

## **2 Corinthians 13:5-14 (NIV)**

Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you--unless, of course, you fail the test?

And I trust that you will discover that we have not failed the test.

Now we pray to God that you will not do anything wrong. Not that people will see that we have stood the test but that you will do what is right even though we may seem to have failed.

For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth.

We are glad whenever we are weak but you are strong; and our prayer is for your perfection.

This is why I write these things when I am absent, that when I come I may not have to be harsh in my use of authority--the authority the Lord gave me for building you up, not for tearing you down.

Finally, brothers, good-bye. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints send their greetings.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

This is a very appropriate text for this morning. In the book of II Corinthians Paul writes a very personal letter to a church that he labored with for a long time.

Here at the end of his second letter to the church at Corinth Paul is saying good-bye even though he has hopes of seeing his friends there again sometime in the future. But good-byes are never easy.

I remember the story about a pastor who was leaving his church and at the end of the service this one woman was crying and was obviously upset.

So the pastor came up to her and said, "Don't cry Mrs. Smith, I'm sure the next pastor will be just as good." Then the lady said, "No, that's what they said the last time."

Saying goodbye is never easy. When Paul wrote this letter to the Corinthians, he had every intention to see these believers again. But whenever you say goodbye, you never know.

There are a number of very emotional scenes in the Bible when people have to say goodbye to each other. We'll begin this morning we're going to look at a few of them.

In the book of Acts the apostle Paul gave a parting sermon to the elders at Ephesus. Then it says:

**Acts 20:36-38 (ESV)**

And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. <sup>37</sup> And there was much weeping on the part of all; they embraced Paul and kissed him, <sup>38</sup> being sorrowful most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they accompanied him to the ship.

**Farewells are sometimes permanent.**

That's what makes good-byes so difficult. You never know what tomorrow may bring.

In the past couple of weeks I've been making the rounds trying to visit as many of our shut-ins as possible, and we still have a few calls to make.

I'm very much aware that I may be saying goodbye to some of these dear folks for the last time.

Several years ago we went to visit a wonderful sister in Christ who was dying of cancer. She was spending her last days in the home of relatives under hospice care.

We all knew that her time was near. We read Scripture, sang a hymn, and prayed. When we left I remember saying "I'll see you on the other side."

Sometimes farewells are permanent. But even if they're not, saying good-bye tugs at your heart.

When Naomi was about to say goodbye to her daughter in laws Ruth and Orpah, it was one of those heart wrenching scenes.

**Ruth 1:8-9 (ESV)**

But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go, return each of you to her mother’s house. May the LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me.”<sup>9</sup> The LORD grant that you may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband!”  
Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept.

**Ruth 1:14 (ESV)**

Then they lifted up their voices and wept again. And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

There’s a part of me that identifies with Ruth today. I feel like clinging to all of you so that I don’t have to let go.

There’s an old French proverb that says, “To leave is to die a little.” It is always painful to say goodbye to a time in your life that can’t be replaced.

This is of course what we’re feeling acutely this morning. The LORD is good. His plans for all of us are good. But it’s hard to let go of the past.

Yet as we see often in Scripture, farewells are sometimes necessary. There is the example of Jesus in the NT. He said to his disciples, “It is far better for you if I do go.”

That’s the way it is when God calls you to leave one place to go to another. It may be painful, but it’s the right thing to do.

There was a time in my life when I tried to discern God’s will by how I felt at the moment. If something was painful and it hurt, it must not be of God.

If Jesus had followed that method, he never would have left his disciples; in fact he never would have gone to the cross.

Farewells are sometimes necessary. There’s another old saying that goes:

Every parting gives a foretaste of death,  
every reunion a hint of  
the resurrection.

Farewells may sometimes be necessary, but it's the goodbye part of it that's so painful. One pastor told me that he would rather sneak out of town in the middle of the night than have to face all that comes with saying goodbye.

But these times are necessary in life. You cannot fully appreciate the gift of life without knowing the painful reality of saying farewell to those you love. The depth and capacity of your soul depends upon it. These times of farewell are necessary.

### **Farewells move you on to the next step**

#### **Luke 9:61-62 (ESV)**

Yet another said, "I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home." <sup>62</sup> Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

Jesus isn't saying that it's wrong to say goodbye, but when you do, it's got to move you on to what God has for you next.

Saying goodbye, as painful as it is, at least gives you a chance to bring closure to a relationship and a time in your life.

Jesus was saying that if you want to follow him, you can't always be looking back. When you say goodbye, you've said the past is over, and it's time to move on.

When I visit those who have lost their spouse, there's a difference between those who mourn deeply, but have moved on, and those who can't let go of the past; they're always looking back.

It is not being disloyal to acknowledge that God is sovereign and your future is in His hands.

But farewells provide the opportunity for blessing. The old English word goodbye is a shorten version of the phrase, "God be with you."

That's the best way to say goodbye to anyone, whether it's for a long time, or for just the day.

There's an old Hebrew farewell blessing recorded in the book of Genesis between Jacob and Laban.

The place was also called Mizpah, because he said, "May the LORD keep watch between you and me when we are away from each other. (Genesis 31:49 NIV)"

Mizpah in the Bible means "watchtower" or "lookout." It's a name commonly used in Palestine to refer to places used to provide security.

May the Lord keep watch between you and me while we are absent from one another.

In a couple of weeks some college students are going to have to say goodbye to their families as they go off to school.

That can be a very hard thing to do, especially for parents saying goodbye to the new freshmen who are leaving home for the first time.

You wonder if they're ready to be out on their own. You wonder if they're going to be all right. You wonder what you should say to them as they leave; what words of wisdom you should pass on before they leave the nest.

As I left for college my mother cried, and my father said, "Well Son, don't do anything I wouldn't do." I said to myself, "OK! That leaves my options **WIDE** open."

I remember when our kids went off to Covenant College. That's a long way from home. Saying goodbye and leaving them behind was one of the hardest things I had ever done.

I was proud of myself for keeping my emotions in check. I was not going to cry in front of my kids. But then I lost it right at the end.....when I got the tuition bill!

Farewells also lend themselves to final appeals and encouragements. When Paul said goodbye to the Corinthians, he did so with an exhortation. He tells them to do at least three things.

## **1. Examine Yourself**

### **2 Corinthians 13:5 (ESV)**

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!

That is a great way to begin any exhortation. Instead of giving a big long winded lecture on what to do and what not to do while he's gone, Paul puts the ball in their court.

Take a look at your heart and see what's there.

There are really very few times when any of us will listen to an exhortation.

It doesn't matter if it's a high school commencement speech or a lecture from your parents. Most exhortations are faintly heard and rarely remembered.

Sermons are the same way, especially messages that earnestly urge you to live and act a certain way. They are heard but usually not listened to. It seems to be human nature to block out exhortations.

So Paul says, "Examine yourselves". See if you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Well, how do you do that?

## **2. Measure yourself against the truth.**

Now we pray to God that you will not do anything wrong. Not that people will see that we have stood the test but that you will do what is right even though we may seem to have failed. For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth.

#### 2 Corinthians 13:7-8 NIV

When I was at General Assembly a while back the keynote speaker said that for many of us in the church, it's not that we didn't know the Bible well enough.

He said that the problem with a lot of us is that we're so familiar with the Bible that we don't let it penetrate into our hearts. We don't allow the Scriptures to confront us as Jesus confronted the faithful in his day.

When was the last time you read a portion of the Bible that offended you? That challenged you? That confronted you?

If it's been a while, maybe you ought to examine yourself. Maybe you've gotten too comfortable with God's Word.

#### Hebrews 4:12 (ESV)

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

I think over the past 20 years I've quoted that passage more than any other. "Discerning the thoughts and intents of the heart."

Every word of the Bible is God breathed. It doesn't become the Word of God, it is the Word of God. Evangelicals are united on this point.

But we often pick which parts of the Bible we want to focus on. American evangelicals tend to be very individualistic. We read the Bible as if God were speaking directly to us as individuals.

But if you examine the Scriptures, the LORD speaks to us corporately, as His chosen people. The common means of grace; the Word and sacrament were given to the church, the people of God.

For those of you who believe, but aren't actively involved in the Body of Christ, examine yourselves in light of the truth of God's Word.

You belong to the family of God. You belong in the Body of Christ. Around you are your brothers and sisters in Christ. You need them as much as they need you.

They say that one of the drawbacks of a long term pastorate is that the people get so used to you that they don't listen to you anymore. That may depend on whether or not you have anything worth listening to.

But on the other end of it, it may depend on whether or not you're allowing the Word of God to penetrate into your heart. If the Bible is heard but not listened to closely, it's easy to shrug off the exhortation of a preacher or even an apostle.

Examine yourself. Test yourself. Don't look around and see how you stand up to others. Look within your heart, and measure yourself up to what God expects.

Finally, Paul exhorts his flock to **AIM FOR PERFECTION**.

(2 Corinthians 13:11 NIV)

Finally, brothers, good-by. **Aim for perfection**, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.

The ESV translates this "Aim for restoration." The perfection that we seek in this life is to be fully restored in Christ.

We are justified by grace through faith. We are reconciled to God by the blood of Christ. Our union with Christ is complete. But the work of the Spirit continues.



Aim for restoration. As far as it depend on you, be at peace with everyone. If you come to worship and know that your brother or sister has an issue with you, leave your gift at the altar and come to terms with them.

If the sun went down last night and you were still angry with your spouse or family member, it's past time to be reconciled. Aim for restoration.

The KJV says, "Be perfect." That's the aim, but it won't be found in ourselves. Our perfection is in Christ. The heart of the Gospel is reconciliation. Bringing together those who were separated by hostility.

Aim for perfection. Aim to do what is right, not to draw attention to yourself, but to Christ.

The final point deals with THE GLORIOUS REUNION.

### **2 Corinthians 13:12-14 (ESV)**

Greet one another with a holy kiss. <sup>13</sup> All the saints greet you. <sup>14</sup> The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

For the believer, a farewell is given with the expectation of a reunion. To be apart from the body is to be with the LORD. It's becoming part of the great cloud of witnesses.

It's knowing that one day our faith will be replaced by sight, and we'll join the great multitude that preceded us.

Protestants don't use the word "saint" very often. A saint is simply one who has been fully restored in Christ. It's not our merit that counts, but it's the righteousness of Christ imputed to us by faith. That alone makes a person a "saint."

After the resurrection of Christ, a foretaste of that great reunion took place.

### **Matthew 27:52-53 (ESV)**

The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, <sup>53</sup> and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many.

One day, in God's timing, something far greater is going to take place. A reunion, in a scale far beyond our imagination, will consummate the coming of the Kingdom, with the glorious return of Christ.

There will be a banquet with that reunion, which the LORD Supper anticipates. Until then, we persevere, and we serve our Master until He returns.

Before we move one of my assignments has been to buy three plots across the street at Cowell cemetery.

I was walking over there the other day. I saw the names of so many people that I have known and loved over the years. I have not forgotten them. I look forward to seeing them again.

I cannot imagine what it would be like to say goodbye to someone you love without JESUS Christ and the hope of the Gospel.

Faith in JESUS Christ is not wishful thinking or a vague hope for the best. It is an absolute trust in the finished work of Christ on the cross that reconciles us to the only true God who is absolutely holy.

We leave you today with the assurance of that hope.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,  
and the love of God,  
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.