

2 Cor 13:7-14 Final Admonitions and Benedictions

In March 1942, General Douglas MacArthur was forced to flee the Philippines in the face of an aggressive Japanese invasion. MacArthur, his family and a small team of close associates fled to Australia. Shortly thereafter, he uttered the famous words, “I shall return.” MacArthur vowed that he would return and liberate the Philippines from the Japanese. True to his word, in 1944, MacArthur landed in the Philippines and began fulfilling his promise. In September 1945, he accepted a formal surrender from the Japanese on board the USS Missouri.¹

2 Cor 13 is Paul’s “I shall return” statement. He promises that he’s about ready to return to their church (.1), and when he does, he’s hoping not to “use sharpness” (.10). He does not want to be harsh with them. His intent is to build up the church, not destroy it. They can avoid a difficult interaction with him if they will simply do the right thing.

In this last part of the book, Paul states his desires or intentions for the church. He hopes that the church will turn from evil and do the right thing. These are spiritual goals that we should have as well. We should be pursuing these same virtues and qualities.

So let’s consider ...

I. Paul’s final admonitions/commands .7-10

.7a Note that Paul is praying for this outcome; he’s asking for God’s help for this church to avoid evil and do right.

A. .7a Do no wrong/evil.

He uses the common word for “evil/bad,” and he probably has in mind the list of sins in 12:20b and .21b. Quit committing sins of the flesh and of the spirit that cause so much disunity. These sins must be rooted out and eliminated before he visits.

¹ <https://tij.tv/shows/i-will-return-general-douglas-macarthur/>

B. .7c Do what is right.

It's translated as "honorable" here, but it's just the common word for "good."

If the church would just do right and avoid evil, he would not have to "use sharpness" (.10) with them. They could avoid a stern rebuke if they would just make the right choices.

App: Much of the Christian life boils down to avoiding evil and doing good. Choices in life often come down to good and bad, proper or improper. Holy living amounts to avoiding evil and doing good. That's how we should see many of life's choices—black or white, good or evil.

C. .7b, d Ignore appearances.

1. "Not that we should appear approved" (δόκιμος).

Although the entire book is an explanation of his ministry and a defense of himself, he's not really all that concerned about what the Corinthians think of him at this point. He was not really concerned about their approval or disapproval of him. He's not motivated by appearances—how they view him.

2. Though we may seem disqualified (ἀδόκιμος)

I.e., even if you don't approve of us, even if it seems as if we have failed, he's urging them to follow his advice. The false teachers were claiming that Paul was not a real apostle. They criticized him for all kinds of faults and failures.

Paul says that they could think that if they wanted to; it would not stop Paul from doing his duty as an apostle. Their criticism is not going to stop him from doing what he has to do.

App: Appearances are important to a certain degree; we must guard our testimony and reputation. However, testimony and reputation are not the highest concerns. If we put God first, some people will probably not hold us in high esteem; people will disapprove of us. So we have to carry on in spite of what others think of us.

We want to maintain a good testimony and reputation, but we have to do the right thing no matter what others think of us. We can't be overly concerned about appearances. "Maybe you think I have failed as an apostle, but that doesn't change things."

D. .8 Pursue the truth.

1. Truth is truth. We must deal with reality, not mere appearances. We evaluate all appearances by the truth.
2. Paul had this personal commitment—do nothing against the truth but only for the truth.

Obviously, he does not mean that no one can attack or deny the truth. But Paul and his colleagues were trying to uphold and defend the truth. Unlike the false teachers, their ministry was truthful and honest. They were committed to the truth no matter where it took them.

3. The Corinthians were not really pursuing the truth. They had been listening to the false teachers and had turned away from the truth. And that led them into all kinds of trouble.

App: Like Paul, we should be doing nothing against the truth but only for the truth.

Modern culture does not accept the idea of absolute truth. They speak in terms of "my truth" or "your truth," but not in terms of "the truth." The modern world wants to deny the idea of truth.

We believe in God's truth. John 17:17—"thy word is truth." We can know the truth, and the truth will set us free. So we must have a high commitment to truth. We should follow the truth no matter where it takes us, even if the truth is unpopular or causes conflict.

E. .9a Think realistically about human strength.

1. Remember that one of the criticisms against Paul was that he was weak. He was not strong physically, and his speaking ability were rather weak. His letters were strong and weighty, but his personal demeanor was weak.

2. Paul appeared to be weak because he was humble and gracious. He tried to persuade gently and humbly, not sternly or harshly.
3. So he admits here somewhat sarcastically that he was weak and the Corinthians are strong. I think he's speaking ironically or sarcastically here; the opposite was true.
4. He's just saying he doesn't care if they think he's weak and that they are strong. What they think of him will not change what he will do when he arrives at the church.

F. .9b Be orderly. "complete," KJV "your perfection"

1. The word here (κατάρτισις) means "to be fit, to be equipped, to be orderly, to be qualified."

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." In Matthew 4:21, it is translated "mending nets."²

So the word refers to things being in order and in good repair, to be fit, adequate, or qualified. He's not talking about sinless perfection. He's talking about something being in good order or well equipped.

2. The Corinthians lacked this quality; they were guilty of serious disorder; they lacked fitness; they were ill-equipped; they were disqualified; they needed some mending.

The people of this church were guilty of serious sins (12:20-21). So the implication is that they needed to repent of these sins and bring their lives back into order.

² Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 679.

App: Spiritual fitness and good order is an aspect of spiritual maturity. All of us ought to be pursuing good order and spiritual fitness. We need to get our act together spiritually. We need to fix our issues, mend what is broken, put our lives into good order. One of the signs of spiritual maturity is an orderly lifestyle.

G. .10 Be prepared (for my next visit).

Verse 10 is a summary of the entire letter in one sentence. Paul wrote this letter to inform them and warn them about his impending visit.

1. At his upcoming visit, he wants to avoid “sharpness.” The word (ἀποτόμως) refers to harshness, severity. He didn’t want to be stern with them; he wanted to be pleasant and gracious.
2. Notice the word “authority.” This is a not-so-subtle reminder that Paul has apostolic authority over this church—whether they recognize it or not. He certainly wants to encourage and edify the church, but he may be forced to deal with them very sternly.
3. He could use sharpness/harshness because of his authority. The Lord gave him authority, but the intent of the authority is building up, not tearing down. He wants to avoid a sharp, harsh interaction with the church. He wanted to build the church up, not tear it down.

Cf. Jeremiah 1:10 See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, To root out and to pull down, To destroy and to throw down, To build and to plant.

4. The fact that he has to warn them or threaten sharpness implies that they were lacking or failing in these areas. They were doing evil. They were paying attention to external appearances. They were working against the truth, not for it. They thought they were strong, when in reality they were weak. They lacked good order and were living like disqualified people, almost like unbelievers. All that needed to be torn down.

5. If they didn't get their house in order—if they did not repent of the sins he had listed—Paul would have to use his authority as an apostle to root out and pull down. If they don't set things in order, he'll do it, and it will not be pleasant.

Illus.: Home renovation programs—This Old House, Fixer Upper, Home Town. They inevitably begin a project with tear out/demolition—“demo day.” They have to tear down before building up.

Sometimes that's what has to happen spiritually as well—we have to tear out some things before building up or installing new things. Sometimes a sledge hammer is necessary at the beginning of the process. Paul has warned them that he'll come in there with a sledge hammer if they don't deal with the sins he's listed.

You have to expose error when you teach the truth. You have to rebuke sin so that people live holy. Some people might see rebuke as tearing down, but the intent is not to destroy; the intent is to build up.

A pastor is not an apostle, but *if he's functioning biblically*, the pastor has a degree of authority. He is the overseer, the president, the shepherd of the flock. It's his responsibility to both tear down and build up. He has the authority to use sharpness if necessary. It's a lot more pleasant to build up than to tear down, but sometimes tear out is necessary. We have to rebuke sharply so that people are sound in the faith. That's often part of the building up process.

When a spiritual leader has to use sharpness, the intent or purpose is to build up the church. “We do all things for your edification.” Even sharp rebuke is ultimately for the purpose of building up.

Ephesians 4:22–24 that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, 23 and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

Spiritual growth/edification is a process of putting off and putting on, tearing out and building up. We can do much of that ourselves, or if we don't, others may get involved.

How do we avoid sharpness from our spiritual leaders? How do we avoid harsh rebuke? We take Paul's advice here—we repent of our sins and change our behavior. We quit doing evil and we start doing good.

It's always best for us to deal with our own weaknesses, failures, and problems before someone else has to rebuke us sharply for them. That's true personally, and it's also true for a church. We should be constantly making sure that we are doing what's right, truthful, and fitting. If we do that, we'll avoid sharp rebuke.

What needs to be torn out of your life? What needs to be demolished so that you can start building?

Trans: Paul is hoping that the people listen to his admonitions so that when he arrives, they can have a peaceful and pleasant time together. He'd rather spend time building the people up rather than tearing them down. But he's ready to use sharpness if it's required.

All of us would rather enjoy being encouraged and built up in the faith rather than enduring sharp rebuke.

II. Paul's final appeals, greetings, and benediction .11-14

A. .11 He appeals to the church to pursue Christian virtues.

1. Be mature/complete (KJV "perfect") (καταρτίζω), "mend your ways" — same root word as vs. 9; he's urging them towards orderliness, fitness, maturity; he wants them to be equipped, to be restored to good working order.
2. Be of good comfort (παρακαλέω)—be encouraged, accept encouragement. He'd rather encourage than rebuke. He's urging them here to accept and apply his exhortations to them so he can avoid rebuking them further.

3. Be united; of one mind—lit. “think the same” (τὸ αὐτὸ φρονεῖτε). That means that we are agreeable; we seek consensus and unity. Sometimes we have to agree to disagree, but we can do it in an agreeable manner.

Unity in the church is a very high value that we must pursue constantly.

1 Corinthians 1:10 Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.

Philippians 2:2 fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.

4. Live in peace; be peaceful (εἰρηνεύω)—the church should be a peaceful place; we must avoid division, discord, and conflict at church. We want peace and harmony. We don’t want tension or strained relationships; we want peace.

Romans 12:18 ... live peaceably with all men.

App: These virtues should characterize the church: it should be a place of good order, a place where people are encouraged and equipped, a place for people of like faith and practice—they think the same about the Christian life, and a place of peace and tranquility. That should be the normal experience at church. That’s what visitors should experience when they attend our church—order, edification, unity, and peace.

The most serious problems in many churches are division and lack of concern for one another. It does not take much to upset the orderliness, encouragement, unity, and peace of the church. But woe to the person who is responsible for upsetting the peace and good order of the church. If someone is upsetting the church, he deserves sharp rebuke.

- B. .11end If you follow his advice, you’ll experience God’s love and peace. If you pursue these virtues, you can expect God to be with you.

App: As a church, we can expect God’s blessings when we have these virtues. God’s blessing upon us is dependent on our godly behavior and attitudes. If we want to enjoy God’s blessings and presence with us, we must have these virtues.

C. .12 He urges them to express brotherly love and unity—“greet one another with a holy kiss.”

1. A kiss on the cheek was a common form of greeting in the NT era. For Christians, the kiss expressed union and fellowship within the family of God.
2. This kind of kiss had no romantic intentions. It expressed Christian love, not romantic interest.
3. A kiss like this was usually reserved for people of the same sex. In the early church, men usually sat on one side of the church and women on the other side. Men kissed men, and women kissed women. But the kiss was much like the way we think of a handshake. Cf. kissing the cheek in France, Italy.
4. In our context, we greet one another with a holy handshake. In some churches, they do a lot of hugging, but you don’t see too many people kissing each other on the cheek. And I don’t guess that most of us would want people coming up to us and kissing us on the cheek. Maybe it’s different for ladies; you wouldn’t mind another lady kissing you on the cheek??

App: The point of a holy kiss was that it expressed friendship, fellowship, brotherly love and unity. Friends greet friends with a holy kiss or a holy handshake, or maybe a hug. These are appropriate expressions of love, fellowship, and unity.

We ought to be able to be friendly and civil to everyone at church. Everyone who comes in the doors should experience a warm welcome—maybe not a kiss or a hug, but certainly a handshake, a smile, and a warm word of greeting.

The church should be a place of warm personal relationships and close friendships. We should be abundant in our expressions of love, unity, and friendship.

D. He passes along the greetings of “all the saints.”

1. The postscript of the book says that Paul wrote this while he was in Philippi. That’s where the Philippian church was located, so “all the saints” probably refers to the believers in that church and perhaps also his co-workers. Other believers were interested in the well-being of the church in Corinth.

2. Every Christian has spiritual ties with “all the saints.” Every believer is a saint, and every believer stands in spiritual unity with all the other saints.

App: We should promote fellowship and cooperation among like-minded churches. We should see ourselves as cooperating in ministry and worship with all the other saints.

We should pray for and support the work of the saints locally, around the state, in our nation, and around the world. It’s a blessing to be in fellowship with other believers from other like-minded churches.

E. He finishes with a Trinitarian blessing. May they enjoy God’s presence through

1. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ

2. The love of God

3. The fellowship/communion (κοινωνία) of the Holy Spirit

This is a prayer that God in his Triune nature may endow the saints with his own virtues—grace, love, and fellowship.

Quote: The grace of Christ banishes self-assertiveness and self-seeking, the love of God puts jealousy and anger to flight, while the fellowship created by the Spirit leaves no room for quarreling and factions (cf. 12:21).³

When these virtues are within us and within our church, it makes church a far more pleasant and peaceful place. This should be our prayer as well.

So Paul finishes his long letter that's been full of hard things on a high note. Even though he's threatened to "use sharpness" when he visits, he prays for God's blessing upon them. He encourages the church with God's blessings even though there are some severe problems in the church.

Hopefully, we don't have the same problems that the church at Corinth had, but we have our own set of problems and faults. But despite our weaknesses, we trust that God is with us. We experience the grace of Jesus, the love of God, and the fellowship of the HSp in our church. We are striving for good order, encouragement, unity, and peace. We want our church to be filled with warm affection and brotherly love. We want to be built up and strengthened in the faith. We should be praying for the Lord to be with us so that we can fulfill his purposes for our church. And we should be striving to develop these virtues within our own lives.

³ Murray J. Harris, "2 Corinthians," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Romans through Galatians*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 10 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 405.