

Study of Second Corinthians

Week Eleven

2 Corinthians 12:19-13:14

Day One

19 Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you? We have been speaking in the sight of God as those in Christ; and everything we do, dear friends, is for your strengthening. 20 For I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be, and you may not find me as you want me to be. I fear that there may be quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder.

v. 19 – As stated in previous studies, Paul was indeed defending his position in that church as their founder and apostle. He had to do this, however, for his opponents were attacking his personality and work ethic. In so doing, they were actually trying to undermine his authority and replace it with their own. Paul knew that if that happened, then the church in Corinth would be weakened and even destroyed. He had to be bold in his defense, therefore, something that he didn't appear to be comfortable doing.

Paul seemed willing to be misunderstood for a greater good or cause. As I have also stated in previous studies, Paul was a great leader and shepherd who knew that it wasn't about him or his reputation. It was about Christ and His work, and that work was the preaching of the gospel and establishment of churches.

Are you willing to be misunderstood for someone else's good? Are you able to take criticism and defend yourself at the right time, but stay silent the rest of the time? Paul was willing to do both, and that is why God used him so mightily and extensively.

I want to be a leader like Paul, or should I say that I want to be a leader who follows Jesus like Paul followed Jesus. I want to invest my life in strengthening other people, just like Paul did. When criticism comes, and it will come, I want to be meek but not naïve. *Lord, if I'm going to do all that, I will need Your grace.* **Will you join me in those affirmations and prayer?**

v. 20 – We see that it wasn't just a dispute over Paul's role and whether or not he was a super-apostle as others claimed to be. The real issue was that there were carnal problems in the church at Corinth. The fact that they were open to debating such silly things proved that there was competition, jealousy, pride, and arrogance in their midst. Paul was preparing to come and visit, but he wanted his letter to "pave the way," so to speak. In other words, he wanted them to repent and get their attitude right before he came. If that didn't happen, then he would have to be firm and that would not make for a pleasant visit.

So Paul was doing a little advance work with this letter. Paul wrote his letters because he could not be in all places where he needed to be. Of course, the Holy Spirit was guiding his hand as he wrote. Writing is such a powerful medium, don't you agree?. I have embraced writing more and more over the last five years, and these studies are part of that. **How much to do you write? How effectively are you putting things down on paper for others to see? How many letters do you write to others to encourage them or tell them you love them? Paul wrote, and I am convinced that writing is an important part of the work that all of us have to do.**

Day Two

21 I am afraid that when I come again my God will humble me before you, and I will be grieved over many who have sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual sin and debauchery in which they have indulged. 13:1 This will be my third visit to you. "Every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses."

v. 21 – Someone once said, “A man is his work.’ If that’s true, then these churches were Paul’s work and life, and if the people weren’t doing well, then he didn’t do well. Notice how Paul never swept a problem aside or under the carpet, as we like to say. He would not ignore sin or some other weakness because it was easier to do so. Paul confronted that so that the church could be strengthened and grow, paying the price in being misunderstood and criticized. Isn’t that what makes a good pastor and leader?

Repentance is such a key in our walk. We must always be examining ourselves for attitudes and behaviors that are detrimental to our spiritual development and repenting from them. Repentance simply means turning from those things and walking the other way. That isn’t something you do only at the time of conversion; it’s not an event. Repentance is a lifestyle as we see where we fall short of God’s purpose and will and ask Him to change us. God forbid that you or I ever get so sophisticated in our walk with Him that we lose touch with our need for repentance.

v. 1 – Oh, how I wish I would follow this dictate, “every matter must be established by two or three witnesses.” How often I’ve taken the report of one person and run with it, to my embarrassment and pain. I’ve been too quick to believe the negative talk of one, especially if it “confirmed” my suspicions. How I wish suspicion was a spiritual gift, but it’s not! If it was, I would have the greatest such gift in the world!

When I believe these one-sided reports, I form opinions and take courses of action that are most often incorrect. There is a proverb that speaks to this:

The first to present his case seems right, till another comes forward and questions him (Proverbs 18:17).

There’s also another warning that I’ve neglected in Proverbs, for often the people giving me the reports don’t have the best motives:

18 Like a madman shooting firebrands or deadly arrows 19 is a man who deceives his neighbor 1 and says, "I was only joking!" 20 Without wood a fire goes out; without gossip a quarrel dies down. 21 As charcoal to embers and as wood to fire, so is a quarrelsome man for kindling strife. 22 The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to a man's inmost parts. 23 Like a coating of glaze over earthenware are fervent lips with an evil heart. 24 A malicious man disguises himself with his lips, but in his heart he harbors deceit. 25 Though his speech is charming, do not believe him, for seven abominations fill his heart. 26 His malice may be concealed by deception, but his wickedness will be exposed in the assembly. 27 If a man digs a pit, he will fall into it; if a man rolls a stone, it will roll back on him. 28 A lying tongue hates those it hurts, and a flattering mouth works ruin (Proverbs 26:18-28).

Help me, Lord, be more wise and discerning when I receive information from others. Help me wait to hear this from two or three others before I decide to take action.

Day Three

2 I already gave you a warning when I was with you the second time. I now repeat it while absent: On my return I will not spare those who sinned earlier or any of the others, 3 since you are demanding proof that Christ is speaking through me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you.

v. 2 – Paul had encountered the same problems when he was in Corinth on his previous visit and had warned them to straighten up. If they didn't, then he promised he would exercise his apostolic authority, which he had stated earlier in this letter was to given to him to produce a different affect:

For even if I boast somewhat freely about the authority the Lord gave us for building you up rather than pulling you down, I will not be ashamed of it (2 Corinthians 10:8).

Paul did have authority and he wanted to use it to build, but he would tear some down with it if he had to. This very dynamic is what makes church leadership so difficult. You want to be Christ-like and be kind, but there are times when wolves in sheep's clothing appear. Then leadership must act to protect the flock, but the flock can be confused about who is doing what and take sides with the troublemakers against the leadership. This isn't to say that leaders do things correctly each time they have to act in such cases. The problem is that leaders must deal with some complex issues for which they often don't have the experience or precedent.

I was in a church recently where some men had broken away to start another church. The pastor had to say publicly that their effort wasn't endorsed or approved by him and recommended that people stay away from those who had left. Of course, the pastor came off looking like he was heavy-handed. The church formed by those breakaways, however, has already split within two years and those who left the original church have had a tough time making their new church function.

That's why I recommend that church members pray for and support their pastor whenever they can. I know from experience that it isn't easy building or overseeing a church. Nor is it easy to be a follower of an imperfect leader. Both roles require grace and the help of the Holy Spirit.

v. 3 – This is the first time that Paul mentioned this charge leveled against him: Christ wasn't speaking through him. If Christ wasn't, then who was? Satan? Paul's ego? Who performed the miracles through Paul? Demons? It's still hard to fathom that some would accuse the great apostle of being a phony, but that's what was going on.

Paul was confident that Christ was indeed working and speaking through him. That takes courage to confess, for some I'm sure some would say that statement was or is arrogant. Paul knew what he believed and believed in what he did for Jesus. There were no second thoughts when he did his work. I want that kind of confidence, don't you? I want to know that Christ is with me and that my work is what He would do if He were there doing it.

When I get ready to minister, I always pray for two miracles. The first is that I will be able to speak. I ask for help that I would be able to say the words that Jesus would say if He were standing before that congregation. That always requires a miracle and I yield my being to be able to do so. The second miracle is that the people would hear, that 100 or 1,000 people will go home and each one say, "He was speaking right to me."

Day Four

4 For to be sure, he was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God's power. Likewise, we are weak in him, yet by God's power we will live with him to serve you. 5 Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you — unless, of course, you fail the test? 6 And I trust that you will discover that we have not failed the test.

v. 4 – Paul knew that he lived and worked in Christ's power. His work was to serve God's people with that power and it was resurrection power. That's the same power that you and I have. We have the same Spirit who raised a dead man back to life living in us. Not some token of that Spirit or a replica, but the same Spirit. When we work in Christ, we have that resurrection power that works in and through us.

That's why we should produce supernatural results in whatever we do. The problem is that we too often limit those supernatural results to healing the sick and raising the dead. When few of us produce those miracles, we stop expecting supernatural results. Jesus said:

I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even *greater things than these*, because I am going to the Father (John 14:12).

What could be greater than raising the dead? Raising more dead than Jesus did? That's one way of interpreting that verse. There's another way, however, that I think you should consider. Jesus never opened an orphanage, built a church building, published a book, found a cure for a disease, started a school or founded a missions organization. Why not? He could do all that, and in some sense He does, but He does those things through you and me. **Why can't those things be considered part of His promise for greater works? If that's true, then what can you do in the power of the Spirit that is greater than anything Jesus ever did? When can you do it?**

v. 5 – You see that Paul urged them to give themselves this very test. Did Jesus live inside them? How would Jesus live inside anyone? It is through the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of resurrection power? **Do you have faith in Christ? Are you in Christ? If you are, then why don't you do greater works?** Paul wrote to the Romans:

You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you (Romans 8:9-11).

What evidence is there that the Spirit lives in you? What kind of fruit are you exhibiting? What kind of work are you producing?

v. 6 – Paul urged them to give him and his workers the same test, to see if they are in Christ? How would anyone know for sure? We've looked at the answer on several occasions in this study alone: They will produce fruit that is consistent with being a Christian. A tree can't produce anything but what it was created to produce. If the tree is diseased, it will produce bad fruit. The same is true for a believer. A true believer will produce good fruit, and a good apostle will produce good fruit. Paul challenged them to examine the evidence of his life and determine if he passed the test. Once again, Paul displayed tremendous confidence in his work and position in Christ. **Do you have that same confidence?**

Day Five

7 Now we pray to God that you will not do anything wrong. Not that people will see that we have stood the test but that you will do what is right even though we may seem to have failed. 8 For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth.

v. 7 – Paul didn't want to come and cause the Corinthians pain. He was hoping, therefore, that they would do what was right even if they perceived that he was wrong. It's a difficult thing at times to do what is right even when someone is wrong, or at least you *think* they are wrong. The best example of this is found in Jesus' father Joseph's life:

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly (Matthew 1:18-19).

Joseph “thought” that had done wrong and was pregnant. In spite of that, however, Joseph determined to do what was right. He decided to divorce her quietly so she would not experience public disgrace. Then God gave Joseph a dream and explained the truth to him and truly told him the “right” thing to do.

So Paul knew he was correct, but he urged the Corinthians to act right even if they thought he was acting wrong. I think I’ve heard it referred to “erring on the side of grace.” That means we decide to extend grace and, if we’re wrong, at least we were wrong by being like the gracious God we serve.

Is there some situation in your life where you need to act “rightly” even though you perceive the other party has acted “wrongly?” I hope you’ll do what Paul asked the Corinthians to do and act correctly in the midst of someone else’s failure.

v. 8 – Paul had a “high view” of his abilities in the Spirit. He knew that God had led him to plant the church in Corinth. He therefore also knew that God would give him wisdom and grace to build the church wisely and according to the will of God. Paul knew that there were men who would not do right where the church was concerned, and he was trying to protect the Corinthians from those men.

As stated earlier, I admire Paul’s courage and confidence. Those are things I want to emulate, without arrogance or a strong hand. There are times I knew I had the word of the Lord, but others disagreed. I consequently yielded and the results weren’t good. Paul wasn’t going to yield here, because he knew the results would be bad for the church. I want to operate in that kind of confidence.

Here are some verses to help you with your confidence (and me with mine):

Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then will I be *confident* (Psalm 27:3).

For the LORD will be your *confidence* and will keep your foot from being snared (Proverbs 3:26).

"But blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose *confidence* is in him" (Jeremiah 17:7).

We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the *confidence* we had at first (Hebrews 3:14).

So do not throw away your *confidence*; it will be richly rewarded (Hebrews 10:35).

This is the *confidence* we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us (1 John 5:14-15).

What can you do to improve your confidence in what God has called you to do? I know one thing: Just reading those verses above has helped me. I think I will repeat them again and again for the next few days. Care to join me?

Day Six

9 We are glad whenever we are weak but you are strong; and our prayer is for your perfection. 10 This is why I write these things when I am absent, that when I come I may not have to be harsh in my use of authority — the authority the Lord gave me for building you up, not for tearing you down.

v. 9 – Paul was glad to pay any price to see that the church and saints in Corinth reached their proper maturity and development. The concept of perfection here is a bone out of joint returning to its proper place. I can also connote a building with a few boards and stones being in their proper place so that the entire building is habitable. The concept of perfection here isn't sinless living or rightness of action at all times. It's more consistent with harmony and order than moral perfection. Paul wanted them to function properly and live together in peace as Christ intended His body to live.

v. 10 – Paul repeated what he had written earlier in chapter 10 and verse 8. He did have authority in Christ, but it was to be used whenever and wherever possible to build up and not tear anyone down. His authority was to build up the Church, not to build down, so to speak.

Notice that Paul's authority was a gift—the Lord *gave* it to him. He didn't earn it, nor was he worthy of it. It was a gift. It was not his to use as he wanted, nor could he take any sense of pride in it. It wasn't because of his education or experience; it was bestowed so that the body of Christ would benefit and be built up.

When I teach on servant-leadership, some believe I'm saying that leaders must not have power, that they must be meek and quiet. That isn't what I teach at all. I acknowledge that leaders have power. It's what they *do* with that power that determines whether or not they are servant-leaders. Servant-leaders use power to serve others and their highest priority needs. Non-servant leaders use their power to build their own kingdom and to lord it over others. In some sense, servant-leaders power see how much of that God-given power they can give away and invest in developing other people, businesses, churches or ministries. Leaders who aren't servant-leaders amass power for their own ends and purposes.

As I've stated many times, Jesus and Paul as he emulated Jesus are our models for leadership. **Are you a servant-leader? Do you desire to be one? If you do, then God will give you insight and grace, but you will find yourself swimming upstream, so to**

speak, for most desire to be leaders who are served rather than serve. The best summary of a servant-leader I've found in Scripture is in Peter:

Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers — not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock (1 Peter 5:2-4).

Use those verses as the guidelines to be a servant-leader, even if you're in the business or academic world. Those guidelines will insure that you are indeed a servant-leader.

Day Seven

11 Finally, brothers, good-by. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you. 12 Greet one another with a holy kiss. 13 All the saints send their greetings. 14 May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

v. 11 – Paul summarized this short letter (remember that the last four chapters of what we know as Second Corinthians were probably a separate letter that was added on). He was appealing to them once again to be in harmony with one another and with his leadership role and style. He urged them to be of one mind. The only way that can happen is for each person to submit to the mind of Christ, to plug into the same source. As long as any reserved the right to make up their own minds about anything, they would be in disharmony. Harmony requires that I die to my way of thinking and embrace the thoughts of Jesus.

When we determine to live and do rightly, God is with us, as we showed above in the example of Joseph, Jesus' father. He determined to do right as he knew to do, and God was with him, giving him further insight and direction. If you do what you can do, God always does what He can do. So in some sense, you and I determine how God will act toward us!

The LORD has rewarded me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands in his sight. To the faithful you show yourself faithful, to the blameless you show yourself blameless, to the pure you show yourself pure, but to the crooked you show yourself shrewd. You save the humble but bring low those whose eyes are haughty (Psalm 18:24-27).

So it's up to you. How do you want God to relate and respond to you and your fellowship of believers?

v. 12 – We are to set apart our relationships with our brothers and sisters as holy, separate from all other relationships because of Jesus. I often quote Paul's words to the Ephesians:

I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe (Ephesians 1:17-19).

God must open my eyes to see my glorious inheritance in my brothers and sisters, for often I see them as more of a pain than a blessed inheritance! I'm sure they see me as the same. **Do you need to be reminded of your glorious inheritance with any individual or group of believers?**

v. 13 – The believers are called saints, not when they die, but while alive!

v. 14 – Paul expressed this Trinitarian blessing of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit to close this letter. He blessed them with grace, love and fellowship. What a fabulous blessing to give anyone—grace, love and fellowship. Grace comes from Jesus—the forgiveness of our sins. Love comes from the Father—who proved His love by giving His only-begotten Son for us. Fellowship comes from the Spirit—it is through His work and fruit that we are able to relate to God and to one another.

I hope you have enjoyed this study of Paul's Corinthian letters. I know I have. As we end, let's pray.

Father, I thank you that You have enabled us to finish this study. We've learned so much, but there's so much more to learn. Thank you for your servant Paul and for his words, which You inspired and use to lead and guide us today. May You bless this study of Your word, Lord, and allow us to take these lessons forward to apply in our daily lives. We pray in the name of our Lord Jesus. Amen!