

# Life Together

*Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?  
If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him.  
For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.  
(1 Corinthians 3:16-17. ESV)*

*And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same  
image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.  
(2 Corinthians 3:18. ESV)*

## **Examine Yourselves**

**June 26<sup>th</sup>, 2016**

**2 Corinthians 13:1-10**

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### **Introduction:**

Good morning! Open your Bibles to 2 Corinthians 13:1; that's on page 970 in your pew Bibles.

Let's get right into it this morning, beginning at verse 1; hear now the Word of the Lord:

<sup>1</sup>This is the third time I am coming to you. Every charge must be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. <sup>2</sup>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—<sup>3</sup>since you seek proof that Christ is speaking in me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you. <sup>4</sup>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.

<sup>5</sup>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! <sup>6</sup>I hope you will find out that we have not failed the test. <sup>7</sup>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. <sup>8</sup>For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. <sup>9</sup>For we are glad when we are weak and you are strong. Your restoration is what we pray for. <sup>10</sup>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. (2 Corinthians 13:1–10 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord – thanks be to God!

This is one of those passages that doesn't really need to be analysed – it needs to be obeyed. This entire passage is built around two parallel imperatives – two commands – we read them in verse 5:

**Examine** yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. **Test** yourselves. (ESV)

Paul is calling on them to put their faith on trial. Charles Hodge says about this verse:

To examine and to test mean the same thing. Both express the idea of trying or putting to the test to ascertain the nature or character of the person or thing tried.<sup>1</sup>

Paul is saying an interesting thing here, he is saying that the issue is not whether I am a real Apostle or not, the issue here is whether you are a real Christian or not – that’s what we need to find out – that is what we are going to look into when I come and you would be wise to do some self testing in advance of that day. That’s what Paul says here to the Corinthians but of course that is good counsel to Christians in every generation. All Christians should engage in regular self evaluation because all Christians will one day stand before God and “pass under the rod” to determine whether they are sheep or goats. Jesus said that, he said:

<sup>31</sup> When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne.<sup>32</sup> Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. (Matthew 25:31–32 ESV)

Jesus is coming. And when he comes he will judge all peoples. He will make them pass under the rod – that is he will examine the evidence in order to determine their nature and character. That’s a serious piece of information; listen to how that story in ends in Matthew 25:

And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” (Matthew 25:46 ESV)

There is no court of appeal, there is no second chance there is no coming back from the Final Judgment and so obviously, the smartest thing we do is to obey what Paul is telling us to do in 2 Corinthians 13. Examine ourselves – test ourselves to see whether or not Christ is in us.

Now the fact that the Bible commands us to scrutinize and test our own faith suggests two things:

1. It suggests that some people are really saved but they lack the assurance of faith

Paul gives every evidence in this passage that he anticipates that some and perhaps most of the

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Hodge, *2 Corinthians* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1995), 234.

Corinthians are in fact really saved but there is just so much uncertainty and so much unrest because they remain so confused about so many Gospel issues. If they sort through these things honestly they will arrive at a place of confidence in their faith. That is one of my pastoral objectives for this morning. I believe that there are people here this morning who are really Christians but they are not sure that they are because there is so much confusion and chaos in their lives and that's a hard place to be and so I hope that this message will be helpful for you.

2. It suggests that some people think they are saved when in fact they are not

Jesus said that was a real possibility. In Matthew 7 he said:

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 7:21 ESV)

Some people who are absolutely sure that they are Christians will discover that they are absolutely wrong. In a room of this size there are almost certainly going to be folks who believe that they are saved who are not. Therefore it is absolutely critical we look at some evidence about ourselves and the reality of our faith well in advance of the Day of Judgment. Because on that day there will be nothing you can do about the verdict that is given – but today there is plenty that you can do. And so my second pastoral objective today is to help some people discover that they currently have no reliable basis for their present assurance of salvation. Discovering that today could be the difference between eternal life and damnation.

So let's obey this text. Let's put ourselves on trial in order to examine the reality of our faith in Jesus Christ.

Now the first thing we need to do in a trial is decide what sort of evidence will be admitted and what sort will be excluded. There are certain things that just don't meet the standard of evidence in a courtroom. For example you are not allowed to submit hearsay or rumor as evidence because they are notoriously unreliable. Similarly, throughout the Corinthian Correspondence Paul has declared certain things inadmissible in terms of their testimony about our faith in Christ. Let's remember what those things are so that we do not think that we will be able to build our case upon them.

## Unreliable Evidence:

### 1. Religious Experiences

Paul makes it very clear in 1 Corinthians that there were many people who had gone through the waters of baptism and who had been regularly taking communion who were not in fact saved. They thought that participation in these rituals ensured participation in the life to come. And Paul warns against that. He tells them a story about how the Israelites were all baptized – they all passed through the waters of redemption when they walked through the Red Sea – they all ate the spiritual food and drink:

<sup>5</sup>Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

<sup>6</sup>Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. (1 Corinthians 10:5–6 ESV)

Those people – despite that all of them had been baptized and had eaten the spiritual bread and had drunk the spiritual drink – all of them died in the desert. None of them saw the Promised Land. They had the experience but they didn't have the faith. Paul ends that passage with a clear warning:

Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. (1 Corinthians 10:12 ESV)

Don't trust in religious experience – if you lean on that for your assurance you will fall!

Secondly, Paul warns the Corinthians and us not to trust in:

### 2. Spiritual Gifts

One of the main concerns that Paul has in writing 1 Corinthians is the concern to **DEPRIORITIZE** – not **DELEGITIMIZE** – but **DEPRIORITIZE** spiritual gifts. His whole argument is that spiritual gifts are good – you should desire them because they build up the church – but if you think they prove that you are a Christian you are sadly mistaken. Spiritual gifts cannot be received as evidence of our status before God for the simple reason that spiritual gifts can be faked. The Bible says that:

<sup>9</sup>The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders... (2 Thessalonians 2:9 ESV)

Spiritual gifts – while good – are also dangerous if we think that they somehow PROVE that we are Christians. Paul isn't saying that they are bad – anymore than he is saying that baptism and communion are bad – he is just saying that religious experience and spiritual gifts DO NOT CONSTITUTE EVIDENCE OF SALVATION.

So what does? What can we look to as a legitimate indicator that Christ is in us and we are in him? Let me suggest 4 things drawn from our reading of the Corinthian Correspondence.

### **Reliable Evidence:**

#### **1. A growing love for the Body of Christ**

That is actually the whole point of Paul's arrangement of 1 Corinthians chapters 12,13 and 14. Paul is talking about spiritual gifts in chapter 12 and he's talking about spiritual gifts in chapter 14 – but what is he talking about in chapter 13? He's talking about love and the point he is trying to make is that spiritual gifts are various but LOVE IS UNIVERSAL. Gifts are fine – but love is definitive. Look at how he opens chapter 13:

<sup>1</sup> If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, ... if I have prophetic powers .... but have not love, I am nothing. (1 Corinthians 13:1-2 ESV)

Paul couldn't be more clear here, he says: "If you have spiritual gifts but you don't have love you have nothing. That doesn't prove you are a Christian – that gift may not even be from God - but love? Love for the body of Christ? That comes from God - that's a fruit of the Spirit that is convincing evidence that Christ is alive within you."

Of course that is very similar to what Jesus said in the Parable Of The Sheep and The Goats. Do you remember what distinguished the sheep from the goats in that story? Jesus said:

<sup>35</sup>For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, <sup>36</sup>I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' .... 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.' (Matthew 25:35–40 ESV)

Loving care for 'the least of these my brothers' is received as evidence that these people are truly disciples of Christ. Obviously then, we need to understand the identity of these "brothers". Are they the biological brothers of Jesus? Is this saying that we need to be loving toward James, Joseph, Simon and Jude – the biological brothers of Jesus? Or is it referring to the community of disciples? Thankfully, Jesus answered that question:

<sup>48</sup>"Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" <sup>49</sup>And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! (Matthew 12:48–49 ESV)

In another passage he said:

"My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it." (Luke 8:21 ESV)

Putting all of these passages together we can say with confidences that an increasing, practical, need meeting, risk taking love for the community of disciples is received as reliable evidence that we are in fact believers in Jesus Christ.

So let's get real practical and real pastoral. I know that some of you here today are in fact REAL BELIEVERS but you don't FEEL like a real believer – you have the reality of faith but not the assurance of faith. Let me see if this is helpful for you. Do you see a desire in yourself to serve your fellow Christians? Do you feel a desire to share what God has given you with brothers and sisters within the believing community who are in need? Do you feel a desire pray for brothers and sisters in Christ? Does this body of believers increasingly FEEL LIKE your spiritual family? Are these disciples increasingly "your mother and your brothers and your sisters?" If so – if that is true and increasingly true of you – then there is really good reason to suspect that you have been born again, because that's not normal. That is a fruit of the Spirit, thanks be to God.

## **2. A growing love for the Jesus of the Gospel**

We've mentioned several times over the course of this series that the Corinthians were struggling with the Jesus of the Gospel. They were culturally inclined to desire a stronger and more

transcendent type of Savior. They wanted a POWER RELIGION and the idea of a Suffering Savior was very hard for them to embrace. And that is why Paul would not let them look away. He said:

For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. (1 Corinthians 2:2 ESV)

I'm just going to keep hammering this point, Paul says, because you are really struggling with it. He comes back to it here in 2 Corinthians 13. He says:

For he was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God. (2 Corinthians 13:4 ESV)

You don't get to have just the bits of Jesus that you like. You can't have POWER JESUS without naked and suffering Jesus. There is no glory that bypasses the weakness of the cross. You see, in the early church, it wasn't the divinity of Jesus that caused people to stumble, it was the humanity of Jesus. That Jesus suffered – that he was human – that he died naked and abused and rejected and scorned – that didn't fit with what they wanted in a Savior. They didn't see that as beautiful – they didn't yet understand fully how this Jesus was exactly the Jesus that they needed. Now part of their problem was that they didn't really understand sin. They didn't really understand the devastating effects of sin. They thought they needed a powerful example – they didn't understand that they needed much more than that. They didn't need an example, they needed a Savior – but they didn't get that yet. Mark Seifrid writes:

“God saves us from ourselves. This is the Gospel upon which the Corinthians seem to have only a feeble grasp, if they have grasped it all.”<sup>2</sup>

Basically, the Corinthians were confused about the Gospel right here at points 2 and 3. They didn't really understand sin and therefore they didn't really understand Jesus. By the way – that's a pretty common problem. If you try and jump into the Gospel without working your way through all of the component parts you will inevitable end up with the wrong Jesus. If you don't understand the holiness of God and the sinfulness of sin then you will end up with something other than the Suffering Servant on the cross. That's what happened to the Corinthians and so Paul is saying go back and test yourself against the reality of the Gospel and see if you are loving and trusting in the REAL JESUS – THE JESUS WHO SAVES US FROM OUR SIN. The Jesus

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<sup>2</sup> Mark Seifrid, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 479.

who took on flesh to do for us what we could NEVER do for ourselves. The Jesus who died, naked and scorned on a cross – by whose STRIPES WE ARE HEALED. This is the only Jesus that saves – so make sure that you are loving and believing in him. A real Christian is growing in their understanding of and trust in the real Christ of the Gospel.

So let's get practical and pastoral again. Are you growing in your understanding of the Christ of the Gospel? Are you like the Apostle Paul who desperately wanted TO KNOW THE CHRIST in whom he had believed? Can I tell you something? If you are ok knowing only as much about Jesus now as you did when you were 6 then you are probably not saved. You probably didn't see the real Jesus – because if you did you would want to know more. You would want to see more of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Do you love Jesus – the REAL JESUS – more today than ever before? Do you love to press in so that you can learn and love more? If you do then that is very reliable evidence that you have been born again. If that isn't you then preach the Gospel to yourself until it lights a fire in your soul. You may have let your spark go out from lack of attendance. See to it. Remind yourself of him in whom you have believed. That is ultimately the most important source of our Christian assurance – a growing delight in the Christ of the Gospel.

### **3. A growing contentment with who God has made you to be**

Part of being saved from ourselves is being saved to a contentment with ourselves. We are what he has made us to be. We are the gender that he has made us to be, we have the gifts that he has given us to have. A true Christian is growing in contentment with respect to these things. Paul addressed the issue of gender in 1 Corinthians 11 and he addressed the issue of gifts in 1 Corinthians 12. There were folks in Corinth who weren't content with their gender and who weren't content with their gifts and Paul reminds all of these folks about the Sovereignty and goodness of God. He says:

God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. (1 Corinthians 12:15–18 ESV)

God makes us who we are – discontent with who we are is a mark of fallen humanity. But a real Christian has been reconciled to God, to others and to themselves. So let's ask ourselves some hard questions. Are we growing in our contentment with God's Sovereign ordination over our



lives? Are we happy being the woman or the man that God has made us to be? Are we growing in our appreciation of the dignity assigned to us and the importance of the roles and ministries prepared for us from before the foundation of the world? A real Christian is increasingly at peace with their identity and calling.

#### **4. A growing discomfort with the presence and practice of sin**

This has been one of Paul's main concerns over the course of these letters. He is really concerned by their ability to tolerate on-going sin. He said back in 1 Corinthians 5:

<sup>1</sup>It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. <sup>2</sup>And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? (1 Corinthians 5:1–2 ESV)

The Corinthians actually thought that it was a mark of their spiritual maturity that they were able to tolerate grievous sexual sin. They were proud of their spiritual open mindedness but Paul was gravely concerned: Ought you not rather to mourn? It is a bad thing when Christians are comfortable with sin. Real Christians are moving in the exact opposite direction. They are growing in their hatred of sin, they are growing less confident in their ability to resist temptation and more certain of their need to walk very close to the Word of Christ. Real Christians are not at peace with sin.

Let me ask you a real practical question. Do you sin less and do you hate it more than when you first believed? If the answer to that is yes than that is convincing evidence that Christ is alive within you. A real Christian sins less and hates it more each day as they grow in their walk with Jesus. Young Christians sin a lot and hardly notice. Older Christians sin rarely and mourn deeply every time. They want to be like Jesus. They want to be done with sin.

Real Christians aren't perfect – but they long to be. They want to grow, they want to change and even more than that – they want Jesus to RETURN! Because:

when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. <sup>3</sup>And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. (1 John 3:2–3 ESV)

Everyone. Do you want some evidence that you are saved? Read this verse. If the first half

FIRES YOU UP in anticipation of Christ's return – that's a good sign. If it strengthens your resolve to do battle with sin and to purify yourself just as he is pure – than THAT'S A GOOD SIGN because EVERYONE who has this hope in him purifies himself just as he is pure. This is a reliable marker – just like love for Christ, just like love for the Body of Christ, just like love for who Christ has made you to be – these are all reliable markers – they don't MAKE US SAVED – but they do provide some evidence that we are saved. They give us good reason to hope that Christ is alive in us.

So if you see these things in yourself then give thanks to God and continue growing. Partner with his grace, weed your garden, attend the ordinary means, look to Christ and grow, by one degree of glory to the next. But if you don't see these things then take that seriously. Don't blow this off; don't trust in things that the Bible says you shouldn't trust in. Do business with God. Get on your face before the Lord. Ask him: God why is it that I don't really love the body of Christ? I could take it or leave it. I could come or not come. I am not moved by the needs of my brothers and sisters in Christ. Why is that? And Lord, why is it that I am so eager to look away from the Christ of the Gospel? Why is it that I am so eager to hear about a Jesus who does not appear in the pages of Scripture? Why is it that I don't like who I am and how you've gifted me? Why am I so callous and uncaring towards my own sin? Why am I tolerant when I should be in mourning? Could it be that I have not been born again? Could it be that I am not filled with the Spirit of Christ? Could it be that I am not a Christian?

That may be a very hard conversation to have but listen to me very carefully – you want to have that conversation now and NOT on the Day of Judgment. You want to have it TODAY because today is STILL the day of salvation. Thanks be to God, let's pray together.