

STUDY ON THE BOOK OF CORINTHIANS

Second Corinthians – Chapter 13

Paul's Third Visit

“This will be the third time I am coming to you. “By the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established.”” (v1)

On his first visit to Corinth, Paul founded the church and stayed *a year and six months* (Acts 18:11). His second visit was a brief, painful visit in between the writing of 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians. Now he is prepared to come for a third time. The rest of this chapter will confirm why Paul seems to be warning this church ahead of his coming.

Paul quotes this passage from Deuteronomy 19:15 and Matthew 18:16, and quotes it in reference to his coming visit.

Q: Who are these two or three witnesses?

My suggestion is that these two or three witnesses are the testimony of his associates especially Titus that he had mentioned on several occasions in this letter and the nameless brother who has a good reputation among the brethren. The point of the quotation is to remind the Corinthian Christians that he comes this time as a judge, not an investigator. He has enough evidence to write, *“If I come again I will not spare.”*

“If I come again I will not spare.” (v2)- Those are strong words: I will not spare. However, the situation among the Corinthian Christians called for strong leadership. A Christian pastor must never let authority corrupt into authoritarianism, yet *“Rebellion against an appointed minister is rebellion against the higher power that appointed him.”*

“I have already warned those who have sinned in the past and all the rest as well, and I warn them now even though I am absent [from you] as I did when I was with you the second time, that if I come back I will not spare anyone, since you seek [forensic] proof that Christ is speaking in and through me. He is not weak or ineffective in dealing with you, but powerful within you. For even though He was crucified in weakness [yielding Himself], yet He lives [resurrected] by the power of God [His Father]. For we too are weak in Him [as He was humanly weak], yet we are alive and well [in fellowship] with Him because of the power of God directed toward you.” (vv2-4 AMP)

Paul's opponents, the *“most eminent apostles”* or *“super apostles”* among the Corinthian Christians (2 Corinthians 11:5 and 12:11), said they wanted to see more *“power”* from Paul. He seemed too weak and humble for their liking. So, Paul addressed this thinking: *“You want to see proof of Christ speaking in me? Fine. When I come the third time, you will see the power of God in my rebuke as I clean house. So, clean it up before I come.”* Just as Jesus displayed weakness yet now reigns in power, so Paul will come with similar power after showing the Corinthian Christians his weakness.

It would seem that in their immaturity the Corinthians were unimpressed by Christlike gentleness and meekness... but were overawed by arbitrary displays of power. The Passion Translation puts v4 this way:

“For although he was crucified as a “weakling,” now he lives robed with God's power. And we also are “weak ones” in our co-crucifixion with him, but now we live in God's triumphant power together with him, which is demonstrated on your behalf.” (v4 TPT)

I guess Paul's meekness and gentleness is misinterpreted as weakness while it is not. This time, the church in Corinth will experience the *“other-side”* of Paul.

Examine Yourselves!

“Test and evaluate yourselves to see whether you are in the faith and living your lives as [committed] believers. Examine yourselves [not me]! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves [by an ongoing experience] that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test and are rejected as counterfeit?” (v5 AMP)

This becomes a personal responsibility – “Examine Yourself!” – are you still in faith or you have wondered off? Paul asks the Corinthian Christians to consider a sobering question: “Am I really a Christian?”

We are rightly concerned that every believer has the assurance of salvation and knows how to endure the attacks that come in this area from Satan. At the same time, we also understand that there are some who assume or presume they are Christians when they are not.

“The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (Romans 8:16)

For every believer, there is a witness from the Spirit of the Lord that we are children of God, saved, and walking right with the Lord. We are often very ready to examine and test others, but first – and always first – we must examine and test ourselves. That was the trouble at Corinth. They criticized Paul and failed to examine themselves.

“unless indeed you fail the test and are rejected as counterfeit” or “disqualified”. Paul knew there were some among the Corinthian Christians who were disqualified for eternal life and salvation. Their thinking was worldly because they were of the world, not of the Lord. This is a hard truth to confront, but it is better to know now than when it is too late. The word for disqualified is simply the negative of the word for test in this same passage. If we do not examine ourselves and test ourselves now, we may find that we ultimately do not pass the test and are disqualified.

Key to your Test

Jesus Christ in you... What are we to look for when we examine and test ourselves? We are to see if Jesus Christ is in you. We are not to look for perfection – in ourselves or in others – but we should see real evidence of Jesus Christ in us.

“Now, what is it to have Jesus Christ in you? The true Christian carries the cross in his heart; and a cross inside the heart... If you have a cross in your heart – Christ crucified in you, the hope of glory – all the crosses of this world’s troubles will seem to you light enough, and you will easily be able to sustain it. Christ in the heart means Christ believed in, Christ beloved, Christ trusted, Christ espoused, Christ communed with, Christ as our daily food, and ourselves as the temple and palace wherein Jesus Christ daily walks.” (Spurgeon)

Paul is NOT disqualified

“But I trust that you will know that we are not disqualified.” (v6)

“But I hope you will acknowledge that we do not fail the test nor are we to be rejected.” (v6 AMP)

Paul anticipates a counter-question. “Paul, you ask us to examine ourselves. Well, why don’t you examine yourself? Maybe you aren’t a Christian after all!” Paul dismisses this question out of hand. It is so apparent that we are not disqualified or rejected that he simply trusts that they recognize the truth of it.

“Now I pray to God that you do no evil, not that we should appear approved, but that you should do what is honourable, though we may seem disqualified.” (v7)

Again, he admonishes this church that they do no evil for their own good... not just to affirm Paul's ministry. I guess it has come to the point where Paul is passing on the responsibility for their growth and righteous lifestyle back to the church in Corinth.

“For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth. For we are glad when we are weak, and you are strong. And this also we pray, that you may be made complete. Therefore, I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness, according to the authority which the Lord has given me for edification and not for destruction.” (vv8-10)

Paul, even as an apostle, could do nothing against the truth. Even the apostles were not above the truth. Paul could only work effectively for the truth, not against the truth. Any experience or encounter that cannot be validated with scripture (the embodiment of Truth given to us), should be questioned and discarded.

If Paul's weakness could contribute to the strength of the Corinthian Christians, he would be glad. His real concern was that the Corinthians may be made complete.

“To be made complete” is basically the same idea as in 2 Corinthians 12:19: *we do all things, beloved, for your edification*. Paul wanted to build up the Corinthian Christians, to make them complete. They were already a body strong in spiritual gifts and personal testimony (1 Corinthians 1:4-7), but their strength was not complete. They were not like a building that was just a foundation and a bit of rubble. They were like a building built tall and strong – for one and a half walls, with the other walls crumbling or barely started. Paul wanted them to be made complete.

Conclusion to 2 Corinthians

“Finally, Finally, believers, rejoice! Be made complete [be what you should be], be comforted, be like-minded, live in peace [enjoy the spiritual well-being experienced by believers who walk closely with God]; and the God of love and peace [the source of lovingkindness] will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All God's people greet you. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” (vv11-14 AMP)

Paul's final instructions to this church in terms of farewell to his letter can be summarised as these:

1. **Be Complete**

Become complete: In 2 Corinthians 13:9, Paul revealed that he prayed that you may be made complete. Now he exhorts them to help answer his prayer as he challenges them to become complete.

As Christians, we should not excuse and neglect areas of our life by saying, “I'm just not into that” or “That's just my weak point.” We certainly cannot work on everything at once before the Lord, but we can have a heart to become complete.

2. **Be Comforted, Be Likeminded, Live continually in peace**

By exhorting the Corinthian Christians to do these things, Paul proves an important point. These are at least partially in our power to do. We often think that our comfort, or being of one mind, and our being at peace with others just depends on them. In part that is true, but it also depends on us. We need to let God worry about their part, and we can worry about our part.

It costs something to work hard to be of good comfort, be of one mind, and to live in peace; but the reward is worth it: The God of love and peace will be with you. If you feel that God is not with you, perhaps

it is because you are resisting and rejecting His call to be of good comfort, be of one mind, and to live in peace.

3. Greet one another with a holy kiss

The idea of greeting one another with a holy kiss was common in this culture. The fact that it is a holy kiss shows that it had nothing to do with romantic affection. It was commonly practiced as a warm greeting in the early church.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. This is the only place in the New Testament where the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are mentioned together in this kind of blessing. Paul wanted the Corinthian Christians to be completely blessed by everything God is.