

2 Cor 13:1-6 Do You Pass the Test?

Paul is the father of the church at Corinth. One of his main concerns is that the people of the church were in danger of failing the test. He urges them to test themselves (vs. 5) to see if they are in the faith. Paul seems to have considerable doubt regarding the spiritual condition of the people of that church. In the previous section (12:20-21), Paul had listed sins of the spirit and sins of the flesh the people were guilty of. They had continued this practice of unrepentant sin. Their sins had threatened the unity and the purity of the church. And because of their sins, Paul was threatening stern and severe rebuke when he arrives for his next visit.

So this is a serious warning to the Corinthian church. If the spiritual condition of the church remains as it is, he will come in and take drastic measures. There's going to be a fight between him and the false teachers; he's ready to clean house if they don't clean it up first.

All of us should take heed to Paul's command here to test ourselves and see where we are spiritually. If we pass the test, we have good reason to be assured of our salvation. If we fail the test, we have good reason to question our salvation.

Let's consider the instructions here regarding how to pass the test.

- I. .1-2, 6 Submit to legitimate spiritual leadership.
 - A. Spiritual leaders persevere in their commitment to the church.
 1. .1 They have multiple interactions. He's planning to visit them for the third time.

He quotes from a familiar passage in the OT law (Deut 19:15). That passage has to do with proving things in a court of law. In cases where there were two or three witnesses of a crime, the punishment followed. The evidence of guilt called for judgment. So the implication is that the church at Corinth is ripe for judgment because of their sin. Paul is going to take decisive action when he arrives if they don't repent.
 2. .2 They have multiple communications.
 - a) .2a He's writing the same thing he said before, at his second visit. He's warned them and rebuked them for these sins previously, yet there has been no change.

- b) .2b He's writing to those who have "sinned before." Many of them were guilty of the sins that he's listed (12:21b). He's ready to pass judgment on them.
- c) "all the rest" would be others in the church who had compromised, perhaps those guilty of the sins listed in 12:20b.
- d) So this is a stern warning that he's going to be harsh in his authority of they don't repent.

And speaking of harshness or severity...

B. .2end Spiritual leaders may have to discipline the unrepentant with sternness/severity.

- 1. "I will not spare." (φείδομαι) – to avoid, to refrain, to keep oneself from something.
 - a) In 2 Cor 1:23, he had said that he had not re-visited them in order to spare them. He had avoided another visit thus far because he did not want to be harsh and severe with them. He was hoping that they would solve their own problems.
 - b) But now Paul is ready to visit and he's not going to refrain from the work that needed to be done. He's resolved to deal with the issues head-on. He's going to deal very severely with the false teachers and those continuing in unrepentant sinful behavior.

App: Spiritual leaders generally want to spare people from harsh and severe rebuke. They want to persuade gently and rebuke softly.

If people would respond to mild suggestions and gentle recommendations, pastors could avoid harsh discipline. Most pastors want to avoid harsh and severe measures.

But when it's necessary, the church must deal sternly with unrepentant sin, especially flagrant, habitual immorality and divisive behavior. Many churches never exercise church discipline, or they are very lenient and indulgent regarding the sins of the people. But here Paul shows us that, in some cases, the proper action is severe, stern rebuke for those who threaten the unity or purity of the church. We don't spare them.

If a pastor exercises stern rebuke, it's probably because gentle suggestions and mild warnings have not worked. Cf. Mt 18:16-17.

2. .3 Paul's next visit would demonstrate that Christ is powerfully speaking through him.
 - a) .3a Paul's critics in the church were seeking proof that Christ was "speaking in [Paul]." This could be translated as "by me" or "through me." (ἐν ἐμοὶ λαλοῦντος χριστοῦ) Apostles were spokesmen for Christ. Paul was an ambassador for Christ.
 - b) But some in the church were calling into question his apostleship, his apostolic authority. The false teachers were questioning or denying Paul's apostolic credentials.
 - c) Paul was ready to demonstrate that Christ was speaking through him. And Christ speaking through him would be "not weak toward you but mighty in you."

Paul was promising that when he showed up, he would demonstrate his authoritative power as an apostle of Christ. If they want proof of that authority, they'll see it when Paul arrives and deals with the sin in the church sharply and decisively.

App: Pastors are not apostles, but they speak as a representative of Christ. They proclaim the Word of God authoritatively. They are responsible to protect the purity and unity of the church. Sometimes pastors have to proclaim God's word powerfully and sharply. We'd rather be gentle and mild about it, but in some cases, we must sternly apply the authority of God's word.

- C. .6 Spiritual leaders are qualified. They must pass the test.
 1. The word "disqualified" or "reprobate" (ἀδόκιμος) means "lacking value, proven worthless, failing the test." Something disqualified is counterfeit, discredited; it flunks.
 2. To be "not disqualified" means to be qualified, to pass the test. Paul and his co-workers were legitimate. They had passed the test. They had the credentials and authority to lead the church.

3. This statement is another warning that, when he arrives there, he will apply his apostolic authority to them. He's planning to demonstrate the fact that he is a qualified apostle; he's going to extend his apostolic authority on them, rebuking them soundly.

Titus 1:13 ... *rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith;*

App: The Bible provides a list of qualifications for spiritual leaders in 1 Tim 3 and in Titus. Churches must avoid calling people into ministry who lack qualifications, who fail the test, who are discredited. If unqualified people get into positions of authority within a church, what usually happens? They prove themselves to be counterfeit; they discredit themselves, blaspheme the name of Christ, and defile the good reputation of the church.

E.g., Some of the biggest names in the evangelical world have done exactly that—discredited themselves, proven themselves to be unqualified counterfeits, defiled the name of Christ.

Trans: So the first principle we find here is that, if we want to pass the test, we must follow qualified spiritual leaders.

- II. .3b-4 Understand that Christ's power is evident in human weakness.

One of the big problems in the church was that they judged Paul's gentleness and meekness as weakness. They didn't value humility; they appreciated power and self-confidence. So in their minds, Paul was weak.

Paul's point here is Christianity has elements of both human weakness and divine power.

- A. .3b Christ is "not weak toward you, but mighty in you." Paul reminds his readers here that they had experienced the power of Christ at their conversion and through the miracles they had seen. So they knew the power of Christ by experience—he was powerful, not weak.

- B. .4a Christ experienced human weakness.
1. The crucifixion is a demonstration of human weakness. Jesus had the power to avoid the cross, but he humbly subjected himself to sinful humans in order to save them. He laid down his life voluntarily in apparent weakness.
 2. Likewise, Paul may have seemed to be weak because of his physical infirmities and the persecution and suffering he'd endured. Paul was "weak in him" in that he shared the same kinds of suffering that Jesus did.

But that's not the end of the story.
- C. .4b Christ lives by God's power
1. The resurrection is a demonstration of God's power. Christ overcame physical death by the power of God. The cross led to the crown. He is now king of kings and lord of lords; he has all power. Every knee shall bow...
 2. From a worldly point of view, both Jesus and Paul appeared to be weak. But from God's point of view, both were strong.
 3. The point is that human weakness was not going to stop Paul from a strong response to their sin. Paul may appear to be weak, but he has the power of God and is going to respond powerfully to their disobedience.
- D. .4b All Christians are humanly "weak in him" but "live with him by the power of God."
1. Like Jesus, we are weak in the human flesh. We are subject to disease and death. From a human point of view, in comparison to powerful people, Christians often seem weak.

Quote: We are subject to infirmities and trials; we seem to have no power; we are exposed to contempt; and we appear to our enemies to be destitute of strength. Our enemies regard us as feeble; and they despise us.¹
 2. However, through God's power, we are strong.

2Co 12:9 ... My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.

¹ Barnes' Notes

3. .4end The power of God is currently effective “toward you.” Paul is full of the life and power of Christ, and he’s ready to exercise that power “toward you” (εἰς ὑμᾶς). If he has to rebuke, admonish, and chastise, he’s ready to do that. He’s fully capable of exercising his apostolic authority over them, and he’s threatening to do it if they don’t shape up.

Quote: Whatever weakness the Corinthians ascribe to Paul, they ought to recognize that behind Paul stands the omnipotent Christ, who will by no means permit the sins of the Corinthian church to run forever unchecked.²

Paul may appear to be weak, but he has the power of God. Christ stands behind qualified spiritual leaders and gives them the authority to deal with spiritual problems in the church.

III. .5 Examine your own spiritual condition.

The Corinthians had been scrutinizing Paul’s ministry; they’d been examining him and complaining about his supposed failures. But now Paul turns the tables and demands that the people examine themselves instead of examining him. “Why don’t you take a look at yourselves for a change.”

The way that they’ve been acting, there is good reason to fear that some of them had been deceived by the false teachers. Their sinful behavior and their bad theology brings their Christianity into question.

So he tells them to examine themselves, and we see three aspects of this:

A. .5 Examine your self.

1. The word “examine” (πειράζω)—to submit to a test, to demonstrate the true nature of something.
2. The word “test” (δοκιμάζω) means just about the same thing—put to the test, examine, try out. The word sometimes refers to assaying or trying metals to see if they are genuine.
3. And what is under examination/testing?
 - a) Examine “yourselves” – “yourselves” is emphasized here—lit., “yourselves examine.” Instead of focusing your critical gaze on others, you should test yourselves. You need to do some inner personal soul searching of yourself.

² Carson, 175.

- b) If they did not recognize Paul as Christ's apostle, there was something wrong with them. If they remained in unrepentant, habitual sin, there was something wrong. If they could follow the false teachers, there was something wrong.
- c) There was nothing wrong with Paul; there was something wrong with them. They ought to be able to see that.

App: It often happens that, when people point out the faults and failures of others, they fail to see their own faults and failures. They are critical in their examination of others, and very tolerant in their evaluation of themselves. That's what we call hypocrisy—strictly evaluating others while ignoring your own personal faults.

If we take a good look at ourselves, we would find plenty of faults and failures. Instead of examining others, perhaps we should spend more time and effort examining ourselves. Get the beam out of your own eye before worrying about the speck of dust in someone else's eye.

- B. .5 Examine your faith. "whether you are in the faith."
- 1. To be "in the faith" is to be a Christian. So he's questioning the validity of their profession of faith in Christ.
 - 2. This is a very serious charge. These people profess to have faith in Christ. They were boasting of their gifts and abilities as Christians. Yet Paul here brings their profession of faith into question. Why?
 - a) They should examine themselves because of the sin lists—vss. 12:20-21. Many were practicing these sins without repentance. When these kinds of sin are evident in a professing Christian's life, and there is no evidence of repentance, then there is good reason to question whether they are truly saved.
 - b) They should examine themselves because of the influence of the false teachers. When Christians follow false teachers instead of legitimate spiritual authorities, there is good reason to question whether they are truly saved.

- c) If they are questioning Paul's apostleship, there is good reason to question whether they were saved.
3. Paul tells his readers and us to "test yourselves." How do we test whether we are "in the faith"? I would suggest three tests:

a) Do you affirm the Gospel?

- (1) The person and work of X
- (2) Repentance and faith

Mk 1:15--Have you repented and believed the Gospel?

b) Is there evidence of good fruit in your life?

(1) A good tree brings forth good fruit—is there evidence of good works/fruit? What are some of these good fruits? We find several in 1 John—true believers

- (a) walk in the light (1:6-7). Christians are pursuing holiness and righteous living.
- (b) are sensitive about sin. We confess and forsake it (1:8-10).
- (c) are obedient (2:3-5, 29). The general trend or pattern in a genuine believer's life is obedience, not rebellion.
- (d) love the things of God rather than the things of the world (2:15-17).
- (e) love other believers (3:10-15, 5:1-2). I.e., the 2nd great command—love one another.
- (f) are committed to a doctrinally-sound church (2:19). True believers maintain unity with other believers in a church.
- (g) affirm sound doctrine (2:20-23). We know the truth; we affirm that Jesus is the Christ.

That's all good fruit; these are the evidences of salvation.

- (2) On the other hand, for a genuine believer, *bad* fruit is largely lacking. You are *not* a bad tree producing bad fruit. I.e., you are not indulging in habitual, unrepentant sinful behavior. You may stumble from time to time (James 3:2) but you are not consistently producing bad fruit.
- c) Does the Holy Spirit “bear witness” (Rom 8:16) that you are a child of God?
- (1) A believer will have evidence of the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control. If the Spirit is dwelling within you, this fruit should be evident.
 - (2) And a believer will have a calm, consistent inner sense that he is a child of God. The Spirit bears witness with our human spirit that we are members of God’s family—we are children of God.

So our assurance of salvation is both fact and feeling. The feeling of being saved comes from the facts of salvation. If you’ve believed the Gospel and if there is solid, biblical evidence of good fruit, then the inner assurance of salvation follows.

It is spiritually valuable to test ourselves, to see if our profession is consistent with our experience. When we compare our life, our behavior, and our attitudes with the Word of God, how well do we test? Do we prove to be genuine or counterfeit?

Barnes: The best way to [prove our faith] is to subject it to [actual trial] in the various duties and responsibilities of life. A man who wishes to [prove] an axe, to see whether it is good or not, does not sit down and look at it, or read all the treatises which he can find on axe-making, and on the properties of iron and steel, valuable as such information would be; [instead] he shoulders his axe, and goes into the woods, and puts it to the trial there. If it cuts well; if it does not break; if it is not soon made dull, he understands the quality of his axe better than he could in any other way.

So if a man wishes to know what his religion is worth, let him [put it to the test] in the places where religion is of any value. Let him go into the world with it. Let him go and try to do good; to endure affliction in a proper manner; to combat the errors and follies of life; to admonish sinners of the error of their ways; and to urge forward the great work of the conversion of the world, and he will soon see there what his religion is worth—as easily as a man can test the qualities of an axe.

What is the quality of your axe? That is, when you examine your faith, when you see how it works in the world, what do you find? Do you love God and others? Do you hate sin and repent of it? Do you pray? Do you walk humbly with God? If so, then you have good reason to believe that your faith is genuine. If not, then you don't have good reason to believe that your faith is genuine.

C. .5end Examine the evidence of your life.

What if the evidence points in the wrong direction? Vs. 5—you are “disqualified” (KJV has “reprobate”).

1. The word “disqualified” or “reprobate” (ἄδόκιμος) means “lacking value, proven worthless, failing the test.” You've tested the axe and found that it fails to perform as an axe should.

A disqualified person may *claim* to be a Christian, but there is nothing there to prove it. In fact, the evidence proves just the opposite. The evidence *for* salvation is lacking, and the evidence *against* salvation is convincing.

Matthew 7:17–18 ... ***a bad tree bears bad fruit. ... a bad tree [cannot] bear good fruit.***

That's a good description of what it means to be disqualified—lacking good fruit, bearing bad fruit.

- a) Spiritual speaking, to be disqualified means that you are *not* a genuine Christian. You may *claim* to be one, but the evidence points the other way.

It's like counterfeit money—it seems like real money, but upon close inspection, it's fake; it is disapproved—it proves to be worthless, it has no value; it fails the test.

- b) It does not matter how you *feel* about yourself if the *facts* show that you are disqualified. You may think that you are saved and even feel like you are saved, but if you prove to be a reprobate—if you produce bad fruit, if you fail the test—then you're not saved.
- c) So the implication here is that some of these people may not actually be saved. Perhaps many of them (12:21). Throughout the letter, Paul has spoken to them as if they are genuinely saved. But here at the very end, when he has exposed their unrepentant sin, he holds out the potential that many may actually be unsaved.
- d) .5end Christ is in you *unless* you prove yourself to be disqualified. When a person claims to be saved, yet continues in unrepentant, habitual sin, he is disqualified—reprobate, counterfeit, failing the test. If you are showing the signs of disqualification, then Christ is not in you.
- e) Paul is *not* suggesting here that a person can lose his salvation. But a person certainly can claim to be saved and not be saved.

Matthew 7:21–23 “*Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. 22 Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ 23 And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’*”

Titus 1:16 *They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified (ἀδόκιμος) for every good work.*

Stern warnings like this can serve to jolt a person out of complacency and apathy. When the apostle questions your salvation, it ought to wake you up.

Many churches—even churches like ours—are guilty of teaching what I call easy-believism. They call people to believe in Jesus but say little or nothing about repentance or holy living. And then those who make a profession of faith often fail to show much evidence of salvation. They continue in habitual, unrepentant sinful behavior, yet they think that they are genuinely saved. But if they closely evaluated their life, they would find good reasons to question the reality of their salvation.

Paul is urging his readers not to assume that they are saved if their spiritual experience demonstrates that they are disqualified. Likewise, if the evidences of salvation are missing from your life, then it's likely that you are not saved. If you have good reasons to doubt your salvation, then you need to deal with that.

2 Peter 1:10 Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble;

I trust that none of us will prove to be disqualified. But it is very common for people who are not saved to claim that they are. I would urge you to do what Paul says here—examine yourself to see if you are in the faith, to see if Christ is in you. If the evidences of salvation are present, then you can be assured of your salvation. If the evidences of salvation are lacking or questionable—especially if you are guilty of the sins he mentions in this context—then you may be disqualified—a reprobate, one who fails the test.

If we examine ourselves and find that we fail the test, what do we do? We confess our sins, repent of them, and trust in Jesus to save us from our sins. We become genuine, sincere followers of Christ.

If we look at our lives and find evidence of salvation, but also evidence of unrepentant sin, then we deal with the sin ourselves before someone else has to confront us or rebuke us about them.

Do you pass the test? Take some time to do what Paul tells us here—“Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith.”