

Examining the Self

Introspection, according to Webster, is “a looking into one’s own mind, feelings, etc.” It is a process of self-examination for the prime purpose of finding where we can improve on things we might be lacking in. So from time to time Christians need to examine whether our thoughts, words and actions either add to or take away from the progress in growing the local church. What am I doing toward personal growth and encouraging others, whether new to the faith or not, that will help us all to excel at spiritual growth? And this is where we need to be open with the most important person we need to be honest with; ourselves. When people lie to themselves they’re only hurting themselves. Especially when it may well have consequences to their eternal souls.

2Co 13:5 Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?--unless indeed you fail to meet the test!

To examine is to scrutinize and is part of the process, in this case, of self-discipline. In this verse it has to do with being “in the faith”. Do our thoughts and actions demonstrate our conviction, do they have a positive effect on those in or out of the body of Christ or are they just plain hypocritical? And do we need to constantly try to convince ourselves that what we may think or be doing is right, when all along we’ve not compared it to what is written and to do so without bias? Do we know better or are we, as Steven accused his accusers just “stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, ...always resist[ing] the Holy Spirit”? (*Act 7:51*) Our integrity, as the Christians we proclaim to be, depends on an honest introspection which sometimes may require the unbiased judgment of another person. And with that we, a), need to be “speaking the truth in love” (*Eph 4:15*) when critiquing each other’s attitudes, intentions, works or speech and, b), we need to be personally receptive when someone wishes to approach us concerning something we may need improvement on or on something that needs to be resolved. Because the only way Christ can abide within us is if we’ve dissected every inner thought and attitude toward the lost and others in the church, with a clear and unbiased conscience. And if we’re so often having struggles in relating with others, shouldn’t we honestly consider that there may be a common denominator in that? So, when we begin to examine the self, one thing we need to look at is the sin of...

Holding a Grudge

Jas 5:9 Do not grumble (*Gk.4727- to sigh, murmur, pray inaudibly*) against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door.

Since God, the eternal, Omni-present Judge, through His word is the Discerner of “the thoughts and intentions of the heart [and] no creature is hidden from His sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to Whom we must give an account” (*Heb 4:12*), shouldn’t that give us at least a little concern when we might hold a grudge against another, especially when that person did nothing to harm us personally? Notice Jesus’ words concerning someone who may have something against **us**. Maybe **we** did something to offend a brother or sister in Christ. Of course He’s speaking under the Mosaic covenant but the same concept applies to us under the Christian age.

Mat 5:23 So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has **something against you**, 24 leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. (*Emp. added*)

“The Pharisees were intent only on the external act in worship. They looked not at all to the internal state of the mind. If a man conformed to the external rites of religion, however much envy, and malice, and secret hatred he might have, they thought he was doing well. Our Saviour taught a different doctrine. It was of more consequence to have the heart right than to perform the outward act. If, therefore, says he, a man has gone so far as to bring his gift to the very altar, and should remember that anyone had anything against him, it was his duty there to leave his offering and go and be reconciled. While a difference of this nature existed, his offering could not be acceptable. He was not to wait until the offended brother should come to him; he was to go and seek him out, and be reconciled. So now the worship of God will not be acceptable, however well performed externally, until we are at peace with those that we have injured. He that comes to worship his Maker filled with malice, and hatred, and envy, and at war with his brethren, is a hypocritical worshipper, and must meet with God’s displeasure. God is not deceived, and he will not be mocked.”

Albert Barnes

Gal 6:7 Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.

But what about the brother who is unapproachable? What level of responsibility does he shoulder if another wishes to confront him but he continually avoids meeting with him or throws a hissy fit? What if **he**, by his actions, refuses to hear and thus to forgive?

Mat 18:35 So also My heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."

So, when doing a self-examination we need to ask ourselves, “do others find me approachable?” And forgiveness is not just something we do for show. It has to come from the heart or God cannot go back on His will and forgive the person who won’t. Faithful Christians, because of the love shown by Christ while hanging in agony on a cruel cross, in asking His “Father [to] forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Lk 23:34), understand and commit themselves to constantly be in a frame of mind to **want** to forgive another’s outright or perceived wrong. We cannot do what God cannot do in forgiving the unrepentant. But we **must** do what He’s commanded when the repentant offender asks to be forgiven, and at that point move on, or God will treat us in like manner at the judgment. As Jesus spoke to His disciples after they asked Him to show them how to pray, He warned them of this very thing.

Mat 6:14 For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, 15 but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

But again, there is a stipulation to forgiveness.

Luk 17:3 Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and **if he repents**, forgive him, 4 and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' **you must forgive him.**" (Emp. added)

And forgiving someone includes holding no grudges because how can we say “[we] love God and [hate our] brother” because if a Christian doesn’t “love his brother whom he has seen [he] cannot love God Whom he has not seen” (1 Jn 4:20). We can be angry with someone as long as we have cause but anger can lead to sin.

Eph 4:26 Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and give no opportunity to the devil.

"The new man gets angry but keeps it under control so that he does not involve himself in sin. A means of doing that is not allowing anger to remain in us past the end of one day. Resentments tend to build and fester into a putrefying sore."

Gary Hampton

When we are "angry with [a] brother without a cause" (Mat 5:22-KJV) we can open the door for Satan to wreak havoc on the peace between brethren.

"In that case it is evil; and it is a violation of the sixth commandment, because "he that hateth his brother, is a murderer," (1Jn 3:15). He has a feeling which would lead him to commit murder, if it were fully acted out. The word "brother" here refers not merely to one to whom we are nearly related, having the same parent or parents, as the word is commonly used, but includes also a neighbor, or perhaps anyone with whom we may be associated. As all people are descended from one Father and are all the creatures of the same God, so they are all brethren: and so every man should be regarded and treated as a brother."

Albert Barnes

That said a second area where we need to look inside the self is ...

Love

As stated, we are all brethren according to the flesh but Christians especially are brethren more so when it comes to the Spirit. So there's a special meaning to the word love that is supposed to exist between us. According to Paul's writing to the church at Corinth...

1Co 13:4 Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it **is not arrogant** 5 or **rude**. It does not **insist on its own way**; it is not **irritable** or **resentful**; 6 it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. 7 Love **bears** all things, **believes** all things, **hopes** all things, **endures** all things. (Emp. added)

If I have love for my brethren and want what's best for the church in general, I'm not going to insist on having things my way or I'm out of here. No kid playing ball in a sand lot likes it when the one who brings all the equipment gets into a pout when he doesn't like a certain call, gets irritable and resentful and leaves taking everything with him. We are all in this together, we should all be able to bear each other's personalities since we all have "equipment in the game". But we all need to play by the rules because the game will always go on even if the whole team disbands.

2Co 13:8 For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth.

And even though we can get away with hiding it most of the time, our attitude shows outwardly in ways others can see. Remember, attitude can either enhance or harm our relationships with others and who wants to be around someone with an attitude that isn't good?

Mar 7:20 And He said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. 21 For **from within, out of the heart** of man, come evil thoughts, ... 22 ... **pride**, foolishness. 23 All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person." (Emp. added) So...

1Ti 1:5 The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

A third area where we need to self-examine is our...

Work Performance

Whether the apostle was referring to those who voluntarily served as slaves or not, the idea is the same either way.

Eph 6:5 Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, 6 not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, 7 rendering service with a good will **as to the Lord** and not to man, 8 knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free. (*Emp. added*)

Obviously, who would want to be a slave? Although there **are** those who are slaves to their work. But even if a slave, a Christian should always continue being a Christian no matter what. But today since none of us are slaves everyone still has to earn an honest living somehow and everyone should be thankful to God we have a means to do so. Along with that, whatever we agreed to work for, pay wise, when we were first hired wherever, should only be raised as an employer sees fit and not out of tenure, threat or other unmerited ways. Our employer should **want** to give us a raise based solely on our **own** job performance. As John the immerser told the soldiers who came to him asking what they should do, he told them to “be content with [their] wages” (*Lk 3:14*). If we get to the point where we aren’t making enough due to whatever, it’s not the employer’s fault so he shouldn’t be the one to be responsible for keeping us out of debt. A Christian’s work ethic should be second to none and should never be according to the worldly ‘dog-eat-dog’ mentality or by kissing up to the boss to get raises if that’s the reason we’re doing the kissing up in the first place. If we think of our boss as we would the Lord then we would work every task we do to the best of our ability without excuse. Ultimately, our income **does** come from Him anyway. But if we think the more we work the more He blesses us we need to look inside and ask why we are working so much and how will it benefit the Lord and His church. And not that working overtime is a sin either. We sometimes work the extra hours to have a reserve when those lean times come. But again the, often sore, subject comes up on our...

Giving

How much am I to give? If I get some overtime, am I supposed to give a portion of that into the collection? If we have to ask that question we may actually have a spiritual heart problem.

2Co 9:6 The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. 7 Each one must give **as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly** or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. (*Emp. added*)

One reason God prospers the Christian is so that through the faithful saint He supplies the finances to support the work of the church to evangelize the lost. The amount of work the church does is to be based solely on the contribution given freely by her members. To say “God loves a cheerful giver” is to say that such a giver does so in faith knowing what reward awaits

him in the end. But if we hold back in our giving, as Ananias and Sapphira did even though we may not suffer as they did, God will remember and He will reward us in like manner.

2Co 9:9 As it is written, "He has distributed **freely**, He has given to the poor; His righteousness endures forever." 10 He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food **will** supply and **multiply** your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. 11 You **will be enriched** in every way **to be generous** in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. 12 For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. (*Emp. added*)

It has been understood that the older, depression era generation of brethren that have the least to give are the ones who give the most. Jesus alluded to this when He called the disciples to note what was going on at the treasury when comparing what was being contributed by those of means to that of an older widow.

Luk 21:3 And He said, "Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them. 4 For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."

The older generation, along with those who never seemed to have anything, appreciate what it means to be frugal and understand sacrifice and give accordingly knowing the importance of saving the lost. As Paul stated when commending the churches of Macedonia that...

2Co 8:2 ... in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. 3 For they gave according to their means (*Gk.1411- ability*), as I can testify, and **beyond** their means, of **their own accord**, 4 **begging us** earnestly for the **favor** of taking part in the relief of the saints-- 5 and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us. (*Emp. added*)

Obviously, a Christian who hasn't given self totally to the Lord won't be one who has a conscience to give as the Lord has prospered them. But notice, those of Macedonia sincerely **begged** Paul for the **favor** to be able to have a part in taking care of the work that desperately needed the finances necessary to be done. In this area, we need to ask our inner self, to whom am I enslaved to?

Mat 6:24 "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money. 25 "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?

It's okay to put something back for a rainy or for retirement but when we get to the point of being stingy when it concerns "the collection for the saints" (*1 Cor 16:1*) we need to ask the inner self if we're doing our best and can sacrifice more since God gave the ultimate sacrifice to save us. Which brings us to the last area where we need to consider when contemplating whether or not we have...

Salvation

Jesus has been given “all authority in Heaven and on earth” (*Mat 28:18*) which includes His authority to save the souls of the repentant, obedient few. So why are there so many differing views on what we need to do to be saved? That was a question I had struggled with when as a young teenager. But everywhere I went there were so many conflicting ways taught about salvation I finally gave up. I was so discouraged I quit searching; but only until that fire inside began to nag at me to start looking again. God knew I was searching and He knew what was needed for me to find the truth on this subject. And He did get my attention. And when I found the truth I knew it was genuine because it wasn’t “produced by the will of man, but [from] men [who] spoke from [the word of] God” (*2 Pet 1:21, my input*) as they were guided by what the Bible says. And I became obedient to it.

1Pe 1:22 Having purified your souls by your **obedience to the truth** for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, 23 since you have been **born again**, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; (*Emp. added*)

Everyone was asking if I was “born again” but not one of them told me the truth on how that was made possible until one person asked me “what does the Bible say?” We went to scripture for the answer and there it was in black, white and red. Jesus’ own words then convicted my heart.

Joh 3:3 Jesus answered him (*Nicodemus*), "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born (*Gk.1080- regenerated*) again (*Gk.509- from above*) he cannot see the kingdom of God."

He then went on to explain the procedure that showed what that means.

Joh 3:5 Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

Thus Jesus Himself has shown where baptism is not a work of man but a grace “from above” since salvation comes...

Tit 3:5 ... not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy, **by** (*here’s the avenue through which salvation is possible*) the washing of regeneration and renewal (*Gk.342- renovation*) of the Holy Spirit, 6 Whom He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 **so that** (*here’s the result of our obedience to being washed*) being **justified** by His grace we might **become heirs** according to the hope of eternal life. (*Emp. added*)

We don’t receive His grace until we become obedient to His will and have our sins washed away through “the washing of regeneration (*being baptized thus ‘born again’*) and renewal of the Holy Spirit”. As Peter told the crowd in Acts 2:38 that they would receive the Holy Spirit only **after** they were baptized, “Christians are bought with a price and have become the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit” (*Gary Hampton*). Holy Spirit cannot dwell in the unsaved! For a while there I accepted the opinions of those I thought were in positions of authority who should have known the truth about salvation. But it doesn’t take a college education to understand what the Bible simply teaches on how we must be saved. The first thing we need to ask our inner selves is “am I willing to let the Bible speak since it **is** the authority on salvation?” And “am I willing to accept it in faith and be obedient to the will of God to be saved?” “Am I willing...

Eph 4:22 to put off [my] old self, which belongs to [my] former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, 23 and to be renewed in the spirit of [my] mind,

24 and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

Notice what happened to those Israelites who, through their disobedience, weren't permitted to enter the promised land.

Heb 3:18 And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to **those who were disobedient**? 19 So we see that they were unable to enter **because of unbelief**.
(Emp. added)

You might say "well if that's all there is to being saved is to believe than I must be saved because I believe and confess that Jesus is the Christ". But believing alone is not enough. When Jesus gave His disciples the Great Commission in Mk 16:16 He stated...

Mar 16:16 Whoever believes **and** is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. (Emp. added)

Again, the one person we need to be completely honest with is our inner self. Are you being completely honest with your inner self when it comes to holding a grudge against another person, loving your brethren, how you perform in your workplace, your giving and most importantly, how you view the subject of salvation according to the truth?

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