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Test Yourself and See Christ in You

2 Corinthians 13:5-10

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. The word from God through which the Holy Spirit strengthens our faith in Jesus is 2 Corinthians 13.

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? 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. For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. We are glad whenever we are weak but you are strong; and our prayer is for your perfection. This is why I write these things when I am absent, that when I come I may not have to be harsh in my use of authority—the authority the Lord gave me for building you up, not for tearing you down. (2 Corinthians 13:5-10 NIV84)

Dear friends in Christ, fellow saints washed clean in the blood of our risen Savior:

“Prove yourself, Paul! Prove that you really are such a great apostle!” That’s what some in Corinth were saying. They weren’t saying it to his face, since he wasn’t there at the time. Rather, they were sowing seeds of contention and division. “Paul might write a strong letter,” they said, “but in person he is weak. Why listen to what he says. Listen to us instead.”

That was one of the problems that the Apostle had to address in the Corinthian congregation. Today’s text does that, but to understand the flow of thought better some additional background helps us.

Corinth was a major city of the Roman empire, located in southern Greece. East and west met at Corinth, along with the vices from both. The Apostle Paul visited Corinth on his second missionary journey around A.D. 51. He started the congregation there and stayed a year and half.

The church in Corinth was both gifted and troubled. After Paul left, divisions developed within the congregation breaking the bond of love. Instead of focusing on Christ crucified, many pursued what appeared powerful and wise by the standards of the world. Members took other members to court. Some boasted of their tolerance of an incestuous relationship and other sexual immoralities. There was misunderstanding about marriage, abuse of the Lord’s Supper, misuse of spiritual gifts, and false ideas about the resurrection. How distressed Paul felt when he heard of these troubles! So he wrote the letter that we call 1 Corinthians to work through these problems.

Later he sent his coworker Titus ahead of him to Corinth. Titus returned with

good news. They were making progress, but some problems remained. So Paul wrote another letter, which we call 2 Corinthians.

One of the problems he addresses, which brings us to the text, is the accusation that he was not a genuine apostle. Others had come claiming to be super-apostles. “Follow us,” they said, “instead of Paul. Listen to our message instead of his.” And if they had been teaching Christ crucified, Paul would have had no need to defend his apostleship. But they were leading the Corinthians away from Jesus.

So to keep them holding on to the truth, the one and only truth that saves, that truth of Christ, which he had preached, Paul defends his apostleship in several ways throughout this letter. Today’s text comes as Paul closes the letter and reminds the Corinthians of some of the points he has made. Let me flesh them out for you as if I were Paul speaking directly:

“Do you, Corinthians, still question the authenticity of my apostleship? Do you require proof? Look no farther than what has happened in your own hearts. ‘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? And I trust that you will discover that we have not failed the test’ (2 Corinthians 13:5, 6 NIV11). For you see, dear Corinthians, the message of Christ crucified, the message Jesus sent me to bring to you, has changed your hearts. You are my proof. You are my letter of authenticity, not written with pen and ink, but written in your hearts that believe. What the Holy Spirit has accomplished in you through the message of Christ crucified, which I preached, is proof of my apostleship.

“What’s more, dear Corinthians, I don’t care if I appear weak in person when I come to you. Those so-called super-apostles might say that a real apostle would come with fire and brimstone to clean house displaying his divine authority, laying down the law and making rules. But I would rather be able to come to you in the joy of the gospel that has freed us from the law, even if that means I appear weak. That’s why I wrote in advance to deal with the problems ahead of time. I stand by what I wrote, even if it caused hurt and pain, for the Lord has used it to bring about godly repentance. For, dear Corinthians, I’d rather come to you rejoicing in the Gospel of Christ crucified rather than having to deal with impenitence. That’s why ‘we pray to God that you will not do anything wrong—not so that people will see that we have stood the test but so that you will do what is right even though we may seem to have failed’ (2 Corinthians 13:7 NIV11), since when you do right, I don’t need to show my divine authority to drive out the wrongdoer. I’d rather have you strong in the faith, even if that means we appear weak as apostles. ‘For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. We are glad whenever we are weak but you are strong; and our prayer is that you may be fully restored. This is why I write these things when I am absent, that when I come I may not have to be harsh in my use of authority—the authority the Lord gave me for building you up, not for tearing you down’ (2 Corinthians 13:7-10 NIV11).”

Now, our situation is different than the Corinthians. But we still do well to hear Paul’s call to test ourselves and to learn how Christ in us shows itself in our lives. Test yourself and see Christ in you. That’s the theme to take to heart.

Test yourself. Is Christ in you? If Christ is not in us, we fail. For without Christ, you and I are completely unrighteous. We are full of sin and false in all we do. For even our best is corrupted by our sinfulness. Guilt clings to us from the moment our life began. Powerless. Helpless. Lost. Damned.

Only Jesus Christ changes our condition. He is your Righteousness, dear friend, that covers your guilt. He is the Ransom that paid for your sins. He is the Life that rescued you from death and damnation. He alone makes all the difference. Believe in him.

And as he lives in you and me, how that changes us! For you see, faith in Christ is not only words. Faith is not like the second son in the Gospel today that said he'd do as his father asked, but didn't. Faith is a living, powerful, active thing. It shows itself in our lives. For Christ in you changes the way you live.

A. As you do what is good

Test yourself and see that Christ is in you. See it as you do what is good. That is my prayer for you and what we pray for each other, even as Paul did. "We pray to God that you will not do anything wrong" (2 Corinthians 13:7 NIV11), he wrote. For you see, when we are in Christ, we know and believe that God himself is working for us. He did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not along with him graciously give us all things? So we don't need to resort to doing wrong in order to protect ourselves or get ahead in the world. We don't need to fear that if we do the right thing others might take advantage of us. The heavenly Father will take care of you. Test yourself and see that Christ is in you as you boldly do what is good.

B. As you work for the truth

Test yourself and see that Christ is in you. See it as you work for the truth. "We cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth" (2 Corinthians 13:8 NIV11), Paul writes. And you know the source of the truth: the Bible. Just as the Corinthians could know that Paul brought them God's message because his words changed their hearts and brought them to know and believe in Jesus, their Savior, so also the Bible has brought you your Savior, Jesus Christ. For the Bible has confronted us with our own sin and helplessness and then comforted us with the good news of Jesus Christ and his blood, poured out for you for the forgiveness of your sins. Do nothing to undermine that truth; rather, do all you can to defend it and spread it. For you know the truth, because Christ is in you.

C. As you build each other up

And finally, test yourself and see that Christ is in you. See it as you build each other up. That's why Paul wrote this letter. That's why we gather together around God's word each week. Build each other up to rely on Christ alone. The world's way of building others up is to make them feel empowered and self-reliant. But the way of Christ is weakness and the cross. Look at how he was crucified in weakness, but now he lives by God's power, risen from the dead for your salvation. So build each other up as God's power shines through your weakness. For when we are weak, then we are strong, strong with the power of God, strong to pass the test, strong for Christ is in you. Amen.

The peace of God that surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in

Christ Jesus. Amen.