

Self-Examination

Bible Background • 2 CORINTHIANS 13:1–11

Printed Text • 2 CORINTHIANS 13:1–11 | Devotional Reading • JAMES 1:12–18

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: IDENTIFY the standards of faithful living in Christ that guided Paul’s life, SENSE the growth in faithful living by testing our lives in Christ, and EMBRACE faithful living as the basis for communal life in Christ.

In Focus

“Ethan is wrong! He knows better,” Mathew thought as he sat across the dinner table from his brother, “I must tell what happened.” Ethan had been warned several times about going into the candy store with the Smith boys. They did things contrary to the way Ethan and Mathew were being taught. They were always talking back to adults, getting into fights, and stealing. Ethan knew better. Ethan and Mathew loved going to church. They especially liked going to church with their grandparents and hearing Pastor Gray preach. The boys got baptized at the same time. They even chose the same favorite Bible verse, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

Now Ethan was stealing and being disrespectful to Mr. King, the candy store owner. Mathew knew what Ethan was doing was wrong. He even told Ethan he was going to get in trouble because he knew better. Granddad would always say, “Boys, if you want to know if you are doing right, God is your plumb line. We examine ourselves by God’s Word.”

As Mathew pondered how to bring up what happened, Granddad said, “Ethan, I saw you today at the candy store. What were you doing over there?” Mathew was so relieved! Granddad had seen what happened, too.

When our sin has been called out, do we acknowledge and confess our sins? Or do we deny them? Do we examine ourselves against God’s Word?

Keep in Mind

“Examine yourselves to see if your faith is genuine. Test yourselves. Surely you know that Jesus Christ is among you; if not, you have failed the test of genuine faith” (2 Corinthians 13:5, NLT)

Words You Should Know

- A. Perfection** (v. 9) *katartisis* (Gk.) — A state of being mended or restored so as to be fully functional
- B. Farewell** (v. 11) *chairete* (Gk.) — A parting salutation literally meaning “Rejoice”

Say It Correctly

none

KJV

2 Corinthians 13:1 This is the third time I am coming to you. In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established.² I told you before, and foretold 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.
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.
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.
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.
8 For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth.
9 For we are glad, when we are weak, and ye are strong: and this also we wish, even your perfection.
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.
11 Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.

NLT

Corinthians 13:1 This is the third time I am coming to visit you (and as the Scriptures say, “The facts of every case must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses”).² I have already warned those who had been sinning when I was there on my second visit. Now I again warn them and all others, just as I did before, that next time I will not spare them.
3 I will give you all the proof you want that Christ speaks through me. Christ is not weak when he deals with you; he is powerful among you.
4 Although he was crucified in weakness, he now lives by the power of God. We, too, are weak, just as Christ was, but when we deal with you we will be alive with him and will have God’s power.
5 Examine yourselves to see if your faith is genuine. Test yourselves. Surely you know that Jesus Christ is among you; if not, you have failed the test of genuine faith.
6 As you test yourselves, I hope you will recognize that we have not failed the test of apostolic authority.
7 We pray to God that you will not do what is wrong by refusing our correction. I hope we won’t need to demonstrate our authority when we arrive. Do the right thing before we come—even if that makes it look like we have failed to demonstrate our authority.
8 For we cannot oppose the truth, but must always stand for the truth.
9 We are glad to seem weak if it helps show that you are actually strong. We pray that you will become mature.
10 I am writing this to you before I come, hoping that I won’t need to deal severely with you when I do come. For I want to use the authority the Lord has given me to strengthen you, not to tear you down.
11 Dear brothers and sisters, I close my letter with these last words: Be joyful. Grow to maturity. Encourage each other. Live in harmony and peace. Then the God of love and peace will be with you.

The People, Places, and Times

Paul. Even before his conversion, Paul was instrumental in causing the church to spread from its Jerusalem roots. Paul's participation in the death of Stephen the deacon and frenzied persecution of believers after the Resurrection caused them to flee Jerusalem and take the Gospel to other parts of world. After his conversion (Acts 9:1–19), Paul embarked on three missionary journeys spreading the Gospel throughout the Roman Empire. Paul personally established numerous churches, and he also wrote at least thirteen epistles in the New Testament. The conversion of a notorious church hater such as Paul proves that even the worst of sinners can be changed, empowered, and used by God.

Corinth. A key city in ancient Greece until it was destroyed by the Romans in 146 BC. Julius Caesar rebuilt it as a Roman colony in 46 BC, and it grew and prospered. In Paul's day, Corinth was thriving because of its two seaports (to the west and the east) and had become a commercial center. The cosmopolitan center thrived on commercial entertainment and corruption. Pleasure seekers came there to spend money on immoral practices. A very active cult of Aphrodite there employed temple prostitutes. Corinth became so notorious for its evils that the term *korinthiazomai* (Gk. "to Corinth") became a synonym for debauchery and prostitution.

Background

In 2 Corinthians Paul is again writing the church because of immoral practices. Additionally, there have been attempts to besmirch Paul's reputation. Paul argues that his trials prove God's power in him rather than proving God's displeasure with him. Paul makes his argument in this letter in order to help the Corinthians so that when he comes to visit them, he will not have to be harsh.

Paul often mentions how God's power is seen in the weakness of the Cross. The Corinthian Christians were very much like the pagan culture that surrounded them. Indisputably, Paul had Christ in him. The Corinthians must decide if Christ is in them. If they conclude Christ is in them, then they cannot deny Christ is in Paul, their spiritual father. In this letter Paul speaks of his authority for building them up (2 Corinthians 10:8) and encourages them live in the power of God.

At-A-Glance

1. The Minister's Warning (2 Corinthians 13:1–6)
2. The Minister's Prayer (vv. 7–10)
3. The Minister's Challenge (v. 11)

In Depth

1. The Minister's Warning (2 Corinthians 13:1–6)

Paul was preparing to visit Corinth for a third time. He remembered how humbling his experience was on his second visit to Corinth. It was humbling for two reasons. One was the offense against him, and the second was that he found many people in the church living contrary to God's will. Paul was repeating his warning to them about the consequences of their sin. He assured them that if they had not changed their ways, they would have many regrets. They were asking for more than they were expecting when they asked for proof of Paul's authority. Paul recognizes that in his weakness God's power is seen. He knows how powerful the God he serves is.

Christ's experience on the Cross demonstrated humiliation and physical weakness. Paul identifies with the weakness of Christ as shown on the Cross; therefore, he also knows the power of God is with him and will

sustain him as he confronts the problems plaguing the Corinthians' church. Paul wants them to understand they are not just dealing with or confronting him, but God.

Paul encourages them to be sure of their faith. If they examine themselves and find that they are not pleased with the results, they must change. The Corinthians must be accountable to God for themselves.

What methods do you use to examine yourself in the faith? How do you go about an examination of your faith?

2. The Minister's Prayer (vv. 7–10)

Paul prays for their success in the faith. If the Corinthians refuse the correction, it is to their own peril. Paul is concerned with the urgency of this need. They cannot live in sin, overlook error, and expect God to be pleased. Paul lets them know that he has the authority to give this instruction and correction. Paul makes it clear that the truth will prevail. He declares that he will not oppose the truth. Instead, he must always stand for the truth. Paul is willing to deny himself on their behalf. If Paul's weakness will help them be strong, then Paul is satisfied. His only prayer is for the full restoration of the Corinthians to fellowship and holiness.

Paul explains that he is writing to them harshly and straightforwardly because when he comes to them in person, he wants the discipline part to be out of the way. Perhaps the church at Corinth expects Paul to make some strong showing of his apostolic power. Paul does not want to have to make such a show of force. He is not trying to tear them down; rather, his intent is to build them up with the authority and power God has granted him.

What errors or sins do you see the church overlooking today? How do you speak against it?

3. The Minister's Challenge (v. 11)

Paul closes his letter with a benediction that encourages the Corinthians to aim for completeness in Christ. His benediction has four statements of encouragement. First, he tells them to be joyful. While his manner and tone may seem harsh, he wants them to rejoice in the Lord because there is hope through the Holy Spirit for them to be restored. Second, he tells them to grow to maturity. The purpose of his letter and the teaching he has provided was aimed at growing them in full maturity in Christ so that they can be strong in faith and steadfast in their love for one another. The Corinthians have faced a trying time. There have been dissensions and arguments, accusations and disputes; but now Paul says to lay aside discord and focus on encouraging one another. This is a reference to strengthening one another in the faith so the church can be stronger. Finally, he tells them to live in harmony and peace. This can only be done if their sin and disdain have been replaced by joy, maturity, and encouragement. Then, Paul says, they will be at peace with the God who loves them.

How do you remind yourself of the joyful hope Christians have in Christ?

Search the Scriptures

1. What does Paul mean when he says "if I come again, I will not spare" (v. 2) and "lest being present I should use sharpness" (v. 10)?
2. The Corinthians were told to examine and test themselves. How should they do this (v. 5)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. Paul's letter shows his love, compassion, and understanding. When we need to give correction to our brothers and sisters in the faith, how can we exhibit those same characteristics?
2. How can we be constructive and not destructive when giving reproof and correction to the people of God?

Liberating Lesson

No one likes to be corrected, young or old, female or male. However, there is a time for everything, including correction and reproof (cf. Ecclesiastes 3:3). Without discipline, we are often at odds with others and not able to please God. Often the negativity we see in our communities—the fights, murders, and crimes—are the result of undisciplined living. There is a time when we all need discipline. When discipline is handled with love, we find the dangers brought by undisciplined actions can be avoided. Paul’s benediction provides the basis for liberating correction that can result in positive family and community relationships. Our discipline must be concerned with maintaining the joy of our relationships, the maturity needed to be members of the community, the encouragement that we can and must give to one another, and the harmony and peace we seek to achieve. If this is the basis of our conversation, correction, and discipline, the God of love and peace will surely bless us to live abundantly and in unity.

Application for Activation

The standard for faithful living is found in the Word of God. While we might be tempted to compare ourselves with others and to judge our actions according to whether we are better than or even not as bad as someone else, we must always look to the Bible (and to those who exhibit a wise example) to determine if our actions, thoughts, and relationships are pleasing to God. When we make comparisons between us and them, we become judgmental and often overlook our own shortcomings. As Christians, we should be more eager to examine ourselves than to judge others. We ought to measure ourselves by the standards set in Scripture. This week, examine yourself honestly to see where you may need to change or to embrace a more God-like stance. You will find when you follow God’s plan that you have the power to live peaceably with people and with God.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

2 Corinthians 13:1–11

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

Having visited the Corinthians twice, Paul is coming for the third time. Paul is their pastor, and his pastoral work requires teaching and visitations. The situation in Corinth has persisted.

There are those who have fallen from the faith and are living in ways that are sinful and detrimental to the church. Furthermore, their actions cause dissension and deny the Cross. This has caused Paul, as their spiritual father, to chasten them as the situation demands. Paul will address the issue of sin and false doctrine according to God’s law as sanctioned in Christ. His visit will be the final one, but he wants to put an end to the issues they face before he arrives. The particular actions Paul is concerned about are sexual immorality, sectarianism that is

causing division, and false doctrine that is trying to keep believers in legalistic bondage rather than freedom in Christ Jesus. He addressed all of these before in 1 Corinthians and presumably during his other visits. He explains that either they will heed his correction in his letter or, when he arrives, he will not spare his words or his actions.

3 Since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, which to you-ward is not weak, but is mighty in you.

There were those who sought proof of Paul's apostleship. Paul (2 Corinthians 1:1) by the will of God. Paul writes his letter to address this and other issues. Paul reminds the Corinthians that he is an apostle, sent by Christ and by God's grace. Paul had endured abuse for the sake of Christ. But when the genuineness of his apostleship is called into question, Paul draws a line. He explains that there is no weakness in Christ but mighty power that seeks to correct them. For in challenging Paul, they are challenging the Lord Himself who commissioned him. They have seen the impact of the Holy Spirit at work among them and the fruit in their lives that was planted through Paul's preaching. In reality, they have their proof already. Moreover, Christ was at work powerfully among them in Paul's absence, so they should know better than to continue to ignore or indulge sinful behavior.

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.

The Corinthians are grappling with the paradox of Christ's power being shown through His weakness. Christ's power has transformed the Corinthians' lives, but Christ was crucified in weakness. Christ is the Prince of life (Acts 3:15), yet He died on the Cross in total humiliation (Philippians 2:8). Yet the Cross, which was a supreme spectacle of weakness and human degradation, is the source of power unto salvation for believers. The instrument of weakness became the instrument of power (2 Corinthians 4:8–12; 6:4–10; 11:23ff; 12:5–10). Christ Himself endured the sufferings of our weakness so that the believer who is united with Christ in His death will also participate in His glorious resurrection (Romans 6:3; Philippians 3:10). Christ, who died as though weak, was raised to the majestic glory as King of kings and Lord of lords. Therefore, Paul can live to say that he is Christ's apostle even in his weakness.

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?

Now that they can prove that God is working in Paul through Christ, it is time for the Corinthians to prove to Paul whether Christ is in them. They should turn their attention to themselves. They must confirm to themselves that they have faith in Christ. Each Christian has to do his or her own self-examination. The Corinthians must be restored (v. 9) to their former faith. They must be built up if they have lost their foundation. Through Paul's ministry, they came to faith. Now they must prove their faith to Paul. If they know that Christ dwells in them, then they should also know that Paul is Christ's apostle. This could be done either through voluntary confession by individual members or through the disciplining of individual members of the church. They have to scrutinize themselves instead of scrutinizing Paul. Upon self-examination, the Corinthians will discern whether they have faith or not. So Paul hopes that they will start walking in the way of Christ.

6 But I trust that ye shall know that we are not reprobates. 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.

Paul assures the Corinthians that after they have examined themselves and if they have found themselves to be truly in the faith, then they will surely see that Paul and his fellow missionaries are also in the faith ("not reprobates"). Paul prays that their examination of themselves and of Paul will not be tainted by sin. He is not so much concerned that a tainted examination would find him guilty, but that such a test would mean that his spiritual children were being dishonest. Paul's focus is on the spiritual well-being of the Corinthians, even as they doubt his apostleship.

8 For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth. 9 For we are glad, when we are weak, and ye are strong: and this also we wish, even your perfection.

In a pastoral manner, yet partially ridiculing them, Paul desires that they be strong in faith rather than weak. But he and his fellow missionaries consider themselves weak. The irony is that the Corinthians are even weaker and need to be strong. Misconduct in the congregation must be dealt with wisely in order to avoid schism. Using Paul's example, pastors must not shrink from imposing discipline when circumstances demand it. But authority must go through the proper routes and not degenerate into authoritarianism or abuse. A pastor must conform to the teaching of Christ, who is the Head of the church. Paul, therefore, longs that there should be harmony that bears fruit among members. The noun for perfection (Gk. *katartisis*, ka-TAR-tees-eess) is used only here in the New Testament, though its verb form is used often. It does not speak of moral perfection but of being made whole. It is elsewhere translated "mend" (Mark 1:19) or "restore" (Galatians 6:1) and carries the idea of putting into a proper shape so that the perfected item can do everything it is meant to do. Therefore, when the Christians reach "perfection" as the body of Christ, its members will function efficiently.

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.

Paul is accused of being bold and terrifying when he writes but weak when he is present (2 Corinthians 10:10). So, he answers the charge by saying that he does not need to act with sharpness when he comes, for he has already exercised his authority by letter. When he comes, he will act pastorally. His sharpness is that the church may become spiritually strong (12:19). He has been given this authority by the Lord (10:8). While he was challenged by his opponents, he will act as a pastor. He will still discipline the church (12:20). However, as a pastor, he will act in gentleness rather than severity. With a rod of love and a spirit of humility, he will pastor them.

11 Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.

Paul concludes his letter with affectionate words to the brethren and with exhortation. The term *chairete* (Gk. KHAY-reh-tay), which is often translated "farewell," can more literally be translated "rejoice." Indeed Paul wants them to rejoice in the Lord (Philippians 3:1; 4:4). Joy should be a mark of every Christian community. *Katartizesthe* (Gk. ka-tar-TEEDzess-thay, "be perfect") is the verb form of the noun for "perfection" used above (v. 9). If all are made whole, they will live in harmony. *Parakaleisthe* (Gk. pa-ra-ka-LACE-thay) means "be comforted." Paul prays that the Corinthians should embrace God's comforting (cf. 1:3). "Be of one mind" means the Christians, though they hold different opinions as individuals, should always come to agreement based on the Word of God. They should respect each other. In so doing they will be united in love so that the teaching of Christ may unify them as parts of the body of Christ to promote peace and love.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Weigh the Evidence Carefully
(Deuteronomy 19:15–20)

TUESDAY

Building Up Your Faith Community
(1 Thessalonians 5:12–22)

WEDNESDAY

Preparing for the Lord's Supper
(1 Corinthians 11:26–29)

THURSDAY

Honor Your Elders
(1 Timothy 5:17–22)

FRIDAY

Test the Spirits
(1 John 4:1–8)

SATURDAY

Give Generously to Enrich Your Life
(2 Corinthians 9:10–15)

SUNDAY

Examine Yourselves in Your Faithful Living
(2 Corinthians 13:1–11)