Did Paul Fail to Keep His Word?

2 Corinthians 1:12-24 NLT

Remember the old days when you would invite someone over for celebration or a party with a month’s notice and they would respond with a “yes” or a “no” two weeks before the gathering?

Now days, with the advancement of communication technology it seems that people don’t like to commit to things in advance. Maybe this is my own perception, but it’s almost like people would rather wait until the last minute in order to see if better options come along.

Or maybe, people just want to be sure to keep their word so they hesitate to answer because they are unsure of what may come up that could legitimately take priority.

Have you ever made a plan to take your kids to the park or the zoo or maybe even to just play catch with them?

But then your boss piles on the work and traffic is terrible and you don’t get home in time. Over the years, I have struggled with this as a husband, a parent, and a friend. Is this what the Apostle Paul is talking about when he says, let your "yes” be a “yes” and your “no” be a “no?”

The simple answer is “no” this is not what Paul is talking about. There are three basic principles, about making plans, that we can observe through this passage in 2 Corinthians chapter 1.

1. Make a Sincere and Calculated Plan
2. Stick to the Plan (Keep your word)
3. Change the Plan if the Plan May do More Harm than Good

**Be Sincere and Authentic**

12 We can say with confidence and a clear conscience that we have lived with a God-given holiness **(Or in honesty)** and sincerity in all our dealings. We have depended on God’s grace, not on our own human wisdom. That is how we have conducted ourselves before the world, and especially toward you. 13 Our letters have been straightforward, and there is nothing written between the lines and nothing you can’t understand. I hope someday you will fully understand us, 14 even if you don’t understand us now. Then on the day when the Lord Jesus returns, you will be proud of us in the same way we are proud of you.

2 Corinthians 1:12-14 NLT

Paul and his associates did their best to be sincere, authentic, and understandable as they shared the truths of God. They were not trying to hide things or use language that was purposefully ambiguous. Notice that even though they were straightforward, apparently the listeners still didn’t fully understand what they had been teaching them. But Paul’s conscience was clear before God knowing that he taught with an authenticity and sincerity of heart and mind.

Let me give you an example. Someone might tell you that believers are saved by faith alone. A statement which I would agree with wholeheartedly. But, as a pastor, teacher, and student of the Bible I would not be okay stopping there. Because faith is always connected to something that demonstrates that faith. In otherwords faith is never alone. At the same time I wouldn’t try to give you a list of necessary evidence for faith. That is not my call.

I think there are many Christians who have an agenda on both sides of this equation. Some say you are saved by “faith alone” to quench the Spirit from working in your life or their own.

While on the other side the person who gives you the list of necessary works that must be connected to faith may simply trying to modify your behavior apart from the Holy Spirit’s work in your life. This too, could be defined as quenching the Spirit.

Instead of these two approaches, I would be straightforward in saying that it is faith alone that saves and that faith is always demonstrated through action of some kind.

Abel brought a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain.

Noah built an Ark.

Abraham left his homeland to follow God’s leading.

Sarah kept believing that she would have a child.

Jacob blessed both of his sons.

Rahab hid spies.

The thief on the cross believed Jesus’ words.

Zaacheus gave have of his money to the poor.

I am unable to be sincere and authentic unless I am sincere and authentic about what I don’t know. I don’t know exactly how your faith in God will be demonstrated.

We have seen that Paul was honest and straightforward about his plan to visit, but as we continue in the passage we will see that his plan’s changed. Does that mean that Paul was double-minded?

Let’s continue in verse 15.

**Don’t Make Deceptive Promises**

15 Since I was so sure of your understanding and trust, I wanted to give you a double blessing by visiting you twice— 16 first on my way to Macedonia and again when I returned from Macedonia. Then you could send me on my way to Judea.

17 You may be asking why I changed my plan. Do you think I make my plans carelessly? Do you think I am **like people of the world** (Huckster Preachers) who say “Yes” when they really mean “No”? 18 As surely as God is faithful, our word to you does not waver between “Yes” and “No.” 19 For Jesus Christ, the Son of God, does not waver between “Yes” and “No.” He is the one whom Silas, Timothy, and I preached to you, and as God’s ultimate “Yes,” he always does what he says. 20 For all of God’s promises have been fulfilled in Christ with a resounding “Yes!” And through Christ, our “Amen” (which means “Yes”) ascends to God for his glory.

2 Corinthians 1:15-20 NLT

Notice hear that Paul was contrasting his word with the words of the “people of the world.” This can also be understood as those who were hucksters or those who deliberately deceived. Some people just tell you what you want to hear to get your confidence. They make plans with no intention of following through. It is simply a ploy to gain your favor. Not only does Paul contrast his word with the people of the world he also brought God’s word into it. God never tries to deceive. He doesn’t play the bait and switch game. Even though we might not always understand it, He doesn’t say “yes” when He really means “no.”

And the same was true of Paul, it truly was his plan to visit the Corinthians a second time and encourage them for their good behavior.

However, even the best laid plans are better if they are changed. In the last part of this chapter Paul goes on to explain why he decided not to visit in person.

**Realize that It is Sometimes it is Best to Change your Word (Even if the listener doesn’t understand)**

21 It is God who enables us, along with you, to stand firm for Christ. He has commissioned us, 22 and he has identified us as his own by placing the Holy Spirit in our hearts as the first installment that guarantees everything he has promised us.

23 Now I call upon God as my witness that I am telling the truth. The reason I didn’t return to Corinth was **to spare you from a severe rebuke**. 24 But that does not mean we want to dominate you by telling you how to put your faith into practice. We want to work together with you so you will be full of joy, for it is by your own faith that you stand firm.

2 Corinthians 1:21-24 NLT

Paul realized that a personal visit would be more discouraging than encouraging. He said the reason he didn’t return was “to spare them from a severe rebuke.”

Apparently this letter to the church in Corinth was the most loving way that Paul could share the truth. It seems that an in person visit would be to exasperating for the people. He changed plan for their benefit not because he was double-minded. People who are being sharpened can only take so much.

One of my friends, who sharpens his own knives, recently told me that when sharpening a knife edge you can’t try to do too much at once. If you do it is really hard for the knife to have a good edge.

Please remember this as you help sharpen those around you. The approach of being brutally honest is brutal. As one author said, “People who believe in being brutally honest usually like the brutality more than the honesty.”

Instead, we are to share the truth in love. In other words, use the right amount of sharpening so it doesn’t dull the blade.

In closing, I will repeat these three principles for keeping your word.

Be Authentic and Sincere with your Word

Don’t Make Deceptive Promises with Your Word

Realize that it is Sometimes Best to Change Your Word

And the last thing I will add is don’t run around calling people promise breakers if they sometimes fail to keep their word. Instead consider the circumstances and weigh out the motives. Sometimes people truly are deceptive in order to gain your trust, but for the most part people have sincere and authentic plans that a sometimes difficult or maybe even unwise or at least untimely to carry out.