

Examine Yourselves!

By [Wayne Jackson](#)

Second Corinthians is probably one of the least frequently studied, or even read, books of the New Testament. To fully appreciate this inspired treatise, one needs to have some background knowledge of the establishment of this church, the problems that plagued these Christian people, and the relationship between the apostle and this congregation he established (cf. Acts 18:1-11).

Background of the Text

At this point it will be sufficient to say that there developed a faction within the Corinthian church that disputed the credibility of Paul's apostleship.

These were themselves "false apostles" who attempted to undermine Paul's authority as an official representative of Christ. They arrogantly hurled charges and challenged the apostle to present the evidence of his office—that they might examine it and pass judgment on its validity (2 Cor. 10-13).

Paul thus made preparations to visit the church in an attempt to ameliorate the problem. When he came, however, it would not be so that they might examine **him**. They had sufficient evidence already of his apostleship (cf. 2 Cor. 12:12). Rather, in preparation for his arrival these saints must:

"Examine your own selves, whether you are in the faith; prove your own selves" (2 Cor. 13:5).

This challenge contains an abiding principle that ranges far beyond the immediate context of this rebuke to the Corinthians. From this situation the conscientious student may extract valuable truths to bless his own life.

Self-examination

The term "examine" (KJV, ESV) or "try" (ASV) is from the Greek **peirazo** (found thirty-eight times in the New Testament), which can convey several senses depending upon the context—not the least of which is the idea of endeavoring to discover the nature or quality of something by testing it (Danker et al. 2000, 792). For instance, the early Christians were subjected to a fiery trial to test their authenticity (1 Pet. 4:12).

In this Corinthian text, the term is a present tense form, suggesting **sustained** examination.

In order for a spiritual examination to be effective, it must be characterized by certain qualities, none of which may be lacking. These are elements every conscientious person should constantly pursue and cultivate, difficult though the challenge may be.

Personal Examination

Human beings are professional critics of others. We analyze, criticize, stigmatize, and ostracize. While there is a place for "righteous judgment" (Jn. 7:24), critical examination should begin in the mirror.

In the Greek Testament the term "yourselves" leads the sentence for emphasis. One will never be able to remove the splinter from another's eye until self-surgery extracts the log from his own (Mt. 7:3-5). There first must be personal scrutiny. Until that is achieved, one can go no further.

Jesus told a parable of two Jews who went to the temple to pray (Lk. 18:9ff). The one, a Pharisee (the strictest sect of Judaism — Acts 26:5), congratulated himself that he stood elevated above others. He cataloged his alleged virtues and drew a sharp line between himself and "this publican" (the phrase drips with disdain) who likewise had entered the environs of the temple.

In glaring contrast, the publican (a Hebrew tax collector on behalf of Rome, thus a despised person) humbly stood "afar off" from the sacred precinct. He would not even lift up his eyes, so conscious was he of his own spiritual flaws. Rather, he "beat his breast" in contrition, and solicited the Lord's merciful propitiation (see ASV fn).

He was a model of self-examination. Those who would please their Creator must be courageous enough to examine themselves and take careful notes.

An Honest Heart

Once one is sufficiently candid to initiate a self-analysis, he must be able to honestly evaluate and acknowledge what he discovers. This demands integrity (Psa. 26:1).

In his parable of the sower, the Lord spoke of the “good” soil that was wonderfully productive. He explained the metaphor as the “heart” (mental disposition) that is “honest and good” (Lk. 8:15).

If a Christian desires God’s approval, he must have that level of integrity that operates on the premise: “I long to obey the Lord so passionately that I am willing to make any sacrifice to do so.” That is the ideal, however short of it we may fall.

As the Jews steadily resisted believing that Jesus was their Messiah (cf. Jn. 12:37), they had begun already to form murderous plans, claiming he was leading the people astray (Jn. 7:1, 12). Nonetheless, they marveled at his teaching brilliance because he was not a formally trained rabbi (Jn. 7:15).

The solution to that puzzle, he contended, was that his teaching was not strictly human. Rather, it was from God (Jn 7:16). Then he provided the key to faithful discipleship:

“If any man **wills** to do his will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak from myself” (Jn. 7:17).

The sense is this: “[Y]ou must take care to preserve an honest mind and cultivate a heart that yields itself unquestioningly to God’s truth” (Pink 1945, 385).

Being willing to surrender to Heaven’s will is absolutely requisite.

In his second letter to the church in Thessalonica, Paul condemns those who “love not the truth” (2 Thes. 2:10). When one begins to meander through divine revelation, consciously sifting out those things unpleasant, difficult, or unpopular, he has not exhibited the type of integrity necessary to be approved of God.

The Objective Standard

The examination process involves some **standard of truth** by which one’s conduct is measured. From the nature of the case, how can one examine himself concerning whether he is “in the faith” if there is no objective standard by which his life is to be gauged?

The criterion certainly is not his own conscience (valuable as that instrument is), for there always is a human tendency to measure oneself by himself, and such reflects a serious lack of understanding (2 Cor. 10:12; cf. Prov. 16:2). Much less even do the fickle inclinations of a reckless society constitute the proper guidelines for right living (Ex. 23:2).

Due diligence recognizes that divine approval comes only by conforming to holy Scripture:

“Give diligence to present yourself approved unto God, a workman who needs not to be ashamed, holding a straight course in the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15, ASVfn).

Subsequently the apostle will sharpen this proposition:

“Every scripture is inspired of God, and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness; that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

The Goal of Examination

Introspection, to be valid, must involve **purpose**. There scarcely is any profit in self-analysis, even honestly engaged and measured by divine truth, unless one purposes to mold his life to the mind of Christ (Phil. 2:5). There is a vast gulf between the theoretical and reality.

The Christian's goal is to refrain from being "fashioned according to this world." To the contrary, he aims to be "transformed" by the renewing of his mind (Rom. 12:1-2). This does not occur by means of some supernatural "zapping" of the Holy Spirit, but by diligent, daily application of the word of God to his life, with resulting adjustments. Simply speaking, it is called repentance.

Repentance has taken a hard hit in today's world, and such has not left the church unaffected. Biblical repentance is not the cheap thing so often seen in our society, which ranges from the curt, "Sorry!," that oozes sarcasm, to the genuine, "I am **so** sorry!," that bares its anguish.

Nor is repentance a mere regret (such as characterized Judas – Mt. 27:3). Instead, repentance is genuine contrition, accompanied by a change of state or actions (or both). Metaphorically these components are designated as "fruit" (Mt. 3:8).

On July 2, 1893, J. W. McGarvey, the celebrated Restoration leader, delivered an address in Louisville, Kentucky. It was simply titled, "Repentance." He began this marvelous discourse by saying, "The greatest obstacle to the salvation of men is the obstinacy of the human will."

Subsequently, he pointed out that, comparatively speaking, it is not all that difficult to persuade multitudes of the divine nature of Jesus of Nazareth. An honest consideration of the evidence is tremendously compelling. Nor is it a rigorous task to lead folks to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of their sins, once they are convinced they are lost and without the hope of eternal life apart from obedience to Christ (2 Thes. 1:8-9; Heb. 5:9; 1 Pet. 4:17).

McGarvey forcefully emphasized that the most difficult obstacle in the path to genuine conversion "is to induce them to **repent**" (emphasis original).

Men want Christianity without conversion, forgiveness without forsaking. When there is no authentic purpose behind one's actions, he subjects himself to mere ritual without substance.

Thus to these Corinthian saints the apostle will say they must "prove" their own selves if they would have Jesus Christ resident within them. Otherwise, they are reprobate, i.e., they have proved themselves disingenuous (13:5b).

The Faith

The second aspect of Paul's admonition has to do with the phrase "the faith." The expression may be used either in an **objective** sense, i.e., that which is exterior to one's self, namely the divine **system of doctrine**—Christianity itself. It is also grammatically possible that the words are employed in a **subjective** manner, i.e., pointing inwardly to one's **personal faithfulness**. There are good scholars on either side of the issue. Let us briefly consider these possibilities.

[Note: other terms similarly are used in both objective and subjective senses, depending upon the context. "Law" may refer to a particular law, e.g., the law of Moses, or to the principle of law. "Truth" can denote that which conforms to reality, or it may refer to a body of doctrine which one must obey.]

Objective Faith

In the early days of the church, a great crowd of Jewish priests "became obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7), i.e., they obeyed the gospel plan of redemption required by the Lord. Though Saul of Tarsus had been a persecutor of Christians, after his conversion he preached "the faith" (Galatians 1:23), the gospel message. Both Hymenaeus and Alexander made "shipwreck concerning the faith" (1 Timothy 1:19), i.e., the doctrine of Christ, by means of their blasphemous teaching (v. 20). Jude urged his beloved kinsmen in the Lord to "earnestly contend for the faith," (v. 3), which was an admonition to defend the Christian system.

Is this the point of emphasis in 2 Corinthians 13:5? Lenski comments: "We do not see how 'the faith' can be anything but objective faith: the Christian doctrine and the confession which all believers have" (1963, 1332; see also Barnett 1997, 608).

If this is the significance, the meaning suggested would seem to be a caution to examine and make sure that one really is a Christian, having truly obeyed the gospel.

Was Paul possibly suggesting that his radical critics, who opposed his authority from Christ in the face of overwhelming evidence, might need to take inventory and determine whether they were even a part of the body of Christ? Were they, perhaps, only “tares” in the kingdom? (Mt. 13:24-30).

Certainly there is no doubt that there are those in every age identified with the people of God who never did yield to the truth in reality. For various other motives, e.g., to please a spouse, to facilitate business interests, to emulate what friends were doing, etc., they migrated into “the fellowship.” Some may never have been taught adequately. Proper teaching is required for actual conversion (cf. John 6:45; 8:32; Acts 19:1ff).

Subjective Faith

As noted above, the phrase “the faith,” is, on occasion, used subjectively, i.e., pertaining to an inner quality characteristic of someone.

Matthew 23 is one of the most incendiary chapters in the New Testament. Christ exposes the outrageous transgressions of the scribes and Pharisees. Among his indictments was the fact that while they prided themselves in the minutia of certain regulations (e.g., tithing), they left undone the weightier matters of the law—like justice, mercy, and “faith” (Greek “the faith”). The latter clearly suggests “faithfulness” (ESV).

In his epistle to the Romans, Paul speaks of the Jews who had been entrusted with “the oracles of God,” i.e., the Old Testament writings (Rom. 3:1-3). In spite of that, some of them “believed not.”

This question is then raised. Did their lack of belief nullify “the faith of God”? The expression here signifies “the faithfulness” of God. Irrespective of the fickleness of humanity, Jehovah always maintains his integrity.

Could then Christian faithfulness be the focus of the apostle’s rebuke? Kistemaker is adamant: “Paul is not referring to objective faith that is rooted in doctrine but to subjective trust in Jesus Christ” (1997, 450).

If this is the thrust of Paul’s argument, then it would be an admonition to personally focus on the common weaknesses which may disrupt the Christian life. This would involve strength over weakness that comes through learning, self-discipline, and the encouragement of others (cf. Romans 14:1ff; 15:1ff). It would be the faith that works through love (Gal. 5:6). It is that quality of faith that is depicted by James in the book that bears his name.

It is a faith accompanied by action (Jas. 2:14) and revealed in benevolence (Jas. 2:15-16). It is vibrant in spirit (Jas. 2:17) and visibly demonstrable (Jas. 2:18). It transcends mere demonic “faith” (Jas. 2:19). It is fruitful (Jas. 2:20) and obediently sacrificial (Jas. 2:21-23). It is the faithfulness that justifies (Jas. 2:24) and for which there is precedent in principle even from unexpected sources (Jas. 2:25). This faith stands in bold contrast to the “corpse” dogma that faith alone procures salvation (Jas. 2:26).

Faithfulness is the unswerving conviction that Jesus Christ is the Son of God combined with the disposition to trust one’s soul to him for salvation and care, undergirded by a determination to obey his commands without reservation (cf. Thayer 1958, 511).

A Concluding Warning

In effect, therefore, Paul urges these folks: “Keep on testing yourselves; or do you fail to appreciate the relationship you have with Christ? Unless, of course, you flunk the test and are demonstrated to be worthless!”

This context contains a solemn warning against the illusion of false security. It urges a personal, honest, objective, purposeful, and sustained self-examination to be assured of right-standing with the Lord. It is a precautionary admonition needed by every person who professes reverence for the Son of God and the redemptive system he inaugurated by means of his death.

Related Articles

 [What Is Faith in Christ?](#)

- [The Wages of Sin and the Free Gift of God](#)
- [God's Plan of Salvation for His Lost Children](#)
- [The Righteous Shall Live by Faith](#)
- [The Heart of the Matter](#)
- [May a Christian Address Christ in Praise or Prayer?](#)
- [The Righteousness of God Revealed](#)
- [A Perversion of Biblical Faith](#)
- [The Mandate for Christian Unity – A Study of Ephesians 4:1-6](#)
- [The Role of Woman](#)

Works Cited

- Barnett, Paul. 1997. *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Danker, F. W. et al. 2000. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago.
- Kistemaker, Simon J. 1997. *II Corinthians*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker.
- Lenski, R. C. H. 1963. *I and II Corinthians*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg.
- McGarvey, J. W. n.d. *Sermons*. Cincinnati, OH: Standard Publishing Co.
- Pink, Arthur. 1945. *Exposition of the Gospel of John*. Vol. 1. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- Thayer, J. H. 1958. *A Greek-English of the New Testament*. Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark.

Scripture References

Acts 18:1-11; 2 Corinthians 10-13; 2 Corinthians 13:5; 1 Peter 4:12; John 7:24; Matthew 7:3-5; Luke 18:9; Acts 26:5; Psalm 26:1; Luke 8:15; John 12:37; John 7:1, 12; John 7:15; John 7:16; John 7:17; 2 Thessalonians 2:10; 2 Corinthians 10:12; Proverbs 16:2; Exodus 23:2; 2 Timothy 2:15; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Philippians 2:5; Romans 12:1-2; Matthew 27:3; Matthew 3:8; 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9; Hebrews 5:9; 1 Peter 4:17; Acts 6:7; Galatians 1:23; 1 Timothy 1:19; 1 Corinthians 13:5; Matthew 13:24-30; John 6:45, 8:32; Acts 19:1; Matthew 23; Romans 3:1-3; Romans 14:1; Galatians 5:6; James 2:14; James 2:15-16; James 2:17; James 2:18; James 2:19; James 2:20; James 2:21-23; James 2:24; James 2:25; James 2:26

Cite this article

Jackson, Wayne. "Examine Yourselves!" *ChristianCourier.com*. Access date: August 1, 2020. <https://www.christiancourier.com/articles/1445-examine-yourselves>

**CHRISTIAN
COURIER**

©2020. All rights reserved. ISSN: 1559-2235.

Publisher

Fortify Your Faith
P.O. Box 11746
Jackson, Tennessee 38308
Phone: (731) 256-7280 – Fax: (731) 256-5152

[Privacy Policy](#)

[Copyright](#)

[Acceptable Use Policy](#)