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Are You in the Faith? Part 3

2 Corinthians 13: 5-10

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*Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? – unless indeed you are disqualified. But I trust that you will know that we are not disqualified.*

*Now I pray to God that you do no evil, not that we should appear approved, but that you should do what is honorable, though we may seem disqualified. For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth. For we are glad when we are weak and you are strong. And this also we pray, that you may be made complete. Therefore I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness, according to the authority which the Lord has given me for edification and not for destruction.*

The title of our sermon this morning is “Are You in the Faith?” “Are You in the Faith?” This is part three. And we are in 2 Corinthians chapter 13, verses 5 through 10. And we’ve been looking at this text now for a couple of weeks. We come to this third and final week on this text, unpacking this text together. And so far in this text, 2 Corinthians chapter 13, verses 5 through 10, we have focused on the first point of the text which is Paul’s pastoral imperative, his pastoral command to them in verse 5. *Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? – unless indeed you are disqualified.* Now for context, Paul has made two prior visits to the church at Corinth. He’s now preparing for a third visit to the church at Corinth. Part of the preparation that Paul is now making through this letter involves the Corinthians themselves getting their spiritual house in order. Continued sin in the church, ongoing influence in Corinth of false teachers there, has Paul extremely concerned about their spiritual condition. He is extremely concerned about the condition – the state of this church.

Now as we’ve also discussed, their sin. The influence of these false teachers has also had a negative impact on the relationship of the church to the Apostle Paul himself. Their relationship has become estranged and that is a terrible circumstance to find themselves in. They need the preaching of God’s word through the Apostle Paul. It’s for their good. Through the efforts of a blistering negative ad campaign, you could say, against the character and ministry of the Apostle Paul; his enemies in Corinth have succeeded in planting doubts and ultimately in separating friends. And so now, those people in Corinth, those people that he loves, those people that he’s labored for so sacrificially for, those people that he loves so dearly, now, those people look at him with suspicion. They look at him with doubt. They look at him with distrust. And so Paul finds himself in a very unenviable position of having to defend himself and defend his ministry among them. They’re putting Paul to the test. You see? They’re putting Paul to the test.

Look at verse 3. They’re now seeking a proof that Christ is speaking through him. A proof that he’s a genuine apostle. A proof that he actually speaks for the Lord Jesus Christ. Now they ought to know that.

Paul spent 18 months with them on his first visit to Corinth. He came again on a second visit. Paul has written now – the letters that we know of, this is the fourth letter of those – the second canonical letter. They ought to know better. They ought to know. They know the Apostle Paul. But Paul patiently, lovingly endures their suspicion. He patiently endures their doubt, their criticisms. And he essentially says to them, “Listen, if you want proof that I’m truly an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, then look no further than yourselves. Look no further than yourselves.” Verse 5, “Yourselves examine.” Don’t put me to the test. “Yourselves examine.” *Test yourselves. Do you not see that Jesus Christ is in you? You – Paul would say – are our living epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; clearly – he would say to them – you are an epistle of (the Lord Jesus) Christ – And who is it? Who is it that ministered that word to you through which you believed? Right? Who did the Lord work through to write that living epistle? Paul would say that we are ministers of that living epistle. So that in verse 6, “I trust,” Paul says, “that you will see, we are not disqualified, either.”*

Then, from the pastoral imperative given to us in verse 5, Paul moves now to a pastor’s prayer in verse 7. And Paul, once again in verse 7, wearing his heart on his sleeve. Look at verse 7 with me. *Now – Paul says – I pray to God that you do no evil, not that we should appear approved, but that you should do what is honorable, (even) though we may seem disqualified. For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth. For we are glad when we are weak and you are strong. And this also we pray, that you may be made complete.* Now it may seem obvious at the first, but I think it’s a point worth laboring for, that Paul prays for the church. Paul prays for the church. He faithfully, tirelessly preaches the word of God to them. He faithfully, tirelessly labors in ministry among them. Working for their joy. Working for their spiritual wellbeing. He pleads with them. He weeps with them. He confronts them. He instructs them. He corrects them. He encourages them. He agonizes over the condition of their heart. He weeps over the condition of their heart. He weeps over the state of their soul. He writes this letter. He’s written many letters. He labors for them. And all of that planting, all of that sowing, all of that watering, all of that fertilizing, is nothing if the Lord isn’t the one who gives the increase. Right? The Lord must give the increase.

Imagine for a moment the hardworking and diligent farmer. Hardworking and diligent farmer is up early. He labors late by the sweat of his brow, until the sun goes down and he can’t see any more to labor. He does the backbreaking work of tilling up the soil, pulling up weeds, throwing out the rocks, furrowing the fields. He walks through the fields, casting the seed in the soil. He covers it carefully with earth. Cares for the seed. He does all that he can to sow well. Does all that he can to sow diligently. Right? He tends the field. He drives out the vermin. He scares off the birds that would come in and swoop in and take the seed. He does all that he can in hope and expectation of a harvest. But unless the rains come, he has no crop.

John Owen would say that “to labor in the Lord’s field without prayer is to ‘sow seed at random, which will not succeed merely by our sowing.’” We don’t do this in our own strength. We don’t do this in our own power. All of our best efforts will come to precisely nothing if the Lord doesn’t work in and through them. Right? When we labor – and we should be laboring. You find here no excuse for lack of labor. Paul doesn’t pray so that he doesn’t have to work. Paul works and labors among them and then prays for God to bless his work. Right? We’re not going to succeed merely by our sowing. We need the Lord to give the increase. Right? We can set the kindling on the pile – we need God to rain down fire from heaven upon it. Amen? We need to work, but we need to trust the Lord for the results. The genuine – for the genuine disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ who puts his hand to the plow and sows the seed of the

gospel, if the Spirit of God doesn't rain down on that work, there's no profit in it. There's no profit in it. All our work, all our labor will not succeed merely by our sowing. It is God who gives the increase. Prayer is no substitute for the work that God has called us to do. But that work is fruitless if we're not relying upon God in faith to work through it. Right? So Paul – what does Paul do then? Paul prays. He prays. We need to pray. Right, brothers and sisters? We need to pray. Labor for your brothers and sisters in the church and then pray that God would bless them.

When we think about prayer and all the blessings of prayer, it's difficult to be at odds with someone you're praying diligently for. Right? Difficult to be hostile toward them or prejudiced against them when you're praying diligently for them. So the Lord uses prayer to knit us together, to cultivate love among us. The Lord uses prayer to make our work fruitful in our ministry efforts as a part of this church. He uses prayer to bless us. We need to pray. Right? We need to pray.

Now Paul prays to God for them. Paul's closing the letter. He is bringing it to a close. He's giving them final instruction. He's giving them final warning. Giving them final encouragement. And he says, "Listen, what I'm laboring for, I'm praying for. What I'm laboring for, I'm relying upon God for." So what does Paul pray for? Notice two things from our text. First, he prays for their obedience. Second, he prays for their sanctification. He's laboring for their obedience. He wants them to obey. Obey the Lord Christ. Right? He's laboring for their obedience. He's laboring for their sanctification. And so he's praying for their obedience and he's praying for their sanctification. The two must go together. Our labor is in faith. Our labor is in faith.

Now notice first, he prays for their obedience. And he refers to their obedience in verse 7 in two ways, both negatively and positively. Verse 7, look at verse 7. *Now I pray to God that you do no evil.* That's obedience stated negatively. Don't do evil. Right? *I pray to God...you do no evil.* Look also at the end of verse 7, *but (rather) that you should do what is honorable.* That's obedience stated positively. *Do no "kakos"* in the Greek, "evil" but do what is "*kalos*" in the Greek, "good". A bit of a word play there. Do no evil, do rather what is good.

He begins by – *do no evil.* Okay? *Do no evil.* Now he references the evil that he was concerned to find among them in chapter 12, verse 20. He's concerned to find among them – *contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, backbitings, whisperings, conceits, tumults.* He writes further in verse 21, that he's fearful or concerned of finding among them those who are not repentant of – *uncleanness, fornication, and lewdness.* He has in mind a specific experience with the church at Corinth. We have our own sins to be concerned with, don't we? And many of these on this list would also apply to us today. We don't want to find evil in our midst. *Do no evil* – Paul prays – but rather do what is good. Obedience stated positively. The grammar suggests here that Paul wants to find them in an ongoing pattern of doing good. When I come I want to find you doing good. Right? *Do no evil* but be found doing what is good. The same word used here of "good" – for "good" – is used of a "good" tree in Luke 6 *that brings forth "good" fruit.* Or in Galatians 6 where we're not to *grow weary in doing "good".*

Titus expresses what Paul is praying for here. In Titus chapter 3, verse 8 where Titus says, *This is a faithful saying...these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain "good works".* We are saved by grace through faith – *that not of ourselves, it is (a) gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.* But we are saved to "*good works*" that God has – *prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.* Right? When Titus – if (unintelligible) to be careful to maintain good works, then what should we be talking about doing as a church? We should be talking

about obeying the Lord in good works. Right? If He wants us to affirm one another in these things constantly, how often should we do that? All the time. Constantly. Right? I'm not sure. It perturbs me. The problem that people have today with preaching obedience in the Lord's church. We are to obey the Lord Jesus Christ. How are we to obey Him? We are *to be diligent, steadfast...abounding in good works*. The work of the Lord. What is our responsibility in the church? Good works. Right? Let's take a hint here from Hebrews chapter 10, verse 23. Where the writer says, *Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the day approaching.*

Let me ask you, church – let me ask you, have you become complacent in that responsibility? We have a responsibility to serve the Lord. There are good works that the Lord has called us to. They're good. "Kalos." They're useful, beneficial, beautiful. Right? They're good works. Our responsibility is to maintain – *be careful to maintain good works*. Our responsibility in the church is to stir one another up to love and to good works, not forsaking assembling of ourselves together but rather assembling together and exhorting one another, stirring one another up to *love and good works*. Have you become complacent in that responsibility? *Do no evil*. Be found doing what is good. The Lord is going to return. Let us... let Him find us so doing when He comes.

Then, Paul adds a qualification to his prayer for their obedience. And as we look at this qualification together, consider how important their obedience was to Paul. Consider how important their obedience was to him. What was Paul willing to sacrifice for their obedience? Listen to verse 7. *Now I pray to God that you do no evil, not that we should appear approved, but that you should do what is honorable, (even) though we may seem disqualified.* Now in verse 6 – back in verse 6 – Paul was hopeful that when the Corinthians examined themselves, the true Christians in Corinth would come to the conclusion, from a healthy self-examination, that Paul also was genuine. Right? That was the point of the self-examination in verse 5. But that hope, that desire on the part of the Apostle Paul wasn't self-serving. It wasn't self-serving. Paul says essentially here, "I'm not praying for you to obey so that we can look good. So that our reputation can be established." Right? And Paul says, "I'm praying for you to obey even if it means we don't look good." Do you see that in verse 7? In other words, Paul is saying, "I have no self-interest here. I'm not out for my own reputation. I'm not out for my own name. Not out for my own fame. My concern is your spiritual wellbeing. My concern is your obedience. For the sake of the Lord Christ, for the sake of His church; Paul says, *"I pray to God...do no evil.* Do what is good. My concern is your spiritual wellbeing, your obedience."

You have to remember the context here. Right? When we think about Paul's reputation being on the line. Paul was being viciously attacked in Corinth by many who wanted to tear down his reputation. And listen, isn't it true, nobody wants their name dragged through the mud. Nobody wants their name dragged through the mud. It's not easy having your character slandered. It's not easy having your character disparaged or trashed. Some of the most godlessly cruel people are professing Christians who should know better. It might have been understandable under the circumstances for Paul to have lashed out against the injustice of it all. Would it? It was critical – it was critical that Paul had a good reputation among them. Paul wanted the Corinthians to hear him, to heed the message that he was preaching. They needed to listen to him. They needed to trust him. But as important as Paul's reputation was, as important as Paul's good name was, he would much rather have them faithful and obedient to the Lord than his own reputation intact. Right? Their obedience – more important than his own reputation. Paul

surmised that even if he would have to carry on as disqualified in their sight, even if he would have to give false teachers the victory over him that they so desperately wanted, even if he had to be humiliated, disparaged, defamed, slandered, or shamed; Paul says it would be worth it if it meant seeing the Corinthians obedient to the faith. “I don’t care what other men say about me,” Paul says, “I don’t care what other people think.” Paul himself was content with being thought of as weak, or dishonored, or foolish. *It is a very small thing* – Paul had said – *that I should be judged by you or... (any) human court.* That kind of treatment is to be expected for a bond-slave of the Lord Jesus Christ. Isn’t it? *All those who desire to live godly (in this present age) will suffer persecution.* And Paul says, “I’m not here to serve myself. I’m not here to serve my reputation. Not here to serve my bank account. I’m not here to serve my foolish pride. I only care about what the Lord thinks and I want your obedience to Him.”

Now that’s the heart of a faithful minister. That’s the heart of a faithful brother, heart of a faithful sister. Someone who would come to you when you’re in sin, who would care not or care less for how they’re perceived in your sight than for your own spiritual good. Someone who would be more concerned for you, where you’re at and how you’re doing, than they are for their own name, or for their own comfort, for their own convenience. Someone who loves you in that way. Right? That’s a faithful brother, a faithful sister. Listen, we’re... we’re all called to ministry in the Lord’s church. If you’re professing to be a Christian, then you are called to labor for the Lord’s people and the Lord’s church, to minister to them. And this is a faithful example of that. Right? Paul laboring among the people of God, even to his own hurt if that’s what it took. And it did. He’s got the scars on his back to prove it.

There’s a parallel to this kind of selfless love expressed by Paul and that’s found in Romans chapter 9. Turn there with me quickly, to Romans chapter 9. Back a few pages in your New Testament. Paul wears his heart on his sleeve. And there’s this parallel in Romans chapter 9 to the same kind of selfless, self-sacrificing love that Paul expresses in our text. It’s found in Romans chapter 9, beginning in verse 1, where Paul says here – he says, *I tell the truth in Christ, I’m not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit.* Now Paul is effectively here is swearing an oath. Right? He is deadly serious about what he’s going to say. In other words, this is not exaggeration. This is not hyperbole. He knows that what he’s about to say is almost unbelievable. Someone might say, “Listen. You don’t know what you’re – you don’t know what you’re saying, Paul.” Paul says, “I know exactly what I’m saying.” *I tell the truth in Christ, I’m not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart – why? Because – I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen.*

In other words, what Paul is saying here, “I would accept separation from the Lord Jesus Christ and the torments of hell, if it meant that my countrymen could be reconciled to God and eternally saved.” That’s Paul’s love for those that he’s ministering to. Paul’s love for his own countrymen, according to the flesh. That’s an expression of love that we see in his heart in 2 Corinthians chapter 13, verse 7, verse 8, verse 9. How important was their obedience to Paul? How important? Paul told the church in Rome, in Romans chapter 1, verse 5 that through him, through Paul – or through the Lord Jesus Christ, Paul has – *received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name, among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ.* Paul loved these people and it was an expression of love

that he called them to obedience. And it was an expression of love that he labored so diligently among them and now it's an expression of love that he pours out his heart to God in prayer for them.

So husbands, could you say that about your wife? That I want her saved, soundly safe on the day of judgement. If it were that she would be saved by it, I would gladly accept hell for her. Do you love her that way? Do you love her sacrificially that way? Wives, would you say that about your husband? Parents, certainly you would say that about your kids, wouldn't you? Like, wanting your kids to be saved so desperately. "Lord, if it were possible, I would gladly go to hell in their place." Do you have any part of that kind of self-sacrificing love in your heart for the people here in this church? Do you... is there some semblance of that for the people here? – for this church? Do you love the Lord's church in that way? Are you committed to the Lord's church with that kind of self-sacrificing love? The kind of love that says, *I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls.*

It's so easy – so easy to be self-willed, self-interested, self-indulgent, self-absorbed. But what does it look like? What does it look like, brother? What does it look like, sister, when you deny yourself for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ and serve His people? What does it look like to deny yourself? Paul is willing to sacrifice his reputation. Paul is willing to sacrifice his life. Paul is willing to sacrifice even his salvation if that would help. The Lord Jesus Christ sacrificed His life. And often to our shame, we're not willing to sacrifice our own time. Right? It's shameful, the lack of love, the hardhearted self-indulgence. We can't show up to worship Him with the people of God? Are you willing to sacrifice some convenience? Isn't it worth it? The people of God are here on the Lord's Day. We need to be here with the people of God worshipping the Lord with them. The people of God are here on Sunday night, and the people of God are here on Sunday night worshipping the Lord. The people of God are praying together. The people of God are singing hymns together. The people are hearing the word of God preached to them on Sunday night. The people of God are here during the week, living amongst one another, sharing time together in small groups. The people of God are here praying together. The people of God are here exhorting one another. The people of God are here loving one another. The people of God are here. Don't be hardhearted. Stop forsaking the assembly. Think seriously about your love for the Lord and your love for the people here. If the Lord's work and if the Lord's people are an unwanted intrusion into your life, work, or time, then examine your heart before Him.

In 2 Corinthians chapter 13, Paul is laboring in love for them. And it's not a light matter to Paul that he would say, "I'd rather have your obedience than my good reputation." Do you see? *I pray to God that you do no evil, not that we should appear approved, but that you should do what is honorable (even if) we may appear disqualified. For – he says – we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth – We can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth.* "Even if it might be more expedient for me," Paul says, "even if it might be better for my reputation or more profitable for me to appear approved, we can do nothing that would undermine the work of truth, the work of the truth in you, the work of the gospel in your life, the work of the Spirit in your life, the work of the word of God in your life. Paul is saying, "I am bound to labor for the effective working of the word of God in you even though I may appear to be disqualified myself." Right? "I can't go against the truth." Paul's object, Paul's aim, Paul's ambition is to see the truth of God at work in them and Paul's not going to sacrifice that even for his own reputation. "I'm not going to labor, I'm not going to work against the truth but for the truth." He says, "I can do nothing against the working of God's truth for your benefit, even if it's to my own hurt. I can only labor for the effective work... effective working of God's truth for your benefit."

*For – verse 9 – we are glad when we are weak and you are strong.* Paul was content, even rejoiced, in his own weakness. He said in chapter 12, verse 9 – he says – *most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.* Paul understood that when he acknowledged and embraced his own weakness, relied by faith upon the grace of God at work in him, he became a conduit – or became a pipeline, an instrument of God’s power. And that’s what Paul took joy in. Paul wanted to be an instrument of God’s power. God working in and through him. And so Paul acknowledged and embraced then, his own weakness and relied upon God by faith. Right? This prayer is an evidence of that. Relying upon God by faith.

Paul knew that he would find no joy, no fruitfulness in his own strength. And so Paul owned his own weakness. Right? He would find strength, fruitfulness, hope, and therefore, joy in God’s strength. So Paul says in verse 9, “I’m happy to appear weak if you’re strong. I’m happy, I’m content to appear weak if you’re strong.” Paul knew that if they were strong, that was evidence that God was at work in power through him. And Paul would be content with that. “Strong” here in verse 9, is a reference to running strong. Right? Strong in the faith. *Strong...in the power of His might.* It’s a reference to faithful obedience. “If you are running strong,” Paul says, “I’ll be glad to be seen as weak.” Paul is praying to God again for their obedience.

Secondly. Paul prays for their obedience. *Do no evil* but rather do that which is good. Secondly, Paul prays for their sanctification. He prays for their sanctification at the end of verse 9. He says, *this also we pray, that you may be made complete.* That word there for “made complete” is a word used to mean “perfect” or “whole” – “made perfect.” Brought through a building process of putting things in order to the point of having them complete, a point of completion. It was used medically of setting a broken bone or setting something that was out of joint. Taking something that was out of joint and putting it back into joint. Restoring it from uselessness to usefulness. Right? Apart from the Lord Jesus Christ, you are useless. Other than to glorify Him in the outpouring of His wrath on unjust, wicked sinners. God appointed us that we would glorify Him. We were made in His image, designed by God to reflect His image, to bring glory to Him. Apart from that purpose for your creation, you are disjointed. You are a joint out of place. You are a broken bone. Paul prays that through their salvation, and now through a process of sanctification, that they would be made whole. They would be restored. They would be made complete, made perfect. This word appears only here in the New Testament. But there are passages in the Bible that help us understand what Paul is referring to here.

Turn with me to Colossians chapter 1. Colossians chapter 1. There’s a good example here in Colossians chapter 1 of exactly what Paul is speaking about. You look at Colossians chapter 1. Look first at verse 3. And what do we find Paul doing for them in verse 3? Praying. Right? Praying. Paul is not self-sufficient. Paul knows where his strength comes from. Paul knows where the fruitfulness is going to come from. Paul was praying, giving thanks to God for what God has done for them through the gospel. Look at verse 3. He says, *We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints.*

Now drop down to verse 9, and notice in verse 9 what Paul specifically prays for. Verse 9 – *For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding – verse 10 – that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him –* What is that? That’s obedience – *being fruitful* – in what? – *every*

*good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.* That's what Paul is praying for. That they would be made complete, filled with knowledge, walking worthy of the Lord, fruitful in every good work, strengthened with all might, and giving thanks.

Now what follows this text is a tremendous passage for Christology. Right? The person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. And as we follow the passage down, look with me at verse 24. And Paul says this regarding that prayer in relationship to his own work in verse 24. He says, *I now rejoice in my sufferings for you* – His labor for them. His work for them. The persecution. The difficulty. The adversity that he suffered on their behalf. And then he says, *I rejoice in that – and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church.* Not that what Paul was doing for them was in any way atoning for their sin. The Lord Jesus Christ did that. Did that entirely and that work is done. But there is work for the people of God that remains for the church. And the Lord intends to do that work through His people. And Paul says, *I am (filling) up what is lacking in (those) afflictions of Christ for the sake of His body.* – I'm going to labor for the church – *of which* – verse 25 – *I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God.* Paul was given a stewardship.

Listen, brother and sister, you're given a stewardship. I'm given a stewardship. We've been given a stewardship to minister to the people of God in this church and to minister to people out there with the gospel. Right? We also have a stewardship. That's been revealed to us in His word – *the mystery* – he says, in verse 26 – *which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we preach, warning every man...teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect* – complete, whole, sanctified, restored. Right? – *in Christ Jesus.* He's praying here and laboring here for the sanctification of God's people. He will labor, preaching Christ, *warning every man...teaching every man in all wisdom* – until all of them are – *perfect in Christ Jesus.* That's our responsibility.

So, I guess if there's anyone here perfect, then we cannot concern ourselves with that person. They're perfect. But for all the rest of us here who are not perfect, we have a responsibility to one another, don't we? And my responsibility doesn't end, frankly, when I walk down the stairs. It continues until you're made perfect. And your labor of love to me should continue until I'm made perfect. And listen, I'm a long way off. So it's gonna take a lot of work, for a long time, if the Lord carries.

Paul says in verse 29, *To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.* I love that connection. Right? That is Philippians chapter 2. *Work out your...salvation with fear and trembling* – why? Because it's God who is working – *in you both to will and to do according to His good pleasure.* Paul is praying. Paul knows that the fruitfulness, the blessings come from God Himself. Paul knows that that work is going to be done by the Spirit of God. But then Paul says it's to this end that I labor, striving. According to what, Paul? *According to His working which works in me mightily.* That's a cause for joy, right? – in the life of a believer. To know that when you do the work of God – to know that when you preach the word of God – when you're preaching the Lord Jesus Christ, God in power is working through that word. God in power works in you mightily. *To this end* then, Paul says, "I'm going to labor and I'm going to strive." I guess if we don't believe it we just won't do it. But Paul believes it.



And Paul is going to rely upon God and Paul is going to be engaged in that labor, for the love of the Lord Jesus Christ and for the love of His people.

Look with me at Philippians. Philippians chapter 1. Look at another example. Routinely in the New Testament, we see Paul praying for the church. We see Paul praying for the church. Relying upon God to do that work in them through his labor. Through the preaching of the word of God. Through the work that God has called us to do. In other words, God doesn't do that work in absence or in exclusion from our prayers. God does that work through our prayer. God doesn't do that work circumventing His people. God does that work through His people. We are a means through which God accomplishes the work of building up His church. We have a responsibility to join Him in that work. Right? And to be faithful, and to labor, and to strive according to His work in and through it.

Philippians chapter 1, look at verse 3. Paul says, *I thank my God upon every remembrance of you – Paul is praying – always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy – Paul is pleading with God to bless these people – for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now – Paul has not stopped praying for them, not stopped laboring on their behalf – being confident – verse 6 – of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.*

Paul could say, right? "Listen, I believe that God who began a good work is going to complete it. And so what does all that have to do with me? I can sit back. I can relax. I don't have to worry about that. God is faithful. If He started that work, He's going to complete it." Paul doesn't think that way. What does Paul think? "God has begun a work. God is going to complete it. And so I'm going to jump in there and work for Him. I'm going to be a part of that work that God is doing and I want to be a means through which God completes that work." He doesn't sit out. He's not sitting on the bench.

He says in verse 7, *just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart – I love you. Right? And this is a... this is an expression of his love for them – inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace. For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ. And this I pray – Do you have any of this heart for the people of God? For this church? For your brothers and sisters? Do you love them? Do you love the Lord Jesus Christ this way? Do you love the Lord's people this way? He says, this I pray – verse 9 – that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere...without offence (until) the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by (Christ Jesus), to the glory and praise of God.*

He's praying for them. Praying for their spiritual wellbeing. Pouring out his heart in prayer for them because he loves them. He loves the Lord. He loves the Lord's church. Laboring among them because he loves the Lord and he loves the Lord's church. Brothers and sisters, we should live every day in light of that day. Right? Approving – *the things that are excellent...sincere and without offence till the day of Christ.* Living every day in light of that day.

If you're not a Christian – if you're not a Christian – if you've never turned from your sin to put your faith in Jesus Christ, then I pray you live every day now in light of that day. That day is going to come in great terror. Rather than filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Christ Jesus to the glory and praise of God – if you do not turn from your sin, you do not trust Him alone for salvation – then you will be filled with the fruits of your own unrighteousness in that day. Your condemnation will be to the glory

and praise of God. Turn from your sin and trust Him. The Lord offers freely, in grace, salvation from your sin, salvation from the wrath of God. Turn from your sin. Will you just continue to reject the Savior who offers you that salvation? There's no mystery to this. That mystery's been revealed. You can turn to Him now. Forsake your sin and flee to Christ. Paul is praying to that end for those dear people among whom he has ministered. Pleading with God to work in him and through him mightily for their benefit.

So then, Paul having prayed for them, Paul begins to draw this letter, 2 Corinthians, now to a close in verse 10, where Paul says, *Therefore I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness, according to the authority which the Lord has given me for edification and not for destruction.* Verse 10 in many ways, really, is a summary of the letter as a whole. "*These things*" that he references in verse 10, is referring to the 13 chapters of this letter. "*These things*", this letter, 2 Corinthians I have written to you – *being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness.* He says, "I'm preparing to visit with you. I'm coming for a third visit. And as much as I am preparing for this visit," Paul says, "I want you to prepare for this visit as well. And so I'm writing this letter to you ahead of my visit to give you an opportunity to consider your ways, to consider your sin, and to repent.

Paul says, "I'd rather not use '*sharpness*'". The word means "severity". I'd rather not be severe. It's a reference to church discipline. Right? We remember – we've discussed the severe letter where Paul rebuked the Corinthians for their unrepentant sin. Specifically for not dealing effectively, as they should, with the false teachers who were gaining a foothold in Corinth. And Paul wrote them a severe letter. This is a reference to church discipline. It's a reference to the authority that's been given Paul as an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ. An authority that is intended by God for their edification, for their building up, and not for their tearing down. Not for their destruction. That's what his authority is to be used for: for their good, for their building up. Paul says, *If I come again* – as he says in chapter 12 – *I will not spare.* Those who are unrepentant, *I will not spare.* I'll use sharpness. I'll use severity if I have to. I pray that won't be the case. Paul says, *I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness.*

Essentially, it's better that I send this letter ahead of my visit so that you can prepare. "What will you do?" He's asking them, right? "What will you do? What are you going to do? I'm pleading with you. I'm pleading with God on your behalf. Praying for you. *Do no evil,* be found doing good. I want you to be complete. I want you to be made whole in the Lord Jesus Christ." How would the Corinthians respond? That will be a subject of another sermon.

But listen, brothers and sisters, that's our pray for you. That's our prayer for you. Our prayer to God for you among many things is that you would *do no evil.* Our prayer for you is that you would rather do that which *is honorable.* Do that which is good. We desire in the Lord that you would be made complete. Be found doing good, brother. Be found doing good, sister. Don't be found in hardhearted rebellion. Don't be found in cool or even coldhearted complacency. Don't be found lukewarm such that you would be vomited out of the Lord's mouth. Don't be found running in the course of this world. Don't be found running in the course of your own self-interest, self-absorbed, preoccupied with your own ambition. Beloved, we have labor to do in this church. We have good work that we have been called to. We have a gospel, the everlasting gospel to preach. There is a good work to be done. Be obedient. Be zealous. Be fervent. Be steadfast and abounding in the work of God. Amen?

And all praise, honor, and glory to the One who completes that good work in us. Let's pray. As you pray, I'd ask you to go before the Lord and consider your own labor on His behalf. Consider the state of your

own heart, the state of your own soul; and confess sin, repent of sin, trusting Him. And pray that the Lord by His Spirit would apply this text to your heart and mind. And then we'll pray together before we're dismissed. Lets' pray.