

Series: 2 Corinthians
Title: What it is to be in the Faith
Text: 2 Corinthians 13: 5
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2 Corinthians 13: 5: Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?

Many at Corinth were examining Paul seeking proof of Christ speaking in Paul—*2 Cor 13: 3: ...ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, which to you-ward is not weak, but is mighty in you.*

Paul says, “If you want proof Christ is speaking mightily through me then *“Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith;*

The real test that Christ is working mightily in his preacher is by examining ourselves whether through his preaching, Christ has called us into the faith. We examine the preacher to see if Christ is speaking in them by examining ourselves, whether Christ has been formed in us so that now we have a real, living union with Christ in spirit and in truth.

All through the 1st and 2nd epistles to the Corinthians, Paul has declared that Christ saves through preaching. And that is what he is doing here.

Proposition: Through the preaching of the gospel, Christ is formed in his people and God calls us into the faith.

EXAMINE YOURSELVES

First, note he says, *“Examine yourselves, prove your own selves.”* No man can examine and prove you but you; no man can examine and prove me but me—*“For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him?”* (1 Cor 2: 11)

Therefore, as I examine myself, I am to be honest with myself. If I am not in the faith, now is the time to repent and cast my care on Christ. I do not want to wait until I face death and judgment. If I examine myself and find that I have control over my sin, that I never doubt, that I am more and more holy by my works then I am not being honest with myself, I am not in the faith. That is not what we are examining.

But if I am troubled when I examine myself by God’s word, then I need to consider it may be God chastening me for my good.

1 Corinthians 11: 31: For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. 32: But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.

What a blessing! God chastens his children so that we shall not be condemned with the world. If I am troubled when I hear the truth of what it is to be in the faith according to God’s word, I need to consider it may be the Lord chastening me. If it is, he will not let me go. He will strip me. God will bring his child to bow to his word. It is because God will bring his child to give Christ all the glory! So as painful as that chastening may be, I have great reason to rejoice. The Lord only chastens those he loves. What a reason to rejoice!

One last thing on this point of examining ourselves. Some insist a believer cannot know with assurance that he is in the faith until he meets God. But the Spirit of God would not command us to examine ourselves were it not possible for us to know. Christ said,

John 14: 20: At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.

1 John 2: 3: And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments...3: 23: And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment. 24: And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.

Being in the faith, having Christ in you, is to believe only on Christ, apart from any work you do, and to love your brethren in Christ. John says “*hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.*” So yes, believers are made to know if they are in the faith.

PROVEN BY GOD’S WORD BY GOD’S WAY

We know we are in the faith by examining ourselves by God’s word. God declares in his word how he calls his child into the faith and forms Christ in us. It is of paramount importance that we use nothing else to but God’s word to examine ourselves. I am not to use my experience or my feelings only the word of God. I am not the touchstone by which truth is declared, God is. Therefore, I must submit everything to God’s word.

Many at Corinth were either glorying in the preacher through whom they were called while others were claiming to have been called without a preacher. They were each saying different things, “*I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ.*” Those who said they were “*of Christ*” meant they came to be in the faith without a preacher. Throughout 1st and 2nd Corinthians, time and again, Paul declares all that to be false.

It is of utmost importance that we recognize that it is God the Holy Spirit who made Paul to declare that God uses three things to call us into the faith. This is God’s word. This is God declaring the one way he calls his children into the faith. The following three ways are not man’s way, they are God’s way.

THE FOOLISHNESS OF PREACHING

1 Corinthians 1: 18: For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. 19: For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. 20: Where *is* the wise? where *is* the scribe? where *is* the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? 21: For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.

One, the means God uses to call his child into the faith is preaching. To those who are perishing, preaching is foolishness. Those at Corinth who said they were *of Christ* thought it was foolishness in that they thought it unnecessary to call a child into the faith.

Yet, all who have been called through preaching know that preaching is the power of God. This means that we thought was foolishness or unnecessary is what God used to destroy our self-wisdom and brought our self-understanding to nothing. The Spirit of God tells us to look around and hear the testimony of faithful believers in the church. In Christ’s church, where is the wise? Among Christ’s people, where is the scribe who independently searched scripture came to be in the faith? Where in Christ’s church is the disputer, the proud debater of this world? If God has made us honest then we will find that none of these are found

among those in whom Christ dwells. It is because in the hearts of each child God has called through preaching, God has made foolish the wisdom of this world. We now behold God's wisdom in using this means of preaching. By this means God has made us to know that "*the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*" (v25) The way we know this is because "*after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.*"

In our text in 2 Corinthians 13, this is the reason Paul told the Corinthian brethren that if they wanted to prove whether Christ was speaking mightily through him then they should examine themselves. It is because it is through preaching that Christ calls his child into the faith. That is what he said earlier in that epistle:

2 Corinthians 3: 1: Do we begin again to commend ourselves? or need we, as some *others*, epistles of commendation to you, or *letters* of commendation from you? 2: Ye are our epistle written in [your] hearts, known and read of all men: 3: *Forasmuch as ye are* manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart. 4: And such trust have we through Christ to[ward] God: 5: Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency *is* of God;

So let me examine myself. Did Christ call me into the faith through the means of preaching? God's very purpose in saving this way is to destroy in his child our self-acclaimed *wisdom, to destroy the self-searching scribe and the understanding of the prudent.* If God has destroyed this in me—by giving me the mind of Christ—then I will bow to God's word that indeed he made me truly know Christ in spirit and in truth through the means of preaching. If God has destroyed this in me I will not object by exalting my searching, my experience and my feelings as the touchstone. I will bow to God's word as the only touchstone whereby I examine myself whether I be in the faith.

Be sure to understand, to be in the faith is not a mere conversion experience of feelings and sincerity and an assent of the intellect to a system of doctrine. Feeling is not faith nor is intellectual assent faith. Those things can be produced by human wisdom and self-searching. Men can be sincerely wrong with all the same feelings. Just look at those who crucified Christ thinking they were doing God's service and calling on the name of God.

Faith is only by God's revelation. It is only given God's way using the means that pleases God. And that means is preaching. God may use our scripture reading and other things in providence to begin drawing us. But it is by the means of preaching that God forms Christ in his child so that we have a true, living communion with Christ in spirit and in truth. This is when we truly behold Christ is All! This is when we see how drastically different God's gospel and God's people are from the bondage we were once in. Immediately God gives us the unction of the Holy Spirit and we know all things in salvation and providence are in and by Christ. Immediately, when given this unction God makes it so we cannot call the Lord Jesus accursed anymore nor can we hear preaching that calls him accursed by not declaring Christ to be our All: our Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification and Redemption. "*Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.*" (1 Cor 12: 3)

At the same, with faith comes a true, hearty love for brethren! We see how much our brethren sacrificed so that we could have this preaching through which God made Christ All unto us. For the first time, we truly love our brethren. For the first time, we truly understand how wise God is to use the means of preaching because by it he knits the hearts of his people together in love.

Ephesians 4: 10: He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.) 11: And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and

some, pastors and teachers; 12: For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: 13: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: 14: That we *henceforth* be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, *and* cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; 15: But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, *even* Christ: 16: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

Therefore, for the first time, we become committed to sacrifice whatever necessary to spread this gospel to other needy sinners. This love of brethren is by the constraint of Christ's love for us given in the new birth when God calls us into the faith through the means we once thought foolishness!

So first let me examine myself to see if I was called by the means with which God is pleased to save them that believe: preaching.

CHRIST AND HIM CRUCIFIED

1 Corinthians 1: 22: For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: 23: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; 24: But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.

Two, God calls his child into the faith using only the preaching of Christ and him crucified in spirit and in truth. Though God uses preaching, it is not just any kind of preaching. It is by the preaching of Christ and him crucified in spirit and in truth. God destroys our wisdom and gives us the mind of Christ, not through preaching that blasphemes his name, but only through the preaching of Christ in truth.

In Isaiah 52, the LORD declares how he has nothing to do with those preachers who make his people howl under their law-mongering. But Christ declares that he sends his true preacher and through the gospel that exalts him, Christ makes his child to know it is Christ speaking in their heart in spirit and in truth.

Isaiah 52: 5: Now therefore, what have I here, saith the LORD, that my people is taken away for nought? they that rule over them make them to howl, saith the LORD; and my name continually every day *is* blasphemed. 6: Therefore my people shall know my name: therefore *they shall know* in that day that I *am* he that doth speak: behold, *it is I*. 7: How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth! 8: Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing: for they shall see eye to eye, when the LORD shall bring again Zion.

Now that Christ has brought again Zion by raising from the dead as Head over his church with all power, Christ's watchmen lift up the voice declaring Christ and him crucified, thy God reigneth! As Christ's preacher lifts up their voice, the Voice of Christ sings together with their voice. Through the preaching of Christ in truth, Christ speaks effectually into the hearts of his people. But Christ only does this work through his pastors as they preach the truth which exalts Christ alone. He says,

Jeremiah 3: 15: And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding.

Christ will give you pastors. Christ will give you pastors according to his heart. Christ will give you pastors which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding. Christ only gives preachers who preach the truth! Christ destroys the proud, self-wisdom in his people and gives us the mind of Christ, not through preaching that blasphemes his name, but only through preaching that exalts Christ in spirit and in truth. This is why John gives us a test to prove Christ's true preacher:

1 John 4: 2: Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: 3: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.

Hereby we know when the Spirit of God is in Christ's preacher. Every preacher that confesseth—it means he preaches publicly before all men the whole truth of Christ. He preaches election glorifying Christ, the limited atonement Christ accomplished for his people, Christ our Head who sends his gospel and makes it effectual in his people, Christ who grows his people in his grace and knowledge, Christ who shall return and will not lose one of his people, Christ before whom every knee shall bow. The man who is not ashamed to preach the whole truth of Christ publicly, giving Christ all the glory for every aspect of the salvation of his people, is of the Holy Spirit.

But the man who will not confess publicly the whole truth of Christ is not of the Holy Spirit. He may tell you privately that he believes the whole truth of Christ but he will not preach Christ publicly. He takes the offense out of the gospel when preaching publicly. He makes either wisdom, righteousness, holiness or redemption to be partly by man's searching, man's will or man's works. This man is not speaking by the Spirit of God but is anti-Christ.

So let me examine myself. If a preacher's message is so anti-Christ that I departed and went where I could hear the truth then I need to bow to Christ's word. Christ says he does not send men preaching lies to call his people into the faith! Christ may have used the written word to begin calling me out of such a place. But when Christ calls me and makes me to know it is Christ speaking is only through Christ's preacher who proclaims the whole truth of Christ. Let me add this because I have heard men ask a question about this. It is possible that Christ may use a man who later proves to be reprobate. But while Christ is using that man, Christ only saves through the preaching that declares the whole truth of Christ and him crucified.

NO SUFFICENCY BUT GOD

1 Corinthians 1: 26: For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: 27: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; 28: And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: 29: That no flesh should glory in his presence. 30: But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: 31: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

Three, God calls his child into the faith using only a man who knows he has no sufficiency in himself. By God's power exercised through the preaching of Christ and him crucified, he knows the power to call his child into the faith is of God and not of us.

Again, the Spirit of God calls on us to look around at those who are called. There are "*not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble*" that God has called. Paul was such a man after the flesh

but God taught him he had no sufficiency in himself and made him wise in spirit. Thereby, Paul knew the preacher Christ uses has no sufficiency in himself to call anyone into the faith but his sufficiency is of God.

Paul was taught this as every child of God is taught it. Christ arrested Paul on the road to Damascus but then Christ sent Ananias to declare the gospel to Paul. It was through a preacher declaring Christ to Paul that Paul was made to know that he was not called by a man but by the power of God.

Acts 9: **15**: But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: **16**: For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.

This is what Christ said he would do in Isaiah 52. As Ananias was lifting up his voice, preaching the gospel of Christ to Paul, Christ said he would lift up his Voice together with Ananias, "*For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.*"

Acts 9: **17**: And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, *even* Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. **18**: And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized. **19**: And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus. **20**: And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.

Having experienced the power of God through the preaching of an insufficient man, when speaking of Christ making his child his epistle by writing the gospel on his heart through the Holy Spirit, Paul said,

2 Corinthians 3: **4**: And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward: **5**: Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God;

In our text in 2 Corinthians 13, Paul said the same thing in different words when he said,

2 Corinthians 13: **4**: For though [Christ] was crucified through weakness, yet he liveth by the power of God. For we also are weak in [Christ], but we shall live with [Christ] by the power of God toward you.

Like as God gave Christ power, God gives his preacher power to handle the word of God honestly, to preach Christ according to the scripture, and to depend on the Spirit to make the word effectual. Paul said,

2 Corinthians 4: **1**: Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy,...

That is as we have received mercy by the power of Christ, so by the power of Christ we do the following:

2 Corinthians 4: **2**...we faint not; **2**: But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. **3**: But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: **4**: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. **5**: For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.

Then Paul declares again, that the reason he preaches not himself but only Christ the Lord is by the power of God:

2 Corinthians 4: 6: For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to *give* the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. 7: But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.

Each of God's people has experienced this power of God through the preaching of Christ and him crucified the same as God's preacher. This is why Paul said "*the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.*"

The reason God uses this means is so that no flesh shall glory in his presence. It is by this means that God makes his child give Christ all the glory—"That no flesh should glory in his presence. But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, *He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.*" This is what it is to be in the faith. It is of God that you are in Christ. It is of God that Christ is made All unto us. It is of God that we are made to cease glorying in ourselves and glory only in Christ Jesus.

This means of preaching Christ and him crucified is pleasing to God because it gives Christ all the glory as our Prophet, Priest and King. *As our Prophet* he gets all the glory for teaching us in the heart the fear of the Lord through the preaching of his gospel. *As our High Priest* he gets the glory for being the subject of our message: our Righteousness and Holiness through his obedience unto the death of the cross. He is the faithful High Priest who brings God and his people together in one. *As our King* he gets all the glory as our sovereign who by his power overcomes every obstacle to send his preacher to his people and bring each of his children the gospel and call us into the faith.

So the man who claims to be saved another way glories in himself in whichever of these points is his different way.

If a man says he was saved hearing a message other than the truth of Christ and him crucified—a false Jesus who died for everyone but depends upon the sinner to make his work effectual or to make himself holy—then that man glories in his own works of righteousness and holiness.

If he says he was called by the preacher who had sufficiency in himself—impressive credentials, preaching intellectually, taking the offense out of the gospel, using high-pressure tactics to coerce a profession—then that man glories in outward appearance.

If he says he is of Christ apart from hearing the gospel preached then he glories in his own understanding and prudence as being a scribe who came into the faith by searching God's word. He glories in himself as much as the man who says he was saved by his works.

But if a man confesses he was saved God's way—by preaching, by the truth of Christ and him crucified, by God's power speaking through a man with no sufficiency in himself making Christ all unto him—then he glories only in the Lord. That is the man who is in the faith.

WHAT IS IT TO BE IN THE FAITH?

Let's summarize what we have heard. What is it to be in the faith?

- To be in the faith is to have nothing about self to glory in—*that no flesh should glory in his sight.*
- To be in the faith is to be in Christ by God's electing power and grace—*of God are ye in Christ.*

- To be in the faith is for God through the preaching of the gospel to make Christ my All. Christ is my Wisdom rather than my own experience and understanding and prudence. Christ is my Justification given freely through faith in Christ rather than by the works I have done. Christ is my Holiness given when Christ is formed in me in the new heart through the hearing of his faith, not by the hearing of the works of the law. Christ is my full redemption from the laws curse.
- To be in the faith is to be one with Christ in spirit and in truth in a living communion so that I truly believe and rest from all my works and glory only in the Lord for all salvation.
- To be in the faith is to genuinely love my brethren, to lay down my life so they can continue to hear the gospel of Christ, and to do love them from a heart constrained by Christ's love for me.
- To be in the faith is to confess that all this was done for me—I was called into the faith and Christ was formed in me—by God's way *through preaching, through the preaching of Christ in truth, through God's power making Christ my All!*

Lamentations 3:40: Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the LORD.

Colossians 1: 18: Christ is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence. 19: For it pleased *the Father* that in him should all fullness dwell; 20: And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, *I say*, whether *they be* things in earth, or things in heaven. 21: And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in *your* mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled 22: In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight: 23: If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister;

When Paul says "*the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven*" it means Christ sends the preaching of the gospel to every person he calls to faith whether they be Jew or Gentile. So in our text, if they wanted to prove that Christ was speaking through Paul in power, Paul tells them to examine themselves. Paul did not tell the Corinthians to examine themselves because he doubted their faith but because he was certain that Christ had given many of them faith through his preaching. Indeed they had to be brought to repent from their vain glorying. They had to be brought to repent from their current divisions because they were not of one mind glorying only in the Lord. But despite all their problems, Paul trusted that Christ had given them faith through his preaching. Only a believer can examine himself and know he is in the faith. That is why he told them to examine themselves. That is why I tell you to examine yourselves.

Amen!

