons and daughters of God.

We are, as it says in Romans 8:17, “co-heirs with Christ.”

That is why Paul can say here in verse 20 that “all the promises of God find their Yes in him.”

That is both an amazing statement and a sobering statement.

Every single one of God’s promises to his people belongs to those who belong to Jesus.

That must also mean apart from Jesus no one can claim a single promise from the almighty.

There is no yes today and no tomorrow with the LORD.

He is all in for His people for the sake of His Son to the praise of His glory forever.

That is as reliable as it gets and we should have a desire to reflect that in our lives.

[How many people have ever had to drive an unreliable car? Anybody have to drive one before owning a cell phone? If you have had that experience you also likely had the experience of walking somewhere when you thought you would be driving. I think it is fair to say that most people don't like that. Far better to have a car that you can trust to get you from point A to B.]

If you were going to compare yourself to that illustration which car would you consider yourself?

The unreliable clunker or the dependable vehicle.

No we are not perfect, but Christians should be consistent and dependable people.

It is a means by which we can point people to a gloriously dependable Saviour.

[Of course someone might say, "What a minute, we are far from perfect so how can we possibly have any hope of living this out?" It's true we are not perfect. If you have read 1 Corinthians then you know they big problems as a church. In fact, it is their own immaturity that has led them to question the integrity of the apostle. Thankfully, the gospel is more than an amazing message it is the result of the action of our amazing God. That is the third lesson of our text this morning, that...]

**Point #3 – Christian consistency depends on God's work in the heart. (Verses 21-22)**

It should be no surprise that the Bible calls us to strive for faithfulness because that is the expected result of what the LORD does in the miracle of salvation.

Verse 21 begins with a powerful statement. It says, "And it is God..."

What follows down to verse 22 are actions that God takes for the good of believers.

Paul mentions four things here that God does.

First he writes, "It is God who established us with you in Christ.

Commentator Colin Kruse points out the word "established" is a legal term suggesting a commitment will be carried out.

If you believe the gospel, then the sovereign all powerful God of the universe binds Himself to keep you in His Son forever.

Second, God, "has anointed us" it says at the end of verse 21.

Anointing should bring to mind images from the Old Testament.

It was the pouring on of oil to set apart someone for service to God.

Paul wrote something similar in 1 Corinthians 6 when he said, "You are not your own, you were bought with a price."

Instead of pouring oil, the LORD pours out the Holy Spirit upon his people as a means of setting us apart.

We are set apart by God for the glory of God.

Third it says, “God.....has also put his seal on us.”

In the ancient world documents and letters were often written on scrolls which looked like rolled up pieces of paper.

In order to keep documents from being tampered with and as a means of showing their authenticity, people would often drip hot wax on the rolled up scroll and while it was still hot press in a piece of metal with a unique sign, symbol, or image on it which would seal the document closed leaving their mark upon it.

God has done that upon His people.

It is an unbreakable irremovable seal that marks us as belonging to Him and no power, not even the devil himself can remove that mark from us.

Lastly he writes at the end of verse 22, “God...has given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.”

Our hope in being consistent as believers is in the work of the Holy Spirit renewing us day by day into new creatures who are overcoming our fallen nature.

Notice here Paul says the Spirit is given as a “guarantee”.

That sounds pretty certain and the reason it sounds that way is because it is.

While it is true that the Spirit’s work may vary in appearance and pace from believer to believer, He is present in every single Christian and He never fails in His work.

Therefore, it is simply the nature of being born again to be increasing in the consistency of our thoughts, feelings, and actions as we walk with the LORD.

[Jesus talked about this in a few places when He compared people to plants and trees. He says, “People don’t pick figs from thorn bushes, or grapes from briars.” Where do you get figs? From a fig tree. Where do you get grapes? From a grape vine. Why? Because that is what a fig tree and a grape vine produce.]

It is the very same thing with being a Christian.

The indwelling of the Holy Spirit produces fruit. Love, joy, peace patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and self-control.

Does He do that on Sunday and not Monday through Saturday?

No, the Spirit is consistent in His work.

We should all ask ourselves this morning, “How is the level of consistency in my life?”

Do our lives reflect the steadiness of the gospel we say we believe?

One of the ways we can measure that is by asking ourselves about our desire for the good of God’s people.

Do we have any? Is it mountain tops and valleys or is it our normal way of being.

What about the value of our word?

Do we say one thing today and another tomorrow?

Are we consistent in what we say from person to person  
or does our story change to suit selfish desires?

These things are some of the evidences of the Holy  
Spirit at work in us and if He is at work in us then  
we can be sure that we will grow in being  
consistent to the glory of God.

That is both a good testimony and an  
amazing gift of assurance because it shows  
that we are in Christ and there is no better  
place to be because as it says here in verse  
20 “all the promises of God find their Yes in  
Him.”

Let's pray.