

2 Corinthians 13:1-14
Jeremiah 1
Psalm 8

“Examine Yourselves”

July 17, 2016

God had called Jeremiah to be his messenger – his prophet.

God set him over nations and over kingdoms,
to pluck up and to break down,
to destroy and to overthrow,
to build and to plant.

He warned him that he would face resistance – “they will fight against you” –
but God promised that “they shall not prevail against you,
for I am with you, declares the LORD, to deliver you.”

There are interesting parallels between Jeremiah’s call and ours.

In the Great Commission, Jesus promised to be with us to the end of the earth.

Paul will say in 2 Cor 13 that Christ gave him authority to build up – not to tear down.

Jeremiah’s ministry included both the destruction of the temple
and the promise of a new covenant.

Paul’s ministry only includes the preaching of the new covenant.

Jesus is the one who tore in two the curtain of the temple.

He tore down the old temple in order to build a new one in himself and in his church.

That’s why we sing Psalm 8 – the song of the Son of Man exalted above all things in glory!

Sing Psalm 8

Read 2 Corinthians 13

Why are your relationships a mess?

Why do you struggle to connect with your spouse – your children –
your parents – your brothers and sisters – your colleagues – your boss?

Why do you feel disconnected from yourself?

All these problems reveal an underlying dysfunction in our relationship with God.

You know what your biggest problem is?

You don’t love God!

If you loved God, you would do what he says.

So the fact that you don’t do what he says means that you don’t love God!

How can we be restored to right relationship with God?

We need to believe the gospel.

And we need to *obey* the gospel – in its implications for our relationships with each other.

Paul was concerned that he would find the Corinthian church
“fragmented, dysfunctional,
and harboring recalcitrant, unrepentant, immoral members.” (Guthrie, 628)

And so he gives them two warnings here at the end of 2 Corinthians.

1. Warning #1 – The Resurrection Power in Church Discipline (v1-4)

Paul has spent many chapters laying out the pattern of Christian ministry –
from Christ to us to you –
the way of the cross is the only way to glory;
Christ’s power is only made perfect through suffering;
these light momentary afflictions are preparing for us an eternal weight of glory.

But the way of the cross does *not* mean being passive!
There is real *power* in the way of the cross.

Ask Ananias and Sapphira!

In the book of Acts, they lied to the apostles – and to the Holy Spirit –
and the result was that the Spirit struck them dead!
In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul says that many of the Corinthians became sick
because they misused the Lord’s Supper –
and some even died.

Jesus and his apostles all talk about the importance of church discipline.
There comes a point when persistent sin must result in excommunication.
Paul has been patient – he has given two warnings –
he has given those who sinned plenty of opportunity to repent.

Now, he says:

This is the third time I am coming to you. Every charge must be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.

This is a quote from Deuteronomy 19:15 –
which spoke of the requirement that a single witness was not sufficient
to convict someone in the courts of Israel.

Paul is using the quote metaphorically.
Paul knows full well that he is only *one* witness.
The same witness saying or seeing the same thing three times
is *not* the same thing as three witnesses!
But the *point* of the law in Dt 19:15 was that no one should be convicted of a crime
without ironclad evidence.
One witness cannot provide ironclad evidence
because there is no way to verify what the witness says.

Now, I need to take a moment to clarify a common misapplication of this verse:

when you are dealing with a “he says / she says” situation –
you often hear people say,
“Well, there’s only one witness, so I can’t believe you.
The Bible says that I need two or three witnesses.”
That’s *not* what the Bible says!

The Bible says that every *charge* must be established [*in court*] by two or three witnesses.
I once received a heart-breaking call from a pastor
who said that there was an accusation that a man in their church
had molested his step-daughter.
They believed the girl – but they only had *her word* –
there was no other evidence.
They were so convinced by her story,
that they even encouraged her mother to divorce the man because of it!
But scripture requires 2 or 3 witnesses to establish the charge.
What were they to do?

I encouraged them to dig deeper.
Sin is never an isolated incident.
Maybe this was the first time he had ever done this particular sin (maybe),
but surely there would be other sins surrounding it.
If he was actually innocent,
then the digging would vindicate him.
If he was truly guilty,
then the digging would turn up something.

So, *yes*, you need two or three witnesses to substantiate a *charge* in church discipline.
But that doesn’t mean that you need two or three witnesses *to believe someone!*

Why did I believe a young lady
when she came to me with the claim that her husband was abusing her?

Because she was believable!
I know – that’s a very low standard!
But because we have such a high standard for conviction,
we *need* to have a low standard for believing someone!
Unless I have a good reason to think that you a liar and a fraud,
I will generally believe what you tell me.
Until you give me a reason to disbelieve you – I will believe what you say.

Why?
Because Jesus calls me to love my neighbor.
And Paul tells me that love believes all things!

Now, I once had a husband object to this.
He said, “Why don’t you believe me when I tell you I didn’t do it?”

Why do you believe her and not me?”

My reply:

“If I believe her, and she is a liar, it does you no harm –
because you can easily prove her to be a liar
by the grace and love that you show in this process.
But if I believe you, and *you* are a liar, it does her *great harm* –
because I would be putting her back into a dangerous situation.”

In one sense, what Paul is dealing with in Corinth is very different.

But in another sense, his *approach*
models the Christian’s stance toward abusive situations.

Paul *moves toward* the situation.
He moves forward with humility – modeling the way of the cross.

But meekness is *not* weakness.
Humility is not passivity.

There is a *power* that is veiled by the way of the cross –
but it is no less real for being veiled!

Paul has been saying *over and over again*
that the pattern of Christian ministry is from Christ to us to you –
which means that if *you* do not embrace the way of the cross,
if you refuse to walk the path of humility,

then, Paul says, “I will not spare them.”

Listen to the sternness in Paul’s voice:

² I warned those who sinned before and all the others, and I warn them now while absent, as I did when present on my second visit, that if I come again I will not spare them— ³ since you seek proof that Christ is speaking in me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you. ⁴ For he was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but in dealing with you we will live with him by the power of God.

Jesus went to the cross – but he *didn’t stay dead!*
Paul has endured suffering and trials –
he rejoices in affliction and boasts in his weakness –
but in the same way that Jesus was raised from the dead –
in the same way that he “lives by the power of God” –
so also Paul and his traveling presbytery will live with him by the power of God
in dealing with you.

Paul doesn’t say *exactly* what he will do.

But in 1 Corinthians 5:4-5, Paul spoke of this sort of thing:

“When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present,

with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan
for the destruction of his flesh,
so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.”

Paul had gone on to tell the Corinthians “Purge the evil person from among you” (5:13).

When a person is excommunicated, they are handed over to Satan.
They are cut off from Christ and his church.

A few weeks ago we announced that a few former members
had been erased from the church rolls.

Erasure generally means that people just didn’t communicate well in the process –
and we’ve tried to figure out where they are,
but they just aren’t very communicative!

That’s *not* excommunication.

We are not handing them over to Satan –
we are generally trusting that they found another church.

But when a person persistently sins – and *refuses* to repent –
then Paul says that they will eventually need to be dealt with severely
(that’s the word he uses in verse 10 –
he doesn’t *want* to be severe –
but he cannot allow these people to continue to harm the church!)

Yes, one central goal of church discipline is restoration –
but another goal of church discipline is protecting the flock from danger.

Paul sees these false teachers – these false apostles – as a serious threat to the church.
If they will not respond to the call of the cross,
then he must come in the resurrection power of Jesus Christ
to deal forcefully with them.

And Paul says that Christ *is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you.* ⁴ *For he was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but in dealing with you we will live with him by the power of God.*

The pattern of Christian ministry is from Christ to us to you.
That is true of suffering – of weakness – of the cross.
It is also true in the resurrection power of God.

Christ is not weak in dealing with you.
Yes, Christ *was weak* in the cross – he was crucified in weakness.
But now he lives by the power of God.

Christ has given to his church resurrection power.
And that power is exercised by the pastors and the elders of the church.

Paul speaks of how “we” are weak in him
(and Paul’s “we” in 2 Corinthians refers to his traveling presbytery).
It is an authority that Christ gave for *building up* the church – not for tearing down.
So when others are engaged in tearing down,
they must be removed from the church.
It’s not about protecting “turf” – maintaining “control” – or anything of that sort.
It’s about building up the body of Christ and protecting the sheep against wolves.

If you are going to experience resurrection power in the church of Jesus Christ,
then you *need* for your shepherds – for your elders and pastors –
to protect you from ravenous wolves who would devour you.

And that’s why Paul gives his second warning in verses 5-10

2. Warning #2 – So Test Yourselves (v5-10)

⁵ *Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves.*

Why does Paul say this?
Examine yourselves?
What does that mean?

Think about the pattern:
From Christ to us to you.

Christ walked the way of the cross – from suffering to glory – from weakness to power.
Paul and his traveling presbytery have walked the way of the cross.

What about you?

Test yourselves!
The Corinthians have been challenging Paul to demonstrate his authenticity.
Now Paul turns the question around!
“Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith.”

Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!

Jesus Christ is in you!
At least – he is in you *if you pass the test!*
So what is this test?
And how do I pass?!

How will you respond to what Paul says here?
How will you respond to the truth?
How will you respond to the Word of God?

Because there are people in the church who refuse to obey the truth.
And Paul's concern here is for the whole church in Corinth.

“Christ in you” is not merely an individual statement.

It also refers to the community.

“A community claiming to follow Christ as Lord is called to live appropriately
in covenant with the living Christ” (Guthrie, 639)

Paul frequently uses this sort of conditional statement in his letters.

In Romans 8:9 he says, “You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit,
if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you.”

In Romans 8:17 he says, “And if children, their heirs

(namely, heirs of God and also fellow heirs of Christ) –

if indeed we suffer with him so we may also be glorified with him.”

In Colossians 1:22-23 he says, “But now he has reconciled you

by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight,
without blemish and free from accusation –

if you continue in your faith, established and firm,

and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel.”

Paul understands that not everyone who says “Lord, Lord” is truly in Christ.

The Romans 8:17 passage is especially important.

If you are in Christ – if you are a fellow heir of Jesus –

then you must suffer with him so that you may also be glorified with him.

If you try to bypass the suffering to get straight to the glory –

then you are not following Jesus!

If you are in Christ – if Christ is in you – then your life will more and more reflect
the cruciform pattern of Jesus.

Notice how Paul says this in verses 6-7

⁶ I hope you will find out that we have not failed the test.

In other words, as you examine yourselves – as you test yourselves –

I hope that you will discover that we have been speaking the truth!

Indeed, if you come to the conclusion that Paul has failed the test,

that is evidence that *you* have failed the test!!

But in another sense, it doesn't really matter what you think of Paul.

What matters is that you *not do wrong*:

*⁷ But we pray to God that you may not do wrong—not that we may appear to have met the test,
but that you may do what is right, though we may seem to have failed.*

First, notice that Paul *prays*.

Paul understands that he will never be able to change the hearts of the Corinthians!
Only God changes hearts.
Therefore, *we pray*.

It's true that thinking poorly of *Paul* would be a problem!
But Paul – always seeking to imitate Christ! –
humbles himself and says “it doesn't really matter what you think of us!”
We pray to God that you may not do wrong –
that you may do what is right.

In the context of the epistle,
doing “wrong” would mean rejecting Paul and his pattern of ministry –
and doing “right” would mean accepting Paul and his pattern of ministry.

And if they do wrong – if they refuse to accept Paul and his pattern of ministry,
then he will have no choice but be severe in his use of the Lord's authority:

⁸For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. ⁹For we are glad when we are weak and you are strong.

(When we are weak and you are strong – that means that the ordinary pattern is working!)

Your restoration is what we pray for. ¹⁰For this reason I write these things while I am away from you, that when I come I may not have to be severe in my use of the authority that the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down.

The ordinary pattern is that the authority of Christ is used for building up –
not tearing down.
That's why Paul has always been gentle with them.
His opponents had accused him of being strong by letter, but weak in person.
And Paul says that the reason why he has appeared weak
is because that is the pattern of Jesus!

Jesus did not win his great victory by a mighty display of power!
He won the great victory through suffering and death.
And even so – the apostles and Christian ministers through the centuries
have continued to follow the pattern of the cross.

But never confuse that pattern of humility and patient endurance
with a lack of authority and power.

The Lord Jesus Christ has given to his ministers *authority*.
It is given for building up – and not for tearing down.
The language there is drawn from the call of Jeremiah that we saw earlier.
Jeremiah was called “to pluck up and to break down,
to destroy and to overthrow,

to build and to plant.” (Jer 1:10)

But Christian ministers are given authority *to build up*.

We are not in the tearing down phase.

We are in the building up phase.

But while you are building a house,

if someone comes along and puts a few crooked 2x4s in the wrong place

then you need to tear them out!

And Christ’s authority for building up includes the warrant for removing those 2x4s!

But Paul does not want to close on a note of severity!

So he concludes with some final exhortations in verses 11-13.

And in a very real way,

if the Corinthians do what Paul exhorts them to do in verses 11-13,

then they will avoid the severe confrontation that awaits them otherwise!

3. Final Exhortations – Aim for Restoration (v11-13)

¹¹ *Finally, brothers,^[a] rejoice.*

Paul frequently calls the church to *rejoice*.

Rejoice in the Lord always!

Rejoice, Jesus has won the great victory!

Paul has just said in verse 9, “we rejoice when we are weak and you are strong.”

So when he calls the Corinthians to *rejoice*

he is calling them to the same pattern of life.

Rejoice *not* that you are strong –

but that in your weakness – in your affliction –

the strength of Jesus is revealed!

And because Jesus has won the great victory:

Aim for restoration,

Turn away from your destructive patterns of behavior –
and aim for restoration.

Again, in verse 9, Paul had prayed for their restoration.

So now he urges them to aim for restoration – to be restored!

comfort one another,^[b]

Paul concludes 2 Corinthians where he began!

In chapter 1, verses 3-4, Paul had said:

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

Comfort is not the absence of affliction.

Comfort comes from God in the midst of our affliction.

God's comfort may or may not include the removal of affliction.

But God's comfort always encourages and strengthens you.

And that is because the source of comfort –

the source of consolation and encouragement –

is God himself – “the Father of mercies and God of all comfort.”

Paul says that comfort moves from God to us to others.

God's comfort is not designed simply for *you*.

God has joined us together with Jesus as one body,

so that we might be one new community in him.

Why does God comfort you in the midst of your affliction?

“so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction,

with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”

Now at the end of 2 Corinthians, Paul challenges the Corinthians to do *just that*.

God does not comfort you so that you might be comfortable!

God comforts you so that you might be able to comfort others.

If you try to hoard comfort – if you try to keep it all to yourself –

you will find that you become increasingly uncomfortable.

Because comfort – consolation from God – is designed to be given to others.

Therefore, *comfort one another!*

And also:

agree with one another,

Be of the same mind.

This is the same language that Paul uses in Philippians 2

when he challenges the Philippians to have the same mind in them

that is yours in Christ Jesus.

We are to develop a common way of thinking –

a common way of knowing, of loving, of doing.

This is not optional for the Christian!

It's *not* that you all need to adopt *my* way of thinking.

It's that we all together are to more and more adopt the mind of Christ.

And as we more and more adopt the mind of Christ –

as we more and more agree with one another –

we will also:

live in peace;

Peace does not simply mean the absence of conflict.
When you are at peace with your brother,
there is a relationship of wholeness and well-being.

God's *purpose* in redemption was to bring *shalom* – to restore *peace* and well-being.

And that's why Paul said at the beginning of his epistle:

“grace to you and peace
from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

No longer are we strangers and aliens –
no longer are we outcasts without hope.

But because of what Jesus has done,
now, as Paul says at the end of verse 11:

and the God of love and peace will be with you.

I hope that you are seeing this growing and increasing in your relationships.
I hope that as we get more and more plugged in to each others' lives,
we can develop this common way of knowing and loving and doing.
Not my way – not your way – but the way of our Lord Jesus Christ,
which *he*, by his Holy Spirit, more and more is working in us.

Therefore:

¹² *Greet one another with a holy kiss.* ¹³ *All the saints greet you.*
If you are at peace with one another,
then you may greet one another with a holy kiss.

First let me explain what this looks like.

In Jewish and in Greco-Roman culture, the kiss was an expression of friendship.
Ordinarily it was a kiss on the cheek – though it could be on the lips.
It was a simple form of greeting or parting between friends or relations.

But Paul elevates the kiss to a new level.

It is the *holy* kiss.
The sanctified kiss – the kiss that expresses this holy bond between us!

The holy kiss is dangerous.

Because the kiss is an intimate expression of love and affection.

When you kiss someone you are vulnerable!

When your cheek is next to his cheek – you can't see what he is doing!

Judas betrayed his Lord with a kiss.
And *that* is why the holy kiss is so important!
As the divided, polarized Corinthians come together
they are called to greet one another with a holy kiss.

I remember that when my pastor preached on this when I was in college,
he said that he thought that we really should start practicing this.

And yet, after the sermon, I watched 40 men shake his hand and walk past him.
Finally, I couldn't take it any more.
I walked up to him and said, "I think you're right."
And I kissed him on the cheek!

I don't think that he was expecting anyone to take him that seriously!

Our culture has made everything way too sexual.
And we in the church need to embrace the way of our Lord Jesus.
Perhaps the way to start is with the holy kiss!

When I was in Eritrea,
I got used to kissing men.
In Eritrea they practice a three-fold kiss
(and yes, it is based on the Trinity!).
Left, right, left.
It was good for me to see a culture
where men could be physically connected to other men –
and there was simply *nothing* sexual about it.

If we are the family of Jesus –
then the holy kiss is an appropriate sign of our connection to Jesus and to one another.
I've preached on this four times now over the years –
so at this point I'd better either put up or shut up –
so be forewarned, that if you hug me, I will kiss you!

If you're not ready for this – I'm fine with a handshake!
The holy handshake is a place to start!

Conclusion: The Benediction (v14)

Paul often concludes with a simple benediction –
"the grace of the Lord Jesus be with you." (e.g. 1 Cor)

but here he expands it into the benediction that I use most Sundays!

¹⁴ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

At the beginning of 2 Corinthians, Paul had highlighted the Trinitarian working of the gospel:

2 Corinthians 1:21-22

“*And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.*”

It is God who establishes us with you in Christ.

It is God who has anointed us.

It is God who seals us – who places his seal upon us and claims us as his own!

It is God who gives us his Spirit as a guarantee in our hearts.

Notice how Paul completes the Trinitarian proclamation of the gospel
by highlighting the Holy Spirit’s work in anointing us and sealing us
as the *guarantee* – the downpayment – of the inheritance of Jesus.

Jesus has been seated at the right hand of the Father – he has received the full inheritance.
And he has poured out the Holy Spirit upon us that we might receive the *guarantee*
of the rest of the inheritance.

And so now here at the end of the epistle
he highlights the saving work of the Triune God:
the *grace* – the free gift – of the Lord Jesus Christ;
the *love* of God – for God so loved the world that he gave his only Son;
and the *fellowship* – the communion – of the Holy Spirit

Where can you find grace?

Where can you find love?

Where can you find fellowship and communion?

In God himself.

As George Guthrie puts it:

“Paul offers a profoundly God-centered solution to the problems in Corinth.
Ultimately, the church’s struggle with their apostle
manifests an underlying dysfunction in their relationship with God.
The answer, then, has to do with the Corinthians
being restored to right relationship with God
through a proper understanding of the gospel
and an obedience to the implications of the gospel
for their various relationships with each other,
with other believers, with the false teachers,
and with Paul himself,
but ultimately with God through the Lord Jesus.” (Guthrie, 655)