

19. Restoration or Ruin?

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Date: 20 October 2013

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[0 : 0 0] Well, good evening, friends. We come to our Bible reading now, and perhaps you would turn with me, please, to 2 Corinthians chapter 13, and you'll find this on page 970 in our big hardback Bibles, 970. And this is the final chapter of Paul's second letter to the Corinthians. It would be lovely to know how they responded to his letter. We have no real record of that, but it's a thought for us to hold in our minds as we listen to this final chapter. How did they respond? And indeed, how are we going to respond in our own day?

So 2 Corinthians chapter 13, verse 1. This is the third time I am coming to you. Every charge must be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. I warned those who sinned before, and all the others, and I warn them now while absent, as I did when present on my second visit, that if I come again, I will not spare them, since you seek proof that Christ is speaking in me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you.

For he was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but in dealing with you, we will live with him by the power of God. Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you, unless indeed you fail to meet the test. I hope you will find out that we have not failed the test. But we pray to God that you may not do wrong. Not that we may appear to have met the test, but that you may do what is right, though we may seem to have failed. For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. For we are glad when we are weak, and you are strong. Your restoration is what we pray for. For this reason, I write these things while I am away from you, that when I come, I may not have to be severe in my use of the authority that the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down. Finally, brothers, rejoice.

Aim for restoration. Comfort one another. Agree with one another. Live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

And may God add his blessing to these words of the Apostle Paul. Well, do turn with me again to 2 Corinthians chapter 13, page 970.

[3 : 2 7] Well, let's bow our heads for a moment of prayer before we start. Dear God, our Father, we thank you that you have entrusted to us your words, the words that come to us through the prophets and the apostles and the Lord Jesus.

And yet they're your words, and they are the words of life and truth. And we pray now that you will open our hearts afresh, that you will give us fresh ears to listen to you, and hearts that are ready not only to understand but to obey and to love you and serve you.

And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Well, you'll be aware, friends, that this is our last session on 2 Corinthians, and I'm giving it the title, Restoration or Ruin.

In other words, will the church at Corinth, back in the year 57 AD or whenever it was, will the church at Corinth pay attention to Paul's letter and thus find restoration, which is what they needed?

Will they return to the gospel and the lifestyle of the gospel? Or will the church disregard Paul's letter, perhaps cutting it up into a thousand pieces and dropping it into the harbor in Corinth and allowing it to sink without trace, which would mean ruin for the church at Corinth.

[4 : 52] Now, you'll see how this theme of restoration appears in this final chapter. Perhaps you'd look with me at the end of verse 9. And you'll see how Paul says, Your restoration is what we pray for.

That's where he sees the need. Your restoration is what we pray for. And again in verse 11, Aim for restoration. So in broad terms, this church had only two possible futures.

If they were to listen to Paul and do what he is urging them to do, they will discover discipline, unity, godliness and usefulness. But if they turn away from Paul, they will effectively cease to be Christian.

Their church is rather like a building which has been badly damaged by rain and frost, dry rot, vandalism and neglect. It needs drastic and determined action if it is to be restored.

But if the restorative action is not taken, its only future is ruin. Now, let's remind ourselves about what had been going wrong in the Corinthian church.

[5 : 59] And here I'm drawing on one Corinthians as well as on two Corinthians. There was division in the church and disunity amongst the church members. Remember how some favored various Christian leaders over and above others.

There were different favorites. I follow Paul. I follow Apollos. I follow Peter and so on. They were proud and arrogant. They thought they were very wise and grown up and terribly gifted.

And they were gifted, but they were using their gifts to show off, not to serve each other or to help each other. And they were very unloving to each other. That's why Paul had to write his famous 13th chapter of 1 Corinthians to teach them everything about love that they didn't know.

And there was sexual immorality going on in the church. And it seemed they didn't grieve over it or mourn over it. So the church had become a toxic cocktail of misbehavior.

But worse was to come between the writing of 1 Corinthians and the writing of 2 Corinthians. Because a group of influential people who soon became leaders, people that Paul describes as super apostles in 2 Corinthians chapter 12, verse 11, these people had come into Corinth from somewhere else, and they were teaching the church a false gospel and a false Jesus.

[7 : 19] And the Corinthians didn't appear to be able to see how these false leaders were leading them astray. And if you look at the final two verses of our chapter 12 here in 2 Corinthians, you'll see that Paul is fearful that the sins and the problems that he addressed in 1 Corinthians were still going on, still gripping the church.

Look with me at chapter 12, verse 20. Quarreling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder. And then in verse 21, impurity, sexual immorality, and sensuality.

And in that verse, Paul says that he fears that when he returns to Corinth, he's going to have to mourn over the fact that all these things are still going on and have not been repented of.

Now, friends, just imagine coming in through the door into our building here to come to a service of the church. And imagine that you find a notice written up over the door in large letters.

And the notice says this. Welcome to this church. We who belong to it are the proud and unrepentant practitioners of quarreling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder.

[8 : 36] We also endorse and promote impurity, sexual immorality, and sensuality. In fact, our logo is to boldly sin as no church has ever sinned before.

Now, if you were to come to our church building and find a message like that written above the door, I hope that you would quickly turn on your heel and march off. But this is the kind of church that the Apostle Paul was having to contend with at Corinth.

Look at verse 20 in chapter 12. In other words, that I'm going to have to be the tough disciplinarian with you.

That's not the way you would want me to be. You would want me to be the gentle, encouraging father figure. And that's exactly the person I would like to be as well. But you may force me to have to call unruly members of the church to account.

Do you remember how back in 1 Corinthians chapter 4, Paul had written, What do you wish? Shall I come to you with a rod or with love in a spirit of gentleness?

[9 : 47] Now, he's not talking about a fishing rod there. He means the kind of rod that an old-fashioned head teacher would keep behind his study door. The kind of rod that people of my vintage felt on our persons many years ago.

Now, it's this atmosphere of the need for discipline which shapes the opening verses of 2 Corinthians 13. So let me read the first two verses again. This is the third time I'm coming to you.

Every charge, every charge of sin against an individual church member, that's what he means, must be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. I warned those who sinned before and all the others, and I warned them now while absent, as I did when present on my second visit, that if I come again, I will not spare them.

So Paul is picturing a kind of court scene. And Paul is picturing an unrepentant sinner being brought in before him. And charges about this person's sinful behavior are laid before the apostle Paul.

Now, you'll see how Paul is careful to protect this sinner from the malice of a particular solo enemy. That's why he says that he will only consider a case if evidence of sinful behavior is produced by more than one witness.

[11 : 05] And no doubt Paul would be very careful even then, in case somebody was being persecuted by a group of malicious adversaries. But the point is that if Paul is satisfied that an individual is living an unrepentantly sinful life, he will not hesitate to discipline that person.

I will not spare them, he says at the end of verse 2. Now, how do you think Paul might have exercised discipline? Well, there's no evidence, I think, that he had corporal punishment in mind.

He often had been on the receiving end of lashes and whippings and so on, but no evidence that that's what he was thinking of, despite what he says about a rod in 1 Corinthians. But we can be sure that he would have spoken very sternly to the individual, urging and commanding repentance.

And if repentance was not quickly forthcoming, he would have barred that person from active involvement in the life of the church until there was genuine repentance. Now, we'll look at verses 3 and 4 in just a moment, but let's take note at this stage that the first thing that Paul presses on the Corinthians so that their church should be restored and not ruined is the need for a healthy, strong pastoral discipline.

Ultimately, of course, it is Christ, not the apostle or the pastor, who administers the discipline. But the church needs to know that discipline will be administered if necessary. Now, let's just step back from the text for a moment and think about discipline.

[12 : 38] Any human institution needs good discipline if it is to function well. So a school needs good discipline, starting from the head and the governors downwards.

An army regiment needs good discipline. A company who is running a business needs good discipline. A political party needs it. A family certainly needs it.

Now, in Western society, over the last 50 years or so, there's been quite a strong trend which has been cutting against good discipline in just about any institution that you can name.

And the force that has fashioned this trend has been the idea that each individual should be allowed, by society, to express himself or herself as that individual pleases.

So a person will say, if I want to do it, whatever it is, I shall do it. And if society doesn't like the way I'm expressing myself, society can take a running jump.

[13 : 38] Now, this anti-discipline trend is, of course, deep down an anti-God trend. Because good order and good discipline flow from God himself.

It's one of the straplines of the book of Proverbs that fools despise discipline and refuse to submit to it. So if I live a life in which I'm determined to do my own thing, I'm making a little God or Godlet out of myself.

I'm throwing off the true God and the disciplined life that he requires of me, and I'm giving way to the demands of my nasty, sinful nature. So in the terms of chapter 12, verse 20, when I get the opportunity to quarrel and be jealous and angry and slanderous and gossipy and conceited, there is no God-given restraint in my life and heart that stops me from behaving in these destructive ways.

And likewise, in the terms of chapter 12, verse 21, I will look for opportunities to practice sexual immorality, which means any kind of sexually intimate behavior outside marriage.

And I will take those opportunities because, again, there is no God-given influence that will stop me. And like the Corinthians, I may even become proud of my behavior.

[14 : 56] I'll start saying loudly to society without any sense of shame or embarrassment, I'm an adulterer. That's the way I am. You've got to take me that way. Or I'm actively gay. You'd better get over it.

The sins of those last two verses of chapter 12 are the sins of Corinthians who were claiming to be Christians, but who were not willing to exercise the self-discipline, self-discipline, which is at the heart of all true Bible holiness.

And Paul says, if you're not willing to discipline yourselves, you will have to submit to Christ's discipline. It's the only way in which to restore a church that is in danger of collapsing into ruin.

Now let's look at verses 3 and 4 to see how Paul understands this discipline. The Corinthians, and we see this throughout 2 Corinthians, they were inclined to write Paul off as something of a weakling.

Their false apostles, these incomers, these super apostles, were people who enjoyed throwing their weight around and dominating the church. Paul says of them back in chapter 11, verse 20, they make slaves of you and devour you and take advantage of you and even slap you in the face.

[16 : 12] And the Corinthians seem to have been willing to put up with this kind of tyrannical behavior. And they know that Paul is different. They know that, in the words of chapter 10, verse 1, Paul follows the example of the meekness and gentleness of Christ.

But meekness does not equal weakness, and gentleness does not equal lack of firmness. So Paul explains here in verse 3 of our chapter 13, that Christ is speaking through Paul's words and leadership, and that Christ will show that he is not weak in dealing with the unruly Corinthians, but powerful.

For, he goes on in verse 4, he was crucified in weakness, Christ was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God. What Paul means is that there is a unique combination of weakness and power in Christ.

To say he was crucified in weakness is an enormous understatement. I mean, what apparently could be weaker than a naked man nailed through wrists and ankles tied up on a cross?

A crucified man is the epitome of weakness. He can't even lift a cup of cold water to his lips. But, verse 4, he may have been weakness to the nth degree while he was crucified on the cross, but he lives, says Paul, by the power of God.

[17 : 39] So if his dying, his death, was weakness, his resurrection is power. And that's why Christ is not weak in disciplining the church, but rather powerful.

The weakness of his crucifixion is past, but the power of his resurrection life is in the present. Now, in the second half of verse 4, Paul shows how his life, how Paul's life, mirrors and reflects that of Christ.

For we also, says Paul, that means Paul and Timothy, we also are weak in him, but in dealing with you, we will live with him by the power of God.

In other words, Christ's weakness in dying and crucifixion is paralleled by Paul's human weaknesses with which, just look back to chapter 12, verse 10, with which he says, I'm content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities.

But, back to chapter 13, verse 4, Christ's resurrection life and power is paralleled with the power that I, Paul, will show as I deal with you in exercising discipline.

[18 : 52] So, the thrust of verses 1, 2, 3, and 4 is to say to the Corinthians, repent, I'm coming. It is true that at one level, I'm weak.

Yes, I'm quite different from your brash, aggressive, super apostles. But the power of the living Christ is at work in my ministry. And those who are unrepentant will not be spared the lash of my tongue or further sanctions if they should prove necessary.

Now, friends, as we begin to feel the force of what Paul is saying to us here, I guess we will tend to react in one of two ways. Either, we will loathe it or we will love it.

If we recoil from what Paul is saying here, it will be because we don't want to submit to the wholesome discipline of Christ. And if we don't want to submit to Christ's discipline, it will be because we want to be able to quarrel, be jealous and angry and hostile, because we want to be able to indulge in slander and gossip and conceit and disorder, or because we want to keep open the possibility of indulging in sexual immorality at some future point, even if we're not doing so now.

On the other hand, if our hearts are glad to read these words, it will show that our hearts yearn for Christ. Now, when I say that, I don't mean that we will never be tempted to do the things mentioned in verse 20 and 21 there.

[20 : 26] Temptation will often come to us to behave in those ways. But if we find ourselves gladly agreeing with Paul in this first paragraph of chapter 13, it shows that we value belonging to a church which will not hesitate to discipline us if we step outside the boundaries of godly behavior.

And let me put this in personal terms about myself. It's a great help and a strength to me to know that if I start to behave in a chapter 12 verse 20 or 21 fashion, my fellow Christians, not just my fellow elders, but fellow Christians, will quickly lay their hands on my shoulder, take me to a private place, and talk to me earnestly and if necessary severely because they love me and because they love Christ.

It's a wonderful deterrent to all of us to know that our fellow Christians will not abandon us to a life of disorder and unaccountability. The church of Christ is governed by the discipline of Christ and we need it.

Now you younger ones, when I say you younger ones, I mean, not you, those under the age of about 30 something I'm thinking of. You younger ones, as you grow in maturity and years to take more responsibility in the life of the church, part of that responsibility is going to be to bring the discipline of Christ to bear upon your fellow believers.

Some of you are doing that already, sometimes even at 20 or 23 you're doing it, but you bring the discipline of Christ to bear upon others because you love them. Paul wrote to the Corinthians like this because he loved them.

[22 : 10] Where there's no discipline, there's no love and it's good for us to belong to a church that is constrained by the loving discipline of Christ, but where a church refuses that discipline, it is heading rapidly for ruin.

So here is the first element in Paul's pleading with the Corinthians. Christ's discipline is powerful and says Paul, I will exercise it on my return to Corinth if I find that you're still in disorder.

Now this leads to the second element in Paul's pleading and that is that the Corinthians must now examine themselves and test themselves to see whether, in the words of verse 5, they are in the faith.

That means they must test themselves to see whether they're really Christians at all. Now you may well find that verse 5 rather surprising because you may think, but hasn't Paul been treating the Corinthians all along as Christians?

So isn't it rather odd that right at the end of this letter he suddenly raises the possibility that perhaps they're not Christians at all or that perhaps some of them are not truly Christians?

[23 : 19] Well, yes, you're right to think that all along he has been treating them as Christians. He begins the letter, chapter 1, verse 1, to the church of God that is at Corinth with all the saints, that means Christians, who are in the whole of Achaia.

And at various points in the letter he uses terms like brothers and beloved. And it's the same in 1 Corinthians. He writes to them as Christians. Now he spells it out that they're baby Christians.

He calls them infants in Christ, not ready yet for solid food, only ready for milk. So why should Paul right at the end of this second letter raise the question whether they're Christians at all?

Well, let's ask the question, how is a true Christian recognized? Can any of us tell who is a true Christian? Mercifully, at the most important and ultimate level, it's only God who knows who truly belongs to him.

You and I don't have x-ray eyes. Bzzz. We can't see into the spiritual depths of each other's hearts. But, at a more visible level, a great deal is obvious.

[24 : 36] So think of a person who professes to become a Christian. A person who says to his friends or her friends, I've become a Christian. I've received Christ as Savior and Lord. As time goes on, it becomes pretty obvious if that really is true.

So if that person really is a Christian, he or she will become very different. They'll become enthusiastic for the Bible. They'll become unashamed to say that they are Christians, particularly in the company of those who are not Christians.

They will want to be at church and share the company of a motley crew like this lot to meet their Christian family. They will want to pray. They'll want to be taught the Bible.

They'll want to sing praise. And their moral life at every level will undergo prolonged progressive changes so that the sinful habits and practices of those last two verses of chapter 12 will increasingly be left behind as repentance deepens.

Now, we know that there will be times of great struggle over some of these things. Struggle is a sign of faith growing, not a sign of faith being absent.

[25 : 48] But over time, there will be real, progressive, lasting change in an individual's mind and heart and lifestyle. Now, that must be the case for true Christians because as Paul puts it here in verse 5, do you not realize this about yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you unless indeed you fail to meet the test.

Jesus Christ in the person of his Holy Spirit, his other self, actually lives in the heart and life and personality of everyone who belongs to him.

His powerful presence inside our hearts and lives will inevitably make an enormous difference as we learn over the long years to love the things that he loves and to hate the things that he hates.

and this will mean that quarreling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit and disorder will be diminished. Their power to overcome us will be progressively subdued.

The one who has taken up his royal residence in our hearts is at work to subdue these things and likewise to subdue the impulses towards impurity and sexual immorality which can be so strong in human nature.

[27 : 06] Now we will struggle with all these things especially perhaps in the earlier years of the Christian life those struggles can go on. As Paul puts it in Galatians chapter 5 the desires of the flesh that is the sinful nature are against the spirit it's like this there's a clash going on and the desires of the spirit are against the flesh to keep you from doing the things that you want to do.

So when we struggle with sin it's a sign that the Holy Spirit is training all his military hardware on the wretched pigsties and manure heaps in our hearts where the sins of verses 20 and 21 dwell.

So if you're struggling with these things it's a sign that Christ is in you not that he is not at home. Now to get back to Paul the reason he writes as he does in verse 5 is because he can see so little sign of change in the lives of these Corinthians or at least in the lives of some of them.

Look at verse 21 in chapter 12 I fear that many who sinned earlier may have not repented. In other words there seems to be no change no progress no sorrow for a godless lifestyle no struggle going on with sin just a wretched continuation an unrepented continuation in it.

And that's why Paul has to ask whether some of the Corinthians may never have been truly Christians in the first place. So how could the Corinthians test ourselves and examine ourselves?

[28 : 49] Well a few straightforward questions are surely all that is necessary. Let me ask a few. First am I learning to fear God and to live my life constantly under his eye?

am I learning to love the Lord Jesus and do I want to please him? Do I pick up my Bible with pleasure and read it with growing interest and hunger?

Do I turn to the Lord regularly in prayer conscious that I am as puny as a grasshopper and that he is limitlessly powerful? Am I learning to honor him and does it grieve me when I see him dishonored?

Am I increasingly conscious of how sinful I am and therefore of how great a thing it is for me to be saved and forgiven? Am I learning to love his people, to serve them and to support them?

And there are many other questions we could add to that list but if your honest answer to them is yes you need have no doubt that Jesus Christ is in you to use Paul's phrase.

[30 : 01] Well now the next few verses especially 6, 7 and 8 are rather difficult and I don't want to get bogged down in them so let me just offer a paraphrase of those verses in which I'll try and bring out their meaning and flavor.

Just have a look with me at 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10. So verse 6 I hope you will find out when you apply the test to yourselves and inevitably apply it to me and Timothy as well.

I hope you'll realize that Timothy and I are truly Christians. But, verse 7, our prayer to God is that you will repent and turn away from your sinful ways.

Our concern in prayer is not for ourselves that we should look good but that you will repent and thus be restored quite regardless of the impression that we seem to create.

For, verse 8, our concern is for the truth and nothing but the truth. In this case, the truth of your repentance and your restoration. Verse 9, it's your restoration that is our chief concern as we pray and if that happens, we will be glad because it will mean that your Christian life is growing strong and we won't have to unleash the weaponry of apostolic discipline that we would otherwise have to use.

[31 : 19] And, verse 10, I'm writing to you like this while I'm still absent from you so that you'll be able to set your lives in good order before I come to visit you because when I come to you I don't want to have to be severe with you.

Yes, the Lord has given me authority to tear down as well as authority to build up, but I don't want when I visit you to have to tear you to pieces.

I want to be able to build you up and teach you and encourage you and strengthen you. I want my forthcoming visit to be a visit of joy, not a visit of tears and grief and verbal lashings and punishments.

So looking back over the first ten verses of this chapter, it's clear that there is a single message to the Corinthians. Repent, because that is the only way to avoid ruin and to find real restoration for your church.

The Corinthian church needs to set its corporate mind on living the kind of life which again and again and again and again sets behind it the sins of the last two verses of chapter 12.

[32 : 29] So the thrust in verses 1 to 4 of chapter 13 is repent, otherwise you will be disciplined, and the thrust of verses 5 to 10 is repent, because that is the only way to prepare properly for my visit.

And the message for us, here we are in 2013, is that we too need to be a constantly repentant church. Repentance is not just something that happens at the beginning of the Christian life, is it?

It's something that has to go on again and again and again. Look again at the sins of verse 20 in chapter 12. I want to read them out again. I've read them three or four times already, but here we go again.

Quarreling, jealousy, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, disorder.

Now friends, please raise a hand if you believe that you are in no danger of falling into any of these. Now look at verse 21.

[33 : 36] these are sins of the mind as well as of the body. Impurity, sexual immorality, sensuality. Again, please raise a hand if you believe that you're in no danger of falling into any of these things.

Well, I take it that the absence of raised hands is a corporate confession of our moral frailty. my hands, friends, are as firmly kept down as yours are.

Now just think ahead a generation, think ahead 25 or 30 years from now. If the Lord has not returned by that time, what kind of a church will the Tron Church be then?

Well, by that time, of course, some of us will have died, others will have moved away to other cities or other countries, others will still be here, grayer and more wrinkled, but still here.

The question is, as we think of this question, ruin or restoration, what kind of a church will this church be? It doesn't take much, humanly speaking, for a church to slide into disrepair and ruin.

[34 : 49] Just one wrong corner turned, one decision made which lacked courage. The fear of God, which is the beginning of wisdom, being neglected in the church.

So we need to be a church that is constantly watchful and repentant again and again, constrained by the Lord's discipline, gladly submitted to the teaching of the apostles and the Lord himself.

Now just look at the final verses, because they give us a snapshot of a happy and holy and restored church. Verse 11, finally, brothers, rejoice, take joy in the Lord, take joy in the gospel every day.

Aim for restoration. That's the restoration of true Christian life and real Christian fellowship. To use the metaphor of a building, Paul is saying constantly work to maintain the fabric.

Clear the gutters, replace the broken windows, mend the leaking roof, don't neglect anything that threatens to undermine the soundness of the building. Verse 11, comfort one another.

[36 : 02] Isn't that a lovely command? All of us need comfort at times. Let's give it freely and lovingly. Then he says, agree with one another.

Not about whether you prefer blue to green or Mozart to Beethoven, but develop a common mind on the gospel and develop a common purpose, a shared purpose, that is determined to get that gospel out into the world.

Live in peace, he says. If there are lurking disagreements between you, between you and a brother or a sister in the church, work on those disagreements until they disappear.

And, end of verse 11, if we do all this, we have a promise that the God of love and peace will be with us. That is the promise of his presence in the church.

Verse 12, greet one another with a holy kiss. Now, friends, we're allowed to interpret that in a British fashion. Many of you would not wish me at the end of this service to stand there at the door kissing you first on the left cheek and then on the right in Mediterranean fashion, would you?

[37 : 11] Especially if I've had plenty of garlic for lunch, which I think I probably have. But the point is this, the point of that verse is this. Let's be warmly and frequently in loving conversation with each other.

Let's not run away from each other or hide from each other. Do you ever have that feeling? I do. You see somebody and you think, oh, I'll just pretend I haven't seen them or go off and do something else.

But the fact is, Paul is really saying, I'm here, you're here. I've seen you, you've seen me. Boo.

Boo. We notice each other, we love each other, let's encourage each other and let's do that regularly with warmth and understanding and gentleness.

Verse 13, all the saints greet you. That's an important little verse. Paul means the Christians here in Macedonia, where I'm writing from, they send their loving greetings all the way down to you in southern Greece.

[38 : 11] Corinthians, you're part of the worldwide fellowship of Christians. That's an incentive to repair your dilapidated house. Your restoration is important to the building up of the whole wider church.

It's not just about Corinth. Now just compare those last verses, verses 11 to 13 there, with the final two verses of chapter 12.

The final two verses of chapter 12 give us a snapshot of a church in ruin. Whereas the final few verses of chapter 13 give us a snapshot of a joyful church, a foretaste of heaven, a church in restoration.

Isn't that the kind of church that we would want to have here 25 or 30 years from now? And as for verse 14, well, a whole sermon could be spent on that one verse.

We can't do that. But let me just say this, that whenever we say these words together, it's the same as saying that we accept the whole of two Corinthians. Corinthians, these familiar words conclude Paul's appeal, this very strong appeal to his wayward Corinthians.

[39 : 20] So whenever we say them, we're saying no to false apostles and false teaching. We're saying no to arrogant, triumphalistic religion.

And we're saying yes to the meekness and gentleness of Christ. We're saying yes even to weaknesses and insults and hardships and persecutions and calamities.

We're saying yes to the sufferings which are the inevitable consequence of following a crucified Savior and a persecuted apostle. This second letter to the Corinthians is not in tune with much that passes for Christianity today.

But if we accept it and follow it, we shall know in our hearts and our lives and in our church the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.