



Much could be included in an introduction to II Corinthians, realizing it is an oft quoted resource. The underlying purpose and focus of this letter is built around a few basic concepts. First, Paul is defending his apostleship throughout, because some had come to Corinth looking to “outdo” Paul. Verses such as II Cor. 10:10 Paul describes what he has heard said of him, and that, degrading him (and this is in the context of the infamous point that comparing ourselves among ourselves is not a wise practice). Paul must defend himself, not because he is concerned for his personal reputation, but because those boasting themselves “better” than Paul are doing so to gain a hearing and a following with their distortions of the Gospel. Paul did not desire to see them swayed into error (because of its ultimate danger to their souls and growth), and in so doing we have a variety of sections where we will learn and be taught along with these Corinthians. The importance of the integrity of what we are taught and that of the ministries we participate should be considered highest priority.

Paul had also, at this point, been discouraged because he was not sure where his friend in the ministry, Titus was (II Cor. 2:13). Part way into this letter we see the thrill and waves of encouragement that comes over him as he finally sees Titus (II Cor. 7:6, indicating this encouragement comes from God Who “comforts the downcast”). Part of Paul’s discouragement is also caused by not only their questioning his apostleship, but even his motives in not coming to them directly, and this magnified in their apparent “buying into” what the false teachers were promoting. It is common for such to seek to discredit the message by discrediting the messenger. Interestingly, Paul does not build himself up, but instead, details God’s work in him to make him “adequate” (3:6), and goes on to describe the glories of the true Gospel and, in so doing, demonstrates the numerous flaws of what these other teachers are declaring. He defends his/their approach to the Scriptures in chapter 4 which would lead us to believe that these other teachers are using deceptive methods and interpretive approaches to make their points (which has been an enemy throughout each generation of Church history).

Rather than being ashamed of his sufferings, Paul lays them out as points of honor and uses the discussion to remind them of what is coming (chapter 5) versus living for the “now” and all the comforts and “safe zones” it can provide. He goes on to push personal purity/holiness not being “bound” to unbelievers, instead “perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (7:1). To support this, he encourages them not only in their personal walk, but in their ministerial “walk” by encouraging them to prepare for his coming by readying their gift for the impoverished and persecuted Christians in Judea (and that from the all churches in Macedonia that were suffering themselves), chapter 8. In defense of himself, we learn of his “thorn in the flesh” and his prayer to have it removed. Yet (in chapter 12) he tells of the gracious answer from the Lord that “My grace is sufficient” and that His power “is made perfect in weakness”. The letter ends with Paul’s challenged to them to “test yourselves” to scrutinize whether or not they are “in the faith”. The most dangerous form of deception is self deception!

I. An Encouraging Greeting In The Face of Suffering - 1:1-11

A. Paul’s greeting to the church - vs. 1-2

1. “Paul an apostle” - these few words actually hold more significance in this letter than might be initially realized - since his apostleship was apparently in question by many in the church; this reality (as he uses the title here) is essential

Even if a messenger is proven to be of poor character or deceptive does not necessarily mean the message is to be rejected - clearly one of Satan’s tactics is to discredit the Truth by means of those outwardly standing with the Truth and yet being found to lack integrity themselves

- a. As referenced in the introduction, there is a natural tendency to discredit a message because the messenger is “discredited” in our eyes - and part of this “natural tendency” will be heightened when we do not like the message we are hearing
- b. Paul will stress the reality of his apostleship, and the overall integrity of his ministry for the Lord, and while doing it, stress the contents of “the message” as well
- c. His authority is in “Jesus Christ” for an “apostle” is literally a messenger sent to bear/distribute the message of another in authority over them

Paul did not seek approval nor vindication from people - he served them as he served Christ, for the will of God and not subject to the will of man in these things

Timothy could serve as another witness as to their need to hear what Paul was sending them - as the Lord laid out in Mt. 18, other witnesses should be brought in when dealing with the faults of another believer

These are more to be identified with their association with Christ and their commonness in that than they are in their being Corinthians - conformity to their age and culture was not in the "scope" of their life purpose

Those who live unaware of the source of these seek favor and peace in the wrong places, from the wrong sources! The "favor" of man comes at a cost (one subject to change and with the possibility of being revoked at any time) and "peace" apart from God is an ever elusive goal, and its counterfeits become less than satisfying and non-lasting replacements

"The English word comfort is from the Latin *confortis* (brave together)." RWP

When we entertain thoughts of deserving better, even little troubles become excruciating

We are not released from stress to relax, but are so "freed" to serve others

d. His position as an Apostle in Christ, is so, by means of the "will of God" (in contrast to his own will or the will of men) - this is needed, partly so, because his authority was being questioned by men - those who see their authority coming from "men" (those that are sent to serve for Christ) are likely to look to "men" for direction

e. Paul references Timothy in the greeting as "the brother" (Τιμόθεος ὁ ἀδελφός) - Timothy had been sent to them (I Cor. 16:10), so they would have known him - it is possible also that Paul references him in answering some of their objections against himself, that he had sent Timothy (not desiring they be neglected) and also to lend more authority in this letter (since Timothy would have provided an account of how things were in Corinth)

2. "To the church of God" - vs. 1b

a. We get used to the language and phrasing used here in verse 1 and are apt to skim over it, failing to consider its significance - the "Church" is God's which must serve as an ongoing reminder that we are accountable in our participation in it

b. Then it is plainly put that, as part of the church, these are then "saints" - here it is also for "all the saints" (τοῖς ἁγίοις) in Achaia - put together, considering the actual words used, it is "to all the ones called out (Church) who are set apart ones (saints)"

c. We are a gathering of redeemed believers more than we are families and citizens

3. "Grace and peace to you from God..." - vs. 2

a. This is the common salutation from Paul to Churches serving not just as a greeting, but also as a reminder of where both of these gifts come from - "grace" is favor given to the undeserving (but **real** favor none the less), and peace is a calmness (peace of mind, even containing the idea of contentment)

b. The source of such being, "God our Father", and such a relationship to the Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth is made-so through the "Lord Jesus Christ"

c. These are essential to have always with us, since the absence of them (or the belief we are lacking them) will cause us to seek them elsewhere - the "peace" He gives is "not as the world gives" (John 14:27), since His is lasting and based on His immutability

B. The "God of all comfort" comforts in all afflictions - vs. 3-11

1. The first word Paul uses of God in his introduction to his account of suffering is "Εὐλογητὸς," typically translated "blessed", though it describes more God's being "good for it" (that being praise) - if anyone should be praised (honored) it is He

a. There are numerous things, people, and ideas that are given such "admiration" but, in the "long-run," they are not good for it (worthy of it)

b. It is significant that Paul is beginning a brief section dealing with suffering (his suffering be quite substantial) and this with praise of God (not questioning Him)

2. He (God) is the "Father of our Lord Jesus Christ", not just given for the purpose to support the doctrine of the trinity, but to serve as a reminder who exactly it is that is ruler of the universe (**even He who allows** the suffering Paul faced) - vs. 3

a. Having come to know more of the Lord Jesus Christ (the promised one of God), they should also then see Him (the Father) in light of His mercy and being the source of true comfort

b. The phrase used is "πάσης παρακλήσεως" literally stating God the Father as "the whole of comfort" or "the fulfillment of all types of comfort", and "comfort" being "to call to one's side" thus to stand with them in what **must** be faced (though much of suffering is made more painful because we expect we ought never suffer, not seeing it as a necessity of life - see I Pet. 1:3-9)

c. So, God is the "Father of mercies" (not giving us what we rightfully deserve, for even in suffering, we **deserve** much worse than what we face), and "God of all comfort" (for there will be others made-out to be a "god" that offer pseudo-comfort)

3. God "comforts" so we can comfort others - vs. 4

a. He stands with us in ALL our "afflictions" (the wording being θλίψει ἡμῶν, picturing all our pressures, the troubles/challenges to us that would hem us in (corner us))

b. This is done, for our relief/aid, but for the purpose to do the same that was done to us by God to/for others suffering "affliction"

The suffering is part of bringing encouragement (comfort)- it is not rare to come across those who are without joy even though their lives seem relatively free of "affliction"

Not that we need to suffer the same "affliction", just that we need to have been comforted (challenged) in ours

It is not the comfort we have to give as much as it is the comfort we ourselves have been given

As Saul was asked in Acts 9:4 "why are you persecuting me?" by Christ - Paul was persecuting Christians

Many man-made causes come to a quick end when there is no willingness to suffer for it - few other realities lend weight to a movement as much as the willingness and actuality of suffering for it - many Christians are unwilling to suffer for their association with Christ

This is a core work (responsibility) of being a Christian - we are encouragers (to "stay with it") in times of trouble (and distractions) as well as standing with each other through pressures, as God has done with us

To successfully escape such pressures/endurance, would be to miss-out on the truest comfort

And such fearful living produces a steady, non-stop stress of its own, where "comfort" is more seen in less stress than no stress

- c. It is important to note that the word for "comfort" is far more than something to numb the pain or a "hammock" of sorts to let us reach a state of relaxing; instead it is also "... emboldening another in belief or course of action..." (BDAG)
- d. So we are to **encourage** others in their hurts/troubles and pressures because we are so encouraged by the "God of all encouragement" - we are often less likely to seek out those needing comfort when we ourselves cannot escape pressure
- e. The reason for the comfort in ALL affliction is to enable us to comfort others in ANY affliction - suffering of all sorts is a vital part of our growth (in a sin-infected world) because of what we learn, the disciplines that are developed, the character and integrity that are grown into us by them, and then the scope of our ministry of comfort/support increases
- f. The source and content of this "comfort" is key - those who yield to despair and **resolved pessimism** have nothing of use to share - we are comforted "through Christ" (all that is associated with Him, His example and our position in Him) as well as (in the upcoming verses) "patient enduring"

4. The "sufferings of Christ are ours" as is His comfort - vs. 5-7

- a. "For" starts an explanation that needs to be carried all the way through, to understand this seemingly odd start - how would it be considered comforting to be told that the "sufferings of Christ" are ours "in abundance"?
- b. The sense is along the lines of "there is an overflow of the sufferings of Christ that overflow to/on us" - these are not sufferings that are needed to finish His work; these are the sufferings of association with Christ (any and all costs of being one of His and like Him)
- c. The advantage here though, is that in the abundance of the troubles and hardships we face as we follow Christ, **so we have in like amount** (abundance) comfort "through Christ"
- d. Christ suffered doing the will of the Father (as will we), yet what an encouragement to know that there is such purpose in all our suffering with/for Him!
- e. The "no-lose" scenario (a "win-win") - Paul clarifies that if they are afflicted it is "for your comfort and salvation" - they are comforted (encouraged) for "... the sufferings one man endures for a good cause are the source of profit to others." (Cambridge Bible) and they are so **emboldened in the worthiness of "the cause"**
- f. Yet the practical purpose for Paul's suffering was for their "consolation" (encouragement), he suffering in various ways in bringing the Gospel to them and standing with the Truth, so as to bring to them the way of salvation - and much of his suffering (apart from what he is about to share) came even from their midst - sadly, running from such suffering is not conducive to leading others to "salvation"
- g. And then, as part of the "win-win", if Paul is comforted (encouraged) it is such as will be shared with them, comforting them - encouragement begets encouragement just as discouragement tends to beget discouragement in others - we don't strive for encouragement just for ourselves, but for the sake of those around us
- h. Ironically, this type of deep, enduring encouragement is only to be had in suffering - for such comfort is "effective" (ἐνεργουμένης ἐν ὑπομονῇ, working in endurance) as one is patiently living through the troubles - see Heb. 12:11
- i. So, with this as truth, Paul can say with confidence that his expectation is secure in the reality that as they are led into sharing the same sufferings Paul and his team were facing (because of Christ), so they would get to share in this exceptional encouragement
- j. How is this all possible? It will not be fully known until lived, but we can at least see that if one is **able to face** what they would expect would be too difficult, too fearful and painful, then they would be immensely encouraged, since so many live their lives afraid of such sufferings, not seeing them as endurable - see also James 1:2-4, II Thes. 1:4-7

5. Pushed beyond their ability to handle the ordeal - vs. 8-11

- a. We need to understand that Paul is about to deal with the apparent complaints that were directed at him for not coming as he had planned to come to them - their criticism was not taking into account the trouble Paul and his team were facing - had they known, they should have been less likely to be so critical and "hard" on him
- b. We must not be hard on others because they are unable to encourage us!

- His explanation of the account shows his valuing them versus a "just get over it!" reaction
- Oddly enough, some clarity of a concept is lost when too many details are provided
- The wording is "ὑπερβολὴν ὑπὲρ δύναμιν" exceeding above power/strength
- They were brought to a point where they were preparing to be killed (to die) - such severity should motivate us to pay close attention to what such a man would say regarding comfort and the purpose for such trials
- "... strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." Acts 14:22
- Those who do not ever truly contemplate their own death will not come to realize the significance of the time and life they currently have
- "How completely satisfying to turn from our limitations to a God who has none." Tozer
- Prayer is to be seen by us as not only an essential part of how we look for things to be done, but also as a significant part of our ministry while here on the Earth - we must not look for things to occur or seek to do things for God without prayer!
- No part of the work of God is insignificant! This is part of the drive in us to desire to be a part of as much of His work as possible, for it is all eternally productive! All else is temporal at best and will perish with time and decay
- c. His beginning of verse 8 is almost as though he is telling them that it took exceptional circumstances to divert him from his plans to be with them - "we do not want you to be unaware brethren" (ἀδελφοί indicating them as family)
- d. He references an "affliction" that "came on them" (γενομένης, aorist middle) when in Asia - there is a great deal written speculating what this is referring to, but this is not necessary to understanding what is being taught - the speculations have focused on the possibility of this being a psychological/emotional struggle, or the pressures of the strained relationships of ministry or the persecutions of their enemies - all three concepts should be included in this discussion for these truths cover **all** aspects of suffering
- e. This "burden" was beyond their strength to handle it - the wording in the Greek picturing a weight too heavy for them to bear - this helps clarify that when we are told that the grace of God will always be sufficient in all trials, that this grace is quite often reached as we are taken beyond our natural ability to cope with such stress
- f. It was so excessive and overwhelming that they "despaired for life" (as in they thought they were going to die) - this is not the despair that turns on God (see 4:8) - this "sentence" was "within them" indicating this was what they concluded themselves; they were facing death as best as they could determine
- g. The positive result (though thrust upon them) was that they would not "trust" themselves (be persuaded, convinced of themselves), but their focus of faith would be on God "who raises the dead" - and such is the focused hope of the believer; that at the worst we can face in this life (death), there is far greater hope to be had (to look forward to) - we are NEVER without hope! - also, as a fine point of theology, God raises "the dead" (so death is necessary (normally) for resurrection) - if we would never die as we are, we would never be "raised to the full newness of life" - vs. 9
- h. "The church at Corinth, like many another since, thought it could bypass affliction on the way to comfort; the theme of the epistle is that this is impossible (cf. Acts xiv.22). Christian discipline means, for an apostle and for the church as a whole, a progressive weakening of man's instinctive self-confidence, and of the self-despair to which this leads, and the growth of radical confidence in God." C.K. Barrett
- i. Paul appears to compare this particular deliverance from death as a type of resurrection from the dead (and such "brushes with death" which typically leads to, at the very least, a new outlook on life) - vs. 10 - and God will continue to deliver them from death (for as long as it will be required - for their death will not depend upon the "will of man" but only upon God's will and timing)
- j. Again, we do not know what account this is referencing, but Paul describes it as "ἐκ τηλικούτου θανάτου" (out of so **great** (mighty) death) - it was especially horrible in some way that it stood out as significant to one who had many other "brushes with death"
- k. "If many will intercede on our behalf, many will be bringing their thanksgiving to God" - this looks to be the overall intended point of verse 11 - Paul urges them to participate (join him) in helping by means of intercessory prayer (δεήσει) - those that had been praying would understand and would be giving thanks to God for their deliverance - the ongoing practice would continue to add to the number of those literally turning their faces to God for His goodness
- l. This statement could have served as a subtle rebuke to those who not only had not been praying for Paul, and who had been opposing him in their church
- m. Prayer is one of the key ways in which we all are united in any ministry/calling - many are (or have become) independent in their "walk with God" to the exclusion of the church - this was never the intended purpose for any of us!
- n. Paul is about to essentially defend himself to them and make a case for his integrity (in the upcoming verses), warding off any obstacles to their looking to be fellow-workers in the work of God in Corinth
- o. Paul had already described the extreme difficulty he and his team had faced, which should have begun to "soften" them toward him - for whatever reason, many at Corinth had come to dislike Paul and looked on him as discredited

II. Lives of Integrity, Not in “Fleshly Wisdom” but by God’s Grace - 1:12-24

A. “Personal pride” in the best way - vs. 12

1. The word for “proud” is “καύχησις” describing a glorying or boasting in something - “pride” is almost always used in a negative sense, but in this context it is used by Paul to portray what he finds **contentment** (self-satisfaction/fulfillment) in

In such societies “empty pretenders” become the norm - each lives in the fear of being discovered to be “less” than they put forward, so a mutual protection of hypocrisy becomes the “moral”; so the “immoral” are those who live-by and “push” integrity

- a. It seems to be a natural course of life to pursue points of personal “pride” in things that are vain or that one really cannot take any “credit” for
- b. The seemingly odd start to this section is likely in response to what would be expected by many in the Corinthian church - they were looking for him to be ashamed of himself (for their own deduced purposes) - yet he comes at them “proud” of his integrity (by God’s grace) - **such a concept often gets lost in the goals of a facade-building society**

2. How they (Paul and his team) “conducted” themselves “in the world” was key

see also 1 Tim. 1:18-20 - and consciences can become “defiled” (see Titus 1:15); this is the danger and result of fighting conscience (searing conscience as seen in 1 Tim. 4:1-5) - and in this case, it is seared (dead-ened) with self-righteousness

- a. Paul took satisfaction in the witness of a good/clear conscience - this is a rare find because it is typical to get so used-to disregarding conviction (guilt) and the sense of duty (small a great), that it would take a great deal of pressure to get one motivated to change (repent) and responsive to the ongoing “pricks of conscience” to restrain from vanity and be turned to “focus on God-given **responsibility** (purpose)
- b. What was his conscience “testifying” to? His “simplicity” (ἀγιότητα), his singleness of purpose/focus, and that he was genuinely not double-minded - he was not controlled by the distracting influences competing for his time, attention and resources (therefore he did not have multiple motives) in his behavior (in how he conducted himself)
- c. His behavior was also characterized as (driven to be) “Godly sincerity” (that is the sincerity God approves) as in pure, unadulterated (found to be what it “puts itself out to be”) so no masks or half-truths are needed (no “spin” is required) - apparently his presentation of what “Godliness” really was, was looked upon to be a “front” for some other agenda (which is common in much of society) - his conscience bore witness that this was real and no facade - this he could “celebrate” for there is significant freedom in living and facing life when there is **nothing** to hide!
- d. This was done (lived-out) “not in fleshly wisdom” (by means of it) but by God’s grace - his integrity was not caused by “worldly cleverness” or natural instinct (for these will not lead one to genuine integrity of unshakable values) - and Paul was consistent whether “in the world” (with those outside the Church) as well as these believers

ἀγιότητα is translated “holiness” in the NASB and part of true holiness is freedom from “pretence”

Genuine sincerity is difficult to find - many feign it as well act (for instance) in their pursuit of truth that they actually desire to find it - Paul really was focused on true truth and lived as “transparent” as possible

The world does have WYSIWYG people, but what you get is not of lasting/best value - humanity needs Godliness but Godliness cannot have “humanism” and still be “Godly”

B. Don’t “read in between the lines” and understand fully (not partially) - vs. 13-14

1. Paul is looking to essentially say something along the lines of , “Come on! You know me/us!”

Such conflicts arise when priorities revolve around “self” rather than God and His cause/purpose

- a. As stressed previously, the issue of division in churches (amongst believers) leads to many using such divisions, doubts and open conflicts, as a way of disqualifying the message taught/preached - at the very least, such is a distraction to learning and implementing it (**relationship** conflicts can stifle growth, if not confronted)
- b. In this context, Paul was having to deal with those (for whatever reason) who had come to distrust him and his motives, and this was becoming a profound distraction - this is typical with us (left to our own motives and pride), where we get so frustrated with the inconsistencies we see/perceive in others, that we become disenchanted with “Christianity” altogether (though not legitimate)

Even with significant inconsistencies in “Christian” arenas, it does not disqualify Scripture - the unfaithfulness of others will never excuse our unfaithfulness!

2. Yet, Paul clarifies, what he had and was writing, was consistent and something they could understand - there were no “hidden meanings” in what was being/had been written

Plain texts of the Bible become unreasonable and more complex than they need to be, because of the influence of prejudicial biases, where “self” is the final authority and not God’s Word

- a. When distrust affects our listening (in this case, invalid distrust), basic understanding is set aside and what normally would be plain/clear becomes obscure and undecipherable
- b. This response is seen in those who cannot accept the Gospel at face value, because they do not trust the work of God in Christ - as a result, the Gospel texts become cryptic and faith becomes more a work, and received grace becomes a **goal** (versus a gift)
- c. Paul also states that what he wrote they could “understand” (truly know) and his hope for them what that they would continue to “understand” it till “the end” - in other words, that what they had genuinely learned (of Truth), they would not be talked out of (convinced away from) - even the truths about him and his team (and thus, teaching)

Doubt-causer (doubt promoters) cannot be avoided, but they can be fortified-against with proper preparation and anticipation of their tactics

3. Partial understanding of what to be “proud” of - vs. 14

Such “not fully informed opinions” may be caused by impatience, lack of focus or a dislike of parts of what is being taught - this stems for “self” being the final authority of what to believe and submit to

What we “glory in” can be evidenced in our associations - we are to see the predominant relationships to be with those living for the day of the Lord - all others may bring temporary glory but will have long faded when **THE** day has come

Paul was jealous of their devotion, not for his sake, but more for all of theirs - these joint efforts for God here will be what we look back on with the greatest memories

- a. It was apparent to Paul that they were only partially pleased with him and his message (either that they all only were partially convinced or that part of their church liked him)
- b. This found its root in the reality that they only partially understood him, and the full message he was declaring - many negative opinions regarding Scripture stem from the same thing; a partial understanding of it
- c. Paul’s desire was that there would be a realization of the “mutual boasting” they could have of each other at the “day of our Lord Jesus” - this is an indicator that such “glory” will be more in the working relationships we had with each other in the Lord’s work, more than individual “glories” - he desperately desired they could see it this way rather than their apparent desire to keep looking for something/someone better than Paul - this could be related to the issue they had (in I Cor. 1) with being embarrassed with the “preaching of Jesus Christ and Him crucified”
- d. Notice the perspective the Lord gave His disciples in Mark 10:28-31 (that even in the “present age” there is a **receiving** the precious things we lose for His sake (even family) **back** many times over) - such finds its truest fulfillment when those of the church realize each other as the true family, and our “boasting” (glorying) is sought more in those relationships than even in our earthly families
- e. There is a sense also that much of the rejoicing we will have in that day, will be in the growth and accomplishments (by God’s grace) in others, and our thrill to have been so used in any part of it! This realization helps us stay focused on what we really ought to be hoping to see in each other (growth and thus productivity for the Lord)

C. Though Christ’s servants may seem unfaithful, God is always faithful - vs. 15-22

1. Paul is about to give the reason why he did not fulfill the plans he had written to them in I Cor. 16:5-9 - he was unable to keep to these plans, and now is dealing with some discouragement or disgruntlement it had caused amongst the Corinthian church

Such is not a legitimate case against God’s rightness, but because we deal with people, it must be faced and responded to appropriately

- a. Paul is about to try to ensure that the perceived inconsistency does not affect their perspective of God’s consistency
- b. This is not an unusual problem or issue to face; sadly, it is common for people to “write-off” God because they can point to inconsistencies in His “people”

2. Paul’s defense - vs. 15-16 - he had intended to come to them (as planned) and his plan was such to visit them twice, and so they might “twice receive a blessing”

Being easily hurt by fellow believers is an indication our focus is more on self than it is on others and the Lord - if our “glorying” is in each other (not self), we are less apt to be controlled by the offenses stemming from the feeling of being let-down

- a. Such a “blessing” is likely to have involved their participation in the service to the Christians in Macedonia and then those in Judea
- b. The “confidence” he mentions in verse 15 is along the lines of what he had just been writing - that there was **some** “understanding” of his ministry and message, and so there was also (at least) **some** understanding of the mutual value they were to have in each other - and such assumed value would be expected to protect against offenses that would cause separation or abandonment

3. Paul was not “vacillating” in his inner motive - vs. 17

Our plans and goals with and for each other (when it comes to their encouragement and growth in the Lord) ought always to be made with utmost seriousness - but there must always be an allowance for the intervention of God’s will **over** ours

- a. He was clearly dealing with their frustration with his not fulfilling the plan he had set - and since he will use this to transition into the faithfulness of God, his concern was that they would use their frustration to lower their expectations of God
- b. The word for “vacillating” (NASB & ESV) is “ἐλαφρία,” indicating a “levity” or “fickleness” in his planning (as though he would not be too serious in what he told them, and treated their feelings and plans lightly)
- c. Was it that he really was “fickle” (changing as a normal course of life)? “... or am I guided in my purposes by the flesh, saying, Yes, today, and, No, tomorrow?” BBE
- d. Should they assume that his plans were changed “on a whim” because he just “felt” like it? - it is easy to assume others are unfaithful because they are somehow “carnal/of the flesh” if we ourselves are so inclined
- e. Could they consider him the type that can firmly say “yes” to someone one day and then firmly say “no” the next regarding the same subject? - this would be very serious because if true, then his entire message could be called into question

Truth does not pivot on us, but we can become a strong deterrent to it by our own inconsistencies, or if we never answer criticisms against us - sometimes we must, not for our sake but for God’s

We ought not be those who hold others "to their word" if it becomes clear that they were truly unable

f. It should also be noted, that when we say "yes" or "no" to any commitment, none of us can control all things and that, even though we are purposed, God may work circumstances in such a way as to prohibit us

4. God does not vacillate (regardless of what you think of His messengers) - vs. 18-20

It is likely that there were some in the church using Paul's absence to disqualify what he was teaching - those desperate to write-off certain truths will often resort to pointing out the flaws (perceived or real) of the proclaimer

- a. Paul stresses that God is faithful (trustworthy), and in the same way their "word" to them has not be contradictory or ever-changing - it would be possible (even probable) for some to equate the perceived lack of trustworthiness of messengers (preachers/ teachers) with that of God's faithfulness as well
- b. He was looking to assure them that what was taught was consistent and not subject to change (similar to what Paul warned against in Eph. 4:14)
- c. "Jesus the Son of God is always 'Yes'" (always in the affirmative and not in the speculative and variable) which is why Paul could guarantee that his "word" (message) did not/would not vacillate - his (Paul's) message was not one of his own making, derived from his "opinions" at any given time, and subject to circumstances
- d. This is emphasized (Christ as God's "yes"), because He was the fulfillment of God's promises (**in-full and with precision**) - there is not even the slightest failing with God!
- e. If he dealt with them consistently on so serious a matter (THE most serious), why would they question (or allow it to be questioned) his integrity?
- f. Don't lose perspective on the one we are to keep our focus (as far as needed faithfulness) - the Lord Himself Who will not change (an "anchor" of the soul while the "billows roll")
- g. By mentioning Silvanus (Silas) and Timothy, he does at least two things - first, he demonstrates that there was one consistent message among three messengers and, second, to remind them of the beginning (Acts 18:5) when they first heard the Gospel - remember what it was like (before these new distractions came along)
- h. Now, Paul looks to solidify their focus on God's faithfulness by emphasizing that, "For all the promises of God find their Yes in him..." - Christ is the focal point between man and God and demonstrates His consistency, so much so that "through Him is our Amen" ("amen meaning "let it be so," being agreement and confirmation of such **complete fulfillment of God's promises**) - and here, it was their unified "amen" with him
- i. The focus of Paul and his team was on the "glory of God" (which would come through them pointing them to Him) - most "false teachers" can be recognized by their pursuit of "glory" to themselves (or making life essentially "about them")

popular or unpopular, the message would not change

As if saying, "Can't you see what's happening? Would you cast aside the pure Gospel over such a trivial thing (in comparison)?"

see also I Cor. 15:8-11 (though many taught, the message was singular)

God was not characterized as making promises and fulfilling only part or none of them - these naysayers in the church were apparently looking to redirect their attention to lesser things (most likely glorifying these "super apostles" over God Himself)

5. The "validator" is God (His "perspective" is above all others) - vs. 21-22

This may seem like a detail of Theology, but it is an important truth, that God not only places us "in Christ," but **together** as well - He gives us the teachers and life-friends we are to have - if we are seeking the influences and friendships apart from this, we are guaranteed to be distracted, disoriented and disillusioned

- a. The One who "establishes us" is God, and this is "in Christ, with you" - He brought us together (not we ourselves, formulating ourselves into "Christian groups" (of our own making/determination)) - the word for "establishes" is "βεβαιῶν", a word used for the confirming (standing by) the validity of a "product" - in this case, the "product" being our place "in Christ" along with each other "in Christ" (we're His team)
- b. He has also "anointed us" (χρῖσας) - as in setting aside for a "royal purpose" - another reminder that we are not self-appointed to His work - it is our privileged position to be set apart for His purposes, and so not to be distracted by attention-grabbing counterfeits or by petty offenses
- c. He has also "sealed" us - on the underlying Greek word, Murray Harris (New International Greek New Testament II Cor.) wrote, "... he means that God (1) has "branded" believers as his property, (2) has attested the reality of their status in Christ, and (3) has guaranteed their "protection in transit" as his permanent and inviolable possession."
- d. And, pulling it all together, He "gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge" - once again, a key term is used providing a clear description of what we have - "ἀρραβῶνα" was a term used of a down payment and a guarantee of more to come - in this case, such a "seal" (in our innermost being, who we are, "heart") assures us of the future, especially beyond this life - this "seal" evidenced in the "fruit of the Spirit" in us
- e. These Corinthian Christians were contemplating of disqualifying one of their own "team" and passing their judgment on the wrong things (by the wrong standards) - focusing on the priceless value of what we have in common in God unites us!

"inviolable" - never to be broken

Such a "pledge" (inner assurance) ought to be more treasured than external "stimulants" put in our view or path to lure us away to temporal values

Their unity (their unified "amen") was around these truths more than their personal differences