

HOW DO I KNOW I AM A CHRISTIAN?

“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.”

This time every year pastors in our synod are asked to do a hard thing. They are asked to evaluate themselves. There are about twenty or thirty categories such as administration, teaching Bible class, preaching, visiting the elderly, hospital visits, and so on. There are also categories on teaching German or Latin and even French. You rate yourself from a 1 to a 5, with a 1 being weak and a 5 strong. After a pastor evaluates himself, his circuit pastor looks it over, changes any numbers he thinks should be changed and then discusses it with him.

Have you ever done that? Have you been asked to rate yourself and then have some objective, third party come in and tell you what scores you should have? What if I gave you an evaluation form for being a husband or wife or child, a neighbor and then changed the numbers as I see them? It is difficult, difficult because we are afraid of what weaknesses would come out, difficult because we don't want to think too much of ourselves.

Friends, that is what the Lord wants us to in our text for today. He tells us to examine ourselves. It will be difficult, at first, but in the end the Lord will adjust our numbers according to Jesus Christ. So let's take the test and ask, am I a Christian?

I. Am I sorry for my sins?

All churches have problems and the church in Corinth is no exception. Paul summarized the problems in the previous chapter. ***“I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be, and you may not find me as you want me to be. I fear that there may be quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder.”*** Paul was going to return soon, but he was afraid he would have to come with the full force of the law, condemning them, binding them to their sins in the hopes they repent and can be forgiven.

But it doesn't have to be that way. The members themselves can deal with these sins without having to wait for “fire and brimstone” Paul to arrive. ***“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?”*** God wants us to examine ourselves. How do we do this? I am going to use the word, “repent” to help us understand how we examine ourselves. Repentance means to turn around and it is like driving in the wrong direction. You need to stop going in the direction you are going, turn around and then head in the right direction. Repentance involves three steps or stages: am I sorry for my sin where you realize you are in the wrong direction, do I believe Jesus is my Savior where God turns you around, and then do I want to change my sinful life as you head in the right direction. So as we evaluate ourselves, the first question to ask is, “Am I sorry for my sins?”

Are you sorry for your sins? We confessed them earlier. Did you mean it? We all will readily admit we are sinners, but are we sorry for all our sins? If I was having company coming over this afternoon, I can clean up the house in fifteen minutes guaranteed. It doesn't matter how much junk is laying around, I can clean it up. All I have to do is grab the stuff and jam it in the closet. I can get away with it.

But can I get away with it before God? I mean, I could ask the kids to clean their rooms. In fifteen minutes they say they are all done. But I know better. I look under the beds and in the closet and I see all the junk piled up there. You can't hide that from parents. We can't hide our sins before God.

On the pastor evaluation forms, we can chose from 1 to 5. We may think we can do the same when it comes to sin. “OK, maybe I am not a five, but I am certainly not a one.” Maybe, compared to that person over there, but not before God. You see, it is either pass or fail. Take the parable of the Good Samaritan. Maybe when someone was in need, you didn't walk on the other side to avoid him. Maybe. But then again, were you a good Samaritan to him? Did you sacrifice everything you have for your needy neighbor? Did you pay all his medical bills? Husbands, maybe you don't yell at your wives, but do you love them more than yourself? Kids, maybe you don't run away from home, but do you honor and obey your parents even if you don't agree with them? We can hide our sins pretty well from one another, but God opens the closet door and sees all the junky sin we piled up there.

So, it is true, you failed the first question. You are a sinner. Guess what? A failure in this question doesn't mean you fail the test. In fact, it means you are passing the test. That is why Jesus came into this world, to save sinners like you and me, so lets ask the second question: “Do I believe in Jesus Christ?”

II. Do I believe in Jesus as my Savior?

Do you believe? Well, who do you say Jesus is? Take the Apostles' Creed. You acknowledge, don't you, that God is one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. You acknowledge that Jesus is Lord. You acknowledge he was conceived by the virgin Mary, born,

suffered and died and rose again. You confess that he died for your sins, rose so you may live forever in heaven, and he is coming back for you. So far, you are passing the test.

But there is one more step: do you trust Jesus? Once a father who had a demon-possessed son asked Jesus, "IF you can heal him, please do so." Jesus replied back, "IF I can?" and the man instantly replied, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief." Faith is knowing who Jesus is. But it is also trusting him. Friends, don't be disturbed if there is some doubt in you. Remember, we have the New Man in Christ, but we also have the sinful nature which doubts everything God says. You can have saving faith along with doubt just like the father of the demon-possessed boy. In fact, because you are bothered by your doubts tells me that you do trust in Jesus. It is like asking, "Where did I put my keys?" You don't know where your keys are, but you know you have keys. Concern over doubt tells me you do believe, otherwise you wouldn't be having that battle inside of you.

Now faith isn't something easily seen. You can give a blood sample at the clinic and they can measure all sorts of things: your cholesterol level, glucose level, any presence of infection, and so on. It can't measure faith. So how do we measure it? Some would attach faith to feelings, the more I feel like a Christian, the more of a Christian I am. But feelings will often deceive you. Look at Job. Emotionally he didn't feel loved by God. In fact he began to question God's love and argue with him. But in the middle of that emotional whirlpool, what did he say? I know that My Redeemer lives and in the end I will stand with him, I not another. Job didn't feel close to God, but he knew he was close because of God's Word. He trusted what God said rather than how he felt. What does God tell you? You know Jesus is God. You know he died for your sins. You know God forgives you and gives you eternal life, the same eternal life Jesus has in the same heaven. You have hope because God gives you hope.

So, you do believe in Jesus. Good, only one more question to ask: do you want to avoid evil and do what is good and pleasing to God?

II. Do what is right and noble.

"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."

Before Paul came to Corinth, these people didn't know God or Christ. Sure, some belonged to the synagogue, but they didn't know about the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. All that changed when Paul came with the gospel of Christ. They began to worship the true God and look to Jesus for their salvation. Yes, they had their problems, but Paul still boasted about these fellow Christians. When it came to a special offering to relieve starving Christians in other parts of the world, the Corinthians were the first to stand up and pledge money. They were very gifted. They excelled in all sorts of gifts and they used those gifts in church. In other words, the faith they had in Jesus changed their lives outwardly as well.

That is because the New Man, the believer in us, wants to do what is right. ***"For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth."*** I have an apple tree in the back yard. I am tired of apples, so I tell the tree to grow pears next year. Will it? No. It is an apple tree that grows apples. The believer in us wants to produce good fruit, fruit of faith. That's what believers do.

But this is often a struggle. Corinth, with all that was going for it, still had its problems. We will do well to remember a simple truth from the Bible, that the believer is both a sinner and a saint at the same time. When God brought us to faith, he didn't reform the sinner; the sinner can't be reformed. Instead we are reborn with a New Man, raised to life just as Jesus is raised to life. The sinner is totally corrupt, the saint is totally holy. The sinner is afraid of God and is reluctant to do what he says, the saint only loves God and loves to do the noble thing in God's eyes.

We so often don't do what is good because we are still sinners. But maybe you can see now how repentance is the way to examine ourselves. The fact we still commit sins bothers us so we turn to Christ to be assured of forgiveness and then we can actually see this faith as we want to avoid sin and do what is good in God's eyes, and then we see sin again, well, we go around the circle again.

Friends, are you Christian? Yes, because you are ashamed of your sins. Yes, because you know and believe in Jesus as your Savior. Yes, because you hate the sin that keeps popping up in your life and want to do the right thing. Congratulations. You passed. INJ Amen.