

The Church of the Servant King

www.cotsk.org

Survey of the Bible Series – Paul’s Second Letter to the Corinthians

(SB_2 Cor_chp13)

Paul’s Warnings (13:1-10)

¹ This is the third time I am coming to you EVERY FACT IS TO BE CONFIRMED BY THE TESTIMONY OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES. ² I have previously said when present the second time, and though now absent I say in advance to those who have sinned in the past and to all the rest as well, that if I come again I will not spare anyone, ³ since you are seeking for proof of the Christ who speaks in me, and who is not weak toward you, but mighty in you. ⁴ For indeed He was crucified because of weakness, yet He lives because of the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, yet we will live with Him because of the power of God directed toward you. ⁵ Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you--unless indeed you fail the test? ⁶ But I trust that you will realize that we ourselves do not fail the test. ⁷ Now we pray to God that you do no wrong; not that we ourselves may appear approved, but that you may do what is right, even though we may appear unapproved. ⁸ For we can do nothing against the truth, but only for the truth. ⁹ For we rejoice when we ourselves are weak but you are strong; this we also pray for, that you be made complete. ¹⁰ For this reason I am writing these things while absent, so that when present I need not use severity, in accordance with the authority which the Lord gave me for building up and not for tearing down.

Observations

- ✚ Paul references a “third time” visit.
- ✚ In verse 1, Paul quotes Deuteronomy 19:15 when he states that “every fact is to be confirmed by the testimony of two or three witnesses.”
- ✚ In verse 2, Paul issues a warning to the Corinthians.
- ✚ When (Gr. *ean*, not “if”) Paul came, he would use his apostolic authority to discipline any in the fellowship who required correction.
- ✚ Paul divides the Corinthians into two groups – “those who have sinned in the past” and “all the rest.”
- ✚ The Corinthians sought proof of Christ in Paul and wanted to see the power of Christ manifested (v. 3).
- ✚ Paul explains the relationship between Christ’s “weakness” and His “power” in verse 4.
- ✚ The Corinthians were exhorted by Paul to “test themselves” to see if they were of the faith and if they did not pass the test Jesus was not in them (v. 5).
- ✚ In verse 3 Paul indicates that some of the Corinthians were seeking proof (*dokimen*) that Christ was speaking in Paul.
- ✚ Then in verse 5 Paul turns the tables on them and challenges them to prove themselves (*dokimazo*).
- ✚ What some of the Corinthians questioned was not Paul's salvation. It was his experiential sanctification.
- ✚ They questioned whether he was a true spokesman and apostle of Christ.
- ✚ Likewise, when he turned the tables he questioned their sanctification, not their salvation.

- ✚ In verse 7-8, we see Paul's greatest desire expressed. It was the obedience and godliness of his readers. This was more important to him than his own vindication, as important as that was (v. 6).
- ✚ Verses 9-10 – Paul was willing to appear weak if by that weakness his disciples could become stronger and more mature (cf. vv. 5, 11; Col. 1:28). In harmony with this objective he had written 2 Corinthians. He wanted his distance from the Corinthians to cushion his severe admonitions. Nevertheless, if it was necessary he would deal severely with them in person. Some destruction through judgment of sinful conduct might be necessary before construction of the church in Corinth could proceed.

Interpretation

- ✚ Absent indications to the contrary, I take this statement at face value – Paul had visited twice prior to writing this letter and was now ready to come a third time. The second visit was Paul's so-called "painful visit."
- ✚ By quoting a passage from the Mosaic Law, Paul is not reinstating the Law or indicating that the Law is the governing principle of the Church Age believer's life. Paul is affirming a principle for the Church Age dispensation that is consistent with the Mosaic Law.
- ✚ Paul was most likely indicating that the church would pass judgment and, on the testimony of the witnesses that Jesus Christ prescribed, would decide who was right (1 Cor 5:3-5).

³ For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present. ⁴ In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, ⁵ I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. (1 Cor 5:3-5)

- ✚ Jesus' teaching regarding the Jewish, kingdom-centric *ekklesia* was built upon the same principle (cf. Matt 18:15-20).

¹⁵"If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. ¹⁶"But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED. ¹⁷"If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. ¹⁸"Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven. ¹⁹"Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. ²⁰"For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst." (Matt 18:15-20)

- ✚ Paul had warned the Corinthians during his second or painful visit. He was now issuing a second warning in anticipation of his return to Corinth.
- ✚ "Those who have sinned in the past" probably refers to the immoral individuals who had failed to respond to Paul during his painful visit (12:21b).
- ✚ "All the rest" probably includes the larger group that failed to submit to Paul's authority (12:20b).
- ✚ Paul's critics would have first-hand proof of his divinely given power. Christ-like gentleness and humility (10:1) did not impress the Corinthians as displays of power did (11:20). Paul's threatened judgment of the erring in the church would provide the proof that many of them required that the powerful Christ was working through Paul. Jesus Christ will Himself likewise experience vindication one day when He comes in judgment.
- ✚ Paul's "weakness" was in reality an evidence of great strength, strength of commitment to His Father's will. The Father rewarded His Son by sustaining Him with supernatural power. Similarly

Paul in submitting to God's will had appeared weak to some in Corinth. Nevertheless God would sustain him too supernaturally. That supernatural power would be evident to the Corinthians when Paul arrived in Corinth and dealt with them as Jesus Christ will deal with His people when He returns.

- ✠ Paul's question is usually construed with regard to positional justification: were the Corinthians really believers?
- ✠ However, the context demands that the question be interpreted differently.
- ✠ The question is concerned with Phase 2 experiential sanctification: did they *demonstrate* that they were in the faith (cf. 1 Cor. 16:13) and that Christ was in them by their obeying His will.
- ✠ If they stood the test, they were walking in the faith and obedient; however, to fail was to be disobedient and subject to God's discipline.
- ✠ After twelve chapters in which Paul takes their Christianity for granted, can he only now be asking them to make sure they are born again?
- ✠ Verses 7-8 – Paul could not bring himself to do anything that would harm the truth, even to vindicate himself. Promoting the truth (i.e., the gospel) was his great ambition even if it meant that some regarded him as a false apostle.

Evidently Paul's anticipated visit to Corinth was a pleasant one. Paul wrote Romans during the three months he was in Corinth (Acts 20:2-3, A.D. 56-57). In it he gave no indication that there were problems in Corinth. Moreover he proceeded with his plans to evangelize unreached areas, which he would not have done if the Corinthian church still needed his attention (cf. 10:14-16). Furthermore, Paul wrote that the Corinthians "were pleased" to complete their collection for the Jerusalem saints (Rom. 15:26-27). Finally the Corinthian church's preservation of 2 Corinthians argues for this church's acquiescence to Paul's admonitions and warnings.

Application

- ✠ This section of Paul's epistle should cause us to reflect upon how we define power in the Christian life.
- ✠ Is power defined in cosmic terms, e.g. overt displays of human strength and worldly accomplishment or in submission to God's plan and purpose?
- ✠ What idea of "power" have you internalized and what "power" in this world do you respect?

Conclusion to Epistle (13:11-14)

¹¹Finally, brethren, rejoice, be made complete, be comforted, be like-minded, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. ¹²Greet one another with a holy kiss. ¹³All the saints greet you. ¹⁴The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.

Paul concluded this letter with an exhortation, a salutation, and a benediction. He intended each of these to draw the emphases of this epistle together to impress on his readers the basis and importance of their unity with one another and with himself.

- ✠ Rejoice – there is joy (Phase 2 expression) in the believer who has internalized the Phase 1 realities.
- ✠ Be made complete – the believer who has not internalized the whole of Truth is fragmented and double minded to that extent.
- ✠ Be comforted – the believer draws comfort and encouragement in life from an assurance of salvation and acceptance in the beloved.
- ✠ Be like-minded – believers are encouraged when they can fellowship in like-mindedness.
- ✠ Live in peace – there is no peace in the local church where there is division based upon carnality.

- ✠ Greet one another with a holy kiss - The believers practiced this custom commonly. It symbolized the forgiveness, reconciliation, unity, and fellowship that existed between the people who kissed each other. Until unity prevailed in the church this kiss was hypocritical.