

Faith is Meant to be Lived 2024
2 Corinthians 13:5-13(14)

2 Corinthians 13:5-14 (New Revised Standard Version)

Examine yourselves to see whether you are living in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you? —unless, indeed, you fail to meet the test! I hope you will find out that we have not failed. But we pray to God that you may not do anything 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. For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. For we rejoice when we are weak and you are strong. This is what we pray for, that you may become perfect. So I write these things while I am away from you, so that when I come, I may not have to be severe in using the authority that the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down. Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell. Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

During WW II my father was trained & served as an airplane mechanic.

So when I bought my first car he made absolutely certain
that I knew how to check the fluids and change the oil,
explaining that my car's dipstick was a true friend.

And from time to time he would ask if I was remembering to check.

For several years I taught Old Testament at a community college,
and since it wasn't a required course for any major,
then most of the students taking that course must've
had some interest or curiosity about the Old Testament.

That meant to me, that whenever I gave the class a test,
that though my students were the ones taking the exam,
in truth, I was really the one being tested ---
to examine if my teaching had generated enough interest
for the students to have actually learned the material,
otherwise, I had failed as their Old Testament instructor.

My students were taking the test, but I was the one being tested,

which was the Apostle Paul's perspective in the 2 Cor. text, vs. 5-6, Examine yourselves to see
whether you are living in the faith. Test yourselves. ... I hope you will find out **that we have not
failed.**

Paul means that if they were **living in the faith**
then Paul and his ministry team had **not failed**.

I have occasionally heard someone complain that the modern church
needs to get back to the ways of the ancient New Testament Churches,
which makes me pretty sure
that they haven't read through any of the NT letters,
especially Paul's letters to the Christians in Corinth.

I have never known or even heard of any Presbyterian Church that even came close to the conflict, misunderstandings and struggles that Paul describes, addresses and tries to correct in his letters to the Christians living in Corinth.

The church in Corinth was first started by the Apostle Paul. He was there with them for about 2 years getting them established. Later, he moved on to preach the Good News in other places although he continued to stay connected through letters.

Other traveling preachers came along after Paul left, and apparently some were very smooth and inspiring speakers who also impressed the Corinthians with their credentials. Since Paul didn't request or accept their financial support, some claimed that he must not be qualified or worth being paid, so they could discount & ignore what he had taught them.

These preachers, many of whom came from the church in Jerusalem, were Jews and believed there was much more to Christianity than just receiving God's grace through faith, as Paul taught.

These others preachers insisted that beyond just following Jesus, that to be a Christian, you first had to be a Jew like they were, because a true Christian also needed to follow and adhere to all of the Jewish customs, ritual-law and other traditions. The conflict was intense, rejecting Paul & his teaching about grace.

Paul insisted that it's not about religious Law and tradition, but it's entirely God's gift of grace through faith in Christ, **because our good deeds are not why God loves us, heals and saves us, or nurtures our faith toward greater depth, trust and maturity.**

It is not our religious good deeds or even mistakes and failings, for these do not really define our faith or who we really are, but rather our lives are defined by grace & by God's promises.

These traveling preachers stirred up major conflict and division and brought endless turmoil and destructive disunity to the Church. Paul's letters to the Church in Corinth were his attempts to get them back on track by living well as God's much beloved & blessed people.

We don't have any photographs or video recordings of Paul, but the New Testament writings do seem to suggest and infer that the Apostle was not very impressive physically, and he may not have been a very gifted public speaker,

which the other traveling preachers may have used to attack him, as a way to turn the Corinthian Christians against him and urge the Corinthians to reject Paul & his teaching.

In the chapters preceding our Corinthians text today,
trying to respond and answer those who were attacking him,
Paul is forced to list and describe his teaching credentials
which as it turns out were very, very impressive,
and far superior to those who were against him.

Then Paul points this out, that through his unimpressive weaknesses,
that in fact, made the strength and power of Christ more visible.

So earlier Paul wrote to the Corinthian Christians, vs. 11:7, 12:9-10,

Did I commit a sin by humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I proclaimed God's good news to you free of charge? He (Jesus) said to me, "**My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.**" So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am content with weaknesses ... for the sake of Christ; **for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.**

Paul is explaining, don't focus on outward appearances of strength,
but rather focus on how God accomplishes through our weaknesses -
and that is the message that Paul wants them to notice.

Consider your own spiritual life history – your journey of faith,
& the significant steps in your own spiritual growth & development.
Probably it wasn't during seasons of ease & smooth sailing,
but more from your trials, mistakes and difficult times.

The truth is, one of the most difficult to accept and understand
facets of God's mysterious & wonderful purpose, grace & reversals,
is that sometimes we need to be weak, even hurt and broken
so we can more fully experience God's strength in our lives,
just as it's hard to see the moon when the sun is shining brightly.

I can say with absolute certainty and heartfelt conviction,
that I never really grasped the unfathomable depth, breadth
and unending fullness and faithfulness of God love & mercy...

... until I had totally messed up, crashed, burned and failed,
until I was defeated, crushed and broken into total despair
**and was stunned to find out and experience for myself
that God did still love me, and was with me, anyway.**

The real proof and power of God's presence in our lives,
isn't our amazing faith-experiences or our successes & good times,
but that God sustains us even in our weakness and failure-
--- and that always, **God's grace is sufficient.**

That is the gift of our weaknesses, mistakes, flaws and failures
that makes more room in our lives by suppressing our pride,
for Christ's power to work in us toward God's good purpose,
as a spiritual strength and vigor, not of our own,

can emerge from a continuing relationship with God.

Paul's letter is his attempt to correct the Christians in Corinth
so that they will get back on track before his next visit, vs. 10-11,

So I write these things while I am away from you, so that when I come, I may not have to be
severe in using the authority that the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down.

Finally, brothers and sisters, ... Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another,
live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.

Do you hear and urgency and passion of Paul's appeal to them?

Please don't be complacent or continue in the wrong direction,
but stop, try to evaluate where you are spiritually
and make whatever changes and adjustment that are needed,
and a part of that is how you live in peace, love & hope.

**And know however much any one of us may stray, sin or get it all wrong,
yet we always remain well within God's grace & redeeming love, vs. 5,**

Examine yourselves to see whether you are living in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not
realize that Jesus Christ is in you?

Every year, back when I operated several retail stores,
after closing, I had every employee come the first store.

Then each employee would be assigned to a specific section
where they were to write down every item & count how many.

When all was counted at that store, we'd move on to the next store
until every item in the stores had been counted and written down.

Then each item listed on every page would be priced out at cost,
and the total was a measure of exactly how much profit we'd earned,
the a most critical evaluation of how I was running the business.

In life, from time to time it is necessary for us to pause,
to examine, measure and evaluate how we are really doing,
and this also applies to our Christian walk of faith,
are we really living out the faith we claim to believe?

**So today as we come to the Lord's Table, we must remember that
it's always a place of grace and welcome, of presence and nurture,
where we can be entirely open and honest with the Lord,
knowing with certainty that we'll still always be loved...**

... and so in accord with Paul's message to the Corinthians,
how am I responding to the gracious love & blessings of God?

To examine and test in a more specific, authentic and pragmatic way,
I find that a 2-part spiritual self-examination is most helpful.

1st pause to take inventory by making a list of all my blessings,
which then helps turn my focus toward the Lord God,

and that appreciation can also make me more generous,
and more able to remember when times get difficult.

2nd where do I most need to grow and deepen my faith,
and what do my relationships look like
- with God - with neighbor

**Today we have come to share the Lord's Table of gracious love,
the gift of sacrament and mystery, of God's presence & blessing,
where we remember & celebrate our hope & life in Jesus Christ.**

It's a very good and appropriate place to ponder with care,
what do my words, deeds, attitudes and my secret thoughts reveal
about the authenticity and progress along my journey of faith?