

Faith That is Tested

2 Cor 13:1-11

SS Lesson for 11/03/2019

Devotional Scripture: James 1:12-18

OUTLINE

LESSON BACKGROUND AND KEY VERSE

Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Key Verse: 2 Cor 13:5

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

MAJOR THEME ANALYSIS

TESTED THROUGH DISCIPLINE (13:1-4)

Deal only in truth (1)

Know the source of truth (John 14:6)

Know that Satan is the father of lies (John 8:44)

Beware of false prophets (Matt 7:15)

Use God's word to distinguish between good and evil (Heb 5:14)

Beware of sin (2)

Flee sin (1 Tim 6:11)

Test the spirits (1 John 4:1)

Don't give Satan a foothold (Eph 4:27)

Live in the strength of God (3-4)

God is the provider of our strength (Ps 18:32)

Because God is our strength, we will trust in Him (Ps 28:7)

God's weakness is greater than our strength (1 Cor 1:25)

TESTED THROUGH EXAMINATION (13:5-8)

Examine self (5)

Examining means to consider our ways and be sure they match God's word (Ps 119:59)

Examining means to test our ways (Lam 3:40)

Examining means giving very careful thought to our ways (Hag 1:5)

Examining means to judge our ways (1 Cor 11:31)

Examining means to be careful that we are doing what we should (Heb 4:1)

Evaluate results (6)

To be sure every thought comes under the control of God (2 Cor 10:5)

To be sure the type and motive of the work (1 Corinthians 3:12)

To be sure we are right before judging others (Matt 7:1-2)

Use God's Word as measure (7-8)

God's Word is for teaching and reproofing (2 Tim 3:16)

Word teaches us what sin is (Rom 7:7)

God's word is the perfection that we must strive (Ps 19:7)

TESTED THROUGH STRIVING FOR PERFECTION (13:9-11)

Pray for perfection (9)

Pray for mercy (Luke 18:38)

Pray for the power to live a life worthy of the calling of God (Eph 4:1)

Pray to live a life worthy of the Lord (Col 1:10)

Pray that our thoughts and words are pleasing to God (Ps 19:14)

Follow the authority of God's leaders (10)

Authorities are setup by God (Rom 13:1)

God commands us to obey and pray for our leaders (1 Tim 2:1-2)

Follow godly leaders because they are held accountable (Heb 13:17)

Live in unity and peace (11)

Live in peace as much as it is up to us (Romans 12:18)

Jesus prayed for the Church's unity (John 17:20-23)

God is the only source of unity (Rom 15:5)

It is the Church's responsibility to bring about unity of faith (Eph 4:13)

CONCLUSION AND OTHER THOUGHTS

COMMENTARY THOUGHTS FROM BOB DEFFINBAUGH

Paul Needs No Defense; The Corinthians Do (12:19–13:4)

Paul's Final Challenge and Closing (13:5-14)

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FROM THE NIV STANDARD LESSON COMMENTARY

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FROM THE ECHOES COMMENTARY

Lesson Background and Key Verse

Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Close personal relationships bring us great joy, but they bring pain also. The stronger the emotional connection, the more we care. The closer and more longstanding the relationship, the greater its capacity for causing sorrow or creating happiness. Because of the high stakes, it takes great courage to confront a close friend who is causing pain. We want to think that time will erase any relationship rift, but this is often not the case. As with an infection, sometimes the wound must be reopened before it will heal. When restoration is achieved, the relationship may emerge even stronger than before, but we know this does not always happen. When we find ourselves at odds with a friend, confrontation presents a risk because it could end the relationship altogether.

Paul's first visit to Corinth occurred on his second missionary journey (Acts 18). He arrived between AD 52 and 54 after visiting Philippi (16:11-40), Thessalonica (17:1), and Berea (17:10), as well as Athens (17:16-34). Corinth was the second-largest city in Greece, about 50 miles west of Athens, but the two cities were very different. Athens represented learning, culture, and the grand traditions of the Greeks. Corinth, on the other hand, thrived as a Roman commercial and transportation hub. Scholars were made in Athens; fortunes were made in Corinth. Paul spent about 18 months ministering in the city of Corinth (Acts 18:11). His initial stay resulted in a church that included Jewish and Gentile believers (18:1-8). Mixing those two groups was not easy, for each had a sense of cultural superiority over the other (compare 1 Corinthians 1:20-22). The Greeks remembered the glory of their philosophers and the military exploits of Alexander the Great and his successors, dating back to 334 BC. It was they who brought Greek culture (Hellenism) to much of the Mediterranean world. The Jews, for their part, identified themselves as God's chosen people, with an ancient law given to them by God himself (compare Romans 2:17-29). Yet Paul argued persuasively that they had a new, common identity as the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12, 13, 27), united under a common Lord and Savior (1:2). After Paul's departure in AD 54, outsiders arrived whom Paul sarcastically calls "superapostles" for their claim of authority greater than his own or that of any other apostle (2 Corinthians 11:5; 12:11). These "apostles" tried to discredit Paul (11:5-15; 12:11, 12). Paul was deeply hurt by the Corinthians' acceptance of false teaching, which signaled to be a betrayal of friendship. Before writing 2 Corinthians, he traveled to Corinth to correct this false teaching, to clear his name, and to restore his relationships. The book of Acts does not tell us of this visit, but Paul refers to it as a "painful visit" (2 Corinthians 2:1). The setting for the writing of 2 Corinthians is quite different from the setting for his writing of 1 Corinthians. In the first letter, likely written about AD 56, Paul draws on his relationship with the Corinthians to give authoritative directions concerning many problematic issues in the congregation (see 1 Corinthians 1:10-17; 5:1-6:20; 7:1-14:40). He does this with confidence, believing their love and respect for him will allow his voice to be heard even when he is not there (see 5:3-5). By the time Paul wrote 2 Corinthians in AD 57, the impact of the false apostles had poisoned Paul's relationship with his friends. Because of this, Paul had some bold, harsh words for the Corinthians, words designed to put their relationship to rights. His response came in the form of a harsh, sorrowful letter (2 Corinthians 2:4). Paul saw more than a friendship at risk. He feared that a church he loved would turn to false teaching in ways that endangered their faith (11:1-15).

Key Verse: 2 Cor 13:5

Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? — unless indeed you are disqualified.

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

13:1-3. Paul's second visit to Corinth (2:1) had been a humbling experience (12:21), not only because of the offense against him (cf. 2:5-11) but because many in the church were living contrary to the will of God

(12:21). Paul had warned them about the consequences of sin then and he did so again in this letter. Following Jesus' application of Deuteronomy 19:15 to errant brethren (Matt. 18:16), Paul promised discipline for the unrepentant. The proof of his apostolic authority which they wanted would be given but in terms they would be wise to avoid (cf. 1 Cor. 5:5). Though Paul was weak, **Christ** whom he served was **not** (cf. 2 Cor. 10:4).

13:4. The paradox of Christ was the paradox of Paul. With **God's power** at His disposal (Matt. 26:53) Christ nonetheless followed the course of **weakness** to the cross. In the Resurrection the magnitude of that untapped power was displayed (Eph. 1:19-21). This side of the grave Paul like Jesus followed the path of "weakness" but as in Jesus' life, a glimmer of **God's power** showed through (e.g., Matt. 4:23; 2 Cor. 12:12). Paul wanted this power to be used for constructive rather than punitive purposes (cf. 13:10; 10:2-6), power that would enable him **to serve** them.

13:5-7. Throughout the letter Paul subjected himself and his ministry to scrutiny. Now he handed the lens to the Corinthians, with the challenge that they consider their own conduct (**yourselves** is in the emphatic position in Gr.). Paul's question is usually construed with regard to positional justification: were they Christians or not? But it more likely concerned practical sanctification: did they *demonstrate* that they were **in the faith** (cf. 1 Cor. 16:13) and that **Christ** was **in** them by their obeying His will? To stand **the test** was to do what was right. To **fail** was to be disobedient and therefore subject to God's discipline. The words **fail(ed) the test** (2 Cor. 13:5-6) and **failed** (v. 7) render the Greek word *adokimoi* ("disapproved"; cf. *adokimos* in 1 Cor. 9:27). Whatever doubts the Corinthians may have had about Paul's conduct (e.g., 2 Cor. 1:17, 2:17; 7:2) he believed that a sober evaluation would lead them to vindicate him. He hoped they would not be disapproved by God; and he hoped they would see that *he* was not disapproved by God. Still it was their reputation or standing, not his, that concerned him.

13:8-10. For himself, Paul knew he was powerless **against the truth**, the will of God. His experience on the Damascus Road had taught him that (Acts 9:1-6). Like Jesus his **Lord**, he was willing to spend and be spent on behalf of others (cf. 2 Cor. 8:9; 12:15). In his weakness he was made **strong** (12:8, 10) and so were they (13:9). He was concerned about the Corinthians' welfare (cf. Phil. 2:20-21). **Perfection** (*katartisin*) may be translated "restoration." This noun occurs only here in the New Testament but is kin to the verb *katartizesthe* translated "aim for perfection" in 2 Corinthians 13:11 and elsewhere used for repairing nets (Matt. 4:21). As a conclusion to this warning (2 Cor. 12:20-21; 13:5-7), this prayer for restoration of their ways was certainly fitting. Then Paul could be spared the pain of disciplining those he loved (cf. 2:2) and instead he could work with them for their joy (1:24) and **for building them up** (13:10).

Did the Corinthians respond positively to Paul's warning? Yes. Paul had conditioned the expansion of his ministry in other areas on the problems in Corinth being resolved (10:15-16). He followed the writing of this letter with a visit of three months during which time he wrote the letter to the Romans. In that letter he wrote "Now... there is no more place for me to work in these regions" (Rom. 15:23). His appeal had been heeded. The Corinthians were now obedient.

13:11-12. Paul's final appeal was a call for unity: **Aim for perfection** (i.e., "be restored or complete"; see v. 9), **listen to my appeal, be of one mind** (cf. Phil. 2:2), **live in peace**. This unity could be realized only as they depended on God who supplies **love** (cf. 2 Cor. 13:14) **and peace**. Such unity was expressed by a **holy kiss** (cf. Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 1 Thes. 5:26; 1 Peter 5:14).

13:13-14. **The saints** of Macedonia, with whom Paul was staying at the time he wrote 2 Corinthians, sent **their unified greetings**. In closing, Paul invoked the blessing of the Triune God so that **the grace** manifested by **Christ**, **the love** expressed by **God** the Father (cf. "the God of love," v. 11), and **the fellowship** created by **the Holy Spirit** might **be** experienced in Corinth.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

(Note: Lesson major points and cross-references copied from previous lesson dated 05/28/2000)

Tested Through Discipline (13:1-4)

1 This will be the third time I am coming to you. "By the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established."

2 I have told you before, and foretold as if I were present the second time, and now being absent I write to those who have sinned before, and to all the rest, that if I come again I will not spare —

3 since you seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, who is not weak toward you, but mighty in you.

4 For though He was crucified in weakness, yet He lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, but we shall live with Him by the power of God toward you.

Deal only in truth (1)

Know the source of truth (John 14:6)

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Know that Satan is the father of lies (John 8:44)

You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

Beware of false prophets (Matt 7:15)

"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.

Use God's word to distinguish between good and evil (Heb 5:14)

But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

Beware of sin (2)

Flee sin (1 Tim 6:11)

But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness.

Test the spirits (1 John 4:1)

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

Don't give Satan a foothold (Eph 4:27)

and do not give the devil a foothold.

Live in the strength of God (3-4)

God is the provider of our strength (Ps 18:32)

It is God who arms me with strength and makes my way perfect.

Because God is our strength, we will trust in Him (Ps 28:7)

The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and I am helped. My heart leaps for joy and I will give thanks to him in song.

God's weakness is greater than our strength (1 Cor 1:25)

For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.

Tested Through Examination (13:5-8)

5 Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? — unless indeed you are disqualified.

6 But I trust that you will know that we are not disqualified.

7 Now I pray to God that you do no evil, not that we should appear approved, but that you should do what is honorable, though we may seem disqualified.

8 For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth.

Examine self (5)

Examining means to consider our ways and be sure they match God's word (Ps 119:59)

I have considered my ways and have turned my steps to your statutes.

Examining means to test our ways (Lam 3:40)

Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the LORD.

Examining means giving very careful thought to our ways (Hag 1:5)

Now this is what the LORD Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways.

Examining means to judge our ways (1 Cor 11:31)

But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment.

Examining means to be careful that we are doing what we should (Heb 4:1)

Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it.

Evaluate results (6)

To be sure every thought comes under the control of God (2 Cor 10:5)

We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

To be sure the type and motive of the work (1 Corinthians 3:12)

If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw,

To be sure we are right before judging others (Matt 7:1-2)

1 "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. 2 For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

Use God's Word as measure (7-8)

God's Word is for teaching and reproofing (2 Tim 3:16)

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,

Word teaches us what sin is (Rom 7:7)

What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, "You shall not covet."

God's word is the perfection that we must strive (Ps 19:7)

The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;

Tested Through Striving for Perfection (13:9-11)

9 For we are glad when we are weak and you are strong. And this also we pray, that you may be made complete.

10 Therefore I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness, according to the authority which the Lord has given me for edification and not for destruction.

11 Finally, brethren, farewell. Become complete. Be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.

Pray for perfection (9)

Pray for mercy (Luke 18:38)

And he cried out, saying, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Pray for the power to live a life worthy of the calling of God (Eph 4:1)

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

Pray to live a life worthy of the Lord (Col 1:10)

And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God,

Pray that our thoughts and words are pleasing to God (Ps 19:14)

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart Be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer.

Follow the authority of God's leaders (10)

Authorities are setup by God (Rom 13:1)

Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.

God commands us to obey and pray for our leaders (1 Tim 2:1-2)

I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone- 2 for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.

Follow godly leaders because they are held accountable (Heb 13:17)

Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.

Live in unity and peace (11)

Live in peace as much as it is up to us (Romans 12:18)

If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

Jesus prayed for the Church's unity (John 17:20-23)

20 "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: 23 I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

God is the only source of unity (Rom 15:5)

May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus,

It is the Church's responsibility to bring about unity of faith (Eph 4:13)

Until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh

Paul Needs No Defense; The Corinthians Do (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 may 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.

13:1 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 shall live with Him because of the power of God *directed* toward you.

Here Paul really turns the tables on the Corinthians. They believe his efforts are all aimed at his own defense. Paul is not a man-pleaser (see Galatians 1:10). He and his associates are concerned with *God's* approval, and thus they conduct their ministry **“in the sight of God,” “speaking in Christ”** (verse 19). The goal of their ministry (unlike their adversaries in Corinth) is not to build themselves up and feather their own financial nest (see earlier), but to build up the Corinthians. Paul speaks only on his own behalf as an apostle, because rejecting his apostleship will be devastating to their spiritual lives.

Here Paul changes from a defensive posture (which is really for the Corinthians' sake) to an offensive posture. Paul is not on trial; the Corinthians are the ones on trial. Paul is an apostle of Jesus Christ, and as such, he sets down truths the Corinthians should accept and abide by. Those who are doing wrong are not Paul and his associates, but a number of the Corinthians who use their opposition to Paul's apostleship as a smoke screen to cover their own sins. Paul now brushes the smoke screen aside and presses his own attack. It is the Corinthians who must prove themselves, not Paul.

Paul does not fear that the Corinthians will fail to approve of him, but that they will not respond adequately to his rebuke and thus be found continuing in sin (verse 20). Paul fears that when he does arrive at Corinth—for the third time—he will find them other than he wishes. Consequently, if Paul is not happy with what he sees when he arrives, they will not be happy to see him. Paul knows the kinds of things he is likely to find of which he will not approve: **“strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, and disturbances.”** In addition to these, Paul has every reason to expect that he will find **“impurity, immorality, and sensuality.”** He has good reason to expect these things, for they are the very things he found it necessary to rebuke in his first epistle, specifically or more generally. These are the sins he exposed and rebuked in the past, and he fears some may not have repented of them. Even more distressing, these are also manifestations of the flesh as opposed to the fruit of the spirit:

19 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, 21 envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God (Galatians 5:19-21).

If this is the case, they will find Paul a man in mourning (verse 21), deeply grieved over the sin in their midst. They will find more than this, however, for they will find Paul a powerful accuser. In verse 1 of chapter 13, Paul once again speaks of coming to Corinth for the third time, but this time with a different twist:

1 This is the third time I am coming to you. EVERY FACT IS TO BE CONFIRMED BY THE TESTIMONY OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES.

It is very apparent that Paul links the text he cites from Deuteronomy 19:15 with his third coming to Corinth, but many students find this link difficult to explain. I think the link is really more simple than it seems. In Deuteronomy 19:15, we read these words:

15 “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.”

For obvious reasons, the Law forbade convicting anyone on the basis of only one person’s testimony. The Law required two or three witnesses for another to be found guilty. How does the need for two or three witnesses relate to Paul’s three visits? Quite simply, as seen in our Lord’s words in the Gospel of Matthew:

15 “And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. 16 But if he does not listen *to you*, take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED” (Matthew 18:15-16).

The brother who sins is first confronted by the one who has learned of his sin. He is the first witness, and he rebukes the wayward brother. If the wayward one repents, the matter is settled. If not, the first witness—the accuser—takes one or two more *with him*. They do not go on their own, but with the accuser. On each of Paul’s visits, it is safe to assume that he was not alone. We know that Priscilla and Aquila were with him in Corinth on his first visit (Acts 18:1-4). We are not sure who accompanied him on his second, “**sorrowful**,” visit, but we know that Paul hardly ever traveled alone. On his third visit, we know that there will be a number of men there, because Paul has already mentioned them (2 Corinthians 8:16-24). When Paul arrives in Corinth for the third time, he will be joined by those whom he has sent ahead, not to mention any who travel there with him.

Paul sees his three visits to Corinth as the fulfilling of the requirement of Deuteronomy 19:15. Paul is the Corinthians’ accuser. He will have made three visits, each time accompanied by at least one witness. So by the time he has come the third time, he will have fulfilled the Law’s requirement, and rightly the accused parties will be found guilty. This means that when Paul comes on this third visit, things can and will happen that could not and did not happen on the first or second visits. Do some charge that Paul is impressive in his letters but unimpressive in his personal visits (see 2 Corinthians 10:10)? This perception is partly true, because these are only his first and second visits. The third time, however, “will be a charm.” The third time will be different from the first two visits. The witnesses will have verified Paul’s accusations, and the time to punish will have come. And so Paul warns those who take his threats with a grain of salt, “**If I come again, I will not spare anyone**” (verse 2).

Do some want to see proof of Paul’s apostleship, just as the Jewish religious leaders challenged our Lord to prove that He was the Messiah? They will get it! Our Lord’s first coming was in weakness. His resurrection was in power. *His second coming will be vastly different from the first.* And so it will be with Paul’s third visit to Corinth. If they wish to see power and strength, they will! The Corinthians must not be deceived by Paul’s reticence to take strong action in his previous visits. They should expect his next visit to be very different, if necessitated by their persistent sin.

Paul’s Final Challenge and Closing (13:5-14)

5 Test yourselves *to see* if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test? 6 But I trust that you will realize that we ourselves do not fail the test.

7 Now we pray to God that you do no wrong; not that we ourselves may appear approved, but that you may do what is right, even though we should appear unapproved. 8 For we can do nothing against the truth, but *only* for the truth. 9 For we rejoice when we ourselves are weak but you are strong; this we also pray for, that you be made complete. 10 For this reason I am writing these things while absent, in order that when present I may not use severity, in accordance with the authority which the Lord gave me, for building up and not for tearing down.

11 Finally, brethren, rejoice, be made complete, be comforted, be like-minded, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you. 12 Greet one another with a holy kiss. 13 All the saints greet you. 14 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.

Paul closes his second epistle with several challenges. *The first challenge is that Paul's readers test themselves to see whether they are in the faith (verse 5).* It is obvious that Paul challenges the Corinthians to test themselves to learn whether they are truly saved. Several conclusions can be drawn from this challenge.

It is good for this question to be raised and for every church member to seriously consider it. Some would discourage anyone questioning the reality of their faith, as though this might raise unhealthy doubts. Paul does not hesitate to challenge the Corinthians to examine themselves to see if they are in the faith. Those who are saved will not be harmed by the process, and they may find the exercise very helpful. Those who are lost will certainly not be led astray by encouraging them to assess their true spiritual state. As I read my Bible, in heaven there will be no surprised saints, saved but not knowing they were. But there will be many who thought themselves saved who are shocked to find themselves in hell (see Matthew 7:21-23; Luke 16:19-31).

It is assumed that some members who profess to be born again believers are not. It is apparent that some in the Corinthian church are actually regarded as having apostolic authority, and yet Paul's words describe them in such a way that we must wonder if they are even saved (2 Corinthians 11:12-15). Elsewhere, the apostles make it even clearer that there are those in the church who profess salvation but do not possess it (see 2 Timothy 3:1-9; James 1:19-2:26; 2 Peter 2; 1 John 2:18-19; 2 John 6-11; Jude 17-19). As far as outward appearances are concerned, the difference between a disobedient Christian and a professing unbeliever may be very slight.

It is possible to test ourselves regarding our salvation and know whether we are saved. Paul's challenge that the Corinthians test themselves to see whether they are in the faith implies it is possible for one to know if they are saved. Why would Paul urge the Corinthians to take a test which is inconclusive? It is assumed one can know for certain that they are saved, and that questioning one's salvation leads to a sense of assurance about salvation. John writes to saints so that they might know they are saved (see 1 John 5:13f.).

There are both Arminians and Calvinists who are not convinced that they can know, with assurance, that they are saved. Arminians believe they can lose their salvation by sinning, and thus if they were to die with unconfessed sin, they fear they will perish eternally. Calvinists rightly (in my reading of the Bible) believe that their salvation is the result of God's prior election (choosing them for salvation). But some Calvinists fear that they can never know if they are one of the elect, and so they go through life agonizing over their lack of assurance. Paul says we can test ourselves, and the inference is that we can know.

Paul's words also suggest that those who are unsaved, but sincerely desire to know their spiritual state, can know they are lost and thus come to saving faith. When Paul challenges the Corinthians to "take the test," he is indicating that one can determine if they are lost just as surely as they can determine if they are saved. Now those who are lost, whose minds have been blinded by the **"god of this world"** (2 Corinthians 4:4), will not think it necessary or proper to take the test. But those who sincerely wish to know the truth about their eternal state can know. Our Lord Himself said that the Holy Spirit would **"convict the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment"** (John 16:8-11). I wonder if any Corinthians accepted Paul's challenge and "took the test" only to learn they were lost, and then came to a true and saving faith in Jesus Christ.

Paul does not specify what the "test" is to know whether you are saved. I have a confession. In preparing to preach this message, I prepared a list of questions to serve as the "test." I was then forced to make a disturbing observation. Paul himself did not supply us with the "test" but only a challenge to take the test. I think there is good reason for this. One who is willing to accept Paul's challenge and "take the test" is reminded of what constitutes being **"in the faith"** or "out of the faith." Paul speaks of those who are **"in the faith"** as those of whom he can say, **"Christ is in you"** (verse 5). The problem at Corinth is that some find the gospel Paul preaches (**"Christ crucified"**—1 Corinthians 1:23) too simplistic and not very appealing. Some came with a new gospel, and at least some Corinthians did not even recognize the switch that had occurred (2 Corinthians 11:3-4). When the "gospel" becomes "Christ or ..." or "Christ and" it is not the gospel Paul preaches, but a "gospel" which keeps us from ever knowing *for certain* that we are **"in the faith."** This is because the new "gospel" requires something of us.

The old gospel Paul preaches is Christ *only*. Apart from Christ, we are sinners, deserving of God's eternal wrath (hell). In Christ, we are dead to sin and its penalty, alive to righteousness, awaiting our eternal hope of heaven. When you test yourself, does your salvation depend upon you, upon your status, your performance, your works, or upon Christ? *If you recognize that apart from Christ, you are "dead in your trespasses and sins," and that you are saved by faith—not by your good works—and that you are now "in Christ" (see Ephesians 2:1-10), then you know you are saved.* Nothing can change this, for your salvation depends *only* on Christ and what He has already accomplished on the cross of Calvary and in His resurrection from the dead.

If the Corinthians do **“examine [themselves] to see if [they] are in the faith,”** and find assurance of their own salvation, they can hardly question the salvation of Paul who first brought the gospel to them, through whose ministry they were saved. This is the reason Paul says in verse 6 that he trusts they will realize that he and his colleagues in ministry have not failed the test either.

In the midst of Paul’s final exhortations and instructions, verses 7 through 10 are found, almost parenthetically. In these verses, Paul speaks of himself and his attitude and actions toward the Corinthians. He tells his readers in closing that he is praying for them. He is praying they will do no wrong. This is not so that he and his colleagues will look good; it is in the best interests of the Corinthians as they do what is right. Paul’s words in verse 8 seem puzzling: **“For we can do nothing against the truth, but only for the truth.”** It seems as though he is saying, “I, as an apostle, proclaim the truth and contend for the truth. I am an advocate for the truth. I cannot work against the truth. Thus I further the truth, not only by proclaiming it, but by praying for its outworking in your lives.” In addition to praying that the Corinthians cease in their sin, he prays that they will grow in their Christian faith and walk and **“be made complete”** (verse 9).

Along with his prayers, Paul writes these epistles to the Corinthians while absent from them. His absence, like his prayers and epistles, is intended for the good, the building up, of this church which he loves (**“beloved,”** 12:19). He does not wish to deal severely with them, even though he has the authority to do so. To forestall a severe coming, Paul purposely stays away for a time, writing to them and praying for them in the hope that they will repent of their sin, cease from doing wrong, and be made complete in their faith. Now having once more assured the Corinthians of his benevolence and genuine love, Paul returns to his final exhortations:

11 Finally, brethren, rejoice, be made complete, be comforted, be like-minded, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you. 12 Greet one another with a holy kiss.

Notice several things about these instructions:

These are all commands, not mere suggestions, or even exhortations. These verbs are imperatives.

All of these commands are applicable in the context of suffering and adversity. Paul addresses the problem of triumphalism—the belief and expectation that Christians should here and now experience all the blessings God has stored up for us in heaven. Every one of Paul’s commands has a very direct relationship to the life of self-sacrifice and suffering to which every Christian is called.

Paul prays for the Corinthians about those things which he commands. Does Paul command the Corinthians to **“be made complete”** (verse 11)? He also prays for this (verse 9). Paul knows that apart from the enabling of the Holy Spirit, these imperatives are impossibilities, and thus he prays that God will enable that which He requires.

Some of these commands are passive (“be comforted,” “be made complete”), indicating that we are required to cooperate with God so that He may bring about His work in us. We often struggle with “God’s part” and “our part.” Paul’s commands, expressed in the passive voice, indicate that we are to have a part in that which God does in us. God does not depend upon us; we depend upon God. But God does expect us to obey by cooperating with Him in the work He is doing in and through us. Are we troubled and afflicted? God comforts us. But we must accept and embrace that comfort which He promises and provides. It is God who will complete what He has begun in us (see Philippians 1:6), and yet we are to **“be made complete.”**

The commands Paul gives here are solutions to the problems he exposed earlier. There are factions and divisions in the Corinthian church. Some of the saints are suffering for their faith. There are doctrinal deviations from the truth. If these commands Paul sets down are obeyed, these problems will be resolved.

Finally, these commands are linked to a promise for those who obey them. Paul ends his instructions with the words, **“... and the God of love and peace shall be with you”** (verse 11). The presence of God is promised to those who trust and obey Him in the midst of their trials and tribulations.

Paul urges the Corinthians to greet one another with a holy kiss. This does not allow for divisions and factions or dissension. The Corinthians are not told to **“greet one another with a Hollywood kiss, but with a holy kiss.”** They are to openly demonstrate to one another their love, affection, and unity in Christ. Paul then greets the Corinthians on behalf of all the churches, further reminding them that they are a part of a much bigger “body” than their actions and attitudes might sometimes indicate. Paul then closes with a blessing, which reminds the Corinthians of their union with the Holy Trinity—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and the blessings which flow from that union—grace, love, fellowship.

(Adapted from URL:<https://bible.org/seriespage/17-paul-s-closing-argument-appeal-and-blessing-2-cor-1211-1314>)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

The Old Testament offers many accounts in which followers of God found victory despite being in positions of weakness (see Exodus 14:26-28; Judges 7; 1 Samuel 17; 2 Chronicles 32:9, 16-21; Isaiah 37:36, 37). All have one thing in common: the God who wins the victory. Even in weakness, God's people are strong because of Him. We have this dynamic working for us too. We often think that success in the Christian life is a matter of trying harder. Our efforts are important, but we will never be fully mature in our Christian walk through our own efforts. In fact, self-focused striving may block the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Think of your own life. Are you satisfied with your progress as a Christian believer? Are you weak like Christ or strong in your own wisdom? Maybe it is time to "let go and let God," giving Him the glory along with your obedience.

Concluding Thoughts from the Echoes Commentary

Get the Church in Order - When Paul traveled to Corinth on his second missionary journey, he established a church in the city. He prepared to revisit the congregation there, but first warned he would not hold back on his criticisms of the church. He was coming in apostolic authority and in the strong influence of God. The Christians could endure public denunciation of ungodly behaviors and suffer discipline. Paul strongly urged them to get things in order before he got there. Paul explained that the humility and weakness Christ displayed on the Cross was not what he was bringing to Corinth. The Lamb of God is now in a place of dominion. Paul assured them he was coming in the same power.

Get Yourself in Order - Paul laid before the Corinthian Christians a sobering command: test to see if you indeed are a Christian. Where do you really stand? The apostle challenged the entire church to rethink their position. Paul further said, if you are not sure, it's quite possible your profession of faith is worthless. Accuracy about Christ is of major importance, Paul said, and he would take what action was needed. Paul desired to see this church grow and become mature, strong, and complete in Christ. Just like a parent who anticipates a child will develop into a productive adult and good citizen, he wanted to use this upcoming visit with the Corinthian church to build them up, instead of spending precious time dealing with immaturity and disciplinary issues.

God Can Accomplish the Impossible - Could the church in Corinth accomplish what Paul was praying and commanding? Is it possible for believers today to come around the table and agree, with so many different ideas and understandings? Can there be good relationships that build up one another? The key phrase is in 2 Corinthians 13:11: "the God of love and peace will be with you." With the Lord, believers who are operating in His wisdom and strength can accomplish the impossible.