

Put Things in Order 2 Corinthians 13:11-13

What do you do when you have been criticized and your sincerity has been questioned by members of your family? How do you handle the stress? Do you wish good or evil on the persons that are causing you trouble? Well, if you prayer for and encourage those who have deliberately made themselves your enemy, then you are like Paul. Paul had visited Corinth on his second and third missionary journeys and the people were dear to him. Now Paul is writing, as a father to correct and encourage his children. To begin with, Paul encouraged the Corinthians by his personal prayers on their behalf (2 Cor. 13:9). He is making his final appeal and calling for unity, telling them to aim for perfection, to listen to his appeal, be of one mind, and live in peace. But he also knew this unity could be realized only as they depended on God who supplies love and peace.

Paul prayed for their perfection, “spiritual maturity,” for them to mend their ways, “correct the wrong behavior” and “put things in order.” This does not mean absolute sinless perfection, because this will not happen until we are with the Lord. The word for perfection in the Greek means “to be fitted out, to be equipped.” As a medical term, it means “to set a broken bone, to adjust a twisted limb.” It also means “to outfit a ship for a voyage” and “to equip an army for battle.” So Paul prayer is that they would be equipped for their ministry. Another way of saying this is “put things in order”

Paul wanted them to walk closely to the risen Lord so that they would be equipped. It was not through their own power, but through the ministry of our risen Lord that God perfect or equips God’s people (Heb. 13:20–21). Jesus uses the Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16–17) in the fellowship of the local church (Eph. 4:11–16) to equip the church for life and service. Jesus also sometimes uses suffering as

a tool to equip us (1 Peter 5:10). As Christians pray for one another (1 Thes. 3:10) and personally assist one another (Gal. 6:1), the exalted Lord ministers to the church and makes us fit for ministry.

Paul understood that balanced Christian growth and ministry is impossible in isolation. Someone has said that you can no more raise one Christian than you can raise one bee. Christians belong to each other and need each other. A baby must grow up in a loving family if it is to be balanced and normal. The emphasis today on the “individual Christian,” as apart from his or her place in a local assembly, is wrong and very dangerous. We are sheep, and we must flock together. We are members of the same body, and we must minister to one another.

Paul wrote this letter, one of four that he wrote to this particular church to correct and encourage them. Paul wrote this letter to meet the immediate needs of a local congregation, but we today benefit from it because it is a part of the inspired Word of God. Paul’s great desire was that the congregation’s obedience to the letter solve their problems, so that he would not have to exercise authority when he visited them. In the same way that a father hopes his words of advice will be followed by his children!

He finishes his letter with a hope. He has three hopes for the Corinthians. *(a)* He hopes that they will go onwards to perfection. There can be no standing still in the Christian life. The person who is not advancing is slipping back. The Christian is a person who is ever on the way to God, and therefore each day, by the grace of Christ, they must be a little more fit to stand God’s scrutiny. *(b)* He hopes that they will listen to the exhortation he has given them. It takes a big person to listen to hard advice. We would often be a great deal better off if we would stop talking about what we want and begin listening to the voices of the wise, and especially to the voice of Jesus Christ. *(c)* He hopes that they will live in agreement and in

peace. No congregation can worship the God of peace in the spirit of bitterness. Christians must love each other before their love for God has any reality.

Paul knew sometimes the minister of the Word must tear down before he or she can build up (see Jer. 1:7–10). It is like the farmer who must pull up the weeds before he can plant the seeds and get a good crop. Paul had to tear down the wrong thinking in the minds of the Corinthians (2 Cor. 10:4–6) before he could build up the truth in their hearts and minds. The negative attitude of the Corinthians made it necessary for Paul to *destroy*, but his great desire was to *build*.

Paul knew it is much easier to take a new believer and teach him or her the Word than it is to try to change the wrong thinking of an older saint. Wrong ideas can “hold out” against the truth for a long time, until the Spirit of God demolishes the walls in the mind.

Paul encouraged the saints to cultivate grace, love, and peace (2 Cor. 13:11–12). Rejoice! “Be mature! Be restored and fitted for life!” “Be encouraged!” In spite of all their sins and problems, they had every right to be encouraged.

To live in peace was a needed admonition, to them and every Christian. In the church of Corinth there were divisions and dissensions in the church (see 2 Cor. 12:20). But, if they practiced love and sought to be of one mind, the wars would cease and they would enjoy peace in their fellowship. Now to be of one mind does not mean that we all agree on everything, but that we agree not to disagree over matters that are not essential.

We must remember our God is the “God of love and peace” (2 Cor. 13:11). The question for us is: Can the outside world tell that from the way we live and the way we conduct the business of the church? “Behold how they love one another!” was what the world said about the early church, but we have to work at this.

Paul asked the Christians to show outward signs of their inward peace with each other. Since ancient times, the kiss has been a form of greeting and a gesture of

love and fellowship. The early church used the kiss of peace and kiss of love as evidences of their affection and concern for one another. It was a “holy kiss,” sanctified because of their devotion to Jesus Christ. Members of the early church often kissed new believers after their baptism and thus welcomed them into the fellowship. Today we embrace or kiss to greet each other in love.

The everyday fellowship of God’s people is important to the church. We must greet each other in other places as well as the fellowship of the assembly, and we must show concern for each other. In giving this admonition, Paul was certainly hitting hard at one of the most serious problems in the church: their division and lack of concern for one another.

Finally, he finishes with a blessing. After the severity, the struggle and the debate, there comes the serenity of the benediction. One of the best ways of making peace with our enemies is to pray for them, for no one can hate a person and pray for them at the same time. And so Paul ends his letter to the troubled Church of Corinth with the benediction ringing in our ears. The way has been hard, but the last word is peace.¹

The closing benediction in 2 Corinthians 13:14 is one of the most beloved and used in the church. It emphasizes the Trinity (see Matt. 28:19) and the blessings we can receive because we belong to God. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ reminds us of His birth, when He became poor in order to make us rich (see 2 Cor. 8:9). The love of God takes us to Calvary where God gave His Son as the sacrifice for our sins (John 3:16). The communion of the Holy Spirit reminds us of Pentecost, when the Spirit of God came and formed the church (Acts 2).

The Corinthian believers then, and all believers now, desperately needed the blessings of grace, love, and communion. Many then and now emphasize Law

¹ Barclay, William, lecturer in the University of Glasgow (Hrsg.): *The Letters to the Corinthians*. Philadelphia : The Westminster Press, 2000, c1975 (The Daily Study Bible Series, Rev. Ed), S. 266

instead of grace, exclusiveness instead of love, and independence rather than communion (fellowship). The competition in the Corinthian church, resulting in divisions, would have been solved if the people had only lived by God's grace and love.

The church is a miracle, and it can be sustained only by the miracle ministry of God. No amount of human skill, talents, or programs can make the church what it ought to be. Only God can do that. If each believer is depending on the grace of God, walking in the love of God, and participating in the fellowship of the Spirit, not walking in the flesh, then he or she will be a part of the answer and not a part of the problem. We will be *living* this benediction—and being a benediction to others!

Parents, ask God to make you that kind of Christian, and make your children those kinds of Christians.

Be encouraged—and then encourage others.^{2 3 4}

²Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. 2 Co 13:9

³Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:585

⁴Omanon, Roger L. ; Ellington, John: *A Handbook on Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians*. New York : United Bible Societies, 1993 (UBS Handbook Series; Helps for Translators), S. 244