

(2 Corinthians) ch.12:1-13:14

by Zac Poonen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of humility and dependence on God, and how God's power is made perfect in human weakness.

Duration: 43:45

Scripture: Matthew 7:15, 2 Corinthians 12:9

Topics: "Spiritual Humility", "Christian Character"

Description

In this sermon, the Apostle Paul addresses the Corinthians and emphasizes that he will not show leniency when dealing with sin in their midst. He assures them that his power comes from Christ speaking through him, despite his unimpressive personality and lack of eloquence. Paul compares his weakness to that of Jesus, who was crucified in weakness but brought to life by the power of God. He then discusses his own experiences and visions, but refrains from boasting about them to avoid being seen as greater than he truly is. Overall, Paul emphasizes the importance of assessing a person's character based on their words and conduct.

Transcript

Let's turn today to 2 Corinthians and chapter 12. In our last study, we were considering how the Apostle Paul was seeking to show the things in which God had enabled him to boast. Not the type of things that the false apostles were boasting in, that which the world considers big and great, but that he had suffered for the Lord's sake in various ways, and been imprisoned and beaten, etc.

And he finally concludes with saying that when he was in Damascus and the king was trying to capture him, he had a most inglorious escape, having to be lured in a basket. There was no miraculous lifting up of his body by the spirit like Philip experienced, that we read in Acts chapter 8. No, he escaped in a very ordinary way, and these are the things that he talks about, the things in which he was humiliated and humbled, his difficulties and his trials. And he goes on in chapter 12 to continue on the same theme, and he says, Now I'll go on to visions and revelations of the Lord.

He begins by saying it is not profitable to boast, but I want to boast like a foolish man, he says. He's being sarcastic in the whole passage. But coming on to visions and revelations of the Lord, he says, He's obviously referring to himself as we see later on in the passage.

But such is his humility that he speaks of it as a man whom he knew more than 14 years ago, whether in the body I do not know or out of the body I do not know. God knows such a man was caught up to the third heaven. Here was an experience that Paul had of being taken up into the immediate presence of God, the third heaven.

God dwells in the third heaven, and this place is also called in verse 4 paradise, which is now the place of departed spirits of believers. This is where Jesus said he would meet the thief on the cross. Now paradise, which was then in the heart of the earth, has been taken up to the third heaven.

The first heavens are the heavens that we see, the stars in the sky and all of space. Beyond that is the second heaven, which is probably the dwelling place of Satan and his hosts, the rulers of the heavenlies. And beyond that is the third heaven, where God himself dwells.

And Paul doesn't know whether it was with his body or without, just in the spirit, but he says he was caught up. And I know how such a man was caught up into paradise, verse 4. And he heard words up there when he was in the third heaven. But he says they were words which a man is not permitted to speak about.

There is a lot of empty boasting today among people who boast of having been taken up to heaven, and who tell us fancy stories about all their experiences. Quite a contrast to the humility and the genuineness of the testimony of the apostle Paul. It's his humility which proves to us that he's genuine.

He heard words, but they were words which were inexpressible. Words that a man is not permitted to talk about. And that's not surprising, for the atmosphere of heaven must be such that there are things that God speaks to a person which are meant only for him.

There's something we can learn from this passage, that God sometimes says things to some of his servants which are not meant to be shared with others. They are meant only for oneself. We read in Revelation chapter 10 about the seven thunders, and John heard words being spoken and he wanted to write, and the voice said, Don't write, that's only for you.

Likewise, Paul heard words, but they were only for him. On behalf of such a man, he says, I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except in regard to my weaknesses. Paul says, as far as he's concerned, the only thing that he can boast about are his weaknesses.

Think of his humility, that he had an experience about which he kept quiet for 14 years. What a contrast to the situation with many Christians today who have an experience and they can hardly wait a week before they publicize it and write a book about it. But Paul knew that these are things to be kept secret, and he mentions it only so that the Corinthians will recognize that he is a genuine apostle to expose the false apostles who boast about empty visions.

That's the only reason. If it were not for such a reason, we would never even have known that Paul had such an experience. He never told anybody about it.

And there we see the attitude we should have to supernatural experiences. Quite a contrast to the way many Christians boast about imaginary supernatural experiences today. Dear brothers and sisters who are listening, remember, here is an example we can follow.

Here was a man who said, follow me as I follow Christ. There are things a man can experience. He needs to keep quiet about it.

If it's not going to edify another, the only things that we are to share with others are those which will edify them. That which will merely exalt myself. What is the use of sharing that? If Paul had described all his personal experiences which would not edify others, there was no need to talk about them.

And he doesn't. But he says, I will boast about my weaknesses. That he can talk about because all people have weaknesses.

He wouldn't go into detail about his visions and revelations because those things are given to very few. But he says, I can boast about my weaknesses. For he says, if I do wish to boast, I shall not be foolish.

I shall not be guilty, for I shall be speaking the truth. If he wants to boast, he can boast about genuine experiences which he has had with God, but he won't talk about them. But I refrain from this, he says.

I will not talk about it because, listen to the reason, I don't want to be, I don't want anyone to be influenced by the wonderful character of these revelations to think more of me than is justified by my words or conduct. He says, I don't want anyone to think that I'm a great man of God and that's why I want to keep quiet about these visions and revelations. What you have seen in me and what you have heard from me.

In other words, you are to know the type of person I am by my words and my conduct. What he sees in me and what he hears from me. These are the two things that manifest what we are.

What people see in our lives and in our speech. And Paul says, you see my life and you see my speech. And you can assess me.

Beyond that, if I tell you about the wonderful visions and revelations I have had, I may exalt myself. Paul was so afraid that people would think of him more highly than they deserved to think of him. What a contrast to the attitude of many Christians today who are actually more concerned that other people should think less of them.

Than they deserve to be thought of. Paul's attitude was exactly the opposite. And that is the attitude of a humble man.

That is the attitude of a spiritual man. He's afraid to talk about personal experiences lest other people give him extra credit and value. As a man of God.

Just because of the revelations he has had. And we learn something very important from verse 6. That a man is to be assessed not by the visions and revelations he has had, but by his conduct and his speech. Jesus said, by their fruits you shall know them.

It is not by a man's gifts that we are to evaluate him. No. This is the mistake in Christendom today.

We see a man who has great gifts of prophecy. Or a man who is able to cast out demons. Or a man who can heal the sick.

And immediately most Christians are impressed. And on top of that, if that man goes on to talk about the visions and revelations he has had and the angels he has seen and the times he has been caught up to the third heaven, it's almost as though that man has become a mini-God to many Christians. And here is where we have to be extremely careful.

It's not by gifts that a man of God is identified. Jesus said, if you go by gifts, you will be deceived by the false prophets. You read Matthew 7 and verses 15 onwards to verse 23 and you see very clearly Jesus contrasting fruit with gifts.

By their fruits you shall know the false prophets, he said. And he goes on to say, there are false prophets, many of them, who will come to me in the last day and say, Lord, we prophesied in your name. Cast out demons and did miracles, but he will say to them, I never knew you.

And so here again we see, Paul says, I refrain from talking about my supernatural experiences. The true proof of a genuine man of God, that he refrains from speaking about his supernatural experiences, which are not going to bless others, because he does not want anyone to think more of him than is justified by his conduct and his speech. And there is a good example for all of us to follow.

Let's learn from God what we can speak about, that which will edify others and that which merely exalts ourselves, we are to keep quiet about. Let's turn now to 2 Corinthians 12, verse 7. Paul has just said that he will not boast in anything except in regard to his weaknesses. Verse 5. He didn't boast about the miracles he did, about the people he raised from the dead, about the demons that were cast out through handkerchiefs that touched his body, or the churches he established or the scriptures he had written, but his weaknesses.

And he goes on to give us a revelation of something that happened in his personal life. He had fantastic revelations. God spoke to him directly, he wrote scripture.

He was transported up to the third heaven, but he doesn't boast in these. He is honest enough to tell us in verse 7, that because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, to keep me from exalting myself. And there we see that Paul was in danger of spiritual pride.

Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. Every one of us is in danger of spiritual pride, particularly those who have been most gifted by the Lord, those who are most used by the Lord, those who have more revelations, and those who have had supernatural experiences, are in great danger of spiritual pride. Paul recognized that.

And he says, to keep me from exalting myself. God resists the proud, but he gives grace to the humble. And if God was to give Paul grace, as he wanted to, it was necessary that Paul should remain humble.

Otherwise, God would have to resist him. God would resist even a servant of his, when that servant becomes proud and puffed up. And in order to help Paul to remain humble, God gave him a thorn in the flesh.

We don't know what that thorn in the flesh was. Perhaps it was a physical infirmity. But whatever it was, it was a messenger of Satan.

Sickness is a messenger of Satan. It could have been a sickness. It could have been some physical infirmity.

And this messenger of Satan kept on harassing and troubling Paul to keep on bruising him and hitting him. And the purpose was, he repeats it again in verse 7, it's mentioned twice in verse 7, to keep me from exalting myself. And then Paul says in verse 8, three times he asked the Lord to remove this infirmity, to

remove this thorn in the flesh, to remove this messenger of Satan.

No doubt he rebuked it and tried to cast it out in the name of Jesus and did all types of things to it, no doubt, but nothing happened. He prayed three times and there was no reply, and he prayed again, and the third time he got an answer. The Lord said to him, My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.

And so, it's not that God didn't answer prayer, but God's answer was no. God always answers prayer. The thing is, sometimes the answer may be no.

Maybe yes, it may be no, but He always answers every prayer. He's a God who hears and answers prayer. In this case, the answer was no.

I'm not going to remove the messenger of Satan. Now, sometimes we can think that if something is from the devil, it accomplishes nothing. It has to be removed from my life altogether.

Not necessarily. In this particular case, here was a messenger that was obviously a messenger of Satan, a thorn in the flesh, and yet, even though Paul prayed desperately for its removal, God didn't remove it. God allowed him to have it and to suffer with it because it was accomplishing a purpose.

Even a messenger of Satan can be used by God to accomplish a spiritual purpose in His servant, to keep that servant from exalting himself so that God can give him grace. It's amazing to see how God can use the devil's actions to serve His purposes. This is the wonderful thing about the sovereignty of the God whom we serve, that He can turn the most wicked thing that the devil seeks to do against you to spiritual profit for your life.

And this is why we can always give thanks. There's nothing that the devil can do to us which God cannot turn to our profit if we humble ourselves and accept God's answer in a particular situation. Even sickness, though sickness is from Satan, all sickness is from Satan because sickness is not a good and perfect gift.

All good and perfect gifts come from the Father above and therefore we know that all sickness is from the devil. But God may sometimes permit it to remain with a purpose, a spiritual purpose. And so, in such a case, the thing to do is not to spend our lifetime trying to get rid of that sickness and not to condemn ourselves for any lack of faith, but rather to humble ourselves and say, Lord, you can heal me in a moment, but if you don't, if it's your will to keep this on me, let it accomplish a spiritual purpose, maybe to keep me humble so that I can get grace.

Paul's revelation of what he went through in that experience has been a tremendous help to suffering saints through the ages. And because he's not told us what that thorn in the flesh was, it applies to every type of thorn in the flesh that we can ever experience. It may not be a sickness, it may be a circumstance that just doesn't seem to alter.

It may be some situation, a messenger of Satan, and God can yet turn it to the fulfillment of His purpose because He works all things according to the counsel of His will. And He can make all things work together for good to those who love God and who are called according to His purpose. And here the Lord told Paul, My grace is sufficient for you.

God's grace is sufficient to overcome every single situation, to make us overcomers in every situation. And we're also told here that God's power is made perfect in human weakness. This is a very wonderful thing

that many Christians don't seem to understand, that God's power is not manifested in strong personalities.

The strong personality has to be broken down before God's power can be manifested. God has to make a man weak. Paul was a strong personality, a strong-willed person, and God had to take him through situations to break him down so that instead of Paul's power, God's power is manifested.

You need to ask yourself if you're serving the Lord as to whose power is being manifested through your life and ministry. Is it your power or God's power? Your power needs to be broken down. You need to be made weak.

And that's why God arranges circumstances and situations for us where we are made weak so that God's power can be manifested because His power is made perfect in human weakness. And if God's power is not manifested through your life, there can only be one answer. You are not yet weak enough.

You are too strong in yourself. Let God break you. And then you'll find His power manifest through you.

Let God break you through the situations He takes you through, through the people whom He sends across to your path to break your plans and to frustrate your hopes. And as He humbles you and breaks you there and makes you weak and helpless, His power will be manifested through you. And therefore, having understood this wonderful secret, Paul says, I will now gladly boast about my weaknesses that the power of Christ may dwell in me.

He says, My weaknesses are not something I'm ashamed of. I praise God for them because that's the very way by which the power of Christ dwells in me. Therefore, he says, I'm content, not just content, but well content, perfectly happy we could say, with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses.

These are the instruments by which God makes us weak. Weaknesses, insults. When you are insulted, that makes you weak, small.

Distresses and persecutions and difficulties. Are you experiencing distresses, insults, persecutions, difficulties for Christ's sake? These are the means by which God is trying to make you small and weak so that His power can rest upon you. If only you could see that and humble yourself under God's mighty hand and accept the situation and the people whom He puts on top of you, you would find His power manifested.

And if you haven't found it in all this time, it's because you have rebelled against those circumstances. You've complained and murmured instead of joyfully giving thanks in those circumstances. It is when I am weak, Paul says, then I am strong.

When we can understand this, that it is in weakness that God's power is manifested, just like we considered earlier, it is in human stupidity that God's wisdom is manifested. Let him who thinks he is wise become foolish. Let him who is strong become weak.

Let God break you and make you weak and His power can be manifested through you. Paul says in verse 11, I have become foolish. All that he has been saying all the way from chapter 11, verse 16 onwards, he says, I am foolish.

I am speaking like a foolish man. Remember that. I am not speaking as a man of God should speak.

I am just speaking like a fool. Actually, I should have been commended by you, he says, for in no respect was I inferior to the most eminent apostles, even though I am a nobody. What is Paul's opinion about himself? He says, I am a nobody.

Think of those four words at the bottom of verse 11. I am a nobody. It is easy to say that the day you are converted.

It is quite another thing to say that after you have been taken up to the third heaven, after you have raised the dead, established churches and written scripture. That is the greatness of the apostle Paul, that at the end of all that he could still say, I am a nobody. The trouble with a lot of people is after some time they have become somebody.

But Paul said, I am a nobody, even though I am not inferior to the most eminent apostles, he says. The signs of an apostle were done in your midst. Signs, wonders and miracles with perseverance.

There was patience of character in Paul's life accompanied with signs, wonders and miracles. He was a true apostle. Yet his opinion about himself is, I am a nobody.

Here is an eminent example whose footsteps we can follow in. Let's turn today to 2 Corinthians 12. Paul speaks here about the signs of a true apostle which were manifested in him.

And the first thing he mentions is patience, perseverance. We have been more used to thinking that the first marks of an apostle are that he establishes churches or he does miracles. And yet Paul, true to the teaching of Jesus who said, by their fruits you shall know them, speaks about patience.

The fruit of the spirit is love. And the first thing mentioned about love in 1 Corinthians 13 is patience. Love is patient.

And it says here, the signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all patience. In all situations he manifested patience. You remember when we considered 2 Corinthians 6, he said the same thing there.

In all things, commending ourselves as servants of God in much patience. Perseverance under trial, enduring patiently, long-suffering. This is the primary characteristic of a true apostle.

And also, signs and wonders and miracles with which God attests his ministry, particularly when it is a ministry of evangelism among the heathen who have never heard about Christ. We read that it is in such situations especially, that these signs and wonders and miracles were done. For an apostle like Paul was called to establish churches in areas where people had never heard about Christ.

And therefore these signs and wonders and miracles accompanied him. But patience as number one and above all. In what respect, he says, were you treated as inferior to the rest of the churches? Except that I myself did not become a burden to you.

And he says sarcastically, forgive me this wrong. He is asking, in what way did I treat you as inferior? Only in one thing he says, that I did not take a collection from you. Notice the number of times he repeats that in this episode.

And in his previous letter to the Corinthians. Thereby seeking to show again the marks of a true apostle, a true servant of God. I did not become a burden to you.

A true apostle, a true servant of God does not make himself a burden to other believers. Here for the third time he says in verse 14, I am ready to come to you and I will not be a burden to you. Again, a repetition of that.

We saw that a number of times in chapter 11. Here again, he says, I am coming the third time and it will be just like the first two times. I will not be a burden to you.

And the reason is, I do not seek you. I do not seek what is yours, but you. Here is another mark of a true apostle and a true servant of God.

He does not seek to get something for himself from other believers, but he seeks them, fellowship with them. He seeks their eternal good. He seeks their spiritual profits.

Here are wonderful phrases that a true servant of God is manifested by. Verse 11, I am a nobody. Verse 12, All patience, and by signs, wonders and miracles.

Verse 13, I did not become a burden to you. Verse 14, I will not be a burden to you. I do not seek what is yours, but you.

Verse 15, I will most gladly spend and be expended for your souls. A man who can say these things genuinely from his heart is a genuine servant of God and an apostle. It's an attitude that we see in the apostle Paul.

The spirit of Christ. Now as we look around, we find that there are many Christian workers who seek not so much fellowship with people as what the people can give them. They seek what is theirs, not them.

But Paul said, I do not seek what is yours, but you. He says just like in the natural world, children are not responsible to save up for their parents. Have you ever heard of children saving up for their parents? Children supporting their parents, yes, but saving up for their parents, no.

Parents save up for their children. It's parents who care for their children and he says, I am a father and I care for you. That's the mark of a spiritual father that he cares for the children.

A person who is always seeking to sponge off other people and take money from others, he cannot be a father. He's a hireling. Paul was a true shepherd.

He did not seek anything for himself from those to whom he ministered. A mark of a true servant of God. And he says not only that, I'm glad to spend all that I have for you.

Not only I don't want something from you for myself, but I'm willing to go one stage further and say I'm willing to spend what is mine in order to bless you, to serve you, and to be expended for your souls, for your spiritual profit. That was the spirit of Christ that Paul had imbibed. If I love you the more, he says, am I to be loved the less? But be that as it may.

Again, a repetition of that phrase that comes so many times in this episode. I did not burden you. It'd be interesting to see how often he says that in the episode.

I did not burden you. It's a spirit that comes through refusing to be a burden to others, ready to carry their burdens, but refusing to put his burden upon them. This is the mark of maturity.

A mature Christian is one who can carry his own burden as well as the burdens of others. An immature Christian is one who cannot carry his own burden much less carry the burdens of others. Paul could carry his own burden as well as the burden of others.

Nevertheless, he speaks sarcastically, crafty fellow that I am, I took you in by deceit. But he says, you know, I have not taken advantage of you through any of those whom I've sent you, have I? Can you say that I have taken advantage of you in any way? Have I used you for my profit or gain in any way? Not at all. I have served you.

I have not taken advantage of you. Here's another statement. Listen to these statements.

I am a nobody. Verse 11. I did not become a burden to you.

Verse 13. I will not be a burden to you. Verse 14.

I will most gladly spend and be expended for your souls. Verse 15. And I have not taken advantage of you.

Verse 17. A man who can say this is qualified to be a servant of God. There are very few like that.

But think that if we can take Paul as an example, we can become like him. And not only Paul, those who were with Paul did not take advantage of the Corinthians either. Paul was very careful, the type of person who got onto his team.

He didn't just choose any Tom, Dick or Harry to join him. He was very careful whom he took onto his team. People who would not take advantage of others.

He did not advertise for workers. He was very careful in his selection. And if he found that somebody like Demas was trying to gain something for himself, he just chucked him out of the team.

That was it. Those who were with me, he says, they didn't take advantage of you. I urged Titus to go and sent the brother with him.

Did he take advantage of you? No, Titus also had imbibed Paul's spirit. Did we not conduct ourselves in the same spirit? What spirit was that? The spirit of Christ who did not seek his own, but gave up everything in order to bless others and help others and bring them to the place where he himself was. That was the spirit that gripped Paul.

And that was the spirit that Paul imbibed from Christ and that Titus imbibed from Paul. For this is infectious. This spirit, when we see it in another, Titus got it from Paul.

The same spirit of I will not be a burden. I will not take advantage. All this time, he says in verse 19, you've been thinking that we are defending ourselves to you.

How does it sound? Does it sound as if we are defending ourselves to you? Actually, he says, it's in the sight of God that we've been speaking. And the only reason we've been saying this is so that you accept the apostolic authority I have so that you acknowledge that what I'm writing is God's commandments and all for your upbuilding, beloved. He says, I'm not trying to project myself as a great man before you.

I don't want that. But so that you can accept what is written. Now, there's no need for us to speak like that today because Scripture has already been written.

Paul was writing in a day when Scripture had not been written. There was a necessity for that. But not today.

For I'm afraid, he says, that perhaps when I come, I may find you to be not what I wish and may be found by you to be not what you wish. And he's talking about sin in their midst that's not being judged. That perhaps there may be strife in your midst, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances.

I'm afraid that when I come again, my God may humiliate me before you. And I may mourn over many of those who have sinned in the past and not repented of the impurity, immorality, and sensuality which they have practiced. Notice Paul's attitude towards sin in the church in Corinth.

He doesn't say you're just a bunch of rotten sinners. He doesn't say God's got to judge you. Notice what he says.

God will humiliate whom? God will humiliate me. Because I'm your father. A father is dishonored by the way his children behave.

He says, I'm humiliated when I think of the way you people are behaving. And he says, I will mourn. They're the ones who should be mourning.

But Paul says, I will mourn over those who have sinned. Another mark of a true man of God. If you really want to know what it means to be a man of God, a servant of God, it's good to go through this chapter.

Here is a revelation of Paul's inner life. One who said, I'm a nobody. Who would not be a burden.

And who mourned for the sins of others. May God give us that spirit. Then we can correct them.

Then we can build them up as part of the body of Christ. Let's turn today to 2 Corinthians chapter 13. This is the third time I'm coming to you, says Paul.

Every fact is to be confirmed by the testimony of two or three witnesses. I have previously said, when present the second time, and though now absent, I say in advance to those who have sinned in the past and to all the rest as well, that if I come again, I will not spare anyone. He is seeking to tell them that he is going to come and settle matters there because of the sin in their midst.

Why is he qualified? And how does he have authority to deal with their sin? Because of what he said in chapter 12 verse 20 and 21. That he considered their sin as that which caused him humiliation before God. He was concerned.

He mourned, chapter 12 verse 21, for those who had sinned and had not repented. Therefore, he could come and deal with them. He says, I will not spare anyone.

Every fact is to be confirmed by the testimony of two or three witnesses. He is not going to take things by hearsay, but where two or three witnesses stand up and prove a charge, he is going to accept it. And he says, I am not going to spare anyone.

This teaches us that the only person who has the right to speak against sin in another, is one who has mourned for the sin of the other. If I do not have the desire or eagerness to mourn for the sin of another, I have no right to judge them. No right to seek to deal with it.

In verse 3 he says, since you are seeking for proof of the Christ who speaks in me, and who is not weak toward you, but mighty in you, for indeed he was crucified in weakness, but he lives because of the power of God. He says, when I deal with you, I am not going to show any leniency. I will not spare anyone.

And thus you will have the proof you seek of the power of Christ who speaks in me. He says, you think I am very weak, but when you come and see me dealing with sin in your midst, despite my unimpressive personality, and despite my lack of eloquence, when you see how I stand against sin and deal with it, you will have a proof there of Christ speaking in me. And it will not be in weakness, but it will be mightily, it will be a Christ of power.

And then he says about Jesus, a very wonderful verse in verse 4, he was crucified through weakness, but the power of God brought him to life. He says, we also are weak enough to be crucified with him, but we live with him by the power of God directed towards you. I am weak as he is weak, but I am strong enough to deal with you, for I share his life by the power of God.

Here is a repetition of what we saw in 2 Corinthians chapter 12, that God's power is manifested in human weakness. And Paul takes the example of Jesus Christ, who was crucified in weakness. He could have called 72,000 angels to come and help him, to deliver him.

He had power to be free from the cross, but he would not use that power. He died in weakness. And through the power of God, he lives.

And Paul says, this is the principle by which we are to live as Christians too. We are weak in him. He says, because you Corinthians don't understand God's way, that you think it is by a manifestation of human power, that we are to do the work of the Lord, like these false apostles.

No, a true apostle is one who appears weak and unimpressive, humanly speaking. Remember this, as Jesus was weak, a true apostle of Christ is weak and unimpressive by human standards. He is mighty with the power of God, fearless against sin, standing ruthlessly against sin.

That is the proof of Christ speaking in him. Notice what he says, I will not spare anyone who has sinned and who has not repented. Verse 3, that is the proof of Christ speaking in me.

How do you know that Christ is speaking through a person when he is ruthless against sin and yet compassionate towards the sinner? Ruthless against sin. Weak in human terms, but living by the power of God. Are you willing to be that, unimpressive in human eyes, weak and living only by God's power which is directed against sin? Then we can follow in the footsteps of Paul as an apostle.

He says, you people are trying to test me, but actually you should be testing yourselves, he says in verse 5, whether you are in the faith. You don't understand what the true faith is all about. You confuse human soul power with the power of the Holy Spirit.

You confuse human personality power with the mighty power of God. It's all confusion. He says, test yourselves.

You haven't understood God's ways. See if you are in the faith. Examine yourselves.

You are examining me, whether I am a true apostle, but examine yourselves. Don't you recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? Which Christ? Not another Jesus which these false apostles

preach, but this Christ, spoken of in the previous verse, who was crucified in weakness. This is the Christ, the true Jesus Christ who has come to live in you.

And he is going to manifest that spirit in you again, of a willingness to be crucified, to take up the cross and die in human weakness, so that the power of God may be manifested in you. Test yourselves, he says. See if this is the Christ who lives in you, unless indeed you fail the test.

But, he says, I trust you will realize, verse 6, that we ourselves don't fail the test. Now, he says, we pray to God that you do no wrong. He says, my desire is that you stir free from sin, that you don't do anything evil.

Not so that we may appear as having produced a wonderful church. Paul's desire is not that other people should look at the church in Corinth and commend Paul and say, oh brother, you've built a wonderful church. He says, no, I'm not bothered about the approval of men.

He says, but I'm concerned that you should do what is right and you should avoid what is evil. Even though people may reject us and we appear unapproved, that's unimportant. For we can do nothing against the truth, he says in verse 8, but only for the truth.

We cannot fight against the truth. That is impossible. We have no power at all against the truth.

God, the Spirit, Jesus, the Father, they're all on the side of the truth. We cannot fight against that. The best thing to do is to get on the side of the truth and serve the truth and support it.

And then we have God's almighty power on our side. If we stand on the side of the truth of God's word, we'll have the almighty power of God on our side. We can never do anything against it.

God's truth will finally triumph. He says, we're glad, verse 9, when we ourselves are weak. He says, we're not bothered if we appear weak.

That doesn't disturb us, even if you appear strong. But what we are praying for, and here is another mark of a true servant of God that he prays something for those to whom he ministers. What does he pray? He says, we pray for your perfection.

You've been justified. We are praying that you will be perfect Christians, that you will press on to perfection. Many Christians are not interested in perfection.

Paul says, I pray that you will press on to perfection. For this reason, I'm writing these things while absent in order that when present, I may not use severity. He says, I'm writing this so that you respond to my letters so that I can see that things have improved when I come there so that I don't have to deal with severity with anyone when I come in accordance with the authority which the Lord gave me.

The Lord gave Paul an authority. He says, not an authority for tearing you down, but to build you up. The authority that God gives us as his servants is not to tear other people down, but to build other people up.

Everything that we say must be to build other people up, not to tear them down. And notice his burden for perfection coming through again. Finally, brethren, rejoice.

And notice what he says. Aim at perfection. What an exhortation.

Aim at perfection. Be comforted. Take courage.

Agree together. And live in peace. These are his closing exhortations.

Aim at perfection. He says, we are praying for your perfection. Verse 9. Aim at perfection in your personal life.

Take courage. Never, never be discouraged. Agree together.

And live in peace. And then God, the source of all love and peace, will be with you. This is how we can have God with us.

When we aim at perfection and we seek to live together in peace. The God of love and peace shall be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss.

All the saints greet you. And a concluding prayer for the Christians in Corinth. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the love of God, the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

That's how Paul concludes. And as we've gone through Paul's letter to the Corinthians, we've seen how Paul has revealed his inner life in this episode more than in any other episode that he's ever written. And that's why this episode is worthy of very close and careful study.

Because it reveals the type of man whom God can use more than any other episode in the New Testament. Many episodes teach doctrine, but here is an episode which teaches what a man of God should be like. May God make us like Paul.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/16/SID16554.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/zac-poonen/2-corinthians-ch121-1314/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net