

## Self-Examination

A Sermon

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“Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates.”—[2 Corinthians 13:5](#).

I HAD INTENDED to address you this morning from the third title given to our blessed Redeemer, in the verse we have considered twice before—“Wonderful, Counsellor, *the mighty God*,” but owing to excruciating pain and continual sickness, I have been unable to gather my thoughts together, and therefore I feel constrained to address you on a subject which has often been upon my heart and not unfrequently upon my lips, and concerning which, I dare say, I have admonished a very large proportion of this audience before. You will find the text in the thirteenth chapter of the second epistle to the Corinthians, at the fifth verse—“*Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?*”—a solemn text, that we cannot preach too impressively, or too frequently meditate.

The Corinthians were the critics of the apostles’ age. They took to themselves great credit for skill in learning and in language, and as most men do who are wise in their own esteem, they made a wrong use of their wisdom and learning—they began to criticise the apostle Paul. They criticised his style. “His letters,” say they, “are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak and his speech contemptible.” Nay, not content with that, they went so far as to deny his apostleship, and for once in his life, the apostle Paul found himself compelled to “become a fool in glorying; for,” says he, “ye have compelled me: for I ought to have been commended of you: for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing.” The apostle wrote two letters to them; in both he is compelled to upbraid them while he defends himself, and when he had fully disarmed his opponents, and wrested the sword of their criticism out of their hands, he pointed it at their own breasts, saying, “‘Examine yourselves.’ You have disputed my doctrine; examine whether ye be in the faith. You have made me prove my apostleship; ‘prove your own selves.’ Use the powers which you have been so wrongfully exercising upon me for a little season upon your own characters.”

And now, my dear friends, the fault of the Corinthians is the fault of the present age. Let not any one of you, as he goeth out of the house of God, say unto his neighbour. “How did you like the preacher? What did you think of the sermon this morning?” Is that the

question you should ask as you retire from God's house? Do you come here to judge God's servants? I know it is but a small thing unto us to be judged of man's judgment; for our judgment is of the Lord our God; to our own Master we shall stand or fall. But, O men! ye should ask a question more profitable unto yourselves than this. Ye should say, "Did not such-and-such a speech strike me? Did not that exactly consort with my condition? Was that not a rebuke that I deserve, a word of reproof or of exhortation? Let me take unto myself that which I have heard, and let me not judge the preacher, for he is God's messenger to my soul: I came up here to be judged of God's Word, and not to judge God's Word myself." But since there is in all our hearts a great backwardness to self-examination, I shall lay out myself for a few minutes this morning, earnestly to exhort myself, and all of you, to examine ourselves whether we be in the faith.

First, I shall *expound my text*; secondly, I shall *enforce it*; and thirdly, I shall try and help you to *carry it into practice* here and on the spot.

I. First, I shall EXPOUND MY TEXT; though in truth it needs no exposition, for it is very simple, *yet* by studying it, and pondering it, our hearts may become more deeply affected with its touching appeal. "Examine yourselves." Who does not understand that word? And yet, by a few suggestions you may know its meaning more perfectly.

"Examine:" that is a *scholastic idea*. A boy has been to school a certain time, and his master puts him through his paces—questions him, to see whether he has made any progress,—whether he knows anything. Christian, catechise your heart; question it, to see whether it has been growing in grace; question it, to see if it knows anything of vital godliness or not. Examine it: pass your heart through a stern examination as to what it does know and what it does not know, by the teaching of the Holy Spirit.

Again: it is a *military idea*. "Examine yourselves," or renew yourselves. Go through the rank and file of your actions, and examine all your motives. Just as the captain on review-day is not content with merely surveying the men from a distance, but must look at all their accoutrements, so do you look well to yourselves; examine yourselves with the most scrupulous care.

And once again, this is a *legal idea*. "Examine yourselves." You have seen the witness in the box, when the lawyer has been examining him, or, as we have it, cross-examining him. Now, mark: never was there a rogue less trustworthy or more deceitful than your own heart, and as when you are cross-examining a dishonest person—one that hath bye-ends to serve, you set traps for him to try and find him out in a lie, so do with your own heart. Question it backward and forward, this way and that way; for if there be a loophole for escape, if there be any pretence for self-deception, rest assured your treacherous heart will be ready enough to avail itself of it.

And yet once more: this is a *traveller's idea*. I find in the original, it has this meaning: "Go right through yourselves." As a traveller, if he has to write a book upon a country, is

not content to go round its borders merely, but goes, as it were, from Dan to Beersheba, right through the country. He climbs the hill top, where he bathes his forehead in the sunshine: he goes down into the deep valleys, where he can only see the blue sky like a strip between the lofty summits of the mountains. He is not content to gaze upon the broad river unless he trace it to the spring whence it rises. He will not be satisfied with viewing the products of the surface of the earth, but he must discover the minerals that lie within its bowels. Now, do the same with your heart. "Examine yourselves." Go right through yourselves from the beginning to the end. Stand not only on the mountains of your public character, but go into the deep valleys of your private life. Be not content to sail on the broad river of your outward actions, but go follow back the narrow nil till you discover your secret motive. Look not only at your performance, which is but the product of the soil, but dig into your heart and examine the vital principle. "Examine yourselves." This is a very big word—a word that needs thinking over; and I am afraid there be very few, if any of us, who ever come up to the full weight of this solemn exhortation—"Examine yourselves."

There is another word you will see a little further on, if you will kindly look at the text. "*Prove* your own selves." That means more than self-examination: let me try to show the difference between the two. A man is about to buy a horse; he examines it; he looks at it; he thinks that possibly he may find out some flaw, and therefore he carefully examines it; but after he has examined it, if he be a prudent man, he says to the person of whom he is about to buy—"I must prove this horse: will you let me have it for a week, for a month, or for some given time, that I may prove the animal before I actually invest in him? You see, there is more in proof than in examination; it is a deeper word, and goes to the very root and quick of the matter. I saw but yesterday an illustration of this. A ship, before she is launched, is examined; when launched she is carefully looked at; and yet before she is allowed to go far out to sea, she takes a trial trip; she is proved and tried, and when she has roughed it a little, and it has been discovered that she will obey the helm, that the engines will work correctly, and that all is in right order, she goes out on her long voyages. Now, "*prove* yourselves." Do not merely sit in your closet and look at yourselves alone, but go out into this busy world and see what kind of piety you have. Remember, many a man's religion will stand examination that will not stand proof. We may sit at home and look at our religion, and say, "Well, I think this will do!" It is like cotton prints that you can buy in sundry shops; they are warranted fast colours, and so they seem when you look at them, but they are not washable when you get them home. There is many a man's religion like that. It is good enough to look at, and it has got the "warranted" stamped upon it; but when it comes out into actual daily life, the colours soon begin to run, and the man discovers that the thing was not what he took it to be. You know, in Scripture we have an account of certain very foolish men that would not go to a great supper; but, foolish as they were, there was one of them who said, "I have bought a yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them." Thus he had at least worldly wisdom,

enough to prove his oxen. So do you prove yourselves. Try to plough in the furrows of duty: see whether you can be accustomed to the yoke of gospel servitude; be not ashamed to put yourselves through your paces; try yourself in the furnace of daily life, and haply the mere examination of the chamber should detect you to be a cheat, and you should after all prove to be a castaway. “Examine yourselves; prove your own selves.”

There is a sentence which I omitted, namely, this one: “Examine yourselves, *whether ye be in the faith*.” Oh! says one, “You may examine me whether I am in the faith; I am an orthodox Christian, fully up to the standard, good genuine weight; there is no fear whatever of my coming up to the mark, and going a little beyond it too.” Ah! but, my friend, that is not the question; I would have you orthodox, for a man who is heterodox in his opinions, will most likely be heterodox in his actions; but the question now is not whether you believe the truth—but whether you are *in* the truth? Just to give you an illustration of what I mean. There is the ark; and a number of men around it. “Ah!” says one, I believe that ark will swim.” “Oh!” says another, “I believe that ark is made of gopher-wood, and is strong from stem to stern; I am quite sure that ark will float, come what may; I am a firm believer in that ark.” Ay, but when the rain descended, and the flood came, it was not believing the ark as a matter of fact—it was being in the ark that saved men, and only those that were in it escaped in that dread day of deluge. So there may be some of you that say of the gospel of Christ, “I believe it to be of a particular character,” and you may be quite correct in your judgment; you may say, “I think it to be that which honours God, and casts down the pride of man;” herein too you may think quite right; but mark, it is not having an orthodox faith, but it is being in the faith, being in Christ, taking refuge in Him as in the ark; for he that only has the faith as a thing *ab extra*, and without being in the faith, shall perish in the day of God’s anger; but he that lives by faith, he who feels that faith operates upon him, and is to him a living principle; he who realises that faith is his dwelling place, that there he can abide, that it is the very atmosphere he breathes and the very girdle of his loins to strengthen him,—such a man is in the faith. But, we repeat again, all the orthodoxy in the world, apart from its effect upon the heart as a vital principle, will not save a man. “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves.”

“Know ye not your own selves?” If you do not, you have neglected your proper study. What avails all else that you do know, if you know not yourself? You have been roaming abroad, while the richest treasure was lying at home; you have been busying yourself with irrelevant affairs, while the main business has been neglected and ruined. “Know ye not your own selves?” And especially know ye not this fact, that Jesus Christ must be in your heart, formed and living there, or else ye are reprobates? That is, ye are worthless persons, vain pretenders, spurious professors; your religion is but a vanity and a show. “Reprobate silver shall men call you, because the Lord hath rejected you.”

Now, what is it to have Jesus Christ in you? The Roman Catholic hangs the cross on his bosom; the true Christian carries the cross in his heart; and a cross inside the heart, my friends, is one of the sweetest cares for a cross on the back. If you have a cross in your heart—Christ crucified in you, the hope of glory—all the cross of this world’s troubles will seem to you light enough, and you will easily be able to sustain it. Christ in the heart means Christ believed in, Christ beloved, Christ trusted, Christ espoused, Christ communed with, Christ as our daily food, and ourselves as the temple and palace wherein Jesus Christ daily walks. Ah! there are many here that are total strangers to the meaning of this phrase. They do not know what it is to have Jesus Christ in them. Though ye know a little about Christ on Calvary, ye know nothing about Christ in the heart. Now, remember, that Christ on Calvary will save no man, unless Christ be in the heart. The Son of Mary, born in the manger, will not save a soul, unless he be also born in your hearts, and live there—your joy, your strength, and your consolation. “Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?”

II. The second point was to ENFORCE THE TEXT. I have proved it; now I am to enforce it; and here is the tug of war. May the Spirit of the living God drive the sword in up to its very hilt this morning, that now the power of God may be felt in every heart, searching and trying the reins. “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith.”

“Examine yourselves,” first, *because it is a matter of the very highest importance*. Small tradesmen may take coppers over the counter without much examination; but when it comes to gold, they will ring it well, for they could not afford to lose a sovereign out of their little gains; and if it comes to a five pound note, there is an anxious holding it up to the window to see if the water mark be there, and whether all be correct, for it might be ruin to the man if he lost a sum to him so large. Ah! but, merchants and tradesmen, if ye be deceived in the matter of your own souls, ye are deceived indeed. Look well to the title deeds of your estate; look well to your life policies, and to all the business that you do; but, remember, all the gold and silver you have, are but as the rack and scum of the furnace, compared with the matter now in hand. It is your soul, your own soul, your never dying soul! Will you risk that? In times of panic, men will scarcely trust their fellows; I would to God there was a panic this day, so that no man would trust himself. Ye may trust your fellows far more safely than ye may trust yourselves. Will ye think, men and brethren, what your soul is? “The *life* is more than meat, and the body than raiment;” but the soul is as much more to be accounted of than the body, as the body is more important than the raiment. Here are my clothes: let me be robbed of my garments; if my body be secure, what signifies it? And as for my body, what is it, after all, but the rag that enshrines and covers my soul? Let that be sick, let that become like a worn-out vesture, I can afford to lose my body; but, O God, I cannot afford to have my soul cast into hell. What a frightful hazard is that which you and I are running, if we do

not examine ourselves! It is an everlasting hazard; it is a hazard of heaven or of hell, of God's eternal favour, or of his everlasting curse. Well might the apostle say, "Examine yourselves."

Again: "Examine yourselves," *because if ye make a mistake ye can never rectify it, except in this world.* A bankrupt may have lost a fortune once, and yet may make another; but make bankruptcy—spiritual bankruptcy in this life, and you will never have an opportunity to trade again for heaven. A great general may lose one battle, but with skill and courage he may retrieve his honour by winning another; but get defeated in the battle of this life, and you can no more gird on your armour, you are defeated for ever; the day is lost, and there is no hope of your being able to gain it again, or so much as to make the attempt. Now, or never, man! remember that. Thy soul's eternal state hangs on the turn of to-day. Loiter thy time away, waste thine abilities, take thy religion at second hand, of thy priest, of thy minister, or of thy friend, and in the next world thou shalt everlastingly rue the error, but thou shalt have no hope of amending it.

"Fix'd is their everlasting state,  
 Could man repent, 'tis then too late.  
 There are no acts of pardon pass'd  
 In the cold grave, to which we haste;  
 But darkness, death, and long despair,  
 Reign in eternal silence there."

"Examine yourselves," again, *because many have been mistaken.* That is a matter which I will undertake to affirm upon my own authority, certain that each one of you can confirm it by your own observation. How many in this world think themselves to be godly when they are not? You have in the circle of your own friends, persons making a profession, of whom you often stand in astonishment, and wonder how they dare to do it. Friend, if others have been mistaken, may not you be? If some here and there fall into an error, may not you also do the same? Are you better than they? No, in nowise. You may be mistaken also. Methinks I see the rocks on which many souls have been lost—the rocks of presumption, and the syren song of self-confidence entices you on to those rocks this morning. Stay, mariner, stay, I beseech thee! Let you bleached bones keep thee back. Many have been lost, many are lost now, and are wailing at this present hour their everlasting ruin, and their loss is to be traced to nothing more than this, that they never examined themselves whether they were in the faith.

And here let me appeal to each person now present. Do not tell me that you are an old church member; I am glad to hear it; but still, I beseech you, examine yourself, for a man may be a professor of religion thirty or forty years, and yet there may come a trial-day, when his religion shall snap after all and prove to be a rotten bough of the forest. Tell me not you are a deacon: that you may be, and yet you may be damnably deceived. Ay, and whisper not to me that you are a minister. My brethren in the ministry,—we may lay aside our cassocks

to wear belts of flame in hell; we may go from our pulpit, having preached to others what we never knew ourselves, and have to join the everlasting wailings of souls we have helped to delude. May God save us from such a doom as that! But let no man fold his arms, and say, “I need not examine myself;” for there is not a man here, or anywhere, who has not good cause to test and try himself to-day.

Furthermore: examine yourselves, *because God will examine you*. In the hand of God there is the scale and the balance: you shall not be taken into heaven for what you profess to be; but you shall be weighed—every one of you put into the scale. What a moment will that be with me and with you, when we are in God’s great scale; surely where it not for faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and for a certainty that we shall be clothed in his righteousness at last, we might all tremble at the thought of ever being there, lest we should have to come out of the scale with this verdict, “*Tekel*,”—(“Mene, mene, tekem, upharsin”)—“thou art weighed in the balances and art found wanting.” God will not take his gold and silver by appearance, but every vessel must be purified in the fire. We must each one of us pass through a most searching test and scrutiny. Beloved, if our hearts condemn us, how much more shall God condemn us? If we are afraid to examine ourselves, what cause have we to tremble at the thought of the dread searching of God? Some of you feel that you are condemned this very day by a poor creature like myself: how much more, then, shall you be condemned when God, in thunder robed, shall summon you and all your fellows to the last infallible judgment. Oh! may God help us now to examine ourselves!

And I have yet one more reason to give. Examine yourselves, my dear friends, *because, if you are in doubt now, the speediest way to get rid of your doubts and fears is by self-examination* I believe that many persons are always doubting their eternal condition, because they do not examine themselves. Self-examination is the safest cure for one half the doubts and fears that vex God’s people. Look at the captain over yonder. He is in his ship, and he says to the sailors, “You must sail very warily and carefully, and be upon your watch, for to tell you the truth, I do not know where I am; I do not exactly know my latitude and longitude, and there may be rocks very close ahead, and we may soon have the ship broken up.” He goes down into the cabin, he searches the chart, he takes an inspection of the heavens, he comes up again, and he says, “Hoist every sail, and go along as merrily as you please, I have discovered where we are; the water is deep, and there is a wide sea room; there is no need for you to be in any trouble, searching has satisfied me.” And how happy will it be with you, if, after having searched yourself you can say, “I know in whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him.” Why, then you will go along merrily and joyfully, because the search has had a good result. And what if it should have a bad result? Better that you should find it out now than find it out too late. One of the prayers I often pray, and desire to pray as long as I live, is this,—“Lord, let me know the worst of my case. If I have been living in a false comfort, Lord, rend it away; let

me know just what I am and where I am, and rather let me think too harshly of my condition before thee than think too securely, and so be ruined by presumption." May that be a prayer of each heart, and be heard in heaven!

III. And now HOW ARE YOU TO SEARCH YOURSELVES? I am to try and help you, though it must be very briefly.

First, if you would examine yourselves, *begin with your public life*. Are you dishonest? Can you thief? Can you swear? Are you given to drunkenness, uncleanness, blasphemy, taking God's name in vain, and violation of his holy day? Make short work with yourself; there will be no need to go into any further tests. "He that doeth these things, hath no inheritance in the kingdom of God." You are reprobate; the wrath of God abideth on you. Your state is fearful; you are accursed now, and except you repent you must be accursed for ever.

And yet, Christian, despite thy many sins, canst thou say, "By the grace of God I am what I am; but I seek to live a righteous, godly, and sober life, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation." Remember, professor, by thy works thou shalt be judged at last. Thy works cannot save thee, but they can prove that thou art saved; or if they be evil works, they can prove that thou art not saved at all. And here I must say, every one of us has good cause to tremble, for our outward acts are not what we would have them to be. Let us go to our houses, and fall upon our face, and cry again, "God be merciful to me a sinner;" and let us seek for more grace, that henceforth our lives may be more consistent, and more in accordance with the spirit of Christ.

Again: another set of tests—*private tests*. *How about your private life?* Do you live without prayer, without searching the Scriptures? Do you live without thoughts of God? Can you live as an habitual stranger to the Most High, having no love to him, and no fear of him? If so, I make short work of the matter: you are "in the gall of bitterness, and in the bonds of iniquity." But if thou art right at heart, thou wilt be able to say, "I could not live without prayer; I have to weep over my prayers, but still I should weep ten times more if I did not pray; I do love God's word, it is my meditation all the day; I love his people; I love his house; and I can say that my hands are often lifted upward towards him; and when my heart is busy with this world's affairs, it is often going up to his throne." A good sign, Christian, a good sign for thee; if thou canst go through this test, thou mayest hope that all is well.

But go a little deeper. Hast thou ever wept over thy lost condition? Hast thou ever bemoaned thy lost estate before God? Say, hast thou ever tried to save thyself, and found it a failure? and hast thou been driven to rely simply, wholly, and entirely on Christ? If so, then thou hast passed the test well enough. And hast thou now faith in Christ—a faith that makes thee love him; a faith that enables thee to trust him in the darkest hour? Canst thou say of a truth that thou hast a secret affection towards the Most High—that thou lovest his Son, that thy desire is after his ways, that thou feelest the influence of the Divine Spirit, and seekest every day to experience the fellowship of the Holy Spirit more and more?



And lastly, canst thou say that Jesus Christ is in thee? If not, thou art reprobate. Sharp though that word be, thou art a reprobate. But if Jesus Christ be in thy heart, though thy heart sometimes be so dark that thou canst scarcely tell he is there, yet thou art accepted in the beloved, and thou mayest “rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.”

I intended to have enlarged; but it is impossible for me to go further; I must therefore dismiss you with a sacred blessing.