

## **"Test Results"**

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 our universe like a scroll and carries us all to the heaven he has prepared for us. Amen.

Dear Fellow Ambassadors of our Savior Jesus:

One of the more ominous or suspenseful things patients will ever hear from their doctors is, *"Well, we got your test results back."* Those moments between that statement and the revelation of what those test results revealed absolutely absorb our attention. Breathing is often suspended as you wait either for news that your worst fears are substantiated or for that flood of relief when you hear that they all came back negative and that all is well. Students often experience similar apprehensions and uncertainties after they take an important test and wait anxiously to hear the results.

In part because we can be extraordinarily pessimistic creatures, human beings tend to loathe uncertainty in any aspect of life, which is why one of the more foolish options some choose is to refuse to have the test done in the first place. This course of action, or *inaction*, is irrational because the test result only reflects reality. You might not want to hear the results, but not hearing them doesn't change the reality that exists. So also students might not want to see their test results, but those results just indicate how well they actually know the material they are supposed to be learning.

Again we find that what applies in the secular also applies in the spiritual. What we find in God's Word is encouragement to test ourselves from time to time to examine 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. Yet more important than the test itself is both what we learn about ourselves and what we do with our test results. We find guidance from our God in our text for his morning, found in Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians, the 13<sup>th</sup> Chapter:

<sup>ESV</sup> **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! <sup>6</sup> I hope you will find out that we have not failed the test. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. <sup>9</sup> For we are glad when we are weak and you are strong. Your restoration is what we pray for. <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> ¶ 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.*

This is God's Word. 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.

It's not uncommon for parents to wonder if their children actually hate each other. The question certainly occurs to many mothers. Often. My own mother used to 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 siblings has to be dealt with, or it will simply fester and grow – like a fungus. Brothers are generally more than happy to do that for each other, quickly identifying any unacceptable actions or silly notions and efficiently dispelling them with any or all of the options available to them – wrenching headlocks, elbows to the solar plexus, noogies, wet willies, etc. The more serious the foolishness, the more serious the purging or cleansing that is called for. Sisters are also routinely included in the educational process.

On a much more serious note, Christians can occasionally (or often) question their own love not just for another human being but for our LORD. Although those can be serious and sobering thoughts, they are necessary. In fact that's 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 instructing here? 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, once we've determined that our faith is in fact alive, is to determine if there is any spiritual sickness in us.

First of all then, how are we supposed to go about verifying whether or not we really are true believers in Jesus Christ? How do we evaluate whether ours is a true, saving faith?

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 by no means 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. Whenever *Christians* find themselves in doubt or crisis over the very existence of their faith, the key 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?"** Testing the validity of your own faith is not accomplished by asking *"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? Do you believe that Jesus did, or did 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 one of your sins?

Doubt in Christians is usually created by examining our own sin and repeated disobedience and comparing that 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 are supposed to find. That is all we ever add to the equation of our salvation plan. We add only 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 God's salvation plan and what we "bring to the table" is indeed a tremendous comfort whenever we examine ourselves *and actually see, recognize, 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 of sin.

Don't miss the irony here, 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, and so forth). 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. Recognizing our sins can and should actually now be a source of comfort, since our sins prove that, as *sinners*, we are included in the group that Jesus Christ came to save. Jesus didn't come for those who think they are well, but for those who know they are sinners.

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 salvation plan, the only way any human being can now **"fail to meet the test"** is to reject Jesus' payment. Human beings do that by trying to replace or even just supplement what Jesus did with our own good works.

The word picture contained in the Greek word translated in our text 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 would 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 onto a marble countertop and to listen to the ring. 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 therefore worthless. There is only one way that sort of thing could ever happen, and that is when man rejects Jesus and either denies his own sin or tries to pay for his own sins with his own 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 we 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. Believing that, know that your faith is genuine and living. You will not be condemned on God's great Day of Judgment.

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 souls that get it wrong.

Think of it in terms of going to the doctor. You don't go to the doctor to determine if you are alive; 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 *our actions* is never intended to give us confidence or assurance that we are Christians. We are to do it *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

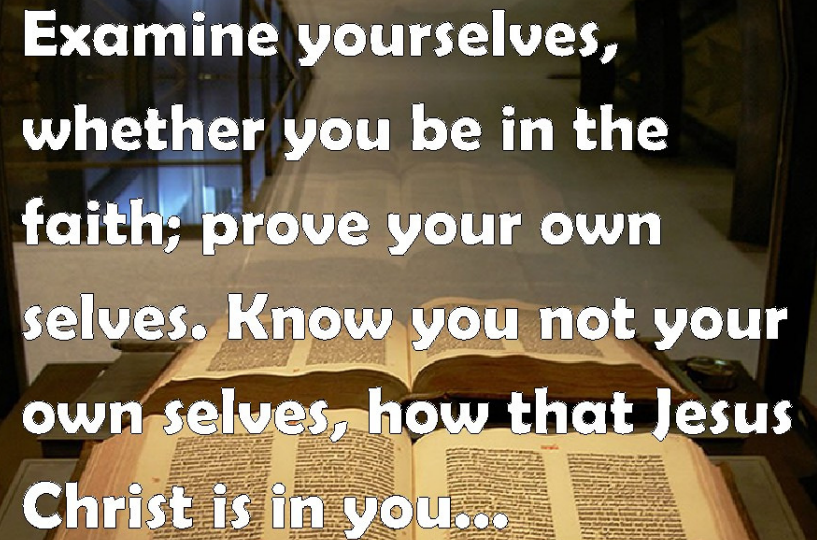
moment of our lives. So it is that the Holy Spirit in our text calls on you, personally and individually, to examine your hearts and lives, to honestly identify what is not right, and to rip from your life all that does not belong there – no matter how difficult. No one else can do that for you.

Recognize yourself as a sinner who could never contribute anything to your own salvation. But then recognize yourself also as a perfect and holy saint in the eyes of God through faith alone in Jesus Christ, who made the full payment for sin on your behalf. Then, with confidence, continue the struggle against your sinful flesh, applying also 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.

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-- <sup>16</sup> 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.' <sup>17</sup> And the LORD said to me, 'They are right in what they have spoken. <sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him. <sup>20</sup> 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, <sup>15</sup> and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel." <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> Then Jesus said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men." <sup>18</sup> They immediately left their nets and followed Him. <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> And immediately He called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went after Him.

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! <sup>6</sup> I hope you will find out that we have not failed the test. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. <sup>9</sup> For we are glad when we are weak and you are strong. Your restoration is what we pray for. <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> ¶ 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.



**Examine yourselves,  
whether you be in the  
faith; prove your own  
selves. Know you not your  
own selves, how that Jesus  
Christ is in you...**

**—2 Corinthians 13:5**

## **ST PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH**

**BISMARCK, NORTH DAKOTA**

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Mick Johnson, President Angela Pfennig, Organist  
Michael Roehl, Pastor

**The Fourth Sunday after Epiphany – January 28, 2024**

## 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 Him, Jesus immediately became the focus of their lives. They were willing to abandon all material things if they could but know and follow Jesus. Petition God for this same attitude and devotion.

### The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed – (Projected on screens)

### The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 243 (Red Hymnal)

"Oh, that I Had a Thousand Voices"

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

**"Test Results"**

### The Marriage Hymn – 790 (Brown Hymnal)

### The Marriage of Keith Mantz and Sunny Hoskins

### The Prayers

### The Pre-Communion Hymn – 305 (Stanzas 1-3) (Red Hymnal)

"Soul, Adorn Thyself with Gladness"

### The Preparation for Holy Communion (Brown Hymnal page 17)

### The Distribution

### The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving (Brown Hymnal page 20)

### The Benediction

### The Closing Hymn – 54 (Red Hymnal)

"Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah"

### Silent Prayer

**Welcome!** - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here! **To our Visitors seeking Holy Communion** – In obedience to God's Word, we practice "Close Communion." This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting anyone to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word, not in judgment of anyone's Christian faith.

### Attendance – Sunday (42) Average (42)

#### This Week at St. Paul:

<b>Today</b>	<b>-9:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service w/Holy Communion
	<b>-11:15 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship Hour and Reception
<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>-6:00 p.m.</b>	– Confirmation Class
	<b>-7:00 p.m.</b>	– Midweek Bible Study
<b>Next Sunday</b>	<b>-9:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday School (No Bible Class)
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service
	<b>-11:00 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship Hour

**CLC News** – Teacher Dan Roehl has returned the call to the faculty of Immanuel Lutheran High School and College. Immanuel of Mankato has called Pastor Timothy Daub.

**Wedding** – Sunny Hoskins and Keith Mantz are scheduled to be married during the worship service this morning. Their union will be celebrated with a reception during the fellowship hour. All are invited.

**Pastor Out of Town** – Pastor Roehl is scheduled to conduct the Sunday service in Live Oak next Sunday. A lay service is scheduled in his absence. There will therefore be Sunday school, but no Bible Class, next Sunday.

**Care Package** – A care package is being prepared for our lone out-of-town student, Aiden Pfennig. Please bring whatever food items you would like to add to the care package no later than next Sunday.