

Week 15, 2 Corinthians 13

Hook



Main Point: As Christians, we must care when others fall into sin, desiring their lives to reflect the Gospel that they profess.

Current Event: An age-old problem plagues diners globally: What do you do if your companion has food in his teeth or on his face? According to Helena Echlin, etiquette expert, the proper decision is to assist, with the following sequence of actions.

1. Pause and examine to ensure that the “food” isn’t something else, such as a mole.
2. If food, give another moment for the offender to notice the food and remove it without being prompted.
3. If dining with a group, provide a nonverbal hint, wiping one’s own mouth, for instance.
4. If dining alone, or if the hint provided in step 3 is not acknowledged, quietly and discreetly say something.¹

Although saying something might feel uncomfortable, you have the opportunity and obligation to save someone from walking this earth looking like a fool.

Would you prefer that someone tell you or keep silent if you were to have food on your face/in your teeth?

Do you take action or keep silent when someone has food on her face/in her teeth?

Transition: Paul concludes 2 Corinthians with a plea for his beloved spiritual children to self-examine and rid themselves of sin.

¹ <http://www.chowhound.com/food-news/54425/is-there-something-in-my-teeth/>

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Book

Main Point: As Christians, we must care when others fall into sin, desiring their lives to reflect the Gospel that they profess.

Text Summary: 2 Corinthians 13 From the end of chapter 12, Paul urges the Corinthians to examine their actions and their pull toward immorality. Despite what they believe, though Paul has shown weakness in demeanor and disposition, he assures them he will not be weak when it comes to the consequences for their actions. Paul doesn't want to bring his authority down on them, but Paul makes it known that he will. Instead, Paul wants the Corinthians to examine their personal commitment to the Gospel and if it is truly genuine and sincere, then so is Paul's. Paul tells them to examine his faithfulness to the Gospel by examining their own faithfulness. He calls for restoration and unity among this body of believers, holding fast to the one, true confession.

2 Corinthians 13:1–6

Sub-Point: Our beliefs in the Gospel must result in living in the power of the Gospel.

Verses 1–4 In the last portion of Paul's letter, his heart is clear: He desires spiritual health and Gospel depth in the lives of the Corinthian believers. Chapter 12 closed citing Paul's honest fear that when he returned to Corinth, what he returned to would not be an encouraging sight. Paul knew that God had given him the authority and the power to rebuke sin and confront the immoral, but that didn't mean it was enjoyable for Paul.

At the opening of chapter 13, Paul reminds his audience this is not the first time he has pointed out their battles for holiness and their departure from Gospel living (v. 2). And yet, the Corinthians remain in their sin and pursuit of the world and its godless provisions. While the Corinthians remain dear to Paul, their feelings for him are not on the same level; they find themselves doubting Paul's legitimacy and his sincerity in the Gospel (v. 3). As we have traveled through 2 Corinthians, we know this to be nothing. Paul warns in verse 3 that in his next visit, God would provide proof of Paul's apostolic authority, which should cause the Corinthians to seek repentance to avoid such a display. Paul is weak but Christ who works through him is strong (v. 3).²

One of the reasons that some Corinthians doubt Paul's legitimacy is his meekness and gentleness of spirit. The Corinthians value strength and power in their orators. Paul's

² David K. Lowery, "2 Corinthians," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 584.

disposition leaves them doubting his Gospel witness.

Paul absorbs this accusation and points the Corinthians to the Cross (v. 4). He explains that Jesus was crucified in weakness, meaning He didn't retaliate even though He was able.³ Christ's power was not seen in His inability to fight back, but rather in His refusal to fight back even though He was most assuredly able. Harris notes, "People who are weak in human estimation because they seek to do God's will are, in fact, supremely strong."⁴

Paul shares in Christ's "weakness" but he also shares in the power of the risen Lord. The apostle's previous visit was a display of "weakness"; this visit would be a display of power (v. 4).⁵

Why does God work through human weakness?

How does our weakness display His power?

For what reason does Paul hope that the Corinthians "pass the test"?

Verses 5–6 How does Paul respond to the Corinthians questioning his legitimacy? He urges the Corinthians to stop examining his life and look inward (v. 5). Reflect on your own Gospel allegiance, Paul says. The apostle is likely challenging the readers to examine their own sanctification; did their actions reflect a genuine conversion by responding to obedience to God's will? To succeed in the test is to be obedient and do what is right, to fail the test is to be disobedient and be subject to God's discipline.⁶

Kruse explains that if the Corinthians come out as committed believers, holding on to the faith, that confirms Paul and the apostles' faith as well (v. 6).⁷ Paul says, "If Christ is in you, then He is in me." Paul wants them to forget about the cultural noise around them and examine their hearts. This is his plea in verse 5. Paul's desire in verse 6 for him and his colleagues to "pass the test" is not primarily for his vindication, but their avoidance of wrongdoing and their commitment to the Gospel message.⁸

In your own words, define what it means to examine yourself, according to verse 5. Why is

³ Murray J. Harris, "2 Corinthians" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longeman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2008), 541.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Murray J. Harris, "2 Corinthians" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longeman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1976), 403.

⁶ David K. Lowery, "2 Corinthians," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 585.

⁷ Kruse, 212.

⁸ Harris, 542.

self-examination important?

Practically, how would we live differently if we lived by the statement, “We are sinners first and sinned against second”?

Why are the actions of a Christian important? What Scripture passages come to mind?

2 Corinthians 13:7–14

Sub-Point: Our love for the Gospel must translate into our love for others’ Gospel confession.

Paul shows in verse 7 he is not concerned with his own life. He is concerned for the Corinthians and their faith. This is what it means to love the Gospel. A Christian’s love for the Gospel doesn’t stop at personal conviction and personal holiness. The Christian’s passion and commitment to the Gospel bleeds over into love for others and others’ joy in the hope of Christ.

This is Paul’s heartfelt confession to his dear friends. His prayer is that they be kept from sin and falling into immorality. He is passionate about their holiness and outward display of the beauty of Christ. This has nothing to do with Paul’s reputation. It has everything to do with his brothers’ and sisters’ commitment to Christ and His reputation.

Notice the consistency of Paul’s deep care for these believers. Paul’s faithfulness to and love for the Gospel overflows into his faithfulness to and love for God’s children. These people are Paul’s family and he yearns for their spiritual growth and maturation.

Look at verse 9 and his transparency. Paul says he doesn’t mind if he is weak if his weakness means increased strength for the Corinthians’ faith. His desire is to build them up and encourage them, not punish them and rebuke them. This is what he says in verse 10, praying for their improvement so that when he arrives they can rejoice in the Lord’s work instead of his having to exert discipline due to their disobedience.

Paul appeals to their love for one another and exhorts them to seek unity and restoration (v. 11). Paul’s desire is that they aim for restoration, listen to his appeal, be of one mind, live in peace, and attain this unity only through a dependence on God, who supplies love.⁹ Unity was expressed in this time by a holy kiss.¹⁰

Why is love for one another important in the Christian’s battle against sin?

⁹ David K. Lowery, “2 Corinthians,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 585.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 585.

Explain what it means to live in peace with one another.

Paul was willing to use discipline, but sought another way first. What makes spiritual discipline and rebuke difficult?

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Took



Main Point: As Christians, we must care when others fall into sin, desiring their lives to reflect the Gospel that they profess.

Group Discussion: Reflect on the book of 2 Corinthians and discuss the following:

What did the Lord teach you through this study?

After walking through 1 and 2 Corinthians, how would you describe the heart of Paul?

What adjustments in your walk with Christ has the book of 2 Corinthians challenged you to make?

Lesson Conclusion: The Corinthians were very dear to Paul, but so was the Gospel of Christ. Paul wanted his visit to be one of encouragement, not discipline. Instead of making their doubts and their concerns about his own reputation, Paul cared more about their commitment to Christ. It wasn't about loyalty to Paul; it was about loyalty to Jesus. Make no mistake, Paul knew that spiritual discipline is necessary at times and that it can bring positive results. But before he took that route, Paul wanted to appeal to the personal faith of his dear brothers and sisters in Christ. This is a challenge to Christians, to hold the Gospel so dearly that the lives of other Christians are dear to us as well.

Challenge

Be prepared to confront other Christians in your life with the truth of right living. Scripture calls us to give counsel, rebuke and exhortation to one another. We must recognize when these times occur and what specific care is required. Paul was ready to discipline but appealed to a gentler way. We need to listen to the Spirit and follow His lead.

Pray for others. We need to be constant in prayer for the protection of other Christians. We know that during this time and these days that Satan seeks to attack believers and wipe away their credibility and in turn, the credibility of the Gospel. Knowing this, just as Paul prayed for the Corinthians to flee immorality, we must pray also for others, that they would not do wrong

and would continue to walk humbly with the Lord.

Seek restoration. As always, we must seek restoration when there is division. As Jesus calls us in Matthew 5, we must be peacemakers and bring peace wherever it is necessary. This means we comfort one another. This means we seek agreement with one another where it is needed, not merely lying down to keep the peace. We must always be agents of restoration and reconciliation, just as Jesus was for us with the Father.