

The God Who Restores

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- [0 : 0 0] Good evening folks, wonderful to have you here. If you're new, welcome. My name's Aaron, this is Jordan. If you are new, I'd love to meet you. Come and say hi afterwards.
- So, this is the last sermon in 2 Corinthians. And I don't know about you, but I have found this book tremendously challenging. Especially the last sort of 5 weeks.
- I think we had those 3 weeks in money. And I found that huge. The last couple of weeks, Paul talking about the glory of God being exposed in his weakness.
- Very profound stuff. Quite freeing actually. You would have noticed if you've been around for a while that during these sermons, we've often had to delve into the back story in the passage. You know, the way Paul talked, he was obviously addressing some specific accusations on occasion.
- Accusations like, you're too weak to be the leader. You've got too many problems. You're not a very good speaker. It's a bit dodgy. You don't take money. You don't take money. Show us proof that Christ is speaking through. Accusations like that.
- [1 : 0 0] And so, he was in the firing line a little bit and addressing those. And this week, as he finishes the letter, it feels like he's turning the table on his accusers. These false teachers who want to get rid of him.
- And it's like these accusers are all up in his face. And Paul sort of takes their shoulders and he kind of rotates them 180 degrees so that they're facing a mirror. And he says to them, you know, the relevant question is not, is God speaking through me?
- The really important question is, are you guys actually Christians? He turns the tables on them. He says, the question is not, am I your apostle? It's, are you a Christian?
- And I think that's the main idea right at the start of our passage tonight. This last little section of 2 Corinthians. And they're very strong words. You heard read, verse 5, examine yourselves.
- That's quite full on, right? Examine yourselves to see whether you're in the faith. Test yourselves. And then it goes on, and later in verse 5, it says in the Greek, specifically it says, know yourself.
- [2 : 0 8] So it's examine yourself, test yourself, know yourself. That's the guts of the passage. And I think the rest of the text, you could break it up into ways the presence of Christ shows itself in your life.
- The proofs of following Jesus. Remember the context again of Paul here. For him, there were question marks around the Corinthian church.
- So he's saying, examine yourself. Like, take a bit of a stock. Take stock of your situation here. He knew that there was, you know, there was this kind of commitment to these false teachers, and there was some immorality, and there was disunity.
- And Paul is saying to them, listen, I'm going to come and visit you shortly. So you need to just check yourself. You need to get right with Jesus. That's what verse 10 is about. He's basically saying, I want to, it's a gracious thing.

He's going, I want to give you guys a chance to sort it out before I get there, because I don't want to get there and have to be the tough guy and maybe, like, kick people out of the church. So check yourself.

[3 : 13] This is Paul doing the hard work of being a truth teller. We talked about this last week. This really is an act of grace. Now, we don't have the apostle Paul coming to visit us anytime soon, but we do anticipate Christ's return and his assessment.

So we should, too, with regularity, assess our lives. We should examine ourselves. We should know ourselves. Now, for those of you here who are a bit OCD or a bit perfectionist, the idea of self-assessment might be horrifying to you.

You might think that the only result of that kind of practice would be feeling completely inadequate and just awful.

John Newton, you know John Newton, right? He wrote Amazing Grace. So he was an 18th century slave trader who converted, was born again, and he was an Anglican minister.

He didn't publish books, but he was a prolific letter writer. It's kind of an art that we've kind of forgotten now, but he was a prolific letter writer. In one letter, he talks about how Christians put too little time and effort into examining themselves and seeking to grow in holiness and the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

[4 : 32] He goes on to say that this sort of examination shouldn't doom the person to feeling overwhelming shame, but it should lead to repentance and it should lead to rejoicing. Because he says the deeper the knowledge of sin in your life, the richer the rejoicing in grace should be.

Now, back to the passage. So probably the really good question to ask is how do we examine ourselves? How do we test ourselves? How do we know ourselves? Well, one way, well, the best way really, isn't it, is to come to the scriptures with an open heart, asking for Holy Spirit guidance and with the assurance of grace and say, what is the scriptures telling me?

How is the scripture challenging me right now? How do we know? Where does the text point to? Where does it point to areas in my life that I need to pay attention to? As we read these final words from Paul, you know, I think there are three areas which we need to examine ourselves in.

I think there are three areas we need to ask the hard question of, are we on board with Jesus in these three areas? I think that's the purpose of this last part of the passage.

And those areas are belief, behavior, and unity. So, those are the three little sections of the sermon. First, let's talk about belief.

[5 : 55] The belief, let's call it the belief test. It doesn't sound fun, does it? But let's have a go. Back to verse 5 again. Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith.

Right. What do you notice there? It's not examine yourselves to see if you have enough faith. I mean, I don't know about you. That's an instant fail right there, probably. It's see if you are in the faith.

There's a definite article in the Greek, in the English. It's the faith. The test, the question we ask ourselves is, are we within the parameters of the apostolic gospel?

And it's not something we should assume. We should test it. We should question that. We should think about that. You could ask yourself, for example, you could say, okay, what parts of the sort of dominant cultural narrative out there have seeped into my faith in a sort of an unhealthy way.

Right. The false teachers, they taught Jesus. They talked about Jesus. But it wasn't the Jesus of the Bible because their gospel was incredibly heavily influenced by the culture to the point where it wasn't the gospel anymore.

[7 : 09] Now, ask yourself, does my faith line up with the historic faith as it's summarized? And the creeds, for example, the Apostles' Creed that we just read out.

Do you find that, let's say somebody famous dies, you know, and they're really lovely, like one of those real lovely people that dies that's really famous. And do you say to yourself, oh, well, they just live this great life.

They were an ambassador for the UN doing something. Or they, you know, they're always, whatever, they were cool all the time. They had charities. Do you sort of say to yourself, oh, well, they'll be okay because they live this really famous good life.

They're probably okay with Jesus, surely. And that's not Christianity. That's just sort of thinking what culture thinks, right? You could ask yourself, you could say, um, uh, Well, let me put it like this.

Do you follow Jesus personally, but think that other faiths that are sincerely held make that person okay with God?

[8 : 17] That's an example of kind of a cultural narrative coming into the Christian faith. I mean, that's not what Jesus taught. That's not what the Bible teaches. Are you in the faith? That's the question. Are you in the faith? Test yourself.

Examine yourselves. And let me remind you, it's not, and this is very important, it's not the strength of your faith, but it's the object of your faith that actually saves you.

I'll say it again. It's not the strength of your faith. It's the object of your faith that actually saves you. The followers of the super apostles probably had an enormous amount of faith in this false gospel.

But that's a bit useless, isn't it? We are infinitely better to have a very fragile faith in the authentic Jesus. So in summary, Paul is the loving father of his congregation, says examine yourself, examine your faith.

And he's not saying again, I just want to keep repeating this because it's important. It's not saying, how are you feeling about your faith? Or how faithful are you? No, it's actually far more objective than that.

[9 : 24] It's a question of commitment to the authentic, historic, biblical beliefs and doctrine of Christianity. So I think some of the practices of the Anglican Church and more liturgical churches are really helpful.

Each week, through the liturgy and the flow of the songs, how they're chosen, we rehearse the gospel. We recite the creeds. Each week, we're reminded of the basic gospel message.

And it's so important that we do that. And it's the reason why that's, and I wanted to impact you. It's the reason why, do you know when sometimes I lead and I get all grumpily say, look, stop, let's say that again, please.

And I always felt a bit bad when I do that. But it's because I don't want you to just jog through it. Just sort of saying it without really thinking about what you're saying.

I want it to impact you. Okay, let's move on. That's the belief test. Are your beliefs orthodox? As we know, though, as we know, you can have great doctrinal beliefs, but not be a follower of Jesus.

[10 : 32] So the next test, the next examination is the behavior test. So this is part two. The behavior test. So in verse five, Paul reminds them of the, as one sort of archbishop called it, the mystery and magic of Christ being in them.

Isn't that wonderful? The mystery and magic of Christ being in them, dwelling in them through the Holy Spirit. If you're a Christian, you have this inward witness. You have this, consciousness is not a great word, but you have this Christian consciousness that should reproduce the character of Christ in you, which is why Paul says things like this.

I hope you will find out that we have not failed the test in verse seven, but we pray to God that you may not do wrong, but that you may do what is right.

For this reason, I write these things while I'm away from you, that when I come, I may not have to be severe in my use of authority that the Lord has given me for building up and not tearing down. So he's saying, look, I'm coming to visit.

And clearly some of you guys are living a life which does not reflect the fact that the Holy Spirit is in you producing the character of Christ. See, Paul expects repentance and he expects progress.

[11 : 43] He expects a change in our life. Now how do we test this? How do you test this? Again, let me just, let me throw out some questions just to prime the pump.

And then you can go away and sort of think and pray about this yourself. Here's a couple of questions. When you look in the mirror, do you see someone whom King Jesus lives? When you listen to the sorts of things you say, does it sound like the words coming from something Jesus might say?

Or are you talking like everyone else talks? When you talk to other Christians, do you see them as brothers and sisters? Or do you see them as kind of just random people around you?

When you pray, do you pray more not to do evil than not to suffer evil? I think that's an important one. When you pray, do you pray more not to do evil than not to suffer evil?

Are you more worried about being a victim than a sinner? Okay, there's a few things to think on there. Look, Christ's presence in his indwelling is proved by an altered behavior.

[12 : 52] And St. John's, we are a Bible-believing church, right? We're Bible, you know this. We're a Bible-preaching church. Orthodox Bible-preaching church. That's why many of you come here. That's great, that's brilliant.

But we want to be a changed-life church as well. Now, there's one of the downsides of it. I mentioned the upside of the sort of Anglican style, right? One of the downsides is that we can actually say all the right things and we can give the appearance of faith.

But actually nothing has changed. When we preach through James, we learn a lot of good stuff when we preach through the book of James. And James tackles this idea quite full on. Let me just read one verse that you'll be familiar with, from chapter 2, verse 14.

He says, If someone says he has faith but does not have works, can that faith save him? You notice the passage, it doesn't read, it doesn't say this. It doesn't say, If someone has faith and does not have works, they can be saved.

It says, If someone says they have faith. If someone says they have faith but does not have works, can that faith save them? So the person, this person, in this rhetorical question, just says they have faith.

[13 : 59] it's the person with all the right answers right? It's mental assent to doctrine but it's not a faith that results in a changed life can that kind of faith save that person?

The inferred answer is no so this means that it's possible to have the object of faith straight but not actually be right with God because it's not real faith it's a belief system, it's just sort of a mental ascent to a set of ideas that never makes it past our mind, never makes it past propositions into our hearts, never makes it past our mind to affect the way we actually live and the way we act that's the warning from James and it lines up very well with what Paul is saying here, the life of faith is not a life of private transactions with God, it's a life of obedience because true faith means that the Holy Spirit has entered your life, it's entered my life and it's transforming us into the likeness of Christ and there's going to be backwards and there's going to be forwards and our path through life our journey through life, our walk through life, we will look a bit drunk sometimes, a bit staggering sometimes but there is forgiveness and there's onwadsness and over time true faith results in a changed life that's the trajectory that

Paul expects, that the Bible expects so that's the behaviour test so we've had the doctrine test we've had the behaviour test now the unity test and we'll do this one quickly and finish up as we practice this self-examination as we take stock of our lives which we should regularly do Paul reminds us of the importance of church, family, unity does that in verse 11 there he says, finally brothers and that means brothers and sisters finally brothers and sisters rejoice, aim for restoration comfort one another agree with one another live in peace and the God of love and peace will be with you greet one another with a holy kiss all the saints greet you the church this was a factious church that they had lost a clear picture of Jesus through this false teaching they'd lost a grip of the gospel they'd failed the doctrine test they'd failed the behaviour test and of course that's just carnage in a church that's chaos he can't have unity there so they're under enormous pressure this church community that Paul is writing to and he doesn't want to dissolve the church he wants them to trash it out he wants them to work it out and that's going to be hard yards he wants them to be restored relationally to each other to him not so they can just have polite services not so they can have quaint little gatherings no he wants real unity he wants joy he wants peace he wants real affection to emanate from this group so he encourages them in five things he says rejoice one two restoration three comfort one another four be of one mind five live in peace six kiss each other let's do them

I know what one you're looking forward to right here we go one at a time rejoice what's the appropriate response to being forgiven by God it's joy isn't it two aim for restoration this means that broken relationships are in the church folks I know some of you guys have broken relationships with each other I know there are conflicts in our congregation and you guys that is sinful it hurts the gospel and you need to work it out you need to repent and you need to come to these people that you have disagreements with or that you've had arguments with and you need to sort that out three you need to comfort one another this could be translated encourage one another when I assess my life as I've been doing as I've been thinking these three things I think this is one I really need to work on I need more encouraging Christian friendships I need those kind of friendships where we hold each other accountable where it's not just we gather and we you know have a drink and we talk about politics

I love talking about politics but we talk about politics and we talk about sports which is I want those kind of friendships where they really sincerely encourage each other in our faith where we are truth tellers where we call each other out and we walk with each other in pain four be of one mind this is not think the same thing it's not we must have exact doctrinal unity on every topic within this congregation we all have things that we disagree on minor doctrinal issues that's fine I'm not worried about that stuff what this is talking about is it's having your mind set on the same object and this is Jesus five live in peace he says set your mind together on Jesus and you'll know peace six kiss each other with a holy kiss it's called a holy kiss because he doesn't want people to think he's being erotic or you know doing some weird sort of thing in the church back in New Zealand as it is in Australia in some European countries people kiss each other when they greet each other that's standard practice in New Zealand anyway and between the sexes if I saw a girl that I knew well

[19:17] I'd give her a kiss on the cheek and in my life though in New Zealand there are a couple of guys that I will kiss when I see them and there's only a couple of them and we only get to see each other every couple of years and this is I don't mean to sound weird but those kisses meant a great deal to me they are precious precious things to me because they communicate to me that Aaron you are you are very special and so special that I'll cross this kind of weird intimate thing and give you a kiss on the cheek and they're saying I value that friendship and I think this is the kind of thing that Paul was getting at now I just need to add an annendum what's that word an annendum what's it called a D addendum yeah that's a hard word addendum this is just a case I've done this to you sometimes I forget I'm in Canada and I will kiss and I will go to kiss somebody on the cheek because I've just forgotten I realise it's not done so much over here and somebody will put the they'll think I'm going in for a hug and they'll put their head in the wrong position and I

I'll kiss them on their ear like right right in their ear I will kiss them and I never know what to do I have done it probably 20 times in the last few years and if I've done it to you I'm sorry and sometimes I'll do it and honestly it's right in the ear right in the ear and I'll pull back and I think should I wink or something should I as I'm pulling back should I say something like it's okay I'm a priest something like that I think I'm a priest so if I've done that to you I'm really sorry I just I just forget where I'm living and it's not right right so so this holy kiss thing what's Paul talking about he's just it's an intimate greeting and it says this it says we share a special bond because of Jesus that's what the kiss is about so whatever that looks like in our context whatever kind of intimate interaction that looks like in our context we should do that we should be a congregation that has genuine affection for each other like there's kids that come up the front and just run up to each other and touching each other and they're calling each other's names and big smiles it's wonderful we should have that kind of affection for each other examine yourselves in that area would you test yourself in that area know yourself in that area

I don't want you to come to church and do this and then take off straight away afterwards I mean sometimes you have something going on in your life that requires that and it's an appropriate it's an appropriate thing but a good chunk of the time folks I want you to be just happy to see each other and tender with each other let me finish up here so Paul calls for self-examination it's a hard and wonderful thing you know what's wonderful what's wonderful about it is that because the more we see our own flaws and sins in our life the more precious and amazing God's grace is to us and the more that happens the more aware you are of God's wonderful grace the more you're able to drop your sort of denials and self-defenses and admit actually actually admit what's going on in your heart to God and to other people and when you do that that's when this stuff can be dealt with it's a tremendous thing to do and it's a difficult thing to do and it's a messy thing to do but it's a very necessary thing to do so let me finish with a prayer that Paul finishes with obviously it's a prayer very familiar to us

Paul finishes this great challenge of reminding us that our mending our progress in the areas of faith, doctrine, behaviour, unity that our healing in these areas it doesn't lie in us this is not a call to pull yourselves up by the bootstraps this is not a call to like come on try harder people you can do better that's not the call Paul's prayer right at the end which is called the peace reminds us that this can only happen change can only happen in these areas when we know the astounding grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the undeserved love of God and the magical and amazing indwelling of the Holy Spirit it's the only way this stuff happens so together can we pray this piece together would you say this with me if you don't know it you'll learn it pretty quick here we go together in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore

Amen Amen Amen