

July 18, 2010 – 3 of 12 in Signs of Life

Examine and Expose

2 Corinthians 13:5–6

INTRODUCTION

Do you have desires that are more than natural desires? Now at first this may not seem like a good question. Someone could say—absolutely: everyone wants to avoid death and live forever. Everyone wants to preserve themselves. But even self-preservation is not the highest, most basic desire. We are not talking about the difference between the desires of the soul versus the desires of animals or even rocks. Every human being—those who are born again and those who are not—have souls, and therefore have desires such as the fear of death and the pursuit of happiness. And any analogies between a rock and a soul might be misleading because at least a rock is there. Our difference is between a nothing and a something: non-life versus life: a soul lit up by God versus a soul that simply wants to get along without him.

Paul's agenda here is a masterful tactic! He basically leaves his Corinthians readers no choice but to affirm the authenticity of his ministry or prefer that they are reprobate! There was one other option, of course, and that is to say that Paul and his teaching are both an abomination and heresy. But they could not sit on the fence. That is exactly as it should be in any Christian conversation.

- TEST YOURSELF TO SEE WHAT YOU ARE IN (v. 5a)
- TEST YOURSELF TO SEE WHAT IS IN YOU (v. 5b)
- TEST EACH OTHER ALSO (v. 6)

The Big Idea is that new life wants to live and wants to make sure of it.

In other words, the first concrete sign of conversion is that you actually care about seeking signs of conversion. You want to know if you're for real because you want to actually be for real! In other words, if there is a false sign-seeking (or a natural sign-seeking), then one thing that will distinguish the real thing from the imposter is that truly Spirit-born testing will not stop at anything to find out. It will not be half-hearted because the Holy Spirit doesn't create only half a heart but a whole: "Unite my heart to fear your name" [Ps. 86:11]. We might actually add to Edwards' list of authentic signs the sign of spiritual self-preservation!

DOCTRINE

I. TEST YOURSELF TO SEE WHAT YOU ARE IN

A) The Biblical Precedent for Testing Yourself (Life is made of testing)

1. The language of testing is not a test for God but for you!

- a. Note that it is a testing out, not a “testing in”!

[Phi. 2:12–13] “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, **work out** your own salvation with fear and trembling, **for** it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”

[Rom. 12:2b] “...that **by testing** you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

- b. Even where God is the Actor in the test, it is him revealing to us what is there.

[1 Cor. 3:13] “each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will **test** what sort of work each one has done.”

2. The nature of testing is “discovery,” not earning

- a. It is a proving out of what is real—either of the grace of the Spirit or the nature of the flesh.

[2 Pet. 1:10] “Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure”

- b. If finding that out strikes you as anti-climactic, may I gently suggest that you may be dead as a doornail. God doesn't need to ‘test’ the same way we do. He knows.

[2 Tim. 2:19] “The Lord knows those who are his.”

B) Testing Yourself by “The Faith”

1. In this context alone, Paul's instruction and their appropriate response are one.

- a. There was a discipline issue that reverberates through both Corinthian letters; and actually many practical matters connected to that. So in all these things **TEST** yourselves. Let everything be an occasion to examine faith by **THE** faith.

[2 Cor. 2:9] “For this is why I wrote, that I might **test** you and know whether you are obedient in everything.”

- b. Paul's ultimate standard for these corrections was not himself: in a sense, he "submits" to them in judging his ministry—but according to what? The very teaching that characterized Paul.

[2 Cor. 13:7] "But we pray to God that you may not do wrong—not that we may appear to have met **the test**, but that you may do what is right, though we may seem to have failed."

2. The phrase "the faith" is used in the New Testament to denote orthodoxy.

[Jd. 3] contend for **the faith** that was once for all delivered to the saints.

[Eph. 4:4, 5] "There is...**one faith**."

II. TEST YOURSELF TO SEE WHAT IS IN YOU

A) The Biblical Precedent for Godly Introspection

1. Spurgeon called this (in Timothy) the "minister's self-watch"

[1 Tim. 4:16] "Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers."

2. In Week 1 we looked at the concern over "Introspection Mania"

- a. So what is the difference between godly and ungodly introspection?

[2 Cor. 7:9–10] "As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. For **godly grief** produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas **worldly grief** produces death."

3. According to Paul, the content of what is looked for is Christ.

[Gal. 4:19] "my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!"

***So moving from Edwards' first sign to his second: Not only is this a new spiritual sense, but this 'sense' is not 'about' the sense or about myself or even anything extra I may gain from it, but it is of God himself. It is what Edwards called **the sense of Divine Excellency**—or that which is most great and happy.

[Col. 1:27] “Christ **in you**, the hope of glory.”

- a. In other words (if you are born again) you will begin to see the attributes of **God** as supremely valuable even if you were to go to hell—not that you will be satisfied with that!—but, you will begin to see God as the only Good in himself. One practical value of this is that if/when you miss out on God or any lesser good, you will begin to see your sin as the thing to blame since **sin** is the rejection of ultimate pleasure. God will really and finally be your fixed reference point for all things.

B) There is a Godly or Holy Discontent in Myself

1. Although there is no deficiency in God, yet there is always an increasing awareness of deficiency in the sinner.

[Phi. 3:12–14] “Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

- a. The idea that we have “arrived” is the height of pride!
- b. The avoidance of / resistance to examination is a manifestation of this pride.

[Prov. 18:1] “Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire; he breaks out against all sound **judgment**.”

2. If a machine that you value has a problem, you stop at nothing to fix it!

- a. Remember that new birth passage in the Old Testament from last week?

[Ezk. 36:26] “And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and **be careful** to obey my rules.”

- b. Translation: EVERY TIME I make a Christian, their new heart WILL BE CAREFUL to identify my will and anything in themselves that gets in the way!

[Ps. 139:23–24] “**Search** me, O God, and **know** my heart! **Try** me and **know** my thoughts! And **see** if there be any grievous way in me, and **lead** me in the way everlasting!”

III. TEST EACH OTHER ALSO

A) The Biblical Precedent for the Horizontal (Practical) Judgment

1. “Vertical testing” for the individual in himself (or herself) is for rock–solid assurance, but, “horizontal testing” is for practical matters, such as:

- a. Not being poisoned by the fruit of false teachers [Mat. 7:15–20]
- b. Not being shaken by the defection of some from the faith [1 Jn. 2:19]
- c. Not being judgmental toward those whose lives “offend us” [Lk. 9:49–56]
- d. Not being double–minded about supporting genuine ministries [2 Cor. 13:6–7]
- e. Being good brothers and sisters to others in their vertical testing [Heb. 10:2?]
- f. Being “good Bereans,” holding Scripture over any mere mortal [Acts 17:11]

2. There are true and false “spirits”

[1 Jn. 4:1] “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but **test the spirits** to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.”

- a. This tells us that our enemy is not physical matter (but evil spirits), that therefore a thing being “spiritual” does not prove it is from God, and that we are to make practical judgments between persons who have spirits.

3. Bottom line—Cain was wrong! We are our brothers (and sisters) keeper!

[Prov. 27:6] Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy.

[2 Cor. 1:24] “Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy.”

APPLICATION

1. **What is the difference between a true and false ‘sense of the divine’?** Some biblical examples may help. Judas beheld Jesus, Cain had a conversation with God, Satan was in heaven, Balaam uttered the words of God, Saul was even filled with the spirit of prophecy. None of those were a gracious, saving work of God upon the soul, were they?

Then where is the difference? According to Edwards, the confidence of the deluded person “is not anything contained in, or taught by these Scriptures, as they lie in the Bible, but the manner of their coming to them; which is a certain evidence of their delusion,” or as Storms put it: “It is the experience of the revelation and not its essence in which they put their trust.”¹ On the other hand, for the genuinely converted, “the divine excellency and the glory of God, and Jesus Christ, the Word of God, the works of God, and the ways of God...is the **primary reason**, why a true saint loves these things; and not any supposed interest he has in them, or any conceived benefit that he has received from them, or shall receive from them, or any such imagined relation which they bear to his interest.”

2. **What is this ‘spiritual self-preservation’?** Think of where Paul tells us that “you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’” [Rom. 8:15] and “And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’” [Gal. 4:6]. Now think of a child who knew nothing but their own love for their mother and father. Imagine if that child was told one day that these parents were not his real parents, or that the parents didn’t really want him, or that.....and dozens of other similar things that called into question everything he ever knew about them. What do you suppose he would do? And when that child began to struggle and reach and press into his parents (or any proof of their love), would you accuse him of judgmentalism? Of theoretical speculative obscurity? Of impractical dogmatizing? Then why do you accept the exact same distraction when it comes to your child-like position to God the Father?

Repeat the Big Idea: that new life wants to live and wants to make sure of it.

So this truly spiritual self-preservation is NOT simply a desire to escape hell or even to live forever. It is a desire to make sure that we have Christ himself, that He loves us, that He intends to keep us, that we are for real unto him!

CONCLUSION

And there is only one place to find this assurance and that is the cross that Jesus died upon.

¹ Storms, p. 85