

SECOND CORINTHIANS

Chapter 13

Final Warnings

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,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.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.

13:1 *third time.* Cf 12:14. (TLSB)

witnesses. This disciplinary procedure is based on Dt 19:15; Timothy follows this when hearing charges against leaders (1Tm 5:19), and Paul does so when dealing with cases mentioned in 12:21. (TLSB)

13:2 *I will not spare ... any.* Paul will not hesitate to take stern disciplinary action against offenders when he comes to Corinth again, as he is about to. (CSB)

A strong assertion of Paul’s intent to excommunicate the unrepentant. Cf 1Co 5:4–5. (TLSB)

13:3 *demanding proof that Christ is speaking through me.* See note on 10:10. They will be given ample proof when he comes, unless they show a change of heart. (CSB)

Paul’s Corinthian opponents contested this (10:10). (TLSB)

He is not weak. Rebellion against Paul is rebellion against Christ, who appointed him as his apostle. The authority of the apostle is the authority of his Master. Any who imagine that Paul is weak will find that Christ, the Lord who speaks through his apostle, is not weak but powerful. (CSB)

13:4 *by God's power we will live with him.* Paul is referring to his present apostolic authority, and to the fact that divine power will be displayed by the punishment of any who resist that authority. (CSB)

For Paul, living in Christ is no figure of speech. As both weakness and strength, wealth and poverty coexist in Jesus, Paul will be the powerful instrument of the risen Lord. (TLSB)

13:5 *Examine yourselves ... test yourselves.* Instead of demanding proof that Christ was speaking through him (v. 3), as the false apostles were inciting them to do, they should look into their own hearts. (CSB)

Paul urges them to subject themselves to what they had put him through by verifying their own genuineness as Christians.

in the faith. Both subjective faith (by which one believes) and objective faith (the doctrine in which one believes). They are to examine their consciences to determine profession of apostolic doctrine and involvement in continual repentance.(TLSB)

Jesus Christ is in you? Jn 6:56; 14:20; 15:4–5; and Gal 2:20 forbid reducing “in” to “among.” The exalted Christ enjoys a miraculous, real presence in each member of His Church. The same is true of the Father (Jn 14:23) and the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:17). (TLSB)

unless indeed you fail to meet the test! Unless they are fake Christians, as some of them consider Paul a fake apostle. “If you have a heart that can expect of Him nothing but what is good—especially in need and distress—and a heart that also renounces and forsakes everything that is not God, then you have the only true God. If, on the contrary, your heart clings to anything else from which it expects more good and help than from God, and if your heart does not take refuge in Him but flees from Him when in trouble, then you have an idol, another god” (LC I 28). (TLSB)

13:6 *we have not failed the test.* Blessed unity in Christ depends on the Corinthians recognizing the genuineness of Paul and his colleagues. (TLSB)

13:7–8 Paul is pastorally concerned for the Corinthians; he is not frantic to vindicate himself. He always acts, and wants the whole Church to order its life, in accordance with the true (and only) Gospel, as opposed to the “different Gospel” (11:4). “When they teach or establish anything against the Gospel, then the congregations are forbidden by God’s command to obey them” (AC XXVIII 23). (TLSB)

13:7 *do what is right.* Then there will be no need for Paul to give evidence of his authority by taking disciplinary action when he comes to them. (CSB)

13:8 *we cannot do anything against the truth.* Paul can exercise his apostolic authority only in a way that supports the truth. Consequently, if the truth is acknowledged when he arrives in Corinth, there will be no need for him to take disciplinary action. (CSB)

13:9 *weak.* To have no need to give proof of his apostolic strength. (CSB)

If the Corinthians are spiritually healthy, Paul will be happy not to assert his authority. (TLSB)

restoration. Or, “completion,” the full fruition of the whole Corinthian Church. (TLSB)

strong. In the truth. (CSB)

13:10 Paul’s heart is in being an instrument of God’s “proper” work of forgiveness, not His “alien” work of punishment (FC Ep V 10). (TLSB)

13:1–10 If need be, Paul will bind sins and excommunicate the unrepentant on his next visit. Yet, he hopes examination of consciences will show the Corinthians that they hold the Lord’s doctrine and that they forsake the way of death to cling to the Lord of life. If Christ dwells in them, then Paul will come in gentleness, for the Gospel will hold sway. • Lord, keep us in Your truth and quicken our repentance, that we may abide in You and You in us. Amen. (TLSB)

Final Greetings

11 Finally, brothers, good-by. 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. **12** Greet one another with a holy kiss. **13** All the saints send their greetings. **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.

13:11–14 These concluding exhortations and salutations exhibit a note of confidence. (CSB)

13:11 *God of ... peace.* See note on 1Th 5:23. (CSB)

This will follow from being of one mind, itself a gift of God. (TLSB)

13:12 *kiss.* A token of mutual trust and affection, still in common use in the Near East—corresponding to the handshake of the Western world. For Christians it must be a holy kiss, for all greetings should be purely and sincerely exchanged in Christ (see 1:2). (CSB)

This outward sign, comparable with today’s handshake, expresses the God-given reality of fellowship. Because the Letter to the Corinthians would be read during the Service of the Word, Paul may have included the greeting here in anticipation of the following Service of the Sacrament. The Early Church celebrated Holy Communion behind closed doors and began the rite with the kiss of peace. Pagan society would later accuse them of hosting orgies in this context. (TLSB)

13:14 The benediction is Trinitarian in form and has ever since been a part of Christian worship tradition. It serves to remind us that the mystery of the Holy Trinity is known to be true not through rational or philosophical explanation but through Christian

experience, whereby the believer knows firsthand the grace, the love, and the fellowship that freely flow to him from the three Persons of the one Lord God. (CSB)

Paul articulates the reality of the blessed Trinity in this liturgical form. The gifts associated with the three divine persons convey a sense of the “mystical union.”(TLSB)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Son’s active favor toward His Church. (TLSB)

the love of God. The Father’s active love that sent and sends the Son and the Spirit. (TLSB)

the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. The sharing in doctrine, Sacraments, and love wrought by the Holy Spirit. (TLSB)

be with you all. The words from Christ’s ambassador give what they say. This is still true as the Church’s ministers pronounce these words till the end of time. (TLSB)

13:11–14 Confident that God’s Word will do its work, Paul utters no more stern demand or harsh rebuke. He moves through gentle appeal to end on a triumphant note. We should take our bearings from God’s good purpose and the communion of saints. The blessed Trinity is not dry theory but the God of love in whom we have life now and forever. • Praise to You, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, that You give Your Church Your very life! Amen. (TLSB)