Paul concludes his defense of his apostleship with a warning to the Corinthians that when he returns and deals with the unrepentant sinners in the church, he will be empowered by the power of God. Paul points out that the faith of the Corinthians themselves was proof that he was not a counterfeit apostle and that everything he had done for the Corinthians was for their spiritual benefit.

1 This *is* the third *time* I am coming to you. In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established.

"This *is* the third *time* I am coming to you" – Acts only records Paul's first visit to Corinth. Many commentators believe that Paul's second visit to Corinth was not pleasant and have it "the painful visit." Some of the Corinthians had begun listening to false apostles and that required some strict rebukes from Paul. Now Paul is planning a third visit to Corinth, one that he hopes to be more pleasant (2 Cor. 2:1-3).

"In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established" – The Mosaic Law required at least two witnesses of wrong-doing before condemning a person (**Deut. 19:15** *"One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established"*). Jesus also held to this threshold of truth (**Matt. 18:16** *"But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established"*). Paul is telling the Corinthians that when dealing with the sin and rebellion in the church, he will be fair and only judge where there are a sufficient number of witnesses.

2 I told you before, and foretell you, as if I were present, the second time; and being absent now I write to them which heretofore have sinned, and to all other, that, if I come again, I will not spare: 3 Since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, which to you-ward is not weak, but is mighty in you.

"I told you before, and foretell you, as if I were present, the second time" – Paul is restating something that he has already told them once before. He is now warning them the second time of the strong measures he will have to make in order to deal with the sin within the church.

"and being absent now I write to them which heretofore have sinned, and to all other" – While Paul is not present in person at Corinth, he is writing a warning to those would still be unrepentant of their sin at the time of his arrival. He also includes "all other" (the rest of the church) who will witness and learn what happens to unrepentant sinners.

"that, if I come again, I will not spare" – Paul says "if" since he doesn't know what circumstances might prevent his return. However, his plan when he returns is to not sweep sin "under the rug" or ignore it. Sin is too serious of a matter to treat in a trivial manner. Paul planned to deal with sin to prevent it from infecting the rest of the church.

"Since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me" – The false apostles had been trying to discredit Paul and the result was that the Corinthians had begun to doubt Paul. Since they were seeking proof that Christ was truly speaking through him, Paul states that they were about to see this proof.

"which to you-ward is not weak, but is mighty in you" – The word of Christ had not been weak since it created a mighty result in the Corinthians: their salvation. Christ's word would continue to be strong as Paul returned to deal with the sin in the church.

4 For though he was crucified through weakness, yet he liveth by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but we shall live with him by the power of God toward you.

"For though he was crucified through weakness, yet he liveth by the power of God" – Paul uses Christ Himself as the ultimate example of God's power being demonstrated through weakness. One of the criticisms of Paul was his apparent weakness in person after writing powerful words (**2 Cor. 10:10** *"For his letters, say they, are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible"*). Christ had willingly become a weak, mortal human being so that He could submit Himself to death on the cross (Phil. 2:5-8). Christ's human weaknesses were superseded by God's power when He was raised from the dead (Rom. 1:4).

"For we also are weak in him, but we shall live with him by the power of God toward you" – Just as God's power superseded Christ's human weakness in the resurrection, so also will the power of God supersede our natural human weaknesses and mortality to give us eternal life. Paul points out that his own human weakness is irrelevant because of the power of God (2 Cor. 12:9).

5 Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates? 6 But I trust that ye shall know that we are not reprobates.

"Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; <u>prove</u> *[test; evaluate]* **your own selves"** – In v. 3, Paul acknowledges that some of the Corinthians, being influenced by the false apostles, were questioning whether he was a true apostle and if Christ was actually speaking through him. Paul now turns the question around and urges the Corinthians to examine themselves to see if their own faith was genuine.

"Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be <u>reprobates</u> *[unapproved; failing the test; counterfeit]***?"** – The Greek word for "reprobates" was used for coins that didn't pass the test for being genuine and were deemed to be counterfeit. The Corinthians originally came to faith under Paul's preaching, so if they are questioning his credentials as an apostle then they should also question their own faith since it was based on the gospel that he had preached to them.

"But I trust that ye shall know that we are not <u>reprobates</u> *[unapproved; failing the test; counterfeit]***"** – Paul is pointing out that the Corinthians knew that he could not be a counterfeit apostle if their faith was genuine. He had preached the truth and they had trusted it for salvation.

7 Now I pray to God that ye do no evil; not that we should appear approved, but that ye should do that which is honest, though we be as reprobates.

"Now I pray to God that ye do no <u>evil</u> *[wrong; wicked]***; not that we should appear <u>approved</u>** *[proved genuine]***"** – The Greek word translated "approved" is essentially the opposite of "reprobate" (counterfeit). Paul's prayer for the Corinthians is that they would not be guilty of sin and his motive for that prayer is not to prove that he was not a counterfeit apostle.
"but that ye should do that which is <u>honest</u> *[good; worthy]***, though we be as reprobates"** – Paul's motive is unselfish since he wants the Corinthians to do what is good even if it somehow made him and his ministry companions look like counterfeits. His priority was the spiritual welfare of the Corinthians.

8 For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth.

This could be better translated as "we have no power against the truth." Truth, particularly the truth of the gospel, is the truth and cannot be changed even if you wanted to alter it. Paul and his ministry companions were morally bound to preach the truths of the gospel that brought salvation to the Corinthians and were unable to preach anything else. So, even if the truth caused them to appear as counterfeits or weak, they could not preach a modified gospel that would cause to look more impressive.

9 For we are glad, when we are weak, and ye are strong: and this also we wish, *even* your perfection.

"For we are glad, when we are weak, and ye are strong" – Paul's love for them was apparent because it pleased him and his ministry partners when the Corinthians were strong in the Lord, even if it was necessary for them to be weak in order for the Corinthians to become strong.
"and this also we wish, *even* your <u>perfection</u> *[to be made complete]***"** – This was the priority of Paul and his partners. They wanted to see the Corinthians become complete and mature in their faith in Christ, ready to confront the challenges of Satan and the world.

10 Therefore I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness, according to the power which the Lord hath given me to edification, and not to destruction.

"Therefore I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use <u>sharpness</u> *[severity]***"** – The Greek word translated "sharpness" comes from a word meaning "to cut." It was Paul's hope that what he had written in this letter would make it unnecessary for him to exercise his apostolic authority to severely rebuke and correct those in the church who were unrepentant and rebellious against Christ. He had already mentioned this earlier in this letter (2 Cor. 2:1-3).
"according to the power which the Lord hath given me to <u>edification</u> *[to build up]***, and not to destruction"** – Paul's apostolic authority was not given to him by God to hurt or tear down people, but to edify them. Neither did he exercise that authority in order to pump up his own ego. Rather, it was his desire to see people saved and grow in their faith.

Verses 11-14: Paul begins his farewell by urging them to be complete and encouraged in their faith, and to live in peace and unity with one another. Paul promised that they would be blessed by the God of peace and love if they did these things. He concludes with expressions of love from the saints and his own prayer that the grace and love of God would be with them as well as the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.