

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

With Paternal Regard

BACKGROUND: Paul's tender affection toward the Christians of Corinth has been evident throughout his two epistles to them. Like a concerned father, he has continuously admonished them about their transgressions and postponed his next visit to give them ample time to change their ways before his arrival. In this final chapter, he makes it clear that this time has run out.

13:1-2. *This will be the third time I am coming to you. "By the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established." I have told you before and foretold as if I were present the second time, and now being absent I write to those who have sinned before, and to all the rest, that if I come again I will not spare*—When Paul returns to Corinth he will deal with those in the church who continue to live sinfully. He quotes Deut 19:15, the Old Testament standard for establishing guilt.

13:3-4. *since you seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, who is not weak toward you, but mighty in you. For though He was crucified in weakness, yet He lives 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.* The boldness and strength they will see in him during his next visit stem from his authority through Christ. His reluctance to display this power in the past was not due to weakness but proof of his strengths of patience and love. The human weakness he has displayed, his vulnerability to persecution from his enemies, was the same weakness that Christ endured. Christ's willingness to bear the limitations of the human body, which put Him under the physical power of His enemies, was actually a sign of His strength.

Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men (1 Cor 1:25).

There is no real weakness or foolishness in God. Away with the thought! For that He had it in His power not to have been crucified He showed throughout; when He cast men down prostrate, turned back the beams of the sun, withered a fig tree, blinded their eyes that came against Him and wrought ten thousand other things. What then is this which he says, *in weakness!* That even though He was crucified after enduring peril and treachery...yet still He was not harmed.
CHRYSOSTOM¹

13:5-6. *Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Prove yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified. But I trust that you will know that we are not disqualified.* Paul asks that they assess their lives to see whether they really show signs of faith. We are a part of Christ through Baptism and Eucharist and remain so as long as we try to live Christ-like lives. If we do not participate in this struggle through all the situations of life, we disqualify ourselves from God's Kingdom, just as those who participate in any quest are subject to the conditions involved.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: (a). What is the message of verses 5-6 to the modern Christian?

13:7. *Now I pray to God that you do no evil, not that we should appear approved, but that you should do what is honorable, though we may seem disqualified.* His prayer is that they not cut

themselves off from communion with God. He would rather that all his concerns seem unfounded and his threats foolish than that he find them in spiritual decay.

13:8. For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth. His spiritual power stems from his faith in the truths God has revealed to those who love Him. If Paul were to act outside these truths, he would find himself powerless.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: (b). What special power did Paul and the Apostles have in the early Church?

13:9-10. For we are glad when we are weak and you are strong. And this also we pray, that you may be made complete. Therefore, I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness, according to the authority which the Lord has given me for edification and not for destruction. If they were spiritually strong and healthy, it would be unnecessary for him to use the power that is his when he has to battle ungodliness. But he would rather be thought weak than have to take measures against them. He would rather be severe in his letters to them than in actions toward them. The authority God gave him was to build up the Church—not destroy it.

13:11. Finally, brethren, farewell. Paul has done all he can. He has taught them the fullness of the Gospel, pointed out the areas in which they have been disobedient, and outlined the present and eternal consequences if they do not change their ways. The rest is up to them. His final words are those of an affectionate father:

Become complete...amend your lives—make whatever changes are necessary to be in communion with God.

be of good comfort...take comfort from one another, from God's word and His promises, and from a clear conscience.

be of one mind and live in peace; be united, not only about doctrine but in day-to-day dealings with one another and with God's creation.

While you are on earth, regard yourself as a guest of the Host, that is, of Christ. If you are at table, He honors you thus. If you breathe the air, you breathe His air. If you bathe, you bathe in His water. If you travel, you travel around His earth. If you accumulate goods, you accumulate what is His; if you squander them, you squander what is His. If you are influential, you are so by His permission. If you are in company with others, you are with His other guests. If you are in the countryside, you are in His garden. If you are alone, He is present. If you set off anywhere, He sees you. If you do anything, He has it in mind. He is the most careful Host Whose guest you have ever been. And be, in your turn, careful towards Him. A good host merits a good guest.²

and the God of love and peace will be with you. To live in accordance with God's plan for man is to know unparalleled love and peace. When we are right with our Maker, we know it, we feel it. His love is sweet.

Taste and see that the Lord is good, Blessed is the man who trusts in Him
(Ps 34:8)!

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: (c). How does Paul's paternal approach to the

Corinthians follow the pattern of God's dealings with mankind?

13:12. Greet one another with a holy kiss. As in the closing of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, Paul refers to the holy kiss. It is a pious tradition within Orthodoxy to greet one another in this way, as the early Christians did, as a symbol of the love Christ said we should have for one another as members of the Body of Christ (Jn 15:12).

What is *holy*? Not hollow, not treacherous, like the kiss Judas gave to Christ. The kiss is given that it may be fuel unto love, that it may kindle the disposition, that we may so love each other, as brothers brothers, as children parents, as parents children, but even far more. For those things are implanted by nature, but these by spiritual grace.

...We are the temple of Christ; we kiss the porch and entrance of the temple when we kiss each other...And through these gates and doors Christ both had entered into us, and does enter, whenever we commune. You who partake of the Mysteries understand what I say. For it is in no common manner that our lips are honored, when they receive the Lord's Body. It is for this reason chiefly that we here kiss. Pay attention—those who speak filthy things, who swear, and let them shudder to think what that mouth is they dishonor.

CHRYSOSTOM³

The holy kiss found expression in the ancient celebration of the Divine Liturgy. Just before the recitation of the Creed, the Kiss of Peace was exchanged by all in attendance, signifying unity in faith. In modern times, this beautiful practice is often eliminated, except among the clergy when more than one priest co-celebrates. Some parishes have revived this meaningful practice, allowing the faithful the opportunity to turn to each other with the words: "Christ is in our midst," and the response "He is now and always shall be." The demonstration of this type of love is powerful, capable of manifesting itself even among strangers.

We forget that in the call to "greet one another with a holy kiss" we are talking not of our personal, natural, human love, through which we cannot in fact love someone who is a "stranger," who has not yet become "something" or "somebody" for us, but of the *love of Christ*, the eternal wonder of which consists precisely in the fact that it transforms the *stranger* (and each stranger, in his depths, is an *enemy*) into a *brother*, irrespective of whether he has or does not have relevance for me and for my life; that it is the very purpose of the Church to overcome the horrible *alienation* that was introduced into the world by the Devil and proved to be its undoing. And we forget that we come to church for this love, which is always granted to us in the gathering of the brethren.⁴

13:13. All the saints greet you. This greeting from the "saints," the other Christians with Paul, is a reminder of the universal Church. All who worship in Truth and try to live accordingly are united in love through Christ. Together they make up the Body of Christ and thus are saints.

13:14. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen. With this invocation of the Holy Trinity, Paul reaches out to all, through the ages, who read this epistle. These powerful words have come to be known as the Apostolic Benediction, with which Orthodox priests bless worshippers during the Divine Liturgy.

Paul did, finally, return to Corinth. He spent the winter there as he had hoped (1 Cor 16:5, 6). It was during this time that he wrote his Epistle to the Romans (c.57 A.D.).

FOOD FOR THOUGHT COMMENTS

(a). What is the message of 2 Cor 13:5-6 to the modern Christian? Christ does not remain with those who live in disobedience. Those who partake of Eucharist without sincerely attempting to rid themselves of the corruption of sin receive condemnation rather than blessing (1 Cor 11:27-30). To live long, healthy, productive lives on earth we must continually assess our physical state and do that which is necessary to remain in optimal condition. To live eternally with God, it is even more important that we apply this principle to our spiritual condition.

(b). What special power did Paul and the Apostles have in the early Church? They had the power that operates through God's love to teach, heal and admonish. Occasionally they were vehicles through which consequences of sin took physical effect immediately, as with Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-10) and Elymas (Acts 13:6-11). These actions were aimed at teaching those involved, and those looking on, that disobedience to God carries consequences (see Acts 5:11; 13:12). Paul and the Apostles also had the spiritual powers (passed on to the priesthood) to forgive sin or not (Jn 20:23), and to grant or deny access to the Sacraments of the Church (1 Cor 5:3-5).

(c). How does Paul's paternal approach to the Corinthians follow the pattern of God's dealings with mankind? A good father makes sure his children know they are loved but also what he expects of them for their own good, and he gives them every opportunity to grow in that direction. He assists them along the way, as Paul helped the Corinthians, but then follows through with stated consequences if his instructions are not heeded, in order to prevent their falling into harm. This is what God has done with man. The magnificence of His Creation is proof of his love for us. The cycle of nature is proof that He has provided life beyond death. He has made His divine plan for man known through His Son and through Scripture. These writings extol the wonders of His Kingdom but also teach, explain and warn of the consequences of indifference to or disobedience of these precepts. He allows ample time for all to learn, to repent, and to try to comply, but the allotted time will run out. At the Second Coming of Christ, which will occur at a time known by no one, judgment will take place:

All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those at His right hand, "*Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world;*" Then He will say to those on the left hand, "*Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels*" (Mt. 25:32-34,41).

Let us then continue to hold these doctrines in their strictness and to draw to us the love of God. For before indeed He loved us when hating Him and reconciled us who were His enemies; but henceforth He wishes to love us as loving Him. Let us then continue to love Him, so that we may also be loved by Him. For if when beloved by powerful men we are formidable to all, much more when beloved by God. And should it be needful to give wealth, or body, or even life itself for this love, let us not grudge them. It is not enough to say in words that we love, we ought to give also the proof of deeds; for neither did He show love by words only, but by deeds also. Do then also show Him by deeds and do those things which please Him for so shall you reap the advantage. For He needs nothing that we have to bestow, and this is also special proof of a sincere love, when one Who needs nothing does all for the sake of being loved by us. *For what does the Lord God require of you, but to love Him, and that you should be ready to walk after Him* (Deut 10:12)?

CHRYSOSTOM⁵

Amen.

¹ Schaff, "Homily XXIX," p.414.

² Velimirovic, Part One, p.254.

³ Schaff, "Homily XXX," p.418.

⁴ Schmemmann, *Eucharist*, p.139.

⁵ Schaff, "Homily XXX," p.419.