

Scripture Reading:

2 Corinthians 13:5–10 (NASB)

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

Sermon Text:

2 Peter 1:3-11 (NASB)

³ for His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us ^[a]by His own glory and ^[b]excellence. ⁴ Through ^[c]these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of *the* divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world on account of lust. ⁵ Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral ^[d]excellence (virtue), and in *your* moral excellence, knowledge, ⁶ and in *your* knowledge, self-control, and in *your* self-control, perseverance, and in *your* perseverance, godliness, ⁷ and in *your* godliness, brotherly kindness, and in *your* brotherly kindness, love. ⁸ For if these *qualities* are yours and are increasing, they do not make you useless nor unproductive in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ For the one who lacks these *qualities* is blind *or* short-sighted, having forgotten *his* purification from his former sins. ¹⁰ Therefore, brothers *and sisters*, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choice of you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; ¹¹ for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.”

A Rooted Faith – Part 3 by John Costa

Second Congregational Church—Winsted 8/4/24

Preface:

So, for those of you who don't know, this is the third and final part of the message on having a rooted faith. The first two sermons demonstrated that although believers might doubt and question God at times, the basis of our faith can and *should* rest on good reason and the certainty and assurance that God provides to his children. God doesn't leave his children wondering if their faith in Him is real but provides after every test and every tribulation, assurance that He is who He says He is and that He will keep His promises. In other words, although there are times when we may need to blindly trust God as opposed to leaning on our

own understanding, the basis of our faith—knowledge of who God is, the truth of the gospel, who we are in Christ—is something we *do* hold with certainty. And today, we'll see that Scripture tells us we can have assurance even of our salvation.

Introduction:

I'd like to ask you all a couple of questions this morning. By a show of hands, how many of you can go more than a few hours without looking into a mirror? How many of you can go more than twelve hours without looking into a mirror? How many of you can go an entire day without looking into a mirror? Now, don't worry this isn't about being vain. But what we do see from this short survey here, statistically speaking, is that most people look into the mirror a couple of times a day. And *hardly anyone* goes more than a day without looking into a mirror. And why? Well, speaking for myself, I want to make sure that what will be seen matches up with how I intend to present myself. If we leave the house in the morning and want to present ourselves with brushed hair, a clean face, and unwrinkled clothes, then we typically like to make sure that's the case.

And all pride and vanity aside, we all care how we present ourselves. Even for the one who intends to have messy hair and grubby clothes. I guarantee, that even that person is still concerned with how he presents himself to some degree. And so, taking a look in the mirror to examine ourselves is obviously a natural thing. If you're anything like me, the face you have when you wake up in the morning is a lot different from the one you leave the house with. It's like I got a whole Dr. Jeckle Mr. Hyde thing going on. Some of you are all too familiar with what I'm talking about right? And if we still see Mr. Hyde in the mirror, we make necessary adjustments right? It's always a good thing to at least take a peak into the mirror every now and then. You may never know if you've got a piece of spinach in your tooth or something embarrassing on your nose. You can't always trust that someone's going to say something and later on you realize you've been walking around all day with something hanging out of your nose. If you're lucky you'll have one of those friends who's bold enough, and loving enough to say, hey John you know you've got something on your...yea you might want to get that. I want to make sure that what's being presented actually aligns with how I want to be seen. In that sense, our appearance exhibits who we are. It represents at least part of our character.

Now, if our physical appearance plays such an important role in who we are, so much so that we look into a mirror at ourselves at least every day to make sure we're presenting that character or quality of ourselves, how much more should we examine ourselves spiritually? Am I examining myself, looking into a spiritual mirror, and reflecting on whether my character aligns with who I am in Christ? Am I evaluating my motives and my thinking to see if they match up with who God has called me to be? Am I evaluating my behavior to ensure that I'm expressing the love of Christ to others?

Exposition:

Today, we first see in the Scripture Reading that Paul tells the Corinthians, test and examine yourselves to see if you are in the faith (2 Cor. 13:5a). And Peter tells the church to "be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election" (1 Pet. 3:10 ESV). So, obviously,

there's an expectation that following a believer's conversion, as they're walking their new life in Christ, there should be some self-evaluation, a point where a believer examines himself to see if he's producing fruit—an occasional gaze into a spiritual mirror if you will, if not a regular self-examination. In one sense, Paul is telling the Corinthians to examine themselves to see if they *are* in the faith.

For a little background, in part, Paul was responding to accusations against him and Titus from some false apostles. As well, many in the church were living contrary to the will of God. So, while assuring them that he has nothing but love for them and true faith, he's also saying, listen you better worry about yourselves and these frauds who are causing division. The church is challenged to ask themselves, am I bearing fruit in keeping with repentance? (Matt. 3:8; Luke 3:8). Am I a fruitful and effective witness? If I am a true believer with an authentic faith, certain fruits should be evident in my life, and if there isn't, I should probably ask myself why, and say, okay there's something off here. We know that Paul says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves but a gift of God" (Eph. 2:8-9). But we also know from James that Faith is evidenced by works (Jas. 2:14-20). And not the works of the law but by our behavior or the fruit in our life.

Now, looking at our Sermon Text, the main purpose of Peter's letter was to expose and combat the invasion of false teachers in the church and the immoral behavior that accompanied them. He intended to instruct them on how to defend themselves against their deception and to recognize authenticity from false doctrine and teaching. So, Paul and Peter were dealing with the same kind of situation—instructing the church on how to guard against false teaching, and to identify false doctrine when they see it. One of the best ways to guard against corruption and identify true faith was to live free of corruption themselves and ensure their own faith. So, we can see why it was important for Peter to call them to examine themselves as individuals but also collectively as a church. Although Peter challenges the church to make sure their fruit matches their faith, he's also encouraging them that they *can* have assurance of salvation. But not only that they can, but that they *should*. When he writes, "be all the more diligent to make certain your calling and election," he's essentially saying, make sure you know what is sound from what is false—know what is authentic faith from what's inauthentic—gain the confidence and assurance from the Spirit that you are without a doubt walking in true faith. And the way to do it was by supplementing their faith with these qualities (as the ESV words it) and making sure these qualities are always a part of your faith. "For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 1:8 ESV). He adds, "For as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble" (v 10 NASB).

So, if we look at the beginning, Peter challenges them to take advantage of the divine power and promises of God which He has granted every believer. God has granted you the divine power to overcome corruption and therefore walk in newness of life. He's saying, if you are truly in Christ, there's no reason you should still be overcome by the corruption of the flesh. Instead, since God has given you all things that pertain to fruitfulness and godliness, your life should reflect the divine nature. In other words, even though the spirit and the flesh still war against

each other, and I still battle sin, the fruit of the Spirit should be more evident in my life than the works of the flesh. He's saying, one way you can experience assurance of salvation and enjoy eternal security is by making sure these qualities accompany your faith.

Out of the seven qualities—which unsurprisingly look a lot like the fruit of the Spirit—the first five relate to a believer's inner life or their relation to God, while the last two are more of an outward expression relating to others. This is important because he's telling them not only that their behavior and their motives and their thinking should change, but also your outward expression of Christlikeness should reflect the divine nature. I should have confidence that Christ is in my life because of the change in my heart, but others should also see the evidence of my faith in the fruit of my life. The process of sanctification is something I can see when I look into the mirror and something others can recognize when look at me. And by telling them to be diligent to make one's calling and election sure, he's not suggesting that they can produce their own assurance by doing this or that. But examining themselves and practicing these qualities will serve as an assurance from God that *they are* in Christ.

Something to keep in mind is that Paul and Peter are writing to the church as a whole. So, the instruction works not only on an individual level but for the whole church. One way of evaluating oneself, and making sure these qualities *are* present and increasing, is to be open to examination—to be held accountable by one another. Who knows that when you look into a mirror, you'll never see exactly what you look like to everyone else? Because everything's backward, it'll always be a little distorted. Sometimes we need an outside perspective to see what's really being presented. What I see isn't always accurate. But one of the great things about self-evaluation as believers is that we can allow God to search our hearts and reveal the hidden parts in us (Ps. 139:23-24). In addition, God uses others in the body—our brothers and sisters in Christ, our leaders, and elders, and our pastor—as vessels of accountability, teaching, correction, and even rebuke. If the church is to build one another up in the faith, then being accountable to one another and being open to correction is as much a part of growth as encouragement and praise. I'll admit, in the moment of correction or rebuke, my guard might go up. I might even take offense. My flesh naturally resists, as it might sting a little. But it doesn't take very long for me to realize that it's like medicine. I invite correction and even rebuke if necessary because I know later on it's going to help my growth and build my faith.

Do you know what correction is like? It's like Bactine on a scraped knee. Who remembers Bactine? You remember, after falling off your bike and your leg or elbow is bruised, bloody, and writhing in pain, Ma comes over with that little bottle of devil's juice to “make it all better.” And for a kid, it's like pouring whiskey over a bullet wound. I can still remember that little green and white bottle. I swear I've got PTSD from that stuff. But, as much as it stings, for the time being, it cleans out any bacteria. It burns, *literally burns* away any impurities. And it prevents infection from spreading and seeping into those vulnerable areas.

Correction works the same way. It might sting just as bad but it prevents spiritual infection from growing inside the heart *and* among the church. As the Scripture says, “For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (Heb. 12:11 ESV). Both Peter and Paul were

quick to hold others accountable but invited being held accountable. But just as important, the more a believer examines himself, the more he allows the Holy Spirit to hold him accountable—the more he enables the truth of God’s Word to act like a measuring rod, where a believer’s doctrine and beliefs are evaluated by Scripture. Their character is gauged by the character of Christ, and their fruit is measured by the fruit of the Spirit.

Conclusion:

So, for a closing thought...as I examine myself, am I seeing the old man? Am I seeing Mr. Hyde in the mirror? If and when I do, will I make the necessary adjustments, to make sure what’s walking forward is a reflection of the new person? Will I be diligent to supplement my faith with virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, Godliness, brotherly kindness, and love? Am I reflecting Christ? Do I see sanctification and growth? Am I seeing the fruit of the Spirit as a regular part of my faith? And if so, am I willing to help another brother or sister evaluate themselves? Am I going to be bold enough or loving enough not only to encourage Christlikeness but to call out bad behavior or to point out when they’re headed in a direction that doesn’t quite line up with their calling? To say, brother, you know you’ve got something there...evaluating ourselves as a body—encouraging the good but also recognizing the areas we fall short. That’s one of the things I do love about this church. I quickly noticed a healthy level of accountability, a system of checks and balances, a body of believers who are not only concerned about productivity and reaching outsiders but concerned about the spiritual growth and well-being of every disciple here, young and old. And we’re willing to ask ourselves, are we growing? Are we staying kingdom-minded?

Sometimes, as individuals or as a church, all it takes is some self-examination, even just recognizing what is present in ourselves and in our church. And then we’re able to come to God and say, Lord, let me reflect you. Let me exhibit the new creation that I am. Because you have granted me by your divine power and precious promises everything pertaining to life and godliness. I have no power in and of myself to overcome the corruption of the flesh but by your Spirit and grace, you’ve given me the ability to identify falsehood, the capability to discern truth, and the power to walk in newness of life. And that is my prayer, that we all—having been granted all the power we need to be fruitful and most effective—continue to build one another up in faith and make certain our calling. Amen.
