

“The Edifying of the Truth”

2 Corinthians 13:7-10

Theme: For ministry to edify, one must intentionally help others follow Christ more.

Background:

- Paul writes this letter to a church struggling with unstable faith due to the malicious and disruptive influence of false teachers, who slandered him as a self-appointed, selfishly ambitious, wannabe outsider only seeking significance and to enrich himself at the Corinthians' expense.
- Paul had visited Corinth twice before – once when he preached the gospel and established the church, and a second time to address their stubbornness and doctrinal drift.
- However, after he left Corinth, the false teachers became even more vicious, and the Corinthian church wavered even more, prompting Paul to write a harsh and stinging letter of rebuke, which is often called the “Lamented Letter” because Paul regretted sending it.
- Yet, it was used by God, and many of the Corinthians repented. However, many others did not, and Paul is writing to the church to comfort those who repented and to warn those who did not of his plan to return and exercise discipline.
- Throughout this letter, Paul defends Christ, who called him as an apostle, gave him the message to preach, and granted him the authority to perform signs and wonders to verify his message.
- The largest part of this letter, Paul emphasizes the importance of believers relying on the Gospel, the message he preached, and they had embraced – Chapters 2-7.
- He then emphasized that Christians cannot be self-absorbed or narcissistic – but must seek the welfare of others and provides them the opportunity to participate in a giving project to help the poor in Jerusalem – Chapters 8-9.
- Paul then defends his ministry as an apostle – showing that rejecting the apostle is equivalent to rejecting Christ and discrediting the gospel – Chapters 10-13.
- In the section immediately preceding our text this morning, Paul indicates that he is coming to Corinth to exercise his apostolic authority to confront the false teachers and those members of the church who were in sin – and will come without mercy, boldly confronting them and will not spare anyone, but will demonstrate the power of Christ to protect the church.

Introduction: As Paul brings his letter to a close, his words in 2 Corinthians 13:7–10 pull back the curtain on his true aim in ministry. Though misunderstood, criticized, and even accused, Paul's deepest concern was never his own reputation but the spiritual growth of God's people. He longed that the Corinthians would live in obedience to Christ and reflect His holiness, even if that meant Paul himself appeared weak or unimpressive.

Here we see that genuine ministry is not about self-promotion, control, or personal vindication—it is about edification. To edify is to build up, to strengthen, to intentionally help others follow Christ more faithfully. Paul prays for their maturity, prioritizes their spiritual well-being above all else, and passionately pursues their growth in the Lord.

This passage reminds us that the true measure of any servant of God is not found in numbers, applause, or status, but in whether their labor results in Christ being formed in the lives of others.

Theme: *For ministry to edify, one must intentionally help others follow Christ more.*

- I. **The Prayer for Edification** (v. 7) – Paul’s intercession reveals his heart for their spiritual growth.
- II. **The Priority of Edification** (v. 8) – Truth and strength are measured by what builds others in Christ.
- III. **The Passion for Edification** (vv. 9-10) – Paul’s authority and energy are directed toward strengthening the church.

I. The Prayer for Edification – 13:7

A. The Plea in His Prayers

1. Paul continues his confrontation of those in Corinth who were leaning in the direction of the false teachers.
2. He had just appealed to them to examine their faith for genuineness, something that would cause them to appreciate the Gospel that Paul delivered to them.
3. In appreciating the Gospel delivered by Paul, they would have to acknowledge that Paul was God’s man, not the charlatan that the false teachers were claiming him to be.
4. He has demonstrated that the faith of the Corinthians was one of the ways that his ministry was certified – cp. **2 Corinthians 3:1-3**.
5. Given the struggles the Corinthians faced from the destabilizing false teachers, Paul’s most important resource was prayer – *“Now we pray to God that you do not wrong.”*
6. Essentially, he is committing them to the Lord to bring conviction of sin and the repentance that turns them away from their sins – cp. **12:20-21**.
7. If they, in response to the Apostle’s appeals and guided by the Gospel, were to turn from their sin, his visit with them would be one of joy and reconciliation, not discipline.
8. An essential element in the desire to see sinners turn from their sin

is the work of God secured through prayer – cp. *2 Thessalonians 1:11-12*.

9. After all, it is God who grants repentance – *2 Timothy 2:24-26*.

B. The Purpose of His Prayers

1. He prayed this for them, not because his reputation was being tarnished by the Corinthians' sinful indulgences, but because their disobedience was cutting them off from God's blessings.
2. His reputation was not what his ministry to the Corinthians was all about - *“not that we ourselves may appear approved, but that you may do what is right, even though we may appear unapproved.”*
3. Paul's approach to them as they refused to repent would be one of severity, thereby demonstrating his authenticity as an Apostle of Christ – cp. v. 2; v. 10.
4. If they repented and Paul was able to come to them in unity, Paul's reputation would continue to be smeared as a weak man who has very little to provide – he will continue to be perceived as *“unapproved”* [ἀδόκιμος] – unqualified or worthless.
5. Yet, their obedience to the Lord (*“do what is right”*) was more important to Paul than the esteem of men – He wanted the believers to esteem Christ even as he was held in low esteem.
6. This is enough for the man of God.

II. The Priority of Edification – *13:8*

A. The Endorsement of the Truth

1. As Paul is greatly concerned regarding how the Corinthians were going to respond to his admonitions and calls for repentance, Paul continues cultivating the scenario of their repentance.
2. He states, *“For we can do nothing against the truth ...”* – a reference to how pointless his warnings of discipline are when they are walking in submission to the Gospel.
3. Paul is wholly devoted to the truth – he preached it, lived it, rejoiced in it, manifested it, and submitted to it, and finds no justification for criticizing anyone for living it.
4. If the Corinthians were submissive to the truth and valued it the way believers should, Paul could not and would not come down on them with correction and discipline.

5. In such a case, he would have no apostolic power to exercise since the Corinthians would be on the side of truth and commendations and endorsements would come through Paul.

B. The Enrichment through the Truth

1. However, if they had refused to submit to the Gospel and to apostolic authority, Paul would come and do what was necessary to advocate for the truth against their ungodliness – “... *but only for the truth.*”
2. Paul was concerned that the authority of Christ to judge the sin within the church would necessarily be exercised against the Corinthians through the Apostle, and he would be called upon to be the agent of such discipline.
3. His work has always been to work “... *for the truth*” through his teaching, preaching, serving, and discipling.
4. His great desire was to see them walking in “*the truth*” – cp. 3 John 3-4:
5. To walk in the truth means:
 - a) Submitting to Christ's Authority – Colossians 2:6.
 - b) Obeying God's Word – James 1:22.
 - c) Rejecting Error and Deceit – Psalms 119:29-30; 1 Peter 2:1-2.
 - d) Bearing Witness to Christ – Acts 1:8.
6. Paul was aware of what Jesus taught through His great prayer that the Word of God was what sanctified and enriched the believer – cp. John 17:17; Acts 20:32.

III. The Passion for Edification – **13:9-10**

A. The Preferment of Those We Serve – **v. 9**

1. Paul's desire for the Corinthians' spiritual prosperity was so great that he states, “*For we rejoice when we ourselves are weak but you are strong ...*”
2. This refers to the ongoing tendency of the false teachers to criticize Paul as “*weak*” because he doesn't approach them with great power and authority, but instead with rejoicing and respect for their spiritual lives – 2 Corinthians 10:10.
3. “*strong*” [δυνατός] – describes spiritually capable, standing for the truth against the fallacies being peddled among them by the false teachers.

4. Paul's passion is not for his reputation or stature, but for the sanctification of the saints in Corinth – *"... this we also pray for, that you be made complete."*
5. *"complete"* [κατάρτισις] -appearing only here in the NT – means "adequate" or "fully qualified" spiritually – cp. v. 5.
6. Paul's absolute delight was found as Christ was formed in them and they responded to Jesus with integrity, authenticity, and genuineness – *Colossians 1:28; Ephesians 4:13.*

B. The Participation with Those We Serve– v. 10

1. As God does this work of conforming them to Christ through the ministry of the Word, Paul desires to come to them – not as a judge and disciplinarian, but as a brother and fellow follower of Christ.
2. He states, *"For this reason I am writing these things while absent, so that when present I need not use severity."*
3. He would interact with them one way or another – either as a judge or as an encourager – *"... in accordance with the authority which the Lord gave me for building up and not for tearing down."*
4. God's Word – ministered through preachers of the Word will either be *"building up"* through fellowship with them and mutual submission, or *"tearing down"* as disobedience and defiance must be destroyed and abandoned.
5. Even as Paul demonstrated that his commitment to the Gospel would lead him not only to rejoice when it is embraced and lived out but also to take action against those who reject and deny it, the church must likewise rejoice and stand firm.

For ministry to edify, one must intentionally help others follow Christ more.