



PART 2

PAUL IN CORINTH: LEADERSHIP UNDER FIRE

Chapter Six

PAUL DEFENDS HIS SINCERITY

Dishonesty and artificiality are incompatible with true leadership. The leader who engages in double-dealing or deception will very quickly lose his following. Remember the first principle of leadership we observed in chapter 1 is that a leader must be trustworthy.

Underhandedness, indecision, infidelity, and even ambiguity all sabotage trust and subvert leadership. And rightfully so. **Insincerity is not a quality good people should tolerate in their leaders.**

As we noted briefly in the previous chapter, false teachers in Corinth had seized on the apostle Paul's change of travel plans (he had canceled half of a planned double visit to Corinth), and they were evidently exploiting that incident in order to portray Paul as vacillating, unreliable, two-faced, cunning, and insincere (cf. [1 Corinthians 4:18-19](#)).

[1 Corinthians 4:18-19 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁸ "Now some have become arrogant, as though I were not coming to you.

¹⁹ But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I shall find out, not the words of those who are arrogant but their power."

So Paul's first order of business in [2 Corinthians](#) (after assuring the Corinthians of his personal devotion to them) was to answer that charge.

He does so in a thorough and tenderhearted way. First of all, he flatly denies the allegation that he had been insincere:

[2 Corinthians 1:12 \(NASB\)](#)

¹² "For **our proud confidence is this: the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you.**"



He assures them that he has never spoken a word or written anything to them that was **couched in deceit, concealed in double meanings, or otherwise deliberately misleading:**

2 Corinthians 1:12-13 (NASB)

¹²“For our proud confidence is this: the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, **not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God,** we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you.

¹³**For we write nothing else to you than what you read and understand,** and I hope you will understand until the end.”

And then he assures them of his wholehearted love and commitment toward them:

2 Corinthians 1:13-14 (NASB)

¹³“For we write nothing else to you than what you read and understand, and **I hope you will understand until the end;**

¹⁴**just as you also partially did understand us,** that we are your reason to be proud as you also are ours, **in the day of our Lord Jesus.”**

He reassures them that when he originally planned his itinerary, it was his earnest intention and sincere desire to come twice to Corinth—once on his way to Macedonia, and again on his way home:

2 Corinthians 1:15-19 (NASB)

¹⁵“In this confidence I intended at first to come to you, so that you might twice receive a blessing;

¹⁶that is, to pass your way into Macedonia, and again from Macedonia to come to you, and by you to be helped on my journey to Judea.

¹⁷Therefore, I was not vacillating when I intended to do this, was I? Or what I purpose, do I purpose according to the flesh, so that with me there will be yes, yes and no, no *at the same time?*

¹⁸But as God is faithful, our word to you is not yes and no.

¹⁹For the Son of God, Christ Jesus, who was preached among you by us—by me and Silvanus and Timothy—was not yes and no, but is yes in Him.”

Paul was saying that when he initially expressed his intention to visit Corinth (**1 Corinthians 16:5**; cf. **1 Corinthians 4:19**; **1 Corinthians 11:34**), there was no pretense whatsoever in his words. “As God is faithful,” he said (thus in effect reinforcing his assurance with an oath), his communication with them was a well-meant “yes.”

1 Corinthians 16:5 (NASB)

⁵“**But I will come** to you after I go through Macedonia, for I am going through Macedonia.”

1 Corinthians 4:19 (NASB)

¹⁹“**But I will come** to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I shall find out, not the words of those who are arrogant but their power.”

1 Corinthians 11:34 (NASB)

³⁴“If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, so that you will not come together for judgment. **The remaining matters I will arrange when I come.”**



He sincerely **intended to come**. And he **would still come**. But circumstances had changed the timing of the planned visit.

Then in what almost seems a digression, he reinforces the truth of God's own faithfulness, and the utter truthfulness of the gospel message. Notice how he invokes all three persons of the Trinity to make this point:

2 Corinthians 1:19-22 (NASB)

¹⁹“For the Son of God, Christ Jesus, who was preached among you by us—
by me and Silvanus and Timothy—was not yes and no, but is yes in Him.

²⁰For as many as are the promises of God, in Him they are yes; therefore also
through Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us.

²¹Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God,

²²who also sealed us and gave *us* the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge.”

Paul was pointing out that his own sincerity as a messenger of the gospel was rooted in the truthfulness and trustworthiness of the gospel itself. And that in turn reflects the unshakable faithfulness of the Trinity.

Next, Paul explained *why* there had been a change in his plans. Once again he invokes a solemn oath to attest to his sincerity:

2 Corinthians 1:23-24 (NASB)

²³“But I call God as witness to my soul, that **to spare you** I did not come again to Corinth.

²⁴Not that we lord it over your faith, but are workers with you for your joy; for in your faith you are standing firm.”

2 Corinthians 2:1-4 (NASB)

¹“But I determined this for my own sake, that **I would not come to you in sorrow again.**

²For if I cause you sorrow, who then makes me glad but the one whom I made sorrowful?

³This is the very thing I wrote you, so that when I came, I would not have sorrow from those who ought to make me rejoice; having confidence in you all that my joy would be *the joy* of you all.

⁴For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you with many tears; not so that you would be made sorrowful, but that you might know the love which I have especially for you.”

In other words, whatever combination of circumstances may have contributed to the cancellation of Paul's visit, his own ultimate motive for postponing the visit was nothing other than his sincere compassion for the Corinthians.

He did not want to come to them in sorrow (**1 Corinthians 2:1**).

1 Corinthians 2:1 (NASB)

¹“And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God.”



He had delayed the visit in order to spare them the rod of discipline ([1 Corinthians 1:23](#); cf. [1 Corinthians 4:2](#)). He had not been insincere; he had acted merely out of love for them.

[1 Corinthians 1:23 \(NASB\)](#)

²³“But we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness.”

[1 Corinthians 4:2 \(NASB\)](#)

²“In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy.”

In this vital but often-overlooked passage of Scripture, we see highlighted three keys to Paul’s sincerity.

First, he always operated with a clear conscience.

Second, he always sought to show himself reliable in words and action.

And **third**, as the Corinthians themselves were well aware, his dealings with them were never self-serving or heavy-handed, but always driven by a genuine, tender affection for them. Here is why Paul’s enemies were ultimately unsuccessful in portraying him as insincere or two-faced:

INTEGRITY THAT MAINTAINS A CLEAR CONSCIENCE

Notice that the first witness Paul calls in defense of his sincerity is his own conscience. He had never deliberately misled the Corinthians, deceived them with verbal trickery, or even been purposely vague with them (“We do not write you anything you cannot read or understand” [[2 Corinthians 1:13 NIV](#)]).

[2 Corinthians 1:13 \(NASB\)](#)

¹³“For **we write nothing else to you than what you read and understand**, and I hope you will understand until the end.”