

“Did I Show Fickleness?”

“When therefore I was thus minded, did I show fickleness? or the things that I purpose, do I purpose according to the flesh, that with me there should be the yea yea and the nay nay?” (2 Cor. 1:17).

Fickleness, in our age, is the action of one who is unstable, who tells one person one thing, then promises another something just the opposite. In colloquial terminology, such an one is “wishy washy” and “flighty”. Paul’s question to the Corinthians implies that some of his detractors there accused him of saying one thing (“yea”) one moment, then turning right around saying the opposite (“nay”).

It is a mark of weakness, at best, and dishonest at worst for one to be “fickle”. A “fickle” person soon loses all the trust another might have in him, and makes suspect anything he might say. Paul assures the brethren that the message he, Silas, and Timothy had preached among them was not suspect. He wrote, “But as God is faithful, our word toward you is not yea and nay, For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us ... was not yea and nay, but in him is yea. For how many soever be the promises of God, in him is the yea” (2 Cor. 1:18-20a). In essence Paul asserts the trustworthiness of God — His word and His promises.

What was the basis for those accusing brethren? It really was a childish thing and appeared to be a charge from some who possessed a negative attitude toward the apostle. The apostle had implied that he would soon visit them but did not come in the “time frame” they supposed he would.

So Paul explains, “And in this confidence I was minded to come first unto you, that ye might have a second benefit” (2 Cor. 1:15). When Paul mentions “in this confidence” he has allusion to that which he had earlier written: “and so also ye did acknowledge us in part, that we are your glorying, even as ye also are ours, in the day of our Lord Jesus” (2 Cor. 1:14). At least part of the Corinthians recognized Paul’s worth to them: their knowledge and hope of eternal life was owed chiefly to him because he was the first who there proclaimed the good news about Christ. And, they were Paul’s “glorying”: his work was not in vain for the Corinthians had received gladly his message.

So he purposed first to come to them that they might have a “second benefit”. By this the apostle meant there were two routes he could have followed from Ephesus to Corinth: by sea (a journey which would carry him directly to Corinth), or over land (a journey which would carry him first through Macedonia, then to Corinth). Neither Macedonia nor Corinth were his ultimate destination. He, with messengers from the churches who traveled with him were bound for Jerusalem to deliver relief for poor saints there. But Corinth was the point he planned to sail from to Jerusalem. If Paul had sailed first to Corinth, then visited with churches in Macedonia, then returned back to Corinth to embark a ship there headed for Jerusalem, the Corinthians would have had a “second benefit”: they would have had two rich, profitable visits from the apostle. Had

Paul followed the “land route” (as he ultimately did), they would have had only one visit, one benefit from him.

But, Paul did not sail directly to Corinth as first he purposed; he went overland through Macedonia. Yet his failure to follow through with his initial intentions was not fickleness; there was a very good reason for the change. “But I call God for a witness upon my soul that to spare you, I forbade to come to Corinth” (2 Cor. 1:23). Those Corinthians who called in question Paul’s motives because he changed his plans did not realize how very fortunate they were he did! Had he come at the time he first purposed to come, his visit would have been anything but pleasant for them. As he later writes, “For I fear, lest by any means when I come, I should find you, not such as I would, and should myself be found of you such as ye would not ...” (2 Cor. 12:20). In his first letter Paul addressed many sins and irregularities among them and then asked, “What will ye? shall I come unto you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness?” (1 Cor. 4:21). Had Paul come to Corinth at the time they first expected him, it would have been with a rod. He delayed his visit to give them more time to repent, not because he was fickle minded.

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