

A Call to Self-examination

2 Corinthians 13:5-10

“Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves” (v. 5)

There is something rather curious about our human nature. We are more interested in ourselves than anything else, yet the last thing in the world we want is the real truth about ourselves. The Bible recognises this again and again. When it comes to self-examination and self-analysis we are easily put off by rationalising, by self-centredness and by an unwillingness to be utterly honest with ourselves with one another and with God. So I will attempt to answer three questions:

1. What prevents us from effectively involving ourselves in self-examination?

- **Self-satisfaction and complacency**

In chapter 8 of this letter Paul had already written to the Corinthians about their lack of generosity. In 8:7 he says, “ ... You excel in everything – in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness” But then he went on to urge them to be generous with their money.

So we can be wonderfully eloquent and woefully stingy! It appears to me that Paul was saying, “You Corinthian believers are so preoccupied with some sensational aspect in your walk with God that you have failed to recognise the importance of generosity – unlike the believers in Macedonia.”

So excellence in one area of our discipleship makes us complacent about other areas of deficiency, “examine yourselves” to see where you are coming short. Don't say, “I can't be bothered!” We tend to organise our lives into separate watertight compartments. We are happy with some but it hurts us a great deal to probe into other compartments. We will never get where God wants us to be unless we let God smash through and break up our complacencies.

- **Self-deception** (see James 1:22)

This is another hindrance to self-examination – See 1 Cor. 5. Paul discovered there was a huge, rapidly growing “cancer” in the Corinthian church that was being glossed over – sexual immorality. In 2 Cor. 5:2 he says, ***“You are arrogant! Ought you not to mourn?”*** Individually and in teams/church life we find discipline ferociously difficult. I was once told a story of a pastor who said, *“Well, it is true that I am living in adultery, but I'm preaching better than I ever did!”* I hope this story isn't true, but I fear it may be! This is self-deception – rationalising and defending ourselves. With complete honesty we must say, *“O Father, regardless of the cost and regardless of the consequences, I bare my soul to You. In the light of Your Word and Your Spirit, I will examine my heart.”*

But we should not be completely absorbed in morbid subjectivity. That leads to a nervous breakdown! Someone has said, *“For every look deep inside yourself, have ten long looks at our Lord Jesus.”* The sure correction to morbid subjectivity is to look at the Cross. James tells us that self-examination is like looking into a mirror (God's Word) and seeing a very ugly face, but then finding fault with the mirror instead of oneself. Perhaps that is why there is so much destructive criticism of the Bible.

2. What is the purpose of self-examination?

- **The first purpose: examine yourselves see whether you are in the faith** (2 Cor. 13:5)

So the first purpose is quite objective. The founder of our company and his wife were with us recently. He was expressing his frustration at being bombarded by people wanting him to take sides on “the emergent church movement” in North America and asking him where our company stood on the ‘Insider-Outsider’ debate. Clearly evangelicalism is becoming more and more stridently polarised on many issues. In our company and in many similar companies we are losing major donors because of this.

So what is “the faith”? Are we unconsciously drifting away from “the faith”? “The faith” is a phrase used more than once in the New Testament. It refers to the body of received truth centering on the Lord Jesus. Jude urges us to, **“Contend earnestly for the faith.”** Paul tells us he, **“Kept the faith”**. Have you kept the faith? Or are you drifting away from essential things?

- **There is a second purpose in self-examination: “Test yourselves ... is Jesus Christ in you?”** (2 Cor. 13:5)

So the first reason for self-examination is “doctrinal”. The second reason is “experimental”. Are you experiencing day by day the Lord Jesus dwelling in your heart and life? We may be learned or experienced. We may have leadership roles, but from God's point of view we are valueless unless we have the indwelling Lord Jesus in our hearts and lives. It isn't good enough to say. **“I am not a heretic!”** We can be just **“a clanging cymbal”** (1 Cor. 13:1). Our emptiness will reveal itself as we ask the Holy Spirit to guide our self-examination – especially into the dark corners of our lives.

3. What is the process of self-examination?

If we are going to examine ourselves effectively there must be some real yardstick or criteria by which we can measure ourselves. There are three such criteria in the context of 2 Corinthians 13.

- **“That you may do no wrong”** (v. 7)
Will you check yourself each day with this question: **“Am I harbouring any known sin in my life?”** God wants to deal with all your sins. It doesn't matter if it is negligence rather than impudence. You know James 4:17, **“Whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.”** Are you allowing a known sin in your life?

This is a negative consideration but Paul goes on to give the second criteria:

- **“Do what is right.”** (v. 7)
What is right is that which reflects honour and glory upon the Lord Jesus, upon His Gospel and upon His people. One of our chronic dangers is that we are content with negative goodness. We live by a lot of negative don'ts. Now there is something true about this. “Thou shalt not murder or commit adultery or steal or bear false witness or covet” etc. We don't believe in this and we don't do that But you can't live by negatives and be a healthy believer. I think I will be very ashamed if I stand before the judgement seat of the Lord Jesus and say, **“Well Lord, I didn't get drunk, I didn't lie, I didn't make friends with unbelievers**” I think my wonderful Lord Jesus will gently say to me, **“These things are good as far as they go, but what did you do? What load did you carry? What love did you express? What contribution did you make to the Kingdom?”**

There is a true story of a Canadian building contractor who largely worked in lumber. After he retired his daughter went as a worker to South Korea [this was about 60 years ago]. In one of her letters home she wrote, *"I wish you were here to supervise this job!"* The agency had purchased a large amount of lumber to put up a new building. They had plans, but no one with the expertise to manage the construction. The daughter never even thought he might reply, but to her astonishment she received a reply, *"I am arriving on such and such a ship in the Pusan harbour on such and such a date."*

Out of his quiet, comfortable home he came just because he loved the Lord Jesus. When he arrived he managed the job for six days, but on Sunday he said to his daughter, *"Please could you find me a Korean youth who can speak a little English. I want to go out into the villages and give out Gospels."* His daughter replied, *"No, no dad you should rest or you will have a breakdown you are over 70 years old."* He said, *"I want to do it."* He did this for several weeks, but one Sunday afternoon his daughter's worst fears came to pass. It wasn't serious but her father had fainted on a little road going to a village. Even though it wasn't serious she scolded him. He looked at her and said, *"My dear, I wouldn't do it for anybody else but Jesus went all the way to Calvary for me."*

And that's it! Something positive done as a thank you gift for all the Lord Jesus has done for us.

- ***"Aim for perfection!"*** (v. 11)

Paul urges these believers to be perfect. In 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1, Paul mentions a number of things: hospitality, abandoning lingering idolatry and the relief of poverty among believers. In the last few chapters he urges them to abandon triumphalism and one-upmanship. Elsewhere he urges them to ***"live in peace"***. I think this includes avoiding polarisation, jealousy and factions. In Scripture this is a high priority – see Eph. 4:1-3

To this Paul adds, ***"And the God of love and peace will be with you."*** John Wesley had a "method" that he taught to the early Methodists in the Great Evangelical Awakening in England in the 18th century.

On Sunday they had to examine themselves in the love of God and the simplicity of their faith.

On Monday they had to examine themselves on their love for people – and so on through the week. These are some of the questions they had to ask themselves at least weekly. Use them in your own life!

- ✓ Am I consciously creating the impression that I am a better man than I really am – in other words am I a hypocrite?
- ✓ Am I honest in all my actions and words or do I exaggerate?
- ✓ Do I 'confidentially' pass on to others what was told to me in confidence?
- ✓ Can I be trusted?
- ✓ Am I a slave to dress, friends, work or habits?
- ✓ Am I self-conscious, self-pitying or self-justifying?
- ✓ Did the Bible live to me today?
- ✓ Did I give it time to speak to me today?
- ✓ Am I enjoying prayer?

- ✓ When did I last speak to someone with the goal of winning that person to the Lord Jesus?
- ✓ Am I making contacts with other people and using them for Our Master's glory?
- ✓ Do I pray about the money I spend?
- ✓ Do I get to bed in time to get up in time?
- ✓ Do I disobey God in anything?
- ✓ Do I insist on doing something about which my conscience is uneasy?
- ✓ Am I defeated in any part of my life – jealous, impure, critical, irritable, touchy or distrustful?
- ✓ How do I spend my spare time?
- ✓ Am I proud?
- ✓ Do I thank God that I am not like other people? (the Pharisee and the tax collector)
- ✓ Is there anyone I fear, dislike, disown, criticise, resent or disregard? If so, what am I doing about it?
- ✓ Do I grumble or complain?
- ✓ Is the Lord Jesus very real to me?

Let me end with Psalm 139:23-24

“Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there is any grievous way in me and lead me in the way everlasting.”