

Pastor Jeremy M. Thomas
Fredericksburg Bible Church

107 East Austin

Fredericksburg, Texas 78624

830-997-8834 jthomas@fbgbible.org

A1412 – March 23, 2014 – 2 Corinthians 13:7-14
Paul's Final Words

We're coming to the conclusion of 2 Corinthians so next week we'll review the entire letter, the historical setting, the theme, the argument, the outline. So if you have any questions on 2 Cor then put those in the box for next week. For this week just recall that the book nicely divides into three sections; what you might refer to as the three E's. In chapters 1-7 Paul is giving an Explanation of Ministry, in chapters 8-9 Paul is giving an Encouragement to Give and in chapters 10-13 Paul is giving Evidence of His Apostleship. So the three E's, explanation, encouragement and evidence give you the basic structure and outline of the book and we'll be reviewing these three sections next week in order to bring it all together. Following 2 Corinthians we will begin Paul's *magnum opus*,ⁱ the Book of Romans.

Today we want to complete the exposition of 2 Corinthians and to do so we'll review last week's lesson which leads to the finale. In 12:20 Paul revealed that he was coming to them again and that he was afraid that when he arrived they would not be what he wanted them to be nor would he be what they wanted him to be; meaning, if they were still committing these divisive sins then this would not be acceptable to Paul and he would be a strict disciplinarian and they would not enjoy it. Strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance and disturbances are all evidences of walking according to the flesh and they all cause division in the one body of Christ. These sins had been evident in the past and if they were still evident then that was the last straw, Paul would discipline them severely. In verse 21 Paul was also afraid that the Lord would humiliate him and he would mourn publicly over those who had sinned in the past and still continued in those sins without repentance. In this case Paul was concerned with the sexual sins which dominated Corinth and were a temptation to all who visited. In popular culture one went to Corinth to 'Corinthianize', which meant to sleep

with a Corinthian prostitute as an act of religious worship. The Corinthians engaged in these behaviors as pagans and now that they were Christians they should have put off this behavior. If not Paul would be humiliated and would mourn over them. We are one body with Christ now and we should never become one body with a prostitute. This should be obvious but breaking with past sins is always a struggle. Nevertheless, Paul did expect them to break with them. In 13:1, in order to confirm that those suspected of these behaviors were actually guilty Paul would require substantiation by two or three witnesses. In 13:2, if some were convicted he warns in advance that he will not spare anyone from the discipline, no matter who might be involved. In 13:3, since they were seeking to see Paul's apostolic power his severe discipline would clearly reveal it. Christ, in 13:4, was crucified because of His taking to Himself a frail humanity, but He lives a resurrected life now because of God's power toward Him. We too are weak in our human frailty but the very power of God that will raise us from the dead would be exercised through Paul in disciplining them. They would sense the mighty power of God in him if discipline was necessary. Therefore, before Paul came, in 13:5, they needed to endeavor to discover whether they were walking consistent with the Christian faith. Did they not know this fundamental truth about themselves—that Jesus Christ was in charge of their life—unless, of course, they were not walking in the faith? But I hope says Paul in 13:6 that you will now recognize clearly that we do not fail to walk in the faith. Paul lived by faith and therefore Jesus Christ was in control of his life. He passed the test. And so we learn that when we walk by faith Christ takes control of our lives but when we do not live by faith Christ is not in control of our lives and the lusts of the flesh issue forth. A Christian can choose to live either way but when we first come into the Christian life we are like infants and we need the pure milk of the word to grow and learn how to live the Christian life by grace through faith. Within two or three years we should have grown to learning to live this way and we are then ready for the pure meat of the word so that we can grow to maturity. From then on we are mature but maturing because there is always room for growth. The point is that there is a normal progression in the Christian life and if that progression is not taking place then Paul would be concerned about you and he would exercise discipline to stimulate growth. Just like little children need discipline to grow to adulthood so spiritual infants need discipline to grow to spiritual maturity. And not growing to maturity is abnormal and produces a deviant society.

Today we come to 13:7-14 where we find Paul's prayer request, his explanation for writing, a final exhortation, a salutation and a benediction. So there are a number of things here as Paul closes up. His prayer for the Corinthians is verses 7-9. He says, **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. For we can do nothing against the truth, but only for the truth. 9For we rejoice when we ourselves are weak but you are strong; this we also pray for, that you be made complete.** There's Paul's prayer for them and his prayer involves a negative side, a positive side and assures them that the prayer is not about making himself looking good but it's for the truth and for the spiritual well-being of the Corinthians. Let's make several points. First, it's interesting that Paul reveals his prayer request for them when he could have kept it private. This shows the validity of occasionally sharing with others what you are praying for them. In my estimation this can accomplish a number of positive things. For one, it can encourage the person to know that you are praying for them. Two, it can reveal to them the nature of your concerns for them. I see these as positive results of sharing your prayer for someone else with them.

Second, in the order of prayer we see that Paul prayed to **God** and not Jesus or the Spirit. The rule of thumb is that whenever **God** is used without being modified by either the Son or the Spirit it always refers to the Father. Prayer changed in the Church age in the sense that the Son instructed His disciples to pray to the Father in the name of the Son and by the power of the Holy Spirit. This had never been done before because Christ's work on the cross and subsequent sending of the Holy Spirit had not yet been accomplished. But in light of the soon accomplishment He said, "if you ask the Father for anything in My name, He will give it to you. Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full." So this is a new way of praying and I think it's important to realize what it means to pray in the name of the Son. When we conclude a prayer with "in Jesus' name" we're not pronouncing a magic formula that assures we will get whatever we requested, nor are we just mouthing some closing words. What we are doing is requesting that the prayer be answered according to the will of the Father in light of the cross work of the Son.

Third, the actual prayer request has a negative aspect. The negative prayer request here is that the Corinthians **do no wrong**. What it means is that they **do no** evil since the Greek word translated **wrong** means “evil” and stands in sharp contrast to the positive prayer request a bit later in this verse where he prays that the Corinthians **may do what is right**, the word which means “good.” So the negative prayer request to do no evil is a prayer request that they do not live according to the flesh, a simple but vital request.

There are several important things we can learn from this simple prayer. One is that Paul knew that a believer could do evil. He was not under the delusion as some are in our day that if someone is a believer they will always do good. Believers can do evil because they still have a sin nature. Those who are deluded into thinking that believers cannot do evil or cannot do much evil do not hold that Christians still have a sin nature but only a new nature that is gradually eradicating the old tendencies. However, the Scriptures definitely teach in Romans 6-7 that we still have a sin nature and that its power can be defeated only as we reckon ourselves dead to sin. So believers still have a sin nature and out of this sin nature comes evil. Practically speaking what this means is that we cannot judge whether someone is a believer or not if they do evil, another common tendency. We have this illusion that everyone who is a Christian is automatically going to live the Christian life. Yet this is absurd. I do think, however, that we can judge whether a believer is out of fellowship or not if they do public evil. This was Paul’s judgment in 12:20 and 21, that if the divisive and sexual sins at Corinth were confirmed to be going on by two or three witnesses then he would discipline them. So I presume that we can do the same and if believers are living as unrepentant then we need to confront them.

Two, is that God is necessary to help us overcome our evil tendencies. This is not something you can do yourself. Paul **prayed to God** that they **do no** evil. The implication is clear - left to themselves they could not overcome the evil disposition of the flesh. But with God’s gracious influence toward them they could overcome evil and do good. The way it works is that when we are an unbeliever all we can do is evil because all we have is a sinful nature. This does not mean we can’t be moral, in the humanistic sense of the term, it only means that we can’t please God. But when He works through His word and we learn and He draws and we come to faith in the Son of God then the Holy Spirit regenerates us and gives us a new nature. This new nature is contrary

to the old sin nature and as we learn the word our new nature has new desires to please God. Yet even with a new nature and new desires we do not have the ability to fulfill those desires left to ourselves. That's why we have the filling of the Spirit. He is the one who, when we depend upon Him, fulfills those new desires. So practically, what Paul is showing us is that prayer is a means by which the Father works in our lives such that we yield to the Spirit who overcomes our fleshly desires to do evil and that we do what is good instead. Without Him it's impossible.

Third, Paul explains the negative prayer request further by saying, **not that we ourselves may appear approved.** Paul was not praying for them so that he would appear vindicated in their sight. Paul was actually praying for their spiritual growth. As we find commonly in Paul's writings he was more interested in his converts than he was in himself. This is merely walking in the footsteps of our Savior who was more interested in saving us than Himself. When the people at the cross said, "If you are the Messiah save yourself," they asked for a demonstration of His true identity, but to have saved Himself would have meant that He not have saved us. The lesson is that we should put others ahead of ourselves. Paul did, the Savior did, and you should. **Even** if it results in you not **appear approved.** Jesus didn't appear approved to others on the cross but He was approved unto God.

Fourth, is the positive prayer request, **but that you do what is right.** As we said, this Greek word means good. To do what is good is to have the fruit of the Spirit which is opposite to the flesh. There are only two ways to live at any given time, according to the flesh which is evil or according to the Spirit which is good. Paul is praying on the flipside of evil which is that they do good.

Fifth, and this was so, **even though we may appear unapproved.** Even though he may not look good in the Corinthian's sight, what was more important was that the Corinthians do good and not evil. His own reputation, while he was concerned about it, was nevertheless not the most important thing.

The reason set forth for not being ultimately concerned with his appearing unapproved to them is verse 8. **For we can do nothing against the truth, but only for the truth.** The truth was ultimate to Paul, even if it meant

failing to vindicate himself. Paul could not bring himself to do anything that would harm the truth. At least in Paul's day man held out that there was truth, though people questioned it, as Pilate asked, "What is truth?" But today that question is irrelevant. There is no hope of finding truth for postmodern man. The postmodern truth is that all truth is relative. However, the claim that all truth is relative is self-defeating since it requires there to be one absolute truth, the truth that all truth is relative. But unfortunate even more than this is the fact that people don't care whether there is truth or not. Yet truth is what men need in order to be set free. What is the truth? The truth is that God created the world and man as His image bearer to be good stewards of the world for the glory of God. However, we rebelled in Adam and consequently fell under the curse of sin. At the proper time God sent His Son into the world to die for our sins in order to satisfy His perfect holiness. Through faith in Him we are restored to a relationship with Him and in the coming resurrection His image in us will be completely restored. Paul could do nothing against this truth because this is the truth that fallen men need. It is still the truth that men need to know, regardless of what they think or believe, what the truth is.

Another reason that Paul set forth for not being ultimately concerned with his appearing unapproved is verse 9. **For we rejoice when we ourselves are weak but you are strong.** Paul already taught us the truth that when we are weak then we are strong because it is God's strength that sustains us. In light of this he said that he would gladly spend and be expended by the Corinthians for their sakes. If Paul appeared weak in their eyes this was a reason for rejoicing because it was through his weakness they became **strong**. On a deeper level, if one understands the principle they can understand that if they were strong in reality they were weak because they were not depending upon themselves but God. And if they perceived Paul as weak he too was strong because he was depending upon God. Whether they understood this or not is highly questionable, but the important thing is that we understand the principle that it is when we are weak, in pain, suffering, that we are strong because we are forced to depend upon God; and therein we find all the strength we need.

Finally, at the end of verse 9, **this we also pray for, that you be made complete.** The Greek word **made complete** is *katartisis* and refers to "the process of maturation." So Paul's final prayer is for their spiritual maturity.

All believers should move from infancy to maturity and once they reach maturity they should continue maturing. Like the vine in John 15, the tender new shoots bore nothing so the vinedresser lifted them up in order to encourage growth. The next year they bore fruit and the vinedressers pruned them so that they would mature and bear more fruit. So it should be with the Christian life, we should grow from infancy to maturity and keep on maturing. This is the essence of Paul's prayer **that you be made complete**.

In verse 10 Paul moves from his prayer for them to an explanation for why he wrote. **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**. Paul's didn't want to come and use severity. He would much rather them shape up ahead of time. This final note explains why his tone has been so threatening in chapters 10-13. He's warned them that if necessary he would be very bold and that if anyone had not repented he would not spare the rod. This way hopefully they will repent ahead of time so that when he arrived they could all have a good time. Paul did not enjoy having to use **severity**, even though it was **in accordance with the authority which the Lord gave** him. While his authority could be used for discipline it was given to him primarily for **building up** the church and **not for tearing it down**. Why not just respond positively to the severe message, repent and get their lives in order so that when he came they could have a peaceful and enjoyable time together?

It is interesting that Paul indicates that if sin remains confrontation and conflict are necessary. Yet he also indicates that such confrontations are not desirable and should be avoided if possible by repentance. One of the troubles today is that if you confront a Christian openly living in sin they will most often get mad and walk out the door and go to another church. The story is sad enough on its own but it's not the whole story. The rest of the story is that the sin never gets resolved and the sinner continues to live in sin. At the last they remain in spiritual infancy because they never grew up. On a national scale it's one of the major reasons we're in the predicament we are in. The Christians didn't deal with sin and hence they became more and more like the world and now it is pulling teeth to teach anything of deep doctrine. The consequence is doctrinal shallowness, even hatred of doctrine in many churches, especially the emergent church movement. Verse 8 is the extreme

opposite of the emergent church and their leaders. They do nothing for the truth, but only against it. The emergent church has turned Christianity on its head. We need to learn that sin must be confronted or else those who permit it are themselves part of the problem. In any case, in verse 10, Paul did not want to have to come and confront the sin, he wanted to come and just build them up. But if necessary, he would.

In verses 11-12 Paul gives his final exhortation. **Finally, brethren, rejoice, be made complete, be comforted, be like-minded, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.** All of these things point to unity. If they achieved unity then the God of love and peace would be with them. The implication is that if they do not achieve unity then the God of love and peace would not be with them in their divisiveness. This means that He would not be with them in the sense of approving their divisiveness. But if they did achieve unity then **the God of love and peace would be with them** in the sense that He would be approving of them and in that unity they would enjoy the true love of God and peace that are unique to the Church.

Verse 12 reveals the practical manifestation that Paul hoped they would express if they achieved unity, that they would **greet one another with a holy kiss.** Now I don't suggest that you go around giving one another holy kisses, not in our day and age. But the holy kiss in their day was a common practice among believers expressing "forgiveness, reconciliation, unity, and fellowship that existed between the people who kissed each other." It was a kiss on the cheek. But "Until unity prevailed in the church" to give "this kiss was hypocritical."ⁱⁱ So Paul wanted them to be able to give this kiss with sincerity. With so much division at the Church of Corinth there was ample room for forgiveness and reconciliation. At the heart of the Christian life is forgiveness and reconciliation since Christ has forgiven us and reconciled us to God. So if we can't forgive and be reconciled then the real question remains whether we really grasp the significance of what Christ has done for us. Sadly, many Christians are divided over minor issues that they can never resolve. What a sorry testimony. You know, that's just a sign of immaturity. Grow up. It was Paul's hope and it's my prayer that we as a group of believers are mature enough to be able to admit wrong, express forgiveness and be reconciled to one another when conflicts occur. Once you've done so, if you want to greet one another with a holy kiss I won't be too upset, as long as that's as far as it goes.

Verse 13 is a salutation from the saints in Macedonia where Paul wrote from. **All the saints greet you.** And verse 14 is the benediction. One of the most quoted benedictions in all of Scripture. **The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.** What did you notice in that verse? Hopefully you noticed the Trinity. It's not a big long doctrinal explanation of the Trinity but the Trinity is in verse 14. The orthodox way of stating the Trinity is to say that God is one in essence and three in Person. The ancients expressed it by a triangle with God in the center and the Father, Son and Spirit at the three apexes. This is to show that the Father is God, the Son is God and the Spirit is God, that is, they all share the same essence, but the Father is not the Son and the Son is not the Spirit and the Spirit is not the Father. In this verse what Paul is doing is centering certain qualities as emanating from or being promoted by one of the distinct members of the Trinity. **Grace** from the **Lord Jesus Christ**, **love** from **God** and **fellowship** from the **Holy Spirit**. I don't think that the verse is saying that only the Lord Jesus Christ is gracious or only the Father is loving, but I think what Paul is doing is targeting the Lord Jesus Christ as the one through whom grace is most clearly seen in His efficacious work on the cross, and the Father as the one through whom love is most clearly seen in His sending of His Son and the Spirit as the one through whom fellowship is enjoyed. In any case, Paul wants the grace, love and fellowship that comes from the Trinity to be with them all. These are qualities that we should want among ourselves as they are at the center of the practical Christian life.

In conclusion, the question is, when Paul came did they get their lives and house in order or did he have to come and discipline them severely? Three evidences indicate that they got their spiritual lives in order before Paul arrived. First, Paul had said he would not expand his ministry beyond Corinth until their spiritual lives were in order (10:14-16). Paul held that if he could not get one group straightened out he still had work to do there until he did. Yet while at Corinth he wrote Romans and in this book he revealed that he was planning to make his new base of operation in Rome. So the very fact that Paul was planning to expand his ministry west proves that they did get their spiritual lives in order. Second, Paul received a collection from the Corinthians in accordance with his encouragement to give to the saints at Jerusalem (Acts 20:4; Rom 15:26). Such a collection shows that they cared for

the saints and wanted to be a part of this ministry. Third, Paul's letter to the Romans, written from Corinth, reveals no ambivalence or troubles at Corinth. Putting these factors together the clearest picture is that the Corinthians who remained antagonistic to Paul and living in sin got these problems straightened up before his arrival. So there is a positive ending to the story at Corinth, at least by AD57. Next time we'll review so read through the whole letter and if you have questions put those in the box.

ⁱ In the literary realm the Latin *magnum opus* refers to the largest, and perhaps the best, greatest, most popular, or most renowned achievement of an author.

ⁱⁱ Constable, T. (2003). *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (2 Co 13:12). Galaxie Software.

[Back To The Top](#)

Copyright (c) Fredericksburg Bible Church 2014