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Examine Yourself

2 Corinthians 13:5-10

Prayer: *Father, again I just want to thank you and praise you for your goodness, thank you and praise you for the gifts that you give us constantly, not the least of which we will be celebrating in this season of Easter, in the season of your resurrection, what an incredible gift of life itself that you've given to us. And Lord, again this morning as we are going to open up your word, this is a hard message and I just want to pray, Lord, for your Holy Spirit. You have given us gifts, as I've said, and the greatest gift you could give us is your Holy Spirit. We pray that your Holy Spirit would come alongside us, that you would give us the ability to open up your word, give us the ability to see it, to understand it, to hear it and to make it change our lives. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well every month during communion we encounter a challenge and the challenge is to examine ourselves. If you recall 1 Corinthians 11:28, it says: *Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.* And here we have Paul who is

directing us to understand how incredibly sacred the communion table is and to come prepared with hearts that have been thoroughly examined. This morning I want to widen and increase that scope and look at what Paul says in *2 Corinthians 13:5* where he says this, he says: *Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you -- unless indeed you fail to meet the test!*

Examine yourselves, test yourself to see if you are in the faith. That's a foreign concept to many evangelicals. Once saved, always saved, I mean isn't that the bedrock truth of the Bible? And it absolutely is. If you are saved by God, you will always be saved. But God took great pains to warn us that his church will always be a mixture of those who are genuinely saved and those who have successfully kidded themselves. And Jesus made that clear by telling us a story. This is *Matthew 13*, it says: *Another parable He put forth to them, saying: The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared. So the servants of the owner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' The servants said to him, 'Do you want us then to go and gather them*

up?' But he said, 'No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn."' " Now if you've ever seen a picture of wheat and tares together, you know that they're nearly identical. And they are what makes Jesus's point here. Jesus is saying that his church is always going to contain two types of people: Those who are the real deal and those who look like the real deal but are not. Jesus says the real and the phony will coexist together until harvest time when he is going to do the separating. So I can't think of a better reason to test yourself than that.

And this morning I want to address three different aspects of why testing yourself is the best and most important thing you could ever do. I want to ask first why? I mean why should I test myself? And second, what should I test in myself? And thirdly, how do I know how to test for it? How do I know if I'm deceiving myself? So first why should I test myself? And again I want to let Jesus answer that question. This is *Matthew 25*. He says: "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from

another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'" What we see here on the response of the sheep is genuine astonishment. This is the first of two forms of astonishment we're going to see in this passage. One is from the sheep and one is from the goats. Neither of them fully understood the significance of their actions or inactions. The sheep did what they normally do, they follow their Master. In this case it meant caring for their brothers and sisters without stopping to note what good deeds they were doing or how it was going to in some way benefit them. You know it says: "Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you or thirsty and give you drink?'" What's

implied here is that their good deeds, they're so normal, so normative that they never even register as something significant and hence, they were oftentimes simply forgotten until Jesus at the last days reminds them that nothing, nothing done for his sake will ever be forgotten.

But you know the goats have their own astonishment as well. This is verse 41. It says: *"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.'" Then they also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?' Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."* The goats are astonished. They're astonished that they're not able to recognize someone of significance, implying if they had seen that person, well, they would have acted differently. This is precisely how goats think. You know if you could have been some use to me, I would have treated you very differently. Again verse 44: *"Then they will also answer saying, 'Lord, when did we*

see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison and did not minister to you?'" You would have counted; the others, not so much.

Well, may I suggest to you that both sheep and goats are moved down their own individual pathways by a pattern of either resisting or accepting self-examination. Jesus gives us yet another example in John 9. He had healed a man who was born blind and he had the gall to do this on the Sabbath and so the Pharisees, they are deeply offended. Now they knew that Jesus' power to heal was a sign from God but they never, never stopped to ask themselves why in the world would God give him this power? I mean they were so intent on maintaining their power that they lost the ability to critically examine themselves. I mean the dialogue that takes place with Jesus after they throw the blind man out of the temple is a classic examination of what happens when self-examination is taken off the table. This is *John 9:35*. It says: *Jesus heard that they cast him out -- that's the blind man -- Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" He answered, "And who he is, sir, that I may believe in him?" Jesus said to him, "You have seen him and it is he who is speaking to you." He said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him. Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind."* Some

of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, "Are we also blind?" Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no guilt. But now that you say 'We see,' your guilt remains."

You have to understand, you see, their guilt was a direct result of a refusal to examine themselves. I mean their blindness was self-induced. Jesus tells them if you were simply blind naturally, you would not be held responsible for it, but now by claiming that you can see spiritually when your reaction to my miracles proves that you can't, well you've proven that your unwillingness to examine yourself has put you in this place and now you are responsible. See, sheep examine themselves but goats never will. And goats are often deeply religious. The Pharisees, they became blind because they lived in this moral universe of outwardly conforming rules that minimized the importance of motive. I mean they took their cues and they took their cues only from their outside surroundings, and Jesus hated that. Jesus detested a morality that was only skin deep for only -- for two main reasons. First of all, it was essentially deceptive. It was the morality of smoke and mirrors, I mean, looking good on the outside was the only requirement and what mattered most was who do I impress? You remember the goats being shocked that they didn't recognize who it is that they should be kind and generous to? I mean they were not about to waste kindness on someone who couldn't be of any benefit

to them. So they automatically overlooked the truly needy. That was deceptive. Secondly and perhaps even worse it was self-deceptive, I mean, this phony morality tricked those who adhered to it into thinking that they were morally good when they were not. And Jesus has yet another example of how deadly this thinking is in *Matthew 7*. He says this, he says: *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me you workers of lawlessness.'"* I submit to you that those words are the most terrifyingly awful words human ears will ever hear. They are directly the result of a refusal to examine oneself. And I want you to understand, it's important to make a distinction here. These are not folks who had their salvation and then lost it. I mean I don't believe that anyone who is genuinely saved can ever lose their salvation, and I believe that because the gift of salvation is something that is rooted in God's sovereign choice. Every single one of us who understands the gospel who have given our lives to Christ understands that it's not the result of our cleverness or spiritual insight but because God, for reasons known only to God, has chosen us before the very foundations of the earth. And Jesus couldn't have made that more clear when he said

in John 6:37: "All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day." I mean Jesus makes it very clear that believers are a gift given by the Father to the Son, a gift no one can snatch from his hand. So the issue that we believers face is not one of losing a salvation we can never lose, it's in deceiving ourselves into thinking we have a salvation we never had in the first place. Well, now you might think well, it's all up to God, I guess. What's going to happen is going to happen, I mean, there's not much I can do about it anyway, I mean, if I'm self-deceived, I guess I'm just self-deceived. But that ignores the fact that the scripture gives us numerous examples of God's taking people from the ranks of the self-deceived and by his grace giving them the ability to open their eyes and recognize the deception before it's too late. Just consider Nicodemus. This is a guy who was a member of the religious ruling class. He was a member of that group that never engaged in self-examination, but he saw the miracles that Jesus was doing and he asked himself what none of the other Pharisees asked themselves, and this is critical. This is what made the difference in Nicodemus's life. His willingness to examine himself led him to seek Jesus out even if it was under the cover of darkness. This is

John 3. It says: Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

You know it's cloaked language but Jesus is telling Nicodemus that the secret to being born again doesn't lie with human beings, it lies with the Holy Spirit who opens men's eyes. The Spirit blows where it wills. Well, God's Spirit had taken Nicodemus from the ranks of the self-deceived and by moving him to examine himself brought him to a place where he fully embraced the gospel. And we see that throughout the scriptures, I mean, there was Zacchaeus, there was the woman at the well. Time and again we see Jesus

breaking through their self-deception and forcing these chosen ones to examine their lives. We live in a climate today that has by and large given up on the idea of self-examination. I mean to question your salvation is to go against all of the scriptures that say that salvation is not something that you earn, it's something that is given freely on the basis of your faith. I mean after all, *Ephesians 2*, doesn't it say: *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.* Well, all of that is a hundred percent true. Well if salvation is a gift not related to my works, then my failure at works probably doesn't make any difference. That is not true. And that's what many folks teach today. "Once saved, always saved" became the rallying cry. "Just as I am" became the theme song that said God's going to accept me no matter how bad a sinner I am, and like many half-truths, it became an evangelical cliché. The fact is God will always accept us just as we are; that is a given. But his Spirit will never, never leave us there. See, God has plans for his children. *Romans 8* says: *And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conform to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.* God does cause all things to work together for good to those whom he's called but "the good" God

is specifically speaking about there is defined in the very next sentence: it's being conformed into the image of His Son. Again he says: *For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to --* what? *To be conformed to the image of His Son.* You see, God is about the business of choosing for the sake of his own glory hopeless sinners that he then begins the process of conforming into the very image of His Son. That means that every single Christian is on a journey of transformation and it starts from the moment they are saved and it doesn't end even when we get to heaven. God says in *2 Corinthians 3: But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.* What that means is that no child of God ever, ever stays the same when the Spirit of God enters into them. And if there's no evidence of change taking place, then that in itself might be evidence that God's Spirit never did in fact enter into them. The sad thing is is today, that's a very hard sell. We have bought into pieces of the gospel cafeteria-style and the results can be spiritually deadly. You know we hear one piece of the gospel that salvation is a forever thing and it can never be lost and we combine that with another piece of the gospel, it says: If we confess with our mouths that Jesus is Lord, we will be saved and we wind up with a teaching that says if you've ever responded at any point to any call of the gospel, you are forever locked into

eternal life regardless of what kind of life you live. That's the view that the devil loves. It's the view that he truly appreciates because it carries self-deception to its intended end. Folks wind up living a life pointing straight to hell all the while thinking, oh, I'm on my way to heaven.

Let me give you an example. This is the example of Robert Dear, because it's a classic case in point. Three years ago Robert Dear took a gun into a Planned Parenthood in Colorado Springs and he murdered three people and wounded nine others in the attack. Now my interest in him comes from what was said about him in an article in the *New York Times*, it described the man as a deeply religious monster who was a problem gambler, who beat his wife, who cheated on her, fathered two children out of wedlock and this is what his wife said -- quote -- "He claims to be a Christian, and he's extremely evangelistic but does not follow the Bible in his actions. He says that as long as he believes, he'll be saved, he can do whatever he pleases." You know, God doesn't give me the final authority to pass judgment on Mr. Dear, that's between God and him, but every single thing about his life and his actions clearly cries out that this man was by every objective measure no Christian. I mean I wish I could say that Mr. Dear's attitude is an outlier, but unfortunately it's not. I've had conversations with people whose sentiments are essentially the same. Mr. Dear is

an extraordinarily extreme example of the danger that faces everyone who refuses to examine themselves. Just to repeat what he says: "As long as he believes, he'll be saved, he can do whatever he pleases." Is that what the scripture really teaches? Let's look at that verse that people put a lot of emphasis on. It's *Romans 10:9*, it says: *If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.* Now does anyone actually think if I can just get you to confess those words that Jesus is Lord you're going to be saved? I mean if that's the case, all I need to do is grab a wad of \$20 bills and go into the homeless sections of the city and reach out to those poor souls dangling a \$20 bill there and say, "Hey, confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord." I mean, my guess is the majority of those folks would take me up on that offer. Are they saved? I mean the text says: *"If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."* You see the confession of the mouth is linked to a belief in the heart, and that's what changes everything. You see, it's the belief in the heart that causes God to say: *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.* I would be hard pressed to see a new creation in Robert Dear even though he might say the right

theological words. I mean the world may have been appalled at his murderous assault on innocent lives, but my guess is that Mr. Dear feels quite satisfied with himself and he's convinced that his standing before God is not just good, but it's probably great. I mean he went out and killed a bunch of pro-choicers; what could be better? My guess is his study of scripture never encountered this passage which says: *Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you -- unless indeed you fail to meet the test!*

This leads me to my second point which is: What should I test in myself? Well first of all, this isn't a theological test. One of the wonderful things about Christianity is that it's based on faith, it's not based on knowledge. And Jesus made that clear in *Mark 10*, he said: *And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it."* And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them. What Jesus is saying is what is required to enter heaven is not a lengthy theological dissertation but simple childlike faith. Where does that come

from? Well, I can tell you where it comes from, it comes from Christ living inside us. Paul says we are to test ourselves but consider what the test itself is. He says: *"Do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?"* Well, the reason why Paul makes the presence of Christ inside you the test is because that's the baseline that divides Christians and non-Christians. It's not your denomination, it's not your baptism, it's not any statements you made, it's not your theological knowledge, but one simple quality that distinguishes you as a Christian from somebody who is not. Does Jesus live inside you? And this is what Paul was getting at with the test and this is what determines whether you are a sheep or a goat. Listen to what *Romans 8* says, it says: *You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.* I don't think it gets more cut and dry than that. What he's saying is if Jesus is living inside you, you're a Christian. If Jesus is not living inside you, you are not. I mean it's really that simple. And obviously what Paul is saying is that the most important part of the test is determining if Jesus lives in you. And again, the scripture gives us information about that, it tells us what that is like. Again, this is *Romans 8:11*, it says: *If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies*

through his Spirit who dwells in you. So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. Now what Paul is saying is that if the Spirit of Christ dwells in you, then you will be led by that Spirit. Then what matters to Christ is going to start mattering to you. If Christ lives within you, you will always be engaged in putting to death the deeds of the flesh. I mean you will know without a doubt that there's a war going on between your flesh and your Spirit, and you will now find yourself firmly on the side of the Spirit. Christians know the exact same temptations that everybody else does, but we also know that God has equipped us to push back against them instead of accepting them as normal. And that's not to say that we as Christians don't fail, we fail and we fail repeatedly but because -- and I say this every month in communion, we have the Spirit of God inside us. Because we have the Spirit of God inside us, we get convicted about our sin, we determine to repent, to turn away from that sin. Christians don't always win the war between the flesh and the Spirit but we are always engaged, and we're always engaged because God himself is now living inside us and he's the one who is pressing the battle. Robert Dear showed no evidence of that whatsoever. He said as long as he believes, he'll be saved, he can

do whatever he pleases.

You know, I've had folks come up to me and say, you know, I'm genuinely, I am frightened, I am scared that I'm not a believer. That greatly concerns me. And I always tell them, I said, you know something, the question itself is a sign of health. Those people who've asked themselves those questions are the people who are healthy. If you look at all of the different instances in the New Testament, all of the people who were goats never asked that question. It was never even part of the discussion. And if you ever get to a stage where you're no longer concerned about the sin in your life, then that's the time to be afraid. Why? Because those who don't have the Spirit of God within them eventually give up the battle, and their fall back position unfortunately oftentimes dovetails with the contemporary theology that says, well, just shrug your shoulders, click your heels and repeat after me: "Once saved, always saved." That was Robert Dear's theology. And it thrives in a climate where self-examination is not presented.

I mean we live in a time of unprecedented personal autonomy which is a fancy psychological way of saying what God said thousands of years ago when he looked at the state of Israel in the book of Judges and said: *"In those days there was no king in Israel.*

Everyone did what was right in his own eyes." Personal autonomy says I'm the final standard of what is good or bad, what is right or wrong. That view has infected our entire culture and that includes the church. I mean there used to be a time when there was a great gulf separating the world's self-authenticating view and the biblical view which said that God's standards are God's and we are to conform to them. I mean now whole segments of the church claim how they *feel* about such areas as homosexuality or same-sex marriage or abortion or fornication, how they feel about those things trumps the written word of God. Well, not everyone but certainly an awful lot of folks are doing what is -- quote -- "right in their own eyes," and that makes self-examination all the more difficult.

Which leads to my third point. How do I know I'm not deceiving myself? What standard can I use to determine whether my self-evaluation is legitimate or not? And once again we have two choices. Number one, you can first, you can self-authenticate as the world and lots of the church is doing at present. Chances are you're going to find that no matter where you are, you're going to feel pretty much okay about it. Or you can go back to the original biblical understanding of what the standard is and how we self-examine. And again, Paul made that very clear. He said: *Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith. Test*

yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourself that Jesus Christ is in you -- unless indeed you fail to meet the test! And again, it's incredibly simple: Is Jesus Christ alive inside you? Okay, so how do we answer that question objectively? Well, fact is you can't. There's no series of objectively quantifiable check boxes that you can check off in order to make sure that Christ is genuinely living inside you. You know you can measure how well your diet's doing by how many pounds you lost as you step on the scale, you can measure how well you're doing at saving by looking at your savings account but you can't measure the extent to which Jesus has grown within you by standards like that. That doesn't mean that you can't test yourself. We have God's own words that give us a subjective way of gauging our progress. See, Jesus is present within us by the power of his Holy Spirit and his Spirit always leaves telltale traces of his presence. We call those traces the fruit of the Spirit. Here's how Jesus describes the test of his presence within us. He says: "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples."

Again it doesn't get much plainer than that. God's word tells us the fruit of the Holy Spirit is the measure of how Christ is growing within us. And God gives us an objective description of what that fruit is in *Galatians 5:22*, he says: *The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.* Remember we spent months and months going over what each of these individual fruits are, so obviously I can't spend that time now, but I would refer you back to that if you would need some in depth analysis. Simply put, when Jesus Christ is alive within you, these nine qualities which represent the loveliness of Jesus Christ, those qualities are going to be growing in you as well. The Lord Jesus Christ is the essence of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control. And it is God's intent to see that essence manifested in my life and your life, not just so that we can be fulfilled and improved, even though we will, but so that he, that is Jesus Christ would be glorified in my becoming more and more like him. I mean taken alone these fruits are simply a description of an ideal person. I mean who wouldn't want to be like that? I mean naturally everybody wants to grow those kinds of fruit but that's not what this fruit is all about. You know, an atheist can have these qualities but he will never have this fruit because the fruit is directly connected to the Holy Spirit of Christ growing inside

you, and the essence of this fruit is love and the love is the love of Christ and that comes from Christ alone. You know when we looked at the fruits, we saw that all of those other nine qualities, they're just subsets of what love is. And the way we described it is love is the grapefruit and joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, all of those, those little wedges that are inside the grapefruit that make up the grapefruit but the grapefruit is love. So we look at love as a means of testing if Jesus is alive and well within us. And God is very clear about telling us what love is and you've all heard it many, many times, you hear it almost every time you go to a wedding. *1 Corinthians 13: Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.*

So here at long last is the gist of our test. I want you to take a couple of minutes, I want you to prayerfully, carefully and honestly answer the following: Love is patient. Am I growing in patience? Do I sense that God is in charge and that my times are really in his hands and not mine? That's the patience of Jesus growing in me. Am I kind? Do I extend God's goodness to those less fortunate than me because I'm constantly aware of the grace

that I've received? Well, that's the kindness and the goodness of Christ growing inside me. Do I refuse to envy or boast? Do I sense more and more that everything that is good within me has come from Christ alone? That's the meekness and faithfulness of Christ growing within me. Love is not arrogant or rude. Am I increasingly aware of the times when I have been arrogant and rude? When I lose sight of the grace that keeps and sustains me, does my conscience convict me? Well that's the patience and kindness of Christ growing within me. Do I refuse to insist on my own way? Do I find that it is no longer my way or the highway but rather what now matters is His way? That's the meekness of Jesus coming out in me. Do I find that I'm less irritable and resentful than I used to be? That is the self-control of Jesus coming out in me. Do I hate wrongdoing? Do I rejoice in the truth? That's the goodness of Christ coming out in me. Am I willing to bear all things, believe all things, hope in all things and endure all things for Christ's sake? Does the kingdom of God matter more and more to me so that every single thing that life throws at me matters less and less? That is Christ growing the fruit of the Holy Spirit in you. And so it goes with all nine fruits. Now if you don't have any of these fruits operating in your life, then you just might conclude that you are not who you think you are.

I have an aquarium, I've kept it for years and years and this past

fall I was just kind of fooling around, I just threw out a trap and I caught two little tadpoles, put them in my aquarium. I've been watching them for about the last six months and I know that tadpoles have within them the making of a frog, and so in time I expect to see these short little stubby legs appear and see the tail start to shrink and the legs start to grow, then you have a frog from a tadpole. So far nothing's happened. So far I've seen nothing in these creatures that seem to indicate that their tails are shrinking and their legs are growing, so I'm wondering if I got frogs at all or not some kind of bizarre salamander or something. You see, a genuine frog is going to have those qualities inside him. And if they don't appear, then you can conclude, well, that's probably not a frog. See, genuine Christians have something inside them. It is the Spirit of Christ. And the Spirit reveals itself in the fruit of the Spirit. If there's no appearance of this fruit, then it's wise to start wondering if the Spirit is present. And if the Spirit is absent, you are not a Christian, period. No fruit, no Spirit.

Jesus said: *"I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."* See all the fruits of the love of Christ are rooted in how God is growing Christ in me, and the test that Paul calls us to is a simple willingness to vigorously ask myself

how the love of Christ has grown within me this past year, this past decade, this past eon, whatever you want to choose, or not. Paul says this is a self test that we are to examine ourselves, but that doesn't mean that we can't benefit greatly from the input of others. And one of the reasons why it's so critical to become part of a church community is that the community itself can help immensely in either verifying or falsifying your claims to be growing this fruit. If we really want to grow in Christ, we want the benefit of the input of our brothers and sisters, then it's really up to us to make that happen. Now we can't expect to help us -- people to help us critically evaluate how we're doing if we're not willing to risk the pain of an honest evaluation. And so we ask ourselves those questions: I mean, are we easily approachable? Do we lash out at criticism or do we collapse into a ball of self-pity? I mean I know it's hard but giving people the space and the comfort to allow them to be critical can give you a whole new perspective on how you're doing. But what's critical is a willingness to turn the camera around and examine myself. It can change you from being one of the tares to the wheat, from the goats to the sheep, but only if you're willing to take the risk and do the hard work of examining yourself.

You see, at the beginning of this message I said that Jesus said that his church is always going to contain two types of people:

Those who are the real deal and those who look like the real deal but are not. And what I should have said is actually there are going to be three types: There are the real, there are those who are not and there are those who by God's grace move from unreal to real. And they do that by following God's command to look inwardly, openly and honestly. Think of Nicodemus. He felt the power of the Holy Spirit pushing him to examine himself. He could have ignored it just as I suspect Robert Dear has and he would have remained lost. So right now if God is speaking to you, please do not ignore it. I would far rather you enter eternal life fearing your faith wasn't genuine than to stand confidently before your Master to hear him say, *"Depart from me, I never knew you."*

Understand, faith is a gift. It's not something that you get by trying harder. It comes simply by asking for it. Any one of you here today can ask for and receive that gift. God says: *"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks, it will be opened."*

And what you will find is the Spirit of Christ come to live inside you. And the question that all of us need to ask is has that happened to me? Sheep examine themselves; goats never will. *Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you -- unless indeed you fail to meet the test!*

Let's pray.

Father, as I said at the beginning of this message, this is a hard message. It's a hard message for me, but it's something that I know that I will be responsible for people standing before you hearing awful, awful words. I don't want somebody to come back to me and say, "You never warned me. You never said I could be sitting in a church for 30, 40 years as a tare and not as wheat. You never warned me to examine myself." Father, here today I am warning all of us, including myself, of the critical importance of examining yourself. And Father, if there is anyone today upon examination that says I need to square this away, I need to share this with somebody else, I need to be able to say God is convicting me that I'm not who I thought I was, I pray that they would come forward, that they would share prayer with our elders, with those who are there to meet them and to pray with them. I pray that you would give each and every one of us sitting in this room the absolute assurance that they are believers, that they are wheat because they know, they sense, they see the fruit of the Spirit of Christ growing in them. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.