

We have come to the conclusion of Paul's letters to the Corinthians. In the first seven chapters Paul defended his ministry to both friends and to those who had turned against him. He also described for them and for the Christian church of the future the ministry of the new covenant in Christ. In chapters 8 and 9 he described what that meant for those who were repentant. Then in the final four chapters (10-13), he warned the unrepentant while ending on a note of hope for the church with a unique benediction.

⁵ Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test! ⁶ I hope you will find out that we have not failed the test. 2 Corinthians 13:5,6 The “false apostles” had been asking the Corinthians to examine Paul by worldly standards. They claimed he was not handsome, or eloquent, or powerful, and even failed to follow through on what he said he would do. Now Paul turns it around and asks them not to examine the false teachers, but for them to examine themselves. The test they were to apply to themselves was whether or not Christ was in them. He alone is the standard for what we should be like. And the only way to be more like Him is to be in the faith. Faith in this sense is the Christian faith. Has Christ redeemed us? Has He taken up residence in our hearts (John 14:23ⁱ)?

D. A. Carson points out: *If the Corinthians declare they have failed the test, then doubtless Paul will be humiliated (cf. 2 Cor. 12:21ⁱⁱ); but in that case the Corinthians are in no position to point the finger at anyone. If on the other hand, they feel they have passed the test, then since Paul did all the initial evangelization among them, he is the last person they are in a position to condemn.*ⁱⁱⁱ

How do we know if we are truly a Christian? We must be in Christ and He in us. That is what Paul described in this letter as becoming a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17^{iv}). It is to have repented of our old nature and way of life and allow Christ to live in and through us. It is the beginning of the process of sanctification as the Holy Spirit molds us into the image of Christ and the Word renews our minds (Romans 12:2^v).

As is so often the case, Paul is pulling from the Old Testament passages, especially the psalmist who wrote in Psalm 139:23,24 ²³ *Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts!* ²⁴ *And see if there be any grievous way in me and lead me in the way everlasting!* (See also Psalm 17:3^{vi}; 26:2^{vii}.) The prophets also pled with Israel in the same way (Lamentations 3:40^{viii}; Haggai 1:5-7^{ix}). Paul encouraged them to examine themselves before taking communion (1 Corinthians 11:28^x, 31^{xi}). This is because God knows how deceitful the human heart can be. Sometimes we allow ourselves to cling to an idea that justifies our sin because we do not want to give it up. We can come up with our own ideas of truth, especially if we are not in the Word and in fellowship. Self-examination is when we let the Word search our hearts as we read it. In fellowship, others who have been in Christ and matured will challenge our unbiblical ideas that we have come up with. It is part of the wonderful process of sanctification. It is maturing in Christ. But if we avoid the Word and fellowship, we stagnate or start to justify more compromises. **We can come up with a god we are more comfortable with, which is really making ourselves our own god.**

Paul challenges us with his zeal to realize we might not spiritually be where we thought. We may be failing the test. In our culture, that is a rude statement. But in the

kingdom of God that is a loving statement meant to prod us to a greater commitment to what really matters. Our culture wants everyone to feel comfortable with their sin. If anyone even mentions sin, the common reaction is one of justification and to use the label “judgmental.” The world’s favorite verse is “Do not judge.” Matthew 7:1^{xii} They have no idea that Jesus commanded us to not judge by outward appearances *but judge with right judgment* (John 7:24^{xiii}).

Paul is asking them and us to judge ourselves. Just because you were moved by the Spirit and felt God touch your heart does not mean that you are His. Are you in Christ and is He in you? Recognition of our sinfulness is the first step. Unless we see our need for forgiveness, we will not ask for it. Unless we ask, we will not receive. (1 John 1:8,9^{xiv}). Forgiveness makes way for Jesus to live in us. When He takes up residence, we find there is a battle within. *True believers desire what is right and pure, while recognizing the powerful force of sin in their nature that is still at work because they are not yet glorified.*^{xv} When we surrender to Jesus, we begin to learn to crucify the old desires and God fills our hearts with new ones: love for God, for fellow believers, and for God’s Word (Galatians 5:24^{xvi}).

I would ask you to examine yourselves one step further. Are you growing in Christ? Have you backed off in your passion and commitment? Or are you closer and more committed than ever before? If we have experienced the love of God and His faithfulness to us, we should desire to draw closer to Him until we are finally home, and He finishes the work in us (Philippians 1:6^{xvii}). Paul called it pressing toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:14^{xviii}).

How can Paul be so confrontational? It is because he loves them. He knows his ancestors came out of Egypt only to die in the wilderness. They saw the miracles, just as the Corinthians saw the signs and wonders done by the Apostle Paul, and yet they were still drawn to the eloquent false teachers. He is pleading as father pleads with his children who have been listening to those who would lead them astray (Hebrews 3:12,13^{xix}).

⁷ But we pray to God that you may not do wrong—not that we may appear to have met the test, but that you may do what is right, though we may seem to have failed. 2 Corinthians 13:7 Paul and his team prays for the Corinthians to do the right thing, even if in the process, it may seem Paul has failed. Paul was not concerned what they thought of him, as long as they were following the true gospel. His desire was for their spiritual maturity. That is the desire of the new nature in us. We know it is not about us. It is about Jesus and seeing others follow Him. It does not matter if in the process we are looked down on (1 Corinthians 4:3,4^{xx}). We live to please our Savior, not man.

⁸ For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. 2 Corinthians 13:8 Jesus is truth (John 14:6^{xxi}), and He is the Word incarnate (John 1:14^{xxii}). Paul lived to please Him. He walked in the Spirit. Everything he had written to them was for them to see the truth. Either the false teachers were teaching what was true or Paul was. Paul makes a bold declaration that he and his team can only do what is for the truth.

⁹ For we are glad when we are weak and you are strong. Your restoration is what we pray for. 2 Corinthians 13:9 Paul is playing with the vocabulary of the false teachers’ accusations that Paul was weak. In the previous passage Paul embraced the claim of weakness (12:9^{xxiii}). The Holy Spirit had spoken to his heart and told him that when he is weak, the power of Christ is perfected in him. He uses weakness and strength as words

that are bound together. If the Corinthians are restored to the pure gospel, they will be strong in Christ too.

Here is that shepherd's heart that we have seen in Paul throughout these two letters. He wrote of his daily anxiety for all the churches. They are like teenagers, easily influenced and inexperienced at facing the cunning of Satan. He longs to see what he stated elsewhere as Christ formed in them (Galatians 4:19^{xxiv}). He is indignant when someone is made to fall (11:29^{xxv}). Even if they have slandered him and are ungrateful for all the sacrifices he made for them, he prays for their restoration. That is because he is willing to share the heart of Jesus for them.

¹⁰ For this reason I write these things while I am away from you, that when I come I may not have to be severe in my use of the authority that the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down. 2 Corinthians 13:10 Paul tells them in this verse the whole reason for writing this letter. He does not want to come and have to discipline them. He is praying this letter will open their eyes to how they have been led astray so that they repent and are restored. He would much rather come and teach for their upbuilding rather than to spend the time disciplining them, perhaps even sending people out of the fellowship. It reminds me of an event when Samuel came to Bethlehem. The elders met him trembling and asked, "Do you come peaceably" (1 Samuel 16:4^{xxvi})? If the false teachers commanded obedience by their harsh behavior and thought Paul weak, they had never seen the Lord exercise discipline through him. Paul was hoping the letter would bring the desired results so that would not be necessary.

Today the warning stands over the church, and especially those who have transmitted the present cultural values into the church, so that church is little more than a Christianized version of modern culture. The warning stands where leadership is built on the cult of personality—where image is everything. The warning looms where worship is show time—where preaching is entertainment—where God's Word is muzzled and the pulpit panders to itching ears. The warning echoes where we are the focus of worship—our feelings, our comfort, our health, our wealth—where super-apostles are preferred over Paul.^{xxvii}

¹¹ Finally, brothers, 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. 2 Corinthians 13:11 Paul ends the letter with five brief commands. The first was to rejoice. That gives the impression that Paul truly believed the congregation would heed the letter. If they are restored to the true gospel, there would indeed be reason to rejoice. When we are operating in the flesh, we see everything in a negative way. When we walk in the Spirit, we are full of praise and rejoicing for we are aware of God's goodness in our lives. We can give thanks in everything (1 Thessalonians 5:18^{xxviii}).

Joy is part of the legacy the Lord Jesus Christ left His followers. "These things I have spoken to you," He told the apostles gathered in the Upper Room, "so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full" (John 15:11^{xxix}), and promised them, "I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you" (John 16:22^{xxx}). He asked the Father that His followers "may have [His] joy made full in themselves" (John 17:13^{xxxi}). Scripture describes believers' joy as great (Luke 24:52^{xxxii}; Acts 15:3^{xxxiii}), abundant (2 Cor. 8:2^{xxxiv}), overflowing (2 Cor. 7:4^{xxxv}), animated (Luke 6:23^{xxxvi}), inexpressible (1 Peter 1:8^{xxxvii}), and full of awe (Ps. 2:11^{xxxviii}).^{xxxix}

Aim for restoration. Paul did not want the false teachers to be excommunicated. He wanted to see them drop the behavior of the world that they had adopted and to humble themselves, repent, and be restored. They were obviously people with leadership potential. If they were humbled and operated in the Spirit, they could be useful for the kingdom of God.

Comfort one another. After some of the harsh rebukes and eye-opening explanations of how they had gone astray, they would need to comfort one another. After repentance there is often the need for comfort. We know the enemy of our soul likes to condemn us so that even if we know we are forgiven, we feel we are incapable of making a right decision. Kent Hughes calls comfort *the currency of concord and unity*.^{xi}

Agree with one another. That is of course about the essentials of our faith. They were to agree about the truth that Paul taught them as Jesus' apostle. This not just agree to get along with one another, but to embrace the truth they had received and stand on that truth no matter how impressive a speaker may be that brings something different.

Live in peace. The aim within the church family should always be to live in peace. We may not agree on minor issues, but our love for the Lord and respect for His Word is what binds us together. If we want the presence of the God of love and peace, we must strive for peace among ourselves. Forgiveness and patience are essential for living peacefully together.

Each of these five admonitions is written in a tense that implies from this time forward. We are to continue to rejoice (Philippians 4:4^{xli}). We are to always aim for unity. We should always comfort one another and agree with one another. We are to forever live in peace. These things are not natural to the fallen nature of man, but they are the characteristics of those who are new creations in Christ.

¹³ *All the saints greet you.* 2 Corinthians 13:13 The church in Ephesus sent their greetings to the Corinthians. This reminded the Corinthians that they were a part of much larger body of believers. There was a standard of behavior of the churches of the time (1 Corinthians 14:33^{xlii}). The Corinthians needed to see that they were part of something much greater than their local church and live that example. We need to see that as well.

¹⁴ *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.* 2 Corinthians 13:14 This is the only Trinitarian benediction in Paul's letters. He is not trying to give us a theological explanation of the trinity. *The triune God is simply the air Paul breathes, as is seen in his other references to the Trinity (cf. Galatians 4:4-6^{xliii}; 1 Corinthians 12:4-6, Ephesians 1:3^{xliv}, 13-14^{xlv}; 2:18^{xlvi}; 3:14-17^{xlvii}; 4:4-6^{xlviii}).*^{xlix}

The grace of Jesus: how can we begin to describe the grace piled upon grace we are blessed with in Christ Jesus (John 1:16¹)? He set aside His glory in heaven to enter this fallen world and live for 33 years among us, putting up with our stubbornness and outright hostility, offering His body and blood and to face the separation from God so that we might be made new and be His forever. He came to reverse the curse that we all deserve. He extends that grace to us daily, to the lost world around us daily, and for all who are in Him, His grace works all things together for our good. What a Savior!

The love of God: that is what sent His only begotten Son (John 3:16^{li}). ⁸ *but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* Romans 5:8 ¹⁰ *In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.* 1 John 4:10 ³⁸ *For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor*

angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers,³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:38,39

The fellowship of the Holy Spirit: If you are in Christ, you have the continuous, faithful counsel of the Holy Spirit, warning you when you need it, comforting you when you need it, and always ready to direct you when you ask. He is a friend that is closer than a brother (Proverbs 18:24^{lii}). Fellowship with the Holy Spirit is fellowship with the Father and the Son.

As I thought about our journey through the second letter to the Corinthians, I think what stood out to me was the heart of Paul for the Corinthians. What an example he was for pastors throughout the generations. The natural man would just right off a church that turned against him after he sacrificed so much for them. But in Paul we see the heart of Jesus, full of grace and compassion even for those who have caused the church to doubt his authority. He wanted restoration for all, grace for all, comfort for all. His desire was to see them again in unity.

The message of the letter for our day is to cling to the truth of gospel. Know the Scriptures so that when someone comes with a new revelation or some new interpretation and they are so impressive in their delivery, you will know truth from error. When a person tries to weave the modern culture in and that which is contrary to Scripture, you will know to take a stand. It is important for us to remember the words of Jesus. ^{15b} *For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.* Luke 16:15b

If you are in fellowship with the Holy Spirit, you will know error from truth. You will discern that something is amiss. When you see a pastor who is there for personal gain or adulation rather than service out of love for the Lord and the people you will know there is a problem. If they attack other pastors to exalt themselves, remember this letter.

The secondary message is that God uses the weak. His power is perfected in weakness. We consider Paul such a great apostle, but he knew his own weaknesses. And Jesus added to that a thorn in the flesh to keep him from becoming conceited (12:7^{liii}). This gives a whole different attitude toward our weaknesses or afflictions. Paul's presentation may not have been as eloquent as others, but it was full of the truth and the power of the Holy Spirit. God delights in using broken vessels like us. Praise God for the demonstrations of His mercy and grace!

Questions:

- 1 What was behind Paul's request to examine themselves?
- 2 What would pass the test? How can we know for sure?
- 3 Why is Paul be so confrontational?
- 4 What was Paul's prayer?
- 5 Describe Paul's shepherd's heart?
- 6 Why did he write the letter?
- 7 Review the five commands.
- 8 Review the benediction and what it means to us.
- 9 What should we remember from the letter?

ⁱ **John 14:23 (ESV)**

²³ Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.

ⁱⁱ **2 Corinthians 12:21 (ESV)**

²¹ I fear that when I come again my God may humble me before you, and I may have to mourn over many of those who sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual immorality, and sensuality that they have practiced.

ⁱⁱⁱ *From Triumphalism to Maturity* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984], 179

^{iv} **2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

^v **Romans 12:2 (ESV)**

² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

^{vi} **Psalms 17:3 (ESV)**

³ You have tried my heart, you have visited me by night, you have tested me, and you will find nothing; I have purposed that my mouth will not transgress.

^{vii} **Psalms 26:2 (ESV)**

² Prove me, O LORD, and try me; test my heart and my mind.

^{viii} **Lamentations 3:40 (ESV)**

⁴⁰ Let us test and examine our ways, and return to the LORD!

^{ix} **Haggai 1:5-7 (ESV)**

⁵ Now, therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts: Consider your ways. ⁶ You have sown much, and harvested little. You eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill. You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm. And he who earns wages does so to put them into a bag with holes. ⁷ Thus says the LORD of hosts: Consider your ways.

^x **1 Corinthians 11:28 (ESV)**

²⁸ Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

^{xi} **1 Corinthians 11:31 (ESV)**

³¹ But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged.

^{xii} **Matthew 7:1 (ESV)**

¹ "Judge not, that you be not judged.

^{xiii} **John 7:24 (ESV)**

²⁴ Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment."

^{xiv} **1 John 1:8-9 (ESV)**

⁸ If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

^{xv} John F. MacArthur Jr., [2 Corinthians](#), MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2003), 468

^{xvi} **Galatians 5:24 (ESV)**

²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

^{xvii} **Philippians 1:6 (ESV)**

⁶ And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

^{xviii} **Philippians 3:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

^{xix} **Hebrews 3:12-13 (ESV)**

¹² Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. ¹³ But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

^{xx} **1 Corinthians 4:3-4 (ESV)**

³ But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. ⁴ For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me.

^{xxi} **John 14:6 (ESV)**

⁶ Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

^{xxii} **John 1:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

^{xxiii} **2 Corinthians 12:9 (ESV)**

⁹ But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

^{xxiv} **Galatians 4:19 (ESV)**

¹⁹ my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!

^{xxv} **2 Corinthians 11:29 (ESV)**

²⁹ Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?

^{xxvi} **1 Samuel 16:4 (ESV)**

⁴ Samuel did what the LORD commanded and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling and said, “Do you come peaceably?”

^{xxvii} R. Kent Hughes, [2 Corinthians: Power in Weakness](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006), 230

^{xxviii} **1 Thessalonians 5:18 (ESV)**

¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

^{xxix} **John 15:12 (ESV)**

¹² “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

^{xxx} **John 16:22 (ESV)**

²² So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.

^{xxxi} **John 17:13 (ESV)**

¹³ But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves.

^{xxxii} **Luke 24:52 (ESV)**

⁵² And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy,

^{xxxiii} **Acts 15:3 (ESV)**

³ So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the brothers.

^{xxxiv} **2 Corinthians 8:2 (ESV)**

² for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.

^{xxxv} **2 Corinthians 7:4 (ESV)**

⁴ I am acting with great boldness toward you; I have great pride in you; I am filled with comfort. In all our affliction, I am overflowing with joy.

^{xxxvi} **Luke 6:23 (ESV)**

²³ Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets.

^{xxxvii} **1 Peter 1:8 (ESV)**

⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory,

^{xxxviii} **Psalms 2:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling.

^{xxxix} John F. MacArthur Jr., [2 Corinthians](#), MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2003), 484.

^{xl} R. Kent Hughes, [2 Corinthians: Power in Weakness](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006), 233.

^{xli} **Philippians 4:4 (ESV)**

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.

^{xlii} **1 Corinthians 14:33 (ESV)**

³³ For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints,

^{xliii} **Galatians 4:4-6 (ESV)**

⁴ But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. ⁶ And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”

^{xliv} **Ephesians 1:3 (ESV)**

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,

^{xlv} **Ephesians 1:13-14 (ESV)**

¹³ In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

^{xlvi} **Ephesians 2:18 (ESV)**

¹⁸ For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

^{xlvii} **Ephesians 3:14-17 (ESV)**

¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, ¹⁶ that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love,

^{xlviii} **Ephesians 4:4-6 (ESV)**

⁴ There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

^{xlix} R. Kent Hughes, [*2 Corinthians: Power in Weakness*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006), 235.

ⁱ **John 1:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.

ⁱⁱ **John 3:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

ⁱⁱⁱ **Proverbs 18:24 (ESV)**

²⁴ A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

^{liii} **2 Corinthians 12:7 (ESV)**

⁷ So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited.