2 Corinthians 13:1-6

The Best Possible Third Visit

1 This is the third time I am coming to you. EVERY FACT IS TO BE CONFIRMED BY THE TESTIMONY OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES. 2 I have previously said when present the second time, and though now absent I say in advance to those who have sinned in the past and to all the rest as well, that if I come again I will not spare anyone, 3 since you are seeking for proof of the Christ who speaks in me, and who is not weak toward you, but mighty in you. 4 For indeed He was crucified because of weakness, yet He lives because of the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, yet we will live with Him because of the power of God directed toward you. 5 Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you--unless indeed you fail the test? 6 But I trust that you will realize that we ourselves do not fail the test.

Continuing on with his desire for a premium third visit to Corinth Paul moves from the lists of sins and warning unrepentant sinners in chapter 12:20-21. This is an intense section, but for slightly different reasons than the main thrust of earlier chapters: Paul is not interested in arriving at Corinth for the third time and finding sinful immaturity and the appearance of being lost as common within the body.

*Paul wrote the list of sins in 12:20 that he was aware of that the church was facing. Are those sins we face today in the modern church as well?*

# Confirmation of Repentance

## A Third Visit

The Corinthian church was upset that Paul had not made a third visit before, but it appears as of the end of chapter 12 and this first verse in 13 that he will be returning. It doesn’t appear that Paul has the highest expectations for what he will find. If before they were jealous for his time, they may now be a bit more concerned that he’s coming to set their house in order, and it might get a bit apostolically uncomfortable.

*Does this warning passage cast any negative light on Titus’ encouragement from earlier in the epistle?*

Titus encouraged Paul in chapter 7, but Paul seems to be responding to other parts of Titus’ report about the character of some still mingling within the body. Paul seems to be concerned about those bold sinners more than being entirely discouraged about the entire body.

## By the Testimony of Two or Three

Paul quotes Deuteronomy 17:6 as a reference to that specific piece of the Mosaic Law [c.f. Deuteronomy 17:2-6]. In that case if anyone was idolatrous, or violated God’s commandments in a way that was punishable by death, then there should be a thorough inquiry, and then if the person is found guilty then they should be put to death. This would have had the first witnesses begin the capital punishment followed by all of Israel so that there would be no evil in Israel.

The first witnesses would have to stand there with the accused and that is not something that a heart can take lightly. God’s Law was designed to separate Israel from the pagan cultures surrounding them; to preserve righteousness and justice; it was not designed for capital punishment. Capital punishment was a reflection of the seriousness of sin.

*Paul is quoting the Law. Does he want to reintroduce the Law into the church?*

Paul’s point is not that those in the church should be punished for idolatry or violating the Law unto the point of death – which would be alarming for various reasons – but that the principle of not preserving evil has been the standard for behavior within God’s saints for a very, very long time. Furthermore, the idea of capital punishment should have been an emphasis on how gross sin is in God’s sight.

*If the believers in Corinth were all witness to carnality and were not willing to deal with the sin, who was really weak in this scenario?*

The Corinthian elders should have been pushing for spiritual growth. If God was using His Holy Spirit as Paul outlined in 1 Corinthians 12-14 then the body should have been well established, loving one another, and living lives that reflected their relationship with Jesus Christ. Instead Paul has reports of the weakness of Corinth that demands correction so that they can be an abiding body that would be much more reflective of Christ, Paul’s ministry work, and edifying for the saints day in and day out.

*What was the awesome opportunity for weakness in the body?*

While atrophy may hurt as it is countered, the longer term opportunity for growth is still seen in the eternal context of the body. As Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 3:18 the believers were being transformed into the image of Christ. That starts at a place of weakness, but ends in a place of ultimate, eternal strength.

## I Have Previously Said… I Will Not Spare Anyone

After quoting the Deuteronomy 17 passage Paul then reiterates a message that he had previously given: he will not spare anyone. Again, this is not actually suggesting capital punishment within the church for sin.

In past letters and in this letter Paul has written the following:

* Carnality’s wood hay and stubble will be burned away (1 Corinthians 3:15)
* Be imitators of Paul’s life and behavior (1 Corinthians 4:16; 11:1)
* Paul would rather not come to discipline (1 Corinthians 4:21)
* Paul would cast immorality and perversion out of the church (1 Corinthians 5)
* Sinfulness is not appropriate for the sanctified (1 Corinthians 6:11)
* Our bodies are Christ’s (1 Corinthians 6:15,19, 20)
* Flee immorality (1 Corinthians 6:18)
* Don’t cause your brother to stumble (1 Corinthians 8:13)
* Run the race of our faith to win (1 Corinthians 9:24-27)
* The Law’s consequences were an example to us that God is not pleased by willful sinning; We should not sin (1 Corinthians 10:1-14)
* Don’t come to the fellowship drunk and glutted (1 Corinthians 11:21)
* Examine yourself to make sure you’re abiding when you take communion (1 Corinthians 11:28)
* God judges us for our correction (1 Corinthians 11:32)
* We are being transformed into Christ’s image [which is righteous] (2 Corinthians 3:18)
* We renounce craftiness and adultery (2 Corinthians 4:2)
* Be pleasing to God (2 Corinthians 5:9)
* Fear the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:11)
* We live for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:14-15)
* Corinthians’ carnal affections restrained them from their full life in Christ (2 Corinthians 6:12)
* Let us cleanse ourselves from all defilements (2 Corinthians 7:1)
* I am afraid I will come and find you sinning (2 Corinthians 12:20)
* Repent of sinning ways (2 Corinthians 12:21)

Paul’s message to the Corinthians about living a life that reflects Christ’s life is consistent, and if we had his ‘first’ letter we can imagine it contained more of the same.

*What is Paul not going to spare anyone from?*

Paul does not want to spare those who are belligerently sinning within the body because sin behaves like cancer. The preservation of sinfulness will lead to consequences like extremely hindered evangelism, wounds within the body of Christ, and a faith that is unlikely to be passed down from generation to generation within an church’s area of influence geographically (witness the original churches Paul wrote to being gone today). Those are earthly consequences, but heavenly consequences include a lack of rewards as well.

Putting things in a Romans vocabulary: shall we continue sinning so that grace may abound? No! May it never be!

## Seeking for Proof

*Why were the Corinthians seeking proof of Christ’s power in Paul?*

After Paul’s defense of his ministry throughout this entire letter and parts of 1 Corinthians he proves out some of Christ’s strength in written form: Don’t sin. Christ’s resurrection was through the power of God. It’s miraculous, it’s the only resurrection of its type in all of time and space. That is the power of God that is directed towards Corinth in Paul’s writing.

The Corinthian church appeared to be financially impoverished (on average), and yet they were still obsessed with clout and social status. They wanted an apostle that was bold and yet Paul was historically very gentle (which they perceived as weak). Now Paul writes this entire letter defending the legitimacy of his ministry and caps it off with a strength he is bringing that reflects the very power of the resurrection of Christ – and they’re at the receiving end of that. This sounds terrifying because sparing no one and resurrection power are not weak, they’re the ultimate in strength.

Paul is not offering idle threats, but his purpose is to repair the foundations of the Corinthian church that they could stand against the onslaught of carnality that the world trade center that it was faced. If they were to be resistant to that danger, and to preserve the church into future generations the truth that was to be understood, and then applied, was critical. That truth has no place for wonton sinning.

# Test Yourselves

## Not All the Corinthians Are Passing the Test

*Do we need to be testing ourselves to see if we’re in the faith?*

Paul then writes this exaggerative statement to make sure that the church body each, individually, knows that they are saved. He’s not doubting their salvation specifically, but he’s wanting them to start at first causes. It’s an operating system reboot sort of thought: Make sure that your whole world is rooted in this one point of salvation.

The test here is for evaluation of reality: does it stand under scrutiny? If you’re in the faith the outside scrutiny of others is not God’s righteous judgment and knowledge of your belief, but it is unexpected that the believer would be normally walking in the flesh. Examining yourself has to do with reviewing the results of the test.

Stated another way: Paul was being called weak, but Paul is saying, “Is your faith weak?” Can you test it and then the results are that you’re reflecting the life of Christ in your daily walk?

*Do those who are confident of their salvation test something else besides testing to see if they’re in the faith?*

Spiritual maturity is rooted in an abiding faith. If we’re not abiding we need to, as Paul writes to the Colossians, be setting our minds on things above. The Holy Spirit draws us towards fellowship with Him. If we don’t sense that fellowship, then we simply set our thoughts on Him and that is all. Legalism introduces a process and redefines repentance from a change of mind to a series of guilt-related practices rather than recognizing the established, unassailable relationship with Christ. Liberalism ignores the problem all together. The believer should see abiding as normative, and if we’re not, just simply adjust our thoughts [c.f. Colossians 3:1-3; 1 Corinthians 2:13].

## Paul Passed the Test

No matter where the Corinthians were in the self-test results (and some did pass the test c.f. 1 Corinthians 11:19), Paul and his cohort were authentic and he was coming to show that authenticity. That would show up as stark contrast to carnality, divisiveness, and the sins mentioned earlier.

# Conclusion

Paul is coming to Corinth (Lord Willing) with a very, very specific purpose: to love the church body in Corinth. He’s not looking forward to the idea of facing massive carnality having taken root in the body there, so his writing here is seeking for the body to self-correct (by the power of the Holy Spirit). This puts pressure on the elders in Corinth to be leading rightly, for the body to be abiding, and for Titus and the brother to help facilitate some growth and maturity before Paul gets there.

*Do churches today need this sort of correction?*

In the broader church today we often find that sin is treated with kid gloves due to our cultural preferences, or it is judged with legalistic harshness so that believers are wounded. There is a specific principle that Paul wrote to the Galatians [c.f. 6:1]: you who are spiritual restore such a sinner. This isn’t something anyone wants to do, but it is something that, when done properly, leads to edification, spiritual growth, and the building up of the whole body!