

Paul has reached the end of his letter, and he closes with several admonitions to the church.

I. BE READY FOR MY VISIT - 13:1-4

In 12:14 he had mentioned his third visit, and now he repeats it. He refers to the OT law that two or three witnesses settle a matter (Dt. 19:15), as though his third visit were God's final opportunity for the church to make matters right. He had told them before, and was now reminding them again, that this visit would mean unsparing judgment to those who were guilty of sin. His boldness to deal with this sin would be proof enough that he was not a weakling! (See 10:10 and 11:6.)

His statement in vs. 4 is interesting. In His death, Christ seemed to reveal weakness; but His resurrection revealed the power of God. In his previous visit, Paul showed seeming weakness as he served in Christ's power; this next visit would be different. There are times when we show His power in us by our seeming weakness; there are other times when we must be severe through the power of God. Paul's thorn in the flesh experience is an example of being "weak in Him" yet living by the power of God.

Had the Corinthians only obeyed the Word of God, they would have spared themselves and Paul all this agony. It is when Christians ignore or oppose the Word of God that they bring trouble upon themselves, others, and the church. How many pastors have gone through a personal Gethsemane because of Christians who refuse to listen to God's Word!

II. BE SURE YOU ARE SAVED - 13:5-7

The Corinthians were spending a great deal of time examining Paul; now it was time they examined themselves! Socrates, the Greek philosopher, used to say, "The unexamined life is not worth living." A true Christian experience will bear examination. "Are you even in the faith?" asked Paul. "Are you truly saved?" Every man must prove himself; no man can tell another he is born again.

A true Christian has Christ in him. The word "reprobate" means "counterfeit Christian." The word literally means "not passing the test." His enemies have charged that he is a reprobate (a false prophet), a charge that he denies in vs. 6. He begs them to turn away from evil living and speaking, not simply that they might thereby prove that he is a true apostle, but for their own good. If they repented, he would not have to prove his apostleship by coming to them with discipline but he was willing to set aside this privilege for their sakes. Paul would rather lose his reputation and see them helped spiritually than to have them continue in sin and give him the opportunity to exercise his apostolic privileges. Peter warns pastors that they should not exercise lordship over the church (1 Pt. 5:1ff), and Paul is manifesting that same spirit here. The warning of discipline is never for the purpose of exalting the pastor, but always to lead the offender to the place of repentance.

In this day of synthetics, it is important that professing Christians know that they are saved. Remember the warnings in Mt. 7:15-29, and the startling truths of II Cor. 11:13-15.

III. BE OBEDIENT TO GOD'S WORD - 13:8-10

In vs. 8, Paul is not suggesting that there is no way to oppose the truth. Satan certainly opposes the truth with his lies, and men are more prone to believe his lies than they are God's truth! Paul is saying that the repentance

of the Corinthians would be "that which is honest" (vs. 7) and according to the Word of God. Since they would be obeying the truth, Paul could do nothing against them in terms of judging sin or disciplining the offenders. He himself could not want anything other than the truth in the church at Corinth.

In fact, Paul goes on to say that he would be glad to make this next visit another demonstration of his weakness (I Cor. 2:1-5) if it meant that they were living in the power of God. His aim was their perfection - their spiritual maturity in Christ. They were babes in Christ, carnal and worldly, and needed to mature. "I want to build you up, not tear you down," he assures them. "This is why I am writing such a stern letter. I want you to start heeding God's Word and making matters right in the church. If you do, I'll not have to use sharpness when I come."

IV. BE MATURE IN YOUR FAITH - 13:11-14

Note the love that flows from these final words. He calls all of them brethren, and makes no distinction between those who attacked him and those who supported him. "Farewell" means "rejoice." Paul has written with tears (2:1-5), yet he finds time and opportunity to "Rejoice evermore" and "In everything give thanks."

"Be perfect" is another admonition to grow up in the flesh (see vs. 9). If they were mature Christians, then the blessing Paul closes with in these verses would be their portion. There would be comfort, unity, peace, and sweet fellowship with one another and with God.

The "holy kiss" was an Oriental custom among believers; a modern version might be (as Phillips puts it), "Shake hands all around!"

Paul closes with one of the greatest of the Bible benedictions, the benediction of the Trinity. The "grace of our Lord Jesus Christ" takes us back to Bethlehem, where He became poor for us (II Cor. 8:9); "the love God" takes us to Calvary where God gave His Son; and "the communion of the Holy Spirit" takes us to Pentecost where the Spirit baptized all believers into the Body of Christ. How fitting this benediction was for this divided, unspiritual church!

And we need this benediction today.