**“Passing the test” - 2 Corinthians 13 (Aroma of Christ conclusion #15)**

**I consider myself a fairly calm confident person yet no matter how prepared tests always made me a bit nervous. (Well, maybe not “Eye tests.”). But written school exams and especially flight/ATC tests were always good for sweaty palms.**

    ·        **Paul is giving a “Faith exam” to the Corinthians. With no guarantee of him being able to visit Corinth one more time as he hopes these may be his final words to this church. He is impressing upon them the True gospel, doing so not so much as a theologian but as an invested, passionate spiritual father. He draws them close and says: Read :5-10.**

**This examination is different from Paul’s “worthiness examination” about the dangers of partaking of the Lord’s supper without humbly considering the body of Christ (I Cor. 11:28). It’s also different from Jesus’ challenge (Matthew 7:5) to *examine the log in our own eye before hypocritically judging one with a speck in his eye.***

**What Kind of test is this? This test Paul speaks of is a measure of whether the believer understands or has departed from the true nature of the gospel itself.**

**When it comes to “Faith tests” our minds tend to answer by saying: *Have I been good this week? Have I read my bible enough, prayed enough or gone to church? Have I been “good enough?”***

**Paul reminds us that when our mind thinks that way about our relationship with God it is contrary to the very gospel of grace Paul is preaching.**

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**How would you feel if you gave your child a birthday gift and they went and busted open her piggy bank to pay you for it?**

**Paul, better than anyone, as an ex-Pharisee, a recovering legalist, and former violent enforcer of religious law, knows what this thinking looks like.**

·        **In answering the self-exam, the test question, we tend to put the emphasis on ourselves, on what *good things we have done or the bad things we have not done*the past day or week and conclude: “*OK, I’m pretty good.”*  And that is how we sometimes give ourselves the most important test of all.**

**Paul says, *Its only a 1 question test*. “*Do you realize Jesus Christ in you*?” Do you?**

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**Surely there is more to it than that – Yet we don’t need to answer a whole list of moral or doctrinal questions. If you take the test that way you think (without admitting it) you can save yourself. If so, you are in need of restoration (:9,11).**

**Paul answers the test question many times in various ways. For example: *“By grace you have been saved through faith, not by your works lets anyone should boast.* - Ephesians 2:8-9.**

**What is so insightful in this test and the question we must answer is it probes to the very core of how we view ourselves compared to God. When we agree with God and our need for the cross because we are sinners who cannot save ourselves, then we understand this good news, this gospel of grace.**

**Remember in school as the teacher handed back your tests that you knew you bombed? And then you heard those beautiful words, “*Class, this test will be graded on the curve, so round up two letter grades.”*  The smart people never cared about the curve. They didn’t need it. But for the rest of us mere mortals the curve was our only salvation. What that meant was regardless how poorly you did, there was always at least one really smart kid in class, who BTW you didn’t really know or even like, that raised your score to a passing grade, to a level you could not attain yourself. It was a grade much better than you deserved and because of another you passed. I often thanked God for the curve.**

**The answer “Yes, Christ is in me” is the only correct answer.  When we give that answer alone, we are confessing we trust the *curve of grace* in Jesus Christ; we trust his perfection to save us when we had no chance on our own. Despite us getting an “F” on the test of holiness and worthiness we are ultimately, finally, and gracefully judged holy and worthy based on Christ’s work alone, not ours.**

**Dane Ortland (“Gentle and Lowly” pg.160) – *“Being found clean in God’s eyes is not dependent on us keeping ourselves clean but on us taking our mess to God. God doesn’t limit himself to working with the unspoiled parts in us that remain after a lifetime of sinning. Christ’s forgiving power runs deep enough that he is able to redeem the very worst in us if we take those miseries to Him.”***

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**That is why it is called the “good news!” That is why Paul is warning the church to never listen to anyone who comes with a different message, a different gospel, saying you can only be saved, only be the true church, if you accurately check all the moral and doctrinal boxes.**

**“Jesus plus” - What Paul is battling against in the hearts of the early church and our hearts is the false gospel that salvation comes by “*Jesus plus*” something else. Do I trust Jesus alone or Jesus plus my good works? Jesus alone or *Jesus plus*“circumcision and the law.” Jesus alone or *Jesus plus* my doctrinal positions? Jesus alone or *Jesus plus* my worship practices once a week? Jesus alone or *Jesus plus* ... fill in the blank. We are asking too many questions?**

·         **Paul says there is only one test question. If you trust Christ alone in you, then you pass the test.**

**“Restoration” :9,11**

**Paul is praying for the Corinthian Christians to be “*restored*.” Look at :9-11.**

**Many Bible’s translate this word as “*perfection*.” Yet this word means to *restore to its proper, whole state.* Think of a broken bone, needing to be re-set and mended back to how it was intended.**

**Paul says (:6-9) regardless of what you think of me and my weaknesses I pray for you to be *restored* to a correct understanding of the gospel that properly answers the question, *“Did Jesus pay it all or not?” How do you answer?***

**Due to these false teachers the church was wandering dangerously close to falling off the cliff into *salvation by works. Paul calls such, “*another gospel” (Galatians 1) because it seeks to undermine and diminish the all-sufficiency of the DBR of Jesus, substituting it with a litmus test of human works and doctrinal questions before you are considered a true Christian.    I Corinthians 15:1-4**

**There is a double-edged sword to this “restoration.” On one hand it’s the most difficult of all tests to pass because we fail miserably at making ourselves righteous.**

**Yet, by the grace of God it is the easiest test to pass. Paul is clear that how we view *Christ in us* determines if we have been “restored,” if we pass the test!**

**Conclusion: We end where we started. Contemplating Paul’s challenge to the body of Christ to smell like Jesus; to be covered with that sweet aroma of grace, service, and love in a hostile and alien culture. To be vessels of the gospel treasure that reveals a way back to God as ministers of reconciliation. We are the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, who comforts, guides, leads and guarantees what is to come.**

**We close with this blessing from Paul to the Corinthians Christians. *“May the grace of the Lord Jesus, and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”*Amen!**