

# Yes!

## Part 1

### 2 Corinthians 1:18-22 (NIV)

<sup>18</sup> But as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not "Yes" and "No."

<sup>19</sup> For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by me and Silas and Timothy, was not "Yes" and "No," but in him it has always been "Yes."

<sup>20</sup> For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God.

<sup>21</sup> Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us,

<sup>22</sup> set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

Welcome to this new series entitled "YES". This was not the original plan for October but while I was away on leave I was reading 2 Corinthians and I came upon a particular verse:

*For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God. (2 Corinthians 1:20)*

When I read those words a little Geiger-counter went off in my spirit telling me that God wanted to get hot about this passage and particularly about the word yes. The first thing I picked up from God, which we will come back to again and again through this month, is how much God desires for us to live in the freedom of his yes and because of this God wants to free us from the no's, the negatives that rattle around within us. Secondly, and this is a big frustration for me, I believe that the message God wants to communicate to people is a big yes to life but many people believe that God is only saying no and this negatively colours their attitude towards God.

So to begin with I just want to tease out a little - the power of yes. Think back to a time when you really wanted something, it might have been a batman utility belt – anybody? - No – ok that was just me. Well it might have been an event, a camp, a project a holiday – something that you were really pumped about, really excited about, but it all hinged on someone, usually your parents, saying yes and as you asked the question and held your breath, the world stood still for a moment until either the word "no" dragged you down to the depths of despair or the word "yes", filled your body with eruptions of joy and excitement.

You see "Yes" is a powerful and life giving word while "no" sometimes rattles around in us in a very unhelpful way. In 1992 a new telecommunications company began operating in Australia with the logo – Optus - Yes. The reason this was chosen was that the marketing people saw an opportunity to leverage the public perception that the former lone player in the market, Telstra, only ever said "no" to its customers. Cable & Wireless Optus' Director of Marketing, Stephen Cameron said: "*Over time, 'yes' has been used to signify choice, affirmation, delight and most recently optimism*".

It does seem that a “Yes” opens doors while a “no” closes them. “Yes” affirms and welcomes our place in the world - “no” questions our very existence. “Yes” engages with people – “no” turns our face away from people. “Yes” sets us free to do great things - “no” closes off our future. “Yes” is delightfully curious – “no” darkens our life with the fear of failure.

Surprisingly – The bible paints a picture of yes being part of the very nature of God. I say surprisingly because the God of many peoples imaginings is a cranky “no” saying curmudgeon (bad tempered or surely individual) who appeared to love nothing more than spoiling our fun with a hell threatening no. But actually God’s story begins and ends with unconditional yes. In the beginning we see God contemplating - will I create new worlds? Yes! Will I fill one of those worlds with a crazy number of new living creatures? Yes! Will I make a living creature who carries my image, my divine spark? Yes! Will I make a second creature so they can cosy up together on cold nights? You better believe it - Yes!

The bible begins in the gift of yes, and ends in a blaze of yes

*<sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.*

*<sup>4</sup> He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."*

*<sup>5</sup> He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."*

(Revelation 21:3-5)

In between the beginning and the end of the bible story is the journey in which God helps people rediscover His great Yes. To the first human beings, Adam and Eve, God continued to say yes. Yes, this world is yours. Yes enjoy it. Yes everything is for you. Everything is yes, there are millions of yeses - there is only one no – the one and only no was God’s plea - do not turn your back on me, which is what it means to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:17) – it means to go your own way and that’s what they did. What follows is the story of God reclaiming His relationship with human beings and restoring his yes with us.

In a sense the rest of the Old Testament is the story of God taking his people back to school to learn how to live in God’s yes. You see every childhood is built on a foundation of “no” which establishes healthy boundaries. No Lisa your peanut butter toast does not belong in the CD player. No Linda you can’t take a contract out on your brother. No Peter the pizza oven is not a good place for the cat. *The aim of a foundation of no is to prepare our children for a life time of yes.* This is also God’s plan for us all – the Old Testament is a foundation of No that prepares people to live successfully in Christ’s yes. The Law, where God says;

### **10 Commandments**

(Exodus 20:1-17)

1. Other God’s - No
2. Idols – No
3. Disrespectful towards God – No
4. Keep the Sabbath – yes

5. Care for your parents – yes
6. Kill – No
7. Be unfaithful to your partner – No
8. Steal – No
9. Lie – No
10. Wanting other people's stuff – no

In the Old Testament Covenant God's people were blessed if they kept the law and punished if they broke it which is really how we bring up kids. Kids, here are the rules, yes you can play with your friends when your chores are done - throwing your food across the room does not constitute eating and no you can't have desert. But the point of these laws is for our children to grow up with firm and healthy boundaries that enables them to live in freedom and not to be crushed to death by the pile of rubbish in their bedrooms. The same hope is in the bible, God is looking to develop grown up believers – people who will follow Him not because they have to but because they want to, people who have learnt to live in God's yes.

In the third chapter of Second Corinthians, Paul speaks about it this way – he says:

*You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. (2 Corinthians 3:3)*

What Paul is saying is that the Christians relationship with God is not based on the Ten Commandments written on stone tablets but in a grown up relationship with God through his Spirit, written on the tablets of our heart. What does Paul mean by that? It's why I don't seek to please my wife out of contractual obligation but out of love, because it is now the nature of my heart to want her to be happy. God is working towards the same transformation of our hearts, creating in the tablets of our hearts this wonderful loving yes between us and God. – listen to Paul.

*Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.. (2 Corinthians 3:17-18)*

To live in the presence of the Holy Spirit is to live in the warmth of God's yes, His eternal affirmation of love for us. So what is sin? Sin is the same as it was for Adam and Eve turning away from God, to live outside of his yes in a no of our own making. The cross is the central event in this struggle between the yes and the no. Pilates asks Jesus; are you the king of the Jews, and Jesus says yes (Luke 23:3). But the Jews said "no" crucify him (Luke 23:21) and they did, and for three days their "no" appeared to have won the day, but on the third day, on the third day, God spoke the most powerful yes that has ever been spoken in the history of all creation. God thundered yes for his son and Jesus rose and smashed through the shackles of sin and death (Romans 8:2) winning for us a great freedom. There is freedom in God's yes because the cross of Christ has removed all condemning no's from our lives (Romans 8:1). Because it is condemnation, along with all its ugly cousins – shame, guilt, low self- esteem, self-loathing, self- doubt – that bind people's souls in terrible darkness that only the light and power of God's unconditional love, his unconditional yes, can set us free. It's why we call it the good news – Amen?

So why is Paul declaring in this passage that Christ is “Yes”? The reason is that the Corinthian church was an ongoing battle ground between the life giving yes of Christ that Paul had planted in that church and a darkness of no that had risen up. Paul knew first hand that Jesus was all about Yes. Jesus’ yes had transformed his own life. Paul had been a passionate hater of Christians, yet when he met Jesus on the Road to Damascus, Jesus said “yes” to him, and gave him a new name and a new life. So whenever Paul preached about Jesus he was preaching Christ’s yes to people and their need to give their yes to Christ and this is where the problems start for the Corinthian church. There were people in the Corinthian church who had not and would not fully give their yes to Jesus. By their behaviour and attitudes it was clear that they reserved their yes for their own lives and their own beliefs. That they were not fully engaged with Jesus they had not fully given him their yes and people who reserve their yes will develop an attitude of no to others because they are not speaking out of unity in Christ but out of their own spirit – do you see?

This Spirit of no had become a big problem in the Corinthian church. No, they would say, Paul is not a great preacher. No, you are not a proper Christian unless you speak in tongues. No, if you are poor you cannot share our food during communion, God has blessed us with abundance why should we share it with you. Their behaviour was prideful, elitist, unloving rebellious and immoral. Their latest no and the background to this passage – is that they were saying no, Paul is not a good leader. He said he would visit us but he didn’t. Paul cannot be trusted he says yes one moment and then no the next. And so Paul responds

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John Piper paraphrases what Paul is saying:

*Our planning and preaching are not fickle; they are not double minded; they are unified; they are YES to you. We live for your good. We are for you and not against you. Our life and ministry is a resounding YES, YES, YES! Yes to your joy! Yes to your holiness! Yes to your faith and hope and love and peace and power! . . . My heart is not divided toward you because God’s heart is not divided toward you.*

Paul is basically saying that no Christian can give a Yes and No commitment. That is contrary to the nature of a Christian, because it is contrary to the nature of God. God is not like that; he is faithful, Paul says. When God says "Yes," then it is an eternal "Yes." He will never take it back. When God says "No," he means "No." He never says "Yes" and means "No." Paul points to the unity of relationship and purpose of the three missionaries, Silas Timothy and Paul as an example of a “yes” unity with Christ in contrast to the behaviour of the Corinthian faction.

Unfortunately Paul suspects that it doesn’t really matter what he does, it doesn’t really matter what he says, it will always be no with these people. Paul is fairly sure that he is just going to have conflict with these people no matter what.

*I call God as my witness that it was in order to spare you that I did not return to Corinth. (2 Corinthians 1:23)*

(This sounds like all the conditions for a nasty church split, and there is some evidence that this is exactly what happened to the church at Corinth. An author by the name of Clement of Rome writing in the late 80's had this to say to that church

*"Your division has perverted many. Take up the epistle of the blessed Paul, the apostle, what he first wrote unto you in the beginning of the Gospel, of the truth he charged you and the spirit concerning himself and Cephas and Apollos because even then you had made parties.*

*"It is shameful, dearly beloved, yes, utterly shameful and unworthy of your conduct in Christ that you should be reported that the very steadfast and ancient of the Corinthians, for the sake of one or two persons, makes sedition against its presbyters")*

This is a battle that has happened and will happen in thousands of churches across the world. Churches that live in God's yes, that have a yes culture, that love well and live well and live in unity are places of great spiritual life and acceptance. Churches that have people who have withheld their full yes to Christ, who are prideful and seek to control, who say no to the body Christ, create such discord that all good spiritual life is jeopardised. The Corinthian letters are a cautionary tale and if we want to remain a yes church with a yes culture then there is one really simple thing that Paul says we have to do, stay intimately connected with Jesus by giving Jesus our complete and total yes.

*<sup>20</sup> For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God. <sup>21</sup> Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, <sup>22</sup> set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. (2 Corinthians 1:20-22)*

Looking ahead to the fifth Sunday of this month we are planning on having a special outreach service in which we will be preaching a simple message about why a person needs to say "Yes" to Jesus. It may be that you have a friend who is considering Christ, has not yet made a decision, but is ready to be challenged about their commitment to Christ. It is for people like this we will be specially designing the message on 30<sup>th</sup>.

In the next few weeks we will be looking deeper into God's yes and how it can free us from the negative no's that run around in our lives. We will also continue to unlock the 2 Corinthians 1 passage such as what Paul means that we are anointed, sealed, and have a deposit in the Holy Spirit.

To finish off this morning I just want you to consider this question quietly in prayer - have you given Christ your unequivocal yes, your full yes, or are there some little no's niggling away at your relationship with Jesus. – Let's pray