

## The Dangers of Self-Deception

2 Corinthians 13:1-14

As we come to the end of our studies of Paul's letters to the Church at Corinth, I want to take just a little time to remind you of some background and facts that we have studied.

In the first place, Corinth was a city in Greece that was a Roman colony with a very mixed population: Jews, Greeks, Romans, Asiatics, and Phoenicians, to mention a few. It was famous for its wisdom and its wealth. It was also famous for its luxury and its license. In a very real sense, Corinth in the first century has its equivalent in the twenty-first century New York, Chicago, Las Angeles, Atlanta, or Charlotte, where you have great centers of population, areas of people from different kinds of situations and backgrounds.

Acts 18 tells us Paul established the church at Corinth, and it was composed of both the highly intelligent and wealthy, as well as the poorer and unlearned people in Corinth. And it was because of this cultural mixture that problems arose in this highly publicized Church. But it was not by accident that God had done established the church in that manner. It was the purpose of God, and He had chosen such people in order that through them might be demonstrated a principle of life in the midst of all the philosophy and learning and wisdom of Corinth, that no flesh might glory in His presence. These were the people who had received Paul's two letters.

The first letter to the church at Corinth gives an indication of the condition and the character of the church, but Paul's second letter was a tremendous revelation of the life and character of Paul himself. The first letter exposed the wounds of sin, but the second letter tells us what it cost a man of God when he set about trying to heal the wounds. That is the distinction.

**There is one outstanding thing that you cannot escape if you read this letter through carefully: it is the tremendous change in the tone between the first nine chapters and the last four chapters.** In the first nine chapters Paul is writing with a wonderful sense of warmth, comfort, thanksgiving, and a sort of conciliatory attitude; but in the last four chapters, he is sad and severe again. Many reasons are suggested for this, but I think the exact one would be that in this church, as in most churches anywhere, there is a group of people who want to be “in charge.”

2 Corinthians 7:6-9 reminds us that Titus had brought the message of the condition of the church that gave Paul much gladness, “Nevertheless God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, and not only by his coming, but also by the consolation with which he was comforted in you, when he told us of your earnest desire, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced even more. For even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it. For I perceive that the same epistle made you sorry, though only for a while. Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing.” Paul was glad that most of the people of the church at Corinth, who received his first letter, had responded to his message by repenting and turning to the Lord.

**But there were some who, instead of repenting, had become very offended at what Paul had written, and were showing their resentment by attacking Paul's ministry.** Therefore, he says in 2 Corinthians 11:4-5, “For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it!”

**Ladies and gentlemen, some things about church never change.** And the truth of the matter is there is always that little group of

people who are not willing to follow biblical instructions, much less pastoral leadership. **Why? Because they are not willing to change their habits, change their attitudes, and change their desire to be in control.** And when that happens, they usually attack the church's leadership. Therefore, it seems to me that the first nine chapters of this letter were written to the majority of the church who wanted to go on with God, and the last four were written to the minority who were angry and filled with accusations.

**Now when people get upset they start complaining and “nit-picking” about things that have absolutely nothing to do with the reality.** Notice some of the things of which they were accusing him. In chapter 10:10 they said, “...his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible.” In chapter 11:6, they accused him of being “rude (or uncultured) in speech.” In chapter 11:16 they even accused him of being insane, and he responded, “Let no man think me a fool...” And in chapter 12:16 they accused him of being dishonest.

**That is just a little of the ridicule and abuse this man of God had taken from the church at Corinth.** He was accused of weakness, of harshness in preaching, of insanity, of being contemptible in appearance, of being no apostle, and even of being dishonest.

**Therefore we come now to consider his final appeal and vindication of his own ministry.** His appeal was to those who would examine him, "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves." In verse 3 he says, “...you seek a proof of Christ speaking, in me...” In other words, he is saying, “Before you start examining me, you had better start with your own selves.” That is exactly the same warning Jesus gave in Matthew 7:3-5, “And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, Let me remove the speck from your eye; and look, a plank *is* in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.”

**I have taken time to say all that with a definite purpose, because I truly believe that in this twenty-first century counterpart of Corinth in which we live, we are seeing the Body of Christ falling into the same trap and the same dangers of self-deception that threatened disaster to that little group of people in the church at Corinth.** Child of God, be very careful when you become critical and filled with accusations, because there is a very good possibility that what is coming out of your mouth is an indication of what is in your heart! Therefore, Paul's advice to each of us is to "Examine yourselves, whether you are in the faith..."

I would like to examine this passage of scripture by breaking it into four parts so that we can glean a better understanding of its meaning.

**First, Paul calls for self-examination.** He says, "Examine yourselves, whether you are in the faith..." This is not a challenge to be applied to someone else. The text implies that this is something that is very personal and very private; it says to examine yourselves.

**Second, Paul says that we are to prove our selves.** I have found that it is one thing to look at yourself and conclude that you are walking in a right relationship with God, but, as someone has rightly said, "The taste is in the pudding." And the real proving ground for the Christian life is not such much here at church (although I am convinced that many people fail ever here), but out in the real world where we live. **What are we showing the world about the impact of the Gospel on our everyday living?** What are we showing our children, our mates, our fellow workers, or our employer? What kind of influence are we having on the people that we "hang around with" in life? **Do we exhibit something in our lives that causes others to want to come to Mountain Grove to see what we are doing here?** Or are we exhibiting the kind of attitude that is driving people away?

**Therefore, Paul says that we need to prove ourselves.** And Paul says the only way that we can prove our Christianity is to check our actions and make sure they are lining up with how the Bible says that we should be living.

**Three, Paul says we need to realize that Christ lives in us.** He says, “Know ye not your own selves how that Jesus Christ is in you...” Remember, it was Paul that told us in Colossians 1:27, “To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Jesus gave us this insight in John 6, “I am the bread which came down from heaven...No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day...Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day...He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.” 1 John 3:24 says this, “Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.”

**Paul was convinced that when we realize that the Lord of Glory has taken up residence in us it will make a difference in how we live our life.** You see, Paul was convinced that no one could ever be saved and still be the same as before.

**Four, Paul says if Christ does not dwell in you, you are lost.** He says, “...except you are reprobates...” Look at where Paul has brought us from. **First he says we need to examine ourselves; then he says we need to prove ourselves; then he says we need to know that Christ is in us.** Now, we see that if Jesus Christ isn't in us then we are “reprobates.” The Greek the word translated “reprobates” literally means, “unapproved, unworthy, worthless, disapproved, rejected, a castaway.”

**Based on the clear teaching of the Word of God, Paul is convinced the only way to be saved is simple child-like faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ.** For example, Acts 4:12 says, “Neither is

there salvation found in any other, for there is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved.” Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven, and his shed blood on the cross is the only way that you can wash and be made clean from sin, as seen in 1 John 1:7, “But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.”

**The only way into heaven is through the shed blood of Jesus Christ.** Anyone who does not have Jesus Christ in them is a castaway and unworthy of entry into heaven. If we claim to be a Christian then we have a responsibility to examine and prove our walk with God. We can also have the assurance that we know him if we love God and love those around us.