

## *Glory in the Face of Changing Circumstances*

*Attribute of God: Immutability*

*Christ focus: He reflected this characteristic of God (God's glory being seen in the face of...) through his devotion to simplicity and sincerity.*

*Thesis: In the midst of changing circumstances we must: act with godly sincerity, cling to God's Immutability in order to see His perspective thus glorifying God in how we react to change.*

Read the text: 2 Corinthians 1:12-22

### Examining the Text:

→ v12-14 – Paul defends his integrity

- Paul uses the concept of boasting both negatively and positively, negatively as an unwarranted self-confidence in your own abilities and positively (here) as legitimate confidence in what God has done and enabled on to do.
- Side note: Paul does not equate one's 'conscience' as the voice of God within or even the moral law, Paul viewed the conscience as a human faculty which adjudicates human action according to the highest standard that person receives.
- His general defense of his character and integrity acts to pave the way for him to defend his integrity in specific relation to his changed plans.

→ v15-16 – Paul's changing plans

- Recap of Mike's overview of Paul's relationship to the church in Corinth (and remember that he spent eighteen months with them on his first visit!)
- Note that Paul actually changed his mind twice here: first it was so that he would be able to visit Corinth both on the way to and again on the way from Macedonia (so he intended to visit them twice) so that he could give them "a second experience of grace". Paul did make the first visit, then proceeded on to Macedonia, but the second change of plans came when Paul decided not to go back to Corinth on the way back because of the pain associated with the first visit (which is what Mike talked about last week.)

→ v17-22 – biblical decision making

- Paul takes time now to discuss what biblical decision making looks like and what it doesn't look like, and in doing so continues to defend his conduct in regards to changing his mind on an original decision.
- Biblical decision making is not:
  1. wavering/indecisive/shakey (v17) the question posed: "was I vacillating...?" is asked in such a way in the greek as to indicate that a negative answer is required.
  2. Like the world (non-Christians) makes decisions. (v17) – the word flesh simply means here 'according to the flesh' and refers to a worldly way of decision making.... The implication

implied here is that a selfish man might make a decision that he was ready to renege on if it no longer suited his desires...

3. Yes and No here reflects Jesus' direction in Matt 5:33-37 (and again James 5:12)
4. Paul points out that though as Christians we make up our minds and stick to it, God is the one who is ultimately in control (v21-22)

Now all scripture is profitable for teaching and training in righteousness (2 Tim 3:16) so what are we to learn from this description of Paul's changing plan?

**NOTES:** *In the midst of changing circumstances we ought to:*

**1. Conduct ourselves with "simplicity and godly sincerity". (v. 12)**

- <sup>33</sup>"Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.'<sup>34</sup> But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God,<sup>35</sup> or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King.<sup>36</sup> And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black.<sup>37</sup> Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil. (Matthew 5:33-37)

- Have you ever known someone who was so unreliable that when they said they would do something or be somewhere they immediately, as if reading your facial expression after they told you their intent, said: "No really I promise... or I swear"? What Jesus is getting at here is an art of living where when you don't have to swear by oaths or convince people of our sincerity with extreme words – simply that we would be a people whose yes meant yes and their no meant no.
- It speaks to being solidified in our own convictions.
- It speaks to not complicating our lives to the point where we are so entangled we are no longer reliable.
- It speaks to keeping our word in the big things, our marriage vows, our commitment to Christ (in all atmospheres, not just church), our job—but also in the small things: to our spouses (I'll be home for dinner with you at 5), to our kids (I promise we'll go to the beach on Saturday), to our employer (I'll do my best)
- Integrity means that we do what we say we will.

**2. Reflect upon and cling to the Immutability of God.**

- Remember that the context here is in changing circumstances, life moves quickly around us, and life changes.
- Look at me, in the last several months I have gotten married, I have left a church I attended for 17 years, I am transitioning from full time ministry in a Pentecostal church where I served for just over 5 years to an Alliance Church apprenticeship and I've watched my amazing parents walk through difficulty in their marriage for the first time in 30 years – there are so many changes in my life right now that if I didn't have something solid, something unchanging to cling to in the midst of it I would be getting swallowed up with fear and panic.
- As human beings we don't naturally embrace change, most of us don't like it and those who do have learned to through change. We like routine, we like knowing, we like concrete.
- But in the times of change we know that we are anchored in the one that doesn't change.
- <sup>8</sup>Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. (Hebrews 13:8)

- <sup>6</sup>"For I the LORD do not change..." (Malachi 3:6a)

3. **Gain a proper perspective of our situations.**

- Remember that circumstances change from our perspective, not from his.

- "I am the **Alpha** and the **Omega**," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." (Revelation 1:8 – Rev. 21:6 adds beginning and the end...)

- This means that He is the God of the Beginning → A God who set in to motion His Sovereign decrees... his plans, history – he was the God who put it all in to motion with intent, with thought and with direction.

- He is also the God of the End → His plans are supreme and WILL come to fruition... what he plans happens and what he intends happens. In the end he will be glorified and he has intentions that will be fulfilled in all of these circumstances that appear to be changing and evolving from our restricted perspective,

- <sup>17</sup>"If you say in your heart, 'These nations are greater than I. How can I dispossess them?' <sup>18</sup> you shall not be afraid of them but you shall remember what the LORD your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt, <sup>19</sup>the great trials that your eyes saw, the signs, the wonders, the mighty hand, and the outstretched arm, by which the LORD your God brought you out. So will the LORD your God do to all the peoples of whom you are afraid. <sup>20</sup>Moreover, the LORD your God will send hornets among them, until those who are left and hide themselves from you are destroyed. <sup>21</sup>You shall not be in dread of them, for the LORD your God is in your midst, a great and awesome God. <sup>22</sup> The LORD your God will clear away these nations before you little by little. You may not make an end of them at once, <sup>23</sup>lest the wild beasts grow too numerous for you. <sup>23</sup> But the LORD your God will give them over to you and throw them into great confusion, until they are destroyed (Deuteronomy 7)

- We have an annoying human flaw that we are only able to occupy one area of space and time and as such we don't have God's luxury of seeing the beginning from the end and as a result we so often get consumed with what's right in front of us... either wishing it would change or lamenting that it has changed and if we could only step back and see what God sees we would understand that his ways are so much higher than our ways and we are so foolish for thinking we know how our circumstances should look!

4. **Look for opportunity to glorify God with our reactions.**

- If he is Sovereign, and Immutable and his plans are perfect and in the end they will accomplish exactly what he wishes them to accomplish, then our reactions to changing circumstances ought to be a reaction of humility and reverence.

- <sup>13</sup>Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit" — <sup>14</sup>yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. <sup>15</sup>Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that." <sup>16</sup>As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. <sup>17</sup> So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin. (James 4:13-16)

- The Truth project has a haunting question that they reask over and over: "Do you believe that what you believe is really real?"

- It's haunting because in essence it asks, "if you actually believe that, why do you live like it's not true?"

- If I believe that God is Sovereignly in control of the changing circumstances around me why am I constantly so irritated and fearful of change? (Side note: This extends from Starbucks baristas taking too long to get you your coffee in the drive thru to being laid off of work)
- He is a Good God, and therefore his plans lead to His glory – not ours, and if we are to suffer or our situation is to change for the worse, then we ought to hold our heads up high and be able to say:
- "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD." (Job 1:21)

#### **ACTIONS:**

##### **a) *Ask yourself: What are you built on?***

- We all know the story of the foolish and wise builders, one built his house on the sand and the other on the rock – the firm foundation, or the rock (depending on which gospel you're in) is the Word of God and the teachings of Christ → they provide us with a sort of handbook that explain the art of living, and the sand simply represents anything else. Interestingly both builders faced a storm, something tragic, something difficult, or simply a change in weather... they both faced it, but what lasted was what was built on God's word.
- What is your life built on? Success? Wealth? An earthly relationship? You might not think you're built on it, but what dictates how you make decisions and how you react to circumstances? That's what you're built on.

##### **b) *Fix your eyes on the anchor not the waves.***

- Like I said I recently got married... and it's awesome.
- It's hard at times because it's a change. I have to learn how to share my space and how to share my stuff. Colleen is an evening person and I'm a morning person... she is very detailed and I'm not... I could eat a burger every day of the week and she needs variety (the audacity) ...
- ...the point is, is that there are areas where change in our routines or change in the way we've always done something could be a point of frustration (and I'm told they might be after the honeymoon period) – but the truth is even those changes, frustrating at times, annoying at times, as so enjoyable because you are in the midst of changes with the person you love the most, learning about them, sharing with them...
- In our Christian life there will be hardships, changes that annoy and frustrate us... but they are changes designed and created by your Sovereign God, who you get to be with amidst those changes and learn new things about Him as you cling to the only unchanging thing in this world! Enjoy it, embrace it, and while doing so, learn to enjoy Him!