

LOOKING FOR PROOF

2 Corinthians 13

Scripture makes clear that it doesn't pay to question or challenge the authority God has established.

From Aaron and Miriam, to Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, those who challenged the leader God established paid dearly for their rebellion.

Corinthians look down on Paul because he never takes action against them.

Paul issues one more warning about the danger of not acknowledging God's seal of affirmation on His representatives.

He has been slow to use that authority, out of concern for them. They don't appreciate his concern for them.

They don't understand the risk.

Now he issues a final warning.

If they don't turn back, God WILL do something serious about their haughty attitude and rebellious spirit.

VINDICATION OF PAUL'S MINISTRY 10-13

In 2 Cor. 13, Paul continues to respond to their feuding about whether he has the right to tell them what to do.

"Who does he think he is?"

"He's not as significant as the super-apostles we follow!"

"They're more dynamic, more powerful, more prestigious."

"Why should we do what Paul says?"

PREPARATION FOR VISIT 12:19-13:10

In light of his plan to visit, Paul warns them to repent and judge themselves.

He fears that he may come and find some who are still unreconciled to him.

If they don't correct the problem he'll have to demonstrate the full weight of his apostolic authority.

CONCERN BEFORE GOD 12:19-21

PAUL FEELS THE CONCERN OF A TRUE APOSTLE

His concern isn't what THEY think about his ministry.

His concern is what *GOD* thinks.

We give account to God; not to man.

He's saying this for their edification; not to defend himself.

He's concerned for their welfare.

He wants them to experience God's *blessing* and mutual enjoyment

–NOT negative, critical attitudes that will destroy them.

We ought to reflect concern for the welfare of others.

Not trying to obligate others to live up to our expectations.

But rather, seeking to build up others, that we together might become all that God wants us to become.

That's Paul's concern for them.

WARNING TO JUDGE OURSELVES 13:1-10

TRIPLE WITNESS TO THE OFFENSE 13:1-2

This will be my third visit to you. "Every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses." ² I already gave you a warning when I was with you the second time. I now repeat it while absent: On my return I will not spare those who sinned earlier or any of the others,

The O.T. standard required three witnesses

Tit. 3:10-11 indicates that a repeated confrontation does the same thing.

Paul isn't establishing a legalistic formula calling for 3 witnesses.

His point: there's been ample opportunity to prove the need for action.

Paul's 3 visits add up to a triple testimony to their offense.

The rebels attest to the witness, telling one another that Paul talks big in his letters, but never *does* anything about it.

Having observed the attitude twice before, if it's still evident, he'll have sufficient "*witness*" to take action.

Ample evidence demonstrates that correction is needed.

He'd rather *celebrate God's work*, but he'll judge, if necessary.

If they refuse to repent, he'll have no choice but to discipline them.

If he is forced to act, he will act with the power of Christ.

AUTHORITY OF CHRIST DEMONSTRATED IN PAUL 13:3-4

³ *since you are demanding proof that Christ is speaking through me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you.*

⁴ *For to be sure, he was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God's power. Likewise, we are weak in him, yet by God's power we will live with him to serve you.*

Their problem:

They're troubled that Paul isn't a powerful, dynamic leader.

If he has Christ's authority,

he ought to take charge strongly and lead God's people.

They're bothered by the fact that **Paul is weak... while claiming to represent Christ,**

Christ isn't weak; Christ is powerful in them.

Paul's answer:

Christ's strength was only evident *after* His "*weakness*."

Christ appeared weak when He died on the cross before He was made alive to demonstrate God's power.

With God's power at his disposal,

Christ followed the path of weakness to the cross.

He didn't rebuke his attackers.
 He "*opened not his mouth*" against them.
 He didn't zap them; didn't retaliate against them.
 He didn't call out the angels of heaven.

He had to become weak, . . .

He had to die, . . . in order to become Savior.

But He didn't stay dead! *After* he became weak, . . .

He came to life again; *then* He became strong.

Now He lives and works by God's power in the church.

Christ's weakness led to a demonstration of strength.

The magnitude of untapped power is displayed in the resurrection.

Similarly, **Paul's demonstration of "weakness" out of God-given concern for them, will lead to a demonstration of God's power in them.**

That same power that was at work in Christ, is at work in Paul.
 It's by that power that THEY received life.

That power will be evident in his response to them, unless they repent.

When he responds, it will be evident that Christ lives powerfully in him.

PROOF OF REAL FAITH 13:5-10

⁵ *Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?* ⁶ *And I trust that you will discover that we have not failed the test.* ⁷ *Now we pray to God that you will not do anything wrong. Not that people will see that we have stood the test but that you will do what is right even though we may seem to have failed.* ⁸ *For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth.* ⁹ *We are glad whenever we are weak but you are*

strong; and our prayer is for your perfection. ¹⁰ This is why I write these things when I am absent, that when I come I may not have to be harsh in my use of authority—the authority the Lord gave me for building you up, not for tearing you down.

They're concerned about whether Paul is approved; whether HE passes the test.

They're using the wrong standard.

Paul's ministry isn't dynamic enough; he does no exciting miracles; he tells no passionate stories; he doesn't have a high-class lifestyle; he's a poor laborer. **Why should we listen to him?**

Paul knows that when the standard is right, he *will* pass the test (6).

Paul wants them to examine themselves.

"Don't worry about ME. YOU be sure about YOURSELVES."

"Examine YOURSELVES to be sure you're in the faith."

This is a legitimate challenge to us as well,

God doesn't call us to examine others to see how they're doing!

We ought to examine ourselves, to be sure WE have the real thing!

Is God's work evident in OUR lives?

Paul is praying that they will pass the test and be approved.

He doesn't hope they'll *fail* the test, just to prove that he's right.

Nor does he hope they'll pass the test so he can boast about them.

He isn't hoping they'll be approved so he'll look good.

He wants their approval before God to be evident to all.

He's interested in their welfare.

He doesn't want to "pull the wool over anybody's eyes."

He wants it to be evident that they have the real thing.

He wants them to stand strong.

If they do what's right, they'll be approved and demonstrate their faith is real.

We don't *become* part of God's people by obedience, but our obedience demonstrates that *we are part* of God's people.

His interest isn't to show his superiority to them.

He's not trying to put them down.

He hopes to build them up.

If they follow his instructions, their time together will be a time of celebration, encouragement and blessing for them all.

He wants them to know that if they pass the test—if Christ is really in them, he's the one who brought them to faith.

Their approval provides evidence of *his* approval (5-6).

That's what he's praying for—that we'll be approved. 7-10

He wants us to do no wrong; but to do what's right.

He wants us to walk in truth; to be honest.

He wants us to be strong.

He wants us to grow to "perfection" (to full maturity/fully equipped).

He continues to be concerned for their welfare.

He desires above all the spiritual well-being of his spiritual children.

In one sense their *approval* would be counter-productive.

If they do what's right, he'll continue to *appear* weak, because he won't have to exercise his authority.

Yet he would prefer to appear weak and see them pass the test.

He doesn't have to make a power-play to prove his value.

He's not in this to prove he's boss, or to make a name for himself.

Their success is good enough for him.

If they pass the test, everybody wins.

Their approval affirms their faith *and* his authority.

God's work in their lives affirms the ministry God gave him.

That's Paul's prayer: that we will be all God wants us to be.

... that we will be conformed to the image of His Son.

Paul has no desire to see them defeated or destroyed.

He wants to build them up, to become all God wants them to be.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS 13:11-14

FINAL EXHORTATIONS 13:11-12

¹¹ *Finally, brothers, good-bye. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.*

Several exhortations lead us toward perfection.

Rejoice ("farewell" = rejoice; both uses are legitimate meanings)

3rd time Paul uses it. Elsewhere it's a call to rejoice:

1 Thess. 5:16 "Rejoice always!" [same word!]

Phil. 4:4 "Rejoice in the Lord always! Again I say, Rejoice!"

A call to cheer up.

Rather than focus on the negatives, which lead to critical attitudes,

Paul wants us to focus on what God has done and celebrate.

Be made complete ("perfect" <= fully outfitted, equipped, mature)

This was his prayer in 13:9.

Become fully equipped, mature.

Be comforted –Encourage one another; nudge one another on.

Don't tear each other down.

Be like-minded (think the same things; manifest the mind of Christ)

It doesn't mean that you always agree about everything.

It does mean that when we disagree, we'll treat each other with mutual respect—not tearing down people who disagree with us.

Live in peace

Their kind of “one-upmanship” breeds self-centered feuding.

He desires that they be characterized by unity and peace.

=> *“then the God of love and peace shall be with you.”*

When the world sees the way we respond to one another, can they tell that we are followers of the God of love and peace?

Exhortations combine as a call to show love for one another.

When we show that kind of love for each other, it's evident that God is present among us.

He's the God of love and peace.

When He resides in us,

He produces His fruit in us.

These exhortations are especially appropriate for **the church that has everything—except love.**

Paul desires that these be evident among us, as we grow in Christ.

¹² *Greet one another with a holy kiss.*

They demonstrated love for one another by personal contact.

In their culture, men would kiss men;
women would kiss women.

He wants more than just the cultural ritual.

Our expression of love should be genuine—a *HOLY* kiss.
Our culture has perverted the idea of kissing.

Same sex public kisses have become the symbol of
homosexual society—it goes together with a clenched
fist, raised in rebellion

There's nothing sexual about what Paul is promoting.

It's an outward expression—and it is *HOLY*—demon-
strating genuine love and concern for one another.

Equivalent to “A holy hug”—People are huggers.

This too should be holy—a genuine expression of love and
concern.

I had to learn to be a hugger. It didn't come naturally for
me!

Our family didn't do a lot of hugging.

Genuine love is expressed by genuine concern and contact.

People need more contact with one another—literally.

That contact should NEVER be sexual in nature

—genuine love and concern, expressed by touching one
another.

FINAL GREETING 13:13

¹³ *All the saints send their greetings.*

BENEDICTION 13:14

¹⁴ *May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and
the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*

These words are often **used in benedictions** at close of
worship.

I have used them many times.

It's easy to repeat the words and miss the point!

Notice what Paul hopes will be evident—the *nouns* he wishes for:

Grace Love Fellowship

All have to do with the unity of the body of Christ!

May there be grace and love and fellowship among you!

Paul prays that God will grant us the qualities we need most: grace, love and fellowship—*all of these come from God!*

God is the source of grace, love and fellowship.

It's the grace that our Lord Jesus Christ first modeled, dying for us.

It's the love of God—Who loved us while we were still sinners.

It's fellowship, which the Holy Spirit produces in us.

Only GOD can produce these qualities in us.

Paul desires to see these evident among the Corinthians.

When God produces them in His people, there's **JOY IN SERVING JESUS!**

That's what this book is all about!

The joy of serving Jesus,

when God produces His fruit among His people.

What principles for our lives does Paul reveal?

How did the Corinthians respond? We don't know!

All we can do is be sure the love and concern for one another, the desire to please God above anything else, is true of us. So that those who minister to us may experience joy in serving Jesus!