

Apostolic Optimism
2 Corinthians 13:11-14

Corinth has been a tough go for the Apostle Paul. The church had started well but it wasn't long until the forces of darkness were successful in weakening the church as evidenced in the epistle of **1 Corinthians**. And this weakness within the church was then compounded by the arrival of certain false teachers who preached a strange amalgam of Christianity, old-covenant concepts, and triumphalist theology that imported the values of the Corinthian culture into the church.

And these imported values from the Corinthian culture became the foundation upon which these false teachers began to attack the authenticity of Paul's apostleship.

So, what were some of those specific attacks? The false teachers based on the cultural values of the Corinthians attacked Paul by saying, "Paul suffered too much to be considered an authentic apostle." The false teachers based on the cultural values of the Corinthians attacked Paul by saying, "His ministry was too bland and his message too dull to be considered an authentic apostle." The false teachers based on the cultural values of the Corinthians attacked Paul by saying, "Paul lacked the kind of supernatural visions to be considered an authentic apostle." The false teachers based on the cultural values of the Corinthians attacked Paul by saying, "Paul lacked the necessary commendations to be considered an authentic apostle." The false teachers based on the cultural values of the Corinthians attacked Paul by saying, "Paul's blue-collar work ethic and his commitment to supplying for his personal needs by working with his hands made him an unworthy candidate for being considered to be authentic apostle."

And were those attacks that were leveled against Paul by his opponents in this weakened Corinthian Church effective? Yes! They were effective. Though Paul, at great personal sacrifice, had introduced the gospel of Christ to Corinth and had been used by God to establish the church in Corinth, he was, based on those attacks, rejected by the vast majority of the church as a true and genuine apostle of Christ.

What an amazing turn of events! But Paul did not abandon the church. When he heard about the threat that had come upon the church from these false

teachers, he left the church in Ephesus, where he had been ministering, to return back to the church of Corinth for a second visit. On this second visit, known as the “**sorrowful visit**,” he was attacked publicly and the church as whole did nothing about it. It was at this time that Paul, after leaving the church, wrote what has become known as the “**severe letter**” which was then delivered by Titus to the church at Corinth.

Obviously the Corinthians response to this letter was very critical. If they responded well, then perhaps the church could be rescued. If they did not respond well, then of course the chances of the church being rescued would have been greatly diminished.

Therefore in light of this fact, Paul would have wanted to know as soon as possible how the Corinthians had responded to his letter. And because Paul would have wanted to know this as soon as possible, when Titus did not rendezvous with Paul in Troas to report how the Corinthians had responded, Paul could not contain himself, he left Troas so that he might perhaps intercept Titus in Macedonia, which was just north of Corinth.

So was Paul able to intercept Titus in Macedonia. Yes! Paul, after a period of time had passed, was able to intercept Titus. And was the report that Titus gave to Paul a good report? Yes, the report was very good. Titus explained to Paul that the vast majority of the Corinthians, in response to his letter, had in fact repented, but even so the situation was still very volatile. Why?

The situation, in spite of this good news, was still very volatile because the false teachers were still there along with a significant number of other Corinthians who had not yet repented. So Paul’s work was not yet complete and the church was still under threat.

Therefore at this point Paul sat down while in Macedonia just north of Corinth and penned the letter of **2 Corinthians**, which we have been studying now for a number of years. And what was Paul’s hope for this epistle? His hope was that God would use this epistle to bring about repentance in the remaining unrepentant Corinthians so that when he came to them on his third visit he would not have to manifest his apostolic power by initiating a judgment against these still as yet unrepentant Corinthians. This is what he hoped.

Thus Paul, in this epistle of **2 Corinthians** in a brilliant and stormy rebuttal to the attacks that had been launched against him, defended the authenticity of his apostleship while defining authentic ministry.

So how did Paul do this? After Paul's introductory remarks in **2 Corinthians 1:1-11** and after he had reviewed his history with the Corinthians in **2 Corinthians 1:12-2:11**, he went on to defend the authenticity of his apostleship to the whole of the Corinthian church in **2 Corinthians 2:12-7:1**. After **2 Corinthians 7:1**, Paul in **2 Corinthians 7:2-9:15** began to directly address the repentant in the church at Corinth imploring them to fulfill certain specific Christian responsibilities. And then finally after having directly addressed the repentant, he then turned his attention to the unrepentant beginning in **2 Corinthians 10:1** alerting them to a final and climatic judgment that he was prepared to initiate against them if he in fact came to them on his third visit and found them unrepentant.

We are now coming to the end of this section, as Paul brings this great epistle to its conclusion in **2 Corinthians 13:11-14**. And what do I hope will stand out to us as we now examine these final concluding verses? This is what I hope. I hope that Paul's enduring and unrelenting optimism for the church at Corinth would shine forth brightly in these concluding verses. And I would hope that Paul's enduring and unrelenting optimism in regard to the Corinthian church would encourage us to adopt the same attitude as Paul seeks to restore sinning brothers and sisters, regardless of how many disappointments we may encounter.

So now let me read these verses for you. **“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. (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.”**

So, what is the question that we will be asking as we examine these final four verses of this epistle? What are the three major components of Paul's optimistic conclusion?

The first major component of Paul's conclusion was closing admonitions (2 Corinthians 13:11). So let us read **2 Corinthians 13:11** and see if this is not

so. **“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.”**

So, what was the first component of Paul’s hopeful and optimistic conclusion? Admonitions! So, what was the first admonition?

The first admonition was **“rejoice.”** What does the verse say? **“Finally, brethren, rejoice.”** So, what was on Paul’s mind when he gave this admonishment? I believe the key for understanding what was on Paul’s mind as he gave this admonishment can be found in **2 Corinthians 13:9** when Paul told the Corinthians what brought him joy. So now let me now read for you **2 Corinthians 13:9. “For we rejoice when we ourselves are weak but you are strong; this we also pray for.”**

So based on what Paul told the Corinthians in **2 Corinthians 13:9** about what brought him joy, what would we have to conclude would have been on Paul’s mind when he admonished them “to rejoice” in **2 Corinthians 13:11?**

Based on 2 Corinthians 13:9, when Paul admonished the Corinthians to rejoice, he was in essence calling them to manifest their unity with him by joining him in rejoicing over the strength they themselves derived through his weakness.

Whenever God’s strength is magnified through weakness it should always be a cause for rejoicing on behalf of God’s children, whether His strength is being magnified through our weakness or through the weakness of another. So, what was the second admonition?

The second admonition was “be made complete.” So let us go back to **2 Corinthians 13:11** and see if this is not so. **“Finally, brethren, rejoice, be made complete.”**

So, what was on Paul’s mind when he gave this admonishment to “be made complete?” Again I believe that the key for understanding this admonishment can once again be found in **2 Corinthians 13:9**. So let us once again go back and read that verse and see if this is not so, but this time we will read whole verse. **“For we rejoice when we ourselves are weak but you are strong; this we also pray for, that you be made complete.”**

So based on **2 Corinthians 13:9**, what did Paul have on his mind when he admonished the Corinthians to be “made complete?”

Based on 2 Corinthians 13:9, when Paul admonished the Corinthians to be “made complete,” he was calling them in essence to respond to his prayer which required them to embrace him and the lifestyle consistent with his message. For if they responded to his prayer in this way then they would have been restored back to the place they were before the forces of darkness and the false teachers had begun to infiltrate the church. So, what was the third admonition?

The third admonition was “be comforted.” So let us once again go back to **2 Corinthians 13:11** and see once again if this is not so. **“Finally, brethren, rejoice, be made complete, be comforted.”**

So, what was on Paul’s mind when he gave this admonition? The key for understanding this particular admonition is to understand how the word translated “be comforted” (PARAKALEISTHE) should be translated, which is not as a “passive” but rather as a “middle voice” Or in other words this admonishment should not be understood as a call for the Corinthians to be comforted but rather as a call for them to comfort one another or perhaps better said to “admonish one another” based on their subjection to Paul and what he has written to them in this epistle. So, what was the next admonishment or in other words his fourth admonishment?

The fourth admonishment was “be like-minded.” So let us once again go back to **2 Corinthians 13:11**. **“Finally, brethren, rejoice, be made complete, be comforted, be like-minded.”** So, what did Paul mean by this?

The Greek phrase translated **“be like-minded”** literally means “think the same thing” or “have the same convictions and beliefs.” The conformity Paul called for is the antithesis of a shallow, superficial truce based on belief emphasis based on the notion that doctrine is divisive and everyone’s opinion is equally valid. Nor is it a pragmatic working agreement with those whose agreement with those who are not committed to contending earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints (Jude 3). Paul called for believers to have a common understanding of and conformity to the truths of God’s Word. So, what is the next admonishment?

The fifth admonishment was to “live in peace.” So let us once again go back to **2 Corinthians 13:7** and what does it say? **“Finally, brethren, rejoice, be made complete, be comforted, be like-minded, live in peace.”**

Living in peace is the natural outflow of viewing the truths of God’s Word in the same way and living our lives in accordance with the those held truths.

Now stepping back and looking at the whole of these five admonitions, we see that the power of Paul’s closing admonitions lies in no single command but in the aggregate of these five terse, staccato injunctions about rejoicing, restoring, comforting, agreeing, and living in peace – all present imperatives calling the Corinthians to continuous action day in and day out. If the Corinthians persist, then they have a promise. And what is that promise? Let us look at the very end of **verse 11**, **“And the God of love and peace will be with you.”**

God imparts His unique inner qualities to His children as they actively do His will. In truth, therefore, the Christian life and the existence of unity within the church do not come through passivity. We must actively, in the strength and power that God supplies through the Spirit, pursue these things.

So were these admonitions displaying Paul’s enduring optimism toward the Corinthians? I believe they were. And this brings us to the second major component of this greeting. So, what was the second major component of Paul’s optimistic conclusion?

The second major component was “greetings” (2 Corinthians 13:12-13). So let us now read **2 Corinthians 13:12-13** and see if this is not so. **“Greet one another with a holy kiss. (13) All the saints greet you.”**

Notice that there are two greetings contained in these verses. So, what was the first greeting? The first greeting was a local greeting (2 Corinthians 13:12). So let me now read **2 Corinthians 13:12** and see if this is not so. **“Greet one another with a holy kiss.”** So would it be fair for us to say that a “kiss” would qualify as a local greeting? I believe it would be very fair.

A kiss was a common form of greeting in the ancient Near East. It typically was a cheek-to-cheek embrace between members of the same sex. In the early church it was not a mere formality, like a handshake in Western culture

today. The holy kiss took on a special significance as a physical expression of brotherly love and mutual affection between church members of different social backgrounds, different nationalities, different races, and perhaps even perhaps between men and women, which perhaps would explain the addition of the qualifying term “holy.” So, what was the second greeting?

The second greeting was a universal greeting (2 Corinthians 13:13). So now let now read for you **2 Corinthians 13:13. “All the saints greet you.”**

Though distance prevented Paul, his associates, the believers in Macedonia or in other words “**all the saints**” from giving the Corinthians a holy kiss, Paul wanted them to know of their affection for them and therefore he said to the Corinthians “**all the saints greet you.**”

So based on his admonitions as well as his greetings, was Paul hopeful and optimistic that eventually all the Corinthians that he was presently writing to would in fact be united in their affection for him and committed to a lifestyle that would be consistent with the message he had preached to them? Yes! Now we come to the third and the last major component of Paul’s conclusion. And what is this third major component of Paul’s optimistic conclusion?

The third major component was the “benediction” (2 Corinthians 13:14). So now let us read 2 Corinthians 13:14 and see if this is not so. “**The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.**”

Knowing the power of the gospel, may we by God’s grace remain enduringly optimistic when seeking to restore sinning brothers and sisters in Christ.