Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Self-Examination
Scripture: 2 Corinthians 13
Code: BQ080912

Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! (13:5a)

The Corinthians, prompted by the evil insinuations of the false apostles, had demanded proof of Paul's apostleship. He reluctantly defended himself, not for his own sake, but for the Lord's, and so the Corinthians would not be cut off from the truth he preached to them. But in this passage, he turned the tables on his accusers and challenged them to **test** and **examine** themselves. The Greek text places the pronouns before the verbs for emphasis and literally reads, "Yourselves test to see if you are in the faith; yourselves examine." Instead of arrogantly and foolishly challenging the genuineness of Paul's relationship to the Lord, the Corinthians needed to examine the genuineness of their own salvation. The familiar New Testament terms *peirazo* (**test**) and *dokimazo* (**examine**) are used here as synonyms. They convey the idea of putting something to the test to determine its genuineness. The test was **to see if** the Corinthians were **in the faith.** *Pistis* (**faith**) refers here not to the subjective element of belief but to the objective body of Christian truth —the Christian faith.

Paul's call for self-examination was not a new concept. Job cried out to God, "How many are my iniquities and sins? Make known to me my rebellion and my sin" (Job 13:23; cf. 31:4–6). In Psalm 17:3 David declared, "You have tried my heart.… You have tested me and You find nothing." "Examine me, O Lord, and try me;" he pleaded in Psalm 26:2. "Test my mind and my heart." In perhaps the most familiar Old Testament example of self-examination David prayed, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way" (Ps. 139:23–24). In Lamentations 3:40 Jeremiah exhorted his fellow Israelites, "Let us examine and probe our ways, and let us return to the Lord," while the Lord's challenge to Israel was, "Consider your ways!" (Hag. 1:5, 7). Describing the self-examination that is a prerequisite for participating in the Lord's Supper, Paul wrote, "A man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup.… But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged" (1 Cor. 11:28, 31).

Like Paul, the writer of Hebrews understood well the danger of self-deception. Some of the people he addressed in his epistle were intellectually convinced of the truth of the gospel but uncommitted to Christ. He called them to examine the danger of that position in a series of warning passages, which

show clearly the great risk of being in the church, but not in Christ.

The first of those warnings is in Hebrews 2:1–3:

For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it. For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard.

The phrase, “for this reason” points the reader back to the majesty and glory of Jesus Christ in expressed in chapter 1. He is revealed as the “heir of all things” (v. 2), the One who “made the world” (v. 2), “the radiance of [God’s] glory and the exact representation of His nature” (v. 3), and the One who “upholds all things by the word of His power” (v. 3). After making “purification of sins” on the cross, Christ rose from the dead and ascended to “the right hand of the Majesty on high” (v. 3). Jesus Christ is superior to the angels (vv. 4–7), since He is God (v. 8), the supreme Ruler of the universe (v. 13), and will judge those who fail to come all the way to faith in Him.

The writer also noted a second reason not to reject the gospel, reminding his readers, “If the word spoken through angels [the Old Testament; cf. Acts 7:53; Gal. 3:19] proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?” (Heb. 2:2–3). The Law was given through Moses, but the gospel through Jesus Christ (John 1:17). If those who rejected the Old Testament Law did not escape punishment, how will those who reject the gospel?

Finally, the writer warned his readers that they were accountable because the gospel they had heard “was at the first spoken through the Lord,” then “confirmed to [them] by those who heard [the apostles], God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will” (Heb. 2:3–4). They could not plead ignorance, having seen the gospel verified by supernatural signs.

Because of the majesty of Christ, the example of what happened to those who rejected the Old Testament Law, and the powerful, miracle-attested preaching of the apostles, those who reject the gospel are without excuse.

A second warning passage comes in Hebrews 3:6–4:2, 6–12:

Christ was faithful as a Son over His house—whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end. Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, “Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as when they provoked Me, as in the day of trial in the wilderness, where your fathers tried Me by testing Me, and saw My works for forty years. Therefore I was angry with this generation, and said, ‘They always go astray in their heart, and they did not know My ways’; as I swore in My wrath, ‘They shall not enter My rest.’ ” Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called “Today,” so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end, while it is said, “Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts, as when they provoked Me.” For who provoked Him when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt led by Moses? And with whom was He angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? So we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief. Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it. For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard.… Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience, He again fixes a certain day, “Today,” saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before, “Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.” For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that. So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience. For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

The writer reminded his largely Jewish audience of one of the most tragic events in their history. He quoted from Psalm 95, which describes Israel’s unbelief and rebellion in the wilderness after God delivered them from Egypt. Even though they saw His miraculous works on their behalf, many still refused to believe. As a result, God sentenced the unbelieving rebels, who “always [went] astray in their heart, and … did not know [His] ways,” to die in the wilderness and never enter the Promised Land (cf. 1 Cor. 10:1–5). They symbolize those who come near but, because of their sin and unbelief, never enter into the final rest of salvation.

Based on their sobering example, the writer of Hebrews warned his readers, “Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called ‘Today,’ so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin” (Heb. 3:12–13), and “Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts, as when they provoked Me” (v. 15). His great “fear” was that “while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of [his readers] may seem to have come short of it” (4:1). Those in the church “have had good news preached to [them], just as [the Israelites in the wilderness] also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard” (v. 2). Hearing the gospel but not coming to faith merely increases a person’s condemnation. Those who are outwardly involved in the church but who through disobedience, love of sin, and unbelief fail to embrace Christ will not enter the eternal rest of heaven. The longer they are exposed to the gospel without committing themselves to it, the harder their hearts will become. “Therefore,” the writer of Hebrews urged his readers, “let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience” (v. 11).

Perhaps the most familiar of the warning passages in Hebrews is found in 6:4–9:

For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame. For ground that drinks the rain which often falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God; but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned. But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way.

In 6:1 the writer addressed those who were sitting on the fence, who had becoming superficially involved in the church but had not come to faith in Christ. He exhorted them, “Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity [salvation], not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God.” They needed to move beyond the incomplete Old Testament teaching about the coming Messiah, repentance, and faith in God to embrace the fullness of the New Testament gospel of Jesus Christ.

Though they were not saved, they had experienced significant spiritual opportunity. They had been “enlightened” (understood the gospel intellectually), had “tasted of the heavenly gift” (experienced some of the nonsalvation benefits Christ brought; i.e., healing, deliverance from demons), been

“made partakers of the Holy Spirit” (either through seeing His miraculous gifts operating in the church or experiencing His convicting of sin, which can be resisted; cf. Acts 7:51), and “tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come” (the miraculous gifts referred to in Heb. 2:4). It should be noted that none of those terms refer anywhere in Scripture to salvation.

These uncommitted people were in a disastrous position. If, after experiencing all of those spiritual benefits, they were to “[fall] away, it [would be] impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.” Because they reject the gospel despite having a full understanding of it, such apostates are unredeemable; there is no further revelation to give them. They have rejected with full light.

Using a simple agricultural illustration in verses 7 and 8, the writer pointed out that there are ultimately only two kinds of people in the church. Similar to Jesus’ parable of the sower (Matt. 13:18–23), they are represented by two different types of soil. When the rain, symbolizing the gospel, falls on the good soil (representing true believers), it “brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, [and] receives a blessing from God” (Heb. 6:7). On the other hand, the worthless ground (representing those who hear and understand the gospel but reject it) “yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned” (v. 8).

Hebrews 10:26–31 reiterates the danger facing those who understand the gospel but remain uncommitted to Christ as Lord:

For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay.” And again, “The Lord will judge His people.” It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Those who refuse to repent and confess Jesus as Lord will die in their sins despite their knowledge of the gospel. There is no other Savior than Jesus Christ and no other sacrifice for sins. “There is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

Those who reject Christ face “a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries.” The reference, taken from Isaiah 26:11, is to God’s eternal destruction of His enemies in hell (cf. Matt. 5:22; 18:9; Mark 9:43; Rev. 19:20; 20:14–15; 21:8). If those who broke the Mosaic Law were put to death without mercy, the writer asks, “How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?” The sobering reality is that the greater people’s exposure to the gospel, the more severe their punishment will be if they reject it. To allow them to continue unchallenged in their rejection of the gospel only increases their condemnation. The church, knowing “it is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God,” must call them to repentance. It should be remembered by unbelievers that sitting under the preaching of the gospel is high-risk behavior, because rejection intensifies eternal punishment.

A final warning from the writer of Hebrews comes in 10:38–39: “But My righteous one shall live by faith; and if he shrinks back, My soul has no pleasure in him. But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.” The righteous, who “live by faith,” are the opposite of apostates, who are devoid of faith. Those who associate themselves outwardly with the church, give intellectual assent to the gospel, yet “shrink back” from a full commitment to Jesus Christ face the terrifying reality of “destruction”—eternal punishment in hell. But the righteous will experience the “preserving of [their] soul” for eternal bliss in heaven (cf. Col. 1:5; 1 Peter 1:4).

Before the storm of divine judgment bursts upon them, people need to examine the foundation of their spiritual life. Only what is built on the bedrock of true saving faith in Jesus Christ will survive (cf. Matt. 7:24–27).

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