

Introduction

A year ago I bought a Red Haven Peach Tree and planted it. We already had an Elberta Peach tree so I was happy about getting a Red Haven. A Red Haven Peach is a yellow peach, and it is one of the most popular peach trees. I pruned it, and then have taken excellent care of it. This year there were four peaches on it, not a lot, but I was not expecting any on it this first year. They finally ripened and Karen and I ate them last week. Although the peaches were excellent, I was not entirely happy about them. They were not Red Haven peaches; they were white peaches, probably Elberta peaches. I was disappointed that what I was sold was not what it was labeled, and it took a year for me to find out. It was not until we looked at the real test or proof, the fruit, that we found out that it was not a Red Haven peach.

The Corinthian church bought into some new leaders that claimed they were apostles. They also made some false allegations against Paul. They wanted to discredit him so that they could take control of the church. This letter to the Corinthians is largely about Paul's defense of his apostleship and ministry. In his defense, he addresses these people who have come to Corinth claiming to be apostles, and he called them false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. Those are strong words coming from the apostle Paul.

(2 Co 11:12–13) “But what I am doing I will continue to do, so that I may cut off opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the matter about which they are boasting. {13} For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.”

How did Paul know these were false apostles? He knew they false apostles because of their fruit. Jesus taught that we are to beware of false prophets who come to us in sheep's clothing. He said that every good tree bears good fruit and the bad tree bears bad fruit. He concluded, “So then, you will know them by their fruits.” Just like I was able to tell that this peach tree was not what it claimed to be, a Ranger Peach, by looking at their fruits. Paul examined the fruit of their lips. He examined the fruit of their lives. Finally, he examined the fruit of their ministry, their teachings, and he determined that these were not Ranger peaches. These were false apostles disguised as apostles of Christ.

(Matt 7:15–20) “Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. {16} “You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn *bushes* nor figs from thistles, are they? {17} “So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. {18} “A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. {19} “Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. {20} “So then, you will know them by their fruits.”

Paul has been sarcastically addressing these various false allegations that have been made against him. In this final part of this section called Paul's Warning and Defense, Paul gives the proof of his apostleship. He is providing the fruit or evidence of his ministry, and his hope is that by examining these fruits, they will discover that he is the real apostle. In this passage, Paul shares the signs of a true apostle which he performed. Second, he shares about his fatherly example for his spiritual children. He had not been a burden to them, and he and his team had conducted themselves blamelessly. Third, Paul wrote about his apostolic authority. He is hoping not to have to use that authority to deal with sin in the church. Paul would much rather use his authority to build up the body, which is why he was given his apostolic authority.

Proof of Paul's Apostleship

1. Signs of a true apostle (2 Cor 12:11-12)
2. Fatherly Example (2 Cor 12:13-18)
3. Apostolic Authority (2 Cor 12:19-13:10)

(2 Co 12:11–12) “I have become foolish; you yourselves compelled me. Actually I should have been commended by you, for in no respect was I inferior to the most eminent apostles, even though I am a nobody. {12} The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles.”

(2 Cor 12:13-18) “For in what respect were you treated as inferior to the rest of the churches, except that I myself did not become a burden to you? Forgive me this wrong! {14} Here for this third time I am ready to come to you, and I will not be a burden to you; for I do not seek what is yours, but you; for children are not responsible to save up for *their* parents, but parents for *their* children. {15} I will most gladly spend and be expended for your souls. If I love you more, am I to be loved less? {16} But be that as it may, I did not burden you myself; nevertheless, crafty fellow that I am, I took you in by deceit. {17} *Certainly* I have not taken advantage of you through any of those whom I have sent to you, have I? {18} I urged Titus *to go*, and I sent the brother with him. Titus did not take any advantage of you, did he? Did we not conduct ourselves in the same spirit *and walk* in the same steps?”

(2 Cor 12:19-13:4) “All this time you have been thinking that we are defending ourselves to you. *Actually*, it is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ; and all for your upbuilding, beloved. {20} For I am afraid that perhaps when I come I may find you to be not what I wish and may be found by you to be not what you wish; that perhaps *there will be* strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances; {21} I am afraid that when I come again my God may humiliate me before you, and I may mourn over many of those who have sinned in the past and not repented of the impurity, immorality and sensuality which they have practiced. {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.”

(2 Cor 13:5-10) “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. {7} 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. {8} For we can do nothing against the truth, but *only* for the truth. {9} For we rejoice when we ourselves are weak but you are strong; this we also pray for, that you be made complete. {10} 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.”

1. Signs of a true apostle (2 Cor 12:11-12)

Paul begins by saying that he was compelled by the Corinthians to become foolish. Instead of being commended by them, they had asked him for a commendation. They had said that he was self-appointed and was not a real apostle. Of course, the other apostles, including Peter, affirmed his apostolic calling. The allegations were completely false, and the Corinthians were one of the proofs of his apostleship. They should have been his commendation. Earlier, in 2 Corinthians 11:1-6, Paul had asked the Corinthians to bear with him in a little foolishness. In verse sixteen, he told us that the foolishness he was referring to was boasting. He felt compelled to speak about his apostolic ministry, and address some of the allegations brought against him.

(2 Co 12:11) “I have become foolish; you yourselves compelled me. Actually I should have been commended by you, for in no respect was I inferior to the most eminent apostles, even though I am a nobody.”

(2 Co 11:1) “I wish that you would bear with me in a little foolishness; but indeed you are bearing with me.”

(2 Co 11:16) “Again I say, let no one think me foolish; but if *you do*, receive me even as foolish, so that I also may boast a little.”

He had told them that he did not consider himself in the least inferior to the most eminent apostles or super apostles. He conceded that he was unskilled in speech, but in the area of Biblical knowledge and understanding, he was very strong. Now, Paul states this again, “that in no respect was I inferior to the most eminent apostles.” Even though he made that bold statement, he balanced it by saying, “even though I am a nobody.” Paul is displaying confidence in his apostolic ministry balanced with humility, a sign of great leadership.

(2 Cor 11:5-6) “For I consider myself not in the least inferior to the most eminent apostles. {6} But even if I am unskilled in speech, yet I am not *so* in knowledge; in fact, in every way we have made *this* evident to you in all things.”

Paul had already dealt with their request for a commendation, and now he turns to the signs of a true apostle that he performed among them. While with them, he had performed signs, wonders, and miracles with all perseverance. The Greek word for signs is *semeion* (Strong's G4592), and it means a public sign or miracle. It is used seventy-seven times and translated as sign fifty times and miracle twenty-three times. If we look at a few of the signs, it gives us a better understanding of their use and purpose.

(2 Cor 12:12) “The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by **signs** and wonders and miracles.”

In John 2, Jesus performed His first public sign, and it was at the wedding in Cana. When they ran out of wine, at the request of His mother, He turned water into wine. John wrote, “This beginning of His signs... and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him.

(Jn 2:11) “This beginning of *His* **signs** Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him.”

At the end of John's gospel, he wrote that Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which were not written in this book. John included the signs that he did so that those reading would believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name. The signs that Jesus did were attesting signs. They attested that He was the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God. The end result of the sign at the wedding in Cana was that His disciples believed in Him. The end result of the other signs were for people to believe in Christ. The reason for Paul to perform miracles was in the course of sharing the gospel, so that people would believe in Christ. At the same time, those signs were not performed by everyone; they also attested to the fact that Paul was an apostle, called by God. We do not know what signs Paul did in Corinth, but he said that he had performed signs among them, so they were well aware of the signs that he had done.

(Jn 20:30–31) “Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; {31} but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.”

The next signs of a true apostle were wonders. The Greek word is *teras* (Strong's G5059). It is used with signs most of the time. Here are a few of the examples where they are used together. In John 4:48, Jesus said that if they did not see signs and wonders, they would not simply believe. In Acts 2:43, there were many signs and wonders taking place through the apostles. In Acts 4:30, the church prayed for God to extend His hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Jesus. In Acts 5:12, “at the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people. In Acts 6:8, Stephen was full of grace and power, and was performing great wonders and signs among the people. Stephen was not one of the apostles; he was one of the deacons chosen in Acts 6 to help take care of the widows in the church. Signs and wonders were performed by God through His servants, the apostles, but they were not done exclusively by apostles.

(2 Cor 12:12) “The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles.”

(Jn 4:48) “So Jesus said to him, “Unless you *people* see **signs and wonders**, you *simply* will not believe.”

(Ac 2:43) “Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many **wonders and signs** were taking place through the apostles.”

(Ac 4:30) “while You extend Your hand to heal, and **signs and wonders** take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus.”

(Ac 5:12) “At the hands of the apostles many **signs and wonders** were taking place among the people; and they were all with one accord in Solomon's portico.”

(Ac 6:8) “And Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great **wonders and signs** among the people.”

(2 Cor 12:12) “The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles.”

The third sign of a true apostle that Paul mentioned was miracles. The Greek word is *dunamis* (Strong's G1411), and it is used 120 times. It is translated as power in seventy-seven of those occurrences. The KJV translates it as mighty deeds and the ESV translates it as mighty works in this verse. In Romans 15:18-19, Paul wrote that he had preached the gospel in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit. The signs and wonders are accomplished by the power of God, in the power of the Spirit. Paul was saying to the Corinthians that they had witnessed the power of God through his ministry to them.

(Ro 15:18–19) “For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed, {19} in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit; so that from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.”

When Paul planted the church in Corinth, he was with them in weakness and fear and trembling. His message to them was not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that their faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.” The Corinthians had witnessed God's power flowing through Paul's apostolic ministry. He was by no means inferior to the most imminent apostles.

(1 Co 2:3–5) “I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, {4} and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, {5} so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.”

2. **Fatherly Example** (2 Cor 12:13-16)

An apostle is a spiritual father. An apostle raises up spiritual children, and in particular spiritual leaders. In 1 Corinthians 4:14-17, Paul admonished the church as his beloved children. He said they could have countless tutors in Christ, yet they would not have many fathers, because in Christ Jesus he became their father through the gospel. Spiritual fathers raise up children. They also raise up leaders. Paul sent them Timothy, who was Paul's beloved and faithful child in the Lord. Paul took Timothy along with him and raised him up as a strong leader. In 1 Thessalonians, Paul identifies Timothy as an apostle. Paul sent him to Ephesus to bring correction to the false teachers and to lead that work for a period. Spiritual fathers raise up spiritual sons, especially leaders. They train and ordain leaders in churches.

(1 Co 4:14–17) “I do not write these things to shame you, but to admonish you as my beloved children. {15} For if you were to have countless tutors in Christ, yet *you would not have* many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. {16} Therefore I exhort you, be imitators of me. {17} For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church.”

The next proof that Paul gives the Corinthians is how he was a spiritual father to them and was not a burden to them. He asked the question, “for in what respect were you treated as inferior to the rest of the churches, except that I myself did not become a burden to you?”

Paul's tone in this section is different, and he once again uses some sarcasm, saying, “Forgive me this wrong!” He did not need to apologize to them for not being a burden to them. He was not a burden to them.

(2 Cor 12:13) “For in what respect were you treated as inferior to the rest of the churches, except that I myself did not become a burden to you? Forgive me this wrong!”

When Paul went to Corinth, he found a Jew named Aquila, who was married to Priscilla. They were tent-makers, just like Paul. Because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them, and worked with them. Paul was preaching in the synagogue every Sabbath, but he was making tents to support himself. The, when his co-workers, Silas and Timothy, came down from Macedonia, Paul began devoting himself completely to the word. The inference is that Silas and Timothy made tents in order to free up Paul to devote himself to the word. Silas was a mighty prophet and Timothy was a young apostle. None of them had the mindset that other people owed them a living. Just because they were in ministry, and on the team of probably the greatest apostle ever, did not give them the idea that they did not need to do secular work and support themselves. We have many people in the ministry that believe that if God calls them to plant a church or do some other type of ministry, that He is obligated to provide for them through the ministry, and that they should not be doing any secular work. That is not the example of Paul. He and his co-workers worked with their own hands to support themselves, and they were not a burden to the churches that they planted.

(Ac 18:1–5) “After these things he left Athens and went to Corinth. {2} And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. He came to them, {3} and because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and they were working, for by trade they were tent-makers. {4} And he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks. {5} But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul *began* devoting himself completely to the word, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.”

Paul tells the Corinthians that he is coming for a third time, and he does not intend to be a burden to them this time either. Paul did not seek what is theirs. Instead, Paul wanted the Corinthians. He wanted relationship with them. He wanted to help them grow in Christ and become mature. Paul explained that children are not responsible to save up for parents, but parents for their children. Paul was the spiritual father in Corinth, and he felt responsible for them, not the other way around. This is in stark contrast to the false apostles who had come into Corinth. They wanted Paul out, and they wanted to be supported by the Corinthians. In chapter eleven, Paul stated that he was going to cut off opportunity from those who desire an opportunity. By continuing to be a blessing, not a burden, he was going to cut off the opportunity of these false apostles.

(2 Cor 12:14) “Here for this third time I am ready to come to you, and I will not be a burden to you; for I do not seek what is yours, but you; for children are not responsible to save up for *their* parents, but parents for *their* children.”

(2 Co 11:12) “But what I am doing I will continue to do, so that I may cut off opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the matter about which they are boasting.”

As a spiritual father, Paul would rather gladly spend and be expended for their souls. Every parent feels this way. We will spend and use our resources to help our children succeed in life. We do it in the natural, but Paul was referring to their eternal souls. Paul was willing to spend and be extended for them to grow spiritually and be complete in Christ. Paul's motivation was

love; he had a father's love for his children. Paul asked a apropos question. "If I love you more, am I to be loved less?" Paul wanted to be loved and appreciated by the Corinthians.

(2 Cor 12:15) "I will most gladly spend and be expended for your souls. If I love you more, am I to be loved less?"

Paul ends the second proof of his apostleship by telling the Corinthians that he did not burden them himself. Then, with more sarcasm, he said, "Nevertheless, crafty fellow that I am, I took you in by deceit." The very opposite was true. Paul was straight-forward with the Corinthians. He had no hidden agendas or motives. There was no deceit in anything that he did. Paul had one goal and that was to present every man complete in Christ. Paul proclaimed Christ, taught and admonished every man with all wisdom so that he could present every man complete in Christ. On the other hand, these false apostles had taken the Corinthians in by deceit. They had hidden agendas and motives, and they were crafty fellows.

(2 Cor 12:16) "But be that as it may, I did not burden you myself; nevertheless, crafty fellow that I am, I took you in by deceit."

(Col 1:28–29) "We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. {29} For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me."

Next, Paul said that he and his team had conducted themselves blamelessly. The top qualification for any leader is character. Elders need to have character that is above reproach. Deacons need to have proven character. Throughout the Old and New Testament, God sought leaders with godly character. Paul and his team behaved blamelessly before the Corinthians. Paul transitions from being a burden to being blameless. He said, "Certainly I have not taken advantage of you through any of those whom I have sent to you, have I?" It is a rhetorical question and the answer is obviously "No." Paul mentions Titus and the brother that went with him. He asked if Titus had taken advantage of them, and the rhetorical answer is again, "No!" Paul and his fellow workers had not taken advantage of any of them; they had behaved blamelessly. His team had conducted themselves in the same spirit and walked in the same way that Paul had walked.

(2 Cor 12:17-18) "*Certainly* I have not taken advantage of you through any of those whom I have sent to you, have I? {18} I urged Titus *to go*, and I sent the brother with him. Titus did not take any advantage of you, did he? Did we not conduct ourselves in the same spirit *and walk* in the same steps?"

The fruit of Paul's ministry was excellent. He and his team had lived their lives above reproach. They had conducted themselves blamelessly. Paul had been a great team leader, and had set a great example for them. Paul had disciplined and reproduced other godly leaders, which is what spiritual fathers do.

3. **Apostolic Authority** (2 Cor 12:19-13:10)

This is Paul's warning and defense of his apostleship. He has spoken of the signs of a true apostle that were performed among them. He spoke of his fatherly love for them. He was not a burden to them, and was gladly expended on them. He and his team were great examples and did not take advantage of any of them. Now, he speaks again of his apostolic authority. He has told them that he was given authority by God to build them up, not to destroy them.

He told them that all this time they have been thinking that he was defending themselves to them, and he has been doing exactly that. But there is a greater reason that Paul has been defending himself, and his apostolic ministry. He said, "It is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ; and all for your upbuilding, beloved." Paul is looking out for the best interests of the church in Corinth. He is trying to protect them from false apostles and false doctrine.

(2 Cor 12:19) "All this time you have been thinking that we are defending ourselves to you. *Actually*, it is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ; and all for your upbuilding, beloved."

In Ephesians 4:11-15, God gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ. This is exactly what Paul has been doing. He has been equipping the saints for their upbuilding. The body is to be built up until it attains to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. That is Paul's heartbeat. His goal is to help them grow to maturity and become complete in Christ. In his epistles to the Corinthians he has dealt with the strife, divisions, immorality, selfishness, and other sins. He told them that they were babes in Christ, because they were living fleshly or carnal lives. Paul is trying to help them grow and mature in Christ, which is part of building up the body of Christ.

(Eph 4:11–13) "And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers, {12} for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; {13} until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ."

As a result of the equipping of the saints, the church is no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming. The church in Corinth was being carried away by a false doctrine. They were being led astray by the trickery of men, and craftiness in deceitful scheming by these false apostles. God wants His church equipped and protected from these false apostles and doctrines. A mature believer is going to be grounded in God's word and protected from these crafty and deceitful schemes and teachings. Paul has been defending himself, but more importantly, he has been writing these things for the upbuilding of the church in Corinth.

(Eph 4:14-15) "As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; {15} but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ,"

Paul is coming for a third time and he is concerned that he may not find them in the spiritual condition that he wishes. He is concerned that there will be strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, and disturbances. He is concerned that they have not repented of all the sins that he has confronted them about in his four letters. Paul is afraid that when he comes, he will be humiliated before them and that he will mourn over many who have sinned and not repented of the impurity, immorality, and sensuality which they have practiced. Paul is very concerned about their spiritual condition.

(2 Cor 12:20-21) “For I am afraid that perhaps when I come I may find you to be not what I wish and may be found by you to be not what you wish; that perhaps *there will be* strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances; {21} I am afraid that when I come again my God may humiliate me before you, and I may mourn over many of those who have sinned in the past and not repented of the impurity, immorality and sensuality which they have practiced.”

Many people do not like confrontation, particularly about sins. Today, many are more concerned about numbers than sin. I appreciate Paul because he preached the whole counsel of God. He said that he was innocent of the blood of all men, and he could say this because he confronted people and churches about their sins. He has confronted the Corinthians, and he is pleading with them to repent of past sins, and to be holy and blameless.

(Ac 20:26–27) “Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. {27} “For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God.”

Paul now gives his warning to the Corinthians. He said this is the third time he was coming to them. He told them at the beginning of the letter that he had not come to them again in order to spare them. He wanted to give them time to repent. In chapter twelve, he told them that he was ready to come to them for a third time. Now, he repeats himself, telling them that this is the third time I am coming to you. This is a warning to the Corinthians.

(2 Cor 13:1) “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 Cor 1:23) “But I call God as witness to my soul, that to spare you I did not come again to Corinth.”

(2 Cor 12:14) “Here for this third time I am ready to come to you, and I will not be a burden to you; for I do not seek what is yours, but you; for children are not responsible to save up for *their* parents, but parents for *their* children.”

It is also a warning, evidenced by his reference to Deuteronomy 19:15. God gave Moses the procedure for dealing with iniquities and sins. There was not to be punishment given on the basis of a single witness; there had to be evidence provided by two or three witnesses. Paul is warning them that when he comes, he is going to deal with those that are sinning. He will do it Scripturally, getting the facts established by two or more witnesses, and then church discipline will be carried out.

(Deut 19:15) “A single witness shall not rise up against a man on account of any iniquity or any sin which he has committed; on the evidence of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed.”

In Matthew 18:15-17, Jesus gave the church instructions about how to deal with sin. These were the first instructions given to the “church” and they deal with sin. If our brother sins, we are to go and show him his fault in private. We are not to talk about his sin with others; we are to go to our brother and show him his fault in private. In some cases, it may be a pattern of sin, rather than a single incident. We should deal with sins prayerfully and with an attitude of winning our brother. This is not the pastor's responsibility; it is the person who saw the brother sin. The instructions Jesus gave for dealing with sin in the church was given to all of us, not just the pastors.

(Matt 18:15-17) “If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. {16} But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that **BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED.** {17} If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.”

If our brother listens to us, which means that he receives the correction, repents of his sin, and his relationship with God and you is intact, then we have won our brother. If he does not listen and repent, we are to take the confrontation to the second level. We are to take one or two others with us that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. It does not mean that leadership needs to be involved, only witnesses. The goal is the same as the first level, to win our brother. If our brother refuses to listen, we are to take it to the third level, where we tell it to the church. At this point, leadership must definitely be involved. We don't bring things before the whole church without the pastors being involved.

If our brother does not listen at the third level, Jesus said that he should be to us as a Gentile or tax collector. Tax collectors and Gentiles are unbelievers, and we are to try and win them to Christ. We should try to maintain relationship with them, and to serve them. The practice of shunning by some groups is not treating this unrepentant person as a tax collector or Gentile. There are consequences within the fellowship. If someone is treated like tax collectors and Gentiles, they would not be participating in the Lord's Supper. We would welcome them to come to church, but their participation and service would be limited. The goal is to win them, and to restore them.

Paul tells the church that he told them in his last visit, and is telling them again, that he is not going to spare anyone on his next trip. This is a serious warning to those who have continued in sin. He said that since they are seeking proof of the Christ who speaks in me, and who is not weak toward you, but mighty in you, he is not just willing to give that proof, he will not spare anyone. Paul has given a very strong warning to the church in Corinth.

(2 Cor 13:2-3) “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.”

Paul said that Christ was crucified because of our weakness. That is the Greek word, *astheneia* (Strong's G769), which means disease, infirmity, sickness, or weakness. In this case, the disease or sickness that we have is sin. Christ did not die because we were physically sick; He died to free us from our sins and restore our fellowship with the Father. Christ was crucified because of weakness, but He lives by the power of God. It was by the power of God that Jesus was raised from the dead. Now, those of us who are weak in Christ, will live with Him because of the power of God directed towards us.

(2 Cor 13:4) “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.”

Paul asked the Corinthians to examine themselves to see if they are in the faith. That is a great question for people who are living in sin. Christ died to set us free from our sins. We are to live transformed lives, not being conformed to the patterns of the world. If there has been no change

in our lives, it is a legitimate question to ask, “Have I received the Lord Jesus Christ into my life? If we have received Christ, we know that He is in us. If we have never believed that Jesus is the Christ, and that He came in the flesh and died for our sins, and was raised from the dead, and have never confessed Him to be Lord of our lives, then Jesus has not come into our lives. We have failed the test.

(2 Cor 13:5-6) “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.”

Paul has warned the Corinthians, but his desire and prayer is that they do no wrong. Paul does not want to come and act boldly. He does not want to come and use his apostolic authority to deal with sin in the church. He does not want to come and mourn over their sinful state. Paul wants to come and find the house swept and in order. He wants to come with joy. Paul is praying for the church to walk uprightly and do no wrong. Paul's main concern is not whether the Corinthians think he is approved or unapproved; he is concerned that they are doing what is right. A true leader, whether pastoral or apostolic, is more concerned about the spiritual condition of the flock than what people think about them. Paul told the Galatians that he was not a man-pleaser, but a God pleaser, and he could not be a bond-servant of Christ if he were trying to please men. A true spiritual leader is concerned more about the truth than what people may think of him. Today, many are unwilling to speak the truth because it may offend someone. That is the sign of a man-pleaser. God pleasers are concerned for the truth. True leaders are not concerned about the flock being made complete, and are willing to suffer and endure hardships so that the flock can be made complete.

(2 Cor 13:7-10) “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. {8} For we can do nothing against the truth, but *only* for the truth. {9} For we rejoice when we ourselves are weak but you are strong; this we also pray for, that you be made complete.”

(Ga 1:10) “For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ.”

Paul ends his warning and defense with a final reminder about the authority that the Lord gave him, which for building up and not for tearing down. He is writing this letter and warning to them before he comes, so that when he is present, he does not need to use severity.

(2 Cor 13:10) “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.”

Conclusion and Applications

Paul is getting ready to return to Corinth for the third time. He has written and given a defense of himself and his apostolic ministry. He was really more concerned about the spiritual condition of the flock than anything else. He wanted the Corinthians to repent of any and all sin before he got there. If they did not repent, he was not going to spare anyone. Even though this letter was written as a defense, it was really for their upbuilding. Paul wanted them to learn and grow from this. He wanted them to be a holy church. He wanted to present them complete in Christ.

The applications for us are about our spiritual condition. Are we complete in Christ? Are we mature in Christ? Are there any sins in our lives that are hindering us from maturing in Christ?

What is our attitude towards sin? Are we willing to sweep sin under the carpet and ignore it? Or, are we willing to be obedient to Jesus' instructions and go to our brother or sister when they sin? Are we willing to confront people their sins?

I was surprised, but not surprised by an article this week about something that happened at a prayer breakfast in Washington, D.C. Nancy Mace, a Representative from South Carolina spoke, and in her talk she mentioned that she woke up at 7:00 a.m., and was getting picked up at 7:45 a.m. Her fiancé, Patrick, tried to pull her to his side when she woke up, and she told him, "No, baby, we don't got time for that this morning. I gotta get to the prayer breakfast, and I gotta be on time."¹ Here is a woman that is not just representing South Carolina, she is representing the church. The church in Corinth, like churches everywhere, have men and women living in sin together, and show up for services. Sin is rampant, and sin is accepted. The church does not confront sin. We tell God, "Who am I to confront that person about their sin?" God tells us to go to our brother when he sins and try to win him. We are His representatives and that is what He is asking us to do. Are we willing to be obedient to Jesus' instructions and confront sin? The apostle Paul was willing to confront sin. He was more concerned about their spiritual condition than what they thought about him. He was more concerned about pleasing God than pleasing men. He was willing to be bold if necessary, but was praying that the church would do what was right. That should also be our attitude.

Closing Prayer

Father God, thank You for the example that the Apostle Paul left us. Thank You for his life, ministry, and passion to see the church be made complete. Thank You for his love for truth, and his commitment to declaring the whole counsel of God. Thank You for how he used his authority, always to build up the church, not to tear it down. Help us to always be building up our brothers and sisters. Help us to be an encouraging place of worship. Thank You for this letter to the Corinthians, and how it speaks to the church today, who is still struggling with the same issues. Help us to examine ourselves. Help us to repent when we fall short of the mark. Help us to be bold and willing to confront sin in the church. Help us to love people so much that we are willing to speak the truth in love to them. Give us courage, humility, gentleness, and wisdom when we have to go to our brother. Help us to be a pure and spotless bride, and ready for You. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

¹ <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/nancy-maces-naughty-prayer-breakfast-speech-commenters-worked-up>

Paul's Warning and Defense – Part 6

Introduction (2 Co 11:12–13, Matt 7:15-20, 12:11-13:10)

1. **Signs of a true apostle** (2 Cor 12:11-12, 11:1, 11:16, 11:5-6, John 2:11, 20:30–31, Jn 4:48, Ac 2:43, 4:30, 5:12, 6:8, Ro 15:18–19, 1 Co 2:3–5)

2. **Fatherly Example** (2 Cor 12:13-16, 1 Co 4:14–17, Ac 18:1–5, Col 1:28–29)

3. **Apostolic Authority** (2 Cor 12:19-13:10, Eph 4:11–15, Ac 20:26–27, 2 Cor 1:23, 12:14, Deut 19:15, Matt 18:15-17, Ga 1:10)

Conclusion and Applications