

Vacillation of Purpose?

One of the key ingredients in a productive and successful life is to make sure that goals and activities line up in a forward moving line. This, of course, maximizes use of time and produces the best results with the least expenditure of effort. However ... not all things go according to the intentions of the careful planner. "The mind of man plans his way," was the observation of the sage Solomon, "but the Lord directs his steps" (Proverbs 16:9). James also issued a cautionary note, stating, "You ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that.'" (James 4:15). Unforeseen circumstances change the plans, and each Christian has to build some flexibility in his life or he will find himself continually frustrated because his plans are not

working out. Thus, the apostle Paul, planning on coming through Corinth on his way north to Macedonia, and then stopping in again on his way south, found it advisable to change his plan due to internal issues in Corinth. "I call God as witness to my soul," is how he presents his case to the brethren, "that to spare you I came no more to Corinth" (2 Corinthians 1:23). Paul's plans changed, but he did not want the brethren to think that he is operating in an arbitrary, "wishy-washy" manner.

- **"Yes" and "No" at the same time?** — The apostle is insistent that he operated openly, "in holiness and godly sincerity." He really intended that the congregation in Corinth be "twice blessed," in that he would pass through there going north, and then later going south and on to Judea. "Therefore," he queries, "I was not vacillating when I intended to do this, was I?" His enemies are certainly ready to pounce on a positive answer here. But he has another question, appealing to the consistency of his character over the years. "Or that which I purpose," he proposes, "do I purpose according to the flesh, that with me there should be 'yes, yes' and 'no, no' at the same time?" (2 Corinthians 1:17). The track record of the apostle clearly was that he was a man of great determination and unvarying direction. Those who operate "according to the flesh" in this category tend to be those who change their minds for whimsical reasons, and cannot be trusted to follow through with anything. Not Paul! "But as God is faithful," he emphasizes, "our word to you is not 'yes' and 'no'" (2 Corinthians 1:18).
- **"Yes" in Christ** — The apostle Paul was not operating according to the flesh but was clearly functioning according to the Spirit. "For those who are according to the flesh," is his teaching, "set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit" (Romans 8:5). Hence, as one whose working was according to the Spirit, he continues his commentary to the Corinthian brethren, "For the Son of God, Christ Jesus," is his appeal to the spiritual side, "who was preached among you by us—by me and Silvanus and Timothy—was not 'yes' and 'no,' but is 'yes' in Him" (2 Corinthians 1:19). This is a very, very interesting sentence: The Son of God is "yes" in Him. Jesus is the positive "force" of the universe, the very "Yes!" of God.

The apostle Paul thus is not vacillating in his interactions with the church at Corinth. The Jesus whom he serves, the Jesus whom he imitated, is all about "yes." Hence his goal, in the sight of God, was to get to Corinth. The problem, in this case, was with the Corinthians. Paul's statement is worth re-emphasizing: "To spare you I came no more to Corinth." The "yes" that was in him was turned to "no" by the Corinthian Christians themselves. In this long explanation the apostle has undercut the criticism expected from entrenched enemies in the congregation at Corinth, and is prepared to continue to do battle over doctrinal and schismatic issues at work in that particular church.

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