

2 Corinthians 13:1-14

The apostle Paul was about to visit Corinth again. He realized that he could not hold off any longer. Things could not be allowed to go on unchecked.

The time had come to go back and see how things stood.

Summary

In 2 Corinthians 13:1-14, Paul brings his letter to the church in Corinth to a close by saying certain things about his upcoming visit.

1. Readied Firmness Revisited vv. 1-6

Paul was ready to be firm with the believers in Corinth if the situation demanded it but everything would be scrupulously fair and above board (**2 Cor 13:2**). The apostle was not lashing out and getting his own back. He was Christ's spokesmen (**13:3-4**). Whilst ready to be firm with the believers in Corinth, Paul nevertheless hoped that the Corinthians would take action themselves to put things right so that outside intervention would not be necessary (**2 Cor 13:5-6**).

2. Preferred Gentleness vv. 7-10

Paul's prayer that the Corinthians 'may not do wrong' (**2 Cor 13:7**), reveals his earnest desire that the church would reform its practice. This would be a vastly preferable outcome to Paul's having to initiate church discipline. Over against his rivals' concern to cultivate their own image, Paul was more concerned that the believers in Corinth should do good than that he should look good.

If the church responded positively to all that Paul had said in this epistle and he found on his arrival that all was well, the truth would have gained the upper hand in Corinth and there would be no further need for Paul to act (**2 Cor 13:8**). Paul's concern all along was the health of the church rather than his own reputation (**13:9**). We see again the apostle's preference for a leadership style which was gentle and self-effacing as he explains his purpose in writing the whole epistle (**2 Cor 13:10**).

Christian leadership differs from leadership in the world. Whilst there is a place in the churches of Christ for occasional displays of decisive and courageous 'authority', the Lord has given that authority 'for building up and not tearing down.'

3. Final Words vv. 11-14

As the apostle brings this epistle to its conclusion, his closing words are kind ones. This is remarkable in itself since the church in Corinth was immature and exasperating. This church had tested Paul's patience.

Nevertheless, his parting 'farewell' is addressed to them as 'brothers' (**13:11**).

He then exhorts them to spiritual joy. Joy in our salvation and in our union and communion with the Lord is our highest privilege and duty.

This is followed by a number of other brief exhortations (2 Cor 13:11).

First, 'Aim for restoration' has the idea of 'mend your ways.'

The time had come to leave spiritual adolescence behind and strive for excellence.

Secondly, 'Comfort one another,' has the idea 'Be strengthened and encouraged.'

Paul wanted the Corinthians to pay careful attention to all that he had written, knowing that this would strengthen them.

Thirdly, 'Agree with one another,' was especially pointed in view of the Corinthians' tendency to degenerate into a collection of squabbling cliques.

Fourthly, he encourages them to '**Live in peace**'.

This would follow naturally from being 'of one mind'.

Paul makes a connection between the Corinthians' obeying his exhortations and the 'God of love and peace' being with them. There is a correlation between our obedience as Christians and our enjoyment of God. There is also a need for demonstrated affection between the members of the church (2 Cor 13:12).

A church that is wracked by problems can easily fall prey to the tendency to become inward-looking (2 Cor 13:13). Paul reminds the Corinthians that they were part of a much wider whole and, by implication, that the whole cause of Christ was affected in some degree by their response to this epistle.

The letter closes with a trinitarian benediction (2 Cor 13:14).

4. Concluding Questions

So how did the members of that first-century church respond to this letter?

A great deal was at stake. **First** of all, the church was in danger of becoming irrelevant. A self-absorbed church that is inward-looking will soon find that it has little impact on the wider community. When all attention is focused on the problems within, compassion for a perishing world evaporates.

Secondly, the church was in danger of extinction. It was perilously close to breaking up into fragments, characterized mainly by mutual suspicion.

Did the situation in Corinth resolve itself? We cannot say for certain.

We do know, however, that when Paul eventually made his third visit to Corinth, he spent three months there and during that time he wrote the great epistle to the Roman church. There is no hint in that epistle that, even as Paul was writing, he was deeply involved in problems that continued to demand his immediate attention.

There is at least, then, a strong possibility that the church that first received this epistle took its message to heart.

That raises another question: 'What of today's churches?'

How do they respond to the challenges posed by this epistle?