

Self-Examination of One's Relationship to Christ

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Examine Yourselves

Paul writes to the Corinthians about their relationship to Christ. This admonition is still as relevant today as it was in the first century. Many profess faith in Christ, but, at the same time, their actions indicate that something is missing in their perspective of what Christianity is all about. In this Epistle, Paul writes: “**Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless of course, you fail the test**” (2 Corinthians 13:5)? This text invites us to look into our own hearts in order to determine what is in it. This examination is about “**the faith**,” that is to say, it is about the message of salvation by grace through faith in the finished work of Christ upon the Cross. **Paul is concerned as to whether or not the Christians in Corinth have fully understood the preaching of the Cross.** Today, this same concern confronts us. How many of us have understood the preaching of the Cross? How many of us have made this message of the Cross foremost in our lives?

Shortly before Jesus met His death on the Cross, He had a confrontation with the Pharisees who wanted to question Him about the **greatest commandment in the Law**. In this episode, one of the Pharisees who was a so-called expert in the Law sought to test the skills of Jesus. Matthew reports this event between the two. We should listen to Jesus’ reply to the following question by the expert:

“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”³⁷ Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your **heart** and with all your **soul** and with all your **mind**.”³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment.³⁹ And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’⁴⁰ **All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.**” (Matthew 22:36-40)¹

¹ All citations are from the *New International Version* 1984 edition.

What does this teaching by Jesus convey to us in our day-to-day walk with God? “**With all your heart**” should awaken within us a consciousness that every believer must serve the Lord with attentiveness and zeal. “**With all your soul**” is a soul-making activity, which activity requires reading and meditation on the Word of God day and night (Psalm 1). “**With all your mind**” conveys the idea that **learning wisdom is an intellectual activity that requires study and reflection.** Paul echoed the whole of Jesus’ response in his teaching, which instruction is found in his Epistle to the Christians in Rome: “Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh” (Romans 13:14). Our conduct or attitude should be in harmony with the new *aeon* (see Romans 12:1—13:14).

Have we allowed the words of Paul in Chapter 12 of Romans to remold our actions? What does Romans 12 mean to us? What is the focus of our love? Is it God or is it just ourselves? How do we react to God’s children who do not have 20/20 vision in their interpretation of God’s written Revelation? Do we love God when others do not see eye-to-eye as we do? Do we really love His children (see 1 Corinthians 13)? **If we love “God” the way Jesus portrayed Him in the Scriptures,** we will alter our conduct to be in harmony with the “weak” as well as with the “strong” in the faith. **Love for one another is the answer** as to how we accept others even with disagreements (See Romans 14-15 and I Corinthians 8). In the beginning of Jesus’ ministry in Galilee, He, in His “Sermon on the Mount,” encouraged His listeners to “**seek first** his **kingdom** and his **righteousness**” (Matthew 6:33). Where do we stand? Are we out-and-out for Christ? **Is our progress in our Christian faith stunted or underdeveloped?** Are we walking in wisdom? Have we set a good example for those around us?

Preaching of the Cross

Remember, Paul wanted to know if the preaching of the Cross had just reached or penetrated their minds, that is to say, had it pierced their hearts. **In this short text (2 Corinthians 13:5), he wanted the Corinthians to embrace, as it were, Christ into their total activities.** God had seized them through the message of the Cross, but some, apparently, did not capture Him in their daily walk? In other words, Paul wanted God’s sovereignty to infect every believer in Corinth. He wanted God to be Lord of everyone’s life. We, as Christians, too, should reflect upon 2 Corinthians 13:5 in order to determine our relationship to God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

What does this Scripture to the Corinthians express to us as the people of God today? Does believing in Jesus as our Savior make a difference in our lives? Are we the same with or without our belief in the message of salvation? When we profess faith in Christ, the world expects differences in our lives that separate us from those who do not believe in Christ. It is in this vein that Paul writes to the Corinthians. **They were constrained to give some kind of account for their behavior.** How is our behavior? Have we lost our zeal for spiritual things? Are we still happy about our faith? Do we still stand in awe of God’s redemption for humanity? Paul, in his correspondence to the Christian Jews, exhorted the believers to pay attention to their new faith:

We must **pay the most careful attention**, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. ²For since the message spoken through angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, ³ how **shall we escape** if we ignore **so great a salvation**? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. ⁴God also testified to it by **signs, wonders** and various **miracles**, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will. (Hebrews (2:1-4)

God's Way of Salvation

Have we really given consideration to what we have heard about Jesus in the Gospels? Have we given careful commitment to God's Gospel? Have we given sufficient reflection upon God's scheme of redemption? Do we really believe that God exists? Just a thoughtful examination of His Word lets us know that God had not left **them** nor us today without sufficient proof to establish beyond a shadow-of-a-doubt that Jesus is God's Way of salvation. Apparently, some Christians, in the first century, addressed in the Book of Hebrews were reverting back to the Old Covenant World of Judaism. Have we lost our zeal for spiritual things? What does Jesus mean to us? Are our hearts glad about God's revelation of Himself "in" and "through" Jesus? Is this joy now foreign to us? Have we lost our first love? If so, our faith is not very deep. **Is our faith just lodged in our understanding and not in our hearts?** Paul wanted faith in Christ to penetrate into the very heart of every soul. **Is there gratitude in our minds for spiritual things?** What about Sunday gatherings? Do we relish our time together with other saints or do we dislike the time spent on Sundays in praising God within the corporate body of Christ? Paul wrote to the Colossians about this very issue of one's attitude toward spiritual things:

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. ¹⁶ **Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly** as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs **with gratitude in your hearts to God**. ¹⁷ **And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.** (Colossians 3:15-17)

Are We Serving God Wholeheartedly?

In a boy's college room among the banners and pennants was one that read: **I AM WILLING TO BE THIRD**. It wasn't until the freshman year was almost ended that his chum spoke about it. "George," said he, "I have been curious all the year to know the meaning of that motto on the wall over your table. I may not come back next year, tell me what it means." "My mother gave it to me," answered George. "She said if I would live a helpful life, **I must be willing to put God first, others second, and self third.**"—S. S. Lesson Illustrator.²

Are we doing the will of God "**from the heart**"? Are we serving God "wholeheartedly" (see Ephesians 6:6-7)? Is God first in our lives? **Have we allowed the "word of Christ" to dwell in us richly?** Do we **sing with gratitude** in our hearts to God? When we become Christians, there ought to be a complete change in our personality. **Forgiveness is to be one of**

² Aquilla Webb, *One Thousand Evangelistic Illustrations* (WORDsearch, 2000), 68.

our characteristics. Because we have been forgiven, we ought and must forgive others. Christianity brought “**mercy**” to the world. We, today, are a part of the New Creation (**New Heaven and Earth of Revelation 21**, which is also known as God’s Messianic kingdom as foretold by Daniel 2 and 7; 9:24-27, and Chapter 12), which blessing should bring about a change in our love for God.

When we praise God, are we mindful of God’s **omnipotence**, His **Holiness**, His **majesty**, and His **greatness**? As we reflect upon God, we ought to be caught up in wonder and struck with awe and bow in adoration for His love for lost humanity. **Do the pleasures of life take priority over God?** Is God first in our lives? Do we desire to serve God more than we enjoy the pleasures of life or the pleasures of sin for a season? Paul, in the Philippian Epistle, sets forth his own examination about his own faith in Christ. Listen to Paul as he opens his heart to the Philippians:

But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ What is more, **I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish**, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. ¹⁰ **I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection** and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. (Philippians 3:7-11)

The Christian Life Is a Vocation

The primary vocation of the Christian life is the same for all believers, not just the preacher in the pulpit. We, as Christians, are here in the world to love God and to love our neighbors. We are God’s task force. We are here to serve God. **The Christian life is a vocation that is to be woven into the very fabric of our being.** Paul writes to the Romans: “If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord” (Romans 14:8). **Do we believe this Scripture?** Many of us today live as if we are our **own** masters. We, as Christians, often fail in the purpose of our lives because we love the world more than we love God. **Is Jesus the center and heart of our faith?** If God is not foremost in our lives, we wonder how anyone can effectively reach out to others. The following story is told about a Scottish missionary, home on furlough from her work in India, concerning a “Christ-like Life:

She had been teaching a group of children one day, telling them the story of Jesus, bringing out bit by bit incidents showing His character. As she was talking one child, listening intently, grew excited, and then more excited. At last she was unable to restrain herself, and blurted out: “I know him; he lives near us.” Was there ever such praise of a human?—S. D. Gordon.³

³ Aquilla Webb, *One Thousand Evangelistic Illustrations* (WORDsearch, 2000), 115.

Justification Is What God Does for Us

Have we examined ourselves to see if we are in the faith? **What does God's grace mean to us?** Until we recognize that grace, in and of itself, is incomprehensible, then, and only then, is it grace. Justification, on God's part, means to declare one righteous, not to make subjectively righteous. **Justification is what God does for us, not what we do for God.** In other words, justification is **furnished** by God, **devised** by God, and **made attainable** by God. The righteousness that justifies is the righteousness that is outside of us. In the Book of Romans, Paul sets forth a justification that is outside of the Law. In salvation, **we work from justification, not to it.** God's righteousness is outside of us. In other words, **His righteousness** is imputed, that is to say, **credited** to us. Paul dealt with this issue of condemnation on the part of others, but he refutes this mindset of condemnation from others:

What, then, shall we say in response to these things? **If God is for us, who can be against us?** ³²He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? ³³**Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen?** It is God who justifies. ³⁴Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. ³⁵Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” ³⁷**No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.** ³⁸**For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,** ³⁹**neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.** (Romans 8:13-39)

God had foretold, over 500 years earlier (520 BC), what Paul addressed in his Epistle to the Christians in Rome. God dealt with this situation as stated in the prophecy of Zechariah (3:10). Satan accused the high priest of his sins before God. We should listen to this conversation between God and Satan:

Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and **Satan standing at his right side to accuse him.** ²The LORD said to Satan, “The LORD rebuke you, Satan! The LORD, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! **Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?**” ³Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. ⁴The angel said to those who were standing before him, “**Take off his filthy clothes.**” Then he said to Joshua, “See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put fine garments on you.” ⁵Then I said, “Put a clean turban on his head.” So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him, while the angel of the LORD stood by. ⁶The angel of the LORD gave this charge to Joshua: ⁷“This is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘If you will walk in obedience to me and keep my requirements, then you will govern my house and have charge of my courts, and I will give you a place among these standing here.’” ⁸“Listen, High Priest Joshua, you and your associates seated before you, who are men symbolic of things to come: I am going to bring my servant, the Branch. ⁹See, the stone I have set in front of Joshua! **There are seven eyes on that one stone, and I will engrave an inscription on it,** says the LORD Almighty, **and I will remove the sin of this land in a single day.** ¹⁰“In that day each of you will invite your neighbor to sit under your vine and fig tree,” declares the LORD Almighty.” (Zechariah 3:1-10)

CONCLUSION

In closing this short study, we need to read and reread Paul's summary of God's great love for His creatures:

As for you, you were **dead** [spiritually dead] in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. ⁴ **But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive [spiritual resurrection] with Christ even when we were dead [spiritually] in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.** ⁶ And God raised us up [resurrection from spiritual death] with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷ in order that in the coming ages [Messianic Age] he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ **For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.** ¹⁰ **For we are God's handiwork**, created in Christ Jesus **to do good works**, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:1-10)