

TEST YOURSELF

EXAMINING YOURSELF TO SEE IF YOU ARE IN THE FAITH

⁵ Test yourselves *to see* if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test? ⁶ But I trust that you will realize that we ourselves do not fail the test.

2 CORINTHIANS 13:5-6

Main point: Testing ourselves helps us please and serve Christ better.

INTRODUCTION:

I've never met a person who said, "I enjoy examinations!" In fact, most students—whether elementary school, high school, or college—would tell you that examinations at the end of the school year are one of the most stressful times in their lives. A sigh of relief is heard when the exams are over, and there are no more examinations to face. Most people hate examinations, and because this is the case, I don't suppose when we read of Paul's challenge to *examine ourselves* that we welcome it with open hearts. Nevertheless, here it is, clearly stated in the Word of God—*test yourselves*.

What makes this examination *unique* is that we are called to play the role of the *examinee* and the *examiner*. We are not called here to examine *others*, but *ourselves*. We are the examinee! But we are also the ones called to administer the examination. It was A.W. Tozer who once said,

"An unexamined Christian is like an unattended garden. Let your garden go for a few months, and you will not have roses and tomatoes but weeds. An unexamined Christian life is like an un-kept house. Lock your house up as tight as you will and leave it long enough, and when you come back, you will not believe the dirt that got in from somewhere. An unexamined Christian is like an untaught child. A child that is not taught will be a little savage. It takes examination, teaching, instruction, discipline, caring, tending, weeding, and cultivating to keep the life right."

EXAMINE YOURSELVES

Let your eyes drop to verse 5 alone, notice carefully that Paul repeats the challenge three times so that we are clear about what we are to do.

- He begins verse 5a, "**Test yourselves...**"
- Then in the middle of verse 5b, "**examine yourselves...**"
- and then the third use is put in the form of a rhetorical question in 5c, "**Or do you not recognize this about yourselves...**" and literally in the Greek, it is, "do you not know yourselves..." that Jesus Christ is in you?

Christians are to *test themselves*, *examine themselves*, and *know themselves*. This is a biblical practice for every Christian, and I want you to think with me about what the Bible says about it and how to apply it to our lives.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF EXAMINATION?

Now the purpose for the test is to discover whether we are *real, genuine, authentic Christians or not*. The people to whom Paul was writing were *professing Christians*. They were *church members* at Corinth, and it was necessary for them to examine themselves. The same is true for us. Many listening now online are *church members*, and others are only *church attenders*. But whether you are a *member* or simply an *attender*, it is still necessary to *test ourselves, examine ourselves, and know ourselves* to discern if, in addition to being a church member or a church attender, we are true, genuine, and authentic Christians.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF THE TEST?

To say it another way, how is the test to be conducted? What will help us to understand the nature of the test is to understand the words which are used here in this passage and elsewhere. Two words are used in verse 5, which give us two sides of one coin. The verb "**test**" (*peirazo*) means to put to the test in order to ascertain the nature of something, including imperfections, faults, or other qualities. The verb "**examine**" (*dokimazo*) means to observe, to check out and look over carefully or inspect.

- These terms are used of *testing animals*. This is how it was used by Jesus in the Parable of the Dinner. The story, as told by Jesus, goes that a man was giving a big dinner, and he invited many, and when things were ready, they all began to make excuses. One said, "*I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out...*" or test them or examine them to see if what I bought is of good value or not (*Luke 14:19*). That's one use of the word—to see if something is of profitable use.
- These terms are also used of *testing candidates for the deacon ministry*. In 1 Timothy 3:10, Paul said, "*These men must also be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach.*" This is not a physical or academic examination, but an examination of his character and conduct to determine his fitness for ordination. The first use of the term as to do with testing for value. The second use is testing for fitness.
- The final way these terms are used is of *testing gold, silver, or coins* to see if they are genuine or counterfeit. Peter uses it in this sense in 1 Peter 1:7, "*...so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;*"

To test the value or use, to test fitness, and to test authenticity. The result of all these tests is to bring out one of two things:

1. After the test, you either come out (*dokimos*)—*approved, tested, or proven to be genuine*.
2. Or, if you failed the test, you were (*adokimos*)—*disapproved, discredited, or disqualified*.

This is what Paul is aiming at in this challenge to *test yourselves*. Either you come out as a true, genuine Christian or you discover that you are not, and then you discover what needs to be done.

SOME DON'T WANT TO TEST THEMSELVES

There are a couple of reasons that people give for not wanting to test themselves, and it will be helpful to briefly think about them before we apply the examination to ourselves.

The first reason some don't want to examine themselves is that they say self-examination is self-introspection. And self-introspection is unhealthy. This is true. Self-introspection is unhealthy because it uses *the wrong standard*. This is what Paul was getting at in **2 Corinthians 10:12**,

- ¹² For we are not bold to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves; but when they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are without understanding.

That is, self-introspection is unprofitable because it does not lead to a clear knowledge about oneself. Introspection is a *tainted, unhealthy* practice because if the goal is to compare yourself with yourself, then the end is to become more *obsessed with yourself*. This is not good. Some people are so introspective that they are always examining their own mental, emotional, and physical well-being so that they are "turned into" themselves completely. This is actually what happened at the Fall of our first parents, Adam and Eve. Man became turned in on himself rather than on God.

However, self-examination is different. It is a *means* to a different end. Self-examination is an *occasional, consistent* discipline of the Christian where we examine ourselves in order *to serve and please Christ better*. In other words, the examination is with a view toward Christ. So, we must distinguish between self-examination and self-introspection. One is *healthy*; the other is *unhealthy*.

The second reluctance as to why some people don't examine themselves is that they say, self-examination leads to assurance and assurance is presumptuous. In other words, to presume that once you are saved, you are always going to be saved is arrogant, over-confident, and irreverent. Now, they are right to say that *self-examination leads to assurance*, but it is wrong to think that assurance is presumption. Why? Because it is God's will that you be sure of your salvation. God actually wants you to be sure of your salvation. Peter wrote,

- **2 Peter 1:10**—Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble;

The Apostle John said,

- **1 John 5:13**—These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.

Don't let fears of *introspection* on the one hand, or *presumption* on the other, keep you from self-examination with the goal of being pleasing to the Lord and serving Christ better. Now with that extensive introduction, let's commence to the subject of self-examination.

WHAT ARE THE TESTS OF SELF-EXAMINATION?

First, there is THE TEST OF DOCTRINE.

⁵ Test yourselves *to see* if you are in the faith; examine yourselves!

The pronoun "**yourselves**" is first in the Greek sentence, emphasizing that the readers (including you and I) needed to focus not as much on *others* as on themselves (ourselves). The RSV translates verse 5, "*Examine yourself to see whether you are living in the faith...*" But the ESV, KJV, and the NIV translates this, "*Examine yourself to see whether you are in the faith.*" In every translation, the definite article is kept—"the faith." Now *faith* and *the faith* are different things. **The faith** does not refer to something *in us* like trust or reliability, but "the faith" is a

reference to something that God has revealed. It does not refer to the ACT of believing but rather to WHAT is believed. It is the truth that God has revealed for us to believe, which is the unchanging message of the Gospel—that *body of Christian truth* which brings salvation (past, present, future). Jude made reference to it in his letter.

- **Jude 3**—Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.

God has given a *body of doctrine* that is fixed. And Jude reminds us that in order to persevere in the faith, various contests must be encountered, and continual warfare maintained because it is under attack. When Paul says to test yourselves to see if you are in “the faith,” he is calling you and I to examine whether we are *standing* in the body of Christian doctrine, the apostolic faith, and remaining *loyal* to the revelation that God has given to His people to believe.

Why was this necessary? Because faith teachers had arisen in Corinth who preached *another Jesus*, in a *different spirit*, and a *different Gospel*.

- **2 Corinthians 11:4**—For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear *this* beautifully.

Later, Paul exposes them for who they are.

- **2 Corinthians 11:13-15**—For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. ¹⁴No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. ¹⁵Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds.

This is why Paul said to them in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4,

- **1 Corinthians 15:1-4**—Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, ²by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. ³For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,
- **1 Corinthians 15:10-11**—But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me. ¹¹Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

The Apostles placed over against the doctrines of the false teachers, the true Gospel. The faith, the Gospel, is the yardstick against which we must examine ourselves. This is the first test. It is not the *only* test, but it is the first test. It is possible to be in agreement in doctrine and orthodox in your beliefs and not be a true follower of Jesus. James says, “You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.” (James 2:19). The demons of hell believe in the One God, who is one in essence and distinct in persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They have orthodox doctrine, and James is saying it is possible to have orthodox doctrine and still not have true faith.

It is essential to believe in what the Scriptures reveal about the Person and work of Christ, because it is impossible to be saved without belief in the truth. One must believe that Jesus is God the eternal Son, the

Word made flesh who died for our sins and rose again from the grave. We must believe that He ascended to the right hand of God, where He reigns, and He is soon to return to judge the world, perfect the saints, and restore creation to its intended purpose. Are you standing in the faith?

What if I don't believe these things? What if you deny the teaching of the incarnation of Christ? The New Testament reserves some of its strongest language about where you stand.

- **1 John 2:22-24**—Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. ²³ Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also. ²⁴ As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father.
- **1 John 4:1-3**—Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. ² By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; ³ and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the *spirit* of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.
- **Galatians 1:6-9**—I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; ⁷ which is *really* not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. ⁸ But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! ⁹ As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!

Application: It is essential that we examine ourselves to see if we are IN THE FAITH, the body of Christian doctrine, because there are many false teachers IN THE CHURCH. They are *leaders* in the church, *bishops*, *theologians*, *pastors*, *elders*, *deacons*, and even conference and denominational leaders.

Dr. Joe Stowell, former president of Moody Bible Institute tells the story in his book *Following Christ*, of being invited to join a group of evangelical ministers and ministries at a conference in Chicago. Before the conference, he thought he would check out what ministries were offering so he visited the booths and tables where they set up their materials. He was shocked to discover information about transcendental meditation and different faiths, alongside literature about Christ. When he asked the coordinator, "Why were these other teachings being offered at a "evangelical" conference?" And the coordinator who was a minister himself said, "We believe that Jesus is a way among many other ways. We don't discriminate." Dear friends, Jesus is not to prominent among other teachings, but He is preeminent above every other and stands alone as the only Lord and Savior of those who believe. There is the test of doctrine.

Second, there is THE TEST OF EXPERIENCE.

⁵ Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?

Now, behind the challenge of the Apostle to *test their faith* was a challenge from the Corinthians to the Apostle to *prove his calling*. They accused Paul of being inconsistent because he said he would come to visit them and was hindered (*2 Cor.1:15ff*). They challenged Paul's authority because he strongly urged them to deal with sin in their midst (*2 Cor.2:1ff*). They accused Paul of bullying them with intimidating words, but he lacked the courage to confront them face to face (*2 Cor.10:8-14*). Now Paul says, if you want me to *prove my calling*, you need to also *prove your conversion*. Examine yourselves! "Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?"

If Jesus Christ is IN YOU, then you've passed the test. If Jesus Christ is NOT IN YOU, then you've failed the test. Here Paul refers to that glorious truth of the indwelling of Jesus Christ in the believer's heart. This is the common teaching throughout the New Testament. For example:

- **John 14:16-18**—I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; ¹⁷ *that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you.*
¹⁸ "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.
- **Galatians 2:20**—I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.
- **Philippians 4:13**—I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.
- **Ephesians 3:16-17**—that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love,
- **Colossians 1:26-27**—*that is*, the mystery which has been hidden from the *past* ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, ²⁷ to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. [the solution for every sin struggle]

Paul asks, "*do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you...*" Listen, a Christian is not just somebody who *believes in the truth about Jesus*, but somebody IN WHOM JESUS CHRIST LIVES! Does He live in you? This is the test of experience.

But someone asks, how do I know if Jesus Christ is in me or not? How does Jesus draw attention to His own presence in the believer's life? How does He make His presence *felt* so that we know He is in us or not?

One of the ways Christ does this is through the inner witness of the Holy Spirit. Physically, Jesus sits at the right hand of God, but He lives within every true believer through the power of the Holy Spirit.

- **Romans 8:14-16**—For all who are being led [present passive indicative—meaning that which already exists] by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. ¹⁵ For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" ¹⁶ The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God.

One of the ways that Jesus draws attention to Himself is not by *revealing divine directives to the mind*, but by *impelling our wills to pursue and practice truth*, so that we voluntarily conform to the will of God. He pours the love of God in our hearts so that we know that *God loves us* and feel bathed in God's love (*Rom.5:5*). He gives us *joy and peace in believing* (*Rom.15:13*). We know that Jesus Christ is in us because He makes His presence felt by the power of the Holy Spirit.

But in an even more pronounced way, Jesus makes His presence evident in our lives, not just by an inner witness, but by an external conformity to His character. The first is a *subjective* experience, but the second is an *objective* reality. This is something people can see. Our character is shaped to be more like Him. Christ Himself reproduces His image in us.

To these same Corinthians, Paul spoke of the character of Christ when he said, ,

- **2 Corinthians 10:1**—Now I, Paul, myself urge you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—I who am meek when face to face with you, but bold toward you when absent!

Are we being conformed in our character more and more to reflect the love of Christ, the righteousness of Christ, and the mercy of Christ? Again, Paul spoke of this shaping as he spoke to the Galatians.

- **Galatians 4:19**—My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you—

Honestly, dear friends, how can we say that Jesus Christ is in us if He is not reproducing His character in us? This is *the test of experience*, and the test of experience is not just *a test of feelings*; it is a test of *character*. John puts it this way,

- **1 John 2:6**—the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.

Recap: First, there is *the test of doctrine*. Second, there is *the test of experience*.

Third, there is THE TEST OF FELLOWSHIP.

⁶ But I trust that you will realize that we ourselves do not fail the test.

In the church at Corinth, they were split by factions. And this is why Paul said in **1 Corinthians 11:18-19**,

- ¹⁸ For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that divisions exist among you; and in part I believe it. ¹⁹ For there must also be factions among you, so that those who are approved may become evident among you.

What is the function of divisions in the church? Paul says that divisions manifest those *who are saved* and *those who are not*, those who approved (*dokimos*), tested, and proven to be real, genuine, authentic Christians, and those who are not. There were those opposing apostolic teaching about godliness and discipline, but still within the church (1 Tim.6:3-5). And Paul gave this plea before he wrote the final chapter from which we have been studying.

- **2 Corinthians 12:19-21**—All this time you have been thinking that we are defending ourselves to you. *Actually*, it is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ; and all for your upbuilding, beloved. ²⁰ For I am afraid that perhaps when I come I may find you to be not what I wish and may be found by you to be not what you wish; that perhaps *there will be* strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances; ²¹ I am afraid that when I come again my God may humiliate me before you, and I may mourn over many of those who have sinned in the past and not repented of the impurity, immorality and sensuality which they have practiced.

How can you claim to be Christians, Paul said, if these ungodly things are being practiced in your life and are disrupting the fellowship of the saints?

Paul closes this letter by saying these words,

- **2 Corinthians 13:11**—Finally, brethren, rejoice, be made complete, be comforted, be like-minded, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.

The word for “**complete**” is translated *mend your ways, restore what is broken and grow to maturity, put things in order*. Here are the tests for examination.

- The test of doctrine—are we in the faith?
- The test of experience—is Jesus Christ within us? Are we being conformed to His character?
- The test of fellowship—are we living at peace with one another and striving to be like-minded?

In summation, the tests are *an apostolic faith—an indwelling Christ and a loving fellowship*. To those who would question the authority of Paul’s office and demand the reality of the Christ who speaks in him, Paul says, “it’s okay to challenge my calling, but you must examine and prove your conversion!” If your conversion is true, then my calling must be true because I brought you the Gospel. But if your conversion is not true, if you are not a real, genuine Christian—then you fail the test.

CONCLUSION:

John Wesley is a perfect example of the need to *examine oneself*. He was involved with his brother Charles in a small group that came to be known as *the Holy Club*. He and several other students fasted until 3:00pm on Wednesdays and Fridays, received communion, and studied and discussed the Greek New Testament and the Classics each evening. They visited the prisoners and the sick on a regular basis. But after a mission trip to Georgia, Wesley met a group of believers called Moravians, and the disposition of these believers was so distinct that he came to realize that he was not in the faith. He later was born again on May 24, 1738 at Aldersgate and he later wrote a sermon entitled, “*The Almost Christian*.”

He had a concern for justice and truth, a form of godliness, avoided strife, did as much good as he could, used the means of grace, avoided materialism, and practiced sincere prayer and service, but he was only almost a Christian. Once he became altogether Christian, his brother Charles who was also converted shortly before he was, wrote a hymn which pictures how he was and you may be now.

A goodly, formal saint
I long appear in sight,
By self and Satan taught to paint
My tomb, my nature, white.
The Pharisee within
Still undisturbed remained
The strong man, armed with guilt of sin,
Safe in his palace reigned.

But O! the jealous God
In my behalf came down;
Jesus himself the stronger showed.
And claimed me for his own:
My spirit he alarmed,
And brought into distress;
He shook and bound the strong man armed
In his self-righteousness.

If John and Charles Wesley, along with Paul and so many others were like this, you may be now. Paul's challenge remains—test yourself, examine yourself, know yourself.

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