

SECOND CORINTHIANS

Chapter 13

Introduction

The believers in Corinth were living in sin. The closing verses of chapter twelve list “contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, backbitings, whisperings, conceits, tumults... uncleanness, fornication and lewdness.”

Paul was planning a return to Corinth. He knew he must exercise his authority as an apostle of Jesus Christ and discipline them for their sin. As he contemplated his visit, Paul saw a *problem* and shared a *preference*:

1. The problem he saw was that the believers at Corinth demanded that he offer them proof he was indeed an apostle who had God’s authority to exercise discipline.
2. The preference he shared was that they deal with their sin before he arrived so that his visit would be less painful for everyone.

Paul addressed both of these concerns in verses five and six by saying to them,

2 Corinthians 13:5 Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified.
2 Corinthians 13:6 But I trust that you will know that we are not disqualified.

“Examine yourselves” was Paul’s brilliant solution. Spiritual self-examination would solve the problem regarding his authority as an apostle. They wanted proof of Paul’s apostleship. He said to them, “**You** are the proof I am an apostle!” Remember, it was Paul who had pioneered the work of the Gospel in Corinth. He had gone there with the authority of an apostle and preached about Jesus Christ. The believers at Corinth were fruit of his ministry. If *he* was disqualified to be an apostle, then *they* would be disqualified as believers since they were his disciples!

Spiritual self-examination would also solve his preference that they deal with their sin prior to his arrival. If they examined themselves they would repent of their sin and not need to be disciplined when Paul arrived.

We can organize our thoughts around two points: #1 Submit To Spiritual Self-Examination To Reveal Your Sin, and #2 Submit To Spiritual Self-Examination To Recover From Your Sin.

#1 Submit To Spiritual Self-Examination To Reveal Your Sin

(v1-6)

The meaning of certain key words is critical to our understanding of the intention of these verses. They are the words *disqualified*, *proof*, and *complete*.

1. “Disqualified” was used to describe metals which, when tested, were found to be false.¹
2. “Proof,” “test,” and “approved” are all forms of the same Greek word. They were used of the testing process of metals by which impurities were discovered and discarded so that what was pure remained.²
3. “Complete” means to restore to proper condition.³

These words describe submitting precious metals to a process of testing by which impurities are revealed and removed so that purity can be restored.

Paul was writing to believers living in sin. He was exhorting each of them to submit themselves to a process of testing, what he called spiritual self-examination, that would reveal the impurities of sin so that the impurities could be removed and the believers restored.

2 Corinthians 13:1 This *will be* the third *time* I am coming to you. “*By the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established.*”

¹ William MacDonald, *Believer’s Bible Commentary*, p. 1869.

² *Complete Biblical Library*.

³ *Ibid.*

2 Corinthians 13:2 I have told you before, and foretell as if I were present the second time, and now being absent I write to those who have sinned before, and to all the rest, that if I come again I will not spare -

Paul's quote from Deuteronomy put the believers on notice that he intended to initiate a process of official church discipline upon his arrival. Sin cannot be overlooked.

They had challenged his authority. By the way, this is a classic strategy. Often when you attempt to confront sin in the church, the person simply leaves. It is essentially a declaration that they do not recognize your authority to discipline them.

2 Corinthians 13:3 since you seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, who is not weak toward you, but mighty in you.

Paul had proclaimed the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ in Corinth. They believed the message of salvation by grace alone through faith alone and had experienced the "mighty" transforming power of the indwelling Holy Spirit in their lives. Their challenge to his authority as an apostle was illogical. Their own testimony proved that Paul was a man sent by God to proclaim the Gospel.

Paul was not suggesting that these Corinthians were unsaved. In fact, his whole argument rests upon the premise that they **were** saved! Since they *were* saved, he **must** be an apostle because it was through his ministry as an apostle that they came to know the Lord.

2 Corinthians 13:4 For though He was crucified in weakness, yet He lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, but we shall live with Him by the power of God toward you.

The Cross upon which Jesus died seemed to declare His "weakness." But He rose from the dead and "yet lives by the power of God." His servants seem weak; but they, too, live by the power of God. They might think him weak, but Paul was coming in the power of God to deal with their sin.

Here's a question: Would you rather confess your sin alone to God or be confronted with your sin among the whole congregation? *Better to confess!* Paul exhorts them to,

2 Corinthians 13:5 Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified.

He was exhorting each of them to personally examine their own lives for the impurities of sin so that their sins could be *revealed* and *removed* in order for them to be *restored*. The phrase “in the faith” does not refer to saving faith but to living by faith. In other words, since you are Christians, see if you **act** like Christians! They “knew” that Jesus Christ was “in” them, but they were not letting Him live through them.

What about this word “disqualified?” Look at verse six:

2 Corinthians 13:6 But I trust that you will know that we are not disqualified.

They could not disqualify Paul’s authority over them without also disqualifying themselves. If he was not an apostle, then they were not saved. But **he was**; and **they were!** Bible commentator William MacDonald writes,

“Paul is not telling the Corinthians to engage in self-examination as a proof of their salvation. Rather he is asking them to find in their salvation a proof of his apostleship.”⁴

The verse is first for **believers**. The believers at Corinth were judging, accusing, and criticizing Paul while they were living in sin. He tells them to first examine themselves. It is exactly like Jesus telling you to first remove the beam in your own eye before you can scrutinize others for the specs in their eyes.

Can a person commit sins like the ones the Corinthians were guilty of and really be saved? I would cite the biblical example of Lot, Abraham’s nephew, in the Old Testament. The guy’s life was a disaster. You would never conclude that he was a believer... **Until** you read Second Peter 2:7 and learn that he was declared righteous by God – *a saved man!*

Believers sin. Believers should examine themselves. Actually, it is more proper to say that you submit yourself to spiritual self-examination. Only the Lord can properly perform a spiritual self-examination. You simply submit to it. Your heart is wicked and

⁴ p. 1869.

deceiving; only the Lord can know it. You examine yourself by inviting the Lord to examine you. You pray, as David did,

Psalm 139:23 Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties;
Psalm 139:24 And see if *there is any* wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting.

This verse does have application to those who are unsaved. It is possible for you to be self-deceived and think you are saved when you are not. Self-examination ought to reveal this to you as you scrutinize your life for proof you are a Christian.

What is the proof you are a Christian? A lot of writers have tackled this subject of the evidence you are saved. They usually come up with lists of questions to ask yourself. Some of their questions are just weird. For example: The Puritans of the Holy Club in Oxford, England, during the time of John Wesley asked as one of their test questions, “*Do I get to bed in time and get up in time?*”

The best tests can be found in a reading of First John. For example: John says,

1 John 5:1 Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him.

There is really only one test with two proofs. The test is, “Are you born of God?” If you are, the proofs will be that you will love God and you will love other Christians.

This is the same standard Paul uses when he reminds the believers at Corinth, in verse five, “Jesus Christ is in you.” The thing that makes you a Christian is being “born of God.” You must be born again. You must receive from God a new nature and His indwelling Holy Spirit. When you do, you can *expect* and do *experience* radical changes. It is nothing less than a transformation. It is described as going from death to life, from darkness to light. You are called a new creature in Jesus Christ. This is why I don’t mind examining myself. Jesus came into my life and transformed me from within. It was nothing short of a miracle.

When you are born again, you “love Him Who begot” you. You understand that you were headed for hell but for the love of God in

sending Jesus Christ to die for you. You love Him because He first loved you!

When you are born again you love other Christians. You realize that in spite of their sinfulness God sent His Son to die for them exactly as He did for you. Though there may be many things about them you do not like, you love them as your brothers and sisters in God's family.

If you are unsaved, **get saved!** "Believe that Jesus is the Christ." If you *are* saved,

#2 Submit To Spiritual Self-Examination To Recover From Your Sin (v7-14)

Christians *can* and *do* sin grossly. There are "contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, backbitings, whisperings, conceits, tumults... uncleanness, fornication and lewdness." When these things are revealed, it is so you can repent, be restored, and **recover** the joy of your walk with Jesus.

2 Corinthians 13:7 Now I pray to God that you do no evil, not that we should appear approved, but that you should do what is honorable, though we may seem disqualified.
2 Corinthians 13:8 For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth.

Their submission to his discipline when he arrived would indeed "approve" him and show him to be a true apostle. Paul would rather they repent on their own, even if it meant that some would still consider him "disqualified." Everything he did was only motivated by "truth."

2 Corinthians 13:9 For we are glad when we are weak and you are strong. And this also we pray, that you may be made complete.

He wanted them to be strengthened in their walk. This wasn't about who was right and who was wrong. It was about righting their wrongs for their own sake. The word "complete" means *to restore to proper condition*. He wanted them to be restored and recover what had been missing in their lives, both as individuals and as a church.

2 Corinthians 13:10 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.

He would rather they confess and repent on their own than have to confront them. He would rather edify their faith than have to tear-down their faults.

In his closing comments Paul lists some of the things he wanted them to recover:

2 Corinthians 13:11 Finally, brethren, farewell. Become complete. Be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.

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

2 Corinthians 13:13 All the saints greet you.

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

“Farewell” is the word *rejoice*. It was their joy, the joy of the Lord, that he wanted them to recover.

“Become complete” is *restore*. It is used of fishermen mending their nets. It is an encouragement that they would once again be useful in winning others to Jesus Christ - once they themselves had recovered.

“Be of good comfort” is *be encouraged*. It might be a reference to the ministry of the indwelling Spirit, Who is grieved by sin.

“Be of one mind, live in peace.” They were known for divisions, strife, open hostility. These would be a thing of the past.

“The God of love and peace will be with you.” God is always with you. But you do not always experience His love and peace. They could recover these.

“Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you.” Sin destroys fellowship with other believers.

In verse fourteen Paul mentions each Person of the tri-une God. It is a summary statement to remind them of the fellowship that they had been missing. “Grace,” “love,” “communion” – these are the things they ought to treasure. These are the things sin was hindering them from experiencing.

Conclusion

Let me make one final suggestion. Submitting to spiritual self-examination will get you back on track... *But it will also keep you on track!* It is not something to do only when there are “contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, backbitings, whisperings, conceits, tumults... uncleanness, fornication and lewdness.” It is something you constantly practice to prevent these from occurring in the first place.

Make David’s prayer **your** prayer:

Psalm 139:23 Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties;

Psalm 139:24 And see if *there is any* wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting.