

Strengths and Weaknesses in a Believer's Walk of Faith

2 Corinthians 13

2 Corinthians 13: This will be the third time I am coming to you. "By the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established." 2 I have told you before, and foretell as if I were present the second time, and now being absent I write to those who have sinned before, and to all the rest, that if I come again I will not spare— 3 since you seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, who is not weak toward you, but mighty in you. 4 For though He was crucified in weakness, yet He lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, but we shall live with Him by the power of God toward you. 5 Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?— unless indeed you are disqualified. 6 But I trust that you will know that we are not disqualified. 7 Now I pray to God that you do no evil, not that we should appear approved, but that you should do what is honorable, though we may seem disqualified. 8 For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth. 9 For we are glad when we are weak and you are strong. And this also we pray, that you may be made complete. 10 Therefore I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness, according to the authority which the Lord has given me for edification and not for destruction. 11 Finally, brethren, farewell. Become complete. Be of good comfort, be of one mind, 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 communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

Background Notes

In verse 1 Paul stated that he would be coming to Corinth for a third time. This is the visit that he mentioned back in 2 Corinthians 12:14: *"Now for the third time I am ready to come to you."* Remember, Paul's first visit to Corinth was when the church was founded, recorded in Acts 18. This second visit appears to have been the "painful visit" mentioned in 2 Corinthians 2:1. Paul made this visit when he was ministering at Ephesus, on his third missionary journey.

"But I determined this within myself, that I would not come again to you in sorrow."

Now Paul was proposing a third visit, and the apostle did make this third visit to Corinth near the end of his third missionary journey. Acts 20:3 says that Paul spent three months at Corinth at that time.

The logical question at this point is: How successful was Paul's ministry among the Corinthians during this third three-month visit? Was the collection for the needy saints in Jerusalem successfully completed? Did the Corinthians respond to Paul's exhortation to excommunicate the false apostles and correct the false teaching at Corinth? Was Paul able to spend the three months in ministry, building up the Corinthian believers in the faith? Or did Paul have to conduct the

disciplinary “trials” that he mentioned in verse 1? Was Paul able to fulfill his desire of preaching the gospel even farther west, beyond the regions of Corinth (as stated in chapter 1)?

We believe that the answer to all of these questions is “yes”. How do we know this? We know it because Paul’s epistle to the Romans was written from Corinth during the three months that Paul was there. In Romans 15:25-27, Paul wrote, *“But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem. It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things.”* So the Corinthians willingly gave and completed the gift for the poor saints in Jerusalem.

In reference to dealing with the false apostles who had infiltrated the Corinthian church and were undermining the authority of the apostle Paul, it seems that this problem was resolved as well. In Romans 15:23-24 Paul wrote, *“But now no longer having a place [or, work] in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come to you, whenever I journey to Spain, I shall come to you.”* There’s no way the apostle Paul would have written this if problems still remained at Corinth. Paul would not have left Corinth after three months if the problems of the false “apostles” and unfinished discipline still existed there.

Doctrinal Points

1. It is not inconsistent for believers to exhibit both power and weakness in their walk of faith.

From some of the Christian testimonies that we hear today, it would be easy to get the idea that the Christian life should be one of unending power, and that a Christian should never exhibit weakness of any kind. But that kind of teaching is not biblical. Look again at verse 4: *“For though He was crucified in weakness, yet He lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, but we shall live with Him by the power of God toward you.”* So it is not inconsistent for believers to exhibit both power and weakness in their walk of faith.

In our walk of faith, we are to follow the pattern set by our Lord. He certainly displayed the power of God in His miracles of healing and serving others, but He followed the course of weakness and suffering to the cross. We read in Matthew 26:53 that on the cross the Lord could have displayed the power of God and called on more than twelve legions of angels - but for our sake He chose the path of weakness and crucifixion.

Looking back to 2 Corinthians 12, the same pattern was exhibited in the life of the apostle Paul. In verse 12, Paul said the power of God was exhibited in his life, even to the point of signs and wonders and miracles. Yet at the same time he had a “thorn in the flesh” that caused him difficulty and weakness. *“And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ*

may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong"(12:9-10).

It is not inconsistent for believers to exhibit both power and weakness in their walk of faith. That is the way it is in the walk of faith.

Now in the context of chapter 13, Paul spoke about the power of God that would be evident to the Corinthians if he had to exercise discipline during his third visit – and he *would* have to exercise discipline if the Corinthians did not deal with the problem of the false teaching and false apostles. Paul assured them that he did not want to come to them in a disciplinary way, but rather he wanted to use the power of God for building them up. *"For we are glad when we are weak and you are strong. And this also we pray, that you may be made complete. Therefore I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness, according to the authority which the Lord has given me for edification and not for destruction"(v9-10).* It is not inconsistent for believers to exhibit both weakness and power in their walk of faith.

2. It is not inconsistent for believers to exhibit both assurance and questions in their walk of faith.

Notice - we didn't say "assurance and *doubts*," but "assurance and *questions*." The Lord wants us to have assurance of our salvation in our Christian faith, but it is not wrong to ask questions about the Christian faith. In fact, verse 5 says that it's a good thing to question ourselves – to examine what we believe in reference to our salvation, and examine our lives in reference to our sanctification.

In fact, in the context of this chapter, Paul told the Corinthians that they *should* examine themselves (and not Paul), about their Christian faith. If they passed the test, it would prove they were truly saved, because they were doing the right thing. It would also prove that Paul was a true apostle, because he had led them to Christ.

However, if they failed the test it would prove that they were not walking in the faith, and maybe not even truly saved. It is not wrong to make sure of your salvation. Are you walking with the Lord? Are you obeying the Lord? Hebrews 5:9 says, *"Christ became the author of eternal salvation to all those who obey Him."* Are you obedient to the Lord in all areas of your Christian life? If you're not, is it because you are negligent or backslidden? Or is possible that you are not really a true believer?

Verses like verse 5 are not included in the Bible to make us *doubt* our salvation. They are included to motivate us to *make sure* of our salvation by examining what we believe, and by questioning and examining our walk of faith. It is not inconsistent for Christians to exhibit both assurance and questions in their walk of faith.

Practical Application

Put the emphasis on “holy” in “holy kiss.”

In the conclusion to his letter of 2 Corinthians, it's clear that the apostle was very concerned that the Corinthian Christians come to peace and unity, and that they should grow together in truth and love. This was the will of God for churches then, and it's the will of God for churches today as well. The benediction of the Trinity is included in Paul's farewell: the love of God, the grace of the Lord Jesus, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit (v14).

In verse 12 Paul said, *“Greet one another with a holy kiss.”* There is some evidence that the holy kiss was only between members of the same sex in the first century church, but we can't be sure of this.

In any case, was this exhortation meant to be trans-cultural, and still good for today? Or was this teaching only for the 1st century church culture? There is no indication that the “holy kiss” was only for 1st century believers. However, whether in the 1st century or in the twenty-first century - remember, it is to be a *holy* kiss.

Put the emphasis on “holy” in “holy kiss.”