

## Week 2, 2 Corinthians 1:12–2:4

### Hook



**Main Point: The Gospel gives us confidence in God and in one another.**

**Current Event:** Berkley police officer John Larson created the first “lie detector” machine in 1921. This polygraph was based on the systolic blood pressure test created by psychologist William Moulton Marston, who would later become a famous comic book writer and creator of Wonder Woman (whose “magic lasso” could make criminals speak the truth). Marston believed that one could ascertain whether a subject was lying or not based on blood pressure changes. Today’s polygraph tests measure a variety of physical changes in addition to blood pressure, including pulse and breathing. Polygraphs are not widely accepted by the scientific, legal or political communities; their effectiveness has been undercut by serious criminals who have “tricked” the test.<sup>1</sup>

***Is it difficult for others to determine whether you are being honest or not? Do your facial expressions or other actions tend to give you away?***

***Would you consider yourself a fairly discerning person when it comes to ascertaining the honesty of another?***

***Has someone you love ever questioned your honesty or your character? How did you resolve the conflict?***

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-22467640>

**Transition Sentence:** Today's lesson will examine Paul's reaction to a group of believers who seem to be questioning his motivations for his actions. He must deal with their lack of trust in him and his concern over their trust in the message he preached, the true Gospel.

## Week 2, 2 Corinthians 1:12–2:4

### Book

**Main Point:** The Gospel gives us confidence in God and in one another.

**Text Summary: 2 Corinthians 1:12–2:4** Certain allegations are made against Paul from the Corinthian believers. They question the nature of his travel and as a result, question his integrity. They accuse Paul of flippant behavior, making decisions based on feelings and self-interest rather than the needs of others. But Paul won't have it. In his explanation, Paul seeks to do two things. First, he wants to make sure that any doubt in his actions from the Corinthians is not synonymous with doubt in the Gospel message. Secondly, Paul wants to assure them that he has acted in a godly manner and out of deep care and concern for them, not a lack of it. Paul wants them to have confidence in the Gospel and he wants them to have confidence in those that preach and live by the Gospel.

### 2 Corinthians 1:12–22 [Read]

**Sub-Point:** Though we may doubt others, we must not doubt the truth of the Gospel.

*Verses 12–17* In verses 12–14, Paul wants to be clear: there's nothing secretive about what he's doing. He can be trusted. He and his colleagues have acted in line with the Scripture and in line with godly wisdom and care, not flippantly or according to the world's standards.

When he speaks of boasting in that, that they have acted out of godly sincerity, Paul essentially means they are confident in their behavior. Paul uses the concept of boasting more than any other New Testament writer.<sup>2</sup> Again, these opening verses show that Paul is direct. He is not writing one thing while meaning another.<sup>3</sup>

The issue at hand is the nature of the apostle Paul's travel plans. For the Corinthians, Paul appeared to be quite flippant and unsure about his plans for travel, where he stopped and the order in which he did so. The Corinthians saw Paul's travel motivated by self-interest and not for the needs of the people.<sup>4</sup> They saw him making decisions without any thought, merely doing what felt right in the moment.

In verse 15, Paul appeals to their relationship. Before he explains his travel, he wants to start by calling to mind the deep bond in Christ he shares with the believers in Corinth. The people of

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<sup>2</sup> Colin Kruse. *Tyndale New Testament Commentary: 2 Corinthians*. [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987], p. 71.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>4</sup> Tremper Longman III & David E. Garland. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Romans – Galatians*. [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008], p. 447.

Corinth are very dear to Paul. He is certain of their bond and the strong foundation that it is.<sup>5</sup> But Paul's integrity is being called into question. The Corinthian believers aren't convinced that Paul has acted in their best interest. This is the cause for Paul's writing in verse 17. He assures them that he doesn't make his plans according to his own desire. He doesn't commit to one thing and do another. He isn't split on his faithfulness. He isn't lacking focus or dedication.

***How does Paul say he has behaved, according to verse 12?***

***Why is it important that the Corinthians understand the true nature of Paul's change in plans?***

***What is your tendency when responding to criticism or questioning concerning your motives?***

Verses 18–22 Paul appeals to God's faithfulness to explain his own in verse 18. God is faithful and His promises are always sure, coming to complete fruition. There's nothing about God that is uncertain. Just as God doesn't say yes and no to the same situation, Paul has not done that either.

Paul continues in this train of thought through verse 22. In Christ, there is no uncertainty, not a trace of indecision.<sup>6</sup> Christ is the fulfillment of God's promises and the ultimate completion of God's redemptive plan. Paul wants to make sure that though the Corinthian church doubts the nature of Paul's travel plans, they are not doubting the message of the Gospel he preaches.<sup>7</sup> Here, Paul draws a distinction between the humanity of the messenger and the divinity of the message.<sup>8</sup>

Through God's hand and through God's plan, Paul and his colleagues have been given purpose. God has called them out and into his mission as faithful messengers.<sup>9</sup> Paul wants to remind the Corinthians that it was God who commissioned Paul. This word used for "established" in verse 21 is actually used in a legal sense to make sure commitments were carried out.<sup>10</sup> God has committed Paul in such a way that Paul will carry out what God has planned. Paul is under God's authority, not his own. God has established Paul, identified him as a faithful servant, and sealed him with the promise of the Spirit. For this reason, trust the Spirit in Paul. Trust God to work. Paul leans heavily on the nature of God's calling,

***What does it mean that the promises of God find their "yes" in Jesus?***

***What is the significance of Paul's being established by God in his work?***

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<sup>5</sup> Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, p. 74.

<sup>6</sup> Longman III & Garland, *Romans – Galatians*, p. 447.

<sup>7</sup> Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, p. 76.

<sup>8</sup> Longman III & Garland, *Romans – Galatians*, p. 447.

<sup>9</sup> Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, p. 78.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

### ***How does a believer cultivate a confidence like Paul's?***

*Section Application* Paul acts by the Spirit, not in a worldly manner. For Christians, we can struggle with doubt. We can struggle with trusting others. How can we know they are telling the truth? How can we know they are being genuine? Paul says whatever we do, we must not let the distrust we may have in others affect our trust in God. Don't let the sin and failings of others put a hindrance on your belief and assurance in the Gospel message. While we may fail, Christ never will. The other side to this is that because we can trust God, we can trust one another. This gives us great hope. Trustworthiness doesn't rest in our abilities or our past records. Trustworthiness rests on nothing but the work of God.<sup>11</sup>

### ***How do these verses testify to God's faithfulness?***

***In what way is the Spirit a guarantee for believers that we are in Christ and sealed by God?***

***What does it mean that God has "put his seal" on Paul?***

***How does someone who has been deeply hurt or betrayed in the past begin to trust others again?***

## **2 Corinthians 1:23–2:4 [Read]**

**Sub-Point:** We can trust one another because of our love for one another.

*Verses 1:23–2:3* Paul continues to fight for the relationship with the Corinthian believers. He postponed his travel plans because he didn't want to cause them any more pain than he already had, according to verse 23. Remember from our first week, Paul visited the Corinthian church after his departure due to divisive behavior and problems within the body. The visit did not go as Paul had hoped. For this reason, Paul chose to write a letter rather than make a visit. He says this in 2:1 as well. In this, Paul seeks to serve the Corinthian Christians, not domineer over them (v. 24). Paul appeals to his role as an apostle, that it is one of service, not one of a tyrant.<sup>12</sup>

In the second chapter, we notice that Paul's joy is intimately connected with the joy of the Corinthian Christians. He did not want to dry up the very source of his happiness (v. 2).<sup>13</sup> For their sake, Paul wrote them a letter instead of visiting them. This isn't for self-interest; this is for their good and their pleasure. Scholars say that by not visiting them, Paul averted a potential disciplinary visit. The letter that Paul crafted instead is known as the "severe" or "sorrowful

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Longman III & Garland, *Romans – Galatians*, p. 450.

letter.”<sup>14</sup> It is referenced in 2 Corinthians 7:8, 12 and was written after 1 Corinthians and after the painful visit, referenced in 2:1.<sup>15</sup> The purpose was to rebuke the Corinthians, but to do so in love and in the end, to prove his love for them.

***How might the Corinthians have experienced pain through a visit from Paul?***

***According to verse 2, what is a source of Paul’s joy?***

***What insights do verses 1–3 provide for believers who might be in conflict?***

Verse 4 Paul assures them in verse 4 that “although the letter arose out of deep distress and anguish, his main aim was to convince them of his deep affection and concern for them.”<sup>16</sup> This is the message throughout Scripture. God disciplines those whom He loves, not those toward whom He is ambivalent. Discipline is not the absence of love, but the abundance of love. This is Paul’s argument. “Pain inflicted by love can be a tool God uses to produce a repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret.”<sup>17</sup>

Pastor and author Tim Keller says that true friends are like surgeons, only cutting in order to bring healing. Paul wants the Corinthians to reflect on his care and love for them and let that influence the conclusions they’ve come to about his actions. As Christians, when it comes to those close to us and those we love, we give the benefit of the doubt. And because we can trust Christ, we can trust Christ’s Spirit to work in and through the body of believers.

***Why is the spiritual health of the church at Corinth a great concern for Paul?***

***How does discipline communicate love? Do you have a deep, transparent relationship with a believer of the same gender who challenges you?***

***How has discipline helped you grow in your Christian walk?***

***How does putting our trust in God and the Gospel allow us to put our trust in others?***

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

## Week 2, 2 Corinthians 1:12–2:4

### Took



**Main Point:** The Gospel gives us confidence in God and in one another.

**Current Event:** In a 2013 CBS News article, it was reported that only one-third of Americans say that most people can be trusted; this is compared to a similar survey in 1972 in which half of the Americans surveyed felt that most can be trusted.<sup>18</sup> Trust from one believer to another influences cooperation and the health of the local and universal church.

***Would you describe most people as trustworthy? Would you describe most Christians as trustworthy?***

***How has your trust of other believers, or lack thereof, impacted your spiritual life?***

***In what ways has God demonstrated His trustworthiness to you?***

**Lesson Conclusion:** Things can get in the way of our trust and confidence in God and the Gospel. In the last part of 2 Corinthians 1, the people of Corinth let the apostle Paul's travel plans come against their trust in Paul and perhaps their trust in Paul's message. In order to walk the Corinthians through the truth, Paul appeals to his love for them and his concern for their wellbeing. He also makes sure that their trust in the Gospel has not wavered. But then Paul uses confidence in God and the Gospel to restore confidence in Paul himself and his mission. God has established Paul and commissioned him, therefore the Corinthians should trust God at work in Paul. Though Paul had strong words for the believers in Corinth, they could find peace in Paul's love for them, knowing he did not mean to bring them any pain, but rather to increase their joy in and love for God in Christ.

### Challenge

**Show your true affection.** Paul cared deeply for the believers in Corinth. Think about the people in your life who are special to you, whether family or dear friends. How do you show them your love for them? Do you do this well? Let the example of Paul provide you with the

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<sup>18</sup> <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/trust-issues-only-one-third-of-americans-feel-they-can-trust-fellow-citizens/>

urgency to show your affection and care for those in your life.

**Give grace to others.** It's easy to be accusatory. We see this in the attitude of the Corinthians. They have made their mind up about Paul and his intentions. However, they were mistaken. Having this in mind, seek to give grace to others rather than condemnation. Don't always think of yourself on the high ground. Give the benefit of the doubt. Listen to people. Be willing to be proven wrong in hopes that the other person was acting without sin.

**Be honest.** In connection with giving grace to others, be honest about your situation or circumstances. Don't feel the need to lie to cover something up or to make a story make sense. Feel the safety to be honest with those in your life, even if that means expressing wrong you committed.