

The Book of 2 Corinthians, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 13: Examine Yourself; Final Greetings

2 Corinthians 13:1-14

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Second Corinthians closes with a chapter that turns the spotlight from Paul, whom the Corinthians had been examining for twelve chapters, onto the Corinthians themselves: "Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith." The teacher should treat this command as the doctrinal center of the final lesson. It teaches the vital practice of self-examination and carries a sobering implication that must be handled with care: Paul warns church members that they could "fail the test." This stands directly against the doctrine of "once saved, always saved," for it assumes that a person can bear the name of Christ, belong outwardly to the church, and yet not be truly in the faith. The Christian life is not a transaction completed once and then guaranteed regardless of how one lives; it is a living relationship to be tested and kept.

The teacher should present this in a balanced, pastoral way. On one hand, Scripture genuinely offers assurance; believers can know they are in Christ (1 John 5:13). On the other hand, that assurance is not grounded in a past decision alone, regardless of present faith and obedience, but in an ongoing, living, obedient relationship with Christ. The warnings of Scripture, that a believer can fall away, be severed from Christ, or fail the test, are real (Hebrews 3:12-14; Galatians 5:4), and they are given precisely so that we will examine ourselves and remain faithful. The teacher should help students avoid two errors: a false, untested assurance that presumes on grace while living carelessly, and an anxious, paralyzing introspection that never rests in Christ. Healthy self-examination looks honestly for the evidence of genuine faith, faith, repentance, obedience, love, and the fruit of the Spirit, and leads either to renewed assurance or to repentance.

At the same time, this chapter is meant to send students back to their own hearts and out into a healthier life together. It calls for the resurrection power of Christ in our weakness, for correction received as restoration, for accountability that flows from love, and for a congregation marked by joy, peace, comfort, and unity. And as the final lesson of the whole study, it is an opportunity to gather up all that God has been doing through 2 Corinthians. So aim at both targets. Help students examine themselves honestly and understand why assurance rests on a living, obedient faith rather than a past decision alone, and lead them to rest in the grace of the Son, the love of the Father, and the fellowship of the Spirit with which Paul ends the letter.

Question 1

Student Question:

Paul reminds the Corinthians that Christ “was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God,” and that we share both that weakness and that power (vv. 3–4). What does this teach about the pattern of the Christian life, weakness and apparent defeat giving way to resurrection power, and how does the risen Christ’s power bear on the way His church confronts sin?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin with the pattern Paul draws from Christ Himself: He “was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God.” The cross looked like utter defeat, weakness, failure, the end. But it gave way to resurrection power. This pattern, weakness yielding to power, runs through the whole Christian life.

Help students see how this applies to them. We share in Christ’s weakness now, in our frailty, our struggles, our apparent defeats. But we also share in His resurrection power, the same power that raised Jesus is at work in His people. The believer’s present weakness is not the final word.

Draw out the bearing on how the church confronts sin. Paul’s critics thought him weak, but he reminds them that the risen Christ acts powerfully through His church. The Lord who seemed weak on the cross is mighty to deal with His people. Discipline in the church is backed by the authority of the risen Christ.

This pattern gives hope to the struggling believer. The places of our weakness and apparent defeat are exactly where the resurrection power of Christ loves to work. We do not face our sin and frailty alone or in our own strength, but in the power of the One who conquered death.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The cross-and-resurrection pattern: weakness giving way to God’s power (v. 4)
- Believers sharing in both Christ’s weakness and His resurrection power
- The risen Christ’s authority at work in His church
- Hope for the struggling believer in the power of the risen Lord

Discussion Prompts

- How does the pattern of cross and resurrection shape the Christian life?
- What does it mean that we share both Christ’s weakness and His power?
- How does the risen Christ’s power bear on the way His church addresses sin?

Question 2

Student Question:

Where do you most need the resurrection power of Christ in your life right now, a sin you cannot overcome on your own, a situation that feels like defeat? What would it look like to stop relying on your own strength and draw on the power of the risen Christ?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question invites students to name where they most need the resurrection power of Christ. We all have places of apparent defeat, a sin we cannot seem to overcome, a situation that feels hopeless, a weakness that has worn us down.

Help students see the temptation to face these in their own strength, either through grim willpower or through despair. Both leave Christ's power out of the picture. The gospel offers a third way: drawing on the power of the risen Lord at work within us.

Make this concrete. Relying on resurrection power is not passivity, but it is also not self-effort. It looks like honest prayer for God's strength, dependence on the Spirit, the use of God's appointed means, His word, His people, His grace, and a refusal to believe that our weakness is the final word.

Encourage students to name one area of defeat and to bring it deliberately under the power of the risen Christ this week, asking for His strength rather than relying on their own. The aim is to live in the resurrection power available to every believer.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The temptation to face sin and defeat in our own strength or in despair
- Drawing on the resurrection power of Christ rather than self-effort
- Dependence on the Spirit and God's appointed means
- Refusing to treat present weakness as the final word

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you most need the resurrection power of Christ right now?
- What is the difference between self-effort, despair, and relying on Christ's power?
- What would it look like to bring one area of defeat under His power this week?

Question 3

Student Question:

Paul says he writes and warns so that he may build them up rather than tear them down, aiming at their "restoration" even as he confronts their sin (vv. 8–10). What does this teach about the purpose of God's correction and discipline, and how does even severe warning flow from a desire to restore rather than to destroy?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul makes his aim explicit: even his warnings are meant "for building up and not for tearing down." He confronts sin, but his goal is restoration. The whole severe section of the letter flows from a desire to see the Corinthians made whole, not crushed.

Help students grasp the purpose of God's correction. Like a loving father, God disciplines those He loves, not to destroy them but to restore them (Hebrews 12:7–11). Even His sharpest words are aimed at our healing. Correction is an expression of love, not its opposite.

This reframes how we should understand the hard parts of Scripture and the hard providences of life. God is not against us when He confronts our sin; He is for us, working to build us up. The pain of correction is the pain of healing, not of rejection.

Apply this to how the church practices discipline as well. Biblical correction always aims at restoration, just as we saw in chapter 2. A church that confronts sin without longing to restore has missed Paul's heart, and God's. The goal is always to build up.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The restorative purpose of God's correction and discipline (Hebrews 12:7–11)
- Correction as an expression of love, not its opposite
- The hard parts of Scripture and providence as aimed at our healing
- Church discipline always aiming at restoration

Discussion Prompts

- What does it teach that even Paul's warnings aim at building up?
- How is God's correction an expression of His love?
- How should this shape the way the church practices discipline?

Question 4

Student Question:

How do you tend to respond when God, through His word, His people, or your conscience, confronts something in your life? Do you receive it as an attack to resist or as a loving call toward restoration? What would it look like to welcome correction as a means of being built up?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question turns the matter of correction toward how students receive it. When God confronts us, through His word, His people, or our conscience, our response reveals whether we see Him as for us or against us.

Help students examine their typical reaction. Do they resist, argue, and defend, treating correction as an attack? Or can they receive it as a loving call toward restoration? The difference often lies in whether we trust that the One correcting us is seeking our good.

Point to the freedom of receiving correction well. The person who can hear a hard word without crumbling or bristling is free to grow. Defensiveness keeps us stuck; humble reception opens the door to being built up.

Encourage students to recall a recent correction they resisted and to revisit it as a possible means of restoration. The aim is to become people who welcome correction as the loving call it is meant to be, and so to be built up rather than to remain stuck.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Our response to correction as revealing whether we trust God's heart
- Defensiveness that keeps us stuck versus humility that lets us grow
- Receiving correction as a loving call toward restoration
- The freedom of being able to hear a hard word

Discussion Prompts

- How do you tend to respond when God confronts something in your life?
- What makes the difference between resisting correction and welcoming it?
- Is there a recent correction you should revisit as a call toward restoration?

Question 5

Student Question:

Paul announces his coming with sobering seriousness, that every charge will be established by witnesses and that he "will not spare" those who persist in sin (vv. 1–3). What does this teach about the reality of accountability in the Lord's church, and why does genuine love refuse to ignore unrepented sin?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul announces his coming visit with great seriousness: charges established by witnesses, and a warning that he "will not spare" those who persist in sin. This is not harshness for its own sake; it is the seriousness of a shepherd who refuses to let sin destroy the flock.

Help students see that accountability is real in the Lord's church. The body of Christ is not a place where sin is simply ignored in the name of tolerance. Out of love for God and for one another, the church takes sin seriously and calls its members to repentance.

Draw out the connection between love and accountability. It is not love to watch someone destroy themselves in sin and say nothing. Genuine love refuses to ignore unrepented sin, precisely because it wants the person's good. The most loving thing is sometimes the hardest word.

This challenges a culture, inside and outside the church, that equates love with endless tolerance. Paul shows that real love and real accountability belong together. A church that loves will hold its members accountable, and a member who loves will welcome it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The reality of accountability in the Lord's church
- The church taking sin seriously rather than ignoring it
- Genuine love refusing to overlook unrepented sin
- The union of love and accountability against a culture of mere tolerance

Discussion Prompts

- What does Paul's seriousness teach about accountability in the church?
- Why does genuine love refuse to ignore unrepented sin?
- How does this challenge the idea that love means endless tolerance?

Question 6

Student Question:

Are there areas of your life you quietly avoid examining, corners you would rather not bring into the light? What makes honest self-examination feel threatening, and what might you be protecting by avoiding it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question asks students to identify the corners of their lives they avoid examining. We all have them, areas we keep in the shadows, questions we would rather not ask, sins we have learned not to look at directly.

Help students understand why self-examination feels threatening. We fear what we might find; we prefer the comfort of not knowing; we protect a cherished sin or a flattering self-image. Avoidance feels safer than honesty.

Point to the truth that avoidance does not make the problem disappear; it only lets it grow in the dark. The very areas we refuse to examine are often where we most need the light of Christ. Bringing them into the open is the path to healing, not harm.

Encourage students to name one avoided corner and to bring it honestly before God this week, trusting that His light comes to heal, not to condemn those in Christ. The aim is to grow in the courage of honest self-examination rather than the false comfort of avoidance.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The areas we keep in the shadows and avoid examining
- The fear and self-protection behind avoidance
- Avoidance allowing sin to grow in the dark
- Bringing hidden areas into the light as the path to healing

Discussion Prompts

- What areas of your life do you quietly avoid examining?
- What makes honest self-examination feel threatening?
- What might you be protecting by avoiding it?

Question 7

Student Question:

Paul ends with a cluster of commands for the church: “Rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace” (v. 11). What do these final exhortations teach about the marks of a healthy congregation, and about each member’s responsibility for the peace and unity of the body?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul’s closing commands paint a portrait of a healthy congregation: “Rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace.” These are not optional niceties but marks of a church in which the God of love and peace dwells.

Help students see that each of these is a shared responsibility. The peace and unity of a congregation are not the job of the leaders alone; every member contributes to the health or the dysfunction of the body. We are each called to rejoice, to comfort, to seek restoration, and to pursue peace.

Draw out the connection to God’s presence. Paul says that as they live this way, “the God of love and peace will be with you.” There is a link between a congregation’s unity and its experience of God’s presence. Where the body is torn by division, something of God’s peace is grieved.

This calls students to take responsibility for their own part. Rather than waiting for others to change, each believer can ask how they are contributing to the peace, comfort, and unity of the church, and can take up their share of the work of building a healthy body.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The marks of a healthy congregation: joy, restoration, comfort, unity, peace (v. 11)
- Each member’s shared responsibility for the health of the body
- The link between a congregation’s unity and its experience of God’s presence
- Taking personal responsibility rather than waiting for others to change

Discussion Prompts

- What do these final commands reveal about a healthy congregation?
- Why is the peace of the church every member’s responsibility, not just the leaders’?
- How is God’s presence connected to the unity of His people?

Question 8

Student Question:

What is your own contribution to the peace and unity, or to the tension and division, of your congregation? Where might God be calling you to be a peacemaker, an encourager, or one who seeks restoration with a brother or sister?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question asks students to assess their own contribution to the life of their congregation. Every member is either building up or tearing down, contributing to peace or to tension, however small their part may seem.

Help students examine honestly. Are they encouragers or critics? Peacemakers or stirrers of conflict? Do they carry grudges that fracture fellowship, or do they seek restoration? The health of the body is the sum of such individual contributions.

Point to specific opportunities. Perhaps there is a brother or sister they need to be reconciled with, an encouragement they could offer, a complaint they should lay down, a unifying word they could speak. Peacemaking is concrete, not abstract.

Encourage one concrete step toward being a peacemaker, encourager, or reconciler in their congregation this week. The aim is for each student to take up their share of the work of building a healthy, loving, united body where the God of peace dwells.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Every member as either building up or tearing down the body
- The believer's call to be an encourager and peacemaker (Matthew 5:9)
- Reconciliation and the laying down of grudges within the church
- Concrete contribution to the unity and health of the congregation

Discussion Prompts

- What is your own contribution to the peace or the tension of your congregation?
- Where might God be calling you to be a peacemaker or encourager?
- Is there a brother or sister with whom you need to seek restoration?

Question 9**Student Question:**

Paul issues the searching command, "Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves... unless indeed you fail to meet the test!" (v. 5). What does it mean to examine ourselves to see whether we are truly in the faith, how does this command stand against the idea of "once saved, always saved," given that Paul warns even church members that they could

“fail the test,” and how is a genuine, healthy assurance found not in a past decision alone but in an ongoing, living, obedient faith in Christ?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal heart of the final lesson, and it should be taught with clarity, balance, and pastoral care. Paul commands the church, who had been busy examining him, to turn the examination on themselves: “Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves.” And he adds the sobering possibility: they might “fail to meet the test.” The teacher should let the full weight of this land.

First, explain what self-examination means and does not mean. It does not mean a morbid, endless introspection that never finds peace, nor a self-focused anxiety that takes our eyes off Christ. It means honestly looking for the evidence of genuine faith, asking whether we truly trust and follow Christ, whether we have repented and continue to repent of sin, whether the fruit of the Spirit is growing, whether our lives actually show that Jesus Christ is in us. The same Scripture that commands examination also offers real assurance to those who are walking with Christ (1 John 5:13). The goal is not perpetual doubt but honest testing that leads either to renewed assurance or to repentance.

Second, show clearly how this command stands against the doctrine of once saved, always saved. Paul is writing to baptized members of the church, and he warns that some of them might fail the test, that is, might prove not to be genuinely in the faith, or might have fallen away from it. This makes no sense if a person, once saved, is eternally secure no matter how they live. Scripture consistently warns that a believer can fall away (Hebrews 3:12–14), be severed from Christ (Galatians 5:4), and need to confirm their calling (2 Peter 1:10). The very command to examine ourselves assumes that the outcome is not automatic, that our standing must be tested and kept, not presumed.

Third, locate genuine assurance rightly. Healthy assurance does not rest on a past decision alone, a prayer once prayed, a moment at a baptism, treated as a guarantee regardless of present faith. It rests on an ongoing, living, obedient relationship with Christ. The person who is trusting Christ today, walking in repentance today, bearing the fruit of the Spirit today, can have deep and well-grounded assurance. The point of self-examination is not to rob faithful believers of peace, but to keep all of us from the deadly danger of a false, untested assurance that presumes on grace while the heart has drifted from Christ.

End with balance and hope. Paul is not trying to make the Corinthians doubt; he expects that honest examination will confirm that Christ is in them. The command is a safeguard, not a sentence. Help students examine themselves honestly, neither presuming nor despairing, and to find, on the far side of honest examination, either the joy of renewed assurance or the grace of fresh repentance, and in both cases a faith that is living, obedient, and kept to the end.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The command to examine and test ourselves to see whether we are in the faith (v. 5)
- The real possibility, even for church members, of failing the test
- The correction of “once saved, always saved” by Scripture’s warnings (Hebrews 3:12–14; Galatians 5:4; 2 Peter 1:10)
- Genuine assurance grounded in ongoing, obedient faith rather than a past decision alone
- Self-examination that leads to renewed assurance or to repentance, not endless doubt
- The danger of a false, untested assurance that presumes on grace

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean to examine yourself to see whether you are in the faith?
- How does Paul’s warning that believers could “fail the test” stand against once-saved-always-saved?
- Where should genuine assurance be grounded, if not in a past decision alone?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across the whole letter of 2 Corinthians, from the God of all comfort to this final call to examine yourselves and the benediction of grace, love, and fellowship. Name one specific way Jesus has been forming you through this study, and what is your first step toward that change this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone question closes not only the lesson but the entire study, and the teacher should treat it as a moment to gather up the whole journey through 2 Corinthians. Encourage students to look back across the letter and name what God has been doing in them.

Recall the sweep of the book: the God of all comfort, the call to forgive, the surpassing glory of the new covenant, the treasure in jars of clay, the ministry of reconciliation, the call to holiness, godly grief and repentance, the grace of giving, the weapons of our warfare, the danger of counterfeit gospels, the sufficiency of grace in weakness, and now the call to examine ourselves. Ask which of these the Spirit has used most powerfully in each student.

Invite each to name both the change and the first step. The change is the deepest thing God has been forming; the step is the concrete obedience that carries it forward beyond the study. The goal is that the study would end not merely in knowledge gained but in lives genuinely changed.

Close the whole study where Paul closes the letter: in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Remind students that the aim of every lesson was never information alone but transformation, that they would actually become more like Christ. Send them out resting in the triune God whose grace, love, and fellowship have been with them through every page.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Spiritual formation across the whole study, not mere information
- The triune blessing of grace, love, and fellowship as the letter's climax (v. 14)
- Genuine transformation into the likeness of Christ as the goal
- Concrete obedience carrying the study's fruit into daily life

Discussion Prompts

- Looking across the whole study, what has God been doing in you?
- What single change is Jesus inviting you to make as a result?
- What is your first concrete step toward it this week?