

The Big Exam
2 Corinthians 13: 4-10

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Gerrit Scott Dawson**

For the students among us, this last day of Thanksgiving break carries with it a bit of dread. I could always feel the cloud of guilt start floating back. I'd hear the whisper, "You're behind!" Because before there could be candlelight communion, presents and feasts, there must be exams. That means pressure. One or the other, at test time, the truth is going to come out.

Now we dread exams for fear that we will do poorly. We don't want to be out-ed as people who didn't study enough, or learn the right material. We'll get judged. Who wants to take an exam with that kind of pressure?

But in our passage this morning, Paul wants to give the Christians in Corinth an exam. Not to judge them, but to encourage them. He wants them to test themselves so that can realize the treasure they actually already possess. So he writes, "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 the test!"

That's the test. The one exam that matters. Is Christ Jesus in you? Now before we go on, let's pause and minute and notice how unique a question that really is. No one ever asks, "Is Mohammed in you?" That would make a mere man into someone divine. That's a blasphemous question. Because only Allah is divine. No atheist asks, "Is Charles Darwin in you?" That's ridiculous for a materialist. Darwin died in 1882. He doesn't live anywhere anymore and besides, a person can't live inside another person. No Buddhist asks, "Does Siddhartha live in you?" The goal is not to have someone live in me but for me to discover how I live in the great All. Christianity alone has this combination of history and mystery. Of the history of a particular life of Jesus lived once in time and the mystery of a present spiritual communion with him. That's the wild uniqueness of the gospel. I can't stress this enough. All religions are not the same. They do not lead to the same place. They do not have the same goals. In fact, only Christians claim a present, personal relationship with the historical founder of our faith. Is Jesus Christ in you? That's quite a question.

How can anyone possibly answer that question? Can we have confidence in this reality? Can we know joyful, genuine assurance? Yes, we can. Paul wants the Corinthians to run the tests that will remind them that Jesus is in them. There are diagnostics we can do to prove the reality that we are in Christ and he is in us. Let's run five of these proofs today and see what we learn.

1) Do I hear the Shepherd's voice? In John 10, Jesus likens himself to the good shepherd. He says, "The sheep hear his voice and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out." Later he says it again, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." The sheep recognize the voice of their true shepherd and they are responsive to him. He is not a stranger. He knows each sheep by intimately by name. His voice is familiar to them. So when he leads, they follow.

So here's the diagnostic question, "Are you responsive to the voice of Jesus?" When you examine yourself, do you know that you are not your own. You have been claimed by Jesus. He called your name and you said Yes. Perhaps this has been a voice you've heard all your life and you can't remember not knowing the Shepherd. That's gorgeous. Perhaps you remember a definite time when you were a lost sheep and the Shepherd came and got you. I love the lyrics of the hymn "The King of Love My Shepherd Is". Henry Baker wrote, "Perverse and foolish oft I strayed, yet in love he sought me, and on his shoulders gently laid, and home rejoicing brought me." Have you experienced that?

But this question is not just about a past experience with Jesus. It's about the present moment. Today Jesus speaks to us first and foremost through his Word, the Scriptures. So we can refine the question, "What happens when you hear or read the Scriptures?" Suppose the Word just washes over you, makes no sense, seems boring, or seems to have no relevance to your life. Then you have to ask, "Is Christ Jesus really in me?" Because the sheep hear the Shepherd's voice. And Scripture is his voice. I should be hearing him speak to me in his Word. And if that's true, then rejoice. You pass the first test. I hope you're able to say easily, "Yes, I love the Bible. I hear Jesus speak to me through the Scriptures. The treasure shines. It seems written just for me. There's always something new."

2) Does the Spirit pray through me? Paul wrote, "God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" (Gal. 4: 6), Elsewhere he says, "For the Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Rom. 8: 16). Those who belong to Jesus have been adopted into him. We have been adopted into his Sonship with the Father. He has made us part of his family. From all eternity, Jesus the Son of God has loved his Father. Now he places his own

Spirit inside us. The Spirit cries out in us for the Father. We love the Father because Jesus has included us in his Sonship.

From this comes the simpler diagnostic question, “Are you moved to pray? Do you desire to worship the Triune God?” Worship is proof of the Spirit of Christ Jesus living within us. The Spirit draws us upwards to Christ. He leads us to joyfully acknowledge that the man Jesus of Nazareth is the Savior of the world and the Lord of the cosmos. Paul wrote earlier to the Corinthians, “No one can say Jesus is Lord [and truly mean it] except in the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 12: 3). If you thrill to proclaim, “Jesus is Lord,” that’s a guarantee that Christ is in you. If you are dulled out by worship, if your heart never wants to sing, if you don’t want to praise the Father, Son and Holy Spirit that gives me pause. You want to check that out. What’s the deal with me? Am I rebelling against God? Am I holding out on him?” The normal experience of Christ in us is the Spirit praying and worshipping through us. We want to praise God. We want to speak to him. That’s a sign that Christ Jesus lives in us.

3) Do I know the hope of glory? Paul wrote to the Colossians church of “the mystery that is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1: 27). We are people with great hope for the future. Our confidence is not in present circumstance but that Christ who died, Christ who is now risen and with his Father, is also Christ who will come again. He is the one who will make all things new (Rev. 21: 5). The world is not purposeless. History will not always repeat itself. The sorrow and the suffering will not go on forever. Christ Jesus has defeated sin, death and the devil and he will work his victory out to the fullest.

That gives me hope even when the world seems crazy. So here’s the simpler diagnostic question, “Do you have hope in Christ’s future?” In his letter to the Philippians, Paul describes one of the mysterious qualities of those who trust Christ: “the peace that passes understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4: 7). We get frustrated as others do, but we do not despair of the future. We get worried as others do, but we have a person who can deal with our worry. We grieve as others do, except that we do not lose hope. We weep to see our loved ones die, but then a mysterious tranquility comes over us. We know that we will see them again. We know that resurrection reunion awaits us. We are not dismayed; we are confident, even in martyrdom.

Hope and peace are qualities of Christ in us. Test yourself. Are you stuck in cynicism? In despair because the world just won’t work right? Crushed as you face the future? In denial of death? What’s the deal? If Christ Jesus is in you, you have

a priceless treasure: the hope of glory and the peace that passes understanding. If you know these qualities, that's proof, in a world such as this, that he is in you.

4) Do I love the body of Christ? The apostle John wrote, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love" (I John 4: 7-8). One of the clearest tests for whether or not Christ is in us is whether or not we are growing in love for his people. John spoke with such depth and simplicity when he declared, "God is love." It is the nature of love to be turned outwards towards another. Love means relationship. Love means the heart of God flowing out from our hearts.

In one of his letters, Paul described the fruit that grows in the life of someone who has the Spirit of Jesus living in them. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Gal. 5: 22). Peter wrote about increasing steadfastness, brotherly affection and love for one another. He said, "If these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1: 8). Here's the simple diagnostic, "Am I intentionally acting in love towards my brothers and sisters in Christ."

If the answer is yes, that's a proof that Christ Jesus is in me. If I'm staying withdrawn, indifferent, critical, cranky or bitter, what's the dang deal? Such actions grieve the Spirit of God.

5) Am I both against and for the world? John famously tells us, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son." John also tells us, "Do not love the world or the things of the world" (I John 2:15). God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself and we are ambassadors for Christ. But we are also aliens and strangers here. This world is not our home. This world is the place where we live and share the love of God. We are against the world as it rebels against God. WE are for the world that needs a savior. We live a paradox, and it makes us discontent with how things are, even as we are content to belong to Christ.

Here's the simple diagnostic, "Do you feel out of place in this world? Like you wish things were different? Do you feel a yearning for God to set things to rights?" Jesus taught us to pray, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." When Christ Jesus lives in us, we cannot be content with the world the way it is, for we grieve that people are lost and broken. We feel so frustrated at their stubbornness and blindness. But we do not despise them. We long for Christ's

redemption to seek and to save all the lost. That sense of wanting to leave the world even as you know you're sent to the world is proof that Christ Jesus is in you.

So that's five ways to consider Paul's question, "Do you not know that Jesus Christ is in you?" He wants us to examine ourselves. So take a look. Ask:

Do I hear the Shepherd's voice?

Does the Spirit pray through me?

Do I have the hope of glory?

Do I love Christ's body?

Am I both against and for the world?

If the answer is No, then it's time to do some more soul-searching. These are normal aspects of Christian experience. It may be that you have yet to receive Christ Jesus into your heart. It may be you have a block that needs to be dissolved. Don't wait to take care of this. Talk to me. Talk to one of our pastors or elders.

If the answer is yes, rejoice! Stop doubting. Claim your assurance. These are the normal aspects of Christian experience. They follow receiving Jesus in your heart. Your joy will increase as you become more aware of what you already have. Your obedience will grow as you realize these questions are your guide to life in Christ. The purpose of an exam is to reveal the truth. Beloved if you are in Christ and Christ is in you, then all is well, no matter what you face, in the deepest places, and nothing can separate you from him.