

# **2 Corinthians 13 - Self Test for Progressive Sanctification; Final Greetings**

III. Paul's vindication of his apostleship (2 Cor 10:1—13:14)

- (3) Paul announces his upcoming visit (12:14—13:10)
  - (C) Paul warns them to examine themselves (13:1-10)
- (4) Conclusion (13:11-14)
  - (A) Exhortations (13:11-12)
  - (B) Salutation (13:13)
  - (C) Benediction (13:14)

## **2 Corinthians 13**

(C) Paul warns them to examine themselves (13:1-10)

**1** This is the third time that I am coming to you. ON THE TESTIMONY OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY MATTER SHALL BE CONFIRMED.

**1** This is the third time I am coming to you. Every fact is to be confirmed by the testimony of two or three witnesses.

**1** This will be the third time I am coming to you. "Every accusation must be verified by two or three witnesses."

**1** This is the third time I am coming to you. In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established.

**2** I have previously said when I was present the second time, and though now absent I say in advance to those who have sinned in the past and to all the rest as well, that if I come again I will not spare *anyone*,

**2** I have previously said when present the second time, and though now absent I say in advance to those who have sinned in the past and to all the rest as well, that if I come again I will not spare *anyone*,

**2** I have already warned those who sinned previously and all the rest. Although I am absent now, I am warning them as I did on my second visit: If I come back, I will not spare you,

**2** I told you before, and foretell you, as if I were present, the second time; and being absent now I write to them which heretofore have sinned, and to all other, that, if I come again, I will not spare:

3 since you are seeking proof of the Christ who speaks in me, who is not weak toward you, but mighty in you.

3 since you are seeking for proof of the Christ who speaks in me, and who is not weak toward you, but mighty in you.

3 since you want proof that the Messiah is speaking through me. He is not weak in dealing with you but is making his power felt among you.

3 Since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, which to you-ward is not weak, but is mighty in you.

4 For indeed He was crucified because of weakness, yet He lives because of the power of God. For we too are weak in Him, yet we will live with Him because of the power of God *directed* toward you.

4 For indeed He was crucified because of weakness, yet He lives because of the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, yet we will live with Him because of the power of God *directed* toward you.

4 Though he was crucified in weakness, he lives by God's power. We are weak with him, but by God's power we will live for you.

4 For though he was crucified through weakness, yet he liveth by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but we shall live with him by the power of God toward you.

**5 Test** yourselves to see if you are **in the faith**; **examine** yourselves! Or do you not recognize *this about* yourselves, that **Jesus Christ is in you**—unless indeed you **fail the test**?

5 Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?

5 Keep examining yourselves to see whether you are continuing in the faith. Test yourselves! You know, don't you, that Jesus the Messiah lives in you? Could it be that you are failing the test?

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?

- This is a verse used primarily by Calvinism to scare the living daylights out of many Christians. To do so, this verse is always plucked out of its context, then used to berate believers into doubting their salvation/justification. It causes Christians to be introspective on whether or not they are saved, rather than to look to the finished work of Christ for our assurance of salvation.

- "Test" - *peirazō*, to test for the purpose of ascertaining quality. The "test" here is not a test on whether or not you're saved...it's a test to see if, as a believer, you are walking in fellowship with Christ. Paul is not building a doctrine on how to determine whether you're saved or not.
- The Corinthians, Paul's original audience, were clearly saved. Paul assumed their believing status throughout both epistles (Cf. 1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 1:1, plus 1 Cor 3:1,5; 6:11,19-20; 2 Cor 1:21-22,24; 3:2-3; 6:14-16; 8:9; 10:15). You can't interpret this verse any differently than you would interpret the rest of Paul's writings to the Corinthians.
- What would be Paul's point at the end of 2 Corinthians to ask the Corinthian church to "examine" their lives to see if they are truly saved, after both of his letters to them assumed throughout that they were already saved?
- "...in the faith" - refers to experience rather than position
- In the Calvinist interpretation, "in the faith" refers to salvation/justification, and "failing the test" means that a person is never saved (either lost salvation [Arminianism] or never really had it [Calvinism]). However, "in the faith" can apply to a believer...a believer can either be "in the faith" or not "in the faith." It doesn't exclusively pertain to unbelievers. Here are just two examples:

In 1 Cor 16:13 Paul says: "Be on the alert, stand firm **in the faith**, act like men, be strong." And in v15, Paul calls them "brethren" showing that they were believers.

In 1 Peter 5:9, Peter says: "So resist him, firm **in your faith**, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brothers and sisters who are in the world."

- In both verses above, "in the faith" can refer to a believer. And that believer can either stand firm in their faith, or not stand firm (waiver) in their faith. But either way, they are still believers.
- "...examine" - *dokimazō*, verb, meaning to prove, discern, or scrutinize to see whether something is genuine or not
- The same word is used as an adjective in 2 Tim 2:15: Be diligent to present yourself **approved** [*dokimos*] to God as a worker who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.
- When Paul says "prove yourself" or "show yourself approved" [*dokimos*] in 2 Tim 2:15, he's talking to Timothy, someone whose salvation was not in doubt. The issue in this verse is not justification, it's whether are you handling the Word of God correctly.
- So when you see the exact same root word used in 2 Cor 13:5, you see that it can be used of a person whose salvation is not in doubt either. Just because you see the phrase "examine yourself" doesn't necessarily mean that it's speaking to someone whose salvation/justification is in doubt because it clearly doesn't mean that in 2 Tim 2:15.

- "...Jesus Christ is in you" - the common Calvinistic interpretation is that if you "fail the test" that Christ is not "in you," and if Christ is not in you then you must not be a true believer.
- But the phrase "Christ in you" is not only related to justification, but also related to sanctification
- "...fail the test" - *adokimos*, not standing the test; not approved; that which does not prove itself as it ought to
  - The same word [*adokimos*] used for "fail" in 2 Cor 13:5 is used by Paul to describe himself in 1 Cor 9:27: but I strictly discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be **disqualified** [*adokimos*].
  - So if you're going to say that "fail the test" in 2 Cor 13:5 means you may not be saved, then Paul may not have been saved based on his usage of the same word in 1 Cor 9:27.
  - In 1 Cor 9:27, is Paul saying that he may not be a Christian? Of course not, that would be preposterous. What Paul is saying, if you understand the context of 1 Cor 9, is that he didn't want to be a hypocrite...he didn't want to preach one thing, then live the opposite. He wanted his lifestyle to match his preaching, otherwise he would be "disqualified" for a reward over and above salvation.
  - If Paul didn't "discipline his body," "make it his slave," and "preach to others" would he be disqualified from salvation? Of course not, that's clearly not what he is saying in this verse.
  - This whole misinterpretation goes away when you realize that Paul was not worried about his salvation/justification, but rather his progressive sanctification, and the ever-present possibility that if he didn't "discipline his body" and "make it his slave" he would be hypocritical, his preaching would lose its power, and he would forfeit rewards at the Bema Seat judgment of Christ.
  - The NT holds out the possibility that a believer will be judged and not rewarded because they do not have any good works that make it through the fire (2 John 8; Rev 3:11). So in 2 Cor 13:5, the "failure" is not entrance into heaven, but rather rewards at the Bema Seat judgment of Christ

Here's what John MacArthur says about this verse:

*"Doubts about one's salvation are not wrong...Scripture encourages self-examination...In 2 Cor 13:5, Paul wrote, 'Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?' That admonition is largely ignored—and often explained away—in the contemporary church."*

Here's what R.C. Sproul says about this verse:

*"Paul's words help clarify the doctrine of assurance of faith. Paul asks the Corinthians to examine their own lives for evidence of salvation. Such evidence would include trust in Christ (Heb 3:6), obedience to God (Matt 7:21), growth in holiness (Heb 12:24; 1 John 3:3), the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23), love for other Christians (1 John 3:14), positive influence on others (Matt 5:16), adhering to the apostolic teaching (1 John 4:2), and the testimony of the Holy Spirit within them (Rom 8:15-16)."*

What Christian passes all of these tests every day? No one. And neither did John MacArthur or R.C. Sproul during their lives. In fact, no believer can say that they passed these "tests" that Sproul lays out here. So does that mean we should all question our salvation? No!

If you buy into the John MacArthur/R.C. Sproul/John Piper interpretation of this verse, it is impossible to have any assurance of salvation. You will spend your entire Christian life neutralized and introspective on your own works rather than resting on the completed work of Jesus Christ.

Sproul and MacArthur completely misinterpret this verse because they have a predisposition to the doctrine of perseverance of the saints, which they twist this verse into supporting. However when you read the verse in context, and cross-reference it with other verses on assurance of salvation, you learn that we are never commanded to question our salvation/justification, nor to look to ourselves for our assurance.

### **Context of the Passage**

To understand this verse, we have to understand the context:

- The Corinthians were challenging Paul's apostleship. They were not challenging whether or not Paul was saved, they just doubted he was a genuine apostle since he was not one of the original 12. If Paul was indeed an apostle (which he was), then the Corinthians would have to submit to his authority (which they didn't want to).
- The surrounding verses demonstrate that this is the context:
  - 2 Cor 13:3: since you are seeking **proof** of the Christ who speaks **in me**, who is not weak toward you, but mighty in you.
  - 2 Cor 13:6-7:
    - 6 But I expect that you will realize that we ourselves **do not fail the test**.
    - 7 Now we pray to God that you do nothing wrong; not so that we ourselves may appear approved, but that you may do what is right, though we may appear **unapproved**.

- In 13:5, Paul takes the Corinthians' argument against his apostleship and turns it around on them. He takes the same terminology that they were using against him and he uses it against them. His question is essentially, "Are you even mature enough as a Christian to make a judgment on whether or not I am an apostle?"
  - He says, if you want to test me (regarding apostleship), instead why don't you test yourselves (regarding spiritual maturity)
- In 13:1, Paul is talking about church discipline...he says "This is the third time I'm coming to you." Paul had addressed the question of his apostolic credentials on two previous occasions, this being the third time.
  - He's following Matt 18:15-17, and even quotes the same OT passage quoted in that passage in v1 (Deut 19:15)
  - Since it appears that Paul is referring to church discipline here, and church discipline is reserved only for the saved (you don't initiate church discipline on an unbeliever), Paul is not talking about a salvation/justification issue, but a growth/sanctification issue.

6 But I expect that you will realize that we ourselves do not fail the test.

6 But I trust that you will realize that we ourselves do not fail the test.

6 I hope you will realize that we haven't failed our test.

6 But I trust that ye shall know that we are not reprobates.

7 Now we pray to God that you do nothing wrong; not so that we ourselves may appear approved, but that you may do what is right, though we may appear unapproved.

7 Now we pray to God that you do no wrong; not that we ourselves may appear approved, but that you may do what is right, even though we may appear unapproved.

7 We pray to God that you will not do anything wrong—not to show that we have not failed the test, but so that you may do what is right, even if we seem to have failed.

7 Now I pray to God that ye do no evil; not that we should appear approved, but that ye should do that which is honest, though we be as reprobates.

8 For we cannot do anything against the truth, but *only* for the truth.

8 For we can do nothing against the truth, but *only* for the truth.

8 For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth.

8 For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth.

9 For we rejoice when we ourselves are weak, but you are strong; this we also pray for, that you become mature.

9 For we rejoice when we ourselves are weak but you are strong; this we also pray for, that you be made complete.

9 We are glad when we are weak and you are strong. That is what we are praying for—your maturity.

9 For we are glad, when we are weak, and ye are strong: and this also we wish, even your perfection.

10 For this reason I am writing these things while absent, so that when present I *need* not use severity, in accordance with the authority which the Lord gave me for building up and not for tearing down.

10 For this reason I am writing these things while absent, so that when present I *need* not use severity, in accordance with the authority which the Lord gave me for building up and not for tearing down.

10 For this reason I am writing this while I am away from you: When I come I do not want to be severe in using the authority the Lord gave me to build you up and not to tear you down.

10 Therefore I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness, according to the power which the Lord hath given me to edification, and not to destruction.

Paul's first epistle was organized, deliberate, practical. His second Epistle to the Corinthians defies analysis; it is an outpouring of his heart. It is like an electrocardiogram: it shows us the condition of Paul's heartbeats. Honest and vulnerable, he gives us insight into our own.

These last four chapters seem to differ from the first nine, which had sense of warmth, comfort, and thanksgiving. These last four seem to be written to the critical minority, and are sad and severe. (This is why some believe they may be a fragment of his "fourth" letter.)

(4) Conclusion (13:11-14)

(A) Exhortations (13:11-12)

11 Finally, brothers *and sisters*, rejoice, mend your ways, be comforted, be like-minded, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.

11 Finally, brethren, rejoice, be made complete, be comforted, be like-minded, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.

11 Finally, brothers, goodbye. Keep on growing to maturity. Keep listening to my appeals. Continue agreeing with each other and living in peace. Then the God of love and peace will be with you.

11 Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.

12 Greet one another with a holy kiss.  
12 Greet one another with a holy kiss.  
12 Greet one another with a holy kiss.  
**12** Greet one another with an holy kiss.

(B) Salutation (13:13)

13 All the saints greet you.  
13 All the saints greet you.  
13 All the saints greet you.  
**13** All the saints salute you.

(C) Benediction (13:14)

**14** The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the **fellowship of the Holy Spirit**, be with you all.  
**14** The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.  
**14** May the grace of the Lord Jesus the Messiah, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with all of you!  
**14** The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen.  
- "...fellowship of the Holy Spirit" - it is the fellowship ministry of the Holy Spirit that makes fellowship among believers possible (Cf. Phil 2:1)

[The second [epistle] to the Corinthians was written from Philippi, [a city] of Macedonia, by Titus and Lucas.]