

"Examine Yourself - Honestly"

Text: 2 Corinthians 13:5-11

Even as all around you the Godless madness of this world rages in ever-greater fury, may the simple peace of the gospel grant calm and contentment to your heart, until that incredible day when our Lord rolls up this earth like a scroll and carries us all to the heaven he has prepared for us. Amen.

Dear Fellow Workers in the Lord's service:

One of the paradoxical oddities of the pastoral ministry is the fact that members often hesitate to confide in their pastor and share their problems until that shepherd has been with them for a number of years. Unfortunately, by the time members gain that sense of comfort and confidence, they may also have tired of the sound of the same voice week after week. Having heard many (or even most) of his "best" stories and examples, there is a tendency to be lulled to sleep by the familiar cadence of his presentations and sermons. In other words, just when a pastor begins to be truly effective, he ceases to be as effective as he once was.

The unique danger here – if one can call it that – is that we can come to imagine that we have learned all or nearly all that we can from our called servant and, as a result, that we begin to listen accordingly. It is the old "familiarity breeds contempt" carried into the spiritual. The answer, of course, is that no one has ever learned all that he can from another individual simply because that individual has not learned all that *he* will. That is why pastors continue to study, learn, and grow. It is also foolish to imagine that one can know all that there is to know about another human being in light of the fact that we don't even know all that there is to know about ourselves.

So it is that we find encouragement in God's Word from time to time to examine and reexamine ourselves – our own hearts, our own thoughts, our own actions. What we find, whenever we attempt such a thing, is that truly understanding ourselves requires both honesty and great humility. We hear just such encouragement from our God in our text for his morning. That text is found in Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians, the 13th Chapter:

ESV **2 Corinthians 13:5-11 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. 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. ⁸ For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. ⁹ For we are glad when we are weak and you are strong. Your restoration is what we pray for. 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. 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.

These are the perfect words of our Holy God. What a blessing it is, in our shabby, artificial, hollow world, to know that these words are both holy and divine – without flaw or defect of any kind. God grant us the wisdom to regard these words always with that understanding. With confidence therefore we pray, ***“Sanctify us by Your truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth!”*** Amen.

First a question for you parents: *Ever wonder if your children hate each other?* The question certainly occurs to many mothers. Often. Moms often lament *“I just can't help but wonder if you kids even love each other at all?”* As kids we would, of course, examine the question briefly in our fertile, adolescent minds, and then come to the conclusion that love is not the point. Idiotic behavior in one's brother has to be dealt with, or it will simply fester and grow – like a fungus. Brother are generally more than happy to do that for each other, quickly identifying any silly notions and efficiently dispelling them with a wrenching headlock or an elbow to the solar plexus. The more serious the foolishness, the more serious the purging or cleansing that was called for. Sisters are also routinely included in the educational process.

On a much more serious note, it can occasionally (or often) occur to us to question our own love; and not just our love for another human being, but our love for our LORD. Although those can be serious and sobering thoughts, they need hold no terror for us. In fact that is the very thing that the Holy Spirit through Paul encourages us to do in our text for this morning. There we read quite plainly: ***“Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves.”*** Can't get much more straightforward than that, can it? But what

exactly is God the Holy Spirit suggesting? How do we go about examining ourselves? There are actually two tests we are encouraged to carry out here. The first is to evaluate whether or not we are believers, the second – having determined that we are in fact alive – is to determine if there is any spiritual sickness in us.

How are we then, first of all, supposed to go about verifying whether or not we really are true believers in Jesus Christ?

Most of you have probably heard the simplest answer to this dilemma. *"If you are worried about whether or not you are a Christian, that in itself is an indication that you are. Unbelievers don't worry about such things. The concern, in itself, is therefore the verification."*

There is, of course, a certain element of truth in that simple answer. It is not, however, foolproof. Not much on this earth is. Unbelievers can also worry about death and hell, but theirs is a different kind of worry – a mindless, panic-stricken terror actually. The key for *the Christian* who finds himself in crisis over the very existence of his faith is to stop looking at yourself and to start looking only to Jesus Christ. That is where the Spirit directs us in our text: **"Do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?"** The question then becomes not *"What do you think of yourself?"* but *"What do you think of Jesus Christ?"* Do you believe that Jesus did what he said he did, and that he was who he said he was? Did he, or did he not, live a perfect life on this earth, and then offer that life on the cross as a payment great enough to cancel the debt of every single sin?

Most often we find that doubt is created by our own sin and repeated disobedience to what we know to be the will of our God. At those times – indeed at *all* times – we are to remind ourselves that that is exactly what we add to the equation of our salvation plan. We add sin, and weakness, and doubt, and inconsistency, and ingratitude, and selfishness, and every other kind of sin and evil imaginable. We add only to the debt side of the ledger. Jesus is the only one who adds to the payment side.

This understanding of what we "bring to the table" is indeed a tremendous comfort whenever we examine ourselves *and see exactly what we are supposed to see – our sin*. Foolishly, our doubts usually come when we fail to see anything at all that we have added to the payment side of God's salvation plan - as if we could ever add *anything at all* to the payment side.

Here there is great irony clearly evident, for we are often comforted by the very situation that should cause us alarm, and alarmed by the very situation that should cause us comfort. How so? We are often comforted when we look at our lives and focus on the things that seem to be going well (regular church attendance, consistent prayer and Bible reading, lack of any recent hideous sins, etc). Yet God's Word teaches us that **"all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags."** Living as we ought to live, in other words, contributes nothing toward our salvation – no more than saying thank you caused the gift that preceded the thank you. Yet it seems to always be in surveying our own conduct that we often manufacture our own consolation. Ours sins are actually now a source of comfort – or should be. They prove that we are included in the central gospel truth that Jesus Christ came to save sinners. Jesus didn't come for those who think they are well, but for those who know they are sinners.

So it is that our text continues by talking about **"failing the test."** What does it mean to "fail the test"? What it does *not* mean is that our actions fail to measure up to God's requirements. How could it mean that, when our part of God's salvation equation, our contribution, is sin and failure of every kind? Since Jesus provided everything necessary on the payment side of the Father's plan, the only way any human being can now **"fail to meet the test"** is to reject Jesus' payment. We do that by trying to replace it or supplement it with our own good works.

The word picture contained in the Greek word here translated as **"fail to meet the test"** is that of a coin that is tested in an effort to determine whether or not it is genuine, and therefore of any value. Though there is little danger today that anyone will go to the trouble of trying to counterfeit American coins (it would cost more to make the counterfeits than the criminal would stand to gain) as late as 50 years ago this sort of testing was still done in the United States. The easiest, most common test was to drop the coin on a marble countertop and to listen to the ring of the coin. A solid, genuine coin would "ring true." The ring of a counterfeit would be dull and lifeless.

Imagine the horror of standing before God on the Day of Judgment and hearing his eternal condemnation of your faith as counterfeit and worthless. There is only one way that sort of thing could ever happen, and that is when man rejects Jesus and tries to pay for his own sins with his own currency of good works. That is the only sort of payment that could ever be disqualified by God. He is certainly not going to disqualify, or declare counterfeit, the perfect holy payment

made by his own dear Son. How could he? Why would he? He himself declared that payment to be perfect and complete by raising Jesus from the dead. What hung in the balance as Jesus lay in the tomb was not just Jesus' own eternal future, it was *our* eternal future. Remember that God had laid on Jesus **"the iniquity of us all."** (Isaiah 53:6) When God raised Jesus, he declared the entire debt of sin to have been paid in full. The soul that pleads the blood of Jesus on Judgment Day simply cannot be condemned, for God himself has sworn, *"Whoever believes in Jesus shall not perish but have everlasting life."*

We can see, therefore, that when the Holy Spirit in our text encourages us to **"Examine ourselves to see whether you are in the faith,"** and to **"Test ourselves,"** we are rightly first of all to see only debt in our lives – the debt that was however paid in full by our Savior Jesus.

Having therefore determined that we are alive through faith in Jesus Christ, Paul also encourages us toward the second part of the self examination: Is there "sin sickness" in your life that is causing you harm and threatening your faith and eternal salvation? Our text first spoke of whether or not we are alive in Christ. Now we find exhortations in our text that we **"do no evil"** and that we **"should do what is honorable."** There is no contradiction here. We are not saved by our actions, yet by our actions we certainly want to thank our LORD for what he has done for us. This is not a difficult distinction to make, but you would never know it by the number of Christian denominations who justify themselves according to their own conduct.

Think of it in terms of going to the doctor. You don't go to the doctor to determine if you are live; you go to get help with a problem, or to determine if you are sick. So also Christians are assured that we are alive in Christ, but we now also want to identify and purge any cancer of sin from our lives. The purpose of regularly evaluating ourselves and our actions is never intended to give us confidence or assurance that we are Christians. It is done *as Christians* to see if our actions are in harmony with our Savior's will for our lives. He bought us. We are his. How does he now want us to live out our time of grace on this earth?

Such an examination is now the responsibility of every single Christian. It is something each of us is moved to do on our own – willingly, according to that new man that has been brought to life within us. The new man in us is not afraid of God, for our new man exists in perfect harmony with our God – experiencing only God's love and mercy. That part of us is a perfect, holy creation of our Savior God, and it is that part that we want to "put on" every moment of our lives. So it is that the Holy

Spirit in our text calls on you, personally and individually, to examine your hearts and lives, to honestly identify what is not right, and to rip from your life – no matter how difficult – all that does not belong there. No one else can do that for you.

Learn then to know yourself as a sinner who could never contribute anything to your own salvation. But then know yourself also as a perfect and holy saint in the eyes of God because of the payment Jesus Christ made on your behalf. Then, with confidence, apply the closing words of Paul to yourself – as is indeed fitting and right. **"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."** Amen.

Scripture Readings

ESV **Deuteronomy 18:15-20** "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers--it is to him you shall listen-- ¹⁶ just as you desired of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die.' ¹⁷ And the LORD said to me, 'They are right in what they have spoken. ¹⁸ I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. ¹⁹ And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him. ²⁰ But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die.'"

ESV **Mark 1:14-20** Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, ¹⁵ and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel." ¹⁶ And as He walked by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. ¹⁷ Then Jesus said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men." ¹⁸ They immediately left their nets and followed Him. ¹⁹ When He had gone a little farther from there, He saw James the *son* of Zebedee, and John his brother, who also *were* in the boat mending their nets. ²⁰ And immediately He called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went after Him.

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The Fourth Sunday after Epiphany – January 28, 2018

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 5 (Red Hymnal)

"Lord Open Thou My Heart to Hear"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The Epistle Lesson: (Deuteronomy 18:15-20) Our first reading tells of a remarkable problem. The Jews' were terrified of their God, and yet they needed to communicate regularly with that same God – who alone could supply all of their needs. God himself provided the solution by sending a Mediator - Jesus Christ - to be our Savior. Because of what Jesus has now done, Christians recognize God as our loving Father.

Psalm 51 (Supplement page 31) (Brown Hymnal)

The New Testament Lesson: (Mark 1:14-20) Jesus continues to gather his band of Apostles. Here he calls some of his key men: Peter (Simon) and Andrew, James and John (the sons of Zebedee). Note the reaction of these men when they were called. Once they found Jesus, he immediately became the greatest thing in their lives. They were willing to abandon all material things if they could but know and follow Jesus. Pray God for this same attitude and devotion.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed (Brown Hymnal page 15)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 243 (Stanzas 1-3) (Red Hymnal)

"Oh, that I Had a Thousand Voices"

The Sermon – 2 Corinthians 13:5-11 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"Examine Yourself - Honestly"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 243 (Stanzas 4-5) (Red Hymnal)

"Oh, that I Had a Thousand Voices"

The Prayers

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 54 (Red Hymnal)

"Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

Attendance – Sunday (36) Ave (43)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School (No Bible Class)
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
Wednesday	-6:00 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Bible Study
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – Pastor Neal Radichel has accepted the call to Immanuel of Mankato, MN. The CLC Board of Trustees is meeting this weekend. Winter meetings are held on CLC convention years. Since this is a convention year, please consider serving as a delegate. St Paul has not been represented by two delegates at a convention for quite some time. The dates for this year's convention are June 21-24.

Sunday School Party – The Woman's Fellowship will be hosting a Sunday School party for all Sunday School children on February 10th at 11:00 AM. There will be pizza, games and a mission project. The women also plan to meet during the party to make crosses for the mission project. Please see Cindy Ollenburger if you have questions.

Board of Trustees Meetings – Pastor Roehl is attending CLC Board of Trustees meetings in Minneapolis this weekend. Our thanks to the dedicated laymen who are presenting the Word of God to us this morning.

CLC Grade School Tournament – The CLC Grade School Tournament in Eau Claire is again being planned for this spring. Please see Pastor Roehl for more information if your grade-school aged child would like to participate.