

CHAPTER 13

In this chapter the apostle threatens to be severe against obstinate sinners, and assigns the reason thereof (v. 1-6); then he makes a suitable prayer to God on the behalf of the Corinthians, with the reasons inducing him thereto (v. 7-10), and concludes his epistle with a valediction and a benediction (v. 11-14).

2 CORINTHIANS 13:1-6

THE APOSTLE ASSERTS HIS CLAIMS

In these verses observe,

I. The apostle threatens to be severe against obstinate sinners when he should come to Corinth, having now sent to them a first and second epistle, with proper admonitions and exhortations, in order to reform what was amiss among them. Concerning this we may notice,

1. The caution with which he proceeded in his censures: he was not hasty in using severity, but gave a first and second admonition. So some understand his words (v. 1): *This is the third time I am coming to you*, referring to his first and second epistles, by which he admonished them, as if he were present with them, though in person he was absent, v. 2. According to this interpretation, these two epistles are the witnesses he means in the first verse, referring rather to the direction of our Saviour (⁽⁴¹⁷⁶⁾ Matthew 17:16) concerning the manner how Christians should deal with offenders before they proceed to extremity than to the law of Moses (⁽⁴⁵⁷⁶⁾ Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15) for the behaviour of judges in criminal matters. We should go, or send, to our brother, once and again, to tell him of his fault. Thus the apostle had told these Corinthians before, in his former epistle, and now he tells them, or *writes to those who heretofore had sinned, and to all others*, giving warning unto all before he came in person *the third time*, to exercise severity against scandalous offenders. Others think that the apostle had designed and prepared for his journey to Corinth twice already, but was providentially hindered, and now informs them of his intentions a third time to come to them. However this be, it is

observable that he kept an account how often he endeavoured, and what pains he took with these Corinthians for their good: and we may be sure that an account is kept in heaven, and we must be reckoned with another day for the helps we have had for our souls, and how we have improved them.

2. The threatening itself: *That if (or when) he came again (in person) he would not spare* obstinate sinners, and such as were impenitent, in their scandalous enormities. He had told them before, he feared *God would humble him among them*, because he should find some who *had sinned and had not repented*; and now he declares he would not spare such, but would inflict church-censures upon them, which are thought to have been accompanied in those early times with visible and extraordinary tokens of divine displeasure. Note, Though it is God's gracious method to bear long with sinners, yet he will not bear always; at length he will come, and will not spare those who remain obstinate and impenitent, notwithstanding all his methods to reclaim and reform them.

II. The apostle assigns a reason why he would be thus severe, namely, for *a proof of Christ's speaking in him*, which they *sought after*, v. 3. The evidence of his apostleship was necessary for the credit, confirmation, and success, of the gospel he preached; and therefore such as denied this were justly and severely to be censured. It was the design of the false teachers to make the Corinthians call this matter into question, of which yet they had not weak, but strong and mighty proofs (v. 3), notwithstanding the mean figure he made in the world and the contempt which by some was cast upon him. Even as Christ himself *was crucified through weakness*, or appeared in his crucifixion as a weak and contemptible person, *but liveth by the power of God*, or in his resurrection and life manifests his divine power (v. 4), so the apostles, how mean and contemptible soever they appeared to the world, did yet, as instruments, manifest the power of God, and particularly the power of his grace, in converting the world to Christianity. And therefore, as a proof to those who among the *Corinthians sought a proof of Christ's speaking in the apostle*, he puts them upon proving their Christianity (v. 5): *Examine yourselves*, etc. Hereby he intimates that, if they could prove their own Christianity, this would be a proof of his apostleship; for if they were in the faith, if Jesus Christ was in them, this was a proof that Christ spoke in him, because it was by his ministry that they did believe. He had been not only an instructor, but a father to them. He had begotten them again by the gospel

of Christ. Now it could not be imagined that a divine power should go along with his ministrations if he had not his commission from on high. If therefore they could prove themselves *not to be reprobates*, not to be rejected of Christ, *he trusted they would know that he was not a reprobate* (v. 6), not disowned by Christ. What the apostle here says of the duty of the Corinthians to *examine themselves*, etc., with the particular view already mentioned, is applicable to the great duty of all who call themselves Christians, to examine themselves concerning their spiritual state. We should examine whether we be in the faith, because it is a matter in which we may be easily deceived, and wherein a deceit is highly dangerous: we are therefore concerned to *prove our own selves*, to put the question to our own souls, whether Christ be in us, or not; and *Christ is in us, except we be reprobates*: so that either we are true Christians or we are great cheats; and what a reproachful thing is it for a man not to know himself, not to know his own mind!

2 CORINTHIANS 13:7-10

THE APOSTLE ASSERTS HIS CLAIMS

Here we have,

I. The apostle's prayer to God on the behalf of the Corinthians, that they might *do no evil*, v. 7. This is the most desirable thing we can ask of God, both for ourselves and for our friends, to be kept from sin, that we and they may do no evil; and it is most needful that we often pray to God for his grace to keep us, because without this we cannot keep ourselves. We are more concerned to pray that we may not do evil than that we may not suffer evil.

II. The reasons why the apostle put up this prayer to God on behalf of the Corinthians, which reasons have a special reference to their case, and the subject-matter about which he was writing to them. Observe, he tells them,

1. It was not so much for his own personal reputation as for the honour of religion: "*Not that we should appear approved, but that you should do that which is honest, or decent, and for the credit of religion, though we*

should be reproached and vilified, and accounted as reprobates,” v. 7.
Note,

(1.) The great desire of faithful ministers of the gospel is that the gospel they preach may be honoured, however their persons may be vilified.

(2.) The best way to adorn our holy religion is *to do that which is honest*, and of good report, to walk as becomes the gospel of Christ.

2. Another reason was this: that they might be free from all blame and censure when he should come to them. This is intimated in v. 8, *We can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth*. If therefore they did not do evil, nor act contrary to their profession of the gospel, the apostle had no power nor authority to punish them. He had said before (~~4708~~ 2 Corinthians 10:8) and says here (v. 10) that the power which the Lord had given him was to edification, not to destruction; so that, although the apostle had great powers committed to him for the credit and advancement of the gospel, yet he could not do anything to the disparagement of the truth, nor the discouragement of those who obeyed it. He could not, that is, he would not, he dared not, he had no commission to act against the truth; and it is remarkable how the apostle did rejoice in this blessed impotency: “*We are glad,*” says he (v. 9), “*when we are weak and you are strong;* that is, that we have no power to censure those who are strong in faith and fruitful in good works.” Some understand this passage thus: “Though we are weak through persecutions and contempt, we bear it patiently, and also joyfully, while we see that you are strong, that you are prosperous in holiness, and persevering in well-doing.” For,

3. He desired their perfection (v. 9); that is, that they might be sincere, and aim at perfection (sincerity is our gospel-perfection), or else he wished there might be a thorough reformation among them. He not only desired that they might be kept from sin, but also that they might grow in grace, and increase in holiness, and that all that was amiss among them might be rectified and reformed. This was the great end of his writing this epistle, and that freedom he used with them by *writing these things* (those friendly admonitions and warnings), *being absent, that so, being present, he should not use sharpness* (v. 10), that is, not proceed to the utmost extremity in the exercise of the power which the Lord had given him as an apostle, *to revenge all disobedience,* ~~4706~~ 2 Corinthians 10:6.

2 CORINTHIANS 13:11-14

THE APOSTOLIC BENEDICTION

Thus the apostle concludes this epistle with,

I. A valediction. He gives them a parting farewell, and takes his leave of them for the present, with hearty good wishes for their spiritual welfare. In order to this,

1. He gives them several good exhortations.

(1.) To be perfect, or to be knit together in love, which would tend greatly to their advantage as a church, or Christian society.

(2.) To be of good comfort under all the sufferings and persecutions they might endure for the cause of Christ or any calamities and disappointments they might meet with in the world.

(3.) To be of one mind, which would greatly tend to their comfort; for the more easy we are with our brethren the more ease we shall have in our own souls. The apostle would have them, as far as was possible, to be of the same opinion and judgment; however, if this could not be attained, yet,

(4.) He exhorts them to live in peace, that difference in opinion should not cause an alienation of affection that they should be at peace among themselves. He would have all the schisms that were among them healed, that there should be no more contention and wrath found among them, to prevent which they should avoid *debates, envyings, backbitings, whisperings*, and such like enemies to peace.

2. He encourages them with the promise of God's presence among them: *The God of love and peace shall be with you*, v. 11. Note,

(1.) God is the God of love and peace. He is the author of peace, and lover of concord. He hath loved us, and is willing to be at peace with us; he commands us to love him, and to be reconciled to him, and also that we love one another, and be at peace among ourselves.

(2.) God will be with those who live in love and peace. He will love those who love peace; he will dwell with them here, and they shall dwell with

him for ever. Such shall have God's gracious presence here, and be admitted to his glorious presence hereafter.

3. He gives directions to them to salute each other, and sends kind salutations to them from those who were with him, v. 12, 13. He would have them testify their affection to one another by the sacred rite of a kiss of charity, which was then used, but has long been disused, to prevent all occasions of wantonness and impurity, in the more declining and degenerate state of the church.

II. The apostolical benediction (v. 14): *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all.* Thus the apostle concludes his epistle, and thus it is usual and proper to dismiss worshipping assemblies. This plainly proves the doctrine of the gospel, and is an acknowledgment that Father, Son, and Spirit, are three distinct persons, yet but one God; and herein the same, that they are the fountain of all blessings to men. It likewise intimates our duty, which is to have an eye by faith to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost to live in a continual regard to the three persons in the Trinity, into whose name we were baptized, and in whose name we are blessed. This is a very solemn benediction, and we should give all diligence to inherit this blessing. The grace of Christ, the love of God, and the communion (or communication) of the Holy Ghost: the grace of Christ as Redeemer, the love of God who sent the Redeemer, and all the communications of this grace and love, which come to us by the Holy Ghost; it is the communications of the Holy Ghost that qualify us for an interest in the grace of Christ, and the love of God: and we can desire no more to make us happy than the grace of Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*