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

The Pattern of Sanctification: Authenticity, Part 1
Scripture: 2 Corinthians 13:5-6
Code: 47-93

Let's open our Bibles to 2 Corinthians chapter 13 as we hear from God, this morning. It wouldn't be a true expression of worship if we gathered and didn't hear His Word as He speaks to us in it...2 Corinthians chapter 13.

As we come down to the end of this rich epistle, we've come to a section from chapter 12 verse 19 down to chapter 13 verse 10 that answers the question: what concerns does the faithful pastor have for his people? Paul is writing this letter to a church, a church which he founded which he loves greatly and in the end of the letter he sums up his real concerns for that church. It is a great section because it gives us such practical insight into the issues that the church must be concerned about. What matters really occupy the heart of a faithful pastor, and consequently should occupy the life of the church.

Now we already know that in verse 19 at the end of the verse Paul spoke of everything he did all for your upbuilding, beloved. That's how he began this section, and he ends it the same way in chapter 13 verse 10, the end of the verse. He says, "The Lord had given him authority for building up and not tearing down." So in general his concern for the church is its upbuilding, its edification, its spiritual well-being. Those two statements, chapter 12 verse 19 and 13:10, bracket the passage in between. And what is involved in the spiritual well-being of the church? What is involved in the church if it's to be being built up? If it's to be being edified? Being strengthened?

Well there are seven issues that Paul addresses in the verses in between that sort of become the components of this generic concern for the spiritual well-being of the church. We remember that in verses 20 and 21 at the end of chapter 12 he expressed a concern for repentance, that the church be dealing with sin by repentance. And then in chapter 13 verses 1 and 2, discipline, that where there was a lack of repentance the church would act to express discipline on that sin. Thirdly, the issue of authority came up in verses 3 and 4. He was concerned that the people recognize that Christ was t he Lord of the church and that His authority was coming to them through the apostolic testimony, through the preaching of the gospel by the Apostle. He is concerned then for the repentance of the church, the discipline of the church and the authority over the church.

Down in verses 7 and 8 the issue is obedience. He is concerned about the obedience of the church that they would respond obediently to the truth. And then in verses 9 and 10 he is concerned about

the maturity of the church. He says at the end of verse 9, "That you be made complete, or mature." And so repentance, discipline, authority, obedience and maturity occupy the pastor's heart as he is concerned about the spiritual well-being of the church.

Now that leaves us with the issue before us in verses 5 and 6 and this is the issue of authenticity...authenticity. It's really at the heart of this whole discussion. He is concerned most of all that they be real Christians, authentic Christians. In fact, repentance, discipline, authority, obedience and maturity have no application if in fact they are not genuine believers. So in verse 5 he says, "Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you, unless indeed you fail the test? But I trust that you will realize that we ourselves do not fail the test."

So at the core of the pastor's concern for the spiritual well-being of his church is this matter of authenticity. Are you a real believer? Test yourself and examine yourselves to see if you are in the faith. He is really asking the question: are you spiritually alive? I suppose if we asked the surgeon to tell us about his greatest concern he might say, "Well certainly the health and well-being of the patient is important, but more important than their condition of well-being is the fact that they're alive." First of all, the duty of the physician is to maintain their life and then to pursue the best quality of life for them. And I think that's exactly where the Apostle Paul is here. He is concerned that they be built up to full maturity. He's concerned that they live spiritually at the highest level but at the very base concern is the matter of them being alive at all. He is concerned about whether they are spiritually alive or dead. That's his greatest concern. Are his people genuinely alive in Christ?

I think that should be the concern of any pastor. That should be a compelling issue in the heart of any pastor. Are the people under his care genuinely converted people? Are they alive in Christ? Because if they're not, then there is no possibility for spiritual growth for repentance and discipline and all those matters which concern him in this passage.

This is nothing new, by the way. Doing a spiritual inventory on one's condition is a very old thing. The psalmist on numerous occasions said to God, "Test me, try me, prove me, look at my heart, show me my spiritual condition." You find that, for example, in Psalm 17. You find it later on in the Psalms. Over in Psalm 139, you find it in Psalm 26, the prophet Haggai in chapter 1 addresses that same issue of spiritual inventory. So it's not really anything new. God had called the Jews to that same inventory because occasions where God said things like this, "All Israel is not Israel." That is to say not all the Jews are true Jews. What does He mean by that? Well not all those Jews who were outwardly the people of God, outwardly within the covenant of God were at the same time inwardly the people of God. And they are warned repeatedly how important it is not to be circumcised outwardly but to be circumcised in the heart, that is not to be cleansed only physically but to be cleansed spiritually. And as that was a concern with the people of God in the Old Testament, it is a

great concern with the people of God in the New Covenant. The New Testament is filled with the calls to people to authenticity, to real Christianity, to genuineness. They're very serious calls and in fact the New Testament lays out some severe warnings to people not to come close to Christianity and not be genuine. I will say this now and repeat it later. The church is the worst place for an unconverted people...an unconverted person to be. The church is the worst place for an unconverted person to be. You're in the most dangerous and unsafe place to take your place in the church and be apart from Christ.

I'll show you why. Before we look at this text let me expand on this by having you turn to the book of Hebrews chapter 2. We could look at a number of passages in the New Testament that warn people about being in the church but not being converted and about the danger of that. But none is better than the book of Hebrews. Hebrews, as its title indicates, was written to a group of Jews who constituted a church. We don't know where it was and we don't know who started it. We don't even know who wrote the book of Hebrews. But it is written, inspired by the Spirit of God, to address this church of converted Jews.

Now the church was made up of genuine believers and they are referred to throughout this epistle. But also in that church were a fringe group of Jews who had been intellectually convinced of the truth of the gospel. They had heard it. They had seen evidence of its veracity, its truthfulness. They had moved into the social fellowship of the church. They were involved to some degree. They attended to some degree. They participated to some degree. But they were not converted. They had not committed their faith to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

Periodically through the book of Hebrews this group in the church is warned. I'm going to have you look with me at five or six of these warnings. We're not going to dig into them as deeply as we could but we're going to look at them in a sort of a summary fashion as a setting for the rest of our message from our text in 2 Corinthians. But they really do help us to come to grips with the seriousness of being in the church but not in Christ, being less than authentic, less than a genuine Christian. And as I said earlier, and I will say again, if you're not a true Christian, this is the worst place you could be as you will see when we look at these texts.

Turn to Hebrews chapter 2 and that's where we'll start this perusal of the warning passages in this letter. We read in verse 1 of chapter 2, "For this reason," or "Therefore, for this reason.." that takes us back immediately into chapter 1 to explain the reason that he's referring to. And chapter 1 is all about the glory of Jesus Christ. Verse 2, for example, talks about Christ the Son of God who is appointed heir of all things, through whom the world was made. And it says in verse 3 that this Son of God is the very radiance of God's glory and is the exact representation of God's nature. It is He who sustains everything by the Word of His power. It is He who on the cross made the purification of sins. It is He who rose from the dead, ascended and sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high. It is He who is better than angels. It is He who is called the firstborn or the premier one in verse

6. It is He whom the angels of God worship. It is He in verse 8 who is God forever and ever who has a throne and who rules with a scepter. It is He, according to verse 13, who is set on high and under whose feet all enemies are placed. It is He, Jesus Christ. And because of who He is, because of His glory, "For this reason...the writer says...we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it."

Because of the glory of Christ, you must pay closer attention than you have been paying to the gospel which you've heard because you're in danger of drifting away from it. In other words, you come up close, you sniff around the truth of the gospel, you're enlightened by it, you comprehend it. You see the wonder and the glory and the majesty of Christ. You're in grave danger at that point if you drift away from that. Verse 2 explains why, "For if the Word spoken through angels," what is that? That's the Mosaic Law. If you go back into the Old Testament you will remember that the Mosaic Law was brought by angels, they brought it from God. "And if the Mosaic Law, the Old Testament law spoken through angels proved unalterable, it could not be changed, it could not be edited, it could not be altered, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense." In other words, if you ever broke the law you were judged for it. If the law was unalterable, unchangeable, and if every person who ever broke that law paid consequence for it, verse 3, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?"

If people didn't escape the judgment of God when they rejected the Mosaic Law, how do you think you're going to escape the judgment of God if you reject the gospel of Jesus Christ? That's the issue here. If they didn't escape who disobeyed the law, you won't escape when you disobey the gospel. And they had heard it, verse 3 says. "It was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard." Who would they be? The Apostles. They had firsthand testimony this assembly of Jews from the Apostles. They had heard it from the Lord and they preached it to this group and this group heard and believed and a church was founded.

Not only did they hear the gospel preached but verse 4 says, "God was bearing witness with them as they preached it," the Apostles who preached it, "by signs and wonders and various miracles." And those are the very three things mentioned in 2 Corinthians 12:12 as the marks of an Apostle...signs, wonders and miracles. "The Apostles preached, God attested to the validity of their gospel by signs, wonders, various miracles and by the manifestation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will." They didn't have any excuses. They heard the truth from eyewitnesses, the Apostles. The truth which they preached was indeed the gospel of the great Jesus Christ who is described in chapter 1. That gospel preaching was affirmed and attested by miraculous signs and wonders and mighty deeds, confirmed by the gifts of the Spirit of God that operated through those Apostles. And if they rejected it, they were in serious trouble. More serious trouble than those who rejected the law delivered by angels, the Mosaic Law. That's a serious warning.

Based on the majesty of Christ in chapter 1, based on the Old Testament law and rejection of that, based on apostolic testimony, it was very serious to disobey the gospel. How shall we escape the judgment of God if we neglect so great a salvation? This is a warning then to those Jews, a part of that church community but not authentic Christians. And it stands as a warning to all of you, serious warning. Nobody neglects the law of God without a just punishment. And even more so, nobody neglects the gospel of Jesus Christ without a just punishment.

You say, "Well we haven't seen the signs and wonders and mighty deeds." But the record of them is laid down right here on the pages of holy Scripture. And this testimony is in fact true. And so they are warned not to neglect this great salvation.

Turn to chapter 3. In chapter 3 and verse 6 it says that Christ was faithful as a son over his house. Who's house we are. And he is saying the church is a household of God, the household of Christ, and Christ is faithful over His house. He's a faithful Savior, He's a faithful father, as it were, over his household. "Who's house we are IF," there's a key word there, "If...if, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm to the end." If we prove to be real. And then he warns in verse 7, "Just as the Holy Spirit says," and he quotes Psalm 95. He quotes the Old Testament, "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." Psalm 95 is a warning passage which God...in which God brings up the unbelief and the disobedience of the children of Israel after they had been taken out of Egypt. You remember God had delivered them by the plagues, He had opened the Red Sea, they had crossed the Red Sea on dry land. It had closed down and drowned the Egyptian army and Pharaoh. And then they were wandering in the wilderness in sin and disobedience. And that's what he's referring to. They were there having been delivered from Egypt, they were in that middle ground, they had come out of Egypt and they were ready to enter the promised land but they never could enter it because of unbelief. There they were in the wilderness, murmuring, complaining, griping building a golden calf, worshiping an idol, hardening their heart toward the true God. Verse 9 says they were testing God. "They saw My works for forty years and they still would not believe, 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." Rest referring here to the land of Israel, they never entered. They all died. Their carcasses were strewn all over that wilderness. They never entered the promised land. And that is a metaphor, that is an analogy of salvation. People who come out, as it were, like Peter said, they're clean from the pollution of the world, they step out of the world into the community of believing people but they never enter into salvation and they will be judged.

The problem is, verse 10, "They go astray in their heart and they did not know My ways." They don't really know God, their hearts have never been chanted. Verse 12 says, "Take care, brethren, don't be like that group," referred to in Psalm 95, those wilderness wandering Jews, "take care, brethren,

lest there should be in any one of you an evil unbelieving heart in falling away from the living God." You get this close and that evil, unbelieving heart causes you to fall away. "You better encourage one another...verse 13 says...day upon day as long as it's still called today". In other words, while you still have opportunity, "Lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." What hardens the heart is the fact that you love sin. Sin deceives you into thinking it offers more to you than the gospel offers. That is a deception, isn't it? That is a deception.

"So keep encouraging each other lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sins." In verse 15 he repeats it, "Today, today if you hear His voice do not harden your hearts as when they provoked me." And as a result verse 18 says, "They were disobedient." Verse 17 says, "Their bodies were scattered in the wilderness." Verse 19 says, "They never entered in because of unbelief." Chapter 4 verse 1, he says "Therefore let us fear also lest while a promise remains of entering His rest," you're hearing the promise, the gospel's offered, heaven is offered, forgiveness, salvation. "You're hearing it but fear lest anyone of you should seem to come short of it." You come all the way this close, you come near to God and then you fall away. "For indeed we have had good news preached to us, the gospel, just as they also but the word they heard did not profit them because it was not mixed with faith," is what the Greek says. And when it's not mixed with faith, it's useless. "Those kinds of people...verse 3 says...won't enter into rest. We who believed enter that rest just as He has said, As I swore in My wrath," Psalm 95 again, "they shall not enter My rest." Again in verse 5, "They shall not enter My rest." Verse 6, "They fail to enter because of disobedience." Verse 7, "Today," again he repeats it again, "today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts."

Then in verse 11, "Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest lest anyone fall through following the same example of disobedience." Disobedience, love of sin, unbelief, deception by sin, you come all the way this far, you get involved with the church, you get on the edges of the church, maybe you get into the church, you socialize in the church, you hear, you understand but you never embrace Christ. You will never enter into rest. You will never enter into heaven. And you're in grave danger of deception by sin and of disobedience that causes you to fall away and feel only the wrath of Almighty God. And verse 13 says, "There is no creature hidden from His sight but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." God knows your heart, He knows if you're in that condition. He knows that.

"Why don't you come," verse 14 says, "to the great High Priest, Jesus the Son of God." "Why don't you come," verse 16 says, "to the throne of grace and receive mercy and grace to help you in the time of your great need." Tremendous warning passage.

Chapter 6 takes us to another warning passage. And this one perhaps the most familiar. Verse 1, he says to these fringe people, these people who have come out of Judaism but not into Christ, they're hanging around, they're a part of the social entity of the church, they're...they're there, they're tares,

as it were, among the wheat. He says to them, "Leave the elementary teaching about Messiah." You've got to come beyond that Old Testament teaching of Messiah, you've got to come to maturity. And that is a synonym in Hebrews for salvation. You can't go back and talk about repentance and dead works and faith and washings and the laying on of hands which they did with animal sacrifices, and simply believing in the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. That was all part of the Old Testament teaching. You've got to go beyond that, come on, you've got to leave that behind and move on to the fullness of the New Testament gospel. And here's the warning in verse 4, "For, or because, in the case of those who have once been enlightened," that means you understand, you understand the gospel, you understand that God came into the world in the form of Jesus Christ, born in Bethlehem of a virgin Mary, lived a perfect life, died a substitutionary death, rose three days later, ascended into heaven, is a great High Priest, will some day come again, you understand the gospel, you understand He died for our sins. You understand that, you have been enlightened. You understand the gospel. You are therefore in a very dangerous place. "You have also...he says...tasted of the heavenly gift." The heavenly gift, of course, is the gift of God's Son, the unspeakable gift of Jesus Christ given to us. You've had a taste of that. You understand the flavor of the reality of Jesus Christ. You've become a partaker of the Holy Spirit in the sense that you've seen the working of the Spirit, you've seen the power of the Spirit of God, like the crowds that ate the food that Jesus created, like the crowds that watched the miracles that Jesus did by the power of the Spirit. Verse 5, "You've tasted the good word of God, you've tasted the powers of the age to come." The age to come is the Kingdom where Christ will rule on earth and miracles will be common place and He will express His power throughout the earth. And you've seen previews of that.

They...the Hebrews had actually seen them for themselves because the Apostles who preached the gospel did signs, wonders and miracles in their presence. So he says, "You've seen it all, you've heard it all, you've been enlightened by it all. You understand the gospel. You understand the power of Christ. You understand the power of the Spirit. You understand the power of the Word of God. You understand the power of the age to come." Point being-you have a full understanding. "If...verse 6...you then fall away when you've had a perfect, complete understanding and you still reject, it's impossible to renew them again to repentance." You can't be saved. If you reject when you have a full understanding, it's impossible to be saved because there can't be anymore information. You're in a very dangerous position when you understand that you're disobedient and hard-hearted and will not embrace Jesus Christ authentically. It's impossible to bring you to repentance. You are an apostate. An apostate is not a person who rejects the truth because he doesn't understand it. An apostate is somebody who rejects it because he does. That's an apostate. You have fallen away.

There's only two kinds of people in the church, long term. I mean, people come and go and here and there, but in the church there are just two kinds of people. There are people who have believed and are authentic Christians, and there are people who had not believed but understand to one degree or another and they're the ones being referred to here. They are in grave danger because if they fall

away, they can't be renewed again to repentance because they fall away from having full understanding.

He illustrates this in verses 7 and 8, these two kinds of people. He calls them soil like Jesus does, ground. There is ground that drinks the rain. The rain is the gospel, so the gospel comes like rain and hits the ground and it brings forth vegetation, useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God. Those are true believers. The gospel comes, this is good soil and up comes the vegetation that is useful. It is blessing from God. These people are blessed because this is those who truly believe. The same rain falls, verse 8, but it falls on bad soil full of weeds and it yields thorns and thistles and worthless and close to being cursed and ends up being burned. You just take the weeds and burn them. That's hell. Same rain, two kinds of soil. The gospel comes and it comes to the church and it comes with clarity and those who are believing people, those who have come to Christ and committed their life to Him and are authentic Christians, the rain falls on them and it just produces all kinds of fruitfulness and blessing from God. And there are those people who understand and who know the truth but reject Jesus Christ and all that comes out of their life is thorns and thistles, absolutely worthless things that end up being burned.

To the true Christians he speaks in verse 9, "But, beloved, we're convinced of better things concerning you and things that accompany salvation." But there was this group who understood but hadn't embraced Christ. They were in a very dangerous, dangerous position.

To show you further how dangerous it was, turn to chapter 10 of Hebrews verse 26. Here comes another warning to the same kind of people, some of you this morning fit into this category for whatever reason you're attracted to the church, you're involved to one degree or another but you don't belong to Jesus Christ. You have not committed your life to Him. Verse 26 says, "If we go on sinning," if you go on living your life your way, "willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth..." in other words, you don't accept it, you don't acknowledge Christ, you don't embrace Christ as Lord and Savior, committing your life to Him, you just go on in your pattern of willful sinning, "there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins." There's no where else for you to go. If you will not acknowledge Christ as your Savior, there is no other Savior. If you will not acknowledge His sacrifice on the cross for your sins, there is no other sacrifice. You will die in your sins. There is no one else but Christ. He is alone the Savior. There's no salvation under heaven under any other name than His, it says in the book of Acts.

Now all that awaits you if you reject Christ, no other sacrifice awaits you, there is no other salvation, but verse 27, what awaits you is a certain terrifying expectation of judgment. All that's left for you is certain terrifying expectation of judgment. In fact, he calls it the fury of a fire which consumes the adversaries. That's speaking of hell itself, that fire, taken from Isaiah 26. You have nothing to look forward to but a fire that burns forever.

Notice his continued thought in verse 28. "Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses." You broke the law of Moses, there was a death penalty and when two or three confirmed that you had indeed violated that law, you were to die. That was judgment.

Now if you look at the law of Moses, break the law of Moses and pay a serious penalty, verse 29 says, "How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled underfoot the Son of God?" It's one thing to break the law of Moses, it's a far worse thing to trample underfoot the Son of God. The Son's greater than the law, in that sense. If you have trampled underfoot the Son of God by not embracing Him as Savior, when you have heard and understood His gospel, if you have regarded as unclean the blood of the Covenant which He shed to sanctify, if you have thus insulted the Spirit of grace who offered you the gospel, how much severer punishment shall you receive? That's why I said earlier and I say again, the worst place for an unsaved person to be is in the church because all you're doing, all you're doing is increasing your culpability and guaranteeing a severer punishment. You'd be better off to go to Las Vegas on the weekend. Hell would not be as severe in terms of its judgments. You'd be better off not to be here at all than to be here all the time rejecting this message. This is the worst place you can be.

One of the reasons I don't want to make the church comfortable for unbelievers, I guess, in the end. You either want them to hear the message and believe and embrace Christ, or leave lest they just increase their eternal torment. And verse 30 says, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," and again the Lord will judge His people. Verse 31, "It's a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God." You see, it's not just a nice thing to come to church and feel sentimental about Jesus. It's a very serious issue.

Now finally, look at verses 38 and 39 of chapter 10. Thirty-eight, "My righteous one shall live by faith and if he shrinks back my soul has no pleasure in him." Anybody who falls away, anybody who comes all the way this far, comes out of the world, as it were, gets cleansed from the pollutions of the world moves toward the gospel, associates with Christians, gets involved in the church, but shrinks back, falls back from a real commitment to Jesus Christ, God says, "My soul has no pleasure in him." That's taken out of the prophet Habakkuk. But verse 39, "We are not of those who shrink back to destruction but of those who have faith to the persevering...have faith to the preserving of the soul." That refers to heaven. We're the true believers, the writer says, not like those who fall back.

All of that to suggest to you in very, very certain terms that you're in a dangerous condition if you understand the gospel of Jesus Christ and you're just hanging around the church but you're not real. Rejection of the gospel is dangerous. It intensifies eternal punishment. That's why the worse place to be unsaved is in the church.

Now, let's go back to our text. This is the matter which Paul discusses in this passage. This very matter comes to our attention in 2 Corinthians 13:5, "Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith." Examine yourselves, he says. Paul is concerned about the authenticity of his people.

Now let me get this in the context here because it is a fascinating, fascinating little section. Remember the familiar false teachers that we always talk about had invaded the Corinthian church which was Paul's church. He had planted it, founded it, led these people to Christ. The false teachers had invaded the church. Well they wanted to teach lies and in order to succeed at that they had to attack Paul because the people trusted and loved Paul. So they went on an all-out campaign to slander Paul. And the people went along with it. They assaulted Paul's authority, along with everything else about him. They attacked his authority. They said he doesn't speak for Christ. He doesn't speak the truth. He's not a true Apostle. In fact, Paul referred to that, didn't he, in verse 3 when he said to them, "Since you are seeking for proof of the Christ who speaks in me." They were...they were wanting him to prove that Christ actually had spoken through him because that's what the false teachers had denied. They said Christ doesn't speak through him. He's a charlatan, he's a fraud, he's a fake, he's a phony, he's a self-appointed prophet. He says whatever he wants to get money and to build an empire. They wanted proof that he...that actually Christ was speaking in him. And they were saying he's so weak, his presence is unimpressive. His speech is contemptible. And he admitted he was weak and he was a clay pot and he was always suffering and always in pain and always in prison. He just was weak. And he refers to that.

We are weak...he says. And so here in our weakness you have bought the lie of these false teachers that Christ doesn't speak through us. He admitted to being weak. But was he in fact the agent of the living God, the incarnate God Jesus Christ even though weak? That was the issue. It shouldn't have been but it was. So he comes to the bottom line in verses 5 and 6 and here is his response. "Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith. Examine yourselves."

Now, what's the point? If you do your spiritual inventory, listen, and you conclude that you are in the faith, that you are true believers, that the gospel of Jesus Christ has transformed your life, that Christ dwells in you, if you conclude that then you know I am a true Apostle. Right? That's his point. Look at your lives, are you true believers? Have you been genuinely transformed? If you are then I must be a true Apostle who preached a true message, a message that brought Christ to you.

If they doubted his apostleship they would have to doubt his message. If they doubted their message, they would have to doubt their own conversion. So he says, "Take a look at your life, has it been transformed? If it's been transformed it was the truth of Christ that transformed it and I'm the one that preached that to you. If you test yourselves, if you examine yourself to see if you're in the faith and you find that you are genuine Christians, then you certainly can't doubt that I had Christ

speaking in me." It's exactly his point.

In 1 Corinthians 9 chapter 9 verse 2 he said earlier to them, his first letter, "If to others I am not an apostle, some people might not think I'm an apostle, at least I am to you...why?...for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord." You're the proof of it. You stamp the seal of authenticity on my apostleship by virtue of your transformed lives. He said essentially the same thing in 2 Corinthians 3:2, that was 1 Corinthians 9:2, this is 2 Corinthians 3:2, "You are our letter written in our hearts, known and read by all men being manifested that you are a letter of Christ cared for by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts." In other words, the authenticity...they were saying, "Well he doesn't have any letters, he doesn't have any commendation letters, he doesn't have any official documents." And Paul says, "Look, you're my official document. You are the letter that people read and can affirm the validity of my apostleship." You can't conclude that you have been genuinely transformed, that Christ is in you and I'm not legitimate because I've brought Christ's message to you. That's the point here. A tremendous truth.

The bottom line is any preachers, any pastors authenticity is verified most notably by the lives of the people to whom he ministers. Test yourselves, *peirazo*, it means to examine, to prove, examine yourselves, *dokimazo*, two words used as synonyms here. The synonym "examine you" is a very familiar one in the New Testament, do an inventory to find out if you're true. Check yourselves out. Test your hearts. Examine yourselves. What are you going to find out? Because what you find out has immense implications for me.

Now, what are they looking for? Verse 5, "To see if you are in the faith. "The faith" means the Christian faith, it's objective. If you're in the faith, if you're in the Kingdom, if you truly belong to God, objective, if you're a true Christian. Check yourself.

Now this is very important what I'm going to say here, very, very important. All of this is but this notably unique, I think, to understand. It is crucial to remember this that in this context Paul is calling for a self-examination, listen carefully, which he is sure will reveal that they are true Christians. In other words, he's literally putting his apostleship on the line on the basis that he is sure they're genuine believers. "Go ahead...he says...I will put the authenticity of my apostleship on the back of your self-evaluation. I'll rise or fall with it." He was that sure that when they did the inventory they would conclude that they were true Christians and therefore he had to be a true apostle because they were Christians by virtue of his ministry.

And you know what that tells me? That tells me that Paul expected them to find themselves genuinely transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ. He expected that. And, beloved, I want you to know this, he knew them and he knew they were Christians and you can know when someone's a Christian. You can know that. It's...it's not mysterious. There are some people that you may not

know it about but you can know that someone is a Christian. He knew it about them. He didn't have any hesitation about that. He knew their lives. He knew there was no explanation for the transformation apart from the power of Jesus Christ. This is one of the great New Testament texts to affirm that one can know if he has genuinely been born again. This idea that has been largely perpetuated by the Roman Catholic Church that you never know until you die is foreign to the New Testament. You can know. This is not some mystery to somehow be disclosed after death and you sort of die wondering whether it's going to be hell, purgatory or heaven, but not being sure of any of those. Paul is really saying...Look, you know very well you're in the faith, I know very well you're in the faith, what in the world are you doing questioning my authority when you know your lives have been transformed by the message which I preached and it was Christ who preached it through me otherwise it wouldn't have transformed your life?

You can't question Paul's apostleship if you look at his results. You know you're in the faith. He gets sarcastic about it, he's so upset. Verse 5, "Or do you not recognize this about yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you?" That's sarcastic. Is it so hard that you can't even see that Jesus Christ is in you? That's sarcasm. Of course, it was obvious, that's why he says sarcastically, do you not recognize what is most apparent? The most apparent thing about you is that your life has been transformed. You know you're in the faith. You know that Christ is in you. "If any man be in Christ he's...what?...a new creation, old things are passed away, new things have come." You know that. And by that very knowledge you know Christ has spoken through me, the very Christ who transformed you.

This isn't some mystery. In fact, he says back in 2 Corinthians 4:2 that the truth has been commended to their consciences. He says the same thing in chapter 5 verse 11. Their conscience...their conscience responded to what they knew about their own genuine conversion and about Paul's true apostleship. Why in the world would they believe the lies of these false teachers? So foolish. True salvation, beloved, is recognizable. It's perceivable. I certainly don't go through my life saying, "Oh, am I a Christian or am I not a Christian? Oh, I don't know if I'm a Christian...I'm not sure." I...there's no explanation for my life except that Christ has transformed it. There's no explanation for my attitude toward sin and my attitude toward righteousness. There's no explanation for why I commit my life to the teaching of God's truth. There's no explanation for why I want to praise and rejoice in the Lord. There's no explanation for that other than the Lord has transformed my heart. True salvation is perceivable, it's recognizable. You can look at your life and see it. You can know that Jesus Christ is in you because you've been transformed, you've been born again...all that means is you're a new person. He was so certain that these believers would validate their true conversion that he put his apostleship to that test and he is sure that their self-examination will reveal that they're converted and they're converted because he preached the truth. And if they were authentic, then he was authentic.

But, verse 5, he does have to say, "Unless indeed you fail the test." Indeed meaning in fact, or in truth. Some of you might be *adokimos*, unqualified, disqualified, despised, unworthy, reprobate, that's what that word means. Some of you are going to fail the test. You're going to do the inventory, it's possible to fail. It is possible to fail. There are those people in the church, some of them are here this morning as always, Christ is not in them. By the way, "Jesus Christ is in you" is a great truth, isn't it? "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he's none of His," Romans says. "Christ lives in you," Galatians 2:20. "The life you live is really Christ living in you." And this man...this presence of Jesus Christ in you and in me produces manifest discernable transformation called new creation.

And then in verse 6 he says, "Now, when you've done the inventory and passed the test, I trust that you will then realize that we ourselves do not fail the test." If you don't fail the test, then I don't fail it either. If you're authentic, I'm authentic. If you're a true Christian, then I was a true preacher. Understood? Now it is possible that some of you can fail the test. The genuineness of any preacher is tied to his followers. That's why Jesus in Matthew 7:16 said, "By their fruits you shall...what?...know them." You look at somebody who says they're a prophet and where's the prophet's garb and they're inwardly a wolf, look at their followers. Look at the people that follow them. You'll know them by their followers. The credentials of any pastor are his people. Their lives are the evidence of whether or not Christ has spoken through him. Hosea said, "Like people, like priest." Jesus said, "And when a man is fully discipled, he will be like his teacher."

And what about you? I say to you, test yourselves, examine yourselves. If you were asked to do that and I'm asking you to do that, what tests do you apply? I'm asking you to see if there's evidence that the power of Christ has changed your life. I'm asking you to determine your true spiritual condition. What are you looking for? If I say test yourselves, examine yourselves, what are you going to look for?

Somebody might say, "Well, I prayed a prayer x-number of years ago." That's not it. That is not a valid basis on which to test your spiritual condition.

You say, "Yeah, but it was very emotional and I asked Jesus to come into my heart." Still not valid.

You say, "When I was very small and my parents were there..." Still not valid.

You say, "Actually I was in a revival and I walked an aisle in an invitation." Not valid. Not valid.

Verbalizing a prayer and physically walking an aisle, "But I was very emotional. I cried." Not valid. "I laughed." Not valid either.

Somebody says, "Well actually I was baptized. I was baptized. I was even immersed, I was..." Not valid.

"I go to church. I've gone to church. I've been in church for years." Not valid.

"I really have good feelings about God and I really believe in God and I have good feelings about Jesus." Not valid.

None of that has any bearing whatsoever on the authenticity of your conversion.

You say, "Well then what am I looking for?"

I'm going to give you five things, I'm only going to mention them and tonight in our communion service I'm going to go through them more carefully in preparation for the Lord's table where we are called, aren't we, to examine ourselves?

Here are the five things you need to look for:

Number one, penitence. You don't ever look for something in the past, you look for something in the present. The first thing is an attitude of penitence. Jesus said, remember, in the Beatitudes, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn over their sin and are meek," Matthew 5:3 to 5. The first thing you look for is an attitude of penitence toward sin, repentance toward sin, disdain for sin. You cannot continue in sin, 1 John says, and call yourself God's child. You're going to be like Paul, you're going to see sin in your life but you're not going to like it. Romans 7 Paul said, "I see things in my life I hate." You're going to confess your sin, you're going to acknowledge your sin. There's going to be an attitude of penitence.

Secondly, righteousness. You're going to be characterized not only by penitence but by righteousness. Remember when Jesus said you're never going to be in My Kingdom unless your righteousness exceeds that of...whom?...the scribes and the Pharisees. Now theirs was purely external righteousness, they just went through external ceremonial things, external moral and social things. But the kind of righteousness that the Lord looks for, the kind that belongs to people in His Kingdom is not an external righteousness, but an internal one. And what that means is the love of doing what is right. If you're truly Christ's you love righteousness, you love what's right. It's far more than the superficial righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. It's doing what is right from the heart. You long to do what's right.

The third key word is submission. You eagerly, gladly, joyfully, happily submit to the lordship of Jesus Christ. You count the cost, you pay the price, you yield up your life, you give all you have if need be, the opposite of what the rich young ruler was willing to do. You count the cost. You make whatever

sacrifice because nothing...nothing is as valuable as the lordship of Christ in your life. You gladly proclaim Him your sovereign and joyfully follow Him whatever He asks. That's your heart cry, even though you sometimes aren't willing as you ought, that's your deepest longing.

The fourth word is obedience. The truth of God's Word is compelling to you and you're not just a hearer of it, you're a doer of it. You say, "Oh how I love Your law," Scripture compels you, you love to be obedient to it.

Penitence, righteousness, submission, obedience and the fifth word is love. Your life is marked by love for God and love for God's people...love to the Lord and love to other people who are in Christ.

You can't ever verify your salvation on the basis of a past event or events no matter how emotional, ecclesiastical they were. When you look for the inventory, this is what you're looking for, an attitude of penitence toward sin, a pursuit, a hunger and thirst after righteousness, a willing and joyous submission to the lordship of Christ, a longing to obey the Word and a compelling love toward God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, other believers. That's what identifies you as being in the faith and evidences that Christ is in you. Now tonight we're going to expand on those.

Father, thank You again for this great Word to us, and we are concerned, we are profoundly and deeply concerned about the authenticity of Your church. We're concerned about the fact that the church is very often filled with people who are not spiritually alive and that's, of course, the most critical thing. I pray that Your pastors and shepherds across this world will be concerned about the authenticity of their people and then they can concentrate on repentance and discipline and authority, obedience and maturity. Father, thank You for Your clear Word to us, and oh how I pray, O God, for any here who are not true Christians, who stand in that dangerous place of having been exposed to the gospel, having understood it, perhaps even understanding that it is true and yet have not embraced Christ and are in danger of the deceitfulness of sin, the hardness of heart, the falling away that leads to a more severe punishment. O Father, save those souls even today for Your glory and the honor of Christ we pray. Amen.

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