



UNFILTERED

REAL FAITH IN A FAKE WORLD

The Final Exam

“It’s time for your examination.” For some of us, those words create discomfort or strike a note of fear in our hearts. For others, they recall memories of an unpleasant medical experience in our past. For still others, they remind us of long essays or endless test forms at school. When it comes right down to it, we generally do not like examinations. Why not? Largely because of the possibility of failure. The health exam might reveal bad news; the school exam might reveal that we have not learned the material as thoroughly as we thought. Thus, we may be reluctant to do a spiritual self-exam because we are afraid of what we might find (or not find) if we go searching.

But exams are not the problem. A health exam does not give us a bad health condition; it simply reveals one that is already there. Likewise, an academic examination does not cause us to fail; it simply reveals that we are failing. A spiritual self-exam does not make or break us as Christians; it simply reveals what we are. This can help us: whether we are Christians or not, we should know what we are. Paul certainly thinks so. When he gets to Corinth, he will find out what the Corinthians really are and deal with them accordingly. It is far better for them to self-examine and deal with the issues immediately than to wait for him to get there and deal with them more forcefully.

Consequently, in this passage Paul instructs the Corinthians to examine themselves. Up to this point, thanks to the super-apostles, the Corinthians have been much more focused on examining Paul and his ministry to see whether he is legitimate. As the apostle brings his letter to a close, he turns the tables and instructs the church members to examine themselves before he comes, so that he can deal gently with them and not severely.”¹

Icebreaker

What is the hardest test you’ve ever taken?

¹ Casto, Trent. 2 Corinthians (Reformed Expository Commentary) (pp. 418-419). P&R Publishing. Kindle Edition.

Daily Devotions

Day 1: Read It

Read 2 Corinthians 13:1–14.

Get It

1. **What is needed to establish charges?**
2. **How does Paul say Jesus was crucified and raised?**
3. **What are the Corinthians to do according to verse 5?**
4. **What is Paul's prayer for the Corinthians (vv. 7 & 9)?**
5. **How does Paul want to use his authority?**

Day 2 — Today's Theme: When Time Runs Out

Read 2 Corinthians 13:1–4.

In high school, my first job was at Jimmy John's. The job itself was easy, and for the most part, the people were easy to work with. The environment was fun, and since work came in waves, we spent a lot of time joking around. I kind of became the class clown at work (at least in my own mind). I wanted to make people laugh, and while I took pride in doing my job well, I probably took even more pride in being funny.

We had a lot of downtime, and I got into all kinds of dumb, silly stuff to entertain the crew. Honestly, I cringe at most of it now, so I'll spare you the details. Needless to say I was stacking up stupidity points, and the managers had a lot of patience with me.

Anyway, in the back of the shop, there was a big safe where the money deposits went, and we also had a large ice machine. One day, for whatever reason, I thought it would be hilarious to take a big scoop of ice and drop it into the deposit slot of the safe. I did it, everyone laughed, I felt great, and then we finished our shift and went home.

The next day, when the manager came in and checked the deposit, she quickly realized that the money and paperwork had been sitting in a pool of water from the melted ice. That's when my stupidity finally caught up with me. I had worked there for years, always joking around, and I think I started to believe I was untouchable; as long as I was a good worker, I'd be fine.

But that day, I got sat down by the assistant general manager and formally written up. My time of grace had run out. I had made my bed, and now I had to lie in it.

In our passage today, Paul is preparing the Corinthians for a similar moment. He's coming to visit them again, but this time things will be different. He has been patient. He has warned them. He has given them time to repent. But now he makes it clear, if sin is still present, he will not spare them.

Like my manager, Paul didn't start with discipline. He started with patience. But patience isn't laziness—it's giving time for change. And when that time is ignored, action becomes necessary.

Paul's approach reflects Christ Himself. Jesus came the first time in weakness, showing mercy and patience. But He is not only the suffering Savior, He is also the risen King. And His power will be made known. In the same way, Paul has been gentle with the Corinthians, but he is ready to act for the sake of truth and the purity of the church.

- 6. Paul knows that the next time he visits, he'll have to seriously address the Corinthians' sin. Why do you think he showed patience with them before stepping in more directly?**

- 7. What role does an everyday member of the church have in helping others grow in holiness and stay on the right path?**

- 8. Why do you think church discipline is important for keeping the church healthy and spiritually pure?**

- 9. Why do you think it was important to make sure accusations were confirmed by two or three witnesses before taking action?**

Day 3 — Today's Theme: Self-Evaluation

Read 2 Corinthians 13:5.

At student ministries, we do a lot of fun trips and activities, and we always try to make them as great as possible. One of the biggest events we do is Fall Camp. I love Fall Camp, and it's always a blast, but when it's over, our team always sits down and evaluates the weekend. We ask ourselves, what went well? What didn't go well? We evaluate almost every event we do.

Even though we're the ones in charge of the trip, we open the door for ourselves to see where we failed and we're honest about it. We don't fluff anything; if we made mistakes, we want to own them, so we can make it better the next time. This allows us to see that there are always things to improve and that we need to examine ourselves.

In 2 Corinthians 13:5, Paul writes *"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!"*

"Paul now speaks directly to the offenders who have not repented. The first command here to 'examine yourselves' refers to a test that can reveal the nature or character of someone. 'Yourselves' is slightly emphatic in the Greek text, as in 'Examine yourselves as opposed to me or anyone else.' The second phrase, 'test yourselves,' is a different word but nearly synonymous with the first. Ordinarily, this word implies proving oneself. Paul's desire for the Corinthians is to test themselves and pass. They need to search their hearts and determine whether they are 'in the faith,' that is, are they true Christians?"²

10. How does testing or examining your faith help you be confident that you are truly saved (1 John 5:13)?

11. What could happen in our lives (or in a church) if we never stop to examine our faith or how we're living?

12. What are some practical ways you can check your heart and life to see if you're truly following Jesus?

² Casto, Trent. 2 Corinthians (Reformed Expository Commentary) (p. 425). P&R Publishing. Kindle Edition.

Day 4 — Today's Theme: Reality Check

Read 2 Corinthians 13:6–14.

Have you ever had to call out a friend and give them a reality check? Not in a harsh way, but in a way that they just need some help and guidance, and you've been able to see an area of their life where they are falling short. It can cause a rift in relationships sometimes, but the loving thing to do is to help our friends and people close to us come to a closer relationship with Jesus. That's our goal, not to be prideful or arrogant, but to be helpful. We need to be this for others, but **more importantly**, we need people to be this for us. We need leaders, coaches, mentors, and friends who care about our walk with Jesus and are willing to correct and guide us.

Most of what we know of Paul's relationship with the Corinthians involves confrontation and correction, even here at the end of this letter. We know from experience that these kinds of interactions are never fun and they present all kinds of threats at every turn. Despite their difficulty, they are necessary. But hard conversations don't mean they are devoid of love and care. As Paul closes out this letter, he assures the Corinthians that his prayer for them is for their restoration. And Paul recognizes that his role and authority isn't meant for tearing down but for building up. What a great reminder for us today that as Christians, when we face conflict with one another, our aim should always be to build one another up in the faith.

13. Looking back at earlier chapters in 2 Corinthians, how have you observed Paul working with the Corinthians to build them up and restore them?

14. In verse 7, Paul says his concern is that the Corinthians would do what's right. What do you think that means?

15. What pressures or temptations in your own life make it difficult to do what you know is right?

Day 5 — Today's Theme: The End

Hey students, I just want to give you a round of applause.

Back in January, we started this journey through the book of 2 Corinthians. I know it hasn't all been easy, but the awesome reality of God's Word is that it will always be relevant and true!

Our prayer as a team is that what we've studied in this series sticks with you well into your adult years, and that you've begun to develop a real discipline of studying God's Word that you'll carry for the rest of your life. Spend time in God's Word, not just here on Wednesday nights. You need to let it shape your life.

Over the past five months, we've invested a lot of time studying 2 Corinthians together under the banner "Unfiltered: Real Faith in a Fake World." Our Christian brothers and sisters in Corinth struggled at times to navigate the narrow path as followers of Christ in a world that stood in opposition to their Savior, and if we're honest, we face those same struggles too.

The Corinthians had difficulty identifying and following sound spiritual leaders. They dealt with hurt and challenges when ministry didn't go as planned. They needed help understanding spiritual expectations and keeping an eternal perspective.

And yet, even in all of that, they are still called "brothers."

16. How have you seen your faith become more "real" over the past five months?

17. Skimming back through the pages of 2 Corinthians, what are some of the defining characteristics of "real faith" that you want to take with you from this study?

This study was written by Ethan Wentzlaff, based on the adult study by the VBC pastoral team.