
Are You in the Faith? (2 Corinthians 13:5-8)
10/15/2017 Sermon by Pastor Jason Liebenow



A family sat down to dinner and prayed, thanking God for the food, for the hands that prepared it, and for God's gracious and daily care. As they ate, however, the father complained about the meal. The bread wasn't fresh! The coffee was bitter! The meat was tough!

As meal ended, the man's youngest daughter asked him, "Father, do you think God heard us pray?" The father said, "Of course he did." The daughter asked him, "Do you think he heard what you said about the bread, coffee, and meat?" The father answer less confidently, "Yes." The daughter asked one last question: "Which do you think God believed?"

The man learned something about himself that day. He learned that he had let his mealtime prayer become just something he said, rather than a real, honest conversation with God.

Sometimes it hurts to really take an honest look at ourselves. But that honest look really brings us freedom. It lets us live in the truth rather than in lies. It lets us live in the light rather than in the dark. Today, God calls us to repentance, to take an honest look at ourselves. God asks us, "Are You in the Faith?"

Now, let's understand what those words mean. What does it mean to be "in the Faith" and what does "repentance" mean? First: What does it mean to be "in the Faith?"

Now, the way Paul words it, he's not talking about faith in the subjective way. He doesn't mean "Do you really believe?" Instead, he words it "whether you are *in the faith...*" Paul is here talking about the objective kind of faith; that which faith believes, that to which faith clings. Here, Paul is talking about the teachings of Christianity; what God has actually told us in the Scriptures.

So, the test here is not, "Do you believe strongly enough?" The answer to that is always going to be "No." Even our faith remains tainted by our own sinfulness. But that's not what Paul's talking about. The test is: "*What* do you believe?" "Do you believe *the Scriptures*?" "Are you a Christian?"

Throughout the second letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul, who wrote the letter, is defending his apostleship. Some false teachers had come among the Corinthian believers and claimed that Paul was not a real apostle. They claimed that Paul was not actually teaching God's Word. They claimed that *they* had all of God's Word. So, Paul writes to the Corinthians to defend his apostleship, not because Paul had a big head and wanted to be important, but because if Paul is discredited, then the

message of the gospel would be discredited.

The false teachers were not just engaging in some kind of power game with Paul. They were leading people to hell by teaching that we are not saved by grace alone, through faith alone. They were pointing the Corinthian believers to their works for their salvation rather than pointing them to Jesus and his works.

The section before us comes at the end of Paul's letter where Paul gives this one final proof of his apostleship: the fact that the Corinthians were Christians. Paul came to Corinth and taught the people there about Christ. Paul is pointing the Corinthians to this fact: if Paul isn't a real apostle, then the Corinthians aren't real Christians! If they are Christians, on the other hand, which Paul knows to be the case, then they are so because God brought them the gospel truth through Paul.

Paul calls them to self-examination. Are they Christians? Are they in the faith? Do they hold to the teachings of Christ? If so, that happened through the gospel message that Paul brought them.

Are You in the faith? This is a great opportunity for us to ask the same question of ourselves. Are we in the faith? Are You in the faith? Put yourself to the test right now. Are You in the Faith?

Well, did God so love the world that he gave his One and Only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life? Are you a part of the world? Go ahead, pinch yourself! Are you a human? Did Jesus die for our sins? Was Jesus raised to life for our justification, so that we could be declared "not guilty"? Has God fulfilled his promise to remove our sins as far as the East is from the West?

Has God guaranteed these promises to you through Word and Sacrament? Has God united you with Jesus' death and resurrection through your baptism? Has God continued to assure you of salvation through the gospel message? Has God continued to affirm that promise to you by giving you the very body and blood of Christ to eat and to drink?

If so, then recognize that you are a Christian. You have passed the test! You are in the faith! And if you are in the faith, then know that Christ lives in you. That's what it means to be "in the Faith." It means to believe what God says in the Scriptures. It means we match our lives up constantly to what God actually says. And God, through the Word, is calling you into continual repentance.

What does repentance mean? There's a lot of confusion about what exactly repentance is. Repentance is not moping around and feeling bad about yourself. Yes, repentance is feeling sorrow over your sins, but it is also looking to Christ with the hope that your sins have been forgiven. For now, we will limit our discussion of

repentance to 4 points.

1) The Scriptures often describe repentance as “fruit.” That word, as opposed to “works,” really implies willingness and a certain spontaneity to our repentance. Real repentance isn’t something my parents made me do. It’s not something I can accomplish by following a step-by-step process.

A farmer doesn’t *make* his plants grow fruit. Instead, he puts them in a good environment to grow, and God makes the plants grow the fruit all by themselves. In the same way, we are not called to muster up the emotion or the willpower to force those fruits grow. Instead, God calls us to put ourselves in a good environment (gathering with other Christians to grow in the Word and go with the Word, making church and Bible study regular parts of our routines, etc.) and then God grows those fruits in us.

Also notice, the Scriptures call them “fruits,” not “apples.” We need to be careful not to demand one specific act of repentance from someone and sometimes even from ourselves. Sometimes, God works a fruit that we aren’t expecting. I may be struggling with a certain sinful habit and, before God works that habit out of my life, he may be working in me a total despair of myself to fight my own sin and a total trust in him to work in me what is pleasing to him.

2) The fruit of repentance is to desist from the sin. If I recognize that my stealing has been a sin, I want to stop doing it. Will I fall into the same sin again? Possibly. I still have that sinful nature. I may have created something of a habit that my brain naturally goes to and it may take a lot of effort and help from my Christian brothers and sisters to break that sinful habit. But the point is, I do not make that sin my lifestyle. I don’t approve of it. I don’t defend it. I don’t make excuses for it. I call it what it is: sin. I condemn myself when I fall into it and go back to God for forgiveness in Christ.

3) The fruit of repentance is to restore, if possible, what sin ruined. God calls me to amend my life, to replace evil with good. If I have harmed my neighbor in some way, repentance may mean going back to that person to ask forgiveness and try to right my wrong. If I’ve stolen, it would be good to give back what I took. If I’ve lied, it would be good to tell the truth, even if that hurts me. If my sin has put me into a sinful habit, I do not continue living in and approving of that habit. Instead, I seek to get it out of my life.

4) The fruit of repentance is to do all to the glory of God, whether we eat or drink, work or play. Repentance is a full-life continuous action. This means that repentance is a continual self-examination. Luther recommended these four questions for personal Bible reading. 1) What truth is God telling me here? 2) What

does this reading lead me to confess? 3) For what does this lead me to thank God? And 4) For what does this lead me to pray? Use those questions to make your personal Bible reading a time for self-examination.

Repentance means that I do not allow my mealtime prayers to be just something I say before I eat. It means that I do not allow Christ to be just something I listen to on Sunday mornings. Repentance means that I do not let myself be that son from the parable who says all the right things to God and then refuses to hear and do what God says.

Repentance means that we recognize the grace God has given us, how God has graciously forgiven our sins in every aspect of our lives, how God generously blesses us with all we need every day even though we deserve none of it, how God mercifully forgives every bit of our sin-stained lives and continues to declare to us through Word and Sacrament that we are his own.

So, Are You in the Faith? Are you a Christian? What does God say? God says that you are his child through baptism. God says that he died for your sins on the cross. God says that he has purchased you and purified you to be his own with his very blood. Therefore, God calls us to repentance, to continually measure ourselves up against God's Word. To be sorry for our sins and to trust that God has forgiven those sins. So, stay in the Word and trust God to produce the fruits of repentance in you. Amen.