

2 Corinthians 12-13

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Tape 8163

Pastor Chuck Smith

Let's turn in our Bibles to 2 Corinthians, chapter twelve.

This first verse of chapter twelve is a little difficult in the original Greek language, that is, the construction in the Greek language. It doesn't translate well into English. They did the best they could.

It is not expedient (They have translated) for me doubtless to glory. Basically, what Paul is saying is that you are more or less forcing me to boast or to glory, yet it is not really of any value. So, he has as we have mentioned before, in these last chapters, he is dealing with the detractors, who had followed him in Corinth. Paul had founded the church there. He had gone into uncharted territories with the gospel, a very strong church was raised up in Corinth. Paul spent a couple of years there ministering to the church. When he moved on, there were false teachers that came in. And they began to denigrate Paul, challenging his apostleship, challenging the gospel that he had preached, the gospel of grace. They were seeking to put their own trips on the people. They were seeking to bring them under the law and thus Paul is sort of defending though he said it really isn't necessary nor should it be necessary. He's defending his call to be an apostle of Jesus Christ. He's defending the gospel that he preached to them.

So he has been talking about the things that he experienced as a minister of the gospel. They included the difficulties as far as personal punishment or pain or suffering that he experienced personally. The beatings, the stonings, the imprisonments, the shipwrecks and the daily pressures that came upon him as he dealt with the many, many churches that had come out of his ministry that he was still seeking to deal with the problems, that would arise as they would be brought to him, wherever he was. And so, now he goes from the physical aspects of the ministry, as an apostle, to the Spiritual things. So he said, I really, you sort of forced me to glory, but yet I know it's of no value.

So *I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord.* He is going to talk now about the visions that he has had. The revelations that God had given to him. He starts out with a very fascinating experience.

²*I knew a man in Christ (he is talking about himself) above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven.* ³*And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;)*

⁴*How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.* Now, about fourteen years prior to the writing of Second Corinthians, Paul was preaching in Lystra. It's recorded in Acts (Acts 14:19-21), chapter fourteen. And while he was ministering there in Lystra, the Jews stirred up the people against Paul. They stoned him. They thought he was dead. They drug his body out of the city. His companions also thought he was dead! They were standing around weeping because he had been such a valiant soldier of the faith. And as they were standing around him, weeping, suddenly his eyes sort of fluttered. He opened them up and said, well, let's go back into the city. I didn't finish my message! He was a tough guy!

But whether or not he was dead or alive, Paul, himself, said, I don't know. And that is what he means by, whether in the body or out of the body. Whether or not I had an out of body experience. I don't know. God knows! That's not the important thing. During this time, he said, I was caught up into the third heaven.

Now, the Bible does speak of three heavens. It speaks of the atmosphere around the earth as the birds flying in the heaven. It speaks of the celestial heavens as God placed the sun and the moon and the stars, in the heavens—the limitless expanse. And then he speaks about the dwelling place of God, that place in the universe where is the throne of God, the actual place of God's dwelling, His throne in the heavens. So, the Bible makes mention to the three heavens, the atmosphere, the celestial heaven and the dwelling place of God.

The Jews spoke of seven heavens. The Mormons sort of picked up the seven heavens, so they talk about seven stages of heavens and degrees of glory and so forth. But it's not really Biblical. The Bible mentions

the three. The third heaven being God's dwelling place. And so I was caught up into the third heaven. He calls it paradise. He was caught up into paradise. And I heard unspeakable words or, again, I heard things that to attempt to describe them with words would be a crime.

In modern philosophy they talk about the possibility of having an ultimate experience. Now just what that ultimate experience might be, they don't know. And whether or not anyone has ever had that ultimate experience, they don't know. Because the problem with this ultimate experience is that because it is the ultimate experience, there are no words to describe it. If you had it, you wouldn't be able to share it with anybody because it is so beyond anything that it is impossible to try and describe it to someone else. So if you said, oh, last night I had the ultimate experience. If the person would say, well, tell me about it, you would know that they know nothing about the ultimate experience, because if they knew anything about the ultimate experience, they'd know that you can't tell about it. You can't describe it. There are no words to describe it.

Well, in a sense, Paul had an ultimate experience. He was caught up into Paradise, the third heaven. There he heard things so glorious that he said that it would be a crime to try to describe them in human language because words have not been invented, words have not been created that can describe the things that I experienced there. They were beyond description. And any attempt at describing would be criminal because it would be so much less than the actual experience to try and reduce it to words, would be criminal.

How would describe the beauty of say, the sunset at our last baptismal service? As the sun set down over the horizon and the skies were colored in that beautiful pink and orange and all. As the colors were reflected across the water and the palm trees were siloetted on the sky on the other side of the bay, if you had a person who was blind, how would you describe that scene? The beautiful rippling water, the various colors of the sky, the clouds and all, how would you describe it to a blind person? You would say, oh it was the most beautiful pink. Pink? And it was sort of orange. Orange? And if they had felt something before with sort of a rough skin, people said, that's an orange. But you see, you would do your best, but it would be inadequate. You would realize that I can't put into words or into word pictures, the beauty of that scene.

I read one day of a little girl who was born blind. When she was about six years old, she was examined by a doctor. He said he felt that an operation could be performed that would allow her to see. Now up to this point her mother had done her best to describe the world in which she lived. She tried to describe to her blue sky, fluffy clouds. She tried to describe green grass and colored flowers. She tried to describe what the world looked like. She daily spent time with her, trying to paint word pictures to the little girl. And the prospect of her being able to see was exciting and so they went through the operation. Daily they would remove more of the bandages. They didn't want her to be shocked with just a bright light to begin with. So they had bandages over her eyes and daily allowing a little more light to hit the optic nerve so that it wouldn't be a total shock when the last bandage was removed. So finally the day came when the last bandage was removed. She was sitting on her mother's lap. And as the bandage was removed, for the first time she could see her mother's face. For the first time she could see the room that her mother had described, the big window in the front of the room. And she ran over to the window and looked out. For the first time she saw the blue skies, the fluffy clouds, the children playing, the green grass and the pretty flowers. She burst out in sobs. She came running back to her mother, just sobbing. Her mother said, what's wrong sweetheart? What's the matter? She said, Mommy, why didn't you tell me it was this beautiful? The mother said, well honey, I tried. But you see, there are some things you just can't describe.

So Paul is saying that about heaven. It would be a crime to try and to describe it in human language because it would fall so fall short of the reality of the glory and the beauty that is there.

We used to sing, "Heaven is a wonderful place, filled with glory and grace. I want to see My Savior's face for heaven is a wonderful place. I want to go there."

And truly as Paul talks about this glorious experience. And he's not certain whether he was in the body or not, whether or not I was dead or alive, I don't know. Basically in the body or out of the body is what he is saying, I don't know if I was dead or alive. They thought he was dead. His friends thought he was dead. He doesn't know. All I know is that I was caught up to the third heaven. I was taken into Paradise and there the glorious things that I heard.

⁵*Of such an one* (That is the one who had this glorious revelation and glorious experience.) *will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities* (weaknesses). ⁶*For though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool; for I will say the truth: but now I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me to be, or that he heareth of me.* So Paul said, I'm not going to try and describe everything. I am going to forebear, because, number one, I don't want you to think of me more than I am.

You know, it's interesting that we so often put people sort of on spiritual pedestals. We put them on a pedestal, the Billy Grahams and these men. We sort of put them on pedestals. We think, oooh, they are so close to God! And usually, in our minds, we put them on a higher pedestal than they actually are. There is a danger about that. It's so tragic as they say, idols all have feet of clay.

So often times people, sort of put themselves on a pedestal. Then the truth is revealed about them, the Jimmy Bakers, the Jimmy Swaggerts, and so many of the television personalities. Somehow TV has a way of elevating a person to a "star" status. We begin to think of them more highly of them than they really are. Then we hear the truth. They have feet of clay. We are devastated to find out that they have a drinking problem or they have a sexual problem. It devastates us because we are prone to elevate them higher than they really are. So Paul is trying to guard against this. I'm not going to boast. I'm going to forebear. Lest you think I'm really better than I am, more highly of me, than I actually am, you should think of me above that you see me to be or that which you hear of me.

⁷*And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.* Paul had this wonderful revelation of heaven, an experience, caught up into the heavens. And there an abundance of revelations. He had three years of personal tutoring by Jesus in the deserts of Arabia, where the Lord spoke to him and taught him. He gave to him the revelation of this glorious gospel of grace that he was to take to the Gentile world. Because of the abundance of these revelations, it would be easy to become exalted. To sort of get on a spiritual pride trip and think of others as spiritually inferior and begin to look down on others as you begin to exalt and elevate yourself. And lest people exalt and put him on that pedestal, Paul said there was given to him this thorn in the flesh, a minister of Satan buffeting him.

The word thorn in the Greek is stake. It is the Greek word for a tent stake. So it was not just a little rosebush thorn. It was a severe malady. Now just what the thorn was, Paul doesn't tell us. So any speculation on our part is just that, speculation. It is worthless, because anyone has a right to his own opinion. We don't know what it was. Most commentators believe that it was an eye problem.

There is an Oriental disease that causes your eyes to run. It is very ugly because there is a constant running of your eyes. It hinders your sight. Paul was constantly squinting with this stuff running out of his eyes. It was not pleasant to look at.

In his letter to the Galatians (Galatians 6:11), which we will start next week, at the end of the letter, he says, you see how large a letter I have written to you in my own hand. In the Greek, it is the size of the letters I wrote in my own hand. And so he had to write in big letters because of his poor eyesight. So some have suggested that that was his thorn in the flesh.

Perhaps in verse ten, Paul is describing what the thorn is. He said I take pleasure in my weaknesses and in the reproaches and in being in necessities and in persecution and distresses for Christ's sake.

All of these things that Paul suffered for the sake of Jesus Christ, it could be a culmination of all of these things. We don't know. We have to leave it there. We don't know. Paul calls it a minister of Satan. It is buffeting him. He sees the purpose. It is to keep him humble because of the abundance of the revelations that he had, lest he be exalted above measure. It was to keep him humble.

⁸*For this thing I besought the Lord thrice,* Now you think of Paul, you think, oh man that guy is so close to the Lord. You know, the Lord would do anything for Paul. You know he would answer any prayer. But here's Paul, three times praying that the Lord would remove this infirmity.

that it might depart from me. ⁹*And he* (The Lord) *said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.*

So Paul responds. *Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities* (weaknesses), *that the power*

of Christ may rest upon me. I'd rather have the infirmity and know the power of Christ than to be strong and powerful and all in my own strength and not have the relationship that I have with Christ and the revelations that He has given to me.

Don McClure, who was an assistant pastor here years ago, and is now pastoring our Calvary Chapel in San Jose, recently had a stroke. As a result of the stroke, the pressure, as I understand, sort of blew out the retina in his right eye. He is now blind in his right eye. And I was talking to Don about it. I called him up to sort of console him. Don was saying, Chuck, you know God has done so much in my life, spiritually, through being blind in my right eye. He said that He has taught me so many things. He has shone me so many things about myself. He said I've always been so aggressive. I've always had to, you know, had to pass everybody on the road. I would just always be so aggressive. Now, he said, I have to be careful. I find myself driving in the right lane because I can't see cars that will pull up on the right side of me. I'm like a little old man driving now on the right lane. And he said but the things that the Lord has taught me through this are so glorious! I wouldn't go back to having both eyes for anything because the lessons I've have learned, the growth that I have had and experience, the things that Christ has taught me and done for me through this, are worth the loss of that eye.

That's sort of what Paul is saying. Yes, I have a thorn in the flesh. Yes, this is a ministry. Yes, I did seek the Lord for deliverance, but I wouldn't trade what I have now for a strong healthy body. I wouldn't exchange it, the abundance of the revelations that were given to me, basically, this relationship that I have come to know in the Lord in His strength and His power in my life.

Therefore, he said, I glory in my weaknesses that the power of the Lord might rest upon me. ¹⁰*Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.* God's strength, the Lord said, will be made perfect in your weakness. Wherever we feel that we are strong, we think we can handle it. We think that we don't need help. We are capable. That is the area where you are most apt to stumble or fall because you are trusting yourself. You are relying upon your own abilities, your own power. And no matter how strong you may be, one day you are going to come up against a situation that is bigger than you and you're not going to be able to handle it. And if you are that kind of person, self-confident, capable, when you come up against a thing where you aren't able to handle it, you are devastated and destroyed.

In the areas where you are weak, you know you are weak and you know that I've got to trust in the Lord in this. In those areas, His strength is then made perfect in your weakness and you're able to stand. You are able to stand. You can go through things that you never dreamed that you could go through because you know you can't go through it so you are forced to rely upon the Lord. You receive then His strength. What a difference between His strength and my strength, between His abilities and my abilities! How good it is when I have learned to trust the Lord and to draw from Him, His strength. Thus, as Paul said (Phil. 4:13), I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

Paul now sort of apologizes. He said, ¹¹*I am become a fool in glorying; ye have compelled me:* You forced me. I hated to do that. He didn't want to bring up these things, but because of the challenge against him by these false teachers, he was forced to do it. I am become a fool in glorying, but you forced me.

for I ought to have been commended of you: for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing. What does that say about the rest of the apostles? We're nothing! Because a person stands and teaches the Word of God, doesn't make him any higher. We have that tendency, that human tendency of elevating people and sort of lifting them up, but we're nothing! We are servants of Jesus Christ. That's all! And so Paul said, I'm not behind the chiefest apostle, yet I am nothing. It means that they are nothing either. I mean, we're just, all of us, on the same plane. The Lord sees all of us on the same level. So many times, people say, oh, I want you to pray for me because I feel you are closer to God. Not so! We are all equally close to God. Paul said (Acts 17:28), in Him we live, we move, we have our being. We're surrounded by Him. We are all close to God!

¹²*Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds.* Now you should be commending me. I was the one that brought you the gospel I lived among you an exemplary life. I shared the truth. I shouldn't have to be defending myself to you.

When these guys came in, you should have been defending me, because the signs of an apostle and this was their constant accusation. He's not a true apostle. Paul said the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds. Now this was one of the signs of apostleship—the working of miracles, signs and wonders. Those were the marks of an apostle. Paul said, those were wrought by me among you, the proof of the apostleship, the power of God working through Paul's life.

¹³*For what is it wherein ye were inferior to other churches, (The work that I established there wasn't inferior to the other churches.) except it be that I myself was not burdensome to you? forgive me this wrong.* I didn't take any offerings. I didn't take from you. Forgive me this wrong. The Bible says you are not to muzzle the ox that treads out the corn, that the laborer is worthy of his hire. So Paul had every right to receive support from them.

Writing to the Galatians, in our next book that we will study, Paul said (Galatians 6:6) that they that are taught in the word ought to communicate unto those that teach them in all things. That is they should support them. And yet, Paul said, the church there in Corinth that I established was not inferior to any of the churches except the fact that I didn't receive from you. Forgive me this wrong!

¹⁴*Behold, the third time I am ready to come to you; and I will not be burdensome to you:* I'm not coming to receive for myself.

for I seek not yours, but you: (I'm not seeking anything that you have. I'm not seeking any of your money, your position. I'm seeking you. My love is for you.)

for the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children. (Jeff, you can just erase that one out of your mind. He quotes this one to me all the time.)

So Paul said, ¹⁵*And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you;* I'll give you all I have. I'll gladly spend and I'll be spent for you. I'm not looking for anything from you! Oh man, what a different attitude this is from so many ministries today that are constantly appealing for funds. They are constantly developing new gimmicks to try to get people's support. They are constantly having emergencies in their ministries that call for extra donations. Paul said, I'll gladly spend and be spent for you. I'm not seeking your money. I'm seeking you!

though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved. Paul said the more abundantly I love the less I seem to be loved, a difficult thing!

¹⁶*But be it so, I did not burden you: nevertheless, being crafty, I caught you with guile.* It was not a burden, but I just caught you with trickery.

¹⁷*Did I make a gain of you by any of them whom I sent unto you?* Did they come and say, Paul is in desperate need? He needs an offering right away. He says, please send him your money.

¹⁸*I desired Titus, and with him I sent a brother. Did Titus make a gain of you? walked we not in the same spirit? walked we not in the same steps?* Paul is trying to point out these fellows that have come in and are putting me down. Notice the emphasis they are putting on money! The emphasis as far as your supporting them, giving to them so that they can live a lavish lifestyle. Notice how they are doing that.

Peter wrote that there were false prophets among them who used feigned words or deceitful words in order to made merchandise of you, the mark of prophet, the deceptive words, the deceptive gimmicks to make merchandise of the people. But those that I sent, didn't they walk in the same way that I did?

¹⁹*Again, think ye that we excuse ourselves unto you? we speak before God in Christ: but we do all things, dearly beloved, for your edifying.* I'm speaking the truth in Christ. Anything and everything I do is for your sake. It is for your being built up. I'm not looking for anything for myself. My heart is for you. I love you. And I'll gladly spend and be spent for you because of my love.

²⁰*For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would, and that I shall be found unto you such as ye would not: lest there be debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults:* I don't want that! I want to come and have this loving experience with you. I don't want to have the divisions and the backbitings and so forth.

That's something that has been a bane in the church through the years. Those argumentative people who are constantly trying to foment strife and problems as they argue over words, over meanings and so forth. They are trying to create divisions. Paul said, I don't want that. I don't want to find you that way and you surely don't want to find me that way!

21 And lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and that I shall bewail many which have sinned already, and have not repented of the uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness which they have committed. Paul is saying, I don't want that God should humble me by using me powerfully.

You remember in the early church in the case of Sapphira and Ananias (Acts 5:1-11) where when God was moving in a mighty way and the hearts of the people were touched. Some of the people began to sell their possessions and bring the money and lay it at the apostles' feet. That certain couple, Ananias and Sapphira, sold their property. But they held back part of it for themselves. They came hypocritically making a pretense that they were giving everything, when in reality they were only giving a part. Now, it's very obvious from the Scriptures, that the sin was not in giving a part of it.

Peter makes that very plain. While you owned it, was it not your own to do with it as you pleased? Did anyone ask you or force you to sell it? Did anyone force you to bring everything that you gained from the sale of it to the church? The answer was no, to all of those questions. Their sin wasn't in holding back. Their sin was that of hypocrisy, pretending to give all when in reality they were holding back, in order that people might think of them more highly than they really were. To think of them as, oh, look at them. Did you see that? They were exalting them.

And of course the punishment was very severe. Ananias fell over dead. An hour or so later, when his wife came in with this same hypocrisy, she fell over dead, the power of the Holy Spirit in the early church!

Now Paul is saying, I don't want to come and be humbled by people falling over dead. And I will bewail some of you. That is what he is saying. I don't want to bewailing some of you. It is a serious thing to lay your hand against the work of God. It is a very serious thing!

Several years ago, when I first started in the ministry, there were some people who had started to come to the church. They were of what is known as the "Jesus only" persuasion. That is that Jesus is the only one. He is the Father. He is the Son. He is the Holy Spirit. Jesus only. There in Tucson there are quite a number of "Jesus only" people. That is where we were pastoring at the time. And this family started coming to church. He started arguing in the adult Sunday School class, his belief of "Jesus only". It was brought to my attention. He had preached it to me a lot. But I'm not really one to argue Scripture. I don't to argue Scripture. So he would quote some Scripture that he felt backed his position. I'd say, yep, that what it says. So he thought that I believed him. But I didn't bring up well, you know, who was Jesus praying to when He said, My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me? And was He a ventriloquist when He came up out of the water and the voice of God the Father spoke from heaven, saying this My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. I didn't bring up those kind of things. I was thinking them, but I didn't want to get into an argument.

So because I didn't argue, he thought I agreed. He was wrong. But he thought I agreed. So in the Sunday School class he had convinced some other people that this position of "Jesus only" was Scriptural and correct, so they really created quite a commotion this one Sunday morning. They said, well the pastor believes this!

The teacher came to me and said, Pastor Smith, do you believe this? I said no, I don't believe this. Well he said you are going to have to go and straighten him out and let them know.

I went to them and said, look, I don't believe in the "Jesus only" doctrine. I believe that there is one God, but He is manifested in three persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. I believe in the three personalities or the three persons of the Godhead. Oh, this was like blasphemy to them. The fellow went into a prophecy. He saw a casket. He looked in the casket and there I was lying in the casket. I had two weeks to repent and tell the congregation that I, you know, believed in "Jesus only" or you know, they would carry me out of the church in that casket.

They gave me until Saturday night to determine whether or not I was going to share the truth with the church the following Sunday. And if I didn't share the truth they weren't coming back. Well, I said I don't

need until Saturday night. I can tell you right now that I don't believe the "Jesus only" doctrine. I see too many flaws in it. Oh don't say that, we'll call you Saturday night. I don't need until Saturday night. I can tell you that right now. Well, they called me Saturday night. He repeated his prophecy. They didn't show up that Sunday, nor the other families that they influenced.

But the Lord was gracious. We actually had more people the following Sunday than we had when they were all there. So, God was gracious to us in that regard. The problem was though within two weeks, he died. I said to my wife, he saw the casket, but he just saw the wrong face. But it's a serious thing to put your hand against the work of God.

Several years ago we were called to go out to the Los Serranos community church to pastor. The church has gone through a very hard experience. The previous pastor was discovered to be molesting some of the boys in the church. He had been arrested by the sheriff. They had made some kind of agreement that if he would leave the country or leave the area, you know, go back to Arkansas or something, they would not press charges. So, the families of some of the boys that were involved in this molestation were there in the church, they were boys in the church. They, naturally, wanted to kill the guy.

But then, then there were other people who had a deep love for him. He had been there for thirteen years. He had started the church. And so it was a large church and the supervisor asked me if I would go out and take it. I really didn't want to. In my heart I loved the church I was pastoring. We were in Huntington Beach. I loved to surf in Huntington. It was just a good life. I didn't want to go out there. It's smoggy and all, out there near Chino.

So, the church was going to have three different pastors to come and speak. Then they were going to vote. I went out and spoke because as a favor to the supervisor. Then I called him and told I wasn't interested. He said, well, would you just leave your name on the ballot? I said well, all right, I can do that, I guess. So I told my wife, honey, I really don't to go out there. I put out a fleece to the Lord and when they vote, unless they vote for me unanimously for me on the first ballot, we won't go. That will be our sign. And I thought I was safe you know. That was an impossibility. And so the Lord, though began to give me a Scripture several different times in Isaiah that was so applicable in that situation. The Spirit of Lord is upon me. He has anointed me to preach the gospel, to heal the brokenhearted. I said, oh, no, no, no. But it seemed that that Scripture was showing up everywhere.

And so on Sunday evening I received a call from the chairman of the board. He said, Pastor Smith, the church has just had their vote, as far as the new pastor. He said they voted unanimously to invite you to come on the first ballot. I said, oh my! So we felt that it was the Lord's will. You know submission is not doing what you want to do. We make a mistake about that. Oh, I am submitted to the Lord as long as He asks me to do what I like to do, you know. I'm in total submission. Submission is doing what you don't want to do.

It's not where I wish to be nor where I wish to go, for who am I that I should chose my way? The Lord shall choose for me. It is better for I now. So let Him bid me come or go or stay. And so it was a hard decision. We moved.

But the interesting thing was that after we accepted the invitation from the church, there was a lady that started to call up people and say, you know, our pastor really needs our support. We need to rally behind him and this Chuck Smith, you know, and started to create dissension. It was the Wednesday night before the Sunday I was to start. She had started the week before, this dissension. On Wednesday night as she was going to church, she was hit by a car and killed. It was just one of those things where God said, don't touch my anointed. Do my prophets no harm. Paul is talking about this kind of a thing where God deals severely with those who are causing problems within the church. It is a dangerous thing to put your hand against the work of God.

And so Paul is saying, I don't want when I come to Corinth, that there be these things going on that the Spirit of God will humble me before you by actually demonstrating His power and I will bewail some of you.

13:1 This is the third time I am coming to you. In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established. We'll go through these things, these accusation that are being made. But as the Old Testament

said, that everything was to be established in the mouth of two or three witnesses. You weren't to accept the witness of one. It had to be in the mouth of two or three witnesses, everything shall be established.

²*I told you before, and foretell you, as if I were present, the second time; and being absent now I write to them which heretofore have sinned, and to all other, that, if I come again, I will not spare:* Now, I'm warning you! When I come, I'm not going to spare you that are sinning. We are going to deal with these issues head on.

³*Since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, which to you-ward is not weak, but is mighty in you.*

⁴*For though he was crucified through weakness, yet he liveth 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 Paul is sort of giving them a warning, these that are creating the problems. These that are living lives of sin and are trying to excuse them. I'm coming. I'm coming in the power of the Spirit. I'm not going to spare.

⁵*Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?* ⁶*But I trust that ye shall know that we are not reprobates.* And so he is saying, now look, examine yourselves. Prove yourself if you are in the faith. What an important thing that is! There are so many people who are living lives of sin and yet they feel they are all right. They feel that somehow they have a special dispensation from God, that they can somehow engage in the world and in the things of the world and in the worldly practices and still be saved.

And Paul is challenging them, examining yourselves to see if you are truly in the faith. Don't you realize that Jesus Christ is in you? He wrote earlier and said, you know, if you join yourself to a harlot and Christ is in you, you're bringing Him into that relationship. You become one with that. But you are one with Christ and so he is really warning them to check it out. Examine yourself. It's not what you say, your actions speak louder than your words. We trust that you will realize that we are not reprobates.

⁷*Now I pray to God that ye do no evil; not that we should appear approved, but that ye should do that which is honest, though we be as reprobates.* (in your minds) ⁸*For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth.* The truth is going to stand! The truth will stand. That is always to me a comforting thing. The truth will stand. We can't do anything against the truth, only for the truth.

⁹*For we are glad, when we are weak, and ye are strong: and this also we wish, even your perfection.* I'm glad for your strength! And I desire your perfection.

¹⁰*Therefore I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness, according to the power which the Lord hath given me to edification, and not to destruction.* Paul wants to use the gifts of God to build them up, not to destroy them. He wants to see the power of God in their lives, building them up, not destroying them.

It's an interesting thing. The Bible speaks of God as a consuming fire. It actually speaks of God as a fire. The Greek word is *eremacasmus*. It is the slow burning fire of nature, everywhere. This slow burning fire of nature is gradually destroying everything. Put a piece of metal out on the ground. Leave it there for a few days and you see little spots of brown on it. What's happening—*eremacasmus*, the slow burning fire of nature is starting to destroy it, gradually in time. It's everywhere, *eremacasmus*. You cannot escape it. It's throughout the whole universe. The universe is winding down. The second law of thermodynamics—*eremacasmus*.

Fire is interesting in that we use fire to temper steel. That is heating it up to a point, thus, making it permanent by the fire. Some things are hardened and made more or less permanent by the tempering of the fire, while other things are consumed and destroyed by the fire. The same fire transmits something into permanency and other things it destroys.

In the time of Hezekiah (Isaiah 37), when Isaiah was ministering to him, the city of Jerusalem had been surrounded by the Assyrian army. And Isaiah had comforted Hezekiah, telling him that God was going to deliver the Assyrians into the hand of the Jews.

One morning as they looked out at the camp of the Assyrians, they saw that there was nothing but dead corpses. In the night an angel of the Lord went through the camp and wiped out a hundred and eighty-five

thousand of the Assyrians. There were just dead bodies all over the place. And it said, fear gripped the hearts of the sinners in Zion, for they said who amongst us can dwell in the midst of the devouring fire? They saw God as the fire, that they say the results of God's fire on the Assyrians. Fear gripped the hearts of the sinners and the hypocrites. They said, oh, wait a minute, look at what the fire of God has done. Who amongst us can dwell in the midst of that devouring fire?

God's Spirit in your life, in a person's life, can be transmitting them into eternal, building up. But also the power of the Spirit can be used in destruction! Paul said, I don't want that. I want to use the gifts to build you up. I don't want to see you destroyed. So I am writing these things to you. I hope that the issues are all settled before I get there. I don't want to have a showdown when I arrive.

¹¹*Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect,* (Now the word perfect is not as we use it today, without flaw. The word in the Greek, means to grow up, be mature. And it always speaks of full age or maturity. Just grow up!)

be of good comfort, be of one mind, (Quit the division.) *live in peace* (Don't have the factions.); *and the God of love and peace shall be with you.* ¹²*Greet one another with an holy kiss.*

¹³*All the saints salute* (Greet. The word salute doesn't mean you know, a Boy Scout Salute. They used to say that at the end of weddings, you may salute your bride, you know. I was actually at a wedding, where a guy in the military was getting married. The guy said you may salute you bride. He saluted her!) *you.*

¹⁴*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost,* (Here you have the three in One. This is why I couldn't agree with that guy in Tucson. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit. There are three persons of the One God. One God manifested in three persons. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, the fellowship or communion of the Holy Spirit) *be with you all. Amen.*

So Paul's benediction, dealing with the threefold nature of God—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Thank You, Father, for the instruction. May we give heed. Lord, we do pray that we might take to heart these warnings of Paul's to the church of Corinth. That we might live holy lives before You, that we might forsake the world and the things that are in the world. That we might grow up spiritually, that we might be mature, that we might walk in peace, walk in love. That we might be everything that You want us to be, dedicated, committed, unspotted by the things of the world, walking in purity, walking in holiness, because You are holy. Lord, we commit our lives afresh to You tonight. We want to be everything that You want us to be. We want to be fully committed and submitted, Lord, to You. Guide us. Help us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.