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# 2 Corinthians

**But I trust that you will know that we are not disqualified.** 2 Corinthians 13:6

In verse 3, Paul noted that they "seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, who is not weak toward you, but mighty in you." Rather than merely seeking a proof that he and his fellow apostles are in Christ and fully capable of demonstrating the power of Christ towards them, he asked them to examine themselves. As much as looking for the power of Christ in Paul, they needed to determine if they were even in the faith.

How could they rightly discern the source of Paul's power if they couldn't even determine if their own faith was sound? This is why he then admonished them by saying, "Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified."

Now come his words to them based on this, "But I trust that you will know that we are not disqualified." In doing their own self examination, they will then be able to discern the Source of Paul's words and actions towards them. They will know that it is Christ speaking in him. This entire line of thought follows so well with his previous words to them from Chapter 2 -

"These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. <sup>14</sup> But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned. <sup>15</sup> But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is *rightly* judged by no one. <sup>16</sup> For 'who

has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?' But we have the mind of Christ." 2 Corinthians 13-16

Life application: Just because someone is a believer in Christ, it does not mean that they have the gift of discernment. There are preachers in a thousand denominations. Do they all have discernment? Obviously not, because many come to entirely different conclusions on the same spiritual matters found within the Bible. For each of us to be able to discern what is correct and what is not, we need to do our own inward tests concerning our faith, and we need to know the Bible ourselves. It is impossible to imagine that we have time for dinner out, nightly TV, football games, etc., and yet we don't have time for reading our Bible and attending Bible studies.

**Now I pray to God that you do no evil, not that we should appear approved, but that you should do what is honorable, though we may seem disqualified.**

2 Corinthians 13:7

Paul has been discussing his need for discipline when he comes. And along with this discipline must come a demonstration of his apostolic powers. Before his arrival though, he asked them to examine themselves. His words of the last two verses said -

"Examine yourselves *as to* whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified. <sup>6</sup> But I trust that you will know that we are not disqualified."

They are to conduct a self-evaluation to see if they are actually disqualified. Having said that to them, he now says, "Now I pray to God that you do no evil." His correction through the use of his apostolic powers implies that they are doing wrong. However, he would rather have them do right and there not be a need for that power to be wielded. In its use, he and those with him would certainly "appear approved." This word, approved, is set in contrast to the word "disqualified."

If he appeared approved, it would settle all the matters concerning the charges of the false apostles levied against him, and it would be a real positive note concerning him, but he would rather simply have them do right and let the charges against him stand. As he says, "...that you should do what is honorable, though we may seem disqualified."

To him, it would be preferable for the Corinthians to think whatever ill they wanted about him if they were living properly. It was of higher value to him that they were approved and doing what is right than it would be for him to have a good name and a seemingly perfect reputation. This type of humility towards those he loved is seen elsewhere in his epistles. A remarkable example is found in Romans 13 -

"For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh,..." Romans 9:3

Life application: Are we willing to humble ourselves if it means that those who are weaker in the faith will be brought to a position of sound doctrine and right living? What value is our esteem in others' eyes if they are not living right? Rather, wouldn't it be better to be lowered in the eyes of those who are living for the Lord than to be esteemed by those who are not?

**For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth.** 2 Corinthians 13:8

With a cursory reading of this verse, it appears that Paul is speaking as a person who is incapable of working against the truth. We would then see it comparable to the words ascribed to George Washington which say, "I cannot tell a lie." Although this is a noble way of looking at it, Paul's words are more intense than that. They are somewhat comparable in type to the words of John the Baptist when he said, "He must increase, but I *must* decrease" (John 3:30).

The "we can do nothing against the truth" isn't speaking of his personal abilities so much as that of the power of the Holy Spirit in Him as an apostle. In essence, "I have no ability to work the power of my apostleship against the truth (because of the Holy Spirit in me.)" Thus the reciprocal is also true - "I only have power to work in accord with the truth in my apostolic ministry (because of the Holy Spirit in me.)"

As a man, Paul had the ability to lie or to sin in any other way. But when he was exercising the powers of his apostleship, this was not possible because the Holy Spirit is God and can in no way work unrighteousness.

Paul's words here demonstrate that when he comes and makes judgments to enforce the standards of the church, his actions will be perfectly just. This is not because he is perfect, but because the Holy Spirit who would speak through him is.

Life application: Today, many claim they have the powers of an apostle or some other Holy Spirit designated ability which then elevates them to a position of power within the church. Some go so far as to say that when you speak against them, you are committing a crime against the Holy Spirit. Reject such people as perverse and stay far away from them. The Bible is written. It is our source for determining if someone is speaking the truth concerning God or not. Such fools will be dealt with by God. But for now, let them play alone in their own deluded funhouse.

**For we are glad when we are weak and you are strong. And this also we pray, that you may be made complete. 2 Corinthians 13:9**

These words follow logically with what he just said in the previous verse. Paul is speaking of the spiritual state of the Corinthians. If they are spiritually strong, there will be no need for a demonstration of the Holy Spirit's power through the apostles. In essence, they will appear weak because everything is AOK. Should the

Corinthians be weak in their walk, then they would need to be "strong" in the use of their apostolic powers.

Therefore, this contrast is given not as any physical strength/weakness, but in connection with spiritual matters. In such matters, he says that "...we are glad when we are weak and you are strong." More than just being a state of proper functioning, it was a point of gladness for Paul. And this should be the truth with any pastor.

If he has a spiritually strong congregation, then his job of teaching them should be rather easy. If he has one that is dysfunctional and spiritually misguided, then of course it would be a point of mourning and constant strife. How happy is the pastor then who doesn't need to be "strong" in exercising his knowledge and authority, but rather to be "weak" in appearance because of the strength of his congregants!

Pastors then, like Paul here, should say, "And this also we pray, that you may be made complete." This should be the goal of every pastor. Paul looked for growth and spiritual adulthood in those he ministered to.

The word for "completion" in this verse is *katartisis*. It is only used here in the NT and means "preparing" or "making fit." However, there is a corresponding verb found in the NT which is used by Matthew and Mark to indicate the mending of fishing nets. Thus, it gives the idea of restoring something. And this is exactly what Paul has been working towards in the Corinthians; a restoration of spiritual health.

It is true that all pastors should look for a mature congregation who are spiritually healthy and able to conduct their own lives well, but some pastors actually want the opposite. By having a congregation of spiritually weak people under him, he can then exercise control over them. This can even lead into dangerous cults. If those who listened to Joseph Smith were properly educated in theology, they would have abandoned him and there would be no Mormonism today. Instead, the world is filled with this aberrant cult.

Life application: If you are in a congregation where you are not being instructed on the deeper tenets of theology, you may need to find another church. Doctrines such as the Trinity, the human/divine nature of Jesus, election, predestination, sin and repentance, and so on should be regularly brought into Bible studies. These are not rabbit trails, but are foundational issues which need to be taught and understood by all congregants.

**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 Corinthians 13:10**

The words here are given with the greatest humility. They are not so much of an apology as many take them, but rather they are simply a statement of fact. "Therefore" is given as a summary of his words since verse 1 (and even inclusive of other verses where he has promised to use his authority if necessary). "I write these things being absent" shows that he truly intends for his words to be read, accepted, and acted upon before he comes. It is his hope that his words while absent will be sufficient to bring about all necessary correction within the church.

"Lest being present I should use sharpness" defines what will be necessary if the letter doesn't have its intended effect. In this clause, the word translated as "sharpness" is an adverb. Therefore, Vincent's Word Studies suggests that to give the force of the adverb, it should read "deal sharply." If dealing sharply is necessary, it will be "according to the authority which the Lord has given me."

This means his apostolic authority. It is based on his selection by Christ as the Apostle to the Gentiles and it will come with a demonstration of power and of the Holy Spirit. Paul is hoping that this will not be necessary, but should it be so, he will use it "for edification and not for destruction."

It is neither the intent of Paul, nor the desire of the Lord, to destroy a church. Nor is it even to destroy those in the church who are not walking according to the word. Rather, it is always desirable to find correction and repentance within the

body. The seven letters to the seven churches in Revelation make this abundantly clear. Only when such edification is not found will stronger actions be effected.

It is notable that what Paul says in this verse has already been addressed by him in chapter 10 -

"For even if I should boast somewhat more about our authority, which the Lord gave us for edification and not for your destruction, I shall not be ashamed—<sup>9</sup> lest I seem to terrify you by letters.<sup>10</sup> "For *his* letters," they say, "are weighty and powerful, but *his* bodily presence *is* weak, and *his* speech contemptible."<sup>11</sup> Let such a person consider this, that what we are in word by letters when we are absent, such *we will* also *be* in deed when we are present." 2 Corinthians 10: 8-11

There he spoke of his actions being for "edification and not for your destruction" and he noted that the tenor in his letters was "weighty and powerful" but that when present he seemed "weak." Paul has clearly shown that this will not be the case if it is necessary.

Life application: It is always preferable to build up and to edify rather than to destroy. This should be the goal in our lives for strained friendships, difficult work situations, trials within a church, and for other such reasons. Let us always endeavor to be peacemakers when possible.

**Finally, brethren, farewell. Become complete. Be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.**

2 Corinthians 13:11

Paul begins his final words here with the statement, "Finally, brethren, farewell." First, despite all of the problems associated with the church and all of the questions about their walk and the application of proper doctrine among them, he never questions their salvation. Instead, he counts them as "brethren." It is a

reminder of his continued proclamation that if someone is saved, he will remain saved. He never questions this.

Secondly the word "farewell" is literally "rejoice." Charles Ellicott notes that it is the standard way that Greeks parted, and so the word being translated as "farewell" is acceptable and makes the word understandable to an English-reading audience "if only we remember that it was used in all the fulness of its meaning. 'Rejoice—let that be our last word to you.'"

After this, he petitions them to, "Become complete." He is asking them to listen to the words he has written and apply them to their lives. In doing so, the dysfunction and disorder which they continued to experience will be taken away. In turn, they will be a properly functioning and healthy congregation where all things find their correct place. He is petitioning them for wholeness in their life and conduct before the Lord.

"Be of comfort" is what will naturally result from accepting his counsel and acting upon it. There are promises in the gospel which go beyond salvation. They lead to harmony in this life and rewards in the next. In order to secure those things, a right application is necessary. If this is accomplished, then this comfort Paul petitions for them will be realized.

"Be of one mind" is a goal that he has directed them towards in both of his letters. For us, it is by applying all of Scripture to our lives. When we are united in God's word, then we will be of one mind. In a united mind, the pitfalls which he noted in 1 Corinthians 12:20 will be avoided. Instead of those things, there will be harmony and they (and thus us!) will "live in peace."

Living in peace comes from being of one mind and it is a blessed state that all believers should work for in this life and which they should anticipate with all their hearts because it is a foreshadowing of the true peace which will be realized when we are gathered to the Lord. If this is the goal of the congregation, it will



permeate their lives and be a mark of the true Christian fellowship which is often lacking because of personal strife and ambition.

The verse closes with the words, "...and the God of love and peace will be with you." According to Scripture, God is love. Therefore, we are to emulate Him. In so doing, He will be among us in an intimate way. As God doesn't change, then His love neither increases nor decreases. Rather, it is we who move in relation to Him. His love will be realized more fully when we are loving towards each other and towards Him.

He is also the Author of peace. Therefore, in pursuing peace, harmony, and contentment, we will be emulating Him. He will be with us and He will bless us for pursuing this blessed state. This final clause is a conditional one then. The "God of love and peace" being with us is dependent on our actions. When we are filled with strife, backbiting, anger, and contention, His presence will not be there as it should be. But when these are put aside and we pursue love and peace, His presence will permeate us and our fellowship.

Life application: If we want peace, then we need to be peacemakers. If we want to experience love, then we need to receive God's love and share it among one another. Let us pursue this with all of our hearts, knowing that a portion of our rewards and losses at our judgment will be based on these things.

### **Greet one another with a holy kiss. 2 Corinthians 13:12**

Paul just said, "Finally, brethren, farewell. Become complete. Be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you." Continuing on now in the hopes they will follow that advice, and in order to promote the general good of the congregation, he tells them to "Greet one another with a holy kiss." This was, and still is, the custom in many parts of the world. The kiss is intended as a greeting just as western nations today shake hands or possibly hug, depending on familiarity. In the Far East, a deep and respectful bow is given in substitute of this.

Although Paul's letters are prescriptive, intent must always be considered. Is Paul mandating that all people in all churches meet one another "with a holy kiss?" The answer is "No." The reason why this is important is because there are small pockets of churches that mandate this even today and even in western societies, such as the US. However, the intent of the kiss of greeting is cultural, not merely biblical. Proof of this follows from the first kiss noted in the Bible in Genesis 27:26 when Isaac blessed his son Jacob before he departed to Padan Aram.

From that point, the kiss is seen among the covenant people and among those who aren't yet in the covenant, thus demonstrating the cultural nature of the greeting. It is used in the same way we use a handshake. When Jacob met Rachel, without knowing her in any familiar way yet, he kissed her. In 2 Samuel 20, the following exchange begins with a kiss of greeting and ends in death -

"Then Joab said to Amasa, "Are you in health, my brother?" And Joab took Amasa by the beard with his right hand to kiss him. But Amasa did not notice the sword that *was* in Joab's hand. And he struck him with it in the stomach, and his entrails poured out on the ground; and he did not *strike* him again. Thus he died." 2 Samuel 20:9, 10

In 1 Samuel 20:41, David and Jonathan, close male friends, gave a fraternal kiss in accord with the culture before departing. And, Proverbs 27:6 notes the following -

"Faithful *are* the wounds of a friend,

But the kisses of an enemy *are* deceitful." Proverbs 27:6

This demonstrates clearly that the kiss is cultural because even enemies will kiss rather than shake hands. This is seen in these parts of the world today when leaders who are at war with each other still greet with a kiss. Exchanging "kisses" with "shaking of hands" in this Proverb would hold exactly the same meaning and intent.

And as a premier example of this, read this exchange between Jesus and Simon the Pharisee -

And He said to him, "You have rightly judged." Then He turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped *them* with the hair of her head. You gave Me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in. You did not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil. Therefore I say to you, her sins, which *are* many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, *the same* loves little." Luke 7:43-47

And of course, the most famous kiss in history is recorded concerning Judas' betrayal of Jesus and reflects the sentiments of Proverbs 27:6 (above) perfectly.

It is important then to understand the cultural nature of this admonition by Paul lest we get swept up into legalism over something which is actually not intended for all cultures and in all situations. If a person with an immune deficiency were to use this verse in a prescriptive manner, he could soon be dead from receiving the germs of others.

Finally, the kisses in these and other verses throughout the Bible which are between men and men (such as David and Jonathan noted above) are not in any way intended to convey the perverse sin of homosexuality as modern liberals often imply. They are merely cultural and welcoming displays just as handshakes are today. To imply this in their writings shows a disregard for God's order in the natural world.

Paul ends this thought with, "The churches of Christ greet you." This carries on the warmth that has been transmitted so far. He has gone from personal greetings, to personal recommendations for continued harmony and love, and has finished with extended greetings from many others. He has been careful to show that the bonds of Christian love extend out in all ways and to all those who are believers.

Life application: If you are in Rome, do as the Romans do. If you are in Japan, do as they do. It wouldn't be appropriate to go to church in the Far East and attempt to hug, kiss, or even shake the hands of another unless they first offered. If you are in a mid-eastern area, a fraternal kiss may accompany a greeting. In America, a hearty handshake and maybe a friendly hug is the custom. The intent of Paul's words is promoting warmth and harmony between believers, not causing offense.

**All the saints greet you. 2 Corinthians 13:13**

As the letter begins to close, Paul reminds the Corinthians that they are still beloved by the members of the other churches. In other words, he hasn't maligned them in any way and he hasn't led them to believe that the church in Corinth wasn't worthy of their greeting. Instead, he notes to those around him that he was writing to the Corinthians, and they in turn asked for their greeting to be passed on to them. It is a sign that Paul had presented the church at Corinth to them as a group of fellow Christians.

The first letter to the Corinthians ended with the statement, "The churches of Asia greet you." Now, when ending this letter he says, "All the saints greet you." It is of note then that wherever he was, he considered all of the churches and their members as a part of the greater church-universal. It is his intent to ensure that they felt this bond of the greater family through his words.

Life application: It is important to not divide what God has joined together. When a church is in right standing with the Lord, they should be considered as brothers and sisters in Christ. Lesser doctrinal differences are to be expected, but those who hold to proper orthodoxy in the greater issues should be treated with the kind respect which Paul shows in his letters to the churches that he addresses.

**The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen. 2 Corinthians 13:14**

This is the last of the 257 verses of the book of 2 Corinthians. Paul ends this marvelous epistle with words reflecting the nature of God revealed in the pages of Scripture; that of the Trinity. Charles Ellicott notes that, "It is not without a special significance that the Epistle which has been, almost to the very close, the most agitated and stormy of all that came from St. Paul's pen, should end with a benediction which, as being fuller than any other found in the New Testament."

The words are rich and alive. They reflect both a prayer of blessing and a hope for the ending of the strife and division which so permeated the church at Corinth. And so he begins with, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ." Normally, words describing the Trinity do not begin with Jesus, but with God (implying God the Father). However, the thoughts are inverted here.

The order he has chosen is important to Christian theology because it shows that there is really One God revealed in three Persons without any inequality between the three. If there were, Paul's words would be most inappropriate. However, this shows that they are truly co-equal within the Godhead. His words, rather than noting any distinction, are given based on priority of thought. He wants, first and foremost, to highlight the "grace of the Lord Jesus Christ" one last time to them.

Grace is one of the great themes of the Bible. Man is fallen and man needs grace for his salvation and for his continued walk with the Lord. Paul asks for this marvelous blessing to be bestowed upon his audience. In this petition, it is understood that they are undeserving of it. One cannot merit grace. Therefore, the petition is one of hope that this unmerited favor "of the Lord Jesus Christ" will continue to be lavished upon them - sinners already saved by that same grace.

He next focuses on the "love of God." The term "God" here is certainly speaking of "God the Father." This is evident by the naming of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit in the same verse. Albert Barnes describes the words of this clause - "The love of God brings salvation; imparts comfort; pardons sin; sanctifies the soul; fills the heart with joy and peace; and Paul here prays that all the blessings which are the fruit of that love may be with them."

This logically follows "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ" in order because one cannot truly experience the continuous and eternal stream of the love of God without first being reconciled to Him. It is through the grace of Christ that this occurs. Though it is also an act of the love of God, without receiving the grace by faith, one cannot continue in the love of God. However, once the gift is received, the love of God will be realized and revealed in.

Paul's final words of the epistle close with, "...and the communion of the Holy Spirit *be* with you all. Amen." The communion, or fellowship, of the Holy Spirit is something that not all believers fully experience. One is sealed with the Holy Spirit upon belief (Ephesians 1:13, 14). At that moment, they receive their guarantee of eternal life and they receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit. They will never receive "more" of the Spirit.

However, this doesn't mean that they will experience the fullness of what they have received. In Ephesians 5:18, Paul tells us to "be filled with the Spirit." In the Greek, it is an imperative, but it is also in the passive. This means that we are not actively, but passively filled with the Spirit. This then means that He will fill us as we yield to Him. This is done through prayer, praise, worship, fellowship, and study of His word. It is through these things that we are "filled" with the Spirit. We have all of the Spirit we will ever receive, but He can get more of us as we yield to Him.

In yielding, we enter into fellowship with Him. It is this blessed state which Paul prays will come upon his audience at Corinth (and thus us!) as he writes to them. It is something they were surely lacking, but something that his letter of love to them hopes for. May it be with us as he has prayed for them!

The final word "Amen" is apparently missing from most early manuscripts and therefore many scholars suggest that it is a later addition by a scribe. Whether this is so or not cannot be precisely determined. No matter what, it is something that Paul would have surely said in his heart, even if it was unstated with his pen. It means "So be it," and this would have been Paul's fervent desire for them.

Life application: You have now made it through 257 verses of the book of 2 Corinthians. You are next admonished to carefully evaluate the coming book of Galatians; a book which contains 149 wonderful verses of doctrine for our understanding. Stay tuned as we prepare ourselves for that journey by relying on the very benediction which has been bestowed upon us by Paul at the end of this marvelous letter, 2 Corinthians.