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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes

INTRODUCTION

Everyone take out a blank piece of paper, we're going to take a test. Can you recall how you felt when you heard those words from a teacher or professor? As we come to the end of the book of 2 Corinthians, it's “Test Time.” Life is full of tests. We start taking tests in the first grade. When we get into high school we take the ACT or the SAT, which often determines if and where we attend college. Then when we get to college we discover it's full of harder tests. Then when you graduate you only take more tests. Lawyers have to pass the bar exam, doctors have to pass their board exams, and accountants have to pass the CPA exam. In the military, soldiers take aptitude tests. Then as we grow older we find life is full of driver's tests, vision tests, hearing tests, drug tests, and medical tests. And you'll often hear us testing microphones in this room saying, “Testing, one, two, three.” Life is full of tests.

I love the story about a man who underwent a series of medical tests. After the tests, the doctor called his wife into his office. The doctor said, “Your husband has a rare illness and he is going to die unless you devote yourself to meeting his every need. You've got to wake up early and cook him three nutritious meals every day. Whatever he asks for, you have to grant his request. If you do this, he may get better.” The wife left the doctor's office and her husband said, “What did the doctor say?” The wife said, “The doctor said you're gonna die!”

Let's take a math test right now (it's also a mind-reading test). I'll give you a math test, and then I'll predict your answer. Take a blank sheet of paper or use the margin of your outline. Write down any number between 1 and 9. Now multiply that number by 9. If the number has two digits then add those two digits together (if your number is 23 add the 2 and the 3 to make 5). Next subtract 5 from your number. Now, using the alphabet, assign a letter to that number. A is 1, B is 2, C is three and so on. Now you should have a letter. Now write down a country that begins with that letter. Got it? Now look at the second letter in that country and choose the name of a circus animal that begins with the second letter of your country and write it down. You should have a country and an animal written down. Got it? All I want to say is “There are no elephants in Denmark!” (readers, try it for yourself).

Sometimes the answers to tests can be rather funny. Here are some actual answers given by high school students:

- (1) Ancient Egypt was inhabited by mummies and they all wrote in hydraulics. They lived in the Sarah Dessert and traveled by Camelot.
- (2) The Bible is full of interesting caricatures. In the first book of the Bible, Guinnessis, Adam and Eve were created from an apple tree.
- (3) Moses led the Hebrew slaves to the Red Sea, where they made unleavened bread which is bread made without any ingredients. Moses went up on Mount Cyanide to get the ten commandments. He died before he ever reached Canada.
- (4) The Greeks were a highly sculptured people, and without them we wouldn't have history. The Greeks also had myths. A myth is a female moth.
- (5) Socrates was a famous Greek teacher who went around giving people advice. He died from an overdose of wedlock. After his death, his career suffered a dramatic decline.

- (6) Another story was William Tell, who shot an arrow through an apple while standing on his son’s head.
- (7) Gutenberg invented removable type and the Bible. Another important invention was the circulation of blood. Sir Walter Raleigh is a historical figure because he invented cigarettes and started smoking. And Sir Francis Drake circumcised the world with a 100 foot clipper.

Hopefully the answers you give to our test today will be better! As we come to our text, remember the Christians in Corinth subjected Paul to the microscopic scrutiny of their evaluation. He passed every test with flying colors and finally he says, “Stop examining me and start examining yourself. It’s test time!” But this is an open book test. Let’s open God’s book and read 2 Corinthians 13:5-10:

“Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test? And I trust that you will discover that we have not failed the test. Now we pray to God that you will not do anything wrong. Not that people will see that we have stood the test but that you will do what is right even though we may seem to have failed. For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. We are glad whenever we are weak but you are strong; and our prayer is for your perfection. This is why I write these things when I am absent, that when I come I may not have to be harsh in my use of authority—the authority the Lord gave me for building you up, not for tearing you down.”

Have you have discovered how easy it is to confess other people’s sins, but how hard it is to confess our own? The only exercise some people get is jumping to conclusions and running other people down. But for the next few minutes, let’s stop looking at others and let’s examine ourselves. Socrates said, “The unexamined life is not worth living.” There are four test questions in this passage that I’d like for you to ask yourself.

1. AM I SOLID IN THE FAITH?

I call this the Assurance Test. Do you have the blessed assurance that you are truly saved? Our text says, “Test yourselves to make sure you are solid in the faith. Don’t drift along taking everything for granted. Give yourselves regular checkups.” (vs. 5 *The Message*) There is a difference between the idea of “faith” and “the faith.” “The faith” refers to the Christian faith as opposed to any other kind of faith like “the Jewish faith” or “the Hindu faith.” In this context “the faith” refers to the entire body of beliefs we embrace as Christians. Jude writes that we should “contend for THE faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.” (Jude 3).

To be solid in the faith means you are truly a Christian. Paul used a word that literally means, “counterfeit.” There were counterfeit believers in Corinth, and I believe there are multitudes of counterfeit Christians on the membership rolls of churches. How do we explain the fact that there are 14,000 members of Green Acres but less than half that number ever shows up to serve, or to contribute anything to the life of this church? When someone asks me how many members we have I always say, “We have over 14,000 members, but the FBI couldn’t find half of them.” It sounds funny, but a membership roll is really a prospect list.

There really is such a thing as a counterfeit Christian, although it sounds like an oxymoron. In Matthew 7 Jesus predicted on Judgement Day many (not a few) would say to Him, “Lord, Lord, in your name we did many good works. In your name we even cast out demons.” Then Jesus will say to them, “I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!” (Matthew 7:21- 23) THE faith is not a religion of doing things for God. THE faith is a personal relationship in knowing Jesus and being known by Jesus. The people Jesus described used the right religious language and they were involved in much religious activity, but they never had a relationship with Jesus.

Global Missions uses the term “10/40 window.” It refers to the area of Africa and Asia that lies between the 10th parallel north and the 40th parallel north. The largest concentration of lost people live in this 10/40 window. However, today, we are being made aware of what’s called the “7:21 window.” It comes from Matthew 7:21, where Jesus said, “Depart from me, I never knew you.” In other words, one of the greatest potential harvests for evangelism is actually on the rolls of churches in America. Researcher George Barna says 50% of church members in America are actually counterfeit Christians, and should be the target for evangelism.

A counterfeit Christian looks like a Christian and even acts like a Christian at times. Did you hear about the counterfeit twenty dollar bill that got into circulation? It did a lot of good. It was placed in the offering plate of a local church; it was used to buy clothes for a child who was cold; it was used to purchase food for a hungry family; it was used to pay the electric bill for a family that was cold. But when that twenty dollar bill arrived at the bank, the teller declared it was counterfeit and it was burned. So it will be with some people who talk the religious talk and even walk the religious walk, but they never had a relationship with Jesus.

Do you know for certain you are solid in the faith? You may say, “Well, Pastor, nobody can know for sure.” Oh yes you can. The Bible says in 1 John 5:13, “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may KNOW that you have eternal life.” You can know you are solid in the faith.

I have a younger brother, Dan, who has always lived a pretty good life. I can remember the Sunday when Dan walked the aisle as a child and was baptized. He was involved in everything at our local church. He sang in the youth choir, and even went on mission trips. He was better behaved than I was as a teenager. If my brother had died at age 17, I would have probably preached at his funeral. I would have said, “Dan was a good young man. He loved the Lord and he’s in heaven today.” But I would have been lying because if my brother had died at age 17 he would have arrived in hell, because by his own testimony, he claims he wasn’t truly saved until he was 18 years old. For many years he was living the faith of our parents. He was religious but he didn’t have a relationship with Jesus Christ. He could have fooled me—and he did. But he was counterfeit until he was truly born again.

How about you? Are you solid in the faith? Do you have a relationship with Jesus that is real and personal? Have you confessed with your mouth that Jesus is your Lord and do you believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead? If you do, you can know for certain you are solid in the faith.

2. DOES MY CONDUCT REVEAL THAT JESUS LIVES IN ME?

I call this the Fruit Test. The Bible says, “You need firsthand evidence, not mere hearsay, that Jesus Christ is in you.” (vs. 5 *The Message*) My father was a forester, and he could name every tree. I can’t do that, but when I see an apple hanging on a tree, my brilliant mind deduces, “That’s an apple tree.” And Jesus said you can tell a believer by their conduct. This passage says there should be PROOF you are truly a follower of Jesus Christ. Paul used the word “test” four times in two verses. The Greek word for test is *dokime*, from which we get our English word “document.” A document is more than a piece of paper; it also carries the idea of “proof.” A person selling antiques might say, “I have documented proof that this piece of furniture was made in 1820.” That document proves that it’s genuine. The word translated “fail the test” simply means “undocumented.” We’re all familiar with the idea of undocumented immigrants living in the U.S. According to the latest estimates, there are over 12 million undocumented immigrants living in the U.S. Our government reserves the right to ask people for documented proof that they are legally residing in our country.

Paul used this idea to ask, “Is there any ‘documented proof’ in your life that Jesus Christ is living in you? To put it another way, if it was illegal to be a Christian and you were arrested, would there be enough evidence to convict you?”

There are two sources of evidence to prove Christ is in you—internal evidence and external fruit. The first evidence is the internal witness of the Holy Spirit. The Bible says, “The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we God’s children.” (Romans 8:16) When you become a true believer, God’s Holy Spirit takes up residence in your spirit to represent the life of Jesus Christ. When that happens, it’s as if the Holy Spirit shakes hands with your spirit and He says, “Welcome to the family of God.” This is an inner, subjective witness. You must be cautious at this point because we can have faulty feelings, false impressions, and misdirected emotions. Don’t depend on this inner witness alone.

The external evidence is when we display the fruit of a Christian. This is objective evidence that can be observed. The fruit of the Christian life is found in Galatians 5:22: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. In the early part of my Christian life I really struggled because I read in the Bible about how I should be living, but my lifestyle didn’t measure up. So I would redouble my efforts to be loving, joyful, and kind, but I wasn’t consistent. In my home church, I went forward so many times during the invitation to rededicate my life that I had my own little path worn into the carpet. I was determined to live the Christian life even if it killed me—and it almost did! I was straining so hard to live like Jesus that I almost had a spiritual hernia!

But when I was in college I made the wonderful discovery that the Christian life isn’t about trying to imitate Jesus, it’s about surrendering my life to Jesus and letting Him live His life through me. I discovered the secret was not in rededicating my self, but by having myself crucified with Christ. What a difference that has made! It truly is the greatest discovery of my life. No longer do I have to struggle to love that person who is unlovely, I only have to allow Jesus in me to love that person. I don’t have to work up some feeling of joy; I just allow the joy of Jesus to be expressed in me.

I enjoy illustrating this revolutionary truth using a simple prop of a glove in my hand. This glove represents my life. "Glove, I want you to spread your fingers apart. Come on glove! Do it! Oh, you can't, huh? What a sorry glove you are." Let's try another command, "Glove, make a fist. Come on. Get with the program! You're a miserable failure as a glove! You can't obey any of my commands." That was a description of my Christian life until I understood that Christ lives in me. When I place my hand in this glove, it's a picture of what happens when I yield my life to Christ who lives in me. Spread my fingers? No problem. Make a fist? No problem. Do you know for certain Christ is in you? Do you sense God's Spirit shaking hands with your spirit? Does your conduct reflect the love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, meekness and self-control of Jesus?

3. AM I LIVING UNDER THE AUTHORITY OF GOD'S TRUTH?

I call this the Bible Test. In this section on testing Paul wrote, "For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth." (vs. 8 NIV) People without Christ are constantly asking, "What is truth?" But Jesus answered that question unequivocally when He said to His Father, "Your Word is truth." (John 17:17) God's Word, the Bible, contains the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. So another way to give documented proof that you are a Christian is if you have a hunger for a steady intake of God's Word. Peter wrote these words to new believers, "Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation." (1 Peter 2:2) Can you honestly say that you crave the Word of God the way a hungry baby craves milk?

Here are a couple of simple questions to help you self-diagnose your attitude toward your Bible. First: Do I believe that God's Word is true and that it is my final authority on deciding what is right and wrong? There used to be a saying, "God said it. I believe it. That settles it." That sounded cute, but the truth is: God said it and that settles it whether you believe it or not! Some people read their Bibles like a tax attorney reading the IRS code looking for loopholes. But God wants us to read and study His Word like a love letter He has written to guide us through our daily lives. When you're asked a question that involves morality or ethics, is your first response, "What does the Bible say?"

A second test question about the Bible is: How well do I know God's Word? The Bible is the world's best selling book, but among Americans, it may be the least-read book as well. The average American household owns three Bibles. But there is an epidemic of Bible ignorance in our churches. The Barna Research Group interviewed people claiming to be Christians and only 34% of the people questioned could name all four gospel writers. A whopping 75% of them believe the Bible contains, "God helps those who help themselves."

Do you read God's Book more than you read any other book? A pastor was making a house call to one of the families in his congregation. As they were sitting in the living room, the woman noticed there wasn't a Bible in that room. She wanted to impress her pastor so she said to her son, "Honey, go get the book that mommy loves to read!" In a few minutes her son came back in carrying a TV Guide! Grade yourself. How are you doing on the Bible test?

4. AM I EXPRESSING LOVE TOWARD OTHERS?

I call this the Love Test. Our text says, “We don’t just put up with our limitations; we celebrate them, and then go on to celebrate every strength, every triumph of the truth in you. We pray hard that it will all come together in your lives.” (vs. 9 *The Message*) Paul’s love for the Christians in Corinth can be seen in the fact that he was more concerned about their welfare than his own. One of the best ways to know for certain you are truly a child of God is if you have an unselfish love toward others. Jesus gave us a new commandment that we should love others just as He loved us. He said, “All men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (John 13:35) The true mark of a Christian isn’t wearing a cross around your neck, or putting a fish symbol on your car, or carrying around a big black Bible. The mark of a Christian is love for others.

In the Bible, the opposite of love isn’t hate, it’s selfishness. A life devoid of love thinks only about “me” and cares nothing about others. By now, you’ve probably heard about the Wal-Mart employee in New York who was trampled to death by shoppers on Black Friday. Witnesses said the shoppers kept streaming in and trampling the man as he lay on the floor. One witness said the people acted “like savages” and when they were told they would have to leave the store because of the employee’s death, shoppers shouted that they had been in line all night and continued to shop. What a tragic testimony of the greed and selfishness that has become a part of our culture.

Love always says, “you first.” Selfishness always says, “me first.” Love always wants to ask others how they are doing. Selfishness always wants to talk about “how I’m doing.” A man once wrote a letter to Dear Abby saying: “I am one guy who has everything. I am handsome and intelligent. Women are always flocking around me telling me how marvelous I am. I’m beginning to find this extremely boring. How can I discourage these hopeful females?” Abby wrote back: “Just keep talking.”

Do people know you’re a disciple of Jesus because you love others just as He loved you? C.S. Lewis writes about a man who had a dream about heaven and hell. In hell, people were seated at a long banquet table stacked with delicious food. Everyone was tied to their chairs and each person had a 3-foot long fork and spoon strapped to each arm. There was utter chaos as everyone fought to feed themselves. Forks and spoons were clanking like swords, food was flying everywhere, and nobody was able to satisfy their hunger. The scene was one of unfulfilled hunger and eternal frustration. (Reminds me of Wal-Mart on Black Friday)

Then the dream changed to a scene of heaven. The man saw the same long banquet table loaded down with delicious food. Like those people in hell, everyone had the same long forks and spoons fastened to their arms. But in heaven, each person was using their fork and spoon to feed the person seated across from them. As they took turns feeding each other, there was laughter and happy conversation. Everyone was fed until they were fully satisfied. C.S. Lewis wrote that the basic difference between heaven and hell is the difference between selfishness and love.

So how well do you score on the Love Test? Well, when you drive off from our crowded parking lot in a few minutes, you’ll get a chance to test whether your attitude is “you first” or “me first!”

CONCLUSION

So how did you do on this test? We need to be honest with ourselves. Don't be like the man who jumped off the Empire State Building. As he was falling past the 40th floor a window washer asked him, “How are you doing?” He said, “So far, so good.”

The reason we need to submit to a regular spiritual self-examination is because one day we'll stand before God for a real final exam. It won't be about what *kind* of Christian you've been, but whether or not you are a Christian. Through the years I've asked a simple question to get people to think about their spiritual condition. I'd like to ask you: “Suppose you are standing before God right now and He asked you, ‘Why should I let you into heaven?’ What do you think you would say?” Think carefully before you answer, because this could be your final exam. And God won't give you a grade; it's a pass/fail test. Would you answer by talking about all the religious things you've done like attending church, reading the Bible, or being good? Would you show Him your contribution records? Would you flash Him your baptismal certificate? As I said at the beginning, this is an open book test. Let me give you the correct answer. “It's not what I have done, it's all about what Jesus did for me when He gave me His grace and mercy on the cross. Nothing in my hand I bring, only to the cross I cling!”

And if you can truthfully give that answer, you won't have to worry about your final exam. Actually you'll arrive to discover Jesus has already taken your test, and He had a perfect score!

OUTLINE

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