

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Analysis

- A. Paul reminded the Corinthians of the things he intended to do when he came to them on this third visit (1-4).
1. He stated the basis on which any testimony would be accepted (1).
 2. He warned that he would not spare those who had sinned (2).
 - a) He had told them about this in the first epistle, and was repeating it for their benefit.
 - b) He had warned them when he was present the second time (that is, through his first epistle to them).
 - c) He was repeating it in his absence, warning them that he would not spare those who had sinned or the rest when he came again.
 3. He gave his reasons for this intended action against sinners in their midst (3-4).
 - a) They had desired proof that Christ was speaking through him (3a).
 - b) Christ is not weak, but powerful in His dealing with them (3b).
 - c) Explanation of the issue of weakness and power (4).
 - (1) He was crucified in weakness—voluntarily submitting to death on the cross—but He lives by the power of God as demonstrated by His resurrection.
 - (2) In the same way, Paul declared that he was weak in Him, but lived with Him by the power of God. God's power raised him from death in sin and enabled him to live for their sakes.
- B. He urged them to settle their problems in the light of the truth (5-10).
1. The issue to be settled was their relation to Christ (5-7).
 - a) They were to examine their relation to the faith (5a).
 - b) They were to test their relation to Christ (5b).
 - (1) Were they in Christ?
 - (2) Were they rejected? Had they failed to pass the test of true relationship to Him?
 - c) Paul expressed his hope and prayer for them (6-7).

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- (1) He hoped that they would not fail in their relation to Christ (6).
- (2) He prayed that they might do no wrong (7).
 - (a) This was not that he might appear to have been vindicated.
 - (b) He wanted them to do what was right.
2. He was writing to help them do this very thing (8-10).
 - a) In doing so, he must act according to truth.
 - b) He rejoiced in his own weakness when they were strong.
 - c) He prayed that they might settle their problems.
 - d) He wrote while absent that he might not have to use the authority which the Lord gave him to build up and not to tear down (10).
- C. He closed the epistle with words of admonition, promise, greeting, and benediction (11-14).
 1. Admonition (11a).
 - a) Rejoice (good-bye).
 - b) Settle your own problems—put things in order.
 - c) Be comforted—accept his help.
 - d) Straighten out your thinking—think the same thing.
 - e) Live in peace.
 2. Promise: The God of love and peace will be with you (11b).
 3. Greeting (12-13).
 - a) Greet one another with a holy kiss.
 - b) All the saints greet you.
 4. Benediction: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (14).

Paul's Intended Action on His Third Visit

Scripture

13:1-4. This is the third time I am coming to you. At the mouth of two witnesses or three shall every word be established. 2 I have said beforehand, and I do say beforehand, as when I was present the second time, so now, being absent, to them that have sinned heretofore, and to all the rest, that, if I come again I will not spare; 3 seeing that ye seek a proof of Christ that speaketh in me; who to you-ward is not weak, but is powerful in you: 4 for he was crucified through weakness, yet he liveth through the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but we shall live with him through the power of God toward you.

Comments

This is the third time.—See comment on 12:14. Anticipating the long delayed third visit, Paul kept reminding the Corinthians that he was coming. In the above paragraph, he had indicated his determination not to be a burden to them. He also pointed out his intention of dealing with any sinful practices of which they might not have repented. *At the mouth of two or three.*—Quoting from Deut. 19:15, Paul cited the Law as the standard by which he intended to deal with sinful practices mentioned in 12:20-21. There is no good reason to assume that this quotation was being applied to his own statement about his forthcoming visit.

as when I was present the second time.—Paul had been present with the Corinthians, not in body but in spirit through his authoritative apostolic epistle in which he had given specific instructions for dealing with sinful practices which the Corinthians had allowed to develop in their congregation. He had received adequate evidence to establish the fact that parties and divisions actually existed in their midst. He had not written to them on the basis of mere hearsay. Reliable testimony had been furnished by those of the household of Chloe. In the case of immoral conduct involving the man who was living with his father's wife, the evidence was so clear that even the pagans were condemning the church for condoning such a thing. In the matter of lawsuits among brethren, the evidence against them was such that the pagan judges looked disparagingly upon the churches for allowing such a condition to exist.

Although Titus had reported their obedient response to the instruction Paul had sent in his first letter, the presence of false teachers at Corinth was sufficient grounds for his fear that some of them might have sinned again, or that some may never have repented.

Upon his arrival, he intended that every charge should be supported by adequate testimony. Those among them with Jewish background were thoroughly familiar with this procedure and would surely assent to the fairness of Paul as he anticipated the possibility of being forced to use the authority which the Lord gave him to build up and if need be, to destroy the sinful practices that were opposing the gospel of Christ.

to them that have sinned heretofore.—Paul had asked in his first letter: "What will ye? Shall I come unto you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness?" (I Cor. 4:21). While the church as a whole had responded to his warning, he kept repeating it for the sake

of some who may not have heeded it and the rest who might have become involved again in such sins as he had listed in 12:20-21.

seeing that ye seek a proof of Christ that he speaketh in me.—Apparently some had begun to question whether or not Christ had been speaking through Paul as he had written to them warning them of the consequences of their sins. Some had gladly listened to those false teachers who said, "His letters are weighty and strong, but he is weak when present." Clearly, the false teachers had implied that Christ was not speaking through Paul and that he would not be able to carry out such punishment as he had promised. Yet the Corinthians knew that their very relation to Christ depended upon the gospel which Paul had preached to them. Furthermore, they knew that he had exhibited the credentials of his apostleship in the miracles which he had performed in their midst. All this points to the fickleness of the human heart. We do not wonder that Paul was afraid that the Corinthians might lapse into their old sins, for he knew how quickly the Galatians had turned from the gospel as he preached it to a different kind of gospel that would enslave them in false teaching.

who to you-ward is not weak, but is powerful in you.—Paul had constantly boasted in his own weakness and in the power of Christ that had raised those who were dead in trespasses and sin to sit with Him in the heavenly places. That power had been channeled into their lives through the gospel which Paul preached. False teachers had no such power. As ministers of Satan teaching false doctrine, they were corrupting men and making them slaves of unrighteousness. Only through the power of the gospel can men be transformed into the glorious image of the Lord. See II Cor. 3:18.

for he was crucified through weakness.—Christ Jesus who existed in the form of God and was on an equality with God took upon Himself the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of men. He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the death of the cross. See Phil. 2:6-8.

Jesus said, "I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No one taketh it away from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment received I from the Father" (John 10:17-18). Although He could have called twelve legions of angels to defend Him, He meekly submitted to arrest in the Garden and suffered the indignities that were heaped upon Him by His tormentors at the time of His trial and, finally, allowed them to crucify Him. From the human point of view no greater symbol of weakness could be found than the cross. But

myopic men have failed to see that in His death He destroyed him who has power of death, that is, the devil. See Heb. 2:14.

yet he liveth through the power of God.—The resurrection of Christ is the foundation of Christian faith. The world has not known a greater demonstration of power than that which raised Christ from the dead and caused Him to sit at the right hand of the Majesty on high. It was to this power that Paul directed the thinking of the Corinthians who had been saved from sin through the power of the gospel, but who, if they insisted on returning to the old sinful ways, were facing eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of His might. See II Thes. 1:8-9.

For we also are weak in him.—In his first letter, Paul had written: "God hath set forth us apostles last of all, as men doomed to death" (I Cor. 4:9). From the human point of view, Paul readily admitted his weakness, but he refused to boast in anything except the power of Christ that had saved him from sin. He had been crucified with Christ; but he was living in faith, that is, he believed the gospel of Christ and conducted himself in accord with it. He was anticipating the life with Him in the eternal kingdom made possible through the power of God.

Problems Settled In The Light of Truth

Scripture

13:5-10. Try your own selves, whether ye are in the faith; prove your own selves. Or know ye not as to your own selves, that Jesus Christ is in you? unless indeed ye be reprobate. 6 But I hope that ye shall know that we are not reprobate. 7 Now we pray to God that ye do no evil; not that we may appear approved, but that ye may do that which is honorable, though we be as reprobate. 8 For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth. 9 For we rejoice, when we are weak, and ye are strong: this we also pray for even your perfecting. 10 For this cause I write these things while absent, that I may not when present deal sharply, according to the authority which the Lord gave me for building up, and not for casting down.

Comments

Try your own selves.—The Corinthians had been wanting Paul to prove to them that Christ had spoken through him. He had given them adequate proof of it, reminding them that he would again

demonstrate it when he arrived on his third visit. He also reminded them that it was their responsibility to put themselves to the test with regard to their own faith and to determine, by testing it, whether or not they were living a life of faith in Christ. Such a test could only be carried out in the light of the authoritative message of the gospel that had been delivered to them by Christ's apostle. It couldn't be done by measuring themselves by the standards of the false teachers who "measured themselves by themselves and compared themselves with themselves, and were without understanding" (II Cor. 10:12).

Paul was recommending to the Corinthians an exercise by which every Christian should continually check his relation to the Lord. Only a diligent study of the Word and a sincere effort to put into practice can assure one that he is living in harmony with the true faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

prove your own selves.—Paul had written in his first letter that a man was to prove himself in the light of the meaning of the loaf and cup in the Lord's supper. He was to determine what there was in his life that met the approval of Christ. The bread represented the body of Christ and the true relation of each member of that body to Christ the Head. The content of the cup symbolized the blood of Christ which was the means of blotting out all sin. No better place could be found for the Corinthians to examine their own lives than at the Lord's table as they meditated on the meaning of the death of Christ for their salvation.

Or know ye not as to your own selves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—Paul did not hesitate to declare that Christ lived in him because he had been crucified with Christ. See Gal. 2:20. He also made it very clear that those who belong to Jesus Christ have crucified the flesh—a symbol of sinful conduct—with its passions and longing desires for things that are evil. See Gal. 5:24. He had written to the Corinthians in his first letter to remind them that their bodies were temples of the Holy Spirit which was in them which they had from God. They did not belong to themselves, for they were bought with the price of the blood of Christ. Therefore, Paul urged them to glorify God in the body. See I Cor. 6: 19-20. If they were actually glorifying God in the things that they were doing, they could be sure that Christ was in them. If the test which he had directed them to make proved otherwise, they could know that the Lord did not approve their conduct. Had they failed by the standard of measurement which the Lord had given them through His faithful apostle?

But I hope that ye shall know that we are not reprobate.—Since the test of their faith and the presence of Christ in them depended upon the standard of the gospel which Paul preached, he hoped that they would know that he and all the apostles through whom Christ had spoken were not rejected by the Lord. This, of course, was something that the super-apostles had insinuated, if indeed they had not openly declared it. Since they were ministers of Satan, nothing they said could possibly be used by the Corinthians to test their relationship to Christ.

Now we pray to God.—The earnestness of Paul as he thought of the tragic fate of those who were about to reject the gospel of Christ led him to express his views in his prayer to God that they do no evil. His concern was not for himself nor for what the false teachers might say about him. He did not want to be guilty of joining with them in false teaching that he might merely appear to be approved by Christ. His concern was that they, as his children in the gospel, might do the thing that was right before the Lord even though false teachers might attempt to discredit him and show that he did not have the approval of the Lord.

For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth.—As an apostle of Christ, Paul spoke the truth. And as one who had been crucified with Christ and had committed himself wholeheartedly to the Lord, he acted in accord with the truth.

For we rejoice, when we are weak.—It did not matter to Paul that false teachers were calling him weak. He had gladly admitted it, because the secret of his life was to be found in the power of Christ who had raised him from death in trespasses and sin to the place where he could truthfully say that Christ lived in him. He did not make void the grace of God. Although he could rejoice in his own weakness, Paul rejoiced that his children in the gospel were strong. Their strength, too, depended upon their relation to Christ. It depended upon their being in the faith; upon their living by the standard of the gospel; upon their putting on the whole armor of God, that they might withstand the crafty work of the devil through his ministers who had fashioned themselves into ministers of righteousness.

even your perfecting.—Paul uses this interesting term again in verse eleven. He had used it in I Cor. 1:10. See *Studies in First Corinthians* on the various usages of the term.

In this context, Paul is urging them to settle their problems, to get rid of their sinful practices, to rearrange their lives that they might be

in harmony with the truth of Christ as delivered to them by His inspired apostle.

For this cause I write these things while absent.—Once again Paul called their attention to his purpose in writing this epistle. What he said to them about sin and its punishment was no idle threat. It did, however, give them an opportunity to correct their ways and avoid the punishment which would otherwise be meted out to them through the authority which the Lord had given to Paul.

They had joined with Paul in punishing, according to his instructions, the one who had been guilty of immoral conduct. That had meant delivering the guilty one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, with the fond hope that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Paul was hoping and praying that it might not be necessary to again use his authority against sinners in their midst who refused to repent.

Closing Admonition And Benediction

Scripture

13:11-14. Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfected; be comforted; be of the same mind; live in peace: and the God of love and peace shall be with you. 12 Salute one another with a holy kiss. 13 All the saints salute you. 14 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Comments

Finally, brethren, farewell.—Despite the fears which he held that they might again be corrupted through the efforts of the false teachers, Paul addressed the Corinthians as brethren when he told them good-bye.

This was characteristic of his letters, for in the first epistle he had addressed them as the church of God, although he was aware of their divisions by which they were destroying the temple of God. He called them "brethren" although he was aware of the spiritual immaturity that marked them as men. The term "brethren" implied that they were members of the family of God. But it in no way implied approval of practices unbecoming to a child of God. It did indicate Paul's love and hope for them that they might settle their problems in the light of the gospel so that they might be in the family of God in heaven. For that reason he urged them to be perfected. He urged them to

accept the help that he as their father in the gospel offered those who were like beloved children to him. He wanted them to be united in their expressed opinions regarding their relation to Christ, by basing their conclusions on the truth which he had taught them. He wanted them to live in peace with one another, but peace must be preceded by purity in teaching and conduct. Their factions, jealousies, and back-bitings could all be abolished by bringing their lives up to the standard of conduct which Christ had set for them. Only by doing so could the peace of God guard their hearts and thoughts in Christ Jesus.

and the God of love and peace.—Paul served the God of love and peace. He demonstrated His love in giving His Son to die for us. He made peace possible through the blood of the cross. Those who have found peace at the cross should be able to live at peace with their brethren in Christ.

Salute one another with a holy kiss.—This was the usual greeting among brethren. Brotherhood is determined by relationship to Christ. Brethren in Christ should follow the apostolic injunction to greet one another even if local customs suggests that it be done through the handshake rather than the holy kiss which was the custom in Paul's day.

All the saints salute you.—Saints are those who have separated themselves from the things of the world by washing their robes and making them white in the blood of the Lamb. They have dedicated themselves to the pure service of God. Paul had addressed this epistle to "the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints that are in the whole of Achaia." He lifted high this holy standard as he closed the letter even though in it he had warned the impenitent sinners about the punishment that would be visited upon them in his forthcoming visit.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.—In this sublime benediction, Paul expressed his fondest hope and deepest longing for those whom he loved as his children in the gospel. He prayed that the grace of Christ, His unmerited favor, might be with them. He knew from experience how that grace had saved him and had continued in providential protection to be with him in all his trials and labors for Christ. He prayed that the grace of Christ by which they too had been saved through their faith expressed in obedience to the gospel might also providentially protect them from the destructive power of Satanic false teaching that they might be presented in purity and victory before Christ when He comes.

and the love of God.—He prayed that God's love which had been

the compelling force in his life might motivate them to obey His Word so that they might not be chastized with the disobedient.

This was God's love for them. His love made forgiveness through Christ available to the believer. But they were not to presume upon the love of God, for those who will not walk with Christ in the new life shall suffer punishment, even destruction from the presence of the Lord. See II Thes. 1:8-9.

and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.—This was the fellowship or partnership of the saints which had been made possible through following the wisdom of God revealed by the Holy Spirit through the inspired apostles. Paul prayed that it might be a reality in their lives as they worked together for Christ at Corinth and joined with the brethren in Macedonia to help the saints in Judea.

As these solemn words were being read to the church, the brethren must have realized that they were far more than a mere formal closing. This was an earnest prayer that had come from the heart of the one who had led them to Christ and who continued to love them as a father. The sublime benediction embodied the apostle Paul's hope and prayer for the saints of God at Corinth.

Summary

Paul had mentioned his forthcoming return visit to Corinth in his first letter. Much of the second epistle centers in the explanation of his delay in coming. It had been necessary to postpone the trip until he had given them time to act upon the instruction given in the first epistle about the tragic sins which they had permitted to go unreproved in their midst.

While he had written with loving care for those whom he considered his children in the gospel, he again, as he closed the letter, called attention to the necessity of getting themselves straightened out in the light of the truth of the gospel which they had learned from him. He was coming. And he would not spare those who were guilty of conduct unbecoming a Christian. But he assured them that all would be done in fairness for every charge would be established by adequate testimony.

Under the influence of false teachers, they had been led to question his authority. Did Christ really speak through him? Since they had asked for proof, Paul gave them ample evidence to support his authority which the Lord had given him to build up the church, not to tear it down as the false teachers were doing.

Since they sought proof of him, he suggested that they put them-

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selves to the test and find out in the light of the truth whether or not they were in accord with the faith in Christ. Was Christ in them? He was, unless they failed to pass the test of conducting themselves according to His gospel. Out of his love for them, Paul expressed his hope that they would not fail, even though false teachers attempted to disqualify him as an apostle of Christ. He boasted only in his weakness and in the power of Christ by whose death and resurrection he, as well as the believers at Corinth, had been saved.

Paul prayed to God that they would do no evil, but he reminded them he was guided by the truth in all his dealings with them. As an apostle of Christ, he could do nothing against the truth. Lest they miss the point, he reminded them again that the purpose of his writing was to give them time to take care of their problems so as to avoid being punished upon his arrival.

The letter was finished. Reluctantly, it seems, Paul said "good-bye" to the brethren whom he loved in Christ. But once more he urged them to straighten out their problems, to take courage, to hold the same views of the gospel, and to live in peace. "Do this," he said, "and the God of peace will be with you."

Gathering up all his hope and prayer for them in one sublime benediction he wrote: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you."

Questions

1. Why did Paul repeat his statement that he was about to make a third visit to Corinth?
2. What had he expected them to accomplish before he arrived?
3. Why did he insist that everything was to be established by two or three witnesses? To what things did he refer?
4. How had Paul dealt with the charges against them when he was present in spirit?
5. What punishment had been meted out by the church to those who had sinned?
6. What may this suggest as to the action Paul intended to take through the authority the Lord had given him?
7. Since Titus had reported that they had obeyed the instructions of the first letter, why did Paul anticipate the possible need for further disciplinary action on this third visit?
8. What proof were some demanding of Paul? Why?
9. How had Paul responded to this demand?

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10. In what sense was Christ crucified through weakness?
11. How was the power of God demonstrated in Him?
12. What effect did this have on the Corinthians? on Paul?
13. What was the nature of Paul's weakness about which he boasted?
14. How will the power of Christ be used against the disobedient when He comes?
15. What does it mean to be crucified with Christ?
16. What does it mean for Christ to live in the Christian?
17. Why did Paul tell the Corinthians to try themselves?
18. How were they to do this?
19. How were they to know that Christ was in their midst?
20. What would demonstrate that they were unapproved by Christ?
21. Why did he say "I hope that you will know that we are not unapproved"?
22. Whom did he include in this expressed hope? Why?
23. Who had been suggesting that Paul did not have the approval of Christ?
24. Why did Paul say, "We can do nothing against the truth"?
25. Why did Paul rejoice when false teachers called him weak?
26. In what did he rejoice in the lives of the Christians at Corinth?
27. What did he mean by "your perfecting"?
28. Did Paul teach "perfectionism"—the doctrine that holds that it is possible to reach a state in this life in which it is impossible to commit an act of sin?
29. What are some of the ways in which the word translated "perfect" was used in Paul's time?
30. Why did Paul, in his closing words, refer to the Corinthians as "brethren" after having just warned them about their sins?
31. Why is God called "the God of love and peace"?
32. What is the Christian's obligation and privilege in the matter of greeting others?
33. What did Paul mean by "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ"?
34. What did he mean by the "love of God"?
35. What did he mean by "the communion of the Holy Spirit"?

For Discussion

1. In the light of Paul's instruction for the Corinthians to try themselves, how can the Lord's supper be made a meaningful experience to the conscientious Christian?
2. What is the place of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ in the life of the faithful Christian.