

As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby. - 1 Peter 2:2

THE SINCERE MILK OF GOD'S WORD

The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword... - Hebrews 4:12

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“Examine Your Own Selves”

2 Corinthians 13:5: *Examine your own selves, whether you are in the faith. Test your own selves. Or don't you know as to your own selves, that Jesus Christ is in you? – unless indeed you are disqualified.*

In the above verse, the inspired apostle commands Christians to examine ourselves. This is a responsibility *each* of us has.

What can be much easier than examining oneself is examining *others*. While Scripture does not demean the importance of helping others make needed correction, the one each should foremost examine is *self*.

This is the key teaching in the first five verses of **Matthew 7**. After saying, “*Judge not, that ye be not judged*” in **verse 1**, our Lord explains what He means by this in the next few verses. His point is summarized in **verse 5**, which says, “*You hypocrite! First remove the beam out of your own eye, and then you can see clearly to remove the speck out of your brother's eye.*” In other words, we must help others receive the cure for sin (cf. **Gal. 6:1**; **Jas. 5:19-20**), but look in the mirror *first*.

When “looking in the mirror” to examine oneself, it's important to do so according to God's standards, rather than using the standards of the world.

Part of the inspired apostle Paul's “*charge*” for “*those who are rich in this present world*” in **1 Timothy 6:17-19** is “*that they not be arrogant.*” While humility is essential for *everyone*, it is easy to have an inflated view of self based upon earthly successes.

Possessions, prestige, accomplishments, and the like can give one a false sense of security if this is the “standard” used in examining oneself (cf. **Rev. 3:17**).

The same could be said for self-examination based on comparing oneself to *other people*.

In **2 Corinthians 10:12**, Paul said, “*For we are not bold to number or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves. But they themselves, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves with themselves, are without understanding.*”

While looking to others' *positive* examples can be helpful (**Heb. 13:7**), what is condemned in **2 Corinthians 10:12** is a recipe for self-righteous deception (cf. **Luke 18:11**). Whether or not we are right with God is not based on how we measure up to other fallible people, but how we measure up to the perfect standard of God's Word and our Savior.

When we examine ourselves in view of God's perfect standard, we must do so with *honesty*. To see ourselves as God does, we must have a sincere approach to self-evaluation, instead of a pre-determined conviction that we have nothing to change.

Such sincerity is exemplified by the Bereans in **Acts 17:11**. These Bereans' nobility is explained by their “*readiness of mind*,” a mark of their sincere desire to know the truth. Notice their simple purpose in examining the Scripture: “*to see whether these things were so.*” Like the Bereans, we must seek to know and practice what is right, whether it agrees with prior convictions or not. Such honesty is crucial to profitable self-examination, and should be applied to *all* of God's truth.

The Bible provides the spiritual nourishment we need to grow (**1 Pet. 2:2**; **2 Pet. 3:18**) and make needed corrections (**2 Tim. 3:16**). We must enable this growth, though, by examining ourselves in light of His Word with a sincere desire to let God mold us and make us according to His will.

Overcoming Past Sins

A challenge many Christians struggle with is dealing with past sins.

We must recognize the severity of our sins (**Luke 18:13**), have godly sorrow (**2 Cor. 7:10**), and do what God requires for sins we have committed to be forgiven (cf. **Acts 2:38** for the alien sinner & **Acts 8:22** for the erring Christian). Once we *have* done what God requires to be forgiven though, that sin becomes a part of our *past* and should be viewed accordingly.

Remembering past sins in ways God desires is important.

Just as Paul was humbled by his past sins (**1 Cor. 15:9**), we too should realize we are nothing without God's grace. Remembering sins we have committed should help us show compassion toward individuals who struggle with things we once did. Past mistakes should also be *learned* from, helping us not only to teach ourselves, but to warn others.

Remembering sins of the past in ways that *haunt* us, though, can be destructive.

Doing so can lead an individual to be hesitant to do the work of the Lord, out of fear he or she is not "good enough." It can cause one to be hesitant to speak out against sins, for fear he or she will be a hypocrite. It can "beat one up" internally as the joy, hope, and peace that should exist in the mindset of Christians is replaced with sorrow and anxiety. This is a problem, but it is one God's Word provides answers to.

Apart from Jesus, every person who has reached a point of accountability before God has sinned (**Rom. 3:23**).

Saul of Tarsus, for instance, was guilty of persecuting Christians (**Acts 9:1-2**). He later became a faithful apostle, and was inspired to write about half of the New Testament. Though

his past caused Paul to view himself as the "*chief*" of sinners (**1 Tim. 1:15**), he was useful to God because he *changed*.

In **1 Corinthians 6:9-10**, the Holy Spirit through Paul warned about those who will not inherit God's kingdom. In **verse 11**, He said "*such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.*"

Christianity is not about who we *were*, but who we *are*. If we have done what God requires for a sin to be forgiven, why dwell on the harm it caused? We do not want to take lightly any thoughts of *future* sin or *present* sin, but *past* sin that has been forgiven should not torment us. The church that Jesus built is composed not of individuals who have never sinned, but of individuals who know they *have* sinned and therefore need a Savior to escape eternal punishment. He is the "great physician" who will spiritually heal *any* who will submit to His teachings (**Luke 5:32**).

"*God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began*" to give eternal life to those who come to Him on His terms (**Titus 1:2**). If we reject this out of worry we have done too horribly to be forgiven, we deny the gift Jesus gave His life for.

We cannot change the past. But we *can* resolve to obey God moving forward.

Won't we all make that choice and thus be able to proclaim with Paul "*Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief*" (**1 Tim. 1:15**).

Won't we forget "*those things which are behind*", and reach forth to "*those things which are before*", pressing "*toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*" (**Phil. 3:13-14**).

-*Michael Hickox (both articles)*

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For questions, comments, or to request a Bible study, please contact MichaelDHickox@gmail.com