

SELF-INQUIRY – SELF-EXAMINATION

As we turn to the Acts of the Apostles we read about a proposal the Apostle Paul made to Barnabas, also known as the son of Encouragement, after their first missionary journey, suggesting that they re-visit or conduct a self-examination or self-inquiry of the Churches they had founded, and see how these congregations were getting along.

Acts 15:36: "And after some time Paul said to Barnabas, Come, let us go back and again visit and help and minister to the brethren in every town where we made known the message of the Lord, and see how they are getting along."

Now this was a very wise and useful proposal. They wanted to go and see whether or not their members were continuing steadfast in the faith. Were they growing in Grace? Were they going forward or standing still? Were they prospering or falling away?

Let us lay it to heart, and apply it to ourselves in this Twenty-First Century. Let us search our ways and find out how things stand between us and God. Let us "see how we are doing." We live in an age of peculiar SPIRITUAL PRIVILEGES.

Since the world began, there has never been a better opportunity for a man's soul to be saved as there is in the world today! There has never been a time with so many signs of religion in the land; there has never been so many sermons preached; there has never been so many worship services held in churches and chapels; there has never been so many Holy Bibles sold; there has never been so many Holy Bibles given to Christians; there has never been so many religious books and tracts printed; there has never been so many daily Christian programs on radio and television as in our present day!

Everywhere there seems to be a new interest in religion of one kind or another at Christian bookstores in shopping centers, store-front churches, huge evangelistic crusades, rallies, Bible studies, and prayer meetings. The Gospel Message of the Lord Jesus Christ is reaching more individuals than ever before.

We can safely say we live in an age of SPIRITUAL PRIVILEGES. But are we any better for it? In an age like this it is well to ask: "how are we doing with our souls?" We live in an age of peculiar SPIRITUAL DANGER. Never, perhaps, since the world began was there such an immense amount of mere OUTWARD PROFESSION of religion or fake relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ as there is in this present day.

The fact of the matter is a painfully large proportion of the congregations in the land today, consists of UNCONVERTED people, who know nothing of

heart-religion or true relationship with the Savior Jesus Christ, and have never declared Christ in their daily living.

Myriads of "butterfly" Christians, who are always crowding after various preachers who come to town, have no desire to obey God's Word that they hear. They hold no allegiance to any of the preachers they listen to on the radio or watch on TV; they are nothing better than empty tubs, and tinkling cymbals, without a jot of real vital Christianity at home. The Parable of the Sower is continually receiving most vivid and painful illustrations.

The way-side hearers, the stony-ground hearers, and the thorny-ground hearers abound on every side. The life of many fake Christians, I am afraid, in this age, is nothing better than a continual course of spiritual dram-drinking – taking bits here and there from the scriptures and preachers. This is evident in "butterfly" Christians who jump from one preacher or church to the other without a surrendered life of following any of the sermons.

These Christians are always morbidly craving fresh excitement, especially those associated in the tongues or Pentecost church groups, and other emotional types of services. They seem to care little what it is if they only get it!

All preaching seems to come alike to them; and they appear unable to "see differences," so long as they hear what is clever, have their ears tickled, and sit in a crowd. Worst of all, there are so many today deluded into thinking that you do not have the Holy Spirit's Baptism until you speak in tongues.

Insensibly almost to themselves, they take up a kind of hysterical, sensational, sentimental Christianity, until they are never content with the "old paths," and, like the Athenians, are always running after something "new."

Too many Christians today are always ready to teach than to learn; they are not content with a daily steady effort to grow up into Christ's likeness, and to do Christ's work quietly and humbly. Too many today are being tossed about, and "carried to and fro by every wind of doctrine;" they run from one religious leader to another looking for new sermons instead of studying their Holy Bibles.

Consequently, as we look around us, we should well ask ourselves, "what are we doing about our souls?" The next big question we need to ask ourselves right now is: "do we ever think about our souls at all?" I believe there are literally hundreds of thousands of so-called Christians who cannot answer that question satisfactorily.

These false Christians never give the subject of true relationship with God any place in their hearts. From the beginning of the year to the end they

are absorbed in the pursuit of business, success, pleasure, politics, money, or self-indulgence of some kind or another.

Does Luke 17:28-36 sound familiar? "So also [it was the same] as it was in the days of Lot. [People] ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; But on the [very] day that Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed [them] all. That is the way it will be on the day that the Son of Man is revealed. On that day let him who is on the housetop, with his belongings in the house, not come down [and go inside] to carry them away; and likewise let him who is in the field not turn back. Remember Lot's wife! Whoever tries to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will preserve and quicken it. I tell you, in that night there will be two men in one bed; one will be taken and the other will be left. There will be two women grinding together; one will be taken and the other will be left. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other will be left." From the Amplified Bible.

Let us prayerfully consider our Savior's warning, because it applies to us, too. Death and judgment, Eternity, Heaven, and hell, and a world to come are never seriously considered. Those who think they are Christians and live on as if they were never going to die and rise again to stand before the Judgment Seat of God to receive an eternal sentence, should think again!

These fake Christians do not openly "oppose religion," because they have not dedicated themselves to constantly study the Word of God nor have sufficient reflection about it; but they eat, and drink, and sleep, and get money, and spend money, as if true relationship with God is a mere fiction, and not a reality. There just seems to be nothing at all about the future.

Too many people today, who say they are Christians, do not take true relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ very seriously, unless they are frightened for a while by sickness, death in their families, loss of a job, or an accident. An example of such temporary fear was when thousands rushed to churches following the tragedy of September 11, 2001 in New York, Washington DC and Pennsylvania, U.S.A. How long did their church attendance or call to prayer last? Another worldly example might be compared to what happens to a driver who is fined by the police for exceeding the speed limit. After receiving the fine from the police, the driver slows down to the point of going below the speed limit temporarily. The next day, the driver goes back to exceeding the speed limit as if nothing happened the previous day.

Without such uncomfortable interruptions in their life, these fake Christians appear to altogether ignore true worship of the Almighty God, and hold on to their worldly ways calmly and undisturbed, as if there were nothing worth thinking of except this sinful world.

This is literally the life of multitudes today. And as they pass away their place is taken up by multitudes like them. Today, there are literally millions of men and women who think of everything under the sun except the one thing needful - the self-examination and salvation of their souls!

Like the Jews of old, they do not "consider their ways;" nor "consider their latter end;" nor "consider that they do evil:" Isaiah 1:3; Haggai 1:7; Deuteronomy 32:29, respectively.

Ecclesiastes 5:1-7: "KEEP YOUR foot [give your mind to what you are doing] when you go [as Jacob to sacred Bethel] to the house of God. For to draw near to hear and obey is better than to give the sacrifice of fools [carelessly, irreverently] too ignorant to know that they are doing evil. Be not rash with your mouth, and let not your heart be hasty to utter a word before God. For God is in Heaven, and you are on earth; therefore let your words be few. For a dream comes with much business and painful effort, and a fool's voice with many words. When you vow a vow or make a pledge to God, do not put off paying it; for God has no pleasure in fools (those who witlessly mock Him). Pay what you vow. It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay. Do not allow your mouth to cause your body to sin, and do not say before the messenger [the priest] that it was an error or mistake. Why should God be [made] angry at your voice and destroy the work of your hands? For in a multitude of dreams there is futility and worthlessness, and ruin in a flood of words. But [reverently] fear God [revere and worship Him, knowing that He is]." From the Amplified Bible.

Like Gallio, "they do not care of any of these things;" because such matters does not affect nor bother them:

Acts 18:12-17: "When Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him to the judgment seat, saying, "This fellow persuades men to worship God contrary to the law." And when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, "If it were a matter of wrongdoing or wicked crimes, O Jews, there would be reason why I should bear with you. But if it is a question of words and names and your own law, look to it yourselves; for I do not want to be a judge of such matters." And he drove them from the judgment seat. Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat. But Gallio took no notice of these things."

If Christians prosper in the world, and get rich, and succeed in their line of life, they are praised, and admired by their contemporaries. Nothing succeeds in this country like success, but for all this they cannot live for ever. Christians who, like Gallio, don't examine their present spiritual condition and their future eternal life, will die and appear before the Judgment Throne of God, and be judged, and then what will be their end? When a large group of this kind exists in any country, no one needs wonder that I ask whether or not you belong to this group.

If you, by any chance, belong to such a group of people, you ought to have a mark set on your door, as there used to be a mark on a plague-stricken house two centuries ago, with the words, "Lord have mercy on us!"

I want to ask another question: "Do these Christians ever do anything about their souls?" There are multitudes in this country who occasionally "think about" their relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, but unhappily they never get beyond "thinking." After a stirring sermon, or after a funeral, or under the pressure of illness, or when things are going on badly with their family, or when they get hold of a striking religious book or watch a new "Christian movie," will at that time "think" a good deal, and even talk a little about religion in a vague way. It is ridiculous to learn that many people claimed to have wept after watching a recent "Christian" movie. Weeping is NOT the same as repentance unto salvation!

But they stop short, as if thinking and talking were enough to save them. They are always "meaning," and "intending," and "purposing," and "resolving," and "wishing," and telling us that they "know what is right," and "hope to be found right at last," but they never attain to any action.

There is no real, complete separation from the service of the world and sin; there is no real decision of picking up their cross to follow Christ; there is no real DOING in their Christianity. Their life is spent in playing the part of the son in the Lord's parable who the father asked to go and work for him:

Matthew 21:30: "But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, 'Son, go, work today in my vineyard.' He answered and said, 'I will not,' but afterward he regretted it and went. Then he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said, 'I go, sir,' but he did not go."

Similarly, Christians who promise to follow Christ, but don't are in the same category as the disobedience son. They are like those whom Ezekiel describes, who "liked his preaching, but never obeyed what he preached:

Ezekiel 33:30-32: "As for you, son of man, the children of your people are talking about you beside the walls and in the doors of the houses; and they speak to one another, everyone saying to his brother, 'Please come and hear what the word is that comes from the LORD.' So they come to you as people do, they sit before you as My people, and they hear your words, but they do not do them; for with their mouth they show much love, but their hearts pursue their own gain. Indeed you are to them as a very lovely song of one who has a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument; for they hear your words, but they do not do them."

In a day like this, when hearing and thinking, without DOING is so common, no one can justly wonder that I press upon all men and women, the absolute need of a self-examination or a self-inquiry of your soul.

To pass a school examination, we stay up late, sometimes overnight studying hard for the test in the morning. Do we stay up late to examine our Christian life? Do we spend extra time praying for our spirituality? Do we stay up late studying our Holy Bibles, asking for the Holy Spirit's enlightenment so we may overcome the world, flesh and the devil, and obtain spiritual wisdom and spiritual power to bear the Fruits of the Spirit?

Let us ask ourselves again right now: "what are we doing about our souls?" Let us sincerely ask ourselves whether we are trying to satisfy our consciences with a mere formal religion or a real relationship with God. Myriads in the world are making shipwreck on this rock of formal religion.

Like the Pharisees of old, they make much ado about the outward part of Christianity while the inward and spiritual parts are totally neglected. They are careful to attend all the services of their place of worship, and are regular in using all its forms and ordinances, and are never absent from Communion when the Lord's Supper is administered.

However, the Lord Jesus Christ exposed these fake Christians by declaring in Matthew 15:8-9, "These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me, and in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."

There are many today who think they are Christians and argue that their religious doctrines and teachings are correct, but are not prepared to practice what they preach. Anyone who knows them intimately can see with half an eye open that their affections are set on things below, and not on things above!

When you observe these people carefully, you will see that they are trying to make up for the need of inward Christianity by an excessive quantity of outward form. And this formal religion does nothing good to them. They are not satisfied.

Beginning at the wrong end, by making the outward things first, they know nothing of inward joy and peace, and they pass their lives in a constant struggle, secretly conscious that there is something wrong, and yet not knowing the reason.

When fake Christians of this kind are so painfully numerous, then there is no need wondering why I press upon you the importance of self-examination. If you love life, do not be content with the husk and shell and scaffolding of religion.

Remember our Savior's words in Matthew 15:9: "in vain do they worship me," about the Jewish "show-off" formalists of His day? It needs something more than just being a Christian and going diligently to church to take our soul to Heaven. The means of Grace and forms of religion are useful in their way, and God seldom does anything for His church without them.

But let us beware of making ourselves shipwreck on the very lighthouse which helps to show the channel into the harbor. In taking up all of this, let me ask one more question before closing: "Have you received the forgiveness of your sins?"

I pray that all would admit they are sinners, for "all are." But many would plead that they are sinners, but also plead they are NOT as bad as many others, and that they have not been so very wicked, and so forth. But few would pretend to say that they had always lived like angels, and never done, or said, or thought a wrong thing all their days.

In short, all of us must confess that we are more or less "sinners," and, as sinners, each of us is guilty before God. And because we are guilty, then we must be forgiven, or we will be lost and condemned forever at the last day.

Now the beautiful part of the Christian relationship with God is that it provides for us the very forgiveness that we need - full, free, perfect, eternal, and complete.

Everyone needs to believe in the forgiveness of sins, which has been purchased for us by the Eternal Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ. He purchased it for us by coming into the world to be our Savior, and by living, dying, and rising again, as our Substitute, in our behalf.

Christ bought our forgiveness at the price of His Own most precious Blood, by suffering in our stead on the Cross, and making satisfaction for our sins.

But this forgiveness, great and full and glorious as it is, does not become the property of every man and woman, as a matter of course. It is not a privilege which every member of a Church possesses, merely because he is a Church member or because they were born in the Church. Forgiveness of sins is a blessing each individual must receive on their own by their own personal faith; lay hold on by faith, appropriate by faith, and make their own by faith. Otherwise, Christ would have died in vain for the sinner:

John 3:36: "And he who believes on – has faith in, clings to, relies on – the Son has (now possesses) eternal life. But whoever disobeys – is unbelieving toward, refuses to trust in, disregards, is not subject to – the Son will never see (experience) life. But instead the wrath of God abides on him – God's displeasure remains on him; His indignation hangs over him continually."

No other terms of forgiveness of sins can be imagined as simple and as suitable to any person as faith in and salvation through Jesus Christ our Savior. One old saint said about justification: "It is but believe and have." It is only faith in Christ that is required; and faith is nothing more than the humble, heartfelt trust of the soul which desires to be saved.

The Lord Jesus Christ is able and willing to save, but men and women must come to Christ and believe. All who believe are at once forgiven and justified! Without believing there is no forgiveness at all. Now here is

exactly the point, I am afraid, where multitudes of people fail, and are in imminent danger of being lost for ever.

These Christians know that there is no forgiveness of sin except in Christ Jesus. They can tell you that there is no other Savior for sinners; nor Redeemer nor Mediator except in Him who was born of the Virgin Mary, was crucified under Pontius Pilate, died on the Cross, and was buried.

But here they stop short and go no further! Some Christians have never come to the point of actually laying hold on Christ by faith, and becoming one with Christ, and Christ in them. They can say, "He is a Savior, but not "my" Savior; He is a Redeemer, but not "my" Redeemer;" He is a Priest, but not "my" Priest; and He is an Advocate, but not "my" Advocate," and so they live and die unforgiven!

No wonder Martin Luther said, "Many are lost because they cannot use possessive pronouns." When this is the state of many in this day, no one need wonder that I ask men and women whether they have received the forgiveness of sins.

An eminent Christian lady once said, in her old age, "The beginning of eternal life in my soul was a conversation I had with an old gentleman, who came to visit my father, when I was only a little girl. He took me by the hand one day and said to me,"

"My dear child, my life is nearly over, and you will probably live many years after I am gone. But never forget two things: One is that there is such a thing as having our sins forgiven while we live. The other is that there is such a thing as knowing and feeling that we are forgiven." The old lady said, "I thank God I have never forgotten this old man's words."

How is it with us? Let us not rest until we "know and feel," that we are forgiven. Once more, let me ask, in the matter of forgiveness of sins, "How do we do?"

Moreover, let us ask ourselves if we know anything by experience of conversion to God. Without conversion there is no salvation:

Matthew 18: 3: Jesus said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven."

John 3: 3: Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Romans 8: 9: "But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His."

2nd Corinthians 5: 17: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."

We are all by nature so weak, so worldly, and so earthly-minded, so inclined to sin that without a thorough change we cannot serve God in life, and could not enjoy Him after death.

Just as soon as ducks are hatched they naturally take to water, so do children, as soon as they can do anything take to selfishness, lying, and deceit; without a desire to pray or love God, unless they are taught. High or low, rich or poor, gentle or simple, we all need to continually conduct self-examinations of our souls in our life for a complete change - a change, which is the special office of the Holy Ghost, to give us.

Call it what you please, new birth, regeneration, renewal, new creation, quickening, repentance, this transformation must be obvious if we are to be saved; and if we have examined ourselves and been converted it will be seen!

Consequently, our deep sense of sin and our deep hatred of sin, our sincere faith in Christ, our complete love of Him, our ultimate delight to be holy, our heart's longing to be filled with the fruits of the Spirit, our brotherly love, and fellowship with God's people, and then our real distaste for the things of the world - these are the symbols and evidence which always accompany conversion.

Myriads around us, I am afraid, know nothing about the necessary process of self-examination, repentance and conversion. They are, in the Scripture language, "dead," and "asleep," and "blind," and "unfit" for the Kingdom of God. Year after year, perhaps, they feebly repeat the words, "I believe in the Holy Ghost;" but they are utterly ignorant of the Holy Spirit's changing operations inside a man or woman.

Sometimes they flatter themselves by declaring that they are "born again," because they have been baptized, or go to church or receive the Lord's Supper, while they are TOTALLY destitute of the marks of the new birth, as described by the beloved Apostle John in his first Epistle:

1st John 1: 4-9: "But if we [really] are living and walking in the Light as He [Himself] is in the Light, we have [true, unbroken] fellowship with the one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses (removes) us from all sin and guilt – keeps us cleansed from sin in all its forms and manifestations. If we say we have no sin – refusing to admit that we are sinners – we delude and lead ourselves astray, and the Truth [which the Gospel presents] is not in us – does not dwell in our hearts. If we [freely] admit that we have sinned and confess our sins, He is faithful and just [true to His own nature and promises] and will forgive our sins (dismiss our

lawlessness) and continuously cleanse us from all unrighteousness – everything not in conformity to His will in purpose, thought and action.”

As you consider my questions, have you stopped to examine your life? In times like these, it is important to press the matter of conversion on men’s and women’s souls. No doubt there are plenty of sham conversions in such a day of religious excitement as we see today.

But bad coin is no proof that there is no good money. No! Rather, it is a sign that there is some currency which is valuable, and is worth imitating. Hypocrites and fake Christians are clear evidence that there is such a gift as real Grace among men and women.

Let us search our own hearts then, and see how it is with us. Let us sit down before the picture of sin that is displayed to us in the Holy Bible, and let us consider what guilty, vile, corrupt creatures all of us are in the sight of God.

What we all need is an entire change of heart called regeneration, transformation, new birth, conversion, etc. What a mass of infirmity and imperfection cleaves to the very best of us at our very best! What a solemn thought it is that “without holiness no man shall see the Lord!”

We must see the need to cry with the publican every night in our lives, when we think of our sins of omission as well as our sins of commission,” and pray “O God, be favorable (be gracious, be merciful) to me, the especially wicked sinner that I am.” Luke 18: 13. Let us not go to bed tonight until we have conducted a self-examination or self-inquiry of our souls.

May God bless your soul! Amen.

We are always glad to give Scriptural advice and counsel to those who desire to write us about their problems, and to remember their requests for prayer in our services.

In addition, we publish sermons on other subjects, which take up in detail teaching on how to deal with God successfully and be delivered out of all our troubles. We will gladly send them to those who desire them for their own use or for others.

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Self-Inquiry - Self-Examination
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