February 13/14, 2010

# Examine Yourself

**2 Corinthians 12:11 – 13:14**

*Each One Reach One: The Cost and Rewards*

Pastor Bryan Clark

Let's imagine this morning three different pathways. The first two pathways may seem very different but, when you get so far down the paths, they actually merge together and end up in the same place—and that's a bad place. The other pathway is very different and ends up in a very different place. The theme of pathway number one would be: "Because I am weak, I am weak." (Repeat) "Because I am weak, I am weak." These are people who have some sort of a warped theology and have totally misunderstood the message of weakness and brokenness to the extent that they live in that weakness every day. They would be people who constantly struggle. They're stuck in the mud; they just can't get out of the mud. They seem to slog through life. They're struggling with habits; they're struggling with behaviors; they're struggling with addictions; everyday just seems like a struggle. These are people that would be characterized by the reality that, "It's not my fault; it's everybody else's fault." They're always pointing fingers at somebody else or some other circumstances. Their life song is, "Woe is me! Poor me!" It's because they've bought into a theology that says, "When I am weak, then I am weak."

The second pathway would be defined by this motto: "Because I am strong, I am strong." These people would be neck deep in a performance-based value system. They work really hard to project an image that says they've got it together. They put on their church face and their church face is very impressive. By day it seems like they've got it all together but by night there's a dark side. By night there's a life that is lived in the shadow. It's about habits; it's about addictions; it's about behaviors that are offensive to God. There's a life that goes on behind closed doors that's very different from the public life. These people would be characterized by this belief that they can do it themselves. But if you follow those first two paths, while they look very different up front, they eventually merge together and they end up in a very bad place.

The third pathway would be defined by the theme: "I am weak; therefore I am strong." They have correctly understood the message of grace but we're left with the question, "What does that mean, "When I am weak, then I am strong," and how do you know which pathway you're on?

If you have a Bible, turn with us to 2 Corinthians, Chapter 12. This morning we'll finish our study of 2 Corinthians. Paul has been boasting about himself. Over and over again he says it's foolish; he doesn't like it but he keeps doing it. Last week in our text Paul says, "Okay, if I'm going to boast, I'm going to boast in my weaknesses." He summarized it in verse ten of chapter twelve when he said, "*...when I am weak then I am strong".* We pick it up in verse 11:

> **I have become foolish; you yourselves compelled me. Actually I should have been commended by you, for in no respect was I inferior to the most eminent apostles, even though I am a nobody.** (*NASB, 2 Corinthians 12:11)

Again Paul feels like it's foolish to boast about himself but feels like he's backed into a corner. The Corinthians should have come to his defense. The Corinthians should have commended him but they didn't, so Paul is left to do it himself. **The most eminent apostles**...we saw them earlier in chapter 11. The Greek would be *super apostles*. He's referring to the false teachers—those who have set themselves up as the religious elite—and Paul sarcastically refers to them as the *super*

*apostles*. But he says he is ...**in no way inferior...** to them but immediately followed by a statement ...**though I am a nobody**. Now this is the delicate balance of understanding this theology. The fact of the matter is, if you embrace a grace-based value system, you're not inferior and you're not superior. We simply abandon that competition/comparison type of a value system. Paul is, in essence, saying that just because he chooses not to play the game of a performance-based value system doesn't mean he has less value. But he quickly follows by saying, "But that doesn't mean I have more value; it's just that we don't think that way anymore." Paul makes the same argument in Romans, Chapter 12. He spent eleven chapters developing the idea of salvation by grace through faith. Then, starting in chapter 12, he's going to tell us, "Then how do you live as a result of that?" And he says that we need to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. What does he mean by that? We have to think differently: Romans 12:3—"...by not thinking of yourself more highly than you ought to think." In other words, in a performance-based value system, every moment of every day is spent thinking about, "How do I promote myself?" That's the essence of the system. When I reject that system and choose to embrace grace, I understand that if I choose to not spend every hour of every day promoting myself, nobody else is going to take up the slack. I abandon the idea that I need promoting and understand my value now comes by being rightly related to God through grace— through what Jesus Christ has done for me. So it's not that I think less of myself; it's not that I think more of myself. I just have abandoned that value system and now understand I have value in God. Now I don't expect the unsaved culture to buy into that. The world around me does not understand grace; I don't expect them to. Paul's argument is that we, as a community of grace, should see it differently. The outflow of a grace-based system is we no longer have a basis to think *more than* or *less than*. We're simply abandoning the concept and realizing that we all have equal value in being recipients of God's grace and being rightly related to God through Jesus Christ. So that's his argument there: "I'm *not less than but I'm not more than; I just don't think that way anymore."*

Verse 12:

> **The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles. For in what respect were you treated as inferior to the rest of the churches, except that I myself did not become a burden to you? Forgive me this wrong!** (Vs. 12-13)

Now we know the problem. The Corinthians believe they're a second-rate church and they believe that because of that, they received a second-rate apostle. "*We were sent the second string so we're a second-string church.*" Obviously the Jewish legalists—the false teachers—had convinced the Corinthians that somehow their church was inferior because Paul was inferior. Paul is then saying, "I'm not inferior." As a matter of fact, when he showed up in Corinth, he demonstrated all the power of signs and wonders that validated a true apostle of Christ. So he makes the argument, "In what way are you inferior? The only difference is I didn't charge for my services." This has been an argument that's come up in both letters over and over again. In this case what he's saying is—knowing that the false teachers used and abused the Corinthians—the only thing Paul's guilty of is he chose not to be a burden to them and do the same thing. So then he gets very sarcastic, "Please forgive me for my insensitivity." That's in essence what he's saying.

Verse 14:

> **Here for this third time I am ready to come to you, and I will not be a burden to you; for I do not seek what is yours, but you; for children are not responsible to save up for their parents, but parents for their children. I will most gladly spend and be expended for your souls. If I love you more, am I to be loved less?** (Vs. 14-15)

Paul's talking about a third visit. The first visit was about eighteen months. That's when he planted the church. His second visit he talks about in chapters one and two. He called it his *tearful or painful visit*. It was a very difficult visit and now he's talking about a third visit. Apparently Paul's strategy to not charge the Corinthians for his services was very effective. For whatever reason, Paul felt it was best for the sake of the gospel not to do that—understanding that the false teachers had used and abused the Corinthians. The fact that Paul didn't charge—didn't become a burden to them— apparently has been quite an effective strategy—so much so that the false teachers are constantly using energy to spin this in such a way that they deflect the argument and so they keep coming back, thinking of reasons why Paul's got ulterior motives. And so Paul is saying, "When I come, I'm still not going to charge for my services. You're not going to manipulate me into this. I want them to see there's a difference between what they have done to you and how much we genuinely love you." He uses a metaphor of parents. He says, "I don't want your money; I want you!" He's already identified himself as their spiritual parent. Now don't take this metaphor and run with it. You can always run a metaphor to things that aren't intended. Paul's not saying that there isn't a day when children take care of their parents or something like that. But the simple truth is when my children are little, I don't expect them to support me. It's my calling to support them. Paul is saying, as their spiritual parent, what he wants is them. He loves them and he will **spend and expend** himself in order **not to be a burden** on them. In other words Paul has sacrificed himself. He has spent himself for their good. He has loved them far more than the false teachers and he asks a logical question: "If that's the case, what's so wrong about that?" Why is this a problem—that he loves them more than the false teachers? He's trying to get them to see how silly that argument is.

Verse 16:

> **But be that as it may, I did not burden you myself; nevertheless, crafty fellow that I am, I took you in by deceit. Certainly I have not taken advantage of you through any of those whom I have sent to you, have I? I urged Titus to go, and I sent the brother with him. Titus did not take any advantage of you, did he? Did we not conduct ourselves in the same spirit and walk in the same steps?** (Vs. 16-18)

Apparently the latest spin of the false teachers was this: *It appears as if Paul wasn't taking money from you. But the fact of the matter was he was collecting money for the churches in Jerusalem and sneaky fellow that he is—that word **crafty** is really equivalent of our word con-artist—con artist that he is, he's actually embezzling out of the mission's fund in order to fund himself. But he's acting like he's not taking anything from you.* That was the accusation, so Paul gets very sarcastic again and says, "Yes—crafty fellow that I am—I'm such a con artist that I deceived you into giving offering for the churches in Jerusalem and I've been embezzling the money for myself." And then he comes back and he says, "We know that's not true."

In chapters eight and nine we talked about this offering that Paul was taking for the saints in Jerusalem because they're in the midst of a famine. And, in that text, Paul bent over backwards to operate with integrity to make sure that when Titus came to pick up the money, that there were several people with him and that there were witnesses and everything was done with the utmost integrity. So he's just going back and saying, "You know this isn't true; you know I haven't been taking funds. We have operated with the highest degree of integrity."

Now one of the questions that I think comes up in the text is, over and over again Paul keeps saying, "This is foolish to boast about myself," but then he boasts about himself and, as the reader, you find yourself thinking, "*If you think it's so foolish, stop doing it*!" Well now in verse 19 he tells us why he's doing it.

> **All this time you have been thinking that we are defending ourselves to you. Actually, it is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ; and all for your upbuilding, beloved.** (Vs. 19)

In other words Paul is saying, "If you think the reason I've been working so hard to repair my reputation is because of me, then you're mistaken." Paul, in essence, says, "I know that ultimately I answer to God," and his reputation is in God's hands. The reason he has been boasting about himself and trying to help the Corinthians sort this out, is that if the Corinthians don't understand the difference between someone who is telling the truth and someone who is deceiving them, they're going to destroy their lives. So in order for Paul to sort this out, he wants them to look at the messenger, in order to help sort out the truth of the message. So that's what Paul is saying there. He's concerned that if the Corinthians don't understand the difference between the false teachers and his message of truth, they're going to destroy themselves. As a matter of fact he even says he's very afraid of that.

Verse 20:

> **For I am afraid that perhaps when I come I may find you to be not what I wish and may be found by you to be not what you wish; that perhaps there will be strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances; I am afraid that when I come again my God may humiliate me before you, and I may mourn over many of those who have sinned in the past and not repented of the impurity, immorality and sensuality which they have practiced.** (Vs. 20-21)

What is Paul's fear? Paul's fear is that when he arrives in Corinth nothing will have changed. You go to the list in verses 20 and 21; you go back to the very first letter—the first chapter—Paul talked about a list very similar to this. Now after two letters and a significant amount of time, Paul's fear is that, "I'm going to show up and nothing has changed," —that we're still the same as we were then. I think verses 20 and 21 give you the fruit of believing the message of the false teachers. It is the fruit of a performance-based religious system; it is the fruit of legalism. Paul's concern is that nothing has changed. When he talks about being humiliated, he's talking about the fact that he genuinely believed that they had experienced a life-changing power of Jesus. He believed that they were being radically changed! He believed that they were becoming new creations. As a matter of fact, several times in both 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians, he was bragging about them. He was cheerleading for them! We've talked about them multiple times. So what happens now if he shows up and they're characterized by verses 20 and 21—that nothing has really changed? It will be humiliating; it will be shameful; it will be embarrassing. It will be an opportunity for the false teachers to step up and say, "What is the problem here? If Paul is right, how do you explain this?" So that's Paul's fear; that's his concern.

Chapter 13:1

> **This is the third time I am coming to you. EVERY FACT IS TO BE CONFIRMED BY THE TESTIMONY OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES. 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, since you are seeking for proof of the Christ who speaks in me, and who is not weak toward you, but mighty in you.** (1 Corinthians 13:1-3)

What Paul is saying is, "When I come the third time, if it is evident that nothing has changed, I will deal with it." He's really saying, "I will deal with it severely!" He quotes from Deuteronomy the idea of two or three witnesses. Now the Deuteronomy text means two or three witnesses—not to the confrontation—but two or three witnesses to the offense. In other words there are two or three witnesses that confirm this sin is happening. It's also possible there is evidence that the Jews believe that if you happen to witness the same sin, but on three different occasions, you could consider that three different witnesses. So Paul may be saying, "I saw it the first time; I saw it the second time; if I see it the third time, I'm going to deal with it." And he says he's going to deal with it severely. Now you remember that the critics had leveled the criticism against Paul that when he hides behind his pen, he's very courageous, but when he shows up in person, he's a bit of a wimp. And so Paul is saying, "If you think that's the case, then you're going to find out when I show up that that's not the case." But what he claims is not his own power but the power of Christ in him, which launches him into a very important theological discussion.

Verse 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.**

Okay, this is the thought process: He says, "When I come, I'm not going to come as a weakling. I'm going to come with great power; but it isn't my power; it's the power of Christ in me—who by the way is in you. Yes, it is true that Christ died for our weaknesses. He died for our sin but He did not leave us in a state of weakness. He rose from the dead and He rose from the dead through the power of God who raised Him to new life. Therefore when we trust Christ as Savior, we understand that. Yes, He meets at our point of weakness—our sinfulness—but He doesn't leave us there. We experience resurrection power that raises us to live life at a whole new level." Therefore the argument is this: If that's true, how do you explain verses 20 and 21? In other words, if their argument is, "We're weak because we're weak and that's why we live this way," he's saying, "You don't get it! You only understand half the gospel! It is true that He died for us but it's also true He rose from the dead! And it's resurrection power that fills us to live life at a whole new level." Verses 20 and 21 are totally inconsistent with anyone who gets this. If those verses still describe you, you would have to conclude, "You don't get it!"

Let me see if I can explain it this way: If you have understood the message of weakness and brokenness to be path number one—"Because I am weak, I am weak," therefore it becomes your excuse for why you have this issue, why you have this habit, why you have this addiction, why you struggle everyday—"...because I'm weak." You haven't understood the gospel. Jesus did not leave you there!

Let's imagine path number two—someone who would say, "Because I am strong, I am strong." This is how it works itself out. There is this public image and there's this shadowy secret life. It's because I believe I'm strong and I can't afford to admit I'm weak. So you struggle with this stuff in the shadows. Let's take an issue. Let's imagine that you struggle with internet pornography. When you watch it you feel shameful; you feel embarrassed; you feel dirty; you know it's wrong. And each time you say, "I won't do it again," but you do it again and again and again. What's the problem? The problem is this—and I'm going to be brutally honest! The problem is not that you are too weak; the problem is that you are too arrogant! You are too arrogant and you've convinced yourself, "I can do this myself!" Your arrogance is what makes you weak. "I can do it myself; I can do it myself; I can do it myself!" But you can't! Your track record is overwhelming evidence you can't! Your arrogance is destroying you. Until you understand that Christ meets me at my point of weakness and then you surrender and recognize you need help, nothing's going to change. But realize he doesn't leave you there. He fills your life with resurrection power from God to set you free from anything this world throws at you. The only explanation for why you continue to live in verses 20 and 21 is you just don't get it—because you have adequate resurrection power to live life at a whole new level. It's exactly where Paul goes in verse five.

> **Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith;** [the Bryan translation would be: Trust yourselves to see if you get it!] **examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?** (Vs. 5)

He's given you two options there. One is it could be that you truly are born again; you truly are saved—you just don't get it. You still don't get that He didn't leave you in your weakness but has filled you with resurrection power. Or you examine yourself and there's simply no evidence of Christ in you. You failed the test and that's why you live the way you live.

> **But I trust that you will realize that we ourselves do not fail the test. 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.** (Vs. 6-7)

This verse is a little confusing but what Paul is saying is this: His desire for them is to examine themselves and, as a result of that, to live differently. And then it says that Paul and his team have examined themselves and they see the evidence of Christ's power in them. And he wants the same for the Corinthians. But then he says. *"Even if you don't see it approved in us, you still need to do the right thing*." In essence what he's saying is, "This is not about Paul or Apollos or Cephas." You remember the very first chapter of the very first letter, that was the problem. People were saying, "I'm of Paul; I'm of Cephas; I'm of this person; I'm of that person." And Paul is saying, "This is not a personality cult." This is not about whether Paul's right or they're right. It's about what's true and even if you were to disapprove us, it doesn't change the fact that the truth is still true. It's exactly what he says.

Verse 8:

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

In other words, at the end of the day, the truth is true. This is not about whether you're Lutheran or Methodist or Presbyterian or Catholic or Berean or Baptist. We get way too hung up on that stuff. It's about what is true. It's not about this preacher or that preacher. It's not about this theological

camp or that theological camp. It's about what is true and what is not true and that's the point Paul's making.

> **For we rejoice when we ourselves are weak but you are strong**...
> [Very sarcastic there when he's saying, "You know we as the apostles, we are weak but we're impressed that you're so strong. Even though your lives are characterized by verses 20-21, you're so strong. It's full of sarcasm but he wants better for them.] **...this we also pray for, that you be made complete**. [In other words, that something would change.] **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.** (Vs. 9-10)

Paul really hopes that when he comes it can be a pleasant meeting and not a severe meeting like before. We do know from the book of Acts that Paul made a third visit. It's recorded in Acts, Chapter 20. He stayed for three months. While he was there he wrote the book of Romans. The Jewish legalists hatched a plot to kill him and, at the end of three months, he had to flee back out of Corinth in order to spare his life. And that's about all we know from the Scriptures.

Verse 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. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.** (Vs. 11-14)

Just one note to verse 14: The final farewell is all three members of the Trinity. You have the grace of Christ; you have the love of the Father and you have the fellowship of the Spirit as He closes out this letter. I want to close on verse 11. **Finally brethren**...I think the list in verse 11 is the fruit of pathway number three. The reason it's so important to understand the difference between that which is true and that which is untrue is the end of both pathways is different. Paths one and two merge together and end up in the same place—it's verses 20 and 21. Pathway three is a very different path. That is the pathway of grace and power and ends up with the fruit of verse 11. It's joy; it's **completeness** or growth—maturity. It's to be **comforted, likeminded**—which is unity—to **live in peace** which is harmony and to experience **the love and the peace** of God. It's what everybody wants! But it's not found on path one; it's not found on path two. It's found on pathway three—to understand the realities of grace and the power that God has given us.

Paul said it himself, "Examine yourself." In just a minute we're going to celebrate communion together and one of the features of communion is always to examine yourself. 1 Corinthians told us that when we come together to celebrate the broken body of Jesus, we are to examine ourselves. But we don't examine ourselves to see if we lived so good this last week, we're worthy of communion. We examine ourselves to see if we recognize that we're broken people. We are a broken body that comes together to celebrate the broken body of Jesus. So what I would encourage you to do, as we partake of communion today, is to do exactly what Paul says, "Examine yourself". Number one: Which pathway are you on? Does your life reflect the fruit of verses 20 and 21 or does it reflect the fruit of verse 11? Which pathway are you on? And the second question is: Which pathway do you want to be on? What changes do you need to make? I'm going to lead us in prayer; the worship team will come up; we'll sing through a song and then Ken will lead us through communion.

*Our Father we're thankful this morning that You love us, that You sent Jesus to die for us, that when we were dead in our weakness, we were dead in our sin, Christ died for us. But, Lord, He didn't stay in the grave. Through Your power He was resurrected to new life. Lord, help us to understand that though you meet us at our point of weakness, You don't leave us there— that You have granted us resurrection power to live a new life. Lord, in this auditorium this morning, there are people right now on pathway number one, pathway number two, and pathway number three. Lord, I pray that Your Sprit would search our hearts, Lord that we would experience the fruit of pathway number three, that we would truly understand and embrace the realities of grace. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

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Febr. 13/14, 2010

# Study Questions
# Examine Yourself
### 2 Corinthians 12:11-13:14
*Each One Reach One: The Cost and Rewards*
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## Opening Discussion

1. Is truth just something we talk about and argue about in theory or does truth really matter? Explain. Why does it matter?

2. In the previous text Paul boasted in his weakness. Does coming to terms with our weaknesses give us an excuse to behave badly? Why or why not?

3. Who is more likely to get stuck in behaviors, habits and addictions, someone who is weak or someone who is strong? Why?

## Bible Study

1. Read 2 Corinthians 12:11-13. Paul is walking that delicate line between recognizing that we are not inferior to others in the world just because we've embraced grace but maintaining that our performance doesn't make us "somebody." How do you explain the correlation between Paul's statement that he is not inferior yet he is a nobody? How do we truly value one another in an appropriate way in a culture of grace?

2. Read 2 Corinthians 12:14-18. What is Paul's argument in this paragraph? Is Paul's purpose in going back over these details just to save his reputation or something more? What is his purpose according to 12:19? What do we learn from this?

3. Read 2 Corinthians 12:20,21. What is Paul's "fear?" Compare this text with 1 Corinthians 1:10-17. What is the fruit of performance based religion or legalism? Why? Why does truth matter?

4. Read 2 Corinthians 13:1-10. What should be the result of our salvation? Because Christ died for our weakness, should we remain weak? What does it mean to "live with Him?"

5. Do you think it's true that what keeps us stuck in our habits, bad behaviors and addictions is not that we are too weak but because our arrogance makes us think we can be strong enough? Explain.

6. What does Paul mean by "examine yourselves?" What are we supposed to be looking for? Why should we examine ourselves?

7. Compare the fruit of grace (13:11) with the fruit of performance or legalism (12:20,21). Which would you prefer to characterize your life? What's going to determine the difference?

## Application

1. What does it mean to you to examine yourself? How will you do that? How can the small group help you in this?

2. Summarize what has impacted you the most from 2 Corinthians? What will be necessary to experience 13:11 rather than 12:20,21?


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