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A Stern Warning

13: 1-10

A stern warning DIG: What role should the congregations of God and their leaders play in holding believers accountable for spiritual growth? What is the responsibility of the individual when challenged to grow spiritually? What does it mean to “examine yourselves to see if you are in the faith?” Why do you think this is necessary for believers to do?

REFLECT: How is discipline an act of love? If ADONAI failed to discipline His children, would He be viewed as weak or strong? Explain. How might a person test their faith? Why would it be important for them to do so? How would you go about examining yourself? It is common practice to take a “spiritual inventory?” How often should you do such a thing?

Examine yourselves to see whether you are living the life of faith. Test yourselves.

The church in the grossly wicked city of **Corinth** faced a crisis. Most of its members had come to **Messiah** out of paganism and idolatry (see the commentary on **First Corinthians**, to see link click [Ce](#) - **The Pagan Background of Counterfeit Spiritual Gifts**) and brought some of those immoral practices into the church. In **First Corinthians**, **Paul** had confronted a long list of **sins they** were still engaged in. And as if that weren't enough, **the false apostles** (see [Af](#) - **The Problem of the False Apostles**) who had invaded the **Corinthian** church were leading it astray into further **sin**. **The apostle** was deeply concerned, not for the church's cultural relevance, but for its holiness. **He** knew that if **the Corinthians** failed to lead godly lives, the church would dishonor **the Lord** and be spiritually ineffective. Any church that tolerates **sin** (see the commentary on **Revelation Bc** - **The Church at Thyatira**) will be lifeless; therefore, **Paul** discussed the method of church discipline and a plea for self-examination.

A warning of impending discipline (13:1-4): For **the third time** in successive verses (**12:20**, **12:21** and **13:1a**) - each near the beginning of the verse - **Paul**

signals **his** intention to **come to visit them**. Despite **his** determination not to **come to them** again in grief (2:1), that is, to deal with unrepentant **sin** with severe discipline, it appeared that just such a **visit** was a reality.²⁹¹ Thus, **Paul** laid down a biblical principle that **he**, as a Jew speaking to a largely Gentile congregation, was very familiar with: **Any charge must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses (13:1b)**. Church discipline is not a witch-hunt, where people's reputations are destroyed by flimsy, unsupported allegations. Because **ADONAI** is a **God** of justice (**Isaiah 30:18**), **He** has designed a discipline process that is both thorough and fair. **Paul's** chastening of the unrepentant **sinner**s at **Corinth** would be carried out in strict accordance with **God's Torah (Deuteronomy 19:15)**. No one was to be put out of the church until a thorough four-step process had been completed (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Gi - If Brother or Sister Sins, Go and Point Out Their Fault**).²⁹²

Paul now concludes what **he** began in **12:20**, foreshadowing **his** impending visit to **Corinth**. Once again - for the fourth time in four consecutive verses - **Paul** declares **his** intention to **come to Corinth**. The impact of this repetition upon the hearers of the letter would leave no doubt as to **Paul's** imminent final **visit**.²⁹³ **To those who sinned in the past and to the rest I say beforehand while absent the same thing I said when I was with you on my second sorrowful visit (2:1): if I come again, I will not spare you (13:2)**.

The most important reason for church discipline lies in **Ha'Shem's** often repeated charge to **His** people: **Be holy, for I am Holy (Leviticus 11:44-45; Deuteronomy 6:17-18; First Peter 1:15-16 and 2:9-12)**. Church discipline is sometimes necessary to help believers **purify themselves from everything that can defile either body or spirit, and strive to be completely holy, out of reverence for God (7:1)**. **God Himself** disciplines **His people** so **they** can share **His** holiness (see the commentary on **Hebrews Cz - God Disciplines His Children**). As part of that process, **God** has given the Church the responsibility of disciplining its **sinning** members. That is such a basic element of the Church's life that **Paul** was outraged when **the Corinthians** failed to discipline one of their members who was living in unrepentant immorality (see the commentary on **First Corinthians Ba - Failure to Discipline an Immoral Brother**).²⁹⁴

The goal of every faithful Messianic rabbi or pastor is to allow the Messiah to speak through **him**. That does not happen through an audible voice but through the proclamation of **God's Word**. **The Corinthians** were right in **looking for proof**

that **Messiah** did, in fact, **speak** through those who claimed to be **apostles** (**Revelation 2:2**). Unfortunately, **they** were measuring **them** by the wrong standards. **Paul** didn't display the forceful personality traits that marked **the** proud, arrogant **false apostles**, which impressed many of **the Corinthians**; therefore, some demanded convincing proof of **his apostleship**. So **Paul** compared **himself** to **Messiah**, who in **His** humanity took on **weakness**. **He is not weak in dealing with you, but he is powerful among you. For although He was executed on the cross in weakness, now he lives by God's power.** Returning to **his** warning, **Paul** told **the Corinthians** that **the power of God** that raised **Messiah** would be directed toward **his enemies** when **he visited Corinth** again (**13:3-4**). **He** would be like **the Lord**, who warned **the church at Pergamum: Therefore, repent! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against you with the sword of My mouth (Revelation 2:16).**²⁹⁵

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise **Your** love that so mercifully forgives **the repentant sinner**. **Your** complete forgiveness of our **sins** is so awesome! What a joy and comfort that when in holy fear we **repent** by telling **You** how very sorry we are for our wrong action, **You** put our **sins** where they can never touch. **For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His mercy for those who fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. (Psalm 103:11-12).***

***Repentance** is like a sparkling jewel that is given to show deep regret and love. Though **repenting** takes a humble heart, it is well worth it for then the wrong is cleaned, forgiven and the relationship is restored. It is so important to stay clean in our relationship with **You**. **Sin** hampers any relationship and we want to always be walking in a way that pleases **You**. **You** are such a wonderful **father** and we so delight in pleasing **You**! In **Your** holy **Son's** name, **Yeshua**, and the power of **His** resurrection. Amen*



A plea for self-examination (13:5-10): Rather than demanding proof that **Messiah** was **speaking** through **Paul, the Corinthians** ought to be examining **themselves** to find out if **they** were continuing true to the **faith**. **Examine yourselves to see whether you are living the life of faith. Test yourselves. Don't you realize that Yeshua the Messiah is in you (13:5)?** Like **Paul**, the writer to the **Hebrews** well understood the danger of self-deception. Some of the people **he** addressed in **his** letter were intellectually convinced of the truth of the Gospel but uncommitted to **Messiah**. **He** called **them** to examine the extreme danger **they** were in if **they** didn't step over the line from knowledge to faith (see the commentary on **Hebrews A1 - How Shall We Escape If We Ignore So Great a Salvation**). However, **Paul** knew that the majority of **the Corinthians** were genuine believers and would therefore **pass the test (13:6)**.

Therefore, as believers, we need to give ourselves a regular spiritual check-up. God places a high value on the habit of self-evaluation. At least five times in Scripture we are told to test and examine our own spiritual health. To maintain your physical health, you need regular check-ups with a doctor who can assess your vital signs – blood pressure, temperature, weight, and so on. For your spiritual health you need to regularly check the five vital signs of worship, fellowship, growth in character, ministry and mission. **Jeremiah** advised: **Take a good look at the way you are living and reorder our lives under God (Lamentations 3:40 The Message).**²⁹⁶

As **he** closed **his** letter, **Paul** summarized the elements necessary for spiritual growth. If they were going to **be conformed into the image of Messiah (Romans 8:29)**, **they** needed to deal with **their sin**. In this passage, Paul concludes the main body of his letter by addressing two more essential elements of the sanctification process: **obedience** and **integrity**.

Obedience (13:7-9a): And we pray to God that you will do nothing

wrong. His prayer was that **the Corinthians'** obedience would make it unnecessary for **him** to come to wield **his** authority and discipline **them**, or if **he** came, **they** would have **repented** so that there would be nothing to confront. Overshadowing this passage as **they** have the entire letter, were **the false apostles** who were influencing **the Corinthians**. Many in the congregation had become enamored with **them**, and as a result, **they** were partially successful in undermining the church's loyalty to **Paul**. As **Paul** wrote this letter to affirm **his** authenticity in the face of those vicious attacks, **he** was not jealously guarding **his** own reputation. But **he** was very aware that if the church turned away from **him**, it would also be turning away from **Messiah**. **We are not concerned with our appearing successful, but with doing what is right, even if we appear to be failures. Paul** would gladly appear as **a failure** if **the Corinthians'** obedience removed the need for **him** to display **his apostolic** power. **Their** purity and obedience were far more important than how others viewed **him**. Let **the false apostles** and **their** deceived followers go on considering **him** disqualified as **an apostle**; as long as the majority were living in obedience to the truth, **Paul** was content. **For we cannot act against the truth, only for it.** Loving **the truth** means honoring **it**, and **Paul** would not hesitate to confront those who strayed from **it**. **Paul's** willingness to be perceived as **weak** as long as **his** spiritual children were **strong (First Corinthians 4:9-13)** prompted **him** to write: **So, we rejoice whenever we are weak and you are strong (13:7-9a).** **His** concern was that **the Corinthians** be obedient and **strong (First Corinthians 16:13; Ephesians 6:10).**

Integrity (13:9b): Indeed, we pray that you become complete (Greek: *Katartisis*, meaning *prepared, equipped, or fully qualified*). The related verb *katartizo* (**13:11**) has the basic idea of *putting things in order, in their proper place, or restoring or fixing something that is broken*. This quality of integrity or completeness sums up the elements previously mentioned: **repentance (12:20-21)**, confronting **sin** through church discipline (**13:1-2**); submission to authority (**13:3-4**), authenticity (**13:5-6**), and obedience (**13:7-9a**). Perhaps the English word integrity best expresses the meaning of *katartisis* in this passage. A person with integrity is one whose thoughts, beliefs, words, and actions are all in perfect harmony. For the believer, integrity involves having every area of life in submission to the truth of God's Word; not being perfect mind you, but with nothing consistently out of sync. Since the perfect picture of integrity is **the Lord, who knew no sin (5:21)**, the goal of integrity is to

be like **Him**. As David wrote: **ADONAI, who can rest in your tent? Who can live on your holy mountain? Those who live a blameless life, who behave uprightly, who speak truth from their hearts and keep their tongues from slander; who never do harm to others or seek to discredit neighbors; who look with scorn on the vile, but honor those who fear ADONAI; who hold to an oath, no matter the cost; who refuse usury when they lend money and refuse a bribe to damage the innocent. Those who do these things never will be moved (Psalm 15:1-5).**²⁹⁷

Finally, in **13:10 Paul** concludes the main body of **his** letter with what is, in effect, a summary in one-sentence: **I write these things while away from you, so that when I am with you I will not have to use my authority to deal sharply with you, for the Lord gave it to me for building up and not for tearing down** (Greek: *kathairesis*, meaning *destruction* or *demolition*). This was his final stern warning. If some of **the Corinthians** persisted in **their sin** and defiance of **the Word** and will of **the Lord** - **he** would not hesitate to act. **He** fervently hoped **they** would heed the warnings in this letter so **his third visit** would be different than **his** second one, which was so sad and **painful** for **him (2:1)**.

Did Paul succeed? Did **the Corinthians** heed **his** warnings, **repent**, and turn away from **the false apostles**? Did **they** welcome **Paul** on **his third visit**? **The apostle** did, as **he** promised, visit **Corinth** again. **Acts 20:2-3** records that **he** spent **three months** in **Greece**. Since **20:2** says **he** came to Greece from **Macedonia** (the northern part of **Greece**), and when **he** left, **he finally arrived in Greece** (or **Achaia**, meaning the southern part of **Greece**). Since **Corinth** was located in **Achaia**, **Paul** undoubtedly spent most or all of that **three-month** period in that **city**. Though the B'rit Chadashah offers no specific details of that visit, four lines of evidence suggest that **the Corinthians** responded positively to **his** letter and **his visit to them** was the joyful one **Paul** had hoped for.

First, **Paul** wrote **Romans** during that **three-month** stay in **Corinth**. The references to **Phoebe**, **Gaius** and **Erastus** were made in **Romans 16** because **they** were friends of **Paul** in **Corinth**. But more importantly, nowhere in **Romans** did **Paul** express any concerns about the situation in **Corinth**. That implied that things were calm and peaceful while **he** was there.

Second, **Paul** wrote to the **Romans** about **his** plan to **visit Spain** via **Rome (Romans 15:24)**. If things were still chaotic in **Corinth**, it is unlikely that **he** would

have had imminent plans to leave there.

Third, **Romans 15:26-27** indicates that **the Achaians** (as noted above, **Corinth** was in **Achaia**) had responded to **Paul's** appeal regarding the collection for the Messianic community in Jerusalem (see **Bm - The Call to Complete the Collection**). **The Corinthians** would not likely have made that contribution (especially handing it over to **Paul**) if **they** still harbored doubts about whether **he** was **a** true **apostle**.

Finally, the inclusion of **Second Corinthians** in the B'rit Chadashah canon argues that **the Corinthians** responded favorably to the letter. If **it** failed to achieve **its** purpose, **it** would not likely have been accepted by the Church as Scripture.

This letter, in which **Paul** poured out **his** heart to **the Corinthians**, achieved its goal of reconciling **them** to **him**. Like the rest of Scripture, it will infallibly achieve what **ADONAI** designed it to achieve. As **YHVH** declared through **His prophet Isaiah**, "**For just as rain and snow fall from the sky and do not return there, but water the earth, causing it to bud and produce, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so is my Word that goes out from my mouth - it will not return to me unfulfilled; but it will accomplish what I intend, and cause to succeed what I sent it to do**" (Isaiah 55:10-11).²⁹⁸