

Helpers of Your Joy (2 Corinthians 1:11–24)

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Introduction

Paul delayed his visit to Corinth because, even though his hard letter (1 Corinthians) had been received in the spirit Paul hoped for, not everyone was cordial. Some, in an effort to gain personal advantage, continued to criticize the apostle. Thus, Paul sought to point to the purity of his own actions and motives to silence these critics. The explanation forms the theme for the balance of the chapter.

The focus of this message is the necessity for all professing Christians to follow Paul's example in his sincere gospel work. Sadly, too much of Christian ministry in our time is designed to promote some personal advantage for either the preacher or the ministry promoted.

We cannot have revival until God breaks His servants of *self* to follow the principle stated in Galatians 2:2. Old King Self must be dethroned through crucifixion to enthrone King Jesus Christ in its place. All self-confidence, self-seeking, self-importance, self-promotion, and whatever else there be of self must die. As Paul previously appealed to the Corinthians, "*I die every day!*" (1 Corinthians 15:31).

I. The Necessity for Gospel Integrity (vv. 11–16)

1. Paul's charge to the church was to help him by prayer rather than question his motives (v. 11). Their joining his objective would result in their spiritual benefit.

The importance of all believers' uniting in prayerful and mutual concern cannot be overstated. Praying is a work of the Holy Spirit (Philippians 1:19, 20; see also Romans 15:30).

Paul was absolutely convinced that his success in the work of the gospel depended on the prayers of all the saints, united in their desire that the will of God be done and His kingdom come. However, this work is wholly dependent on the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 6:19, 20). It is the Spirit of God who knows the mind of the Lord (Romans 8:26, 27).

2. Paul's basis for his appeal for the prayers of the Corinthians was his personal integrity (v. 12). Verse 12 begins with "*for,*" which begins an explanation. Paul needed the church to pray for him and his co-workers. He needed their sympathetic disposition to support his decisions and actions. His ministry, he assured them, was not for his own personal benefit but for the blessing of others through his gospel work (v. 12). Paul was not trying to deceive them or hide anything from them.

To "*boast*" actually means to *glory* in something. It is generally used in modern culture in a negative way—bragging about something to promote personal advantage. He assured them it was "*not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God, and supremely so toward [them]*" (v. 12). Paul was completely transparent (vv. 13, 14).

3. The ultimate motive that drove Paul's sincere behavior in his gospel work was the certainty of his appearance on the Day of the Lord (v. 14) and his desire to glorify God with his work on that Day. That Day would sort out all ministry motives. Paul deals with this in Chapter 5. It was not personal survival that drove his decisions but the glory of God. Paul had no fear of dying (5:1). He longed that what was mortal might "*be swallowed up by life*" (v. 4). That gave him courage to pursue God's will, but it also put the fear of God in him (vv. 9, 10).

In his first epistle he urged those who were building on the foundation that, by the grace of God, he had laid, to do so with correct materials because "*each one's work will become manifest, for the Day [the Day of Christ's judgment] will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done*" (1 Corinthians 3:13; 2 Corinthians 5:14, 15).

Thus, “*on that day of our Lord Jesus, you will boast [glory] of us as we will boast of you*” (v. 14). The glorying will not be of self but of Christ because the result will ultimately glorify Christ (v. 20).

However, “*If anyone’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire*” (v. 15).

II. God’s Faithfulness (vv. 17–22)

1. Paul laid out his integrity to argue for the Corinthians’ understanding of his change of plans. He called God to witness against him (v. 23) if he were telling a lie. Rather, it was to “*spare them*” that he did not come to them as planned.

Although he was an apostle and had the right to control them in matters of discipline (“*not that we lord it over your faith*”), Paul wanted them to be filled with joy. This end would be accomplished by his working with them. They would be “*helpers*” (KJV), working together mutually to the glorious end of establishing them in the faith (v. 24).

2. Neither was Paul vacillating, as some critics charged (v. 17). He was not making his plans according to the flesh (saying “yes and no” at the same time). Paul rested on the promises of God, which in Christ were always “Yes and Amen” (vv. 19, 20). The Old Covenant was based on conditional promises (“*If you do this, then you will be blessed*”). However, the New Covenant in Christ Jesus is no longer conditional. It is not a matter of “if and then” but “Yes and Amen!”
3. “*God is faithful*” (v. 18) was the foundation of Paul’s word to them (v. 21).

Lessons

1. There are three kinds of believers: (1) *dependent* Christians who want their leaders to make rules for them; (2) *independent* Christians who want to do their own thing in their own way; and (3) *submissive* Christians who depend on the Spirit of truth to lead them into the Word of truth, obeying Him in that truth. Which kind of believer are you?
2. Believers have an *anointing* (v. 21; 1 John 2:20, 27, 28). Jesus was anointed to the threefold office of prophet (Acts 3:22), priest (Hebrews 6:20), and king (Revelation 19:16). There is a threefold responsibility on all believers because they are in Christ: (1) prophet—representing God to the people with the Word of God; (2) priest—representing the people to God by prayer; and (3) king—working as Christ’s co-regents to bring in the kingdom of God (Revelation 1:6).

It is this responsibility that Paul was working to establish in the Corinthian church. The bottom line in Paul’s argument is that it was not Paul, failing or succeeding, but God who was establishing them and anointing them to that responsibility; thus, Paul charged them, “*You also must help us by prayer.*” How are you fulfilling your responsibility?