

Examine Yourselves
II Corinthians 13:1-10

INTRODUCTION

The woman had identified herself as being a member of a local Baptist church. When we asked her the question, "Suppose you were to die today, and were to stand before God, and He were to say to you, "why should I let you into my heaven?" What would you say?" A startled look came over her face. As she slammed the door in our face, she said, "I don't think about things like that. That would drive you crazy." Her response to the question was much more typical than her action. Not many of us like to make that kind of examination of our relationship to God.

The Corinthians had been ready to subject Paul to an examination. They were demanding that he provide proof that he was a true apostle of Jesus Christ. In this last chapter Paul turns the tables on them. Under the inspiration of the Lord he admonishes, "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you--unless, of course, you fail the test." This word "examine" means to try or to test. The thing to be tested is our relationship with God. The behavior of the Corinthians had given reason to doubt the genuineness of their knowledge of the Lord. Paul challenges them to check their spiritual credentials.

Are you willing to follow the admonition of this text? In our day in which little time is really devoted to this kind of discipline this could be a very helpful exercise for the soul. In seeking to point the way to make such an examination, let me make some suggestions from the text.

I. WE SHOULD EXAMINE OURSELVES PERSONALLY.

"Examine yourselves--test yourselves". In both instances "yourselves" is the emphatic word. We seem to have an inclination to examine other, but the text calls for self-examination. There is good reason for the emphasis of this text. There is a good reason that it must be done personally.

The very nature of our relationship with God calls for this personal examination. The most personal thing in the world is a man's relationship to his God. It involves a relationship between the inner spirit of the man and the Holy Spirit of God. When there is a proper relationship, there is an inner union between these two spirits. This union of spirit with Spirit is such that it cannot be inspected or evaluated by any outside observer. Ultimately it can be known and evaluated only by the person involved. You can guess about my relationship with God on the basis of what you can observe, and you may be very close to the truth, but the only person who can know is me.

There is another aspect of this. It should be personal because ultimately I am the only person responsible for this relationship. Others may care and may seek to help, but I am personally responsible for the state of my relationship before God. If I am wrong with God, condemned by God, I will be the one responsible for it.

I will bear the penalty for condemnation. If I am saved from my sin, I am the only one who can take the steps necessary for it to happen. No one else can ever repent for me. No one can ever reach out in believing prayer for me. No one else can ever publicly confess Christ for me. I am the one responsible, so I need to personally examine myself before God.

Why are we so reluctant to do this? Many of us will regularly subject ourselves to a thorough physical examination. We have learned that unless we take care of our health no one can do it for us. We regularly examine our financial position. We have learned that if we are to survive in this kind of world, we must take care of such matters for ourselves. Why will we be so negligent about the only aspect of our lives that involves eternity? In the light of the issues that are involved, it is imperative that we personally examine our relationship to God.

II. WE SHOULD EXAMINE OURSELVES PROPERLY.

Paul gives us helpful indications about how to do this in our text. The doctor has certain procedures he follows in testing your health. There are certain vital signs that will tell him and you much about your condition. There are some vital signs in the life of the spirit. Paul suggests three in the text.

We should examine our faith. "examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith". There are two aspects of faith that might be examined. There is an objective aspect of faith that might be examined. God has given to His people once for all a body of truth that is rightly called "the Faith". It is the faith because it embodies that truth to which the Christian is committed in Faith. So an examination might be made of your commitment to the truth that God has revealed in Christ and caused to be recorded in the Scriptures. There can be some comfort in knowing that you have not rejected the faith. The Apostle Paul found encouragement in being able to say, "I have kept the faith".

However, the aspect of faith in view here is probably the subjective. By this we mean that personal faith, personal trust in, personal reliance upon the Lord Himself. To examine this is to make sure that you are now trusting in Christ Jesus alone for salvation. It is not enough to be able to say, "I once believed in the Lord for salvation." Do you now believe in Him for salvation? Do you still consider Him to be the only hope of eternal life? There is a clear witness in the scriptures that the faith that saves perseveres. This means that it does not quit believing. It can withstand the "fiery trials" and will only be purified by them. Could it be that whatever faith you might have had has been lost? This is one of the vital signs in this examination. You must test your own heart to see if there is a readiness to confess Jesus as Lord and Saviour now.

We should examine our fullness. "Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you--unless you fail this test?" The form in which Paul presents this question indicates that he expects a positive answer to the question. He is confident that they do know that Christ Jesus is in them by the Holy Spirit. The word translated "realize" means to know fully, to know experientially. There is an inner assurance that Christ Jesus does dwell within.

This is at the heart of the Christian Life. A Christian is a person in whom Christ dwells. Paul writes, "Christ in you, the hope of glory." He takes up residence in the life by the Holy Spirit at the moment of the New Birth. After a while this experiential knowledge will come for the presence of Christ within will begin to be manifest. It will be seen in the illumination of spiritual truth. The "things of God" begin to become real and personal to those in whom Christ dwells. There will be the inner guidance. "As many as are led they are the sons of God". There will be the inner witness to your relationship to God. The Holy Spirit makes known to those in whom He dwells that they are the children of God.

If you are to make a proper examination, you need to check on this. Do you have this personal "fullness" of Christ in your heart? If Christ is not in you, then you do not belong to the family of God.

We should also examine our fruit. In the verses that follow our text, Paul calls attention to fruit. "And I trust that you will discover that we have not failed the test. Now we pray to God that you will not do anything wrong. Not that people will see that we have stood the test but that you will do what is right even though we may seem to have failed." Paul prays that there will be the vindication of their profession of faith in their deeds. He longs for there to be an absence of wrong doing. Wherever there is evident violation and transgression of the commands of the Lord, there is reason to question the relationship to God. He also prays for evident goodness. He wants the deeds of love, the works of compassion, the words of grace, and expressions of faith to be evident in the life. Such deeds are the fruit of a proper relationship to God. Do you dare examine your fruit? Does your behavior match your words? Is there evidence on Monday in what you do that you meant what you said on Sunday? Jesus said, "By their fruit ye shall know them." We have to be concerned about our fruit.

This would be the proper way to make this personal examination.

III. WE SHOULD EXAMINE OURSELVES PURPOSEFULLY.

Paul admonished us to make this examination with good purpose. This is not wasted effort. Such examination can prevent our being the victims of self-deception. Human nature is such that each of us is subject to self-deception. Unless we are careful to make our "calling and election sure", we might just find ourselves on the last days crying out "Lord, Lord," only to hear Him say, "Depart from me, I never knew you." I can imagine no worse tragedy than that. I have known enough unconverted church members through the years to know that this is a very real possibility. This is one good purpose.

Such examination also renews in you a sense of wonder at the goodness and grace of the Lord. In the unexamined life, it is easy to lose the wonder of being a Christian. It can become an accepted matter to which little thought and attention is directed. In such a life, the joy will be missing often. But as you go back to the beginning of the walk, and tract the points along the journey, and evaluate what the relationship means to you in the present, you will find yourself with a

renewed sense of awe. You will be made to say anew, "The Lord has been good to me."

Such examination can also lead to a re-affirmation of the importance of the body of Christ to you. This may have been what Paul desired to happen to the Corinthians. He knew that if they would make the proper examination it would lead them to renewed awareness of the part that he had played in their spiritual journey. They were demanding proof of his work, when they were the best proof possible. They had come into the way of faith through the message of the Gospel that he had delivered to them.

CONCLUSION:

Do you dare examine your relationship to the Lord? Would you be as honest and as open with yourself as you know how? Would you invite the living God to guide you in this examination through His Word and His Spirit? Would you continue the examination until you can confidently say, "I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day." You will reap a good reward from such an exercise of examination and testing.