

Handling a Serious Misunderstanding

(2 Corinthians 1:15-22)

Have you ever had a serious misunderstanding with someone? Even the best Christians have misunderstandings. Paul and the Corinthian believers are biblical examples. This passage reveals **three principles for handling a serious misunderstanding**. First is ...

Communicate clearly (1:15-18).

Paul writes, *Because I was sure of this* (1:15a). Prior to his visit to Corinth, Paul was confident of what he wrote in the previous verse-when Christ returns, they would be as proud of him as he is of them. Paul continues by writing he wanted to give them a *second experience of grace*, or a double blessing, by visiting them on his way to Macedonia (Northern Greece) and again when he returned (1:15-16). Paul had also previously written, in *1 Corinthians*, of his planned visits and the possibility of spending the winter with them (1 Cor. 16:5-6).

However, when he arrives at Corinth, he doesn't get the reception he expects. Some of the believers reject him and repudiate his apostolic authority. As a result, Paul changes his travel plans and doesn't go back to Corinth from Macedonia (2:1). Instead, he writes a second letter because he believes another visit will only make matters worse. But Paul's change of plans gives his opponents another reason to criticize him.

Some of the Corinthians have misunderstood Paul's actions; therefore, he is explaining his motives. Paul gives us a wonderful example of what to do when we have a misunderstanding.

First, we must make sure we clearly communicate our motives and actions. However, we must do it in the right spirit. This requires not being condescending or angry. Instead, we must obey what command in Ephesians 4:15a?

Because of his change of plans, some of Paul's accusers question his honesty. Paul is probably addressing one of their accusations when he asks the rhetorical questions about *vacillating* and making his plans in the *flesh* when he changed his mind(1:17a-b).

Then, Paul asks if his plans were purely human and he was saying "yes" and "no" simultaneously (1:17c). Apparently, some have accused Paul of selfishly making his travel plans, rather than by the leading of the Holy Spirit.

A person who makes decisions *according to the flesh*, or in a worldly manner, will say "yes" when it is convenient but then renege on a promise when something better comes along. In his epistles, Paul often contrasts a believer's desire for being controlled by the Spirit and being controlled by the flesh. For example, what does he write in Romans 8:5?

Paul responds to the charge of duplicity by writing, that as *God is faithful*, his word to them was not *Yes and No* (1:18). Instead of defending himself, he reminds the Corinthians, *God is faithful*. Paul's point is that since he is God's messenger, he is also truthful.

He did not break his *word* to the Corinthians. Neither in his preaching nor in travel plans does Paul give an ambiguous *Yes and No* but is led by the Holy Spirit.

To handle a serious misunderstanding, **communicate clearly** and ...

Elaborate honestly (1:19-21a).

Paul now elaborates on his previous point. He writes, *For the Son of God, Jesus Christ*, whom they preached among them, even by Silas and Timothy, was not "*Yes and no*," but in Christ, it is yes (1:19). This means Jesus never wavers between "Yes" and "No," but is God's ultimate "Yes." This same Jesus, who is always faithful and true, has appointed messengers: Paul, Timothy, and Silvanus (Silas), who are also trustworthy and true.

Paul continues by writing that every promise of God shows His faithfulness by being answered "Yes" in Christ (1:20a). Has God kept all His promises of salvation, forgiveness, peace, and joy? The answer is *Yes* in Christ. They are all fulfilled in Christ. When God makes a promise, one may ask if He keeps His promise. The answer is always "Yes." God's most important promise is to Abraham and is found in Genesis 22:18a. What is it?

Did God keep that promise? The answer is "Yes" in Jesus Christ. Therefore, Paul also writes, that through Christ the *Amen* is spoken by Paul and his associates *to God for his glory* (1:20b). The early church often used the word *Amen* in corporate worship. When used in worship, the Hebrew word *Amen* basically means to agree with, or affirm, what has been said (Deut. 27:15). The church at Corinth had affirmed Paul's message of salvation. His preaching transformed their lives. How absurd, Paul argues, it is to accept his message as reliable, but consider him to be unreliable. How ridiculous to trust Paul's words about eternal things, but question him about temporary things, such as his travel plans!

Now, Paul describes how he, Timothy, and Silas, as well all the Corinthian believers, are bound together. He writes, that it is God who *establishes*, or strengthens, us *in Christ* (1:21a). Paul's faith is eternally linked with the Corinthians. They had come to Christ and had become very close to Paul during his eighteen-month ministry in Corinth. What does Paul write in 1 Corinthians 4:15c that reveals his close relationship with the Corinthian believers?

To attack Paul's honesty and trustworthiness is to question what he taught them that led them to faith. It would be to "cut their nose off to spite their face." Paul is just keeping things in the context of his ministry and elaborating honestly.

To handle a serious misunderstanding, **communicate clearly, elaborate honestly, and ...**

Capitulate to the Holy Spirit lovingly (1:21b-22).

Paul also writes God *anointed*, or commissioned, them (1:21b). In the Bible, anointing someone commissions them for service or ministry. For example, God tells Moses to make beautiful priestly robes and put them on Aaron and his sons (Ex 28:40-41b). Then, what does God tell Moses (Exodus 28:41c-d)?

Old Testament priests, prophets, and kings were anointed to signify they were God's representatives on earth (1 Sam. 15:1; 1 Kgs. 19:16).

God has not only *anointed* them, but Paul writes God has put His *seal* on them (1:22a). All true believers have the *seal* of God. In the ancient world, a *seal* referred to the practice of sealing a letter, so it would not be tampered with until it reached its final destination. A letter would be sealed with wax, and while the wax was still soft, a king or other official would press his unique seal into the wax. God has sealed us with the Holy Spirit.

What two facts does Ephesians 4:30 tell us about the Holy Spirit? Be sure to personalize!

1.(4:30a)

2.(4:30b)

God has also given His Spirit into the hearts of believers as a *guarantee* of everything He has promised (1:22b). The word translated *guarantee*, or "earnest," refers to a down payment, or deposit, given to guarantee the completion of the transaction. This practice is used today when someone buys a house.

Paul's point in verse 22 is **It is the Spirit of God in our hearts, not our works, that guarantees our salvation.** God gives us the Holy Spirit as a *guarantee*, but where is He? Paul tells us: *in our hearts*. What is He doing *in our hearts*? In Romans 5:5b, Paul writes about one of the vital ministries of the Holy Spirit. What is it?

The Holy Spirit enables us and empowers us to let God's love flow through us into the lives of other people. During misunderstandings, true believers shine through in this area. Even during a serious misunderstanding, the love of God will flow through true believers because they have the Holy Spirit in their hearts.

What important truth about the Holy Spirit is found in Romans 8:9c?

If you have the Holy Spirit in your heart and are not grieving Him, you will demonstrate love, even during a serious misunderstanding.

To handle a serious misunderstanding, **communicate clearly, elaborate honestly, and capitulate to the Holy Spirit lovingly.**