

08/16/26 Caring Enough to Confront
2 Corinthians 12:19-13:4

Introduction and 3 Things...

Last week, Pastor Adrian taught on 2 Corinthians 12:11-18, revealing four heart qualities of a true minister. Anticipating a third visit to Corinth, the Apostle Paul reveals his humility, perseverance, sacrificial love, and integrity while reluctantly defending his apostleship. Paul is willing to sacrifice *everything* to establish the Gospel with this young church; to, as he says in verse 15, ***“most gladly spend and be expended for your souls”***. Out of his deep love for the Corinthians, Paul now gets incredibly honest while expressing concern that they have not yet repented of persistent sin within the church.

Please open your Bibles as we read 2 Corinthians 12:19-13:4 -

2 Corinthians 12:19-13:4

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. 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, ²² immorality and sensuality which they have practiced.

¹³ 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.

Have you ever had a conversation with someone who misunderstood or misjudged you? It's a bad feeling, isn't it? I tried to maintain good grades in college - mainly because I wanted to keep my scholarship, but despite my best efforts, there was one teacher I could not get an "A" from no matter what I did. He would grade my work and make notes on how to improve, but even after applying all his suggestions, my grade never changed. I finally requested a meeting, and asked the teacher what I needed to do to improve my grade. He said there was really nothing I could do, because when the semester began, he had sized me up as a "B" student!

My grade in this class was of no great consequence, but Paul's plea for the Corinthians not to misjudge his apostolic authority or intentions had eternal implications: he desperately wanted them to fully receive the Gospel and repent of some persistent, ungodly sins in their church.

Main Point: In 2 Corinthians 12:19–13:4, Paul models four principles for lovingly confronting someone who is in persistent sin so that we will be equipped to do so biblically.

- 1. Confront for Edification (12:19)**
- 2. Confront with Grief (12:20–21)**
- 3. Confront with Justice (13:1)**
- 4. Confront in Christ's Authority (13:2–4)**

My prayer is that when we see a Christian brother or sister in persistent sin, Paul's example will encourage us to lovingly confront them and call them to repentance for the sake of God's glory, of unity within the Body of Christ, and for the sake of their good.

First, Paul models in verse 19 that when we see a fellow Christian struggling with persistent sin, regardless of any character attacks against us, we are to:

1. Confront for Edification (12:19)

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.

Have you noticed that it's hard *not* to get defensive when someone accuses you of being defensive, and you really weren't being defensive, but now you are? Paul begins our passage by clarifying a misunderstanding he knew that some in Corinth held regarding his motives and his character. Using unspiritual, worldly criteria to evaluate Paul, they judged him to be a not-so-impressive apostle, and they had begun listening to some externally impressive leaders who unfortunately were wolves in sheep's clothing – the Corinthians were choosing “style” over “substance”!

When Paul previously clarified that his apostleship was ordained and empowered by God, they accused him of being defensive and weak! The truth is, Paul didn't care what they thought of him. He spoke to them ***“in the sight of God,”*** the only One he sought to please. He said in Galatians 1:10 that if he was still trying to please men, he would not be a bondservant (slave) of Christ. Paul's goal was always to please Jesus, Who first loved him and gave Himself on the cross for Paul. (Gal. 2:20)

What Paul *did* care about was whether the Corinthians would receive, believe, and practice the Gospel that he taught, because their eternal destiny depended on it! Instead of becoming angry at their immature, worldly thinking, Paul confronted for the sake of their edification, not his exoneration! He reminded them that all his efforts and teaching were for their *upbuilding* – meaning his goal was to help them grow in Christ!

Notice Paul ends verse 19 by calling the Corinthians ***“beloved.”*** He uses the word *“Agapetos,”* which is taken from *“Agape.”* It's a word you use to address someone you love and are *deeply devoted* to – a term of great affection. It brings to mind Paul's statement to the Galatians 4:19, calling them ***“My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you.”*** Paul wants there to be no mistake that the serious warning he's about to give the Corinthians about tolerating sin comes from a place of great care for their souls, for their relationship with Jesus Christ.

Parenting can help us understand this kind of love. If you tell your child they can never run into the street, they might feel you are just restricting their freedom to be cruel. It's tempting to ease off on discipline when children accuse you of being mean, but *you* know as a parent that the rules you establish are for their safety and their good. In fact, not following the rules could result in death.

Greater than concern for the Corinthians' physical safety, Paul feared for their eternal spiritual condition, which led him to lovingly confront for their *edification*. Now in verses 20-21, Paul's fear that they were continuing to sin caused him to:

2. Confront with Grief (12:20-21)

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.

Paul begins with the phrase ***“I am afraid that,”*** expressing sober anticipation of his next visit. Paul grieves *in advance* as he expresses several fears: First, that when he visits again, he may be disappointed by their lack of respect for his apostleship and their failure to repent, and they might be disappointed that Paul has come to administer strong church discipline.

Second, Paul grieves because he fears their sinful behavior may be causing disunity in the church. He mentions four sins that are also listed in Galatians 5:19-21. These are *relational* sins finding their opposites in the ***“Fruit of the Spirit”*** (Gal 5:22-23). These sins depict how Paul fears the church members are treating each other: “Strife” means always looking for a fight, “Jealousy” indicates ungodly rivalry, “Angry tempers” refers to outbursts of rage, and “disputes” reveals a selfish, “what’s in it for me?” attitude. In contrast to the Fruit of the Spirit, these are “fruits of paganism,” the deeds of people not yet sanctified by grace.

The next four sins Paul mentions describe specific problems in the Corinthian church: *slanders, gossip, arrogance, and disturbances*. “Slanders” and “gossip” bring to mind the recent situation where church members were backbiting and carrying out a smear campaign against Paul. In 1 Corinthians 1:10-13, Paul was informed that some were arguing and choosing sides with teachers they claimed were better than Paul. In 2 Corinthians 10, Paul countered accusations that he was “weak” and rebuked those ***“who commend themselves”*** and ***“measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves.”*** There was a lot of focus on *self* rather than Christ!

The Corinthians also had a big problem with “arrogance,” the next sin Paul mentions, and “disturbances,” meaning that as a result of all their infighting, the church was in a state of disorder. So much so that there was a good chance they might split into several disgruntled groups if they didn’t *repent!*

Paul continues grieving in verse 21, mentioning a third fear: that when he visits again, ***“God will humiliate me before you, and I may mourn over many of those who have sinned in the past and not repented.”*** Paul takes his calling and ministry seriously. He doesn’t fear human disappointment; he fears that if the church he founded is still infected with immorality, God may determine that Paul has run his race in vain. Back in 1 Corinthians 3:10-15, Paul taught that God tests each man’s work, and if a man’s work is burned up because it is worthless, he will suffer loss rather than receiving a reward.

In addition to being humbled before God, Paul anticipates grieving over their lack of repentance when he visits. He’s not expressing righteous indignation, as if to say: “I can’t believe you are still committing the same sins!” No, Paul *dearly loves* these brothers and sisters, and hopes that confronting them with his serious concerns will lead them to wake up and live as people who are ***“washed,” “sanctified,” and “justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of God.”*** (1 Cor 6:11). Paul loved the Corinthians too much to ignore their ongoing sin, which is why with grief he was compelled to warn them to repent!

This morning I would like to ask: have *you* personally responded to the Gospel message, repenting of your sins and trusting in Christ? He bore your sins and my sins in His body on the cross, suffering God's wrath as He paid for them in our place. 1 Peter 3:18 says: ***"For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit."***

This morning, you can simply turn from your sins in repentance and trust in Christ, believing that he died for your sins and receiving the free gift of eternal life in Him. I plead with you to put your trust in Christ alone for salvation today!

Speaking now to believers: Do we love our brothers and sisters in Christ and grieve over their persistent sin enough to lovingly confront them, or do we allow the fear of "rocking the boat" to keep us from saying what needs to be said for their good? Cornerstone is committed to sharing God's Truth with a capital "T" on Sundays, but each of us is called to do so in our day-to-day lives.

In verses 20-21, Paul mentions 11 different sins. Sometimes we skim over such lists, or we feel that naming this many sins is overkill, but *every word* of Scripture is divinely inspired by God. In biblical counseling, we name sins what the Bible calls them. Why is that important? Because replacing words like "slander" with "bad-mouthing" or "gossip" with "spilling tea" or "adultery" with "stepping out" does three things: 1) it minimizes the harm that our sin causes to others; 2) it removes personal responsibility for sin, seemingly eliminating our need for a Savior; and 3) it prevents genuine repentance, because it keeps us from acknowledging the severity of our sin before a holy God.

So, Paul teaches us we must Confront sin in others for their Edification – for their spiritual growth – and we must Confront with Grief, mourning over their lack of repentance. But he also models the need to:

3. Confront with Justice (13:1)

In chapter 13:1, Paul writes: ***This is the third time I am coming to you. Every fact is to be confirmed by the testimony of two or three witnesses.***

After expressing fears about his upcoming visit, Paul warns the Corinthian Church he will address their unrepentant sin with *justice*. This means verifying that what he was told is accurate and holding them accountable to God's standards. Quoting Deuteronomy 19:15, Paul communicates that he's basically going to put them on trial:

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.

This unique requirement from Old Testament law says that at least two witnesses are needed for a conviction. Commentators suggest Paul might be thinking of Timothy, Titus, members of the church, or even God Himself as potential witnesses. He is making the point that the sins he listed are *serious*, which is why Paul is committed to approaching the matter with *fairness* and *justice*. How serious are these sins? In Galatians 5:19-21, Paul says that people who practice sins such as strife and sexual immorality will not inherit the kingdom of God!

Does this mean no person who has sinned in one of these ways will go to heaven? No, because God forgives the worst sinners who repent and trust in Christ! It means that those who practice these sins *without repentance* are in active rebellion to God and therefore will not inherit His kingdom. Paul wants

to purge the Corinthian church of such unholy sins because they are tearing the church apart and dishonoring the name of Christ. He writes in 2 Corinthians 6:14: ***“for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?”***

Confronting with justice means verifying the charges against those in unrepentant sin, yet our hope is always for God to grant them repentance. God exercises justice in condemning sin, but He also exercises justice in forgiving sinners: Paul says in Romans that the gift of justification by God’s grace through the blood of Jesus proves that God is ***“just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”*** (Rom 3:26)

So we must justly confront those in persistent sin while calling them to repentance. In Matthew 18:5, Jesus tells us that the purpose of confronting a brother or sister in sin is to *win them back* to the Lord! If you become aware that a brother or sister in Christ is struggling with ongoing sin, will you lovingly confront them? Do you trust God to use your confrontation to bring about repentance? There’s a powerful story about such a confrontation in 2 Samuel 12:

Israel’s King David was confronted by the prophet Nathan regarding his adultery with Bathsheba, a soldier’s wife, and the cover-up where David sent the soldier to die on the front lines of war. The Lord commanded Nathan to tell David a parable about a rich man who stole and killed a poor man’s only lamb. David was furious when he heard about this wicked rich man until Nathan revealed, “You are the man!” David had blood on his hands from killing Bathsheba’s husband and committing adultery. God judged his sin, which included the death of his child. However, after Nathan confronted David with *justice*, he confessed his sin, repented, and was forgiven by the Lord.

When necessary, we are to confront sin in others for their Edification, with Grief, and with Justice, but similar to what the prophet Nathan did, we are also to:

4. Confront in Christ's Authority (13:2–4)

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.

Paul reminds the Corinthians this is not the first time he has promised to confront their sin – he did so on his brief second visit. Based on his statement: ***“I say in advance to those who have sinned,”*** Paul’s warning from the second visit still stands, and those he previously called out have not fully repented.

One pastor comments:

“We are not to ignore the sin in our midst. The church can only maintain its holiness if members discipline fallen believers with spiritual discernment and Christian love.”

After promising a thorough investigation – ***“I will not spare anyone,”*** Paul says he will not confront in *his* strength, but in the power of God. The Corinthians confused Paul’s gentleness with a lack of authority. They mistakenly equated power with being assertive, and probably hoped for a demonstration of power similar to when Paul struck the magician Elymas blind for trying to thwart his ministry in Acts 13:11.

Paul knows they question whether Christ works through him, so he boldly states that Christ “*speaks in me*” - this means they have a problem with Jesus rather than Paul! The Corinthians didn’t grasp that Paul’s apparent weakness was really *total dependence* on the God’s power. Paul wore his weakness as a “badge of honor” because for Christians, it’s the platform from which the power of God is displayed to the world!

I once heard it said that a godly preacher should become invisible by the end of his sermon. What does this mean? It means that he has faithfully taught God’s Word in a way that keeps the focus on God, not himself. His aim is not for people to leave the service saying, “what an amazing preacher!” but “what an amazing God!” This is our goal when confronting persistent sin in a brother or sister’s life; we don’t want to get in the way of God’s Word and Spirit convicting them and leading them to repentance!

Biblical love does not look the other way when someone we love is walking persistently in sin. It doesn’t say, “That’s none of my business” when a brother or sister is wandering away from Christ. Sometimes the most loving thing we can do is care enough to confront.

But Paul has shown us that *how* we confront matters. We confront for edification—not to win an argument, defend ourselves, or put someone in their place, but to build them up in Christ.

We confront with grief—not with a spirit of superiority, but with a broken heart over the destructive power of sin.

We confront with justice—not acting on gossip, assumptions, or hearsay, but carefully establishing what is true according to God’s Word.

And we confront in Christ’s authority—not trusting in our personality, wisdom, or strength, but depending upon the power of Christ to accomplish what we never could.

I believe there are two questions we need to ask ourselves this morning.

First, is there someone you love whom you need to confront?

Maybe you have seen a brother or sister continuing down a sinful path, and you have remained silent because you don’t want to jeopardize the relationship. You don’t want an awkward conversation. You don’t want them to be angry with you.

Remember Paul. He loved the Corinthians too much to stay silent. Sometimes love encourages. Sometimes love comforts. Sometimes love bears patiently. And sometimes love cares enough to confront.

But there’s another question we need to ask: Is there an area of persistent sin in your own life that you need to confront?

It’s much easier to see someone else’s sin than our own. Maybe God has already used His Word, your spouse, a friend, a pastor, or another believer to bring something to your attention, but instead of humbling yourself, you have defended yourself, minimized your sin, blamed someone else, or just refused to repent.

Don't harden your heart. The Savior who speaks with authority in this passage is the same Savior who laid down His life for sinners.

Verse 4 says, ***"He was crucified because of weakness, yet He lives because of the power of God."***

At the cross, Jesus appeared weak. He was mocked, beaten, rejected, and crucified. Yet what appeared to be weakness was God's mighty power accomplishing our salvation. Christ bore the judgment that our sins deserved, and God raised Him triumphantly from the grave.

This means that when Christ exposes our sin, He does not do so just to condemn us. He exposes our sin to lead us to repentance, forgiveness, restoration, and greater obedience.

So whether God is calling you to lovingly confront someone else or humbly receive confrontation yourself, the remedy is the same: *Run to Christ!*

Depend upon His power. Submit to His Word. Turn from sin. And trust that the Savior who loved us enough to die for us also loves us enough not to leave us unchanged.

May God make Cornerstone a church where we love one another enough to speak the truth, we are humble enough to receive the truth, and we are dependent enough on Christ to trust Him with the results. Because sometimes the most loving thing we can do for one another is care enough to confront.

Let's Pray...

Benediction

1 THESSALONIANS 5:23, 28

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.