

- ***READ II Corinthians 13:1-8*** The relationship between the Apostle Paul and the Christians in Corinth was certainly an interesting one. His first letter to the Corinthians is the longest epistle in our New Testaments by word count, barely edging out the letter to the Romans by only a few words. But then we throw in II Corinthians and we come to see that as far as we can tell, Paul wrote and interacted more with this church than any other. Notice in the Text we just read that he not only wrote to them, but he was also in their presence multiple times, at least three from what we can tell in Scripture.. (**Acts 18; I Corinthians 16:5-8; II Corinthians 12:14; 13:1**) It seemed as if this church was in need of all the help that they could get based upon all of the issues that Paul addressed in his first let to this church.
- We could probably imagine that these brethren probably weren't the biggest fans of Paul, and it might be that this is shown through what we perceive are challenges to his Apostleship beginning in **II Corinthians 11**. He begins at this point of the letter giving evidence for his personal ministry and work for the Lord as a handpicked Apostle. He puts forth his sufferings in Christ, his vision of heaven, his thorn in the flesh, and other evidences to show that he truly was of the Lord and charged with the duties of an Apostle.
- By the time we get here to chapter 13, we see Paul flipping the script on the Corinthians and telling them that it is time for them to consider themselves and their faiths. They had put Paul on trial for his Apostleship, and now he says that it is time for them to put their own faiths on trial. Here's the thing about self evaluation though...when we seek to self evaluate, it can be very tempting to judge ourselves on the lowest standard possible in order to come out looking good. Paul could've done that. He could've said that he didn't sacrifice to idols or anything like that, but instead he gave evidence of great weight. Sometimes we like to use faulty standards to judge our faithfulness, and we need to guard against that. I want to take some time to examine this this thought of proper examination, and hopefully we will all be encouraged and motivated to properly examine ourselves to see if we are "in the faith."

I. God expects for us to take time to evaluate our spiritual health.

- A. Paul's admonition to these brethren seems to be for the purpose of theme evaluation themselves based upon how they are treating Paul and excusing him of not being who he claims to be. However, the principle still remains that self evaluation is something that disciples need to do often. It can be very easy for us to get complacent in our faith, fail to do some checks from time to time, and then when we finally do some self evaluation...we find ourselves completely off course. Testing, evaluating, and examining of ourselves in our faith is of the utmost importance.
- B. So how is it that we can judge our spiritual health? I think the principles for the quickest way to make some evaluations is to judge ourselves how the Scriptures show us we can make judgements about anyone. I think about Jesus's teachings that make references to "judging them by their fruit." We see this kind of language used in the context of judging false prophets in **Matthew 7:16-20**. There Jesus says that if their fruit...if their actions or their teachings are not right then we can know them to be false.
- C. But what if everything they are doing on the outside is good and right on down the line? See this is where this can get a little tricky. This is the difficult part of making judgments of ourselves and others. I think we can easily spot out the person that isn't doing right based upon their bad actions, but what if they're doing all the right things? Well at that point, all of us would probably judge them based upon the fruit test to be good and faithful. But there is a strong limitation to our evaluating of others and that is the fact that we cannot see the heart.
- D. We know this don't we? We know that we cannot see the heart of others, and we especially know that others cannot see our hearts. Satan knows this, as well, so what he wants to do is mold us into people who would fit well with what Jesus says about the Pharisees in different places, but specifically in **Matthew 15:8 & 23:27,28**. That first references is familiar to us because there Jesus says that these individuals honor God with their lips, but their hearts are far from Him. Then in **Matthew 23**, Jesus describes these same people as being beautiful white washed tombs on the outside, but being full of dead bones on the inside. He says that on the outside they look righteous, but inwardly they're full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. We might be able to fool others into think that we're righteous. We might even fool ourselves into thinking this is the case, but God sees and judges the heart.

- E. Think back with me to when Samuel was seeking to anoint the next king of Israel in **I Samuel 16**. He went to the house of Jesse and he ran across Eliab who seemed to externally fit the bill just fine. But remember what the Lord said. *"Do not look at his appearance or at his height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart"* (**I Samuel 16:7**) God makes reference to how man sees in this text, so how is it that man usually sees?

II. We often seek to use faulty standards of faithfulness in order to look better.

- A. We see the only way we can see, and we often judge ourselves just how we might judge or evaluate others. We look at those external factors, but let me suggest that these are not exactly rock solid standards, but they can be quite faulty if they are all they use. Let's look at a few of them for a moment. Consider if you have ever used these faulty standards before.
1. **The faith of others.** If we were willing to compare ourselves to the strongest of faithful men and women, then this might not be a terrible idea at all. But what is often the case is that we seek to make ourselves feel better about ourselves by only comparing ourselves to those who are especially weak in their faiths. Or we judge someone as being strong and then we say, *"we're just as good as them so we must be good, too!"* We will almost always come out looking good in these instances. (**II Corinthians 10:12**)
 2. **Our past way of living.** Maybe we used to live about as far away from God as possible. Maybe in our self evaluations we want a little confidence boost, so we make the point that at least we're not as bad as we used to be! That's good right? Well, yes it is good that we are not only a 10 on the wicked scale, but that doesn't make us really more righteous if we've only knocked that down to a 7 or 8. We're still not faithful as we ought to be.
 3. **Fulfilling Christian duties.** Or maybe we think, *"Well...I have the right morals. I treat other people right. I don't steal or kill. I help old ladies across the road, so I must be exactly what God wants me to be."* Let me say that I have known of atheists who could say these same things. Does that mean that they too are faithful to God?
 4. **Our level of Biblical knowledge.** *"But, Nick...I know all the books of the Bible frontwards and backwards. I can name all the authors. I know all the passages on baptism. I can tell you the exact time when revelation was written and I even know the size of lead that John used."* Again, this is good, but Bart Erhman and Dan Barker (two of the leader Bible skeptics) sure know a lot about the Bible, as well.
 5. **Other quantifiable measurements.** *"I have been a Christian for 19 years of my life. I go to church every single time the doors are open. I give of my means. I sing the songs. I even go to the meetings and special service. I can check nearly all of the boxes!"* It's good that we have a lot of checks on this made up list, but where does that really get us?
- B. Again, some of these measurements are necessarily bad or wrong, and I'm not discounting all of them, but our judgements of ourselves must be deeper than just what we can see on the outside. God judges us from the inside out, and that is where we must begin because if we don't then there can be devastating consequences.

III. Using faulty standards does nothing but stunt our spiritual growth and health.

- A. Let's be reminded that we often use these standards for ourselves because they either make us look good to ourselves or others. It might be that our family raised us to have this faith and we really don't want to let them down, but at the same time we're just really not bought in to true discipleship. What is the easiest way to keep from rocking the boat? Just keep doing the right things when others can see us. They will think that we're on board, and it'll ease our minds to some extent. Obviously, this is a terrible place to be! We're only wearing a mask in this life, and God will expose it in the last day. I think about Judas who was one of the Twelve. He did the right things in front of other people, but his heart was full of greed, and we know where that eventually got him. (**John 12:5-6**)
- B. Or maybe you legitimately are a person of faith and you want to grow. But can I suggest to you that if this is where you are, and I'll say that this is where I want to be...then we need to begin evaluating our hearts first. If we only ever judge what we do on the outside then we could be deceiving ourselves and never growing in our true love for and devotion to God. In doing so we will stunt our growth, and our self evaluations won't really do too much for us. We must desire to judge ourselves as God would can and will judge us which is from the heart, not just what is on the outside.

IV. We must be honest in our evaluations, and seek to know if we are truly "in the faith."

- A. True honesty begins by looking within ourselves to our hearts. When seeking true self evaluation, even if we are doing the right things, we still need to ask ourselves why it is that we do what we do. Let me suggest three things that we need to examine if we want a true evaluation of whether or not we are in the faith.
- B. Let's begin our conclusion by considering that we need to examine our motivation. The motivation for what we do is found within our hearts and it fuels what we do. Notice what is said in **Proverbs 16:2**. *"All the ways of man are clean in his own sight. But the Lord weights the motives."* When we examine how we are living, it might seem that we are doing just fine, but the Lord doesn't just look at our actions, but He considers why it is what we are doing. If our motivation isn't a love for God, His Kingdom, and others...then our good lives aren't worth much of anything before God. (**I Corinthians 13:1-3**)
- C. Secondly, let's consider that we need to evaluate our focus when it comes to whether or not we are in the faith. As David is informed that he won't be able to build God's temple, he charges his son Solomon with the task. As he does so, he says in **I Chronicles 28:9**, "As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of our father, and serve Him with a whole heart and a willing mind; for the Lord searches all hearts, and understand every intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will reject you forever." Here David not only mentions intents or motives, but he also instructs Solomon that his heart needs to seek or be focused on God in all things. Our focus must be on God, just as Solomon's focus was in his younger years of ruling. He wanted wisdom because he wanted to be able to be the best king for God's people possible. His motives and his focus were good, and he thrived for God as long as he did and God was with him in return.
- D. Finally, we need to examine our motives, our focus, and we need to examine and evaluate what it is that we truly value in this life if we want to know whether or not we are truly in the faith. We know well what is said in **Matthew 5:19-21**. The emphasis we want to give is on the "where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." What we truly value in this life will determine what type of heart we possess. It will determine whether we have a heart for God or if our heart longs for this life and world. That is most accurately determine what type of person we are, and we can come to know pretty surely whether or not we are in the faith as Paul sought to be.
- E. If we can honestly determine that our motivation and focus is, and if we can honestly determine what we value above all else...then I am convinced that we are on the right way to knowing whether or not we are in the faith. We will be able to more accurately determine our level of spiritual health.

It can be easy for us to be so concerned with the spiritual health of others that we don't ever give any attention to whether or not we first are in the faith. Some of the Corinthians wanted to nail Paul to the wall, but he was confident in who he was in Christ because he evaluated himself by proper standards. May we, like the Apostle Paul take time in self evaluation and come to know whether or not we are in the faith. If we are, great! Time to keep getting stronger. If we find ourselves lacking, then may God help us to evaluate our spiritual health through seeking only Him in all things. May God be praised through our efforts to serve Him with all of our hearts, souls, and minds, and may we be a people who can say we are truly in the faith.

PRAYER