

2 Corinthians
Leon L. Combs, Ph.D.

Chapter Thirteen

2Cor 13:1 This is the third time I am coming to you. Every fact is to be confirmed by the testimony of two or three witnesses.

2Cor 13:2 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,

Paul is now getting to the point of his next visit to Corinth. Church discipline is extremely important in the life of the church. The first instruction Jesus gave to the church was concerning church discipline:

Matt 18:15 "And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother.

Matt 18:16 "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.

Matt 18:17 "And 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-gatherer.

This four-step process must always be followed in addressing sin within the church. Discipline is an important process of God's dealing with His people for we are to be holy (1 Peter 1:15-16; Lev 11:44; Ex 22:31; Num 15:40; Deut 6:17-18 and others).

Job 5:17 "Behold, how happy is the man whom God reproveth, So do not despise the discipline of the Almighty.

Psa 94:12 Blessed is the man whom Thou dost chasten, O Lord, And dost teach out of Thy law; 1Cor 11:32 But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord in order that we may not be condemned along with the world.

Heb 12:5 and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, Nor faint when you are reprov'd by Him;

Heb 12:6 For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, And He scourges every son whom He receives. "

Heb 12:7 It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?

Heb 12:8 But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

There was considerable sin within the Corinthian church (1 Cor 5:1-2, 6-7, 9-13) and they were even enduring the false teaching of the false apostles as we have seen. Paul had already put one unrepentant sinner out of the Corinthian church (1 Cor 5:3-5) and now he was coming for the third visit. In OT Law, one was not to be convicted of a crime unless the accused person's guilt was confirmed by two or three witnesses (Deut 19:15; John 8:17; Heb 10:28). This same process is involved in church discipline as stated by Jesus (Matt 18:15-17). Of course the same process is

to be employed in dealing with church leaders (1 Tim 5:19) and the sins that trigger such discipline are serious doctrinal error (1 Tim 1:18-20), sins that threaten church unity (Titus 3:10), and issues of purity (1 Cor 5).

In these two verses Paul is telling them that he is going to come on his third visit to bring discipline to the church members who have not repented and that nobody is exempt from such discipline. He does promise to employ proper techniques but discipline is necessary.

2Cor 13:3 since you are seeking for proof of the Christ who speaks in me, and who is not weak toward you, but mighty in you.

2Cor 13:4 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 shall live with Him because of the power of God directed toward you.

As we have discussed, the people had been fooled by the false teachers into questioning the authority of Paul and he has had to answer such accusations. The people are right to seek proof that Paul's authority is from Jesus but they were basing their proof on the wrong judgments such as personal charisma, powerful speaking abilities, and physically appealing appearances. The proof of a person having Christ speaking through them is the inspired Word of God that is proclaimed without error. Jesus Christ was crucified because of His human weakness that He allowed to be manifest in His absolute obedience to the Father:

Phil 2:8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

But Jesus lives because of the power of God! God raised Him from the dead (Rom 1:4; 7:4; 8:34; 10:9; 1 Cor 6:14; 15:4, 20; Gal 1:1; Col 2:12; 1 Peter 1:21) and this was the powerful message preached by the early preachers. His death shows His human weakness and His resurrection shows His divine power. Paul, Titus, and others also showed the human weaknesses but they would all live with Jesus because of the power of God that was directed through them to these people (Rom 6:4-11). Paul was going to return to Corinth in judgment in the same way that Jesus will return in judgment (Rev 2:16).

2Cor 13:5 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?
2Cor 13:6 But I trust that you will realize that we ourselves do not fail the test.

At the heart of church discipline is the assumption that the people are indeed Christians. However the fact is that in the church are members who do not belong to the family of God (2 Cor 11:26; Gal 2:4; Matt 13:25-30, 36-42). People who are not Christians cannot repent of their sin because they have not been born again. There is an awesome promise for those who are self-deceived about their relationship to Jesus:

Matt 7:23 "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'

Therefore Paul is telling all the church members to test themselves regarding the true state of their heart, mind, and soul. Asking the Lord to test us is not a new concept:

Job 13:23 "How many are my iniquities and sins? Make known to me my rebellion and my sin.

Psa 26:2 Examine me, O Lord, and try me; Test my mind and my heart.

Psa 139:23 Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts;

Psa 139:24 And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way.

Paul also had previously told this church to test themselves before partaking of communion:

1Cor 11:28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

1Cor 11:29 For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he does not judge the body rightly.

1Cor 11:30 For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep.

1Cor 11:31 But if we judged ourselves rightly, we should not be judged.

There is also the sobering warning by the writer of Hebrews:

Heb 6:4 For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit,

Heb 6:5 and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come,

Heb 6:6 and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God, and put Him to open shame.

Heb 6:7 For ground that drinks the rain which often falls upon it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God;

Heb 6:8 but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned.

Many are in the church today who have benefited from being a member of a church as they have heard the Word of God, participated in Holy Communion, been baptized, sat in Sunday School classes, and had other benefits of being in a congregation of believers. But if they have openly left the fellowship because they were never born again then they are lost forever. Every member of a church should test themselves to make sure they are not self-deceived. Christianity is not a religion in that you can learn the rules, walk the aisle, be baptized, attend all services, pay money and time and then be a Christian. A person is only a Christian if he has been born again into the Family of God. Even the demons believe (James 2:19). Knowledge and even obedience to the regulations of the church do not save anyone.

A person can look into his heart and determine if he is really a child of God. Have we really recognized the horrible nature of our sin nature, confessed those sins to God, and really repented from that former life? Are we truly abhorrent about our sin nature and trusting only in the double imputation of God in our lives for our salvation? Do we have such a desire for righteousness in our life that we long to know more of the Word of God and to have fellowship with other Christians? Are we totally submissive to God and to His representatives? Are we committed to obedience to the commands of Jesus (John 14:15)? Do we have a love for Jesus and for other Christians or are we just in love with ourselves? A true Christian examination

focuses not on externals but on the heart and uses externals only for a measure of the heart. Paul concludes these verses by saying that he hopes that they understand that he passes the test. From what he has shared with them about his life and from their direct knowledge of his commitment to the Lord Jesus, it should have been obvious to them that he passes and the false teachers fail.

2Cor 13:7 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 should appear unapproved.

2Cor 13:8 For we can do nothing against the truth, but only for the truth.

2Cor 13:9 For we rejoice when we ourselves are weak but you are strong; this we also pray for, that you be made complete.

2Cor 13:10 For this reason I am writing these things while absent, in order that when present I may not use severity, in accordance with the authority which the Lord gave me, for building up and not for tearing down.

Paul's continual desire is not that he would be approved by them but that they would be approved by Jesus. His heart's desire is that they do right in the sight of God. All that he does is for the truth and he cannot do anything to harm the truth. His joy is not in seeing that he is strong but that they stand up for the truth of God and repel any false doctrines. He wants them to be complete even if he suffers. He has written this letter in the hope that when he arrives for the third time to them he will not have to discipline them but he will discipline for the building up of the church if he has to do so. The word translated "complete" can also mean "one of integrity" with all of the thoughts and actions of the person being integrated with the truth of the Word of God. Christians should be people whose ethics are Bible based and not based upon any other authority.

2Cor 13:11 Finally, brethren, rejoice, be made complete, be comforted, be like-minded, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.

2Cor 13:12 Greet one another with a holy kiss.

2Cor 13:13 All the saints greet you.

2Cor 13:14 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.

He ends his letter with a great blessing. He asks that they rejoice in their position in Christ, and they constantly submit to the process of sanctification (be made complete), that they be comforted by the Word of God, that they all have the same mind-set based upon the Word of God and their devotion and love for Jesus, and that they live in peace with fellow Christians. If those items are their focus then the God of love and peace will be with them, and with us. He asks them to greet each other with a holy kiss to differentiate it from any inappropriate encounter. The kiss in this culture was a way of greeting close friends and relatives and today we might call it a "holy hug" or "holy handshake". He says that all the saints in his circle send their greetings and this would be a sincere greeting as demonstrated by the willingness of the Macedonians to give money to Christians in need. He then closes with a wonderful benediction as he asks for the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with them all. This benediction is a wonderful statement of the mystery of the Trinity.