

Women's Bible Study – Spring 2008

Shared Lives: *The Relationship Between a Pastor and His People*
January 23, 2008

Shared Promises: 2 Corinthians 1:12-24

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How a person conducts himself in the public eye and on the world stage gives us important clues about their character, their beliefs, and the way they see their place in the world. We have ample opportunities to observe such examples in this season of presidential candidate debates. Recently I came across a fascinating lecture by historian Paul Johnson. He noted that,

“Prince Otto von Bismarck, the Prussian who created Germany in its modern form, always put on uniforms when he addressed the Reichstag on an important constitutional issue. His successor as Chancellor, Bettman-Hollweg, had himself specially promoted from major to colonel so that, when declaring war in 1914, he could speak to the Reichstag from a suitable rank.

The English and American traditions and instincts are quite different. George Washington might wear a uniform when the Republic was in danger, to indicate his willingness and ability to defend it. As a rule, however, he deliberately stressed his civilian status by his dress. He was anxious to show that, unlike Cromwell 150 years before, he would not use his military victories to become a Caesar. His self-restraint fascinated contemporaries.

After American independence was secured, King George III asked an American, “What will George Washington do now?” He was told: “I expect he will go back to his farm.” The King commented, in frank admiration: “If he does that, he will be the greatest man on earth”. And that is what he did. When he finally –and reluctantly—accepted political office, he waited to be summoned by election.”¹

George Washington was a Christian. He served God in his generation in the position and place to which God called him. This morning/evening we will take an intimate look at the life of the Apostle Paul, a man who served God in his generation in the position and place to which God had called him.

¹ Johnson, Paul. *Imprimis: A Publication of Hillsdale College*. December 2007. Volume 36. Number 12. Page 1.

The Context^{2, 3}

Gretchen provided an excellent overview last week. I think she over marketed my limited expertise in geography and history. Nevertheless, I will attempt to reacquaint us with the context of Corinth. This ancient city had long been one of the leading cities in Greece, at times rivaling Athens in its importance.

What made Corinth so important as a city was its geographic location. Corinth was located near the narrowest point of the isthmus, a narrow strip of land sticking into the Mediterranean Sea. Almost all goods and merchandise that flowed into Greece passed through the city of Corinth. As noted last week, many times merchant ships found it easier to offload their cargo, drag the ship on rollers across the peninsula, and then reload it on the other coast. This saved the crews from going 240 miles around a very dangerous cape.

As a result, Corinth had a lot of traffic. It was the combined Hollywood and Las Vegas of its time. At the height of its power, Corinth had a free population of 200,000 people plus a slave population of half a million.

Its status as a busy seaport, its booming economy, its role as host city of the Isthmian games, its slave trade, and its 1,000 temple prostitutes available to assist in the worship of pagan gods all drew large numbers of transient people and contributed to the city's loose morals.



This was the bustling city that Paul found when he arrived in Corinth on his second Missionary Journey. He soon met up with Aquila and Priscilla, the husband and wife team who had fled Rome. Paul began preaching in the local synagogue; but most of the Jews rejected the gospel. They eventually brought Paul before the new Governor on charges of worshipping God contrary to Jewish law. The Governor dropped the charges and Paul stayed in Corinth for about 18 months.

After his departure from Corinth Paul received disturbing news that problems had arisen in the Corinthian church. He wrote a letter (which we no longer have) to confront those issues. While he was ministering in Ephesus on his third missionary journey he heard of still more problems. Meanwhile the church had written him a letter requesting some clarification on issues in the church. Paul could not leave the work in Ephesus and so he responded with the letter we now know as 1 Corinthians. The letter apparently solved some of the issues, but new and more dangerous ones had arisen. Paul left Ephesus and went to Corinth. This visit

² Background information for this segment: MacArthur, John. *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 2 Corinthians*. 2003 page 3.

³ Tenney, Merrill C. (Editor). *Zondervan Pictorial Dictionary*. Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan. 1967. pages 182-183.

is known as the “sorrowful” or “painful” visit and did not go well. Paul returned to Ephesus and sent a strongly worded letter known as the “severe” letter to the Corinthians. This is a letter that we also do not have.

Paul left Ephesus and went to Troas. He then went on to Macedonia where he received an update about the church. Apparently many of the Corinthians had repented and reaffirmed their loyalty to Paul; Paul was encouraged but yet knew the lurking dangers from the false teachers invading the church. As he prepared for his upcoming visit to Corinth, he wrote 2nd Corinthians, probably in late AD 55 or very early AD 56.⁴ We will pick up our scripture reading where we left off last week. Please turn to 2nd Corinthians Chapter 1 beginning with verse 12.

Scripture Passage

¹²Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from God. We have done so not according to worldly wisdom but according to God's grace. ¹³For we do not write you anything you cannot read or understand. And I hope that, ¹⁴as you have understood us in part, you will come to understand fully that you can boast of us just as we will boast of you in the day of the Lord Jesus.

¹⁵Because I was confident of this, I planned to visit you first so that you might benefit twice. ¹⁶I planned to visit you on my way to Macedonia and to come back to you from Macedonia, and then to have you send me on my way to Judea. ¹⁷When I planned this, did I do it lightly? Or do I make my plans in a worldly manner so that in the same breath I say, "Yes, yes" and "No, no"?

¹⁸But as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not "Yes" and "No." ¹⁹For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by me and Silas and Timothy, was not "Yes" and "No," but in him it has always been "Yes." ²⁰For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God. ²¹Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, ²²set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

²³I call God as my witness that it was in order to spare you that I did not return to Corinth. ²⁴Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, because it is by faith you stand firm.

The Charge

In 1 Corinthians 16:5-7 Paul had told the Corinthians that he would visit them after traveling through Macedonia. ⁵After I go through Macedonia, I will come to you—for I will be going through Macedonia. ⁶Perhaps I will stay with you awhile, or even spend the winter, so that you can help me on my journey, wherever I go. ⁷I do not want to see you now and make only a passing visit; I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits.

He actually planned to visit them twice, once on the way to Macedonia and once on the way back. Paul made the first visit on the way to Macedonia, but after the very painful visit referenced earlier he decided not to visit the Corinthians on the way back. Instead he wrote what is known as the “severe letter”.

⁴ MacArthur, John. 2 Corinthians: Strong Words from a Loving Pastor. 2007. page 1.

Paul had changed his travel plans. Paul's opponents used this circumstance to charge him with duplicity. I ordinarily do not use words like that in teaching; because that is not a common word; and I didn't even know exactly what it meant. But after several commentators repeated used it, I decided to look it up.

Duplicity means: the character or practice of secretly acting one way and openly acting in another in order to deceive.⁵ That is a very serious charge. Basically his opponents are saying that you are deliberately calculating to deceive us. The evidence they presented to support this charge was his change in travel plans.

As I was preparing for this lesson, I was trying to think about the charges from Paul's perspective. My husband has an interesting hobby, several actually. Some men golf, others are really into football, and some like to refinish old cars. My husband likes to run for public office. I can remember during those election seasons that many charges by opponents were just funny. You would be accused of being ignorant, or uninformed, or inexperienced, or even a little overweight. But the hardest charges were the ones that attacked your integrity and your motives.

Imagine what it was like for Paul. Last week we read of his reflections on his ministry ⁸We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life.

He gives us a few more specifics about the reality of his life and his sufferings in chapter 11,

²⁴Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. ²⁵Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, ²⁶I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. ²⁷I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. ²⁸Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.

Can you imagine after all of those sufferings and all of the time Paul had spent with them in Corinth what it must have felt like to be accused of duplicity? I think this blow to Paul was more crushing than all of the hardships he has just catalogued for us. As Christians, I think one of the lessons we need to take away from this passage, is that we must be very cautious in charging our church leaders with wrong motives. I realize there are some leaders who are behaving insincerely and with wrong motives, we need only to pick up a newspaper to see that. But those are the minority not the majority.

We can cause great damage to our churches and great grief to our leaders when we make charges against them without serious thought, prayer, and convincing factual data. You have to wonder what the Corinthians were actually thinking to charge Paul with such a

⁵ World Book Dictionary. 1980 edition. Doubleday & Company, Inc.

serious offense over something as trivial as a travel itinerary. Good leaders are hard to find, they are precious gems, we should not make their work unnecessarily burdensome. Hebrews 13:17 ¹⁷Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.

The Response

Despite these charges Paul does formulate a response; a calm, thoughtful, measured response. His response is a helpful example to us in our roles as leaders and as followers. When you think of leadership you may think in terms of Paul, a central figure in the New Testament, or leaders on the stage of American History, like George Washington, but I am thinking of leadership in a much broader way.

Most of us everyday serve in some sort of leadership role. As women we have leadership roles in our families. As mothers we have a special opportunity to influence generations for God. As members of extended families serving as grandmothers, daughter-in-laws, mother-in-laws, aunts, nieces, and cousins, we can have significant impact. We also have leadership roles in our church. We are assistants, teachers, nursery workers, small group leaders, ushers, greeters, café workers, and leaders of ministries.

Many of you have broader leadership roles in the community. In our morning and evening sessions we have women who are head chefs, teachers, radiology technicians, physical therapists, physicians, scientists, entrepreneurs, comptrollers and accountants. There are women who are musicians, artists, and those who serve in all kinds of nonprofit organizations. All of us are leaders and followers of Jesus Christ who can profit from the study of Paul's response to the Corinthians.

Paul's 5 Responses to Conflict

1. Examine Himself

Paul's first response is to Examine Himself. He examines his conscience, his motives, and his intentions. He concludes that he has not done anything with regard to his relationship with the Corinthians that was inappropriate. He says that he and his colleagues have conducted themselves in the world and in their relationship to the members of the Corinthian Church in the holiness and sincerity that are from God.

That is an incredible statement. How many of us can publicly say when we are involved in a conflict that we have conducted ourselves in the holiness and sincerity that are from God? When I think about my marriage, my interactions with my children, and my interactions with others; I can't always say that. We need to examine ourselves. When we are involved in a conflict we need to honestly ask ourselves, What is my contribution to this conflict? Have I done anything that has contributed to the strained relationships?

I think Paul, could say that he had acted in holiness and sincerity because he was a man well experienced in the habit of confession and self-examination. I get the impression that he had wrestled in prayer with the Lord many times regarding the Church at Corinth.

The word "conscience" used in this passage is from a Greek word that conveys the idea of the soul reflecting on itself or knowing oneself. Even those who do not know God have a sense of what is right and what is wrong. Romans 2:14-15 ¹⁴(Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, ¹⁵since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.)

The conscience is not infallible. We see evidence of that all around us as unbelievers attempt to justify behavior that is in complete opposition to God's law. It is really the highest standard that they understand. One Commentator described the conscience not as a lamp, which illuminates the truth; but more like a skylight that merely lets moral light in.⁶ We as believers need to make sure that our consciences are skylights through which God's word radiates. In order to do that we need to spend time in God's word.

I want to put in a brief word of encouragement for those of you have committed to read the Bible Through This Year. Maybe you are following the Autumn Ridge Plan included in your bulletin; or maybe you have another favorite plan to help motivate you; but Reading the Bible Through is a wonderful way to infuse your life with God's truth. I can't tell you how many times just this past week I have been so blessed when I sat down to read the assigned daily reading and been surprised to discover a truth that was directly applicable to this lesson. Maybe that was one of the bonuses that Pastor Steer talked about on Sunday.

2. Consider the Community

The second response Paul has to this church in conflict is to Consider the Community. Paul is very concerned about the Community of Believers in Corinth; even though right now that are a source of grief to him. He seems so community minded, so aware of the relationships between himself and others, and the greater relationship among the people in the local church. There are two particular examples of this concern in this passage. The first is Paul's use of plural pronouns. Notice our passage.

¹²Now this is [our](#) boast: [Our](#) conscience testifies that [we](#) have conducted [ourselves](#) in the world, and especially in [our](#) relations with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from God. [We](#) have done so not according to worldly wisdom but according to God's grace. ¹³For [we](#) do not write you anything you cannot read or understand. And I hope that, ¹⁴as you have understood [us](#) in part, you will come to understand fully that you can boast of [us](#) just as [we](#) will boast of you in the day of the Lord Jesus.

¹⁵Because I was confident of this, I planned to visit you first so that you might benefit twice. ¹⁶I planned to visit you on my way to Macedonia and to come back to you from Macedonia, and then to have you send me

⁶ MacArthur, John. The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 2 Corinthians. 2003 page 31.

on my way to Judea. ¹⁷When I planned this, did I do it lightly? Or do I make my plans in a worldly manner so that in the same breath I say, "Yes, yes" and "No, no"?

¹⁸But as surely as God is faithful, [our](#) message to you is not "Yes" and "No." ¹⁹For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by [me and Silas and Timothy](#), was not "Yes" and "No," but in him it has always been "Yes." ²⁰For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God. ²¹Now it is God who makes both [us](#) and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed [us](#), ²²set his seal of ownership on [us](#), and put his Spirit in [our](#) hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

²³I call God as my witness that it was in order to spare you that I did not return to Corinth. ²⁴Not that [we](#) lord it over your faith, but [we](#) work with you for your joy, because it is by faith you stand firm.

This is the apostle Paul speaking, the author of more New Testament books than anyone else. This was a man who met the Risen Lord on the Damascus Road. This is the missionary who planted churches all over the Mediterranean world. If anyone could be a lone ranger Christian you would expect it from him. And yet we see him constantly referring to other people.

He sees himself as part of the community. He sees himself as [part](#) of a ministry team. He doesn't seem himself as [the](#) ministry team. I find that incredible.

The second observation about community that we can make from this passage is Paul's attitude regarding the mutual eternal benefit between the members of the community. He doesn't have an "us" and "them" perspective he has a "we" perspective, meaning all of us in the church are engaged in a partnership of mutual eternal benefit. He says, And I hope that, ¹⁴as you have understood us in part, you will come to understand fully that you can boast of us just as we will boast of you in the day of the Lord Jesus.

Our salvation places us in a role of community, the church. We are not to function simply by ourselves, or for ourselves, but to be concerned about the needs of others; especially those in the family of God.

3. Answer the Charges

Paul's third response is to Answer the Charges. That sounds very simple; but many times we would prefer to avoid conflict. There are several notable examples in the Bible of central characters who did not deal with significant issues of conflict in their relationships. Take for example, Eli with regard to his relationship with his sons. Consider the example of David with regard to the relationship with his sons, Ammon and Absalom.

Paul really must answer the charges. You see while it is troubling that Paul is being charged with duplicity the most serious implication of this charge is that if he can't be trusted in such trivial matters as travel itineraries then how can his message of Christ and the Cross be trusted. Paul explains his travel change by saying, ¹⁵Because I was confident of this, I planned to

visit you first so that you might benefit twice. ¹⁶I planned to visit you on my way to Macedonia and to come back to you from Macedonia, and then to have you send me on my way to Judea. ¹⁷When I planned this, did I do it lightly? Or do I make my plans in a worldly manner so that in the same breath I say, "Yes, yes" and "No, no"?

²³I call God as my witness that it was in order to spare you that I did not return to Corinth.

Paul made a specific decision to change his travel plans for their benefit. He basically determined that after the painful visit and the severe letter another visit at that time would not be helpful. Perhaps he thought maybe a little cooling off period would let them consider the changes they needed to make.

This situation with a perceived broken promise or unexplained change even in something as small as travel plans gives us insight into the reality that how we handle the everyday matters of life provides opportunities for others to draw conclusions about God and his trustworthiness.

We have to realize that our actions; however reasonable they are to us, can be misinterpreted by others. As I was working on this lecture a list of shall we say implied promises that I had not followed through on kept coming to mind. It took a while but I finally got it. I needed to follow through or communicate why I had made changes in plans lest they be an opportunity to reflect poorly on my God. These were some things on my list:

1. Return a Hat Borrowed for a School Play
2. Return Variety of Borrowed Books
3. Return Borrowed Clothes for Christmas Concert
4. Wrap and Deliver Two Long Overdue Wedding Presents
5. Call Friend to Schedule Appointment to help unpack boxes from a Move.
6. Order Pair of Socks promised to Sister
7. Schedule Play Date
8. Deliver Gift Certificate to Friend for Pet Sitting

Maybe those don't seem too earth shattering; but do you see how they fit in a category similar to Paul's change in travel plans? What's on your list? Do you have some tasks: people you have promised to pray for, call, or visit that you just have not managed to get done?

4. Direct Them to God and His Word

Paul has examined his conscience, considered the community, answered their charges, and now he needs to direct them to God and His Word. We want to be a good witness for Christ. It is our responsibility; but we will always be an imperfect picture so we like Paul have to direct them to God and His Word.

Paul is trustworthy. He did not act deceitfully with the Corinthians. They can trust him regarding the message of Christ and the Cross. And part of that message is that God is absolutely faithful. We may have to make changes, thoughtful corrections, or even apologies for our own failures to follow through on our promises; but that is never the case with God.

He is absolutely trustworthy. Since the fall of man, God has promised a Savior. God speaking to the serpent, ¹⁵ And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel. (Genesis 3:15)

Throughout the ages as history unfolded, he gave us more and more detail about the Promise. Speaking to Abraham, the Father of the Jews, he said, and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you. "(Genesis 12:3) Speaking to King David, He promised, ¹¹ When your days are over and you go to be with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, one of your own sons, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹² He is the one who will build a house for me, and I will establish his throne forever. (1 Chronicles 17:11-14) Speaking through the Prophets, Isaiah 53 is full of descriptions of Jesus, the suffering servant, who would come to save the people from their sins. Speaking through the Angel, God promised, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. (Luke 2:10-11). Jesus himself personally delivers some of the promises of God:

¹⁶"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. John 14:6

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; ²⁶and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. (John 11:25-26)

All of God's promises are fulfilled in Christ. He is absolutely trustworthy. There is no deceit in Him.

Another reason Paul direct them to God and His Word is to get them to remember the greater purpose for the church. They have to move beyond all this bickering about travel plans and remember their purpose. They are to be spreading the gospel and bringing glory to God and so are we. The enemy must surely love it when we are distracted from our greater purpose.

5. Rely on the Holy Spirit

Finally, Paul reminds them to rely on the Holy Spirit. You see Paul's responses are not a result of his education, his experience, or his oratory skills, although those were helpful resources. His responses are the result of a life infused with the Holy Spirit.

Last week we talked about the role of the Holy Spirit as the great Comforter. Throughout this study we will build our understanding of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is also our Counselor, But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. (John 16:7) And in the focal passage for today, Paul says, ²¹Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, ²²set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

All Christians are given the Holy Spirit. He is our Comforter and our Counselor. His presence is available to advise us and give us insight in dealing with difficult issues especially in the Church. He will remind us of God's word and convict us of sin. He is the deposit, our guarantee for the fulfillment of all future promises.

Paul, was in a very difficult situation, but his responses are a useful model for us to emulate. God has called each of us to a place of service in our generation. We do not know our place on the world stage, I don't think Paul or George Washington really knew during their lifetimes, the significance of their role of obedience to the position and place to which God had called them. What is the role to which God has called you in your generation? And are you willing to serve in obedience even in difficult times?

Intensive Study Questions:

1. Paul in this letter has to answer some charges about his ministry. From this snapshot in Chapter 1 Verses 12-24, what was the main charge that Paul was answering? (Hint: Look at his travel plans.)
2. What are some of the ways that he defended himself? (Consider his tone, his words, his attitude).
3. Explain how you can use one or more of these responses when addressing conflict in your own relationships.
4. If you have any opportunity to use one of these responses this week consider sharing what you learned with your group.
5. In verse 20, Paul says all the promises of God in Christ are yes. What promises is he referring to? List three promises (with scriptural references) that Paul might have had in mind.
6. Verse 22 refers to the Holy Spirit. List at least three functions of the Holy Spirit (with scriptural references). (Hint: John Chapters 14-16).

Discussion Questions:

1. This passage has some helpful examples of handling conflict in relationships, which responses of Paul do you find most likely to be helpful in your own relationships?
2. How can you try to implement some of those responses in your relationships?
3. Paul says in verse 20, that all the promises of God in Christ are yes. What promises captured your attention the most? How do those eternal truths make a difference in your life?
4. Why do you think Paul mentions the work of the Holy Spirit in his discussions with the Corinthian Church? How could the Holy Spirit help in this situation and in our own situations of conflict?