

### 13:5–8 *Test Yourselves!*

**THE CORINTHIANS' CONSCIENCES.** WOLFGANG MUSCULUS: “Examine yourselves to prove whether you are in the faith.” Paul here shifts the grounds of his argument to their consciences. It is as if he were saying: “But if you do not acknowledge the power of Christ living in me, at least acknowledge that it lives in you. Consider carefully and show whether the power of Christ has been disclosed to you. If that power is discovered in you, then why do you not recognize it in me, through whom you received it?” This is a summary of the present passage.... Some people interpret the clause “that Jesus Christ is in you” to relate to the grace of Christ, by which believers are being regenerated and made righteous, and their consciences granted peace. But their interpretation differs from the focus of the argument with which the apostle is concerned. For he is not dealing with justifying grace in this passage and those spiritual gifts which accompany it, but with the power of Christ, that through the fear of it the unrepentant Corinthians might be called back to repentance.

Nevertheless, I acknowledge that it is appropriate to apply this passage as a specific warning to examine whether we have faith in Christ and whether or not Christ dwells in us by faith. For there are certain tests of faith by which we recognize whether or not Christ is in our hearts

by his Spirit seeing that the slothful are incapable of being true believers in Christ. COMMENTARY ON 2 CORINTHIANS 13:5.<sup>21</sup>

**CORINTHIANS MUST EXAMINE BOTH THEIR FAITH AND BEHAVIOR.** CARDINAL CAJETAN: Paul previously stated, “not as I wish” and explained right behavior. Now he explains the same thing regarding faith. Now whether this word refers to the faith that is necessary for salvation, or whether it is the faith that is freely and graciously given (namely by a miracle) is not entirely clear. “Test yourselves.” Unless this is an intensification [of what was said previously], he is referring here to behavior and so he is warning them to examine themselves both in faith and in behavior. “Do you not realize this about yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you?” It is as if he were saying: “It is certain that you recognize yourselves in this respect, that Jesus Christ is in you.” This can be understood of Christ being in them by faith, or by the gift of tongues and prophecy, or by the evident punishment which they had experienced in the incestuous person (of which the Corinthians were in the middle). COMMENTARY ON 2 CORINTHIANS 13:5.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Musculus, *Commentarius ... in posteriorem epistolam Pauli ad Corinthios*, 406, 407.

<sup>22</sup> Cajetan, *In Posteriorem Pauli Epistolam ad Corinthios Commentarii*, 198–99; citing 2 Cor 12:20.

**THE NEED TO EXAMINE OUR CONSCIENCES.**  
**TILEMANN HESSHUS:** After Paul adequately refuted the false apostles and reproved the rashness of the Corinthians, he finally sends them back to examine their own consciences. And thus, by doing this, they can learn with whom Paul acts more leniently and whom he reproves more harshly. “Prove for yourselves,” he says, “if you are in the faith. You do not need to fear my threat. For, if you recognize your presumption and impenitence, should you not wonder at the severity of my reprimand, and, considering it, to repent quickly?” Truly, such a proof and examination of conscience should often be undertaken by godly people lest they clothe themselves in an empty appearance of piety. Indeed, it is necessary to practice self-examination in such a way that we diligently consider whether we have embraced the gospel from the heart and have a burning love and zeal for heavenly doctrine. Now those who despise the divine word or pretend to be zealous for heavenly doctrine—this is the clearest proof of presumption and ungodliness. David says, “Salvation is far from the wicked, for they do not seek your statutes.” And Christ says in [John 14](#), “Whoever does not love my word does not keep it.” On the other hand, if anyone notices within themselves a serious zeal for heavenly doctrine, they can conclude from this that they are being led by the Spirit of God. David says, “I have consid-

ered my ways”—which is to say, “I have examined my way and myself, and I have turned my steps to your testimony....

Second, the conscience must be examined whether we have repented with all sincerity and from the heart. Truly, we should be terrified by God’s wrath and our hearts should grieve that we provoke his wrath. Then, both examining and stimulating our faith, we should find rest from our terrified conscience in the promise of the gospel concerning the benefits of the mediator. When we observe these things within ourselves, we are able to establish with certainty that we are led by the Spirit of God, for serious and eager repentance is not a work of the flesh. And a sincere faith in the mediator does not result from human’s free will, but it is a most certain fruit of the Holy Spirit, persuading men and women to fear God. **EXPLICATION OF [2 CORINTHIANS 13:5](#).**<sup>23</sup>

**TESTING EXAMINES DEEDS, NOT WORDS.**  
**MARGARET FELL:** [Hope in Christ] is a mystery to all you carnal professors, who are yet in your sins and your uncleanness, and yet will tell of faith, and hope, and God, and Christ. But your root is rottenness, your ground is corrupt, and your chaff is to be burned; the fire is kindled, which cannot be quenched. They day of the Lord is come, which burns as an oven,

<sup>23</sup> Heshsus, *Explicatio Secundae Epistolae Pauli ad Corinthios*, 297v–298r; citing [Ps 119:155](#); [Jn 14:24](#); [Ps 119:59](#).

and all your corrupt profession and deceitful hypocrisy shall be as stubble.... Your profession of God and Christ in words (when in works you deny him) will not serve you; the Lord abhors all your vain profession and hypocrisy. Therefore, give over your deceitful dissembling, and turn to that which rips you up, and lays you naked and bare before the Lord God, from whom you cannot hide yourselves.... Give over deceiving of your souls, for those who do righteousness are righteous, even as they are righteous; and all sin and uncleanness the light condemns, and if your hearts condemn you, God is greater, and knows all things. Therefore do not deceive yourselves but search and try your own selves, for if you know not how that Christ is in you, you are reprobates. And so all you formal professors, try your own selves, and to the Light come to be tried, and there you will see your rotten profession will be too light. And do not deceive your souls, but now ye have time, prize it, while it is called today. TO ALL THE PROFESSORS IN THE WORLD.<sup>24</sup>

**PAUL DEFENDS ASSURANCE OF FAITH.** JOHN CALVIN: This passage is worth our careful attention for two reasons. First, it shows the relationship that exists between the faith of the people and of the preaching of

<sup>24</sup> Fell, *Women's Speaking Justified*, 78–79\*; citing Is 5:24; Lk 3:17; Mal 4:1; Ezek 23:29; 1 Jn 3:7; Lam 3:40.

their minister, namely, that one is the mother that produces and brings forth, and the other is the daughter, that must not forget her origin. Second, this passage proves the assurance of faith, which the sophists at the Sorbonne undermine, or rather, almost entirely banish from the minds of men and women. For they condemn the “rashness” of everyone who is persuaded that they are members of Christ and have him dwelling in them. For they command us to be content with what they call a “moral inference”—that is, sheer conjecture—so that our consciences remain constantly in suspense and confused. But what does Paul say here? He declares that all people who doubt whether they possess Christ and are a part of his body are reprobates. Therefore, let us hold this alone to be right faith, which causes us to rest safely in God's grace, with no wavering opinion, but with a firm and constant assurance. COMMENTARY ON 2 CORINTHIANS 13:5.<sup>25</sup>

**ABSOLUTE ASSURANCE OF SALVATION NOT TO BE EXPECTED.** COUNCIL OF TRENT: As no pious person ought to doubt the mercy of God, the merit of Christ, and the virtue and efficacy of the sacraments, so each one, when considering themselves and their own weakness and indisposition, may have fear and apprehension concerning their own grace, since no one can

<sup>25</sup> CO 50:151 (CTS 40:396–97).

know with the certainty of faith, which cannot be subject to error, that they have obtained the grace of God....

Canon 15: If anyone says that a person who is born again and justified is bound *ex fide* to believe that they are certainly in the number of the predestined, let them be anathema. Canon 16: If anyone says that they will for certain, with an absolute and infallible certainty, have that great gift of perseverance even to the end, unless they shall have learned this by a special revelation, let them be anathema. DECREE CONCERNING JUSTIFICATION.<sup>26</sup>

**CHRISTIANS CAN HAVE A CERTAIN FAITH.** CYRIACUS SPANGENBERG: The Council of Trent has also concluded that one should consider as reckless and unchristian people those who dare say that they are certainly members of Christ, children of God, and heirs of eternal life, and that one should have a good hope of this but not conclude it completely, for such would be great presumptuousness and make people secure, as Cardinal Hosius<sup>†</sup> writes in his heretical books.

Against such false, cursed, and damned diabolical teaching of the papists, Paul puts right here the contrast and wants everyone to be certain of his

faith. And he therefore says, “Test yourselves, whether you are in the faith,” and he writes right away against the Council of Trent and the pope’s teaching when he says in [Romans 8](#): “I am certain of this, that neither death nor life, neither angels nor principalities, neither power, either present or future, or high or low, nor any other creature may separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” And [2 Timothy 1](#): “I know in whom I believe and am certain that he can keep my deposit until that day.” We should also follow this example of Paul’s and be certain of our faith’s religion and salvation and rest in the certain grace of God, firm and without doubt. For God has no desire or pleasure in doubters. FORTY-NINTH SERMON.<sup>27</sup>

**CHRIST IN YOU.** TILEMANN HESSHUS: Not only does Paul want us to be certain about the faith, but he also wants us to be certain that Jesus Christ dwells within us, which is known by the same process of examination. There can be no more effective way for us to discover this, which draws us away from false security and pride, than if we consider that we are temples of God and that Christ Jesus lives in our hearts. For Christ testifies that the whole divinity of the eternal Father, Son, and Holy Spirit lives in the hearts of

<sup>26</sup> Schroeder, *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, 35, 44.

<sup>†</sup> Cardinal Stanislaus Hosius was a leading Catholic apologist and papal legate to the Council of Trent in 1562–1563.

<sup>27</sup> C. Spangenberg, *Die ander Epistel Pauli an die Corinthier*, 213r-v; citing [Rom 8:38–39](#); [2 Tim 1:12](#).



believers, those who have embraced with a genuine love the Word of God. “If anyone loves me, they will obey my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to him and make our home with them.” What immeasurable benefit, glory, and happiness that the divine majesty lowered himself to such an extent that he did not hesitate to choose to seat himself in our hearts, as in a sacred temple—a dwelling which cannot but be fruitful—so that the eternal Father, on account of his Son, the mediator, through the Holy Spirit imparts divine light and imputes righteousness to us! He renews us in his image; he rescues lost people; he equips the will with power; he bends the heart to love the truth; he adorns us with heavenly gifts; and, subsequently, he governs and defends us. Because of this, then, godly people should examine whether they have God dwelling in them, who will always call them back from false security. EXPLICATION OF 2 CORINTHIANS 13:5.<sup>28</sup>

**BELIEVERS AND REPROBATES.** NIELS HEMMINGSEN: Paul appeals to the testimony of the Corinthians. He has stated that the power of Christ was effective in his ministry, and now he confirms it by their example. The answer to this dilemma can be resolved in this way: “Either you feel

that Christ dwells within you by faith, or you are altogether condemned—choose your side. If Christ dwells within you, then the purpose for the ministry was effective through the power of Christ. If, however, he does not dwell in you, you are really condemned. But, because you do not want to believe such a thing, you must confess that my ministry was equipped by the power of Christ.” Note here immediately the opposition of contrary things, namely, the believer and the reprobate. For if someone is a believer, they cannot be called reprobate; and, by contrast, the person who is reprobate will never be called a believer without confusing opposite things. But how would the Corinthians be able to test and examine whether they were in the faith? There is a twofold way for proving this, namely, an interior proof and an exterior proof. The interior proof is the Holy Spirit, who bears witness to our spirit that we are the sons and daughters of God. For when the Holy Spirit effects faith in us through the preaching of the Word and true repentance occurs through the knowledge of Jesus Christ, and, correspondingly, when the Spirit stirs in our heart new passion for the law of God—this is called “bearing witness to our spirit.” The exterior proof is a life that is innocent, godly, and holy, which displays a good conscience and a kind of perpetual repentance. Because the first and interior proof is hidden, it requires external testimony. For the per-

<sup>28</sup> Hesshus, *Explicatio Secundae Epistolae Pauli ad Corinthios*, 300r–301r; citing [Jn 14:23](#).

son who is without the exterior proof should not boast that they have the interior proof. COMMENTARY ON 2 CORINTHIANS 13:5.<sup>29</sup>

**THE CORINTHIANS' HIGHER DUTY.** JOHN CALVIN: Now Paul urges them all the more vehemently, even as he remains confident that he will not be rejected by the Corinthians. One of two things was necessary—that they would either assign to Paul the honor due to an apostle or condemn themselves as unbelievers and acknowledge that there was no church in their midst. Paul however softens the severity of his statement by using the expression “I hope.” But he does this in such a way as to remind them of their higher duty, for it is very cruel to disappoint the hopes that have been entertained as to our integrity. “I hope,” he says, “that you will know when you have been restored to a right mind.” Now he wisely says nothing about himself in this second clause, calling them to remember the benefits of God with which they have been adorned; or rather, he substitutes their salvation in place of his authority. COMMENTARY ON 2 CORINTHIANS 13:6.<sup>30</sup>

**MINISTERS AND THEIR HEARERS.** WOLFGANG MUSCULUS: Here is Paul's sense in this passage: “Even if there are many

among you who are wicked and hostile to Christ, I nevertheless hope that when I come to you in the power and spirit of Christ that you will have a clear proof of Christ speaking in me, as you seek, so that you will recognize that I am not at all a false apostle of Christ, but a true one.”

It is possible for a man to be a true and genuine minister in the church of God even if his hearers are wicked. Now it is the concern of ministers of Christ to have this objective, that when those who listen to them are finally judged, they might be approved by God and recognized as such. And they can accomplish this if they attend to all of those duties that concern a faithful minister, so that all the guilt rests upon the hearers, just as with barren trees that are unable to produce fruit despite careful tending. Now it sometimes happens that the diligence of ministers serves as proof that the souls of their hearers are ignoble and wicked when they labor in vain to cultivate them [in godliness]. On the other hand, we see that it frequently happens that the barrenness of the hearers serves as proof of the carelessness of the ministers. But that church is certainly blessed where the spiritual progress of the hearers recommends the faith, concern, and diligence of the true minister of Christ. COMMENTARY ON 2 CORINTHIANS 13:6.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Hemmingsen, *Commentaria in Omnes Epistolas Apostolorum*, 307–8.

<sup>30</sup> CO 50:151–52 (CTS 40:398).

<sup>31</sup> Musculus, *Commentarius ... in posteriorem epistolam Pauli ad Corinthios*, 408.

**PAUL'S RIGHTEOUS INTENTIONS.** HEINRICH BULLINGER: You come across a kind of person that allows entire kingdoms and cities to be destroyed provided that it be said that he acted prudently and conquered them. But Paul was furnished with a different disposition because he said that if anything should be pointed out about the Corinthians' guilt, he would count himself among the reprobate lest it seem that he was too concerned for his own glory. He then adds by way of anticipation: "I do not speak in this fashion in order to allege my goodness at the expense of your innocence. For I would gladly suffer being known by the title of 'reprobate' as long as you would not be rejected. Therefore, all our boasting about our authority relates to this, that you should be considered honorable." Now Paul defends this with two statements. First, "No power that we exercised was against anything just and true, but only against lies and wickedness," as was said in chapter 10. Second, "Far be it that I should be eager to be praised at the expense of your name because it is my joy to be weakened so that you might be perfected. I entreat you to read these things and impress them on your heart, for you are God's special people or the Lord's flock." COMMENTARY ON 2 CORINTHIANS 13:7–8.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Bullinger, *In Posteriores ... ad Corinthios Epistolam Commentarius*, 336–37.

**PAUL'S MINISTRY OF PRAYER.** WOLFGANG MUSCULUS: Paul was not only writing and sending brothers to bring the Corinthians back to the right path, but he was also praying to God for them—and with good reason. For he knew that his efforts to plant and water would accomplish nothing unless God gave the growth and the fruitfulness. As Augustine somewhere wisely said concerning the minister of the word: "He should be one who prays before he speaks."<sup>†</sup> Ministers of Christ should pray to God not only for the gift of understanding and speech, but also for fruitful growth [in their hearers]. They should pray not only in church with the congregation of the faithful in the customary fashion, but also in the privacy of their own homes out of their burning zeal, praying that they might also speak in church more passionately and powerfully. The mouth of the person who instructs is cold and lifeless whose heart has not first warmed the sermon with the spirit and ardor of prayer. Prayer also enables the mind to teach zealously as well as listen carefully. COMMENTARY ON 2 CORINTHIANS 13:7.<sup>33</sup>

**FALSE APOSTLES OFTEN CONDEMN GODLY PEOPLE.** NIELS HEMMINGSEN: Since outward honesty, good morals, and restraint

<sup>†</sup> Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* 4.2, NPNF<sup>1</sup> 2:584–85.

<sup>33</sup> Musculus, *Commentarius ... in posteriorem epistolam Pauli ad Corinthios*, 408–9.

from all injury provide testimony of the inner godliness of men and women, Paul prays that they will abstain from all wrong. Now although the false apostles did not understand this, even so Paul was praying for it so that the effectiveness of his ministry might be demonstrated from the Corinthians' testimony. He states that he is not praying for this for his own sake, but instead for the sake of their salvation. In the meantime, he has nothing to say if he seems to be rejected by the judgment of the false apostles. For it often happens that those who are truly godly are considered to be reprobate by false apostles. Paul's example here should be imitated by the minister of the word. COMMENTARY ON 2 CORINTHIANS 13:7.<sup>34</sup>

**THE CHURCH HAS PRIORITY OVER PAUL'S REPUTATION.** TILEMANN HESSHUS: "I pray to God that you may not do wrong." [Paul is saying,] "I am not worried about my reputation, but what I am writing is for the sake of your salvation. I am afraid that you have carelessly abandoned God, for despising the apostolic office is a step toward blatant ungodliness. Hence, I am praying that you are blameless and pure before God so that nothing shameful might reside in you and you will not sin against your conscience but shine forth in every form of godliness. I am not praying

to compel you to approve my authority toward you—this has been given to me by the Lord Jesus."

"Though we seem to have failed." The apostle's intention is not that he is worried about his salvation. Rather, as he says in 1 Corinthians 9, he exerts the greatest effort lest, having preached to others, he himself should be rejected. Therefore, with this resolve in view, Paul does not at all labor for himself, but only for the church to be safely established and appear blameless in the sight of God. And even if people judge Paul to be reprobate, nevertheless, he will not be condemned by God's judgment later on. Now, men and women judge according to outward appearances and are hindered by their perverse affections. But the Lord looks upon the heart; when he will be judged, the Lord will not condemn him.... The judgment of God is far different from the judgment of human beings. Paul teaches us here that we ought not to be overly worried about our reputation, but only that nothing harmful should happen to the church. Our only concern should be that we defend and spread far and wide the glory of Christ. Indeed, we are to present the church holy and blameless before Christ—even at the sacrifice of our reputation, our good name, and our life. Our reputation must not be entirely disregarded for the sake of our neighbor, but we should find it preferable to build up, teach, advance, and provide care for the

<sup>34</sup> Hemmingsen, *Commentaria in Omnes Epistolas Apostolorum*, 308.

church. EXPLICATION OF [2 CORINTHIANS 13:7](#).<sup>35</sup>

**PAUL'S EXTRAORDINARY LOVE FOR THE CORINTHIANS.** ANDREAS HYPERIUS: Lest it seem that Paul, with a tyrannical disposition, desired to rage against the Corinthians or to boast proudly, or that he, as one approved, was looking down upon them as reprobates, Paul explains in detail how he was speaking from the heart, and the reasons and affections that motivated him. And so he says, "I speak in this way so that you may not do wrong. And I desire this, that you might be approved, but we are the one who is rejected (that is, being weak and empty), having no reason for criticizing you." He says that this was his greatest prayer and that all his effort was inclined toward this one thing, that they might always act in an honorable fashion, and he was prepared even to be considered rejected, provided that they might be approved.... This quality of breathing out extraordinary affection and amazing love with which Paul was endowed befits all ministers of the church. And he does not simply want to be considered rejected, but to be viewed as a reprobate, that is, as one condemned, reviled, and considered a liar in the eyes of the world—taken for a reprobate and vain person—while the virtue and good-

ness of the Corinthians might become known before God and other people. Now when Paul said that he prays to God, it seems that he is calling God as a witness, that he was truly feeling this in his heart, and thus he desired that his feelings should be considered as ratified by all. COMMENTARY ON [2 CORINTHIANS 13:7](#).<sup>36</sup>

**SELF-ABASEMENT TO GLORIFY GOD.** JOHN TRAPP: "Though we be like a reprobate," namely, in your esteem. The good heart is content to vilify, even nullify, itself so that God may be glorified and his people edified. Let [the godly person] be a footstool, or whatever else, to help Christ onto his throne. As Luther<sup>†</sup> stated: "Let Luther be called Satan so that Christ might live and reign. Amen." COMMENTARY ON [2 CORINTHIANS 13:7](#).<sup>37</sup>

**THE WORD OF TRUTH IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN UNITY.** MARTIN LUTHER: This is so great a good that no human heart can grasp it (therefore it necessitates such a great and hard fight). It must not be treated lightly, as the world maintains and many people who do not understand, saying we should not fight so hard about

<sup>35</sup> Hesshus, *Explicatio Secundae Epistolae Pauli ad Corinthios*, 301v–302r; citing [1 Cor 9:27](#).

<sup>36</sup> Hyperius, *Commentarii ... in Epistolam D. Pauli ad Romanos, et Utramque ad Corinthios*, 417.

<sup>†</sup> Luther's statement is found in a letter to George Spalatin, dated June 12, 1527. See [WABR 6:62](#).

<sup>37</sup> Trapp, *A Commentary or Exposition*, 736\*.



an article and thus trample on Christian love. They say that although we err on one small point, if we agree on everything else, we should give in and overlook the difference in order to preserve Christian unity and fellowship.

No, my good person, do not recommend to me peace and unity when God's Word is lost thereby, for then eternal life and everything else would be lost. In this matter there can be no yielding nor giving way, no, not for love of you or any other person, but everything must yield to the Word, whether it be friend or foe. The Word was given to us for eternal life and not to further outward peace and unity. The Word and doctrine will create Christian unity or fellowship. Where they reign, all else will follow. Where they are not, no concord will ever abide. Therefore, do not talk to me about love and friendship, if that means breaking with the Word, or the faith, for the gospel does not say that love brings eternal life, God's grace, and all heavenly treasures, but that these come from the Word. SERMONS FROM THE YEAR 1531.<sup>38</sup>

**PAUL WAS SPEAKING THE TRUTH TO THE CORINTHIANS.** WOLFGANG MUSCULUS: The word "truth" covers a wide range of things, which Pilate also realized when he said to the Lord, "What is truth?" But I

think it is employed here to mean the truth of Christ and the truth of the Christian's profession to which it pertains, so that those who are Christians might abstain from all evil and do what is good and honorable. For those who are foreign to the truth of Christ act in a very different manner. Therefore, when Paul said that he was praying to God for the Corinthians that they might not do evil, he was not doing this so that he himself might appear good, but so that they might do what was honorable. And consequently, he added these words "for we cannot do anything against the truth of God" to indicate that, if they were blameless in their zeal for the truth of Christ, he could have nothing against them ... but rather he would be on their side so as to build them up and strengthen them more and more. Paul speaks as an apostle of Christ, assuming nothing for himself except what was according to the power received from God. COMMENTARY ON [2 CORINTHIANS 13:8](#).<sup>39</sup>

**PAUL'S AUTHORITY SEEKS TO DEFEND THE TRUTH.** TILEMANN HESSHUS: That is, "I am not desiring to praise myself or increase my authority in whatever way, whether it happens when I am boasting about the truth or correcting the church—whereas the false apostles have no concerns either

<sup>38</sup> Luther, *Day by Day We Magnify You*, [379](#) (WA 34/2:387).

<sup>39</sup> Musculus, *Commentarius ... in posteriorem epistolam Pauli ad Corinthios*, 413; citing [Jn 18:38](#).

to advance or impede the truth, but only to push themselves forward and to be considered great. Or rather, they do not want to be outdone, even if they recognize that the truth would be concealed and the church destroyed by dissention.” This attitude is not in Paul, who considers nothing except the ancient truth and the salvation of the church. For he does not desire any authority or power to be attributed to him that might obscure or harm the truth. And if he should either boast or take anything for himself, or attempt anything against the truth, he knows that he can not stand but will soon be thrown down because God is the protector and most zealous defender of the truth.

Paul says these things for the sake of the godly, lest they fear him because of this threat of the apostle. For godly people fear him, even when they are living holy lives. But the wicked are presumptuous and defiant, even when they are polluting themselves with wicked deed. Thus, Paul commands the godly and innocent people to be of good heart, because none of his authority or power is against truth and innocence, but is only for the truth, that is, to demonstrate and propagate the truth. EXPLICATION OF [2 CORINTHIANS 13:8](#).<sup>40</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Hesshus, *Explicatio Secundae Epistolae Pauli ad Corinthios*, 302r-v.

**CHRISTIAN LEADERS MUST BE SUBJECT TO THE TRUTH.** JOHN CALVIN: This passage here must be carefully observed because it defines the boundaries of the power that pastors of the church should have, namely, that they should be ministers of the truth. The papists shout that it is written in Scripture, “The person who hears you, hears me; the person who despises you, despises me.” Again, “Obey those who are set over you.” And so, under this pretext, they appropriate for themselves every liberty for usurping unbounded dominion, while, at the same time, they are professed and sworn enemies of the truth, and strain for its destruction with all their strength. In order to expose such impudence, this one statement of Paul will suffice, which declares that they must themselves be subject to the truth. COMMENTARY ON [2 CORINTHIANS 13:8](#).<sup>41</sup>

**THE MINISTER’S AUTHORITY CONFIRMS CHRIST’S TRUTH.** NIELS HEMMINGSEN: The reason Paul speaks about his own apostolic authority: “The power which we apostles have received from Christ is not to display our glory, but it pertains to confirming the truth of Christ. For just as the proofs of our apostleship are attributed only to the certainty of the gospel, so we are the preachers of its power, not its authors.” But those who attempt some-

<sup>41</sup> CO 50:152 (CTS 40:399); citing Lk 10:16; Heb 13:17.

thing against the truth of the gospel, and those who want to exalt themselves by another's authority, are not rightly using the power of Christ, but rather, are obeying Satan. Note as well that this extends all the way to ecclesiastical power—which is not bound to human beings, but to the ministry as Christ works through weak and powerless people. COMMENTARY ON 2 CORINTHIANS 13:8.<sup>42</sup>

PAUL IS SPEAKING OF THE TRUTH OF INNOCENCE AND PIETY. THE ENGLISH ANNOTATIONS: Although it is a true axiom that ... “the truth is strongest and cannot be subverted,” yet it seems here that the apostle does not so much mean the truth of doctrine, but the truth of life, sincerity, and true piety. For Paul threatens to use his apostolic power in punishing the Corinthians, which is the reason he prays in verse 7 that they might escape evil. And this exhortation he establishes upon this reason: “For we cannot do anything against the truth,” that is, if you are innocent and walk in the truth, you do not need to fear anathema or church censure, for the power which the Lord has given us, is to support the church and not destroy it, to uphold and maintain innocence and righteousness, true religion, and virtue, while suppressing the contrary. ANNOTATIONS ON 2 CORINTHIANS

<sup>42</sup> Hemmingsen, *Commentaria in Omnes Epistolas Apostolorum*, 308.

13:8.<sup>43</sup>

APOSTASY IS A DANGEROUS PRECIPICE. JOHN TRAPP: “For we cannot do anything against the truth.” A person who temporarily professes Christ may fall away in such a way as to persecute the truth that they once professed and the ministry that they once admired. A saint, even in their greatest lapses, never falls as far as that. Bishop Latimer<sup>†</sup> tells of a man who fell from the known truth and began to mock and scorn it—yet was afterward touched in his conscience for it. “Beware of this sin,” he says, “for I have known none except this one man that repented. It is a very dangerous precipice.” COMMENTARY ON 2 CORINTHIANS 13:8.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Downname, ed., *English Annotations*, GG4r\*.

<sup>†</sup> Hugh Latimer was an English reformer and preacher who died a martyr's death in 1555 during the reign of Queen Mary.

<sup>44</sup> Trapp, *A Commentary or Exposition*, 736\*.