

**Paul's Final Appeal to the Unrepentant
2 Corinthians 13:1-4
Part One**

How did Paul minister to the unrepentant among the Corinthians in his final appeal to them in 2 Corinthians 13:1-10?

First of all, we will see that he warned them (2 Corinthians 13:1-4). So, what was Paul's warning to these still as yet unrepentant Corinthians?

He warned them concerning the judgment that was about to come to them on his next visit to them, if they remained unrepentant. Let me now read for you **2 Corinthians 13:1-4** and see if this is not so. **"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 will live with Him because of the power of God directed toward you."** So did Paul in these verses warn these still as yet unrepentant Corinthians to prepare themselves for judgment if he came to them on his next visit and found them unrepentant? Absolutely!

So now let us look at these verses more carefully and hopefully in doing so, this point will be reinforced.

We will begin with the very first sentence of the very first verse. And what does it say? **"This is the third time I am coming to you."**

So, what did Paul say next? Let us now go on to the second sentence. And what does it say? **"Every fact is to be confirmed by the testimony of two or three witnesses."**

This sentence is important. It is important because this sentence helps us to see that the judgment that Paul is alluding to here in these verses, that is in

fact awaiting those Corinthians who refuse to repent, is not a supernatural judgment that would be rained down upon them from the courts of heaven, but rather a judgment that would be initiated by Paul and carried out by the Corinthian church itself. So how would this sentence that speaks of **“every fact being confirmed by two or three witnesses”** lead us to this conclusion?

This sentence is a citation from **Deuteronomy 19:15**, which provided for the nation of Israel the necessary legal requirement for accepting evidence into a public trial.

Therefore with this information it should be clear to us that when Paul warned the Corinthians of an approaching judgment in **2 Corinthians 13:1**, he was not alluding to some kind of supernatural judgment that would rain down upon them from God’s throne room in heaven, but rather to a judgment that he himself would initiate and that the Corinthian church itself would carry out in a manner consistent with the rule of evidence, as stated **Deuteronomy 19:15**

So understanding the nature of the judgment that Paul was alluding to in **2 Corinthians 13:1** and knowing that it would be based on the legal requirement cited in **Deuteronomy 19:15**, we are now in a position to specifically identify the judgment that Paul had in mind when he spoke to the Corinthians as he did in **2 Corinthians 13:1**. So, what was that specific judgment?

When Paul warned these still as yet unrepentant Corinthians concerning the judgment that was about to come to them, he was referring to what we commonly refer to as church discipline (Matthew 18:15-20).

So, what is church discipline? We do not have to guess for Christ Himself has outlined church discipline for us in **Matthew 18:15-20**. So let read now read these words of Christ for you.

“If your brother sins, go and show him his fault 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. (17) If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church,

let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.” This is what we call church discipline. And this is exactly what Paul had in his mind, when he introduced the thought of a potential future judgment in **2 Corinthians 13:1** that would be consistent with the rule of evidence that Paul cited from **Deuteronomy 19:15**.

So should church discipline continue to be practiced today? Absolutely! And our church is committed to this practice. We are committed to this practice not only because we believe that this is exactly what the word of God teaches, but we are also committed to this practice because we believe that being obedient to God in this way will serve our sinning brother or sister in Christ, will serve our church, and will glorify God. Therefore, even in spite of the potential difficulties associated with this biblical practice, both on the part of the one going and on the part of the one receiving, we are committed to this practice and will by the grace of God not waver from it.

So, what was the specific judgment that Paul had in mind as he began to unfold his warning to these still as yet unrepentant Corinthians here in **2 Corinthians 13:1-4**? It was the specific judgment of church discipline that could potentially result, if there was not repentance, in the excommunication of the stubbornly unrepentant brothers or sisters in Christ, not only from our formal church fellowships but also from our lives. And why would that be? Because Jesus said to His disciples that if a brother or sister remained stubbornly unrepentant, even after individual believers reached out, small groups of individual believers reached out, and even the church itself reached out, they were to be treated as a Gentile and a tax collector, or in other words understanding the culture of that day He was in essence telling His disciples that stubbornly unrepentant brothers and sisters are to be separated from.

Obviously being the recipient of such an extreme judgment could be and should be very upsetting to the person put out or in other words separated from. So when the possibility of such an action is looming, a warning certainly would be appropriate so that such an action would not take them by surprise. And this brings us to **2 Corinthians 13:2**.

So now let us now read **2 Corinthians 13:2**. **“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.” So, what is Paul saying here in 2 Corinthians 13:2?

Paul, in 2 Corinthians 13:2, wanted to make sure that the unrepentant Corinthians understood that they had been warned in advance of the judgment that would spare none of them.

So based on **2 Corinthians 13:2**, did Paul provide advance warning to the Corinthians of the judgment that would accompany his upcoming third visit and which would spare no one? Absolutely! He had given them advance warning during his second visit to them or in other words during his so-called “sorrowful visit,” and he again has given them advance warning here in this verse.

Paul in his dealings with the Corinthians had up to this point in time been very patient in terms of his dealings with them on so many different levels, but Paul had come to the point that he knew that any further patience would not serve them or in other words he knew that it was time to clean house, So he, on his second visit and now here in **2 Corinthians 13:2**, gave them an advance warning concerning this future judgment that would spare no one, whether that person was a long time sinner, whose sin extended all the way back to his second visit or who was a more recent sinner.

So, what might have been the specific sin or sins that Paul may have had in mind? The primary or basic sin that Paul would have had in mind based on entire book of **2 Corinthians** would have been their sinful rebellion against his authority as an apostle of Christ. But in the more specific sense it would have been the sins of impurity, immorality, and sensuality that Paul apparently linked with their rebellion as spelled out by Paul in **2 Corinthians 12:21**. So now let me read for you **2 Corinthians 12:21** and see if this is not so. **“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.”** In rebellion against Paul was in essence rebellion against Christ who sent him. And their rebellion against Christ, as it always invariably does, results in the works of the flesh. And it is these works of the flesh, which are the evidence of the rebellion, that would lead to the judgment that Paul had warned them of

So did Paul in **2 Corinthians 13:2** make an attempt to make sure that the unrepentant Corinthians understood that they had been warned of the judgment that was coming to them on his third visit and that no unrepentant Corinthian would be spared? And I believe the answer would be yes!

So after Paul did this, then what did he do? After Paul had made sure that these still as yet unrepentant Corinthians understood that they had been warned and had been warned in advance of this coming judgment. He then explained to them the necessity of very this very thorough and expansive judgment in **2 Corinthians 13:3**.

So let me now read for you **2 Corinthians 13:3** and see if this is not so. **“Since you are seeking for proof of the Christ who speaks in me, and who is not weak toward you, but mighty in you.”** So did Paul in this verse after he had warned them about this coming judgment then go on to explain to them the necessity of it? Yes I believe he did.

And what was his explanation? Paul, in 2 Corinthians 13:3, made it clear to these still as yet unrepentant Corinthians that the reason why he was bringing judgment upon them was to provide them with proof that the same Christ who was strong in them was the same Christ who spoke in him.

And why was this proof necessary? They had begun to view Paul as weak, and in viewing him as weak came to believe that he was inconsistent with his declaration that he was an apostle of Christ and therefore a spokesman for Christ.

So why had they begun to view him as weak? This is somewhat complicated. It began with their misunderstanding and what truly set individual believers apart as followers of Christ. We see this misunderstanding highlighted for us by Paul in 1 Corinthians 4:8ff.

But this was not the whole of it. In fact, the most significant factor contributing to this perception of weakness was most likely was what happened on his second visit.

It was most likely his second visit to them that he specifically chose to highlight when giving to them this warning of judgment. So why was this?

But simply putting forward the judgment that was about to unleash against as the proof that Christ spoke in him was not enough. So, what further proof did Paul provided was in 2 Corinthians 13:14?

The further proofs that Paul provided in 2 Corinthians 13:4 that the Christ who was mighty in them was the same Christ who spoke in him were the parallels between him and Christ.

May God give us the grace to practice church discipline so that our sinning brothers and sisters in Christ might be served, our church protected, and the Lord glorified.