

*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? <sup>6</sup> And I trust that you will discover that we have not failed the test. <sup>7</sup> Now we pray to God that you will not do anything wrong—not so that people will see that we have stood the test but so that you will do what is right even though we may seem to have failed. <sup>8</sup> For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. (2 Corinthians 13:5-8)*

### **How Would You Run a Faith Diagnostic?**

Have you ever run a diagnostic on your computer? Do you know what that is? It's a tool to see if your computer is working properly. I don't use it very often but I do occasionally, usually when I'm trying to hook something up to my computer, like a printer, and I can't get it to work. The computer itself gives you the option to run a diagnostic. Technicians and engineers and programmers use that concept of running a diagnostic in a lot of very technical situations. If the check engine light on your car goes on and you take to the dealership, they'll run a diagnostic to see what's going on. We can apply that idea to our faith. In fact, in our sermon text for today, St. Paul told the Christians in Corinth to run a diagnostic on their faith. He said, **“Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves.”** That idea of doing a faith diagnostic, a check up, to see if everything is in order, seems like a good practice to me. But what would that look like? **How would you run a faith diagnostic?**

#### **I.**

Obviously, there's no pull down tab on your faith that you can just click on. So how do we do it? Paul says, *“Examine yourselves. Test yourselves.”* This is a process of self-evaluation. It's taking a hard look at what we think and believe and how we practice our faith. The heart of any healthy faith is our relationship with our Lord. **How would you run a faith diagnostic? You would ask if you're trusting in Jesus.**

Does that seem like a ridiculously simple question? Wouldn't you expect that everyone here would say, “Yes, I'm trusting in Jesus”? I would. But St. Paul was talking to Christians, too. To be sure, the congregation in Corinth was a mess. It had doctrinal problems and divisions and all kinds of other issues. But they were believers in Jesus, so you would expect that their faith diagnostic would say they were trusting in Jesus. That's what a Christian is. But Paul said to them, **“Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves.”** Why would he say that?

Because there is a very subtle danger to our trust in Jesus. Without even realizing it, we can begin to transfer our trust to ourselves. When I was at the seminary and they were teaching us to reach out with the gospel, they taught us something called “the diagnostic questions.” The first is very simple, “If you were to die tonight, where would you go?” Of course, I hope we all would say, “To heaven.” But then the follow up question was, “Are you sure?” How would you answer that question? I often hear people say, “I hope so.” That answer shows that there is an issue to our faith. God wants you to be certain.

The next question is “Why?” Sometimes, I expand it a little, “If God gave you five minutes to tell him why he should let you into heaven, what would you say?” Think about that for a minute. Do you know what I've heard most often, even from members of churches that I served? Some variation of “I'm a good person” or “I do the best I can.” Sometimes, I hear something like, “I'm not perfect but I hope God would forgive me because he sees that I did the best I could.” Do you see the problem with that statement? I hope God will forgive me because I did the best I could. That's actually saying, “I hope God will forgive me because I sinned.” That's what doing the best I could means. It wasn't up to his standard, so God just let me off the hook because I tried.

That is not trusting in Jesus. Now I understand that sometimes when we're put on the spot, the words come out wrong. Sometimes, we just don't do a good job of saying what we really think and believe. Thankfully, God looks into your heart. He doesn't make you play the amateur lawyer in heaven and argue your case. God knows your faith. But while we're down here, it's good to ask ourselves those diagnostic questions from time to time, to remind ourselves that we cannot trust in our good works, we cannot trust in how often we come to church or how much money we give to the Lord or how good we are at parenting or helping the poor or taking care of the sick. None of those things gets us into heaven. We are sinners who deserve nothing but death

and hell. But Jesus was perfect in our place. Jesus died and paid for all our sins. Jesus rose and God has forgiven us. God promises to bring us to heaven for Jesus's sake. Faith is simply trusting that promise.

But there's another level to the question of who we trust in: what about this life? Are we ever guilty of trusting God to get us to heaven but thinking that we have to take care of things here? That kind of thinking can show itself in how we structure our priorities. Do we make time for God? It can show itself in what we choose to do with our money and our time and how we raise our kids. It can show itself in how committed we are to living the way Jesus tells us to here. In the end, believing that we have to care of life here is another kind of idol worship. If we're guilty of thinking that way, our faith is not as healthy as it could be.

So, what's the answer? Repentance. When we take a hard look in the mirror of God's law and we see sinners staring back at us, sinners who think that trying hard will get us into heaven, sinners who think that we are in control of our own lives, that should shake us up a little bit. But then we need to take an equally hard look at the gospel. Jesus has paid for all those sins. Jesus sent the gospel to us and gave us our faith. Jesus promises to watch over us and hear our prayers and bring us home to heaven. Jesus promises that in the gospel, he will renew and restore our faith. Jesus promises that everything he does in our lives is for the good of our trust in him so that we do reach eternal life. And his promises will never fail. So, if the faith diagnostic reveals weaknesses in our faith or a faith that is focused on me instead of Jesus, the cure is to drink deep of the good news of Jesus' love and promises to us. God's power will work.

## II.

Our faith is healthy if it's totally focused on Jesus. But that doesn't mean that our faith has nothing to do with this life. Just the opposite, a healthy faith exerts an incredible force on our lives. So, if the force is not being exerted, that's a sign that our faith is unhealthy. That is what Paul talks about most in these words to the Corinthians. So, if we ask, **how would you run a faith diagnostic? You would ask if Christ is living in you.**

St. Paul asked, **"Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?"** If you pass the faith diagnostic, if in fact you are trusting in Jesus, that always means that Jesus lives in you. But what does that mean? Paul is talking about the new lives we live here because we are Christians. Whatever is in our hearts comes out in our lives, sooner or later. So, if I pretend to be someone's friend, but I really don't like that person, sooner or later, if I spend time with that person, I'm going to do or say something that shows how I really feel. It's just inevitable. Jesus says the same thing: the words that come out of our mouths overflow from our hearts. And that's true about our actions, too. We're all born with hearts that belong to the devil. He lives there. Our sinful nature lives there. But when the gospel comes and God gives us faith, Jesus moves in. Now, the devil doesn't move out, at least not right away. Every time Jesus boots him out the front door, he sneaks back in through a window. But Jesus does live in our hearts. Our words and actions will reflect that. And, of course, the more Jesus cleans up our hearts and pushes out the devil, the more our words and actions show that he is there.

Paul had called the Corinthians to repent for a long list of sins and failures. And repentance shows that it is real by changing our lives. That's what we need to see when we run our faith diagnostic. Are we turning from the sins that are a particular problem for us personally? Are we at least trying to live differently? In other words, is Christ living in us? If not – if we don't even make an effort to turn from those sins – there is something seriously wrong with our faith.

Paul says, **"Now we pray to God that you will not do anything wrong—not so that people will see that we have stood the test but so that you will do what is right even though we may seem to have failed."** Paul was concerned about the faith of these people. It is true that their bad behavior reflected on him. But Paul didn't care about that. His primary concern was that they pass the test of faith. If we pass that test, it has to show itself in our lives. So, just like Paul, I hope and pray to God that you will do nothing wrong. I hope and pray to God that every day, you do what is right in God's eyes because Jesus is living in you, changing how you think and feel and speak and act, changing what you want out of life and what you want for your family and your home and your country. Now, I know that you won't be perfect here. Neither will I. But I hope and pray that we are not guilty of the kinds of public sins that bring the gospel into doubt. I hope and pray that our faith is so strong that we joyfully choose to follow God day after day. I hope and pray that we can see how our faith is making us into new and different people.

Then when all is said and done, we will go to heaven. Not because we were so good, but because we trusted in Jesus. Finally, St. Paul was talking about the triumph of the gospel in us. He closes our reading by

saying, **“For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth.”** He did not mean that he could never screw up or sin or do something that he regretted. Paul was very aware of the weakness of our sinful flesh. But when Jesus is living in our hearts, when he’s in firm control and he’s pushed the devil out, when we are acting according to the faith God has given us, our words and actions uphold the gospel. That will be true always, even though the devil hates it and leads us in the other direction. The beauty of that is that Jesus doesn’t leave us even when we’ve sin, even when we follow the devil after he’s crawled back in. Jesus starts us over every day. So, I can’t deny the sins I committed yesterday. But I can still live for Jesus today.

Reminding ourselves of those truths is the whole point of running a faith diagnostic. Now, I don’t run diagnostics on my computer very often. I only do it when there’s a problem. Paul said these words to Christians who had serious problems with their faith. The congregation in Corinth was deeply troubled. Paul had to write them and visit them, again and again. And those things challenged their faith. Our challenge today is probably different. But with all that’s happening in our world, with an election coming up that many of us feel is unbelievably important for the direction our country will go in, with a pandemic still raging and unrest still simmering in our streets – and with the devil trying to lead us away from Jesus every day, it’s good to do a faith diagnostic. Are you trusting in Jesus and in Jesus alone? Does he live within you and renew your heart and mind lead you to live for him? You know what? Whether your answer is “yes all is good” or “no, there’s a problem,” the next step is the same. Drink deep of the good news that Jesus loves you, that he died and rose for you, and that he will bring you home. That is how he takes residence in our hearts. That is how he keeps us in the faith all the way to eternal life. Drink deep of that gospel message. Amen.