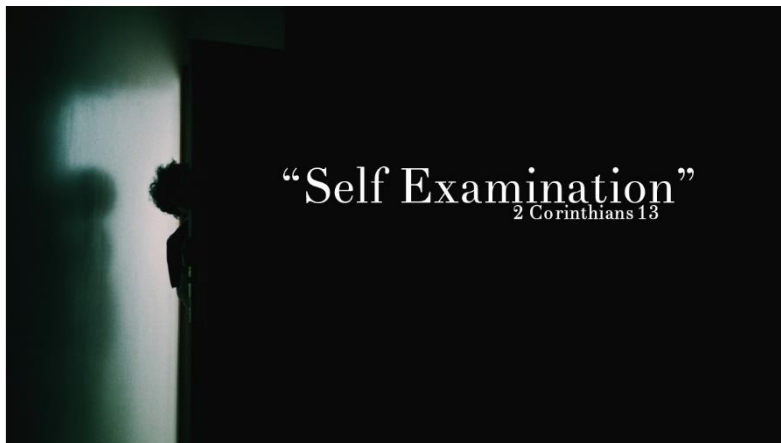


“Self Examination”
2 Corinthians 13

by Pastor Tim Dodson
at JF Believers Church
in Menomonie, Wis
on May 15, 2022



2 Corinthians 13 - *This [will be] the third [time] I am coming to you. "By the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established." 2 I have told you before, and foretell as if I were present the second time, and now being absent I write to those who have sinned before, and to all the rest, that if I come again I will not spare— 3 since you seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, who is not weak toward you, but mighty in you. 4 For though He was crucified in weakness, yet He lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, but we shall live with Him by the power of God toward you. 5 Examine yourselves [as to] whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know 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. 7 How I pray to God that you do no evil, not that we should appear approved, but that you should do what is honorable, though we may seem disqualified. 8 For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth. 9 For we are glad when we are weak and you are strong. And this also we pray, that you may be made complete. 10 Therefore I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness, according to the authority which the Lord has given me for edification and not for destruction. 11 Finally, brethren, farewell. Become complete. Be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. 12 Greet one another with a holy kiss. 13 All the saints greet you. 14 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit [be] with you all. Amen.*

13:1-3

It has always been the tendency of mankind to challenge authority. To shift blame. To rebel. We have struggled with God ...and each other, since the Garden of Eden. We will openly go against what we know to be right, i.e. *Eve and then Adam eating of the forbidden fruit*, and then when we are caught and challenged, we blame someone else. We blame those we view as ‘in charge’ or at least the ones who caught us and then we cry out like Peter on the beach with Jesus and John... “*what about HIM Lord?*” or like Adam before God “*It was the woman that You gave me Lord.*”

The fact is, we rarely need direct Satanic intervention to stumble us. People, *on their own*, have been destroying their own individual lives for centuries through their pride. Our stubborn refusal to repent and humble ourselves before God and especially before our brothers and sisters. After thousands of years of human history since Adam, I really don’t expect that to change.

Those that Paul was coming to meet in this closing chapter were no doubt of some significance in the Corinthian church. Folks who had gathered supporters and wormed their way to some level of human clout. There was little chance that this was going to go well and Paul knew it. Clearly it was not going to go down without some “blood.”

If history was to bear out, the problem people would eventually vacate. They usually do. But they would probably go down the street and start another church that would “minister to the healing” of those leaving the original church in Corinth. All they need is a book about the fall of Mars Hill Church to cover in a study gathering, so they can claim they too were being spiritually abused. Paul was always willing to sit down and talk these things out, just as any pastor must be ...but it would be *they* who would instead hide behind back alley whispers and unsubstantiated accusations. They had already attempted to try Paul in the court of public opinion...and we thought that was a new phenomenon! Although it is sadly a pattern that has been repeated a

million times, the Corinthian church...*or any such church*, would no doubt experience a lifted weight and a time of blessed growth and revival after their exodus.

13:4

Paul cites the leadership example of Christ Himself, *meek and gentle*, yet also unmovable in God's direction and calling. My spirit in leading God's flock, *as well as all of the leadership of this fellowship*, should be one of kindness, moderation, respect and amiable rapport.

However, like young David with his flock of sheep, when a lion comes into our midst, pastors must rise to that occasion. When we read of the ministry of Christ Himself, we find a gentle servant's heart. Servanthood with a patient love and a walk of meekness. Yet we would have to cut away large sections of scripture if we simply stopped there, although many folks do exactly that. Many will try, *on the journey of reimagining Jesus as a vegetarian pseudo-hippy with a lamb wrapped around His shoulders...* will present Christ as essentially giving people the peace sign as he walked by on His journey of self-actualization. However, there are those pesky passages where we read of Him overthrowing the tables of the temple moneychangers and chasing them all out with a whip. Passages where He called the self-righteous and falsely pious people "snakes" while wondering aloud how they would escape the "damnation of hell!" (Matt 23:33)

Despite the overt disparity and the uncomfortable seeming contradiction, both actions came from the same individual: **our Lord!** He is our Creator in the flesh, not a comic book super-hero. He was **and is** loving and gentle when He was given that open door to be so, but firm and unmovable when given no other choice other than acquiescing to Satan and unbiblical positions. And the enemy is slick and unrelenting! Often with seeming innocuous suggestions like "*hey, you're hungry! Turn these stones into bread!*" "*Hey...you're deity...you're 'big man on campus' ...what do you say? How about climbing to the top of the temple and jumping to show how the angels will catch you? Wouldn't that be cool?*" Or "*Hey...how about taking a short cut to power and just fall down and worship me and I'll give you everything you want!*"

13:5-6

Paul is being very blunt here. From the man who clearly believes in the security of one's salvation, comes the ultimate question: "**Are you guys *really* born again?**" The question...albeit blunt, was legitimate and appropriate, for the fruit coming forth from their lives was stinky and rotten. He calls them now to a state of "self-examination." Such a self-examination is not meant to be something esoteric, spiritually "healing" or a new age journey of spiritual self-awareness. It was *and is* to be a critical journey of practical and positional analysis. It is to cause us to step back and take a real and honest look at one's own life: to judge our fruit, *or the lack thereof*, in those of us who claim to belong to Christ. After all, a mistake here will cost you eternity.

Paul is not off course on this matter. For honestly, many of the illusive answers for the unexplainable actions in our church communities are just simply because many of these "spiritual suicide bombers" that pass through our fellowships and so many others, just sincerely have never been born again. (note; paul brings this issue up repeatedly in scripture)

How many today, *perhaps untold tens of thousands*, are going through the motions of church, trying to attain to some arbitrary and self-proclaimed level of righteous and moral living, while having never truly experienced rebirth salvation or a renewed spirit? The term "disqualified" in the original language literally means "having been tested and found false." Like metals tested in fire to examine make-up and strength.

How quickly these trouble-makers in Corinth were willing to scrutinize the life of Paul, while at the same time so slow to look into the spiritual mirror.

Truly, this segment of the religious world is large and tenacious. Once again, these folks will eventually depart the church...*albeit some times only after years*, and often they will even leave the biblical faith totally. Oh, they may continue to attend a church somewhere, but in all reality, they often have rejected the scriptural version of Christianity and will embrace a “Jesus-lite” paradigm. One wherein Jesus is a-ok with them in whatever state they choose to reside, and never applies any pressure to be otherwise. This is what is known as “Cultural Christianity.” Paul speaks of them in 2 Timothy 3:5...those who “have a *form* of Christianity’ by deny the power.” The NLT renders such as “*They will act religious, but they will reject the power that could make them godly.*”

1Jo 2:19 “*They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.*”

Sadly, many of these folks will ultimately complete their life journey having never repented of this state-of-being and will then attempt to stand before “God the judge” in their own righteousness. **This will not go well.** Remember the gentleman that showed up at the wedding feast in his own clothes and not in a wedding garment? (Matt 22) The King was clearly not happy nor was He passively going to look the other way: ***’Bind his hands and feet and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’***

Paul was seeking for these folks to self examine...to judge themselves...to ask and answer the hard questions of faith standing because, *hard or not*, they can be dealt with in the ***here and now***, or in the ***“there-and-too-late.”***

La 3:40 *Let us search and try our ways...*

1Co 11:28 *But let a man examine himself...*

Gal 6:4 *But let every man prove his own work...*

13:7-8

Now Paul utters the “Prayer for a Carnal Church.” It would be a mistake to think that Paul was just doing this so that he might somehow be personally vindicated...so he might “wash his hands” of this issue and all of these folks. Afterall, it is clear that he was doing more in these letters than just trying to win the argument!

His desire was that there would be some practical repentance exercised in these people lives, and that their repentance would actually lead to lives lived out in holiness. In fact, Paul was willing to live with the fact that it all may make ***him*** look bad or it may appear that they had rejected ***him***. If they were just to step up and do right before God and each other, he was willing to pay that tab! He loved them that much!

He simply didn’t want them to flush away their lives and their ministries. No matter what they might claim, it wasn’t ***him*** that stood in the way, but rather their own pride and stubborn hearts! Ultimately it was between them and God. If it cost his relationship with them for them to hear these words and have their salvation challenged ***so be it***. Paul knew the cost and what was on the table, and he likely did long before he officially began his ministerial work.

With all that being said, Paul was actually unwilling to sacrifice one thing in this, and that was the ***truth***. He simply ***refused*** to lie to them. He would not soft-peddle the truth or avoid the hard stuff in order to make them feel better, and he would not twist it to win the debate.

13:9

Clearly Paul was willing to literally be ‘kicked to the curb’ it meant the believers’ ultimate maturing and growth. Remember, this was the same Paul who at one point volunteered to be eternally damned if it meant his Jewish brethren were to find redemption! The bottom line is that he loved these people so much that he was willing to be the sacrifice if it took that to get them back on their feet spiritually. But he also knew he could not stop the will of God, nor would he even *attempt* to step in the way of the Lord’s plans for them, *good or bad*.

13:10

All that Paul had written over the span of these two letters was written because he loved them. He used what seemed to be every tool in the ministerial toolbox; *the gentle spirit, the firm correction, the sound scriptural reasoning*. He begged. He reasoned. He warned. It was all because he was passionate in his desire to see them find their feet and climb out of the hole they were in.

I personally have watched many young people walk away from God and the church because they felt restrained and they wanted freedom. And then...over the subsequent years that followed, it seemed every decision they made...every action...sank them deeper into situations that actually restricted that very freedom...to the point where they were living in the very bondage they had feared in God. Ravi Zaccharis once said that “*Sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay.*” We just can’t seem to accept that God’s road *is the path* to true freedom, wholeness, and purpose. We don’t trust Him. And often if and when we do finally come to enlightenment, we have to work twice as hard to dig our way out. That was the Corinthian church. Paul was essentially asking: *Which way is it going to be?*

Paul knew that that a resolution *had to come*. A decision had to be made and then action had to be taken to see that decision through. Unlike so many fellowships today, Paul was unwilling to just ignore these false teachers and dividing spirits within the church. He was unwilling to ignore the “elephant in the room.” He knew that if his letters weren’t taken to heart, he was going to have to be very forceful when he arrived there personally, and he obviously didn’t relish *that* thought! But if he had to, he would deal with them because of his calling, and yes, the authority that God had bestowed upon him. Despite the uncomfortable prospects of such a confrontation, God more than *desired* His church to be pure, He *demand*ed it.

13:11-14

Paul says something very interesting in his departing words here. He tells them that he *seeks* for them to, “*become complete*.” The verb is the same as the one used for mending of nets in Matthew 4:21, and was a final call to the believers in Corinth to put things right. If they did so, they would be whole, they would be complete. But such would come only through unity based on God’s Word.

“*Be of one mind, live in peace.*” If you do, “the God of love and peace will be with you.”

Now the epilogue: Certainly after the in-depth study of these letters, we are left with the undeniable fact that the church at Corinth was a mess. The issues were legion and to many would seem to be insurmountable: there was partisanship, with the Corinthians factionalizing behind rival leaders (1:10–4:21; 16:10–18). There was debate and struggles within that church concerning incest (5:1–13); prostitution (6:12–21); celibacy within marriage (7:1–7); Christians married to one another and considering divorce (7:8–11, 39); Christians married to pagans asking about divorce (7:12–16); multiple questions surrounding marriage and remarriage (7:25–40); lawsuits (6:1–11); idolatry (8:1–11:1); concerns about women praying and prophesying in immodest ways (11:2–16); chaos in worship, with speaking in tongues and competing voices (chapter 14); inequality in the

communal meal (11:17–34); denials of the bodily resurrection of Jesus and of Christians (15:1–58); Even arguments concerning the collection of money to be sent to Jerusalem (16:1–4); and ruffled feathers over a change in Paul’s travel plans (16:5–9).

Underlying this mess, there were four main difficulties: 1. a basic failure in relating to one another in love; 2. the local church leaders acting in competition for status and influence; 3. arrogant theological reasoning that denied the importance of the body and its demands for righteous discipline(which we might call “Christian intellectualism”); and tensions arising from the pressures that Paul’s teaching about sex placed on his converts. Each of these problems individually would have been bad enough, but when they were all present together, the combination was toxic.

This letter before us was written in roughly 55AD. Paul was martyred sometime shortly after 65AD. There was a letter written and sent to the church in Corinth in roughly 96-98AD by a guy known as “Clement of Rome.” He was an early church father who was believed to have personally known some of the apostles and historians generally understand him to be the same Clement that Paul wrote about in Philippians 4:3. So roughly 50 years after Paul closed things out with this church, this Clement was compelled to write to them again, and guess what the topics were? That’s right...many of the same issues that plagued them earlier for which Paul had wrote to them. Clement pointed them to the truths found in Scripture, including the unifying work of love, the dangers of division in the church, the importance of church authority and that we are not justified by our own righteousness, wisdom, or effort, etc

There is evidence in this letter as well as John’s writings that Corinth eventually succumbed to the very forces that Paul was trying to reel in. The division and power struggles caused dissention and spiritual impotency, and finally obscurity and their demise. All because they refused to truly self examine. All because they refused to acknowledge the truth...