

Paul's Final Appeal to the Unrepentant
2 Corinthians 13:7-10
Part Three

One of the most essential duties of every believer is to pray for other believers. And certainly Paul emphasized the importance of this duty in **Ephesians 6** when he, after having exhorted the Ephesians to put on the full armor of God in **Ephesians 6:10-17**, then concluded that section with an urgent appeal for these same Ephesians to pray for one another.

So now let me read for you **Ephesians 6:18** and see if this is so. “[In light of the spiritual battle and the necessity of us putting on the full armor of God, as detailed for us in **verses 10-17**, let us] **with all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition [for whom] for all the saints.**”

So did Paul, after having exhorted the Ephesians to put on the full armor of God in **Ephesians 6:10-17**, then conclude that section with an urgent appeal for these same Ephesians to pray for one another? Absolutely!

And this is certainly something that each of us need to take to heart. If we as a church are going to be successful in battling against the forces of darkness then it will require us to pray for one another. So do you believe this? I hope you do for this is the truth.

But now let me ask you a question. Did Paul actually practice what he preached? Or in other words did Paul pray for his fellow believers in the churches that he had founded?

And this question brings us back to our study of **2 Corinthians** and more specifically to the last major section of this epistle, which I have entitled “**Paul's final appeal to the unrepentant.**” And where is this last major section? This last major section can be found in **2 Corinthians 13:1-10**.

And it is this section of Scripture that we are presently examining. And what is the question that we are now seeking to answer as we press forward in this examination? How did Paul minister to the unrepentant among the Corinthians in his final appeal to them in 2 Corinthians 13:1-10? This is the question that we are presently seeking to answer. So, what was the first thing that we saw Paul doing in order to minister to these still as yet unrepentant Corinthians?

He warned them (2 Corinthians 13:1-4). And where did we find this warning? We found this warning in **2 Corinthians 13:1-4**. So let me now read these verses for you 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, since you are looking 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 based on these verses did Paul, in seeking to minister to these still as yet unrepentant Corinthians, warn them? Yes he did. He warned them of a coming judgment, which we several weeks ago concluded was the judgment of church discipline that Christ spelled out for His disciples in **Matthew 18:15-20**.

But warning them was not the only way that Paul sought to minister to these still as yet unrepentant Corinthians. He also did something else. And what was that?

He exhorted them (2 Corinthians 13:5-6). And where did we find this exhortation? We found this exhortation in **2 Corinthians 13:5-6**. So now let me read these verses for 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? (6) But I trust that you will realize that we ourselves do not fail the test.”**

So based on these verses did Paul, in seeking to minister to these still as yet unrepentant Corinthians, exhort them? Yes he did. He exhorted them to test themselves, to examine themselves to see if they were **“in the faith,”** or in other words saved. And what did he hope that their conclusion would be? Did he hope their conclusion would be that they were not saved? No, he hoped that their conclusion would be that they were saved. And why would he have hoped this? It’s very simple. If they concluded in their self-examination that they in fact were saved, he then hoped that they, by virtue of the fact that he was the one who brought them the gospel through which

they were saved, would realize that Christ did in fact speak in him, or in other words that he was in fact a true apostle of Christ. This is what Paul meant in **verse 6** when he said, **“But I trust that you will realize [after your self-examination] that we ourselves do not fail the test.”**

So did Paul, in seeking to minister to these still as yet unrepentant Corinthians, warn them? Yes he did? Did he exhort them? Yes, he did. But this was not all. There was still another way that Paul sought to minister to these still as yet unrepentant Corinthians. And what was that?

He prayed for them (2 Corinthians 13:7-10). Let me now read for you **2 Corinthians 13:7-10** and see if this is not so. **“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 may 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, 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.”** So based on these verses did Paul, in seeking to minister to these still as yet unrepentant Corinthians, pray for them? Yes he did.

So let us now go back to these verses and see what he prayed and we will begin with **verse 7**. And what does this verse say? **“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.”** So, what did Paul pray based on **verse 7**?

Did he pray for them that they would be able to get into a good college, get good grades, find a good job, get a good salary and benefit package, be able to buy a nice home and drive nice cars, that they would be able to climb the corporate ladder of success? No! This is not what Paul prayed.

Paul prayed that the Corinthians would do “no wrong” but only that which was “right” (2 Corinthians 13:7).

So now let me ask you this question. What did Paul mean when he prayed that the Corinthians would do no **“wrong?”** When Paul prayed that the Corinthians would do **“no wrong,”** he simply meant, based on the context of

this epistle, that they would no longer continue their rebellion against him nor would they continue to live the kind of sinful lifestyle that he had detailed for them in **2 Corinthians 12:21**. This is what Paul would have meant when he prayed for the Corinthians that they would do **“no wrong.”**

But Paul’s prayer was not simply that the Corinthians would do **“no wrong.”** His prayer was also that the Corinthians would do what was **“right.”** So, what would Paul have meant by this? When Paul prayed that the Corinthians would do what was **“right,”** he would have meant, again based on the context of this epistle, that beyond just ending their rebellion against him the Corinthians would open up their hearts to him and to the lifestyle that would have been consistent with the message that Paul himself preached. This is what Paul would have meant when he prayed for the Corinthians that they would do what was **“right”**.

So what did Paul pray based on **2 Corinthians 13:7**? Did he pray that the Corinthians would get into good colleges and find good success materially and circumstantially? No, Paul prayed that the Corinthians would do **“no wrong”** but only that which was **“right”** in other words Paul’s intercessory prayer on behalf of the Corinthians focused on the spiritual and the eternal.

So now let me ask you this question. If God answered Paul’s prayer, or in other words if the Corinthians did in fact do **“no wrong”** but only that which was **“right,”** would the judgment that Paul had warned them about in **2 Corinthians 13:1-4** still have taken place when he arrived on his third visit to them? And what would the answer be? The answer would be no!

If Paul’s prayer was answered and the Corinthians did “no wrong” but only that which was “right,” there would have been no reason for Paul to initiate a judgment against them. And this of course would certainly not have been a disappointment to Paul, rather it would have been a cause for a great celebration, but the celebration would not have been without a personal cost for Paul. And why would that be?

If Paul’s prayer was answered and there was no reason for Paul to initiate a judgment against the Corinthians, then by default there would have been little or no opportunity for Paul to appear **“approved,”** or in other words there would have been little or no opportunity for Paul to be displayed as a true and genuine apostle of Christ through the manifestation of his apostolic

power. In fact, without the opportunity to manifest his apostolic power in the proposed church-wide judgment that he had just warned the Corinthians about in **2 Corinthians 13:1-4**, he might very well have appeared to his opponents as **“unapproved,”** or in other words lacking the requisite power to be considered a genuine and true apostle.

Did Paul understand this? He absolutely understood this but this did not prevent him from praying for the Corinthians in the way he prayed for them. It didn't prevent him because he was far more concerned about their spiritual welfare than about whether or not he appeared to be **“approved”** or appeared to be **“unapproved.”** And he wanted the Corinthians to know this?

So let us now go back to **2 Corinthians 13:7** and see if this is not so. **“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 may appear unapproved.”**

So was Paul more concerned about their spiritual welfare than about whether or not he would appear to **“approved”** or **“unapproved?”** And did he want the Corinthians to know this? Absolutely!

But that was not all that Paul wanted the Corinthians to know. He also wanted the Corinthians to know something else. So, what was that?

Let me know read for you **2 Corinthians 13:8**. **“For we can do nothing against the truth, but only for the truth.”** So, what did Paul want the Corinthians to know beyond the fact that his prayer on their behalf was not about him but about them? He wanted them to understand that no matter how they responded to his prayer on their behalf, a prayer motivated solely completely out of concern for them and not for himself, that his actions and the actions of his associates would be completely and totally shaped by the truths of God's Word and God's Word alone regardless of how they might respond to his warning, exhortation, and prayer or not respond to his warning, exhortation, and his prayer.

Or in other words, Paul, in 2 Corinthians 13:8, wanted the Corinthians to know that if he found them living in **obedience** to the truth, he would not initiate a judgment against them because he could do nothing “against the truth.” But this was not all that Paul wanted the Corinthians to know.

Paul, in 2 Corinthians 13:8, also wanted the Corinthians to know that if he found them living in **disobedience** to the truth, he would without hesitation initiate a judgment against them because he was “for the truth.”

Loving the truth means honoring it. And if the believers in Corinth honored the Word, Paul certainly would not take any action against them, but if the believers in Corinth failed to honor the truth, Paul would not hesitate to confront those professing believers who strayed from it. In **1 Corinthians 5:3-5** he initiated church discipline against a man who was having an affair with his father’s wife. In **Galatians 2:11-14** he publicly rebuked Peter for his hypocrisy, while in **1 Timothy 1:20** he put Hymenaeus and Alexander out of the church for their errors.

So was Paul willing to act decisively if he was compelled to do so? Absolutely! But acting decisively was not something that he would have wanted to do. In fact, he was hoping that through his prayer on behalf of the Corinthians that rather than having to act decisively in a manifestation of apostolic power they in response to his prayer might prove **themselves “strong”** so that he might continue to appear as **“weak.”**

And where do we see this? Let us now read **2 Corinthians 13:9** and what does it say? **“For we rejoice when we ourselves are weak but you are strong.”** So did Paul, even as he prayed for the Corinthians that they do **“no wrong”** but only that which was **“right,”** have any problem with the thought that if his prayer was answered that he might continue to appear as **“weak?”** Absolutely not!

Why? Paul had learned that weakness was the path to power; it was his human weakness that allowed God’s strength to flow through him. Earlier in this epistle in **2 Corinthians 12:9-10** he wrote this, **“Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.”**

So after having prayed for the Corinthians that they would do “no wrong” but only that which was “right,” what was the next thing that he prayed for? Let us continue to read **verse 9**. And what does it say? **“This we also pray for, that you be made complete.”**

So what did this mean? When Paul prayed that the Corinthian church would be made complete (KATARTISIS), he was talking about the church going from a broken condition to a repaired condition. And how would that come about? It would come about by repentance, or in other words by them doing “no wrong” but only that which was “right.”

So now let me ask you this. Were Paul’s prayers answered? And the answer would be yes! Paul, based on **Acts 20:2-3**, did in fact leave Macedonia to visit Greece for a period of three months, which most certainly would have meant that he visited Corinth for three months, for that is the church that he had established there. So, what did he do while there? Did he initiate a judgment against the church? No! Rather based on evidence from **Romans 15:22-29** he wrote his epistle to the Romans. There is no indication that when Paul came to Corinth, after he had warned them, exhorted them, and prayed for them, that he was forced or compelled to bring a judgment against them.

Paul then completed his final appeal to these still as yet unrepentant Corinthians with a one-sentence summary of this entire epistle in **verse 10**. And what was his one-sentence summation?

“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.”

One of the most essential duties of every believer is to pray for other believers! This is not an option but a duty.

So let me ask you a question. Do you believe this? Do you believe that if we are going to be able to successfully battle the forces of darkness that we must give attention to this? How could we not believe this in light of the words of Paul to the Ephesians when he, after having exhorted the Ephesians to put on the full armor of God in **Ephesians 6:10-17**, then concluded that section with an urgent appeal for them to pray for one another.

And how could we not believe this in light of Paul’s example knowing that he himself practiced what he preached. Certainly we see that here in Paul’s intercessory prayer on behalf of the Corinthians here in this epistle, but this certainly was not the only example of this.

May God give us the grace to fervently and faithfully intercede for our brothers and sisters in Christ in prayer.

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