

PEOPLE, GET READY 2 CORINTHIANS 12:14-13:14

by Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.
with Ra McLaughlin

In the letter's conclusion, Paul encouraged the Corinthians to prepare themselves for his upcoming visit. He wanted them to repent of their sin, and to think rightly about Paul and those who would accompany him so that they would be well received.

A PLEDGE OF GOOD INTENTIONS (12:14-18)

One of the issues Paul addressed in the previous section came to the surface again: misgivings in the church about his financial support. Previously, some in Corinth had ridiculed him because he did not receive payment for his work as an apostle (11:7-16; 12:11-13). But here he addressed a different fear. Apparently, the false apostles (11:13) had warned the Corinthians that if Paul returned he would drain their financial resources. To settle this matter, Paul pledged that he would not take money from the church at Corinth for himself (he still planned to collect money for the church in Jerusalem).

12:14a. Paul began by saying that he was **ready to visit ... for a third time**. He had remained in Corinth for a year and a half during his first visit (Acts 18:11). Then, he had received letters and visitors from Corinth while in Ephesus (1 Cor. 7:1; 16:17), and had traveled from Ephesus to visit them a second time (2 Cor. 1:15-16; 2:1). As he wrote 2 Corinthians, he planned to visit again after Titus had prepared the way. He explicitly mentioned this visit again (compare 9:4-5) because he wanted it to be a positive experience of God's blessing, unlike his second visit had been (2:1).

12:14b. To head off any fears, he immediately pledged that he would **not be a burden** to the church. He had already reminded them that he had not received financial support from them previously (11:7-16; 12:11-13), and he wanted to assure them that he would not change this policy (see 1 Cor. 16:4; 2 Cor. 8:20). Before his second visit, he had considered receiving money from the church for his mission efforts (1 Cor. 16:6), but at this point he thought it better not to receive such help.

Paul's motives were simple but profound. He did not want the Corinthians to think that their money was more important to him than they were. As he put it, "**What I want is not your possessions but you.**" On several occasions, Paul had expressed his desire for an intimate, trusting relationship with the church at Corinth (1 Cor. 4:14-15; 16:7; 2 Cor. 2:4; 6:11-13; 11:11). His thoughts ran to this same desire once again. He

wanted to experience the joy of seeing his spiritual children in harmony with each other and with him.

12:14c-15a. To explain himself, Paul appealed to the common practice of parents. **Children** do not normally provide **for their parents**. On the contrary, **parents** save and give **to their children**. Paul considered himself the father of the church at Corinth (1 Cor. 4:14-15; 2 Cor. 6:11-13). Of course, Paul knew that children do at times give generously to their parents (compare Mark 7:10-13), but this was not the primary direction of support. For this reason (**so**), Paul promised that he would **gladly spend ... everything** he had and **expend** himself as well (compare Phil. 2:17; 1 Thess. 2:8).

12:15b. Paul added an aside that he hoped would touch the Corinthians' hearts. He asked, "**If I love you more, will you love me less?**" This was the tender plea of a loving parent to his wayward children. He opened his heart to them in hopes that they would reciprocate his affection and commitment to them (compare 6:11-13).

12:16. Then, as if returning to his senses (**Be that as it may**; or more literally, "But let it be"), Paul came back to his main point. He had **not been a burden to the** Corinthians. That was a fact. But Paul's opponents had filled the Corinthians' minds with false accusations. Apparently, they argued that Paul had served without financial support in order to trick the Corinthians into remaining loyal to him. So, Paul quickly turned to yet another tack, mocking their insult that he was a **crafty fellow** who used **trickery** against the Corinthians.

12:17-18. To defend himself, Paul asked a question that should have settled the matter. Had he **exploit[ed]** them **through any of the men** he had **sent** to Corinth? Paul had sent **Titus and a brother** to them as his representatives, but they had served the church consistently with Paul's direct work. Previously, he had also sent Timothy, who also had served well (1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10-11; 2 Cor. 1:19). By asking if Titus had **exploited** them, Paul challenged the Corinthians to consider that Titus had acted **in the same spirit** and followed **the same course** of selfless service as Paul had. From Paul's perspective, the answers to these questions were obvious — no one had exploited the Corinthians. There was absolutely no reason to question Paul's motives.

EVERYTHING FOR THEIR GOOD (12:19-21)

In the preceding chapters Paul had spent much time boasting about himself (10:1-12:13). In opposition to the false apostles who challenged his authority (11:12-15), Paul had spoken like a fool (11:16-17) in order to defend his authority by his opponents' standards. Even by these standards, however, he was superior. He had every right to be considered Corinth's true apostle. Here, Paul made sure this boasting would not be misinterpreted.

12:19. Paul realized that the Corinthians might misunderstand his motives. He

wondered if they had **been thinking all along** as he boasted that he **had been defending** himself **to** the Corinthians. It might have been easy for some Corinthians to answer, "Yes." But the apostle wanted to make doubly clear that he felt no need to defend his own integrity or authority for his own sake. He had stooped to this strategy only for the Corinthians' **strengthening** (compare 11:2-4). Paul believed that all things in the life of the Christian church should be done for edification (1 Cor. 12:7; 14:26; 2 Cor. 10:8; 13:10), and this was his motivation as he defended his ministry against the false apostles.

Paul's intensity at this moment is apparent. He repeated the motif that he had been **speaking in the sight of God** (compare 1:18,23; 11:1,31). Moreover, he mentioned that he spoke as one **in Christ** (compare 2:17), and he appealed to the Corinthians as his **dear friends** (compare 1:8; 6:11-13; 8:1; 12:14; 13:11). It was very important to him that they believed his selfless motivation.

12:20. Paul explained (**for**) why he had gone to the extreme of boasting to edify them. He was **afraid** (compare 11:3). To be more specific, he feared what might be the situation when he arrived on his third visit. He was afraid that he might **not find** them **as he want[ed] them to be**, and that they might **not find** him **as they wanted[ed] him to be**. Put simply, Paul knew that if the Corinthians did not observe his instructions in this epistle, he would have to rebuke and discipline them (compare 1 Cor. 4:21). Neither he nor they wanted that.

Paul listed a number of things he was **afraid** he would find in the church. He had addressed some of these earlier in his epistles to the Corinthians: **quarreling** (1 Cor. 1:11; 3:3); **jealousy** (1 Cor. 3:3); **outbursts of anger; factions; slander; gossip; arrogance; and disorder** (compare similar lists in Rom. 1:28-32; 2:8; 13:13; Gal. 5:20-21; Eph. 4:31; Col. 3:8-9). If these attitudes and actions continued to characterize the Corinthian church, Paul would have to deal with them in person, and he did not want to have to do that. As a wise leader, he gave the church ample opportunity to get itself in order before he came.

12:21. Remarkably, Paul was also **afraid** for himself. The sins at Corinth did not merely cause trouble for the church itself. If they continued, then **God** would **humble** Paul himself **before** the church at Corinth. Speaking once again as a spiritual father, Paul considered it a humiliation to have to deal with the sins of the church yet another time. He wanted to take pride in his children (6:11-13; 12:14) and had boasted of them many times (7:4,14; 8:24; 9:2,3). Yet, if he had to rebuke them even after writing to them, his reason for boasting would be removed and he would be humiliated. He was too committed to the Corinthians to separate his feelings about himself from his feelings about them.

Paul did not speak of this humiliation in mere human terms. He explained that it would come **by the hand of God**. Paul knew that divine grace was necessary for the Corinthians to find repentance; he understood that the success of his letters depended

upon the good favor of God. He also realized that a lack of repentance in Corinth would have a divine purpose behind it (Rom. 8:28). He did not enjoy the thought of it, but realized that his own humiliation would be one aspect of God's purposes.

He further described his humiliation in terms of his grief. He would **be grieved** if he found **many who** had **sinned earlier and had not repented**. Paul sincerely desired the repentance and forgiveness of everyone who had fallen into serious sin. Just as he had rejoiced over and even advocated for the immoral brother who had repented (2:4-10), he would be happy if he found the church in order when he arrived, but deeply grieved if not.

When speaking of **those who** had **sinned**, Paul did not have in mind the kinds of sins every Christian commits as he fails to be perfect. Rather, he focused on very serious violations of God's law. He was especially concerned with those who had **not repented of impurity, sexual sin and debauchery**. The city of Corinth was reputed as a city of rank sexual immorality, and Paul realized that more than a few within the Corinthian church had fallen into these sins (compare 1 Cor. 5:1-2; 6:9-20; 7:2). Despite the seriousness of these sins, however, Paul's chief concern was that they repent of these sins in which **they** had **indulged**.

FINAL WARNING (13:1-10)

Having raised the possibility that some in Corinth may not have repented of their serious sins before he arrived, Paul offered a forceful final warning to the church.

13:1a. He began by reminding them again that **this** would **be** his **third visit** (see 12:14). From the information we have in the New Testament, Paul gave more attention to the Corinthian church than to any other. He stayed there one and a half years (Acts 18:11); he wrote to them frequently (Acts 20:31; 1 Cor. 5:9,11; 2 Cor. 2:3,4,9; 7:12); he visited a second time (2 Cor 2:1), and here told them plainly that he was coming again. Paul had been very patient with the Corinthians, and had gone to great lengths to be kind to them. His patience, however, was waning.

13:1b. For this reason, Paul told the Corinthians to prepare to face the issues he had raised with them. To begin with, did not want to have to deal with mere rumors and unsubstantiated accusations. He would not listen to accusations unless they were **established by the testimony of two or three witnesses**. Paul relied on Mosaic legal procedures for this point (Deut. 19:15), applying this national policy from the Old Testament to the legal procedures to be followed in the church (compare Matt. 18:16).

13:2. Paul's insistence on witnesses indicated his intention to deal strongly with the situation in Corinth. He had already given them a **warning** on his previous visit (1:23; 2:1), and he was **repeat[ing] it** here. On his third visit, there would be no more warnings. He was **not** going to **spare**: 1) **those who had sinned earlier**; or 2) **any of**

the others. The first group consisted of those who had fallen into the widespread immoral practices of Corinth (12:21). **The others** of whom he spoke are more difficult to identify. In all likelihood, Paul simply meant anyone else whom he had to discipline. If any Corinthian Christian failed to heed this warning and repent, Paul would discipline that person when he arrived. For its own spiritual well-being, the church needed Paul to exercise a firm hand with them.

13:3. Impatience with the Corinthians' sin did not motivate Paul to threaten them with discipline. Rather, the Corinthians demanded **proof that Christ was speaking through** Paul, and the discipline was to be the **proof**. Throughout his epistles to Corinth, Paul dealt with challenges to his authority as an apostle (1 Cor. 1:12; 3:4; 9:1-2; 2 Cor. 10:8-11; 11:2-7,12-13; 12:11-12; 13:10). He especially focused on this issue in the immediately preceding chapters (10:1-12:13). Some within the Corinthian church doubted Paul's authority as Christ's spokesman, and wanted to see some proof. Paul warned here that the proof would come in the form of harsh discipline. We cannot be sure precisely what kind of proof Paul had in mind, though it was to be indisputable **proof** (*dokime*), whatever it was.

The example of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11) is unique in the New Testament, but it demonstrates that the apostles could exercise discipline in the church that had very real, even physical effects. Paul instructed the discipline of the immoral man in Corinth in order **that his body** (*sarx*) **might be destroyed** (1 Cor. 5:5 margin), which may have physical implications. The sick and dead in Corinth who had abused their brethren at the Lord's Supper perhaps suffered similar discipline (1 Cor. 11:30). John warned of **sin that leads to death** (1 John 5:16), which may be closely associated with the kind of radical discipline Paul had in mind here. Also through the apostle John, Christ warned that he would revoke his blessings from rebellious churches (Rev. 2:5,16,22-23; 3:3,16), and Peter warned that judgment would **begin with the family of God** (1 Pet. 4:17). At the very least, Paul must have been prepared to inflict serious spiritual discipline on the church. He clearly believed the discipline to come would be so dramatic and obviously supernatural that it would prove he spoke authoritatively on Christ's behalf.

13:4. To support his warning that discipline would prove Christ's authorization of his ministry, Paul reminded the Corinthians that Christ humbled himself to a shameful death (2 Cor. 8:9; Phil. 2:8), being **crucified in weakness**, but that he also **lives by God's power**. Paul often associated divine power with the Holy Spirit (e.g. Rom. 1:4; 15:13,19; 1 Cor. 2:4; Eph. 3:16; 1 Thess. 1:5). He also taught that God the Father raised Christ from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 4:24; 6:4; 8:11; Gal. 1:1; Eph. 1:20; 1 Thess. 1:10).

Christ's weakness and power paralleled (**likewise**) Paul's ministry. First, Paul and his company had been **weak**. Paul knew sufferings from persecution (1:4-8; 4:4:8-12; 6:5-10; 11:23-27); he served the Corinthians at great cost and without personal profit (1 Cor. 9:1-27; 2 Cor. 11:7-9; 12:13); he even suffered the humiliation of a physical

ailment by the hand of God (12:7-9). The apparent weakness of his ministry had led some of his opponents to defy his authority (1 Cor. 1:12; 3:4; 9:1-2; 2 Cor. 10:8-11; 11:2-7,12-13; 12:11-12; 13:10). These and other difficulties resulted from Paul's union with Christ in his suffering and death on the cross (2 Cor. 1:5; Phil. 1:29; 3:10; Col. 1:24), and were appropriate to legitimate ministry.

Second, Paul affirmed that **by God's power** he and his company would **live with Christ to serve** the Corinthians. Just as Christ's resurrection and ascension had demonstrated the Spirit's power, Paul's own ministry was powerful. He had been resurrected with Christ (Rom. 6:3-10; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 2:5-6), and had received the power of the Spirit common to all believers (Rom. 5:5; 15:13; Eph. 3:16; Phi. 3:10; Col. 3:1-4; 2 Tim. 1:7) and peculiar to apostles (Rom. 15:19; 1 Cor. 2:4-5; 4:18-21; 1 Thess. 1:5).

The words "**we will live with him**" did not refer to the final resurrection on the Day of Judgment, but to Paul's third visit to Corinth. This is clear because Paul and his company were to live for the purpose of disciplining the Corinthians (see **I will not spare** [13:2]), which was to occur when Paul visited (13:1-2). The NIV somewhat obscures this idea by translating *eis humas* (literally "for you," or "toward you" NASB, NKJV; compare "in dealing with you" NRSV) as "**to serve you.**" Paul and his company already **serve[d]** the Corinthians (1:6-7; 3:2-3; 4:12,15; 5:13; 8:16-18,22-23; 12:19). What awaited their arrival was the discipline of the Corinthians (13:2). Paul described this discipline as living with Christ **by God's power** in order to emphasize that he and his company would act as God's instruments on Christ's behalf, and that the discipline would manifest God's power (compare 13:3). Even harsh discipline would be "for" the Corinthians (*eis humas*; **serve you**) by leading to their eventual repentance (1 Cor. 5; 2 Cor. 2:6-8; Heb. 12:5-11; Rev. 3:19).

13:5a. Paul wanted the Corinthians to take his third visit so seriously that he challenged them to **examine** and **test** themselves **to see whether** they were **in the faith**. Paul used the reflexive pronoun "**yourselves**" twice to stress the idea that they should start looking more at themselves than at him or others.

At first glance, these words conflict with the confidence Paul expressed in the Corinthian church in 7:4,16. When he had learned of their positive response to Titus (7:6-7), he had become very confident of their spiritual condition. Here, however, he actually told them to examine and test themselves to see if they were true believers. It is difficult to know what caused Paul's outlook to shift, but several factors should be remembered.

First, Paul taught that anyone who truly believes in Christ is secure in salvation (Rom. 8:28-39; 1 Cor. 1:4-9; 2 Cor. 4:13-14; Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30; Phil. 1:6; Col. 3:3-4; 1 Thess. 5:23-24). At the same time, merely professing faith in Christ does not secure eternal life (Rom. 10:9). Throughout the Scriptures, testing demonstrates the true nature of faith (compare Gen. 22:1,12; Exod. 16:4; Deut. 8:2; Judg. 2:21-22; Jer. 20:12;

Zech. 13:9; 2 Cor. 13:5; Jas. 1:3; 1 Pet. 1:7; Rev. 2:10). Those who fall away from Christ prove that their claims of faith were false (Mark 4:16-17; Luke 8:13; 1 John 2:19). The same is true of those who reject his apostles (John 13:20; 2 Cor. 11:12-15; 2 Pet. 3:14-17; Rev. 2:2).

Second, Paul's earlier affirmation of the congregation in general did not equate to confidence in every individual. In this passage, he focused on particular people involved in serious sins (12:20-13:2). His challenge was directed primarily toward them. He did not mean that the Corinthians should examine themselves collectively, judging one another's faith and actions, but that each one should examine him or herself.

Third, Paul was concerned with challenging the Corinthians to prepare for his visit so that they might avoid harsh discipline (13:9-10). To make this third visit joyful, all segments of the church needed to repent of the sins that hindered their Christian walks.

13:5b. To encourage them further toward self-examination, Paul asked if they did **not realize that Christ Jesus** was **in** them. Christ's Spirit at work in the believer has certain effects of sanctification and faithfulness (Rom. 6:1-4,11-18; 8:5-6,13-15,23; 1 Cor. 1:7-8; Gal. 5:22-23; Phil. 1:6; 2 Pet. 3:18). If the Corinthians' claims to faith were true, they were united to Christ, and the Holy Spirit was making the truth of their claims evident in their lives. **Unless, of course, they fail[ed] the test.** That is, if the life of any believer showed no signs of the Spirit's activity, then the Spirit was not working in him and Christ was not indwelling him. Paul had already mentioned that the Corinthians were being tested (13:5), and not for the first time (2:9). Their response to his instructions would prove whether or not their faith was genuine.

13:6. Anticipating his opponents' objection, Paul assured the Corinthians that they would **discover that** Paul and his company had **not failed the test.** Paul evidently expected some within the church to question his own Christian living (they had done it before, see 1 Cor. 4:3). In response, he admitted that even he needed to continue demonstrating saving faith in Christ (1 Cor. 9:24-27), just as the Old Testament patriarchs had to demonstrate their faith through testing (Gen. 22:1).

13:7-8. To clarify his motivations, Paul told the Corinthians that he **pray[ed] to God** that they would **not do anything wrong.** He hoped they would respond properly to his instructions. Although the Corinthians were humanly responsible to obey and to remain faithful to Christ, Paul knew that only divine power could enable them to do so (John 15:4-5; Phil. 2:12-13).

His primary desire was not that the Corinthians vindicate his reputation (compare 1 Cor. 4:3-4; 2 Cor. 12:19), but that they **do what was right even though** in the eyes of his opponents he might **seem to have failed.** From the perspective of human wisdom so deeply cherished by many Corinthians, Paul was not very impressive (10:10), and perhaps would appear to have **failed.** He exhorted the church to conform to his instructions, despite what others said about him, so that they might **do what was right**

and pleasing to God. His commitment to **the truth**, not to his reputation, led him to desire this.

To explain (**for**) why he wasn't worried about appearing to fail the test himself, Paul stated that he and his company could not **do anything against the truth**. He was confident that he and his company were true believers, and therefore that they could not actually fail the test, despite what others might conclude (compare 1 Cor. 4:3-4).

13:9. Paul's ministry to the Corinthian church proved that he wasn't interested in preserving his reputation for his own sake (1 Cor. 3:5; 4:3-4). His company was likewise uninterested in their own reputations (12:19). Rather, they were all **glad** when they appeared **weak** and the Corinthians **strong**. Their central **prayer** for the church at Corinth was that God bring them to **perfection** or completion ("that you be made complete" NASB, NKJV). Paul's deepest desire was that the Corinthians would come to maturity in their service to Christ.

13:10. To close this section, Paul summarized his motivations in yet another way. He wrote **these things** when he was **absent** so that when he arrived he might **not have to be harsh**. His harshness here was intended to render unnecessary any **harsh ... use of authority** when he visited. Paul had the power and **authority**, given to him by the **Lord**, to inflict much trouble on the church in discipline (1 Cor. 4:19-21; 2 Cor. 13:2). But he knew that discipline was not the central purpose of his authority. **The Lord** had given Paul this authority **for building ... up, not for tearing ... down**. Insofar as discipline served to build up the church, Paul was willing to inflict it when necessary. His primary desire, however, was to build up the church through positive means. In this case, he felt the best way to build up the church was to exhort and admonish them to repent (**I already gave you a warning ... now I repeat it** [13:2]), and to discipline them only if his words failed to initiate change. Paul was committed to helping the congregation in Corinth one way or another. He preferred a gentle touch, but was ready to do whatever was necessary to rescue them from sin.

FINAL GOOD-BY (13:11-14)

Paul closed this letter with a combination of brief exhortations, encouragements, and benedictions.

13:11. First, Paul quickly listed five exhortations followed by a promise of divine blessing. Five imperatives introduce the exhortations.

First, the expression translated **good-by** in the NIV is often rendered "rejoice" (NASB). The latter translation is more literal, but it may be too wooden to convey Paul's meaning. The Greek expression appears to have been both a normal greeting and farewell at this point in history (e.g. Matt. 26:49; 28:9). If this is correct, then the NIV correctly translates it simply as "**good-by**." By no means should we over read the

expression as a command to be happy. At most, Paul was wishing them well and expressing hope for their happiness.

Second, Paul again encouraged the Corinthians to **aim for perfection**. This had already been his prayer for them in 13:9 (compare “be made complete” NASB; “put things in order” NRSV; see also 1 Cor. 1:10).

Third, he asked them to **listen** to his **appeal** or to “be comforted” (NASB), from the Greek verb *parakaleo*, which may be translated either way. Both the verb and its cognate noun *paraklesis* occur frequently carry the idea of “comfort” in the earlier portions of the letter (1:3,4,5,6,7; 2:7; 7:4,6,7,13) to refer the NASB translation at this point. Throughout the letter, however, they also refer to the idea of “appeal” (2:8; 5:20; 6:1; 8:4,6,17; 9:5; 10:1; 12:8,18). Thus, Paul may have been encouraging them to take comfort, as was his wish for them expressed in the letter’s opening. Or, he may have been reinforcing in their minds the fact that he wanted them to be swayed by his arguments. Of course, he may have chosen this word especially for its ambiguity, and actually have meant both.

Fourth, He exhorted them to forsake their factions and to **be of one mind**, just as he had exhorted them in his earlier letter (1 Cor. 1:10-17; 3:1-23; 4:6-7; 12:12-27).

Fifth, and similar to the exhortation to **be of one mind**, he encouraged them to **live in peace** (compare 1 Cor. 1:3; 7:15; 14:33; 2 Cor. 1:2).

If the church at Corinth heeded these encouragements, they were assured of God’s blessing. **God** would **be with** them. Drawing upon Old Testament expressions (e.g. Gen. 21:22; 26:3,24; 28:15; 31:3; 48:21; Exod. 3:12; Num. 14:9; Deut. 31:8,23; Josh. 1:5,9; 3:7; Judg. 6:12,16; 1 Sam. 10:7; 2 Sam. 7:3; 1 Kings 11:38; 1 Chr. 17:2; 28:20; 2 Chr. 13:12; 15:2; 20:17; Isa. 41:10; 43:2,5; 45:14; Jer. 1:8,19; 15:20; 30:11; 42:11; 46:28; Hag. 1:13; 2:4; Zech. 8:23), Paul assured the Corinthian church that if they conformed to his instructions, **the God of love and peace** would bless them with his special attending his presence. The expression “**God of peace and love**” bore a double meaning in this context. On the one hand, God delights in **love and peace** (Matt. 5:9; Luke 2:14; Gal. 5:22; 1 John 4:7-8,16) and would bless the church that was full of love and peace (see 13:11a). **Love and peace** are blessings in and of themselves, and with God’s blessing the Corinthians would experience even more **love and peace** within their church.

13:12. In a manner rooted in the Jewish culture of that time, Paul encouraged the believers at Corinth to **greet one another with a holy kiss**. He did the same elsewhere (Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 1 Thess. 5:26; compare Matt. 26:49; Mark 14:45; Luke 15:20; 22:47; Acts 20:37; 1 Pet. 5:14). Even today many churches in the Middle and Far East practice light kissing on the cheek or lips among members of the same gender. To avoid erotic implications, Paul described the practice as **holy**. The kissing was that which was and is still customary among brothers and sisters in a family.

13:13. In line with his desire to see precious unity established in Corinth, Paul assured them that **all the saints** sent **their greetings**. The term simply means “holy ones” or “sanctified ones,” and is an appropriate description of all believers (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2; Eph. 1:1; Col. 1:2). It is not clear specifically whom Paul had in mind, but it is likely that the term **all** was intended to include all the believers in general with whom Paul had contact. He wanted to assure the Corinthians of the good intentions of all churches toward their congregation.

13:14. Paul’s final words to the congregation depicted his deepest desires for them. He closed with a Trinitarian benediction. This was Paul’s only full Trinitarian benediction (compare Matt. 28:19; 1 Pet. 1:1-2). Normally, he mentioned only Christ and/or God the Father (Rom. 15:5-6; 1 Cor. 16:23; Eph. 6:23-24; Phil. 4:23; 1 Thess. 3:11-12; 5:23; 2 Thess. 2:16-17; 3:5,16,18; 2 Tim. 4:22; Philem. 1:25). Sometimes he mentioned none of the persons of the Godhead specifically (Col. 4:18; 1 Tim. 6:21; Tit. 3:15). Only occasionally did he mention the Holy Spirit (Rom. 15:13).

It would appear that the associations between the persons of the trinity and the specific blessings are not particularly significant. Elsewhere, Paul associated **Christ** with **love** (Rom. 8:35; 2 Cor. 5:14; Eph. 3:19; 5:2; 1 Tim. 1:14; 2 Tim. 1:13;) and **fellowship** (1 Cor. 1:9; 10:16; Philem. 1:6). He also set **God** alongside **grace** (Rom. 1:7; 5:15; 15:15; 1 Cor. 1:3,4; 3:10; 15:10; 2 Cor. 1:2,12; 6:1; 8:1; 9:8,14; Gal. 1:3,15; 2:21; Eph. 1:2; 2:8; 3:2,7; Phil. 1:2; Col. 1:2,6; 2 Thess. 1:2,12; 2:16; 1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2; Tit. 1:4; 2:11; Philem. 1:3). Further, he associated the Holy Spirit with both **love** (Rom. 15:30; Gal. 5:22; Col. 1:8; 2 Tim. 1:7) and **grace** (i.e., *charismata* or “gifts of grace,” 1 Cor. 12:4; compare Rom. 12:6).

Paul prayed for **grace ... love and fellowship** with the persons of the Trinity because these blessings are so essential to the spiritual well-being of the church. Divine **grace** is the unmerited mercy of God toward his people, granting them forgiveness of sin (Rom. 3:24; 5:15-21; 11:6; Eph. 1:7). Divine **love** is God’s affection and loyalty toward his true people that secures them in saving a relationship with him (Rom. 5:1-11; Eph. 1:3-5). Divine **fellowship** is the experience of the nearness of God which encourages and empowers believers in their daily walk before him (Phil. 2:1-16). Paul wanted all this and more for the congregation at Corinth. Despite the troubles they had given him over the years, his heart’s desire was to see them enjoy the rich blessings of God in their lives. If they would take his epistle to heart, they would surely receive those blessings.

DIGGING DEEPER

A. Christ is speaking through me (13:3)

In one sense, whenever one proclaims the truth of Scripture, one speaks the word of God, the true word about and from God (Acts 13:5,7,44,46; 17:13; Phil. 1:14; Col.

1:25; Heb. 13:7). In another sense, when one proclaims the true gospel, it may be argued that God actually speaks through that person (1 Thess. 2:13). In the verse at hand, Paul meant partly that his words were actually spoken by Christ through him, but he also meant something more. Specifically, Paul asserted that Christ was speaking through him in order to prove that he carried Christ's delegated authority (**he is not weak in dealing with you**). He was Christ's ambassador, Christ's representative (5:19-20), and as such held a position of exceptional authority (10:8; 13:10).

The claim that Christ himself spoke his own words on his own behalf through Paul paralleled in many ways the Old Testament prophets' claims that they spoke the word of the Lord (e.g. Isa. 28:14; 38:4-5; 39:5,8; 66:5; Jer. 2:4; 7:2; 9:20; 17:20; 19:3; Ezek. 6:3; 13:2; 16:35; 25:3; Hos. 1:1; 4:1; Joel 1:1; Amos 7:16; Zech. 4:6; Mal. 1:1). When the prophets proclaimed, "This is what the sovereign Lord says" (e.g. Isa. 7:7; 28:16; 49:22; Jer. 7:20; Ezek. 2:4; 3:11,27; 5:5,7,8; Amos 3:11; 5:3; Obad. 1), they were not simply claiming that their words were true. They were claiming to speak as God's covenant ambassadors, delivering God's authoritative message to his people. In the same way, in the New Testament only the apostles claimed such authority, daring to speak the word of the Lord as God's authoritative representatives (2 Cor. 2:17; 5:19-6:1; 1 Thess. 4:15). Further, in the New Testament only the apostles were called to their offices directly by God (John 15:16; Acts 1:2,8,20-26; 9:1-6), just as God called the authoritative Old Testament prophets as his covenant ambassadors (e.g. Exod. 3:1-4:17; 1 Sam. 3:1-19; 1 Kgs. 19:16; Isa. 6:1-13; Jer. 1:4-10; Ezek. 1:1-3:27).

B. Lord Jesus Christ ... God ... the Holy Spirit (13:14)

The doctrine of the trinity — God exists in three persons, one essence — is not taught clearly in any single passage of Scripture, but the New Testament everywhere displays that its authors assumed the truth of this doctrine. Clearly the Father is a distinct person from his Son Jesus Christ (Matt. 24:36; Mark 13:32; John 5:22; 14:26; 17:1; Rom. 6:4; 2 Cor. 11:31; Gal. 1:1; Eph. 1:3), Jesus Christ is a distinct person from the Holy Spirit (Luke 12:10; John 14:26; 15:26), and the Holy Spirit is a distinct person (John 16:13; Eph. 4:30) from the Father (Luke 11:13; John 14:16,26; 15:26). Further, the Holy Spirit is divine (Luke 1:35; John 16:7; 1 Cor. 2:11), the Son Jesus Christ is divine (John 1:1; 20:28), and the Father is divine (Rom. 1:7; 15:6; 1 Cor. 1:3; 15:24; 2 Cor. 1:2). Moreover, there is only one God (John 5:44; 1 Cor. 8:5-6; Eph. 4:6; 1 Tim. 2:5).

ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION

1. When had Paul previously visited the Corinthians? How did his previous visits and relationship with the Corinthians affect his tone and content in this section of the letter? How did they affect the tone and content of the rest of the letter?
2. Very generally outline the argument of the letter. How does this last section function to conclude the argument? Do you find the argument and its conclusion persuasive?

3. How might this portion of the letter be interpreted differently if one does not recognize Paul's occasional sarcasm? What seems to be Paul's guiding emotion in this part of the letter? How does recognizing this guiding emotion help you understand the content of this section?
4. How well does the description of the Corinthian Christians' sin describe your own church and its sins? If Paul wrote to your church, what issues might he address?
5. Why did Paul give the Corinthians so many warnings? Why had he not disciplined them earlier? How was discipline supposed to demonstrate the legitimacy of Paul's authority? How intrinsic to the function of the church is discipline? How often does your church deal with disciplinary matters?
6. When should Christians examine themselves to see if they are in the faith? How does one know whether or not he/she is in the faith? Was Paul suggesting that the Corinthians should examine one another, or that each person should examine only himself/herself?
7. What was Paul's prayer for the Corinthians? What light does this prayer shed on the preceding chapters? What does it indicate about the goal and means of Christian living?
8. What authority did Paul have? Who gave it to him? Why did Paul have authority? How do his words in this letter, and in this section particularly, comply with the purpose behind his authority?
9. How do the last few verses contribute to the tone of the letter and its warnings near the end? What emotion(s) and attitude(s) do they indicate Paul had toward the Corinthians?