

“Closing Charges to the Church”

2 Corinthians 13:5–14

8/23/26

Introduction

“2 Corinthians 13:5–14”

Today, our journey through 2 Corinthians comes to an end. Back in January of this year, we began our verse-by-verse journey through this personal, heartfelt, and theologically rich letter from the Apostle Paul.

In Ch. 1–2, we began by seeing how the church is to be a fellowship of suffering, transparency, and forgiveness. We have learned that we are to live open, authentic lives that are personally connected to one another, minister the comfort we have received from God to others in need, and graciously extend forgiveness to one another. But the main purpose and thrust of this book is focused on Paul’s ongoing defense of his apostolic ministry. There is a brief section in Chs. 8–9, where we saw Paul’s focus on financial giving and learned about the grace, guidelines, and encouragements of gospel generosity; but the majority of the book focuses on the Apostle Paul defending his apostolic ministry and the true gospel against false teachers. In doing so, Paul masterfully weaves in themes such as the glorious superiority of the New Covenant, holiness & separation from sin, the nature of genuine repentance, spiritual warfare, and weakness & strength.

And while I trust that you have been blessed by the truths of this wonderful book, there is still more to learn from it today. This morning in our passage, Paul provides two closing charges to the Corinthian church, and us by extension.

I. Confirm Your Spiritual Standing (13:5–10)

II. Cultivate Spiritual Unity (13:11–14)

It is my prayer that everyone here would leave this morning knowing their standing before the Lord, and then you would live out your standing in Christ as you cultivate unity within His church.

So, let's soak up all we can from 2 Corinthians as we look at this final section. The first closing charge to the church is to Confirm Your Spiritual Standing in 13:5–10. As we go through this section, we will break it into three subpoints to better understand how these verses fit together.

Starting in 13:5, Paul writes, “Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves!”

I. Confirm Your Spiritual Standing (13:5–10)

A. The Requirement for Confirmation (13:5)

Here we'll begin with the first subpoint: *The Requirement for Confirmation (13:5)*. While just one verse, this verse contains a very important charge from Paul as we consider 2 Corinthians as a whole.

Paul is issuing a command here for the Corinthians to “test” and “examine” themselves. The word “test” means to try or to prove. It has the idea behind it of inspecting something in order to see its true quality, whether good or having faults in it. The term “examine” is a similar word that means to test or prove something and involves carefully inspecting and checking it. You could think of this concept as how a cashier will take a hundred-dollar bill, hold it up to the light, and inspect it in order to see if it is real or if it is counterfeit.

In this section, Paul intentionally uses inspection-type language to make a point. See, just back in 13:3, it says that the Church at Corinth was “seeking proof of the Christ who speaks in [Paul].” Now, the Greek word for “proof” in 13:3 is the same root of the word “examine” (NASB) in 13:5. This demonstrates that Paul is very intentionally using similar language here to make a connection in order to set up this rhetorical reversal.

Here is the idea: The majority of this letter has been chapter after chapter of Paul's defense of his apostolic ministry. The Apostle has been the one on trial, and through the contents of this letter he is seeking to prove his ministerial legitimacy. This theme has been building and building up to this point. The Corinthians have

questioned whether the Apostle Paul is true. *But now*, in 13:5, Paul wants the Corinthians to question whether *they* are true. Now it is time for the Corinthians to be inquired of. Paul now writes *to the Corinthians* and says, “test yourselves... examine yourselves.” The tables have been turned...

But what is the basis of this test and examination? The question that the Corinthians need to answer is: are they “in the faith?” Therefore, we should ask, what does Paul mean by “the faith?” And how can we know if we are “in” it?

Well, I believe that the best answer is that “the faith” is really a comprehensive term to refer to the entirety of Christianity. There are both propositional and personal elements.

First and foremost, “the faith” refers to the body of Christian belief and core truths of Christianity that center on the gospel. The faith is belief in “God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.” The faith is belief that we were created the holy and Triune God, but all of mankind has rebelled against the Lord through sin and we are separated from Him. The faith proclaims that the only solution to this problem between God and man is founded on the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ. The faith is the belief that “Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary.” As the God-man He lived a perfect life. But then He was put on the cross by “Pontius Pilate, was crucified, suffered under the wrath of God, died, and was buried. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty. From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.” This is the Christian faith. This is the gospel of God.

All of these things come together to make up what Jude 3 refers to as “the faith once and for all delivered to the saints.” The church has received this united body of truth from God. Therefore, you can know if you are “in the faith” if you are standing in the stream of this biblical and apostolic witness and truth.

In the imagery of Ephesians 2, you can think of “the faith” as a house. It is the household of God, with the person of Christ as the Cornerstone and the doctrine of

the apostles/prophets as the foundation, and the true saint has stepped into this house and is within its walls. There is a house of God, and the Christian is in it.

But “the faith” means more than that. It's not less than that, but it is more than that. There is a personal aspect of being “in the faith.” This is why Paul continues on in v.5 and says, “Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?” Here, Paul parallels being “in the faith” with Jesus Christ being “in you.” Those who are “in the faith” have been personally connected and united to Christ.

In the imagery of 1 Corinthians 3, you can also think of an individual Christian as a house. A true believer is a house/building/temple/sanctuary, and God is in them. Christians have been made a temple in which God's presence dwells...

So, in this verse, Paul asks the Corinthians, “Are you in the faith and is Christ in you?” And these questions needed to be pressed upon them because their questioning of Paul's legitimacy directly called into question their own legitimacy as Christians. To reject Paul and his gospel would be to place them outside “the faith.” And to be outside the faith would be to be outside of Christ. And to be outside of the faith and Christ would be to, as he says at the end of 13:5, to “fail the test,” meaning that they are fraudulent and counterfeit Christians.

But this question is not just one directed at the Corinthians, but all of us this morning. So let me ask you: Are you in the faith?

I pray that the Spirit of God would make your standing before God clear today. Perhaps as you examine yourself, you realize that you are not in the faith and that Christ is not in you. If so, do not ignore that conviction. It is a mercy from God to see your true condition before Him. And the good news is that you can come to Christ today. Jesus said in John 6:37, “The one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out,” and Romans 10:13 says, “Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved.” So turn from your sin, trust in Jesus Christ, and come to Him today.

But I also do not want this verse to create unnecessary doubt in true believers. Some of you have tender consciences and are painfully aware of your sin and shortcomings. But please know, Paul is not calling us to morbid introspection. He

is calling us to honest examination that ultimately directs us back to Christ. Robert Murray M'Cheyne famously said, "For every one look at yourself, take ten looks at Christ." If you have trusted in Christ and, however imperfectly, desire to follow Him, then take heart. Your assurance rests ultimately not in the perfection of your faith, but in the perfection of the Savior in whom you have placed your faith.

Paul asks, "Do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?" His desire is not to unsettle true believers, but to bring clarity: the counterfeit should be awakened, and the genuine believer should be assured.

Well, while we have seen the call and requirement for confirming one's spiritual standing in v.5, there is an implication of this confirmation in the Corinthians context that we find in v.6. In 13:6, we see The Result of Confirmation. Paul writes, "13:6."

B. The Result of Confirmation (13:6)

While this verse is almost included in passing, Paul uses another verbal connection to set up his vitally important point in this verse. See, the Greek word for "realize" used in v.6 is the same Greek word as "recognize" in v.5. And the Greek term "fail the test" in v.6 parallels the phrases "fail the test" in v.5, and "proof" in v.3.

So follow the line of logic: In 13:3, Paul is saying that the Corinthians have been seeking proof whether Paul was a true minister of Christ. Then, in 13:5, Paul calls for the Corinthians to examine their faith, but he trusts that they will realize Christ is in them and be proven as true. Therefore, if the Corinthians recognize they are true believers, then in 13:6 Paul says that they should realize that he has been proven to be one whom Christ is truly speaking through. In other words, if they are legitimate Christians, then they should know that Paul is legitimate minister!

13:6 teaches us that the result of the Corinthians' confirmation of Christ being in them in 13:5 is that they should once and for all confirm that Christ is in Paul as well. So, while this verse may seem not like much at first glance, it is once again driving home the point of Paul's overarching purpose in this book.

However, just in case this might be misunderstood, in vs. 7–10, Paul goes on to give The Reason for his call for Confirmation. He writes, “13:7–10.”

C. The Reason for Confirmation (13:7–10)

Paul explains that his pastoral rationale for wanting the Corinthians to solidify their standing in the faith is not just self-serving. In v.7, he says that he prays to the God of heaven that He would lead them away from error and into truth and righteousness. He explicitly says he does not want this just so “we ourselves may appear approved.” In fact, as long as the Corinthians are walking in the truth, ultimately, that's all he cares about, even if he “may appear unapproved.” In other words, the Apostle Paul has the good of the Corinthians as his primary aim, not his validation as a minister. His desire for their growth is not primarily a personal thing for him.

And v.8 explains that the reason why Paul can say such a thing is “for we can do nothing against the truth, but only for the truth.” What Paul means is that ultimately, he doesn't put all his stock in having approval from the Corinthians because he and his ministry companions are walking in the truth. Whether they approve him or not, he knows he is a true gospel minister. He knows he has their best interest at heart. He knows that he has a clean conscience before the Lord. Therefore, he can pray for the Corinthians not just so that he would be accepted by them, but ultimately so that they would be led into truth and righteousness.

In fact, he adds in v.9, “13:9.” Paul has no problem bringing a spotlight to his weaknesses. It has been a theme through these final chapters that Paul is happy to boast in his weakness. So, even if Paul is seen as weak, he is happy as long as the Corinthians are being strengthened and built up as a church. His prayer for the Corinthians is simply “they be made complete.” Or, I think, a better translation is what the ESV, NIV, and LSB use: “be restored.” What Paul wants most is the restoration and reformation of the saints at Corinth. He wants these believers to be put back on the right track...

As a brief point of application on this note, let me just encourage us to emulate Paul. Brothers and sisters, care more about people's spiritual welfare than their

thoughts of you. Care more about people's restoration than your reputation. Do your best to do good to others, and let the chips fall where they may. Sometimes people will love you for it, and sometimes they won't. That is not what matters most. What is most important is that the people of God would be built up...

That is Paul's purpose behind this passage and this entire book. He explicitly says in v.10, "13:10." Paul's purpose for writing this letter is that the Corinthians would reform their ways before he visits them next. The reality is, Paul does have the right to wield apostolic authority. He has been commissioned directly by the Lord Jesus Christ to lead the church. But he expresses that he doesn't want to have to bring severe correction and punishment to this church. Like any parent, he would rather that his children in the faith would simply listen to his words. However, the bottom line is, Paul does have apostolic authority, and he will use it if necessary, but only for the edification of God's people. He wants the church of God built up, not torn down...

So, in this section Paul gives an overarching charge to Confirm One's Spiritual Standing. He has laid out The Requirement, Result, and Reason for this charge for Confirmation. But this is not the end of the book. We reach the final paragraph of 2 Corinthians when Paul writes in 13:11, "Finally, brethren." We now come to the close of this chapter and book, and Paul ends this letter by issuing a charge to Cultivate Spiritual Unity. He writes, "13:11."

II. Cultivate Spiritual Unity (13:11–14)

Like vs. 5–10, vs. 11–14 can also be broken up into three sections. First, in 13:11, we have the Call for Unity.

A. The Call for Unity (13:11)

As is typical for the end of Paul's letters, we find here a list of short staccato statements for the saints. In this verse, Paul gives five commands in his closing charge, and they all are related to the topic of unity.

First, Paul commands us to “rejoice” (NASB). Other translations may say “farewell,” and that is because, while the word means rejoice, it is sometimes used as a simple closing remark. But I think it is right to translate it as “rejoice.” Now, you may be thinking, commanding somebody to rejoice is kind of an interesting thing. But, based on the context, it actually makes a lot of sense. Going all the way back to Ch. 1, Paul opened this book by saying that “we... are workers with you for your joy” (1:24). So, Paul is intentionally starting and closing this book by emphasizing the joy he wants the Corinthians to have. He just got done saying in 13:9 that he rejoices when they are spiritually strong, and now here he reiterates this point again. Contextually, this makes sense because while this was a heavy and heartfelt letter of contention and persuasion, Paul’s entire point behind it is that Corinthians would heed Paul’s call for restoration, and then experience the blessed joy, happiness, and gladness that will come with it.

Second, in v.11 the Apostle writes, “be made complete” (NASB). This is the verb form of the noun that was just used back in 13:9. Now, as I mentioned earlier, I believe that both in v. 9 and 11, it should be translated as “be restored” (as it is in the ESV, NIV, & LSB) for the following reasons. This same verb appears in passages in the Gospels to describe the mending/restoration of fishing nets. Likewise, this word also appears in Galatians 6:1 when it speaks of “restoring” anyone caught and ensnared by sin. Additionally, Paul used this same word back in 1 Corinthians 1:10: “I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you *be perfectly united* in mind and thought” (NIV). Therefore, it is best to say that Paul is calling this struggling, wind-tossed church restored to right relationship with each other and himself (not primarily for personal reasons, but because it is biblical), as they seek to rightly living for the Lord. He is calling them to cultivate spiritual unity.

Third, Paul tells the Corinthians: “be comforted.” Here we find another theme that bookends this letter. Back in Ch. 1, the Apostle explained that he endured intense suffering to comfort the Corinthians with the comfort he received from the Lord. He said to the Corinthians in 1:6 that his comfort amid affliction was “for your comfort.” Between Ch. 1 and Ch. 13, Paul has needed to be strong at some points,

but as he closes, he does not want to leave a bitter taste in their mouth, but a sweet one. Here circles back to the theme of comfort to show he wrote this letter in love.

Fourth, the Apostle continues and writes, “be like-minded.” At the time of Paul’s writing, Corinth was a divided church. In the last chapter, 12:20, Paul expressed his concern that they remained in a state of “quarreling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder” (ESV). It is the Apostle’s heart that this church would overcome these divisions, and unity would be obtained. Jesus, in John 17:21, prayed over the disciples that “they may all be one, even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us.” It is Christ’s and His apostles’ desire for the church that they would be unified and be of one mind together.

Fifth and finally, Paul concludes by calling them to “live in peace.” There had been war in the church, but Paul’s aim is for peace. It was time for conflict to end and for reconciliation to begin. Each person in the church is to do their part, and in the words of Romans 12:18, “If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.”

And then the Apostle Paul ends this verse with a beautiful promise. If they do these things, then they have this beautiful promise: “And the God of love and peace will be with you.” Our God is a God of love and peace. And as the church lovingly pursues the path of peace, they will personally and intimately experience the love and peace of God.

So, brothers and sisters, here are the exhortations of this verse. By God’s grace, we are a church that is not divided like the Corinthians. But may we never take that for granted. Division can easily creep in and wreak havoc on a church. We must be on guard. Hear the charge from this verse today and do everything within your ability to cultivate unity with the body of Christ. Seek restoration when it is needed. Let us aim to be of one unified mind. Let us live in peace with one another, because if we do so, “the God of love and peace will be with [us]...”

So, in 13:11, Paul issued The Call for Unity. But, you might wonder, what does that look like in action? And while Paul does not give a comprehensive answer, in vs. 12–13 he does give a glimpse. He writes, “13:12–13.”

B. The Expression of Unity (13:12–13)

When we talk about peace, unity, and harmony, it can feel otherworldly and intangible in our minds. We may struggle to grasp what it looks like. But in these verses, the concept of unity is made tangible. So, in light of his call for unity, Paul now commands us to express that unity practically. And while it may seem simple and maybe unimportant, Paul speaks of simply greeting one another in these verses.

In 13:12, he calls upon the church to “greet one another.” Specifically, in the historical context of Corinth, they were to “greet one another” with “a holy kiss.” I know a 'holy kiss' feels foreign to us culturally. Personally, about the only person who kisses me on the cheek is my grandma! (She can get away with it.) But in the first century, this was simply a normal greeting of love and respect, not something unusual. In that time and place, people would kiss each other on the cheek as a greeting. In the NT, a kiss signifies a greeting of love, respect, and care (NAC, 554–55). Furthermore, adding the word “holy” at the front shows that there was nothing weird or sensual about it. Simply put, this was a greeting that expressed a familial type of warmth and connection. So, Paul is calling the Corinthians to express family-like warmth to one another as an expression of their unity. And while a kiss may not be exactly how we express that in our culture, the point remains that we should, in culturally appropriate ways (such as a hug, handshake, or pat on the back), express our family-like unity tangibly.

So, in v.12 Paul calls the church to greet one another. But then in v.13, Paul greets them when he writes, “all the saints greet you.” While local congregations are especially to express care for one another, there is also a family bond between all believers in all places. All Christians have been sanctified by Christ, and no matter our location, we should express this by treating one another as family. We are to bless one another.

But Paul does not end there with mutual expression of blessing and unity. We have one more verse in this wonderful book of God's word, and it is beautiful. I'll call it The Benediction of Unity. Paul closes this letter by writing, "13:14."

C. The Benediction of Unity (13:14)

Just to clarify our terms, a benediction is a formal invocation/calling down/pronouncement of blessing upon a people. The first formal benediction found in Scripture is found in Numbers 6, when the Lord instructs the priests to say to the people of Israel: "'Yahweh bless you' ... [and] they shall invoke My name on the sons of Israel, and I then will bless them'" (Numbers 6:24, 27, LSB).

I bring this up because it helps us to understand the significance of this NT benediction before us today. So, Paul stands in the long line of biblical benedictions from God's ministers, going all the way back to Numbers 6, in which he invokes the name of God and pronounces God's blessing upon God's people. It is common for Paul to end his epistles with this, but I think it is right to say that, of all the Scriptural benedictions, this one is uniquely glorious because its invocation of God explicitly names all three members of the Trinity. In 13:14, Paul explicitly refers to the Lord Jesus Christ (the Son), God (title used for the Father here), and the Holy Spirit. It is similar to the Great Commission when Jesus tells His disciples to baptize in the singular name of the three members of the Godhead: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Therefore, what we see in this verse is the theological truth that the Athanasian Creed expressed in this way over 1,500 years ago: "the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God; And yet they are not three Gods, but one God." Paul invokes the blessing of the one and true God by speaking of each member of the Trinity... We have an amazingly infinite & incomprehensible God, and I want you to receive this Trinitarian blessing this morning.

First, Paul writes "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ... be with you all." Again, as we have seen in this final passage, Paul weaves in multiple themes from back to Ch. 1. This book began with a blessing when Paul wrote in 1:2, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." He returns to this theme, bookending the book with grace. Specifically, the three terms of the "Lord Jesus Christ" come together to explain that He is both divine (Lord) and human (Jesus),

and the promised Messiah (Christ) who came to rescue His people from their sins (Casto, 326). And it is only through Him that we can receive the grace of God! Because of our sin, we were shut off from God's blessing, but as when the tomb was rolled away, the flood waters of God's blessing came rushing out behind Him, and we can now ongoingly receive the living waters of God's grace! Praise be to God the Son...

Second, the Apostle calls for "the love of God... [to] be with you all." The fact that we receive any blessing from God is rooted in the decree of the Father. In the word of Ephesians 1:3–6, it is the "Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved." This benediction expresses the reality that you have every spiritual blessing due to the loving plan of God... Praise be to God the Father...

Third and finally, Paul calls for "the fellowship of the Holy Spirit with you all. Amen." This term, "fellowship," is the word *koinōnía* and refers to communion and participation with another. As believers, we now have intimate fellowship with the Holy Spirit of God. He lives inside of us. We have a personal relationship with Him. And Paul prays for our increasing fellowship with Him to be with us all... Praise be to God the Holy Spirit...

Conclusion

Well, brothers and sisters, we have seen in this passage Paul's closing charges to the church. Both to the Corinthians and us. You have been called upon today to Confirm Your Spiritual Standing. All of us must test and examine ourselves and solidify whether we are truly in the faith and Christ is truly in us. And we have also been called upon today to Cultivate Spiritual Unity. May we seek to restore anything that needs mending. May we all be united in spirit, live in peace, and express familial love to one another. And if we do, we have a promise from God Himself that His love, peace, grace, and fellowship will be with us all...

Well, brothers and sisters, that is the end of the book of 2 Corinthians. I pray that this study has been impactful on your soul and life. I pray that the Lord in the coming days would prompt you to bring to mind and apply the things you have gleaned from this letter.