

Last week, I did my impression of a cracked record,,, and some of you probably thinking, “Well, that’s nothing new...”

But we were talking about how, through 2 Corinthians, Paul has been

- Defending himself;
- Comparing himself with the false apostles;
- And pointing them towards Jesus'....

Over and over again...,

- Defending himself;
- Comparing himself with the false apostles;
- And pointing them towards Jesus'....

but always working into the centre.

His purpose (at the centre of it all), is to build the Corinthian church up. He wasn't at all, wanting to tear them down – his aim was to build them up...

Paul had a great concern for this church. Some in that church (including some very prominent leaders [the false apostles]), had departed from the true Gospel, and they were now worshipping their own image of what they think Jesus should be like (a false image of Jesusⁱ) ... And because they had departed from the true Gospel, Paul knew that they were heading for judgment...

And he shares this concern in Chapter 13. The 1st verse sets the tone:

13 This is the third time I am coming to you. Every charge must be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.

Now, at a first glance, it might seem a little bit odd to us, that this rule about witnesses, just seems to pop up here, out of the blue... But Paul didn't make it up – he was quoting the legal ethics laid down in the Old Testament

Deuteronomy 19:15 (ESV) 15 "A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed. Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established.

It was a rule, which had at its heart, the aim of protecting people against false accusations and against malicious prosecution... There had to be at least 2 witnesses. 3 or more would be better...

And so right at the beginning of this chapter, we're getting the sense that there's going to be:

- some kind showdown
- some kind of legal confrontation
- some kind of judgment that's going to be brought to bear, when Paul arrives in Corinth...

And Paul's already got his witnesses lined up ready for it...

"Who are they?", you ask... It's Himself, and the majority of the Corinthian church who remained true to Jesus – these people have been reporting to Paul, about what's going on...

13 This is the third time I am coming to you. Every charge must be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. ²I warned those who sinned before and all the others, and I warn them now while absent, as I did when present on my **second visit, that if I come again I will not spare them**

- The first time Paul came (good times), was when he came as a missionary, and preached the Gospel, and they believed.
- The second time he visited (not such a pleasant experience), he **warned** them... Paul himself had witnessed their appalling behaviour – their immorality and their perversion of the Gospel. He saw it; he witnessed it; and he warned them.
- And now, in this letter, he's warning them a second time... Reports have obviously made it to Paul, that the false teachers and their followers, have not repented, and that they're continuing to twist the gospel. And so, the **second** witness, is a multiple witness – the majority in the church who remain faithful to Jesus, who have reported to Paul, what's going on... And so Paul is warning them again now – 2nd warning.
- And when Paul returns for his **third** visit, he will witness against them again, (**if** they haven't repented)

Do you see the case he's building??? There needs to be 2 or 3 witnesses for action to be taken, and not only are there already

2 or 3 witnesses – they’ve already had 2 or 3 warnings... You see, Paul intention isn’t to catch them out, and “Aha!! Gotcha!!” He wants to see them restored... And he’s giving them every opportunity to repent...

But!!!, if they don’t repent, he’s going to step up, and be strong, and do what needs to be done.

Now, throughout this letter, we can see that they’ve been accusing Paul of being weak... but here he says, “Hey, when I come this time, there won’t be any weakness...”

I was quite amazed really, that Paul seems to look for an opportunity of preaching the Gospel wherever he can. And it seems that right here, even in the warning that he’s giving them, he finds an example of the Gospel...

Alright, he talks about how Jesus came first, in weakness – in His human frailty, Jesus was weak, and was crucified... But now He lives, by the Power of God.

Likewise, it seems like Paul has been weak in dealing with them. But when he comes on this next visit, he’s going to come in the power of Jesus.....

It’s like an example of when Jesus returns in **His** judgment...

And Paul has been warning them,,, and the purpose of the warning, is he wants to see them repent – he’d love to see them restored to Jesus, and restored to one another,, But **if**

when Paul returns, they haven't repented, disciplinary action, is going to be taken...

Now, he doesn't tell us (here) what that disciplinary action's going to be, but it almost certainly would be 'excommunication' – There's no place in the church for false teachers and a false gospel, and so they're going to be kicked out of the church...

That's pretty-much the process that Jesus told us to do:

Matthew 18: (ESV) ¹⁵ "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. ¹⁶ But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. ¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. (In other words, have nothing to do with them)

And in Paul's 1st letter to the Corinthians, he talked about "handing a man over to Satan", if he doesn't repent – he's talking about excommunication – removing him from the church...

And in a loose way, he's using this example of judgment, as an example of what's going to happen when Jesus returns... When Jesus walked this earth at His first coming, He appeared

in all of His human frailty and weakness – in a body that could be abused; and cursed; and killed...

But when Jesus returns, He's going to come in all of His power and might... And on the day of The Lord, **He will not spare the wicked**... And even some (many in fact), who claim to belong to Jesus, will find themselves being judged (on that day)...

Matthew 7: (ESV) ²¹ "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.
²² On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?'
²³ And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'

Isn't that a sobering thought... Many (who named Jesus, "Lord"), and did mighty works in His name, "Get away from me – I don't even know you"...

It seems to me, that the Corinthian church, had become a church who had lost their fear of God... Rather than maintaining a sincere and pure devotion to Christ, they were very easily misled by false teachers (who Paul identifies as servants of Satan), into idolatry (following a false Christ)...

And I believe, largely, we the Christian church of today, have lost **our** fear of God...

Our God is an **awesome** God... *Oh, I wish I could reclaim that word for its proper usage... Our St George folk have heard my tirade on this before, but I'm going to 'let loose' again...*

– What word could we use to describe the fear we should hold for the Almighty Holy God, who reigns over heaven and Earth... We used to be able to use the word “awesome”... But now we use that word to describe:

- our day – I had an awesome day;
- a hamburger: - What an awesome burger...

A hamburger's not awesome... Awesome, means you are struck dumb in awe – in reverent fear, as you fall to your knees in worship – in a sense of holy terror... That's what awesome means...

Now, I don't know about you, but I've never felt that way about a burger...

Now, let me be clear here: When we are in Christ – as disciples of Jesus, we shouldn't be scared of God, but when we **know** God, it is natural and right (even though we are in an intimate relationship with God), it is right for us to fear Him.

CS Lewis captured this concept brilliantly, when he wrote his Narnia series... That whole fairy-tale, was more than a fairy-tale – it was an allegory of our saviour... Aslan the Lion represents Christ...

Let me read scene, when Lucy hears about Aslan:

“Is he a man?” asked Lucy.

*“Aslan a man!” said Mr. Beaver sternly. “Certainly not. I tell you he is King of the wood and the son of the great emperor-beyond-the-sea. Don’t you know who is the King of the Beasts? Aslan is a lion – **the Lion, the great lion.**”*

“ooh!” said Susan, “I’d thought he was a man. Is he – quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion.”

“That you will, dearie, and no mistake,” said Mrs Beaver; “if there’s anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they’re either braver than most or else just silly.”

“Then he isn’t safe?” said Lucy.

“Safe?” said Mr Beaver; “don’t you hear what Mrs Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? ‘Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good. He’s the King, I tell you.”

In Philippians 2 (next series [beginning next week]) Paul tells us to work out our **salvation with fear and trembling**.

In fact, back in Chapter 7 of this letter we’re studying now, Paul reminded them of the obedience **they once had** to Christ, as they **received Him with fear and trembling**.

Where's the fear and the trembling, in the church today???

Disobedience, and a rejection of Christ, is what flourishes in a church, when that church has lost its fear of Christ... And if I do not have a healthy, reverent fear of Christ, then that means I don't truly know Jesus as Lord and God...

And so he says in V5:

⁵ Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realise this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? — unless indeed you fail to meet the test!

Righto: How difficult it's going to be for me to explain this, is going to depend on a few things... You see, there's a few 'human' teachings, that **prevent** people from examining themselves (properly), to know whether they are in the faith..

And I'm going to put these under 4 headings:

- A Human religious perversion of the Gospel;
- A Self-saving gospel
- An Emptying of the cost of Discipleship;
- A Human-given unfounded assurance

So, first one:

1.

A Human religious perversion of the Gospel.

Some people believe, that as long as they belong to the right denomination/church, and as long as they were baptised into

that denomination/church, then they are in the faith, and the presence of Christ with them, will be assured...

For them,

- faith has nothing to do with discipleship;
- nothing to do with following Jesus;
- nothing to do with a personal relationship with God; and
- nothing to do with a change of life;
- genuine repentance; or
- indwelling of Holy Spirit ...

In fact, it involves less of a commitment than joining a sporting club...

And I've heard many testimonies, of people who have come out of that kind of empty religion... That kind of religion will not save you, and nor will it be an assurance that Christ is in you...

⁵ Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves.

2.

A Self-saving Gospel.

Probably the most common, community belief, is some kind of moral weigh-off / balancing act of righteousness vs naughtiness... Many people live under the illusion that compared to most people, I'm a good person, and therefore, I'm going to get to heaven...

And this comes in varying degrees. Some people work really hard, and strive to be good, and based on their perceived

goodness, then they think they've earned a spot by Jesus' side...

Others, not so much... It's more like "Oh, I'm not evil. I'm not hurting anyone. I'll be good with God on judgment day."

And if either of those describe you, ⁵ **Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves.**

3.

The Emptying of the cost of Discipleship.

A current heresy in the Christian church, is something I call "Easy-believism"... It's something where people are told, "All you have to do, is believe in Jesus, and you're saved." And it never addresses the cost of discipleship – things like:

- repentance of sin;
- transformation of the character;
- discipleship – following Jesus in righteousness;
- Following Jesus in mission;

It's all about gimme; gimme; gimme, and there's

- no personal suffering;
- no service;
- no dying to self, to live for Jesus...

And if that's the sort of Gospel you've been following, ⁵ **Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves.**

4.

Human-given unfounded Assurance – Once Saved Always Saved

You will not find OSAS in the Bible – it's a human teaching. But for many, it's become an article of faith, that for me to challenge it, I'd be burned as a heretic...

Some people believe that if, at one point you give your life to Jesus, you are saved, and you can never be lost... Even if you don't want to follow Jesus any more, OSAS says you're still right with God...

And if that's what you've been taught, and that's what you believe, then you're going to have a lot of trouble with verses like this one.

⁵ **Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith.**

And when Paul says **Test yourselves.** Well what test would there be? – there is no test...

You see, they believe that you can't fall away from the faith... But that is precisely what Paul is addressing here... At one time, this Corinthian church, received Jesus with fear and trembling... But now Paul is telling them to ⁵ **Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves.** Or do you not realise this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? – **unless indeed you fail to meet the test!**

Is Paul saying, that it's possible to wander away from the faith??? That's exactly what he's saying... In fact, that's what he's been talking about through this whole letter. And now he's coming to the end of the letter and okay you've had all the evidence you've had all the talk now it's crunch time – **Test yourselves are you in the faith???**

And if your walk with God is growing cold, and if Jesus seems to be distant, maybe it's time for you to ⁵ **Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves.**

But, what is the test??? Truth and the presence of God...

Throughout this whole letter, Paul has been setting out the truth, against falsehood... And in the church today, where do we find the truth??? We find the true Gospel, as preached by the Apostles, recorded in the Scriptures... How do you know if I'm teaching you the truth? Well, am I teaching you what's in the Scriptures? Or am I making up a different gospel – perhaps one that's more appealing....

And the **second** test, is the presence of Jesus...

Isn't this wonderful???

do you not realise this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?

But only if you are in the faith...

I wonder if Paul would ask us that same question today??? Do we realise this about ourselves? That Jesus Christ is in us???

Wow... Imagine the tidy-up that would happen at home, if Jesus rang, and he said "I'm popping around in 10min for a visit..."

- *Blow the dust off the Bible and sit that on the coffee table; and*
- *quickly hide those magazines (we don't want Him to see them);*
- *Quick, do the washing up – cleanliness is next to Godliness...*
- *And what are we going to do with all this stuff??? We don't want him to think that we're materialistic...*

Do we realise??? Jesus isn't only coming to visit our homes – Jesus Christ is in us... 24/7...

Wow... How we live, matters... Why does it matter? Because Christ is in us... If **we** are in the faith, Christ is in us... What a privilege; What a delight; What an honour..... This is life-changing stuff...

What's the evidence of the presence of God in our lives? The fruit of the Spirit... And we're going to see a picture of the fruit of the Spirit, as Paul finishes off this letter to the Corinthian church...

Righto:

He doesn't want to be a big meanie when he comes, waving a big stick... His prayer, is for their restoration... His prayer, is that they would be restored to the Christian faith, and that they'd recognise his heart, and that they'd have proper fellowship again.

There is something magnificent, about when a people of faith unite in Christ.....

1.

Firstly, it will be a church of truth.

V⁸ For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth.

There is no room for falsehood, in a church who's faith is truly in Christ... Such a church will not tolerate lies; it will not tolerate false teaching...

It will be a church who loves the pure truth of the Gospel. It will not be content with anything else,, and its entire contentment, will be in its true experience of the true Christ....

2.

Secondly, it will be a church who reconcile, and are unite in Christ...

Paul's desire is for them to be reconciled, so that they can be together again, And that they would recognise the truth and love in Paul.

3.

Thirdly, it will be a church who **rejoice** in the restoration of those who have sinned...

Now, for anyone who's ever experienced disharmony in the church, you can probably identify with this: When it finally comes to a head, and trouble-makers leave, it's tempting to say, "Well good riddance, and don't ever come back..."

There's been so much hurt; so much pain; so much disharmony,, it's like a sigh of relief – "They've gone"...

But that's not the way of Christ... Christ is the one who reconciles / searches for the lost and the broken... And He's the one who rejoices at their return...

And when we are truly a people of faith, we rejoice, not in rejection, but in restoration.

4.

Fourthly, it will be a church of shared fellowship...

It'll be a church that delights in fellowship... *If there's one thing now, that's hurting me more than anything else (with this Covid 19 and Social Distancing), it's that we can't meet together,, and that our fellowship has limitations...*

Do you know how to tell a church who really love Jesus???
You see how they really love being with each other...

It's a church that:

- Comforts one another;
- Agrees with one another;
- Lives in peace with one another;
- And who are affectionate with one another...

How about this:

V¹¹ Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. ¹² Greet one another with a holy kiss.

BTW, do you know the difference between a holy kiss and an unholy kiss??? About 3 seconds... (that one never gets old)...

But in all seriousness, **that** is a direction we can't keep at the moment, isn't it... Social distancing makes it hard **Greet one another with a holy kiss.**

What it is, is an image of having a holy affection for one another...

Well, we've come to the end of 2nd Corinthians... Some of it's been tough going... But the picture of the church that Paul ends on, is the picture of the church that I pray that we are, and that we will (increasingly) be...

1. A church of truth;

2. Reconcile / United in Christ;
3. Rejoice in the restoration of the lost;
4. And a church of affectionate, holy fellowship...

In the grace of Jesus Christ, may we be such a church.

And now I'm going to finish, with the blessing that Paul finished with:

¹⁴ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

ⁱ 2 Corinthians 11:4