

Study 14: Chapter 13

Introduction

Paul concludes the letter by essentially summing up and reinforcing much of what he has already said to them. After a strong severe letter, he concludes with a benediction of grace.

Body of the Study

Prepare for the visit

The proof of his authority

Putting faith into action

Final greetings

Homework and preparation for next week:

- *In reviewing Paul's introduction to the letter (2:1:1-7) what words / thoughts does Paul use strongly? How does this relate to what he has to say throughout the book? Why might he have said what he said the way he said it?*
- *What do we learn about the character of the Corinthian church?*
- Read the notes as a review of the study.
- Read the introductory / background study, and think about the culture of the church.
- Skim read all of the notes as an overview of the book.

Notes for study 14: Chapter 13

Introduction

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Body of the Study

Prepare for the visit

Paul reminds them of his impending visit. “...*This will be the third time that I am coming to you...*” (2:13:1 NKJV). This presents us with the problem of when the second visit was, as discussed in the last study. This time, Paul is stronger – he doesn’t say that it is only his third *intention* to come, but that *it will be his third visit*.

It is worth noting here, that although the scripture is not clear on just when (or even if) the second visit occurred, the matter doesn’t change anything as far as the application to our lives of Paul’s teaching. There are some things in scripture which are plain, and there are other things that we are left without the same degree of certainty. None of the things that are uncertain have any affect on our faith and practice. To take this specific example a little further, if we knew when the second visit had occurred, then it might help us understand a little clearer how the Corinthians might have reacted to Paul’s teaching in the letters. But, it wouldn’t make one scrap of difference to what Paul says, nor about how we apply these things to our life and circumstances!

Paul’s patience has reached its limit. It is time for the Corinthians to act and put into practice the changes that they have been called to make. [If Paul did in fact had made the second visit, then they had had two previous opportunities to change, but had not done so.] He reminds them that justice requires two or three witnesses to establish truth, and Paul would be calling them when he came to ensure that justice was done. [He is not saying that his first visit was the first witness, his second visit the second witness, and his third visit would be the third witness. Such would be an absurdity, and is the equivalent of a witness at a court trial entering the witness box three times to give evidence, and each time “substantiating” the previous pieces of evidence that he had given!] His repeated warnings however, give weight and credibility to the accusations that Paul makes, and the opportunity for the Corinthians (at least the Judaisers in Corinth, and those who were still engaged in their sinful practices) to repent. He says “...*On my return I will not spare those who sinned earlier or any of the others...*” (2:13:2 NIV).

The proof of his authority

In his classic style, Paul “weaves” themes through his letters, and he now returns to the matter of *proof* of his authority. He is now approaching the conclusion of the letter, and the discussion on *proof* is to summarise and emphasise his previous arguments.

The proof would be very evident when he arrives, and he puts the disorderly into order! Whilst some in Corinth regarded him as *weak*, Paul says that his lack of action (up until now) was not a result of weakness, but rather it was the power of God working. Jesus was regarded as weak by His enemies “...*He saved others; let Him save Himself if He is the Christ, the chosen of God...*” (Lk 23:35 NKJV). However, whilst some regarded Him as weak, it was really a demonstration of His strength and submission “...*but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!...*” (Php 2:7-8 NIV). Like the model of Jesus, Paul was exhibiting his self-control in taking revenge. “...*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..." (2:13:4 NIV)

Putting faith into action

Paul now exhorts them to put their faith into action, and do something about it. They were (unjustly) criticising him, in exactly the same way that Jesus had been unjustly judged and criticised. Paul says that they need to take a good hard look at themselves! "...*Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith...*" (2:13:5 NKJV)

Rather than outright condemnation (he has already done that, 2:12:20-21) he now leads them to a position of self-recognition. The first step in bringing about personal change and growth is for the person to recognise that *they need to change*. Without that recognition, no change can be brought about. They need to "...*test yourselves...*" (2:13:5).

If Christ was in them – and Paul knew that He was – then the answer would be that they would be forced to recognise that He was also in Paul. If they came to the other conclusion, it could only be because Christ was **not** in them – that they were therefore disqualified (or rather, had disqualified themselves) as believers. "...*I trust that you will know that we are not disqualified...*" (2:13:6 NKJV)

The arguments made against Paul (by the Judaisers) might have seemed plausible and convincing, but the Corinthians had no excuse for accepting them, since they knew Paul so well. He therefore calls on them to "...*do what is honourable, though we might appear to be disqualified...*" (2:13:7). They knew his credentials as an apostle, and knew his motivations "...*For we can do nothing against the truth, but only for the truth...*" (2:13:8).

Paul was quite content to be regarded as weak, as long as the Corinthians were truly strong, and not simply strong in their own eyes "...*For we are glad when we are weak and you are strong...*" (2:13:9)

In a final verse of admonition and encouragement to change, Paul reminds them "...*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...*" (2:13:10 NKJV)

Final greetings

Paul wants the Corinthians to strive for perfection "...*be complete...*" In extending them parting greetings "...*farewell...*" he uses the word *charis* – grace – but in this case, *rejoice!* After Paul has dealt fairly harshly with them in the letter, he is telling them not to lose heart, but rejoice! As Christians, we have everything to rejoice about. Although (some of) the Corinthians had gone backwards from when they had been converted, they could change and turn the situation around. They needed to look positively, remember God's grace towards them as sinners, and rejoice!

Further, they were to be united in the things of the gospel. From the first letter, we can see the strong factions that had developed in the church. Although much of the dissension had been brought to order, there was still clearly some factionalism remaining – the faithful Corinthians including some who had repented, and those who were entrenched and siding with the Judaisers. They needed to get back together and stand united for the truth.

In the final benediction, Paul cites all three facets of the Godhead:

- The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ
- The love of God
- The communion (fellowship) of the Holy Spirit

This benediction “occurs nowhere else in the Scripture. Coming, as it does, after this, the most severe of letters, it reminds one that the greatest showers of blessing often follow the fiercest flashes of lightning and the mightiest reverberations of thunder.”¹

¹ McGarvey JW & Pendelton, PY “Thessalonians, Corinthians, Galatians and Romans”
Gospel Light Publishing Company, Delight Arkansas. p. 243
Study of Corinthians by Graeme Offer