

2 Corinthians 13:1-10

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[0 : 00] And turn to 2 Corinthians 12 verses 11 to 13 verse 14. Page 9, 7, 8. We'll get into Christmas preaching, Advent preaching next Sunday.

! Farmer and his new bride are driving home from the wedding on a wagon. And there's a horse pulling the wagon. The horse stumbles. And the farmer shouts, that's one.

A little further down the road, the poor horse stumbles again. And the farmer says, that's twice. After a while, the poor old horse stumbles again.

The farmer didn't say anything. But he reaches under his seat, pulls out a shotgun and shoots the horse. This brand new bride is absolutely horrified. She shouts and screams, saying, that is an awful thing to do.

Why have you done that? And the farmer says, that's one. It's very kind of you to laugh. It's a very old joke. Well, Paul is about to make his third visit.

[1 : 01] One, two, three. And there's a warning attached, isn't there? The third visit. Look at chapter 14, verse 12. Here's the third of chapter 14, verse 12. There's no 14.

Look at 13, verse 12. What am I doing? I need to learn to write notes. So, chapter 13, verse 1.

This is the third time I'm coming to you. This is the third time I'm coming to you. There's one. That's two. This is going to be my third visit. And so watch out.

I've given you two warnings. Two warnings. And one more. And you're out, Colin. And what he's aiming for, the purpose of this visit is to put them to the test. Alright? And look what it says in verse 5 and 6.

Examine yourselves to see whether you are in this faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realise this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you, unless, indeed, you did fail to meet the test?

[1 : 59] I hope you will find out when we have not failed the test. It's hard, in one way, when you study this passage, to work out who's in the test. Whether it's Paul or the Corinthians.

And in fact, it is both. They've put him to the test, haven't they, all the way through Corinthians.

They've challenged his leadership. They've questioned his credentials. We've seen that all the way through the letter.

But now he's going to put them to the test. And the two are related, aren't they? When a teacher sets you an exam in class. And says to the class, you're going to have an exam. And if everybody fails the test in the whole class, what does that say about the teacher?

Yeah. Your exam results are a reflection of how good or otherwise the teachers may be. Now I know that there's a little bit of wiggle room, isn't it?

My teachers don't want to say that in school. But your exam results reflect on the teachers. And so Paul is saying, do you want proof of my apostleship?

[3 : 01] If you want to put my leadership to the test, well here's the way to do it. Examine yourselves. See whether you are in the faith. Don't you know that Christ is in you?

Christ is among you? Well unless, of course, if you fail the test. So we're going to do two examinations. We're going to examine Paul and then we're going to examine the Corinthians. So let's examine Paul.

First of all, what right does Paul have to examine the Corinthians? What authority does he have to put the Corinthians to the test? Well first of all, he has the authority of an apostle of Jesus Christ.

He has the authority of an apostle of Jesus Christ. Chapter 12 and verse 11. I have been a fool.

You forced me to do it. I ought to have been commended by you. For I was not at all inferior to these super apostles.

Even though I am nothing. For signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders of mighty works. For in what you were, less favoured than the rest

of the churches.

[4 : 00] Except that I myself did not burden you. Forgive me this wrong. Now he's being a bit sarcastic there. He's not too bothered about defending himself at all. Later on he says, you think I've been defending myself.

But that isn't what it's about at all in the two Corinthians. I am nothing, he says. Pastor Mark is there of a true Christian leader, of a minister. I am nothing, says Paul.

But he is very concerned to defend the office of apostle. As an apostle of Jesus Christ, he insists. I am not in the least inferior.

I was not at all inferior to these super apostles. This is attributed to Mark Twain. I'm not sure whether it was. But it's a famous quote. It says, when I was a boy of 14.

My father was so ignorant, I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be 21, I was astonished at how much the old man had learned in seven years. His father died when he was 18.

[4 : 59] So I don't think it was Mark Twain. But it's similar to what's happening here in Corinth. Paul has planted the church in Corinth. He was their spiritual father. And since he's left, the super apostles have come in.

And they've discredited Paul in the eyes of the Corinthians. So that they can hardly stand of the old man around. They're embarrassed about him. Do you remember what it was like when you were kind of about 12, 13 and your father said, I'll drive you to school.

And you would say with me, I tell you what, Dad, don't go up to the school gates. Just park around the corner. It's all right. And he would say, no, no, no. I'm really happy to drive you into the school.

And you'd say, no, no, no. It's all right. Or you're coming out from a party with a friend.

And you said, well, you park in the street next door. Oh, you don't want to be seen by them, do you? You're embarrassed by them. Teenage kids are often embarrassed by their fathers. Kids go through adolescence.

Now, you don't take that to heart. I hope you don't. It's a phase they're going through, isn't it? I hope you don't, Mark. That's how it was at Corinth. Just a phase.

[6 : 04] Just as they promised me. And the Corinthians are going through spiritual adolescence. They're embarrassed by the old man. And he says to them, doesn't he, verse 11, I ought not to have to commend myself to you.

I shouldn't have to prove myself to you. That's the end of verse 11. You should be defending me. But what does it matter? I'm nothing. The end of verse 11. He doesn't take it to heart.

He doesn't take it personally. He can laugh it off. In one sense. As for himself, well, it's no big deal. But he magnifies his office that he is an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And it matters because the church of the Lord Jesus is built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. So people say today, yes, I actually believe in Jesus.

I'm a red letter Christian. I believe everything in red in the Bible. I want to live by that. But I have got no time for Paul. People who say that, they are not Christians. Because if you haven't got any time for the apostle Paul, you don't know the Lord Jesus.

[7 : 11] The only Jesus you can possibly know is the Jesus who is testified to by the eyewitnesses, the apostles. That's the only Jesus there is. They are the ones who wrote the New Testament.

The church is founded on the apostles. So the first thing they did on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 is what? Is they devote themselves to the apostles' teaching. We only know Jesus.

You only know Jesus through the eyewitness testimony of the apostles. They were the ones whom Jesus promised the Holy Spirit in the upper room. So those chapters in John 14 to 17, we looked at them in house groups from not long ago, and we often take those verses and apply them to ourselves.

Now, there's a sense in which that is right. But you've got to realise in those verses, Jesus was not talking directly, to you. He was talking to the apostles, and he promises to give to them the Holy Spirit so that they will be able to recall everything that he has taught them.

He will lead them into all truth. So did you ever wonder how on earth do we have these recordings of what Jesus said in the Gospels? Well, because Jesus kept that promise.

[8 : 23] He gave them the Holy Spirit so the apostles could remember everything that Jesus had taught them, but not only to lead them into all truth so that they could pronounce on the things that Jesus hadn't taught them on.

So do you remember occasionally the apostle Paul will say, it's me speaking now, not Jesus. He's not saying, you don't have to take this bit seriously, it's just my kind of opinion.

What he's saying in those verses is Jesus never addressed the subject. And when an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ speaks, Jesus speaks to his church. So the apostles are unique.

Their words go into the Bible. My words come out of the Bible, or at least they should. I am not an apostle, I am a preacher. My words come out of the Bible and so you have to hold me to account. And if anything I say is not biblical, you must tell me. You need to examine what you hear from a pulpit. Do you notice I love Paul's modestly here. Don't you love it?

[9 : 29] He magnifies the office of an apostle and yet he's very reluctant to stand in the limelight like the super apostles. He will not big himself up. But he insists on magnifying his ministry.

He says, I am not in the least, I was not at all inferior to these super apostles. Even though I'm nothing, isn't that lovely? That's so in character of the apostle Paul, the man who says I'm the least of all the saints.

Paul who says I'm the chief of sinners. He says, I'm one of the apostles but I'm one untimely born. And he's very reluctant to stand as it were center stage.

Even the way he talks in verse 12 about these signs of an apostle. Look at verse 12. The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience with signs and wonders and mighty works.

He didn't say I did those things. He said these things were done among you. It is passive, not active. In other words, it was God who was doing these things among you.

[10 : 34] But nevertheless, you experienced these signs and wonders and miracles that were done among you. These are the signs of the apostles. It's important, I think, to understand what that means.

John's thought is very helpful on 2 Corinthians. And John's thought very helpfully says we need to have a theology of miracles. And Christians, I find, often don't have one.

Do you know that miracles are not scattered throughout the Bible willy-nilly? They're really not. I mean, you will not find miracles on every page of the Bible. You will not. The miracles are clustered particularly around two events.

The Exodus that we've looked at on Sunday mornings. And the Exodus that Jesus affected at the cross. They are clustered around those two events. There's never, ever, throughout the history of the Bible, a concentration on signs and wonders like there are as there was when Moses led the people out of Egypt.

And when Jesus came into this world and died and rose again and sent his apostles out to proclaim the gospel. When the new Exodus became, when there was a new beginning for the people of God. And those signs and wonders were God's testimony to the apostles.

[11 : 52] But despite what people say, people think miracles are everywhere in the Bible. They're not actually. If you think they are tonight, you're not actually reading your Bible. Miracles are not commonplace even in the Bible and neither should we expect them to be.

They are signs. Now I don't mean, don't think that I don't mean God doesn't answer prayer. Of course he does. And he miraculously answers prayer at times. God is sovereign. But these signs and wonders, they are clustered around particularly the Exodus and the cross.

They are signs of an apostle done primarily through the apostles though not exclusively. They authenticate an apostolic ministry. Sometimes in my notes, if it's a point I want to emphasize, I will put an asterisk.

And if it's a point I really want to emphasize, I will put three asterisks. And a line to draw my eye to it. So I don't miss it. And it is as if God has put asterisks in the margin of history when there's miracles to say, look at this.

Look at this. This is really significant what is happening here. They are not commonplace everyday events. They are signs that God is working for the salvation of the world. In sending his son to the cross to effect a new Exodus for the people of God.

[13 : 10] And notice as well the context of Paul's apostolic ministry. Look at verse 12. The signs of a true apostle were performed among you. With utmost patience with signs and wonders and mighty works.

What's he saying there? He's saying, these things happened. I didn't do these things. God did. God did these things in the context. Well, utmost patience with endurance with perseverance in the face

of much persecution and opposition.

All 12 apostles died as martyrs. John, I suppose, you could argue maybe didn't, lived in old age in exile in the island of Patmos. It wasn't a very comfortable old age. Though old age doesn't seem very comfortable for anyone.

He died as a prisoner of the state. All the apostles died as martyrs. Many of them under great suffering. And one of the reasons we believe the testimony and the message is not just because of the signs and wonders but because they were prepared to die for it.

And so Paul has apostolic authority. There's no doubt about that. These super apostles, they put fun of Paul. They don't come anywhere near, he says.

[14 : 25] They don't come anywhere near to what you have seen amongst you. And even though I am nothing, I'm the least of the least, I'm not the least inferior to these super apostles. So he's got apostolic authority.

Secondly, as we examine Paul, he's got parental authority. Can you see that? He's writing as an apostle of Jesus Christ. He is the one who laid the foundation of that church. And he comes as a site inspector, as a master builder.

He comes with apostolic authority but he also comes as a parent. So verses 13 to 18. You've got the signs of the apostle and you've got the size of the apostle in 13 to 18.

The size of an apostle. He's not just pulling rank here but he's bearing his soul. He shares his feelings.

Look at verse 13. For in what way were we less, for in what were you less favored than the rest of the churches except that I myself did not burden you.

[15 : 24] I was not a burden to you. I haven't been a burden to you. Oh how awful of me. I do apologize he says. I should have been but I don't want your money.

So imagine Chris Roberts taking Gabriel tomorrow morning and saying listen you're about two weeks old and it's about time you started paying me away. Or Chris wakes up Florence in the morning and says it's you know it's about time Chris.

It's about time Florence isn't it? that you are a member of this family you've got to contribute to the budget. That is what happens. So I don't want to take things from you I want to give things to you.

I don't want to exploit you. The super apostles will do that. Look at verse 19. I want to build you up.

It's for your up building. For your building up.

He's their spiritual father there's no way he's going to bleed them dry. I don't want to tear you down.

I want to build you up. It's not the child who provides for the parent generally speaking but it is the children who provide for the parents.

[16 : 27] It is parents who make sacrifices for their children. It's not through school it's not through university. And they're not sacrifices you regret are they? You do that lovingly.

You think I've got to spend all that money on your birthday. Parents provide for their children.

Parents have their children's welfare are half. They make sacrifices for their children.

And Paul says I'll do what it takes. I will gladly spend and be spent. He's going to come as an apostle in Jesus Christ but he's going to come as a parent as a spiritual father.

And do you see the purpose we just saw in chapter 12 verse 19. Have you been thinking all along that we've been defending ourselves to you? It is in the sight of God that we've been speaking in Christ and for your up building beloved.

Paul's not just got a wounded ego. He's not just coming to justify his existence. There are some ministers like that. No that's not why he's coming.

[17 : 32] Everything he says is for your strengthening for your up building beloved. Look at verses 2 to 4 of chapter 13. He says I warned those who sinned before and all the others.

I warn them now while absent as I did when present on my second visit that if I come again that I will not spare them. Since you seek proof that Christ is speaking in me he is not weak in dealing with you but is powerful among you.

Those super apostles are saying Paul is not a real apostle. He's not a real deal. You want proof?

For Christ is speaking through me. He says and when I come he is not weak in dealing with you.

When I come Christ is not weak in dealing with you. He is powerful among you. Verse 4 For he was crucified in weakness but he lives by the power of God. That is the power that is going to come. And that is the power that works in me.

It is to serve you. It's not to dominate you. It's not to tear you down. It's not to make you feel small. It is to build you up.

[18 : 44] Look at verse 9 chapter 13. Do you see the purpose there? For we are glad when we are weak and you are strong. Your restoration is what we pray for.

my prayer is for your restoration. Same word as the disciples. You know when they had fishing nets and the fishing nets were breaking and they were mending their nets.

That's the picture. That's the aim of this third visit. The aim is church restoration. So when we think of church restoration we think of leaky roofs don't we? And we think of crumbling masonry.

So nothing at all has to do with buildings. It's got everything to do with relationships. Look at chapter 12 and verse 20. What was wrong with this church? For I fear that perhaps when I come I may find you not as I wish and you may find me not as I wish.

But perhaps there may be quarreling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, disorder. There's no sign of woodwork or rising damp. No, it's quarreling, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, anarchy, arrogance, impurity, sexual immorality.

[19 : 52] Those are the things that wrecked, churches. And that is what the church in Corinth has become under the influence of these false teachers. I argue that is what bad and false teaching does to a church.

That's what the Corinthians have become. And Paul wants to rescue the church of Corinth from these people and restore it to its former glory. Why? Because he loves it. And so he puts them to the test.

Verses 5 and 6 of chapter 13. He says examine yourself to see whether you're in the faith. Test yourself. He is not saying to you, take a long hour and of yourself in the mirror before you start criticizing me.

No, that's not what's going on. So look at verse 5 and 6. Verse 5 and 6 of chapter 13. Examine yourselves to see whether you're 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 this test. I hope you will find out that you have not failed the test.

[20 : 56] This isn't an entrance exam. This isn't a kind of ancient 11 plus to see if you can get into heaven. That is not the kind of test Paul is laying on the Corinthians here.

It's an entirely positive test. He doesn't really expect them to fail. He certainly doesn't want them to fail. He wants them to pass. He wants them to be assured that they have salvation so that they can go on to perfection and not go on in these ever decreasing circles.

He wants them to aim for full respiration. He doesn't want his third visit to be painful. But he's afraid it might be. He's afraid he might have to discipline them and read the riot act to them.

And he wants them to be fully restored. Verse 9 that is his prayer for them. Verse 11 can you see what the aim is? Aim for restoration to put things right. So let me give you the three tests.

What are three marks of a genuine work of God in our lives? Well first of all there's a doctrinal test. Can you see that in verse 5? Examine yourself to see whether you are in the faith.

[22 : 03] Test yourself. It's not test yourself to see if you've got faith. That's not what he says. It's the faith he's talking about here.

The faith once and for all delivered to the saints. Examine yourself. It's a doctrinal test. You see it is not just enough is it?

It's not enough to say I believe in Jesus. We should ask ourselves which Jesus do you believe in? There's lots of Jesus aren't there? Just to believe in Jesus is not enough.

Do you believe in the New Testament Jesus? Do you believe in the apostolic Jesus that Paul has brought to you? It's just experience. It's not just enough to be doctrinally sound.

The devil is doctrinally sound. Do you remember who the very first people were to recognise Jesus were? The very first people were the demons. They said we know who you are.

[23 : 01] We know who you are. Oh holy one of God you've come to destroy us to torment us and Jesus shut them up and sent them away. James tells us that the demons believe and they tremble.

So to have right doctrine is very very important. But it's not everything. It's not enough. does Christ dwell in your hearts?

Does he live in you amongst you? Because if Jesus Christ is amongst you you have passed the test. But if he haven't you have failed.

In the middle of verse 5 do not realise this about yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you. To profess faith is not the same as to possess faith. A Christian is somebody who believes the right thing of course.

But has Jesus Christ living in their lives and their hearts. Lord Reith was the first director general of the BBC. a fascinating man. He was installed as rector of Glasgow University in 1966.

[24 : 13] And in his installation address he spoke to them about what he called the mystery and the magic of the indwelling. Christ. This is what he said. I know this to be true and I long for you to discover early for yourself what I have discovered so late in life.

The magic and the mystery of the indwelling Christ. And I think Paul is saying to you and I in verse 5 of 2 Corinthians 13 do you know anything of that?

How can we know Christ is living in you and among you? Well there is a sense of course you just know don't you?

Somebody says to me how do you know you're married? How do you know you're married? And I said I just know I know it. I could get out my marriage certificate couldn't I? and I can show you that. I could get Claire to testify but I don't need to do that because I know. How do you know that you are a Christian? Do you know what a Christian is? It's somebody who's in Christ isn't it?

[25 : 30] Christ in you the hope of glory. So how do you know that? Well you know. The Spirit, the Holy Spirit bears witness with your spirit.

the Holy Spirit pours the love of Christ into your heart. So it's gloriously objective.

Christ died for sinners but there is also a subjective element. That's not all there is. It's an objective test as well. When the Holy Spirit who is the Spirit of Jesus comes to live in us.

Do you remember Jesus tonight? He's at the right hand of the Father in heaven. He is bodily ascended but he actually comes to live in and amongst his people by the Holy Spirit. And when the Holy Spirit comes to live in us and amongst us he reproduces the character of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And there is an objective test as well. There's a corporate aspect. So do you see there's a doctrinal test. Are you in the faith? Does Christ dwell in your heart?

[26 : 35] And then there's the test of fellowship. Can you see that verse of the Lamb 14? Verse 11 14. Finally brothers rejoice aim for restoration comfort one another agree with one another live in peace with one another and the God of love and peace will be with you plural.

Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you. It's the test of the holy kiss. Somebody said what's the difference between a holy kiss and an unholy kiss?

About three minutes. So culturally this looks very very different doesn't it? Okay?

But it is a very very important test of Paul's ministry. And it's a very very important test of you and my spirituality. Whether we are authentic believers.

What was he doing as an apostle in the Mediterranean? Through preaching of the gospel churches were being formed. Churches were being built. And that is the test of the apostolic ministry.

[27 : 46] But there are these communities scattered around the Mediterranean where people greet each other and love each other. So what does the holy kiss look like? Well J.P. Phillips when he translated it called it a hearty handshake.

He was an Englishman and said we're from very different cultures. It would look differently in this room how we greet each other. the point is this. We must be glad and we must be pleased when we see one another.

All God's people, all the saints send their greetings. We rejoice don't we? We are individually saved if I can put it out.

That Christ loved me and gave himself for me. But that is only a part of the gospel. that I belong now to the saints of God, the communion of the saints that we gather to worship with brothers and sisters all around the world and with the saints in heaven.

And not locally here and just locally in this congregation but all around the globe. And so whenever we meet not just here on a Sunday we should look for opportunities to meet each other to rejoice in our membership in the holy catholic church all the saints around the world they greet you.

[29 : 06] And so I have to say loads and loads of the pastoral problems in churches could be solved by people coming to church.

And loads and loads of the problems in churches that people have are often because they are not under the means of grace. And they are not greeting one another with a holy kiss.

And they wonder why they're struggling spiritually so much. So there's a doctrinal test, an experiential test and a test of fellowship. And verse 11, aim for restoration. You know that picture of dislocated bones, of amending that. And it's a brokenness of the fellowship and that's what false teaching does. And it makes people proud and they feel superior to each other.

And Paul writes to this church that they're so damaged by false apostles and he says aim for restoration. Put this right. This fellowship has been fractured, live in peace with one another. [30 : 11] Three tests, doctrinal are you in the faith, experience is Jesus Christ in you, and a test of fellowship, live in peace with one another. They have been examining him but now he examines them and I wonder how we fare.

That if we were to have a visit from our apostles, you say we don't have apostles today, do we? That's what you said, Paul. Well we do have apostles. The apostle Paul is our apostle. He's the apostle of the Gentiles.

And we are under his authority in the New Testament. What if Paul was to turn up here next Sunday night? What would he find? We'd find we'd meet at Great Mother High School next week for the carol service but what would he find?

We like the Corinthians, we're impressed by the wrong things. Externals, size, numbers, personality, websites. Big thing amongst ministers at the moment.

How good is your church website? Publicity. Well that's Corinthians. Would he find us quarrelling with one another or jealous with one another?

[31 : 12] Would he find arrogance and disorder? Would he find the sins of our past creeping back into our lives? Or would he say Christ is there? Christ is in those people. Jesus Christ lives among that group of people.

Look how they love one another. Look how glad they are to see one another. Now of course Paul isn't going to visit us, is he personally? But Jesus is.

Apostle Paul is not going to come back but Jesus will come back. And so I want to say to you tonight it's better that you examine yourself now than have him examine you on the day of judgment. Are you a Christian?

If you're not a Christian can I encourage you tonight to do something about it? And you would say to me probably it's so embarrassing people just assume I'm a Christian because I come to church. If you know tonight you're not a Christian talk with me, talk to someone else who's a believer and you might be really embarrassed by that now. That you will be much more embarrassed on the day of judgment.

[32 : 14] When Jesus Christ comes back. So if you're not a Christian talk to somebody who is a Christian about it. You say I don't know if I'm a Christian. It seems really presumptuous to say you are. Well no you should be sure.

You really should. Paul wants these people to know. He wants these people to have assurance of salvation. If you're not sure make sure put it to the test put it beyond doubt.

You say well yes I am a Christian by God's grace. grace. And it is all about God's grace. Look at the end of the book. Verse 14. It's all about God's grace.

It's about the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. That is the reason why you are a Christian tonight if you are one. That's what it's all about. It's nothing to do with you and what you've done. it is God's generosity towards you and God's love for you and God's Holy Spirit working in you.

[33 : 13] And so if you are a Christian and you know you are a Christian, stop going round and round in circles and go for it. Aim for restoration. Let's pray.