

The Book of 2 Corinthians

Lesson 13: Examine Yourselves; Final Greetings -- 2 Corinthians 13:1-14

Every honest letter has to come to an end, and the way a person closes reveals what mattered most to them. Paul is preparing for a third visit to Corinth, and he writes ahead so that the visit will not have to be painful. He warns that he will not spare those who have been living in sin, and he reminds them that the Christ who was “crucified in weakness” now “lives by the power of God.” The same Lord who looked weak on a cross is mighty to deal with His church. But Paul’s deepest desire is not to come swinging in judgment. It is that they would set things right before he arrives, so that his visit can be a reunion of joy rather than a session of discipline.

And then, near the very end, Paul hands the Corinthians a mirror and asks them to look honestly into it. “Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves.” For twelve chapters they had been examining Paul, questioning his credentials, judging his ministry, weighing whether he measured up. Now Paul turns the question around. Stop examining me, he says, and examine yourselves. The most important spiritual question is not whether your preacher passes the test, but whether you do. “Do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?, unless indeed you fail to meet the test!”

That little phrase, “unless you fail to meet the test,” is one of the quiet thunderclaps of the New Testament. It assumes something many people would rather not hear: that it is possible to be in the church, to carry the name of Christ, and yet to fail the test. The Christian life is not a ticket purchased once and then forgotten. It is a living relationship to be examined, tested, and kept. This is why Paul calls them to look honestly at themselves, not to drive them to despair, but to keep them from the far greater danger of a false and untested assurance.

Yet the letter does not end on a note of anxiety. It ends, as it began, in grace. Paul’s final words are a flood of tenderness: “Rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.” And he closes with the most beautiful benediction in all his letters, words the church has spoken ever since: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” That is where this whole journey through 2 Corinthians has been heading, a people examined and restored, living in the grace of the Son, the love of the Father, and the fellowship of the Spirit. Read this final chapter and let it send you back to your own heart with the most important question of all: am I truly in the faith?

Group Discussion: Paul commands the Corinthians, who had spent so long examining him, to “examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith” (v. 5). Why is honest self-examination so difficult, and why are we often quicker to scrutinize others, even our leaders, than ourselves? What does healthy self-examination look like, and how is it different from anxious, paralyzing introspection?

Personal Reflection: Paul tells the church to “examine yourselves” and “test yourselves,” asking whether Christ is truly in them (v. 5). If you set aside what you assume about yourself and looked honestly, what evidence is there in your daily life that Jesus Christ is in you? Is there an area where an honest examination would call you to repentance or renewed faith?

Read 2 Corinthians 13:1–14

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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?

10. 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?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: 1 Corinthians 11:28, examining ourselves before partaking of the Lord’s Supper; Galatians 6:3–5, testing our own work rather than comparing ourselves to others; Hebrews 3:12–14, taking care lest an unbelieving heart leads us to fall away; 2 Peter 1:10, being diligent to confirm our calling and election; 1 John 5:13, that we may know we have eternal life as we walk in Christ