Text: 2 Corinthians 13:5-6
Title: Examine Yourselves
Truth: Ask yourself honestly: Am I in the Faith? Is Christ in Me?
Date/Location: 9/19/2026 at FBC (rev. from 12/10/2006)

Introduction

For three chapters, Paul has been defending his apostolic ministry and authority. The Corinthians sought "a proof of Christ speaking in" Paul (13:3) and may have thought of themselves as judges "over" Paul (indicated in 12:19), a sentiment with which he did not agree.

But now, the tables are turned. Now it is the Corinthians who are under examination instead of Paul! Paul speaks of his third visit, saying that if he comes and the situation is still in shambles like it has been, he will have to straighten it out, not sparing those who deserve to be chastised. After three visits and multiple letters, he has an accurate picture of what is going on.

The circumstances are so dire that Paul now writes:

> "[5]Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know [realize this about] yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified. [6]But I trust that you will know that we are not disqualified."

So, we are going to look at an important "exam" that the Corinthians need to undertake. It is far more important than an exam in college or an exam at the eye doctor.

1. The Setting of the Exam

A. This passage does not stand alone. It is written in the context of the fourth letter to a very troubled church. Initially in 1 Corinthians, we learn there are many divisions in the body; sexual immorality has been paraded and not punished; believers are taking other believers to secular law court; there are problems in the marriages of believers; some were continuing to participate at pagan feasts in idol temples; some of them doubted Paul's apostolic authority; lack of submission was evident in some of the

women's behavior; the Lord's table was abused; spiritual gifts were not being used properly; and a heresy of denying the resurrection came into the church. As if that was not enough, 2 Cor. 12:20-21 lists all manner of sinful activities, demonstrating that the works of the flesh were prevalent among at least some in the church. This is not the fruit of the Spirit!

B. The behavior at Corinth would have been cause for alarm, to say the least. When we see these sorts of things going on, we cannot just assume that people are saved. The church is not healthy. The Bible makes clear that an unrelenting pattern of such sin is evidence of an unregenerate state (1 John 3:4-10, 1 Cor. 6:9-10, Eph. 5:5). Paul could not assume that everyone reading his letter was actually a true believer. The likelihood is that:

1. Some certainly were born from above and were frustrated with the open sin in their own lives and the lives of others.
2. Some were not saved but thought they were.
3. Some were not born again but pretended they were for the benefits it would get them (like the out-and-out heretical false apostles that came in and disturbed the assembly [11:13]).

Only God knows what everyone's situation was. But Paul was not going to make any assumptions—the stakes are far too high.

C. There is one element to the setting of this passage that cannot be duplicated today, and that is the relationship of the church to the apostle. Their salvation is inextricably linked to the genuineness of Paul. If Paul is genuine, those who are saved are true believers, but if he is not, they are not. To reverse it, if they can see that Christ is in their midst, they would know that Paul is also genuine since he is the one that brought them the good news about Jesus. The positive evaluation of the church and Paul rise or fall together. We do not have that today because no man is in that office.

2. The Subjects of the Exam

A. Three times in this text we see the word "yourselves." In the first two occurrences, emphasis in the original (Greek) text falls on these words (rather than on "examine" and "prove"), telling us

that Paul is calling them to examine *themselves* rather that someone else—namely Paul! "Don't be so preoccupied with putting me to the test—be more concerned with your own spiritual standing!"

Let me pause here for a moment. The Scriptures are clear here and elsewhere that our job is *not* to examine everyone else. It is true that we cannot help but to observe the spiritual fruit of some and then have to discern if they are of God or not (Matt. 7:16-20). But that is not to be our focus. It is an evil thing for us to be consumed with judging others in our family or neighbors or church members or digging around in the websites and sermons of other churches. We are to examine *ourselves*. Not others. Our focus must be there, and then we will do well.

B. The third occurrence of "yourselves" comes with the verb "to know." It reflects knowledge "about" themselves and so implies a level of self-consciousness that the Corinthians ought to have. We too need to have a self-awareness when thinking about our own relationship with the Lord.

C. Certainly, this passage has an individual application but note that "yourselves" is plural. This means that the church body corporately is in view. On the individual side, these questions apply—but they also do on the corporate side. To jump ahead a bit—if the question on the individual side is "am I a genuine gospel believer?" then on the church-wide side, the question is this: "are we a genuine gospel church?" Are we, generally speaking, in Christ, and doing His will? Are we "playing church" or really living for Him?

3. The Action of the Exam

A. The two main verbs of the first phrase are *examine* and *prove*. *Examine* is from πειράζω, which means to make a trial of, to put to the test. The same word is used to "tempt" in James 1:13ff. It is also used of the Pharisees putting Jesus to the test (Mat. 16:1), or even believers putting God to the test (Acts 5:9), or of Jesus putting his disciples to a test (John 6:6). Tests come from God and temptations come from Satan (Mat. 4:1). The difference is the intent and trickery involved. A temptation is designed to get you to

sin; a test is designed to refine your faith and improve you. The negative meaning of "tempt" is not in view here. We are never to put ourselves in the way of temptation. We are to flee that. But we can administer a real test to ourselves, not just externally but internally. And that is what God is after here.

B. *Test* or *prove* is from δοκιμάζω, which also means to put to the test, examine, try, with an idea of approving or disapproving using spiritual wisdom or discernment. It is used in Luke 14:19 where a man wants to try out a new set of oxen. In 1 Cor. 11:28 at the Lord's table we are to *examine* ourselves. See also Gal. 6:4 and 1 Thess. 5:21. In 1 Tim. 3:10 *testing* is mentioned of deacons and 1 Peter 1:7 uses the term regarding *proving* our faith by trials.

C. The words "examine" and "test" are not exactly synonymous, but they share significant overlap in meaning in this context. We might say the idea something like this: put yourself to the test and state the result as an approval or disapproval.

4. The Need for the Exam

A. Both verbs are in the imperative—Paul is telling them, "You all **must** make a test of yourselves." Instead of demand of Paul this and that, they need to examine and test themselves.

B. Now, we are not the Corinthians, but this is in the Bible, and it absolutely has applicability to us. Particularly if we have been involved in patterns of sin, or removed from a church's membership, or our church has significant problems.

5. The Time of the Exam

A. Timing is indicated in the present tense of the imperatives, which refers to a present examination of one's spiritual state. It does not do to say, "if you got saved before, then don't ever consider the question again." Some who over-emphasize assurance might say this, but we do not. Why? Because consideration of your status with the Lord is necessary and profitable at any time.

B. The assumption is that the readers are brethren, but the exam is still important. 2 Peter 1:10 encourages us to make our calling and election sure. Eternal security for true believers is never in doubt.

6. The Question on the Exam

A. The question being answered by the testing ourselves is whether we are "in the faith." Is your faith genuine? Are you in the faith? Is Jesus Christ in you?

1. Please note that the text does not ask you to examine yourself to see if you have perfect faith or struggling faith; or if you are a perfectly behaved believer or a poorly behaved one.

2. Instead, it asks you to make an honest determination if you are "in the faith" or not. It is an issue of "in or out," "genuine believer or fake," "in the faith or disqualified," Christ or self.

B. "The faith" refers to the objective truth of the gospel. "The faith" includes the gospel proper and sound doctrine more generally. Being in the faith also has implications for proper Christian conduct which is a natural outflow of true faith.

C. So, we have an objective basis. Our examination is not only subjective, that is, looking at ourselves. It is rather looking at "the faith" and making a comparison of ourselves to it.

D. The required answer is a "yes" or "no" to the question as to whether we are in the faith. If you discern that you are in the faith, the question is answered. Move on to other matters—like how to live better for Jesus, how God wants to use you in His church and prepare you for a future in His kingdom, etc. Do not get stuck!

7. The Four-fold Method of the Exam

A. **Look to the Scriptures**: We've already looked at the objective basis, namely the objective "in the faith" part of the verse, and that really contains the method as well. We look at "the faith" and measure ourselves by that ruler.

B. **Look Within**: There is an element here of seeing what our own hearts are saying. Is the Spirit of God witnessing with our Spirit that we are the children of God? Do I trust in Jesus? Do I *desire* God and His things? Do I see the impact of Jesus Christ inside of me? "Don't you know that Jesus Christ is in you?" In other words,

we look to see Jesus. If we are in the faith, and Jesus Christ is in us, then we will see evidence of that within.

C. **Look to God and Jesus**: What are other ways that such self-examination is accomplished? The same words *examine* and *test* occur in the LXX of Ps. 26:2 where the Psalmist asks the Lord to examine and prove him. Or Psalm 139:23-24 where we ask God to search us and try us and know our hearts and anxieties. Truly, we need the Lord's help to do this testing. Only God knows our hearts exhaustively. Our hearts are dark places without His light shining there, but God knows them well (Jeremiah 17:9-10). Looking to ourselves *only* is a depressing business—we must look up to the Lord constantly. Anyway, He loves us and gave Himsel for us. Why would he NOT help us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? (Romans 8:32). **JESUS IS OUR SAVIOR, NOT US!**

D. **Look to Growth**: Returning to the 2 Peter passage, we learn that doing what v. 5-8 says, namely, growing in Christian graces, is a way to make our calling and election certain and help answer this question. Are you growing in the Lord? Are you understanding more of His ways and His word? Are you more faithful than you were a few years ago? Then you are on the right track. If instead you are indulging in secret sin and declining in spiritual vitality, then you should be deeply concerned because regeneration comes with the fruit of real change. Living faith works itself out.

   The opposite, of course, is if we fail the test. We are disqualified, rejected, we fail to pass, we are unqualified or unworthy.

E. Does this cover all the bases? Assurance of salvation is based on the promises of God, the internal testimony of the Spirit, and perseverance in the faith. Said another way: Do we trust the truth of God's promises? Is the Spirit of God at work in our lives? Are we continuing to believe. The above covers all of that. What does continuing to believe look like? It looks like continuance in personal faith (do I *still* believe in Jesus?). It looks like continuance in sound teaching (do I still believing *rightly* about Jesus and His Word?) And it looks like continuance in good works (am I continuing to live the way the faith teaches me to live?).

F. Hopefully we are not as dull as the Corinthians who were having difficulty understanding if Christ was in their midst and then living accordingly. Some of them were living in sin and were not spiritually aware enough to recognize Jesus Christ in their midst because there was so much sin. God did not authorize Paul to offer any assurance to people in that situation. And as a preacher, I cannot do better than Paul—I'm not here to offer a false assurance. I would rather err on the side of caution and get you to do a serious evaluation and make some improvements.

It is not my job to maximize someone's assurance by any means possible. It is my job to call us to holy faith and living and to make sure we are genuine. When I realized this truth years ago, it impacted my ministry deeply. Perhaps the impact ran so deep that it began to grate on some people—like why does he mention this so often? But I cannot apologize for that because I am convicted that there are a lot of people in churches who possess a false, baseless assurance of a salvation that has made little to no difference in their lives. They are "good" people but not followers of Jesus. I want to make sure you are a follower of Him.

8. The Expected Outcome of the Exam

A. All of this might seem very depressing, and if taken too far, it can lead to a never-ending morbid self-examination that leads to fear and depression and distracts from our service to the Lord. It can be misunderstood and create an infinite regression of thinking that gets us nowhere. It becomes more about self than about "the faith" or "Jesus Christ." Again, we must emphasize that we focus on Christ and His word, not primarily on ourselves! We are asking if we are in the faith, and He is in us. If yes, we stop, because we have the answer. If no, we repent and believe in Him. It is that straightforward. Then we move on to living for God.

B. But Paul is not so down on his readers as it might at first seem. The grammar of how he asks the question about the presence of Christ expects a yes answer. He is not 100% sure that he will get a yes answer from *every* individual, but he is expecting generally that his readers will be able to answer in the affirmative, that Christ *is* in

them. After all, they are a "church of God" (1:1) so we don't expect a group full of unbelievers.

C. The expectation is that the majority of exam-takers will find a positive answer about themselves. Since a positive answer is expected of professing Christians, we do not have to be afraid of examining ourselves. Rather, we should want to do so. Like in product or software testing, you want to test it to see where it may be falling short and fix it.

D. The second major result of the exam (in the original situation) was that Paul himself would be shown to be not disqualified. Some at Corinth thought he was not qualified. But in fact, if the church was genuine in the main, then they owed that to the apostle Paul. He hopes they will "get it" and realize that if they are for real ("qualified"), then so is he. The validity of his apostleship therefore ought to be *very* important to them.

Conclusion

This passage leaves us to reflect on our spiritual health. Really the whole verse is just one big application of what Paul has been writing all along in 2 Corinthians. They were testing him. But they should have been testing themselves. They wanted proof that Christ is working in Paul; Paul wanted proof that Christ was in them too! And so it should be for us—instead of looking at everyone else and comparing ourselves to them (10:12) we ought to be measuring ourselves by the ruler of God's Word, the gospel, sound doctrine, good holy practice, the presence of Christ in our midst, etc.

What is going on in our lives, anyway? Are we real and genuine believers in Jesus, following Him, or just professing that we are without possessing the reality of Christ in us, the hope of glory? Is your conduct matching up to the standards of the gospel? Are you zealous for good works because you want to serve the Lord faithfully and obediently? Do your beliefs match up to the gospel?

I trust you will find that your faith is genuine, and our ministry is qualified as well.

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