

2 Corinthians 13:5-8.

⁵ 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? ⁶ And I trust that you will discover that we have not failed the test. ⁷ 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. ⁸ For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth.

Examine yourselves

- 1. Test yourselves regularly.**
- 2. Test knowing Christ lives in you.**

Some of you may have to test “*your numbers*” a few times a day. With a prick of the finger and a reading from a handheld device you know what your blood sugar levels are. Or perhaps the regular test for you simply consists of keeping an eye out for anything suspicious. It might mean stepping on the scale, or keeping an eye on blood pressure or cholesterol, or maybe it means going to that regularly scheduled check-up with the doctor. These are the types of tests that we regularly undergo in order to make sure that we are in good health. These are the tests that we take in order to uncover and avoid physical troubles both now and in the future. We would do well to examine ourselves regularly.

What is good for the body is, in this case, also good for the soul. Examine yourself and test your spiritual health. A person might then ask, “How?” “How are we to examine ourselves and our spiritual health?” There is no prick of the finger, no scale that you can step on to show that you are spiritually healthy. But there is a way to gauge how we are doing spiritually. Look at your lives.

Is there anything in your outward behavior or your personal life that should be a red flag to your faith and your personal spiritual health? Perhaps there are some very obvious signs that your faith is hurting and you are working on becoming healthier, spiritually speaking. But it just may be that in pride you are ignoring signs and symptoms of trouble. Perhaps you would prefer to forgo the examination and the tests because you are afraid of what you will find. You just don’t want to think about that. Or perhaps you know something is there but you would rather ignore or mask some troubling signs in order to maintain the status quo and feel better about yourself. But the Lord calls out to us, to you, to examine yourself daily, regularly. Like that prick of the finger this may be uncomfortable, but it is for your eternal benefit. Let the Word of God take its powerful effect. Examine yourselves by God’s standards regularly.

There are even tools at our disposal that would be helpful in keeping ourselves from spiritual decay. They serve to help us better understand how our faith and life are connected. It may not be a scale or a nifty handheld device, but in the front part of the

hymnal, on page 156 in Christian Worship, there is a personal examination and preparation for Holy Communion. These questions are such that they lead us to examine ourselves according to God's standards. They are beneficial on any day, even on a non-communion Sunday.

On page 156, question # 1 reads: "What does God tells me about myself in his Holy Word?" Answer: *"He says that I am a sinner and deserve only his punishment."* Question # 2: "What should I do if I am not aware of my sin or if I am not troubled by them?"

Answer: *I should examine myself according to the Ten Commandments and ask how well I have carried out my responsibilities as a husband or wife or single person, as a parent or child, an employer or employee, a teacher or student. Have a loved God with all my heart, gladly heard his Word, and patiently endured affliction? Have I been disobedient, proud, or unforgiving? Have I been selfish, lazy, envious, or quarrelsome? Have I lied or deceived, taken something not mine, or given anyone a bad name? Have I abused my body or permitted indecent thoughts to linger in my mind? Have I failed to do what is right and good?*

Such a test, such a simple examination, can produce profound and eye-opening results. The law accuses. The law convicts. The law exposes the symptoms in my life and the disease of sin that is constantly wreaking havoc from within. I have not been the world's greatest husband. I have failed in my duties as father. I have not been the best employee that I could be, I have failed to communicate with my employees at times I have even been harsh or cruel. And down the list we go: lazy, envious, quarrelsome, and on and on. Our examination results in troubling findings. The disease of sin is taking its toll and the rightful prognosis is death. We need a new heart. We need a new spirit.

Let us examine ourselves regularly by God's Word and his righteous expectations so that in humility and faith we are led to the only solution for all our failures: Jesus Christ our Lord. When we realize our failures, we are no longer ignoring something that may be eternally fatal. Examine yourself regularly. This is the way that God wants us to avoid spiritual catastrophe and faith crippling and killing problems. When we examine ourselves faith will prove itself and spring into action, because we have been given the gift of faith. Because Christ and his Spirit dwell within our hearts we will not ignore our sin or try to sweep our sins under the rug, but instead we will confess our sins before God. We will pray for his mercy and forgiveness and we will receive this miraculous healing forgiveness that comes only through Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord. He gives us a new heart. He gives us a new spirit. He saves us and revives us for lives of service.

He does this wonderful work through his word, for God's Word assures you that Jesus led a pure and holy life for you and died on the cross to pay the full price for all your sins in full. Through faith in Jesus, you have been clothed in your Savior's perfect righteousness and holiness. And through the sacraments our Lord graciously gives us further assurance of this gift of new life. Through Holy Communion I am assured personally that Jesus is mine and I am his for Christ gives to me his body and blood. He takes away all our doubts about his love for us, gives us his own strength to live a God-pleasing life and grants us a joyful foretaste of heaven. And in response to this precious

forgiveness that comes only through Jesus we will daily thank and praise him. We will fight temptation, do our best to amend our sinful ways, and serve him and those around me with love and good works (CW page 156). Examination not only humbles us, but when connected to God's powerful Word, it leads to repentance which leads to a life blessed by obedience to God.

Martin Luther once laid out a table of duties in his small catechism and invited Christians to look at their lives and to examine them based on the calling that God has given to us individually. He lists bible passages that detail God's expectations for husbands and wives, parents and children, employees, and employers, young people, and widows, and finally he lists this final duty for as a word for all. *"Love your neighbor as yourself. This is the sum of all the commandments. And continue praying for everyone."* At the end of this table of duties a short poetic verse sums up the benefit of keeping a close watch on these Godly expectations. *"Let each his lesson learn with care and all the household well shall fare."* This verse serves as a catchy reminder that such an examination of our lives is not designed with the intent to make us feel worthless, but it is for our benefit. Careful examination can be a very good thing.

Take for example the basic classroom test or examination. A teacher does not give his students a test simply to terrorize his students hoping to see them fail, but quizzes are given, tests are taken, and examinations are written so that the students can see that they learned something. The students are able to review what they have learned and through this process they prove to themselves and to their teacher that information has been learned and applied. The teacher does not give the test expecting or hoping the student will fail but that the student will learn and grow.

In the same way Paul does not encourage the Corinthians to examine themselves because he has this desire to see them fail. No, he encourages them to examine themselves closely, to test their lives, because he knows that Christ lives in them. He knows that the word of God which he spoke to them was the living and active word of God. Paul had to speak to them rather harsh words of rebuke, he firmly called them to repentance, and he trusted that those words would take effect. He hoped and expected that they would learn from this self-examination and grow in the faith.

As Paul concludes 2 Corinthians he is preparing to meet and visit with these troubled but beloved Christians. And as he is preparing them for his visit he insists that his desire it that they would repent and fruits of repentance would come forth from these words planted in their hearts and brought to life by the Spirit's power. He prayed and hoped and expected with all sincerity that he could come and not have to speak sternly with them about their continued sin, but that he would be able to rejoice with them and speak tenderly to them, addressing them with the healing balm of the gospel. He trusted and he believed that he would be able to come to them and speak words of forgiveness and love.

Some wanted to criticize Paul for this apparent reversal of message or flip-flopping, but Paul would have none of it. His duty as a minister was not to simply make a hard line stance or enforce a policy, but he was to rightly divide law and gospel. He was called to

rightly handle the word of truth. If the Corinthians repented and amended their sinful ways Paul would gladly speak to them words of love and forgiveness. This was not a change in course or a change in message, but this was rightly handling the word of truth. We are to rebuke the impenitent and to forgive those who are led to repentance. This is what Paul was talking about when he wrote, ***“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. ⁸ For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth.”***

And so the lives of Christians are marked by daily repentance. Our lives are marked by law and gospel. Our lives are daily changed and formed by the truth that God has graciously called sinners like us to faith, given us his righteous even though we didn't deserve it, and now commands us to live lives of love and obedience. We deserve death and hell but instead God gave us Christ. Christ lives in you. Eternal death was your rightful lot, but God in his mercy has given you new and eternal life and therefore fruits of faith and obedience will naturally be produced.

Can that fruit be improved? Can our lives reflect better that Christ lives in us? Yes, most certainly! There is always room for improvement. As companies continue to tinker with their product to get the best out of it, as farmers examine and reexamine their tools and methods and seed in order to attain the highest possible yield, so we too should look at ourselves, constantly assess our station in life and test how we are living for God. Not so that we get the attention or credit, but we examine ourselves according to the truths of Scripture and to the glory of our gracious God. We examine, we confess, we rejoice in the Lord's forgiveness, and we moved to adjust and amend and change. And we do this gladly for the sake of our God who saved us; for he has taken sinful failures and he has made us his victorious children in Christ Jesus.

We are not perfect people; nor will we ever be completely perfect in our lives of obedience here on this earth, but we strive toward perfection knowing that we are perfect where it counts. We are perfect in the eyes of my heavenly Father. For Christ's perfection covers over your failures, Christ's blood purifies me from all sin, his love makes each of us holy and blameless, and Christ himself lives in you and me. And so we examine, we test, we look at our lives and realize that although we are sinners, we are not worthless sinners. Instead we are sinners saved by our gracious Jesus, and we are given worth and value as we have been set apart to be God's holy people who work in his kingdom and gladly do his will.

How can we make that truth clearer in our lives? How can we make it more evident that Christ lives in me and I live for him? We can do this through daily lives of repentance that lead to outward obedience. This is why we examine and test ourselves so that we would continue to grow and mature in our service to God. May the Lord help us to daily take on this blessed charge, and do it willingly and cheerfully, because Christ Jesus has saved us and Christ Jesus does indeed dwell within us. Amen.