

Bold, Part 23: “Examine Yourself”
2 Corinthians 13:1-10
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[SERMON MANUSCRIPT]

Introduction

We are almost done with our study in the book of 2 Corinthians- we’re in the last chapter with today’s Scripture from 2 Corinthians 13:1-10. The title of this sermon is “Examine Yourself.”

This passage is actually connected to the end of chapter 12: Paul reiterated his defense as a true apostle (12:11-13) and then shared how he and his team had served them with a sincere love and integrity for their sake (12:14-18). Then in chapter 12, verses 19-21, Paul warned the remaining few in the church who were still rebellious towards Paul to repent of their sins. He argued that he spoke in Christ in order to build them up- and this all out of a proper fear of God. He feared that some of them would remain in conflict with him and that he would have to exercise discipline if they remained unrepentant in their sins.

Paul called the church to be devoted to the apostle’s teaching, especially in repentance towards Christ, and continued this thought in chapter 13. In chapter 13, he warned the Corinthians to listen to his teaching and then to humbly examine themselves in a way that was consistent with what they believed about the gospel. If they listened to Paul and humbled themselves before the Lord, they would instead experience the joy of restoration that is possible by the grace of God.

Scripture Reading

Go ahead and find this Scripture in your Bibles and then I’ll read it aloud for us. It will also be on the slide in front of you to read along with me. This is the Word of God:

2 Corinthians 13:1-10 (ESV):

1 This is the third time I am coming to you. Every charge must be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. 2 I warned those who sinned before and all the others, and I warn them now while absent, as I did when present on my second visit, that if I come again I will not spare them— 3 since you seek proof that Christ is speaking in me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you. 4 For he was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but in dealing with you we will live with him by the power of God.

5 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! 6 I hope you will find out that we have not failed the test. 7 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. 8 For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. 9 For we are glad when we are weak and you are strong. Your restoration is what we pray for. 10 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.

Amen!

Proposition

The “one thing” in my sermon is always the main overall message of that particular text of Scripture. So the “one thing” for today’s sermon is Paul’s main message to the Corinthian church in the first century as well as to our church today:

Yield to discipline and examine yourself

in light of Christ, which leads to restoration.

Organizational Statement

Throughout this passage, we can see Paul exhorting the church in Corinth into this process that has three steps: 1) first, Christ-centered **discipline** in verses 1-4; 2) second, Christ-centered **self-examination** in verses 5-7; and 3) third, Christ-centered **restoration** in verses 8-10.

I need to just mention a note here: These three steps are not a magical, formulaic three-step process or anything, but it's how Paul presented the path to experiencing restoration in this Scripture to the church. We'll work through these three steps and I'll highlight a related timeless principle for us in each.

Transition: May we **yield to discipline and examine ourselves in light of Christ, which leads to restoration** by experiencing the first step...

Sermon Outline

I. From verses 1-4: Christ-Centered Discipline.

2 Corinthians 13:1-4 (ESV): *1 This is the third time I am coming to you. Every charge must be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. 2 I warned those who sinned before and all the others, and I warn them now while absent, as I did when present on my second visit, that if I come again I will not spare them— 3 since you seek proof that Christ is speaking in me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you. 4 For he was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but in dealing with you we will live with him by the power of God.*

A. Paul warned the Corinthian church one final time that what he said and did was from Christ.

1. [Here's the timeless principle that comes out of this first part of the passage...] **Timeless Principle #1:** Discipline that is exercised properly is a powerful means of grace for the church.
 - a) Once again, Paul told the Corinthians here in verse 1 that he planned on visiting Corinth for a third time. There were still some people within the Corinthian church who chose to follow the false apostles and reject Paul's authority and teaching about how to follow Christ. They stubbornly remained in their sins of quarreling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder (this was from 12:20); they also refused to repent of the impurity, sexual immorality, and sensuality that they were involved in (this was from 12:21).
 - b) In anticipation of this third visit, Paul invoked Jesus' teaching about church discipline from Matthew 18:
 - o Matthew 18:15-17 (ESV): *15 "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. 16 But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. 17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector."*

What Jesus said is that the first step of settling disputes or disciplining each other in the church is for the direct witness to confront the offender privately, one-on-one. Second, if the offender doesn't listen, then the witness should bring another one or two people to confront him again. Then eventually, if the offender refuses to take responsibility and repent for his sins (even after bringing it up to the elders of the church), the final

step that the church and its leaders were supposed to do was to remove the offending person from the church.

- c) Context: Now what's important to know is that the goal of discipline at every step of the process is *not* to punish and condemn someone who has done wrong. The three-fold goal of discipline is always positive. It is to uphold the honor of Christ and the church's witness to the world; it is also to protect the rest of the church from the negative influences of unbiblical thinking and behaving. It is also for that person to be restored in their relationship with the Lord. In this final step of removing someone from the church (which is called excommunication), the hope is that this person would realize their sins when they are no longer able to fellowship with the church and are left alone to fully indulge in their sins. Just like the prodigal son in Jesus' parable (Luke 15:11-32), that excommunicated person would see the folly of his ways and repent!
 - d) So Paul recapped the history between himself and the Corinthian church in verse 2. First, *I warned those who sinned before and all the others*. There were all sorts of relational conflicts like factions within the congregation, disorderly gatherings, and lawsuits. There was also confused theology and wrong teaching about pagan practices, marriage and divorce, spiritual gifts, and the bodily resurrection. So Paul wrote them letters to try to get some of these issues straightened out. At one point he sent Timothy on his behalf to visit them, and Timothy reported that the mess in the church was getting worse. This caused Paul to go to Corinth himself- which was the "second visit" that Paul referred to in verse 2.
 - e) So he had already "warned" those who were rebelling and disobeying Christ and brought it up with the church; he "warned" them a second time- but it was such a disastrous visit that Paul had to leave the city without resolving the issues. And even though most of the church eventually accepted Paul's correction over this time (which overjoyed him), there were still some who did not and he wrote this regarding these unrepentant ones in verses 2-3: *...if I come I will not spare them, since you seek proof that Christ is speaking in me*. This was the final warning for them as he'd gone through a long series of warnings. Paul said that this final discipline would be forceful, after being patient for so long; he would have to lead the Corinthian church in removing these unrepentant people from among them.
 - f) Paul made sure to be clear to explain that he too was *weak in him* (that is, in Christ): he was not better than anyone but was prone to sin just like anyone and everyone else. Remember, one of Paul's life lessons was that Christ's power was made perfect in his weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9-10)! He was content in those situations that made him see his true weakness, because that was when the grace of God manifested most powerfully in his life. In this sense, his weakness was a means of grace.
 - g) This is the key statement in verse 4: *For he was crucified in weakness but lives by the power of God*. Paul reminded the Corinthians that this was Jesus' ministry to them: Jesus made himself weak by becoming a servant; he made himself nothing and was obedient to the point of death on the cross (Philippians 2:8). In this way, Jesus was *crucified in weakness*. But this is good news for people who acknowledge their weakness, because the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ is the power of God that makes his forgiveness, his justification (that is, being made legally right before God), and his new life available to people!
2. [This brings us back to the timeless principle for this first part...] **Timeless principle #1:** Discipline that is exercised properly is a powerful means of grace for the church.
- a) Context: One huge mistake we often make in not exercising discipline properly according to Matthew 18 is when we don't address the offender directly and personally but talk about the issue and the person to *others* instead. Exercising discipline properly also means being soberminded yourself (as Jesus said, taking out the log out of your own eye before pointing out the speck in your friend's eye). It also means speaking the

truth in love: bringing the truth up to your brother or sister in Christ because you love them! This is extremely important because so often we don't bring issues up to people when we see them because we feel insecure about doing so.

- b) Context: Now, when we're on the receiving end of discipline, we must be humble and honest with ourselves! Whatever the motives or tone of the person bringing up the issue to you, have a keen ear for the *truth* of what he is saying! Think about the warning signal in a car. *Show car-warning-signals.jpg*. The point of the warning signals that turn on in my car- the "engine warning light," "low fuel indicator," or "oil pressure warning light"- is to tell me that something is possibly not right with my car! If I ignore a warning signal that goes off, something really bad could happen (like running out of fuel while driving- which has happened to me a few times). Discipline is a warning signal for us that something is possibly not right with our lives- and we should check it out before we really get off the rails! In this way, discipline is a "means of grace": it is a way that people can experience the grace of God in their lives (as I'll explain further later).

Transition: May we *yield to discipline and examine ourselves in light of Christ, which leads to restoration* by experiencing the first step of Christ-centered discipline and then the second step...

II. From verses 5-7: Christ-Centered Self-Examination.

2 Corinthians 13:5-7 (ESV): *5 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! 6 I hope you will find out that we have not failed the test. 7 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.*

A. Paul challenged the Corinthian church to humbly examine themselves in order to see their sin.

1. [Here's the timeless principle that comes out of this second part of the passage...] **Timeless Principle #2:** Self-examination is measuring yourself with God's Word and listening to the Holy Spirit.
 - a) This is the pivot point between Christ-centered discipline and Christ-centered restoration: it's Christ-centered self-examination. Verse 5 is the crux of Paul's message to the Corinthians: *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?* The words "examine" and "test" here mean to prove the worth or genuineness of something. They were to examine and test the genuineness of their faith in Christ.
 - b) This is really ironic if you think about it because many in the church had been challenging the genuineness of Paul's apostolic authority as he tried to speak against the sins that had crept up. Paul set the record straight, after he proved the authenticity of his apostleship, that he wasn't just defending himself, but he was urging them in Christ for their sake to repent (2 Corinthians 12:19)!
 - c) He restated his challenge here in verse 5. If they would only step back again and think clearly about this: they would consider Paul's authority as an apostle who spoke the Word of God to them; they would listen to the words of the Lord Jesus Christ (for, as Paul said, if Jesus was really in them this would happen!); they would look at their lives and realize they were not living consistently in Christ's will. Paul hoped that this realization would lead them to godly sorrow and then repentance- a change of heart towards the Lord again.
 - d) If the Corinthians chose the other course of action, it would be revealing as well. In Paul's words, it would be that they failed to meet the test. What this meant was that if they chose not to listen to the words of Christ and the Holy Spirit within them, it would only confirm what was unfortunately true about them. Their disobedience and refusal to repent of their sins would indicate that they were actually *not* genuine Christians at

all. The discipline exercised properly would be clarifying for them (so that they would not have a false assurance of salvation and false confidence in their status before God) and for the church (so they would no longer be unduly influenced by them).

- e) Paul was not just “rubbing it in their faces” but he spoke out of deep love and concern. He reiterated that he would not be happy if they failed the test. He said in verse 6, *I hope you will find out that we have not failed the test.* If I were to rephrase this, what he meant was, “If you don’t listen to the words of Christ that were taught by me (as an apostle) and my team, and if you don’t examine yourselves, then this is a loss for *all* of us.” He told them in verse 7 that his prayers for them were that they would go beyond just believing Paul’s authenticity as an apostle (not just meeting this test) but also that they would *do what is right* (that is, test themselves in light of the words of Jesus and yield to the Holy Spirit within them).
2. [This brings us back to the timeless principle for this second part...] **Timeless Principle #2:** Self-examination is measuring yourself with God’s Word and listening to the Holy Spirit.
- a) Illustration: Self-examination is very, very important. Let me explain why by comparing it to routine health screenings. We’re coming to understand that routine health screenings are so important right? These are ways that we check for stuff like high cholesterol or blood pressure, diabetes, breast cancer, prostate cancer, or osteoporosis. It is a way to check for serious health conditions or diseases *before* they get too serious and *while* they are much easier to treat. Routine health screenings can literally save lives!
- b) Illustration: Tragically, there are too many people who make all kinds of excuses and find themselves diagnosed too late with serious health conditions! If only they had done those examinations that would’ve caught their disease early enough to have been treated successfully. I’m reaching the stage of life when I seriously have to think about these kinds of health examinations! But there are reasons that I have that prevent me from doing them: like overestimating my own health (or my ability to determine whether I’m healthy or not); being in denial that I need these tests at all; having irrational fears of doctors or needles and such; or just thinking that I’m too busy to make room in my schedule for them.
- c) Context: I would say that the reasons why I avoid routine health screenings are also why we might avoid self-examination. For some of us, it’s overestimating ourselves and thinking that we already know our own spiritual health- it’s our pride! For some of us, it’s being in denial that we have any sin issues in our lives and hearts at all- we don’t want to face them! For some of us, it’s having a fear of really getting deep down into our hearts and confronting those deep-seated issues- the process is too painful or scary for us! For some of us, we just don’t give ourselves the opportunity- the time or space- to really look at what’s going on beneath the surface. Can I ask you to pause and think about what keeps you from honest, humble self-examination?
- d) Context: Another important part of self-examination is measuring yourself with God’s Word, not just with what you think is right or what others think is right! When we measure ourselves with God’s Word, it reveals the holiness of God (that he is infinitely more righteous and just than we ever thought) and it also reveals the depravity of our hearts (that every part of our actions, motives, desires, and thoughts are corrupted with sin). God’s Word points everyone to the gospel of Jesus Christ: he loves sinners; he forgives any and all sin; he credits us with his righteousness before God; he gives us new hearts that love and obey God; and he puts the Holy Spirit in us as a security deposit for eternity!
- e) Context: If we truly have faith and are disciples of Jesus, we trust that we have the Holy Spirit in us to help us in this process of self-examination. He’s already in you- this is a grace of God that you can trust!

- o John 14:15-17 (ESV): 15 *“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. 16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, 17 even the Spirit of truth... You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.*

You love Jesus, you will obey Jesus; the Holy Spirit dwells in you to help you live in the truth! Self-examination that is Christ-centered is *Spirit-led* and leads us to these conclusions and helps us to land on the Rock of our salvation for the mercy and grace that we need. This is what Paul is doing in this Scripture. If discipline is like the “warning signal” that alarms us that something might be wrong, then Christ-centered self-examination is honestly and humbly doing the check-ups in our hearts and lives- testing whether they consistent with what the Bible says about his holiness, our sinfulness, and the hope in his salvation that is found in Christ.

Transition: May we *yield to discipline and examine ourselves in light of Christ, which leads to restoration* by experiencing the first step of Christ-centered discipline, the second step of Christ-centered self-examination, and finally the third step...

III. From verses 8-10: Christ-Centered Restoration.

2 Corinthians 13:8-10 (ESV): 8 *For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. 9 For we are glad when we are weak and you are strong. Your restoration is what we pray for. 10 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.*

A. Paul shared his heart to the Corinthians that the end goal was for them to be restored in Christ.

1. [Here’s the timeless principle that comes out of this third part of the passage...] **Timeless Principle #3:** The gospel, when applied in our lives, leads to experiencing Christ’s restoration.
 - a) Look at Paul’s resolution as he passionately shared these final words to the Corinthians. Here’s verse 8 first: *For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth.* So you see here, Paul was constrained by the truth- he lived in the truth of the gospel and he led others to live in the truth of the gospel as well. This included the Corinthian church, even though some resisted his exhortations and rebukes to do so.
 - b) He went on to say in verse 9: *For we are glad when we are weak and you are strong. Your restoration is what we pray for.* Paul wanted the Corinthians to be strong in the grace and power of Christ, even if it meant for Paul and his team to be weak: allowing their reputations to be questioned and challenged by others; spending a lot of their time, energy, money, and tears; and causing them to pray and cry out to the Lord to change their hearts. The Corinthians would be truly strong if their faith was solidly on Jesus Christ, which was what Paul ultimately wanted.
 - c) What he wrote here is his end goal: *Your restoration is what we pray for.* He had exercised Christ-centered discipline many times with the Corinthian church. This led them to Christ-centered self-examination, measuring themselves with God’s Word (this is the truth!) and listening to the Holy Spirit (who would prick their consciences with the truth!). And the end goal to centering their faith in Christ was *Christ-centered restoration!* Restoration is an awesome part of the gospel!
 - d) The word “restoration” can be understood this way to catch the right meaning: “that all might be right with you” or “that all might be put in order.” It’s the way things are supposed to be! When the Corinthians would allow the gospel to work within them- submitting to Christ-centered discipline and doing some honest, humble Christ-centered self-examination- there is genuine change within them!
 - e) Remember all those issues in the Corinthian church? Restoration of the relational conflicts could look like this: the factions within the church would melt and there would

be a sweet unity of heart and mind instead; the disorderly gatherings would be replaced by times full of loving and building up one another; the lawsuits riddling the church would be settled and people would resolve their problems constructively and graciously on their own. Restoration of theological confusion and wrong teaching could look like this: mixing in pagan practices would be seen with biblical clarity and conviction; broken marriages and easy divorce would transform into healthy, God-reflecting marriages that fought to stay together; the proud, self-serving practice of spiritual gifts would be eclipsed with loving and diverse service of one another for the glory of Christ and edification of the church body. Wouldn't these things be awesome to experience in our church too?

- f) Paul reiterated his purpose in verse 10: *For this reason (their restoration) 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.* He has been writing them- and wrote them now- to disciple them; he really did not want to exert his apostolic authority and have the church remove them from their congregation. He used this authority to build up the Corinthian church, not to tear them down. Actually it's really important to see that the only way here that he could tear them down was to *not do anything*- not speak up or discipline them. He was building them up by disciplining the few who were causing the problems and dishonoring the name of Christ; he was building them up by exhorting them to move towards restoration in Christ.
2. [This brings us back to the timeless principle for this third and final part] **Timeless Principle #3:** The gospel, when applied in our lives, leads to experiencing Christ's restoration.
- a) Context: Here's one real-life connection for us. We're still doing tons of premarital counseling- which is a big praise God for our churches- in which we spend a lot of time teaching future husbands and wives how to resolve conflicts. We tell couples that conflicts are inevitable when in deep, real relationships. And actually conflict is the price couples pay for greater intimacy, as long as they learn how to come to a win-win resolution. In other words, the restoration of the marriage relationship produces greater intimacy, cherishing, and love for each other.
- b) Context: I would also say that conflicts are inevitable when deep, real relationships happen in church- which is supposed to happen in church! And actually conflict is the price churches also pay for greater intimacy, as we learn how to resolve them in light of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The restoration of relationships with fellow brothers and sisters in Christ as spiritual family produces greater intimacy with each other, accepting and even appreciating others' differences, and loving and cherishing one another. And even more so, the restoration of relationship with the Lord- after we go through this process of Christ-centered discipline, self-examination, and restoration- produces greater intimacy with the Lord Jesus, appreciation of the holiness and glory of God, and pure, undivided love for him!
- c) Context: There are lots of people that I don't naturally click with or that I've gotten into conflict with. For example, one time I was venting to my wife about someone with whom I had just had a heated conversation. Surprisingly, she was not on my side, but told me that I was reacting defensively and not really understanding that other person's perspective. Those words of "informal discipline" to me stung my pride a bit, but after some self-examination, the Holy Spirit helped me see that she was right- I was reacting defensively and not trying to really understand that other person's perspective. There is Scripture that says to "put on kindness, humility, meekness, and patience" (Colossians 3:12). I repented and followed up with that person, apologizing sincerely. To be honest, the issue wasn't fully resolved right away and it took a while for the relationship to improve, but I can truly say that I respect and love this person. The restoration I experienced was not only involved changing underlying heart-issues in myself, but also gaining a stronger friendship with this person in Christ!

- d) **Context:** This kind of restoration can happen in our own hearts and can also happen in relationships! Restoration effects the entire church! Imagine if all of us were committed to this process: proper, biblical, truth-in-love discipline (sometimes formal but more often informal); then humble and honest self-examination measured by the Word of God and yielded to the Holy Spirit; ending in restoration that leads to greater love for Christ and for others! What a beautiful, healthy, Christ-centered church we'd be!

Transition: May we *examine ourselves in accordance with faith in Christ, which leads to restoration* by experiencing Christ-centered discipline, Christ-centered self-examination, and Christ-centered restoration. Now let's conclude with the...

Conclusion

IV. Life Application

A. Here are the next steps that we can take in light of what we've learned from 2 Corinthians 13:1-10...

1. Humbly participate in Christ-centered discipline within the church, trusting in Christ's restoring power in us and others.
 - a) We "give" and we "take" Christ-centered discipline! Be committed to speaking the truth in love to your brothers and sisters in Christ- after humbly examining your own heart and life. Also, be committed to receiving Christ-centered discipline when it comes up in your life- with a humble heart that doesn't make excuses, doesn't get personally offended, and that listens carefully. Let's start this process and keep in mind that end goal of experiencing Christ-centered restoration in our lives.
2. Honestly examine yourself with God's Word, listening to the Holy Spirit, trusting in Christ's restoring power in us and others.
 - a) Let's also take that second step when the ball is in our own courts. Confront the ugly truth regarding your own heart, motives, thoughts, and actions by looking into the Scriptures and by yielding to what the Holy Spirit convicts you about. This is a great thing to exercise practically in our LIFE groups! It'll take some time, but at the right times, the price that we'll need to pay for that Christ-centered restoration is by humbly participating in Christ-centered discipline, then honestly examining ourselves with God's Word and listening to the Spirit!

Transition: Praise God for his Word, amen? And what a great tie-in to what we'll be doing together by observing the Lord's Supper today. The Lord's Supper is a visual display of the gospel that we profess we believe and stake our lives upon. Jesus' body that was broken for us and Jesus' blood that was poured out for us is God's gracious provision to restore us with him and with one another!

So at this time, can we examine ourselves in light of Christ? What sins do we need to confess and repent for with the Lord? What relationships need to be mended? Let's take this ordinance seriously, church, and examine ourselves in preparation for the Lord's Supper.

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