

Testing Our Faith

Lesson for March 10, 2024

Unit I: Faith-FULL versus Faith-LESS

Adult Topic: Examine Yourself

Background Scripture: 2 Corinthians 13:1-11

Printed Text: 2 Corinthians 13:5-11

Key verse: “*Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves.*” (2 Corinthians 13:5a, NIV)

A man went to his doctor for a checkup. The doctor did a very thorough examination and then asked the nurse to send the man’s wife into his office. The doctor said, “I have some very bad news, your husband is very sick. The good news is that there is hope. If you will take him home, cook him three hot meals each day and take care of all his needs, he should be recovered in about one to two months!”

The lady left the doctor’s office and went out and got into the car with her husband. The man asked, “Well, what did the doctor say?” The wife looked at her husband and said, “You’re gonna die!”

Anyone who goes to the doctor knows they run a lot of tests to determine the condition you’re in. A test will reveal what you know or what type of condition you are in. It can also reveal what something truly is.

Mark Perryman

A test to determine one’s personal faith is what Paul is urging in this week’s lesson – a self-examination.

Unifying Lesson Principle

Everyone has principles they are challenged to uphold. How and where do we find the courage to live authentically, keeping true to our ideals? Paul challenges believers to examine themselves as they rely on the power of Christ in keeping the faith imparted to them. (*Sunday School Commentary, 2023-2024, Townsend Press, p. 251*)

Key Terms

1. **Be perfect** (verse 11) – Complete, whole, and fully developed; totally righteous. True followers of Christ may become perfect through his grace and atonement.
2. **Test** (verse 5) – A critical examination, observation, or evaluation, a trial. To prove, examine or distinguish by “testing”.
3. **Weak** (verse 9) – To be vulnerable, lacking strength.

Lesson Background

Second Corinthians returns to similar themes as those Paul mentioned in his first letter to this church. Paul is glad to hear that the church in Corinth has heeded his advice. At the same time, it is necessary for Paul to counter criticisms about his personality and legitimacy. Most of this text involves that subject. The fifth chapter, in contrast, contains comforting words which Christians have quoted often in times of hardship. Paul also details his expectations that the church in Corinth will make good on their promise to contribute to the needs of suffering believers in Jerusalem.

The final chapter of 2 Corinthians opens with an ominous warning from Paul. His third visit to them may be marked by the judgment of Christ for sin. He warned them on his previous visit, and warns the Corinthians once more, that he will not be lenient on those found to be in unrepentant sin. Two categories of sin were named at the end of chapter 12: division and immorality. The congregation's desire for proof that Christ is speaking through Paul will be fully satisfied if he must exercise Christ's judgment on any of them for sin. They will see that, though Paul may be weak, Christ will be powerful among them through him (2 Corinthians 13:1–4).

In keeping with that challenge, Paul urges self-examination.

Lesson in Depth

I. **Take A Look at Yourself** (2 Corinthians 13:5-6)

Examine yourselves, whether you are in the faith: Paul asks the Corinthian Christians to consider a sobering question: “Am I really a Christian?”

We are rightly concerned that every believer has the assurance of salvation and knows how to endure the attacks that come in this area from Satan. At the same time we also understand that there are some who *assume* or *presume* they are Christians when they are not. It is a challenge to all: *Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?*

We are often very ready to examine and test others, but first – and always first – we must examine and test ourselves. “That was the trouble at Corinth. They criticized Paul and failed to examine themselves.” (Redpath)

“To examine yourself, in fact, is to submit to the examination and scrutiny of Jesus Christ the Lord – and this never to fix attention on sin but on Christ – and to ask Him to reveal that in you which grieves His Spirit; to ask Him to give you grace that it might be put away and cleansed in His precious blood.” Self-examination “takes the chill away from your soul, it takes the hardness away from your heart, it takes the shadows away from your life, it sets the prisoner free.” (Redpath)

“Now, ‘prove yourselves.’ Do not merely sit in your closet and look at yourselves alone, but go out into this busy world and see what kind of piety you have. Remember, many a man’s religion will stand examination that will not stand proof. We may sit at home and look at our religion, and say, ‘Well, I think this will do!’” (Spurgeon)

Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?: What are we to look for when we *examine* and *test* ourselves? We are to see if Jesus Christ is in you. We are not to look for perfection – in ourselves or in others – but we should see real evidence of Jesus Christ in us.

“Now, what is it to have Jesus Christ in you? The true Christian carries the cross in his heart; and a cross inside the heart, my friends, is one of the sweetest cures for a cross on the back. If you have a cross in your heart – Christ crucified in you, the hope of glory – all the crosses of this world’s troubles will seem to you light enough, and you will easily be able to sustain it. Christ in the heart means Christ believed in, Christ beloved, Christ trusted, Christ espoused, Christ communed with, Christ as our daily food, and ourselves as the temple and palace wherein Jesus Christ daily walks.” (Spurgeon)

But I trust that you will know that we are not reprobates (failed the test): There was no question that Paul was not a reprobate. He was so full of the Lord Jesus that many miracles were performed by him in the name of Jesus. Paul anticipates a counter-question. “Paul, you ask us to examine ourselves. Well, why don’t you examine yourself? Maybe you aren’t a Christian after all!” Paul dismisses this question out of hand. It is so apparent that we are not disqualified that he simply trusts that they recognize the truth of it.

Even so, Paul admitted, **though we may seem to have failed.** If one judges a genuine Christian life by worldly standards (emphasizing “power” and “success”), Paul might seem to have failed. It was by these standards that Job’s friends were convinced that his hardships were the result of sin in his life. However, one could say that only by judging with worldly standards.

II. Practice Obedience

We pray to God that you may not do wrong. So we pray to God that you will pass the test: How? In that you do not do wrong. That you do not continue to practice sin as what Paul had written in Chapter 12 and verse 20. Sins of disharmony - fighting, striving, quarrelling, and sins of immorality - sexual sins. I pray that you will not continue to do wrong in sinning but instead you will repent. You will obey God. And in your repentance and obedience, we would know that you passed the test, that you are genuinely in the faith, that Jesus is in you, that you are genuine in what you do.

So this is what I pray for, that you will repent and obey. But I pray this not so that when you repent and obey, people see that you are genuine and know that I am also genuine, because that's not what I am praying for. I am not praying that I, or we, may appear to have met the test. Our priority is not the guarding or protecting of our own reputation. But we pray that you will do no wrong so that you may simply do what is right. That's all. We just want you to obey. We just want you to do right by God. It's not so much for our reputation. Even though it may seem that we have failed.

For we can do nothing against the truth: Paul, even as an apostle, could do nothing against the truth. Even the apostles were not above the truth. Paul could only work effectively **for the truth**, not against the truth.

For we are glad when we are weak and you are strong: If Paul's weakness could contribute to the strength of the Corinthian Christians, he would be glad. His real concern was that the Corinthians may be made complete.

To **be made complete** is basically the same idea as in 2 Corinthians 12:19: *we do all things, beloved, for your edification*. Paul wanted to build up the Corinthian Christians, to make them complete. They were already a body strong in spiritual gifts and personal testimony (1 Corinthians 1:4-7), but their strength was not complete. They were not like a building that was just a foundation and a bit of rubble. They were like a building built tall and strong – for one and a half walls, with the other walls crumbling or barely started. Paul wanted them to be made complete.

Therefore, I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness: Paul preferred that the Corinthian Christians would clean up their act *before* he came to see them. He wanted to use his authority for edification, not destruction.

Finally, brethren, farewell: Farewell is much better translated *rejoice*. Even though Paul has been severe with the Corinthian Christians, all was written to the end that they would enjoy the joy of walking in a right relationship with God.

Become complete: In 2 Corinthians 13:9, Paul revealed that he prayed that *you may be made complete*. Now he exhorts them to help answer his prayer as he challenges them to become complete.

As Christians, we shouldn't excuse and neglect areas of our life by saying, "I'm just not into that" or "That's just my weak point." We certainly cannot work on everything at once before the Lord, but we can have a heart to become complete.

Be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace: By exhorting the Corinthian Christians to do these things, Paul proves an important point. These are at least partially in our power to do. We often think that our comfort, or being of one mind, and our being at peace with others just depends on *them*. In part that is true, but it also depends on *us*. We need to let God worry about their part, and we can worry about our part.

It costs something to work hard to be of good comfort, be of one mind, and to live in peace; but the reward is worth it: the God of love and peace will be with you. If you feel that God isn't with you, perhaps it is because you are resisting and rejecting His call to be of good comfort, be of one mind, and to live in peace.

Lesson Summary

In 2 Corinthians 13:5-11, the apostle Paul implores the Corinthians to examine themselves to determine whether they are truly living in accordance with the teachings of Christ. He encourages them to test themselves to ensure they are walking in accordance with the teachings of Christ.

The overall lesson that can be learned from this passage is the significance of personal responsibility in one's faith. It suggests that faith is not just a matter of outward actions but also of inner conviction and sincerity. Christians are called to continually assess their beliefs and behaviors to ensure they are aligned with the teachings of Jesus.

Additionally, this passage highlights the following lessons:

- 1. Self-examination:** Paul emphasizes the importance of introspection and self-assessment in the Christian life. Believers are encouraged to regularly evaluate their thoughts, actions, and beliefs to ensure they are in alignment with the teachings of Jesus.
- 2. Authenticity of faith:** The passage underscores the need for genuine faith that is not merely superficial or outward. True faith should manifest in a transformed life and a sincere commitment to following Christ.
- 3. Personal responsibility:** Each individual is responsible for their own faith and spiritual growth. Paul urges the Corinthians to take ownership of their relationship with God and to actively pursue a life that reflects their faith.
- 4. Unity and reconciliation:** Paul urges the Corinthians to aim for restoration, unity, and peace within the Christian community. This highlights the importance of resolving conflicts, practicing forgiveness, and working towards harmony among believers.
- 5. The power of Christ's presence:** Paul reminds the Corinthians that Christ is present among them and that His power is made perfect in weakness. This serves as a source of encouragement and strength for believers facing challenges or difficulties.

Overall, the passage teaches that faith should be lived out authentically and that it should result in a transformed life characterized by unity, peace, and love. These verses emphasize the need for sincere faith, personal accountability, and a commitment to unity and reconciliation within the Christian community.