

Dr. Ayo Adewuya, 2 Corinthians, Session 14, 2 Corinthians 13, Concluding Appeal

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This is Dr. Ayo Adewuya in his teaching on 2 Corinthians. This is session 14, 2 Corinthians 13, Concluding Appeal.

We're now coming to the concluding appeal of Paul to the Corinthians as we look at the last chapter of the book, which is chapter 13.

The chapter concludes the final section of the book, which begins at 12:14. It deals with Paul's promised visit, which was soon to take place. Paul was not concerned about money or the possession of the Corinthians.

Rather, he had a parental love for them, desiring to give of himself rather than making a gain of them. Still, there were some who questioned his motives. Even though he loved them passionately, they were not reciprocating appropriately.

They thought he was exploiting them, and that's because Paul's opponents had created divisions, brought a divisive spirit into the church, and, as such, created a danger of moral disorder. Paul was ready to deal with the problem sternly should the situation remain unchanged during his thought visit. Therefore, he warns the readers that when he comes, he will take disciplinary action if necessary.

So that's what we're looking at in 2nd Corinthians chapter 13. Let's read the chapter now. 2nd Corinthians chapter 13.

This is the last time I am coming to you. Every fact is to be confirmed by the testimony of two or three witnesses. 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.

Since you are seeking proof of the Christ who speaks in me, and who is not weak toward you, but mighty in you, 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 live with him because of the power of God directed toward you.

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. But I trust that you will realize that we ourselves do not fail the test. Now we pray to God that you do no wrong, nor that we ourselves may appear approved, but that you may do what is right, even though we may appear unapproved.

For what we can do, for we can do nothing against the truth, but only for the truth. For we rejoice when we ourselves are weak, but you are strong. We also pray that you be made complete in this.

For this reason, I am writing these things while absent, so that when present, I need not use severity, in accordance with the authority which the Lord gave me for building up, and not for tearing down. Finally, brethren, rejoice, be made complete, be comforted, be like-minded, live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss, all the saints greet you.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Here now, we see Paul coming gradually to the end of the letter, and Paul plans a thought visit to Corinth. As Paul approaches the end of his letter to the Corinthians, he prepares for his thought visit; we see that in chapter 12, verse 14.

And therefore, they must prepare for his coming. To this end, Paul begins by laying out the nature of his future conduct, consistent with the basic principles of his ministry them, which he listed or outlined in verses 14 to 18 of chapter 12. But he's still very apprehensive as to the moral and spiritual conditions in which he will find them.

You see that in chapter 12:19 to 21. They may be certain that when he comes, he will be as firm in his discipline as their situation demands. They are to repent, for his prayer is for the completion of their faith.

Paul appeals again to Christ, crucified and risen, in relation to his ministry among them. That's what we see in 13:1 to 10. So, what we are looking at now could be viewed as Paul's closing arguments.

It continues generally with the judicial or forensic rhetoric we have mentioned before. He defends them, and he accuses them. But it is now mixed with and served by what you call deliberative elements, deliberative rhetorics.

That is where you want somebody to make a decision, people to change their minds, or to change their behavior. He's finished with a full speech, and he has resumed normal discourse. By this, he means to clarify a matter that apparently still bothers the Corinthians, and that is the refusal of his financial support.

So, what Paul does in verses 14 to 18 is abandon his defensive posture and go on the offensive. He expresses his fears about the behaviors he may find on his next visit to Corinth in chapter 12:18 to 21. So, his rhetorical strategy now is to put them on the defensive.

He uses courtroom language, and the demand for proof takes over in a warning, which concludes with an application in 13, 1 to 4. Let's look at it again, 13, 1 to 4. This is the third time I'm coming to you. In the mouth of two or three witnesses, shall every word be established? I told you before, and I'm telling you again, if I were present the second time, I'm being absent, now I write to them, which therefore I've seen unto all that if I come again, I will not spare. Since you are looking for a proof of Christ speaking in me, we to you what is not we, but is mighty in you.

For though he was crucified, he was crucified through weakness, yet he liveth by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but we shall live. So, he uses courtroom language.

So, this section concludes with 5 to 10. So, the rhetorical conclusion consists of an emotional appeal. Paul makes an emotional appeal.

You see, Paul was a good preacher, by the way, because he knows how to start his message and he knows how to end his message. He ends with an emotional appeal. And with that, his defense rests.

Full reconciliation with the Corinthians had been his aim all along. He has sought to remove all the obstacles to a full reunion with them. The greatest asset of Paul is his argument as an apostle.

So, he tells them about what he expects when he gets to Corinth. So, from verse 1, we see what Paul is saying now. In verse 1 it is the third time.

He will deal with the offenders. He said any charge must be sustained. And of course, you know, Paul quite often quotes the Bible that at the mouth of two or three witnesses shall the truth be established.

So, Paul says, look, we're going to see what we make there. And if we confirm that something is wrong from the mouth of two or three witnesses, then we'll deal with it. So, with repeated, repetitive emphasis in 12:14 and 20 to 21, Paul declares that he's ready to come.

He is definitely coming, at least this time around. He told them he had been coming before and he had not come. And that became a problem.

He said, I am definitely coming. And when I come, I'm going to discipline the wrong offenders. He quotes the legal principle in Deuteronomy chapter 19, verse 15, which says every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.

Now, that's unknown in Greco-Roman law. That's not something that happened in Greco-Roman law. The prescription of Deuteronomy 19, 15 was intended to prevent

the conviction of a defendant on the basis of only one testimony, lest it be a malicious accusation of a false witness.

This principle now was adopted in rabbinic jurisprudence. The New Testament applies it to church discipline. Matthew 18, verse 16, 1 Timothy 5, verse 19, and some other examples.

Now the question is, did Paul have in mind a church trial in which formal charges will be examined and judged? Was he going to hold court? If so, who were the witnesses? Some Corinthians testifying against each other? Well, Paul does not explain all that. He simply said, I'm going to make sure that there's ample evidence before I make any decision. So, he now repeats the warning in verse two.

He says, I previously told you when I was present with you the second time. And now, even when I'm away, I'm saying in advance that when I come again, I am not going to spare anyone who has committed or continued in their former sins. Now, the two visits mentioned here are probably the second painful visit of chapter two, verse one.

And the third one now is the one he anticipates. He said that those who had sinned earlier certainly referred to those in 12:21, but we don't know the identity of any others. But what is sure is that Paul says all who have sinned are going to be judged.

I will not spare. Literally, it means I will not show leniency.

I will not show leniency. Not at all. You see the imagery of not sparing here, which originated in ancient warfare, as not killing a defeated enemy.

And that's what it means. I will not spare. What punishment is Paul threatening? Will he excommunicate the unrepentant from the fellowship of the church and hand them over to Satan? As he said in 1 Corinthians chapter five, will he only temporarily exclude them from the life of the church? Will he call for them to be shunned as we see in second Thessalonians three, six and 1 Corinthians five, nine to 11? Or will he call upon God to inflict some bodily sickness on them? Now, these are all possibilities, but there are possibilities, and we cannot be certain of the nature of Paul's intended disciplinary action. Jerome Murphy O'Connell suggests, at least helpfully, that if the community did not respond to his admonitions, the only alternative was for him to declare that the quality of their lives, both individually and collectively, did not conform to the gospel, and they were not, in fact, Christian.

Jerome adds that Murphy O'Connell would be a terrible decision for Paul to take. Paul is going to say, hey, wait folks, you are indeed not Christians, and that would be something very, very difficult for Paul. Or, as C.K. Barrett suggests, they would have fallen back into Satan's realm.

Clearly, the apostle could not forever tolerate immoral conduct within the fellowship of the church at Corinth. A word for us today, a lesson for us today: how much immorality do we tolerate in our churches? We are so caught up with numbers that we are not willing to discipline ourselves. Think about this: If you have a church, ask yourself, how many of these people would actually be ready if Christ were to show up on a Sunday morning? And you have a thousand in your church. Ask yourself, how many of them really know the Lord? And Paul was very concerned about the morals, the life, the behavior of his members.

You see, we sing just as I am, without one plea, but that your blood was shed for me. Listen, we come to Jesus as we are, but once we come to him, we do not remain as we are. We come just as we are, but we do not remain as we are.

That's exactly what Paul is telling these people. If I come, I hope there will be not saints among you, impurity, immorality, sensuality. I hope I won't find any of such things among you because if I do, that will be proof actually that you are not Christians.

Let me say this quickly: I think to talk about sinning saints is an oxymoron. Think about this. You say that man is a righteous liar.

How does that sound? How does it sound to say, well, he's a very honest thief? He's a very honest thief. All he does is steal, but he's very honest. How does that sound to the ears? It doesn't work that way.

But if we take the words of Paul, and if we take the words of the apostles, the blood of Jesus cleanses from sins. He's telling them there should be no immorality, no sensuality, no impurity among you. He lists them.

He says strife, jealousy, anger, tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance. I mean, think about it. Don't we have sanctified gossip in our churches today? And Paul says I don't want to see those sanctified gossips.

He said I will not be lenient with you. Why? Because you are demanding proof that Christ is speaking through me. If proof is what you want, proof is what you get.

You want proof that I'm an apostle, and I'm going to show you proof that I'm an apostle. And the form is in the shape they do not understand. It will assume a form that they do not yet understand.

In fact, we don't know what it is yet, but Paul was very, very clear. Since you desire or seek proof, they are seeking proof that Christ is speaking in him. The Corinthians, in

the expected criteria of genuine apostleship, charisma, polished rhetoric, exalted spiritual experience, triumphalism in life and ministry, not weakness.

You see, for them, this is what they want. Charisma, rhetoric, exalted spiritual experience, triumphalism, but weakness is not it. But Paul says, I will show you a proof.

They demand this proof that Christ is speaking through Paul. Lacking the expected criteria, they refuse to grant that the power of Christ accompanies Paul's presence with them. Unquestionably, Christ has been powerful among the Corinthians, but what does Paul mean by saying Christ is not weak in dealing with them? The church at Corinth will get the decisive proof they want, but Christ will not speak through Paul in the way they want.

They're going to hear Christ speak through Paul, but not in the way they want. He threatens to stand discipline as a sign that Christ is not weak toward them through his ministry but rather is powerful. Then, in verse four, for indeed, he was crucified in weakness but lives by the power of God.

For we are weak in him, but in dealing with you, we live with him by the power of God. It will deal with the offenders with a strong hand. But there are some in Corinth that do not take Paul's authority seriously.

They seek the proof of Christ speaking to him, that is really Christ, a possible agent. To their sorrow, they will discover that his dealings with them will be mighty, not weak. It comes about in this way.

Though the Lord was crucified because of weakness, yet he lives because of the power of God. In like manner, Paul and his associates are weak with him, but they live with him because of the power of God. This power is manifested in Paul's life in ministry, including the discipline that he administers through apostolic authority.

Now, Paul calls them to self-examination. He said, examine yourselves to see whether you are living in the faith. Test yourselves.

Do you not realize that Christ is in you? Unless, indeed, you fail to pass the test. You see, having seen this warning, having given them warning, Paul urges his readers to examine themselves. Examine yourselves rather than examine me.

You need an examination. That's what Paul is saying. You are the ones examining me, but you are the ones who actually need examination.

Examine yourselves. And it is very interesting that Paul writes it in the plural, yourselves. They examine. They are to examine themselves.

It's not a matter of criticizing one another. Paul hopes the Corinthians will correct their situation. When he visits them, he does not want to have to deal severely with them.

Since they have asked for proof, he challenges them now to prove their own Christian faith. Their faith is not unrelated to his own faith. But Paul is also apprehensive that they may refuse his plea.

So, in verses five to six, he turns the table on the Corinthians with his new approach. With an emphatic, I repeated, yourselves. He writes that they are to examine and test themselves.

Examine and test. Two different words. Not Paul.

To determine if they are in the faith. You see, he uses examine, the word *perazo*, from which you also get try, test, or attempt. And then prove, *documazo*, to prove they are virtually synonymous here.

Just with a slight emphasis in difference. There is a slight difference in emphasis, rather. The former indicates the endeavor to discover the nature of something by testing it.

When he says, examine yourselves. The latter is a critical examination of something to determine its genuineness. So, the Corinthians are to test the evidence that they are true believers.

As in 124, to be in the faith entails living in obedience and trusting in Christ. Paul asks a rhetorical question that expects an affirmative answer. Do you not realize, know for certain, that Christ is in you? It's interesting here that he says Christ is in you.

Paul seeks to elicit the desired behavior from them by appealing to who they know they are. They are people in whom Christ Jesus lives. But I think we need to look at this verse differently.

Even though many interpreters take this to be individual, and there's a personal dimension to it, I think we miss the point when we see Paul say, Jesus Christ is in you. Plural, telling them, is among you. It's in them individually, but it's not just the individual residence.

He said, don't you know Christ is among you? And the things you do don't show that in you. If they are, this will manifest in their behavior. If they realize that Christ not only lives in them individually but that Christ is among them, it needs to affect their behavior.

Unless, of course, you fail the test. So, it's very, very important. And then in verse 7, he says, but we pray to God that you may not do anything wrong, not that we may appear to have passed the test, but that you may do what is right, though we may seem to have failed.

You see, Paul is never preoccupied with himself. His interest goes back to that of his readers. His prayer to God is for restoration for them and edification.

He said, listen, I'm praying for you. They have concluded that either we or God may do you no harm. That's what he says.

His prayer to God for them is for their restoration and edification. Some interpreters in the past took whom as you as the direct object of the infinitive, concluding that either we or he, God, may do you no harm. But the current consensus in scholarship is that whoever is the accusative subject of infinity will not do anything wrong.

So, Paul reports this as the basic content of his prayer. We're praying that you will not do anything wrong. You see, the complementary phrases, doing wrong and right, in this context, define what is wrong and what is right in the life of the church in terms of what Paul contends they need to do.

The twofold aim of Paul's prayer is indicated by those clauses. The first one states his negative purpose, nor that people will see that Paul has stood the test. He does not pray that his apostolic authenticity will be vindicated during his third visit by taking severe disciplinary action against those Corinthians.

The second aim of his prayer is that they will do what is right. Paul prays that on their own, they will repent and they will mend their ways. And he concedes that even though we may have seemed to have failed, Paul will gladly give up the proof that Christ is speaking through him.

In verse eight, you see again that Paul's overriding concern is for the truth. You know, it's unfortunate that we live in days where truth doesn't seem to matter, either spiritually or the other. Somebody said it is not the truth that I do not know that bothers me.

It is the truth that I know. And by saying this, look, what am I doing with the truth that we know? It's not enough to know the truth. We must understand the truth, but it's not enough to understand the truth.

We must live the truth. That is, our lives must reflect the truth. Paul's overriding concern as an apostle for Christ is for the truth.

This is the reason for his prayer. He says that he's not able to do anything against the truth, but he only dares act for the truth. I mean, this almost sounds like truth being sovereign, but for Paul, the truth here is to be equated with the gospel.

The gospel not only is to be believed, but it is something to be behaved in life. Paul wants the truth of the gospel to be visibly demonstrated in the lives of the Corinthians. The apostle is unable to do anything against the truth as one in whom the truth of Christ is.

That's what we see there in verse 8. And then verse 9, Paul continues to express his concern for the Corinthians, and he does so by affirming in verse 9, this is what we pray, that you may become perfect. As a summary, verses 5 to 9, having given his warning, Paul urges his readers to examine or to try themselves rather than him. They should regard themselves as being on trial.

They should prove their own selves. Do they not fully know their own self that Christ is in them and among them? Unless indeed they are without proof. In verse 9, he says he's glad when he's weak, and his readers are strong.

He prays for their protection; that is, they are correcting what is wrong, and they're doing what is right. Now, we come to Paul's closing appeal in verses 10 to 14. So, I write these things while I'm away from you so that when I come, I may not have to be severe in using the authority that the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down.

Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell. Put things in order. Listen to my appeal.

Agree with one another. Live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with the holy keys.

All the saints greet you. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you. What must the Corinthians do to restore themselves to a healthy spiritual state? Paul writes a prescription now, which they are to begin to take on a daily basis.

It's like this is a daily dose. Take this one. Verses 11 and 12.

Greet one another with the holy keys. All the saints greet you. Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell.

Put things in order. Listen to my appeal. Agree with one another.

Live in peace. Those are the daily doses they need. Let me tell you, if we have this in our congregations, we will have congregations filled with joy in the Lord.

There will be less divisions. There will be fewer arguments. Put things in order.

Listen to my appeal. Agree with one another. Live in peace.

Then, greet one another. They are to put things in order. Listen to his appeal.

Agree with one another and live in peace. Presumably, they were with each other as well as with Paul, the apostles. Do you know what he says? Paul says if you do these things, if you do these things, then God, who is the author of love and peace, will be with you in the manifestation of spiritual power and blessing.

The reason why God is not moving in most of our congregations is that we're doing everything we can, and yet we can't see God moving. Is it because we are living in peace? Do we agree with one another? We deal with factions. Are we all listening to the truth? Are we listening to the word of God? You know, there's one thing is hearing, and the other one is listening. Many people hear, but only a few people listen.

That's why somebody will talk and say, this is what I said but I didn't hear that because they are really not listening. Listen to my appeal. Agree with one another.

You see, Paul is summarizing his gospel right there. As much as possible and as much as it lies within you, live peaceably with one another. Then they are to show their friendship and affection for one another by greeting each other with a holy kiss, something they did at that time or a prescription this is.

It should be a sufficient remedy for most troubled churches. However, telling the Corinthians what they must do to be healed of their spiritual maladies is not enough. Paul had to remind them of the resources by which they could take their medicine.

He closes his letter by pointing to two resources that the Lord's people have that enable them to do what God requires. What are they? Verses thirteen and fourteen. He said, the grace of the Lord, the grace of the Lord be with you.

Verse thirteen. The grace of the Lord be with you. You see, the fellowship of the saints is very important, and not only the fellowship of the saints, which is very important, a human resource.

The second, which is the greatest resource, is the grace of God. In his closing benediction, Paul prays that the grace of Christ, the love of the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit may be with his readers. Now, isn't it interesting that Paul reverses it?

He begins with the grace of Christ, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God. You know, usually, we start with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but Paul, says the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit. So, here, he does not say the Father is number one, Jesus is number two, and the Holy Spirit is number three.

He shuffles things around because, in his mind, essentially, they are one. The Lord's grace is sufficient for any demand. The Father's love, whichever assures us of his understanding, sympathy, and care, and the Holy Spirit 's joint participation with us in enabling and directing are more than enough to enable us to apply the remedy and to bring about spiritual healing and restoration.

And as we come to the end of 2 Corinthians, I pronounce the same benediction of Paul upon the listener: the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

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